

Impact of MGNREGA on Socio-Economic Empowerment of Women in Palakkad District of Kerala

S. Lakshmi¹ and M. Sundaramari²

In India poverty is highly concentrated in rural areas. Eventhough Indian Economy has enjoyed substantial growth rates inequality has been increased. The main challenges to poverty reduction in India are not just only economic but are also influenced by social inequalities based on caste, ethnicity, gender, age and religion.

Specific gendered risks and vulnerabilities are also faced by the women in our country. They receive up to 30 percent lower wages than men in casual labour and 20 percent lower for the same task (World Bank, 2009). Women constitute two-third of the agricultural workforce but own only less than one-tenth of the agricultural lands and they spend a disproportionate amount of time compared with men on domestic activities (women work 457 minutes per day compared with men who works for 391 minutes) (NAWO, 2008).

The flagship programme of Government of India, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) has been designed in such a way that it incorporates a number of features that explicitly tackle some of the challenges women face in the rural economy and to a certain extent women's differential experiences of poverty and vulnerability.

The main aim of the rural wage employment programme, MGNREGA is to

provide a steady source of income and livelihood security for the poor, vulnerable and the marginalized. The empowerment of women is very much needed for the development of a country. Thus various provisions are made under the act and its guidelines which ensure that women have equitable and easy access to work, decent working conditions, equal payment of wages and representation on decision making process. However, the women of Kerala are socio-economically empowered when compared to women in other states due to their involvement in Self Help Groups. In this context, the paper analyse the contribution of MGNREGA in empowering women socially and economically and the constraints faced by them.

Objectives of the study

- To assess the contribution of MGNREGA in improving the socio-economic empowerment of women
- To identify the constraints faced by women participating in MGNREGA

METHODOLOGY

The study is both analytical and descriptive. The primary data for the study is collected from randomly selected 150 women MGNREGA beneficiaries in Chittur Block from Palakkad District. Palakkad District and Chittur Block were purposively selected for

1 - Ph.D Research Scholar and 2- Professor, Department of Agricultural Extension, Gandhigram Rural Institute, Dindigul

the study. Palakkad district is selected as it is one of the Districts in which MGNREGA is implemented during the first phase in the State. Chittur Block is selected based on the participation of women in MGNREGA during 2013-14. A pretested questionnaire is used to elicit necessary information from the beneficiaries of MGNREGA. The secondary data for the study is collected from magazines, journals, publications by various academic organizations, research studies, management experts and the data published in the official website of MGNREGA.

The socio-economic empowerment of women under MGNREGA is assessed using various parameters in social and economic group. Weightages were provided to the responses for each parameter under the group. A weightage of two is given for the response 'increased', one for 'increased to some extent' and zero for 'no change'. The parameters under social and economic group were also categorized into high potential, moderate potential and low potential based on the average score obtained by each of the parameters. The indicators selected under

economic group are income, savings, purchasing power and decreased dependency on money lenders. Decision making capacity, self confidence, mobility and social participation are the indicators selected under social group.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Participation of women in MGNREGA

Various research studies have indicated that MGNREGA is an important work opportunity for women who would have otherwise remained unemployed or underemployed. Women are participating in the scheme much more actively than they participated in all forms of recorded work (Ghosh, 2009). The rate of participation of women in MGNREGA in Kerala was 66 per cent during 2006-07. This has been increased to 93 per cent for the years 2011-12, 2012-13 and 2013-14, the highest among the states in India during these years. The participation rate of women in MGNREGA at national and state level is given in Table 1.

The main reason cited by the beneficiaries

Table 1
Rate of Participation of Women in MGNREGA

Sl.No.	Year	Kerala(% of women)	India(% of women)
1	2006-07	66	40
2	2007-08	71	43
3	2008-09	85	48
4	2009-10	88	48
5	2010-11	90	48
6	2011-12	93	47
7	2012-13	93	51
8	2013-14	93	53

Source: www.mgnrega.nic.in

for their higher participation in MGNREGA was higher wage rates as compared to the existing wage rates for unskilled labour for women in the District. In a study conducted by Sudarshan (2010), she had reported that the worksites were found managed by women themselves and more over most of the women coming for work had already been mobilized into Self Help Groups. This experience of working together might have also encouraged women to participate in MGNREGA. According to Vijayanand (2009) the Kudumbashree, started by Government of Kerala is being used for creating awareness among women about rights and entitlements, generating demand and also increasing their participation in planning of works and social audits. Bonner, *et.al.*, (2012) has also identified some of the possible factors which are responsible for a

high rate of women participation in the southern states and they were cultural acceptance of female participation in the labour force, influence of Self Help Groups, effective institutions at the State and local government level that are committed to promoting female participation in MGNREGA and wage differentials between private sector and MGNREGA.

Socio-economic empowerment of women under MGNREGA

In order to assess the socio-economic empowerment potential of MGNREGA among women, four indicators each under economic and social parameters were considered. The score obtained by each of the indicators is given in Table 2.

Table 2.
Impact of MGNREGA on Socio-Economic Empowerment of Women

Sl. No.	Indicators	Responses			Total Score	Weighted Average Score
		Increased	Increased to some extent	No change		
I	Economic Parameters					
1	Income	135	13	2	283	1.89
2	Savings	118	24	8	260	1.73
3	Purchasing power	120	18	12	258	1.29
4	Decreased dependency on money lender	110	25	15	245	1.63
	Total				1046	1.74
II	Social Parameters					
1	Decision making capacity	128	9	13	265	1.77
2	Self Confidence	112	29	9	253	1.69
3	Mobility	103	37	10	243	1.62
4	Social Participation	105	30	15	240	1.60
	Total				1001	1.67
	Total Score for the socio-economic parameters				2047	1.71

From the Table 2, it is seen that MGNREGA has the potential for socio-economic empowerment of women. This is evident from the overall score of 1.71 considering all the eight indicators together. The average score obtained for the economic empowerment indicators is 1.74, which is higher than the average score obtained for social empowerment indicators (1.67). This indicates that the degree of economic empowerment of women beneficiaries is found to be more when compared to that of social empowerment as a result of MGNREGA. In economic factors, increase in income scored maximum with 1.89

followed by savings (1.73) and decreased dependency on money lenders (1.63). Under social parameters decision making capacity of MGNREGA beneficiaries stood first by scoring 1.77 followed by self confidence (1.69) and mobility (1.62).

Based on the average score obtained by each of the indicators in social and economic category, they are categorized into three groups namely High empowerment, Moderate empowerment and Low empowerment. The methodology followed for this categorization is given in Table 3.

Table 3.
Grouping of Parameters

Sl.No.	Average score	Category
1	Above 1.70	High empowerment
2	Between 0.85 and 1.70	Moderate empowerment
3	Below 0.85	Low empowerment

According to this categorization the relative empowerment potential of all the eight indicators under study is provided in Table 4.

It is seen that MGNREGA has got high potential for socio-economic empowering of

rural women in three parameters. For the remaining five parameters, MGNREGA has got moderate potential for socio-economic empowering of rural women. Among the three high potential indicators, two are economic

Table 4.
Categorisation of Indicators

High Potential	Moderate Potential
Income	Purchasing power
Savings	Dependence on money lender
Decision making capacity	Self Confidence
	Mobility
	Social Participation

empowerment parameters. However, none of the indicators comes under the low potential category.

Constraints faced by the beneficiaries

An attempt was also made to study the constraints faced by the beneficiaries of

MGNREGA in Chittur Block in Palakkad District. More than half of the beneficiaries (56.67%) have opined that delay in wage payment is the main constraint faced by them. The delay in wage payment may be due to delay in closing the muster rolls and lack of adequate staff for MGNREGA. The other main

Table 5.
Constraints faced by the beneficiaries

Sl.No.	Constraints	Percentage of Beneficiaries
1	Delay in wage payment	56.67
2	Lack of regular work	48.67
3	Distant worksite	41.33
4	Providing employment during agricultural seasons	34.67
5	Lack of worksite facilities	32.00
6	Getting less than 100 days of employment	22.00

constraints faced by the beneficiaries are lack of regular work (48.670%) and distant worksite (41.33%). More details are furnished in Table 5.

CONCLUSION

The participation of women in MGNREGA in Kerala is far ahead the average participation of women under MGNREGA in India. The concept of women's empowerment got wider popularity and acceptance in Kerala with the launching of decentralized planning in the state. The main reason for the high participation of women in MGNREGA is mainly due to the higher wage rate when compared to the existing wage rates for unskilled labour for women in the State. It is

also seen that MGNREGA has the potential to empower the beneficiaries economically and socially. The study findings reveal that the economic empowerment of the beneficiaries of MGNREGA is more when compared to the social empowerment. Women also perceived that MGNREGA is giving them a sense of independence and security. Wages earned under MGNREGA has helped women in several ways. It helped them to pay the debt and retrieve the pawned gold; helped them in taking care of children's education; enabled them to meet the day-to-day household expenses and facilitated them to save money (Sudha Narayan 2008). Even though the participation of women in MGNREGA is more in Kerala, they also face certain problems in participating in the

MGNREGA work. A majority of the beneficiaries cited delay in getting wage as the main problem which restricts them from participating in MGNREGA work. The potential of MGNREGA for women empowerment can further increased by proper implementation and monitoring of the scheme.

REFERENCES

- Bonner K., *et al.* 2012. MGNREGA Implementation: A Cross State Comparison, Woodrow Wilson School, Princeton University.
- Ghosh J., 2009. Equity and Inclusion through Public Expenditure: The Potential of the NREGS, Paper for International Conference on NREGA.
- NAWO, 2008. Engendering the Eleventh Five-Year plan 2007-2012: Removing Obstacles, Creating Opportunities', New Delhi, India.
- Sudarshan R.M., 2011. India's National Rural Employment Guarantee Act: Women's Participation and Impacts in Himachal Pradesh, Kerala and Rajasthan, Institute of Development Studies.
- Sudha Narayan, 2008. Woman Work's and Child Care, www.yojana.gov.in. vol No.52.
- Vijayanand S.M., 2009. NREGA and Panchayati Raj: Learning from Kerala, State Government of Kerala.
- World Bank, FAO and IFAD, 2009. Gender in Agriculture Sourcebook, The World Bank, Washington D.C.