

IMPACT OF MGNREGA TO ACHIEVE FOOD SECURITY AMONG RURAL HOUSEHOLD

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ABSTRACT

Today, India has a population of over 1.21 billion, of which, 250 million people are below the poverty line and approximately 75 percent of them reside in rural areas, making the employment of rural people as crucial for the development of India. To generate more income opportunities, the Government of India has started a flagship programme, MGNREGA, which indirectly resolves all these problems. The Act aims at enhancing the livelihood security and food security of households in rural areas of the country. The MGNREGA and food security are significantly interlinked, and the act gives a necessary push to the purchasing power.

Women are an important index of social and physical health of the nation. Poor status of women and lack of decision-making power at the household level has been maintained as one of the major reasons responsible for the inexplicable levels of malnutrition in the Indian sub-continent. Researchers have shown that women are more likely to reinvest profits back into human capital than are men. When women have economic power, they contribute directly to their children's development, household food consumption and indirectly to their nation's income growth. From a gender perspective, the MGNREGA holds great promise, especially with its clause for protecting woman's access to Scheme through proactive inclusion. By putting cash income into their hands, NREGA is beginning to create a greater degree of economic independence among women. It needs utmost to involve rural women in such kind of income / employment generating activities, so that, her involvement can lead to form sustainable livelihood and improvement of the nutritional situation in poor households.

KEYWORDS: MGNREGA, Food Security, Rural Women

INTRODUCTION

Social protection programs have been an important part of the development process and planning in India, since her Independence. However, after sixty five years, around one-fourth of its population lives in poverty. Despite a plethora of social protection programs, vulnerable groups among the poor have not been well targeted. However, the recent paradigm shift towards rights-based legislations may have hit the right chord with its self-targeting mechanism. The Right to work or the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) provided employment to almost 55 million households, and spending nearly 8 billion US dollars in April 2010–March 2011. Participation of women and socially backward groups has been exceptionally high.

An Act has three types of impact on the society-short term, medium term and the long term. It may also affect a given society at three levels-the value system, the institutions, and the processes. NREGA is one of the most recent Act of India and have very limited empirical evidences to present any observation regarding the medium term and long term effects. Moreover, we also have insufficient basis to discuss the nature of the impact of this Act upon the values or institutions in the State. But, there are enough studies to help us in finding out the short term as well as the procession aspects of the impact this step by the Indian state in the context of empowerment of the rural poor, particularly the more vulnerable sections of the society like women, SCs and STs. The NREGA will have significant positive impact on seasonal rural-urban migrations by providing employment to rural workers during the lean season (Das, 2013). This will reduce the problem of excessive population pressures in Indian cities, as surplus rural labour will find employment in their own districts. The NREGA may also have an impact on permanent migration trends. The Scheme also provides an alternative source of income for rural labourers, raising the reservation wage and implicitly offering labourers' bargaining powers in an otherwise inequitable rural labour market. The Scheme has provided labourers (particularly, those who are in debt bondage or contract labour) with a dignified choice of work (MGNREGA Sameeksha, 2013). MGNREGA has also reduced distress migration from traditionally migration-intensive areas.

While studying the impact of NREP on the income of the women beneficiaries in Madhya Pradesh, Jain (1998) reported that, it helped to raise the income level above the poverty line of the beneficiaries, reduced migration of the rural poor, influenced the agriculture wage rate upward and provided employment in the rural sector to the beneficiaries to a limited extent. Women work outside the home, due to many economic and social reasons. The growing cost of living, debt burden, future needs of the children, unexpected tragedies and shift from joint family to nuclear family have been stated by Sujane and Krishnaveni (1999) in their study on reason of women work outside the home. The real tragedy is that women are often better economic managers of capital than men. Research had shown that women are more likely to reinvest profile as control of income and capital than are men. When women have economic power, defined as control of income and capital (land, livestock) they gain more equality and control over their own, while contributing directly to their children's development and thereby indirectly to their nation's income growth (Nagesh, 2004). In an evaluation of Employment Guarantee Scheme (EGS), Sridhar (2005) reported the progress in Maharashtra, which reduced the extreme level of deprivation among the poorest section. As EGC was reduced migration to urban areas and stabilized employment in the off-peak season with their highest participation in the programme.

Impact of MGNREGA on Nutrition

NREGA was introduced in 2006 to provide 100 days of employment to rural workers. This program has had significant impact on the well-being of women and children. Using the Young Lives project data, Uppal (2009) examines whether NREGS is effective as a safety net for children. The study found that, in general, a self-targeting strategy seems to be working: disadvantaged workers do participate in the program. Moreover, there seems to be a positive correlation between program participation and anthropometric indicators of health outcomes, although this correlation does not remain robust across 22 all the specifications. Importantly, the study finds robust and positive results on reducing child labour, a trend which is likely to positively impact nutrition.

The income from MGNREGS made a very significant contribution to children's well-being, through reducing hunger and improving health and education. For example, in a survey of six North Indian states (Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, M.P., Rajasthan, and U.P.), around 69 percent of the workers sampled reported that it helped them avoid hunger,

and 47 percent said it helped them cope with illness. Around 38 percent of the workers mentioned that it helped with sending children to school.

Based on field surveys, NCEUS (2009) identifies several positive externalities created by NREGS, including —reduction in distress out-migration, improved food security with wages being channelled into incurring expenses on food, health, education and repaying of loans, employment with dignity, greater economic empowerment of women workers, and sustainable asset creation (NCEUS 2009: 219).

One of the successes of NREGS is that the participation of women is in fact higher than the stipulated proportion of 33 percent: the share of women in the program increased from 41 percent in 2006–07 to 49 percent in 2009–10. Empowerment of women is also improved by NREGS. Field surveys show that the share of NREGS income in the total earnings of women workers was around 18 percent (based on four states—Rajasthan, Bihar, Jharkhand, and Himachal Pradesh). The majority of women collect their own wages. NREGS has accordingly broadened the choices and capabilities of the participating women; the additional income helps them improve their education, health, and nutrition.

However, the worksite facilities are in many cases inadequate; although drinking water and first aid are provided, childcare facilities are not available. As a result, women with small children hesitate to participate in the scheme. This gap in the functioning of NREGS has an adverse effect on child wellbeing, including nutrition. A broader problem for NREGS is that it fails to facilitate the creation of productive assets. Convergence of NREGS with agriculture is therefore needed, in order to substantially improve productivity in this sector.

CONCLUSIONS

Nutrition is not anybody's special responsibility; therefore, much greater efforts are needed for convergence. There are so many studies revealed that implementation of MGNREGA are a direct way of increasing the income of the rural poor. It has benefitted the rural households by providing, on an average, wage employment. MGNREGA has been successful in reducing the poverty level by 4 per cent. It has provided almost equal employment benefits to all the categories of farm-sizes, household-types and income-groups. The state-wise study has revealed that though all the states have been benefitted by MGNREGA, but with wide variations. It is observed that the economically weaker states of the country have been benefitted more and have implemented MGNREGA more vigorously. MGNREGA helps to raise in income has led to an increase in food consumption level — of both cereals and non-cereals — by all the categories of rural households. A diversification in the dietary pattern of different households has also been observed, which is again a strong indicator of better food consumption. Implementation of MGNREGA resulted in a substantial increase in calorie-intake as well as protein-intake by different categories of households, leading to a decrease in undernourished and nutrition-deficit households by 8- 9 per cent. In a nutshell, the impact of MGNREGA has been positive and effective in increasing household food consumption, changing dietary pattern and providing nutritional food security to the poor rural households of India.

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