MGNREGA and Control Domain of Empowerment: A Micro-Level Study

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Structured Abstract:

Purpose: The paper based on micro-level data tries to assess the empowerment of women in its control domain.

Methodology: The study is based on an extensive survey carried out on 500 MGNREGA women workers in Nadia district using a well designed structured questionnaire. All the qualitative and quantitative data have been presented and analysed using relevant statistical and econometric tools.

Findings: Women's control over own earnings and self-esteem resulting out of the feeling that they are independent has engraving impact on their overall empowerment. In the study, more than 75 percent of women have responded to enjoy control over financial resources to a satisfactory level. This higher level of retention of income in conjugation with a higher participation rate under the scheme has defined their self-reliance in the study which is the most crucial item for the control domain of the empowerment process. Further, the scheme has contributed to the increased mobility of the more than 85 percent of women under study. These are important findings in the control domain of the empowerment process.

Research Limitations: For the purpose of analysis the concept of empowerment has been zoomed in to only the control domain of empowerment but the term empowerment encompasses a lot of other dimensions as well which is out of the purview of the paper.

Originality: This paper is out and out based on survey data. So, it is original and novel in content and spirit.

Keywords: MGNREGA, Empowerment, Control Domain, Self-Reliance.

Paper Type: Research Paper.

Introduction

The term empowerment has become popular in the field of development since the mid-1980s. As a concept, empowerment was first brought at the International Women's Conference in 1985, at Nairobi. The conference maintained that empowerment is a redistribution of power and control of resources in favour of women through positive intervention (Sashi Kumar,

2008, p. 4). In order to achieve the goal of women's equality and empowerment, they have to be provided with wholesome opportunities and rights (Parvin, 2012). The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (hereinafter MGNREGA or MNREGA), the flagship programme of India, has rightly reserved the rights of the women. Several clauses documented in Schedule-II of the Act relate specifically to women (Carswell & De Neve, 2013, p. 83). In its mosaic, it has overt aspirations for women (Narayan & Das, 2015, p. 46). Basically, MNREGA was not envisioned as a women's empowerment programme, but in its in-built structure, it has every potential to empower the rural women folk economically. As the scheme has converted some of the unpaid hours of the women into paid hours it has started to change their status in the family as well as in the society.

Objective of the Paper

The paper based on micro-level data tries to assess the empowerment of women in its control domain.

Data and Methodology

For the analytical purpose, the study is based on primary data only. For the collection of primary data, an extensive survey has been carried out during 2016-17 at the household level in eight Gram Panchayats selected randomly from four Blocks of Nadia District of West Bengal. The four Blocks are Chakdaha, Krishnaganj, Nakasipara, and Santipur. From these eight Gram Panchayats, 500 odd households working in the MNREGA works have been selected randomly but the target has been to reach to the female workers only. As far as the tools and techniques are concerned, a well designed structured questionnaire consisted of the variables relating to the objectives and concepts of the study has been used to collect both qualitative as well as quantitative data from the concerned sources and presented and analysed using relevant statistical and econometric tools.

Descriptive Data

In our sample there are 15.2 percent general category women while 36.2 percent are Scheduled Castes, 28 percent are Scheduled Tribes and the rest 20.6 percent are from OBC a category. In general, the women in the sample have a lower literacy rate. Only 41.4 percent of women are literate. Regarding marital status, around 82.4 percent of women in the sample are married and 16.6 percent are widows. Rests are unmarried and others.

In respect of MGNREGA participation, the study has assessed average participation of the sample women for the last three years instead of only one year as done by earlier studies (Khera & Nayek, 2009; Pankaj & Tankha, 2010). Considering the aggregate data it can be stated that 9.4 percent of women in the sample have got 0-15 days of work during the last three years and another 21.6 percent of women worked for 16-30 days of work during the said period. It can be further stated that around 69 percent of women in the sample have enjoyed on average 31-100 days of job under the scheme during the last three years, the majority being in the work-days of 31-60 with 48.2 percent.

Empowerment – the Control Domain

The crux to the concept of empowerment is the idea of "power" (Kabeer, 1999, P. 2). As Batliwala (1994) maintains that the most important aspect of the term empowerment is that it contains the word power which may be defined as the control over the material assets, intellectual resources, and ideology (p. 129). In general, there are five components in the empowerment process namely, welfare, access, awareness, participation, and control (Parvin, 2012, p. 187). Control involves the ability of the women to direct or influence events and to have an equal share in the resources and benefits so that they can control their lives.

Control over resources in a very important ingredient of the empowerment process. The resources over which control can be exercised fall into five broad categories such as physical resources, human resources, intellectual resources (information), financial resources and the self which is the unique combination of intelligence, creativity, self-esteem and confidence (Parvin, 2012, p. 199). In our study, the control component of the empowerment process has been explained with the help of three variables.

> **Proportion of MNREGA Earning Retained by Women Workers:** Retention of earning by women is a very crucial indicator for the empowerment of the women as it indicates their control over the financial resources. Control over one's earnings, access to services and products and self-esteem coming out of the feeling that they are independent, contribute to a very great extent to the overall empowerment of women (Parvin, 2012, p. 193). In our data around 38.6 percent of women replied to keep 100 percent of their MNREGA wage while another 39 percent women keeping 26-75 percent of their income from the scheme. Due to special social character existing among the sample women of Sarati Panchayat we found 62.8 percent women retaining 100 percent of MNREGA

earning over there. Similarly, in the case of ST families in Bhajanghat Tungi, Taldah Majdia and Belgoria-I, male members tend to spend on items like liquor. So, there the women run the family and they never allow the male members to handle their MNREGA earning in the apprehension that the money will be misused. Most of the ST female workers of these Panchayats keep 100 percent of their MNREGA wage with them.

Are You Self-Reliant Now: Feeling of self-reliance has an in-built component of freedom that paves the way for other freedoms such as political, social, legal, etc. (Parvin, 2012, p. 200). This is a very decisive parameter in the control domain of the empowerment process. Self-reliance in our study is a joint product of earning from the scheme as well as the proportion of income that can be retained by the workers. That is why in Taldah Majdia Panchayat 71.9 percent of women have been found to retain 100 percent of their MNREGA income but none replied to be largely self-reliant as the MNREGA work opportunity is awfully less there. Whereas in Patikabari Panchayat only 15.6 percent of women declared to keep cent percent of their wage-earnings but 54.7 percent of women are largely self-reliant as the average working day is the highest in Patikabari as far as our sample is concerned, averaging around 90 days in last three years. In aggregate 26 percent of women have emerged to be largely self-reliant as a result of this scheme while another 46.8 percent women have also responded to be self-reliant to some extent.

Physical Mobility after MNREGA: Whether a woman can move freely or not marks her control over self. Physical mobility gives a woman freedom of movement that ultimately ushers in her much sought empowerment. MNREGA has opened up the opportunity for going outside of the home for productive purposes. In our sample, 58.6 percent of women have no other sources of income or employment other than work under this scheme. They only do household chores. In addition to this, some other women get the widow pension. They also hardly need to go out of home for a productive purpose. So it can be stated that around 60 percent of women workers of our sample has got the taste of physical mobility outside the home for productive purposes only because of the scheme. Only 14.6 percent of women replied that the scheme did not have any effect on their mobility. They are basically the agricultural labours who need to go out of home for their employment. For most of them, the scheme has not added any further freedom for mobility. So for the

remaining 85.4 percent of women MNREGA increased physical mobility, largely or partly, that is the true outcome of the Scheme.

Empowerment – the Analysis

In the analytical part, the study mostly dwells on Factor Analysis. Now, factor analysis has been carried out to assess whether the variables chosen for constructing the empowerment indicator are correlated or not and can reach us to a valid and reliable construct that can be used for subsequent analysis. We can refer Mandal, Bandyopadhyay & Roy, 2011; Parvin, 2012; Tikare, 2015; and Hossain, Begum & Kaiser, 2017 for similar usage of factor analysis on primary data.

The results of factor analysis on the control dimension of empowerment have been presented in Table-2 and Table-3. In the case of control dimension, the value of KMO (Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin) measure of sample adequacy is 0.534 which signifies the purpose of adequacy. In the case of Bartlett's Test of Sphericity, the approximate Chi-square value is 496.988 which is significant at <0.001 percent level thereby confirming the presence of inter-correlation among the items of the control dimension.

In the case of awareness, indicator 01 component has been extracted having the Eigen value of 1.84 explaining the 61.38 percent of the variance. Here, we find a single latent trait or construct underlying the items of the control dimension. So, it is a unidimensional factor. Generally, Cronbach's Alpha is a measure used to assess the reliability of a set of scale or test items. Alpha coefficients that are less than 0.5 are usually not acceptable (Goforth, 2015). Here the value of Alpha also signifies the reliability of the scale. So the factor Control thus formed is both valid and reliable. All of the items in question have factor loadings over 0.50 with the variable "Are You Self-Reliant Now?" having the highest loading of 0.994. Self-reliance is the most crucial item for the control domain of the empowerment process as it is the unique combination of self-image, self-esteem and confidence of the women.

All these results from factor analysis allow us to go further for identifying the interdependence between participation variables with that of MNREGA participation of the women workers in our sample as well as identifying the differential impacts of Control factor as empowerment indicator on different demographic variables. For the first purpose cross-tabulation along with Chi-square test is done while for second purpose ANOVA is done, as done by Tikare, 2015 in her study.

Self-reliance in our study is a joint product of earning from the Scheme as well as the proportion of income that can be retained by the workers. So, instead of taking all the three variables we have considered the last 2 items for our further application. For 2nd and 3rd variables, cross-tabulation along with Chi-square test is done.

In our study, Table-4 represents the cross-tabulation between female 03-year average participation with self-reliance and physical mobility after MNREGA. As expected majority of the women consisting of 99.2 percent who felt self-reliant to a large extent due to MNREGA have enjoyed on average 31-100 days of employment under the Scheme in the last three years. Similarly, out of 136 women who felt the Scheme has not contributed to their self-reliance to any extent, 76 women comprising 55.9 percent are in the work-day bracket of 0-30 days. The rest 44.1 percent women who have got fairly good employment under the Scheme between 31-100 days but do not feel self-reliant to any extent as because they have handed over the entire amount of their MNREGA earning to their husbands or heads of their families implying that they don't have the control over the financial resources. In this way, self-reliance is a joint product of MNREGA earning and proportion of income retained by the women workers.

In the case of physical mobility, the picture is crystal clear. About 205 women replied that the Scheme had increased their mobility to a formidable extent. It is a fact that out of them only one woman is in the work-day bracket of 0-30 days. Likewise, in the work-day bracket of 61-100 days, there is not a single woman whose mobility has not increased due to the Scheme. So, it can be easily inferred that women's participation under MNREGA has a strong positive effect both on the self-reliance and physical mobility of them. The highly significant Chi-square results also endorse our inference.

For identifying the differential impacts of Control factor as empowerment indicator on different demographic variables, first one way ANOVA has been carried out to test whether means of different castes differ significantly in respect of control indicator of empowerment. However, Table-6 reflects that means of different castes do not differ significantly in respect of the control domain of empowerment. The Table-7 reflects that mean of different marital status differs significantly in respect of control domain of empowerment. Here unmarried women have the lowest score followed by other, widow and married women. As lower values have been assigned for higher control in our paper, it implies that unmarried women have

enjoyed the highest level of empowerment in the control domain while married women enjoyed the least as a result of MNREGA.

Conclusion

Under the control dimension of empowerment, the study has focused very much on the control over self which encompasses independence, self-esteem and confidence. MNREGA by generating employment for women lays the basis for greater independence, and self-esteem (Jandu, 2008, p. 1). Women's control over own earnings and self-esteem resulting out of the feeling that they are independent has engraving impact on their overall empowerment. In the study, less than a quarter of the women have responded to retain 0-25 percent of their earnings implying that more than 75 percent of women enjoy control over financial resources to a satisfactory level. This higher level of retention of income in conjugation with higher participation rate under the scheme has defined the self-reliance in the study which is the most crucial item for the control domain of the empowerment process as it is the unique combination of self-image, self-esteem, and confidence of the women.

Another dimension of the control domain pertains to physical mobility which gives a woman freedom of movement that ultimately ushers in her empowerment. MNREGA allows and ensures freedom of movement outside the home for the productive purposes to around 60 percent of women workers under study who have been simply doing household chores so far. The scheme has not only converted their unpaid hours into paid hours but also bestowed them the much-sought independence. It has contributed to the increased mobility of the more than 85 percent women under study and in the work-day bracket of 61-100 days, there has been not a single woman whose mobility has not increased due to the scheme. These are the true outcomes of the scheme in the control domain.

Consideration of the differential impact of the Control factor as empowerment indicator on different demographic variables reflects that in respect of caste no significant result has found. However, in respect of marital status, the study indicates that unmarried women have enjoyed the highest level of empowerment in the control domain while married women enjoyed the least as a result of MNREGA.

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APPENDIX

Table 1: Workers' Response regarding Control

Blocks	Gram Panchayats	Proportion of MNREGA Earning Retained by Women Workers			Are You Self-Reliant Now?			Physical Mobility after MNREGA		
		100%	26- 75%	0- 25%	Largely	Partly	No	Largely Increased	Partly Increased	Same
Chakdaha	Hingnara	**17**	**28**	**27**	**10**	**34**	**28**	**15**	**40**	**17**
		23.6	38.9	37.5	13.9	47.2	38.9	20.8	55.6	23.6
	Sarati	**27**	**16**	**00**	**14**	**29**	**00**	**22**	**20**	**01**
		62.8	37.2		32.6	67.4		51.2	46.5	2.3
Krishnaganj	Bhajanghat Tungi	**38**	**37**	**24**	**11**	**52**	**36**	**40**	**35**	**24**
		38.4	37.4	24.2	11.1	52.5	36.4	40.4	35.4	24.2
	Taldah Majdia	**23**	**05**	**04**	**00**	**17**	**15**	**00**	**08**	**24**
		71.9	15.6	12.5		53.1	46.9		25	75
Nakasipara	Birpur-II	**09**	**27**	**24**	**01**	**35**	**24**	**02**	**58**	**00**
		15	45	40	1.7	58.3	40	3.3	96.7	
	Patikabari	**10**	**42**	**12**	**35**	**17**	**12**	**54**	**10**	**00**
		15.6	65.6	18.8	54.7	26.6	18.7	84.4	15.6	**00**
Santipur	Belgoria-I	**24**	**09**	**00**	**16**	**17**	**00**	**06**	**21**	**06**
		72.7	27.3		48.5	51.5		18.2	63.6	18.2
	Fulia Township	**45**	**31**	**21**	**43**	**33**	**21**	**66**	**30**	**01**
		46.4	32	21.6	44.4	34	21.6	68	31	1
Total	Number	**193**	**195**	**112**	**130**	**234**	**136**	**205**	**222**	**73**
	%	38.6	39	22.4	26	46.8	27.2	41	44.4	14.6

Note: In the cells upper figures indicate frequencies and lower figures indicate percentage.

Source: Survey Data.

Table 2: KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy	0.534
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity Approx. Chi-Square	496.988
df	3
Sig.	<0.001

Source: Survey Data.

Table 3: Results of Factor Analysis

Items	Factor Loadings	Eigen value	Variance Explained	Reliability (Cronbach's Alpha)	New Factor
MNREGA Earning Retained by Woman Worker	0.775	1.84	61.38	0.666	Control
Are You Self-Reliant Now?	0.944				
Physical Mobility after MNREGA	0.591				
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis					
1 component extracted					

Source: Primary Data.

Table 4: Female 03-Year Average Participation vs. Self-Reliance, Physical Mobility after MNREGA

Female 03-year average participation		Are You Self-Reliant Now?				Physical Mobility after MNREGA			
		Largely	Partly	No	Total	Largely Increased	Partly Increased	Same	Total
0-15	Count	**0**	**13**	**34**	**47**	**0**	**06**	**41**	**47**
	% within 3-yr partn		27.7	72.3	**100**		12.8	87.2	**100**
	% within paremeter		5.6	25	**9.4**		2.7	56.2	**9.4**
16-30	Count	**01**	**65**	**42**	**108**	**01**	**87**	**20**	**108**
	% within 3-yr partn	0.9	60.2	38.9	**100**	0.9	80.6	18.5	**100**
	% within paremeter	0.8	27.8	30.9	**21.6**	0.5	39.2	27.4	**21.6**
31-60	Count	**75**	**123**	**43**	**241**	**114**	**115**	**12**	**241**
	% within 3-yr partn	31.1	51	17.8	**100**	47.3	47.7	05	**100**
	% within paremeter	57.7	52.6	31.6	**48.2**	55.6	51.8	16.4	**48.2**
61-90	Count	**26**	**23**	**11**	**60**	**52**	**8**	**0**	**60**
	% within 3-yr partn	43.3	38.3	18.3	**100**	86.7	13.3		**100**
	% within paremeter	20	9.8	8.1	**12.0**	25.4	3.6		**12**
91-100	Count	**28**	**10**	**6**	**44**	**38**	**6**	**0**	**44**
	% within 3-yr partn	63.6	22.7	13.6	**100**	86.4	13.6		**100**
	% within paremeter	21.5	4.3	4.4	**8.8**	18.5	2.7		**8.8**
Total	Count	**130**	**234**	**136**	**500**	**205**	**222**	**73**	**500**
	% within 3-yr partn	26	46.8	27.2	**100**	41	44.4	14.6	**100**
	% within paremeter	100	100	100	**100**	100	100	100	**100**

Source: Survey Data.

Table 5: Results of Chi-Square Test

Variables	χ^2	Sig.
Female 03-Year Average Participation vs Are You Self-Reliant Now?	139.88	<0.001
Female 03-Year Average Participation vs Physical Mobility after MNREGA	383.35	<0.001

Source: Primary Data.

Table 6: Descriptive Statistics and ANOVA on Caste

Caste	Gen	SC	ST	OBC$_a$	Sum of Squares	F value	P value
Empowerment Indicator	Mean SD	Mean SD	Mean SD	Mean SD	Between Groups Within Groups Total	0.75	0.52
Control	-8.76 1.13	-5.08 1.02	4.21 0.95	9.67 0.92	2.26 496.74 499		

Source: Primary Data.

Table 7: Descriptive Statistics and ANOVA on Marital Status

Caste	Unmarried	Married	Widow	Other	Sum of Squares	F value	P value
Empowerment Indicator	Mean SD	Mean SD	Mean SD	Mean SD	Between Groups Within Groups Total	6.28	<0.001
Control	-9.29 0.82	8.69 0.99	-3.93 0.94	-4.41 1.29	18.25 480.75 499		

Source: Primary Data.