

Impact Assessment of NREGA's Activities for Ecological and Economic Security

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Sponsored by: UNDP, New Delhi

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) is the first law of its kind internationally which guarantees wage employment to rural people in an unprecedented scale. Apart from providing employment the act contributes towards infusion of transparency and accountability in rural government to target the benefit of the poorest and most vulnerable, rejuvenation of the natural resource base thereby addressing the causes of chronic poverty like drought, flood, deforestation, soil erosion and degradation, poor rural connectivity. In order that all these efforts make an optimum contribution in poverty alleviation and ecological sustainability, it is important that they are scientifically evaluated in ecological and economic terms. Moreover, the role of these activities as climate change adaptation and mitigation measures must be evaluated for greater recognition of their importance by policy makers, implementers and beneficiaries.

In this background this research study was taken up in four districts (Panna , Chhindwara, Dhar and Ujjain) of Madhya Pradesh with the objectives of evaluating the impact of MGNREGA on agriculture production; identification of opportunities under MGNREGA towards adaptation and mitigation measures of climate change; identification and ranking of different ecosystem services associated with MGNREGA based on people's perception.

The increased availability of water due to MGNREGA intervention was found to be substantial in all districts and was even more conspicuous in case of beneficiaries of individual dug wells (Kapil Dhara). This in turn, has resulted in significant increase in cropping intensity, diversity and agriculture production. One of the important outcomes of the study shows that people perceive non material benefits from plantations by MGNREGA more important as compared to material benefits consistently across all districts. In case of road construction activities, it was observed that people attach a very high value to increased visits of government officials as a result of improved connectivity due to new roads.

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Most MGNREGA activities qualify as a measure of adaptation and mitigation of climate change by addressing one or more issues of climate change in multiple ways and the same have been recognized by the policy makers. However, such awareness is lacking amongst the implementers, especially the front line staff. Training for sensitization for the staff at the level of implementation will enhance the appreciation of MGNREGA activities in the light of climate change.