

PEEP (Participatory Evaluation of Entitlement Programs) 2013

PEEP is a study of 5 different entitlement programs (MGNREGA, PDS, Pensions, Mid-day meal and ICDS) across 10 different states including Tamil Nadu. It is coordinated by Dr Jean Dreze and Dr Reetika Khera of IIT Delhi and supported by the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR).

In Tamil Nadu, 4 villages in Kandamangalam Block, Villupuram District and 4 villages in Shanarpatti Block, Dindigul district were chosen for the study. In each village, we randomly selected 30 people who have obtained a Job Card and did a detailed interview with them about all the programs mentioned above.

The study was done in the following 8 villages

1. **Villupuram District, Kandamangalam Block**
 - a. Kothampatty Village, Kothampatty Panchayat
 - b. Pakkam Village, Pakkam Panchayat
 - c. Sornavur Keelpathy Village, Sornavur Panchayat
 - d. C. Kallipattu Village, Kallipattu Panchayat
2. **Dindigul District, Shanarpatti Block**
 - a. Konapatti Village, Shanarpatti Panchayat
 - b. Avilipatti Village, Avilipatti Panchayat
 - c. Vadakatupatti Village, Thavasimadai Panchayat
 - d. Marakkampatty Village, VS Kottai Panchayat

We present below important issues with respect to the MGNREGA implementation.

Delayed Payment

Workers are still paid in cash in Kandamangalam and there are no delays. In one village Kallipattu, wages were paid through a local bank for some time but because of the many problems encountered, they have switched to cash payments recently.

Workers are paid through banks in Shanarpatti block in Dindigul. There are major delays in payment of wages (more than 1 month) in Marakkampatti and Konapatty. MGNREGA Workers, many of whom are poor without any savings depend on the daily wages they earn to

survive. They are put to great stress because of the delay in payment. Visiting the bank to withdraw money which involves significant cost in both money and time adds to the stress. Tamil Nadu had a good reputation of paying money every week but the transition to payment through banks has caused significant hardship to workers.

Business Correspondent Model

Canara Bank, Shanarpatti has adopted the business correspondent model. In Avilipatti, they have hired a local youth from the same panchayat to be the banking correspondent and they pay him 300 Rs to distribute wages of around 1 lakh/work week. The banking correspondent does not use any biometric verification device. When the banking correspondent comes to the village to pay, the panchayat secretary sits with him and helps him. While this defeats the principle that implementing agency should be separate from the payment agency, in the short term this is a good solution to satisfy both the central government's order that payment should be paid only through banks and people's need to get paid in a timely manner and without having to spend significant time and money to make the trip to the bank. The panchayat secretary in addition to helping the banking correspondent, marks the job cards with payment information – days worked, amount paid, date paid. If people were to go to the bank to withdraw money, the panchayat secretary would find it difficult to do this – either he has to go to each house individually to mark this or just mark the job cards of all people who again come to work next week. Maybe it can be insisted that the shift to payment through banks should happen only in places where there is a banking correspondent.

Non availability of work

People are still getting work only on rotation that is they cannot come to work continuously but are forced to take a break. Work is not happening in all clusters. In Viluppuram, work has not been started in some places due to not getting administrative sanction. So, even though people are ready and willing to work for the full 100 days, they are not able to do it.

While the act says that people have a right to ask for work, there is no mechanism to get work applications and allot work based on need. The tables in the electronic job Cards which are supposed to capture the work demand and work allocation are filled with bogus values (That is, it is marked that each worker asked for a certain number of days and was allotted a certain number of days of work when in reality this was not the case)

Men are discouraged from coming to work. In some places, old people who receive pension are discouraged from coming to work.

Low Wages

While the statutory minimum wages per day for Tamil Nadu is Rs 148, many people get paid only around 100 Rs/day. While the officials explain this by saying that people do not do their allotted work, it needs to be recognized that there are significant management issues that need to be addressed as well:

1. Lack of adequate implementation staff: In Konapatti village (Shanarpatti panchayat, Shanarpatti Block, Dindigul District), we visited the worksite in the morning to find one mate trying to manage 160 people. She has to take attendance, allot people to different groups, allot work location for each group, make pre-markings, make rough daily and weekly measurements and inform people of the amount of the work they have done, motivate the workers to work efficiently etc. All this cannot be done by one person if the number of workers is greater than 50. In fact, the operational guidelines stresses that one mate should be there for every 50 workers.
2. Poor work selection: In Konapatti village (Shanarpatti panchayat, Shanarpatti Block, Dindigul District), people were allotted work in a canal which was already clean and well formed. If workers were to do the full quantum of work to be done to get minimum wages (42 cu feet), it could even become useless (Irrigation canals cannot be deeper than the field which they irrigate)
3. Convergence with other departments: New useful works which could be taken up with other departments have not been done. To learn from best practices in other places, to do participatory rural appraisal, make project plans for works that people need and coordinate between beneficiaries and other departments, adequate management and technical staff would be required which is not there currently.
4. All panchayats are treated the same irrespective of their size, need for work etc. Kallipattu Panchayat (Kandamangalam Block, Viluppuram District) is a relatively well off panchayat right next to Keelpennaru where a lot of sand mining happens. The demand for work in this panchayat will be low compared to say Pakkam Panchayat (Kandamangalam Block, Viluppuram District) but the management resources allocated to execute MGNREGA in both places is the same.

5. Many old people come to work and it's physically impossible for them to do the full quantum of work. For such people, it will be more appropriate to pay them according to time-based rates rather than task-based rates (As an example, old people could be asked to look after tree saplings instead of building tree-guards. See Muzzafarpur model project in nrega.nic.in)
6. There are only three soil types (ordinary soil, hard soil and soft disintegrated rock) according to the Schedule of Rates and in most places the wages are calculated based on the hard soil type. Obviously, this is too simple a classification for the very wide variation in soil types that are found in Tamil Nadu. Also, no provision is made for different times of the year - soil will be easy to work after light rains but will become very hard in summer.
7. Workers are not provided good tools to do their work (Existing GO No 605 encouraging SHGs to use their revolving funds is not very useful)
8. Work hours are not amenable to doing hard work - The best time to do good earth work is from 6 am to 10 am and from 4 pm to 6 am, but the MGNREGA work hours are from 9 am to 5 pm. If an incentive is provided to people that they can leave after finishing their work (that is do only task-based measurement) rather than both (task and time based measurement that is in vogue now), it's likely that productivity of people could improve.
9. If overseer comes and measures work done in front of people and makes different payments to different groups, it will also act as a strong incentive for people to work. While provisions for this has been made recently, it's not clear that overseers are doing this regularly.

Low Awareness on entitlements

People are not aware of what the act says with respect to minimum wages, the days within which they have to be paid and that they have a right to work. Very few people have asked for work and that too only informally. While people are aware that gram sabhas happen, most of them do not attend it because they don't know when and where it is held and they do not feel that that there is a point to attending it.

Issues with respect to electronic Job Cards (eJCs) downloaded from

<http://www.nrega.nic.in> (See attached spread sheets for more details)

1. Names of MGNREGA workers in eJC, village information, work details are all in English. Village folks would find it difficult to read this.
2. Father's name or Husband's name is not present in the eJC. This makes it very difficult to identify the person in the village as many people in the village have the same first name. If no column is provided in the MGNREGA MIS for writing father's or husband's name, this can be added along with the name as in '**Name: Kuppan s/o Suppan**'
3. Address is not present in the eJC
4. Hamlet information is not present in some of the eJCs
5. Age information is not correct in some of the eJCs
6. Some eJCs have names of other families in them
7. The number of days worked according to eJC is not consistent with what is marked in the physical JC

Other issues

JC is not with the individual worker but with the team leader. Workers work in teams of 20 and they leave their job card with the team leader. There is potential for misuse in this process.

Mates are not selected in a transparent manner and according to the Operational Guidelines. The panchayat president of Avilipatti Panchayat (Shanarpatti Block, Dindigul District), said that he was pressured to appoint particular people as mates by block level councillors.

Worksite board was not there in the worksites that we visited.