

MGNREGA and its Impact on Daily Waged Women Workers: A Case study of Sonitpur District of Assam.

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Abstract: *It is common in the developing countries that women are being ignored since pre-historic time. The primary objectives of the research are to study the impact of MGNREGA on women empowerment and to identify the obstacles in the path of the implementation of the scheme. The paper focuses on the Female worker in Sonitpur District of Assam to derive conclusions to highlight the impact of the program on the lives of women. Female workers significant benefit reported by the study includes – income gains, social empowerment, more say in intra household decision making and creation of community assets etc. The paper ends up by identify certain barriers to women is access to MGNREGA.*

Key Words: *MGNREGA, Women Empowerment, Impact of MGNREGA Programme.*

I. Introduction:

Gandhiji once said, “In a country like India women are the part and parcel of the vast Indian society. They should be alerted with proper education and also they should be entrusted with all sorts of jobs as per their physical ability.”

Women are essential part of a society. They play vital role in the development of the society as well as the country. The definition of women is actually different for different people but there is an underlying base that cannot change regardless of nationality, caste, color or profession. When women are supported to empower themselves the whole society benefits and families are healthier. Therefore, it is very essential to empower women. Women empowerment refers to the power of having decision making of their own. Present day the word “empower” has become synonymous with the “women”.

According to Investment Banker, “Women empowerment would mean that women are empower to think, dream though whatever they aspire for not dictated by society and usual stereo - type”

Now days it is generally seen that women are not lagging behind of man. They play a very important role in making their family financially independence. Economic empowerment is very important because only women who earn their livelihood can challenge social and gender relations and bring in gender equality. Now days it is observed that more or less women are engaged in all sectors of the country and greatly contribute for development of the country.

The central government takes various initiatives for empowering women. Among of all the initiatives taken by government we have tried to partially study the role of MGNREGA for empowering women in sonitpur district. In the region a large number of women population are engaged as daily wages worker. Most of them are engaged as labor in household work, tea garden, house construction, road construction, shopping complex (as cleaning and sweeper) and so on. The **Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act-2005(MGNREGA)** is an Indian law that aims to guarantee the 'right to work' and ensure livelihood security in rural areas by providing at least 100 days of guaranteed wage employment in a financial year to every household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work.

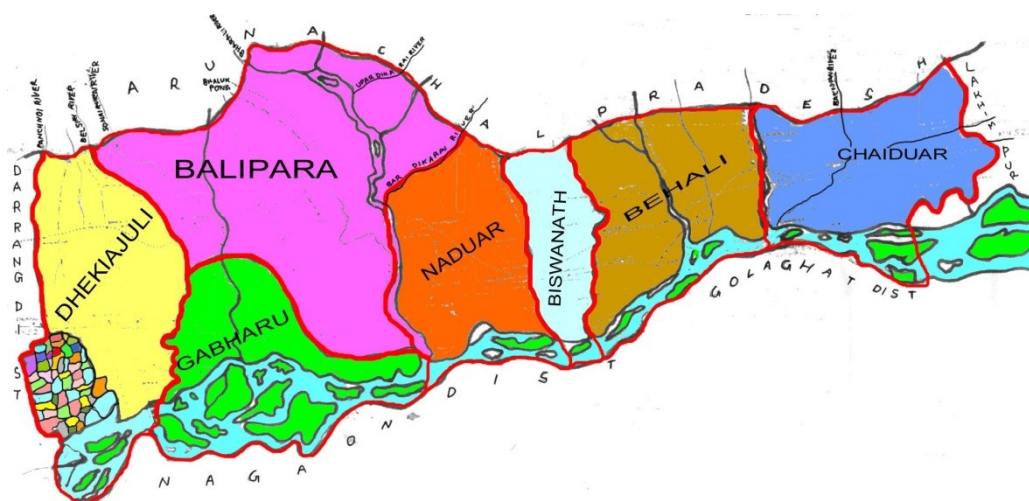
The MGNREGA Programme is the first programme to provide guaranteed livelihood security to India's rural poor. It is an innovative programme to boost:-

- (a) The rural economy,
- (b) Stabilize agricultural production and,
- (c) To provide livelihood security to the poor and there by transform the scenario of poverty.

The MGNREGA, by providing legal guarantee to work, marks a paradigm shift from all earlier wage employment programs. It is an inclusive programme covering all the disadvantaged sections of the society. This programme plays a vital role for the upliftment of the women in the rural areas.

II. Methodology:

a) Study Area: Sonitpur District



Blocks Selected	No of village Selected and their nature of Works	No of Women Workers selected	Total no of Workers selected
Behali	3 (Road Construction)	15	45
Biswanath	3 (Flood Control and Dike construction)	15	45
Naduar	3 (Irrigation & Water Supply)	15	45
Balipara	3 (Construction of Govt Houses)	15	45
Total nos: of Workers Selected from 4 blocks (sample size)		N= 180	

The study has been carried out in the sonitpur district of Assam. As per the 2011 population census it is spread over an area of 5324 sq/km with a population of 16, 77,874. The district is bound by Arunachal Pradesh on the North, Morigaon, Jorhat and Golaghat district on the south, Lakhimpur District on the east and by Darrang District on the West. The people here are not a homogeneous lot. It consist of Assamese, Bengalis, the Nepalis, the Adivasis , the Muslims and the tribes such as Bodos, Mishings etc.

b) Sample Units:-

There are 14 blocks in sonitpur district of Assam. Out of 14 blocks a sample of 25%, which account for 4 blocks are being chosen as the area for drawing sample. In forming the sample of blocks, care has been taken on the basis of demography, location specific feature, etc. to give fair representation of the district. The distribution of the samples has been detail in below in:-

The study is based on both primary and secondary data. Primary data has been collected through structured and unstructured questionnaires/schedules. And secondary has been collected from publication of various bodies data published by research investigators, data published by technical journals and various necessary websites, periodicals, bank report .Collected data has been tabulated in systematic way and treated them with different statistical methods so that certain pattern or relation can be derived. In the region a large no of women population are engaged as daily wages worker. Most of them are engaged as labor in household work, house construction, road construction, shopping complex (as cleaning and sweeper) and so on.

III. Objectives of the study:

This paper studies a lot of things relating to the MGNREGA and women empowerment. Keeping views on all of this aspect following few selective objectives are taken in to consideration:-

- To study the impact of MGNREGA programmers on the life of the respondents.
- To identify the obstacles in the implementation of the scheme.
- To suggest suitable measures for its effective implementation.

IV. Summary of findings:

Women make up 52% of our country's population. Hence there can be no progress unless their needs and interest are fully met. Empowerment would not hold any meaning unless they are made strong and alert and aware of their equal status in the society. There is much that the MGNREGA promises from the perspective of women's empowerment as well. The various impacts of MGNREGA on women are discussed below:-

a) **Increasing income:** One of the main aims of MGNREGA is to increase the participation of women in household income-generation. It has been observed that MGNREGA helped to put cash incomes into the hands of women that create a greater degree of economic independence among women. The survey data (both qualitative and quantitative) suggest that women workers are more confident about their roles as contributors to family expenditure and their work decisions, and that they are also becoming more assertive about their space in the public sphere. It has been found that in sonitpur district the total number of women employment increases from 4.68 lakh in 2010-11 to 5.22 lakh in 2011-12. This indicates that the purchasing power capacities of the women workers have increased.

b) **Consumption Smoothing:** Inevitably, women's MGNREGA earnings are increasing their contribution to household income. From the survey it has been found, a large majority (72 per cent) of the respondents said that they spent wages earned at MGNREGA works on regular food and consumer goods. The increased income locally available through MGNREGA work, they felt, was helping ensure at least two regular meals a day. It could reduce infant malnutrition through positive effects on household's food security and infant feeding.

c) **Lower Indebtedness:** MGNREGA helps to reduce the burden of debt of the women worker to some extent. From the survey, 30 per cent of the respondents said that they had spent their wages on repaying small debts. It also helps them to keep themselves away from the clutches of local moneylenders. But the amount earned through MGNREGA is not sufficient to repay debt.

d) **Enriching Literacy:** MGNREGA helps to improve the education level of the women. The percentage of literacy rate increases gradually through the MGNREGA act. A significant percentage of workers – almost 34 per cent spent their MGNREGA wages on their children's education. According to 2011 population census, the female and male literacy rate of sonitpur district is 63.53% and 76.98% respectively. The 2011 Census report of Assam highlighted an encouraging rise from 54.61 per cent in 2001 to 66.3% in 2011, showing a sharp rise of about 13 per cent in the female literacy rate.

e) **Improved Healthcare:** Through the employment guarantee act, in the study areas, the health condition of the poor people in both rural and urban areas are improved. A large expenditure regularly met through MGNREGA wages is health care, with around 40 per cent of the respondents having spent earnings on this. Therefore the health condition of the selected areas are seen a lot of improvement after implementation of MGNREGA act. This act also provides medical facilities, drinking water facilities, fooding to the worker's children etc. during the working hours.

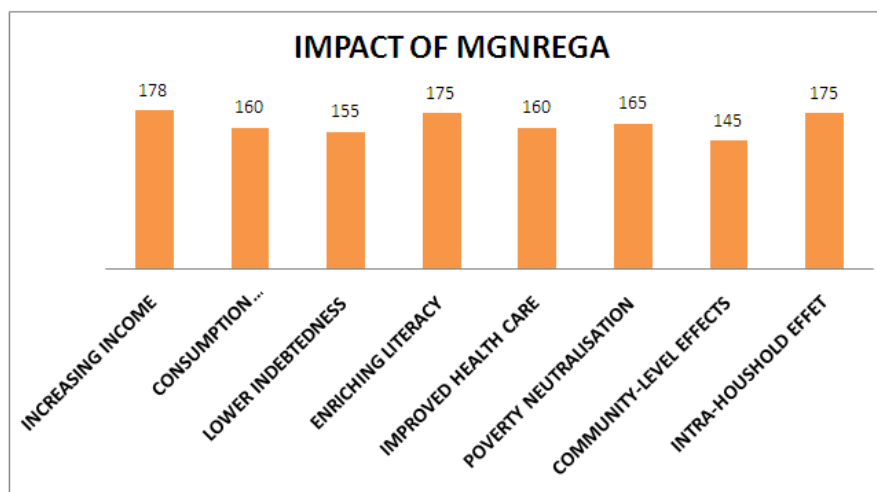
f) **Poverty neutralization:** Before implementation of MGNREGA act it is noticed that the standard of living of the poor people in sonitpur district are very miserable. After the implementation of the act the condition of rural people are improved. From the collected data it is seen that in 2010-11 the total number of job card issued 2.13 lakh which is increased to 2.22 lakh in 2011-12, again it further increased to 2.24 lakh in 2012-13. From this we can say that the numbers of employees are increased. This ultimately increased the income of the people and helps to reduce the poverty level. As a result the living condition is also improved as they are able to develop their sanitation facilities, drinking water, nutrition level, electricity and so on.

g) **Community-Level Effects:** Women's participation at the local or district level of governance process is low in spite of 73rd Amendments of the Constitution. But women participation has increased after the implementation of MGNREGA in many areas. A large number of women workers attended the gram-sabha meeting held in connection with MGNREGA. Community level empowerment of women is one of the great achievements of this Act.

h) **Intra-Household Effects:** Women play a major role in raising the economic resources for their family but their contribution remains uncounted because of their performance is not considered monetarily (unpaid work). In rural areas, the dominance of male in intra-household decisions has been seen. MGNREGA has significant impact in converting such unpaid work of women into paid work and widen the scope of decision making role of women in household matters. As the wages are paid through formal institutions, the intra-household status of women increases and they can control cash resources because withdrawn can be made only as per her own decision.

All this taken together seems to sketch out the beginnings of a marked shift from the previous role of women. While women's labor (farm and non-farm) has always been an essential component in the functioning of rural households, it has been made invisible due to the absence of any monetary remuneration. By putting cash earnings in women's hands, MGNREGA has both increased and diversified the contributions that women

are making to household incomes as wage earners. The impacts of MGNREGA on women empowerment are discussed with the help of the following Bar diagram:



V. Major Loopholes in the Existing Scheme

This act stipulates that wages will be equal for men and women. It is also committed to ensuring that at least 33% of the workers shall be women. By generating employment for women at fair wages in the village, MGNREGA can play a substantial role in economically empowering women and laying the basis for greater independence and self-esteem. However MGNREGA also suffers from some serious limitations:

- **Staff training and administrative set up:** In general there is shortage of field staff and proposal for sanction of staff are pending for approval of the state government. CAG Report, 2007 has singled out lack of dedicated administrative and technical staff for NREGA as the key constraint responsible for procedural lapses.
- **Non-availability of Child Care Facilities:** One of the major shortcomings of the Act is non-availability of child care and raring facilities at the work site even though the Act includes this provision. Different studies show that women remained worried about their children while they are working at MGNREGA worksite even some women do not accept the job facilities of MGNREGA because of non-availability of proper child care facilities.
- **Poor worksite facilities:** MGNREGA funds have been allocated for the provision of safe drinking water, resting place, changing room, first aid, recreational facility for children etc. From the survey it is found that except drinking water facility all other facilities were generally absent. The working women are not satisfied and they said that they had not got any other facility provided by MGNREGA.
- **Delay in Payments:** Delay in payments is also responsible for poor participation of women particularly in case of single women if they are the main earners in the family.
- **Low level of awareness:** In Assam women participation is low because of low level of awareness about the process and entitlements of the programme. Many of the male folks have withdrawn from agricultural activities and joined works in MGNREGA. This vacated space in agriculture has been occupied by the womenfolk and this scene is in study areas.

VI. Suggestions:

Though the vital causes of suffering shown above are before our eyes these can be reduced easily if the schemes and its execution are reviewed frequently and in such cases if lapses are seen they should be immediately rectified. Regarding this, the followings suggestions are given:-

- The employees related with the schemes should be devoted, dutiful and they must have positive vision of their own.
- State MGNRGEA has much more to do to strengthen the Panchayati Raj System, curtailment of direct intervention of other departments or agencies associated with it, would be a welcome step in this regard. The village administration should be brought down to Taluka level or lower level so that all the development programmes under MGNREGA can reach the villages situated at a distance from Development Block.
- Auditing may be done through an extra government agency in addition to Gram Panchayat to check mishandling of fund.
- Panchayat should be empowered financially and job responsibility should be distributed to all the elected members.

- Any kind of political intervention should be stopped.

VII. Conclusion:

The present study shows that if the MGNREGS is undertaken on a scale and implemented well, it can reduce poverty at the bottom level as well as it can empower the poor in the short run. The multiplier analysis has demonstrated the positive impact of MGNREGS on incomes, education and economic upliftment in the study area. From the above analysis it is concluded that the performance of MGNREGA is not full satisfactory. The scheme could not ensure the 100 days job guarantee to the majority of the job card holders. Even we observed that the scheme fails in respect of providing employment avenues to the unemployed in a large scale. In fact the tune and essence of the Act could not shine in the State of Assam. Though MGNREGA has positive impact on employment pattern of women but in Assam their presence is also less in average. The gained benefits of women as community can be understood by increased presence in the gram-sabha, increasing number of women in speaking out in the meetings, increasing capacity of interaction etc. This unique feature little bit found in study areas too. But the poor implementation across the nation (such as lack of child care facility, worksite facility and illegal presence of contractors) accrued the gender sensitiveness of this Act mainly in north-eastern state. Certain initiatives and changes should be taken to remove these barriers. The valuable gains should not be derailed for poor implementation.

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