

Inclusion of Female Labour Force in MGNREGA: A Micro Level Study

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Introduction

As majority of women live below the poverty line and are engaged in subsistence struggle, macro-economic policies and poverty alleviation programmes are to address the pitiful problems of poor women. Steps are being taken for mobilization of poor women, convergence of wide range of economic and social options along with support services to enhance their capabilities. Women's perspective is being included in designing and implementing macro-economic and social policies by institutionalizing their participation in the process. One such programme focusing on unskilled based wage-employment is Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) [1]. The Ministry of Rural Development, Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (Mahatma Gandhi NREGA) aims at enhancing livelihood security of households in rural areas of the country by providing at least one hundred days of guaranteed wage employment in a financial year to every household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work. The Mahatma Gandhi NREGA has become a powerful instrument for inclusive growth in rural India through its impact on social protection, livelihood security and democratic governance. Mahatma Gandhi NREGA is the first ever law internationally that guarantees wage employment at an unprecedented scale.

The Act came into force on February 2, 2006 and was implemented in a phased manner. In Phase I it was introduced in 200 of the most backward districts of the country. It was implemented in an additional 130 districts in Phase II 2007-2008. The Act was notified in the remaining rural districts of the country from April 1, 2008 in Phase III. All rural districts are covered under Mahatma Gandhi NREGA. Various provisions under the Act and its Guidelines aim to ensure that women have equitable and easy access to work, decent working conditions, equal payment of wages and representation on decision making bodies. From financial year (FY) 2006-07 up to FY 2013-14 (upto Dec, 2013) the women participation rate has ranged between 40-51 per cent of the total person-days generated, much above the statutory minimum requirement of 33 per cent. Infact, the participation rate of women under the Scheme has been higher than in all forms of recorded work. Mahatma Gandhi NREGA is an important work opportunity for women who would have otherwise remained unemployed or underemployed. The Scheme has also led to gender parity in wages. Mahatma Gandhi NREGA has reduced traditional wage discrimination in public works.

Access to economic resources has also had a favourable impact on the social status of women, for example women have a greater say in the way the money is spent in households. A large percentage of these women spend their money to avoid hunger, repay small debts, paying their child's schooling, etc. Evidence suggests that the Mahatma Gandhi NREGA is succeeding as a self-targeting programme, with high participation from marginalised groups including the Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs)¹. At the national level, the share of SCs and STs in the work provided under Mahatma Gandhi

NREGA has been high and ranged between 40-60 per cent across each of the years of the Scheme's implementation. SCs and STs Participation rate in the Scheme exceeds the percentage share in the total population in most states. The impact of the various developmental policies, programmes and institutional mechanism is to be gauged from the perceptible improvement in the socio-economic status of women. So an attempt was made to analyze the socio-economic conditions of women beneficiaries of Scheduled Caste (SC)/Scheduled Tribe (ST) community at a micro level. To examine the benefits acquired by the SC/ST women beneficiaries after joining MGNREGA and to identify the problems faced by the women beneficiaries. The hypothesis tested was that the women beneficiaries did not differ in their opinion on the benefits received/problems faced. This research will be of great value to the officials, planners and policy makers in identifying the crucial areas of development of women [2].

Methodology

Based on convenience sampling, two Panchayat Peedampalli and Pattanam were selected from Sulur block in Coimbatore district. The sample unit consists of 100 SC/ST respondents, out of which 50 women beneficiaries were from Peedampalli and 50 women beneficiaries were from Pattanam. Only those who were working in MGNREGA were selected. The responses were elicited through a detailed interview schedule personally administered. The required data were collected through personal interview method. Direct judgment method, a variant of quantitative judgment method was used to measure the benefits and problems. Using the limited category response method, the respondents were asked to mark their preference on a five point Likert Scaling technique and Kruskal Wallis was used. The study is restricted to a small area. The present study is an exploratory one based essentially on primary data. It is a known fact that primary data has its own limitations. The respondents were reluctant to provide correct

¹Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe-Article 341 of the Indian Constitution provides that the President may, with respect to any State or Union territory, specify the castes, races, tribes or parts of or groups within castes, races or tribes which shall for the purposes of the Constitution be deemed to be Scheduled Castes in relation to that State or Union territory. Article 342 similarly provides for specification of tribes or tribal communities or part or groups within tribes or tribal communities which are to be deemed for the purposes of the Constitution to be Scheduled Tribes in relation to the various States and territories. In pursuance of these provisions, the lists of Scheduled Castes and/or Scheduled Tribes notified for each State and Union territory and are valid only within the jurisdiction of that State or Union territory and not outside.

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Sl.no	Variable		Peedampalli (in %)	Pattanam (in %)	Total (in %)
1	Marital Status	Married	68	78	73
		Widow	32	22	27
2	Type of family	Nuclear	88	94	91
		Joint	12	6	9
3	No. family members	1-5	84	92	88
		5 and above	16	8	12
4	No of dependents	0	12	14	13
		1-3	88	86	87
5	Age	20-40	36	44	40
		40 -60	48	42	45
		60 and above	16	14	15
6	Education	Illiterate	70	60	65
		Primary	20	22	21
		Secondary	10	18	14
7	Average income	Before Job	666	726	696
		After job	1558	1414	1486
		't' value			10.997*
8	Average Expenditure	Before Job	2058	1860	1959
		After job	2202	2106	2154
		't' value			6.814*
9	Average Debt	Before Job	15010	21500	18255
		After job	12600	17720	15160
10	Saving	Yes	28	16	22
		No	72	84	78
11	Patta(cents)	Nil	32	28	30
		1-3	54	72	63
		4-6	10	0	5
		6 and above	4	0	2
12	Awareness	Other Beneficiaries	16	0	8
		Panchayat member	84	100	92
13	Record	Thumb impression	72	64	68
		Signature	28	36	32
14	Family member	1	92	92	92
		2	8	8	8
15	Wage discrimination	Yes	48	40	44
		No	52	60	56
16	Satisfaction	Yes	86	84	85
		No	14	16	15

Source: Calculations based on primary data. *Significant at 5% level.

Table 1: Selected socio economic condition of women beneficiaries (in %).

details regarding their income and expenditure. The respondents were apprehensive in sharing their work-related problems in spite of the assurance given by the investigator that the information will be kept confidential. To have accuracy in the data collected, the investigator has applied cross checking method. In this way, gross inaccuracy in the given data is minimized.

Findings

The socio economic conditions of the SC/ST women beneficiaries are given in the following Table 1.

The number of married women beneficiaries was 78% in Pattanam which were more than the women beneficiaries (68%) in Peedampalli Panchayat. More than 20% of the women beneficiaries were widows in both Peedampalli and Pattanam Panchayat. About 88% of the women beneficiaries of Peedampalli had come from nuclear family. But this was 94% in the case of women beneficiaries from Pattanam. The size

of the family members for more than 80% of the women beneficiaries in both Peedampalli and Pattanam Panchayat were 1-5 members per family.

The number of dependents for more than 85% of the women beneficiaries was 1-3 members. The dependency rate was high because there were elders, sick and unemployed adults in their family. In Peedampalli about 48% of the women beneficiaries belonged to the age group of 40-60 years, but this percentage were 42 in the case of Pattanam. The numbers of women beneficiaries in the age group of 60 and above were 16% for Peedampalli and 14% for Pattanam.

More than 60% of the women beneficiaries were illiterate. Before joining MGNREGA the average family income of the women beneficiaries in the Peedampalli Panchayat was Rs. 666, but in Pattanam it was slightly more (Rs. 726). The total average family income was Rs. 696. After joining MGNREGA the average family income for the women beneficiaries in the Peedampalli Panchayat was Rs. 1558,

this was slightly more when compared to the women beneficiaries in Pattanam (Rs. 1414) and the total average family income was Rs. 1486. Based on paired t-test it was found that there was significant difference in the income earned by all the women beneficiaries either before joining or after joining MGNREGA. Since the t-test value was 10.997 at 5% level significance. In Peedampalli Panchayat (7.60) and Pattanam Panchayat (8.36) there was significant difference in the income earned by the family either before joining MGNREGA or after joining MGNREGA.

The average family expenditure before joining MGNREGA was Rs. 2058 for Peedampalli beneficiaries and Rs. 1860 for Pattanam beneficiaries. And the total average expenditure was Rs.1959. But after joining MGNREGA the average family expenditure was more than Rs. 2100 for both Peedampalli and Pattanam women beneficiaries. The total average expenditure was Rs.2154. Based on paired t-test it was found that there was significant difference in the expenditure of all the women beneficiaries either before joining or after joining MGNREGA. Since the t-test value was 6.814 at 5% level significance. There was significant difference in the monthly family expenditure of the women beneficiaries either before joining MGNREGA or after joining MGNREGA in both Peedampalli (3.397) and Pattanam Panchayat (6.56) respectively.

The women beneficiaries for both Peedampalli and Pattanam had debt either before join MGNREGA or after join MGNREGA. Before Joining MGNREGA the average debt was Rs. 15010 for Peedampalli beneficiaries and Rs. 21500 for Pattanam beneficiaries but the debt level for both beneficiaries slightly decreased after joining MGNREGA since it was Rs. 12600 and Rs. 17720 respectively. The reason for debt as stated by the beneficiaries was hospital expenses, marriage, and renovation of the house and education of their children.

For more than 70% of the beneficiaries the saving level was nil in both Peedampalli and Pattanam Panchayat. Around 25% of the women beneficiaries did not receive the land via patta scheme but more than 50% of the women in both Panchayat received 1-3 cents of land from the government (Table 1).

More than 80% of the women beneficiaries in both the Panchayat were aware about MGNREGA through their Panchayat members. More than 60% of the women beneficiaries recorded their attendance with the help of thumb. About 8% of the women beneficiaries in both the Panchayat had another family member working in same scheme. More than 40% of women beneficiaries of the both the Panchayat felt that there existed wage discrimination. The beneficiaries expressed dissatisfaction over the low wages given to them. But 85% of the women beneficiaries in Peedampalli and Pattanam Panchayat were satisfied with the scheme, inspite of low wages.

Awareness

Narayanasamy and Boraian 2009 [3] in their study pointed out that people should be aware of the essential features of the Act in order to be able to make use of the scheme fully. Start-up activities undertaken by the government functionaries, Panchayat and Kudumbasree have largely helped in generating awareness on the essential features of the Act and the Scheme among the rural households. A very high level of awareness could be found under study among them on the essential features of the Act. The level of awareness among the households about the scheme, its components and its salient features was quite high, which can be mainly attributed to the efforts taken by functionaries at different levels to take the scheme to every nook and corner of rural areas. So it becomes essential to analyze the awareness level of the

beneficiaries. Each respondent was asked to indicate the extent of the awareness level as aware or unaware.

Both Peedampalli and Pattanam women beneficiaries were fully aware about the rules and regulations of MGNREGA regarding 100 days work, minimum wages, equal wage for men and women, medical aid, work site facilities, job card should have a photo, providing 15 days job from the date of application and weekly/fortnight wages. About 94% of the women beneficiaries in Peedampalli were aware about the work within 5 Kms Radius, but this was 88% in the case of Pattanam. The number of beneficiaries who had awareness about the eligibility of unemployment allowance within 15 days of application was 66% and 86% in Peedampalli and Pattanam Panchayat respectively. The awareness level regarding this aspect was low in Peedampalli. About 90% of the women beneficiaries of the both Panchayat were aware about the compensation to be paid for delayed payment. But the beneficiaries of both the Panchayat were unaware of the rule that in the event of death they would receive Rs. 25,000 as ex-gratia payments.

Job Related Details

All the women beneficiaries of Peedampalli and Pattanam Panchayat informed the Panchayat members about the requirement of the job verbally and later it was registered. They got the work immediately and worked in the construction site. They didn't bribe any members to get the job; they worked for 6 days per week and 7 hours per day. They worked within a radius of 1-1.5 Km from their houses. They had a job card with photo and Rupees hundred was given as wages per day. At the place of work they received the basic facilities like first aid, crèche, drinking water and shade. In a survey conducted in Cuddalore, Mayurbhanj, Jhabua and Rajnandgaon it was revealed that they had no shades, crèche facility and no drinking water at the worksites NFIW 2008 [4]. A proper working condition is a primary necessity for ensuring safety and efficient condition for workers, which particularly in the case of women is much more important.

Benefits

Narayanasamy and Boraian 2009 [3], in their study found that the benefits of the scheme as perceived by the respondents of the rural households are guaranteed employment; sufficient income for meeting expenses on education, healthcare and household expenses; improved family income leading to improvement in the status of the family; house maintenance, repayment of debts and purchase of assets.

The respondents were asked to indicate the benefits received from MGNREGA. The benefits identified were: (i) 'education of children', (ii) 'better Housing', (iii) 'better health treatment', (iv) 'better social status', (v) 'purchase of household articles', (vi) 'purchase of jewels' and (vii) 'purchase of house'. The women beneficiaries in the selected sample were asked to indicate the benefits from MGNREGA in each of the above factors as 'very much increased', 'increased', 'neutral', 'decreased' and 'very much decreased'. The responses were given weights as +2, +1, 0, -1, -2 respectively. Kruskal Wallis χ^2 test was adopted to find out whether there exists any significant difference in their opinion on the benefits received by the women beneficiaries due to MGNREGA [4]. Table 2 gives the calculated χ^2 values at 5 percent level of significance.

In Peedampalli Panchayat the beneficiaries felt that it is because of their job they could 'educate their children (0.18)' for the factor like 'better housing (-0.02)' and 'better health treatment (-0.08)', the beneficiaries neither agreed nor disagreed to the benefit received. The beneficiaries disagreed to 'better social status (-0.5)' and 'purchase of house hold articles (-0.38)'. But in the case of 'purchase of jewels'

S.No.	Variables	Peedampalli	Pattanam	Total	Calculated χ^2
1	Education of children	0.18	-0.4	-0.11	9.058
2	Better Housing	-0.02	-0.28	-0.15	1.577
3	Better health treatment	-0.08	-0.4	-0.24	1.868
4	Better social status	-0.5	-0.68	-0.54	0.599
5	Purchase of household articles	-0.38	-0.42	-0.4	0.046
6	Purchase of jewels	-2	-2	-2	0.000
7	Purchase of house	-2	-2	-2	0.000

Source: Calculations based on primary data.

Table 2: Benefits-Likert scaling and kruskal Wallis χ^2 test.

S.No	Variables	Peedampalli	Pattanam	Total	Calculated χ^2
Work spot					
1	Hard work	0.1	0.18	0.14	0.156
2	Hours of work	0.2	0.16	0.18	0.048
3	Travel	-0.38	-0.42	-0.4	0.046
4	No Basic facilities	-0.84	-0.96	-0.9	0.968
5	Wages aren't given in time	-2	-2	-2	0.000
6	Less work days	-0.48	-0.42	-0.45	0.019
7	Low wages	0.16	0.6	0.38	2.296
8	Health problems	-0.1	0.3	0.1	2.156
9	Delay in getting job	-2	-2	-2	0.000
10	Corruption	-2	-2	-2	0.000
11	Sexual harassment	-2	-2	-2	0.000
Home					
12	No family support	0.18	-0.4	-0.11	9.052
13	No time to take care of children and elder	-0.02	-0.28	-0.15	1.577
14	No time for social obligations	-0.08	-0.4	-0.24	1.868
15	No time for household chores	-0.5	-0.68	-0.59	0.599
16	Suspicion by husband	-2	-2	-2	0.000

Source: Calculations based on primary data.

Table 3: Problems-Likert scaling and kruskal Wallis χ^2 test.

and 'purchase of house', the women strongly disagreed to it. Similarly in Pattanam Panchayat also the women strongly disagreed to the above two factors. For the other factors like 'education of children (-0.4)', 'better housing (-0.28)', 'better health treatment (-0.4)', 'better social status (-0.68)' and 'purchase of house hold articles (-0.42)' the beneficiaries disagreed to it. Since the wages of the beneficiaries were low they were unable to purchase valuable goods but they were able to meet their day to day expenses in order to maintain their living standards.

The opinion of the women beneficiaries significantly varied for particular a benefit that is 'education of children (9.058)'. Since the calculated χ^2 value exceeded the theoretical χ^2 value for the above factor. For all other factors the opinions expressed by the women beneficiaries did not vary. The calculated χ^2 values were less than theoretical χ^2 values.

Problems

Narayanasamy and Boraian 2009 [3], in their study found that the respondents did face some problems like tools are not good, snakebite at the worksite and difficulty in continuously working in water bodies and certain specific problems like they are not able to strictly follow time schedule, a few are not accustomed to physical work, tools are too heavy to carry and toilet facilities are not made available in certain worksites.

The respondents were asked to indicate the problems faced in worksite. The problems identified were (i) 'hard work', (ii) 'hours of work', (iii) 'travel', (iv) 'no basic facilities', (v) 'wage are not given in time' (vi) 'less work days', (vii) 'low wages', (viii) 'health problems', (ix) 'delay in getting job', (x) 'corruption' and (xi) 'sexual harassment'. The problems faced at home are (xii) 'no family support, (xiii) 'no time to take care of children and elders', (xiv) 'no time for social obligations', (xv) 'no time for household chores' and (xvi) 'suspicion by husband'. The workers in the selected sample were asked to indicate the extent of conflict in each of the above problems as 'fully agree', 'agree', 'neutral', 'disagree' and 'fully disagree'. The responses were given weights as +2, +1, 0, -1 and -2 respectively (Table 3).

Work Spot

In Peedampalli Panchayat the women beneficiaries agreed to the problems relating to hard work (0.1), 'hours of work (0.2)' and 'low wages (0.16)' but for problems like 'travel (-0.38)', 'no basic facilities (-0.84)' and 'less work days (-0.48)' the beneficiaries disagreed to it. In the case of problems like 'wages are not given in time (-2)', 'delay to getting job (-2)', 'corruption (-2)' and 'sexual harassment (-2)' the women beneficiaries strongly disagreed to the problems.

In Pattanam Panchayat the women beneficiaries agreed to the problems relating to 'low wages (0.6)', 'health problems (0.3)', 'hard work (0.18)', 'hours of work (0.16)'. But they disagreed to the problems of 'travel (-0.42)', 'no basic facilities (-0.96)' and 'less work days (-0.42)'.

Problems like 'wages are not given in time (-2)', 'delay to getting job (-2)', 'corruption (-2)' and 'sexual harassment (-2)' the beneficiaries strongly disagreed to the above stated problems.

Comparing both the beneficiaries it was found that they had faced problems relating to 'low wages (0.38)', 'hours of work (0.18)' and 'hard work (0.14)'. For the rest of the problems the beneficiaries neither disagreed nor strongly disagreed.

Home

The women beneficiaries of Peedampalli Panchayat agreed to the problems of 'no family support (0.18)' for the rest of the problems relating to 'no time to take care of the children and elders (-0.02)', 'no time for social obligation (-0.08)' and 'no time for house hold chores (-0.5)', the beneficiaries disagreed to it.

The women beneficiaries of Pattanam Panchayat disagreed to the problems relating to 'no family support (-0.4)', 'no time to take care of children and elders (-0.28)', 'no time for social obligation (-0.4)' and 'no time for household chores (-0.68)'.

While comparing both beneficiaries of the two Panchayat, it was found that the women strongly disagreed to the problems of suspicious by husband. Under the study the women did not face any service problems either at work spot or at homes.

The opinion expressed by the Peedampalli and Pattanam beneficiaries did not vary for all the problems faced at work spot. Since the calculated χ^2 values were less than theoretical χ^2 values.

The opinion of the women beneficiaries significantly varied for a particular problem faced at home that is no family support 9.052), the calculated χ^2 value exceeded the theoretical χ^2 value for the above factor. For all other factors the opinions expressed by the women beneficiaries did not vary. The calculated χ^2 values were less than the theoretical χ^2 values.

Conclusion

The economic conditions of the women beneficiaries improved after joining MGNREGA which is a good sign of development. Women beneficiaries had also started repaying their debt. The beneficiaries had faced problems relating to low wages, hours of work and hard work. Due to low wages they were unable to purchase better products. Since women were engaged in construction work, they found it difficult to cope up with new type of work. The Government has to take in necessary steps to provide suitable jobs to women according to their potential improve the wage level of the workers and raise their living standards.

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