



SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT THROUGH INSTRUMENTALITY OF MGNREGA

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Abstract-- Economic growth, environmental management and social exclusion are the three major pillars of sustainable development. The sustainable development means development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generation to meet their own needs. Thus the concept of sustainable development is not about choice between environmental protection and social progress but rather more about striving for economic and social development that would be compatible with environmental protection. Sustainable development distinguished that growth must be both inclusive and environmentally sound to reduce poverty and build shared prosperity for today's population and to continue to meet the needs of future generations that is what Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MG-NREGA) aims for. MG-NREGA is not only an act against unemployment it is for the betterment of overall sustainability, it includes Sustainability of Economy, Agriculture, Forest, Income, Health and many more ideals and principles of sustainable development. The goals of MG-NREGA are to provide strong safety-net for vulnerable groups by providing a fallback employment when alternative employment sources are scarce or inadequate. It acts as a growth engine for sustainable development of agriculture economy and empowerment of rural poor through the process of rights-based law and new ways of doing occupation. To effectively address the issue of poverty alleviation and sustainable development, there is a need to optimize efforts towards inter-sectorial strategies and to address such concepts government has introduced the concept of convergence. Convergence is leverage for MGNREGA for achieving sustainability through inter-sectorial conjunction. MGNREGA create huge potential for upgrading and creating sustainable rural infrastructure and eco-restoration through a wide range of works activities related to water harvesting, Rural Connectivity, Irrigation, Flood control and Protection works, Rural sanitation and others works and aid the workers in moving from wage employment to sustainable employment. This paper seeks to examine the extent to which sustainable development has been achieved through MGNREGA.

Key words: MGNREGA, Sustainable Development, Convergence, Poverty, Rural livelihood.

1. INTRODUCTION

Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It contains within it two key concepts the concept of 'needs' and limitations. The 'needs' in particular refer to the essential needs of the world's poor, to which overriding priority should be given; and the idea of limitations imposed by the state of technology and social organization on the environment's ability to meet present and future needs. Thus the goals of economic and social development must be defined in terms of sustainability in all countries - developed or developing, market-oriented or centrally planned. Brundtland's in 1987 has also defined the sustainable development (SD) as Sustainable development is a development and well-off that meets the needs of present without compromising the ability of future generation to meet their own needs. [1] Further Ben Ki Moon has also emphasized that We hold the future in our hands together we must ensure that our grandchildren will not have to ask we failed to do the right things and let them suffer the consequences. (UN Secretary-General Moon, 2007). So it is clear from the above two definitions that sustainable development is an integral part of future development and well-being of society. The satisfaction of human needs and aspirations in the major objective of development. The essential needs of vast numbers of people in developing countries for food, clothing, shelter, jobs - are not being met, and beyond their basic needs these people have legitimate aspirations for an improved quality of life. A world in which poverty and inequity are endemic will always be prone to ecological and other crises. Sustainable development requires meeting the basic needs of all and extending to all the opportunity to satisfy their aspirations for a better life. Thus the paradigm of development has changed, social and environment aspects goes hand-in-hand with the economic development in modern pattern of development. Hypothetically it is believed that sustainable development has to address three spheres: socio, economic and environment aspects for achieving sustainability.[2] Therefore to achieve this sustainability each country has to contribute their best and India has to contribute much more than other countries. Sustainable development has been an integral part of Indian ethos and cultural that has been widely reflected even in our culture and ancient scripture.[3] India constitute around



18% of the world's population and account home of about 30% of the poor and 40% of the illiterate people of the world population which is one of the great obstacle in promoting sustainable development. However since independence, policies, programs and target schemes have introduced to eradicate poverty either through direct focus on employment generation, which is one of the greatest obstacles for achieving sustainability or through Building up of assets for the poor, protection of environment, re-innovating rural India. Environment protection and conservation has been promoted through various policy measures across the domains of forestry, pollution control water management, climate change, clean energy and marine & coastal environment. In India, the movement in support of environmental protection and sustainable development started in the early 1980s, due to the devastating effects of the Bhopal gas tragedy as well as international development. Sustainable development has been embedded in the planning process during the 1990s. The Ninth Five-Year Plan (1997–2002) explicitly recognized the synergy between environment, health and development and identified as one of its core objectives the need for ensuring environmental sustainability of the development process through social mobilization and participation of people at all levels. Some of the programmes taken by Government for achieving the goal of alleviation of poverty as well as sustainable development were Community Development Programme (CDP), National Extension Service (NES), Integrated Agricultural District Programme (IADP), High Yielding Varieties Programme etc. Further, Government of India also has been adopted some policies related to sustainable development which has given emphasized on economic and social development, for particular people with low standard of living as well as protecting the natural resource based on environment. The enactment of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) is one such major step towards sustainable development. MG-NREGA is not only an act against unemployment it is for the betterment of overall sustainability, it includes Sustainability of Economy, Agriculture, Forest, Income, Health and many more ideals and principles of sustainable development. The goals of MG-NREGA are to provide strong safety-net for vulnerable groups by providing a fallback employment when alternative employment sources are scarce or inadequate. It acts as a growth engine for sustainable development of agriculture economy and empowerment of rural poor through the process of rights-based law and new ways of doing occupation. To effectively address the issue of poverty alleviation and sustainable development, there is a need to optimize efforts towards inter-sectorial strategies and to address such concepts government has introduced the concept of convergence. Convergence is leverage for MGNREGA for achieving sustainability through inter-sectorial conjunction.

2. ROLE OF MAHATMA GANDHI NATIONAL RURAL EMPLOYMENT GUARANTEE ACT (MG-NREGA) IN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) is the first ever law that gets changed into an act, which guarantees 100 days of wage employment in a year to every household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled, manual work (NREGA, 2005). The basic objectives of MGNREGA 2005 is to enhance livelihood security in rural areas by providing at least 100 days of guaranteed wage employment in every financial year to every household.[4] This work guarantee can also serve other objectives generating productive assets, protecting the environment, rural empowerment of women, reducing rural-urban migration and fostering social equity, development initiative, public investments for creation of durable assets, decentralized implementation, demand driven and so on.

Thus the objectives of the programme include:

- Ensuring social protection for the most vulnerable people living in rural India through providing employment opportunities.
- Ensuring livelihood security for the poor through creation of durable assets, improved water security, soil conservation and higher land productivity.
- Strengthening drought-proofing and flood management in rural India.
- Aiding in the empowerment of marginalized communities, especially women, Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs), through the process of a rights- based legislation.
- Strengthening decentralized, participatory planning through convergence of various anti-poverty and livelihoods initiatives.



- Deepening democracy at the grass-roots by strengthening the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs).
- Effecting greater transparency and accountability in governance.

Moreover, the works undertaken through MGNREGA give priority to activities related to water harvesting, groundwater recharge, drought-proofing, and flood protection. Its focus on eco-restoration and sustainable livelihoods will lead over time, to an increase in land productivity and aid the workers in moving from wage employment to sustainable employment. Also almost 80 percent of MGNREGA works relate to soil and water conservation. MGNREGA works by their very nature place stress on increasing land productivity, recharging ground water and increasing water availability. Recent amendment of the Act to permit MGNREGA works on individual land of small and marginal farmers who constitute 89% of the farming community, in addition to the individual land of SC/ST/BPL/IAY, will augment the impact on agricultural productivity and household income.

Thus the focus of the scheme shall be on the following works in their order of priority:-

- Water conservation and Water harvesting.
- Drought proofing (including afforestation and tree plantation)
- Irrigation canals including micro and minor irrigation works.
- Provision of irrigation facility, horticulture, plantation and land development facilities to the land owned by households belonging to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes or below poverty line families or to the beneficiaries of land reforms or to the beneficiaries under the Indira Awaas Yojana of Government of India or that of the small farmers or marginal farmers as defined in the Agriculture Dept Waiver and Debt Relief Scheme, 2008 or to the beneficiaries under the Scheduled Tribes and other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006.
- Renovation of traditional water bodies including desalting of tanks.
- Land development.
- Flood control and protection works including drainage in water logged areas.
- Rural connectivity to provide all weather access and
- Any other work which may be notified by the Central Government in consultation with State Government.

Thus the works which have been taken up under this act revitalize the natural resource base and address the causes of chronic poverty, such as drought, deforestation, soil erosion, floods, poor rural connectivity; same are the important sides of sustainable development. This program of reducing rural poverty and addressing natural resources is strong because of legal processes and being an Act. Leading to strengthen grassroots processes of democracy and infusing transparency and accountability in rural governance is enshrined in Indian constitution. NREGA is predestined for eradicating poverty, which is closely related to the interruptions such as Prosperity, Environment squalor, Inequalities, Crime, Less choice and wasteful use of resources same are the hindrances for achieving sustainable development. (Department of Economic and Social Affairs,[UN],2008). It is normative framework derived from internationally accepted Human Rights Standards that poverty eradication provides a conceptual frame work for the process of sustainable development. Removal of poverty is therefore a prerequisite for the protection of environment; poverty magnifies the problems of hunger and malnutrition and is further compounded by the inequalities and inequitable access of the people to the food that is available.[5] Further these inequalities because of poverty leads to waste of resources and adversity which ultimately increases the crime rate in the state. NREGA is one which is operationally directed towards promoting and protecting human rights of people living in poverty. It is a demand driven program and is focused on generating productive assets, protecting environment, empowering rural women, reducing rural urban migration and fostering social equality. An analysis of the role played by the MG-NREGA to attain sustainability according to the issues laid down by Ministry of Environment and Forestry (MOEF)[6] are as following:-



S. No.	Issues Raised by MOEF	Problems	Undertaken by MGNREGA
1.	Climate Change	Changes in temperature, water supply and quality will impact on agricultural production, human settlement and health, biodiversity and animal migratory patterns (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [IPCC], 2001 a, b)	Reducing vulnerability to climate change; Drought proofing; Afforestation, horticulture; Carbon sequestration; Tree planting activities, etc.
2.	Food Security	Malnourishing and Hunger, Health problems risk of diseases, infection and mortality, Child death, Price fluctuation in basic food items, Unfair trade risk.	Land development; NREGA used as a supplementary; income source during non-agricultural seasons; Improved agricultural productivity & cropping intensity; Land development; soil conservation Afforestation; horticulture, etc.
3.	Water security.	Floods; landslides; land subsidence and droughts; Water borne diseases; Sanitation and hygiene; Impact on food security.	Ground Water and increased irrigation; Convergence with agriculture; Pisciculture. Improvement in ground water; Water conservation; water harvesting & irrigation, etc.
4.	Energy security	Energy leads to increase emission of CO ₂ . Increase in greenhouse gases. Emission of SO ₂ , NO ₂ . Particle Pollution (PM ₁₀) (PM _{2.5}). Increase pressure on international market of oil and gas. Lead to increase in price level	Preference to manual work, (abandonment of machines at work places).
5.	Managing Urbanization	Sanitation problems, diseases	Distress migration reduced in most of the rural parts; Bargaining power of labour has increased; Purchasing Power; Multiplier effects: food, education which ultimately reduces rural urban migration.

Research further suggests MG-NREGA has reduced poverty and it is believed that sustainable development can be achieved through optimizing gains from several variables, rather than maximizing those from a single one.[7] In Rio Declaration (2007) twenty seven important principles are framed for achieving sustainable development and some of them which are addressed candidly by Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act 2005(NREGA) are:

- People entitled to a healthy and productive life in harmony.
- Equality for present and future generation.
- Eradicating poverty and reducing differences.
- Environment protection.
- Development and higher quality of life for all people.
- Women play an important role in environment management and development.
- Peace development and environment protection.
- Equality of gender and participative contribution of different sectors of society.
- Seeing all humans as having universal characteristics.

3. CONVERGENCE AND MG-NREGA A STEP TOWARDS SUSTAINABILITY

India sustainable development is more relying on rural sector because most of the population lives in rural areas and most of the sustainable development related problems such as degradation of environment, deforestation poverty other social stoppages for achieving sustainability are reasons of poor rural areas. Since poverty is the root cause of environment degradation and also one of the greatest obstacle for achieving sustainable development, therefore, there is need to optimize efforts towards inter-sectorial strategies. Convergence of different programs like, Watershed Programs, National Agriculture Development Program /Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana (NADP/RKVY), National Horticulture Mission (NHM), Scheme of Artificial Recharge of Ground Water through Dug well (ARGW), AIBP, Command Area Development and Water Management Program (CAD & WM) and Scheme of Repair Renovation and Restoration of Water Bodies (RRR), BRGF, National Afforestation Program (NAP) with NREGA will enable better planning and effective investment in



rural areas.[8] In this direction the Government of India has preferred MG-NREGA as a junction and had made it the entry point for convergence for the purpose of facilitating sustainable development through; guaranteed resource support, legal safeguard through the Act, Provision for decentralized planning, being self-targeting nature, facilitating institutional linkages, facilitating rural connectivity. With the convergence of different schemes with NREGA the possible outcome which government has perceived are; reduction in poverty which will foster human development and fundamental prerequisite for achieving sustainable development. Growing convergence address the issues in novel ways, facilitation of ecological synergies; convergence of NREGA will interact natural resources base regeneration through different activities such as afforestation, drought proofing, flood proofing watershed and will lead to effective use of resources, mitigation effects of climate change. NREGA also helps in reducing emission of CO₂, industrial pollution and stemming of distress migration, enhance economic opportunities, strengthening democratic process. The employment provided by NREGA is utilized by inter sectorial convergence schemes like Water Conservation, Afforestation, Human Development, Income Generation and National Savings for the purpose of achieving broader meaning of sustainable development . NREGA and convergence is continuously fighting for the well-being of economy and people and more especially against poverty in the growth and development, in fact it is a state of unsustainability like War. War causes destruction and devastation as a result several human beings suffer in form of violence and hunger. War also leads to destruction of natural resources. Similarly in state of poverty human lives perish because of hunger and lack of basic amenities. The poverty does not allow us to utilize our natural resources. Therefore both war and poverty are two states of unsustainability.[9] The concept of convergence introduced by NREGA is a platform for implementing different sustainable development schemes effectively and efficiently. Convergence is planned and executed within the parameters of NREGA and it plays a pivotal role for implementing different schemes of sustainable development to achieve sustainability.

4. CONCLUSION

Thus we can see that Sustainable development does not focus solely on economic issues rather it encompasses the three general policy areas namely economy, environment and society. Sustainable Development maintains a balance between the various human needs like the desire to have improved lifestyles and feeling of well-being on one hand, and preserves natural resources and ecosystems on the another hand. Thus, Sustainable Development is the caretaker of the divergent factors needed for the existence of the present and future generations. It is a generally accepted that sustainable development cannot be achieved without a substantial reduction in the number of people who are poor. If we leave poverty to prevail in Indian societies, then the dream of sustainable development can never be achieved. Sustainable development in India can be attained only if problem of poverty is resolved first. Thus, MG-NREGA is right-based approach to poverty reduction and has showed how human rights being supported by an inclusive legal framework and realized in a sustainable manner. Convergence is employed as leverage and can be employed as a strategic approach to reduce poverty and promote sustainable development. The employment provided under the scheme of MG-NREGA can be better used for the prerequisites of achieving development. India since inception of MGNREGA has made significant progress in reducing poverty, hunger and food nutrition which is the basic step of achieving sustainable development. It is suggested that being a part of society it is our responsibility to promote sustainable development by making use of alternate resources rather than making our wants unlimited. Moreover, the government should also take steps to bring together various institutes like private, public NGO's and educational institutes for this mission and must consider MG-NREGA as a junction for implementing various policies for achieving sustainability. It is also significant to create awareness amongst the students about the various schemes of MG-NREGA by way of incorporating it in their curriculum. The government should not go for making further policies on sustainable development as they remain idle rather than the government should make proper efforts in implementing the already existing policies It is we who have to decide whether development means affluence or whether development means peace, prosperity and happiness and it is MG-NREGA which can be a better strategy for attaining development if implanted suitably.



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