



## ROLE OF MGNREGS IN EMPOWERING TRIBAL WOMEN OF ATTAPPADY DEVELOPMENT BLOCK IN KERALA STATE, INDIA

**Krishnanunni C. U.**

PhD Scholar, Centre for Study of social exclusion and inclusive policy, Gandhigram Rural Institute, Gandhigram, Tamilnadu – 624 302

**Ashok Jacob Mathews\***

PhD Scholar, Department of Political Science & Development Administration, Gandhigram Rural Institute, Gandhigram, TamilNadu \*Corresponding Author

### ABSTRACT

Attappady Block Panchayat is the only integrated tribal block in the state of Kerala. The land was fertile during the formation of Kerala state in 1956 with 90 percent above population belonging to tribal community. The families in Attappady especially women were concerned about the lack of economic security. The MGNREGS (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme) was introduced in the area during the first phase of its implementation in the country in the year 2006. The successful participation of the people especially women in the Attappady area is more than that of Kerala state average. The programme thus emerged as a vital source of livelihood in the tribal regions of Attappady. The programme enabled the women with an opportunity to earn on their own and to find a decent livelihood. This has brought about more significant level of economic independence for the women. The overall financial condition of the family has improved due to the participation in the MGNREGS. As she started to earn by herself, it helps to create dignity for the women and to have a new identity in the household. Thus, the programme transformed the life of tribal women in Attappady by delivering better livelihood facilities.

**KEYWORDS :** Tribal Women, Empowerment, MGNREGS, Dignity, Livelihood

### INTRODUCTION

In the year 2005, the parliament of India has passed the landmark legislation of National Rural Employment Guarantee Act or NREGA. Later in 2009, it was renamed as MGNREGA or Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act. The act intended to deliver the right to work for all the rural households in India. The law was one of the few experiments in the world which were designed to provide an alternative source of livelihood which has its impact on plummeting migration, growth in education and on the improving health care of the rural population. As Ernst and Berg (2009) pointed out, the connection between economic growth, employment and poverty reduction is a process in which the growth of individual results in an increase of their income which directly results in the progress of income on health, education and productive capacity which improves the sustainability of the individual. Under this Act 100 days work was guaranteed for the entire rural household in India. The main highlight of the programme is that it concentrated on the livelihood activities of the rural families in India. The rural women are the real stakeholder of this scheme. The best part of the plan is that it assures the people with the right to work as well as the state to be accountable to fulfill the rights of the citizens. For the first time in India rural women folk got wage parity with men. It is a revolutionary change brought in by this act. MGNREGA is playing an instrumental role in restructuring local governance and in transforming social protection into social justice. It also leads to higher rural income generation and employment. The practical enactment includes the social security of the vulnerable people with the creation of durable assets and thereby strengthening the livelihood of the rural population and making them towards anti-poverty.

Attappady block panchayat belongs to the Mannarkkad Taluk of Palakkad district in Kerala with a total area of 745 sq. Km. The block Panchayat consists of three panchayats namely Agali, Sholayur and Pudur. According to the Census of India 2011, there are nearly 194 tribal hamlets in Attappady with a tribal population of 30,658 and settlers with 67,672 to make a total of 98,330. The tribal people of the region belong to Muduga, Irula and Kurumba community. The Attappady block has made headlines in news papers as the alarming incidents of infant deaths due to starvation, malnutrition and related health problems casted shadow on the face of tribal development activities of state government.

In Attappady men die very early in life due to alcoholism and women has to look after the families of their own. Women are the primary providers of the family through the income earned from NREGA

programme (NRLM Report 2014). The literacy rate of the tribal society is very significant in the case of Kerala as the increased number of dropouts and lesser percentage school completing community are high among the tribal pockets. The most notable problems among the tribal population include the incidence and intensity of health problems, poverty, livelihood insecurity and environmental degradation. The tribal communities had their particularities of history, social behaviour, production and consumption which influenced their life and livelihood, where the backwardness withered them from the conditions.

### SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The study focused on the gendered impact created by MGNREGA among the tribal women of Attappady in Kerala. The Kerala Model of development has resulted in forming the high standard of progressiveness in the field of human development leading to progress among the domains of sanitation, health, education and poverty eradication. The study focused on Attappady area which lacks far in the social and developmental indicators in a state where the progressiveness happened and on the living conditions of tribal women who were excluded from the developmental discourse of a model state. Despite the successful results in transforming the state, it failed to reach the tribal people especially in the tribal areas of Attappady.

### METHODOLOGY

The data is collected from 360 tribal women who are enrolled in MGNREG Scheme and active participants of the income generation programmes using structured interview schedules. Yamane (1967:886) formula was devised to fix the sample size ie.  $n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$  where  $n$  = sample size,  $N$  = population size and  $e$  = level of precision. 95% confidence level & 5% precision level are assumed. Data was collected from both primary and secondary sources. The researchers adopted purposive random sampling method and the study is exploratory in design.

### AIM OF THE STUDY

This study aims to explore the role of MGNREG Scheme in the socio-economic empowerment of the tribal women of Attappady Development Block, Kerala State.

### SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACT OF MGNREGS ON TRIBAL WOMEN EMPLOYEES

The social security of an individual is of prime concern where he / she are engaged in measures to find livelihood means. The

MGNREGA programme has its primary focus on improving the livelihood security of the rural poor especially that of the women, scheduled caste and scheduled tribe people. The job pattern has designed for providing 100 days of guaranteed employment for the rural poor to do unskilled manual work in a financial year. The MGNREGA programme mainly concentrated on the livelihood of the people whereas it has reached the individuals with an improvement in the lifestyle of the people as the income thus earned through the programme is extra to their usual earnings. The women development is the prime focus as a decent livelihood measures can bring about changes to the outskirts from decision making to overall empowerment. Let us discuss the major findings of the study-

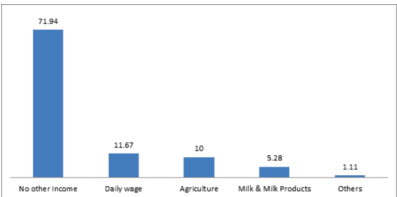
Table 1: Distribution of Respondents by their Tribe

Sl. No.	Tribe	No. of Respondents	Percentage
1	Irula	180	50
2	Muduga	99	27.5
3	Kurumba	81	22.5
	Total	360	100

Source: Computed- Field Data

The data in the table shows that 50 percent of the respondents belong to Irula community, 27.5 percent of the respondents belong to Muduga community, and 22.5 percent of the respondents belong to Kurumba community. The data is collected from above said tribal communities living in the Attappady region.

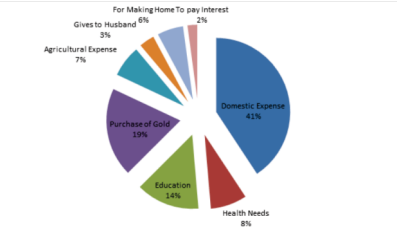
Figure 1: Percentage distribution of respondents on income other than MGNREGS



Source: Computed- Field Data

The data from the above figure shows that the majority of 71.94 percent of the respondents do not have any other income for their life other than MGNREGA whereas 11.67 percent depends on Daily wages for their life other than MGNREGA and 10.00 percent depends on Agriculture as a source of additional income. Only 5.28 percent of respondents depend on Milk & Milk products and 1.11 percent on other sources for their income other than MGNREGA. Thus, the above data highlights the facts that the majority of the respondents (71.94) has no other income and depends on MGNREGA for their primary source of income.

Figure 2: Expenditure of money received as wage from MGNREGS

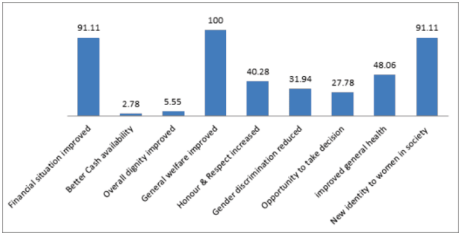


Source: Computed- Field Data

The above figure displays the priority of the respondents in using the money received from MGNREGA in which a majority of 41 percent spends cash for the domestic expense and 19 percent for the purchase of gold. The education purpose covers 14 percent whereas health is 8 percent and agriculture expenses is 7 percent. 6 percent of the respondent uses the money for making a home, 3

percent gives to husband, and only 2 percent applies to pay interest. Thus, the data depicts the fact that the majority of the expenses made by the respondents are for domestic costs, purchase of gold and education.

Figure 3: Economic status improvement

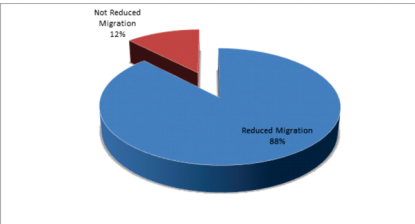


Source: Computed- Field Data

The data from the above figure shows that 40.28 percent of the respondents favoured that the MGNREGS program has increased honour and respect for the women in the society. 31.94 percent of respondent's state that gender discrimination has reduced as the women started to earn. 27.78 percent favours the programme enabled them to have the opportunity to take a decision. The data shows that a majority of 91.11 percent of the respondent has improved their financial situation by working in the MGNREGS programme. 5.55 percent improved their overall dignity and 2.78 percent with better cash availability.

Thus, the data shows that the MGNREGS programme has enabled the women to improve their status in the society concerning decision-making capacity and to be the part of a transformation in the community. The entire respondents believe that the programme has improved the welfare of the household. All the respondents supported the influence made by the programme in promoting the well-being of their family.

Figure 4: Impact of MGNREGS on reducing migration



Source: Computed- Field Data

The data from the table shows that majority of 88 percent of the respondents viewed that the programme has reduced the migration in the area whereas only 12 percent considered that the programme does not influence reducing immigration. Thus, the data depicts the fact that the programme was able to curb migration as per the majority of the respondents.

Table 2: Distribution of Respondents by decision making regarding spending in the family

Sl. No.	Decisions on spending of the family	No. of Respondents	Percentage
1	Husband	52	14.44
2	Children	15	4.17
3	Self	293	81.39
	Total	360	100

Source: Computed- Field Data

The table shows that a majority of 81.39 percent of the respondents under the study used to decide the spending of their family whereas 14.44 percent of the respondent's husbands make a decision on spending and 4.17 percent of the respondent's children take the call on expenditures of the family. Thus, the table reveals the fact that

majority (81.39%) of the respondents use to take decisions on spending of their family on their own and has the decision-making power.

## SUGGESTIONS AND CONCLUSION

The historical importance of MGNREGS unlike any other wage employment programme in the past is the provision of legal entitlements along with the employment. The advantage of this eligibility is the rights provided to the individuals to demand a job without waiting for the will of the administration. The participation of women in MGNREGS is much more than that of men in Attappady area. The provision itself enables the women to participate more in the programme. The workers under MGNREGS should be provided with facilities at the worksite like drinking water, crèche, shade, first aid kit and a caretaker for childcare facilities. Majority of the respondents in Attappady is not provided with any facilities at the worksite. The study states that the mates / supervisors are not getting funds for the provision of these services. The respondents feel this condition to be difficult as it creates an extra burden for them. Some of the respondents have also favoured to get facilities like a place for rest or shade but in this case, they were not available. The study shows that none of the respondents got the facilities for childcare and more over the respondents are not getting adequate facilities at the worksite. The lack of first aid kit at work site is worrisome. The entitlements under MGNREGS provides the individuals with the assurance of getting a job within 15 days of demand, but this provision is not at all fulfilled in the area. The respondents are willing to work continuously under the scheme, but they are not getting the work on time even after submitting their demand. None of the individuals got the entitlement of unemployment allowances, and the majority of the respondents are not aware of it. The majority of the respondents feel that correct allocation of work based on demand is necessary for the effectiveness of the MGNREGS programme in Attappady. Though the socio-economic well being of the tribal women at Attappady block has improved tremendously, there are many things need to be addressed immediately in order to make the programme more productive and fruitful. The current implementation of the programme to be assessed critically and more precision guided execution should be made to avert flaws in future.

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