

Rural development and participatory communication process of MGNREGS: A study of beneficiary's feedback analysis

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Abstract: For creating employment and rural development the government of India has initiated various socio-economic structural measures and participatory communication strategies through different developmental schemes time to time for eradication of poverty and unemployment problems. But the common perceptions towards this kind of developmental programme is that these schemes are not delivering the expected benefits and information to the civil society because of the improper official process, corruption and procedural delay and other reasons. From the review it is seen many studies have been conducted in this programme with regards to monetary involvements and fund utilization, corruption and status of the project work etc. But this paper has made a different attempt to specifically examine the beneficiary's feedback about panchayat participatory communication process of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) and the role of gram sabha and panchayat governance and administration for creating employment and implementing developmental scheme for rural development.

Key words: Participatory Communication, Rural Development, Employment, Feedback, Gram Sabha, Panchayat Governance.

1. INTRODUCTION:

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme is a unique programme of the government of India executed by ministry of rural development under MGNREG act, 2005. This programme, which aims at providing livelihood security to the rural poor, was being implemented with effect from 2 February 2006 initially in 200 most backward districts of the country and then extended to one hundred thirty additional districts in 2007-2008 and has now been notified in all the remaining districts with effect from April 1, 2008. The Act provides a legal guarantee of one hundred days of wage employment in a financial year to every rural household or else an unemployment allowance. The objective of the Act is to supplement wage employment opportunities in rural areas.

Planning is significant to the successful implementation of the rural employment scheme. The Act under section 16, mandates the formulation of a development plan by the gram panchayat on the recommendations of the gram sabha. The development plan will be an annual plan that consists of a 'shelf of projects' to offer employment on demand.

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) is a unique scheme which recognizes the legitimate role of panchayats in addressing their fundamental duty as expressed in the seventy-third constitutional amendment of providing 'economic development and social justice' within their area of jurisdiction. The recognition of panchayat raj institution (PRI) as the principal implementing agency of Mahatma Gandhi national rural employment guarantee scheme, which has to unlock gigantic opportunities for decentralizing development and respecting local solutions to local livelihood challenges.

1.1 A brief overview of employment initiatives by the government

India has a long history of public works programmes. They started as relief works during the pre-British and British period when disasters like drought and floods threatened the survival of people. They provided employment at minimum wages to enable affected people to survive. However, assets were selected in an ad hoc manner, keeping in mind largely the convenience of affected people. After Independence, however, public employment programmes were viewed as a means of generating employment to address the structural un/underemployment, as well as a means of creating productive assets for expanding the labour-absorbing capacity of the economy (Nurkse 1957, Hirschman 1961). The first public works programme, Rural Works Programme (RWP), was introduced in the 1960s and was followed by a series of wage employment programmes, each trying to improve upon the earlier one. These initially were the Crash

Scheme for Rural Employment (CSRE), Pilot Rural Employment Project (PIREP), and then two national employment programmes—the National Rural Employment Programme (NREP) from 1980/81–1989 and the Rural Labour Employment Guarantee Programme (RLEGP) during 1982/83–1989. The Jawahar RojgarYojana was introduced in the mid-1990s to involve panchayati raj institutions and a modified version of this programme, Sampurna Grameen RojgarYojana (SGRY), was introduced in the late 1990s to provide massive wage employment to the rural population (Hirway and Terhal 1994). Maharashtra's Employment Guarantee Scheme (MEGS) is important in this context, as it has several useful features not found in early employment programmes. Maharashtra's Employment Guarantee Scheme (MEGS) was introduced in the early 1970s with multiple objectives of ensuring work to all who were willing to work at a predetermined wage rate in rural regions. The element of guarantee was to make sure that the programme reached the underprivileged at the bottom, on the one hand and promote development of backward or deprived regions, on the other. To make these programmes successful, it is necessary that employment is made available on a scale that meets the demand for work. In short, if planned and implemented well, these programmes can promote strategic use of surplus labour to promote labour-intensive, sustainable development in the economy.

1.2 Theoretical framework

Communitarian perspective of development focuses on economic distribution, participatory approach in policy making and integration of community. It promotes group and individual choice of freedom, cultural and artistic creativity, regional and local autonomy, political participation, consumer and public rights, social mobility and political access and circulation (Majid Tehranian, 1979).

Communitarian approach of development gives more importance to the community and it says that community should decide its own way of development through participatory approaches. There should not be any imposed idea from outside; state must consult with the community people to make any development plan for societal upliftment, peoples' participation is imperative and community must participate in decision making process.

1.3 Communication provisions under MGNREGS

- Awareness generation through Information, Education and Communication (IEC) For people to know their rights under the Act, effective communication of information about the Act and Scheme is essential.
- For awareness generation every State Government will undertake an intensive Information Education Communication (IEC) exercise to publicise the key provisions of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) and procedures to be followed like the process of registration, demand for employment, unemployment allowance, grievance redressal and social audit.
- Information Education Communication (IEC) should target workers, rural households, panchayat and pay special attention to deprived areas and marginalized communities. The state government should draw up an information education communication plan and develop communication material designed to help people articulate their demand and claim their entitlements.
- Information should be widely disseminated, especially in remote areas, through gram sabha, television, radio, films, print media including vernacular newspapers, pamphlets and brochures etc.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW:

S. B Verma and S. K. Shing edited (2004) 'Rural Development through Women's Participation and Electronic Media', and cited in the book that lack of awareness of the latest developments in the field of agriculture science among a large number of farmers is a vital constraining factor. This book made an attempt to study the possible aspects of social change and assess the influences and benefits of various schemes, projects and programs launched by the government, to the rural disadvantaged masses.

Bhatia and Dreze (2006) in the article 'Employment Guarantee in Jharkhand: Ground Realities, published by Economic and Political Weekly, found that the rural employment guarantee schemes in Jharkhand gave births to doubt regarding the commitment to the Act to provide livelihood security and create sustainable development. They find that most of the works had not been completed and the productive value of completed works was not up to the expectation.

Dipjoy Sen Roy and Debabrata Samanta (2009) conducted a study on 'Good Governance and Employment Generation Through NREGA: A Case Study of Gram Panchayat in West Bengal', in order to assess the performance of gram panchayat in performing core characteristics of good governance and to explore the relationship between good governance and employment generation through MGNREGS, and have considered the following components of good governance; (i). Participation (ii) Transparency (iii) Accountability (iv) Effectiveness & efficiency and (v) Equity.

3. METHODOLOGY:

The survey method was employed for this study with the help of a structured questionnaire followed by in-depth interviews and the researcher used convenient sampling technique for this study.

3.1 Study universe and sample size

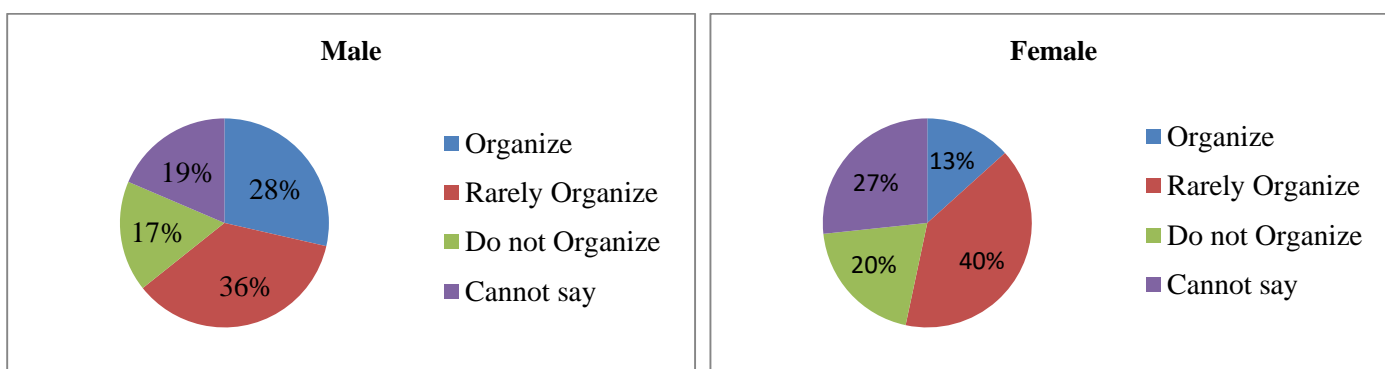
The universe of the study is Rapcha goan panchyat of Gamharia development block under the Seraikela kharsawa district and one hundred beneficiaries were selected as sample size for this study.

3.2 Objectives

- To find out the role of gram sabha and governance of gaon panchyat administration in spreading awareness for implementing the employment and rural developmental scheme.
- To understand the level and source of information of the beneficiaries and their views on the participatory communication process and strategies about MGNREGS.
- To find out the opinion of the beneficiaries on the major obstacle for rural development and employment creation through MGNREGS.

4. Data Interpretation and Analysis:

Chart 1.1: Beneficiary’s feedback about organizing gram sabha by gaon panchayat administration to spread information about MGNREGS.



In chart 1.1, we find that 36 percent male and 40 percent female beneficiaries opine that gaon panchayat rarely organize gram sabha followed by 28 percent male and 13 percent female say that panchayat organize gram sabha for spreading information about MGNREGS. On the otherhand, 17 percent male and 20 percent female said do not organize and 19 percent male and 27 percent female said they cannot say anything about it. From the analysis of data, on the basis of sex we can assume that majority of the respondents both male and female say that panchayat rarely organize gram sabha for spreading information about MGNREGS followed by organize gram sabha and then 46 percent marked cannot say anything.

Chart: 1.2: Beneficiary’s opinion on panchayat’s participatory communication strategies and feedback registering mechanism as to the project work.

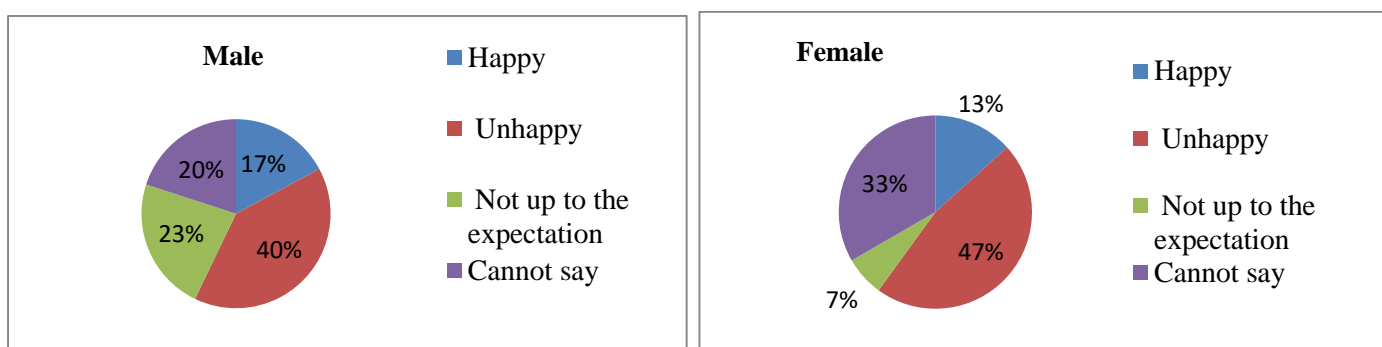
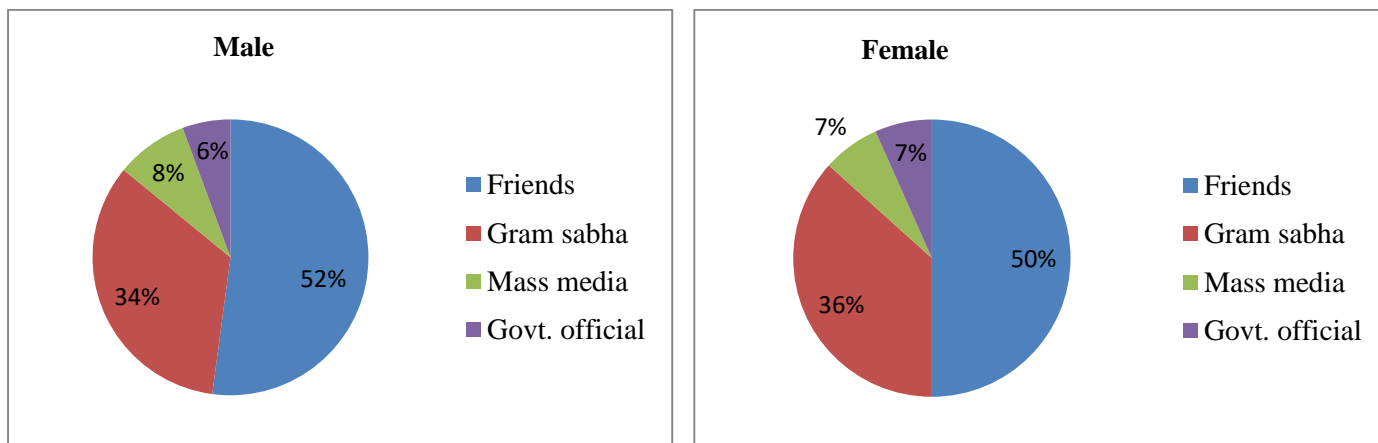


Chart 1.2, reveals that 40 percent male and 47 percent female beneficiaries opine that they are unhappy while 17 percent male 13 percent female said they are happy to the panchayat’s participatory communication strategies and feedback

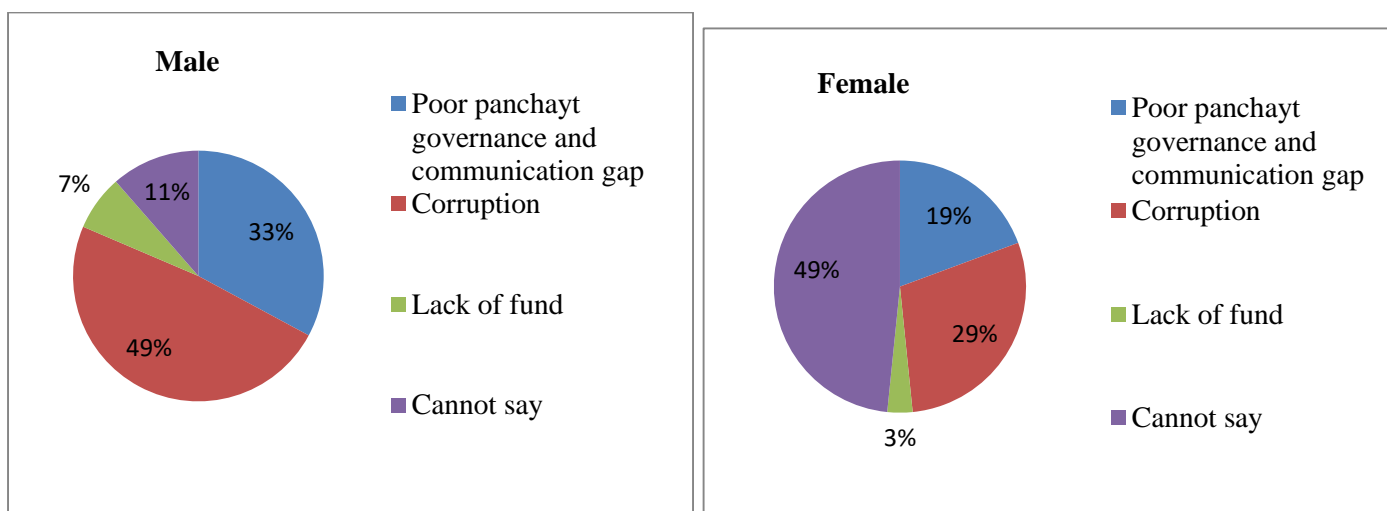
registering mechanism and 23 percent male and 7 percent female say that it is not upto the expectation. On the other hand, 20 percent male and 30 percent female are unable to say anything about it. From the analysis of data, we can assume that majority of the respondents both male and female say that they are unhappy to the panchayat’s participatory communication strategies and feedback registering mechanism.

Chart: 1.3: Beneficiary’s source of information about employment creation and rural developmental scheme.



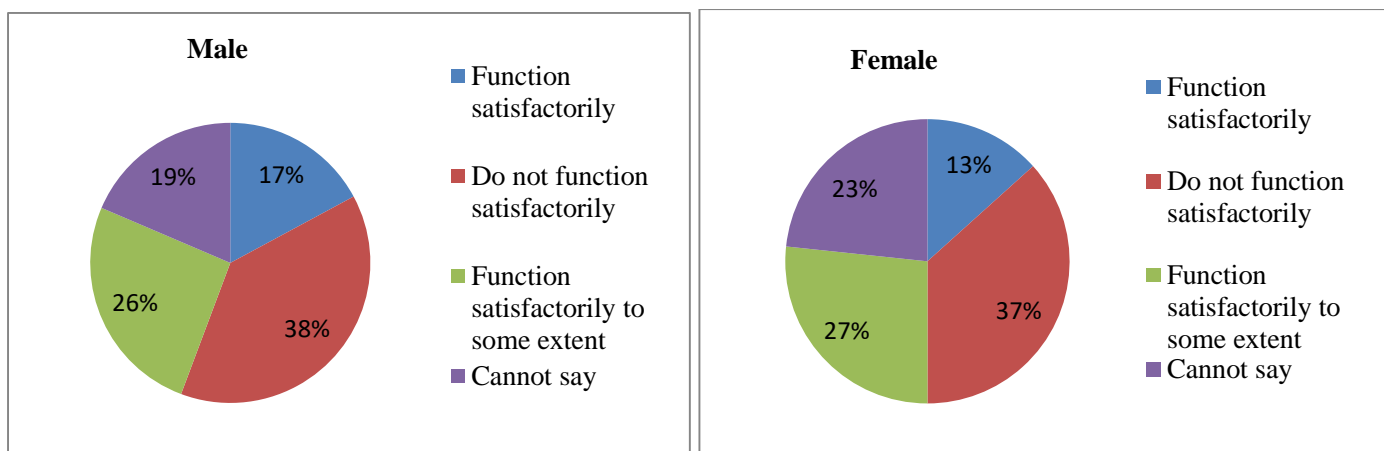
According to chart 1.3, the data reveals that 52 percent male and 50 percent female beneficiaries identify ‘friends’ as their source that informs them about employment creation and rural developmental scheme and 34 percent male and 36 percent female beneficiaries state ‘gram sabha’. On the other hand, 8 percent male and 7 percent female beneficiaries say ‘mass media’ while 6 percent male and 7 percent female beneficiaries identify government official as their source of information. From the analysis of the data, it can be said that interpersonal communication is more effective to both male and female beneficiaries as their source of information about employment creation and rural developmental scheme.

Chart: 1.4: Main obstacle for implementing the developmental scheme and gender wise beneficiary’s feedback.



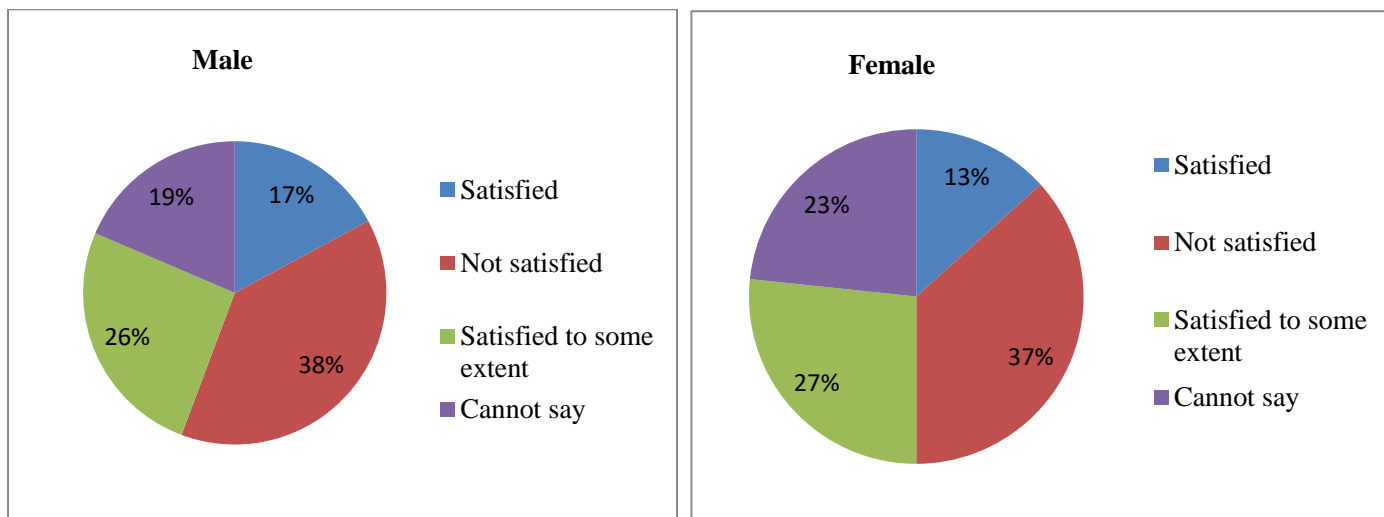
The above 1.4 chart reveals that 49 percent male and 29 percent female beneficiaries identify ‘corruption’ as main obstacle for implementing the developmental scheme and 33 percent male and 19 percent female beneficiaries state ‘poor panchayat governance and communication gap’. On the other hand, 7 percent male and 3 percent female beneficiaries say ‘lack of fund’ while 11 percent male and 49 percent female beneficiaries are unable to say anything about main obstacle for implementing the developmental scheme. It can be inferred by saying that corruption is the main obstacle for implementing the developmental scheme followed by poor panchayat governance and communication gap.

Chart: 1.5: Beneficiary’s feedback on the functions of gram sabha as a forum of participatory communication for planning rural developmental project.



According to chart 1.5 data reveal that 38 percent male and 37 percent female beneficiaries say that gram sabha do not functions satisfactorily as a forum of participatory communication for planning developmental project and 26 percent male and 27 percent female beneficiaries state ‘function satisfactorily to some extent’. On the other hand, 19 percent male and 23 percent female beneficiaries are unable to say anything about it while 17 percent male and 13 percent female beneficiaries say that gram sabha functions satisfactorily as a forum of participatory communication for planning developmental project. It can be inferred by saying that gram sabha and panchayat administration do not functions satisfactorily as a forum of participatory communication for planning developmental project.

Chart: 1.6: Beneficiary’s satisfaction towards the panchayat administration and governance in terms of employment creation and development



The above 1.6 chart reveals that 38 percent male and 37 percent female beneficiaries identify ‘not satisfied’ towards the panchayat administration and governance in terms of employment creation and rural development and 26 percent male and 27 percent female beneficiaries state ‘satisfied to some extent’. On the other hand, 19 percent male and 23 percent female beneficiaries are unable to say anything about while 17 percent male and 13 percent female beneficiaries identify ‘satisfied’ towards the panchayat administration and governance in terms of employment creation and rural development. It can be assumed from the data that majority of the beneficiaries are not satisfied towards the panchayat administration and governance in terms of employment creation and rural development.

5. Major Findings and Conclusion :

From the data analysis we find that 36 percent male and 40 percent female beneficiaries opine that gaon panchayat administration rarely organize gram sabha and 28 percent male and 13 percent female say that panchayat organizes gram sabha for spreading information about MGNREGS. On the other hand, 19 percent male and 27 percent female are unable to say anything about organizing gram sabha by panchayat administration. Data also reveal that 40 percent male and 47 percent female beneficiaries have opined that they are unhappy to the panchayat's participatory communication strategies and feedback registering mechanism while only 17 percent male 13 percent female said they are happy to it. It is seen that 52 percent male and 50 percent female beneficiaries have identified 'friends' as their source that informs them about employment creation and rural developmental scheme and 34 percent male and 36 percent female beneficiaries have said 'gram sabha'. Hence, it can be said that interpersonal communication is more effective followed by small group communication to both male and female beneficiaries as their source of information.

From the primary data, it is seen that corruption is the main obstacle for implementing the developmental scheme followed by poor panchayat governance and communication gap. It is also found that gram sabha and panchayat administration do not functions satisfactorily as a forum of participatory communication for planning developmental project. It is also seen that majority of the beneficiaries are not satisfied towards the panchayat administration and governance in terms of employment creation and rural development.

If the government wants to communicate properly with rural communities, it must understand how to channelize development work through the communities' traditional communication media which can be greatly enhanced by the use of traditional and folk media that are an integral part of rural life, for example proverbs, poems, songs and dances, plays and stories etc.

The right to work in the Indian context is a continuing struggle. In this respect, the state has to undertake some measures to address and deal with the phenomenon of corruption and proper participatory communication process. Corruption and communication gap, inefficiency of government communication system are two major obstacles in the case of implementing MGNREG scheme and sustainable development. The issue of corruption can be dealt through social mobilization by grass roots organizations. Provisions of information, education and communication (IEC) laid in the Act are not being strictly followed by the panchayat administration and government officials. Government can start a feedback mechanism for the beneficiaries in the remote villages to reduce corruption, cheating and make the scheme more effective. Frequent meeting of gram sabhas, and social audits are also an effective guarantee against corruption.

6. Recommendations

- Government should develop feedback mechanism process to get feedback directly from the beneficiaries of the scheme. In this respect, government can provide toll free number to get response from the job card holders or can send higher authority from the state or center to visit the work place of the scheme and interact with the workers to know the ground reality.
- Traditional communication methods like padyatra, village level meetings, puppet shows, street plays, and local folk media can also be used to reach the most disadvantaged sections of society, along with the support of civil society organizations. Mobilizing people for gram sabha, leaflets, posters, street play and wall writing in local language can also be adopted for rural development programmes.
- Community information centre should be established by the government at village level or in the nearest local market for disseminating information to the rural beneficiaries. The information centre will also be responsible for collecting basic issues highlighted by the citizens, families and panchayat, and provide such information to the concerned administration or officials for quick measure. There should be transparency and intensive training inputs at implementation level.

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