

Chapter 7 MGNREGS in Odisha: Social Inclusion and Exclusion Challenges

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Abstract Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), enacted in 2005, is the Indian Government's response to the constitutionally manifested right to work and means to promote livelihood security by creating durable assets in India's rural areas. It provides 100 days of guaranteed work to any person who demands the same. The potential of social protection programs to go beyond the safety net-centred application and leading to social inclusion, empowerment and meeting larger sustainable development goals is increasingly recognised. Therefore, it requires a commitment to change that is gradual and incremental. MGNREGS in the state of Odisha has failed to include and led to exclusion of those who most require it, the Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe, persons living below the poverty line and especially women across these categories. This chapter is based on an empirical study conducted in four districts of Odisha, Bolangir, Kalahandi, Nuapada and Baragarh. The chapter demonstrates the challenges to social inclusion and exclusion that are reinforced by both state and non-state policies and actors. Further, it highlights that due to the limitations of the program, distress migration as a strategy is adopted by many to augment their income as livelihood options are limited in these geographies.

1 Introduction

Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) is the central government's response to the constitutionally manifested right to work and means to promote livelihood security by creating durable assets in India's rural areas (Roy & Day, 2010), thus strengthening the livelihood resource base of the rural poor. The promulgation of the MGNREGA in 2005, and the scheme that followed, MGNREGS, was meant to guarantee 100 days of employment to any individual from a rural household who demands work (Datar, 2007; Jacob & Varghese, 2006). The MGNREGS wages were meant to provide sustained stimulation to the

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