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SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS & WOMEN EMPOWERMENT THROUGH MGNREGA: A CASE STUDY

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Abstract

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a collection of 17 global goals set by the United Nations. The broad goals are consistent though each has its own targets to achieve. The SDGs cover a broad range of social and economic development issues. No Hunger and Women Empowerment are the two important SDGs. For sustainable growth, MGNREGA programme promises to deliver poverty alleviation and to improve empowerment of the women coming from the under privileged section of the society helping them towards self reliance and generating confidence amongst them. The MGNREGA programme inculcates the habit of saving among women, so that they can reinvest in entrepreneurial activities. This paper attempts to examine the role of MGNREGA programme in poverty alleviation and women empowerment as a part of sustainable development goals (SDGs) in Kalna block II, the major sub-division of PurboBardhaman district. The primary data has been collected with the help of a structured questionnaire and secondary data so far available from different journals, magazines and websites.

Keywords: *MGNREGA, PurboBardhaman, Sustainable development, Women, Empowerment, Hunger, Poverty.*

I. Introduction:

Empowerment, a multidimensional process comprising political, social, cultural, economic and legal dimensions helps one to gain control of their lives by raising their alertness. The term 'empowerment' denotes the process of growing the assets and capabilities of individuals or groups to make purposive choices and to transform those into desired

actions and outcomes (Chakrabarti et. al. 2008). Women empowerment can be treated as a process by which women can enjoy greater control over material and intellectual resources that will enable themselves to have greater sovereignty over household decision making and economic resources In India, women are important for national development because they constitute half of country's

human resources. However, the results of National Sample Survey showed that women economic activities are on the decline. This trend was supported by the World Bank's World Development Indicators (2014), which showed that only 27 percent of women in the age group of 15 or elder than that participated in the labour force, declined from 34 percent in the year 2000. This turn down was concentrated among the poor and rural women who are in need of job opportunities (Kabeer, 2016). Therefore, to improve the socio-economic conditions of rustic women, it is necessary to empower the women. The Government of India has launched and implemented several programmes towards poverty alleviation and women empowerment but it has been seen that women in rural areas remained poor. The Government of India has initiated Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MNREGA) which is not only a scheme but an Act that provides legal guarantee to work and under this scheme both women and men participate freely in the rural areas. Women's empowerment was not among the original in-tentions of the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA), 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. The success of MGNREGA depends on the inclusion of all, mainly women in rural India. In contrast to the high participation of women in the pro-gramme as workers, their participation in processes like work selection, social audit, mobilisation of civil society, and share in the control and management of assets created is not encouraging. This being the case, in some places, women's participation in the gram

sabha has increased, and there is even an increase in the number of women who speak in the gram Sabha.

II. Sustainable development goals:

In 2015, the world agreed a new set of global goals to eradicate extreme poverty and achieve sustainable development. Building on the Millennium Development Goals, they are known as the Sustainable Development Goals, or SDGs. The SDGs are built on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). However, contrarily to the MDGs that were intended for action in developing countries only, the SDGs apply to all countries. They cover the three above mentioned dimensions of sustainable development: economic growth, social inclusion and environmental protection. UN has also put forward the idea of six essential elements that help frame and reinforce the universal integrated and transformative nature of the Sustainable Development Agenda. One of important SDG is women empowerment. This goal includes the following important targets: i) End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere; ii) Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation; iii) Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation; iv) Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate; v) Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life;

III. Literature review:

There are many studies related to the impact of MGNREGA on women's participation and their empowerment, most

of which show positive impact. It was endeavoured to review some of them.

Malhotra et al. (2003) made a pioneer study of measuring and analyse the women empowerment. Here used six commonly dimensions, viz. economic, socio-cultural, familial-interpersonal, legal, political and psychological including their potential operationalization in the household, community.

Parveen et al. (2004) quantitatively measures rural women empowerment of Bangladesh at household level. Education, training and exposure to information media have the potential to increase women's empowerment to a large extent.

Khan et al. (2008) studied the women's empowerment in Faisalabad district of Pakistan based upon socio-cultural context of study area. The study suggests revolutionary changes in women education that will support gender awareness and self esteem among women.

Chaudhry et al. (2009) shows diverse result of women empowerment in three different regions, viz. urban, rural and tribal areas of Southern Punjab (Pakistan). Besides education, access to media, socio-cultural norms of the community, job of women and household participation rate, a variable about the knowledge of an Islamic Concept of women empowerment has an effect upon women empowerment index constructed in the study.

Jean Dreze (2011) states that MGNREGA has become tool for rural empowerment by providing 100 days employment per year per household, increased bargaining power of women and rural labour and provided independent earning opportunity to women for empowerment. The authors also found that 79 percent women collect their own wages and 68 percent keep wages with them.

Reetika Khera and Nandini Nayak (2011) in the elaborative study found that limited and irregular labour market, social barriers and working

condition discouraged women's work participation. But, local availability of work, government work, regulated working hours; less exploitative and dignified nature of work under MGNREGA have been main motivating factors for women to participate in works. MGNREGA helped avoiding hunger and migration, purchasing of medicines, payment for children education ad repayment of debts and avoiding hazardous working conditions for majority of the women job seekers, the study found.

Varghese (2011) made a study of women empowerment based upon five independent variables and total women empowerment as dependent variable. It shows that women in Oman are better in household decision making and economic decision making than social empowerment.

IV. Objectives of this Study:

Following are main objectives of this paper. i. To understand the socio economic conditions of women job seekers. ii. To examine how Sustainable Development Goals, particularly, the goal of no-hunger and no poverty been achieved in the study area through MGNREGA. iii. To assess the impact of the MGNREGS on empowerment of women, one of the SDGs, in the study area.

V. Sample Design and Data Collection:

For the present study Kalna Block II, district Burdwan, West Bengal State, India has been chosen. Statistical tools like Chi-square test; percentages etc have been used for data analysis. This study is based on primary and secondary data. Secondary data have been collected from reference books, journals, and websites. The primary data were collected by administering a structured schedule, exclusively prepared by keeping in view the objectives of the study, from 50 randomly chosen female beneficiaries of the MNREGS in January, 2017.

VI. Results and findings:

Women's Participation under MGNREGS in Kalna Block II

There are various factors which determine the women worker's participation under this scheme, viz. nature of work that does not need skilled worker, the limited hours of work, availability of work locally, reduction of migration of male member, substantial jump in the wage rate etc. At the national level women participation has increased significantly to 53.01% in 2012-13 (till January, 2013). Highest participation is seen in states like Kerala (92.66%). Women Participation rate of Kalna Block II under MGNREGA scheme is also found to be high (near 70%). Socio-economic condition of respondents: A Socio-economic condition represents the status, position and growth of a society. Therefore, it is very important to understand the socio-economic structure of a society. In this section, we discuss the socioeconomic conditions of women job card holder in our study area. Socio-economic conditions include the family structure, family headship and educational status of the women.

A. Family structure

Family structure has laid an influence upon empowerment of women. In the study area, 35% of respondents belong to nucleus family and rest 65% to joint family structure before joining MGNREGA and 40% of respondents belong to nucleus family and rest 60% to joint family structure after joining MGNREGA (Table 1). In joint family the women has to compromise family matters strictly with other family member. The decision making power is shared equally with all other family member and husband even cooperating his wife with a good manner cannot interfere in this matter for the sake of peace of family. There is a negative relation between family structure and women empowerment and vice-versa.

B. Family headship

In our society of India in most cases women live under the headship of husband or other family members like father in-law or brother in-law. Family head holds the supreme authority not only in family decision making but also in positioning the role of women in family. In our study, 60 % and 40 % (Table 1) of respondents belong to husband headship with headship of other family member before and after joining MGNREGA. The women being much more flexible with husband in pertaining with family issues than other family member, the women empowerment tends to increase in headship of her husband than other member of her family.

C. Educational status of women

As women empowerment largely depends on awareness of women rights and education which ensures bargaining power of women on family matter. As per field report, 10% women are illiterate before joining MGNREGA. 30% women are primary and middle school and 60% women are secondary and above while these rates are 20% and 80% after joining the MGNREGA. This implies that involvement of MGNREGA expands the literacy rate among the rural women as well as empowerment

Table 1
Percentage distribution of response pattern of Explanatory variables

Explanatory variables		Total respondent (N=50) Before job cards		Total respondent (N=50) After job cards	
		No.	%	No.	%
Type of family structure	Joint	35	70	30	60
	Nucleus	15	30	20	40
Family headship	Others	20	40	30	60
	Husband	30	60	20	40
Educational status of women	Illiterate	05	10	00	00
	Primary and middle school	15	30	10	20
	Secondary and above	30	60	40	80

Source: Calculated and compiled by author

Income level of members:

For the improvement in standard of living, income acts as a major determinant. The income of the members has increased after joining MGNREGA scheme. The highest category of Rs (3000-4000) per month. This increase shows that members have raised their income level after joining the MGNREGA scheme. 14% of respondents lie in the income group of Rs (3000-4000) which has been increased to 24% after joining the said scheme. Again 16% of respondents lie in the income group Rs (5000-6000). It is very significant. According to the data collected there is an impact that there is change in income after enrolment under MGNREGA scheme. Many women job card holders involved themselves in economic activities independently and to raise their income level and standard of living.

Rise in income among the women job card holder represent not only standard of living among the women but also reduction of poverty among the members which is the one of SDGs.

Hypothesis1: H0- There is no significant difference in the monthly income of the women members. H1- There is a significant difference in the monthly income of the women members. Table 2: Monthly Income of the members before and after joining MGNREGA

Table 1
Monthly Income of the members before and after joining MGNREGA

Sr. No.	Month ly income in Rs.	No. of Respo ndent s	Perce ntage	No. of Respo ndent s	Perce ntage
1	Less than 1000	04	08	00	00
2	1000-2000	14	28	05	10
3	2000-3000	18	36	10	20
4	3000-4000	07	14	12	24
5	4000-5000	05	10	10	20
6	5000-6000	02	04	08	16
7	Above 6000	00	00	05	10
Total		50	100	50	100

Source: Calculated and compiled by authors

Table 3
Chi-square value

Chi-square value	Significant	df
21.37	5%	5

Source: Calculated and compiled by authors

Chi-square value Significant df
21.37 5% 5

The critical value of chi-square = 11.070 at 0.05 level of significance

The critical value of chi-square = 16.7496 at 0.005 level of significance

The calculated value of chi-square is 21.37, which is greater than the tabulated value i.e 16.7496. Hence, it is taken as quite significant at the 0.05 level. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected and alternative hypothesis accepted. It reflects that the respondents having higher income has increased significantly after joining MGNREGA. So we can simply say that MGNREGA has positive impact on women level of income.

Community and Women empowerment

Table 4 shows the Women Workers’ Participation in the Gram Sabha in the study area. From the Table 4 shows that after joining the MGNREGA 50% respondents said that they attended the Gram Sabha and 40% respondents said that they not only attended the Gram Sabha but also they had been speaking in Gram Sabha. Ten percent women (NREGS workers) now also meet and interact with government officials (Table 4). This has larger effects in terms of increase in confidence levels.

Hypothesis1: H0- There is no significant difference in the Women Workers’ Participation in the Gram Sabha H1- There is significant difference in the Women Workers’ Participation in the Gram Sabha

Table 4:
Chi-square value

Women Workers’ Participation in the Gram Sabha

	Before joining MGNREGA		After joining MGNREGA		Chi-square value	df	Significant level
	Number	%	Number	%			
% of Women attending Gram Sabha	15	30	25	50	1.023	2	99%
% of Women Speaking Gram Sabha	10	20	20	40			
% of Women Interacting Gram Sabha with Officials	01	02	5	10			

Source: Field survey, 2017, January.

The critical value of chi-square = 1.03 at 0.95 level of significance

The critical value of chi-square = 0.020 at 0.99 level of significance

The calculated value of chi-square is 1.023 which is greater than the tabulation value i.e. 0.20 at the 99% level of significant. Therefore, null hypothesis is rejected and alternative hypothesis is accepted. It reflects that community and women empowerment has improved significantly after joining the MGNREGA scheme.

Contingency coefficient:

The Contingency coefficient, denoted by C, provides a measure of correlation between two variables, with each of these variables being classified into two or more categories. Other coefficient of correlation does not have limits (±). Its upper limit is dependent upon the number of categories. It does

not have negative value. After computing the value of chi-square (χ^2) from the given data, the value of contingency may be computed directly by the use of the following formula:

$$C = \frac{\sqrt{\chi^2}}{\sqrt{\chi^2 + N}} \text{ (Where } N = \text{ number of observation.)}$$

Here, value of Contingency coefficient is 0.06 which is positive that's mean MGNREGA has positive impact on women empowerment in our study area. The calculated value of chi-square is 1.023 which is greater than the tabulation value i.e 0.21 at the 99% level of significant. Therefore, null hypothesis is rejected and alternative hypothesis is accepted. It reflects that community and women empowerment has improved significantly after joining the MGNREGA scheme.

Findings:

The major findings of my study are

- i) Women members become educated after joining the MGNREGA scheme in the study area.
- ii) Level of income of the women members increase.
- iii) Dependence of women on men started declining in the said study area.
- iv) MGNREGS is one of the main sources of alternative employment for women in the study area.
- v) It is observed that participation of women in decision making over family affairs is good.
- vi) Women Workers' Participation in the Gram Sabha in the study area is not bad.

Conclusion

MGNREGA has positive impact on not only employment prototype of women but also their empowerment. Empowerment of women has emerged as an unintended consequence of MGNREGS. Women have benefited more as workers than as a community. Women as individuals have gained because of their ability to earn independently, due to the paid employment opportunity under

MGNREGA. MGNREGA is widely acclaimed that it provides employment, income and help the rural people to come out of the poverty. Independent and monetised earnings have increased consumption choices and reduced economic dependence. This has helped women in registering their solid involvement to the household's income. Their increased presence in the gram sabha, the increasing number of women speaking out in the gram sabha, frequent interactions with government officials and access to banks and post offices are new achievements. On the one side, MGNREGA has positive impact on unemployment pattern of women and on the other side, said scheme reduce hunger-poverty among the rural women. Women have benefited both as individual and as community. Women are benefited individually because they are competent to earn independently, spend some money for their own needs, contribute in family expenditure etc. So we can conclude that MGNREGA is not only a scheme but also an instrument, which helps to achieve the SDGs in the rural area.

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