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SC & ST Women Employment Guarantee Through MGNREGA

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Abstract

MGNREGA has led to a significant increase in monthly per capita consumption expenditure of rural households. It is succeeding as a self-targeting programme with high participation from marginalized groups including the SCs and STs. In the case of both SCs and STs, the participation rate exceeded their share in total population. It has reduced the traditional gender wage discrimination, particularly, in the public works and has had a positive impact on the socio-economic status of women. MGNREGA with its inter-sectorial approach opens an opportunity for convergence with different programmes optimizing public investment

Keywords SC & ST, women, employment and MGNREGA

Introduction

MGNREGA is the first ever law, internationally, that guarantees wage employment at an unprecedented scale. Unique features of the Act include; time bound employment guarantee and wage payment within 15 days; unemployment allowance will be paid by the state government (as per the Act) in case employment is not provided within 15 days; and emphasis on labour intensive works prohibiting the use of contractors, and machinery. The Act also mandates 1/3 per cent participation for women. The primary objective of the Act is to meet the demand for wage employment in rural areas. The works permitted under the Act address causes of chronic poverty like drought, deforestation and soil erosion, so that employment generation is sustainable. The vision and mission of this act is sustainable and inclusive growth of rural India for eradication of poverty by increasing livelihood opportunities, providing social safety net and developing infrastructure for growth. This is expected to improve quality of life in rural India and to correct the developmental imbalances, aiming in the process, to reach out to the most disadvantaged sections of the society. At the national level, with the average wage paid under the MGNREGA weaknesses, opportunities and Threats The SWOT framework was described in the late 1960's by Edmund P. learned, C. Roland Christiansen, Kenneth Andrews, and William D. Guth in 'Business Policy. Text and cases (Homewood, I L: Irwin, 1969) The General increasing from ₹ 65 in FY 2006-07 to ₹ 115 in FY 2011-12, the bargaining power of agricultural labour has increased. Improved economic outcomes, especially in watershed activities, and reduction in distress migration are its other achievements.

MGNREGA

Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) in India is a social security program that addresses the social risk of unemployment in the country. It is based on the fact that the unemployment rate in the country has been soaring over the years and lack of sustainable source of income is responsible for high levels of income poverty especially among the youth and women in the country. The program is thus aimed at providing short time employment opportunities to ensure regular source of income (Kaustav 2010). Under this scheme rural unemployed adults are given a guarantee of 100 days of employment wages at a minimum fix rate by asking them to perform manual work within the community area (Ministry of Rural Development, 2005) In the beginning, in 2005, the act covered only the

200 poorest district of India, but after a long advocacy from civil society organizations and activists, the United Progressive Alliance government extended its scope to covering 625 districts in the year 2008.

NREGA provides employment for adult members of a rural household willing to do unskilled manual work. The beneficiaries are required to register in writing or orally to the local Gram Panchayat (village council). The Gram Panchayat will, after due verification, issue a Job Card. The Job Card will bear the photograph of all adult members of the household willing to work under NREGA and is free of cost. It should be issued within 15 days from the application date. A Job Card holder may further submit a written application for employment to the Gram Panchayat (village council), stating the time and duration for which work is sought. Then the Gram Panchayat issues a dated receipt of the written application for employment against which the guarantee of providing employment within 15 days. In case, the employment is not given within the given 15 days-time period, a fixed daily unemployment allowance as per the Act, has to be paid. Kaustav (2010) also mentions that in order to make sure that the beneficiaries do not have to travel long distances to get work, it is made as a provision in the act the work should be provided within the 5 km radius of the village. If the work is provided outside the 5 km radius, an additional 10 per cent wages will be paid to meet additional transportation and living expenses. The Act also insures that the wages should be paid according to the national minimum wages Act of 1948 (ibid, 2010). Payment of wages shall be done on a weekly basis, and in any case not exceed a fortnight. NREGA is an Employment Intensive Program (EIP). Ginneken (2003, 50) argues that EIPs are popular with developing countries because they enhance economic development by linking social protection to development of infrastructure in a country. The EIPs also have the benefit of being self-selecting and as such are an effective way of targeting. Only those who are desperately poor will participate in the projects (ibid). Thus, the issues of patronage and corruption in the selection of beneficiaries are minimized. Soares (2011, 20) observes that there is a self-selectivity in India's NREGA program as landless laborers, small and marginal farmers, scheduled caste and schedule tribe population and women are over-represented among the beneficiaries. NREGA has had a positive impact in improving household food expenditure although he argues that the program has a weakness in that it does not cater to the goals of promoting skills and development of workers.

The caste system in India

The caste system in India is structured as a four-tiered socio-economic-political system determined by familial line. The system is classified in four Varna's prescribing occupation along with the social status; in sinking order Brahmins (priests), Kshatriya (warriors), Vaishya (merchants) and Sudra (servants). Untouchables, or Dalits, were the people so low in social status that they were not included in the caste system; outcastes. The term „Untouchables“ refers to their traditional degrading and „impure“ occupations that often involved handling dead matter of faeces, resulting in them being considered polluting in themselves – they were not to be touched.

The Dalit

Dalit women within the caste hierarchy The caste system in India is structured as a four-tiered socio-economic-political system determined by familial line. The system is classified in four varnas prescribing occupation along with the social status; in sinking order Brahmins (priests), Kshatriya (warriors), Vaishya (merchants) and Sudra (servants). Untouchables, or Dalits, were the people so low in social status that they were not included in the caste system; outcastes. The term „Untouchables“ refers to their traditional degrading and „impure“ occupations that often involved handling dead matter of faeces, resulting in them being considered polluting in themselves – they were not to be touched.

The Dalit is „unclean“ from birth; is considered perpetually filthy and can never escape his status. According to Hindu scriptures, what is pure must be separated from what is impure. Following that logic, the impure and Untouchable Dalits are forced to live in segregated areas of villages and refrain from touching (and therefore „defiling“) common resources as power supplies and water sources states that it is undeniably shameful to be considered „Untouchable“, and that the practice of Untouchability which leads to higher caste people avoiding Dalits presence, can itself be regarded as an act of shaming.

The practice of Untouchability

The practice of Untouchability is forbidden by law in the Indian constitution, but the social stigma, discrimination and social exclusion of Dalits remains both on an institutional and personal level even today. Asserted that the systematic exclusion has subjected the majority of Dalits to persistent poverty. Therefore, Dalits are suffering from the double burden of being poor and being Dalits. For Dalit women, the situation is even worse, as they suffer from the triple oppressions of being poor, being female and being female Dalits. Dalit women numbers 80.517 million, or approximately 48 per cent of the total Dalit population, 16 per cent of the total female population and 8 per cent of the total Indian population. All available data on the status of Dalit women's rights to education, health and work participation, indicates that they are subjected to lower levels of enjoyment of these rights as compared both to non-Dalit women and men, and Dalit men. There exist, however, very little current data regarding women's experiences of descent-based violence and discrimination – the available data is classified either by gender or caste, but does not include both factors and the relations between them. Caste based Untouchability, discrimination and violence is extensively researched and documented, but mostly with referring to Dalits as one single group, not illuminating the specific intersection between descent, occupation-based identity and gender identity in the experiences of Dalit women.

NREGA and employment

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NREGA is an Employment Intensive Program argues that EIPs are popular with developing countries because they enhance economic development by linking social protection to development of infrastructure in a country. The EIPs also have the benefit of being self-selecting and as such are an effective way of targeting. Only those who are desperately poor will participate in the projects (ibid). Thus, the issues of patronage and corruption in the selection of beneficiaries are minimized. Observes that there is a self-selectivity in India’s NREGA program as landless laborers, small and marginal farmers, scheduled caste and schedule tribe population and women are over-represented among the beneficiaries. NREGA has had a positive impact in improving household food expenditure although he argues that the program has a weakness in that it does not cater to the goals of promoting skills and development of workers.

NREGA’s own act states that “Priority” should be given to women in the allocation of work in such a way that at least one-third of the beneficiaries shall be women”. MGNREGA is designed to transform rural livelihoods through implementing a rights-based approach to employment, and mention empowering rural women as an expected impact of the program.

Dalit and MGNREGA

In this study, NREGA, MGNREGA, and „the Act“ has been used interchangeably for the Mahatama Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme. Terms SC

and ST are given to Dalits and tribal people of India by the Indian Constitution. SC/Untouchables/Dalits have also been used interchangeably for the lower caste and still socially “Untouchable” people of India. Dalit women’s ability to claim their rights as provided by specific policies and laws such as the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act/scheme (MNREGA/S) of 2005. This Act ensures 100 days’ paid employment to each rural household per year within a periphery of five kilometers of the applicants’ residence with 33% reservation for women at equal wage between men and women. The Act also includes a provision for safe worksite facilities such as providing drinking water, shade, childcare and healthcare to workers. The MNREGA is a path breaking Act, which legalized the right to work for the first time in India; it guarantees job security for unorganized sector in the rural areas and is a rights-based demand driven Act. This means that the work is given when work is demanded. However, many of the people in rural areas, specifically the most needy Dalit communities and more specifically the Dalit women and scheduled castes were found not to be demanding the work due to lack of knowledge about the provisions of the Act and unaware of information about how to claim the entitlements.

Women’s access to work which ensures wage parity, as mandated by MGNREGA, is very important for changing social attitudes towards women and the important monetary and non-monetary contributions they make to rural households and to rural communities that has been largely invisible. The evaluation found that the DWLAI programme has gone beyond the mandate of the MGNREGA to get low-income Dalit women supervisory (Mate) positions on the MGNREGA work sites. The technical training they have provided in addition to the pressure they placed on MGNREGA officials to hire trained women in these capacities is a very important breakthrough for women. It has changed perceptions of the leadership roles and capabilities of Dalit women, and has built confidence and self-esteem among women. Furthermore it has implicitly challenged rigid caste hierarchies.

MGNREGS in Tamilnadu

Tamilnadu is generally rated among the better performing states of India, when it comes to implementation of MGNREGS. And if figures such as the ones below, generated by government agencies, are true, then the record is truly impressive.

MGNREGS – TAMILNADU Fact File (2005-2012)

Year	HHs provided work	Women	SC/ST	HHs given 100 days work	Person-days generated (in lakhs)	Person-days generated (%)	Labour Budget (in cores)	Expenditure (in cores)
2005-06	23,141	41	25	N.A.	2.29	N.A.	N.A.	3
2006-07	6,83,481	81	58	N.A.	182.87	N.A.	N.A.	151.64
2007-08	14,18,825	82	61	0.77	642.99	84	615	516.42
2008-09	32,56,419	78	62	6.39	1203.60	56	1722	1005.15
2009-10	40,04,871	83	62	8.84	2391.75	82	1963	1762.37
2010-11	44,13,124	83	58	11.29	2685.63	93	2895	2294.08
2011-12	58,16,369	83	59	14.08	3205.99	110	3572	2932.52
2012-13	55,47,170	84	56	4.66	3047.11	80	5002	3109.91

Note: The figures in percentage under the column of ‘person-days generated’ are arrived by

Comparing with the figures of target HHs – Households

N.A. – Not Available

SOURCE: State Rural Development Commissionerate

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