

IMPACT OF MGNREGA ON EMPOWERMENT OF RURAL WOMEN: A STUDY OF DEOGAON BLOCK IN BOLANGIR DISTRICT OF ODISHA

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ABSTRACT

MGNREGS, the world largest poverty eradication programme launched by the Government of India, which aims at enhancing the livelihood security of rural poor by providing hundred days of guaranteed wage employment in a financial year to every household whose adult members volunteers to do unskilled manual work with reservation of 1/3rd employment for women. This act is also sensitive for women as it advocates for providing legal guarantee of works with an equal wages for both male and female. On this backdrop, an attempt has been taken to assess the impact of MGNREGA on socio-economic empowerment of rural women in Deagoan block of Bolangir district of Odisha. The study is based on primary data collected from 60 women beneficiaries through pre-tested structured questionnaire by adopting simple random sampling. The data have been analyzed by using weighted average and multiple regression analysis. The study found that MGNREGA has positive impact on economic empowerment of women but social empowerment is not remarkable due to lack of awareness on the key provisions of the act.

KEYWORDS: MGNREGA, Empowerment, Beneficiaries, Household, and Livelihood.

Introduction

The constitution of India has given the equality of status and opportunities to all irrespective of gender, but women especially in the rural India have been less economic and social freedom than their male counterparts. Acknowledging the world-wide significance of women, the Government of India declared 2001 as the 'Year of Women's Empowerment'.

The major landmark in the field of women was brought about by 73rd and 74th amendments in which 33 % reservation to the women in the Panchayats and other local bodies was made mandatory. MGNREGA is the one of the flagship programme of the government of India launched during the year 2006 on 2nd February in 200 districts all over the country including 19 districts of Odisha in first phase and from 1st April, 2008 extended to cover all the districts of the country. This act was renamed as Mahatma Gandhi NREGA on 2nd October, 2009; which aims at enhancing the livelihood security of people in rural areas by guaranteeing hundred days of wage employment in a financial year to rural households whose adult member's volunteers to do unskilled manual work. It is treated as world's largest poverty eradication programme in which 1/3rd of employment is reserved for women. The act is also sensitive to working conditions of women workers as it advocates for providing accessible worksite within 5 kms of workers residence, medical aid, drinking water, shade and crèches if there are more than five children below the age of six years. The special features of this act is that it provides a legal guarantee of

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work to both male and female at an equal wage rate. The 10th anniversary of MGNREGA was celebrated on 2nd February, 2016 by generating a noteworthy of 1970 crore person-days of employment since its inception with women participation of 57%.

Review of Literature

The study by Institute of Applied Manpower Research (2008) found that NREGS helps to improve the income level and enhance the standard of living of the rural people particularly the vulnerable section of the society such as women, SC/STs, minorities and so on:

- **R.N. Swamy (2008)** in his case study entitles “Social inclusion through MGNREGA in Kerala” has highlighted that MGNREGA empower women and reduces social exclusion. This labour extensive method to a great extent will help in eradicating poverty among the unskilled laborers.
- **Ramesh and Kumar (2009)** attempted to evaluate the impact of MGNREGA on women empowerment and found that it plays a substantial role in empowering women economically and laying the basis for greater independence and self-esteem. This programme is also helpful in easing out the debt burden to some extent.
- **J.Poonia (2012)** conducted a field study in Kerala entitles “Critical study of MGNREGA: Impact and women’s participation” found that there has been some shift out of female workers from agriculture to NREGS works as the minimum wage paid under NREGS is far greater than the agricultural wages for female workers.
- **A.Ranjan (2016)** in her book ‘MGNREGA and women empowerment’ indicates that MGNREGA has impacted the political modernity of rural women in a considerable way and bring the sense of equality of gender.

Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives of this research paper are:

- To study the socio-economic conditions of the sample beneficiaries under MGNREGA
- To examine the impact of MGNREG on the economic and social empowerment of rural women
- To assess the impact of each social empowerment factor on the overall women empowerment.

Research Methodology

The present study is based on both primary and secondary data. In order to collect the primary data two stage sampling have been used. In the first stage six Gram Panchayat namely, Badbahal, Arjunpur, Singamunda, Mukandapur, Sarasmal and Goudgoth of Deogaon block in Bolangir district was selected basing upon the highest percentage of active women workers registered under the scheme .Secondly, a sample size of 60 women beneficiaries have been chosen by adopting ‘Simple Random Sampling Method’ and required data collected directly from the worksites through the pre-tested structured questionnaire during the month of January,2017. The statistical tools such as Weighted Average, Percentage and Multiple Regression are used for analysis and interpretations of data.

Implementation of MGNREA in Bolangir District

Bolangir is one of the backward districts located in the western part of Odisha. The main occupation of the people of this district is agriculture. So the district economy is predominantly agricultural in character. The district is also industrially backward in spite of its vast natural resources like, graphite, bauxite, mica and forest products. Persistence crops failure due to frequent visit of drought and flood, unemployment, starvation death, malnutrition, acute poverty and migration of labour are the leading manifestation of this district.

Knowing the importance, the Central Government has introduced MGNREGS, the massive flagship poverty eradication programme in Bolangir district in first phase along with 18 other district of Odisha .During the financial Year 2015-16 the Central Government hiked the work days from 100 to 150 days in the drought hit areas. Soon after the declaration, the Govt. of Odisha also increased it from 150 to 200 days by shouldering all cost of additional 50 work days. In this context MGNREGA is the hope of ray of the rural people of Bolangir district for getting employment and increase of household income. On this backdrop, the present study has the greater significance to examine how far MGNREGS impacts on empowerment of rural women and increase the standard of living in a socio-economically backward district like Bolangir by considering Deogaon block as a unit of analysis.

Data Analysis**Socio-Economic Profile of Respondents**

The socio-economic profile of 60 sample women respondents has been tabulated in Table 1:

Table 1: Socio- Economic Profile of Respondents

Characteristics		No. of Respondents	Percentage
Community	SC	16	27
	ST	12	20
	Others	32	53
Age group	Below 30 years	06	10
	31 - 50 years	38	63
	Above 50 years	16	27
Education	Illiterate	31	52
	Primary	25	41
	Secondary	04	07
Annual income	Below - Rs.30000	24	40
	Rs.30000-Rs. 45000	29	48
	Rs.45000 & above	07	12

Source: Field survey

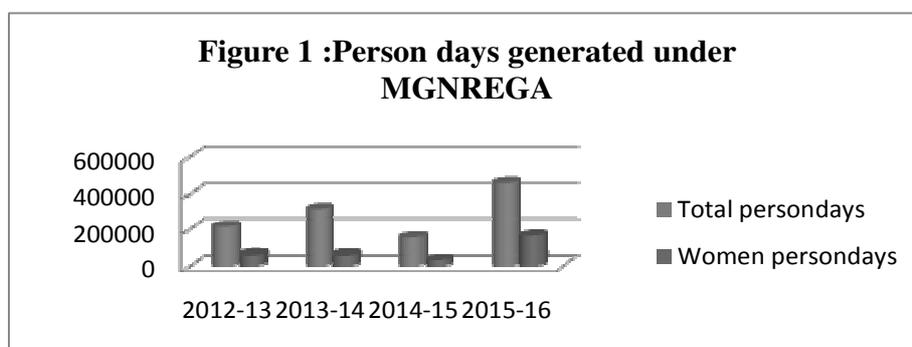
Table 1 indicates that out of 60 women respondent, 27% belong to SC, 20% ST and the rest 53% are of backward and general categories. It is also remarkable that women belong to the age group of 31 to 50 years consists of 63% , below the age of 30 years is 10% and above the age of 50 years is 27% only. This indicates that the women of middle-age highly preferred the MGNREGA works than the women of the younger generation. The women above the age of 50 years also prefer less due to the hard and physical labour work. As regards the educational qualification of sample beneficiaries, the majority of 52% are illiterate, 41% are up to primary and lowest 7% having the educational qualification up to Secondary. It also indicates that women having the higher qualification dislike the MGNREGS works. While analyzing the annual income, it is found that most of the respondents are poor as only 12% belong to the family having the annual income of Rs.45000 or more. Likewise, the highest 48% women belong to the family having the yearly income of Rs.30000 to Rs.45000 and 40% below Rs.30000.

Impact on Employment**Table 2: Women Person-days Generated under MGNREGS in Deagoan Block**

Year	Total Person Days	Women Person Days	% of women Person Days
2012-13	215273	58903	27.36
2013-14	313502	57569	18.36
2014-15	154114	35774	23.21
2015-16	463286	163612	35.31

Source: www.nrega.in

Person days generated under the scheme as shown in Table 2 indicates that during the year 2012-13 to 2015-16 the women work days are much below than the mandatory 33% of women employment as per the act. However, there is an improvement of women employment during the year 2015-16 as it is found to be 35.31% of the total employment generated in the block under study



Account of Women Beneficiaries

Financial inclusion through the operation of bank account is one of the indications for economic empowerment among the rural poor. In order to prevent leakage and corruption the government of India has mandated to pay the MGNREGA wages through the bank or post office account of the beneficiaries. The details of women account holders under the scheme till the end of 2015-16 has shown in Table 3:

Table 3: Bank/Post Office account of women workers under MGNREGA

Particulars	Number
Total number of Accounts of women workers	10230
No of Joint account with women	2361
No of individual account of women	7869
Percentage of individual account of women	77

Source: www.nrega.in

It is evident from Table 3 that the total of 10230 women workers under MGNREGA in Deogaon block have their accounts with the bank or post office out of which 7869 consisting of 77% are operating individual account. The payment through account is certainly reduced the wasteful expenditure and increase the habit of thrift among the women.

Awareness Analysis

Awareness is one of the vital forces for social empowerment and hence attempt has been taken under the study to assess the awareness level of sample beneficiaries about the key provisions of MGNREGA.

Table 4: Awareness Among Women Beneficiaries about Provisions of MGNREGA

Provisions	No of Respondents	% of Respondents
No of days of employment	58	97
Work on demand	03	05
Unemployment allowance	12	02
Minimum wages	54	90
Worksite facilities	39	65
Quota of women workers	09	15
Wage payment within 15 days	38	63
Compensation for late payment	02	03

Source: - Primary data

Data of table 4 reveals that highest 97% of respondents are aware of minimum number of 100 days of guarantee employment in a financial year, followed by 90% about the minimum wage rate. However, it is remarkable to note that only 2% and 3% of women are having the knowledge of the unemployment allowance and compensation for late payment respectively which are vital for women empowerment. Likewise, 95% women are unaware about the allotment of work on demand.

Social Empowerment Impact Analysis

The potential of social empowerment of women under MGNREGA has been assessed by assigning suitable weight to the response of the beneficiaries relating to the different independent variables. The weight for 'Yes' is 2, for some extent or sometimes 1 and for 'No' reply is zero which has been tabulated in Table 5.

Table 5: Impact of MGNREGA on Social Empowerment of Women

Social Factors	Level of Empowerment			Total Score	Weightage Average	Impact on Empowerment
	Yes (W-2)	To Some Extent/ Sometimes (W-1)	No (W-0)			
Own decision to participate	32	12	16	76	1.27	High
Own decision to purchase	10	24	26	44	0.73	High
Participate in Gram Sabha	09	15	36	33	0.55	Moderate
Speaking in the meeting.	05	08	47	18	0.30	Low
Participation in discussion for valid decision	03	04	53	10	0.17	Low
Aware about the overall objectives of MGNREGA	25	08	27	58	0.97	High
Grand total score				239	0.66	

Source: Primary survey

Empowerment Index

- Low level empowerment - Average score below 0.33
- Moderate empowerment - Average score between 0.33 & 0.65
- High empowerment - Average score above 0.65

The empowerment index reveals a high overall social empowerment of women with total average score of 0.66. It is also evident that rural women are highly empowered in term of taking decision by their own in participation of MGNREGA works, purchase of household goods and awareness about overall objective of the scheme as the weighted average scores are 1.27, 0.73 and 0.97 respectively. On the other hand women are moderately empowered in participating in the Gram Sabha. However, their empowerment is very low in speaking and participation in discussion for valid decision as the weighted average score is as low as 0.30 and 0.13 respectively. This is because of their ignorance, low educational qualification and social constraints.

Multiple Regression Analysis

The impact of each social empowerment factor on the overall women empowerment has also been assessed by the following model of Multiple Regression Analysis.

$$WE = \alpha + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \beta_4 X_4 + \beta_5 X_5 + \beta_6 X_6 + e$$

WE = Overall women empowerment

X1= Own decision to participate in MGNREGA works.,

X2= Own decision to purchase,

X3= Participate in Gram Sabha,

X4= Speaking in the meeting,

X5= Participation in discussion for valid decision,

X6= Awareness about the overall objectives of MGNREGA

In this model "α" is a constant and βs are the coefficients, whose worth will be estimated and 'e' refers to the error. Here Overall women empowerment is the dependent variable whereas X1, X2, X3, X4, X5 and X6 are independent variables. Results of multiple regression analysis:

Coefficients a

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	5.515	.043		128.814	.000
Own decision to participate in MGNREGA works.	.049	.043	.050	1.145	.253
Own decision to purchase	-.014	.043	-.014	-.316	.752
Participate in Gram Sabha	.141	.043	.142	3.282	.001
Speaking in the meeting.	.087	.043	.088	2.019	.044
Participation in discussion for valid decision	.027	.043	.028	.634	.526
Awareness about the overall objectives of MGNREGA	-.034	.063	-.064	-.917	.674
R Square : 0.653					

a. Dependent Variable: Overall Women Empowerment

The results of the multiple regression analysis to predict the relationship between social empowerment dimensions and overall women empowerments presented in table- as above. The R Square value of 0.653 indicates that the Dimensions of social empowerment are about 65.3% responsible for variation in overall women empowerment. According to the results of regression analysis, Participate in Gram Sabha and Speaking in the meeting dimensions of social empowerment have a significant impact on overall women empowerment, as table p- value of 0.05(at 95% level of confidence) is greater than calculated Sig. value 0.001 and .044 respectively. Again the value of the Coefficient (B) for Participate in Gram Sabha computed as 0.141 which represents that 100% change in Participate in Gram Sabha Leads to 14.1% change in overall women empowerment. Similarly the value of the Coefficient (B) for Speaking in the meeting is computed as 0.087 which represents that 100% change in Speaking in the meeting Leads to 8.7% change in overall women empowerment.

Findings

- The provisions of providing at least one-third of employment to women have not been strictly followed in the study block as a result of which women are depriving from their right.
- Payment of wages through account induced the women workers to operate joint or individual account which in turn boost their saving and self-esteem.
- The poor awareness of women on the key provisions of MGNREGA indicates that the full potential of the scheme for women empowerment cannot be reflected on the ground.
- The empowerment index reveals a high overall social empowerment of women with total average score of 0.66. But it is very low in term of active participating in meeting.
- According to the results of regression analysis, participation in Gram Sabha and Speaking in the meeting dimensions of social empowerment have a significant impact on overall women empowerment, as table p- value of 0.05(at 95% level of confidence) is greater than calculated Sig. value 0.001 and .044 respectively.

Conclusion

MGNREGA, the flagship programme of government of India has immense potentiality for the socio-economic empowerment of rural women. However, its impact on social empowerment is not so effective due to illiteracy, ignorance and lack of awareness among the beneficiaries. The provisions of the act keeps strong hold towards the rural development and empowerment of women still than it lacks the visible out come due to defective implementation , political interference and lack of transparency. The implementation agencies and government must address these issues seriously for the socio-economic empowerment of women.

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