

## **MGNREGS A GREAT BOOST TO ACHIEVE THE NATIONAL FOREST POLICY.**

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**Introduction:** The UPA-I Government flagship program MGNREGS is considered to be one of the best programs in the forestry sector in many respects. The basic mandate of the program was to create employment guarantee to rural poor and make infrastructure facilities at rural villages. The job guarantee for minimum 100 days per house hold and with much scope on its implementation made this scheme most successful and also found to be the largest and most widely used program in the post and pre-Independent India. Its multi-sectoral coverage and wide publicity further made the scheme more popular and also much useful to various departments as such in forestry sector as well. This scheme is not only providing wage employment to the poor but also its basic features for transparency and its accountability and method of payment have put the entire administrative machinery to think for its better delivery mechanism. It also made some initiatives on participatory democracy and decentralized planning at grass root level.

This scheme had created much bargaining power at the rural villagers for better wages to their labour force. It is a pioneering scheme in which the economical and social right of a citizen is put in the legal purview. This popular scheme having features like availability of legal provision on demanding work within 15 days and wage payment within 15 days and demanding unemployment allowances and compensation and imposition of penalties on redress of grievances within a week time which takes this program in to very unique and unprecedented level. This scheme has the main task of creation of durable assets like water conservation and water harvesting, drought proofing, afforestation and tree plantation, creation of irrigation canal including minor and micro irrigation work, irrigation facilities at SC/ST land holdings and at the Indhira Awas Yojna beneficiaries lands, land development and its improvement, renovation of traditional water bodies and improvement of existing tanks, making rural connectivity by providing all-weather roads and any other asset creation works notified by Central government in consultation with state government. The Gram Sabha will identify the works to be taken up. The Panchayats are having the principal responsibility from planning to implementation and its

monitoring as well. All implementing agencies of this scheme will be accountable to the public and having Social Audit and also within the purview of RTI-Act.

About 70 per cent of Indian population is living at rural areas and among 460 million poor Indian, 75 per cent are living in rural India. Indian Constitutional Article 42 and 41 says that the duty of the elected government to provide employment and right to work of its citizen respectively. Almost, all type of socio-economic indicators like annual income, education, health care, life longevity, standard of living, potable drinking water, balanced diet, transport, etc of rural population is much much below to their urban counterpart. This is basically and strongly due to acute unemployment in rural areas. Most of our (80%) farmers are small and marginal farmers, their income is basically from wage and physical labour oriented work. In India, majority of our women work force is either unutilized or underutilized particularly in rural areas. Under this circumstances, the advent of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act on September, 2005 (came in to force by February, 2006) with much scope to eliminate poverty and to create long term assets in gram Panchayats became a dream come true to the poverty driven Panchayats. The pet project/scheme of Employment Guarantee Scheme (from 1975-2005) of state of Maharashtra was the main source of this act. Many social workers like Aruna Roy and Drezsa Jean had really worked hard to materialize this enactment.

**NFP's mandate and available scope to achieve the same:** From the day the concept of budget came in to the picture, sector like forest had lesser attraction by the planner and budgetary body and not being in the area of serious concern both from central and state government. This legacy of marginal budget and non-focused approach is continued till date. Many of our forest infrastructures like road, buildings, water bodies, watch towers, transport facilities are age old to British period. Due to change in the growing demand on forest and global climate change had put planning bodies to think on global perspective. Enactments of National Forest Policy (NFP) and National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC) are some of the outcome of present day compulsions. As per the objectives of national Forest Policy, 1988 *checking soil erosion and*

*denudation in the catchment areas of rivers, lakes, reservoirs in the "interest of soil and water conservation", for mitigating floods and droughts and for the retardation of siltation of reservoirs and Creating a massive people's movement with the involvement of women, for achieving these objectives and to minimize pressure on existing forests.* In order to achieve the said objective to reach the end goal. One should consistently work on targeted path through micro-level approaches at district, division, block, gram Panchayats and villages level etc since our nation is very vast and diverse in many respects. All micro-level soil moisture conservation works in forest areas is not only serve the local interest but also it will take care of the national objectives on NFP at large. In the geographical time scale, for formation of one gram of soil takes many years but within no time the same get it eroded by a single torrential rainfall. So, keeping/ preserving the weathered soil at the ground surface is not only very important for its productivity but also equally important to avoid any damage to its nearby water bodies (river, tank, dam etc) against siltation or flooding or loss of carrying capacity and its longevity. In the prevailing budgetary provision, thinking for doing large scale Soil moisture conservation work is near impossible task. Under these circumstances, adoption of scheme like MGNREGS is really a bonus to achieve the goal of local and national level. So many million eligible work force particularly women force at rural India is kept un-utilized, but NREGS Act became an eye opener for many problem including rural employment.

**Forest creation and its conservation:** Large areas of denudated and barren forest land as well as public and private waste lands are kept vacant due to lack of fund and care. To convert this un-utilized waste lands, there is much scope for utilizing this open ended budget for creation and stocking and improvement of forest cover. As envisaged in the NFP *"Increasing substantially the forest/tree cover in the country through massive afforestation and social forestry programmes, especially on all denuded, degraded and unproductive lands"*. In West Bengal, forest department is using NREGS fund for creation and stocking of forest cover both inside the forest areas as well as in the private lands and road side areas in order to extent the green cover in the state as said in the national forest policy *'it is necessary to encourage the planting of*

*trees alongside of roads, railway lines, rivers and streams and canals, and on other unutilised lands under State/corporate, institutional or private ownership. Green belts should be raised in urban/industrial areas as well as in and tracts. Such a programme will help to check erosion and desertification as well as improve the micro-climate?.* Annually many lakhs seedlings are being distributed to the public with free of cost particularly during the monsoon time coincide with Forest week celebration in the month of July. It creates much scope to extend the social forestry, agro-forestry and extension and avenue plantation.

**Table 1.Afforestation work in Bankura District, under Forest Department, West Bengal.**

Year	Physical Achievement in Ha.	Financial Achievement in Rs.	Mandays Generated in Nos.
2006-07	1610	18,922,630.20	201334
2007-08	1572	18,917,956.67	229218
2008-09	805	16,513,969.58	178603
2009-10	797	40,807,363.00	411611
2010-11	900	41,778,601.50	418139
2011-12	676	46,356,759.26	356855
<b>Total</b>	<b>6360</b>	<b>183297280.2</b>	<b>1795760</b>



As narrated in the national forest policy *“Provision of sufficient fodder, fuel and pasture, specially in areas adjoining forests necessary in order to prevent depletion of forests beyond the sustainable limit. Since fuel wood continues to be the predominant source of energy in rural areas, the programme of afforestation should be intensified with special emphasis on augmenting fuel wood production to meet the requirement of the rural people”* and also those imperatives are genuinely addressed by implementation of national employment guarantee act. It also take care the basic needs of the rural population for *‘fuel-wood, fodder, minor forest produce and small timber of the rural and tribal populations’* as given in the vision plan.

**SMC work for checking Soil Erosion and harvesting excess run-off rain water.**

Our national geographic locations are divided into many mega watersheds and it is further divided in to macro and micro-watershed. The size of micro-watershed may extend from few thousand hectares to few hectares as per the nature and features of its terrain. To approach any mega-watershed, we need to manipulate macro-watershed and for treating macro watershed we have to work at micro-watershed and to improve the micro-watershed we should look at the individual contours and its plots. So, all this work is a looks like a well grown trees with larger main stem, big trunks, branches, branch lets and small twigs and so on. Therefore, all those mega-watershed treatments are starting at individual contour lines. We are doing soil moisture conservation works like making of contour trenches, cattle proof trenches construction of small earthen dam (ED) , digging of pond, de-silting existing pond and earthen dams , construction of Rock Check Dam ( small RCD) and treating small gullies with locally available materials and techniques with manual labour force. Which are all, typical soil moisture conservation structure for micro-watershed treatment work. All those structure are genuinely conserving rain water, improving its percolation and moisture retention in the sub-surface of the soil and also reducing run-off rain water and minimize the surface soil erosion in the form of sheet, rill and small gullies. This treatments put the bodies at nearby farm land are less vulnerability on flood, erosion

and siltation. This is a typical human- forest- farm- soil moisture approach (rain water harvesting). It makes both forests as well as farm lands are more productive, protective and fertile. The vision envisaged in the NFP *“Increasing the productivity of forests to meet essential national needs” and “checking soil erosion and denudation in the catchment areas of rivers, lakes, reservoirs in the ‘interest of soil and water conservation’, for mitigating floods and droughts and for the retardation of siltation of reservoirs and Creating a massive people's movement with the involvement of women, for achieving these objectives and to minimize pressure on existing forests.,* are religiously taken in to account through implementing of the national flag ship program.



**Table 2. Soil & Moisture Conesevation in Bankura District, under Forest Department, West Bengal.**

Year	Item of SMC work done	Financial Achievement in Rs.	Mandays Generated in Nos.
2006-07	Creation of Earthen Dam, Pond ,Rock Check Dam, De-siltation of existing water harvesting / Ground water recharging structures, Digging Contour Trenches, Digging of Boundary Trenches (FPC Boundary),Digging of Cattle Proof Trenches ,Gully Plugging	2,595,386.12	47359
2007-08		2,713,660.00	50554
2008-09		569,996.00	29696
2009-10		20,066,604.00	131539
2010-11		41,208,455.50	153298
2011-12		28,220,468.00	116028
Total		<b>95374569.62</b>	<b>528474</b>

## **Increasing the productivity of forests to meet essential national needs.**

The national rural employment guarantee scheme is much helpful for Stocking and improvement of forests to reach one of the goals of NFP ***‘Increasing the productivity of forests to meet essential national needs’***. So many patches of degraded forest lands had been brought under forest cover and also huge volume of degraded forests were improved by means of inter-planting, stocking and creation of contour trenches that actively facilitating natural regeneration, One such typical example is Sal (*Shorea robusta*) forest in south West Bengal region. Planting of multipurpose tall seedlings of different species had really improved the quality of plantation and its biodiversity. Introduction of fruit bearing species like Jack fruit, Bale, Tamarind, Ber, Jamun, Wood apple, Jilappi ( *Pithecolobium dulsi* ), Amla, Dumur ( *Ficus hispida.*), Cashew nut, Mohul (*Maduca latifolia*) etc had paved the road map for future source of fruits and fodder to the growing wild animals and also to address the inhabitant tribal populations living in and around forest areas as addressed in the NFP ***‘minor forest produce provides sustenance to tribal population and to other communities residing in and around the forests. Such produce should be protected, improved and their production enhanced with due regard to generation of employment and income’*** and ***‘Conserving the natural heritage of the country by preserving the remaining natural forests with the vast variety of flora and fauna, which represent the remarkable biological diversity and genetic resources of the country’*** .

**Forest Protection and its Management:** Under NREGS scheme, few forest protection works are being implemented, one such work is cattle proof trenches (CPT) which is one of the major work to protect the new regeneration, newly created plantation forest and protection of young plantation of up to four five year aged from cattle grazing. It also promptly protecting from ground fire during dry and hot summer month when all fallen dry leaf litters creating much threat for fire accident. It not only protecting from natural calamities but also from anthropogenic pressure like encroachment and defacement of forest boundaries and threat from over flooded

tourist during peak season as envisaged in the national forest policy '*existing forests and forest lands should be fully protected and their productivity improved*'.



**Improving Agricultural Productivity at nearby forest land:** Large no of micro-water-catchments like mini-earthen dams and ponds are created through the national employment guarantee acts, which amply harvesting the excess run-off water and the stored water in being recycled into the nearby agricultural areas and used for food grain cultivation particularly by tribal communities. The food grain production by the tribal population is not only meet out their colorific needs but also add to their additional revenue generation, by that way it keep them away from sole dependability on forest for their lively hood. Many of such water harvesting structures are used for fish cultivation and also for cultivation of vegetable crops at the lean season which promptly taking to the objectives of national forest policy '*Creating a massive people's movement with the involvement of women, for achieving these objectives and to minimize pressure on existing forests*'.



Earthen Dam Constructed for Multi-purpose at Barjuri Gram Panchyat in G.Ghati Block of Bankura District, West Bengal during 2009-10

**Forest communication and network development:** No isolated program would be successful unless it is addressed with human face. All developmental schemes could be reached the unreached only when there is a reasonable communication. Forest roads are acting as a vital infrastructure to bring the aborigine community to the main stream population. Most of the forest roads are very primitive which is way back to British era, where all are *kaccha* and unmaintained one. Forests roads are life line to millions of tribal and forest dwelling population and also forest staffs and their family members posted at remote forest areas. With the help of national employment guarantee act, forest department in West Bengal making many *kaccha* roads and improving its old roads at remote forest and its fringe areas which creates much scope on transport and communication at in-accessible territories.



**Table 3. Infrastructure Dev. Work in Bankura District, , under Forest Department, West Bengal.**

Year	Item of .Infrastructure Dev. Work	Financial Achievement in Rs.	Mandays Generated in Nos.
2006-07	Construction of moorum road, Repair of road, Boundary Trench Digging, Digging trenches along Patta Land (Tribal Act)	7925761.98	36631
2007-08		9712872	49421
2008-09		6762608	28264
2009-10		7643026	27207
2010-11		5437890	13940
2011-12		6627205	10095
Total		<b>44109362.98</b>	<b>165558</b>

### **.Joint Forest Management support activities & participatory forest management**

Joint forest management is a democratic tool to achieve the national forest policy as well as national greening mission plan. Here, active participation of local villagers particularly the forest protection committee members are ensured in order to achieve the long term goal of production, protection and improving quantity and quality of green cover. Under national rural employment guarantee act, women work force is being intensively utilized to create more plantation and also

soil moisture conservation work to address both ecological and socio-economical need of the hour. The department has created thousands of hectares of forest cover with much plant diversity and also dug large number of mini-water bodies to make permanent livelihood through fish and duck rearing at remote rural areas for tribal and economically weaker section. The national rural employment guarantee act is being implemented to aim at poverty alleviation and sustainable production with democratic mandate. The water bodies are created under this scheme used for multiple purposes like irrigation, farming, domestic use, drinking water, for domestic cattle etc. where water being one of the scares commodity during dry summer months. Large no of Ring wells were constructed for drinking water purpose at remote tribal villages to ensure their potable water supply round the year.



Construction of MGNREGS Dug Well (work in progress) at Belboni Beat jurisdiction in Bankura District during, 2010

**Table 4. JFM Support Activity in Bankura District, under Forest Department, West Bengal.**

Year	Item of JFM Support Activity Work	Financial Achievement in Rs.	Mandays Generated in Nos.
2006-07	Construction of Dug-well/Ring well for nursery workers / at Forest Protection Committee members villages	-	0
2007-08		-	0
2008-09		150,000.00	0
2009-10		14,385,921.55	59480
2010-11		1,406,430.00	3493
2011-12		2,595,886.74	2780
<b>Total</b>		<b>18538238.29</b>	<b>65753</b>

**Conclusion:** The objectives of the national forest policy are envisaged to address at larger section of the society those who are either directly or indirectly dependent and both totally and partially living at forests or it resources. The main mandate of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee act is to create possible livelihood at rural areas particularly for economically weaker section. Both the forest policy and the welfare scheme are mainly people and resource centric. This is mainly to create and utilize on long term basis. Here, appears that the scheme is the mean and policy is an end goal. One of the main activities of the NREGS act is creation of social forestry, agro-forestry and tree plantations at available waste lands. Huge volume of national wealth is being spent and large volume of national assets is created for the **scheme** and **policy** respectively. As such the forestry sector individually not getting sufficient fund to obtain the objectives of national forest policy easily and achieving those objectives is complex and time taking process but *convergence of national rural employment guarantee fund for the objectives of NFP brings the vision plan very close to the reachable distance without deviating from the mandate of the flag ship program.*

#### **References**

1. National Forest Policy
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3. National Greening India Mission
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