

Empowerment of rural women through MGNREGA-a study of MGNREGA implementation in Ghorawal block of Sonbhadra district of Uttar Pradesh

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Abstract

Gender is the inevitable push factor for growth and development of a nation like India. Though women have been contributing to economic productivity since the dawn of human history, their role has been visualized as a passive one. Moreover, it is observed that women are often experienced the situation of extreme poverty which are further aggravated by household and social discrimination. Women empowerment especially economic empowerment is the only way by which it can be possible to give equal status to women in a male dominated society. To be empowered, women should come forward and realize that they are not second grade citizen of the society and at the same time also equally capable with men in all aspects of livelihood. Their empowerment has a great potential in leading the country to spectacular development. The achievement of inclusive growth and overall development is highly dependent on the gender equality and prosperity of women in the rural society. The eleventh five-year plan marks a significant departure from the conventional way of looking at women in plan document. It tries to mark the centrality of women in all sectors. It explicitly recognizes that women are not just equal citizens but agents of economic and social growth. A major initiative taken by the Government of India to raise the level of socio-economic status of the rural people under the Ministry of Rural Development is the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA). The implementation of MGNREGA has been positively affecting the rural life as well as empowering the women of India in various aspects. This paper will mainly focus on the impact of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) on the empowerment of women in the five gaon panchayats of Ghorawal Block of Sonbhadra district of Uttar Pradesh. It also focusses on the prospects and problems of women empowerment through MGNREGA and will try to provide some recommendations to overcome the shortcomings.

Keywords: MGNREGA, Women and Empowerment.

Gender is the inevitable push factor for growth and development of a nation like India. Though women have been contributing to economic productivity since the dawn of human history, their role has been visualized as a passive one. Moreover, it is observed that women are often experienced the situation of extreme poverty which are further aggravated by household and social discrimination. In spite of the given provisions in our constitution, the harsh reality of deprivation and degradation continues. The old system of considering women as

the property of men is still deep rooted as an instinct in the society. The changes have taken place in a significant portion of urban women, but their counterparts living in rural areas are only marginally affected by these changes. Women empowerment especially economic empowerment is the only way by which it can be possible to give equal status to women in a male dominated society. To be empowered, women should come forward and realize that they are not second grade citizen of the society and at the same time also equally capable with men in all aspects of

livelihood. Their empowerment has a great potential in leading the country to a spectacular development. The achievement of inclusive growth and overall development is highly dependent on the gender equality and prosperity of women in the rural society. The Eleventh Five Year Plan marks a significant departure from the conventional way of looking at women in plan document. It tries to mark the centrality of women in all sectors. It explicitly recognizes that women are not just equal citizens but agents of economic and social growth. A major initiative taken by the Government of India in the Eleventh Five Year Plan to raise the level of socio-economic status of the rural people under the Ministry of Rural Development is the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA). The implementation of MGNREGA has been positively affecting the rural life as well as empowering the women of India in various aspects.

MGNREGA and Empowerment of Women: A Positive Initiative:

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) is a landmark legislation passed by the parliament of India after a successful struggle for employment guarantee legislation. MGNREGA as a flagship programme of Government of India was notified on September 7, 2005 in 200 rural districts in its first phase of implementation which took an effect from February 2, 2006. In 2007–08, it was extended to an additional 130 rural districts. The remaining districts were notified under MGNREGA with effect from April 1, 2008. Since then MGNREGA has covered the entire country with the exception of districts that have a hundred percent urban population. The main objective of the Act is to enhance livelihood security of the rural household by providing at least 100 days of guaranteed wage employment in a financial year to every household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work. It was essentially a programme to provide basic income and employment opportunities to poor households in rural areas where opportunities of work did not exist

or was very limited. The programme is different from earlier wage employment programs in terms of its right based and demand driven approach to public work. This Act is the largest ever public programme that goes beyond poverty alleviation and recognizes employment as a legal right. There is much that the MGNREGA promises from the perspective of women empowerment as well. Although, the programme was EMPOWERMENT OF RURAL WOMEN THROUGH MGNREGA-A STUDY OF MGNREGA IMPLEMENTATION IN GHORAWAL BLOCK OF BARPETA DISTRICT OF SONBHADRA never conceived as an exclusive programme for empowerment of women, certain provisions in the act, the scale and flexibility of operation of the programme and the prevailing societal and economic realities of the country made it to emerge as a programme with overtones for empowerment of poor rural women.

Women Related Provisions of the Act:

These very provisions of the Act some way have become very handy for women in increasing their magnitude of empowerment:

- The Act is inclusive in nature. It specifies that a minimum of one-third of the beneficiaries of the scheme are to be women who have registered and demanded employment under the scheme.
- The Act is also gender sensitive. It provides that there shall be no discrimination solely on the ground of gender in providing employment and equal wages between men and women have also been a major incentive for women.
- The MGNREGA in India is an example of important safety nets for women, allowing childcare facilities to be provided on worksites and requiring provision of work close to participants' homes.
- MGNREGA is seen to be a policy response of the Government of India to a situation of poverty and inequality.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

There are a large number of works relating to impact of MGNREGA on empowerment of women. In this

study I have re-viewed only few important ones to understand the concept and to link them. These are: Ashok Pankaj and Rukmini Tankha (2010) in their article 'Empowerment Effects of the NREGS on Women Workers: A Study in Four States' examines the empowerment effects of the NREGA on rural women in Bihar, Jharkhand, Rajasthan and Himachal Pradesh. In this paper, they analyzed that women have gained more opportunity because of cash payment in hand through the scheme as a result they have benefitted through income-consumption effects, intra-household effects, and the enhancement of choice and capability than before.

Ramesh & Kumar (2009) in their study also found that MGNREGA holds the powerful prospect of bringing major changes in the lives of women. MGNREGA is playing a substantial role in empowering women economically and laying the basis for greater independence and self-esteem.

Babita Pandey and Tanveer Ahmedwani (2014) study focused on women participation in MGNREGA in Kashmir. The study shows that role of women in MGNREGA is a distant dream of achieving for it was meant and finds that Kashmir has the lowest percent-age of women participation.

Lavanya and Mahima (2013) determined the scope of women empowerment through MGNREGA in Palakkad. The results of the study showed that MGNREGA had made the women beneficiaries economically independent and it was also concluded that the programme had laid a foundation for self-esteem and independence for women beneficiaries. Hazarika (2009) examined the impact of MGNREGA on gender empowerment in Morigaon and Bongaigaon district of Assam. This study showed that almost 70 to 80 percent of sample workers had meaningful income other than unpaid family work during the pre-NREGA. Majority of the worker felt that they are now in better position to fulfill their own requirement without looking at others.

Khera and Nayak (2009) through their sample survey in six Hindi speaking states of North India focuses on impact of NREGA in the lives of women workers.

This study reveals that there are significant benefits reported by women include increased food security and better ability to avoid hazardous work.

Panda et.al (2009) through their study found that this act empowered rural tribal women in Sikkim and Meghalaya by enhancing their confidence level and by ensuring some degree of financial independence. They mentioned that in the traditional institution like Durbars women are not allowed to have political representation. But mandatory involvement of women in PRI institution has given boost to women empowerment in the state.

Significance of The Study:

The government of India has repeatedly redesigned various employment generation programs to meet the problem of poverty and unemployment from time to time. MGNREGA is the first programme in India that has promised to provide the legal right to work. Though the main aim of the Act is to generate employment in rural areas, but apart from this, there are several secondary benefits lies in the Act in the form of women empowerment. As such the society in the rural areas of Sonbhadra district is highly male dominated. The women cannot take decision on their own without consulting their husbands or fathers neither do they have control over household productive activity such as farming. But these women usually contribute to farming activities such as harvesting and storage of farm produce which are controlled by the male members of the house. Therefore, it is necessary to know their opinion regarding the programme to get a clear picture about the success of MGNREGA. Though many studies have been conducted on women empowerment through MGNREGA, Sonbhadra district remains under-researched in this aspect. Hence the present study aims to fill this gap.

Objectives of the Study:

The broad objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To examine the impact of MGNREGA on socio economic empowerment of women beneficiaries of five GP of Ghorawal Block.

2. To find out the problems in the implementation of MGNREGA.

3. To suggest measures for more effective implementation of MGNREGA based on the findings of the field study.

Methodology:

There are eight Blocks in Sonbhadra district. Only five Gaon panchayat of Ghorawal Block has been selected for the purpose of the study. These are Sahpurwa khurd, Bhulahi, Bhruha, Sonhati and Dohari GPs. The total sample size is 50 and 10 samples from each gaon panchayat have been selected randomly from Ghorawal Block. The targeted groups for the study were the women beneficiaries of MGNREGA.

The study is based on both primary and secondary data. The primary data are collected through questionnaires & personal interview. A structured questionnaire was designed to find out responses for the impact of MGNREGA on socio economic empowerment of women. The sources of secondary data included various books, magazines, journals, internet and official website of MGNREGA of Sonbhadra district. The study is limited to the five gaon panchayats of Ghorawal Block of Sonbhadra district of Uttar Pradesh.

Data Analysis

Age of the Respondants: It reveals from the Table-1 that out of the total sample of 50, the dominant age group is of 18-32 years which constitutes 50% followed by that of 31-45 years which constitutes 32%. Besides 12% of women workers are in the age group of 46-60. A small portion of women i.e 6% belong to the age group of 60 years and above.

Marital Status: Data reveals that 80% women workers under MGNREGA are married, 8% are unmarried and 12% women are widow who are the sole earner of their families.

Educational Qualification of Respondants:

Education plays an important role in creating awareness and increase participation of women in the scheme. 18% of the respondents are illiterate, 40% completed their primary education, 20% completed middle level education, 6% sample has completed secondary education and 16% respondents can only read and write their names.

Benefit of women beneficiaries under MGNREGA and control of their own earnings:

48% women have benefitted from the scheme and have total control over their own earning, 34% women said that MGNREGA has helped women to some extent while 18% sample said that they have not benefitted from the scheme and have no control over their own earnings.

Opinion on women empowerment: Majority of the women beneficiaries (50%) said that they were empowered through MGNREGA, 34% said they were empowered to some extent. While 4% women respondents claimed that they were not empowered and 12% of women workers did not answer.

Other Findings:

- 100% of the sample opined that there are 33% reservation for women is followed.
- In the entire sample gaon panchayat, not a single beneficiary was provided 100 days of work as guaranteed by MGNREGA.
- The awareness level of the respondents regarding the minimum wage, demand for work, unemployment allowance, extra wages beyond 5 kms work, awareness about the worksite facilities were found very low.
- The study reveals non-availability of child care and raring facilities at the work site even though the Act includes this provision.
- MGNREGA funds have been allocated for the provision of safe drinking water, resting place, changing room, first aid, recreational facility for children, etc. From the survey it is found that except drinking water facility all other facilities were generally absent

Table 1. Socio-economic classification of the respondents

Parameters	Category	Number of respondents	Percentage
Age in years	18-32	25	50
	33-45	16	32
	46-60	6	12
	60 & above	3	6
Marital Status	Married	40	80
	Unmarried	4	8
	Widow	6	12
Level of Education	Illiterate	9	18
	Primary	20	40
	Middle	10	20
	Secondary	3	6
	Can read & write their name	8	16
Benefit of women beneficiaries under MGNREGA and control of their own earnings	Yes	24	48
	To some Extent	17	34
	No	9	18
Opinion on women empowerment	Yes	25	50
	To some Extent	17	34
	No	2	4
	Could not Reply	6	12

Recommendations:

- Lack of awareness regarding the scheme has reduced its success rate. To create awareness among the women regarding MGNREGA, apart from brochures, newspapers, television, radio etc., proper campaigning through street drama, loudspeaker, writing on the wall about MGNREGA can be an effective measure to increase awareness.
- To increase awareness, women need to be educated. More initiation and awareness should be given to the rural poor women about MGNREGA, that they should know the benefits of the scheme which will increase the women participation rate.
- Transparency and accountability ensure efficient utilisation of resources under the scheme. Therefore, provision for regular social audit must be carried out by Gram Sabha which enable in bringing transparency and accountability.
- Government should give more importance to productive works based on local need which will cover more women under the umbrella of MGNREGA.

- The study reveals that market wage rate is much higher than MGNREGA wage. It discourages the women to work under the scheme. Therefore, in order to maintain consistency with the minimum market wage rate, MGNREGA wage rates should be revised at a regular interval.

Conclusion:

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) is the largest poverty alleviation and well thought legislation in Indian history of social security programme since independence. By providing guaranteed wage employment to its registered workers, the Act has brought about a silent revolution in rural areas of the country. MGNREGA has come as a ray of hope for the rural households as the main focus of the scheme is to enhance livelihood security in the form of generation of guaranteed wage employment by creating village infrastructure. Though the official statistics reflects that MGNREGA has been quite successful and well implemented scheme that has been operating in Sonbhadra district but in reality

there has been no significant dent on the problems of unemployment of rural women and poverty in the district. Though it has a positive impact on the participation and earnings of the women beneficiaries, but if we compare it with other states, we will find that Sonbhadra district of Uttar Pradesh is still less than average. From the above analysis it can be concluded that the performance of MGNREGA is not full satisfactory. The scheme could not ensure the 100 days job guarantee to the majority of the women job card holders. The Act appears to be quite meaningful and powerful for rural development in general and women empowerment in particular for the entire nation. The problem lies not in the Act, but in its defective implementation and lack of proper monitoring. Involvement of political, delayed in wage payment, lack of transparency, etc., need to be strictly controlled. The prospects of the MGNREGA for rural development and women empowerment are quite bright provided it is properly executed.

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