

# **EVALUATION REPORT ON NATIONAL RURAL EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMME (NREP)**

## **1. The Study**

The National Rural Employment Programme (NREP) which replaced the 'Food for work Programme' came into operation from October, 1980. Since 1st April, 1981, it has been implemented as a Centrally Sponsored Scheme. The NREP was conceived as a programme to take care of that segment of rural poor which largely depend on wage employment and has virtually no source of income during the lean agriculture period. It, therefore, aims at providing supplementary employment opportunities to unemployed/underemployed in the rural areas when they are not able to find other gainful employment. The programme is also expected to stabilise the market wage rates in the rural areas at least to the level of statutory minimum wages.

The basic objectives of the NREP are generation of additional gainful employment for the unemployed and underemployed men and women in the rural areas and creation of productive community assets for rapid growth of rural economy, and steady rise in the income levels of the rural poor.

With a view to have a fresh and comprehensive evaluation of NREP, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development suggested to the Programme Evaluation Organisation of the Planning Commission to undertake a study of restructured programme also.

## **2. Objectives of the Study**

The objectives of the present evaluation study were to find out the following:

- i) the extent of additional employment generated in the rural areas and changes in the income levels of the target group of beneficiaries,
- ii) the contribution of the programme to the creation of durable community assets for augmenting production potentials and economic infrastructure of the area,
- iii) the contribution of the programme to the provision of facilities for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes,
- iv) the contribution of the programme to Social Forestry,

- v) the extent to which the relevant agencies, particularly the District Rural Development Agencies (DRDAs), labour intensive works departments and village panchayats, etc. were playing the role envisaged for them in relation to the identification of developmental requirements of the area and formulation of area and target group specific work projects,
- vi) the effectiveness of the administrative set up particularly of the coordinating departments at the State level and the DRDAs in the implementation of the programme, and
- vii) to study the perceptions, reactions and involvement of the beneficiaries as well as officials, non-officials and voluntary organisations with regard to the utility, effectiveness and difficulties of the programme.

### **3. Sample Size/Criteria for Sample Selection**

All the States were listed according to the descending order of employment generated per lakh of population under the programme and were divided into three strata. Three States were then selected randomly from each of these three strata. Total nine states were selected. At the instance of the Planning Commission two more States viz. Bihar and Orissa were added for process evaluation only, that is to study the administrative and management aspects of NREP in these States.

The study was confined only to 11 States namely, Bihar, Gujarat, Jammu & Kashmir, Karnataka, Kerala, Orissa, Punjab, Rajasthan, Tripura, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal. In all 22 districts, 44 blocks and 132 villages were selected. In two of the 11 selected states namely Bihar and Orissa only process evaluation was done.

Following was the coverage of the study:-

- States 11
- Districts 22
- Blocks 44
- Villages 132
- Beneficiaries 1080 (Actual number canvassed 984 in 9 States only)

#### 4. **Reference Period**

The field work was started in April, 1984 and a major part of the field work was completed by the end of October, 1984. However, due to local elections and floods in Tripura and disturbed condition in Punjab the field work could only be completed in January, 1985.

#### 5. **Main Findings**

1. 13.34 lakh tonnes (64.85%) of foodgrains (out of 20.57 lakh tonnes) under the NREP was utilised during the first year of the Sixth Five Year Plan.
2. The level of employment generated was, however, maintained during the rest of the plan period even when there was sharp decline in the quantity of foodgrains distributed as the quantum of wages paid in cash increased significantly.
3. The sharp decline in utilisation of foodgrains was due to difficulties faced in its distribution, reluctance on the part of workers to accept foodgrains either due to their bad quality or foodgrains being cheaper in open market as compared to those supplied under NREP.
4. Except for 1983-84, the employment generation target under NREP was consistently achieved.
5. Though the level of employment generation has almost remained the same the expenditure on NREP has been increasing over the years mainly because of increase in wages and material cost.
6. Except in the selected districts of Gujarat, Kerala, Orissa and Rajasthan not much interest was shown in NREP.
7. The Block Development Officer was over all incharge of the programme at the Block level. However, where the Panchayat Raj bodies were funding at the block level Panchayats were reported to have been actively associated with the formulation and implementation of the programme.
8. Except for North Kannada district of Karnataka, there was no proper maintenance of records for NREP at various levels in the areas studied.
9. Excepting Gujarat, Kerala and Rajasthan none of the other selected States had prepared the shelf of projects. In some selected states, the work in this regard was commenced only in 1982-83 or even after.

10. None of the concerned State Governments had accorded any particular priority to the (i) works taken up in the areas with pre-ponderant SC/ST or landless labourers population, (ii) works relating to the pockets having complaints of concealed bonded labour; and (iii) works benefiting women.
11. Only 167 (17%) beneficiaries said that they were involved in the planning and selection of projects implemented under NREP. Majority of the beneficiaries involved in such exercise were from Rajasthan and Jammu & Kashmir. Suggestions were made only by 23% beneficiaries and these were accepted.
12. 60 percent of the beneficiaries came to know about the NREP through Panchayats, 13 percent through 'Friends' and 40 percent through VLW.
13. Only the states of Karnataka and Tripura were reported to have the system of registration for employment on NREP works.
14. While 87 per cent selected beneficiaries stated that they got work within their villages, 4 percent stated that they got work only outside their villages.
15. About 87.5 percent of the family members who offered themselves for employment got work. Of these who got employment 70 per cent were males and 30 per cent were females.
16. In the case of Punjab and West Bengal, all the family members who offered for employment were given employment.
17. The employment of child labour on NREP works was not significant.
18. NREP works had in general provided some additional employment opportunities. Opportunities made available through NREP works varied widely and even as between selected districts within the same state.
19. The proportion of SC/ST and OBC beneficiary households in the sample was more than 60 percent in case of Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Gujarat, Punjab, West Bengal and Tripura. It was as low as 38 per cent in Rajasthan and 20 percent in Jammu & Kashmir.
20. The analysis according to occupational categories suggest that employment under NREP was in general provided to the categories of workers for whom the programme was intended to benefit.

21. From the information collected from the sample villages, it appeared that schemes benefiting SC/ST population were not taken up by most of the selected States at least in the initial years of the programme.
22. Social Forestry Programme was in operation in sample villages in only States for the period 1981-83. The scheme for creation of water structure were taken up only in the selected villages of Orissa, Tripura and West Bengal. Minor irrigation works were taken up in the villages from 5 selected States namely Gujarat, Kerala, Orissa, Tripura and West Bengal during all the three years between 1981 to 1984.
23. Soil conservation and land reclamation schemes did not appear to have received enough attention in the selected villages.
24. During 1981-82, schemes for providing drinking water facilities were taken up in the sample villages in the States of Gujarat, Kerala, Orissa, Rajasthan and West Bengal.
25. The average wage income per household increased from Rs. 2418 in the pre-NREP year to Rs. 3248 in 1982-83; an increase of 34 percent over the base year.
26. Wage rate per household in Gujarat, Kerala and Uttar Pradesh was higher than in the other states.
27. The average wage rates for NREP workers in 5 of the sample districts were higher than the non-NREP.
28. Of the 558 beneficiaries who received food- grains and wages 46.6 percent reported food to be of approved quality while 53.4 percent reported it to be not good.
29. Regarding the utility and nature of assets created, the findings of the study are as follows:-
  - i) About 32 per cent of the beneficiaries in 6 out of 9 sample studies reported to have worked on the projects falling in the category of community building. It was given high priority in the sample villages in Karnataka, Jammu & Kashmir and Rajasthan.
  - ii) 17 per cent of the sample beneficiaries in 4 out of 9 states had worked on the construction works for minor irrigation.

- iii) Works for providing drinking water facilities were taken up in the sample areas of only 5 of the selected States.
30. The pavement of street and construction of drains in villages were the priority needs in Punjab which were expected to improve the living condition of the village community in general.
31. It was observed that for all the sample villages taken together the 'construction of rural roads' accounted for a predominant part of the total value of assets created. It was taken up in the sample villages in 8 out of 11 sample villages.
32. Of the total value of assets created under all types of schemes during 1981-82, about 88 per cent was reported as that of durable assets and the remaining 12 per cent as that of non-durable assets.
33. It was found that the Panchayats had no uniform role in the implementation of NREP in different States/districts. However, by and large, Panchayat Samities played an important role in respect of the NREP works in most of the States, and particularly in Gujarat, Jammu & Kashmir, Karnataka, Tripura and West Bengal.
34. It was observed that in none of the 22 selected districts from 11 States any voluntary organisation of repute was involved in the execution of the permissible works under NREP nor had any such voluntary organisation come forward to take up the work.

## **6. Major Suggestions**

1. The State Governments should take effective steps to convene the meetings of the State Level Committee as required under the guidelines. In order to have an effective watch over the implementation of NREP at various levels, the members of these Committees should undertake field visits, frequently.
2. It is desirable that the statistical agencies at the state and district levels are increasingly utilised, not only for generating the statistical data required for planning rural programmes like NREP but also for the system of monitoring and assessing the progress of such programmes.

3. The maintenance of records and data pertaining to the works undertaken/assets created should be streamlined at all levels and should be strictly in accordance with the guidelines issued.
4. Ways and means should be found to ensure that the figures of mandays of employment generated recorded and reported in the progress reports are those of actual employment and not rough and ready estimates.
5. Arrangements for monitoring and progress reporting should be strengthened and improved.
6. The schemes and projects under NREP should be planned by the State Governments more scientifically and systematically and in accordance with the priorities and objectives laid down in the guidelines.
7. The feasibility of collecting such data at shorter intervals or at least at the end of each plan should be considered by the Ministry of Planning (Central Statistical Organisation) and the State Statistical Bureaus.
8. In view of the importance of these data for macro as well as micro level planning such data should be collected more scientifically as a separate survey instead of combining it with the Economic Census.
9. Besides the panchayats, the State Governments should take suitable steps to actively involve the BDOs, VLWs and other block staff in the programme so that the rural poor come to know of the employment opportunities available through NREP works in their respective areas.
10. All State Governments should adopt the system of registration of poor families so that the manpower required for executing different NREP works can be organised as and when required and the workers on the look out for employment on such works can be informed about the availability of employment.
11. The wages paid should be higher if the place of work is at more than a convenient distance i.e. 4 kilometers. This additional wage component could be in the form of an additional quantity of foodgrains.
12. The concerned State district authorities should take effective steps to streamline the arrangements for the distribution of foodgrains under NREP and ensure that good quality foodgrains are distributed to the beneficiaries under the programme.