

WAGE PROBLEMS IN LABOUR MARKET AND MGNREGA

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ABSTRACT

Any effort to alter these circumstances has to aim at addressing wage inequalities from a multi-dimensional perspective which accounts for changing perceptions and notions regarding worker's role and contribution among different agents of the labour markets. In India, while minimum wage differs across states and industries, in order to bring some uniformity to the minimum wage structure, the National Floor Level Minimum Wage (NFLMW) was introduced in the early nineties by the Ministry of Labour and Employment. The NFLMW is non-statutory. The growth process in a dominantly agricultural and backward economy like that of UP should be equitable and inclusive. There is no alternative to this vision whatever may be the growth model. But my findings reveal something else. The growth process in UP has proved to be detrimental to the cause of equitable and inclusive labour market and the acceleration in the growth rate in recent years has done more damage. There have been severe discrimination in the wage rate in labour market in Uttar Pradesh. Social Exclusion (SE) is concerned with inequality the roots of which lie in inequalities of power and wealth. In contrast to static and descriptive terms such as 'poverty', SE places the emphasis on dynamic processes that prevent many from being fully included in rural labour society. Social Exclusion is multidimensional- encompassing social, political, cultural and economic dimensions, and operating at different social levels; dynamic- impacting in different ways to differing degrees at different social levels over time; and relational.

Introduction

An Attempt has been made in this paper to present an overview about “ **Wage Problems in Labour Market and MGNREGA** ”. The paper is divided into three Sections. Section First Covers a brief Introduction about the theme. Section second deals with Labour Market Wages Scenario. Section third has been devoted to examine the Situation of Workers' Participation in Labour Market in Uttar Pradesh. The Paper concludes with section four which gives some suggestions for better transformation of rural labour market with Inclusive growth through MGNREGA.

On the one hand, a relational perspective focuses on exclusion as the rupture of relationships between a group of people and the wider society. From this perspective, social exclusion is typically understood as a 'state' of multiple disadvantages experienced by particular population groups existing outside the 'mainstream' of society unable to participate without rights. To improving rural labour market MGNREGA has become a powerful instrument for inclusive growth in rural India through its impact on social protection, livelihood security and democratic governance. The Act was notified in 200 rural districts in its first phase of implementation (with effect from 2 February 2006). In financial year (FY) 2007-08, it was extended to an additional 130 rural districts. The remaining districts were notified under

MGNREGA with effect from 1 April 2008. Since 2008, MGNREGA has covered the entire country with the exception of districts that have a hundred per cent urban population. The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), 2005, was notified on 7 September 2005. The mandate of the Act is to provide 100 days of guaranteed wage employment in a financial year to every rural household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work. The objectives of the programme include:

- Strengthening drought-proofing and flood management in rural India.
- Aiding in the empowerment of the marginalised communities, especially women, Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs), through the processes of a rights-based legislation.
- Ensuring social protection for the most vulnerable people living in rural India through providing employment opportunities for improving rural labour market.
- Ensuring livelihood security for the poor through creation of durable assets, improved water security, soil conservation and higher land productivity.
- Effecting greater transparency and accountability in governance.

Features of the Act regarding wage payment

- Wages are to be paid as per the State-wise Government of India (GoI) notified MGNREGA wages. Wages are also to be paid according to piece rate, as per the Schedule of Rates (SoRs). Payment of wages has to be done on a weekly basis and not beyond a fortnight in any case. Payment of wages is mandatorily done through the individual/joint bank/post office beneficiary accounts.
- While allocating work, the below mentioned considerations are followed: Work is provided

within 5 kilometres (kms) radius of the village. In case, work is provided beyond 5 kms, extra wages of 10 per cent are payable to meet additional transportation and living expenses. Priority is awarded to women, such that at least one-third of the beneficiaries under the Scheme are women. At least 50 per cent of works, in terms of cost, are to be executed by the GPs.

- The GoI bears the 100 per cent wage cost of unskilled manual labour and 75 per cent of the material cost, including the wages of skilled and semi-skilled workers.
- To ensure that the workers are directly benefitted under the Scheme.
- Transparency and accountability in wage payment is ensured through the: Social audit, to scrutinize all the records and works under the Scheme are to be conducted regularly by the GS.

The MGNREGA marks a paradigm shift in Uttar Pradesh rural labour market from previous wage employment programmes either planned or implemented in India's history. MGNREGA is unlike any other in its scale, architecture and thrust. It has an integrated natural resource management and livelihoods generation perspective. In Uttar Pradesh rural labour market the transparency and accountability mechanisms under MGNREGA create unprecedented accountability of performance, especially towards immediate stakeholders. Some of its other unique aspects are outlined below:

- Its design is bottom-up, people-centered, demand driven, self-selecting and rights-based.
- It provides a legal guarantee of wage employment.
- It is a demand-driven programme where provision of work is triggered by the demand for work by wage-seekers.
- It has legal provisions for allowances and compensation.

- It overcomes problems of targeting through its self-targeting mechanism of beneficiary selection.
- The order of devolution of financial resources to GPs (with GPs implementing 50 per cent of the works in terms of cost) is unprecedented.
- Social audit, a new feature of MGNREGA, creates unprecedented accountability of performance, especially towards the immediate stakeholders.

Labour Market Wages Scenario

The MGNREGA notified wages have increased across States since 2006, Maharashtra observing the highest increase of over 200 per cent, and Kerala the

lowest at 31 per cent. A majority of the research suggests that MGNREGA has led to an increase in agriculture wage rates. MGNREGA boosts the real daily agricultural wage rates by 5.3 per cent. The wage effect is equal for both men and women and is in favour of unskilled labour. Thus, MGNREGA may also be indirectly benefitting poor households through the increase in private sector wages. MGNREGA entitles every worker to wages at the Gol notified, State-wise wage rate, for each day of work. An overview of the performance of MGNREGA over the last 6 years (since its inception) is provided in Table -1 on the following page.

Table -1
An Overview of the Performance of MGNREGA (2006-07 to 2011-12)

	FY 2006-07 (200 districts)	FY 2007-08 (330 districts)	FY 2008-09 (All Rural districts)	FY 2009-10 (All rural districts)	FY 2010-11 (All rural districts)	FY 2011- 12* (All rural districts)	Total FY 2006-07 FY 2011- 12+
Number of Households provided employment (In crore)	2.1	3.4	4.5	5.3	5.5	5	**
Number of Households provided employment (In crore)							
Total	90.5	143.59	216.3	283.6	257.2	209.3	1200
SCs	23 (25%)	39.4 (27%)	63.4 (29%)	86.5 (30%)	78.8 (31%)	46.2 (22%)	337 (28%)
STs	33 (36%)	42 (29%)	55 (25%)	58.7 (21%)	53.6 (21%)	37.7 (18%)	280 (23%)
Women	36 (40%)	61 (43%)	103.6 (48%)	136.4 (48%)	122.7 (48%)	101.1 (48%)	561 (48%)
Average person-days per employed household	43 days	42 days	48 days	54 days	47 days	42 days	**
FINANCIAL DETAILS							
Budget outlay (in Rs crore)	11300	12000	30000	39100	40100	40000	172500
Expenditure (in Rs crore)	8824	15857	27250	37905	39377	37303	166516
Expenditure on unskilled wages (in Rs crore)	5842	10739	18200	25579	25686	24660	110706
[% of total expenditure]***	[66%]	[68%]	[67%]	[65%]	[66%]	[66%]	[66%]

WORKS (In lakh)							
Works taken up	8.4	17.9	27.8	46.2	51	73.6	146
Works completed	3.9	8.2	12.1	22.6	25.9	14.3	87

Source: Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (official website), <http://www.mgnrega.nic.in>.

The MGNREGA notified wage rates have increased across States over the years, with some states like Maharashtra registering an increase of over 200 per cent. The MGNREGA wage is higher than the legal minimum agriculture wage in 19 States (Table - 2). Research studies have attempted to analyse if this increase is causing an upward pressure in rural market wages. A majority of the literature supports this claim. With reference to NSSO 64th Round Survey during agricultural year 2008–09, both male and female workers reported earning an average of Rs 79 per day for work under the Act. These earnings are 12 per cent higher than the average daily earnings for casual workers in rural labour market. Another comprehensive time series of rural wage data (both agricultural and nonagricultural) put

together by the Ministry of Statistics and Program Implementation indicates that the advent of MGNREGA has resulted in a significant structural break in rural market wage increases. Between 1999 and 2005, pre-MGNREGA, nominal wages in the rural economy grew at an average annual rate of 2.7 per cent. Post-MGNREGA, average wage increases almost quadrupled to 9.7 per cent between 2006 and 2009. And between January 2010 and May 2011 (the last date for which this data is available), annual nominal wage growth averaged almost 18.8 per cent. Since January 2010, agricultural wages rose 20.2 per cent, while non-agricultural rural market wages increased 16.7 per cent. Wage growth for men in the agricultural sector averaged 19.7 per cent, while that for women 20.8 percent .

Table -2

Increase in MGNREGA Notified Wages from 2006–07 to 2011–12 and Minimum Agriculture Wage (Rs. per day) 2011–12

State	MGNREGA Wage FY 2006-07	MGNREGA Wage FY 2007-08	MGNREGA Wage FY 2009-10	MGNREGA Wage FY 2010&11 & 2011-12	MGNREGA Wage (revision with effect from 1/4/2012)	Minimum Agriculture Wage (Min. Wages Act) FY 2011-12
Andhra Pradesh	80	80	100	121	137	168
Arunachal Pradesh	55-57	65-67	80	118	124	135-154
Assam	66	76.35	100	130	136	100.42
Bihar	68	77	100	120	122	120
Chhattisgarh	62.63	62.63	100	122	132	114
Gujarat	50	50	100	124	134	100
Haryana	99.21	135	141.02	179	191	173.19
Himachal Pradesh	75	75	100	120-150	126-157	120-150

Jammu & Kashmir	70	70	100	121	131	110
Jharkhand	76.78	76.68	99	120	122	127
Karnataka	69	74	100	125	155	145.58
Kerala	125	125	125	150	164	200
Madhya Pradesh	63	85	100	122	132	124
Maharashtra	47	66-72	100	127	145	100
Manipur	72.4	81.4	81.4	126	144	122.1
Meghalaya	70	70	100	117	128	100
Mizoram	91	91	110	129	136	170
Nagaland	66	100	100	118	124	-
Odisha	55	70	90	125	126	90
Punjab	92-105	93-105	100-105	153	166	153.8
Rajasthan	73	73	100	119	133	135
Sikkim	85	85	100	118	124	100
Tamil Nadu	80	80	100	119	132	100
Tripura	60	60	100	118	124	100
Uttar Pradesh	58	58	100	120	125	100
Uttarakhand	73	73	100	120	125	121.65
West Bengal	69.4	69.4	100	130	136	167

Source: Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (official website), <http://www.mgnrega.nic.in>.

Situation of Worker's Participation in Labour Market in Uttar Pradesh

Several analysts suggest that there is a U-shaped relationship between economic growth and labour force participation. Labour force participation rates are relatively higher in low-income agricultural economies. But as economic growth accelerates, participation of laborers declines up to a certain level before rising again. The present study finds that the rural labour market conforms to the left half part of the 'U'. This conformity is more aggressive in the case of rural labourers. Table-3 presents Worker Population Ratio (WPR) and Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) of rural labour market in Uttar Pradesh along with Average Annual Growth Rates of NSDP at factor cost at constant prices. Table-3 reveals some very disturbing facts. The females' WPR has been abysmally low in comparison to the WPR of males. Moreover, it has declined over

the period. The WPR for females, which was 13.0 percent in 1993-94 in rural UP, declined to 8.7 percent in 2011-12 (68th Round). The gender gap, the difference between the WPR for males and females, was huge at 37.6 percent in 1993-94. It reflects severe gender discrimination. This gap increased marginally to 38.7 percent in 2011-12. Similarly, LFPR has also been quite low for the females. It was 13.1 percent in 1993-94 and declined to 8.8 percent in 2011-12. Here again, the gender gap, the difference between the LFPR for males and females, was huge at 38.1 percent in 1993-94. The gap increased marginally to 39.5 percent in 2011-12. A very strange outcome visible from Table-3 is that both WPR and LFPR of women have witnessed drastic decline in 2007-08 (64th Round). This may be due to the implementation of the MNREGS in 2006-07. Mechanization of agriculture may be another reason. Mechanized agricultural implements and tools like harvesters, tractors, more efficient threshers, levellers, etc. are increasingly being used

now in agricultural activities, displacing some labour from agriculture. However, the ratios for men did not witness such decline.

Since, the rural economy of UP is dominantly an agrarian economy, it can not be assumed that the decline in WPR and LFPR is due to migration of rural women to better jobs in sectors other than agriculture. One possible avenue is the MNREGS. But

again, the participation of women in MNREGS in UP is abysmally low (20 percent in 2012-13) in total person-days. However, there has been some increase in women's participation in MNREGS. The proportion of women in total person-days, which was 17 percent in 2006-07, has increased to 20 percent in 2012-13.

Table - 3

Worker Population Ratio (WPR) and Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) : Uttar Pradesh (Rural) (Usual Principal Status: Percent)								
NSSO Rounds	WPR			LFPR			Economic Growth Rate#	
	Male	Female	Gender Gap ^{WPR}	Male	Female	Gender Gap ^{LFPR}	Period	AARG\$
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
50th (1993-94)	50.6	13.0	37.6	51.2	13.1	38.1	1981-82 To 1993-94	4.17
55th (1999-00)	46.9	12.2	34.7	47.5	12.3	35.2	1994-95 To 1999-00	4.36
61st (2004-05)	47.7	12.3	35.4	48.3	12.4	35.9	2000-01 To 2004-05	3.48
64th (2007-08)	47.8	9.6	38.2	48.5	9.7	38.8	2005-06 To 2011-12	6.84
66th (2009-10)	48.1	9.0	39.1	48.9	9.1	39.8		
68th (2011-12)	47.4	8.7	38.7	48.3	8.8	39.5		

Source (Basic Data): NSSO, Various Rounds, Ministry of Statistics & Programme Implementation, GOI.

Thus, we find that females constitute a very small part of the labour force as well as worker population in the rural labour market and even this proportion has witnessed severe decline over the period. The WPR and LFPR of women witnessed drastic decline in 2007-08 (64th Round), which may be due to the implementation of the MNREGS in 2006-07 and increased use of mechanized tools and implements in agriculture. Thus, on the ground of WPR and LFPR, it can be concluded safely that there has been severe discrimination against women in the rural labour market in Uttar Pradesh. As seen from Table-3, the AARG of the economy has improved during

the period 2005-06 to 2011-12. Therefore, increase in gender gap has not been caused by any increase in WPR and LFPR of men. It implies that both men and women have migrated to some other jobs. MNREGS may be one of them. Moreover, improved economic performance of the economy in recent years has led to absorption of particularly male labourers in some better paid jobs.

The average wage/ salary earnings per day for the persons aged 15 - 59 years engaged in rural labour market areas of Uttar Pradesh have been presented in Table-4. It is evident from Table that

male wage rate in regular wage/ salaried employment has grown by 142.25 percent over the period 2004-05 to 2011-12 whereas the female wage rate in regular wage/ salaried employment has grown by 71.0 percent over the same period, which is just half of the growth rate witnessed in the case

of male workers. This is an example of substantial wage discrimination. The gap in growth rates of male and female casual labourers wages over the same period has not been that much large. Thus, employers have discriminated vehemently against women while increasing wages.

Table -4

Average Wage/ Salary Earnings per day for the age 15 - 59 years# in Rural Areas: Uttar Pradesh										
(Rupees)										
NSSO Round	Regular Wage/Salaried Employees					Casual Labourers engaged in Works other than Public Works				
	Male	% Increase Over Previous Round	Female	% Increase Over Previous Round	Female Wage as % of Male Wage	Male	% Increase Over Previous Round	Female	% Increase Over Previous Round	Female Wage as % of Male Wage
1	2		3	4	5	6		7	8	9
55th (1999-00)	NA		NA		NA	43.50		30.08		69.15
61st (2004-05)	122.40		100.16		81.83	53.37		39.54		74.09
64th (2007-08)	160.50	31.13	129.06	28.85	80.41	73.46	37.64	58.26	47.34	79.31
66th (2009-10)	235.60	46.79	148.11	14.76	62.87	97.04	32.10	69.21	18.80	71.32
68th (2011-12)	296.51	25.85	171.27	15.64	57.76	136.84	41.01	95.31	37.71	69.65
Growth in 2011-12 Over 2004-05	142.25		71.00			156.40		141.05		
Source: NSSO, Various Rounds, Ministry of Statistics & Programme Implementation, GOI.										
Source: Labour Bureau, RLE Reports on wages and Earnings of Rural Labour Households, 2009-10, Shimla										
# For 1999-00, it is for the age 5 years and above										

Table 5

Average Wage per day for Casual Labourers in Selected Villages					
(In Rupees)					
Village	Block	District	Wage Rate		Females' Wage as % of Males' Wage
			Males	Females	
1	2	3	4	5	6
Isouli	Baldirai	Sultanpur	150.00	100.00	66.67
Pure sahani	Baldirai	Sultanpur	150.00	100.00	66.67
Uchhahpali	Milkipur	Faizabad	150.00	80.00	53.33
Parabrahmnan	Milkipur	Faizabad	150.00	80.00	53.33
Ahirouly	Milkipur	Faizabad	150.00	75.00	50.00
Usaru	Masoudha	Faizabad	120.00	65.00	54.17
Janoura	Masoudha	Faizabad	175.00	120.00	68.57
Husepur	sohawal	Faizabad	200.00	100.00	50.00
Safipur	Sohawal	Faizabad	150.00	120.00	80.00
Jignahi	Khandasa	Faizabad	120.00	100.00	83.33

Source: Field Survey-2014

The findings of the field survey on average daily wage rates of casual labourers in the selected villages have been presented in Table 5. Eighteen respondents (10 farmers/employers and 08 labourers) were interviewed from each of the 10 villages. In all, 180 respondents were interviewed. Widespread disparity in wages has been confirmed. The wage rate of females as percent of the wage rate of males varies from the low of 50.00 percent in Ahirouly of Faizabad districts to the high of 83.33 percent in Jignahi, again of Faizabad district. Thus, the findings of the field survey conform to the findings based on the NSSO data. Gender wage discrimination exists and it exists despite all efforts of the Central Government as well as the state government. Thus we may conclude that the acceleration in the growth process in recent period has aggravated the wage difference in terms of increase in wage rates as well as in terms of absolute wage rates them and the growth process has caused severe damage to the cause of wage discrimination in rural labour market.

The reduction in distress migration may be more apparent in the case of households that need to migrate with their families; the entire family is forced to migrate to cities due to limited work opportunities. This leads to a disruption of children's education and access to family health care. My study across 02 districts of Uttar Pradesh found that out of 180 beneficiaries, 60 per cent of the respondents felt that migration had been reduced in their families as a result of MGNREGA. Thirty-five per cent of the respondents (out of 180 respondents) felt that their children's education had been positively benefitted by MGNREGA, while 05 per cent felt that their clothing had improved. The study across two districts in Uttar Pradesh also highlights the positive impact of the Scheme on reduction in child labour. As per the research, MGNREGA reduced the probability of a boy (whose family was provided work under the Scheme) entering child labour by 10 percentage points and of a girl entering child labour by 8 percentage points.

MGNREGA also provides supplementary income for family members who choose or are unable to migrate. In Sultanpur (Uttar Pradesh), the results of study showed that the labour market got vertically segmented: women, old people and the infirm sought employment with MGNREGA and the able-bodied men demanding higher wages chose farm jobs. Likewise in Faizabad where migration to urban centers offers relatively higher incomes for men, much of the MGNREGA workers were found to be women and older men who had discontinued migration. In certain places the reduction in distress migration has been reversed due to improper implementation of MGNREGA processes. In Uttar Pradesh, MGNREGA implementation initially reduced migration but the delay in payment of wages led the people back to their migrant ways. Delay in payment of MGNREGA wages was also found to be a key reason for the lack of enthusiasm among the tribal farmers in Sultanpur districts (Uttar Pradesh) This was in spite of significant differences between the prevailing rural market wage rates (Rs 120/day plus meal; cash payment) and MGNREGA wage rates (Rs 161/day).

Conclusion

It can be thought of as a floor for minimum wages across the country, in the sense that all states are encouraged to ensure that their minimum wages are set above this level. The NFLMW is frequently revised in order to account for rising price levels. Not only is the disparity between workers important, but more important is the fact that workers get paid wages that are lower than the NFLMW even though they work as regular wage workers. The growth process in UP has proved to be detrimental to the cause of equitable and inclusive labour market for workers and the acceleration in the growth rate in recent years has done more damage. Females still constitute a very small part of the labour force as well as worker population in the rural labour market and even this proportion has witnessed decline over the period. On the ground of WPR and LFPR, it can

be concluded safely that there has been severe discrimination against women in the rural labour market in Uttar Pradesh. To develop rural labour market in Uttar Pradesh some of the recent initiatives and reforms taken up by the Government as part of the next level of implementation of MGNREGA, viz. MGNREGA 2.0. The GoUP will also be releasing revised MGNREGA Operational Guidelines based on the recommendations of the Mihir Shah Committee. Some suggestions/ Initiatives are as-

- To help improve the ecological balance in rural India.
- Ensuring the Demand-based Character of MGNREGA
- Effective Planning.
- To strengthen the positive synergy between MGNREGA and agriculture and allied rural livelihoods.
- To respond to the demands of the States for greater location-specific flexibility in permissible works.
- Anticipated quantum of demand for work.
- Precise timing of the demand for work.
- A plan that outlines the quantum and schedule of work to be provided to those who demand work.
- Strict Time Schedule.
- Reducing Delays in Wage Payments.
- AADHAAR.
- Business Correspondent Model.
- Electronic Transfer of Data Files.

Thus, on the whole, it appears that the improved performance of the economy has discouraged women's participation in rural labour market through MGNREGA. This conformity is more aggressive in the case of rural labourers. Whether this is a favourable outcome for the female labour force will depend on the avenues where the migrated labour force has been absorbed. The segment of the women labour force withdrawn from

agriculture and related activities which has been absorbed by the MNREGS is getting higher wages. To that extent, the outcome of the growth process is positive. In this reference my suggestion is that if government really wants to chase the target of inclusive growth through MGNREGA, governments have to formulate better policy for development of rural labour market.

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