

Distress migration from KBK region continues unabated

- [Satyasundar Barik](#)

Even though the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) is widely perceived as a tool to reduce migration from villages to cities for work, this hardly holds true in the case of Odisha.

Distress migration from the KBK region of Odisha continues unabated despite decade-long implementation of the rural employment scheme.

Bitter experience

Residents of Budamunda, a small habitation in Belpada block of Odisha's Bolangir district, narrate the job scarcity affecting livelihood better than anybody else. The village has about 135 households. Now 100 families have migrated to work in harsh conditions in brick kilns of southern Indian States.

"Villagers cannot be assured of adequate jobs to remain here. Many have bitter experience of waiting for months to get their MGNREGA payments. Under the circumstances, migration remains the only option," said Rupdhar Deep, a resident of Budamunda, who was rescued from bonded labour in the past.

In Mallickpada village in neighbouring Patnagarh block, 100 out of 233 students enrolled in the village school have accompanied their parents to other States this year. The story of migration often ending in bondage and torture at workplaces is quite common in districts such as Nuapada, Bolangir, Bargarh, Kalahandi, Subarnapur and Boudh.

"The MGNREGA had received tremendous response in rural and tribal regions for ushering employment and investment on rejuvenation of natural resources and productive assets. However, the performance of MGNREGA in Odisha in comparison with other States was quite discouraging," said Umi Daniel, a prominent researcher on migration and poverty.

In 2012-13, Odisha provided an average of 46 work days to people availing the scheme. But in the ensuing years, the figures show a downward trend. While in 2013-14, average work days were 35 days, in 2014-15 it came down to 31 days. In terms of providing 100 days of guaranteed employment to families, the figure is abysmally low at 5 per cent in 2012-13, 9 per cent in 2013-14, and 6 per cent in 2015.

'Not many have bank accounts'

Further, an average of 9 per cent people get 40 to 50 days of work during last three years. Only 62 per cent of job card holder families are having bank accounts in their names, while 24 per cent have their accounts at post office, says a study by a forum of civil society organisations of south and western Odisha. Rest 15 per cent of MGNREGA beneficiary families are yet to open an account in their names.

The Odisha government in response to a query in the State Assembly recently had informed that 1,35,713 workers migrated from different districts in 2014. Highest 40,751 had migrated from Bolangir district, where only 4,000 families were provided 100 days of work in 2014-15 while average 34 of days of work were made available to people.

"Apart from unavailability of work, the delay in payment under MGNREGA had hit rural populace in KBK region. Most of workers want day's wage after completion of day's work. Due to this reason, most people prefer to work in other States than availing the same in their own village," Mr. Daniel said.

"The delay in payment under MGNREGA had also hit rural populace in KBK region"