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An Analytical Study of Awareness of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) Functionaries in Different Regions of Punjab, India

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration between both authors. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), is the largest work guarantee programme in the world, was enacted in 2005 with the primary objective of guaranteeing 100 days of wage employment per year to rural households. Implementation of programme at village level had done through village level functionaries i.e. *Gram Rojgar Sevak* (an official employee under MGNREGA) and Mates (chosen by the Gram Panchayat or *Gram Rojgar Sevak* (GRS) for marking attendance). Right of the workers and implementing procedure is written under the act. This study aimed to find the awareness of village level functionaries about the right of the workers and implementing procedure. It covered all socio-cultural region of Punjab. A total 44 (28 from *Malwa*, 8 from *Majha*, 8 from *Doaba*) village level functionaries were selected for the study from the all socio-cultural regions of Punjab i.e. *Malwa*, *Majha* and *Doaba* through probability proportionate to sampling size. The results of the study showed that overall, *Doaba* region high

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level of awareness was observed regarding the aspects such as 'right to employment', 'gram panchayat responsibilities', 'procedure to obtain job cards', 'work and wage rates', 'implementation and wage disbursement' and medium level of awareness was observed in 'social audit and public scrutiny' whereas in *Malwa* and *Majha* region in all the aspects high level of awareness was observed. Overall, the functionaries had a high level of awareness regarding all types of provisions under the act but since the functionaries included both the GRS and Mates, so the educational background of mates influenced the results as mates comparatively were less educated and consequently found less aware. Although, functionaries were found highly aware of the provisions under act but due to excessive workload they were not able to implement the programme effectively. There is need to plan the workload judiciously so that they can implement it properly.

Keywords: *Functionaries; Awareness; MGNREGA; Punjab.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Since India's independence, several policies and programmes have been designed with the aim to alleviate rural poverty as an approach towards planned development of the country. The employment oriented programmes as effective instruments of poverty alleviation started receiving attention around 1980's. Consequently, the sixth plan included National Rural Employment Programme (NREP) and the Rural Landless Employment Guarantee Programme (RLEGEP). Some other employment generation programmes launched by central government included Jawahar Rozgar Yojana (JRY), Employment Assurance Scheme (EAS), Sampoorna Grameen Yojana (SGRY) and National Food for Work Programme (NFFWP) etc. However, all these programmes were treated as schemes which did not involve any legal entitlements. They were aimed to reduce the gap between rural and urban people which would help reduce imbalances and speed up the development process [1]. So, huge investment has been made by the Government of India for up-liftmen of rural areas [2].

MGNREGA focus on raising the economic level of the people, reduce poverty and unemployment, improve health and educational status and fulfil the basic needs such as food, shelter and clothing of the rural masses. MGNREGA is to be implemented mainly by gram panchayats (GPs). The involvement of contractors is banned. The law provides many safeguards to promote its effective management and implementation. The act explicitly mentions the principles and agencies for implementation, list of allowed works, financing pattern, monitoring and evaluation and most importantly the detailed measures to ensure transparency and accountability. It is the first ever law internationally, that guarantees wage

employment at an unprecedented scale [3]. The works are mostly taken up under this act to rejuvenate the natural resource base and address the causes of chronic poverty such as drought, deforestation, soil erosion, floods, poor rural connectivity etc [4]. These works were implemented with the help of village level functionaries i.e. *Gram Rojgar Sevak* (an official employee under MGNREGA) and Mates (chosen by the Gram Panchayat or GRS for marking attendance). The MGNREGA was launched in Punjab on Feb 2nd, 2006 in the Hoshiarpur District and was extended to three more districts namely Amritsar, Nawanshahar and Jalandhar under MGNREGA during 2007-08. Subsequently, all the districts were covered under MGNREGA in 1st April 2008 [5]. The study aimed to check the awareness level of functionaries about act because they are responsible to implement the programme at the village level.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study has been conducted in the state of Punjab which is divided into 3 socio-cultural zones i.e. *Majha*, *Malwa* and *Doaba*. There are 22 districts in Punjab out of which 14 are in *Malwa*, 4 in *Majha* and 4 in *Doaba* region. Therefore, probability proportionate to size sampling procedure was used for selection of districts from each zone. The study covered 11 districts of Punjab state using probability proportionate to size sampling procedure. From each district, two blocks were selected in consultation with concerned district officials. From each block two villages were selected for canvassing the schedules and collecting information from the functionaries. So, 22 blocks and 44 villages (two villages per block) were selected from each district. There were two types of village level functionaries i.e. *Gram Rojgar Sevak* (GRS) (an official employee under

MNREGA) and Mates (chosen by the Gram Panchayat or GRS for marking attendance). From each village, one functionary has been selected. So, a total of 44 functionaries comprised the sample of the study. The interview schedule was developed to collect the information of various aspects under *MGNREGA* such as issuance of job cards, employment aspect, wage payments and their records and social audit. Survey method is used to collect the data. The reaction of the functionaries to the implementation procedure followed by GP for the registration of beneficiaries, mechanism of registration in terms of inviting applications, registration for job cards, verification of the same in a transparent manner, social audit etc. were captured in options 'Aware, Somewhat aware' and 'Not Aware' responses with score 2, 1 and zero respectively. Further, frequencies were calculated and then mean scores calculated based upon frequencies.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data below presents the awareness of functionaries regarding different provisions under the *MGNREGA* act. There were two types of village level functionaries i.e. *Gram Rojgar Sevak* (an official employee under *MNREGA*) and Mates (chosen by the Gram Panchayat or GRS for marking attendance).

Table 1 depicts awareness of functionaries about the 'right to employment' right of beneficiaries. It was observed that all the functionaries were aware of the entitlement of workers to 100 days of employment and that all the willing adult

members from the household (willing to do unskilled work) could be included in the job cards ($\bar{X}=2.00$, Rank 1.5th). Functionaries were least aware of the provision of providing employment within 15 days after the submission of application by the workers. In all the regions, it was observed that GRS's were fully aware of the provision under the act whereas Mates were less aware owing to the difference in their educational level and responsibilities. Overall mean illustrates that *Malwa* region functionaries were more aware of their counterparts from other regions ($\bar{X}=1.92$, Rank 1st).

About the GP responsibilities all the functionaries were fully aware about the 'maintenance of 60:40 wage material cost ratio' and 'participation of 1/3rd of women' ($\bar{X}=2.00$, Rank 1.5th) followed by advance preparation of annual work schedule and no provision of contractors and labour-displacing machinery for execution of works/tasks ($\bar{X}=0.44$, Rank 3.5th). Functionaries were least aware about inbuilt incentives under the scheme in all the three regions of Punjab ($\bar{X}=1.45$, Rank 6th). It may be since planning of annual schedule is a responsibility of Gram Sabha and functionaries were not involved at that stage which explains their lack of knowledge about this provision. Also, mate themselves were beneficiaries of the scheme so they were not involved in the planning process. Region wise comparison showed that functionaries in *Malwa* were better aware ($\bar{X}=1.94$, Rank 1st) followed closely by those in *Majha* and *Doaba* regions (Rank 2nd and 3rd respectively) because of their high education level than other region functionaries.

Table 1. Awareness about the 'Right to Employment' amongst functionaries in different socio-cultural regions of Punjab (n=44)

Right to employment	<i>Doaba</i> n ₁ =8	<i>Malwa</i> n ₂ =28	<i>Majha</i> n ₃ =8	Overall n=44	
				Mean scores	Rank
Entitlement of all adult members to employment.	2.00	2.00	2.00	2.00	1.5
Entitlement to maximum of 100 days of employment.	2.00	2.00	2.00	2.00	1.5
Employment to be provided within 15 days of receipt of request.	1.62	1.89	1.00	1.50	4
Unemployment allowance to those who do not offered employment within 15 days.	1.50	1.78	1.62	1.63	3
Overall mean	1.78	1.92	1.66		
Rank	2	1	3		

Table 2. Awareness about the gram panchayat responsibilities amongst functionaries in different socio-cultural regions of Punjab (n=44)

Gram panchayat responsibilities	<i>Doaba</i> n ₁ =8	<i>Malwa</i> n ₂ =28	<i>Majha</i> n ₃ =8	Overall n=44	Rank
	Mean scores				
Ensuring regular planning, monitoring and implementation	1.62	2.00	1.87	1.83	5
Advance preparation of annual work schedule	1.87	2.000	2.00	1.96	3.5
Maintaining a ratio of 60:40 for wage and material costs.	2.00	2.00	2.00	2.00	1.5
No provision of contractors and labour-displacing machinery.	1.87	2.00	2.00	1.96	3.5
Ensuring participation of at least 1/3 rd of the women workers.	2.00	2.00	2.00	2.00	1.5
Inbuilt incentives-disincentives structure for job card holders.	1.37	1.62	1.37	1.45	6
Overall mean	1.79	1.94	1.87		
Rank	3	1	2		

Table 3. Awareness about the procedure of obtaining job cards amongst functionaries in different socio-cultural regions of Punjab (n=44)

Procedure to obtain job cards	<i>Doaba</i> n ₁ =8	<i>Malwa</i> n ₂ =28	<i>Majha</i> n ₃ =8	Overall n=44	Rank
	Mean Scores				
Beneficiary must formally apply for registration	1.50	1.71	1.62	1.83	5
GP to issue the job cards after verification	1.62	1.92	2.00	1.96	3.5
Job card must carry photograph of registered members.	2.00	2.00	2.00	2.00	1.5
Job card must remain in the custody of the household members.	2.00	1.93	2.00	1.96	3.5
Job card holder to apply for work to GP	1.50	1.78	1.75	2.00	1.5
Gram Panchayat must issue dated receipt of the work application	1.37	1.78	1.37	1.45	6
Overall mean	1.79	1.94	1.87		
Rank	3	1	2		

Table 3 illustrates the awareness about procedure of obtaining job cards. The data shows that majority of the functionaries were aware that job card must carry photographs of all adult members of the family and job card holder must formally apply for work to the Gram Panchayat ($\bar{X}=2.00$, Rank 1.5th each). Functionaries were least aware of the fact that gram panchayat must issue a dated receipt of the work application submitted by the workers ($\bar{X}=1.45$, Rank 6th). Further, the data showed that functionaries were aware that verification was necessary before issuing job cards but, this is not practiced as revealed by scores in Table 1

It may be since beneficiaries were known to the Gram Sabha so the gram Sabha members did not take the trouble of verifying them. From the overall mean, it was obvious that *Malwa* functionaries were more aware ($\bar{X}=1.94$) than their counterparts from *Majha* ($\bar{X}=1.87$) and *Doaba* regions ($\bar{X}=1.79$).

Data given in Table 4 depicts that all the functionaries were fully aware about the provisions that notice board should regularly display work-related information, maintenance of muster roll at worksite ($\bar{X}=2.00$, Rank 1.5th), workers must complete the assigned work/task

everyday ($\bar{X}=1.97$, Rank 3rd) and muster roll must bear the office number and signatures of the programme officer for its validity ($\bar{X}=1.92$, Rank 4th). The least awareness was found regarding the display of work division related information on the notice board ($\bar{X}=0.85$, Rank 14th). It may be attributed to the reason that notice boards were not purchased in the first place due to a shortage of funds under MNREGA, so they were not aware about this provision. From the overall mean, it was noticed that *Malwa* region functionaries were more aware of implementing procedure ($\bar{X}=1.77$, Rank 1st) followed by those from *Doaba* ($\bar{X}=1.43$, Rank 2nd) and *Majha* region ($\bar{X}=1.18$, Rank 3rd).

Table 5 illustrates awareness of functionaries about the work procedure and wage rates

under MGNREGA scheme. It was observed that in *Malwa*, *Doaba* and *Malwa* functionaries were highly aware about the fact that employment must be provided within 5 km radius and there should be weekly disbursement of wages ($\bar{X}=2.00$, Rank 1.5th). Further, it was observed that in all the regions, functionaries were least aware of the responsibility of the programme officer to provide work if gram Sabha fails to do so ($\bar{X}=0.99$, Rank 8th) and the provision of unemployment allowance, if state government fails to provide wage employment on time, ($\bar{X}=0.81$, Rank 9th). Overall mean scores depict that *Malwa* region functionaries were most aware ($\bar{X}=1.89$) about work procedure and wage rates and those in *Majha* belt were found least aware ($\bar{X}=1.49$).

Table 4. Awareness about the implementing procedure of the scheme amongst functionaries in different socio-cultural regions of Punjab (n=44)

Implementation procedure	<i>Doaba</i> n ₁ =8	<i>Malwa</i> n ₂ =28	<i>Majha</i> n ₃ =8	Overall n=44	
				Mean scores	Rank
Every worker must sign the muster roll	2.00	1.78	1.75	1.84	5
Noticeboard must display information:					
a. Related to work	2.00	2.00	2.00	2.00	1.5
b. Work division	0.50	1.42	0.62	0.85	14
c. Receipt of funds	0.37	1.64	0.37	0.79	13
d. Expenditure details	0.50	1.50	0.87	0.96	12
Workers must complete assigned work every day.	1.92	2.00	2.00	1.97	3
Muster roll must be maintained at the place of work.	2.00	2.00	2.00	2.00	1.5
Muster roll must bear the office number and signatures of the programme officer for its validity.	2.00	2.00	1.75	1.92	4
After each day's work, mate must reveal entries made in the muster roll to workers.	1.62	1.96	0.50	1.36	10
Work orders and work measurement records book must also be available at the work site	1.78	1.86	0.50	1.38	9
Five-member team to be selected every week to check the expenses.	1.50	1.78	1.62	1.63	6
Entitlement to free medical assistance If the employee meets with an accident	1.37	1.89	1.00	1.42	8
Financial assistance to the family as per state government rules if an employee gets handicapped/ dies/ meets with accident during work	1.78	1.57	1.00	1.45	7
The state government to meet all the expenses, if an employee brings his/her child to the work site and the child meets with an accident.	0.75	1.57	0.75	1.02	11
Overall mean	1.43	1.77	1.18		
Rank	2	1	3		

Table 5. Awareness about the work procedure and wage rates amongst functionaries in different socio-cultural regions of Punjab (n=44)

Work procedure and wage rates	Doaba n ₁ =8	Malwa n ₂ =28	Majha n ₃ =8	Overall n=44	
				Mean scores	Rank
Information must be displayed at a common place.	1.50	1.78	1.87	1.72	6
No entitlement to unemployment allowance if job-card holder refuses to accept the assigned work.	1.00	2.00	1.75	1.58	7
Responsibility of Programme officer is provide work if gram panchayat fails to do so.	0.75	1.71	0.50	0.99	8
Employment must be provided within a radius of 5 km.	2.00	2.00	2.00	2.00	1.5
Additional allowances must be paid in casework is offered beyond 5 km distance	1.75	2.00	2.00	1.92	4
Unemployment allowance must be paid in case the State Government fails to provide wage employment.	0.50	1.57	0.37	0.81	9
Facilities such as crèche, drinking water, child care facility and first aid must be provided at the worksite.	2.00	1.93	1.87	1.93	3
Wages must be paid at the minimum prescribed wage rate.	1.87	2.00	1.50	1.79	5
There must be weekly disbursement of wages	2.00	2.00	2.00	2.00	1.5
Overall mean	1.49	1.89	1.54		
Rank	3	1	2		

Table 6. Awareness about the disbursement of wages amongst functionaries in different socio-cultural regions of Punjab (n=44)

Wage disbursement	Doaba n ₁ =8	Malwa n ₂ =28	Majha n ₃ =8	Overall n=44	
				Mean scores	Rank
Payment is based on actual work performed.	1.62	1.93	1.75	1.77	3
Muster roll includes measurement of the work.	1.00	1.71	0.50	1.07	5
Work output must be revealed at the time of payment.	1.75	1.57	0.37	1.23	4
Payments must be made through the bank or post office.	2.00	2.00	2.00	2.00	1
Entries of payment be recorded on job cards.	1.87	2.00	2.00	1.96	2
Overall mean	1.65	1.84	1.32		
Rank	2	1	3		

Table 6 above depicts that functionaries were maximally aware about the provision of payment of wage ($\bar{X}=2.00$, Rank 1st) through banks and availability of payments records on the job cards ($\bar{X}=1.96$, Rank 2nd) followed by awareness about payment to be worked out based on the actual work performed by workers ($\bar{X}=1.77$, Rank 3rd). Least aware was however observed for maintaining work measurement record on the muster roll ($\bar{X}=1.07$, Rank 5th) and making work output known to the beneficiaries while making payments to them ($\bar{X}=1.23$, Rank 4th). In actual practice, the entries regarding measurement of

work performed by the workers are not made on muster roll perhaps owing to the reason that GRS are overloaded with work and hardly get time to complete formalities on daily basis. Overall mean depicts that *Malwa* region functionaries were more aware ($\bar{X}=1.89$) about disbursement of wage procedure over their counterparts from *Doaba* ($\bar{X}=1.65$) and from *Majha* regions them ($\bar{X}=1.32$).

Table 7 illustrates that all the functionaries from *Malwa*, *Majha* and *Doaba* region were fully aware that the social audit is mandatory once in

six months ($\bar{X}=2.00$, Rank 1st) followed by knowledge about formulation of social audit committee by gram Sabha on six monthly bases ($\bar{X}=1.76$, Rank 2nd) and at least one third of social audit committee members should be women ($\bar{X}=1.72$, Rank 3rd). It was also observed that functionaries were least aware about reporting of discrepancies observed in work related entries as complaints to vigilance committee (Rank 10th). Overall, it was observed that *Majha* region functionaries were better informed about social audit procedure than their counterparts from other regions.

A perusal of the data in Table 8 showed that all the functionaries were aware about the logging of complaints in the complaint register and resolving of these within a specific time ($\bar{X}=2.00$, Rank 1st). The majority were also aware of the provision of residents/ people must have access to all the work-related records lying with the gram Sabha ($\bar{X}=1.80$, Rank 2nd) as well as regular checking of filing and resolving of

complaints by the higher authorities ($\bar{X}=1.78$, Rank 3rd). But no complaints register was maintained by GRS due to shortage of funds. Awareness about printing of complaints in *Khetri Smachar Pattar* was also found low ($\bar{X}=0.75$, Rank 8th). However, the functionaries in *Majha* were found more aware ($\bar{X}=1.58$, Rank 1st) over their counterparts from other regions about this provision of public scrutiny. Majority of the functionaries were also not found aware of the existence of toll-free helpline for maintaining transparency of records. Similar results were reported by Raghavan et al. [6], they concluded that problem which was rampant across all the villages was the lack of adequate communication which led to lack of awareness among various stakeholders. There was a lack of communication from the District level to the Panchayat level and from the Panchayat to the villagers. Panchayat workers, who are the implementers of this scheme, were not aware of the scheme in its true spirit.

Table 7. Awareness about the social audit procedure amongst functionaries in different socio-cultural regions of Punjab (n=44)

Social audit procedure	Doaba n₁=8	Malwa n₂=28	Majha n₃=8	Overall n=44
	Mean scores			Rank
Mandatory once in six months	2.00	2.00	2.00	1
Making social audit announcement by District Project Officer one month in advance.	1.00	1.71	1.87	5
Selection of committee members on six monthly bases.	1.37	1.92	2.00	1.76
Selection of committee members from amongst the beneficiaries.	1.62	1.78	1.00	1.47
Committee must consist of 1/3rd of women members.	1.62	1.92	1.62	1.72
District level programme officer must present all financial records/ documents first to gram Sabha (GS)	0.87	0.89	0.25	0.67
After presenting documents to GS these must be handed over to social audit committee for cross checking	0.75	1.00	1.75	1.17
The committee must submit report after examining all documents.	0.50	0.18	1.75	0.81
Work register containing all the entries must be presented before the committee for verification.	1.87	1.5	1.57	1.65
Discrepancies in entries to be reported as complaints	1.62	0	0.07	0.56
Overall mean	1.32	1.29	1.39	
Rank	2	3	1	

Table 9 illustrates the awareness level of functionaries regarding different provisions available under *MGNREGA* in different regions of Punjab. Overall, in *Malwa* region the awareness level was high with ($\bar{X}=1.75$) followed by *Majha* ($\bar{X}=1.54$) and *Doaba* ($\bar{X}=1.51$). Although, in all the regions awareness level was high but in *Malwa* it was highest amongst all regions. In *Doaba* region high level of awareness was observed regarding the aspects such as 'right to employment', 'gram panchayat responsibilities', 'procedure to obtain job cards', 'work and wage rates', 'implementation and wage disbursement' and medium level of awareness was observed in 'social audit and public scrutiny' whereas in *Malwa* and *Majha* region in all

the aspects high level of awareness was observed. Overall, the functionaries had a high level of awareness regarding all types of provisions under the act but since the functionaries included both the GRS and Mates so the educational background of mates influenced the results as mates comparatively were less educated and consequently found less aware. Similar findings were observed by Khera (2009) in an experiment done on training of mates (worksite supervisors) in Rajasthan to improve worksite management. The evidence suggested success of the training of supervisors at worksite (particularly women) contributed towards better worksite management due to enhanced productivity [7].

Table 8. Awareness about the provision for public scrutiny amongst functionaries in different socio-cultural regions of Punjab (n=44)

Public scrutiny procedure	<i>Doaba</i> n=8	<i>Malwa</i> n=28	<i>Majha</i> n=8	Overall n=44	
				Mean scores	Rank
Vigilance and supervisory committee to supervise all works of <i>MGNREGA</i> .	1.50	1.57	1.50	1.52	4
Job card holders must have access to all the work-related records lying with the gram Sabha.	1.87	1.78	1.75	1.80	2
All the complaints must be entered in the complaint register and solved within a specified time frame	2.00	2.00	2.00	2.00	1
The person filing complaint should receive a written answer by way of action taken	0.75	1.71	1.87	1.44	5
Filing and resolving of all complaints must be checked by higher authorities	1.75	1.71	1.87	1.78	3
Printing of all complaints in <i>KhetriSmacharPattar</i> .	0.12	1.87	0.25	0.75	8
Toll-free helpline must exist for maintaining transparency of records.	0.00	0.89	1.62	0.84	7
Appointment of a state level officer for taking punitive action in case of irregularities	0.62	1.00	1.75	1.12	6
Overall mean	1.08	1.57	1.58		
Rank	3	2	1		

Table 9. Level of awareness of functionaries about different provisional aspects of *MGNREGA* in different socio-cultural regions of Punjab (n=44)

Aspects of awareness	Level of awareness (0-2)		
	<i>Doaba</i> n=8	<i>Malwa</i> n=28	<i>Majha</i> n=8
Right to employment	1.78	1.91	1.65
Gram Panchayat	1.79	1.93	1.87
Procedure to obtain job cards	1.66	1.85	1.79
Work and wage rates	1.48	1.88	1.54
Implementation	1.37	1.76	1.23
Wage disbursement	1.64	1.84	1.32
Social audit	1.21	1.42	1.53
Public scrutiny	1.21	1.41	1.41
Mean	1.51	1.75	1.54

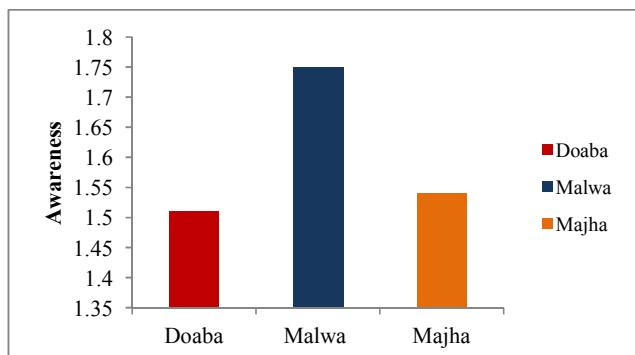


Fig. 1. Level of awareness of functionaries about act in different regions of Punjab

4. CONCLUSION

MGNREGA is a programme which is mainly implemented by village level functionaries. Although, it was observed that Functionaries were highly aware about the provisions under act but they are not able to be implemented same due to excessive work load of *Gram Rozgar Sewak* (GRS). So, it is recommended that the word load of *Gram Rozgar Sewak* (GRS) need to be judiciously planned. At present, they are responsible for the handling of 30-40 villages which is humanly not possible one cannot cover all villages in one day and maintain proper records and measurements of work done by beneficiaries and that in the absence of any conveyance. Training and capacity building of functionaries must be done regularly as it will facilitate their involvement in correct implementation of MGNREGA.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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