

Women's Participation in Employment and Income Generation: A Study of MNREGS in Seoni District

Abstract

The paper analyses the role of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme in provision of employment and generation of income among the women participants in the rural households of Seoni district of Madhya Pradesh.

Keywords: MNREGS, Wage-Employment, Wage-Income, Women's Empowerment

Introduction

Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MNREGS) was introduced by the Government to strengthen the process of democracy at the grass root level and to infuse transparency and accountability in governance and for the upliftment of rural poor and rural unemployed. It is the programme which directly touches the lives of the poor and promotes inclusive growth.

After the notification National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NAREGA) on September 7th, 2005, 'National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme' was launched on February 2nd, 2006. On October 1st, 2009, NREGA was renamed after Father of Nation Mahatma Gandhi as Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MNREGA).

The Act came into force on February 2nd, 2006 and was implemented in a phase manner. In phase I, it was introduced in the most backward 200 districts of the country, it was implemented in an additional 130 districts in phase II in 2007-08 in order to bring the whole nation under its safety net and keeping in view the demand, the scheme was extended to the remaining 274 districts of India from April 1st, 2008 in phase III.

Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Act (MNREGA) is the first ever law internationally, that guarantees wage employment at an unprecedented scale.

The objective of the Act is to enhance livelihood security in rural areas by providing at least 100 days of guaranteed wage employment in a financial year to every household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work. The primary objective of MNREGA is augmenting wage employment. Its auxiliary objective is to strengthen natural resource management through works that address cause of chronic poverty like drought, deforestation, soil erosion to encourage sustainable development.

There are various explanations for the varying participation of women workers under the MNREGS. Factors that have encouraged women workers' participation include the nature of the job not requiring special knowledge and skill (Krishnaraj et al 2004); outmigration of male family members (Bhatty 2006; Mehrotra 2008; Talukdar 2008); the employment opportunity being available at the doorstep (Bhatty 2006; Khera and Nayak 2009); a tradition of rural women working in others' fields (Narayanan 2008); the provision of equal, non-discriminatory wages (Sudarshan 2008; Khera and Nayak 2009); and innovative experiments in implementation like the female mate system in Rajasthan (Khera 2008).

The main reason for participation in the scheme by women is not desperation to earn a livelihood. Women were usually found to be confined to domestic chores or sometimes need-based work in their own farms, but were not regular wage seekers. Women here seem to view MNREGS as an opportunity to earn independently. The sarkari kaam (government-sponsored work), timely payment of minimum wages and payment into the individual account of women workers were other attractions. The availability of a paid employment opportunity, not available earlier, at their doorsteps and sarkari kaam was factors that attracted women to join MNREGS as workers.

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The available literature suggests that though researchers have made attempt to study various aspects of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme across the country. However, this scheme was not seriously explored by the researchers in Seoni district of Madhya Pradesh.

In 2006 the Ministry of Panchayati Raj named Seoni one of the country's 250 most backward districts (out of a total of 640). It is one of the 24 districts in Madhya Pradesh currently receiving funds from the Backward Regions Grant Fund Programme (BRGF).

Looking into the peculiar characteristics of Seoni district a thorough investigation into this problem is essential. The available literature further suggests that this kind of research study is certainly lacking in academic arena. Thus, with this objective in mind the present study has been undertaken to bridge this gap.

In the light of above mentioned facts, a research study titled "Role of National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme in Socio-Economic Welfare: A Study of Seoni District" is conducted. The area of the study is Seoni district of Madhya Pradesh. Seoni is one of the districts which were selected in the phase I of the MNREGS as the Act came into force on February 2nd, 2006 and initially it was implemented in the most backward 200 districts of the country.

Methodology

The primary data and information of the study is related to the period of 2010-11. The purpose for selection of this year is to gather first hand detailed information to assess and evaluate various aspects of MNREGA.

The overall objective of the research study is to assess the impact of MNREGS in Seoni district of Madhya Pradesh.

The research study is based on both primary as well as secondary data related to the objective.

A sample survey was conducted in the study region for collection of primary data. Data were collected through personal interviews which were carried out in a structured way.

The study is based on multi-stage random sample survey of 645 rural households of eight blocks (Seoni, Kurai, Lakhnadon, Chhapara, Ghansaur, Dhanaura, Kewlari and Barghat) of Seoni district. The 645 rural households represent the total gram panchayats of Seoni district.

Block-wise distribution of the households

S.no	Blocks	Number of Households
1	Seoni	129
2	Kurai	62
3	Lakhnadon	108
4	Chhapara	54
5	Ghansaur	77
6	Dhanaura	47
7	Kewlari	78
8	Barghat	90
Total		645

The respective number of randomly selected rural households from a block represents total gram panchayats of the respective blocks.

The period of the study is limited to the year 2010-11, as objective of the study is to provide first hand information of various socio-economic aspects of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme in the study region.

Gender-wise distribution of the respondents

S.no	Gender	Number of respondents
1	Male	397
2	Female	248
Total		645

The study found that out of 645 participating respondents, 397 (61.55%) were male and 248 (38.44%) were female.

Age-wise distribution of the respondents

S.no	Age-group	Number of respondents
1	Less than 25 years	154
2	Between 25-50 years	349
3	More than 50 years	142
Total		645

Out of the 645 respondents, 154 (23.87%) respondents were less than 25 years of age, 349 (54.10%) respondents were between 25-50 years of age and 142 (22.01%) respondents were more than 50 years of age.

Social-category wise distribution of the respondents

S.No	Category	Number of respondents
1	Scheduled Tribes	271
2	Scheduled Castes	139
3	Other Backward Castes	232
4	General	3
Total		645

As far as social background is concerned, 271 (42.01%) respondents were from scheduled tribes, 139 (21.55%) respondents were from scheduled castes, 232 (35.96%) respondents were from other backward castes and 3(0.46%) respondents were from general category.

Occupation-wise distribution of the respondents

S.no	Occupation	Number of respondents
1	Agricultural Labour	376
2	Non Agricultural Labour	132
3	Agriculture Self Employed	124
4	Non Agricultural Self Employed	13
Total		645

The study found that out of 645 respondents, 376 (58.29%) respondents were agricultural labour, 132 (20.46%) respondents were non agricultural labour, 124 (19.22%) respondents were agricultural self employed and 13 (2.01%) respondents were non agricultural self employed.

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Land ownership wise distribution of the respondents

S.no	Land ownership	Number of respondents
1	Landless	382
2	Marginal farmers	113
3	Small farmers	146
4	Large farmers	4
Total		645

As far as land ownership is concerned, it was found that out of 645 respondents, 382 (59.22%) respondents were landless, 113 (17.51%) respondents were marginal farmers, 146 (22.63%) respondents were small farmers and 4 (0.62%) respondents were large farmers.

The study makes an attempt to assess the women's participation and their share in employment and income of the household.

Results and Discussion

Women's Participation and Share in Employment and Income of the Household Women's participation and share in employment and income of the household (On the basis of Occupation)

OCC	Avg.Women's Mnregs Working Day Per Hh	% Share Of Women's W.D. To Avg Twd Per Hh	Avg. Women's Mnregs Income Per Hh	% Share Of Women's Mnregs Income In Total Income Of The Hh
AL	29.48	13.61	2876.65	13.36
NAL	22.14	11.87	2160.42	9.72
ASE	22.20	9.85	2166.27	11.66
NASE	18.45	6.81	1800.35	7.5

AL: Agricultural Labour, NAL: Non-Agricultural Labour, ASE: Agricultural Self-Employed, NASE: Non-Agricultural Self-Employed

The average women's MNREGS working days per household on the basis of Occupation is 29.48 days for Agricultural Labourers, 22.14 days for Non Agricultural Labourers, 22.20 days for Agricultural Self Employed and 18.45 days for Non Agricultural Self Employed. The share of women's working days to the average total working days per household on the basis of Occupation is 13.61% for Agricultural Labourers, 11.87% for Non Agricultural Labourers, 9.85% for Agricultural Self Employed and 6.81% for Non Agricultural Self Employed. The average women's MNREGS income per household on the basis of Occupation is Rs.2876.65 for Agricultural Labourers, Rs.2160.42 for Non Agricultural Labourers, Rs.2166.27 for Agricultural Self Employed and Rs.1800.35 for Non Agricultural Self Employed. The share of women's MNREGS income in the total income of the household on the basis of Occupation is

13.36% for Agricultural Labourers, 9.72% for Non Agricultural Labourers, 11.66% for Agricultural Self Employed and 7.5% for Non Agricultural Self Employed.

Women's participation and share in employment and income of the household (On the basis of Landownership)

Land Own	Avg.Women's Mnregs Working Day Per Hh	% Share Of Women's W.D. To Avg Twd Per Hh	Avg. Women's Mnregs Income	% Share of Women's Mnregs Income In Total Income Of The Hh
LL	25.98	12.52	2535.12	11.95
MF	24.62	10.30	2402.41	13.01
SF	20.76	9.55	2025.76	10.87
LF	3.2	1.18	312.25	1.53

LL: Landless, MF: Marginal Farmers, SF: Small Farmers, LF: Large Farmers

The average women's MNREGS working days per household on the basis of Land Ownership is 25.98 days for Landless, 24.62 days for Marginal Farmers, 20.76 days for Small Farmers and 3.2 days for Large Farmers. The share of women's working days to the average total working days per household on the basis of Land Ownership is 12.52% for Landless, 10.30% for Marginal Farmers, 9.55% for Small Farmers and 1.18% for Large Farmers. The average women's MNREGS income per household on the basis of Land Ownership is Rs.2535.12 for Landless, Rs.2402.41 for Marginal Farmers, Rs.2025.76 for Small Farmers and Rs.312.25 for Large Farmers. The share of women's MNREGS income in the total income of the household on the basis of Land Ownership is 11.95% for Landless, 13.01% for Marginal Farmers, 10.87% for Small Farmers and 1.53% for Large Farmers.

Women's participation and share in employment and income of the household (On the basis of Social Category)

Social Category	Avg.Women's Mnregs Working Day Per Hh	% Share Of Women's W.D. To Avg Twd Per Hh	Avg. Women's Mnregs Income	% Share of Women's Mnregs Income In Total Income Of The Hh
Sc	22.42	9.98	2190.67	11.16
St	21.76	10.46	2123.34	10.01
Obc	29.78	14.01	2905.93	13.74
Gen	3.75	1.88	367.92	1.67

SC: Scheduled Castes, ST: Scheduled Tribes, OBC: Other Backward Castes, GEN: General

The average women's MNREGS working days per household on the basis of Social Category is 22.42 days for Scheduled Castes, 21.76 days for Scheduled Tribes, 29.78 days for Other Backward Castes and 3.75 days for General Category. The share of women's working days to the average total working days per household on the basis of Social Category is 9.98% for Scheduled Castes, 10.46% for

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Scheduled Tribes, 14.01% for Other Backward Castes and 1.88% for General Category. The average women's MNREGS income per household on the basis of Social Category is Rs.2190.67 for Scheduled Castes, Rs.2123.34 for Scheduled Tribes, Rs.2905.93 for Other Backward Castes and Rs.367.92 for General Category. The share of women's MNREGS income in the total income of the household on the basis of Social Category is 11.16% for Scheduled Castes, 10.01% for Scheduled Tribes, 13.74% for Other Backward Castes and 1.67% for General Category.

Conclusion

Women's empowerment was not among the original intentions of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MNREGA), and is not among its main objectives. However, provisions like priority for women in the ratio of one-third of total workers (Schedule II (6)); equal wages for men and women (Schedule II (34)); and crèches for the children of women workers (Schedule II (28)) were made in the Act, with the view of ensuring that rural women benefit from the scheme in a certain manner.

Provisions like work within a radius of five kilometers from the house, absence of supervisor and contractor, and flexibility in terms of choosing period and months of employment were not made exclusively for women, but have, nevertheless, been conducive for rural women.

It was acknowledged by several studies that the MNREGS had provided an opportunity for women to work with dignity. However, the challenges of making the work women-friendly in terms of the task, i.e., the nature of the physical work and increasing the level of participation of women, both as workers and as participants in the decision-making process, were highlighted.

The other measures suggested for the benefit of women workers included creation of a cadre of care-givers, incorporation of breast-feeding breaks in the work schedule for women with infants, enforcement of provisions like crèches and shelters, and convergence with the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS), as childcare is a significant problem for many of them. Therefore, provision of effective childcare facilities at MNREGS worksites is an important issue that calls for creative thinking and action.

MNREGS has the potential for transferring women's unproductive work into productive work in the mainstream economy. MNREGS can also relieve women from spending long hours on the collection of water, fuel wood, fodder, and childcare by strengthening local infrastructure to provide easy access to drinking water, fuel wood and energy, fodder, and childcare facilities. The availability of extra time can help women to access better opportunities in the labour market. The reduction in unpaid work can also have multiplier impact on the economy that will give another push to income, output, and employment. Clearly, this calls for systematic planning of works, keeping in mind the needs of the local economy and its growth potential.

The flipside of the scheme is the nature of the job – hard manual work and wages based on piece rate – which make it difficult for women to earn minimum wages. Field reports suggest exclusion of single, divorced and separated, and old women in some places. In addition, entitlement to 100 days of guaranteed employment is applicable at the household level. In a male-dominant patriarchal society, it is difficult to believe that women's decision to avail of employment under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MNREGS) would get precedence over the decision of male family members.

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