

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF MINOR RESEARCH PROJECT

ENTITLED

“Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MNREGS) and Women Empowerment with special reference to Guruvayur Township”.

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Implementation of MGNREGA has contributed to very high levels of women empowerment. As the work is organized by women's groups, the gender perspective gets built in automatically. A feature of MGNREGS specific to Kerala is that the site is managed by women and that most of the women come for work have already been mobilized in to SHGs, so that there was a prior experience of working together and already existing female managerial capacity, helping them to make MGNREGS more accessible to the women. For the first time equal wages are really paid and this has boosted the earnings of women. As the wages are paid into bank accounts the habit of thrift which was already inculcated through the Kudumbashree experiment has further been strengthened, as the bank deposits are increasing, the intra-household status of the woman has also been improving commensurately as she controls substantial cash resources and withdrawal can be only on her decision. Thus, empowerment of rural women is unintended consequences of MGNREGS. Moreover, actual performance of MGNREGS in Kerala owes much in terms of women participation better than any other states especially because of the state government commitment and the advanced managerial role of Kudumbashree and area development supervisor in particular which mobilize, coordinate and manage the women workers in this scheme.

In the light of the objective of the study following conclusions can be drawn on the basis of empirical analysis:

- In all the 12 wards of panchayat, it has been found that women are fairly young in age, which indicates that the younger generations of women have realized the value of social participation.

- It has been observed that the participation of respondents with below secondary education tends to be more in this area.
- Regarding the caste profile, half of the representatives belonged to Hindu community among 18 percent belongs to scheduled caste and no scheduled tribes. The reservation of seats for these groups ensured their participation in Gram Panchayats.
- It is found that the Christians had a better representation than Muslim members in the Gram Panchayats.
- It reveals that majority of the respondents are married and are able to balance their roles in family life and social life.
- An overwhelming majority of the respondents come from joint-family background.
- The occupational status of the respondents' shows those, majority of women were earning from MNREGS and engaged in the household related activities.
- A majority of the respondents belonged to average income groups. Most of the women have minimum savings after their monthly expenditure.
- Majority of the respondents organize meetings and discuss their problems collectively.
- It is found that a majority of the participants of MNREGS was women than male.
- Majority of the respondents have skill and ability to give suggestions for improvements.
- The members have secured self-satisfaction and self-respect and also acquired a new identity because of their participation in welfare services.
- Most of the respondents knew that reservation of seats had been made for women from the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act and they were in favor of the Bill.
- Majority of the respondents have awareness of their roles and responsibilities. They always visit the ward and interact with people to identify the problems of the wards.

- Involvement of women in the public activity is important for empowerment of women. In collaboration with Kudumbasree unit they involved in catering in the panchayat.
- Majority of the respondents have strong consciousness of their role and are capable of handling issues independently.
- The respondents in most of the Gram Panchayats discuss village problems in meetings, interact with people to identify the needs of the community and implement developmental programmers.
- Majority of respondents have made specific contributions in the form of taking initiative to provide basic infrastructure and water connection for ward.
- Decision- making role is important for empowerment. Majority of the respondents have involved themselves actively in decision making process. They have also exhibited potentiality to emerge as decision makers.
- Large proportions of respondents involved in the problems in their household and get them solved. They are aware of their responsibilities and discharge their duties independently.
- A majority of respondents have shown interest in continuation of the scheme.
- The impact of the scheme was on various important attributes which contribute to the enhancement of quality of life such as food security, fight against poverty and indebtedness, greater economic independence of women, to arrest out-migration.
- There is an improvement in roads and communications i.e. rural connectivity and water level, because the program has a greater stress on the conservation of water bodies
- The program is responsible for the higher local wage rate and cost. It is also seen that 82 percent of the respondents are of the view that the scope of children to go to school has been improved by the program

- The program has offered greater economic independence to women.
- Most of the respondent believes that the program can generate better purchasing power
- it can reduce distress migration
- The rural indebtedness can be reduced by this program.
- A large proportion of the respondents' opinion is that women leaders have got extra responsibilities towards women.
- The problems faced by majority of the women is balancing family life and occupational career
- Introduction of Ayyankali Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme after 2010-11 financial year in Guruvayur township made the respondents disappointed as the new scheme is not providing the facilities which the MNREGS provides.

CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

12 wards were chosen for study because of their special achievement for the implementation of NREGA at the initial stage. They are the moderately developed areas of the village comprising mostly marginal farmers and housewives. In many of these wards poverty was reduced by the consistent focus of several poverty eradication programs. The NREGA introduced with the aim to reduce poverty is thus advantage for these wards. The NREGA can target development using huge demand for casual jobs. The functioning of NREGA in the study area is satisfactory. The closing of MNREGS and the introduction of Ayyankali Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme after 2010-11 financial year was a hit from the back to the respondents in the Thaikkad village and in the Guruvayur Municipality the whole. it was a blow to the beneficiaries of MNREGS in the study area.

Now the respondents are getting very less persondays and so the women were compelled to do other types of occupation which they found to be more difficult.

The MNREGS scheme which was introduced in the year 2008 in the Thaikkad village was 100% successful. The women respondents who were the beneficiaries of the scheme attain maximum benefit. The most disappointing thing is that they were unable to enjoy the scheme after 2010 onwards. They all are anticipating that the MNREGS will be implementing soon back. At the same time women need to gain greater role clarity and strike a balance between their household and official responsibilities.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY AND SUGGESTIONS

- * For improved and active participation of women focus to minimize the vulnerable factors and hindering factors should be taken up and more attention on motivating factors should be laid.
- * As per the observations of the study there is impact of women empowerment programmes on quality of participation of women in MGNREGS. So a convergence mode of planning should be taken up where both programmes will take the support of each other.
- * There are few grey areas with regard to participation of women in the MGNREGS process like participation in social audit and planning of works etc. where special IEC efforts should be made to educate women. Women members of GP should also be involved, in large measure, in social mobilisation and guidance to women workers.
- * Though NREGA was not envisioned as an exclusively women's empowerment programme, the opportunity taken by a large number of women indicates a preference for "government work"

which provides dignity and higher wages than available in the market. The problems such as drudgery need to be addressed by making available gender-sensitive / women-friendly tools.

* NREGA implementation could be strengthened by effective provisioning of what is already available in the Act, such as worksite facilities, eg. shade and safe drinking water and especially child care facilities. The functionalities of Anganwadis may also be reviewed – in terms of timing and other services-so that MGNREGA women workers are ensured of the safety of children (heat, insect bites...).

* The composition of women workers seen on worksites, and the nature of the work offered, suggests that there is need to give some serious thought to developing a wider range of activities under the NREGA. For example, while elderly women and young women with infants coming to sites confirm their pecuniary needs; however, hard manual labour is not desirable from the point of view of their own health or that of infants. The design of the programme needs to accommodate these variations in life cycle and physical ability to undertake hard manual labour.

* The potential of the programme for allowing women to make some savings is observed everywhere. Facilitating their ability to save towards specific income generation is a way of enhancing wellbeing.

* Some “gender-sensitive measures” such as increase in participation of women in planning, implementation and social audits of NREGA, in turn, will create an opportunity for women’s role in asset management.

* As it has come out in the study that gender sensitivity of the delivery system has large influence on quality of participation of women in MGNREGS, special focus should be laid by addressing the attitudinal changes of the officials and making them more gender-sensitive.

SCOPE OF FURTHER RESEARCH

The results are based on the random sample drawn from 12 wards of Thaikkad panchayat in Guruvayur Municipality in Trissur district of Kerala which may not be true for other places. Also the analysis is based on the variables for which I have been able to collect data. A different analysis may found from some other places in Kerala as the topic deals with the empowerment of the women which throws light to open further studies in this field.