

A Critical Analysis on the Concept of Women Development through Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) in Kulpi Block, South 24 Parganas, West Bengal: Issues and Challenges

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Abstract:

Empowerment is a process aimed to changing the nature and direction of systematic forces, which marginalize Women and other disadvantaged sections in a given context. Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) was envisaged as a gender sensitive legislation to provide a fair opportunity to women from rural India to earn without any discrimination of gender. In terms of national averages the scheme under the act has achieved its target but there exist a wide variation among the state in the numbers for participation of women workers. This study is an attempt to identify the barriers that have restricted the participation of women. The MGNREGA ensures on demand one hundred days of employment in a year to a household at the minimum wage for rural households. The MGNREGA is based on twin principles of universality and self-selection. The Act places enforceable obligation on the State and gives power to rural women labourers. As a legal right to work, MGNREGA related with previous employment generation schemes in several aspects. This study examines the impact of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act on rural women in Kulpi block, South 24 Parganas, West Bengal.

Keyword: Empowerment, Women Participation, Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act., Socio economic development

INTRODUCTION

The National Rural Employment Generation Scheme (NREGs), an employment scheme provides wage employment for people above 18 years age for 100 days. It came into effect on 5 September 2005. The NREGs Act 2005 covered 330 districts in India; where 200 were on Phase I districts and 130 on Phase II districts. Social and economic development is the main aim of rural development for rural people, especially to bring about sustained improvement in their living condition through an increase in their income and access to social goods. The status of women is

intimately connected with their economic status, which in turn, depends upon rights, roles and opportunity for the participation in economic activities. The economic status of women is now accepted as an indicator of a societal development stage. However, all development does not result in improving women economic activities. Pattern of women activities are affected by the prevailing social ideology and are also linked with the stage of economic development. Government implements different programmes to improve the social and economic development in rural India.

The introduction of National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS) is one of the affirmative programme. The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act was enacted in September 2005. The National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme was launched on 02.02.2006 and was initially implemented in six districts. From 01.04.2008 onwards, the scheme was extended to the remaining twenty one districts of the state. Thus, the MGNREGA covers the entire country with the exception of districts that have a hundred percent urban population.

The mandate of the Act is to provide 100 days of guaranteed wage employment on demand in a financial year to every household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work. Besides having the potential of creating useful assets, strengthening democracy and decentralization by affecting transparency and accountability this flagship programme of the Government endeavors to empowerment of the socially disadvantaged, especially women, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, through the processes of a rights-based legislation. Thus, MGNREGA with twin objectives of rural employment and development has been perceived as a powerful instrument for inclusive growth in rural India because of its triple impact on social protection, livelihood security and democratic empowerment. It stipulates that employment generating works must be targeted towards a set of specific rural development activities.

Statement of the problem

This study focuses on the impact of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act among rural women. Presently, the MGNREGA is being implemented in all rural districts of the country. MGNREGA has resulted into major financial inclusion where in bank accounts have been opened for the families getting employment. Ministry has advised all the state governments to ensure payment of wages fully through the accounts. The figures from the survey conducted in different states indicate an impressive participation of women in the employment generated through MGNREGA.

The highest employment status among women worked in terms of person days can be seen in 2020-2021, Kerala (87.03%) this is followed by Puducherry (85.49%), Tamilnadu (79.75%), Goa (76.05%) and Rajasthan (62.34%). Among the above data West Bengal selected as a sample area for this study. The present study has made an attempt to know the impact of MGNREGA among rural women.

Implementing NREGA has offered high levels of tribal Women Empowerment like:

- ◆ As nearly 80% of the workers have been tribal Women, they feel comfortable working along their neighbourers.
- ◆ The earning capacity of tribal Women has boosted.
- ◆ As the wages are paid through accounts the tribal Women could control cash materials and withdrawals by her own decision.4.Even the savings have also been raised. NREGA is a 'green' and 'decent work'. Through conservation of natural resources, it protects farmers.

Objective

- To study whether the Women are empowered with the help of this plan.
- To measure the satisfaction level of women beneficiaries through MGNREGA.
- To know the impact of MGNREGA among rural women
- To recommend measures to ensure the socio economic development through women empowerment.

Hypothesis for Null from:

H₁: There is no significant relationship between Age and MGNREGA members have sufficient income.

H₂: There is no significant relationship between Occupation and regular saving habit MGNREGA members.

H₃: There is no significant relationship between No. of earned members and sufficient income of MGNREGA members.

Location of the study

At first, The South 24 Parganas district of West Bengal will be purposively selected for the above investigation, on the basis of the highest employment status among women worked (89.73%) through MGNREGA programme. The researcher belongs to the same district, thus will help for in depth interaction in collecting the data. The present study will be conducted in Kulpi block of South 24 Parganas district, on the basis of the highest employment status among women worked (90.93%) through MGNREGA programme. There are 14 panchayats in this block out of which 2 panchayats that includes 6 which are villages selected for the above investigation.

Universe and Sampling Design of the study

Females of different ages and qualification will be selected for getting the primary data. For the proposed study random sampling will be resorted to, females of different ages and qualification.

Selection of Respondents

MGNREGA women beneficiaries in Kulpi block is 6368 out of which 120 samples will be randomly selected from Keoratala and Karanjali for the present investigation.

Selection of Tools

Construction of research tool to achieve objectives of the research is an important step in any research. Keeping in mind the subject matter and the objective of the study, an interview schedule will be developed after going through relevant literature, conferring with the personals of the MGNREGA women beneficiaries.

Collection of data

For data collection interview schedule through regional language will be used by the researcher. The researcher will conduct interview with the respondents to collect the data.

Tools used

Simple statistical tools like averages, percentages etc. were used to find out the changes in these parameters, which were then tested for statistical significance using Ch-square.

Significance of study

The assessment extensively focuses on examining whether MGNREGA has made successful inroads into the impact of rural women's in India. National Federation of Indian Women (NIFW) being an organisation working on women's issues believes that such a perspective of examining MGNREGA would be of extreme importance for equity based empowerment. Thus, this assessment study believes that such a perspective would enable MGNREGA in the rural districts to become more effective and responsive and even re-orient wherever needed especially in the case of women's empowerment in the long run.

Review of literature

Ashwini Kulkarni, Krushna Ranaware, Sudha Narayanan and Upasak Das in their study 'MGNREGA Works and Their Impacts A Rapid Assessment in Maharashtra, October 2014 state that the works under the Act are supportive to agriculture and even to small farmers. Thus it makes an improvement in the design of asset.

The Effective States and Inclusive Development Research Centre (ESID) in their study, 'Success and failure in MGNREGA implementation in India verifies there is a variation in the provision of employment works under the Act between the states. The implementation alternately depends on the supply of work. Political competition, local power relations, commitment of state and its capacity, the role of lower level authorities determine the difference in supply of work.

Dr. A.S. Ambily, in her study ‘A Study on Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) and Tribal Tribal Women Empowerment, May 2016 reveals that proper implementation is the success of this Act. The main aim is to reduce alleviating poverty, migration, limiting child labor.

L.J Charlas, J.M Velmurugan in their study ‘Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005(MGNREGA): Issues and Challenges, June 2012 reviewed that NGOs and the Government must critically study the impact of this Act in rural areas. The officials make sure that the antipoverty scheme is not mitigated from its initial or exact or actual path. An inconsistency regarding the socio-economic condition between people of urban and rural areas should be reduced.

ANALYSIS AND MAJOR FINDINGS

The survey results are organized as follows, in the first section, the demographic profile of the respondents is presented. The section presents the results of data analysis and concludes with socio economic and perception of the respondents.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Variables and Categories	N=120		Variables and Categories	N=120		%
		%				
Name of Panchayat			Community			
Keoratala	70	58.3	General	70	58.3	
Karanjali	50	41.7	SC	33	27.5	
Name of Village			OBC	17	14.2	
Bhairabitala	10	8.3	Education qualification			
Lakshmipasha	34	28.3	illiterate	29	24.2	
Chitranagar	26	21.7	LP	57	47.5	
Andinagar	15	12.5	UP	31	25.8	
Chak Dulalpur	6	5.0	HS & Others	3	2.5	
Karanjali	29	24.2	Marital Status			
Age			Single	2	1.7	
Below 30	16	13.3	Married	118	98.3	
31-40	28	23.3	Family headed			
41-50	46	38.3	Women headed	16	13.3	
Above 50	30	25.0	Men headed	104	86.7	

Source: Primary data

In the above table exhibit demographics traits associated with the respondents considered for the purpose of this study. It can be observed that a majority (58.3%) of the respondents in the Keoratala panchayath and 41.7 % respondents in the Karanjali panchyath. From the above two

panchyath samples taken from all the villages, Bhairabitala 8.3%, Lakshmipasha 28.3%, Chitranagar 21.7%, Andinagar 12.5%, Chak Dulalpur 5% and Karanjali 24.2% respondents. Age group of the respondents from the above sample below 30 age 13.3%, 31-40 age 23.3%, 41-50 age 38.3%, and above 50 age 25% respondents from this data conclude that majority of the women MGNREGA beneficiaries are higher age group. Majority 58.3% of the women MGNREGA beneficiaries under the community of General, this shows that more rural backward women got benefits through this scheme and also majority of the illiterates 24.2% and low level education background (Lower Primary) 47.5% women joined this scheme. Most of the respondents are married 98.3% and most of the respondent's family headed by men 86.7%.

Table 2: level of Satisfaction

Variables and Categories	N=120	%	Variables and Categories	N=120	%
Satisfaction in working days			Satisfaction in wages		
Highly Satisfied	13	10.8	Highly Satisfied	30	25.0
Satisfied	35	29.2	Satisfied	12	10.0
Neutral	4	3.3	Neutral	9	7.5
Dissatisfied	68	56.7	Dissatisfied	40	33.3
Satisfaction in working condit ion			Highly Dissatisfied	29	24.2
Highly Satisfied	8	6.6			
Satisfied	30	25.0			
Neutral	32	26.7			
Dissatisfied	17	14.2			
Highly Dissatisfied	33	27.5			

Source: Primary data

The above table reveals that satisfaction level of women beneficiary in MGNREGA. Satisfaction level of number of working days provided under the MGNREGA, majority of 56.7% dissatisfied about the working days. Majority of the respondents dissatisfied and highly dissatisfied 57.5% about wage provided under MGNREGA. Satisfaction in working condition of MGNREGA, highly satisfied, satisfied and neutral 58.3% and remaining 41.7% are dissatisfied and highly dissatisfied, its shows around 50% are satisfied by the working condition and remaining respondents are dissatisfied by the working conditions of MGNREGA. From the above table concluded that majority of the MRGNREGA members dissatisfied the above said factors.

Rental house	11	9.2	3-4	62	51.6
Type of house			5 & above	21	17.5
Kutcha	20	16.7	No. of earned members		
Semi-pucca	60	50.0	0-1	18	15
Pucca	29	24.2	2-3	100	83.3
Rental House	11	9.2	4 and above	2	1.7
Own land					
Less than 10 cent	68	56.7			
10 to 20 cent	2	1.7			
No land	50	41.7			

Source: Primary data

Table no.3 shows that socio economic status of MGNREGA members. 8.2% (11) are living in

Table 3: The economic states of MGNREGA Members Table no.3 shows that socio-economic status of MGNREGA members. 8.2% are living in rental house and 90.8% respondents have own house, in which 50% have semi-pucca house, 24.2% have pucca house and 16.7% having Kutcha house. Majority 56.8% of the respondents have land less than 10 cent. 51.6% of the respondents have 3-4 members in their family, 30.8% of the respondents have 1-2 members in their family and 17.5% of the respondents have 5 and above members in their family. 83.3% respondents have 2-3 earning members in their family, 15% respondents only one earning members in their family and only 1.7% respondents have 4 and above earning members in their family.

Table 4: The impact of MGNREGA of Members

Variables and Categories	N=120	%	Variables and Categories	N=120	%
No. of days worked			Increasing the level of income		
51 to 75 Days	45	37.5	Yes	2	1.7
76 to 100 Days	61	50.8	No	118	98.3
Above 100 Days	14	11.7	State your monthly income		
Reason for joining the MGNREGS			Below Rs.3000	83	69.2
working environment	1	.8	Rs.3001 to 5000	37	30.8
Fixed wages	100	83.3	Have sufficient income from the NREGA scheme		
Govt. work	19	15.8	Yes	2	1.7
Have regular saving habit			No	118	98.3
Yes	86	71.7			
No	34	28.3			

Source: Primary data

Table no.4 shows that impact of MGNREGA of members. Majority of 50.8% Members worked 76-100 days under this scheme for a year, 37.5% of the members worked 50-75 days under this scheme and 11.7% members worked above 100 days under this scheme for a year. Most of the 83.3% members joined for the reason of fixed wage got through this scheme. 98.3% member said income level not increase after joined in this scheme. Majority 69.2% of MGNREGA members

earn below Rs.3000 per month income and remaining 30.8% MGNREGA members earn Rs.3001 to 5000 per month income. Most (98.3%) of the MGNREGA members do not have sufficient income from this scheme. 71.7% respondents have regular saving habits and 28.3% respondents have do not have regular saving habit.

Table 5: Age and MGNREGA members have sufficient income

		Do you have sufficient income from the NREGA scheme		Total
		Yes	No	
Age interval	Below 30	0	16	16
	31-40	1	27	28
	41-50	1	45	46
	Above 51	0	30	30
Total		2	118	120
Chi-Square Test				
		Significant Value	df	Sig.
Chi-Square		.689	3	Ns

Source: Primary data

H₁: There is no significant relationship between Age and MGNREGA members have sufficient income.

Result: Table-5 states that at the 5% level of significance, the chi-square value .689 is not significant. Therefore, Age and MGNREGA members have sufficient income are independent. Hence the hypothesis accepted.

Table 6: The Occupation and Regular Saving Habit

Particular		Do you have regular saving habit		Total
		Yes	No	
Occupation	NREGS	82	33	115
	Agriculture & Allied	1	1	2
	Daily labour	3	0	3
Total		86	34	120
Chi-Square Test				
		Significant Value	df	Sig.
Chi-Square		1.656	2	Ns

Source: Primary data

H₂: There is no significant relationship between Occupation and regular saving habit MGNREGA members.

Result: Table-6 states that at the 5% level of significance, the chi-square value 1.656 is not significant. Therefore, Occupation and regular saving habit of MGNREGA members are independent. Hence the hypothesis accepted.

Table 7: No. of earned members and sufficient income from the NREGA scheme

	Do you have sufficient income from the NREGA scheme			Total
		Yes	No	
No. of earned members	0	0	1	1
	1	0	17	17
	2	2	80	82
	3	0	18	18
	4	0	2	2
Total		2	118	120
	Chi-Square Test			
		Significant Value	Df	Sig.
Chi-Square		.943	4	Ns

Source: Primary data

H₃: There is no significant relationship between No. of earned members and sufficient income of MGNREGA members.

Result: Table-7 states that at the 5% level of significance, the chi-square value .943 is not significant. Therefore, No. of earned members and sufficient income of MGNREGA members are independent. Hence the hypothesis accepted.

Recent position of MGNREGA

Union Cabinet has approved 150 days employment per household under Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) in the drought hit areas of the country. Decision in this regard was taken by Union Cabinet Meeting chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in New Delhi. Additional 50 days of unskilled manual work under the MGNREGA scheme will benefit people in drought-hit areas which are facing monsoon deficit affecting kharif crops and rural income. The revised MGNREGA wages for 2016 announced recently have left various state governments in a quandary as they apprehend the new rates would not be able to attract labourers because they are still below the existing minimum wages fixed by the states. Remuneration under MGNREGA has raised to Rs 203 in West Bengal from Rs 183.

Major Findings

- Most of the respondents are married 98.3%.
- Most of the respondent's family headed by men 86.7%.
- 90.8% respondents have own house.
- 83.3% respondents have 2-3 earning members in their family.
- Most of the 83.3 % members joined for the reason of fixed wage got through this scheme.

- 98.3 % member said income level not increase after joined in this scheme.
- Majority 69.2% of MGNREGA members earn below Rs.3000 per month income.
- Most 98.3% of the MGNREGA members do not have sufficient income from this scheme.
- 71.7 % respondents have regular saving habits.
- There is no significant relationship between age group and MGNREGA members have sufficient income.
- There is no significant relationship between occupation and regular saving habit of MGNREGA members.
- There is no significant relationship between No. of earned members and sufficient income of MGNREGA members.

Problems in the way of women's participation in MGNREGS

Corruption -Corruption is the foremost factor that directly or indirectly hampers the very spirit and effectiveness of MGNREGS.

Societal attitude and Discrimination-In many rural areas of India, there are tenacious social norms and stigmas against women working outside the home. It was commonly stated that women “cannot” work on worksites, that they are “too weak”, and that it is “socially unacceptable” for them to undertake this work.

Negligence of childcare facilities-The Act requires that when there are more than five children under the age of six present at a worksite, a female worker be appointed to take care of them. But, non-implementation of these provisions has adverse impact on women labour force.

Low wage and irregularity in payments-In many states, workers do not earn minimum wages. Delays in wage payments make things particularly difficult for women. Moreover, every job card holder is supposed to have an account in nearby financial institutions, which is not an easy process for rural women. This often leads to complications and delay in the process of wage payment. Low level of Awareness: In many states women participation is low because of low level of awareness about the process and entitlements of the programme.

Nature of Work: Most of the studies reveal that nature of work is also not helpful for women workers. In most of the projects work requiring application of physical force, male workers were preferred to women workers.

Poor Worksite Facilities: MGNREGS funds have been allocated for the provision of safe drinking water, resting place and first aid. But most of the studies reported that except drinking water facility all other facilities are generally absent.

SUGGESTIONS FOR MAKING MGNREGS MORE EFFECTIVE FOR WOMEN

Respondents are not satisfied with the number of working days provided through MGNREGA. So Government try to increasing the number of working days of the scheme. Government try to increase the wage provided under MGNREGA because respondents dissatisfied with the present wage. Present income level of the MGNREGA beneficiary is not increased after joined in this scheme. Government try to increase the income level for the MGNREGA beneficiaries. Need to improve the working condition of the Scheme. The following important interventions can make MGNREGS more effective and result oriented for the cause of women-

- The Panchayat must create awareness among the local people about MGNREGS. Awareness should be created among women regarding rights, entitlements, provisions and procedures under MGNREGS.
- Involvement of NGOs in MGNREGS has been very low. NGOs and self-help groups should spearhead the awareness programme among the women. This feature requires to be strengthened to make the rights-based MNREGS more successful and meaningful.
- Women should be kept in the forefront of planning, execution and evaluation of MGNREGS programmes. Moreover, from policy to implementation level, there should be the involvement of anganwadi workers, health workers, self-help groups, NGOs, village committees, cooperatives and other local bodies.
- Only male members get job card which makes women depend on them, Women should also be provided a job card. Every individual worker should have his or her own job card.
- There should be joint bank accounts so women easily can withdraw money according to their need. This will reduce their dependence on men for withdrawing money.
- Some of the projects should be designed in such a way that can be done easily by women as all projects are not appropriate for woman. MGNREGS should promote semi-skilled and skilled jobs such as social services and rural health, so that, women can get associated with rural literacy and health missions and infrastructural activities in the villages.
- A special provision should be made for the people such as widows, women with disabilities, single and deserted women in each household.
- The programme design includes a recommendation that mobile crèches need to be available at workplaces. The programme should improve quality of childcare.
- Extending reservation to dalits with particular reference to dalit women.
- Lastly it may be stressed here that effective information flows and dissemination about the various angles of this provision of the Scheme through all types of media and channels in the rural areas are essential.

Conclusion

The study has revealed that the socio-economic condition of the women regularly working under the MGNREGA scheme in the rural area. They are the really needy people. This study concludes that the scheme does not improve the expected level of socio economic conditions of rural women. Through increasing the number of working days and wages, rural women improve the

income level. Though the socio-economic conditions have improved gradually, but to fasten the rate of improvement some developmental initiative can be integrated with the scheme mainly targeting those women who are working regularly under the scheme for long periods. A multiple scheme and multiagency approach could also be a fruitful idea for the development of socio economic conditions of rural women.

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