



Socio-Economic Empowerment of WOMEN

Initiatives for Impoverished

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MGNREGA as Instrument of Gender Mainstreaming—A Micro Level Analysis

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Abstract—The Census of 2011 estimates that 833million people currently live in rural India. They depend for their livelihood largely on crop and animal husbandry, fisheries, and Agro-forestry. In spite of all Government programmes in the area of social safety nets, 26 crores of people still live below poverty line. MGNREGA provides for the enhancement of livelihood security of the households in rural areas of the country by providing at least one hundred days of guaranteed wage employment in a year. The programme will have significant positive impact on seasonal rural-urban migration by providing rural workers with employment during lean season. This will reduce problem of excessive population pressure in villages. Before MGNREGA, these tribal villages had no option but to move from place to place during off-agricultural season. But with the employment Guarantee Scheme in place, they have a source of livelihood during drought and lean season. This paper focuses on the impact of MGNREGA on the enhancement of economic and livelihood security among women.

INTRODUCTION

Poverty reduction has been a important goal of development since the inception of planning in India. Various anti-poverty, employment generation and basic series programmes have been in operation for decades in India. These programmes were targeted at poor and women and these programmes have been streamlined and strengthened in recent years. One of the goals for the developing countries in the millennium Development goals is to end poverty by 2015; alleviation of poverty by implementing anti-poverty programmes is a long term goal of government of India.

The current Indian economy is on a higher growth strategy, but it still suffers from high incidence of poverty and unemployment in India. The majority of rural people of the country largely depends on earning through unskilled causal manual labour. The inadequate labour demand in lean periods or unpredictable events like natural disaster or personal ill health, all such have adverse impact on level of employment, income and livelihood securities of rural population.

The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) has been passed by the Government of India in 2005 as a national initiative for generating employment opportunities in rural areas and thereby enhancing livelihood security. The NREGA was implemented in 200 backward districts of the country which was later extended to cover other district during 2007-08. Since April 2008 the scheme has been implemented in all districts also.

The primary objective of MGNREGA is to provide not less than 100 days of guaranteed employment in a financial year to every rural household who are willingness to do unskilled manual work. The secondary objectives are the creation of durable commodity asset and development of infrastructure. The scheme has additional objective of providing 1/3rd of employment to women with a purpose of empowering them.

The main features of MGNREGA are:

- It is open to all rural households who are in need of wage employment.
- Those who are willing to do unskilled manual work may submit an application form to the local Gram Panchayat which issues job card that is valid for a five years.

- Employment should be provided **within a radius** of five kilometres of village where the applicant resides.
- Every person who has found **the work is entitled** to receive agricultural minimum wages as notified by the State Government.
- Wages will be distributed **on the weekly basis** through individual account opened in Schedule commercial banks or **post office**.

Table 1: Status and Progress of NREGA Implementation in India (2006-07 to 2010-11)

Indicators	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11
No. of districts	200	331	615	615	615
Households provided work (in Million)	21.02	33.91	45.11	52.53	54.95
Person days (in Million)	905.60	1436.80	2163.35	2835.96	2571.52
Women days (%)	40.63	42.52	47.88	48.10	47.73
SC days (%)	25.34	27.44	29.29	30.48	30.63
ST days (%)	36.43	29.27	25.43	20.71	20.85
Funds allotted (in Million)	102736	192788	363005	456825	526489
Funds utilized (in Million)	88234	159998	272501	379098	393773
Funds utilized (%)	73.08	82.99	75.07	82.99	74.79
Works: total (in Lakhs)	8.42	17.92	39.89	46.17	50.83
Completed (%)	47.15	45.93	30.43	48.94	50.88
Ongoing (%)	52.85	54.07	69.57	51.06	49.12
NREGA income per Household (Rs.)	1920	2973	3899	4401	4113
Person days of work per Household	43.08	42.37	47.96	53.99	46.80

Source: Compiled from NREGA Reports

The volume of employment generated (number of person days) had more than tripled from 905.6 million persons days in 2006-07 to 2836 million in 2009-10 with an annual increase of about 47 percent during the four year period. However, there was a notable decline in employment during 2010-11 despite an increase in the number of households provided with work. There was also an impressive growth in all the indicators of performance under NREGA as evident from the table, particularly, with respect to coverage of households, person days, socio-economically weaker (SC/ST) sections as well as transfer of wage income per household, which increased almost four times during the reference period.

One of the most crucial and socially beneficial outcomes of the NREGS is the increasing levels of women work participation along with emphasis on narrowing down the gender wage gap across states. As evident from table, the share of women in the total employment provided under the scheme has increased from 40.63 percent during 2006-07 to 48 percent during 2008-09 which remained so in the later years as well. While the share of SC communities had increased by 5 percent from 25 percent to 30.63 percent that of ST communities had declined by more than 16 percent. It may also be noted that the progress in employment generated had also corresponded with substantial increase in financial allocations, though there exists a persistent gap in the utilization of funds.

The employment generation under the scheme also resulted in assets creation on a significant scale, a major chunk of which was in the form of water conservation as well as water harvesting during the last six years ever since the launching of the scheme.

The benefits under NREGs are numerous and not just limited to enhancing economic and social, potentials of supplementing income through wage earnings, savings and investment, financial inclusion, providing employment but also has many multiplier effects in terms of building social and physical capital. The NREGA achieves twin objective of rural development and employment.

The number of studies were taken up by NGOs, researcher, institution etc which examined into implementation, functioning and impact aspects of MNREGA. Some studies found visible positive impact on MNREGA on employment, income, out-migration and food security of rural

poor household. It also impacted on the agricultural and non-agricultural wage studies reported delayed wage payment, non-payment of minimum wages and allowances, fake entries, error in wage calculation, corruptions, irregularities etc.

A quick micro level study was undertaken in the rural area viz among 30 women benefits of NREGA scheme. The major findings of the study are:

- Most of the women belong to 21-35 years.
- All of them participated in NREGS programme mainly to due to non-availability of continuous employment opportunities in the agricultural sector.
- The major types of work were construction of roads, mini bridge, digging holes, planting trees.
- The household level of income sustainability increased after participating in NREGS.
- The number of days of unemployment faced was only voluntary.
- Wages are fixed at the rate of Rs 160 per day for women.
- Savings also increased among women and they were deposited in banks.

CONCLUSION

Based on evaluation carried out at field level, it can be inferred that MNREGA holds the key to the development of country's vast rural population. The programme deemed to have huge potential in empowering rural communities. The programme is capable of enhancing income level, food security and livelihood security of rural poor on a sustainable manner. Further MNREGA brought out very positive changes in respect of employment, income wage-rate.

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