
WOMEN PARTICIPATION AND EMPOWERMENT THROUGH MAHATMA GANDHI NATIONAL RURAL EMPLOYMENT GUARANTEE PROGRAMME

Article Particulars

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Dr.G.LAKSHMI, M.A., M.Phil., DGT. , Ph.D.,

Assistant Professor in Economics,
Government Arts College for Women,
Nilakottai, Tamil Nadu, India

Abstract

Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) is considered as a "Silver Bullet" for eradicating rural poverty and unemployment, by way of generating demand for productive labour force in villages. Rural poverty and unemployment in India have grown in an unprecedented manner during the last few decades. There is a growing incidence of illiteracy, blind faith, hungry people, malnourished resulting from inadequate employment, poverty, and the failure of subsistence production during droughts. In order to make solution of these problems and to provide livelihood security to rural unemployed, Government of India (GOI) enacted the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) in 2005. It is the biggest poverty alleviation programme in the world which is started with an initial outlay of ` 11,300 crore in year 2006-07 and now it is ` 40,000 crore (2010-11). This Act is now called as Mahatma Gandhi NREGA. The Act provides a legal guarantee for 100 days of employment in every financial year to adult members of any rural household will do public work related to unskilled manual work at the statutory minimum wage. Thus it is a universal programme. This minimum wage varies from, state to state, in some states it is Rs. 80 whereas in other it is `125 or `120. According to the Act the minimum wage cannot be less than ` 60. The 100 days of work figure was estimated because the agricultural season is only supposed to last roughly around 250 days and unskilled workers have no alternative source of income in the remaining parts of the year.

Keywords: MGNREGA, Rural poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, NREGA, Planning commission

Review of Literature

Bhattacharya characterizes, rural unemployment, a condition under which the worker would be willing to work longer hours or more intensively for a higher income but could have opportunity of doing so, due to the absence of opportunities for working.

Dasgupta study has found that, poor governance in the implementation NREGA in rural West Bengal. The study reveals that despite the fact all the 18 districts in the state have been covered under the NREGA, West Bengal clearly seems to lag behind other

states in terms of actual job provision or the average number of days provided with job per family.

Planning commission has conducted a survey in 20 states to study the impact of MGNREGA. The results showed a shift of low income groups (about 50%) towards high income category, significant increase in the expenditure of food and non-food items (6%) and change in the expenditure pattern, procurement of livestock (68%) and household articles (42%) and initiation of savings for the first time (2%), clearing of outstanding loans (1/5th of sample households) were some of the positive impacts of MGNREGA on rural households. It was also reported the non-provision of employment within stipulated timeframe (80%) and non-payment of unemployment allowances, the utilization of small portion of households for more than 35 days of work and existence of distress migration in sample villages as asserted respondents.

Objectives of the Study

1. To study the socio-economic conditions of the respondents in the study area.
2. To analyze the impact of MGNREGP on the Participation of the women beneficiaries during the period of study.
3. To study the problems faced by the sample women beneficiaries in the study area.
4. To provide remedial measures for improving the existing system of MGNREGP in the study area.

Statement of the Problem

The literature review carried out above reflects that though some researchers have done study on MGNREGP, most of those are confined to economic aspect only. It is not comprehensive. Very few people have emphasized on implementation aspects of MGNREGP. Social aspects are not much highlighted. The present study will discuss both implementation and the impact of women empowerment through MGNREGP in Dindigul district, Tamil Nadu.

The agricultural labourers are poverty stricken because they do not get employment throughout the year. Agriculture is the major source of employment to them, but they are subjected to unemployment and under employment during off season. The wage rates paid to them are also very low level which is not afford and not matching with the existing level of price of the basic needs. Since it is a seasonal in character, their incomes at low level, but their consumption is very high than their income Hence most of them are indebted. This leads to a poor standard of living. The problems of agricultural labourers are likely to vary from region to region and state to state, low productivity, excessive supply in relation to demand, absence of labour unions, except in few areas, lack of alternative employment opportunities, ignorance and illiteracy have all contribute to their low incomes and the consequent poverty.

The Government of India has already launched anti-poverty programmes like Integrated Rural Development programmes (IRDP) Jawahar Rojgar yojana (JRY) and various poverty alleviation programmes to increase the level of employment, income and standard of living of agricultural labourers. These programs tried to reduce only certain level of rural poverty of rural people.

The need to raise the economic status of the agricultural laborers has continuously been engaging the attention of the planners. But the demand has increased, instead of lessening. As a matter of fact, a vicious circle of present day stagnation in economic field begins from low agriculture production while it is true that the development of the agriculture sector is linked with the development of the non-agriculture sector, as no economy can be isolated from the rest of the national economy. No increase in agriculture production can be possible and effective, even though there may be technological improvement without an active and efficient participation of the agricultural labour. The social and economic disabilities and dismantles of agriculture laborers, while they are no small part of the problem, stand in the way of agriculture labour for active and efficient participation. Most of the people in the study area engaged in agriculture. Hence, Government implements the programme to give employment opportunity to women beneficiaries and gives empowerment to them.

The present study is identified 14 blocks, out of which, three blocks are selected based on the concentration of women beneficiaries from each block. The researchers have made an attempt to find out the impact of MGNREGP on the standard of living of the sample respondents in the study area and also focused on whether the act has enhance there, living status through providing employment opportunities under the scheme of MGNREGP.

Significance of the Study

The present study attempts to understand the implementation procedures of MGNREGP and its impact on women empowerment through MGNREGP in Dindigul district, Tamil Nadu. The study focuses on the role of GP to generate sufficient employment opportunities, the procedures for registration, issuance of job cards, and application for employment. This would enable us to understand and examine the institutional mechanisms under which the entire programme is being implemented. The problems and prospects of MGNREGA can be better understood and accordingly, necessary measures can be devised to make the programme realize its set objectives. The outcome of the study will help in understanding the problem of implementation of the project. It will help in formulating the better policy and strategy for the future.

The rural employment generation programme is a significant trust on the need to increase more employment opportunities in the rural areas. It is an important instrument of job creation in rural areas for the unemployed and underemployed workers who belong to the poor segment of the society and are unskilled. Hence, employment

generation is the most positive method of poverty alleviations as well as to reduce the magnitude of rural unemployment in our country. It can serve the best purpose of offering jobs to those agricultural laborers who blink in despair during the lean period. Under this programme, individuals can secure direct employment and improve their skills which could augment their earning potential under this programme. They could receive goods and services with which to improve the conditions of their everyday livelihood.

The social infrastructural facilities called, in other words, social overhead capital, create a new cycle of economic activities in the region. Thus, such social overhead capital helps in releasing new productive forces into economic operations which ensure higher level of employment and growth.

The programme is highly significant not only in helping the poor segment of society but in raising their meagre purchasing power, a little on the one hand and creating national assets on the other. Recognition of concentration of poverty amongst Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes. (SC/STs) who have faced social deprivation over the years, has prompted earmarking of special benefits under the scheme.

The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act gives legal guarantee of providing at least 100 days of wage employment to rural households whose adult members are willing to do unskilled manual labour. Providing 100 days of employment to the rural-poor especially during the lean agricultural season improves the social-economic status of the labour force in rural India. For this purpose, it is necessary to study whether labourers are getting 100 days of employment through MGNREGP.

In MGNREGP, there is a ban on contractors. So, the present study helps to know whether there is any involvement of contractors or not. The study had also an importance to understand and identify the issues like issue of job card in time, to know that is there any wage discrimination among the men and labourers, to know whether the officials are providing minimum facilities at the work spot, like drinking water, child care facilities at the work site and floor shed for the workers etc...

The MGNREGP Act provided a statutory minimum wage for MGNREGP workers. The Act also provided extra wage, where the work is available in the radius of 5kms. The study is useful to observe the facts for the above provision, to land development, road connectivity, flood control and protection, water conservation, drought proofing, distilling of ponds, minor irrigation works and provision of irrigation facilities to SC and ST families and other beneficiaries of land reform are among the type of works undertaken under MGNREG programme. To know the effective implementation of above programmes, a detailed study at the grass root level is necessary and for this reason, the present study has its own significance.

Scope of the Study

India is one of the countries having a large concentration on travel population. It ranks second in the world, next only to Africa. The extremely economic and educational backwardness of the tribes in the country have drawn the attention of the policy makers even prior to independence, the constitutional provisions and legislature measure both during the British rule and during the post independent period to protest the rights of the tribal and property had a significant hearing on the overall tribal economy but they failed to make any impact on the economic conditions of tribal population.

After the initiation of the planned development, many programme were implemented for the social-economic upliftment of the tribal populations both by the state and the central government. Despite these initiatives, the tribal populations are lagging behind the rest of the population. The scenario is clearly attributed to indebtedness, land alienation, poverty, unemployment, health problems, defective educational system and displacement of the tribal people. The MGNREGP is the latest in a series of poverty alleviation programmes undertaken by the government, which would have a beneficial impact on health, education and other determinants of social welfare by breaching the cycle of poverty in tribal areas.

Sources of Data

This study is based on data collected from primary as well as secondary sources. Primary data were collected from the sample respondents six villages under three blocks. Secondary data were collected from various government publications. Information on area production productivity of major crops were collected from the office of the statistics, Dindigul District. In addition to the above, information about the revenue villages were collected from the village revenue records of the villages concern. Besides, books, journals, publication of the research institute were also for collecting secondary information. Secondary data were also collected from the libraries of various universities in Tamil Nadu and library of National Institute of Rural Development Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh.

Period of the Study

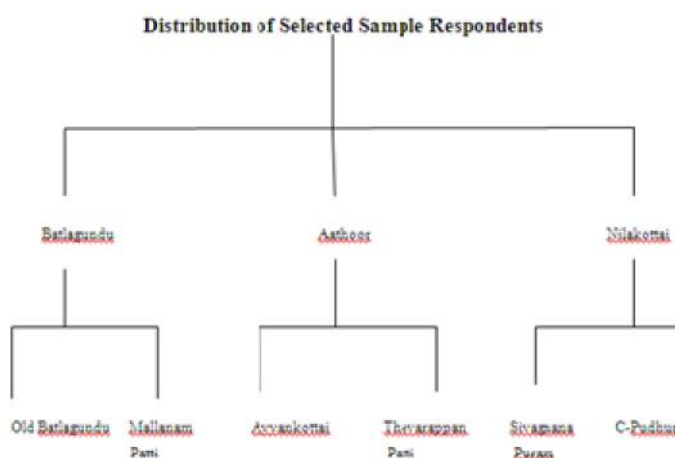
The Present study converts the period from April 2015 to March 2016 for the primary data collection.

Methodology

In the first stage, Dindigul District was purposely selected. In the second stage 14 blocks, are identified of which three blocks are selected, based on the concentration of women beneficiaries from each block. The identified blocks have been named as Batlagundu block, Aathoor block and Nilakottai block,

In Batlagundu block, has been categorized as higher job card beneficiaries and as Aathoor block as medium level job card beneficiaries and Nilakottai block as low level of beneficiaries. In the third stage, from each block, there are two villages selected based on women Job card beneficiaries, totally there are six villages, from each village 50 sample respondents have been selected randomly. In total, 300 sample respondents have been selected for the present study.

Distribution of Selected Sample Respondents



Analysis and Interpretation data

An attempt is made to analyse the socio economic conditions of workers who are in the MGNREGA scheme. In this chapter, the impact of employment generation through MGNREGA scheme and empowerment of women through MGNREGA in Dindigul District of Tamil Nadu. For better exposition, the present chapter has been classified under the following heads.

- i) Demographic characteristics of the selected respondents.
- ii) Women participation and Empowerment through MGNREGA.

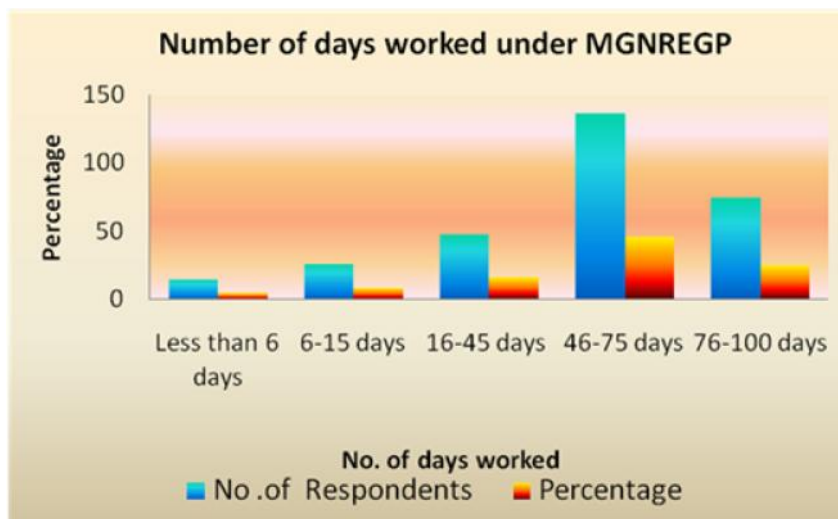
Number of days worked under MGNREGP

No. of days worked	No .of Respondents	Percentage
Less than 6 days	14	4.66
6-15 days	26	8.67
16-45 days	48	16.00
46-75 days	137	45.67
76-100 days	75	25
Total	300	100.00

Source: Primary data

It is inferred from Table that only 45.67 per cent of the respondents worked under MGNREGP 46-75 days in a year 25 per cent of the respondents worked for 75-100 days

and the remaining 29-33 per cent of the respondents, worked less for than 45 days. Even though the government gives guarantee to provide 100 days of employment, but majority of the respondents (75 percent) did not work for 100 days in a year.

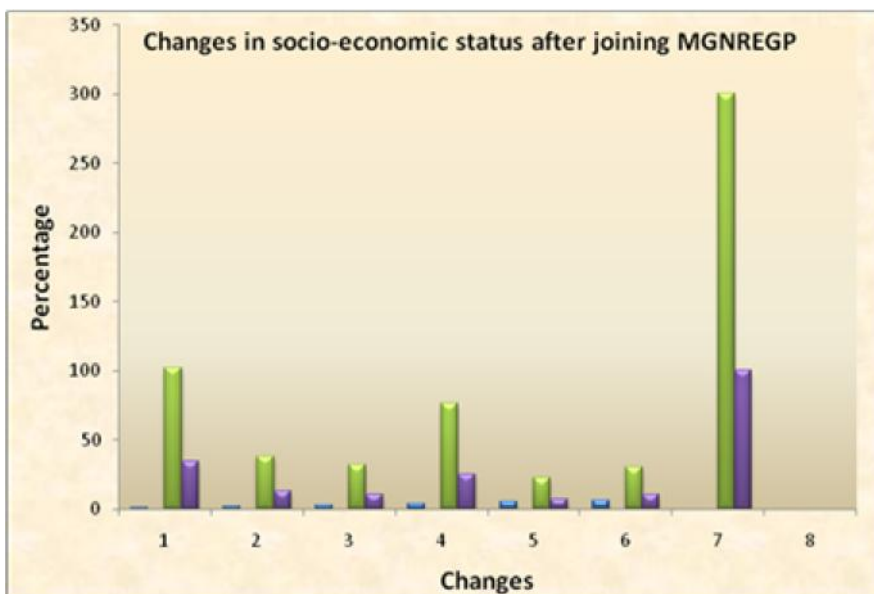


Changes on Socio-Economic Status after Joining MGNREGP

S. No	Changes	No of Respondents	Percentage
1.	Recognition in family/community	102	34.00
2.	Interaction with outsiders	38	12.62
3.	Access to credit Sources	32	10.67
4.	Decision making related to child/money	76	25.33
5.	Family planning awareness/nutrition/health	22	7.33
6.	Family income	30	10.00
	Total	300	100.00

Source: Primary data

The Table shows that 102 respondents witnessed changes in their status and recognition by family after joining MGNREGP. 76 respondents had changes in their status in relation to decision-making after joining MGNREGP. 22 respondents have reported awareness regarding nutrition, health, hygiene, family planning, decision-making, related to children's educational development, access to health services, family income etc... From this study we can conclude that the socio-economic conditions of respondents have improved since joining the MGNREGP works.

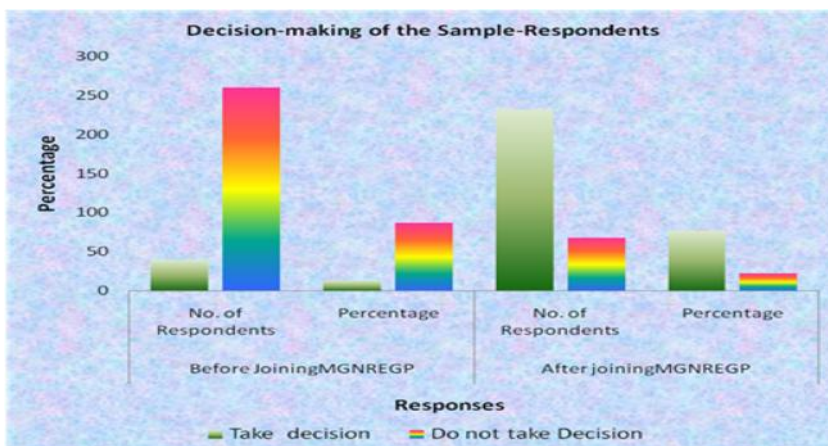


Decision-Making by the Sample-Respondents

S. No.	Responses	Before Joining MGNREGP		After joining MGNREGP	
		No. of Respondents	Percentage	No. of Respondents	Percentage
1.	Take decision	40	13.33	232	77.33
2.	Do not take Decision	260	86.67	68	22.67
Total		300	100.00	300	100.00

Source: Primary data

The above table reveals that 86.67 of the sample respondents did not have any decision-making in the family due to low income earning of the respondents before the implementation of MGNREGP. After joining MGNREGP, 77.33 per cent of the respondents took part in decision-making by their family.

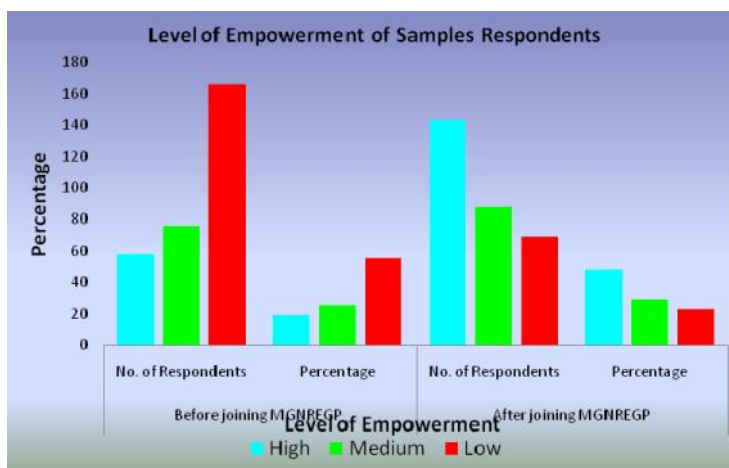


Level of Empowerment of Samples-respondents

S. No	Level of Empowerment	Before joining MGNREGP		After joining MGNREGP	
		No. of Respondents	Percentage	No. of Respondents	Percentage
1	High	58	19.33	143	47.67
2	Medium	76	25.34	88	29.33
3	Low	166	55.33	69	23.00
	Total	300	100.00	300	100.00

Source: Primary data

The above table it is clear that before joining MGNREGP, 19.33 percent of the sample respondents fall under high level empowerment; 25.34 percent of the sample respondents were under the category of medium level; and 55.33 percent of the respondents were under low level empowerment. After joining MGNREGP, 47.67 percent of them rose to the high-level group; 29.33 percentage of them were under medium level and remaining 23 per cent of them belonged to the low level group.



Finding and Suggestions

Findings

- Majority of the respondents (137) received 46--75 days of wage employment.
- 83.33 percent of the respondents received wage of ` 80/- per day. Only 16.67 percent of the respondents received wage of ` 90/- per day. The respondents have opined that there was a wage difference for the same type of work under MGNREGP.
- 102 respondents witnessed changes in their status and recognition by family after joining MGNREGP. 76 respondents had changes in their status in relation to decision-making after joining MGNREGP. 22 respondents have reported awareness regarding nutrition, health, hygiene, family planning, decision-making, related to children's educational development, access to health services, family income etc... From this study we can conclude that the socio-economic conditions of respondents have improved since joining the MGNREGP works.

- 40 percent of the respondents, after having joined MGNREGP, have been taking their own independent decision regarding their personal needs. It has been observed that the percentage of decision-making have been higher in after joining MGNREGP when compared to, before joining MGNREGP decision are taken independently.
- 19.33 percent of the sample respondents fall under high level empowerment; 25.34 percent of the sample respondents were under the category of medium level; and 55.33 percent of the respondents were under low level empowerment. After joining MGNREGP, 47.76 percent of them rose to the high-level group; 29.33 percentage of them were under medium level and remaining 23 per cent of them belonged to the low level group.

Suggestions

- The success of the programme depends upon its proper implementation. Many of the pitfalls of MGNREGA implementation can be overcome if proper processes and procedures are put in place. Thus, there should be continuous efforts towards creating adequate awareness among the people on different provisions of MGNREGS. Creating awareness is necessary not only to motivate the people to work under the scheme but also to encourage them to participate in its planning and implementation.
- A quality awareness campaign with a focus on details of the provisions and entitlement of the scheme should be launched. Ensuring the effective involvement of the GP, villagers and fellow workers in generating quality awareness is more important than distributing and putting up banners, posters and wall paintings. Meetings at the Gram Shaba level may be used as a platform to spread awareness about the benefits of MGNREGP.
- To encourage more women participation in MGNREGP with the special initiatives have to be taken. Widowed women, deserted women and destitute women, who qualify as a household under the Act, have to be identified to ensure that they are provided Job Cards and are given 100 days of work. An individual bank/post office accounts must compulsorily be opened in the name of all women MGNREGA workers and their wages directly credited to their own account for the number of days worked by them. Further it should be ensured that at least 50% of the worksite supervisors (Mates) at all worksites are women. As observed during the field survey, lack of worksite is one of the major factors for low participation of women, the implementing agencies should ensure that worksite facilities such as creches, drinking water, shade etc. are provided.
- Timely payment of wages through into individual accounts of women workers encourages participation and greater control over earnings. And it enhances the independence level of women. More efforts should be taken for timely payment of wages to the beneficiaries. This situation has seen some improvement as reported by the beneficiaries. However, by the very virtue of the scheme being a subsistence support to the target population, the improvement is still required in order to help tackle delays due to ground level functionaries.
- A proper monitoring-mechanism should be developed that can be assured through correct procedure in job card. Performance should be monitored using careful impact evaluations. Strong internal and external monitoring systems, along with concurrent studies, help in diagnostic-remedial measures.

- Travel allowances should be given to the respondents if the job site is more than 15 Km from their dwelling places.
- A package of work site facilities is also an important entitlement of workers. Apart from taking care of the welfare of workers, these facilities raise the level of productivity of workers. The strong monitoring of the facilities by the administration will be useful.

Conclusion

The present study has tried to assess the impact if MGNREGS both on individual household and village community. Simple statistical tools and by using percentage method, much more insights than what quantitative parameters can do. While discussing the impact of the scheme, however, it should be noted that it is very difficult to ascribe the entire positive developments taken place at household and village level purely to the presence of MGNREGP. Nevertheless, an attempt has been made to elicit the responses from different stakeholders in this program to find out how much of changes were made at the household and village level over the period of time for which MGNREGP might has played an important role either primary or secondary level.

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