

**SYNOPSIS**

**Role of MGNREGA in Rural Development**  
*An Appraisal with Reference to Two Districts of West Bengal*

*by*

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# **Role of MGNREGA in Rural Development**

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### **SYNOPSIS**

Rural development is an emerging area of study, policy and research today. As per Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act the centrally sponsored wage employment Scheme aiming at rural development through generation of income, saving, investment, poverty alleviation and durable productive asset creation has been introduced.

West Bengal's share in the whole of India in respect of total number of workers with job cards, total number of individual workers and households employed, total number of persondays generated and total number of households completed 100 days of work recorded an increase under MGNREGS, which indicates that the state's performance in these respects was higher than that in the rest of India in recent years. Values of most of these indicators were, however, fluctuating during this period.

Percentage shares of West Bengal in the total persondays generated to women, SCs and STs in India as a whole recorded impressive increase during 2008-09 to 2014-15. But while making distribution of work among the prospective workers under MGNREGA there is hardly any serious consideration of the relatively backward castes like SC, ST and OBC seeking employment under the programme. This leads to socially unfavourable situations for the vulnerable sections of the society in respect of provision of employment under MGNREGA.

At the aggregate level of the state of West Bengal percentages of SC and ST workers to total workers were higher than those of the respective population shares. But at the disaggregate level of the districts there were 9 districts out of total 18 rural districts of West Bengal where the percentage shares of SC and ST workers under the Scheme were less than those of their respective populations.

The works completed under MGNREGA in two sample districts of Purba Medinipur and Paschim Medinipur, and West Bengal as a whole were mostly water conservation and water-related works.

The financial and physical progress of MGNREGA for the last couple of years was halting given the budget allocation, long-drawn process and unsound management. There is a falling tendency in the proportion of SCs and STs in total employment. But the qualitative progress in terms of employment for women and asset creation is substantial.

The supply-led character of the programme is substantiated by the limited government budget allocation and the 'unmet demand' analysis. In the grass root level the political local leaders mostly take decisions on: what to do, how to do and for whom to do and thus the project gets shaped and implemented through a complicated long-drawn process. The fate of the workers is not in their hand, rather led by visibly invisible hands: the so-called multiple top to bottom (centralized) budgets and 'will with wish' of the decision makers (bottom to top). Moreover, there arise big gaps in both vertical and horizontal coordination across levels of governments within the states which make the scheme fairly 'supply-led'.