INPUT PAPER 4: Government-led Public Works Programme (PWP) and Public Employment Programme (PEP) to address poverty alleviation, climate change and crisis

EIIP SSTC

Inter-regional forum for Asia and the Arab States

8-10 April 2025, Bangladesh

INPUT PAPER 4: Government-led Public Works Programme (PWP) and Public Employment Programme (PEP) to address poverty alleviation, climate change and crisis

ISBN: 9789220427033 (web PDF)
DOI: https://doi.org/10.54394/WOWU0658

Printed in Switzerland

ADDRESSING POVERTY, CLIMATE CHANGE AND CRISIS THROUGH PUBLIC WORKS/ PUBLIC EMPLOYMENT INTERVENTIONS[1]

An Evidence based Agenda of Action for Governments

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

ILO has asked the undersigned to prepare a paper for South–South Technical Cooperation (SSTC), suggesting good practices and opportunities for partnerships, on **'How governments lead the designing and implementation of nationwide PWP/PEP to address poverty alleviation, climate change and crisis'**. As per the Terms of reference, the work includes but is not limited to:

- Provide examples of different PWPs/PEPs from the region but also beyond, the rationale, key challenges and lessons learned from implementation.
- Discuss institutional arrangements, capacity and fiscal requirements for PWP/PEPs and how they can contribute to crisis response and natural resource management.
- Identifying and documenting good practices from **Asia and Arab States.**
- Identifying key challenges in the countries and strategic initiatives where SSTC activities would be able to have major impact.
- Throughout consultations and during the Forum, facilitating policy dialogue and identifying partnerships between governments and institutions from the Asia and Arab States.

1.2 Public Employment Programmes

The International Labour Organization defines Public Employment Programmes (PEPs) as publicly financed and government implemented, long-term investment programmes that directly create employment through productive activities with a high labour intensity, rather than through the expansion of civil services[i]. These interventions share the primary objective of providing employment for workers who are unable to support themselves due to a shortage of market-based employment opportunities. These programmes may also be financed and implemented by donor agencies, in collaboration with a government to which agencies such as the International Labour Organization's (ILO's) Employment-Intensive Investment Programme (EIIP) can provides technical guidance. The term PEP is used collectively and includes Employment Guarantee Schemes (EGS) that are long-term and institutionalized programmes. PEPs are often a component of the national protection system.

Public Works programmes have a long history. They were used during the Great Depression by today's industrialized countries as a counter-cyclic policy instrument (Freedman 1989:2). At that time, massive government funds were channeled into public investment programmes to create work for people, thereby stimulating demand, aiding economic recovery and eventually reducing the slack in the labour

[1] This Input Paper was prepared by Amarjeet Sinha for the ILO - Employment Intensive Investment Programme (EIIP), February 2025.

market. The mobilization of indigenous labour for road, dam and land conservation was widespread in colonial Africa as far back as 1903, and most post-colonial states implemented labour-intensive projects in regions of drought and famine as a tool for crisis mitigation (Webb 1992:4). Several Asian countries (e.g. India, China, Bangladesh) have implemented public works programmes for many years. Such schemes have been used and advocated for alleviating both chronic and transient poverty in South Asia for centuries (Ravallion 1990:2).

While most public works programmes in Africa and Asia have in the past been used to respond to crises such as drought and famine, these schemes have evolved since the '70s into mainstream policy instruments for employment creation and poverty alleviation directed towards segments of the population[ii]. These schemes are viewed by their proponents as possessing the potential for improving household food security and level of living by offering income through employment while at the same time creating assets necessary for future growth.

We live in a world of strife that has seen the resurgence of poverty post covid. The world also faces the impact of climate change as never before. South Asian and Arab region has also experienced dislocation in their economies and employment on account of events over the last few years. Crisis, climate change and persistence of poverty in many of these regions, calls for a humanitarian approach by governments to address the lives and livelihoods of deprived communities. Public Works Programmes (PWPs) and Public Employment programmes (PEPs), and other programmes for public employment, provide an opportunity to learn from the evidence so far. Public Employment Programmes are large scale government and donor driven efforts to mitigate poverty, climate challenges and conflict related deprivation of workers/women.

There are several country specific initiatives addressing the challenges of employment for the deprived households and poor regions that we can learn from. India's Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS – the largest public employment programme of any government), Bangladesh's Employment Generation programme for the Poorest, Nepal's employment initiatives for geographies of poverty in the hilly Karnali regions, also offer lessons for the design, planning and implementation of public employment programmes on scale. South Africa's Expanded Public Works Program (EPWP) and Eithopia's Productive Safety Net Program (PSPN) are also very important national initiatives.

1.3 ILO Employment Intensive Investment Programme (EIIP)

EIIP supports ILO member States in the design, formulation, implementation and evaluation of policies and programmes aiming to address unemployment and underemployment through public investment, typically in infrastructure development. EIIP reinforces and builds institutional and operational capacity to provide productive and decent work that has an economic, environmental and social impact. EIIP has been collaborating extensively with national PEPs, e.g. India's Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) and South Africa's Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) to provide technical support for the design of the infrastructure components of PEPs, advise on measures to improve targeting, and quality and productivity, as well as assisting in the monitoring and assessment of such programmes.

A total of 87 EIIP projects were implemented in 35 countries between 2012-2022. An assessment of several of these projects carried by ILO in 2023 provide valuable insights on the impact of the initiatives.[iii]

1.4 Scope and limitations

This input paper will focus on South–South Technical Cooperation (SSTC) and institutional arrangements to tackle the challenges of public employment, humanitarian assistance and creation of durable public assets and infrastructure. It will undertake a brief review of the MGNREGS in India to see the lessons that it offers for other countries in the institutional design for employment guarantee. It will also look at the other key initiatives so far and provide pointers how best to develop a framework of implementation for such initiatives. This input paper will provide evidence and ideas for **'How governments lead the designing and implementation of nationwide PWP/PEP to address poverty alleviation, climate change and crisis',** with a focus on Asia and the Arab States.

The Paper will be divided in the following sections

1. Introduction
2. Challenges of crisis, climate change and poverty in the developing world.
3. Learning from the experiences so far
4. MGNREGS as a case study for employment guarantee.
5. Developing the modalities for South – South Cooperation for Public Employment/ Public Works and lessons for implementation of PEPs.

2 Challenges of crisis, climate change and poverty in the developing world.

2.1 Context

The World is still experiencing the challenges of a post covid period. While some countries have managed to recover growth and stability, others are still struggling to make a comeback. With rising youth population and high incidence of multi- dimensional poverty, South Asian region in particular, faces a challenge of employment, equality and economic growth. The coming of Artificial Intelligence and its use on scale is also expected to interfere in the unemployment situation. Incomes must rise much faster for aspiring countries like India to escape the Middle-Income Trap. Countries like Bangladesh that had experienced high rates of economic progress, is facing challenges of quality jobs for the youth and higher productivity for wages of dignity. Nepal, Myanmar, Pakistan experience the challenges of poverty, conflicts and climate change like other South Asian nations. The Arab nations also need more public employment at a time when lives and livelihoods are being disrupted due to conflicts.

The Arab States are experiencing a turbulent period on account of conflicts. Lebanon, Palestine, Iraq, Jordan, Syria, are all facing the challenges of conflict and dislocation. Migration of people and communities is on scale. Between 2011 and 2019, political instability and conflict, as well as global economic conditions, led to varying economic growth trajectories across the Arab countries. Women are among the most disadvantaged groups in Arab labour markets.

A substantial gender income gap is evident in the Arab States, where the total earnings of women amount to only 12.5 percent of men's. Emerging trends in the world of work can exacerbate issues related to job security, fair wages, decent working hours and international labour standards, underscoring the need for comprehensive and innovative strategies that leave no one behind.

2.2 Addressing the challenges

There is a need to design and implement pro-employment and inclusive and macroeconomic and sectoral policies, besides improving skills and education system and promoting lifelong learning. There is an urgent need to promote women's participation in the labour force and bridge the gender gap. Inequalities need to be addressed, and workers' rights must be protected in all forms of work.

The challenges of crisis, climate change and poverty require innovative approaches to public employment and social protection. It calls for enhancing the skill sets of individuals to achieve higher productivity and wages of dignity. Decent jobs require investment in higher order education and skills. A more holistic approach is needed to situate Public Employment Programs in the larger canvas of human capabilities. There is a need to address conflict situations in the short run through humanitarian assistance and higher order skills for sustainable livelihoods. Migration poses its own challenges of disharmony. EIIP like interventions seek a minimum quality of life for the deprived while creating new infrastructure through higher wage employment. There are challenges of delivery of programs for the poor on scale as the public system of program management has its own systemic challenges. Governance reforms therefore are integral to all efforts to develop nation specific institutional framework for addressing the challenges of conflicts, climate change and poverty.

Efforts of multi-lateral organizations need government ownership of the initiative. It requires evolution of program management structures that recognize the need for new ideas and innovations. Technical cooperation acquires importance as embedding a good team with relevant skills often changes the character of interventions. Planning improves. Monitoring becomes rigorous and the efforts show in the outcomes. Coordinated working of UN agencies like ILO with public funds and Budget allocation for public employment, is catalyzed by handholding through technical cooperation. Developing country governments welcome such embedding of international agency personnel to improve the mainstream planning and implementation. The innovations of the project Management team challenge the inertia of the mainstream and makes a case for effectiveness of efforts.

Development is interpreted as the process of economic and social change leading to improvement in material livelihoods and wellbeing of people, of the less well-off, by reducing inequality and poverty. The word 'wellbeing' has a wider multi-dimensional meaning to 'encompass expansion of people's freedoms and capabilities to lead lives that they value and have reasons to value' (UNDP 2022).

The composite UN Human Development Index (HDI) attempts to capture wellbeing through indicators of 'a long and healthy life, knowledge and a decent standard of living'. The disadvantages which are obstacles against the less well-off improving their wellbeing are: (a) limited personal or household capabilities and resources; (b) poor environmental conditions, which include the infrastructure, and (c) the socio-political barriers which exclude or limit opportunities for sections of the population.

The EIIP approach contributes to all three of these disadvantages. These approaches become even more impactful when national governments own initiatives for public employment within the national development framework.

EIIP projects encompass all or some of the following activities with employment as the central focus: (a) implementation of infrastructure works to create or maintain infrastructure assets; (b) capacity development (contractors and government staff), and (c) policy and institutional development support. These activities are intended to lead to: (a) improved economic and non-economic infrastructure assets; (b) improved capacities of contractors and government and local administration staff, and (c) changes in policies and institutions which could be deployed to sustain and extend the employment intensive approach.

3 Learning from the experiences so far

In this Section, an attempt will be made to assess the performance of some national Public Employment Programmes and some major initiatives for EIIP across the world over the last ten years, based on the assessments carried out for ILO.

3.1 Lebanon: Addressing the humanitarian – development peace nexus[iv]

EIIPs engagement in Lebanon started in 2017 in response to high influx of displaced persons from Syria and was intended to provide support in a crisis for the Government of Lebanon and Lebanese people to cope with the resulting labour market distress and pressure on public-services and amenities. Since 2017 the EIIP Lebanon Project is being implemented in phases, with the aim to construct, rehabilitate and maintain public assets in Lebanese communities hosting many Syrian refugees. While the initial focus was on providing support for Syrian displaced persons through income from work on EIIP projects, the project had to adapt to accommodate the increased number of Lebanese seeking support after the national economic crisis which started in 2020 compounded by Covid – 19 and the Beirut Port explosion.

The project responded to the national crisis by widening the range of activities and working with more partners. EIIP Lebanon's impacts beyond providing short term employment are summarized below.

- Improvement and maintenance of assets of economic and wider value (roads, markets, rural farming infrastructure and reforestation).
- Continuing road maintenance activities in partnership with the Ministry of Public Works and Transport (MOPWT) and agricultural works in partnership with the Ministry of Agriculture (MOA).
- Formal handover of ownership and responsibility for maintenance to municipalities for sustainability beyond the Project.
- Embedding an EIIP expert as Advisor in the Ministry of Social Affairs (MoSA) to support integration of the EIIP in the national social protection policy.
- Development of the Employment Intensive Projects Guidelines endorsed by MoSA and Ministry of Labour to be adopted by all agencies providing employment-based livelihood support. The Guidelines incorporate decent work principles.

- Innovations in developing and delivering projects in collaboration with NGOs. Examples are collaborations with the Lebanon Mountain Trail Association (to repair and maintain mountain trails used for leisure) and Lebanon Reforestation Initiative.
- Capacity building of contractors to implement employment intensive projects and training in the EIIP approach and decent work principles for agencies engaging in employment-based livelihood support.

3.2 India: Maintenance capacity development support for a national rural roads programme[v]

Launch of Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY)-II in 2013 was supported by a loan of USD 1.5 billion from the World Bank/International Development Association for the PMGSY to be implemented in eight states (Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Meghalaya, Punjab, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, and Bihar). ILO was invited by the Ministry of Rural Development and the World Bank to provide technical assistance to propose and support implementation of innovative solutions for developing a sustainable approach for maintaining roads in the eight States, later extended to more states. In collaboration with National Rural Road Development Agency (NRRDA), EIIP technical assistance was in the following areas:

- Development of a rural road maintenance policy framework at the national and state levels for developing their rural road maintenance policies.
- Enhancing the knowledge of maintenance practices of the state agencies and addressing challenges among state agencies that oversaw rural roads,
- Creation of standard templates for road inventory and road condition surveys along with a Rural Roads. Maintenance Management Manual to assist the development of Annual Maintenance Plans.
- Developing of training material for engineers and contractors covering the full spectrum of rural road maintenance issues.
- Demonstration of innovative processes for contraction rural road maintenance works in the form of Performance Bases Maintenance Contract (PBMC) for routine maintenance and models of community contracting.
- Strategy for strengthening the capacity of PRIs (local government institutions) for execution of maintenance works.
- Integration of ILO's Decent Work elements in the standard contract documents and implementing guidelines of the National Rural Road Development Agency (NRRDA).

ILO in collaboration with the NRRDA piloted and launched a routine maintenance system for Performance Based Maintenance Contracts (PBMC) and community contracting in 16 states to implement sustainable and institutionalized preventive maintenance for rural roads. The mobile app "Aarambh" launched in June 2017 is a web-based application integrated with a geographic information system (GIS) for monitoring PMCs and community contracts. Engineers' inspection reports are entered in the system and can be accessed at any time to examine maintenance related data (geographical locations, road condition attributes and inspection reports). Conformance/non-conformance of any road maintenance activity by the contractor can also be monitored by Aarambh. During 2017, more than 600 Engineers were trained under EIIP Technical Assistance (TA) in the use of the system.

World Bank (2022) highlighted the contribution of the targeted EIIP TA component which had the potential to be transformational. It assessed the asset management principles and forms of local contracting piloted under the World Bank funded part of PMGSY-II to be more effective than requiring construction contractors to be responsible routine maintenance. ***The report noted that involvement of local communities also increases their sense of ownership, as it generated employment for local communities, particularly for women.*** World Bank (2022) reported that 103 districts were implementing performance and /or community-based maintenance contracts introduced by December 2020 which was more than double the target of 50 districts.

3.3 Nepal: Rural road maintenance 2013 – preserving assets and improving livelihoods of maintenance workers[vi]

Nepal ranks among the least developed nations in the world and has South Asia's second-lowest GDP. It had modest GDP growth during the reference period but had considerable reduction in poverty and improvements in rural connectivity during it. The topography and geology of Nepal, along with the high proportion of the population residing in rural area make it difficult to provide all-weather access to all people and lack of proper maintenance exacerbated the situation. During the rainy season, many villages were cut off, as less than 20% of the rural road network remained in usable condition.

To ameliorate the situation, the Government of Nepal (GoN) sought assistance from the World Bank resulting in the World Bank financed Strengthening the National Rural Transport Programme (SNRTP) in 37 districts. The project was approved in 2013, commenced in 2014 and was completed by the end of 2020. The implementation components of the project were: (a) upgrading and rehabilitation of roads and bridges and other crossing structures; (b) periodic maintenance of roads, bridges and crossing structures, and (c) routine maintenance of roads and crossing structures. Components (b) and (c) of SNRTP were devoted to the maintenance of roads and structures. This emphasis in the programme placed by the World Bank was because of the concern related to the waste of road assets because of lack of maintenance which has been referred to earlier in the PMGSY India case study. The World Bank was also concerned about the deterioration of roads constructed under the previous World Bank financed Rural Access Improvement and Decentralization Project (RAIDP) in Nepal.

ILO EIIP was asked to provide technical assistance for the maintenance component because of its expertise in local resource-based employment intensive maintenance and its previous experience in Nepal. The EIIP pilot project implemented in five districts in Nepal testing a sustainable and systematic asset management structure focused on maintaining existing assets provided and input into designing the maintenance components of the SNRTP. A key feature in the design was the maintenance first approach based on the asset management principle that existing assets need to be protected before constructing new roads since maintaining existing roads is less costly than constructing new roads. The approach was applied to the core district network in 37 districts in Nepal.

The maintenance plus principle complemented the maintenance first approach since parts of the rural road network required spot improvements of road sections to achieve all-weather connectivity by roads which were otherwise in serviceable and maintainable condition. For the management of the maintenance of road networks it was essential to compile a database listing the roads and their conditions, maintenance requirements and planning and implementation of works. The project completed a digitized road inventory of district roads and completed the development of the Rural Transport Information Management System (RuTIMS) which is a comprehensive rural road network data management tool to:

- Manage rural road assets including inventories of roads and crossing structures;
- Prepare annual road maintenance plans;
- Manage maintenance contracts and prepare progress reports, and
- Maintain and update GIS-based rural road maps and databases.

Another important feature of the project was the mobilization and deployment of road maintenance groups (RMGs). The RMG approach was effective in meeting the routine maintenance demands, addressing the maintenance backlog and take on some of the maintenance plus activities. ***The combined effective operations with cost efficiency, high labour intensity (over 60% of costs were wages) and providing employment for the poor and the vulnerable, including women.*** The last aspect in considered further below along inside the implantation of decent work principles.

Formal evidence from the World Bank implementation completion and results report (World Bank, 2020) and ILO reports on the project (ILO, 2020c and ILO, 2021c) show that the initial project target of maintaining 3,607 km of roads, under routine maintenance, within its first year of implementation. This target was eventually set at 5,500 km. By the end of the project, a total of 6,546km were maintained under routine maintenance. The initial target for maintenance of crossing structures was set at 4,000 metres, while a total of 16,675metres were maintained by the end of the project. Under periodic maintenance, the initial target of 1,400 km was surpassed, and a total of 1,602 km roads were periodically maintained by the end of SNRTP.

The access improvement target was for the percentage of population within 2- and 4-hours' walking distance of an all-weather road in terai and hills districts respectively to increase by 4%. The actual increases were much larger, an increase of 12.4% in terai and 11.8% in hilly districts. The ILO Final Report (2020) and impact study reported in the World Bank Implementation Completion Report (World Bank, 2020) concluded that:

- The routine maintenance works generated 3.4 million paid days of decent work. Moreover, the project facilitated linkages to livelihood options and cooperatives to create additional economic opportunities. Among 2,697 road maintenance workers, 64% of the workforce consisted of women and 80% were recruited from disadvantaged and vulnerable groups.
- The project developed and implementation of Occupational, Safety and Health Guideline and established occupational safety and health culture at project sites for routine, periodic and upgrading works.
- The average distance to reach an all-weather road decreased by 60% for paved roads and 44% for gravel roads in the participating districts. The average travel time to reach an all-weather road decreased by 61% for paved roads and 42% for gravel roads.
- The average travel time for people to reach socio-economic centres was reduced by 24% for paved roads and 15% for gravel roads. Travel time to health services for pregnant women

decreased by 18%. The average travel tome to seek immunization services for children decreased by 21%

- The vehicle operation cost decreased by 28% for paved roads and by 17% for gravel rods, while trips by people in the participating districts to ships and restaurants increased by 63% and 47% in the for paved roads and by 57% and 69% for gravel roads.

3.4 Bangladesh – Employment Generation Programme for the Poorest[vii]

A large proportion of the population in Bangladesh live around the poverty line, which means that a shock can push millions into poverty and still many more into extreme poverty. The food, fuel and financial crisis of 2007-08 revealed the vulnerability of the poor to shocks. Many of the households resorted to coping mechanisms that included cutting back on food consumption and taking children out of school. Such response has serious long-term implications on nutrition, health and education beyond the crisis, which likely increases vulnerability to poverty and other shocks in the future.

In response, the Government of Bangladesh allocated US$ 800 million in FY 2009 to mitigate the crisis, which included the largest public workfare programme called 100 Day Employment Generation Programme (EGP) by the then Ministry of Food and Disaster Management in partnership with local governments.

The EGP introduced a few new measures as it placed a greater emphasis on pro-poor targeting, minimizing leakage, high accountability and improved transparency. The Programme used the upazila level of poverty map of 2004 to reach those who needed it the most.

From 2009 onwards, a few other modifications emerged in the design of Employment Generation for the Hardcore Poor (EGHP) as the World Bank made a commitment to support with US$150 million. The newly named Project, the Employment Generation Programme for the Poorest (EGPP) introduced the following measures for effective programme implementation: (i) bank account-based payment of wages; (ii) introduction of 10-20 percent nonwage material cost; (iii) nation-wide targeting using the poverty map of 2010; and (iv) installation of implementation Boards at project sites for improved disclosure.

Programme Outcomes

In spite challenges, EGPP has managed to yield several significant outcomes:

- Improved household resilience: More than half the EGPP beneficiary households were found to have savings, and many had been able to reduce outstanding loans. Improved consumption is noticed in terms of the quality of protein intake as well as investment in health.pr
- Local infrastructure built and maintained: Through public works local infrastructure such as roads and ponds are repaired and refurbished.
- Poorer households benefit more from EGPP: This is ensured by setting wages the market rate so that only the poorest opt to participate in the programme.
- Women's employment: EGPP has succeeded in providing temporary employment for poor women who have lesser options to migrate during the lean periods.

Targeting, beneficiary selection, implementation and monitoring capacity, system of Bank payment and access to information continued to remain challenges in EGPP.

3.5 Expanded Public Works Programme of South Africa

The government introduced the National Public Works Programme (NPWP) as a critical element of job creation in 1994. The two key thrusts of the NPWP were the Community-Based Public Works Programme (CBPWP), and the reorientation of mainstream public expenditure towards infrastructure creation, using intensive labour techniques. The Growth and Development Summit 2003 saw The Public Employment Programmes as support for poverty and income relief, through temporary work for the unemployed to carry out socially useful activities. An Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) was seen as an opportunity to provide a modicum of training and work experience, which will enable the ability to earn a living in the future.

Started in April 2004, the goal of EPWP was to alleviate unemployment for a minimum of 1 million people in South Africa (at least 55% women, 40% youth and 2% disabled), by 2009. EPWP is currently in its fourth phase 2019-2024.

ILO's technical assistance since the inception of the EPWP was useful in developing policy design and seeking financial commitments across governments and donors. Such EPWPs must be large enough to have a substantial impact on employment and social cohesion, especially for young people, women, and the rural poor. Some of the Programmes in the EPWPs would take the form of the National Youth Service Programme.

Building on the Achievements of the earlier phases and the challenges that remained, Phase – IV of the EPWP made the following changes

- Strengthening the monitoring of the core EPWP principles to improve compliance to the EPWP guidelines.
- Expansion of the programme through replication and improvements in programmes across all sectors.
- Ensuring and monitoring the provision of quality services and the creation of quality assets.
- Enhancing the EPWP coordination and institutional arrangements.
- Implementing projects and programmes that are more attractive to the youth who are in the Not in Education, Employment or Training Sector and increasing the participation of women across all programmes and sectors.
- Ensuring transparency and accountability through social audits and strengthening programme evaluation to enable improved performance of the programme guided by evidence.
- Strengthening impact evaluation of the EPWP and ensure greater transparency and accountability through the introduction of social audits.
- Strengthening partnerships with the private sector and Technical and Vocation Education and training (TVET) Colleges.

3.6 Ethiopia's Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP)

The Prodctive Safety Net programme (PSNP) is a social protection programme by the Government of Eithopia targeting food insecure households. Established in 2005, the objective of this programme is to prevent household asset depletion and create community assets. To this end, the programme provides cash or food payments against public works that build local infrastructure (e.g. roads) or protect the environment (e.g. terracing). Poor and vulnerable households with limited labour capacity receive unconditional (direct support) payments. Moreover, eligible households with pregnant or lactating women or infant children receive temporary direct support. PSNP works in chronically food insecure districts (woredas) in six Eithopian regions: Afar, Amhara, Somali, Sothern Nations, Nationalities, and People's Region, and Tigray.

PSNP is the second largest social safety net programme in Africa. In 2015, more than seven million people benefitted from the programme. Evaluations by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) show that PSNP is well targeted towards the most food insecure and poorest households residing in the areas in which the programme operates. IFPRI led impact evaluations show that PSNP has improved household food security and expenditures. PSPN is a government led initiative with a large number of multilateral and bilateral development partners contributing to the national effort. It is a good example of partnership among agencies.

3 India's Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Programme (MGNREGS) as a case study for employment guarantee across developing nations

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, (MGNREGA, 2005) was enacted in 2005 amidst agrarian crisis, stagnant rural economy and distress migration of rural casual labour. Over nearly two decades of its implementation, it has helped in reducing distress among rural casual labour differentially in different parts of the States[viii]. The deprived and chronic or extreme poor households have also received support from other programmes of government like the National Food Security Act (NFSA) and the Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana National Rural Livelihood Mission (DAYNRLM)[ix].

MGNREGS 2005 was the culmination of India's experiments in public works-based employment generation programme[x]. It had multiple objectives around its principal objective which was to provide livelihood security through 100 days of guaranteed wage employment to every rural household. According to the scope of its objectives, it has been variously described as poverty alleviation, social security, infrastructure building and participatory development programme. Its scale of operation commands awful applause as the world's largest public works programme and the biggest State sponsored employment generation programme in a non–communist country. Over nearly two decades of its implementation, it has achieved, partly or substantially, many objectives. MGNREGS has generated a lot of public debate about leakages and governance of the programme. There are many studies that pointed out some of the failings in the implementation of the programme. Other studies commended the pro-poor nature of the scheme.

MGNREGS is a **demand driven** wage employment programme and Ministry of Rural Development seeks additional fund as and when required for meeting the demand for work on the ground. It employs a p**articipatory decision-making** process where GPs (local authorities) are responsible for identifying and proposing eligible works.

The scheme engages in four types of work: (a) natural resource management; (b) community or individual assets for vulnerable households; (c) community infrastructure including for self-help groups; and (d) rural infrastructure. **65% of MGNREGA funds must be spent on water and Natural Resource Management (NRM)** work each year, especially in water-stressed areas of the country, enabling the programme to perform as a responsive strategy to slow onset and recurrent shocks such as droughts, floods and cyclones. Water Conservation, Land Development, Drought Proofing, Flood Control, Micro Irrigation, and Plantation. Efforts are made to conserve water, control soil erosion, and promote sustainable agriculture practices. The scheme also focuses on afforestation and sustainable land practices, contributing to the conservation of natural ecosystems and traditional cultures while ensuring sustainable livelihoods for rural communities.

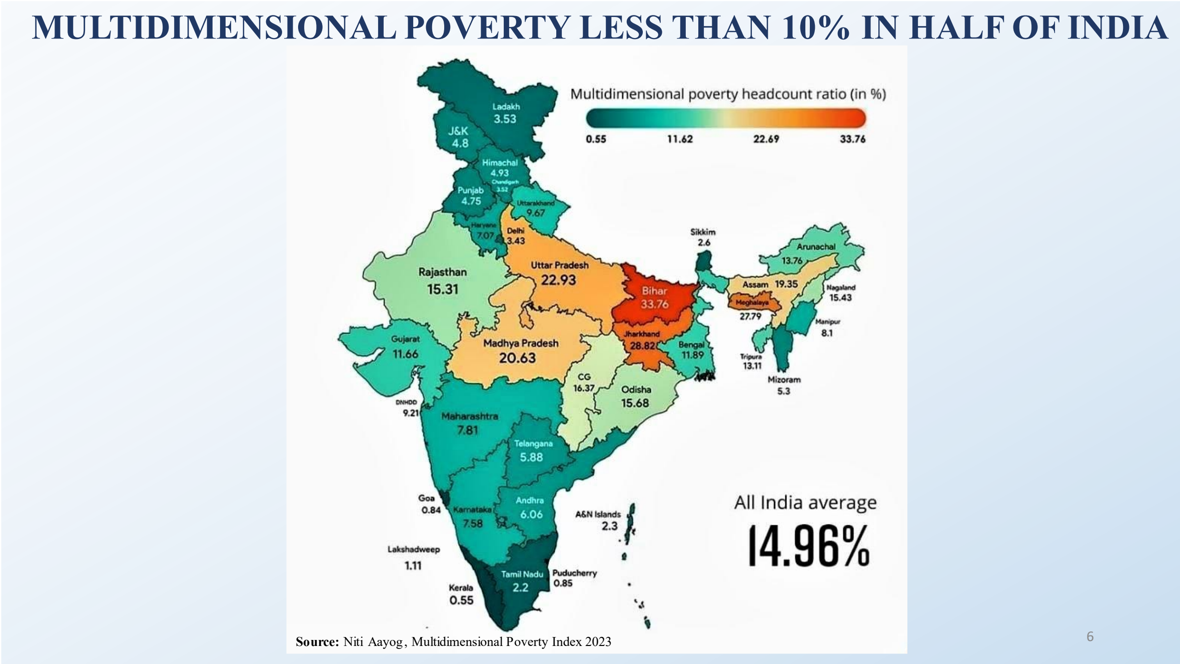
100% funding for unskilled labour cost and 75% of the material cost by Central Government and rest shall be borne by the State Government. A **60:40 wage and material ratio** has to be maintained, and a minimum of 1/3 must be female workers.

The budget for MGNREGA 2024-25 INR Cr 86,000; 32% of the budget for the Ministry of Rural Development and around 2% GOI budget. In FY 2022-23, employment was availed by 61.8 million households This translated to 87.6 million persons for a total of 2.9 billion person-days. The women participation rate was 56.6%. Detailed info, see https://nrega.nic.in/MGNREGA_new/Nrega_home.aspx

The beneficiaries of MGNREGS include small and marginal farmers as well, who avail of MGNREGS work to supplement their low income from agriculture. MGNREGA has acquired a role in water conservation, livelihood diversification, afforestation, rural housing, road construction and solid and liquid resource management in many villages. It has become a source for rural infrastructure and for a range of durable assets.

Though distress conditions of chronically rural poor population have reduced over the years, especially between 2005-06 to 2019-21 the demand for guaranteed employment has not declined. Precariousness of low income in poor households still prevails, notwithstanding improvement. This explains persistence of demand for state guaranteed wage employment. It supports the under employed and develops durable assets that improves incomes in many cases. The thrust on individual beneficiary schemes 2014 onwards has particularly contributed to raising incomes sustainably in many households[xi].

Decline in rural poverty is not consistent across states and regions. There are pockets of acute poverty - in tribal populated areas of central India, in eastern states and many other pockets of poverty in otherwise developed States. In States with very high market wages, MGNREGS wage work gets completely feminized (Kerala, Tamil Nadu) where over 85% of the MGNREGS labour are women. Their incomes through wages supplements family income and creates rural infrastructure.

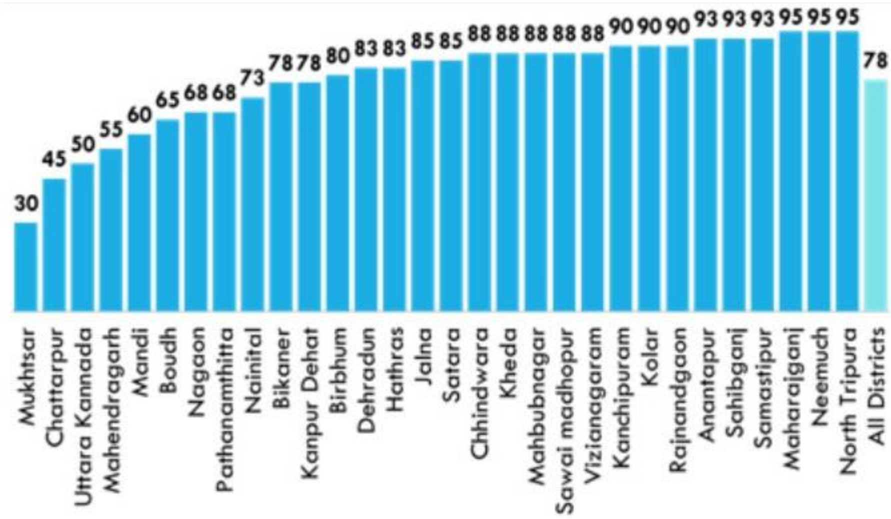


The utility of MGNREGA remains as a 100 percent Centrally funded source of supplemental wage labour and rural infrastructure creation. In the poorer regions of the country, MGNREGS contributes to survival of the poor by staving off chronic poverty while creating durable assets. MGNREGS, therefore is defined in terms of different regions and geographies and the thrust of assets creation needs to be decentralised, adopting grow-climatic zones-based approach. Ways need to be found to make MGNREGS demand in poorer regions and water deficient regions more effective. The pro-poor character of MGNREGS needs to be the thrust and focus and all efforts to improve governance of the programmes in States/Districts/Blocks that need it most, should be the topmost priority. The support of civil society organizations and the creation of Cluster Facilitation Teams (CFTs) of Professionals in such regions to speed up and scale up interventions, needs the topmost focus at all levels of governance and participation.

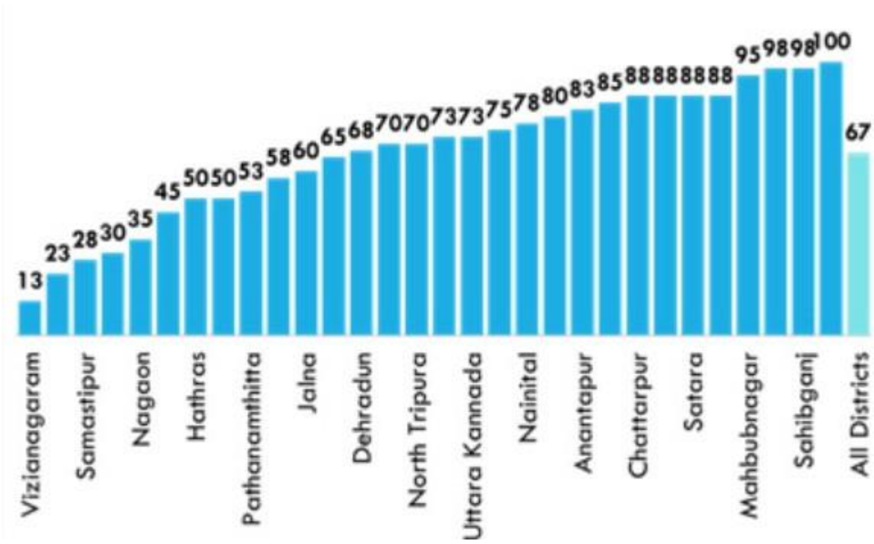
19 years is a long time in the life of a programme. The context of chronic poverty in India in 2005, has changed over these years. The United National Development Programme (UNDP) on Multi-Dimensional Poverty 2022, found that 415 million persons came out of poverty in India since 2005-06. Covid has also created challenges of livelihood, incomes and employment. Climate related challenges are being reported from a large number of districts each year. MGNREGS now provides for 150 days' in case of climate related events, subject to the technical committee recommending it.

It is time ideological debates on MGNREGS gives way to an evidence-based assessment of its contribution to poverty reduction, mitigating global warming, and human well-being. Besides studies on successful water conservation thrust of MGNREGS by the Institute of Economic Growth (2018) under Dr. Manoj Kumar Panda[xii] and Ashok Pankaj's[xiii] work on individual beneficiary schemes (2019) and their positive consequences on sustainable livelihoods, Dalberg's Study on The State of Rural Employment 2022 covering Andhra Pradesh, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh and Azim Premji University's Employment Guarantee During Covid – 19 (2022) covering Bihar, Karnataka, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh, offer useful insights on how the programme today a vital resource for deprived households and their coping with periods of distress. These Studies have identified areas for improvement, but none of them conclude that the resources have gone down the drain or that durable and income generating assets have not been created. No one denies the need for improvement.

IEG – MGNREGS Study 2018



IEG Study % of HH benefiting from increase in water table



IEG Study Change in Agricultural Productivity (%) of Surveyed HH due to the creation of asset

Being demand-based and open-ended, it is true that States like Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Telengana with low incidence of poverty still takes up MGNREGS on a large scale. That does not make MGNREGS wasteful; far from it. MGNREGS has become a rural infrastructure programme as well with feminization of labour. These States use MGNREGS for a greener future, for diversified livelihoods, water harvesting on scale, solid and liquid resource management, river rejuvenation, and so on. It is not that these States have only rich people. Besides 16.4 percent population in poverty, another 18.7 percent are very vulnerable to falling back into poverty. For rural areas the numbers are larger and this needs to be borne in mind. Strengthening utilization of funds in poorer States like Bihar and Jharkhand by improving governance is a better way of tackling the challenge of resource allocation in poorer regions. Rajasthan, West Bengal, Odisha, UP, Chattisgarh and MP also have high Multi Dimension Poverty Indiax (MDPI) but they have started making more and more use of MGNREGS funds. Governance does make a difference. It had been possible due to MGNREGS. Rajasthan's Mukhyamantri Jal Swavalamban Yojana for water security, Maharshtra's Jalyukta Shivir also for improving water recharge, Bihar's Hariyali Mission, Telengana's Plant Nursery in every Gram Panchayat and thrust on afforestation, segregation sheds, soak pits, percolation tanks, rural Haats, construction of Crematorium, Chhatisgarh's thrust on developing tillers given land under the Forest Rights Act using MGNREGS, etc. are all MGNREGS contribution.

Unprecedented gains in water conservation works, solid and liquid resource management, animal sheds, vermi compost and NADEP (a locally innovated compost making process with local biomass), pits, afforestation on an unprecedented scale, contribution to rural housing, Aanganwadi buildings, pucca village roads, have all been taken up and completed. There were also concerted efforts, since 2014-15, to converge the above mentioned works, i.e. work with the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS), under which over 60 per cent of the budget was spent on agriculture and allied activities. Ashok Pankaj's 2017 study highlighted how individual beneficiary schemes went up from a fifth of the works taken up in 2012-14 to two-thirds (67.71 per cent) in 2019-20. While suggesting how MGNREGS can be re-engineered for doubling farmers' incomes, the study in six districts of Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Tamil Nadu confirmed the major gains in incomes of these households because of this thrust. The landless farmers with household gardens could also take up animal sheds and 90 days of wage work under the Rural Housing Scheme. So, the landless were also not left out.

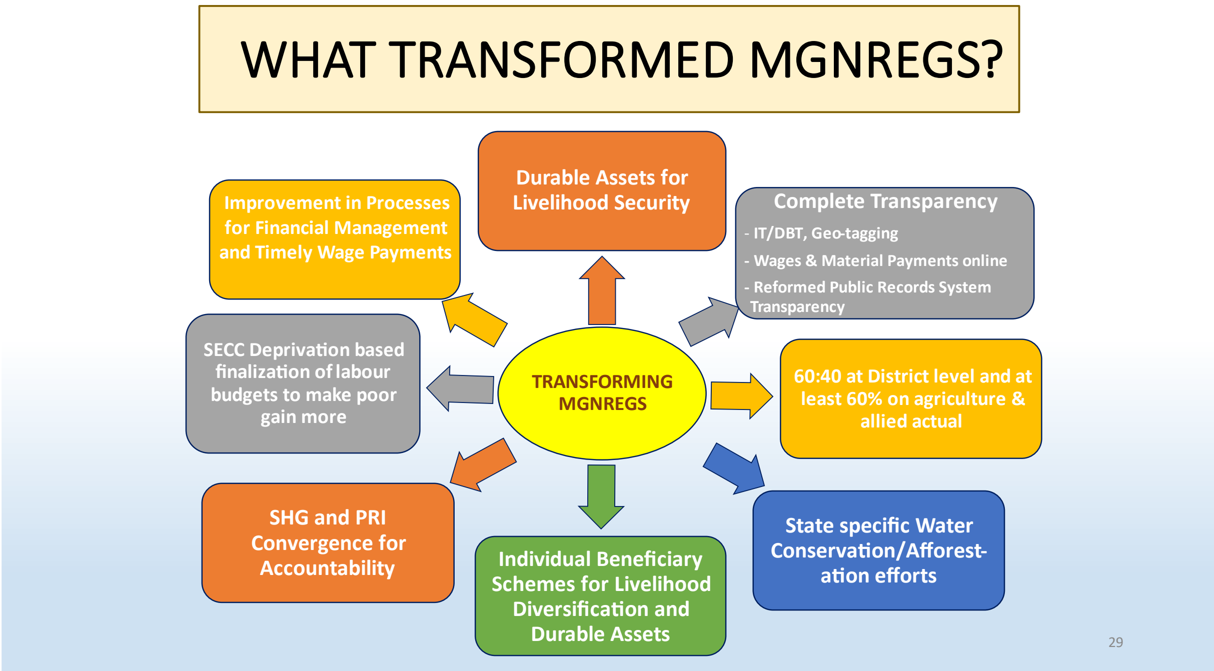
This led to a meteoric increase in income-generating durable assets as compared to the MGNREGS of 2005-2014. In the eight years from 2014 to 2022, 3.57 million farm ponds, 30.72 million natural resource management works, 2.10 million horticulture works, 6.7million plantations, 1.14million check dams, 1.09 million dug wells, 1. 19million cattle shed, 30 million rural housing units, 1.6million NADEP vermicompost pits, 4.99million water conservation structures, and a total of 37.7million individual beneficiary works were completed. This number was only 2.67million for 2005-2014. Sikkim's organic story, Madhya Pradesh's agricultural improvements, Jharkhand's vegetables, fruits and animal resources thrust, Odisha's innovative NTFP and mango-related initiatives, Rajasthan's water management, Andhra Pradesh's natural farming, Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh's efforts at Prakritik Kheti (natural farming) have all gained from such social capital, convergence and credit.

It is not that 2014-2022 did not have rainfall deficient districts; it is just that rain-fed areas are better prepared than before. From river rejuvenation efforts in Uttar Pradesh's Banda to revival of tanks in Uttarakhand's Udham Singh Nagar, a silent revolution in water management is underway, even though the challenge is herculean in many parts of India. Documentation of such efforts by Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) in three volumes of successes under MGNREGS and its contribution to rain-fed agriculture, confirms the gains.

State after State has used this resource for creating durable assets and for improving individual livelihoods through income generating assets like farm ponds and animal sheds. Sikkim used MGNREGS for spring-shed development to provide drinking water, animal sheds for dairy and organic farming, and cardamom plantations for income. Meghalya's Village Employment Committees use MGNREGS for all-round village development and improving incomes, and so on.

- MGNREGS has transformed the lives of rural workers by offering legal guarantees of employment and ensuring dignity and social protection
- MGNREGs has laid the foundation for sustainable rural development. By investing in productive assets and NRM such as water conservation structures, rural roads, and irrigation facilities, PEPs can enhance agricultural productivity and resilience against climate change and environmental degradation.
- MGNREGs has also promoted community participation, grassroots democracy, and gender empowerment, emphasizing the importance of inclusive governance and citizen engagement in program implementation

Like any programme, there are areas of improvement like timely wage payment, better multi-year planning for watersheds, adequate and timely provision of work with a lower differential with market wages, better administrative and technical management for better governance and hassle-free access for the deprived to MGNREGS work, and so on. It is undeniable, however, that the programme has been a savior in difficult times and a resource for diversified income and livelihoods at all times for the deprived. Its pro-poor character due to self-selection for unskilled work and all-round village infrastructure development, cannot be questioned.



The transformation captured under MGNREGS in the 2014-2019 phase, built on a community engagement and trust. Processes were simplified to enable field functionaries understand the programme better. Instead of over 1000 official circulars issued at different times and determined what rules were followed in MGNREGS, we started coming out with a sleek 60 page Annual Master Circular that alone was enough to follow rules. These were mandatorily translated into regional languages to ensure that the worker at the last mile could also understand the programme. The 60 is to 40 ratio for unskilled wage about to material started being calculated at the district level and not the Panchayat level, ensuring high quality works and assets to also come up under the MGNREGS. Aanganwadi buildings was one such infrastructure. Though cross State visits and good practice exposure, many new ideas were internalized as seeing is believing. The gains of these reforms reflect in the national evaluation of MGNREGS carried out in 2017-18 by the Institute of Economic Growth.

MGNRGES - MAJOR NRM WORKS

Individual Assets

- **Farm Ponds, dug wells, staggered trench**
- **Soak Pits**
- **Vermi-compost, NADEP**
- **Tree plantation**
- **Boundary Line Plantation**
- **Land Development**
- **Sand filter for Bore well recharge.**

Community Assets

- **Water harvesting and conservation measures**
- **Minor irrigation works**
- **Watershed development work**
- **Check dam, Trenches, Percolation Tank**
- **Solid/Liquid Waste management**
- **Stabilization Pond**
- **Renovation of traditional water bodies**
- **Irrigation canals and drains**
- **Horticulture, Nursery**
- **Afforestation**
- **Sand filter for Bore well recharge.**

The thrust on individual assets and a mandatory spend of sixty percent of the spend on agriculture and water sector, brought in new energies at the State level convergent action for water management. A lot of the gains have been captured in the documentation of MGNREGS works done by a team of Professors from the Indian Institutes of Technologies. Individual beneficiary schemes focused on animal sheds, vermicompost pits, soak pits, and 90 days of work with Pradhan Mantri Awaas Yojana Gramin to the beneficiary for working on his/her own building. All this led to a string thrust on productive and durable assets. From farm ponds to dugwells, animal sheds, etc. marginal and small farmers could access MGNREGS for individual beneficiary schemes. The landless were already getter 90 days of work on their house construction as many beneficiaries did not have agricultural land. The equity principle was fully taken care of in the approach adopted. The new durable assets improved dry land farming and rainwater conservation on scale in a very large number of villages. The expansion of the vegetables and horticulture sector and a much higher rate of growth for the animal husbandry sector, was made possible due the resources of MGNREGS. Livelihood diversification happened consequently.

5 Developing the modalities for South – South Cooperation for Public Employment/ Public Works.

Public Employment programmes offer an opportunity for South-South cooperation. The developing nations are struggling for decent jobs. The improvement of quality of employment is a major challenge. The examples from across the world and the detailed case study on MGNREGS from India, provides an opportunity for South – South cooperation to build on what works. There is a need to engage with the civil society and the state to develop social protection, employment intensive initiatives, and creation of useful and durable assets that improve lives and livelihoods. MGNREGS engaged with civil society organizations and undertook social audit as a mandatory activity to ensure transparency in the progrmme. The real time public website was very helpful in academics engaging with MGNREGS. An illustrative list for developing the modalities for south-south cooperation for public employment/public works would include the following:

1. Discussion around the successful country partnerships and how they evolved.
2. Project Management partnerships with government.
3. Technical cooperation for better planning, monitoring and implementation.
4. Country specific analysis for importance and feasibility of public employment programmes.
5. Capacity building for public employment programmes among government functionaries.
6. Introducing technology as means for better planning, monitoring and evaluation.
7. Developing community monitoring and collaborative governance institutions for program effectiveness[xiv].
8. Undertaking assessment and evaluation of public employment programmes to understand key areas for improvement for better outcomes.
9. Work with national governments to design interventions in crisis situations, for tackling climate change challenges and for poverty reduction[xv].
10. Developing community owned initiatives like social audit, maintenance policies, women led development.

5.2 Lessons for Public Employment Programmes Across the Developing World Policy

1. PEPs should be continued both in the developed and backward regions, with a changed thrust; as a rural infrastructure and supplemental income for poor households in the relatively better developed rural areas and as a poverty reduction programme in the latter, with a greater focus in backward regions. Rural Development Ministries should make governance and institutional changes that ensure that more PEP funds go to regions that need it most in terms of deprivation or water stressed conditions.
2. Given the multiple, visible and invisible, tangible and intangible benefits of PEP programmes with good governance need to be documented more systematically. This will ensure an evidence-based defence of the outcomes of the programme.

3. It is important to make adequate allocation for PEPs as covid has disrupted lives and livelihoods on an unprecedented scale. A systematic effort at water conservation on the ridge to valley principle needs to be adopted on scale. More resources would be required to get better governance that ensures timely wage payments.
4. More resources will address challenges like delayed wage payments and a better longer-term planning and governance of PEP programmes.
5. Asset creation has improved significantly under PEPs, yet its potential remains untapped[xvi]. Better and scientific planning, use of engineering and technology, encouragement to innovation, flexibility in selection of assets and effective convergence with other development programmes of the government can change the game.
6. Individual assets have potential to transform character of the household from a wage seeker to self-employed that should be given greater attention with an approach to provide them productive assets that create sustainable income[xvii]. These households should be monitored and provided technical and other support through convergence to take them out from the pool of perennial wage seekers in a mission mode and a time bound manner.
7. PEPs should target extremely poor, invariably landless households, through a combined dose of productive public and individual assets and regular income through wage employment for a minimum period of five years, with an effort to end their perennial dependence on PEPs. Other programmes should also simultaneously target them for five years. For that matter, a holistic plan, in convergence, for the total uplift of poor households with strict monitoring of implementation and outcome.

As is clear from the cases presented above, developing societies need to provide public employment programmes as a asocial protection measure. It also serves as an important resource to address durable asset deficits. Water conservation, rural roads, plantations are all critical for the lives and livelihoods of the deprived. Public Employment programmes are also a very good example of higher female participation in wage work and equal wages for men and women. MGNREGS brought about a major transformation in rural India in equal wages to women. By providing employment opportunities in the lean months, public employment programmes reduce distress in marginal communities and deprived households. It is also clear from the case studies above, that governance reforms and improvement in public management systems, transparency, and accountability are major challenges that can be addressed through decentralized community action. Public employment programmes require a multi – dimensional accountability framework that uses technology, community and decentralized management to make a difference to the lives of the deprived[xviii].

References – End Notes

1. [i] ILO Employment Intensive Investment Programme (EIIP) and the Humanitarian-Peace Nexus (HDPN); 2024.
2. [ii] ILO – Employment Intensive Investment Programme Arab States Lessons Learnt and Ways Forward; March 2024.
3. [iii] Kirit Vaidya and Yash Khare – An Appraisal of EIIPs longer-term development impacts; October 2023.
4. [iv] ILO – Employment Intensive Investment Programme Arab States Lessons Learnt and Ways Forward; March 2024.
5. [v] Kirit Vaidya and Yash Khare – An Appraisal of EIIPs longer-term development impacts; October 2023.
6. [vi] Kirit Vaidya and Yash Khare – An Appraisal of EIIPs longer-term development impacts; October 2023.
7. [vii] The World Bank- Program Brief – Employment Generation Program for the Poorest in Bangladesh; 2024.
8. [viii] Ashok Pankaj - Inclusive Development Through Guaranteed Employment; Springer; 2023.
9. [ix] Amarjeet Sinha- The Last Mile – Turning Public Policy Upside Down; Routledge Publishers, UK; 2023; Free Open access available.
10. [x] Reforming MGNREGS – Report of the Committee to Study Performance of States and Governance Issues under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme – Chaired by Amarjeet Sinha; June 2023.
11. [xi] Reetika Khera (Edited): The Battle for Employment; OUP; 2011.
12. [xii] Manoj Panda, Brajesh Jha, Amit Mandal, Vivek Pal, Aakansha Sharma, Atreyee Choudhary, and Deepak Kumar (2018): Rapid Assessment of Natural Resource Management Component under MGNREGA and its impact on Sustainable Livelihoods, Institute of Economic Growth, New Delhi.
13. [xiii] Pankaj, Ashok and Mondira Bhattacharya (2020) – Income and Livelihood Promotion through Individual Assets under MGNREGA, Economic and Political Weekly, 57 (4): 47-54.
14. [xiv] Elinor Ostrom: 2009- Beyond Markets and States: Polycentric Governance of Complex Economic Systems.
15. [xv] Nair, S, Venkatesh, B.T., Bhageerathy, N.S., Karan, A., Unnikrishnan, B., Pundir, P., Sebastian, A.M., Sindhu, S., Krishnan, J.B., Upasak Das, Vijayamma, R., Guddattu, V., (2018) – Public Works Programmes: How effective are public works programmes in stimulating local economic transformation in low and middle income countries? Contextualization of review findings.

London: EPPI-Centre, Social Science Research Unit, UCL Institute of Education, University College London.

16. [xvi] Reforming MGNREGS – Report of the Committee to Study Performance of States and Governance Issues under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme – Chaired by Amarjeet Sinha; June 2023.

17. [xvii] Reforming MGNREGS – Report of the Committee to Study Performance of States and Governance Issues under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme – Chaired by Amarjeet Sinha; June 2023.

Contact details
International Labour Organization
Route des Morillons 4
CH-1211 Geneva 22
Switzerland

Tel: +41 22 799 6111
Email: ilo@ilo.org
Website: https://www.ilo.org/topics-and-sector/employment-intensive-investment

DOI: https://doi.org/10.54394/WOWU0658