

NREGS makes a mark in the lives of many, nationally

ANDHRA PRADESH
FROM MISERY TO HOPE

Nagamma, 46, and her husband, Baga-ranna, 52 live in Kankanivanipalli village in Mahabubnagar district. They belong to the backward community. The childless couple have adopted a boy. They own six acres of land and had hoped to bring up the boy well. But monsoon failure for six successive years rendered their land unproductive. They could not afford to dig a bore or an open well. The landowners were forced to work as agricultural labourers. The couple felt depressed and hopeless because of the change in their financial status and their inability to provide a good upbringing for their son. Just then, NREGS was launched in their village. They promptly enrolled themselves and found work. Their three month labour yielded Rs 15,000. Along with other villagers, they worked on deepening the village tanks, which increased the water storage capacity in the tank. Now more water was now available for irrigation and recharging of the ground water of the village. Nagamma and her husband spent Rs 8,000 to dig a bore well and now their barren land was cultivable. Some money was also spent on renovating their house from a mud plastered hut into a brick house. Her son could now be provided a rekatuvekt comfortable life. The scheme enabled ponds to be deepened to store rainwater. The water level in the wells and bores had come up. Bio-diesel plants had been watered. Canals and branch canals had been dug from the village tanks to the fields to provide irrigation facility. If the scheme continues in the same way, Nagamma is confident that she can soon build a reinforced concrete house.

ORISSA
LIVING WITH DIGNITY

Maharani Pradhan belongs to Kharulchapp village of Sundargarh District. "My husband is dead. I used to beg for survival. Now that I have got employment for two and a half months, I have stopped begging and can now live with dignity." Sukumari Bag lives in Bagabandha village of Sundargarh District. She states, "My husband lost his leg in an accident and is, therefore, not in a position to work. The villagers told me about NREGA. I have worked for 80 days and we are now able to educate our children." Umesh Chandra Bag is a resident of Bagabandha village of Sundargarh district. His father died when he was studying, leaving him to support his two younger brothers who were very young and in school. "When my father died, I had no money. Our sarpanch told me about NREGA. As the head of my family, I registered myself for work. I have been working for 20 days. Since I get paid Rs 100 per day, I am able to save Rs. 50 per day. I hope to study further or do some kind of business." Satyanand Kishan and Radha Kishan are from Village Telko Bud of Sundargarh. Wage work has helped them afford education to their children. "We have completed 80 days of work and are happy. It has become easier for us to send our children to school. Our older daughter has done her matriculation examination and our younger daughter will appear for her matriculation exam this year. Our son is going to college. Now we need

more work to give our children better education." Madhu Kishan, their son, said, "I am very grateful to my parents for doing manual work so that I could finish my education. I am studying in class 12 at the panchayat college in Banakusa because of their hard work." Sita Kishan, the daughter, said, "Because of my parents' work on NREGS sites, I was able to learn stitching and my brother and sister are both studying."

WEST BENGAL
EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN

In a land where there is little or no opportunity of employment and agri-culture depends on the vagaries of monsoon, poverty could be seen everywhere in Mahadevpur village in Anara Gram Panchayat in Purulia district. Although mentioned as a pond in the land record, Choubey Sayer was a barren land before NREGS was launched. The condition of the soil was mixed in nature. In the process of re-excitation of the Sayer, a total number of 3,326 person days were generated through which around 180 families of two adjacent mouzas / villages viz. Mahadevpur and upper Baishyakuli were benefited directly and about 36 families were benefited indirectly by being able to use the water of the bundh for irrigation. The most noticeable feature of this project was the number of women that took part during the excavation. About 50 percent of the total labour forces was constituted by women. This was remarkable in view of the fact that women here traditionally preferred to stay at home while men went to far-away places for jobs. After the successful re-excitation, Choubey Sayer provided water for various purposes, primarily for irrigation of about six acres of surrounding land area. This irrigation facility not only increased production level and led to multiple crop cultivation but also turned barren lands into cultivable ones. All these achievements have turned the socio-economic condition of the women living here on its head. With the greater involvement of women in the project has come greater access to income, the result of which can be seen in the self-confidence that these women have gathered in the past few days. They now are not merely silent watchers but active participators in the decision making of their family affairs. Women are now keener to send their children to schools rather than watching their husbands forcing their children to go for work. The achievement has considerably reduced the migration of labour towards the east. Agricultural activity has provided employment thereby raising the standard of living of the people residing here.

CHHATTISGARH
CREATING PRODUCTIVE ASSETS

Most of Kabirdham district comes under rain shadow area and the farmers are mainly dependent on the major and minor irrigation canals. In past, efforts were made to construct canals but due to lack of maintenance these canals remained either broken or damaged and hence, could not be used fully. There has been a great demand from villagers and farmers for the repair and extension of these canals. NREGA came as a boon for them when redressal of Chirpani Reservoir project was one of the works taken up under

NREGA. Rs 20 lakh was sanctioned for the repair & maintenance of these canals. Until now, 9.55 km length of the canal has also been repaired and lining of these canals has been completed. This has brought cheers and smiles to the faces of the farmers and added to the earnings of poor labourers. Under the project, 25,151 person days have been created and 658 rural families belonging to four villages have benefited. Moreover, additional land of 305 acres of kharif paddy has come under irrigation. This is expected to result in the increase of crop production to tune of Rs 16.30 lakh per year. The ground water level has also come up.

MADHYA PRADESH

EMERGING WOMEN LEADERSHIP

The Madhya Pradesh government chose a novel way to implement NREGS. Although NREGA guidelines provide for 'Rozgar Sewak', the state government decided to recruit mates (supervisors). Small groups of five workers were formed and entrusted with completion of a task. The mate was appointed from among the workers and he or she kept the records of each work. The government decided that around 35 percent mates would be women. The district administration of Satna raised it to 100 percent. And the experiment was highly successful. "Women are considered more impartial, adept and honest than men, especially in the kind of works executed under NREGS," says Satna collector Manish Rastogi. For capacity building of the mates, the Rural Development department funds a week long training after which they are provided with a certificate by the Construction Industry Development Council (CIDC), a body set up by the Planning Commission. The training and certification is intended to make the mates eligible to take up employment in the private sector too.

UTTAR PRADESH

HALT TO DISTRESS MIGRATION

The Vindhya and Bundelkhand region of Uttar Pradesh, covering nine Districts of Mirzapur, Sonbhadra, Chitrakoot, Banda, Mahoba, Lalitpur, Jhansi, Hamirpur and Jalaun, had deficient rainfall for several years. The deficiency was up to 66 percent of the normal annual rainfall for the fourth consecutive year resulting in major crop failure and water scarcity. Low rainfall had given rise to serious crises of drinking water for human beings and animals. Intense soil moisture stress had developed. The problem had been aggravated because of the hilly and undulating topography of the region. Most of the rain water got lost as runoff into the rivers leaving the top soil absolutely dry. Rice and wheat are the staple foodgrains of the people of this region. But due to the severe drought the production of both the crops had suffered a serious setback. The ground water table had gone down leading to difficulties in getting drinking water from the hand pumps. Tube wells for irrigation also showed lower yield. The water area in the traditional ponds (Bandhas, Bandhis and Bawaries) had shrunk. More than 900 years old Madan Sagar reservoir spread over 103 ha in Mahoba district in Bundelkhand region had, for the first time in the peoples' memory, gone dry. Due to the severe moisture stress hardly any biomass remained. In Devrikala village of Pateharakala block of Mirzapur district, people were found to be resorting to distress sale of livestock because of their inability to feed the animals. All this because fodder was not available in the area. As people struggled for survival in such

"The best evidence I've heard yet that NREGA is working"

My colleague Adinarayana Raju reports from the field that large scale farmers are putting pressure on local governments to shut down NREGA worksites during peak harvest season because of the program's upward pressure on local wages. After a recent trip of my own to NREGA worksites in Karimnagar, Andhra Pradesh (AP), I don't find this, that surprising. In Karimnagar, workers told us that the going daily wage rate for farm labour has more than doubled (from around 35-40 Rs a day to 80 Rs a day) since the implementation of the program.

In AP, the farmers' tactics appear to have worked. Eenadu reports (in Telugu) that the AP ministry of rural development has announced that it plans to come up with a NREGA "calendar" (read scheduled work stoppage periods) in the near future.

The political manoeuvring of the large farmers leaves me slightly uneasy and it 's a bit of a disarray that AP is subtly rolling back NREGA just as it appears to be making an impact. Yet at the end of the day this might not be such a bad thing. Too much distortion in the local labour markets would do no one any good in the long run.

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dire circumstances, NREGA proved to be a great boon. Labour-intensive works for renovation of traditional water bodies, water harvesting structures and excavation of tanks were taken up. People were employed in these works. They received minimum wages of Rs 100 per day. For the first time in spite of a situation of severe crisis in agriculture which used to trigger large migration of people to cities, distress migration away from rural areas did not occur.

PUNJAB

TURNING NEW LEAVES

Dhan Kaur, mother of two sons and a resident of village Ajjowal in Hoshiarpur district, belonging to the Sikligar tribe, is a beneficiary under NREGA. Her husband Kartar Singh was a labourer and used to move from one village to another to repair iron buckets, pans, etc. He had to travel even to Himachal Pradesh in search of work. Money was not sufficient to meet the basic needs. So he engaged his elder son, Pawan Kumar, in his profession. Pawan Kumar was married to Sunita. Thus, a new member joined their family. They had a son, Raj, who is now one and half years of age. With the expanding family, their meager income was insufficient. In the meantime, the Government of India selected Hoshiarpur district to be covered under NREGA. Dhan Kaur got her name registered and a job card was issued to her family. She started work right in her village. With the money she earned from NREGA work, she got her daughter-in-law, Sunita, admitted to a Red Cross Society craft centre in village Ajjowal to learn tailoring. She purchased a sewing machine with her savings so that Sunita could start taking sewing orders. At present, Sunita earns about Rs 40 daily by stitching clothes. With her earnings she plans to provide good education to her son Raj.

□ Courtesy: Business Line, Transparency Review, Hindustan Times and reports of Union Ministry of Rural Development