

Rural Women empowerment through MGNREGS a myth or reality: A case study of Uttar Dinajpur District in West Bengal

Zafar Iqbal

Research Scholar, Department of Economics, A.M.U., Aligarh, India

Email - iqbalzafar786@gmail.com

Abstract: Since Independence women empowerment, rural employment and poverty has been the prime agenda of debate in our country. According to census 2011 in west Bengal the total female rural population is 30338168 and Female Worker participation rate is 19.35 per cent. In February 2006 a largest employment programme lunched in the rural region of India to change the life pattern of people is called **Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme - MGNREGA**. MGNREGA create 100 days employment during a financial year of an adult member of the household of unskilled manual worker. MGNREGA is the first ever law internationally that guarantees wage employment. Many efforts are taken by the government to reduce the poverty of rural people but it is still challenging by government due to poor implementation of programme and multitier system of our government policy. This paper basically focus one decade of implementation of MGNREGA and the changes in the life of women in the district of Uttar dinajpur in west Bengal because the population is heterogeneous and it is a very poor district in term of per capita income, industry ,and agriculture. So, MGNREGA is the best programme in such type of district in India.

1. INTRODUCTION:

Uttar Dinajpur geographical rural area is extended 33075.26 sq.km and it is one of the most backward districts of West Bengal in terms of poverty, employment, per capita income and standard of living specially women and minority community. The district rural total female population figure is 1282437 (48.49%) that comprises total female worker 19.84% surrounded by Bihar and Bangladesh. The rural poverty is figure 34.18%. So, the prime debatable problem is Refugees, agricultural laborers, landless farmers, seasonal migrants and women. They do not get adequate support from government departments. Thus, unable to take care of their families, they migrate to different states to look for alternative employment. Majority of women in Uttar Dinajpur are engaged in agricultural labour, manual and casual labour. They earn wages to access their family livelihood. The prevalence of low rural wage rate throughout Uttar Dinajpur has limited extent of economic empowerment for increased women worker participation rate. 73rd constitutional amendment act has given a power to women in all elected local governance bodies in rural and urban areas. The women's Swanirbhar Dals or Self-Help Groups movement across the state since last ten year encouraged women's independency. McKinley's Research Report (Noshir and Anu, 2016) suggests that in India, women now contribute only 17 per cent of country's GDP and make up just 24 per cent of the workforce, compared with 40 per cent globally. The entire effort make by central government and state government since independence is still challenging to change the women status in employment, empowerment and equal participation in nation building. The condition of women in Uttar Dinajpur is not well. Presently the women working participation rate is in the following table by which we easily focus their working challenges.

Census	Total worker main and marginal	Main worker	Marginal worker	Non worker
2001	18.1	8.9	9.2	81.1
2011	19.84	9.26	10.58	80.16

Sources: Census of India

In February 2006 government find a new way to break the myth of women employment and empowerment that launched a largest employment programme in rural India name NREGA and in 2nd October 2009 it rename as MGNREGA ,with this international law that pay equal wages for men and women. It is one of the ambitious schemes launched by India with 200 rural districts in its first phase on 2ndFebruary 2006 which mandate to provide at least 100 days guaranteed wage employment to every rural household in a financial year.

2. WOMEN EMPOWERMENT AND MGNREGA:

Women comprise almost half of the population in our country without their uplift and progress the nation cannot go for a true development. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru said "you can tell the condition of a nation by looking at the status of its women". Rural poverty, unemployment and income disparity are the closest companion to suppress women empowerment. MGNREGA is the powerful instrument to tackle all this hurdle to women with special provision like priority for women in the ratio of one third of total worker (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 kilometres 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. In a male-dominant patriarchal society, it is difficult to believe that women's decision to avail employment under MGNREGS would get precedence over the decision of male family member. The poor district Uttar Dinajpur in rural area where women are traditionally homebound the MGNREGA is playing more significant role to empowering and curbing gender discrimination. The MGNREGS has potential in empowering women by providing them work opportunities has been commented on by other as well (Dreze and Oldiges 2009). The intra-household status of women and their bank deposits are increasing that realize they are control substantial cash resource and withdrawal can be made only on her decision. MGNREGS addresses itself chiefly to working people and their fundamental right to live with dignity. Women empowerment through this programme is depend on realization of this act as a right and effective level of awareness and government instrument to properly implement. The main aim of MGNREGS is increasing women participation rate and household income generation that create a positive social impact assessment suggest that women worker are more confident about their role as contribution to family expenditure and their work decision and more confident in public sphere. *"Only through empowerment of women can the nation become strong. We have to start dreaming today about the success of our nation. We are born with such capacity and we will fulfil it."* - Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam

Women Participation Rate in MGNREGS

Years	Women participation rate in India	Women participation rate in west Bengal	Women participation rate in Uttar Dinajpur	Average person day household in Uttar Dinajpur
2006-07	40.19	18.28	14.61	9.78
2007-08	42.49	16.99	19.83	19.11
2008-09	47.88	26.53	36.71	24.00
2009-10	48.10	33.42	42.00	33.77
2010-11	47.73	33.69	33.62	23.77
2011-12	48.17	32.44	31.76	18.19
2012-13	52.13	33.61	35.68	18.97
2013-14	52.84	35.45	33.02	17.35
2014-15	55.03	40.95	28.96	22.36
2015-16	55.84	46.63	42.53	38.39
2016-17	N.A	45.12	46.43	N.A

Sources: www.mgnrega.co.in

The table shows the per cent of women participation at all India level from 2006-07 to 2015-16, which shows an increasing trend and is above minimum level required is 33percent but in West Bengal and Uttar dinajpur the trending is dramatically in nature. Women participation has increased in each and every year in 2006-07 (40.19percent) India level, west Bengal (18.28percent) and Uttar dinajpur is only (14.61percent) which is below required level. In 2015-16 is up to mark level in all India is (55.84percent), west Bengal (46.63percent) and Uttar dinajpur is (42.53percent). 2010-11 to 2014-15 the women participation level is decline because the workers from tea plantation converted in to the scheme the wage rate in the plantation was raised than MGNREGS wage rate. That is why they again went to tea plantation and also tea plantation is their heredity job where women are main worker; they are reluctant to give up their job. The average person day in Uttar dinajpur is below 50 days since from implementation and it is very unfortunate for women empowerment. In 2006-07

9.78days and in 2015-16 is 38.39days. The guideline shows 100days employment in a financial year. There are various factors to increase women participation in MGNREGS are

- Low productivity in agriculture
- Manson gambling effect it cash crop jute production
- Rice productivity decline
- MGNREGS job nature not requiring knowledge and skill
- Male member migrate to big city for higher earning
- Traditional rural women working in other field where wages are discriminate
- Negligible industry in rural area in Uttar Dinajpur
- MGNREGS create better coordination between women in job nature and transform information each other about her equal wage and dignity in job

Above all the factors are responsible for women participation increase in last 10years in Uttar Dinajpur. MGNREGS paid equal wages to all. MGNREGS wages changes the women decision about household consumption pattern, raising their standard of living and they easily send their children in school. Still central and state government responsibility to increase the women participation rate in MGNREGS through better implementation and providing the awareness to rural people how this programme benefited to them.

Uttar Dinajpur is most backward district in west Bengal with 9 blocks and 98 Gram Panchayats who prepare the roadmap for MGNREGS. The actual and real figure of women empowerment with this employment programme what women actually realize about MGNREGS for this a micro level study of Islampur block which consist 13 Panchayat. The Panchayat raj institution (PRIs) is the major designated agency to identification, execution and supervision of the scheme.

Women Participation Rate in Panchayats with 100 Days

Block: Islampur

PANCHYATS	2012-13		2013-14		2014-15		2015-16		2016-17		Total
	THHE	TFHE	THHE	TFHE	THHE	TFHE	THHE	TFHE	THHE	TFHE	
Agdimti-khanti	00	00	77	00	13	00	347	26	00	00	26
Gaisal 1	01	00	04	00	12	01	98	08	18	00	09
Gaisal 2	19	00	00	00	146	02	302	30	02	00	32
Gobindapur	00	00	14	00	02	00	112	07	09	01	08
Gunjaria	08	00	02	00	10	00	111	17	09	03	20
Islampur	05	01	11	00	83	03	91	09	63	16	29
Kamalagoan	00	00	00	00	11	01	123	10	22	06	17
Matikunda1	00	00	00	00	24	09	47	10	19	02	21
Matikunda2	00	00	00	00	00	00	54	01	00	00	01
Panditpota1	21	00	02	00	29	01	70	05	00	00	06
Panditpota2	01	01	00	00	00	00	90	04	02	00	05
Ramgang 1	05	02	22	00	12	00	265	29	11	00	31
Ramgang 2	01	00	00	00	32	03	110	19	02	00	22
Total	61	04	132	00	374	20	1820	175	157	28	227
Total household employment : 2544						Female household employment 8.29%					

Source: www.mgnrega.co.in

THHE: Total household employment

TFHE: Total female household employment

The performance of Islampur block in five years of total female household employment for 100days is only 8.92 per cent although it is far away from 33percent household get employment in a single year. The panchayat wise analysis shows that only 31 and 32 household got 100days employment in Raigang1 and Gaisal2. Fiscal year 2013-14 was a big surprise for employment not a single household got 100days employment in all panchayat in Uttar Dinajpur district and Matikunda2 panchayat's condition was extremely bad because only single household got 100days employment in five financial years. 2015-16 was the best year which gives 100days employment to 175 female household.

The above analysis of five years has not given opportunity to female employment to change their life. As such their life changing guaranteed employment programme MGNREGS is not fulfilling their dream about contribution to family expenditure and their work decision. MGNREGS was been failed to empower the women's livelihood condition in Uttar Dinajpur.

3. IMPACT OF MGNREGS ON WOMEN PARTICIPATION RATE: MYTH VS. REALITY

MGNREGS is playing an impact role in the women life. Successful implementation of the MGNREGS provides employment opportunity for women and create job for them in rural areas in West Bengal. Rural region burdened with surplus of labour so the employment guarantees programme effectively observed the burden and giving opportunity to them. Women participation rate actually empower them is a reality or myth examine with following results.

In income-consumption effect women are paid manual labour under the scheme of MGNREGA. They help to their household income; consequently they get to choose consumption expenditure on their day to day needs. They are also free to take their own decision independent. Since implementation of this programme in Uttar Dinajpur is shocking because the average persondays employment 8.29 per cent in last five year. They earn a small amount of money under this scheme which cannot change the women conditions and consumption expenditure. They are still in same situation as they before this scheme. Women could earn as much as 100 to 120 rupees in farm sector and non-farm sector. Flexibility in work hours, more social environment and decrease in competition for MGNREGA work by men are the reason women were more attract in this scheme. Many studies like Pellissery and Jalan (2011), Khera and

Nayak (2009), Sudershan (2009), Grown (2006) and Chari (2006) claim that MGNREGA work provides additional income. Women's contribution to the household income and to the West Bengal economy remains largely unaccounted for as they do a lot of work of unpaid work. MGNREGS provides 100days employment to women to convert some unpaid hour into paid hour labour especially those women for whom MGNREGS is a good manual labour to get a paid job outside the home. This remains a fundamental challenge of women's empowerment (Bose 1980).

In spite of 33percent representation of women in panchayati raj institution under 73rd amendment of the constitution, the ground reality in that their representation in such institution are extremely low. In MGNREGS women participation and their contribution is low in all panchayat of Uttar Dinajpur districts of west Bengal as per guideline of MGNREGS. In Islampur block of Uttar Dinajpur district women attendance in Gram-Sabha are negligible because they DID NOT adequate employment in this programme. In five year in manual work under this scheme are lower than expected as we notice zero percent representation in the some panchayats. Most of the studies reveal that nature of work is also not helpful for women workers. MGNREGS earning may have stimulated women to overcome cultural barriers or other reservations they had in seeking MGNREGS employment.

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION:

In rural regions of West Bengal women are traditionally engaged as casual labour and domestic helper. Literacy rate among the women is very low so they are unaware about the reservation of employment for them under MGNREGS. Therefore women as a community have been slow in realising the latent benefits of this scheme. MGNREGS has an optimistic impact on employment pattern of women. It's aims to improve the participation rate of women but in Uttar Dinajpur the rate was very low. While, Islampur block their representation is shocking.

In several studies it was found that the large number of women are not attending Gram-Sabha meeting because they are not welcome there. The benefit for the women under MGNREGS can be raised by increasing their presence in the Gram-Sabha, enhancing their capacity of interaction, involvement of the NGOs and increasing number of women who can actively participate in the meetings. All these efforts will raise the participation rate of women in MGNREGS. It has been more than a decade since the nation-wide implementation of MGNREGS took place, but the women who are supposed to be the benefices of MGNREGS facing challenges to get their share in employment.

REFERENCES:

1. Murthy and Gaur (2002) Women work participation and Empowerment: Problems and Prospects, Jaipur, RBSA Publishers
2. Chari (2006): "Guaranteed Employment and Gender Construction: Women's Mobilisation in Maharashtra", Economic and Political Weekly, 51 (50), 41-48.
3. Grown (2006): "Quick impact initiatives for Gender Inequality – A Menu of Option, Working Paper No. 462, MA, USA: Levy Economic Institute, Bard college.
4. Khera and Nayak (2009): "What Works against Women", Frontline, 26(1): 3-16
5. Dey and Bedi (2010): The National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme in Birbhum, Economic and Political Weekly, XLV (41). Pp: 19-25.
6. Roy and Singh (2010): "Impact of NREGA on Empowerment of the Beneficiaries in West Bengal". Indian Res. J. Ext. Edu.
7. Pellissery and Jalan (2011): "Towards Transformative Social Protection: A Gendered Analysis of the Employment Guarantee Act of India (MGNREGA)", Gender & Development, 19(2): 283-94
8. Das (2012): "Examining India's Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA): Its Impact and Women's Participation". International Journal of Research in Management. Vol. 6, Issue 2.
9. Roy and Dey (2012): Much more than a survival scheme; The Hindu daily, Aug 31, 2012.
10. Arora et al. (2013): "Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme: A Unique Scheme for Indian Rural Women". International Journal of Economic Practices and Theories, Vol. 3, No. 2
11. Maiorano (2014): "The Politics of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act in Andhra Pradesh" World Development, Volume, June 2014, pp. 95–105.
12. Babu and panda (2015):" Performance Assessment Study of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme: An Overview", Global Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies Vol 4(2),pp. 202-213
13. Bureau of Applied Economics and Statistics Government of India
14. District Statistical Bulletin, 2011
15. Census of India 2011.

WEB REFERENCE:

www.mgnrega.co.in.