



Socio Economic Empowerment of Women Under MGNREGA- A Review

K. Keerthi

A Ph.D. Scholar, Department of Home Science Extension and Communication Management, Prof. Jayashankar Telangana State Agricultural University, Saifabad, Hyderabad.

Dr. T. Sarah Kamala

Professor and Principle Scientist, All India Coordinated Research Project on Home Science, Prof. Jayashankar Telangana State Agricultural University, Post Graduation and Research Center (PGRC), Rajendranagar, Hyderabad 30.

ABSTRACT

Mahatma Gandhi urged the nation, that in the moments of doubt, to recall the face of the poorest person and ask oneself, whether the step that are contemplating is likely to be of any use to him or her. It is in this spirit that the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) was launched in February 2006. It is an Indian law that aims to guarantee the 'right to work' and ensure livelihood security in rural areas 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. Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005, (MGNREGA) was enacted on 7th September 2005 as " An Act to provide 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 every financial year to every household". Factually majority of women collect their own wages, broadened their choices and capabilities. The raised incomes were invested on higher education of children, health and nutrition of families, particularly women. Access to bargaining and increased purchasing power resulted in self confidence and sustainable development. Both tangible and intangible benefits occurred due to MGNREGA.

KEYWORDS

MGNREGA, women, empowerment, right to work

In his famous talisman, Mahatma Gandhi urged the nation, that in the moments of doubt, to recall the face of the poorest person and ask oneself, whether the step that are contemplating is likely to be of any use to him or her. It is in this spirit that the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) was launched in February 2006. It is an **Indian law** that aims to guarantee the '**right to work**' and ensure livelihood security in rural areas 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.

Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005, (MGNREGA) was enacted on 7th September 2005 as " An Act to provide 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 every financial year to every household"

a. Objectives of NREGA

- The basic objective of the Act is to enhance livelihood security in rural areas by Providing at least 100 days of guaranteed wage employment in a financial year to every BPL & APL household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work
- This work guarantee can also serves other objectives like
 1. Generating productive assets
 2. Protecting the environment, empowering rural women
 3. Reducing rural urban migration and fostering social equity, among others.

b. NREGA goals

- a. Strong social safety net for the vulnerable groups by providing a fall-back employment source, when other employment alternatives are scarce or inadequate
- b. Growth engine for sustainable development of an agricultural economy

- c. Empowerment of Rural poor through the processes of a rights-based Law

c. Salient features of the Act

1. Listing of individual who is in need of wage employment.
2. A Job Card holder may submit a written application for employment to the Gram Panchayat,
3. The Gram Panchayat after due verification will issue a Job Card.
4. The Job Card should be issued within 15 days of application
5. Employment will be given within 15 days. If it is not, then daily unemployment allowance as per the Act will be provide.
6. Work should ordinarily be provided within 5 km radius.
7. Wages are to be paid according to the Minimum Wages Act 1948 for agricultural laborers
8. Wages are to be paid according to piece rate or daily rate. Wages should be paid through Bank / post
9. At least one-third beneficiaries shall be women
10. Work site facilities such as crèche, drinking water, shade have to be provided
11. Shelf of projects for a village will be recommended by the gram sabha
12. At least 50% of works will be allotted to Gram Panchayats for execution
13. Permissible works predominantly include water and soil conservation, afforestation and land development works
14. A 60:40 wage and material ration has to be maintained.
15. No contractors and machinery is allowed
16. Social Audit has to be done by the Gram Sabha

d. Works under NREG are :

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, plantation, horticulture, land development to land owned by households belonging to the SC/ST, or to land of the beneficiaries of land reforms, or to land of the beneficiaries under the Indira Awas Yojana/BPL families
5. Renovation of traditional water bodies, including de-silting of tanks;
6. Land development;
7. Flood-control and protection works, including drainage in waterlogged 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. Care should be taken not to take up roads included in the PMGSY network under NREGA. No cement concrete roads should be taken up under NREGA. Priority should be given to roads that give access to SC/ST habitations;
9. Any other work that may be notified by the Central Government in consultation with the State Government

MGNREGA and Empowerment

a. Empowerment

Empowerment refers to increasing the spiritual, political, social, educational, gender, or economic strength of individuals and communities. It is a multi-dimensional process, which should enable the individual or a group of individuals to realize their full identity and powers in all spheres of life. Its consists of greater access to knowledge and resources, greater autonomy in decision making to enable them to have greater ability to plan their lives, or have greater control over circumstances that influence their lives and free them from the shackles imposed on them by custom, belief and practice.

Hence it is also a process of increasing the capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes. Central to this process are actions which both build individual and collective assets, and improve the efficiency and fairness of the organizational and institutional context which govern the use of these assets.

b. Social Empowerment

Social empowerment is understood as the process of developing a sense of autonomy and self-confidence, and acting individually and collectively to change social relationships and the institutions and discourses that exclude poor people and keep them in poverty. Poor people's empowerment, and their ability to hold others to account, is strongly influenced by their individual assets (such as land, housing, livestock, savings) and capabilities of all types: human (such as good health and education), social (such as social belonging, a sense of identity, leadership relations) and psychological (self-esteem, self-confidence, the ability to imagine and aspire to a better future). Also important are people's collective assets and capabilities, such as voice, organization, representation and identity.

c. Economic Empowerment

Economic empowerment is thought to allow poor people to think beyond immediate daily survival and to exercise greater control over both their resources and life choices. For example, it enables households to make their own decisions around making investments in health and education, and taking risks in order to increase their income. There is also some evidence that economic empowerment can strengthen vulnerable groups' participation in the decision-making. For example, microfinance programmes have been shown to bolster women's influence within the household and marketplace. The evidence also suggests that economic power is often easily 'converted' into increased social status or decision-making power.

d. Women empowerment

The national movement under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi was one of the first attempts to draw Indian women out of the restricted circles of domestic life into equal role with men.

Writing in 'Young India' in 1918, Gandhiji said, Women is the companion of man gifted with equal mental capacities. She has the right to participate in the minutest details of the activities of man. She has the same right of freedom and liberty as he.

The **Tenth Plan** (2002-07) approach aims at empowerment women through translating the National Policy for Empowerment of women into action and ensuring Survival, Protection and Development of Women and Children through Rights Based Approach.

Empowerment of women also means equal status to women. Empowering women socio-economically through increased awareness of their rights and duties as well as access to resource is a decisive step towards greater security for them.

Empowerment includes higher literacy level and education for women, better health care for women and children, equal ownership of productive resources, increased participation in economic and commercial sectors, awareness of their rights and responsibilities, improved standards of living and acquiring self-reliance, self-esteem and self-confidence.

In the simplest of words it is basically the creation of an environment where women can make independent decisions on their personal development as well as excel as equals in society.

Women want to be treated as equals so much so that if a woman rises to the top of her field it should be a common place occurrence that draws nothing more than a raised eyebrow at the gender. This can only happen if there is a canalized route for the empowerment of women.

Women's empowerment has five components:

- **Sense of self-worth**
- Right to have and to **determine choices**
- Right to have **access to opportunities and resources**
- Right to have the **power to control their own lives**, both **within** and **outside** the home
- Ability to **influence the direction of social change to create a more just social and economic order**, nationally and internationally

e. Women empowerment issues in MGNREGA

(i) Schedule II paragraph 6 of MGNREG Act provides for participation of women in employment guarantee under the Act. It specifically provides that at least 33% of the women should be provided employment.

(ii) Not less than one-third of the non-official members of Central Employment Guarantee Council (**CEGC**) shall be women.

(iii) In case the numbers of children below the age of six years accompanying the women working at any site are five or more, provision shall be made to depute one of such women worker to look after such children.

(iv) Equal wages will be provided to both men and women.

(v) If some applicants have to be directed to report for work beyond 5 k.ms. of their residence, women (especially single women) and older persons should be given preference to work on the worksites nearer to their residence.

(vi) Mates (site supervisor) should be selected through a fair, transparent and participatory process. Adequate representation of women among mates for supervision of work and recording attendance of worksites should be ensured.

Women empowerment issues addressed through MGNREGA

Being a centrally sponsored wage employment scheme throughout the country with constitutional rights, much re-

search has gone in with multiple dimensions. Hence, abundant literature is available. Out of them, the research that highlighted women socio and economic empowerment were reviewed and presented separately.

Social Empowerment

Factors Facilitating Women Participation

Dheeraja *et al.* (2013) conducted a research study on 'factors facilitating participation of women in Mahatma Gandhi NREGS' in Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Kerala, West Bengal. The factors are:

- Locally available
- Less chance of exploitation
- There are regularity and predictability of working hours
- Protect women against migration in search of work.

Rights to Claim the Benefits

Ojha (2012) final report on evaluation of UN women fund for gender equality economic and political empowerment catalytic grant programme, revealed that the dalit women's livelihood accountability initiative (DWLAI) supported by the fund for gender equality has contributed substantially to bringing about changes in the lives of marginalized dalit women in eight districts of Andhra Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh.

Empowerment and well-being of women

Dev (2011) in reports on NREGS and Child Well Being and he concluded that one of the successes of the NREGS is that the participation of women in the scheme is higher than the stipulated reservation of 33%. The share of women in the programme increased from 41% in 2006-07 to 49% in 2009-10. Thus, almost half of the NREGS participants now are women. However, there are significant inter-regional disparities in the participation of women. Field studies have shown that the statutory requirement of 33 per cent participation is not met in Haryana (8%), M.P. (13%), U.P. (9%), Chattisgarh (25%), Bihar (13%) and Jharkhand (18%).

Quick work choice for women and SC/ST groups

Discussion Paper on rights-based legal guarantee as development policy: The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (2010) by united nations of development programme says that the participation rate of women in the financial year 2009-2010 and 2010-11 at the national level was 48 percent. This suggests the potential of Mahatma Gandhi NREGA as a local employment strategy for supplementing household income. It also suggests that the Mahatma Gandhi NREGA's design that has no pre-conditions makes it eminently usable as a quick work choice for women and SC/ST groups.

Cash earning in women's hands

Sharma (2012) conducted a study on SC/ST employment guarantee: women's empowerment in rural India by MGNREGA in the Rajnandgoan, Jhabua, Mayurbhanj and Cuddalore. The results revealed that there was high status of women among the SC/ST groups in the Rajnandgoan, Jhabua, Mayurbhanj and Cuddalore has important effect on the generating community assets and enhancing their spending capacity. High poverty rates pose to be significant obstacles in attaining empowerment among SC/ST women in rural India. By putting cash earning in women's hands, NREGA has both increased and diversified the contribution that women are making to household incomes as wage earners.

Economic Empowerment

Benefited both as Individual and Community

Kar studied on Empowerment of women through MGNREGS: Issues and challenges in Odisha (2013). The study says that Women are benefited individually because they are able to earn independently, spend some money for their own needs, contribute in family expenditure etc. From the study it was found that MGNREGA has positive impact on employment pattern of women. Women have benefited both as individual and community.

- Income-consumption effects
- Intra-household effects

- Community-level effects
- At the national level women participation has increased significantly to 53.01% in 2012-13 (till January, 2013).
- Highest participation is seen in states like Kerala(92.66%) followed by Poducherry (83.96%).
- In comparison to these States Odisha ranked 20 with women participation rate of 37.39%.
- There is delayed payment of wages
- Women workers have been are more prone to harassment at the worksites
- There is an absolute poverty of worksite facilities
- Non-availability of child care facilities

Cash earning in women's hands

Sharma (2012) conducted a study on SC/ST employment guarantee: women's empowerment in rural India by MGNREGA in the Rajnandgoan, Jhabua, Mayurbhanj and Cuddalore. The results revealed that there was high status of women among the SC/ST groups in the Rajnandgoan, Jhabua, Mayurbhanj and Cuddalore has important effect on the generating community assets and enhancing their spending capacity. High poverty rates pose to be significant obstacles in attaining empowerment among SC/ST women in rural India. By putting cash earning in women's hands, NREGA has both increased and diversified the contribution that women are making to household incomes as wage earners.

Earn Independently

Pankaj and Rukmini (2010) studied on empowerment effects of the NREGS on women workers: in four states viz. Bihar, Jharkhand, Rajasthan and Himachal Pradesh. They selected the field survey for data collection. From the study it was found that women have benefited more as workers than as a community. Women as individuals have gained because of their ability to earn independently, made possible due to the paid employment opportunity under NREGS.

Conclusion

Empowerment of women certainly happened due to MGNREGA. Enhancement of economic security, promotion of gender equity and equitable opportunities to disadvantaged groups and increasing bargaining power of the poor are envisaged in the policy. Factually majority of women collect their own wages, broadened their choices and capabilities. The raised incomes were invested on higher education of children, health and nutrition of families, particularly women. Access to bargaining and increased purchasing power resulted in self confidence and sustainable development. Both tangible and intangible benefits occurred due to MGNREGA.

References

1. Dev Mahendra. 2011. Working Paper on NREGA and Child Well-being, IHD - UNICEF Working Paper Series Children of India: Rights and Opportunities. Institute for Human Development and United Nations Children's Fund, India. http://www.ihdindia.org/pdf/mahendradev_new.pdf
2. Dheeraja.C., Madhuri, N.V and Antariipa Daimari 2013. Research Study on 'Factors Facilitating participation Of Women In Mahatma Gandhi NREGS' National Institute Of Rural Development, Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India RAJENDRANAGAR, HYDERABAD- 500 030
3. Government of India and United nations development programme (UNDP). 2010. Discussion Paper on Rights-based Legal Guarantee as Development Policy: The Mahatma Gandhi NREGA. <http://nrega.nic.in/netnrega/home.aspx>
4. Kar Spandita. 2013. Empowerment of Women Through MGNREGS : Issues and Challenges, Odisha Review, February – March. <http://odisha.gov.in/e-magazine/Orissareview/2013/Feb-Mar/engpdf/76-80.pdf>
5. Ojha Pati Gana. 2012. UN Women fund for gender equality final report on Evaluation of UN Women Fund for Gender Equality Economic and Political Empowerment Catalytic Grant Programme: "Dalit Women's Livelihoods Accountability Initiative" India Executed by Gender at Work in partnership with Dalit Stree Sakthi (DSS) through Mitra Service Society (MSS). <http://www.unwomen.org/~media/Headquarters/Media/Publications/en/FGEPProgrammeEvaluationGenderatWorkDSSIndia.pdf>
6. Pankaj Ashok and Rukmini Tankha. 2010. "Empowerment Effects of the NREGS on Women Workers: A Study in Four States". Institute for Human Development, Delhi.
7. Sharma Asha. 2012. SC/ST employment guarantee: women's empowerment in rural india by MGNREGA. International Journal of Human Development and Management Sciences Vol. 1 No. 1. <http://journalshub.com/mrp-admin/journal/pdf/1.%20asha.pdf>