

MGNREGA and Livelihood Status of Rural Women: Indian Perspective

Anindita Neogi
Assistant Professor in Economics,
Ranaghat College, Nadia,
West Bengal, India
aneogi580@gmail.com

Structured Abstract

Purpose: This paper provides an overall livelihood scenario in rural India and the general condition of rural Indian women. Also this study provides the impact of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) on the overall empowerment of the rural women.

Design / Methodology / Approach: Information is based on the secondary data published by the NSSO of India and Census report at different time period.

Findings: Major finding of this study is that Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Act is providing a positive light to rural women. Many studies have shown that with the introduction of this act, several rural women are coming out of their house to engage in paid employment and now they are engaging in decision making regarding spending of money independently.

Research Limitations / Implications: Secondary data will help to make an idea of the role of MGNREGA on the overall livelihood status of the rural women. To know the reality of the effect in depth study with primary data will be of great help.

Practical Implications: This paper provides an alternative source of livelihood which will have an impact on reducing migration, restricting child labour, alleviating poverty, and making villages self- sustaining through productive assets creation.

Originality / Value: The major outcomes of this study may be helpful to the Indian government such that overall empowerment of rural women will be uplifted in future.

Keywords: MGNREGA, NSSO, Rural livelihood, Women Empowerment..

Paper Type: Research Paper.

Introduction

India is a country which achieved independence in 1947, but the rural-urban partition and the rich-poor divide are still plaguing India. 68.84 percent of the Indian population lives in villages. There are 6,40,867 villages in India. According to the “2007 Revision of World Urbanisation prospects” by the United Nations, India would continue to have the largest rural population in the world until 2050 (Hindustan Times, 28.2.2008). Women have been and will be an integral part of the Indian workforce. According to Census 2011, the total number of women workers in India is 149.8 million and interestingly, females working in rural areas amount to 122 million. As per Census 2011, the work participation rate for women in rural areas is 30.02 percent as compared to 15.44 percent in the urban areas. There are several issues which are creating difficulties in the lives of Indians, like rising crimes against women, increasing poverty, corruption, discrimination, lack of transparency in the official functioning, criminalization of politics etc. Rural women in India are less literate than rural men. There is a negative attitude of the family towards educating the girl child. In rural India, very few women have ownership over land or productive assets. Agriculture which is basis of the rural Indian economy is sustained for the most part by the female workforce, also rural women from childhood days have to bear the burden of taking care of younger siblings, cooking, looking domestic animals in their parents’ house. National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO) a government of India organization has stated that in 2009-10 and 2011-2012, women’s employment has fallen in rural India and about 9.1 million jobs were lost by rural women. In this depressing scenario, Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Act is providing a positive light to rural women. Many studies have shown that with the introduction of this act, several rural women are coming out of their house to engage in paid employment and now they are engaging in decision making regarding spending of money. With financial empowerment, many of them are also joining self-help groups to promote their abilities. This paper provides an overall livelihood scenario in rural India and the general condition of rural Indian women. Also this study provides the impact of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) on the overall empowerment of the rural women.

Literature Review

Many conceptual and empirical studies supported that access to land and credit can successfully empower rural women, K.C. Roy, C.A. Tisdell (2000) pointed out that in rural India we have

got two types of rights on land for women, first is legal and another is traditional where traditional is informal right on land, findings suggested that all traditional rights should be transfigured in legal rights. Ashok Pankaj and Rukmini Tankha (2010) reported the empowerment effects of the MGNREGA on rural women using a field survey in Bihar, Jharkhand, Rajasthan and Himachal Pradesh. The authors argue that women workers have gained from the scheme primarily because of the paid employment opportunity and benefits have been realized through income- consumption effects, intra household effects and the enhancement of choice and capability. Narinder Paul, M.S. Nain (2015) suggested a new approach towards empowering rural women in India; they presented a collaborative approach of development with rural tourism for socio-economic empowerment of rural women. Abdul Ahmed (2015) explained the participation of unskilled rural women and their contribution in village economy. Pranab R. Choudhury, Manoj Kumar Behera(2016) proposed a legal government framework related to access to land of women and suggested some legal amendments, in Research study by R. Vishnuvarthini and A.M. Ayyothi (2016) also supported the findings of above researchers, their study presented that only a legal foundation can do economic empowerment of rural women in India. Shabbeer Ahmed (2016) assessed a wide gap between the provisions in Indian constitution and the real condition of rural women in India. The access of rural women to information, assets, credits and opportunities is insufficient. He found inter and intra state imbalances are responsible for low economic empowerment of rural women in India.

Objectives of the study

1. To discuss overall livelihood scenario in rural India.
2. To analyze the impact of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) on the livelihood status of rural women in India.

Research methodology

The present study is primarily based on secondary data. The relevant secondary data has been collected from NSSO of India's report, Census report, newspaper articles, research article and from various Government websites and reports.

Overall livelihood scenario in rural India

More than 400 million people in India still live in poverty, accounting for one third of the world's poor. Poverty is most common in rural areas, with about 26 per cent of rural people

living in poverty, compared with about 14 per cent of the urban population. Poor rural people continue to live with inadequate physical and social infrastructure, poor access to services and characterized by inequalities in assets, status and power. India ranked 136th out of 187 countries on the United Nations Development Programme's 2013 Human Development. Agricultural wage earners, smallholder farmers and casual workers in the non-farm sector constitute the bulk of poor rural people. Within these categories, women and tribal communities are the most deprived. Poverty is deepest among members of scheduled castes and tribes in the country's rural areas. On the map of poverty in India, the poorest areas are in parts of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Odisha, Chhattisgarh and West Bengal. Most of the people in Villages earn their living either through agriculture or handicrafts. Since the availability of land to each family has remained the same and the number of family members has grown, supporting all of them through agriculture alone is becoming difficult. People are moving to towns and cities in search of jobs, but these are also not always available partly because they lack the qualifications. The government is addressing these problems by taking steps to make better farming techniques available to increase crop production from the limited availability of land and other opportunities of employment. It is also encouraging young people to start their own business by providing them training and finance. The National policy for farmers was released by the Ministry of Agriculture in September 2007. The main aim of this policy is to improve net incomes of farmers through increased production, better prices, and support from government through improvement of land, water, and services. The ministry has a large number of schemes which are discussed as follows:

- a) The government gives special type of seeds which are more fertile and resistant to diseases and pests through Campaign for Seed Treatment.
- b) The government provides grant to cooperative groups formed by farmers for generating income through agriculture based business.
- c) The National Agricultural Insurance Scheme (NAIS) has been launched to protect farmers in case of crop damage or loss due to unforeseen circumstances.

As described in the NSSO 66th Report, the male female disparity in wages has continued to be significant, with male wages being 1.4 times the female wages as shown in Table 1 and 2. Thus, as per NSSO 66th Round, average wage/salary earnings per day received by male casual labors engaged in rural works other than public works was Rs. 102 and for females it was Rs.69. The difference was also seen in public works, though not as stark as in private works. In rural areas, wage rates (per day) for casual labour in public works other than MGNREGA

public works was Rs. 98 for males and Rs. 86 for females. The difference was least for casual labour in MGNREGA public works, where the wage rate (per day) was Rs. 91 for males and Rs. 87 for females. State-wise difference in wages is shown in Table 2. On the whole, women's wages are generally lower than men's wages. In every state we see that there is a huge difference of male and female average salary. In India average salary for male is Rs 101.53; where as the average salary for female is Rs 68.94 only. In Chhattisgarh, average salary for male is lowest (Rs70.83) and in Madhya Pradesh, average salary for female is lowest (Rs 58.13) compare to all other states in India (Table 2). In Table 3, Census report show increase in women's share of agricultural employment in the post-reform period. Between 1991 and 2001, the agricultural sector saw a decline in rural main workers from 182.8 million to 170.6 million, a reduction of 11.7 million male and a mere 0.5 million female workers. Despite under-estimation and thus an increasing dependency ratio, the NSSO data show two other trends as regards women's role in agriculture. Firstly, of those rural women who were classified as workers, a greater proportion of them worked in agriculture compared with men, but comparatively fewer women workers were in the more productive non-farm sector (See table 4); and secondly, women's share in the total number of agricultural workers is increasing overtime leading to their increased involvement in agriculture. . As men migrate to urban areas and to non-farm sectors due to both the distress in agriculture and better job opportunities elsewhere, women's responsibility both as workers and as farm managers has been growing, leading to an increased feminization of agriculture.

Impact of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) on the livelihood status of rural women

In Indian social set up, the participation of women in the development process has to be guaranteed through concrete measures taken at various levels for their overall development. Ministry of Rural Development is implementing various poverty alleviation and rural development schemes and these schemes have special components for women. One of the major schemes is Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA). MGNREGA is for the rural people, including rural women, who are unskilled or semi-skilled. MGNREGA is known as a "Silver Bullet" to eradicate rural poverty and unemployment, by way of creating demand for productive labour force in villages. It provides an alternative source of livelihood which will have an impact on reducing migration, restricting child labour, alleviating poverty, and making villages self-sustaining through productive assets creation such as road construction, cleaning up of water tanks, soil and water conservation work, etc.

MGNREGA has come after almost 56 years of experience of other rural employment programmes. The MGNREGA, 2005 guarantees 100 days of employment in a financial year to any rural households whose adult members are willing to do untrained manual work. It is provided in the Act that priority shall be given to women. During the year 2012-2013, total employment of 134.76 crore have been generated, out of this total employment 71.88 crore employment were generated for women under this programme. To increase participation rates of women workers in MGNREGA, the Ministry has suggested that 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. This Ministry has also advised the following rules to all the states:

- a) To identify widowed, deserted and poor women who qualify as a household under the Act and then they will must get 100 days of work.
- b) To ensure that pregnant women and lactating mothers are given works which require less effort and are close to their houses.
- c) To conduct time and motion studies to formulate gender, age, level of disability, climate sensitive Schedule of Rates and to ensure accurate capturing of work done by women at worksites.
- d) To ensure that at least 50% of the worksite supervisors at all worksites are women.
- e) To ensure that worksite facilities such as crèches, drinking water, shade etc are provided through convergence with Women and Child Development Schemes like ICDS.
- f) To encourage participation of women groups, including Self Help Groups in awareness generation, capturing demand, planning, implementation, monitoring and maintenance of works.

Conclusion

Around 70 per cent of the Indian population is living in rural areas, but the effects of poverty, unemployment, poor and inadequate infrastructure in rural areas is leading to socio-economic tensions manifesting in economic deprivation. Women empowerment in rural areas symbolize rural development. It can be looked as the best solution to overcome the twin problem of poverty and unemployment faced by the rural areas. Hence it is necessary for the government and the corporate industry to work hand in hand to tackle major problems faced by women in rural areas. One of the basic policy objectives should be universal empowerment of women, the lack of which tends to continue the unequal status quo. The popular UNESCO slogan should come in handy: 'educate a man and you educate an individual; educate a

woman and you educate a family'. It is necessary to overcome the major problems of inadequate flow of credit, use of obsolete technology and other equipments, lack of basic infrastructural facilities, development and support of NGOs so as to open many opportunities for the women in rural areas. Though many corporate organizations are involved in women empowerment in rural areas, but there is a lot more to be done to overcome the challenges of shyness, financial availability, traditional outlook, family support. 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 Indian villages. It provides an alternative source of livelihood which will have an impact on reducing migration, restricting child labour, alleviating poverty, and making villages self-sustaining through productive assets creation such as road construction, cleaning up of water tanks, soil and water conservation work, etc. For which it has been considered as the largest anti-poverty programme in the world. Since the scheme is going to be in place for an undefined period of time, and is being enlarged in terms of scope and geographical coverage, there are many challenges like non-homogeneity in its effectiveness, region specific disparities and outcomes etc. It is exactly due to this reason; few NGOs have already done some surveys. However, they are very much confined to one or two districts, and more importantly cantered on systemic defects, rather than probing the impact of their programmes on beneficiaries. There is a necessity to carry out an in-depth review of these rural development programmes with different strategies. Thus, there is also a need to critically examine the implementation process of this programme and its impact on livelihood of the rural people. It can be concluded that the success of this Act depends upon its proper implementation and in this scenario, the community participation is very important to make this programme more effective in future.

References

1. Ambasta, P, Shankar, P.S.V., & Shah, M. (2008). Two years of MGNREGA: The road ahead. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 43 (8).
2. Chayal K., Dhaka, BL, & Suwalka, RL (2010) Women in agriculture, *Humanity & Social Science. journal*, 5 (1), 68-72.
3. Dey, S., & Bedi, A. (2010). The National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme in Birbhum. *Economic and Political Weekly*, XLV (41), 19-25.

4. Mammen, K, & Christina P(2000)"Women's Work and Economic Development." *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 14 (4), 141-164.
5. Mehrotra, S.(2008). NREG two years on: Where do we go from here? *Economic and Political Weekly*, 43(31).
6. Roy, D. S., & Samanta, D. (2010). Good Governance and Employment Generation through NREGA: A case study of Gram Panchayat in West Bengal. Presented at Conference on "Infrastructure, Finance and Governance: Push for Growth, Organized by Ministry of Rural Development, GOI.
7. Shah, M. (2004). National Rural Employment Guarantee Act: A Historic opportunity. *Economic and Political Weekly*, XXX (39), 5287-5291.
8. Vishnuvarthini, R. and Ayyothi, A. M. (2016). "The Role of SHGs in Women Empowerment: A Critical Review". *IOSR Journal of Economics and Finance* 7(3), 33-39.

Web Resources

9. <http://www.nrega.ac.in>
10. <http://www.gov.in>
11. <http://censusindia.gov.in>

Table 1
Daily actual wages of male and female workers in 2009-10(in Rs)

Sector	Men	Women
Rural Private	102	69
Rural Public(Other than MGNREGA)	98	86
Rural MGNREGA	91	87

Source: NSSO 2011

Table 2
Average wage earnings (Rs.) per day received by casual labors of age 15-59 years engaged in rural works in 2009-10.

STATE	MALE	FEMALE
Andhra Pradesh	115.41	75.71
Assam	94.38	74.87
Bihar	81.03	65.81
Chhattisgarh	70.83	65.49
Delhi	195.23	200.00
Gujarat	83.17	70.99
Haryana	146.08	99.12
Himachal Pradesh	141.44	110.23
Jammu & Kashmir	157.46	206.54
Jharkhand	103.61	82.17
Karnataka	96.91	62.77
Kerala	226.60	119.31
Madhya Pradesh	74.46	58.13
Maharashtra	86.01	58.22
Orissa	81.00	59.06
Punjab	133.46	91.80
Rajasthan	132.29	94.31
Tamil Nadu	132.14	72.62
Tripura	107.55	83.63
Uttarakhand	122.10	96.70

Uttar Pradesh	97.04	69.21
West Bengal	87.76	65.94
All-India	101.53	68.94

Source: NSSO, 2011

Table 3
Number of rural workers in agriculture (in millions)

Year	Total Worker	Male	Female
1991	182.8	132.7	50.1
2001	170.6	121.0	49.6

Source: Census Report of 1991 & 2001

Table 4
Percentage share of the three broad sectors of total rural work force in 2009-10.

Sector	Male	Female
Agriculture	63%	79%
Secondary	19%	13%
Tertiary	18%	8%

Source: NSSO 2011