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Women Empowerment through Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (Mgnregs)- Dindigul District, Tamil Nadu

P.Sathyaraj¹ , P.Dhanasekar²

¹Lecture, Political science and Dev. Admn. Gandhigram Rural Institute, India

²Lecture, Political science and Dev. Admn. Gandhigram Rural Institute, India

ABSTRACT

This research study delves into the profound impact of MGNREGS on women's empowerment within this region. As a pioneering government program, MGNREGS has played a pivotal role in providing rural women with access to employment opportunities, consequently bolstering their economic self-reliance and fostering social empowerment. Through a comprehensive examination of the program's implementation and outcomes, this study highlights the far-reaching consequences of MGNREGS in uplifting the status of rural women. It emphasizes the program's role in enhancing financial stability, promoting self-confidence, and facilitating greater participation in local decision-making processes.

Introduction

Empowerment is a process aimed at changing the nature and direction of systematic force which marginalize women and other disadvantage section. Empowerment of women is a long and difficult process which is to be promoted with full public support. Women empowerment is the important need of society. It has been considered an effective tool to bring changes in the socio-economic conditions of women. The emancipation of women from various groups of social, economic, political, caste and gender based discrimination. It means granting women the freedom to make those women empowerment became able to organize them to increase their own self-reliance to assert their independence right to make choice and control resource which assert in challenging and eliminating their own subordination. The progress of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) is evident in findings that suggest it could serve as a potent catalyst for socio-economic upliftment and provide livelihood security for India's impoverished populations if implemented earnestly. Employment and earnings generated under MGNREGA should be regarded as supplementary sources of income for these households (Mathur, Lalit 2007). The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) fulfills fundamental requirements for a social safety net for the impoverished, offering employment opportunities, constructing locally prioritized infrastructure, and bestowing dignity through daily labor. Among its components, social audits, as part of NREGA, serve as a progressive mechanism for holding local governments accountable to their citizens. These audits combat corruption by championing transparency and enabling community members to openly voice their concerns and grievances (Jeffrey Hammer, 2009).

According to Pankaj and Tankha (2010), the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) had an unintended but significant impact on the empowerment of rural women. The study revealed that women experienced greater benefits as workers under MGNREGS compared to their role within the broader community. For these women, MGNREGS represented an opportunity for independent earning, reducing their economic reliance on other family members. Furthermore, women engaged in MGNREGS were now making substantial contributions to their households' income. Gosh (2009) highlighted that women were participating in the MGNREGS with notably higher levels of engagement compared to all other recorded forms of work. This finding indicated the scheme's unique appeal and relevance to women. Shah (2012) extended this perspective by illustrating that women's participation in MGNREGS at the national level reached an impressive 47%. This participation rate exceeded their involvement in any other employment opportunities. These insights collectively underscore the significant role of MGNREGS in empowering rural women and providing them with a platform for economic independence.

Statement of the Problems

The empowerment of women is confronted with formidable challenges, predominantly rooted in economic adversity. Many women grapple with the onerous task of providing for their families, encountering substantial obstacles along the way. Meeting fundamental needs such as access to nourishment, clothing, shelter, education, and healthcare has grown increasingly daunting. In this context, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) emerges as a beacon of hope for working women. It presents them with invaluable opportunities within rural households to generate income by judiciously allocating their natural, physical, and human resources to various income-generating endeavors.

MGNREGA plays a pivotal role in mitigating the economic hardships that beset rural families, particularly women, by furnishing them with gainful employment prospects. This program assumes a paramount role in the economic empowerment of women in rural settings, not only enabling them to secure a livelihood but also empowering them to provide vital support to their families in times of dire need.

Objectives

1. To assess the extent to which MGNREGS has contributed to the empowerment of rural women, both economically and socially.
2. To examine how MGNREGS has bolstered the economic self-reliance of women by providing access to employment opportunities.

Methodology

The study adopts a qualitative case study design, with Thomaiyarpuram village as the focal point, to investigate the influence of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) on women's empowerment. FGDs will be convened with groups of women from Thomaiyarpuram to facilitate candid and open dialogues. These discussions will encourage participants to share their personal experiences and perspectives on the empowerment outcomes attributed to MGNREGS. The selection of participants through purposive and random sampling ensures a diverse and representative sample for robust findings.

Case I

A. Tamilarasi, a fifty-two-year-old woman residing in Thomaiyarpuram village, Dindigul district, Tamil Nadu, shares her experience with the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), spanning over twelve years. She resides with her husband and two married children. During the COVID-19 pandemic, MGNREGA became a lifeline for working women like her, offering 100 days of employment. However, the pandemic brought its own set of challenges, with the central government temporarily suspending the 100 days of work. Despite this, the salary for women like Tamilarasi increased from 180 to 205 during the COVID period, greatly benefiting them. During this challenging period, women in the village found MGNREGA employment to be crucial, especially since many small-scale industries closed during lockdowns. The types of work involved tree plantation, pond cleaning, temple maintenance, and other community-centric tasks. Women were organized into groups of three to four members to work in MGNREGA fields. Engaging in MGNREGA enabled Tamilarasi to earn an income independently and make decisions within her family.

Participation in the MGNREGA program also encouraged her to attend Gram Sabha meetings and become involved in community activities, despite these meetings being held in a different village (Kannarpatty village, Adiyanthu panchayat).

During the quarantine period, MGNREGA continued to provide salaries, albeit at an increased amount of 205. However, this amount was primarily used for daily necessities, such as working materials and raw materials. Tamilarasi, at fifty years old, spent the money on her grandchildren's needs and, importantly, on medical expenses during the COVID period. Many women shared her sentiment that the amount was insufficient for their needs beyond daily wages, emphasizing the financial strain the pandemic imposed.

Despite these challenges, the women in the community found great value in the 100 days of work provided by MGNREGA during the COVID-19 pandemic. The program allowed them to fulfill their personal needs, support their families, and contribute to community cleaning efforts when the central government temporarily halted the program. Tree plantation and other activities undertaken during this time were seen as beneficial for both the environment and the village community.

Case II

D. Kanimozhi, a 27-year-old resident of Thomaiyarpuram village in Dindigul district, Tamil Nadu, shares her experience with the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), which she has been engaged with for about twelve years. She lives with her husband and one child, and she has completed her education up to the 2nd grade. During the COVID-19 pandemic, MGNREGA became an invaluable resource for working women like Kanimozhi. The 100-day employment provided by MGNREGA was crucial for women facing the numerous challenges posed by the pandemic. However, there were struggles as the central government temporarily suspended the 100-day work. Despite this, the salary for women like Kanimozhi increased from 180 to 205 during the COVID period, providing some relief. The COVID period was particularly beneficial for women's development due to the closure of small-scale industries during lockdowns. This led to increased demand for the 100 days of work provided by MGNREGA. The type of work involved tasks such as tree plantation, pond cleaning, and temple maintenance. Women were organized into groups of three to four members for their work in MGNREGA fields. Engaging in MGNREGA enabled Kanimozhi to earn an income independently and make important decisions within her family. Participation in the MGNREGA program also encouraged her to attend Gram Sabha meetings and become involved in community activities, despite these meetings being held in a different village.

During the quarantine period, MGNREGA continued to provide salaries, albeit at an increased amount of 205. However, this amount was primarily used for daily necessities, such as working materials and raw materials. Kanimozhi, at 50 years old, spent the money on her grandchildren's needs and, crucially, on medical expenses during the COVID period. Many women shared her sentiment that the amount was insufficient for their needs beyond daily wages, particularly as they often had to spend it on health issues.

Despite these challenges, the women in the community found great value in the 100 days of work provided by MGNREGA during the COVID-19 pandemic. The program allowed them to fulfill their personal needs, support their families, and contribute to community cleaning efforts when the central government temporarily halted the program. Tree plantation and other activities undertaken during this time were seen as beneficial for both the environment and the village community.

Case III

A. Priya, a 43-year-old resident of Thomaiyarpuram village in Dindigul district, Tamil Nadu, shares her experience with the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), which she has been engaged with for about twelve years. She lives with her husband and two children, one of whom is married, while the other has completed education up to the 12th grade. During the COVID-19 pandemic, MGNREGA became a lifeline for working women like Priya. The 100-day employment provided by MGNREGA was crucial, but it was not without its challenges. The central government temporarily suspended the 100-day work during this period. However, the salary for women like Priya increased from 180 to 205, offering some respite.

The COVID period was particularly beneficial for women's development due to the closure of small-scale industries during lockdowns. This increased the demand for the 100 days of work provided by MGNREGA. The type of work involved tasks such as tree plantation, pond cleaning, and temple maintenance. Women were organized into groups of three to four members for their work in MGNREGA fields. Engaging in MGNREGA enabled Priya to earn an income independently and make important decisions within her family. Participation in the MGNREGA program also encouraged her to attend Gram Sabha meetings and become involved in community activities, despite these meetings being held in a different village (Kannarpatty village, Adiyannuthu panchayat).

During the quarantine period, MGNREGA continued to provide salaries, albeit at an increased amount of 205. However, this amount was primarily used for daily necessities, such as working materials and raw materials. Priya, at 50 years old, spent the money on her grandchildren's needs and, importantly, on medical expenses during the COVID period. Many women shared her sentiment that the amount was insufficient for their needs beyond daily wages, particularly as they often had to spend it on health issues.

Despite these challenges, the women in the community found great value in the 100 days of work provided by MGNREGA during the COVID-19 pandemic. The program allowed them to fulfill their personal needs, support their families, and contribute to community cleaning efforts when the central government temporarily halted the program. Tree plantation and other activities undertaken during this time were seen as beneficial for both the environment and the village community.

Findings

- Women worked in groups of three to four members in MGNREGA fields.
- The types of work included tree plantation, pond cleaning, temple maintenance, and other community-centric tasks.
- Engaging in MGNREGA enabled women's to earn an independent income and make decisions within her family.
- Participation in MGNREGA also encouraged her to attend Gram Sabha meetings and engage in community activities.
- The closure of small-scale industries during lockdowns increased the demand for MGNREGA employment.
- Tasks included tree plantation, pond cleaning, temple maintenance, and other community-centric work.
- Women worked in groups of three to four members in MGNREGA fields.
- MGNREGA became a crucial resource for working women's during the COVID-19 pandemic, offering 100 days of employment.

Conclusion

The 100 days of employment offered financial stability when many other livelihood options were limited due to the closure of small-scale industries. The beneficiaries experienced an increase in their salaries, from 180 to 205. This additional income was crucial for meeting their daily needs and medical expenses. MGNREGA empowered women like Tamilarasi, Kanimozhi, and Priya to earn income independently. They were no longer solely reliant on other family members for financial support, which increased their decision-making power within their households. Participation in MGNREGA encouraged these women to attend Gram Sabha meetings and engage in community activities. Despite the inconvenience of meetings held in a different village, they actively contributed to local development.

In conclusion, MGNREGA emerged as a vital instrument of empowerment for women in Thomaiyarpuram village during the challenging times of the COVID-19 pandemic. It provided them with employment, economic independence, and a platform for community engagement. While there were challenges, such as the temporary suspension of the program, the increased income and empowerment gained through MGNREGA significantly improved the well-being of these women and their families.

This study underscores the importance of continued support for programs like MGNREGA, which not only alleviate poverty and unemployment but also contribute to the empowerment of women in rural India. Women's economic independence and participation in community decision-making processes are essential steps towards achieving gender equality and inclusive development.

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