

# MNREGA: Changing Livelihood of the Beneficiaries in West Bengal

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## ABSTRACT

The study was conducted in two districts, Burdwan and South Dinajpur of west Bengal with 200 MNREGA beneficiaries as respondents to assess the impact of MNREGA on the livelihood security of the beneficiaries. Significant changes were found in food security, income security, habitat security, health security and environmental security of the respondents after working under MNREGA. Majority of the respondents (82.5%) were found to be fallen under medium livelihood security category after MNREGA, whereas 80.5 percent of the respondents were found to be fallen under low livelihood security category before MNREGA. So, majority of the respondents shifted from low to medium livelihood security category after commencement of MNREGA in the study area.

**Key words:** MNREGA, food security, social security, livelihood security

## INTRODUCTION

The concept of 'sustainable rural livelihood' is a central to the debate about rural development, poverty reduction and environmental management. The United Nations Conference on Environment and development (1992) put forward the idea of sustainable livelihoods as an approach to maintain or enhance resource productivity, secure ownership, or the access to the resources and income earning activities as well as to ensure adequate and sustainable flows of food and cash to meet basic needs. And the risk of livelihood failure determines the level of vulnerability of a household to income, food, health and nutritional security. So a livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets (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). And household livelihood security has been defined as an adequate and sustainable access to income and resources to meet basic needs including adequate access

to food, potable water, health facilities, educational opportunities, housing and time for community participation and social integration (Frankenberger, 1996). One of the major goals of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MNREGA), a centrally sponsored flagship programme for rural employment generation, started from 2<sup>nd</sup> February, 2006 is to ensure livelihood security to the rural people. The programme has its unique approach to provide purchasing power to the rural poor by guaranteeing at least one hundred days of wage employment to the rural households when other employment opportunities are lean. Central government is making large public expenditure under MNREGA. In the budget (2009-10), an allocation of Rs 39,100 crore had been made for MNREGA, which is an increase of 144 percent over the 2008-09 budget (16,000 crore). Under such circumstances it became necessary to assess how far the programme was achieving its desired goals in terms of securing livelihood of the rural people. That's why a study was taken up to assess the impact of MNREGA on the livelihood security of the beneficiaries of the programme.