



By Sanjeev Kumar Patro

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‘Shoddy works undermined NREGA’

BHUBANESWAR: The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) has failed to achieve its set objectives in Orissa, an evaluation study on NREGA by the National Council of Applied Economic Research and Public Interest Foundation (NCAER-PIF) has concluded.

Hailed as panacea for the poor states like Orissa, the programme is yet to come even close to its mandated outcomes like augmenting income of the poor and building durable economic assets in the rural areas. The shoddy development works undertaken by the State and the fast rising consumer price index has completely negated the outcome of the Act in the State, says the study. Instead of showing a rise in trend under effect of NREGA, the prevailing lowest farm wage rates in the rural Orissa have deteriorated further.

The average annual change in nominal wages during the NREGA implementation in 2006-07 and 2007-08 registered a dip of 0.7 per cent for men and 8.6 per cent for women in the farm sector. The pre-NREGA growth has been pegged at 5.6 per cent for men and 13.7 per cent for women. However, the nominal wage rates in the non-farm sector showed a rise of 6.8 and 5.5 per cent for men and women respectively.

The real wages during the implementation years of 2006 to 2008 recorded a slide for both the farm and nonfarm sectors in Orissa with the average annual change going down by 8.5 per cent for men and 15.8 per cent for women in the farm sector and of 1.5 per cent for men and 2.7 per cent for women in the non-farm sector. In the pre-NREGA years growth was 2.4 for men and 10.4 for women in the farm sector and 1.2 and negative 0.6 for women in non-farm sector. The study has attributed the downtrend to more than 2.5 times rise in the consumer price index (CPI) in Orissa.

The imprudent approach of the Government has also failed the NREGA in building up of durable economic assets in the rural areas. Funds were utilised for building kaccha roads to provide rural connectivity. Lack of proper planning has also affected the NREGA implementation in 2007-08 as of the 40,000 odd works taken up, a mere 6.4 per cent stands completed.

Currently under NREGA, rural connectivity works take a share of 38 per cent against 44 per cent in 2006-07. The Government has taken up more irrigation works in 2007-08 with the share moving up to 54 per cent against 26 per cent in 2006-07. But the number of works completed stands at mere 3.2 per cent, with none of the works under rural connectivity getting completed in 2007-08, notes the study.

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