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Impact of MGNREGA on Women Empowerment: A Review of Literature

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Abstract: It is common in the developing countries that women are being ignored since pre-historic time. The primary objectives of the research are to study the impact of MGNREGA on women empowerment and to identify the obstacles in the path of the implementation of the scheme. The empowerment of rural women is crucial for the development of the rural Bharat. Women have to empower themselves from below in order to make the government to empower them from above. In the words “empowering women is a precondition for creating a good nation, when women are empowered, society with stability is assured”. National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) enacted by legislation on August 25, 2005 and it was renamed as the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) on 2nd October 2009. The MGNREGA has *positive* impact on empowerment and employment pattern of women in recent years. It aims at enhancing livelihood security by providing at least 100 days of guaranteed wage employment in a financial year to every rural household especially for women. Women participation has increased significantly and perceived it giving them a sense of independence and security. The purpose of the study is to examine the women empowerment and a review of literature that has been done on this scheme. The research conducted descriptive study and the secondary data was used like books, newspaper, journals, and magazines for this study.

Introduction

The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) was enacted in September 5, 2005. It came into force on February 2, 2006, and it was implemented in a phase manner. In phase – 1 the programme was introduced in 200 most backward districts of the country. It was implemented in additional 130 district in 2007-08 under phase – II, the scheme was extended to the remaining 274 rural districts of India from April 1, 2008 in phase – III. NREGA now covers all rural areas of the country. The NREGA has been renamed as MGNREGA in October 2, 2009.

The Act provides a legal guarantee of 100 days work in a financial year to every rural household whose adult members are willing to do unskilled manual work at a directive minimum wage rate. The empowerment of rural women is crucial for the development of the rural Bharat. Women have to empower themselves from below in order to make the government to empower them from above. The MGNREGA has positive impact on empowerment and employment pattern of women in recent years. With this scheme Women participation has increased significantly and perceived it giving them a sense of independence and security. Women play an important role in the growth of the society as well as the country. Therefore, it is very important to empower women. Empowerment of women refers to the influence of decision making of their own. The study focuses on performance of MGNREGA across the country and empowering women through this scheme lays the basis for greater independence and also for self esteem. It has become a beacon of light in the empowerment of the rural women and contributed substantially for improving their lifestyle and economic conditions.

Progress of MGNREGA in India

For almost a decade of application, this scheme has been positive in ensuring livelihood for the deprived people in rural areas. During the year 2013-14, 3.8 crores household were given employment and total of 135 crores person-days of employment have been produced. Out of 135 crore, 73.33 crore were for women, 21.9 crore for ST's and 31.53 crore for SC's.

MGNREGA aims at enhancing livelihood security of the households in rural areas of the country by providing at least one hundred days of guaranteed wage employment in a financial year. The allocation of Rs.48,000 crore for the FY 2017-18, is the highest ever allocation for MGNREGA. Under MGNREGA, 235.15 crore, 235.64 crore and 234.27 crore person days of unskilled employment were generated during 2015-16, 2016-17 and 2017-18, respectively.

In 2017-18, 4.35 crore households have been provided employment in 156 lakh works. In the process, 160 crore person days of employment have been generated. Out of the total employment, 54% have been generated for women, well above the statutory requirement of 33%. During 2018-19, 85.61 crore (as on 27.07.2018) person days of unskilled employment has been generated. (ministry of rural development).

In the Financial Year 2018-19, so far 92% wage payments under Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) has been generated within 15 days. This percentage was 26.85% in 2014-15, indicating

the remarkable improvement towards making timely payments. The allocation of MGNREGA was also increased to a record Rs. 55,000 crore in 2018-19. So far, the Central Government has released over Rs. 45,070 crore to the States. (Ministry of Rural development).

Methodology

The present work was based on descriptive study and secondary data was used for this study. The required materials have been derived from various sources like newspapers, magazines, web-sites, books which deal directly or indirectly with the topic related with this study. No primary data was used for this study.

Salient Features of the Act

- Adult members of a rural household, willing to do unskilled manual work, may apply for registration in writing or orally to the local Gram Panchayat.
- The Gram Panchayat after due verification will issue a Job Card. The Job Card will bear the photograph of all adult members of the household willing to work under MGNREGA and is free of cost.
- The Job Card should be issued within 15 days of application.
- A Job Card holder may submit a written application for employment to the Gram Panchayat, stating the time and duration for which work is sought. The minimum days of employment have to be at least fourteen.
- The Gram Panchayat will issue a dated receipt of the written application for employment, against which the guarantee of providing employment within 15 days operates.
- Employment will be given within 15 days of application for work, if it is not then daily unemployment allowance as per the Act, has to be paid liability of payment of unemployment allowance is of the States.
- Work should ordinarily be provided within 5 km radius of the village. In case work is provided beyond 5 km, extra wages of 10% are payable to meet additional transportation and living expenses.
- Wages are to be paid according to the Minimum Wages Act 1948 for agricultural labourers in the State, unless the Centre notifies a wage rate which will not be less than Rs. 60/ per day. Equal wages will be provided to both men and women.
- Wages are to be paid according to piece rate or daily rate. Disbursement of wages has to be done on weekly basis and not beyond a fortnight in any case.
- At least one-third beneficiaries shall be women who have registered and requested work under the scheme.
- Work site facilities such as crèche, drinking water, shade have to be provided.

- The shelf of projects for a village will be recommended by the gram sabha and approved by the Zilla panchayat.
- At least 50% of works will be allotted to Gram Panchayats for execution.
- Permissible works predominantly include water and soil conservation, afforestation and land development works.
- A 60:40 wage and material ratio has to be maintained. No contractors and machinery is allowed.
- The Central Government bears the 100 percent wage cost of unskilled manual labour and 75 percent of the material cost including the wages of skilled and semi-skilled workers.
- Social Audit has to be done by the Gram Sabha.

WORKS TO BE PERFORMED UNDER MGNREGA

The MGNREGA document has envisaged that the focus of the scheme will be on the following work in order of priority:

1. Water conservation and water harvesting.
2. Drought proofing (including afforestation and tree plantation).
3. Irrigation canals including micro and minor irrigation works.
4. Provision of irrigation facility to land owned by households belonging to the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes.
5. Renovation of traditional water bodies including desalting of tanks.
6. Land development & soil conservation works.
7. Flood control and protection work including drainage in water logged areas.
8. Rural connectivity to provide all-weather access. The construction of roads may include culverts where necessary and within the village area may be taken up along with drains.
9. The state government may notify any other work in consultation with the central government.

FUNDING

The Central Government bears the costs on the following items:

1. The entire cost (100 percent) of wages of unskilled manual workers.
2. 75 percent of the cost of material, wages of skilled and semi-skilled workers.
3. Administrative expenses as may be determined by the Central Government, which will include, inter alia, the salary and the allowances of the Programme Officer and his supporting staff and work site facilities.

The State Government bears the costs on the following items:

1. 25 percent of the cost of material, wages of skilled and semi-skilled workers.
2. Unemployment allowance payable in case the State Government cannot provide wage employment on time.
3. Administrative expenses of the State Employment Guarantee Council.
4. Districts have dedicated accounts for Mahatma Gandhi NREGA funds. Proposals are submitted based on clearly delineated guidelines so that funds may be distributed efficiently at each level, and adequate funds may be available to respond to demand. Under Mahatma Gandhi NREGA, fund releases are based on an appraisal of both financial and physical indicators of outcomes.

Labour Budget:

The District Programme Coordinator prepares the Labour Budget in the month of December every year for the next financial year containing the details of anticipated demand for unskilled manual work under the scheme and submits it to the District Panchayat. The Ministry of Rural Development estimates the requirement of funds on the basis of projections made in the Labour Budget. Central funds are sanctioned after the examination of Labour Budgets and taking into account utilization of funds previously released.

Women Empowerment through MGNREGA: Literature Review

There are many studies conducted related to the Impact of MGNREGA on women's participation and their empowerment, which are as follows:-

Maurya (2004) also identified why Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) is very essential for rural areas, because more than 70% Indian population lives in rural areas and the unemployment rate is also higher in rural areas (because of the dependence on agriculture and its declining growth rate). As rural areas retains the largest proportion of population as well as labour force. In 2004-05, 348 million workers lived in rural areas and the majority of them (56.5% of the total workers) earned their livelihood from agriculture. But in agriculture sector, the employment is only for a short period of time and rest the time they are unemployed. (O.P.Maurya, 2004; 48)

Sudha Narayanan (2007) conducted a survey on the sideline of social audit regarding women participation and crèche facilities in Villupuram district (Tamil Nadu) from July 29 to 31 under MGNREGA. The survey covered 15 MGNREGA worksites of 11 villages located in two blocks (Tirukovilor and Tiruvennainellur) of Villupuram district (Tamil Nadu). A total of 104 women workers with at least one child below the age of six years were interviewed. The survey found that 41 percent women were getting income from MGNREGA and most of them belonged to SC's and ST's in the district. In Vengur village the scheme solved the problem of water scarcity, which was available from the pond constructed under MGNREGA. Thiathanur village residents were dependent on the mercy of the Zamindars, but

MGNREGA gave them a sense of independent and security by providing them work. So the scheme was a lifeline for the rural people. Some of them said that they would „starve“ without MGNREGA. 41 percent respondents declared that MGNREGA has been the only source of income for the households in the past few months. 95 percent said that it was their own decision to work under MGNREGA. MGNREGA was the only option when there was no agricultural work. The problem faced by women at worksites of childcare. There was no arrangement of crèche at the worksites and childcare was a significant problem for many of them. 70 percent of the women interviewed said that there was no childcare facility at the worksite. Of the remaining 30 percent, many were unsure if the “shed” at the worksite was really meant to be a crèche. Of the 104 women 50 percent left their children at home, while 19 percent brought their children at worksite. About 12 percent of the respondents reported leaving their children at the „balwadi“ or „anganwadi“ and around 11 percent at schools.

Nirmala Laxman (2007) described the consequences of the social audit done in Villupuram district of Tamil Nadu, 70 percent families have got job cards and they got an average of 25 days employment from April to September 2007. Most surprisingly the share of the women was 82 percent. Labourers were earning Rs. 80 per day within a week. There was no contractor or machine at worksites. Saumya Kidambi of Majdoor Kissan Shakti Sangathan says that when the women of the Villupuram district heard about the scheme they reached at the worksites. As soon as they got their wages they buy a convenient basket. The local shopkeeper started selling „baskets“ and the local people called it “100 dinon ki tokri” (The basket for 100 days). In this region this is the sign of empowerment of women and their increasing economic status. There were also some discrepancy but it was negligible.

Amrita Chatterjee (2011) studied Employment guarantee and women’s empowerment in rural India. Assessing institutional and government need. The study shows that if the male members in a family get more employment opportunities, then the women workers of the families may withdraw the work and for the lack of awareness of the women participation of Gram Sabha is low. The study also finds that in the working place the women workers facing many problems like payment, low level awareness and worksite facilities etc.

Dinesh (2012) the paper examines India’s MGNREGA it impact on women participation. The analysis brings the notice that MGNREGA has positive impact on employment pattern of women. The women have benefited both individual and financially with this scheme.

Gowhar Bashir Ahangar (2014) analyzed the women participation in MGNREGA special reference to Anantnag Districts in Jammu and Kashmir. The study examine that 90% of the surveyed respondents believe after joining in MGNREGA their socio-economic status has improved and the participation of women in Gram Sabha is also increased.

Kartika K.T (2015) study that Impact of MGNREGA on socio-economic development and women empowerment. The paper finds the major issue that panchayats successfully implemented to this programme in the study area and most of the workers are women. This scheme improves the communication, participation, decision making among women workers and most of the workers are saving their money in saving account, insurance etc.

Women's participation in the scheme has enabled them to come out of their homes not only for the purpose of work but to visit panchayat offices and bank which was absent in the earlier days. This has uplifted the women in the society to a higher status of becoming income earning workers. Women remains confined to the household chores, occupation and in formulation of social safeguard policy. There is a refusal to accept the dual role of women in as care givers and income earners in the family as a collective concern of the state. Since women remain as caregivers of the family, their comfort zone of work area is their home with flexible timings etc. all fulfilled by MGNREGA. The Government should create more awareness programme for rural women so that they could know the important provision made for them in MGNREGA.

PROGRAMME IMPLEMENTATION AND OUTCOMES

Outcomes of programme implementation in the year 2012-13 (upto 12.2.2013) are as follows:

1. Employment generated: In 2012-13, 4.48 crore households were provided employment and 163.38 crore persondays of employment were generated.
2. Increasing outreach to the poor and marginalized: Self targeting in nature, the programme had high work participation for marginalized groups like SC/ST (38%), Women (53%) in 2012-13.
3. Strengthening Natural Resource Base: In 2012-13, 64.54 lakh works were undertaken, of which 58% for water conservation, 12% for the provision of irrigation facility to land owned by SC/ST/BPL and IAY beneficiaries, 18% for rural connectivity and 8% for land development.
4. Financial Inclusion of the Poor: With a view to universalise the system of wage payments through individual accounts, it has been recommended to all States to disburse wages through Post Offices and Bank Accounts. 8.71 crore (as per MIS) Mahatma Gandhi NREGA bank and post office accounts have been opened to disburse wages.
5. Mahatma Gandhi NREGA in Left Wing Extremism (LWE) Districts: The Ministry reviews the implementation of Mahatma Gandhi NREGA in LWE districts. During the financial year 2012-13 the average persondays of employment per household is 33 days. The percentage of women participation was 47 as compared to the national average of 53. The percentage of HHs which completed 100 days of employment is 4.24 as compared to national average of 4.59.

Conclusion

This study concludes by an observation through literature review that this act is really leads to women empowerment through active participation of women in this scheme. MGNREA has certainly empowered women workers economically and socially, such as increase in participation of women in planning and social audits of MGNREGA implementaion of better worksite facilities, proper payment of wages, planning of works will encourage women to demand more work under this scheme.

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