Sustainability of Rural Livelihoods and MGNREGA
- A Study in District Mewat, Haryana

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Indian economy, though on a steadier growth path, suffers from several distortions. The incidence of poverty in the country is still high, the agricultural sector is lagging, the natural resources are getting degraded, infrastructure development is far from adequate and there are rising inequalities across regions and across different socio-economic groups. It has been recognized worldwide that adequate and sustainable livelihoods are increasingly important and central to the issues of poverty reduction, environmental management and human development. Thus, consequent to signing the Millennium Declaration in 2000, India recognized and sought to strengthen the livelihoods of poor as a legitimate policy commitment.

The majority of poor in India are overwhelmingly concentrated in rural areas and significantly dependent on wage employment for livelihood. The Government, time and again, has initiated several public works programmes and social security measures to mitigate their plight and ameliorate their conditions. For sustainable livelihood support at the community level, rural people’s entitlement to employment has been mandated through an Act for the entire country. Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), enacted in 2005, is a path breaking legislation that is expected to ensure a legal guarantee of one hundred days of employment to rural poor, who have low risk bearing capacity, poor credit worthiness to take up self employment ventures and who have a strong preference for wage work. This report makes a case for using MGNREGA as an effective development tool, to be seen more as a livelihood-generating programme than just a wage-earning scheme.

The study, conducted under the auspices of the Institute of Rural Research and Development, Gurgaon, attempts to critically probe the present status of MGNREGA, its acceptability, implementation bottlenecks and impact in terms of livelihood enhancement of rural poor in District Mewat, Haryana. This district is primarily rural, backward and socio economically vulnerable. Hence, the study examines the overall livelihoods context and constraints in selected villages across all five blocks of Mewat and analyses effectiveness of MGNREGA within wider livelihood strategies of population under study. It presents a factual analysis identifying the factors that either facilitated or obstructed achievements of intended outcomes.
of MGNREGA interventions. To serve these ends, a concurrent mixed method research design was used and perspectives from different stakeholders were taken into account. Information was obtained from several secondary sources and on the ground, from the Sarpanchs, the randomly selected MGNREGA beneficiaries as well as the non beneficiaries.

The findings of this study, through a holistic analysis, provide a great deal of insights in to the livelihood activities, assets and constraints in Mewat district on the whole and more particularly, in the selected villages. It was found by way of desk review and discussions across villages, that landlessness, low regional geographic endowments, lack of formal education and absence of effective employment opportunities in the non-agricultural sector have largely induced livelihood insecurity in this district. A detailed scanning of the performance of MGNREGA through available government statistics found that Mewat contributed 5.6 per cent to the total person days employment in Haryana, with majority of workers belonging to OBC category (86 per cent) and significant work completion (71.8 per cent) and women’s participation rates (46 per cent) in 2011-12. These figures reflected a scenario different and far from the reality.

The livelihood analysis in the five purposively selected villages indicated a plethora of impediments in terms of physical infrastructure, amenities, human and natural capital. In terms of occupations practiced, the mosaic of farm and non-agricultural income sources was found to be pervasive in all villages. The agricultural seasonality also led not just the casual labourers, but also the small and marginal farmers to adopt diversified livelihood activities. The income, expenditure, savings and indebtedness were probed from the respondents to understand their financial situation. The information on migration patterns, land and livestock details, household facilities, community assets and social networks was gathered and put into livelihoods perspective. Though, there were differences in terms of assets and constraints across villages, overall it was evident from analysis that all the selected locations suffered from inadequacy of basic infrastructure and an aggregate lack of development.

The lack of livelihood security highlighted the pressing and urgent need for effective functioning of MGNREGA. The implementation issues pertaining to awareness about the scheme, application and registration for work, job cards, worksite facilities, record keeping, social audits etc were enquired from the beneficiary households. The specific grievances cited by the respective Sarpanchs and the locals were taken note of. The impact of
MGNREGA was observed from macro level perspective in terms of employment generated and assets created, and also in terms of micro level effects at the community level. Some of the significant results regarding implementation and impact of MGNREGA that came to forefront through the field study are as under.

- The BPL households were found to be proportionately more under beneficiaries (59 per cent), which indicates the scheme, is attempting to benefit the marginalized poor.
- The awareness of different provisions under the Act was lacking in both the workers and the Sarpanchs. This clearly indicates the need to strengthen the awareness and information dissemination on the part of the implementing agencies and the government.
- The work execution did not comply with stipulated norms in any of the selected villages. The work availability should be consistent; dated and signed receipts should be provided with all applications and all mandated facilities at the worksite must be ensured. Any non compliance should be penalized.
- The transparency guidelines in particular were not in place and involvement of Gram Panchayats was unilateral rather than democratic. The redressal mechanism and vigilance and monitoring committees were not institutionalized and complaints of the workers remained unaddressed in absence of social audits. When asked about frequent halting of work, the Sarpanchs cited irregularities in fund transfer and administrative hurdles as the major setbacks. Thus, flow of funds to GPs should be regular for timely utilization and not at the fag end of the year.
- New works in the form of construction of water harvesting structures, azolla cultivation, vermin-composting, construction of toilets etc and other innovative activities on individual lands could be taken up with people’s consensus in a gram sabha validated through proper survey of all contextual factors and topography. There is a need for considering current livelihood activities, assets and constraints at community level in the preparation of annual and perspective plans so that real needs of the people are addressed.

The results of this study clearly indicate that MGNREGA has immense potential to change the rural edifice of the district and can act as a model rural development scheme for transforming livelihoods at many levels. However, this potential of the Act was still incipient in all the selected villages. What is urgently needed is a sustainable, livelihoods oriented, people centric implementation and evaluation mechanisms at the grassroots level. Without these, even a well designed programme will fail to leave the desired impact.
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ABBREVIATIONS

BDO – Block Development Officer
BDPO - Block Development Programme Officer
BPL - Below Poverty Line
CSE – Centre for Science and Environment
CSRE – Cash Scheme for Rural Employment
DWCRA – Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas
EAS – Employment Assurance Scheme
FFW- Food for Work
GOI – Government of India
GP – Gram Panchayat
HHs – Households
HREGS – Haryana Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme
IIHD – Indian Institute of Human Development
IRDP – Integrated Rural Development Programme.
IRRAD – Institute of Rural Research and Development
JE – Junior Engineer
MDA – Mewat Development Agency
MDGs – Millennium Development Goals
MGNREGA – Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act
NGO – Non Government Organization
NREP - National Rural Employment Guarantee Act
OBC – Other Backward Castes
PACS – Poorest Areas Civil Society
PRA – Participatory Rural Appraisal
PRIs – Panchayati Raj Institutions
RLEGPG – Rural Landless Employment Guarantee Programme
RMK – Rashtriya Mahila Kosh
SC – Scheduled Caste
SGRY – Sampoorn Grameen Rozgar Yojana
SL – Sustainable Livelihoods
SPSS – Statistical Package for Social Sciences
ST – Scheduled Tribe
TRYSEM – Training of Rural Youth in Self Employment
UNDP – United Nations Development Programme
CHAPTER 1
Introduction: Conceptual Framework and Methodology

1.1 Background
After many decades of planning, investment and effort, the Indian economy has secured its place among the fastest growing economies of the world. However, this growth can be retarded if it does not simultaneously generate stable and adequate livelihoods for everyone. Article 39A of the Directive Principles of the Indian Constitution, enjoins the State to ensure that every citizen has adequate means of livelihood. UNDP (2000) in its Millennium Development Goals also consider livelihoods as an important factor responsible for eradicating extreme hunger and poverty and thereby attaining a better human development index. Consequent to signing the Millennium Declaration in 2000, India recognized and sought to strengthen the livelihoods as a legitimate policy commitment. The present development mandate is to reach out to poor households, providing livelihoods opportunities as a legitimate right and subsequently sustaining the livelihood outcomes, which is an attempt beyond the conventional dealing with human subsistence and poverty.

1.1.1 Livelihoods – Concept and Approach
The concept of livelihoods has become increasingly important and central to the issues of poverty reduction, environmental management and human development. Livelihoods may be defined as means by which households obtain and maintain access to the resources necessary to ensure their immediate and long term survival (Scoones, 1998). A livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets (stores, resources, claims, and access) and activities required for a means of living; a livelihood is sustainable which can cope with and recover from stress and shocks, maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets, and provide sustainable livelihood opportunities for the next generation (Chambers and Conway, 1992). Thus, livelihood approaches incorporate assets, strategies and well being viewed in the socio-economic context as well as in the context of policies, institutions and processes which have a bearing on how these assets are converted into flows consistent with people’s livelihood strategies. Inequitable access to livelihood opportunities leads to income disparity and widespread poverty coupled with environmental degradation, social unrest and political instability. This perspective can assist in the formulation of appropriate policies that are cognizant of the
various risks and opportunities faced by communities and individuals, and can help to create an enabling environment for sustainable livelihood patterns.

The portfolio of livelihoods of households and communities are highly complex and varied. In much of the developing world, characterized by rapidly growing labour force, people are engaged in a number of activities, sequential and simultaneous, that contribute to their well being and constitute their livelihoods. Amidst high levels of material uncertainty and risk, communities have become more occupationally flexible, spatially mobile and increasingly dependent on several income generating activities. The diversification of livelihood strategies is a rapid process and shows no signs of abating (Gupta, 2009). The significance of the concept of Sustainable Livelihoods (SL) is borne by the desire to empower the capacity of people to earn income that meets their current and future economic and social needs and minimizes their vulnerability to external stresses and shocks (Ashley and Carney, 1999). Thus, the sustainable livelihoods perspective is central to the debate around rural development, poverty reduction and environmental management (Scoones, 1998).

1.1.2 Rural Livelihoods in India

Rural livelihoods constitute the economic, social and cultural universe wherein rural families are bound to make their living. The official estimates of Government of India indicate that 70 per cent of the poor in India are overwhelmingly concentrated in rural areas. A vast majority of these rural poor are engaged in agriculture either as wage labourers or marginal farmers. There is also enough evidence to suggest slowdown in agriculture. Bhalla (2003) indicates that agricultural employment growth rate has become negative in a number of states. Thus, although farming is still an important activity in rural areas, it is increasingly unable to provide sufficient means of survival. Employment growth in the farm sector being stagnant, there is an increasing trend towards casualization of labour. Wage employment, both as agriculture labour and labour in allied services, constitutes a significant means of livelihood in rural India.

Rural labour, which constitutes a large section of unorganized workforce in India, is probably the most deprived and disadvantaged group in the country. These include landless and poor households which typically rely on the sale of their labour in farm and non farm activities. The rural workforce suffers, due to excessive seasonality of employment, lack of wage employment opportunities and low wage rates. These poor rural households practice multiple
livelihoods and even resort to temporary or permanent migration to increase their employment days and cope with the risks. Ellis (2000) gives particular emphasis to the widespread strategy of rural livelihood diversification, which rural households pursue in order to survive and to improve their standard of living. The guiding assumption is that effective rural development support must take diversity of rural households into account.

Prior to 1960s, the rural sector was regarded as ‘residual’, which under industrial and later, agricultural transformation would supply labour to higher productivity sectors and consequently this was thought to eliminate widespread rural poverty (Vaidyanathan, 2000). However, the outmoded perception of direct relationship between non farm and agricultural economy has undergone considerable shift. More so, the impetus towards centrally sponsored schemes represented a sea shift in India’s philosophy towards rural development. Saxena (2003) categorized these rural non farm livelihoods related schemes into five broad types –

- Schemes to stimulate entrepreneurship through provision of subsidized loans (such as IRDP, SGSY)
- Schemes to enhance skills of rural workforce (TRYSEM)
- Schemes to strengthen gender balance (DWCRA, RMK)
- Schemes for specific sub-sectors (Khadi, Handloom)
- Schemes to provide wage employment, which have an added objective of creating or rehabilitating rural infrastructure (EAS, FFW, SGRY)

1.1.3 Wage Employment Programmes for Rural Livelihood Support

Since independence, the Government has initiated several public works programmes and social security measures to mitigate the plight of rural labour and ameliorate their conditions. There is a growing theoretical and empirical literature on the impact of public works programs on poverty alleviation (Dreze and Sen 1989; Ravallion 1991; Besley and Coate 1992; Sen 1995). Wage employment programs in independent India started with the Rural Works Program, which was introduced in 1961 in selected districts in the country. This program was envisaged to generate employment for the poor in the lean season. A series of wage employment programs have followed this program, each trying to improve upon the earlier program. The major programs have been the Crash Scheme for Rural Employment (CSRE) and Food For Work Program (FFWP) in the 1970s, followed by the first all-India wage employment programs, the National Rural Employment Program (NREP) and the Rural
Labor Employment Guarantee Program (REGP) in the 1980s, and the Jawahar Rojgar Yojana (JRY), the Employment Assurance Scheme (EAS), and the Sampurna Grammen Rojgar Yojana (SGRY) in the 1990s.

The two major objectives of these programs have been generation of employment for the poor and creation of durable community assets. The importance of employment in the context of poverty stems from the fact that the poor people rely mainly on the use of their labour power to earn their livelihood. However, after more than three decades of the all-India wage employment programs and spending thousands of crores of rupees on them, one does not observe significant decline in the need for these programs. In fact, the need seems to have increased in the economy due to the low rate of growth of agriculture, increased environmental depletion and degradation, and the overall rural economy lagging in development. Despite concerted efforts, rural poverty in India has grown in an unprecedented manner. In order to reverse this trend and to provide livelihood security to the rural unemployed, and after a long struggle by NGOs, academicians and some policymakers; Government of India (GOI) enacted the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA), 2005 (renamed as Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, MGNREGA).

The main objective of the Act is: “To provide for the enhancement of livelihood security of the households in rural areas by providing at least 100 days of guaranteed wage employment in every financial year to every household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work”. Its other objectives are reduction of distressed migration, creation of durable assets in villages, enlivening of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), empowerment of rural women, promotion of inclusive growth and facilitation of multiplier effects on the rural economy. The Act’s efficacy is based on the logic of using the productive capacity of ordinary rural folk to build and nurture assets, while simultaneously alleviating the problem of chronic unemployment and poverty. It provides an opportunity to build rural infrastructure through watershed development, restoration of water bodies such as tanks and canals, activities aimed at forestry, land development, soil erosion and flood control, and construction of roads and institutional facilities.

MGNREGA is different from erstwhile employment generation programmes not only in terms of its origin and objectives, but also in its design. The earlier employment programmes
were formulated and implemented by the state bureaucracy largely in a centralized manner with little involvement of the local community and the implementation was not subject to social monitoring. Pilferage of resources, leakages and corruption marred the implementation of those supply-driven wage employment schemes. Further, the concept of workers’ entitlement to minimum and timely payment of wages, unemployment allowance in case of the inability of the implementing agencies to provide jobs on demand, and facilities at worksites were not there. Thus, MGNREGA is not merely an employment generation or social security programme, but combines various objectives of rural development, which imparts a unique distinction to it (CSE, 2008).

1.1.4 Role of Gram Panchayats in Implementation of MGNREGA

Though the constitutionally-mandated Panchayati Raj system was ushered in more than fifteen years ago, most of the mega schemes in the functional domain of Panchayats, since then, have largely ignored the Panchayats or given them only a perfunctory role. However MGNREGA breaks new ground in this respect. Panchayats have been legally declared as the "principal authorities for planning and implementation" of the scheme made under the Act. The Guidelines reaffirm this declaring the PRIs as the “key Stakeholders.” As grass roots institution, Gram Panchayat is closest to the people and the locality. It is a very powerful and influential body, wielding effective control over substantial resources and political power (Ghatak and Ghatak, 2002). A Gram Panchayat (GP) is responsible for creating awareness about the scheme, receiving applications, registering names, issuing of job cards, providing employment, keeping records and redressing complaints lodged by people.

MGNREGA being a demand driven scheme, the basic idea is that the labourers who are willing to do manual work are to be registered with the registration officer. Whenever, they require work, they should approach the authorities and formally place a requisition for work. The registration officer in the state is Secretary of the GP, will issue a job-card to each family, within 15 days of registration, which will entitle them to demand work as per their convenience. Any labourer with a job card can ask for work and it should be provided to them within 15 days failing in which they are eligible for getting unemployment allowance. The labourers have to be paid as per the prevailing rate of minimum wages in the state. For the purpose of implementation of the scheme, the GPs are designated as the primary implementing agencies. The Executive Officer of the Intermediary Panchayat is designated as the Programme Officer. The Chief Executive Officer of the Zilla Panchayat is designated as
the District Programme Coordinator. The fund for MGNREGA is allocated at the ratio of 90:10 by centre and state respectively unlike other programmes where the ratio is 75:25. The Central government releases the money to the districts directly who in turn releases it to the sub-district level to be used for various works. The payment for the labourers under all works is made by the GP.

1.1.5 MGNREGA – Status of Implementation in India

Having been designed as a novel and radical response to the challenge of combating rural poverty, MGNREGA is probably the largest rights-based social protection initiative in the world (Farrington, 2007). It aims to provide a steady source of income and livelihood security for the poor, vulnerable and marginalized. The Act initially notified in 200 most backward districts in Phase I, at present is in its third phase and covers 619 districts (99 per cent of the districts in the country). An overview of the performance of MGNREGA over the last 6 years (since its inception) is provided in Table 1. Overall, evidence suggests that MGNREGA does provide basic income assurance to a large number of beneficiaries. In Financial Year 2011–2012 alone, nearly 5.5 crore households (close to 25 per cent of all rural households in the country) were benefitted. Also, from 2006 to 2012, around 66 per cent of the total expenditure has been spent on workers’ wages. The average wage per person-day has gone up by 81 per cent since the Scheme’s inception, with state-level variations. Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) have accounted for 51 per cent of the total person-days generated and women for 47 per cent, well above the mandatory 33 per cent as required by the Act. Also, 143 lakh works have been taken up since the beginning of the programme, of which about 60 per cent have been completed.

Table 1: An Overview of the Performance of MGNREGA in India

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<th>2007-08</th>
<th>2008-09 All Rural Districts</th>
<th>2009-10 All Rural Districts</th>
<th>2010-11 All Rural Districts</th>
<th>2011-12 All Rural Districts</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Districts Covered</strong></td>
<td>200</td>
<td>330</td>
<td>All Rural Districts</td>
<td>All Rural Districts</td>
<td>All Rural Districts</td>
<td>All Rural Districts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>HHs provided employment (in crores)</strong></td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Persondays generated (in crores)</strong></td>
<td>90.5</td>
<td>143.59</td>
<td>216.3</td>
<td>283.6</td>
<td>257.2</td>
<td>209.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Expenditure on Unskilled Wages (in crores)</strong></td>
<td>5842</td>
<td>10739</td>
<td>18200</td>
<td>25579</td>
<td>25686</td>
<td>24660</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Works Completed (in lakhs)</strong></td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>22.6</td>
<td>25.9</td>
<td>14.3</td>
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(Source: www.mgnrega.nic.in  Accessed in Dec. 2012)
1.1.6 MGNREGA – Status of Implementation in Haryana

Haryana is one of the most progressive states of India, spread over 44,212 sq. km. comprising 21 districts, 119 blocks and 6,955 villages. As per Census 2011, the total population of Haryana is around 25 million including 65.21 per cent rural population. The literacy rate in the state is 76.64 per cent, a figure that has improved tremendously in the last few years. However, the sex ratio of 877 females per 1000 males in the state leaves a lot to be desired as it lags behind the national average by 70 points (Census, 2011). Rural poverty was 28.0 per cent in 1993-94 and it dropped to 13.6 per cent in 2004-05. The rate of migration from rural to urban areas is 29.3 per cent.

The Haryana Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (HREGS) under NREG Act, 2005 came into force in January 2007. MGNREGA in this state was initially implemented in the two identified backward districts, Mahendragarh and Sirsa, in the first phase i.e, from Feb, 2006. The scheme was extended to Ambala and Mewat in the second phase in 2007-08. From April 2008 it has been extended to all the remaining 17 districts. Since the inception of this scheme, about 142 lakhs person days of work has been generated and out of this, the share of Mewat is 16.45 lakhs person days. The share of women in total employment generated under MGNREGA in the State has been around 23per cent as against the national average of 49.34per cent. Also, 2.2 lakhs households were provided employment in 2010-11 and 2779 works were completed (www.nrega.nic.in, Dec.2011). Initially, the minimum wage was Rs. 95.13 per manday under REGS during 2006-07. The State Government revised the wage rate for unskilled workers to Rs. 191 per man day with effect from July 2011. The current wage rate in Haryana is highest in the country but there are not enough seekers for the employment programme. This calls for rigorous monitoring and necessary interventions by the authorities concerned. Moreover, out of 1.5 million farmers in Haryana, 998,000 are small and marginal farmers and still the state fell short of the target in utilizing funds as the number of applicants was insufficient (Gera, 2009). Thus, the expansion of the scheme is likely to trigger better reach out and results.

1.1.7 MGNREGA - A strategy for ensuring sustainable rural livelihoods

It needs to be noted that wage employment programs cannot be treated as a pure welfare activity; rather, they have come a long way from their historical origin as relief works organized for the poor in emergency situations or as an instrument of consumption smoothening during lean season of the year. In fact, these programs are now recognized in
the literature as modern instruments of general development policy, as they have shown tremendous potential to alleviate poverty as part of mainstream economic strategy. Ensuring an employment guarantee of 100 days at the specified wage rate, year after year on a continuous basis, to all those who demand it, in all the districts in India is a daunting task. This will be feasible only if works are planned in a way that they generate a continuous flow of employment and the targeted poor are attracted and convinced to take up the employment. The employment guaranteed under the act is to be planned in a way that it keeps creating assets that generate sustainable employment avenues in the mainstream economy. This will gradually reduce the demand for work under the employment guarantee act. If this does not happen, the act will not only become a permanent drain on the public exchequer but it will also be difficult to generate one-shot employment avenues for all those who will keep demanding it year after year.

MGNREGA can emerge as a tool that promotes strategic use of surplus manpower for promoting pro-poor growth leading to sustainable development. The Act has a lot of potential to transform rural economic and social conditions at many levels. It has been seen as a valuable and valued opportunity for the rural poor, to earn a living wage in a dignified manner (Dreze, The Hindu, 19th July 2008). The most remarkable change is that a process for the empowerment of the poor is emerging with NGOs and activists discovering in it a vehicle for meaningful interventions.

In terms of visible impact of MGNREGA, the PACS study (PACS, 2007) notes that more than half of the 600 villages covered in Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh have reported reduced migration. Several other studies also report the same as a result of available NREGA employment in the villages (Jha, Gaiha, Shankar, 2008; Ambasta, Shankar, Shah, 2008). The positive impact of MGNREGA is also confirmed by Naren (2008) who states that there also has been some improvement in consumption by the poor and slight increase in lean season wage rates (especially for women) in areas where the programme has been successful. However, Bhatia and Dreze (2006) find that the rural employment status in districts of Jharkhand shows that much of the potential has been wasted and raises doubts regarding commitment of this Act towards livelihood security. It has also been argued that instead of a short-term distress programme, MGNREGA should rather be seen as a programme for facilitating a long-term impact by using the labour of people to build ecological assets and regenerate the local environment (CSE, 2008).
MGNREGA has given ample opportunity for infrastructure development at the community level. It has been clearly demonstrated at several places that the environmental services like groundwater recharge, water percolation, more water storage in tanks, increased soil fertility, reclamation of degraded lands and carbon sequestration have positive implications for increased crop and livestock production (Ravindranath et al, 2009). However, there is a need to look beyond, into the sustainability aspect by emphasizing on quality of assets and capacity building of users. The community assets should also be maintained and used productively so as to generate sustainable employment opportunities for the poor. Chakraborty (2007) pointed out that the quality of assets created under MGNREGS in districts of Chhatisgarh and Madhya Pradesh was very poor which acted as a hindrance in achieving sustainable livelihood security. The utility and sustainability of community assets can be ensured by evolving institutional mechanisms as are practiced in watershed development so that investment does not go futile. The implementing agencies should receive technical guidance and must upscale successful models (Kareemulla et al 2010).

Another important aspect is the coordination and integration of the scheme with the local/regional economic development process. Under wage guarantee act, large sums of public investments are made. Leveraging these investments towards sustainable livelihood requires inter-sectoral convergence. Since, under the Act, planning is decentralized and funds transferred are untied, works can be planned / structured and executed as per local specific requirements. MGNREGA thus becomes a significant entry point for convergence with other development programmes related to irrigation, roads, water supply, housing, electrification, land and water development, drought proofing, etc. Mathur (2007) suggests that while the ministry of Rural Development is the nodal ministry at the centre, every relevant department and agency must be involved. The machinery of the entire government must act in concert, and conscious and systematic efforts be made to marshal its combined energy, expertise and resource – as has been done only once before, for the green revolution. Hence there is need for proper orientation of functionaries involved, to understand the comprehensiveness of the scheme and design suitable interventions.

1.2 Rationale for the study
The sustainable livelihoods perspective recognizes the impact of macro level policies on people’s livelihoods. Most often, the policies designed at Government level are not conducive to local livelihood strategies. This gap between micro level action and macro level policy
decisions disables the access of rural poor to assets for livelihood improvement. The present study is predicated on the fact that an incomplete understanding of local livelihoods and their context can result in incompatible directives and failed policies.

The study attempts to probe the effectiveness of MGNREGA for livelihood enhancement of rural poor in Mewat in relation to their social economic realities. Mewat is a backward region, primarily rural, reeling under livelihood crisis and with negligent demand for this scheme. A research study conducted by IRRAD (BVJ Gandhi et al 2009) “An assessment of development indicators in rural Mewat” suggests that the implementation of poverty alleviation programmes remains a challenge for this District and it continues to be ignored by policy makers and development agencies due to its remote location. Interestingly, the movement for the creation of the separate district was galvanized by hope for a better governance and development. Thus, seemingly MGNREGA is desirable for this district but at the same time, it is imperative that the unique livelihoods portfolio be understood for MGNREGA to be effective as a livelihood intervention. The context specific factors will offer useful cues for further strengthening of the programme.

The study will also help to examine the assets being created and their contribution towards long term development and sustained employment generation in the selected villages. Also, there have been reports about lack of registration in MGNREGA and no demand for work in various villages of the district. It is in this light that the present study also attempts to assess the role of Gram Panchayats and will bring out qualitative grassroot experiences associated with their performance in overall execution of the programme.

As MGNREGA is being implemented throughout the country, the magnitude of lives that will be touched by this Act will inevitably be massive. Being different from the erstwhile employment generation programmes, it throws up a wide range of issues like social organization, institutional development, benefit distribution, stability and sustenance of benefits etc., that need a careful contextual scrutiny to assess the overall impact of the programme. Moreover, a major challenge currently facing the scheme is, the insufficient attention given to the sustainability of the employment opportunities generated. This will further depend on the extent to which the Government is able to extract the developmental potential of the Act. With the scheme just emerging out fully, few studies have actually attempted to look into the sustainability and livelihoods aspect. Hence, it becomes imperative
that we take stock of the experience so far. The planned research study seeks to facilitate a deeper understanding of community processes and the basic dynamics of sustainable livelihood systems through contextual assessment of MGNREGA in the selected villages.

1.3 Research Questions and Objectives

Research questions

- What activities do people pursue that contribute to their livelihoods?
- What kind of constraints are faced by people in pursuing their livelihoods?
- How MGNREGA affects people’s livelihood strategies?
- Are activities implemented under MGNREGA supportive of sustainability of livelihoods and how?
- What is the role of Gram Panchayats in ensuring sustained benefits from the Scheme?

Objectives

1. To determine the livelihoods context and constraints in the selected villages.
2. To analyze the implementation, impact and role of MGNREGA within wider livelihood strategies of population under study.
3. To assess the awareness and involvement of Gram Panchayats in ensuring sustained programme benefits.

1.4 Research Methodology

This section gives a vivid description of the entire research plan encompassing the conceptualization process, methods, techniques and approaches used in collecting the data, to the analytic processes undertaken with respect to the types of theoretical lenses applied.

1.4.1 Research Design:

To understand the complexity and diversity of people’s livelihoods and to assess the impact of MGNREGA from sustainable livelihoods perspective, a detailed contextual analysis is required. To serve this end, a concurrent mixed method research design was used, tailored to the sustainable livelihoods principles and approaches. According to the *Handbook of Mixed Methods in Social and Behavioral Research* (edited by Abbas Tashakkori and Charles Teddlie, 2003), *Mixed methods* is defined as research in which the inquirer or investigator collects and analyzes data, integrates the findings, and draws inferences using both qualitative...
and quantitative approaches or methods in a single program of study. Mixed method involves combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches in a single evaluation (White, 2009). With the current acceptance and legitimacy of qualitative research and the long-term use of quantitative research, mixed methods provides a means for combining the strengths of both approaches to best understand research problems. The qualitative tools enabled a comprehensive collection of descriptive and detailed community level information from respondents on contextual issues and problems. The quantitative tools facilitated the collection of household level data.

Three ways are apparent in the mixed methods literature for mixing the quantitative and qualitative data: by combining or integrating them, by connecting them from the data analysis step of the first source of data to the data collection step of the second source of data, or by embedding one secondary or supporting source of data into a larger source of data to provide additional information. In the process of research, these three forms of mixing—merging, connecting, or embedding—will occur during various stages of the research, such as during data collection, data analysis and interpretation. Thus, the data and methodological triangulation yielded both descriptive and analytical evidence with respect to the objectives of the study.

1.4.2 Locale of the Study and Sampling:

State: Haryana
District: Mewat

Map1: Location of District Mewat in Haryana
**District Selection Criteria and Profile:** Mewat has remained a region of backwardness since it lags behind the rest of Haryana on almost every yardstick of development indices, as distinctly illustrated in the Census Data. The total area of the region is 1,860 sq km comprising 491 inhabited villages and 6 small towns, thereby having predominantly rural population. The Meo Muslims, account for 70.9 per cent of the total population and are listed under the OBC category being recognized as part of the backward class communities. The literacy rate recorded in district was 44.07 per cent, which is 24 per cent below the national average. It also has a low sex ratio of 894 as against the national average of 927. The district is also deficient in educational infrastructure and in terms of health facilities, the Primary Health Centres cover just 10 per cent of the population (Census, 2011). According to Agriculture Census (2001), the district has only 40 per cent economically active population and 20 per cent of the workforce is engaged as agricultural laborers. Also, out of the total cultivable area, only 53 per cent is irrigated and just 37 per cent sown more than once. Thus, the successful implementation of MGNREGA gets amplified in Mewat for a number of reasons. One, as indicated above, this district is primarily rural and one of the backward districts of Haryana. Secondly, the vulnerability in terms of unavailability of physical and social infrastructure looms large. Various factors such as high incidence of overall and rural poverty, low work participation rate, lower agricultural productivity, and low level of non-farm employment opportunities etc. make this district an outstanding case for the implementation of MGNREGA.

Mewat not only has lower levels of human development, it is also ecologically, a draught vulnerable area. Moreover, the implementation of poverty alleviation programmes remains a challenge for the newly created District and it continues to be ignored by policy makers and major development agencies due to its remote location (BVJ Gandhi et al 2009). Thus, this district presents a strong case to assess MGNREGA from sustainable livelihoods perspectives.
Blocks: The study was carried out in all five blocks of Mewat District (i.e. Nuh, Taoru, Nagina, Firozpур Zhirka and Punhana). The blocks being the basic planning and development units of the district, the fund disbursement for MGNREGA and integration of village development plans happen at this level. Since there are administrative differences in programme execution in different blocks as well as in the levels of backwardness, it becomes important to cover all the blocks in the study to get a holistic and comprehensive picture of the implementation of the programme for sustainable livelihood support across the entire district.

Selection of Villages: MGNREGA was initiated in Mewat in its II phase in 2007-08. However, the activities were implemented in different villages at different times and did not follow any pattern since administrative planning and people’s participation largely determined it. For, the main objective of the study was to ascertain the livelihood security provided by MGNREGA activities, the approach adopted was to select villages where the dominant activities were implemented in a large number. Central and State Government data (the official records given in the MGNREGA website) served as baseline for the purpose of selection of such villages. From each of the five blocks, one village was selected purposively (where there was registration and maximum number of MGNREGA works had been completed in 2010-11). Thus, five villages were covered in the study (see Table 2). The gram panchayat in each village was interviewed and the specific community assets were visited and assessed for sustainable livelihood support.

Selection of Households: There was a problem in acquiring the household list for random selection; therefore a random list of households in the survey field was prepared manually with the help of Sarpanch and Village Champions. All households were divided into two strata as beneficiaries (MGNREGA Job Card Holders) and non-beneficiaries (Households without the MGNREGA Job Card) in each of the selected villages. From each stratum, a simple random sample was drawn. A total of 30 households, including 15 beneficiary and 15 non-beneficiary ones, were chosen from each village. Thus, 150 households were covered in all (see Table 2). The impact of MGNREGA on livelihood strategies of the beneficiary households was probed. The non-beneficiary households were selected for two reasons. One, there are chances that some deserving and willing households have not benefited from the scheme as yet. The inclusion of non-beneficiary households helped in understanding the reasons for their exclusion and their inability to avail of the scheme. Two, the socio-economic
profiles of these non-beneficiary households helped in assessing the demand for the scheme among various socio-economic groups. Also, it helped in ascertaining if they were indirect beneficiaries of the scheme in terms of utilizing the community assets created under MGNREGA.

**Table 2: Sampling Plan**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>District</th>
<th>Block</th>
<th>Selected Villages</th>
<th>No. of Households</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Beneficiaries</td>
<td>Non Beneficiaries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haryana</td>
<td>Mewat</td>
<td>Firozepur Jhirka</td>
<td>Hamzapur</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Nagina</td>
<td>Kherli Khurd</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Nuh</td>
<td>Rithora</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Punhana</td>
<td>Lafuri</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Taoru</td>
<td>Beri Taoru</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1.4.3 Methods of Data Collection

The study used both primary and secondary sources of data. To understand the macro-level factors that influence the range of possibilities for livelihood systems, the social, economic, political, environmental, demographic, historical, and infrastructural information should be considered. It is this information that sets the parameters within which livelihood strategies operate. This information was primarily derived from secondary data sourced from the official websites of Haryana government for MGNREGA and the records obtained from Ministry of Rural Development, Panchayat and BDO’s office. The secondary data systematized the theoretical considerations in the study. The primary data was collected using a mix of quantitative as well as qualitative tools.

The main elements of primary data were as follows:

1. **PRA Techniques:** The Participatory Rural Appraisal techniques have emerged as a prescribed methodology for identifying rural priorities and are being innovatively used at the micro level. The mapping techniques and problems and opportunity analysis were used for understanding the context and constraints pertaining to the livelihood situation at community level, in the sampled villages. These tools also enabled rapport formation in the formative phase of data collection.

2. **Focus Group Discussions:** A checklist (see Annexure 4) was used as a guide to Focus Group Discussions, wherein the issues like location and utility of the project, basis of prioritizing activities, the quality of construction, capacity building of the users for
maintenance of created infrastructure, expected / derived benefits, inclusion, access and control of marginalized groups on assets created etc were discussed. This instrument being participatory yielded important community perspectives on livelihoods issues. Care was taken to ensure representativeness of the group selected for discussion. However, keeping in mind the cultural sensibilities, separate FGDs were conducted with men and women.

3. **Household Interviews:** The households in the selected villages were stratified on the basis of characteristic of beneficiary and non-beneficiary. Two structured schedules (see Annexures 1 and 2) were canvassed having both closed and open ended questions to seek information regarding the personal livelihoods profile, assets possessed, level of participation at various stages of planning, implementation and social monitoring in MGNREGA and the nature and benefits of community assets created etc. From the non-beneficiary households, information regarding willingness to avail of the benefits and need to participate in the employment guarantee program were also probed. The interview method was used since majority of the population in selected villages was illiterate and responses were recorded and marked by the researcher. This also facilitated observation and interpersonal interaction. Care was taken that questions did not sound suggestive or likely to be misinterpreted. For case familiarization and rapport formation, as well as pretesting of the interview schedule, a couple of preliminary exploratory visits were also made to the selected villages.

4. **Key Informants Interview:** The Gram Sarpanchs involved in the implementation of MGNREGA were interviewed through a semi structured schedule (see Annexure 3) to assess their perceptions, role, selection of beneficiaries, perspective plan, benefits of community assets created, need for convergence etc. These interviews further brought critical information to corroborate evidence. The purposive selection of key informants
stems from the fact that they are individuals who provide in-depth and proficient information about a particular phenomenon (Beck, 2004).

The reliability in the present study has been ensured (in accordance with Miller, 2008) through methodological coherence (the appropriate and thorough collection, analysis, and interpretation of data), researcher responsiveness (the early and ongoing verification of findings and analyses with study participants), and audit trails (a transparent description of all procedures and issues relative to the research study). Also, triangulation has been used in this study to check and establish validity (Creswell and Miller, 2000) by analyzing the research questions from multiple perspectives.

1.4.4 Data Analysis
The primary raw data collected from the community and the sampled households was organized, compiled and coded. Appropriate statistical tools and software package SPSS were used to collate, synthesize and structure the field data. The information obtained through PRA techniques and group discussions was also analyzed and interpreted qualitatively. Interpretation of the field results addressed the research questions and the components of Livelihoods Approach were used to add value to the analysis. The generalities related to livelihoods were drawn at community level and the insights were confirmed at the household level. Finally, conclusions were drawn about the direction, scale and significance of impact of MGNREGA and emerging issues in different villages.

1.4.5 Limitations of the Study
The study relied heavily on the willingness of key informants and villagers’ participation, which was at times, difficult to entail owing to their busy schedules. Access to some information like satisfaction with performance of the Sarpanch, savings and credit details etc. was deliberately restricted. It was also difficult to ascertain income-expenditure patterns since villagers had the tendency to overestimate expenditure and underestimate income. At times, certain respondents were selected based on their availability and women respondents in particular, lacked confidence to talk about village issues. Findings of the present study may not be generalized for all villages across all blocks of Mewat. With difference in implementing agencies and their performance, there is bound to be a difference in the level of execution of the Act and its impact on livelihoods across different villages.
CHAPTER 2
Livelihoods in Mewat

In the UN Secretary General’s report to the 2003 meeting of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the United Nations it was stated that:

“Three quarters of the world’s poor live in rural areas of developing countries and depend mainly on agriculture and related activities for their livelihood. In 2025, when the majority of the world population is expected to be urban, 60 per cent of poverty will still be rural. Thus, the millennium development goals of halving the proportion of people living on less than a dollar a day and the proportion of those who suffer from hunger by 2015 cannot be achieved unless rural poverty is urgently reduced” (UN, 2003).

The reduction of poverty requires that individuals and families are able to participate in productive economic activities that enable them to generate an adequate and secure standard of living. This realization has led to a greater emphasis on ‘livelihoods’ in rural development discourse. Thus, rural households pursue a variety of agricultural and non-agricultural activities, sequential and simultaneous, as multiple paths to improving well being (Ellis, 2000).

Based on this grounding, this chapter presents a general overview of the livelihood activities pursued in Mewat and describes the livelihood portfolios of the selected villages. It also attempts to examine how these activities are organized, maintained and diversified. The sections build on a referenced literature review, secondary data and the primary data obtained at the village level for a rigorous factual analysis.

2.1 Key Livelihood Activities in Mewat

Mewat is a newly formed district in the southern part of Haryana, adjoining the National Capital Region of Delhi. It was carved out from erstwhile Gurgaon and Faridabad districts, and came into existence on 4th April 2005 as the 20th district of the Haryana State. The district has five Blocks (Tauru, Nuh, Punhana, F.P.Jhirka and Nagina) and three Municipal areas. The total area of this district spreads over 1499.46 Sq K.M/148310 Hectare and accommodates a total population of over ten lakh. It is predominantly rural in its demography with just 6 towns and around 491 inhabited villages having 88.62 per cent rural population (Census, 2011). Mewat has remained a region of backwardness on several accounts. The Meo
Muslims, who are predominant in this district, account for 70.9 per cent of the total population and are listed under the OBC category. The literacy rate recorded in district was 44.07 per cent, which is 24 per cent below the national average. It also has a low sex ratio of 894 as against the national average of 927. The district is also deficient in educational and health infrastructure (Census, 2011). Livelihood constraints abound in Mewat, both in terms of income generation and quality of life. The sources of livelihoods are extremely vulnerable and characterized by marginal and under-productive landholdings, periodic droughts, insecure land tenure and a reliance on seasonal agriculture and casual labour coupled with inadequate reach to infrastructure, services, credit and markets (Indian Institute of Human Development (IIHD), 2008).

A majority of population in Mewat is dependent on agriculture for livelihood, although the land holdings are small and have low productivity. The Meo community in particular, consists almost entirely of small and middle level peasants. The land use pattern also indicates the prevalence of agrarian livelihoods, with more than 73 per cent area being utilized for cultivation (see Table 3). According to Agriculture Census (2001), Mewat district has total 1,4575 land holdings with an area 1,66,747 hectares, out of which 68.2 per cent fall in the category of less than 2 acre. Only 10 per cent land holdings are 5-10 acres in size or more. Also, out of the total cultivable area, only 29.7 per cent is irrigated and just 37 per cent area is sown more than once.

**Table 3 – Land Utilization Statistics of District Mewat**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area (in Ha)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Geographical Area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultivable area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non Cultivable area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forest Area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permanent pastures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land under non agricultural use</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source- MDA, 2009)

The natural factors of production including soil and water in Mewat district are responsible for degrading and retarding the growth of agriculture production. Despite being in Haryana, Mewat region did not benefit from green revolution and there is almost complete absence of irrigation facilities. The area is traversed by a drain / canal from Rajasthan to Yamuna River which may carry sufficient water in monsoon, but dries off during summers and no further
agricultural activity can take place during these seasons. The main source of the irrigation in
the district is tube-well which constitute 76 per cent of the total irrigated area. But the
desperate use of underground water has depleted the ground water to the level of over-
exploited category. Fast ground water depletion and seasonal variation of tube well yields is
a matter of concern leading to low crop intensity (Sharma, 2008). Moreover, the high salinity
content of ground water and constant rise in saline ground water table has led to deterioration
in agricultural productivity (Tanwar and Kruseman, 1985).

The major crops grown are wheat, mustard, gram, barley in the Rabi season and bajra and
pulses in the Kharif season. Most commonly, mono agriculture is practiced wherein only one
crop is grown in a year. This is primarily due to the dearth of water sources and the
possibility of a second crop only exists in case of timely rainfall. The district also has around
90% soils under loamy sand texture. Being coarse textured, the soils are poor in water as well
as in nutrient retention. Almost all the soils of the district are low in organic carbon and
phosphorus and more than 65 % of the soils are affected with varying degree of salinity (C-
DAP, Mewat, 2007). Absence of support systems in terms of modern knowledge about
agricultural practices, crop diversification, availability of good quality inputs, storage and
market linkages also pose major hurdles in this agrarian community making the farmers
perpetually poor.

Animal husbandry, particularly dairy is the secondary source of income for the people of
Mewat. Buffaloes are the most common milch animals reared. Milk yield is not so low, but
due to heavy indebtedness, the income from milk is much reduced, as many farmers have to
sell milk to the lender at lower than the normal price. Inhabitants who live closer to the hilly
ranges of Aravalli also keep sheep and goats. The poultry population in Mewat is also much
less than in the rest of Haryana (C-DAP, Mewat, 2007).

Besides this, there are 71,816 landless families in the district (Agriculture Census, 2001).
Thus, apart from farming and keeping livestock, selling labour is also an important source of
income for many households to generate cash income. However, not many opportunities exist
for labour work. There is no major industry in the region, except mining work, which is again
a restricted domain. There are also fewer opportunities to diversify income sources in.
Women play a major role in reproductive, productive and community managing activities.
Children often help women with accomplishing some of their responsibilities.
The Meos of Mewat also pursue many different service occupations like bangle sellers, dyers, butchers, water carriers, and musicians, among others. However, rampant exploitation by Bania and Jain moneylenders is another major cause of their poverty (Mayaram, 2006). Most of the Banias of Mewat live off the interest they charge on loans given to the Meos. The general rate of interest per month is three per cent, which works out to an exorbitant 36 per cent yearly, enough to drive many Meo families deep into debt and penury for generations. Consequent to the burden of debt and poverty, many Meo youth have engaged in crimes like vehicle theft, kidnapping, illegal mining, poaching of wild animals and cattle smuggling etc. (Jha, 2012).

Landlessness, low regional geographic endowments, lack of formal education and absence of effective employment opportunities in the non-agricultural sector have largely induced livelihood insecurity in Mewat (BVJ Gandhi et al 2009). Some thinkers believe that all other problems like gender inequality, illiteracy, poor health conditions, high infant mortality rate etc are also mainly because of failure on the above fronts.

2.2 Livelihood Portfolios of the Selected Villages

The primary data for this study was gathered from five villages, one from each block of Mewat. The village level information was elicited through participatory exercises and methods. A lot of community level data was generated through social and resource mapping and during FGDs. By drawing on the findings from community discussions and household interviews, this section provides a description of how rural people in the selected villages strive to make their living and the livelihood activities they pursue. The livelihoods of people across villages were profiled through identification of the key income generation activities and sources of employment.

The general demographic information about the villages under study is indicated in Table 4. As evident from the data, all the selected villages have predominantly Muslim population. This is in line with the fact that in the state of Haryana, Mewat has the largest concentration of Muslim population (IIHD, 2008). Since, religion and caste have important bearing on the socio economic status of households, the high concentration of meo muslims, minorities classified as OBCs, also indicates a higher level of denied opportunities for socio-economic development. The religious and caste distribution of selected villages is broadly similar to the
distribution reported from Census 2011 for the corresponding blocks. The number of BPL families in Mewat is 27.69 per cent (BPL Survey, 2007). The percentage of BPL households was found to be greater than district average in Hamzapur and Lafuri, while relatively lesser in Beri Taoru. This could possibly be due to the fact that Taoru block is agriculturally better off, with significant irrigation facilities and fertile soil, hence supporting the farm based livelihoods. However, number of land owning households was lesser (44 per cent) in this village and most households were engaged in agricultural labour.

Table 4 – Demographic details of selected villages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Village</th>
<th>Beri Taoru</th>
<th>Rithora</th>
<th>Kherli Khurd</th>
<th>Hamzapur</th>
<th>Lafuri</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Block</td>
<td>Taoru</td>
<td>Nuh</td>
<td>Nagina</td>
<td>FP Jhirka</td>
<td>Punhana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total HHs</td>
<td>280</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>468</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslim HHs</td>
<td>260 (93%)</td>
<td>380 (95%)</td>
<td>288 (96%)</td>
<td>145 (85%)</td>
<td>452 (97%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindu HHs</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BPL HHs</td>
<td>22 (8%)</td>
<td>68 (17%)</td>
<td>63 (21%)</td>
<td>62 (36%)</td>
<td>153 (33%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women headed HHs</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Primary Data)

In case of poor households, different members of the family seek and find different sources of food, fuel, animal fodder, cash and support in different ways in different places at different times of the year (Chambers, 1997). Most rural households in the selected villages relied on constructing a diverse portfolio of activities and income sources in order to survive and to improve their standard of living. This included both on- and off-farm activities undertaken to generate income. Table 5 presents the percentage of households engaged in different income generation activities in the selected villages.

Table 5 – Livelihoods practiced in selected villages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Villages</th>
<th>Beri Taoru</th>
<th>Rithora</th>
<th>Kherli Khurd</th>
<th>Hamzapur</th>
<th>Lafuri</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total HHs</td>
<td>280</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>468</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farming HHs</td>
<td>125 (44.6%)</td>
<td>300 (75%)</td>
<td>270 (90%)</td>
<td>120 (70.5%)</td>
<td>450 (96.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Livestock owning HHs</td>
<td>250 (89.2%)</td>
<td>375 (93.7%)</td>
<td>250 (83.3%)</td>
<td>150 (88.2%)</td>
<td>350 (74.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casual labour HHs</td>
<td>180 (64%)</td>
<td>250 (79%)</td>
<td>200 (67%)</td>
<td>75 (44%)</td>
<td>400 (85%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salaried HHs</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self employed HHs</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Migrant HHs</td>
<td>3-4</td>
<td>15 - 20</td>
<td>50-75</td>
<td>15-20</td>
<td>50 - 60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Primary Data)

As evident from data, a considerable number of households across all villages were engaged in farming, maximum being in Lafuri (96.1 per cent). However, these were reportedly, small and marginal farmers owning land ranging from 0.5 to 2 acres. A large number of these farmers also worked as casual labour for a major part of the year. There were two main
reasons cited for this. One, their land was just enough to meet subsistence needs and not much yield was produced to be marketed to fetch income. Secondly, the rising cost of farm inputs particularly water for irrigation being not readily available (all underground water in Lafuri being brackish), pushed the farmers to look for alternate livelihoods.

**Livestock keeping** was also found to be a major livelihood activity across all villages, which served as an important support enterprise. The prominent reasons offered during discussions for rearing buffaloes were regular cash income through sale of milk and easy availability of dung as fuel. The milk was sold at prices ranging from Rs 18- 22 per litre, which was perceived as very less since the households incurred a lot of expenditure in upkeep of animals. Overall, only 15 per cent of the annual income was derived through selling milk.

Moreover, some households had taken loans from milk vendors and the interest was paid in terms of milk. Nevertheless, animal husbandry was also reportedly less tedious than agriculture labour and allowed greater flexibility in working time, especially for women. It also ensured food security for the family and livestock was also viewed as an asset that could be sold off for cash in times of distress. However, the high cost of feed and fodder and lack of guaranteed price of milk were the major constraints cited by most of the respondents. This was also the reason that relative to other villages, less number of households in Lafuri kept livestock. There was also a large and urgent unmet need for veterinary services and immunization of livestock. Some poor households in Lafuri and Hamzapur also kept small ruminants like goats for meeting the family needs of milk.

Although, farming and livestock keeping ruled the roost, the mosaic of farm and non-agricultural income sources was found to be pervasive in all villages. It was revealed during FGDs that a great majority of small and marginal farmers and landless labourers worked as
casual labour, particularly during lean agricultural period, cited from March till June. Due to extreme weather conditions, shortage of water and seasonal nature of farming, the farmers keep the fields fallow for almost 4-5 months and resort to other labour work to survive. Thus, the number of casual labour and migrant households came to be significantly higher in case of Lafuri (85 per cent), which also had a greater number of BPL families (see Table 4 and 5). The agricultural wage rate varied from Rs 250-300 per day while MGNREGA wage payments at the time of survey (Nov. 2012) were on piece rate basis amounting to Rs 191 per day. In Beri Taoru, a large number of casual labour was also engaged in construction work or in services like maali, guards etc in the Real Estate Projects being developed in the block. Access to these work opportunities was mostly achieved through social relations and contacts. Since work was available locally, there were no significant migrant households in this village.

There were more migrant households at Lafuri and Kherli Khurd villages. When the reason for migration was probed, the respondents affirmed that most of the migrants in these villages were heavy vehicle (Trucks, Earth movers and JCB) drivers who migrated to far away states like Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra for almost 6-7 months and earned sufficiently. The families of these migrants however, stayed on in the village itself. Some families in Lafuri also migrated to Punjab for a limited period of 2-3 months to provide labour during cotton harvest. Temporary migration was reported at Rithora and Hamzapur, where few men worked as rickshaw pullers at Gurgaon and Faridabad Districts.

There were very few salaried households in all the villages and the reason reported was lack of formal education and skill training. This is valid since the overall literacy rate in rural Mewat (54.01 per cent) is also very low, which limits people’s chances of being employed in the organized sector jobs (Census, 2011). The self employed households were engaged in shopkeeping, street vending, driving animal carts etc and were fewer in number.

This section thus, exemplifies how the livelihoods of households in selected villages rest largely on very insecure and erratic income activities.
CHAPTER 3
Vulnerability Context and Livelihood Constraints

A holistic analysis of livelihood security begins with understanding the context for any given population. Livelihood context gives a vivid description of the historical, social, economic, infrastructural and political constraints incorporating factors that prevent the communities from optimizing their livelihood potential. Livelihood vulnerability and constraints abound in Mewat, both in terms of income generation and quality of life. This chapter describes the broader vulnerability context in Mewat that affects the susceptibility to poverty and consequently the potential for livelihood sustainability.

3.1 – Vulnerability Context in Mewat

Vulnerability is the degree of exposure to risk, and the capacity of households or individuals to prevent, mitigate or cope with risks (Devereux, 2001). Analysis of vulnerability involves identifying not only the risks but also the resilience in resisting or recovering from the negative effects of a changing environment. The means of resistance or coping strategies are the assets, entitlements and capabilities that individuals, households and communities can mobilize and manage in the face of hardship (Moser and Norton, 2001). Low levels of assets are an important determinant of poor peoples’ vulnerability. The causes of vulnerability are the barriers to accumulating or accessing assets and pursuing opportunities. These have been explored in this section for district Mewat.

Historical setback

The region of Mewat has had a unique ethno-cultural past. Historically, this terrain had been extremely turbulent and subject to repeated invasions throughout the post-Vedic period. This was largely due to the situational peculiarity of the area and the non-subjugative attitude of people. Several ethnographic studies illustrate that the Meos fought with bravery against Jung, Julm and Jamaa (war, atrocities and excessive land revenue) at different times inflicted by Muslim rulers, Britishers and Rajput/Jat rulers respectively (Scott, 2003). Mewat was the military bye pass for the Muslim invaders who invaded Delhi and its geographical boundaries kept changing from time to time. Thus, the repeated loot, plundering, destruction and devastation over the centuries did not allow the region to develop resources that could be channelized for the economic development of the area (Mayaram, 2003).
Natural Resource Constraints
The natural resource stocks generate the resource flows useful for livelihoods. There exists no livelihood that does not directly or indirectly depend on the natural resources. The land and water hold immense value for the agriculture based and allied livelihood activities. The region of Mewat fares poor on this front and suffers from a host of natural resource constraints. It has low geographical endowments as it falls under sub-tropical, semi arid zone with extreme climatic conditions. The place is characterized by low and erratic rainfall, averaging annually around 372 mm confined over a period of not more than a month. There are also high temperature variations in different seasons. More than 80 per cent annual rain fall is received in the month of July-August and September (Monsoon Period). May and June are the hottest month of the year with the temperature ranging 30°C to 48°C. Relative humidity in the entire region remains low and the occurrence of high-velocity desiccating winds in summer is a common phenomenon. Mewat experiences a high incidence of thunderstorms and dust storms, often accompanied by violent squalls and sporadic droughts (C. S. Raghuvanshi, 1999, unpublished report; M. L. Gupta, 2000, unpublished report).

The area has uneven topography of plain and undulating patches of land dotted with hillocks and sandwiched between two parallel ranges of Aravali hills. The upper hills are mostly barren with huge deposits of good quality slate and quartzite. However, illegal and uncontrolled mining have caused severe degradation in the region. Physio-graphically the area is divided into two tracts- upland and low land, running apart by 5–10 km. Soil of the district are loam and sandy loam with light texture and pH of the soil varies from 7.0 to 8.5. The soils are not so fertile. The natural erosive processes have been accelerated by human use. Factors such as increased human population, deforestation with expansion of real estate and resorts, and improper land management have caused steady but obvious resource degradation, particularly of land and water resources. The lack of water resources, prevalence of sodic lands, sandy soil and brackish underground water have been widely reported in Mewat. The surface water is scarce and the groundwater recharge is also difficult due to topography (BVJ Gandhi et al, 2009).

Human Capital Constraints
The Human Capital represents different aspects of people such as skills, knowledge, ability to labor and good health that together enable people or individuals to pursue different livelihood strategies enhancing their livelihood objectives. The government of Haryana declared Mewat
to be a socio-economically backward region (Jatrana, 1999). The Meos, who are a majority in the district, have been listed under Other Backward Castes (OBC). The average household size in Mewat is approximately 7.6, with reportedly a high number of dependants, particularly children and potentially economically active unemployed people. Child marriage is another institution faithfully preserved with the average age at marriage being 14 years for girls and 17 years for boys (MDA, 2009). Thus, Mewat is also characterized by a disproportionately high number of teenage mothers. Low age at marriage has been found to be a significant cause of the deteriorating state of maternal and child health in Mewat (Jatrana, 1999). Meo society is also highly patriarchal which gets reflected in the demographic indicator of male-female sex ratio, that is 906 as against the national average of 927 (see Table 3). The Meos do not practice sex selective abortion or female foeticide but preference for male progeny results in larger family size. The other human development indices for the area are also abysmal. Based on a survey conducted by the Ministry of Minority Affairs (IIHD, 2008) the demographic information about the Meo community suggests that almost 62 percent of the rural Meo households in the Mewat region live at or below the national poverty level.

As Table 6 indicates, the overall literacy rate of the region is 56.1 per cent (which is 24 per cent below the national average) and the female literacy rate is further low at 37.6 per cent. The literacy rate among the Meos in particular, i.e. Muslim women is reported to range between 1.76 per cent and 2.13 per cent, which is appallingly low. Only one in ten Meos is able to properly read and write (IIHD, 2008). Studies show that, since most of these families belong to poor economic status, the capacity to educate their children becomes highly limited. Accordingly, due to insecurity in their employment, the families decide which child to be educated and which to be retained for household work, to facilitate their participation in certain economic activities and daily wage livelihood. It is also found that the education of a particular child is also foregone in order to compensate for the household chores or for looking after the siblings so that the parents can earn their livelihood which is their major priority compared to schooling. Another major setback for education of girls is that of lack of security when they go for high school studies, particularly, if the school is not located in the same village. The poor educational attainment is also attributed to the extremely conservative social milieu, with the strong influence of Tablighi Jamaat, an Islamist movement that was born in Mewat and denounces “worldly education” (Akbar, 2010). Lack of education is an important detriment in enhancing livelihood options.
Table 6: Demographic Data Summary of Mewat (Census 2011)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population Person</th>
<th>1089406</th>
<th>Population Density</th>
<th>729</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population Males</td>
<td>571480</td>
<td>Population Females</td>
<td>517926</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban Population</td>
<td>124017</td>
<td>Rural Population</td>
<td>965389</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex Ratio</td>
<td>906</td>
<td>Literacy Rate Person</td>
<td>56.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy Rate males</td>
<td>72.98</td>
<td>Literacy Rate Females</td>
<td>37.58</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: www.censusindia.gov.in, accessed in January 2013)

Physical Capital and Infrastructural Constraints

The physical infrastructure is very important to the pursuit of livelihood strategies. People in Mewat face a considerable deprivation of both personal and community assets. As far as educational infrastructure is concerned, Mewat has hardly any higher educational institutions and displays a precarious situation of educational facilities. Though primary schools exist in 78.14 per cent of the villages, but there is again a high short fall of Middle, High School and Senior Secondary Schools (MDA, 2009). The district, which was once represented by freedom fighter and the country's first education minister Maulana Abul Kalam Azad in 1957, has only two government degree colleges for a population of about a million. The girls’ formal education in the district suffers from further neglect. The girls belonging to Muslim communities are preferably sent to Madarsas or Makhtabs and not to high schools which are located far from their village. This results in a very high drop out rate of female students after primary and middle levels of formal schooling. The education for Meo girls is limited primarily to religious education (deenī taleem).

The region also shows a poor health infrastructure. Malaria, tuberculosis and other diseases are rampant. In the entire district Mewat, there is just one general full-fledged hospital, Al Afiya Hospital, built with aid from the Sultan of Oman at Village Mandikhera. There are only seven community health centres and 17 Primary Health Centres that cover just 10 per cent of population. The sub-centres lack trained medical professionals and the response to institutional delivery is not encouraging. Prohibitive distance to health centres increases morbidity and child mortality. Due to the lack of qualified medical professionals, quacks and traditional healers have good business in villages of this district (Saifi, 2010).

The other principle infrastructural constraints cited by Sarpanchs and village folks, interviewed during the course of the study, are the lack of provision of water followed by the
need for toilets and transport facilities. Out of 503 villages in district Mewat of Haryana, only 61 villages have fresh ground water, others have very high salinity content in their underground water reserves (SANDRP, 2004). With only 31.6% of households having access to piped water supply, the problem of availability and quality of water is of prime concern and continues to magnify by the day. The freshwater is available only to the villages located on the foothills of Aravalli and the other villages are dependent on irregular government supply, borewells or water purchased at high cost from the tankers. The problem is compounded by unsustainable use of water resource, shortage of recharge options and the geology of the area. The scarcity of freshwater for consumption and other domestic needs also leads to a host of other health and sanitation related problems.

There is also no proper drainage system in the region leading to domestic waste water flowing in the streets creating dirty puddles which are a breeding ground for pathogens and their carriers. Also, barely 12% of households have access to toilets (MDA, 2009). The paved roads are virtually non existent and the only modes of public transport are the archaic jeeps. Mewat district has also been deprived of certain basic amenities such as a railway link, regular bus services, markets, cooperative banks and industries which could provide jobs to the local people. This sheer lack of physical infrastructural support adversely affects the livelihoods in Mewat.

3.2 - Livelihood Assets and Constraints in Selected Villages

Sustainability of livelihoods depends on the basic assets that people have in their possession (Carney, 1998; Scoones, 1998; Hussein, 2002). In the livelihood frameworks of Carney (1998), DFID (2000) and Ellis (2000) the various capital assets available to households for use in pursuit of livelihoods are identified as physical capital, human capital, financial capital, natural capital and social capital. People’s livelihoods and the wider availability of assets are fundamentally affected by critical trends as well as by shocks and seasonality – over which they have limited or no control. Shocks can be the result of human health, natural events, economic uncertainty, and conflict and crop/livestock health etc. These are the key factors contributing to household vulnerability, which in turn affects a household’s assets. In order to get an idea of the extent of vulnerability of the people in the sampled villages, questions were asked regarding their land holding, possession of household assets, structure of dwelling unit, possession of ration card and finally, if they have availed benefits through other government schemes. Given the fact that the present scheme of identifying BPL households relies on
these indicators, these are a good proxy for the level of deprivation of these households. However, in this study, any exercise of quantifying the extent of BPL households in the selected villages is not undertaken.

The following description will highlight these assets available to households and how their levels determine the livelihood constraints faced by households across selected villages.

**Physical Capital –**

The presence of physical capital and the way it is managed and maintained is a key determinant of the quality of life in any given community. The physical resources like schools, hospitals, post offices, banks etc provide requisite services to the public at large. The infrastructure and services are most important in offering direct benefits and support to rural households. However, none of the five villages have a post office branch, bank, primary health centres or even schools beyond middle level. These significantly undermine livelihood outcomes. The Aanganwadi Centres and PDS depots are functioning in all the villages but people reported dissatisfaction. With respect to shelter, all selected villages have mostly semi pucca to pucca houses. The state of sanitation was however grim, with only a handful of households having toilet facilities. Rithora showed a better picture with convergence between MGNREGA and Total Sanitation Campaign, resulting in mass construction of toilet units across majority (75 per cent) of households. Also, all the villages were electrified, but showed gross discontent with power supply inconsistency, limited to few hours per day (see Table 7).

**Table 7 – Amenities in selected villages**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Villages</th>
<th>Beri Taoru</th>
<th>Rithora</th>
<th>Kherli Khurd</th>
<th>Hamzapur</th>
<th>Lafuri</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HHs with Pucca House (per cent)</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HHs with Toilets (per cent)</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electricity (Hours)</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>4-5</td>
<td>3-4</td>
<td>2-3</td>
<td>4-5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Primary Data)

Availability of potable water was also one of the most pressing problems, common to all villages. The people obtained drinking water from personal or community owned hand pumps, often overexploiting the ground water resource and rendering the source defunct. The water situation was extremely alarming in Beri Taoru where water table receded tremendously (upto 200 ft and more) and in Lafuri, with excessively saline underground
water. As a result, people were forced to spend a large part of their earnings on purchasing water from private tankers for daily usage.

It was reported that from many poor households in Lafuri, people travelled up to 3 kms to fetch water from adjacent villages. This resulted in a sheer wastage of people’s productive time. The tanker water at Rs 500 reportedly lasted only 10-15 days since the family size was generally large. The purchased water was most commonly stored in underground or over ground tanks. The quantity and quality of water available for consumption was grossly poor in Lafuri and also perpetuated several water borne diseases and adversely impacted people’s health and spendings. The Government piped water supply in both Rithora and Beri Taoru, was reportedly inconsistent and unable to meet the demand. In some parts of the villages, people also consumed water from open wells or small dug outs of sub surface water at the dried up pond sites.

In terms of fuel consumption, all the interviewed families reportedly relied on firewood and animal dung as fuels for cooking. For irrigation purposes, diesel pumps were being used in tubewells, which was seen as an expensive proposition. With regard to the possession of household durables, almost 77 per cent of the respondents had a mobile phone and 20 per cent had either a tricycle or a motor bike, across all villages. There was an absolute lack of public transport facilities in all five villages and people covered distances varying from 1-3 kms walking to the nearest connectivity point. Most of the internal roads in all the villages were also kutcha and severed with poor drainage. This created lot of puddles due to water stagnation after rains and resulted in a grim state of sanitation within the villages. Poor condition of roads not just made commuting difficult but also caused proliferation of vector borne diseases like malaria, dengue etc in the entire village community.
Lack of access to and availability of physical assets is indicative of poor living conditions across all selected villages and these have significant effect on efficiency and productivity of working members in all households, thus affecting their livelihoods.

**Human Capital –**
These are the individual attributes comprising of educational status, skills, knowledge, and attitudes etc. which are instrumental in contributing to the livelihood outcomes. Education is a potent instrument for social, economic and cultural transformation of people while illiteracy hampers the productive potential and limits employment opportunities in formal or organized sector. The literacy position among sampled respondents was rather gloomy, with a great majority of working population being illiterate. In the sampled households (N=150), 21 per cent families had children who had never been to school and 27 per cent households had children drop outs. The female literacy was found to be negligent, with drop out rates of girl child being very high. In terms of skills, the villagers were trained in different farm and off farm activities. However, job opportunities, both within the village and outside were reported to be limited.

**Financial Capital –**
In smallholder systems in semi-arid areas, financial capital in the form of cash is severely constrained; cash received is soon allocated and spent (Mortimore 1998), and the selected villages are no exception. Financial assets can be explored by probing into cash expenditure and income flows. The income sources of respondents were multiple and diverse, as has also been illustrated in livelihoods profile in the previous chapter. A significant part of income was derived from non farm labour (38 per cent) and by selling milk (15per cent) across all
households. Information was collected on household expenditures using a 30-day recall period for monthly purchases (including food supplies, water, childrens’ school fee, mobile bills, smoking etc) and other additional items were placed in yearly expenditure (including debt repayment, social events, seeds and fertilizers, agricultural equipment etc). This was not a comprehensive expenditure survey and absolute values of expenditures were based only on household estimates. However, this kind of an analysis provides an opportunity for relative comparisons of purchasing power among different household groups. A majority of respondents incurred expenditure on livestock, health and social occasions. Levels of expenditure also varied between MGNREGA beneficiaries and non beneficiaries. The mean monthly expenditure was found to be more on food and relatively lesser on other categories by the former.

The sampled households cited mixed reasons responsible for their financial crisis. On the whole the heads of households who were interviewed claimed that their income from farming was inadequate to enable them attain good livelihoods. The reason stated by most of the respondents was expensive farm inputs, particularly expenditure on water for irrigation and small size of land holdings. This was worsened by the absence of adequate viable alternative income generating activities for them. The coping strategies however varied and were associated with a household's wealth and assets. Regardless of the shock, the most common coping strategies were identified. The use of savings seemed to be less common and found in just 20 per cent of households. Some families also coped by selling animals / livestock or other assets. A majority of beneficiaries (62.7per cent) also reported working in MGNREGA as a coping strategy and some relied on migration also. Almost 61 per cent respondents had taken debt and reported widespread defaulting on the loan repayment. The credit was mainly obtained from milk vendors or money lenders, who charged high rates of interest ranging from 5 per cent to 48 per cent per annum. Some even charged the interest on monthly basis and in case of non-payment, also compounded it monthly. The indebtedness also reflects on the low income base of households and around 40 per cent of respondents took loans for consumption purposes like meeting household needs, for social events and primarily for treatment of illness.

Transforming processes in the form of government policies, laws and regulations also influence the vulnerability context. As revealed by the primary data, all the respondents availed benefits of some or the other Government development programme. The MGNREGA
beneficiaries also utilized IAY (13.3per cent) and PDS (64per cent) in more numbers. The mid day meal scheme and Aanganwadi facilities were also being used by both the groups, though deficiencies in functioning of these programmes were also stated.

![Fig.1 Utilization of Government Schemes](image)

(Source: Primary Data)

**Natural Capital –**

Incomes in rural areas are closely tied to natural resources. Land and livestock comprise an important store of wealth for households and buffer against bad times (Ellis 2000). Almost 69 per cent of sampled households relied on livestock and cropping was the dominant activity for 40 per cent of sampled households. However, around half of all farming households reported land holding of less than 2.5 acres. The increased salinity of soil, irregular rains, pest threats and lack of marketing support in farm systems were reported as pressing concerns in Rithora and Lafuri. In the latter, small farmers in the absence of irrigation facilities, often irrigated their lands with saline water thus wasting the land in the due course of time. Across all villages, the receding water table and lack of appropriate irrigation facilities were quoted as major problems by the farmers. The desperate use of underground water depleted the ground water to the level of over-exploited category, particularly in Beri Taoru. The depth of water table as enquired from farmers is presented in Fig. 1. In Lafuri, all the ground water
sources had brackish water, unfit for agriculture and consumption. The rain water harvested in Johad also mixed with saline water and was not being used by villagers.

**Fig. 2 Water Table in Selected Villages**

![Water Table in Selected Villages](image)

(Source: Primary Data)

In terms of common property natural resources, every village had a ‘johad’ or a pond. Rithora had five such ponds, out of which, two were leased out for fishing. Hamzapur also had a common grazing ground.

**Pic 6: Ponds in Village Rithora**

(Source: Primary Data)

Social Capital –

Woolcock (1999) defines social capital as ‘a broad term encompassing the norms and networks facilitating collective action for mutual benefits’. There is emerging consensus that social capital is crucial for societies to prosper and achieve sustainability (Bebbington, 1999). Douglass recognises that not only development professionals, but the poor themselves acknowledge that social capital is a valuable and critical resource that contributes to their
wellbeing, especially in their times of crisis and social and economic change (Douglass 1998: 122; Dersham and Gzirishvili 1998: 1834-1835).

Social capital has been variously measured as the number of civic organizations, degree of ‘trust’ (civic norms and level of association), degree of local rule compliance and degree of functioning of local institutions. In much ethnographic work the focus is on social processes that enhance people’s abilities to access and defend resources. Although no SHGs or other community groups were identified in the selected villages, nevertheless, social relations played important role in mitigating adverse financial crisis. The wider family networks and neighbours supported each other with small amounts of money, information, water and electricity connections. Minor sums taken interest free from friends and relatives were also repaid quickly to ease pressure on social networks. The incidence of collective activities took place in the form of construction of mosques and madarsas. These formal religious institutions often provided services that the public sector fails to do satisfactorily, for example in relation to education or direct support for the poor by organizing alms giving, or in other ways mobilizing resources to assist those in desperate need.

In general, the Sarpanch, the village elderly and related hierarchies of traditional authority were highly regarded and played pivotal role in matters of social cohesion and conflict resolution. However, plentiful examples were provided in group discussions of the ineffectiveness of such leaders in solving critical problems that on the face of it are susceptible to solution (such as, for example, getting a minor fault in a communal water supply repaired), and the propensity of such leaders to require “gratifications” in order to grant access to various resources or permission to engage in certain activities.

The above analysis of livelihood assets and specific constraints in selected villages, suggests that vulnerability and poverty among households is endemic in Mewat.
CHAPTER 4
Status of MGNREGA Implementation

In this chapter, the specific issues in implementation of MGNREGA have been discussed. To undertake this, the methodology adopted was to look into the whole set of implementation issues from two different perspectives. Firstly, to put the necessity for such a path breaking legislation in a context, the household surveys of beneficiaries and non beneficiaries were undertaken in selected villages. The second and crucial perspective was that of the Sarpanchs, which was sought to be captured separately. The insights have been merged in analysis.

4.1 - Implementation of MGNREGA in Mewat
Carney (1998) acknowledges the significance of transforming processes, policies and structures as important in determining the accessibility to assets to attain a viable livelihood. There is growing evidence that efficiently designed and implemented policies and programmes provide a stable livelihoods platform for people to switch their resources into productive uses. In backward areas with high unemployment rates, transfer benefits from workfare programmes can prevent poverty from worsening, especially during lean periods. Durable assets that these programmes create have the potential to generate second-round employment benefits as requisite infrastructure is developed. With this backdrop, MGNREGA was launched in Mewat district of Haryana, in its second phase in 2007-08. A detailed scanning of the livelihoods context of Mewat in the previous section reveals that there is great scope for implementation of MGNREGA. This section sets out to analyze the implementation issues related to this programme in Mewat.

Employment generation - As per the employment statistics provided by Ministry of Rural Development, Mewat contributed 5.6 per cent to the total person days employment in Haryana. Mewat being dominated by Meo Muslims belonging to OBC, nearly 60 per cent of the provisions seems to have been received by ‘others’. The women beneficiaries comprise 46.25 per cent, which is a significant aspect of the implementation of the programme. Women participation in Mewat is higher than that of Haryana by 6 percentage points. The distribution of employment generation across different blocks (see Table 7) reveals that the cumulative person days generated increased from 2009 till 2011 in all the blocks (except Taoru), after which there was a sharp decline. Maximum cumulative person days were generated in the year 2010-11. The number of households provided employment in Taoru block are
considerably low across all financial years while in Nuh, employment generation has remained fairly consistent.

**Table 8 – Block Wise Details of Employment Generated in Mewat**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S. No.</th>
<th>Blocks</th>
<th>Cumulative number of households provided employment (Persondays Generated in parantheses)</th>
<th>2009-10</th>
<th>2010-11</th>
<th>2011-12</th>
<th>2012-13</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Taoru</td>
<td>1142(73260) 853(56238) 694(48004) 346(23306)</td>
<td>1142</td>
<td>853</td>
<td>694</td>
<td>346</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Nuh</td>
<td>2152(143541) 2934(190368) 2750(180305) 2609(159744)</td>
<td>2152</td>
<td>2934</td>
<td>2750</td>
<td>2609</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Nagina</td>
<td>1936(107738) 1884(131003) 1776(131302) 1923(127783)</td>
<td>1936</td>
<td>1884</td>
<td>1776</td>
<td>1923</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>FP Jhirka</td>
<td>2252(128451) 3359(163526) 2491(126769) 1723(94818)</td>
<td>2252</td>
<td>3359</td>
<td>2491</td>
<td>1723</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Punhana</td>
<td>2272(157307) 3413(238421) 1594(107030) 1700(107556)</td>
<td>2272</td>
<td>3413</td>
<td>1594</td>
<td>1700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>9754(610297) 12443(779556) 9305(593410) 8301(513207)</td>
<td>9754</td>
<td>12443</td>
<td>9305</td>
<td>8301</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: www.nrega.nic.in Accessed in Feb.2013)

**Job Cards Issued** - A Job Card forms the basis of identification for demanding employment. They are issued to the household members (above 18 years of age) who are willing and available to do unskilled work. The total number of households issued jobcards were 32931, highest in 2010-11 with maximum in Nuh block. In terms of job cards issued to SC households, a steady increase in number was seen from 4319 in 2009-10 to 4606 in 2011-12.

**Expenditure incurred under the Programme** - The expenditure under the programme from 2006-07 to 2009-12 increased by 2.5 times, which was found to be a commendable progress. It is further important to note that during 2010-11, expenditure was of the order of Rs.2,982.3498 lakhs which accounts for about 42 per cent of the total expenditure.

**Table 9 – Details of Expenditure incurred on MGNREGA in Mewat Till March 2010**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S. No</th>
<th>Blocks in Mewat</th>
<th>Expenditure as on 31st December-2009 (Rs. in lakhs)</th>
<th>Expenditure as on 02nd April-2010 (Rs. in lakhs)</th>
<th>Difference (Rs. in lakhs)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Taoru</td>
<td>1008.27297</td>
<td>1601.92167</td>
<td>593.6487</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Nuh</td>
<td>945.43879</td>
<td>2138.08715</td>
<td>1192.6484</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Nagina</td>
<td>798.92569</td>
<td>1304.69385</td>
<td>505.7682</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>FP Jhirka</td>
<td>798.18077</td>
<td>1202.86952</td>
<td>404.6888</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Punhana</td>
<td>570.90055</td>
<td>856.49352</td>
<td>285.593</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>4121.71877</td>
<td>7104.06571</td>
<td>2982.347</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: www.nrega.nic.in Accessed in Feb.2013)
Works Status - The Act provides for taking up of different kinds of works related to rural connectivity, water conservation, extending irrigation facilities, land development, digging of ponds etc. Work completion rate of different projects under MGNREGS in Mewat is around 81 per cent. The work status statistics on MGNREGA website reveals that majority of works undertaken in Mewat have been related to rural connectivity. Maximum numbers of assets were created in 2010-11, highest being in Nuh (33.9 per cent) (see Table 9).

Table 10 – Block Wise Details of Assets created in Mewat

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S. No.</th>
<th>Blocks</th>
<th>Assets Created</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2009-10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Taoru</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Nuh</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Nagina</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>FP Jhirka</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Punhana</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>423</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: www.nrega.nic.in Accessed in Feb. 2013)

The aforementioned official statistics thus reflect that MGNREGA has been well implemented in Mewat, relative to Haryana. However, the actual ground reality will be probed and determined through the analysis of the scheme in selected villages in the chapter ahead.

4.2 - Issues in MGNREGA Implementation in Selected Villages

As described in Chapter 1, the sampling entailed selection of villages with maximum number of MGNREGA works completed in 2010-11. The Sarpanch in each village was interviewed and discussions were carried out with community members. This section examines whether and to what extent the stipulated MGNREGA processes are being followed in the selected villages. It captures the views of the beneficiaries and Sarpanchs on awareness about the scheme, demand for work, registration and job card, work process, wage payment, records, monitoring, social audit, redressal of grievances etc.

4.2.1 Demographic Characteristics of Sampled Households

The distribution of sample households by certain demographic features is presented as under (see Table 10). Given high incidence of Muslim OBC population in Mewat, the sample has a natural bias in favor of such households. Also, most of the head of households were males (94 per cent).

Regarding poverty status, the type of ration card held by the family, was taken note of. As per the
guidelines, both APL and BPL houses are entitled to employment under the scheme. It is however, no surprise that BPL households are proportionately more under beneficiaries (62.9 per cent), which indicates the scheme, is benefitting the marginalized poor.

Table 11 – Demographic Profile of Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>MGNREGA beneficiaries (N=75)</th>
<th>Non beneficiaries (N=75)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Religion Practiced and Caste</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindu (SC)</td>
<td>11 (14.7per cent)</td>
<td>13 (17.3per cent)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslims (OBC)</td>
<td>64 (85.3per cent)</td>
<td>62 (82.7per cent)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of Ration Card held</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APL</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BPL</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AAY</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean Family size</td>
<td>7.05</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean No. of children</td>
<td>3.91</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Primary Data)

The family size also has a major bearing on the availability of assets and opportunities to individual members. The primary data showed that the average family size for both beneficiary and non beneficiary households was around seven, with more number of dependents and on an average; two earning members per household. There was also a predominance of joint family system and a relatively higher number of children. This was comparable to the value given by District Level Household and Facility Survey (DLHS-3), 2007-08, which states, Mean Children Ever Born (MCEB) to ever-married women aged between 15-49 years in Mewat was found to be 4.1 (highest in Haryana).

4.2.2 Occupational Distribution and Employment Pattern of Sampled Households

To observe the above characteristics, data regarding participation of family members in different economic activities were analyzed. It was found that the landless comprising agricultural and non-agricultural labour formed the largest section of the beneficiary households (60 per cent). About 40per cent of the households had agriculture as the main occupation among both beneficiaries and non beneficiaries. It can be inferred thereby that small and marginal farmers are also inclined to work in this scheme. Livestock rearing was found in almost 75 per cent of the beneficiary families since it was seen as a viable livelihood option which also ensured food security and a financial stock in times of distress. The presence of a considerable number of landless (60 per cent) and small and marginal landholders (30 per cent) in the non-beneficiary group indicates that they either have some
alternative opportunities of employment that are better than those provided under MGNREGA, or that they are simply out of the reach of the scheme. In other words, the implementing agencies have not been able to provide jobs at the requisite scale.

### 4.2.3 Asset base of Sampled Households

Land continues to be an important source of livelihood for the rural population. Access to land in a predominantly agrarian economy is an important indicator of the level of deprivation of the selected households. The average size of the landholding of beneficiary households was 1.5 acre. The asset base of both, the beneficiary households and non-beneficiary households was poor equating to greater vulnerability to shocks and lower potential for substitution between assets and activities. Though, access to pucca houses was available to 60 per cent per cent of the households, the basic amenities were found to be lacking equally in both the categories. Among beneficiaries, only 41.3 per cent of the households had access to electricity connections and a meager 14.7 per cent had toilet facilities. The condition of the non-beneficiary groups was equally grim, as evident in Table 11. The potable water was bought from private tankers by some households across both the categories. The non beneficiary respondents owned more household durables and saved more amounts of money while their beneficiary counterparts, who saved small amounts at home only.

The level of rural distress in the surveyed villages is also obvious from looking at the extent, source and purpose of credit taken by these households. More number of beneficiary households had taken loans and around 65 per cent of those who availed credit took it for consumption purposes such as social occasions, household needs or during illness. Only 20 per cent of all the respondents took loans for work related needs. The rate of interest on these loans varied a great deal ranging from 5per cent per annum to 48 per cent per annum. The high interest rate charged was mainly by the shopkeepers and moneylenders who charged interest monthly and in case of non-payment also compounded it monthly. The system was also tightly controlled by the moneylenders with the illiterate villagers not owning any piece of paper showing the amount of either principal borrowed or the rate of interest charged. Nor did they have any idea of how much they have actually paid. It was common complaint that despite having paid the interest and principal, the moneylender continued to show them in large amounts of debt and sometimes even taking away their cattle and land.
Also, although more beneficiary households owned livestock (74.7 per cent), which provides an alternate livelihood option and acts as a financial stock, but almost 3/4 th of them reportedly, found fodder and feed too expensive.

*Table 12 – Asset Base of Respondents*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of drinking water</th>
<th>Beneficiaries (N=75)</th>
<th>Non Beneficiaries (N=75)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Common hand pump</td>
<td>15 (20 per cent)</td>
<td>16 (21.3 per cent)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal hand pump</td>
<td>23 (30.7 per cent)</td>
<td>23 (30.7 per cent)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bore well</td>
<td>6 (8 per cent)</td>
<td>3 (4 per cent)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanker</td>
<td>10 (13.3 per cent)</td>
<td>13 (17.3 per cent)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Govt. supply</td>
<td>24 (32 per cent)</td>
<td>26 (34.7 per cent)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HHs with Individual Household Latrine</td>
<td>11 (14.7 per cent)</td>
<td>12 (16 per cent)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HHs with electricity connection</td>
<td>31 (41.3 per cent)</td>
<td>21 (28 per cent)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HHs with Ownership of Durables/Assets</td>
<td>T.V</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Radio</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mobile phones</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sewing Machine</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cycle</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Motor cycle</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Car / tractor</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HHs with Savings</td>
<td>18 (24 per cent)</td>
<td>14 (18.7 per cent)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean, amount saved per month (Rs)</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>279</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Primary Data)

4.2.4 Awareness about MGNREGA

For people to know their rights under the Act, effective communication of information about the essential provisions of the Scheme by respective State Governments is important. However, while discussing with the beneficiaries, it was noticed that many were not aware of most of the tenets of NREGA, especially regarding the provision of unemployment allowance, social audit and importance of gram sabha. Neighbours and fellow villagers (75 per cent) and Sarpanch (100 per cent) were the most cited sources for information on the scheme. Social networks, informal discussions and word of mouth were widely used sources of information to the respondents. Mass media however, have not been referred to for this purpose by any of the respondents. It may be due to very little penetration of these sources in selected areas. Lack of awareness is mainly due to weak Information, Education and Communication (IEC) effort and also not effectively using Gram Sabha for awareness generation.
4.2.5 Provision of Employment

As per the provisions of the Act, at the time of applying for work, the workers should get a dated and signed receipt and employment should be given within 15 days of the request. If employment is not given to the workers, they are entitled for unemployment allowance. However, none of the beneficiaries across all selected villages were aware of this. Only 53.3 per cent beneficiaries themselves approached Sarpanch to ask for work and placed their demand for employment in oral. Some beneficiaries also reported having faced denial on different pretexts. In terms of time gap in and applying and provision of work, 1/4\(^{th}\) of the respondents cited that work was not provided when demanded but when it was available. Only 33 per cent respondents claimed to have been provided work within a fortnight.

**Fig. 3 Time gap between demand and provision of work**

This is against the rights based approach of the Act and defeats its objectives. Also, in 54.7 per cent of the beneficiary households, the women also sought work in the scheme. However, all of them worked within their respective villages and confirmed having received equal task rates as men. Around 15 per cent households also affirmed children’s unpaid participation in the work as parents’ helping hand. This is also against the mandate of the Act which seeks to provide employment only to adults.

4.2.6 Job Cards and Wage Issues

Most of the beneficiaries across all villages did not possess their job cards. Almost 57.3 per cent of households reported that their job cards were in the possession of Sarpanch. Also 14.7 per cent households did not have any job cards and received wages directly from the
None of the respondents knew that with the job card, they are entitled to apply for work at any time. They also were not aware that a job card is valid for five years.

As per the stipulations of MGNREGA, wages should be paid within a week or fifteen days at the most and in the case of delay beyond 15 days, workers are entitled to compensation as per the provisions of the Payment of Wages Act, 1936. However, only 21.3 per cent of the sampled households received wages in this time frame. For the rest, wage payments were reportedly delayed by 1-2 months or even more and No compensation was given for the delayed payments. The NREGA Operational Guidelines though stipulate that Measurements must be recorded transparently, whereby individuals may verify their measurement on a daily basis. Also, at the time of wage payment muster rolls should be read out and Job Card entries should be made. However, these norms were not adhered to in any of the selected village.

Every person working under MGNREGA is also entitled to wages at the minimum wage rate fixed by the State Government for agricultural labourers. Wages may be paid either on a time rate or piece rate basis. A great majority (93.3 per cent) of households confirmed to having received wages on the basis of measurements. However, a small number of respondents also claimed that they received payment on the discretion of Sarpanch as they did not possess the job cards. In terms of mode of payment, Sarpanchs also distributed cash and agreed to operate the bank accounts of many workers (46.7 per cent). They justified that since payment from the block level get delayed, they have to shell out their own money to pay wages in time to the needy workers. The workers also spelt out difficulties in accessing banks and thus found it convenient to receive payment in cash from the Sarpanch.

### 4.2.7 Shelf of Projects, Works and Worksite Facilities

As per the MGNREGA guidelines, administrative and technical sanction should be obtained for all works in advance, by December of the previous year. The number of works in the shelf in a village should also be adequately more than the estimated demand. This was not properly followed. Although use of contractors and machines is prohibited under MGNREGA, beneficiaries at Beri Taoru and Lafuri revealed during FGD that JCB was used for digging of earth for pond construction. Moreover, work requiring material was discouraged, thus not utilizing the scheme to the fullest extent. The works undertaken were mostly roads and village pond construction, but the quality of the works was reported to be fine. At Rithora, toilet units were being constructed and at Beri Taoru, leveling of school ground also took
place through MGNREGA funds. Table 12 enumerates the works completed and ongoing in the sampled villages during different financial years.

**Table 13 - Number of completed and ongoing works in selected villages**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Works completed (Total)</th>
<th>Beri Taoru</th>
<th>Rithora</th>
<th>Kherli Khurd</th>
<th>Hamzapur</th>
<th>Lafuri</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2008-09</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009-10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011-12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ongoing Works (2012)</td>
<td>1 road, 1 johad</td>
<td>construction of toilets</td>
<td>30 soak pits</td>
<td>1 johad</td>
<td>No ongoing work</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: www.mgnrega.nic.in Accessed in Nov. 2012)

Worksite facilities (medical aid, drinking water, shade and crèche) were largely absent as reported by 3/4th of the respondents and only at fewer times, the rest affirmed that drinking water was provided. What is glaring is the near total absence of crèches at the worksite as none of the respondents reported its presence. This is a very significant result as it can severely hamper female participation in NREGA works.

**4.2.8 Transparency and Accountability**

The data on number of gram sabha meetings held and proportion of meetings dedicated specifically to MGNREGA was highly inconsistent and had to be dropped. Judging from the respondents statements, in hardly any of the surveyed villages were Gram Sabha meetings ever dedicated to the scheme. The main reason behind the attendance, participation and frequency of gram sabha meetings standing low was cited as a lack of information sharing about the programme by Sarpanchs. With an abysmal record of gram sabha meetings, involvement of the gram sabha in the planning of works under the Act seems a remote possibility. Absence of social audit also makes it evident that in terms of transparency and devolution of powers to the gram sabha, the villages are not doing too well. The survey points at a heavy presence of the administrative beauracray in planning and implementation of the works. The decisions concerning works were taken by panchayat members in consultation with block officials and were communicated to all in gram sabha.

A large number of respondents (81.3 per cent) said that JE visited for supervision and work measurements usually after completion of work by any of the Sarpanchs. Also, no social audit forums ever took place in any of the selected villages. All the respondents were also completely unaware of the organization of Employment Guarantee Day in the Gram
Panchayat. Muster rolls were maintained and were available for public inspection in all surveyed GPs, however, other records like application register, asset register, complaints register etc were not shown.

4.2.9 Grievance Redressal

There was no vigilance and monitoring committee in any of the selected villages and no social audit had taken place. In the absence of public vigilance it is no surprise that the official MGNREGS website in the “Social Audit Report” section for Mewat mentions that not a single grievance was submitted and action taken (www.nrega.nic.in), whereas, in the field, complaints about delay in payment or non-payment were ubiquitous. Several grievances were reported by the beneficiaries but no action had been taken towards redressal.

More than half of the beneficiaries (56 per cent) cited delayed payment of wages and inconsistent work as the main problems encountered. In Lafuri, the landless respondents though needed, but were reluctant to work under MGNREGA, for regular wages are imminent to their survival and delay in wage payment further put them at risk. The respondents reported that they had no knowledge about the availability of any setup of helpline for grievance redressal. Moreover, awareness about rights and process to seek information under Right to Information Act was also found to be nil. There was also an absolute lack of worksite facilities (as reported by 75 per cent beneficiaries), however being unaware of this mandate, the respondents did not mention it as a grievance. A fraction of respondents in Hamzapur also admitted to work being done using JCB and lack of motivation on the part of Sarpanch in seeking works for the benefit of the village. They also complained about embezzlements of funds and issue of job cards based on Sarpanch’s discretion.
4.3 - Role of Selected Gram Panchayats in MGNREGA Implementation

The sustainability of livelihoods of people cannot be guaranteed if institutional capacity required to design and implement policies and regulations in the interest of the people is lacking. The MGNREGA Guidelines affirm the PRIs as the “key Stakeholders.” A Gram Panchayat is responsible for creating awareness about the scheme, receiving applications, registering names, issuing of job cards, providing employment, keeping records and redressing complaints lodged by people. This section seeks to examine the role played by Gram Panchayats in selected villages in implementing MGNREGA. For this, the Sarpanchs in each of the selected village were interviewed and information so generated is described as under.

Profile of Sarpanchs

The Sarpanchs in all the selected villages were elected in 2010 and resided within the village. Lafuri village had a female Sarpanch, who was illiterate and relied on her son for Panchayat work. Rest of the Sarpanchs were males and had received secondary education. All the Sarpanchs were in the age group 40-55 years and also engaged in farming and livestock rearing as a household occupation. The Sarpanch of Village Kherli Khurd in Nagina block, was a graduate and also ran an electrical goods shop while that of Rithora Village was a retired soldier from Indian Army.

Awareness about MGNREGA

The Sarpanchs were not aware of all the key provisions and procedures of the Act though they had attended Block Orientation Conventions. The current wage rate and maximum duration of employment provided under MGNREGA was known to all. However, the provision of unemployment allowance, grievance redressal helpline, minimum duration of work under MGNREGA, convergence guidelines etc were not heard of. They largely obtained information from the block level functionaries or through the JE. All of them had attended the training sessions at Nuh, where the district headquarter is located, but cited unanimously, the need for further training and guidance.

Role in Planning of Works

All the Sarpanchs agreed on powers vested in Gram Panchayat but denied the actual realization since they were entirely dependent on higher levels of bureaucracy for funds and guidance. In Hamzapur and Lafuri, no Rozgar Sahayak was employed. Rather, all additional
work was looked into by family members of the Sarpanch. In case of other three villages, the Panchayat Secretary or other members served on this post. All the Sarpanchs claimed that works and shelf of projects were chosen in consultation with the people. They also reported that the selection of work to be taken up in the village was always done according to the priorities of Gram Sabha, convened twice or thrice a year. This was in contrast to what the respondents stated that no gram sabhas were conducted primarily for MGNREGA and the planning of works was solely done by the Panchayat.

**Issues in Implementation**

In terms of implementation, the muster rolls were being maintained but other records like application register, asset register etc. were not revealed for public inspection. They agreed to have provided drinking water at the worksite but not any other facility. There was no Vigilance and Monitoring Committee in any of the village and the Sarpanch himself, supervised and monitored all work. They also denied using any contractors or machinery for work completion. This was also against the claims by many respondents that earth movers and JCB were used for digging of Johads in Beri Taoru and Hamzapur.

All the Sarpanchs reported problems in obtaining work approval and timely funds for payment of wages. The Sarpanch of Rithora stated that irregular flow of funds from the district office and delayed measurements by JE, who are overworked, often resulted in discontinuation of work. In Rithora and Kherli Khurd, several toilet units and soak pits being constructed under joint convergence of MGNREGA and TSC, were incomplete for lack of funds.

![Pic 8: Incomplete Soak Pits at Rithora](image-url)
The Sarpanchs also reported having paid bribes to seek work approval and getting estimates prepared privately by spending Rs 500-1000 so as to avoid delays. They also opined that due to limited number of Junior Engineers at the block level, the measurements at worksite get delayed and funds often come late. The administrative and bureaucratic hurdles were majorly cited by all the Sarpanchs.

The Sarpanch of Beri Taoru, where there is less demand for work under MGNREGA confirmed that this was due to presence of better earning opportunities as agricultural wages were higher and also due to the construction sector booming lately in the block. Availability of work and employment was a positive indicator and also resulted in lesser number of BPL households in this village relative to other villages.

**Suggestions given by Sarpanchs**

Though none of the Sarpanchs were fully satisfied with the performance of MGNREGA in their respective villages, however, all of them asserted that programme must continue and found it useful for developing infrastructure in their villages. They demanded technical guidance in preparation of shelf of projects and timely disbursal of funds. Training in preparation of perspective plans and estimates was also cited as a chief requirement. They also wanted more MGNREGA staff appointments at block and village levels, particularly of Junior Engineers, for smooth conduct of activities. The overall impact of the Act as visualized by them and future scoping of works have been discussed in the chapter that follows.

The local bodies and the local governance structures have several opportunities to support the livelihood aspirations of the poor (Moser 1998: 1, 19). In agreement with this view MGNREGA has given ample opportunity to the Gram Panchayats. These local governance bodies need to focus on their core responsibilities like construction and maintenance of the village infrastructure, making them available for all citizenry, building new facilities to meet the emerging new needs etc. The key aspects of good governance will help sustain the livelihood of the rural poor.
CHAPTER 5
Impact of MGNREGA on Livelihood Security

This chapter addresses the perceived impact of MGNREGA on various livelihood features in the selected villages. Impact implies sustained and significant changes in people’s lives brought about by a particular intervention (Hopkins, 1995:5). Livelihood security can be defined as adequate and sustainable access to income and resources to meet basic needs (including adequate access to food, potable water, health facilities, educational opportunities, housing, time for community participation and social integration) (Drinkwater and McEwan, 1992). In this chapter, an attempt is made to examine the direct and indirect effect of this policy on the livelihood activities, assets and capabilities of selected households and other community members through the lens of social, economic and environmental sustainability. Also, the specific assets created in 2010-11, across selected villages have been presented as cases for further insights into the impact of this programme.

5.1 - Impact of MGNREGA in Selected Villages

Shah (2009) suggests that it is important to distinguish between the scheme's wage and non-wage benefits. The wage-benefits are clear from the data on number of person-days of employment generated in the sampled villages. In the entire district, 12,443 households were provided employment in 2010-11 and 779556 person days were generated. The quantification and consequent description of non-wage benefits and their distribution requires deeper investigation. While the poor may benefit from both, the better-off in the village would be primarily interested in the latter. Some of the notable positive contributions by the scheme were claimed by villagers and Sarpanchs. These pertain to provision of supplementary employment in lean agricultural season, financial inclusion of the marginalized, availability of work at equal wages for women and improved rural infrastructure etc.

- In the selected villages, around 69.3 per cent of beneficiary households reported satisfaction from the scheme and interestingly, a very great majority (94.7 per cent) opined that the programme should continue in future. Even amongst the non beneficiaries, 84 per cent were in favour of the continuance of this programme and almost 65 per cent wanted to seek work under the scheme. This refutes the centralized data on no demand for
work and points at the inadequacy of state and district administrative machinery in making work available to all.

- As opined by the Sarpanchs, the incidence of unemployment in all the selected villages was reportedly high. Farming being seasonal in nature, the agricultural activities ceased from March to June. There was also lack of effective non farm employment avenues across all blocks as has been examined in Chapter 3. It was at this time that even the small and marginal farmers needed supplementary income sources. The Sarpanchs remarked that MGNREGA scheme was a better alternative for them who didn’t have any other job in hand. The employment generation under the scheme over the last few years has also shown an increasing trend. Thus, the programme played an important role in supplementing employment and livelihood opportunities within all the villages. This is also evident from the significant number of households registered under the scheme (see Table 13). The maximum number of households registered were from Lafuri (48 per cent) in Punhana block, which also had a greater number of BPL households relative to other villages.

Table 14 – Details of Households Registered in MGNREGA in Selected Villages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Beri Taoru</th>
<th>Rithora</th>
<th>Kherli Khurd</th>
<th>Hamzapur</th>
<th>Lafuri</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total HHs</td>
<td>280</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>468</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Registered HHs</td>
<td>103 (36.7%)</td>
<td>106 (26.5%)</td>
<td>100 (33.3%)</td>
<td>74 (43.5%)</td>
<td>225 (48%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Registered SC HHs</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Registered Others HHs</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>211</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: www.mgnrega.nic.in  Accessed in Jan. 2012)

- Income from MGNREGA, as a fraction of household income, is considered as an indicator of the relevance of the Scheme for the poor. Considering that sampled households practiced diverse livelihood activities, MGNREGA’s annual contribution to household income through wages was found to be around 10 per cent in the beneficiary households. The secondary data (2010-11) for selected villages (www.nrega.nic.in) revealed that among the five selected villages, maximum wages were disbursed in Lafuri. (see Table 14) while wage payment in Beri Taoru was less owing to lesser number of persons employed in the scheme. This is also indicative of the fact that there were less takers of MGNREGA in this village, as commented by Sarpanch, which could be possible due to numerous reasons. Since it came to light in FGDs that people wanted MGNREGA
to continue and desired work in the village, it points to the inability of district administration in providing regular and consistent work.

**Table 15 – Amount of money paid as wages in selected villages in 2010-11**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Persons employed</th>
<th>Beri Taoru</th>
<th>Rithora</th>
<th>Kherli Khurd</th>
<th>Hamzapur</th>
<th>Lafuri</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Wage Payment (Rs)</td>
<td>471448</td>
<td>908426</td>
<td>702831</td>
<td>632135</td>
<td>1039172</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: www.mgnrega.nic.in Accessed in Dec. 2012)

The importance of MGNREGA as a supplementary source of income is also noted by some studies. In a longitudinal survey of 1,064 rural households across Medak district of Andhra Pradesh, around 12 per cent of the households indicated that their household income had increased as more members of the same household were being able to work (Engler & Ravi, 2012). To the extent that this scheme increases the income and purchasing power of poor rural households, it will have an impact on poverty. Field research suggested that this additional income got spent mostly on food, and then on health and other necessities.

- Category-wise distribution of persons provided employment i.e 62.9 per cent of sampled beneficiaries belonging to Below Poverty Line and 85.3 per cent to Other Backward Castes reflects on the **financial inclusion of the marginalized groups**. This is also indicated by more number of BPL families as well as females registered, particularly in Lafuri. Moreover, the payments related to NREGS are made through Bank/ Post-Office, thereby providing a base for increased savings and investment activities by the wage earners. However, in effect this impact was limited since the job cards and bank pass books of several households across all villages remained in the custody of Sarpanchs. Due to delayed payments, the Sarpanchs distributed wages in cash from their own money and later encashed through worker’s accounts.

- MGNREGA **limited the out migration** to some extent from the selected villages. Out of the total sampled beneficiary households, around 20 per cent reported migration. The incidence of temporary migration was slightly higher among the beneficiaries. The irregular availability of work under MGNREGA and delayed payment of wages resulted in continuance of temporary migration. Such workers sometimes commuted daily to neighbouring towns, particularly Gurgaon and Faridabad, to hunt for work. However,
availability of MGNREGA work within the village saved their time and expenses incurred in travelling.

Among non beneficiaries, migration was reported by 16 per cent of households and 58.3 per cent of those who migrated went to another state. Such migrants from the non-beneficiary households belong to different categories of workers, with some of them being semi-skilled like masons, carpenters, painters, artisans and heavy vehicle drivers etc. who get higher income at other places. Another important occurrence is that the migration of female members from the both beneficiary and non beneficiary households was not taking place. The reason attributed by almost one third of the beneficiaries was availability of work and opportunity to earn wages for women in the home turf by working in MGNREGA. In places where the market wages are higher than MGNREGA, men undertake jobs in the market and women seek employment under the Scheme (Sudarshan, 2011). This was also apparent in the findings of another study which concluded that in Rajsamand and Dungarpur (Rajasthan), where migration to urban areas offers relatively higher incomes for men, much of the MGNREGA workers were found to be women who had discontinued migration (Shah et al 2010).

With a national participation rate of 47 per cent and 36 per cent in Haryana in 2011-12, evidence suggests that women are participating in the Scheme more actively than in other works. The present research also indicates that MGNREGA is an important work opportunity for women who would have otherwise remained unemployed or
underemployed. The percentage of women beneficiaries in Mewat was 46.25 per cent. The person days of work created for women has been greater than the stipulated 33 per cent in all the selected villages except Beri Taoru, where farming dominates and women get employed in agricultural operations. Table 14 reflects the percentage of female beneficiaries registered under MGNREGA in 2011-12 viz a viz total persons registered. Women’s access to work in the village had several consequences for the households. First and foremost, it did translate into economic and social empowerment of Muslim women, hitherto confined to domestic life owing to existent social norms and patriarchal values. Secondly, it gave menfolk liberty to migrate and work elsewhere while women could continue to work in MGNREGA in the village itself.

*Table 16 - Number of women workers registered in selected villages in 2010-11*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Village</th>
<th>HHs registered</th>
<th>Persons registered</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beri Taoru</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>308</td>
<td>218</td>
<td>90 (29.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rithora</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>223</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>95 (42.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kherli Khurd</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>291</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>132 (45.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hanzapur</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>57 (41.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lafuri</td>
<td>225</td>
<td>533</td>
<td>316</td>
<td>217 (40.7%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: www.mgnrega.nic.in Accessed in Dec. 2012)

Based on field research, Khera and Nayak (2009) and Pankaj and Tankha (2010) have argued that even relatively small levels of MGNREGA employment for women in India have resulted in significant perceived benefits. However, a disturbing aspect came to light through group discussions. Since provision of child care facilities was largely missing at the worksites, small girls had been taken out of school to help with household chores and look after younger siblings while their mothers worked. This aspect need to be rectified immediately in accordance with the provisions of the Act, which stipulate crèche facility at worksite.

- **Creation of sustainable assets** that strengthen the livelihood resource base of rural areas is one of the key objectives of MGNREGA. The programme through its wide range of permissible works, has also given ample opportunity for infrastructure development at the community level in all the selected villages. Also, with its inter-sectoral approach, the programme has opened up a number of opportunities for convergence. The consequent addition to and improvement in rural infrastructure has impacted the overall livelihoods in study area. Table 16 presents the number of different types of works undertaken in Mewat in 2010-11.
Table 17 – Kind of MGNREGA Works completed in Mewat in 2010-11

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S.No.</th>
<th>Works / Assets Generated</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Rural Connectivity</td>
<td>261</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Water Conservation and Harvesting</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Draught Proofing</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Renovation of Traditional Water Bodies</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Irrigation Canals</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Land Development</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: www.mgnrega.nic.in Accessed in March 2012)

The study findings suggest that while many productive assets have been created on the ground, there is need for more focussed implementation with regard to the creation of durable and sustainable assets under the scheme. This is also an area where more rigorous research is required. In terms of types of works undertaken, rural connectivity was the dominant activity in all the selected villages. Respondents also stated that due to the remuneration being easily calculable in road works the implementing agencies preferred these over other activities. The other completed works were desilting and deepening of Johads in Hamzapur and Beri Taoru, filling of earth and land leveling in Lafuri and construction of toilets and soak pits in Rithora and Kherli Khurd respectively.

To look into the sustainability aspect of assets created, the villages selected in the study were the ones with maximum number of completed works in 2010-2011. The highest number of works was in Rithora (11), (see Fig. 6) probably due to its proximity to District headquarters at Nuh and also because of a proactive Sarpanch.
On the other hand, number of works completed in Beri Taoru was less, in cognizance with the fact that out of total works completed (681) in Mewat in 2010-11, share of the works in the whole of Taoru block (6.2per cent) is also less. The Sarpanch expressed difficulty in motivating people to work under MGNREGA because of higher market wages available to construction and agricultural labour in the block. With proximity of this block to Gurgaon and Real estate Projects being launched here, there were ample opportunities available for labour work. Inconsistent work and delayed wages in MGNREGA also demotivated many workers in Beri Taoru.

5.2 - Analysis of specific MGNREGA Assets

To ensure sustainability of assets created under MGNREGA, adequate project/work selection, technical and organizational supervision, maintenance and end use as well as quality and durability of assets is significant. Perception-based questions were used to assess the development utility of assets as perceived by the stakeholders i.e whether the assets are useful to the beneficiaries and are being used for the purpose they were created for. In all villages, the assets created under MGNREGA in 2010-11 were visited and based on first hand observation and discussions with the workers and Sarpanchs, the following analysis was drawn for randomly selected assets.

5.2.1 Rural Connectivity Works

1. The constructed road networks and firni raasta in Kherli Khurd increased the inter village connectivity and mobility. These roads reportedly reduced the travelling time for villagers.

2. The respondents in Hamzapur opined that compacted earthen roads (see Picture Plate 9) developed through MGNREGA funds, also reduced water logging during rains and proliferation of malaria causing mosquitoes, indirectly benefitting their health.
3. In Rithora, the Sarpanch got several internal village roads maintained through MGNREGA funds. He also claimed to have utilized some of the panchayat funds for paving of mitti murrum roads (see Picture Plate 10). This resulted in draining of excess water on the constructed side channels and the roads remained dry without puddles, thus improving the overall sanitary conditions in the village.

![Pic 10: A Paved Village Road in Rithora](image)

4. The sustainability of an asset depends to a large extent on the soundness of its technical design. In terms of quality, it was noted that in some of the internal village roads in Lafuri, proper dressing of the side slopes and compaction of the road were not given due attention, which resulted in water stagnation and early damage to the road (see Picture Plate 11). The durability of civil works on all weather roads could be low due to non-use of machines like road rollers which are necessary for compaction.

![Pic 11: A Poor Quality Road Constructed Under MGNREGA In Lafuri](image)
5.2.2 Works related to Water Conservation and Harvesting

The dug out ponds, both newly constructed under MGNREGA and revived traditional johads were also visited. These are important common property resources, particularly in the context of water deficient villages in Mewat. These excavated ponds not just cater to local human and livestock water needs of present but also assume significance as an environmental service by recharging the ground water reservoirs for future usage. The ponds are to be deepened and dug out in a manner that excavated earth does not get washed back into it due to rains. Also, the slope, catchment and proportion of surface area and volume needs to be technically determined.

1. In almost all the ponds visited, a common observation was that the excavated earth was disposed off randomly and not stacked properly, neither compacted nor grass turfing provided. The consequent soil erosion during rainy season turned out to be the major cause of siltation in the pond thus reducing its storage capacity significantly over a lesser period of time. A case in point was the pond at Hamzapur (see Picture Plate 12). This pond is located adjacent to grazing ground making it ideal for livestock usage. However, due to washing away of side slopes, the water retention capacity was greatly reduced and the water harvested during monsoons lasted for only 3-4 months.

![Pic 12: A Dug out pond at Hamzapur](image)

2. However, desilting of existing johads provided several sustained environmental services including a rise in the groundwater level and water security, particularly for livestock owning households. The respondents in Beri Taoru reported that water harvested in ponds lasted 4-5 months and it was a multiple use asset being used for household purposes, groundwater recharge, livestock etc. (see Picture Plate 13).
3. Certain ponds were also leased out to private individuals, contractors or large farmers for pisciculture, particularly in Rithora and Lafuri that contributed to panchayat funds, which were utilized for other development works. The pond usage was allowed to other villagers for livestock water and bathing needs since it contributed to organic matter that facilitated growth and multiplication of fish.

4. The community upkeep of the ponds was however limited, possibly due to ambiguity over ownership and usage rights. All villagers, including those who were directly benefiting from the asset, asserted that it was the responsibility of the GP to regularly clean and maintain the assets. The Sarpanchs, though cited lack of separate asset maintenance funds as an impediment. The pond at Kherli Khurd (see Picture Plate 14) was full of filth and not being used at all. The reason cited was that ample water was available in the village through hand pumps and though inconsistent, but the government supply was also there. Thus, water related chores, even bathing of cattle was done at home. The pond however could serve for ground water recharge in the long run.
5.2.3 Land Leveling Works

Land leveling is another permissible work under MGNREGA. In the selected villages, the funds from the scheme were utilized for land leveling in school grounds in three of the selected villages. The respondents reported that these grounds had undulated land initially that restricted children’s mobility and play activities within the school.

1. In Beri Taoru, the Sarpanch reported that in absence of panchayat ghar and a designated community centre, the school ground was extensively used for multiple purposes.

2. The respondents in Lafuri said that the school ground was most often used for important events and meetings in the village as well as during social occasions.

The land leveling work (see Picture Plates 7 and 8) facilitated the availability of a proper social space for conduct of important community level activities. It also enabled the provision of a safe ground for children to play during school hours.

5.2.4 Cases of Convergence

Another most important development observed as a consequence of MGNREGA, was the construction of toilets in two of the selected villages. With open defecation rampant across entire Mewat and only 16 per cent households having proper sanitation facilities, the convergence between MGNREGA and Total Sanitation Campaign could work wonders in accelerating sanitation coverage. As per the convergence guidelines, construction of individual household latrines, school and Aanganwadi toilet units and community sanitary complexes is permissible. For each of these works, the design specifications and unskilled labour and material components have been specified.

1. In the field survey, absence of household toilets was a significant observation. The women respondents, in particular, reported it as a major drudgery having serious
implications on their health, safety and dignity. In Rithora, individual household latrines were constructed (see Picture Plate 17) under MGNREGA, and almost 85-90 per cent households were covered, which reportedly improved women’s health and safety to a great extent. However, due to irregular funds, the cent percent coverage could not be achieved and work had to be halted. Nevertheless, all the respondents cited this work as imminent in keeping the village surroundings clean.

![Pic 17: A Toilet Unit in a BPL Household in Rithora](image)

2. In both Rithora and Kherli Khurd, community toilets and soak pits were also constructed in Masjid complexes (see Picture Plate 18). The construction of toilets and soak pits improvised the hygiene and sanitation situation across the entire village having an indirect bearing on morbidity and health outcomes. This has been a significant achievement of MGNREGA.

![Pic 18: A Soak pit at Rithora Masjid](image)

Apart from these capital construction works, a host of other works were identified through participatory exercises with Sarpanchs and respondents as relevant for livelihoods improvement. These were Azolla cultivation (for cattle fodder), vermi-composting (for manure for fields), construction of animal sheds, building of panchayat ghar/ chaupal/ community centres, construction of toilets and soak pits, reclamation of saline lands, prawn cultivation etc across different villages.
CHAPTER 6
Conclusion and Suggestions for Way Forward

This chapter summarizes the overall inferences and recommendations arising from the study. The sole intention is to identify some of the major actions required to strengthen the livelihoods of poor through MGNREGA. The current parameters of monitoring and evaluation of this programme by the number of jobs created and number of assets created cannot give a holistic picture of sustainability of outcomes. From the point of view of gauging the development effectiveness, the Act needs to be evaluated and monitored on the basis of its impact on livelihood security (CSE, 2008). MGNREGA has to assume the character of a sustainable rural development scheme, out of the shadow of the previous wage employment programmes.

The sustainable livelihoods approach offers a distinctive perspective on understanding the lived reality of people. It is through this lens that the connections between micro level ground realities and macro level policy are drawn in this study. A policy is seldom a discreet decision and does impinge upon people and their livelihoods. The present report, unlike the top down policy assessment, which is too highly aggregated, builds on the livelihood strategies and asset levels within the village communities. Given the legacy of insensitive policies and incompatible directives, this report presents the livelihoods portfolio in Mewat and offers useful cues for strengthening MGNREGA to ensure livelihood security in real terms. The study thus aimed at contextual scrutiny of livelihood factors in five selected villages across different administrative blocks of Mewat to assess the overall performance and impact of the massive MGNREGA and suggests broad directions for strategic thinking on meaningful interventions through this policy, in times ahead.

The results of this study indicate that MGNREGA is an important intervention that has the potential to transform rural economy and livelihoods at many levels. However, this potential of the Act is still incipient in Mewat and requires to be substantially supported by a number of stakeholders. The very orientation of MGNREGA about people’s involvement in public works as a right is a new concept and one that will take time to permeate. However, once established, it can lead to empowerment and subsequent livelihood security for people concerned.
The backwardness and vulnerability of livelihoods in Mewat reflected considerably from the analysis of secondary data on the historical, socio-economic, political and ecological context and constraints. Also, it was evident from the primary data (gathered through field surveys and participatory exercises) that the selected villages too suffered from inadequacy of basic infrastructure and an aggregate lack of development. The lack of livelihood security highlighted the pressing and urgent need for MGNREGA in the entire study area. The programme being completely different in conception and design from earlier government employment schemes (since it treats employment as a right and is intended to be demand-driven), there are bound to be difficulties in making all stakeholders including panchayat members and officials, responsive to this very different approach. It will necessarily challenge the prevailing power structures, in some cases quite substantially. Therefore attempts to oppose or subvert the correct and full implementation of the scheme must be expected, even as they must also be firmly dealt with.

Based on the findings and discussion in the previous chapters, some of the significant implementation issues that came to forefront and the suggestions to deal with them can be presented as under:

- **Awareness among beneficiaries** - The idea that MGNREGA is demand-driven and predicated on employment as an entitlement had still not permeated well in any of the selected villages despite six years of implementation. This was primarily due to lack of awareness among beneficiaries on the processes, modalities, and procedures in the scheme. There is an urgent need to enhance their awareness through dissemination of information about the Act through effective communication plans. Since literacy levels and mass media reach are limited in Mewat, the State Government must utilize other forms of local networks, community media, people’s organizations, radio advertisements, cultural forums, village conventions etc. for this purpose. The Gram Pradhan, other informed village persons and opinion leaders being the main sources of information for the villagers, the awareness campaign should positively involve all these important stakeholders. Also, NGO groups and federations must be encouraged to participate and take on responsibilities of educating workers on their legal entitlements and processes of MGNREGA alongside other initiatives and strategies. The Policy, Governance and Advocacy Centre of IRRAD is making a headway through its comprehensive awareness
campaigns across several villages in Mewat. The local meetings and camps organized by IRRAD provide a platform to discuss about the Policy and address its crucial issues at length in a participatory and conducive manner.

- **Capacity Building of the elected Panchayat Members** – Availability of human resources and building their capacities are critical factors in ensuring the success of any programme. The devolution of functions, funds and functionaries to Panchayats must be rightfully ensured for proper execution of the scheme. The recurring training and capacity building of the elected Panchayat members must follow this and should be accorded priority. The Panchayat members must know the scheme well to exercise the rights effectively. The Professional Institutional Networks and Civil Society Organizations can address these specific training needs effectively. Experience from the field points at government officials dictating Panchayat members on the nature of works, citing vague government orders. This takes away the Panchayats’ powers under the Act, and has to be rectified immediately. In addition special meetings and consultations should also be held at district and state government level from time to time.

- **Job Cards and Application for work** – The MGNREGA stipulates the possession of job card by the job seeker to have details of work, attendance, wages etc and most importantly to keep tab on possible leakages. However, there was sufficient ground evidence that in most of the cases, the Job Cards were distributed according to the discretion and preference of the Sarpanch. Thus, checks are required to ensure that no caste/community group members are denied registration, job cards are not being misused and to protect the households from possible opportunistic behavior by PRI officials. The District Administration should ask for progress reports on job card application and distribution from the gram panchayat on regular basis. Also, many workers were not aware that work has to be applied for after the job card is received. The work was not provided on the basis of applications, but simply when the local authority decided to set up a work and therefore mobilized workers. The need to apply for work in addition to receiving a job card must be made clear to all workers as part of the information dissemination. Application forms should be made easily available. Dated and signed receipts should be provided with all applications. These receipts would ensure the provision of unemployment allowance to workers in case the work demanded is not
provided within 15 days. There was not a single case of the payment of unemployment allowance in any of the five selected villages. This gives the impression that all the households were provided jobs within 15 days of demanding them. However, this was not the case. The people, being illiterate and unaware, applied for jobs not through applications but conveyed it orally to the Sarpanch. Thus, no receipts were issued against which unemployment allowance could be sought. There was a general reservation among the panchayats against the payment of unemployment allowance. This is so because the cost of the unemployment allowance is to be borne by the state government and its payment is considered to be the result of an administrative failure on the part of the implementing agencies/officials.

- **Choice and Quality of work** – The MGNREGA work was identified in all the selected villages in a centralized fashion without convening gram sabhas or entailing people’s participation. Top-down approach of earlier schemes was being repeated. With almost six years behind the Act, planning is yet to reach a large number of villages and gram sabhas. Without a village perspective plan developed by the villagers themselves, the development impact of the NREGA will be poor. There is a need for involvement of common people in the preparation of annual plan so that real needs of the people are addressed. The number of works in the shelf in a village should also be adequately more than the estimated demand. The administrative and technical sanctions should be obtained for all works in advance. Village-level resource planning and designing ought to be strengthened further and the works taken up should improve the total village ecology to accrue benefit to the entire community. Through topographical and other research surveys and after a detailed contextual analysis, the possibility of significant activities may be explored.

In this regard, there is also an urgent need to review the wage material ratios of the states and the districts and to initiate corrective actions where required since only earth work cannot be prolonged and action strategies are required to move to the next higher level of skills and materials. Moreover, in view of maintaining high quality standards and durability of public assets, this may require consideration of some of the critical provisions related to convergence within the Act, and reconsideration of provisions of maintaining the prescribed level of wages and material components in the overall costs. It was also found in the study that poor maintenance and weak institutions are already
rendering productive assets useless. Setting up of strong institutional mechanisms to manage and distribute the resources generated must follow the creation of assets. Also, there should be a binding work completion plan for each asset created which must also include the maintenance plan.

- **Worksites** – The respondents across all villages stated an absolute lack of worksite facilities. The most disheartening was absence of the creche’ or child care facility because of which, the older female children were pulled out of school to look after younger siblings in the absence of mother. It is important to note that the “implementing agencies” are responsible for provision of worksite facilities and should be held accountable for it. Funds and other information must also be displayed at the worksite. Therefore, new methods are required to be worked out to ensure that all facilities are provided and non-provision is penalized.

- **Wage issues** – The primary objective of MGNREGA is to provide wage employment to those who demand it. The fair and timely payment of wages is must to ensure people’s participation in the programme. It is through these wages only that poor can supplement their income to and achieve livelihood security. Although MGNREGA wage rates in Haryana are highest in the country, but, there were several pointers indicative of lacunae in deliverance of wages.

  Firstly, it was found through the survey that muster rolls were not always displayed at the worksite. In some cases, they were also not available for public inspection even at the panchayat office. Thus, local authorities should be reminded by circular that muster rolls must be displayed prominently at the worksite, and there should be periodic check and strict penalties for non-compliance. Where workers are mostly illiterate, muster rolls must be read out at the end of the day’s work. Secondly, measurement of work was not always appropriate. The designated engineer did not visit the site regularly but only once towards the completion of work. This problem was because of shortage of staff at both, the block and district level. Adequate number of trained human resources are critical and must be employed or designated by the concerned authorities. Thirdly, due to delayed measurements and irregular flow of funds to GP, the wage payments were often not made on time. Consequently, the poor and vulnerable, who depend on daily earnings lose interest in the programme and opt for migration or other risky livelihood strategies.
Finally, financial inclusion as envisaged in payment of wages through savings account of the beneficiaries is costless. It appears however that the process involves costs – in terms of resources, efforts and time – to the beneficiaries of NREGA, not only in the short term but also even in the long run, given the poor network of banking and postal facilities in rural regions. Thus, the banking procedures also need to be made more conducive for all the respondents.

- **Social audit and Grievance redressal** – Social audits or the process of cross-verification of government records with realities on the ground completes the feedback loop in the accountability chain. It creates a platform for the poorest and most disempowered to participate in governance. Section 17 of the NREGA mandates that regular social audits be conducted in the Gram Sabhas at least once every six months. Contrary to the official website information, the respondents confirmed that no social audit had taken place at any of the selected locales. Hence, social audit system needs to be put in place to ensure transparency and accountability.

The system of continuous monitoring and evaluation at every stage of the program has to be built in order to ensure quality. Central Operational Guidelines delineates that Gram Sabha will monitor all the works implemented at the village level as well as the employment provided to each person who has applied for work. It will also monitor the registration and issue of job cards and the timely payment of wages. For every work sanctioned under the scheme, there should be a local Vigilance and Monitoring Committee, composed of members of the locality or village where the work is undertaken. There was no such Committee at, anywhere and must be constituted in all the villages at the earliest.

The provisions for redressal were also found to be very weak and need to be strengthened. Dome clarity is required on how and which implementing agency is to be held accountable. Though MGNREGA Helpline was initiated in Haryana, the grievance redressal mechanism has not yet become functional. People mainly approach the Sarpanchs and the Secretaries for their problems, though complaints are not made in writing nor are satisfactory responses received against the filed complaints. Due to lack of information and awareness on the part of the Gram Panchayat, the grievances and the problems of the workers are not provided any solution. MGNREGA, being rights based, the workers’ grievances must be addressed timely and adequately.
**Identifying scope for convergence** – Recent thrust on inclusive growth, made explicit in the approach to the 11th Plan, provides ample space and flexibility to policy makers and planners to pursue interventions in a convergence mode. This field based research suggests ways and means to increase the efficacy of MGNREGA, not only to cater to the needs of the people, but also to take this programme to the next level for achieving a sustained process of rural development, much beyond the limited goal of creating employment for unskilled labors. This is where the notion of convergence of schemes across Ministries/Departments becomes relevant. Convergence of various governmental schemes around MGNREGA, if suitably developed, has the potential to safeguard the interest of unskilled labor and degrading natural resources in Mewat. A combined synergy can effectively take care of the short term direct attack on poverty as well as the long term sustained effect through indirect multiplier effect. The problem and opportunity analysis carried out in the villages provided significant information and guidance to this end. A number of opportunities exist for selection of works under MGNREGA that can help overcome livelihood vulnerability in the selected villages. For instance, livestock keeping is an important activity and source of income for a quarter of population in all villages. However, all the respondents mentioned the expensive feed and fodder as a major problem. This can be countered through Azolla cultivation. Similarly, other works such as prawn culture, rain water harvesting, vermicomposting, maintenance of public buildings, reclamation of saline lands etc could be taken up in the studied villages.

Finally, it can be concluded that implementation of MGNREGA was not up to the mark in any of the selected villages as against the officially available data, which conspicuously hides the ground realities. Nevertheless, the potential of this programme to contribute in increasing rural household incomes and development of rural infrastructure is immense. It can certainly change the rural edifice of the district and can act as a model rural development scheme for transforming livelihoods at many levels. If all the sampled GPs in different blocks have failed to initiate the required change and desired impact of MGNREGA, it is time that community participation is strengthened, and sustainable, livelihoods oriented, people centric implementation and evaluation mechanisms at the grassroots level ensured. Without these, even a well designed Policy will fail to leave the desired impact.
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APPENDICES