Socio-Economic Impact of Rural Development Programmes on Women: a study of MGNREGA in East-Khasi Hills district of Meghalaya

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Abstract:
Purpose
Social and economic development is the main aim of rural development for rural peoples, especially to bring about sustained improvement in their living condition through an increase in their income and access to social goods. This paper is an attempt to examine the implementation and effectiveness of the MGNREGA and its socio-economic impact on women in East-Khasi Hills district of Meghalaya.

Methodology
The methodology of research especially for data collection is based on both primary and secondary sources. The major part of the study will be based on primary sources, which includes fieldwork. The field work will be done by using observation, questionnaire and interview method through participation, informal discussion and interaction with the beneficiaries of the study area. A sample of 60 respondents will be drawn for the purpose of the study through random sampling method from beneficiaries list.

Findings
The primary and secondary sources will be quantified and analyzed in qualitative terms.

Research Limitations
Considering the limitation of research, it has selected only one district from the state of Meghalaya.

Practical Implications
This study would help in analyzing the success and failure of the scheme, its contribution to rural development and also would hopefully provide a guideline to the agencies involved in future implementation of the scheme.

Originality
This study of socio-economic impact of rural development programmes (MGNREGA) on women is probably the first to undertaken in East-Khasi Hills district of Meghalaya, although several studies and surveys had been undertaken with regard to implementation of MGNREGA in different parts of the country but almost negligible for women.

Keywords - Rural development, government programmes, scheme, women and implementation.

Paper Type - Case study, Empirical

Introduction
Rural development according to the World Bank publication is a process to improve “living standard of the masses of the low income population residing in rural areas making the rural development process self-sustaining.” Socio-economic condition of rural India is still lagging behind. Illiteracy, lack of basic education, inadequate medical facilities and poor health awareness, inaccessibility of safe drinking water and proper sanitation facilities, malnutrition and high infant mortality etc. constitute its silent features. Further, the Government of India has been adopted a numbers of rural development programmes for the better improvement of
rural people. The rural development programmes are generally designed “to improve the economic and social life of the rural people at the lower end of income distribution, the poor and those are marginalized because of their gender, caste, lack education, food and shelter etc.

Meghalaya, a small hilly state located in the North Eastern region of India, with an area of 22429 sq. kms and a population of 23 lakhs. It is predominantly inhabited by tribal people (86% of the total population). The state was created on 21st January 1972 out of the two hills districts of united Assam namely United Khasi and Jaintia Hills and Garo Hills district. At present the state has seven districts, viz. East Khasi Hills, West Khasi Hills, Ri-Bhoi, Jaintia Hills, East Garo Hills and South Garo Hills. The economy of Meghalaya is basically agrarian. About 81 per cent of the total population of the state lives in the rural areas and mainly depends on agricultural activities for their livelihood. The Jhum or Shifting cultivation with reduced Jhum cycle is still persistent. The present paper is an attempt to examine and analyse the following objectives:

a) To examine the implementation and effectiveness of the MGNREGA and
b) To understand the socio-economic impact of MGNREGA on women in the East-Khasi Hills district of Meghalaya.

Methodology
The methodology of research especially for data collection is based on both primary and secondary sources. Primary data was collected from the field with the help of both questionnaires and interviews with beneficiaries of the study area. East Khasi Hills district consist of eight blocks. Out of which three blocks is identified through purposive sampling and from each block two villages is selected through random sampling method. The sample size was 60 and 10 women from each selected villages were interviewed.

Socio-Economic Status of Women
Meghalaya is tribal dominate states of North-Eastern region. It is the homeland of three major tribal communities for example, the Khasi, Jaintia and the Garo with their numerous divisions into clans. All the three major communities of the state are matrilineal, wherein the youngest daughter inherits the land. Earlier, females were dominating in the management and decision making of the families and hence the economic and social power was concentrated in their hands. This is rare in other society. However over the years due to social change and external influence, educational expansion and increasing involvement of the male section gradual shift of power has been taking place in recent years. Now many of the families are headed by the males. The tendency is increasing with the involvement of male in the socio-economic activities, expansion of education, emergence of nuclear families etc. In political sphere, women participation level is very low, even in Dorbar¹ female are not allowed to take part in the meeting or decision making.

MGNREGA: A Right Based Wage Employment Programme
Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act was enacted in 2005 with the objective to provide a minimum guaranteed wage employment of 100 days in every financial year to the rural households, who have no alternative source of employment. The most significant features of the MGNREGA are that it’s creating a right based framework and

¹ Dorber is traditional institution of Khasi people. It has a constitution called rule and regulation which concerning administration of Dorbar.
demand driven. As per Act, villagers can demand for work and it have to start within 15 days of putting in the demand. It is also committed to ensuring that at least 33 per cent of the workers shall be women.

MGNREGA was launched during the 2006-07 in three districts of Meghalaya and further has extended to three more districts in the financial year 2007-08. As per this provision and more specifically as per section 4 of this Act, the state government framed a scheme known as Meghalaya Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MREGS). During the II phase (2007-08) the scheme was implemented in East-Khasi Hills district. The state is governed by the provision of Sixth schedule. In the absence of Panchayat Raj institution, the local traditional body of government has been responsible for the implementation of MREGS.

This scheme stipulated the formation of four non-profit voluntary bodies (VEC, AEC, BEC and DEC)\(^2\) at four levels for the operationalisation of the MREGS. The traditional headman of the village or Nokma has been made automatically president of the VEC, and the other two representatives are selected by consensus, with the condition that at least one of them should be a woman. Like the Gram Sabha in other states, the VEC consists of all adult members of the village, male and female, and has to meet every month to collectively plan the works to be undertaken under MGNREGA. Most of the MGNREGA work includes land development, plantation, road connectivity and irrigation in the East-Khasi Hills district.

### Implementation of MGNREGA

There are eight community development blocks in the East-Khasi Hills district of Meghalaya viz. Khadarshnong-Laitkroh, Mawphlang, Mylliem, Mawryngkneng, Pynursla, Mawkynrew, Mawsynram and Sheila Bholagng. During the year 2012-13, across Meghalaya 3,00,297 lakhs household had job card under MGNREGA and the percentage of person-days of women is 56.37. The participation of women under MGNREGA is satisfactory in the all three blocks (Mawryngkneng, Mawkynrew and Mylliem) of East-Khasi Hills district. The total person-days of women at East-Khasi Hills district accounts for 59.93 in the financial year 2012-13.

#### Table no. 1. Coverage of MGNREGA in East-Khasi Hills district during the financial year 2012-13

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>Name of the Block</th>
<th>Household</th>
<th>Person</th>
<th>SC</th>
<th>ST</th>
<th>Others</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>HH</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>HH</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>HH</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Mawkynrew</td>
<td>6866</td>
<td>12846</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6866</td>
<td>12739</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Mawryngkneng</td>
<td>11352</td>
<td>26262</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11337</td>
<td>26233</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Milliyam</td>
<td>13657</td>
<td>24941</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>13329</td>
<td>24339</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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The table no.1 shows that majority of the beneficiaries belongs to ST category. Most of the respondents reported that agriculture or manual labour as the households’ main occupation. From this table it has been observed that emphasis was given on engagement of women in MGNREGA programmes. The percentage of women participation is highest in the Maphalang (58.69) and Milliyam (57.76) block. However, Almost 75 per cent respondents reported that they had work for fewer than 25 days in the previous two year.

Table no. 2. Registered households in MGNREGA in the 6 Villages of East-Khasi Hills district

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl.No.</th>
<th>Name of the Villages</th>
<th>Number of Register Household under MGNREGA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Syniasya</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Umsning</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>3 rd Mile</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>4 th Mile</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Lemthaw</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Mawmluh</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: www.nrega.nic.in

Table no. 3. Demand Employment under the MGNREGA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Demanded Employment</th>
<th>Availed 100 days Employment</th>
<th>Demanded Employment</th>
<th>Availed 100 days Employment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2010-11</td>
<td>9184</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5682</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011-12</td>
<td>7392</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3335</td>
<td>204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012-13</td>
<td>5958</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>6550</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Block Development Office, Mawryngkneng and Mawkyenraw Block, 2013

The table no 3 shows the employment demanded by the respondents and availed 100 days employment. It is clear from the table that the majority of the respondents did not get 100
days employment. According to the financial year 2012-13, around 5,958 beneficiaries in the Mawryngkneng block were demanded employment whereas only 107 respondents were able to get jobs 100 days. Further, in Mawkynrrew block 6,550 beneficiaries has demanded employment through the scheme but only 136 beneficiaries were able to get 100 days jobs.

Table no. 4. Block Wise Status of Work under MGNREGA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mawryngkneng Block</th>
<th>Mawkynrew Block</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Category of work</strong></td>
<td><strong>Type of work</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Year 2011-12</td>
<td>Complet ed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water conservation &amp; water harvesting</td>
<td>Ponds &amp; check Dams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drought proofing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Micro Irrigation work</td>
<td>Check Dams &amp; Irrigation canals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provision of irrigation facility to SC/ST beneficiaries</td>
<td>Do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land Development/ Afforestation</td>
<td>Terracing &amp; Playground</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flood Control &amp; Protection</td>
<td>Side Drains etc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural Connectivity</td>
<td>F/path &amp; M/Road</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others Activity Approved by MoRD</td>
<td>BNRGSK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renovation of Traditional water bodies</td>
<td>Improvement of water source &amp; washing Platform</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Block Development Office, Mawryngkneng and Mawkyenraw, 2013
From the table it has been found that majority of the works taken up are rural connectivity and work related to water conservation and washing platform. Under MGNREGA women are mostly engaged with work related to rural connectivity like, footpath construction, approach road and motorable road etc. When asked about their work under MGNREGA, most of the women respondents said that they were mostly preferred to do light work. Almost 82 per cent women worker said that they found difficulties to do heavy work, like digging pond, carrying soil etc.

**Positive Impact of MGNREGA on Socio-Economic Life of Women**

In the East-Khasi Hills district women have started to appear more actively in the rural public sphere. Further, the scheme has gives power to the rural women to fight for their right to receive the wages. Moreover, women have been get opportunity to come out from their house for paid work and also convenience of work close to their home. Women workers unanimously affirmed that the benefits from MGNREGA employment were high and that they would like to get more days of work in a year. Some of the positive outcome for women through their participation in MGNREGA can be shown as given bellow

**a) Enhancing Income:**
The aggregate wage rate par day in East-Khasi Hills district is 128 rupees, with effected from April, 2012. Wages have been progressively increasing over the years. The scheme has encouraged non-working women, widows and the elderly to participate. More than 75 per cent of the women worker agreed that MGNREGA has been given them additional income. By working under MGNREGA, the women workers have been able to contribute for their family income. Most of the women beneficiary reported that MGNREGA helps them to ensure regular food and also allows them to fulfil their daily needs.

**b) Source of Off Season Employment:**
Rural women have lesser means, education, skill assets and employment options than man. Women are primarily engaged with agricultural work, small business farming etc. It has been noticed that MGNREGA is providing a better source of income during the non-agricultural season.

**c) Participation in Gram Shabhas:**
According to the act project are selected in the Gram Sabha meeting by the demand of local community. Gram Sabha plays a crucial role for conducting social audits of MGNREGA work. From the field, it is understood that large number of women participated in the Gram Sabha meeting. Generally women worker did not allowed to taking part in the Darbar. Women are reported that this is only scheme where they can raise their voice. Women’s participation in decision making process has increased after the introduction of MGNREGS, mainly due to their economic independence.

**d) Women Empowerment:**
MGNREGA has been able to make most of the women independent and empower them. It gives opportunity to women for governmental work, which is to provide higher wage than market. Although, work opportunities outside home reduce the economic dependence of women on men and also increase her economic command within the family. However, 20 per cent of the total respondent agreed that MGNREGA has given greater economic independence to women and also generated purchasing power at local economy. Through this scheme, women have started to assert themselves by seeking their voice.

**e) Gender Equity and Social Security:**
MGNREGA acted as social security measure to the aged women, widows, divorced and deserted women. Through this act women are received equal wages under the provisions of the Equal Remuneration Act 1976 an important measure given prevailing gender wage
disparities. The female dependency level has declined after the execution of MGNREGA. However, women have been able to access health facilities after working in MGNREGA. It has also helped in increasing the saving of women.

**Difficulties for women worker**

However, MGNREGA creates special provisions for women, it can be observed that in some villages under East-Khasi Hill district is not implemented properly. Due to several reasons, the participation of women under MGNREGA did not improve

1. **Low Level of Information**:
   From the field it has been found that, rural people were aware about the act. They were known under the Act each household is guaranteed 100 days of work in a year. But information regarding household registration, job card distribution process, worksite facilities and unemployment allowance was inadequate. Because of this, they are not in a position to claim for unemployment allowance.

2. **Irregularities in Payments of Wages**:
   According to the act, payment for work should be made within 14 days after completion of work through Bank or Post Office. Under MGNREGA delay in payments of wages is a major problem in all blocks. Block development officers reported that wages were not regular due to paucity of fund and also problems with bank. Further, the problem of wage payment through bank or post office is difficult in some of the interior village to the nearest post office is so far.

3. **Poor Worksite Facilities**:
   Under this act there are provisions for workers at the worksite like crèche for children, drinking water, sanitation and shade for rest etc. Although, 65 per cent of the respondent revealed that they have not been provided drinking water and resting area. However, there is lack of child care facilities in almost at the all worksite in East-Khasi Hills district. According to the programme officers during the rainy season, rain affects the working hours.

**Conclusion**

In the East-Khasi Hills district MGNREGA has improved the socio-economic status of some women and enhanced their decision-making power slightly in some households. Apart from the lesser socio-economic constraints, non-availability of the male workers due to their significant migration to plains could be the basic reason for the larger participation of women under the scheme. However, the overall impact of MGNREGA on socio-economic lives of women is quite positive in many ways, whether it is by enhancing their economic independence and self-confidence, contributing to food security, helping to reduce distress migration of minimum wages.

**Reference**


