

Impact of Mgnrega on Status of Tribal Women in Odisha: A Case Study of Rajgangpur Block of Sundergarh District

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Abstract

It is quite widely known that most of India's rural inhabitants are poor and live in poverty, which has been supported by several studies. This is a fact, that even after 66 years of independence and 63 years of implementation of several policies on development and various new legislations and schemes adopted for better human development in tribal areas by the national and state governments from time to time, yet this is very unfortunate that the living standard of tribals of Odisha has hardly improved and state of Odisha continues to occupy the top position in the poverty map of the country. The study for the present purpose was conducted in Rajgangpur Block of Sundargarh district of Odisha. The district has a large tribal population. Out of 62 tribes notified as Scheduled Tribe for Odisha State as many as 40 tribes are found in this district alone. The numerically important tribes are Orans, Mundas, Kharia, Kisan, Bhuyians and Gonds. Concentration of ST is highest in Sundargarh Subdivision. The tribals of Sundargarh district lead a primitive life and inhabit the remote and less accessible areas of the district. They have a rich and diverse cultural heritage of their own. The main sources of livelihood of these tribals are food gathering and hunting, collection of forest produce. Some of the tribes have agriculture as their main occupation while others have adopted cattle breeding, shifting cultivation, artisanship like basket weaving, rope and broom making and pottery and tool making etc. Scores of tribal and rural development programmes have been implemented across tribal areas since independence. However, it is unfortunate that tribals especially tribal women of Odisha are still not an effective part of these inclusive development policies introduced by our national government. Innocent and ignorant tribals are also victims of displacement, losing their land and livelihood, when the question of livelihood is at stake; they are ultimately forced to migrate to cities and neighboring states in large numbers. The rehabilitation package of the displaced tribals does not solve their miseries. Thus, this paper is an attempt to examine the potencies and loopholes in the existing MGNREA and its impact on tribal women in Odisha, especially Rajgangpur Block, which are causing more alienation than development.

Key Words: Poverty, Poverty alleviation programme, Marginalized women, Migration

Introduction

It is quite widely known that most of India's rural inhabitants are poor and live in poverty, which has been supported by several studies. This is a fact that even after 66 years of independence and 63 years of implementation of several policies on development and various new legislations and schemes adopted for better human development in tribal areas by the national and state governments from time to time, the living standard of tribals of Odisha in particular has improved very little compared to other states of the country.

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However, Indian economy continues to be predominantly rural in character thus there were growing incidents of poverty, deprivation, discrimination, hunger, widespread unemployment, under-employment, social inequalities, illiteracy, ill health, high rate of IMR and MMR, distress among the farmer causing suicide, droughts, inadequate employment in the tribal areas leading to huge migration among the tribals either to the cities or neighboring states. Planners, of late, have realized that the strategy of economic growth through industrialization may not bring the benefits of development to the rural poor and that they may continue to suffer from poverty, inequality, and unemployment for years to come. It is therefore, thought necessary to develop alternative approaches and launch special programmes which will address these problems and to enhance livelihood security to rural unemployed while producing durable assets, empowering women, reducing distress migration and promoting social equity. In this context, the Government of India (GOI) enacted the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) in 2005.

Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA):

The enactment of Mahatma Gandhi NREGA, 2005 can be viewed as a watershed in the transition from the era of 'State-Centric' to 'People-Centric' i.e., Government driven schemes to that of legally enforceable worker's entitlements in the field of rural and tribal employment. In order to eradicate poverty in rural areas, several anti poverty programmes like the National Rural Employment Programme (NREP) of 1980-89; Rural Landless Employment Guarantee Programme (RLEGP) of 1983-89; Jawahar Rojgar Yojana (JRY) of 1989-1990; Employment Assurance Scheme (EAS) of 1993-99; Jawahar Gram Samridhi Yojana (JGSY) of 1999-2002; Sampoorna Grameen Rojgar Yojana (SGRY) of 2001; National Food For Work Programme (NFFWP) of 2004 etc, were launched by the Central Government in phased manner and implemented through the State Governments across the country. Amongst the above NREGA was one of the most popular and successful programme which was renamed in 2nd October 2009 as Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA).

The scheme, however, is a landmark rural anti poverty scheme, an initiative towards tribal economic empowerment in Odisha. But ironically in tribal pockets of Odisha due to bureaucratic apathy and conspiracy, and lack of political commitment, did not able to harness any potential result in mitigating poverty of the inhabitant tribes of the state. In the backdrop of allegations that MGNREGA, has not substantially improved the economic condition of the tribal women in the state, the present paper makes a research based attempt at finding answers to the following questions centering around the performance of MGNREGA in tribal pockets of Odisha and Rajgangpur block of Sundergarh district in particular.

The Act for the first time was passed by the government in 2005 and implemented initially in 200 backward districts of the country in February 2006.

Salient Feature and Importance of the MGNREGA:

1. The Act provides a 100 days wage employment guarantees at prevailing minimum wages with a legal guarantee the 'right to employment' for rural unskilled labour. The 100 days of work figure was estimated because the agricultural season is only supposed to last roughly around 250 days and unskilled workers have no alternative source of income in the remaining parts of the year.
2. All adult members of a rural household willing to do unskilled manual work have the right to demand employment.
3. The key element of MGNREGA is the provision of employment by the state to those people who are unable to find alternative employment, which provides a form of 'social safety net' to the rural unemployment people.

4. The payment of wages through bank and post office accounts is other innovative step that is likely to reduce fudging of muster rolls on the part of the implementing agencies since the actual payments are beyond their reach.
5. Payment of wages to be made in every week and in any case not later than a fortnight.
6. Operational Guidelines for the NREGA seek to encourage women's effective participation both as workers and as managers in the programme by reserving 33per cent of all workdays in a financial year to a household.
7. The Act has the provision of reservation of 33per cent of all workdays for women workers in a financial year to a household.
8. It also has the provision of generating productive assets, protecting the environment, empowering rural women, reducing rural to urban distress migration and promoting social equity.
9. Water conservation; drought proofing (including plantation & afforestation); flood protection; land development; minor irrigation are some of the permissible work that are to be carried out under the Act.
10. Other unique features are its 'self selection' and 'demand orientation' i.e., a job card holder applies for maximum 100 days.
11. There is also clear instruction in Act for equal payment of wages for men and women.
12. Provision of crèche, drinking water, first-aid and shade are to be provided on the work sites. If there are more than five children under 6 years of age and that payment to the crèche in charge will not be included as part of the work measurement. The person assigned for this shall be paid the statutory minimum wage.
13. The other key features are transparency and accountability through the provision of grievance redressal mechanism, right to information and social audits to be convened by the Gram Sabha every 6 months as part of the continuous auditing process, and that the timing of the forum should be convenient in particular for NREGP workers, women and marginalized communities.
14. The use of information technology in this programme is considered to bring about greater transparency through intensive monitoring and faster execution.
15. The other important feature of the Act is that employment to the beneficiary will be given within 15 days of demand; payment will also be made within 15 days of work.
16. The GP after due verification will issue a 'job card', after verification, the GP will issue a job card (contain details of the member) to the household with photograph free of cost within 15 days of application.
17. It therefore proposes 'a right- based, job- oriented way' to growth and development – rather than being a resource based employment scheme.
18. Operational Guidelines for the NREGA seek to encourage women's effective participation in the programme, both as workers and as managers of the programme.
19. Act also does away with 'contractors' unlike previous schemes.
20. Each work should be monitored by a local Vigilance and Monitoring Committee which shall be composed of members from the immediate locality or village where the work is undertaken, to monitor the progress and quality of work.
21. The Act has given priority to decentralization thus Gram Sabha (local community) will recommend works to be taken up and Gram Panchayats will execute at least 50% of work and PRI will have a principal role in planning, monitoring and implementation.
22. The Act makes it possible for widows and other single women to access this work by recognizing single persons as a 'household'.
23. The Gram Sabha is expected to ensure that women are represented on this Committee.
24. The Act also specifies that the labour capital ratio in the public works programmes must be at least 60:40.
25. The other important feature of the Act is that 100% wage cost is borne by Central Govt. 25% Material cost is born by the State Government Unemployment allowance is borne by State Govt.

After seeing the popularity of the Act in the next year itself it was extended further to 130 more districts and within a year after the Act got universalized by bringing the entire country under its horizon with the exception of districts that have a hundred percent urban population and got soon named after Mahatma Gandhi in Oct 2nd 2009 to make the Act more reachable to the masses and thus it became Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA). In the context of Odisha all the tribal dominated districts were covered from the very beginning. Thus for the first time, in government's anti-poverty programme the word guarantee had a 'legal tag'.

Thus it is a universal programme. The minimum wage varies from state to state, in some states it is Rs. 80 whereas in other it is Rs. 120 or Rs. 125. According to the Act the minimum wage cannot be less than Rs. 60. If a person having applied for the manual job is not given the job within the stipulated period shall be awarded with unemployment allowance by the state, for which he/she needn't have to apply.

Thus MGNREGA has 3 distinct goals: i) Protective ii) Preventive iii) Promotive

Through the protective goals it protects the rural poor from vulnerabilities by providing them demand based employment. Through the preventive goals it prevents risk associated with agricultural investment and forced migration of rural poor. Through the promotive goals it brings prosperity in rural economy via increased consumption demand. Thus MGNREGA can be considered as a growth engine.

The Implementation Structure of MGNREGA:

MGNREGA has a five-tier structure of implementation starting from GP at the bottom to the central government at the top.

1. Central Government

At the top of the hierarchy comes the central government. The Ministry of Rural Development, New Delhi is the nodal agency for MGNREGA implementation. It has the responsibility to set up Central Employment Guarantee Council for receiving advice on MGNREGA implementation. It may also undertake independent evaluation and monitoring of the scheme. It has the responsibility to prepare the budget and disburse funds.

2. State Government

Next in hierarchy is the state government which acts as a facilitator in the flow of MGNREGA funds and helping in preparation of manpower. It has the responsibility to set up the State Employment Guarantee Council. The latter has the role to advice the government from time to time on MGNREGA implementation in the state. Besides, the council is also entrusted with the responsibility of monitoring and evaluation of the MGNREGA in the state.

3. District panchayat

District Panchayat, in addition to implementing non-mandatory works, coordinates MGNREGA activities at the district level. Besides, it has the responsibility to prepare both the district annual plan and the five-year perspective plan. These two plan documents are the bases which guide the implementation of MGNREGA at the village level. These documents are prepared at the district level in consultation with the GP and block Panchayats.

4. Block Panchayat

The rest 50% may be undertaken either by the block Panchayat or the district Panchayat or both. Block Panchayat monitors and coordinates the plans and works at the block level. Computer updating of MGNREGA works, muster roll entries, etc is done at the block level under the guidance of the MGNREGA programme officer.

5. Gram Panchayat (GP)

GP is the nodal agency at the bottom level that has the authority to select, design and implement 50% of the works. Selection of works, monitoring and supervision are done by the Gram Sabha (village council). GP has the responsibility to register households, issue job cards, receive applications for employment, provide employment and monitor the NREGA works.

In the present study an attempt is made to analyze the following questions as:

- How far has the scheme addressed tribal poverty and socially and economically empowered the tribal women in the state?
- How far does the implementation of the scheme notified under the MGNREGA by Government of Odisha confirm to the Act and Guidelines?
- How far does MGNREGA impact the socio-economic empowerment of tribal women in Odisha?

Profile of the Study Area: Sundergarh District

The study for the present purpose was conducted in Malidihi Gram Panchayat of Rajgangpur Block in Sundargarh district of Odisha.

The district has a geographical area of 9, 71,200 hectares of land out of which forests occupy an area of 3,534.92 sq km, including 2,664.64 sq km under reserved forests and 612.07 sq km under protected forests. The total Cultivable land of the district is 3.36 Lakh hectares.

The district has 3 Subdivisions, 9 Tahasils, 17 C.D Blocks and 9 Towns (Including Census Towns), 1744 villages out of which 1688 are inhabited and 56 are un-inhabited villages, 4 Municipalities, 262 Gram Panchayats.

According to 2011 census, total population of the district is 2,080,664 out of which, 12, 01,479 live in rural area and 6, 29,194 live in urban areas. Total ST Population of the district as per 2001 census is 9, 18,903 out of which number of male are 4, 58,815 whereas female population stands at 4, 60,088. The sex ratio among ST is 957. The district has a population density of 214 inhabitants per square kilometer (550 /sq mi).

The literacy rate of the district as per 2001 Census was 64.86 per cent.

The tribals are a major part of the population of this district. Out of 62 tribes notified as Scheduled Tribe for Odisha State as many as 40 tribes are found in this district alone. The numerically important tribes are Orans, Mundas, Kharia, Kisan, Bhuyians and Gonds.

As per 2001 census, the number of male population stands at 9, 35,601 as against the female population of 8, 95,072. It thus gives us a sex ratio of 971 females for 1000 males as per 2011 census. Sex ratio, as it is, quite unfavorable for the female population. Population of the district stands 188 as against 203 at the state level.

As the district has highest coverage of forest area thus the main sources of livelihood of tribals of this district are food gathering and hunting, collection of forest produce.

The agricultural practices are also very poor in the tribal areas of the state due to unfavorable pattern of land holdings, poor cropping patterns, crude agricultural implements and absence of irrigational facilities. This is the reason that, they are forced to depend upon in the primitive agriculture, partly due to their inability to take part in non-agricultural occupations and partly due to non-availability of viable employment opportunities in own locality.

On the other hand the minimization of forest, the source of food, fuel and fodder recorded a decline. Besides the problem like globalization, displacement, migration, introduction of market economy, has also damaging their life style.

As such deforestation has also led to ecological ambiances along with, growth of pollution, reduction of ground water level, water pollution, less availability of water in the hilly area and death of natural stream which has adversely affected the tribal women in particular any way women are the worst suffer due to food insecurity resulting in malnourishment. Again the Public Distribution System (PDS), which is specifically desired for rural poor and tribal, ignored local stapled food consumed by generations. The food security cover provide under this system has also neglected to ensure whether the poor have the capacity to pay for the food grains made available to them. This disparity has to be resolved to extend the reach of PDS to the areas affected by food distress. A food security should have a dependable provision to ensure that the poor have the capacity to pay for the food grains made available to them. The tribal women of Orissa are not in a position neither the accessibility nor the purchasing power (affordability) to purchase the food. Due to this there is the case of massive migration in the study area.

Profile of the Study Area: Rajgangpur Block

The study area, Rajgangpur is the headquarters of a Community Development Block (PS). It has 9 Gram Panchayats namely: Alanda, Keshrimal, Kutunia, Kukuda, Jareikela, Malidihi, Laing, Chungimati, Panposh. It has 72 villages out of which 70 are inhabited villages and 2 are uninhabited villages. The number of residential houses of the block is 10660 and the number of household comprises of 12013. The civic affairs of the town are managed by a Notified Area Council (NAC). The block office is located at Rajgangpur town itself. However the block is under the administrative jurisdiction of Sundergarh district.

However, the population of the block as per 2001 census is 1, 21,585 out of which 65,786 are male and 56,799 are female. The total rural population of the block is 79,599 out of which 39,731 are male and 39,868 are female. Likewise the urban population constitutes 43,912 out of which 22,618 are male and 21,294 are female. Similarly the total SC of the block is 13,493 out of which SC male stands at 6,952 and female populations constitute 6,541. Total ST Population of the block as per 2001 census 61,917 out of which 30,988 and ST female population is 30,929. Sex ratio of the block stands at 957 females for 1000 males.

However, as per 2001 census the total literacy rate of the block is 65.32 out of which male literacy rate is 75.28 and female literacy rate is 53.72. The literacy rate among the SCs was 53.63 out of which literacy rate among male was 63.82 and female literacy rate was 43.81. Likewise the literacy rate in the STs was 68.28 out of which out of which male literacy were 68.32 and female literacy rate was 63.52. As per 2001 census total rural family in Block werer16, 884 out this 11,944 family were below the poverty line.

Scores of tribal and rural development programmes have been implemented in the Rajgangpur Block since independence but, it is very unfortunate that tribals' especially tribal women of this Block are still not an effective part of these inclusive development policies introduced by our national government. Innocent and ignorant tribals study area in particular are worst victim of displacement, losing their land and livelihood, when the question of livelihood is at stake; they are ultimately forced to migrate to cities and neighboring states in large numbe

The rehabilitation package of the displaced tribals does not solve their miseries. Thus, in this paper an attempt has been made to examine the potencies and loopholes in the existing MGNREA and its impact on tribal women in Odisha, especially Rajgangpur Block, which are causing 'more alienation than development'.

Hence, in the present paper an attempt has been made to assess the impact of the ongoing Mahatam Gandhi NREGA, anti-poverty programmes on the socio-economic condition of tribal women of Sundergarh district's Rajgangpur block in general Malidihi Gram Panchayats in particular which was selected purposively for the present study, with reference to its impact on tribal women of the district. 40 beneficiaries were selected from Malidihi Gram Panchayats purposively from the muster rolls maintained by the Gram Panchayat.

Profile of the Study Area: Malidihi Gram Panchayat

Under Malidihi Gram Panchayat 4 villages are there namely: Malidihi, Rengalbeda, Ranipia, Bhagatola. However, Malidihi GP is geographically far away from the Rajgangpur block office i.e. 12 Km and it is on the hilltop and within the dens inaccessible forest. The people of Malidihi are speeded over throughout the forest. The people of the area are far away from modernity and mainstream.

However, the total number of population of the Malidihi GP as per 2001 census is 3,349 out of which 1,872 are male and 1,477 are female. Similarly the total SC of the GP is 518 out of which SC male stands at 276 and female population constitutes 242. Total ST Population of the GP as per 2001 census 1,945 out of which 1,024 and ST female population is 921. Sex ratio of the block stands at 957 females for 1000 males. However, the total number of workers of the GP constitutes 1843 as per 2001 census.

As per 2001 the total literacy rate of the GP was 65.32 out of which 76.12 and 52.62 was male and female literacy rate respectively. So far as the SC literacy rate of the GP is concerned it was 53.63 out of which male literacy rate was 64.31 and female literacy rate was 43.52. Likewise literacy rate among STs was 67.13 out of which 68.52 was the literacy rate among male and female literacy rate was 42.23 per cent.

The main occupation of the people of Malidihi is agriculture and people used to depend only on rainwater for the agricultural purpose because, the area lack irrigational facility and it is covered from all sides with hills and hard rocks. The total number of cultivators of the area was 1,372 out of which 741 were male and 631 were female cultivators. It was also found from the study that total 2,006 no of non-workers were there out of which 1,184 were male and 2,006 were female. Likewise total 471 agricultural labors were there out of which 236 were male and 235 were female workers. Thus the people of the area are either living in drudgery or migrate to the nearby town for their livelihood and in search of work and are being exploited. Hence the living condition of the people of this GP is not at all good. However, the people in non-worker category are more in comparison to other. Yet the number cultivator is also in the high side. One of the important finding of table is that the number of non-workers is increasing and most importantly the number of female in this category is also increasing very rapidly reason being that there is work available in their locality and in the town area there is great demand of technical hands.

Malidihi Gram Panchayats was purposefully selected because Malidihi is an underdeveloped tribal area situated on the top of a hill, which is surrounded with forest from all sides. It has highest illiterate people with acute poverty, unemployment and under employment. Malidihi is 15 km away from the block office. Tribal people of Malidihi are not only illiterate and ignorant but also lack skill on the top of it poor transport and communication and infrastructure also do not pursue them to go for a gainful independent occupation. Therefore the incidence of poverty is very high in Malidihi.

Thus, from the socio-economic profile of the Malidihi Gram Panchayats it was found that greater percentages of rural families were living below the poverty line. This means between Malidihi GP of the block is a very backward GP characterized by high level of rural poverty, illiteracy, poor irrigational infrastructure, under developed health care facilities and little occupational diversification of people with greater dependence on backward and subsistence agriculture.

Hence, an attempt has been made here to analyze the impact of Mahatma Gandhi NREGA, on the status of the tribal women of Rajgangpur block in general and Malidihi GP in particular. Hence an attempt has been made to examine that how far the programme has addressed to reduce the rural poverty and distress migration in the study area?.

Methods of Study

The methods adopted for the proposed study are both 'empirical and analytical' for which survey method had been adopted. The study is based on both primary and secondary sources of data and information. For the collections of primary data, both qualitative and quantitative tools has been used the quantitative tool in clued structured questionnaires were administered to the respondents for the said study. Focused group Discussion (FGD) and participatory observation method was adopted in the field to make an objective evaluation of the impact of MGNREGA in the Rajgangpur block of Sundergarh District in general and Malidihi GP of Rajgangpur Block in particular.

Impact of MGNREGA on socio-economic Status of Tribal women in Rajgangpur Block

In order to access and avail the entitlements under MGNREGA, the beneficiaries need to be made aware of the facilities of the scheme. Thus to test the level of awareness of the sample beneficiaries some questions were asked which are discussed below.

In order to study the impact of MGNREGA on the status of tribal women in Rajgangpur Block a total of 40 beneficiaries 10 from each village and another 20 respondents without 'Job Cards' were selected randomly from the muster roll from Malidihi GP and they were administered with a semi-structured questionnaire.

Out of 40 respondents 5 were above 50 years of age, 12 were between the age group of 40-49, 15 respondents were between 30-39 yrs and 8 were between 18-29 years of age. Out of 40 respondents 4 were widow, 28 were married and remaining 7 were unmarried.

It was found in the study area that all the 40 respondents with job card holders belong to ST community and 86 per cent of them belong to Hindu religion, and the remaining 14 per cent were from Christian religion. Whereas 82 per cent of them were illiterate and among the 18 per cent were literate, 11 % of them had less than primary level of education and 7 % of them had education up to primary level. All the respondents belong to BPL category.

Out of 20 non-job card holder respondents majority i.e., 90 percent of them were ST and 70 % of them were illiterate remaining 30% had education up to primary level only and most of them were landless. The other 5 per cent of non-job card holder were from SC and other 5 percent from general caste who were engaged mostly in technical jobs they were had education up to upper primary level and were landless also. As Malidihi is a backward area thus many of the tribals are illiterate, ignorant and thus they are yet to get job cards. The study findings reveals that most of the non- job- cards holder category tribals were absent in the village because they have migrated to nearby cities in search of work thus most of the households in the study area were either women headed or aged persons belonging to poor and landless category.

Awareness of the beneficiaries regarding MGNREGA:

For the success of any programme it is imperative to take sufficient step in disseminating information about the programme, its process and benefits etc among the target beneficiaries. Thus the first question was asked on the sample respondent's general awareness regarding the MGNREGA like what are the benefits of it, how many days of guaranteed employment are there, what a job card is, how to get a job card, how to demand for work, unemployment allowance, minimum wage? etc.

Thus the first question that asked to the sample respondents was that 'where from they got the information about the MGNREGA and 'Job Card'?' The options were i) Panchayat office, ii) Sarpanch, iii) Media, iv) Gram Sathi, v) Neighbours, vi) NGO, vii) Any other. It was found from the survey that out of 40 respondents 42.5% of them opined that they got information through Panchayat office, 25% of them came to know from Sarpanch, whereas 15% of them were informed by their neighbours and 10% and 7.5% respectively by Grama Sathi and Panchayat officials. When asked about how many guaranteed days' work are there it was found that a great majority (92.5%) of them were aware of that 100 days guaranteed days.

In response to the question regarding, 'Did you pay any fees/bribe or other charges to get a job card?' 7.5% of the respondents opined that they had to pay a meager amount though to get a job card but they hesitated to name them. Most of the job card holder opined that they have not faced any trouble in getting it whereas only very nominal percent i.e. 15% faced problem that is also in initial years of implementation. One of the important lacking found from the survey was that there were no photographs of the beneficiaries on job. It is a serious lacking but found from study that it is a deliberative act of the Panchayat officials to hide identity of the beneficiary and issue more fake job cards (ghost job card). There was also repetition of names in muster roll with change in name of either father/husband. This shows a clear case serious manipulation in case of job cards. Some of them also told that earlier they got job even without the job card.

Awareness of the beneficiaries regarding work application:

In order to know the level of awareness of the beneficiaries regarding employment followed by work application a very pertinent question was asked to the respondents. Surprisingly overwhelming majority of them (67%) opined that they did not get any employment in response to their work application. Citing the reason for it such respondent said that it all depends upon the Panchayat officials and contractor to provide work. The respondents were given the impression that few works were carried out that too at a faraway place and contractor has his set of workers etc. But as per the guidelines the engagement of contractor is not allowed which is not known to most of the respondents.

The next query was 'Did you participate in the meeting for selection of work?' As per the guidelines women should not only participate as worker but also to as managers. As per data very few of the respondents (22.5%) opined they had participated in such meeting but majority did not participate in selection of work because their opinion was neither solicited nor taken into account.

In responding to the query 'Did you participate in Gram Sabha?', most of the respondents said that a Gram Sabha meeting were convened for very few times and about 57.5% of them have participated and rest of the respondents replied that they were not aware the importance of their presence and so they were engaged in household activities etc.

Awareness of the beneficiaries regarding payment of wages:

Though there is constitutional provision for equal wage for equal work, yet in practice there is discrimination between men and women in terms of wage. Data on the minimum wage received by women respondents for the work they did, majority of them (72.5%) opined that they were not paid any fixed amount for all the time however Rs. 50/- was the minimum. They told that their male counter parts are getting more than them and their complaint were rejected on the ground that male worker do more strenuous work than them and thus they are paid more.

The study findings also revealed that as the tribal women beneficiaries put their thumb impression in their ignorance they face discrepancy in the wage payment and sometimes they get less than the wages signed for. The respondents were also of the opinion that although there is delay in payment of wages but generally they don't lodge any complaint because of the fear of losing the job.

Data pertaining the medium wage payment revealed that the wage is normally paid through Banks/Post Office. Most of the respondents replied that they had accounts in Utkal Gramin Bank, Malidihi branch. In order to know how comfortable were they in operating with bank a question asked to them was 'Do you feel comfortable in withdrawing money from the bank/post office'? It was found that regarding the payment of wages most of the respondents (67.5%) prefer cash payment to account deposit because they love to receive cash as their wage. This is a fact that they lack the habit of saving thus spend the entire earning. As they are illiterate, innocent and shy they are averse to banking system. Whereas others (32.5%) had no objection with direct bank transfer, because 11% of them had understood the usefulness of saving, 18% opined that because of this system they could save it from drunken male family members, and 3% were of opinion that it reduces corruption.

Facilities at worksite

MGNREGA is one of the most gender sensitive poverty alleviation programmes in India. A lot of facilities to women beneficiaries have been mentioned in the guidelines which are mandatory for all the beneficiaries in general and women beneficiaries' in particular some of the basic facilities like- safe drinking water, first-aid kits, rest shades, period of rest and crèche for their children below the age of 6 yrs etc.

It is very unfortunate that workers in the study area were not provided with drinking water which is the minimum requirement and it was absent in the worksite. All the workers had to carry water with them which is insufficient thus do work even without water. In hot summer they had to work under the burning sun all day and all the beneficiaries opined that they had to take rest under the trees. As all the respondents were tribal women who had to do multiple work like collection of fuel and fodder and water from long distance, do all the household chores, take care of the cattle, aged, sick, and children and then employment outside the home. As most of them were married (70%) and 55% of them were having children below 6yrs of age they were bound to carry their children to the worksite. This was very sad that despite there is a mention of crèche for women worker's children and provision for payment of caretaker is there but this facilities were not found in the worksite. Another significant provision of the Act provides that the beneficiaries are to be engaged in work 5 k.m. radius to their home. But ironically the study findings revealed that this provision is grossly violated and tribal women beneficiaries are harassed in this particular aspect. Some of the respondents revealed that they also face harassment at work place but they fear to reveal it in public.

One of the important mention in the guideline and also important for any worker i.e. medical kit, it was found from the survey that it not available with the contractor in the worksite. The temperature in Odisha is increasing every year and people are dying in large number in sunstroke. So it is one of the most essential basic minimum facilities in any worksite which was lacking here. Besides this attack by poisonous creatures, accidents at the worksite also requires immediate medical attention thus medical kit is very important, which was missing in the worksite.

Impact of MGNREGA on the status of tribal women:

Out of all the responses gathered from the respondents on certain key indicators regarding impact of the MGNREGA it is found that overwhelming majority (70%) of the women opined that this scheme has benefited them in improving their economic conditions. It has resulted in reducing their social distance and promoted gender equity.

The scheme has provided opportunity to tribal women to have the exposure to the outside world. It has led to interaction and sharing of their experience, perceptions and sufferings among themselves. It has also generated a community feeling among them.

However, most of the tribal women respondents revealed that the scheme although provided employment to them but some way or other it has affected their family life.

Being women they have double duty both at home and at work place which has multiplied the burden or pressure of work. The study findings revealed that nearly 94% of the respondents were of the opinion that money earned by them is not spent by them independently. Their husband or elder male family members take decision regarding the spending of money which women earn. In some cases it is found that the alcoholic father/brother/husband takes away hard earned money forcibly from them for purchase and consumption of liquor. Only 6% of the respondents reported that they independently spend the money they earn from their work. It has empowered tribal women economically which has enabled them to take care of their personal expenditure and even have support to the family financial position. Almost all of the respondents reported adding to household assets or paying back loans, purchase of clothing for themselves and for their children, medicine, stationary items.

Creation of Assets under MGNREGA

Public works create assets. These can stimulate local development and minimize the distance between urban and rural area. Gandhiji's dream was to provide urban facilities in rural area has got crystallized with this programme which has not thus this programme has not only fulfilled his dream but also justified the title of the programme. At the time of fieldwork for this study, it was found that few durable assets had been created in the study area. So far as creation of assets by the program is concerned, the outcome was to some extent satisfactory in terms of construction of rural roads, renovation of traditional water bodies, rural connectivity, bus shed, and drainage system and even plantation were done to conserve the ecology.

Positive aspects of MGNREGA are

- The first positive step of this programme lies with its gender sensitiveness that use of the term 'man days' has been replaced by 'person days'.
- MGNREGA is that programme which has given extensive scope to participate in work both as worker and also as manager of the programme.
- It has provided opportunity for the exposure of women to the outside world to interact with banks and Panchayat offices which they might not have earlier got the scope to do so.
- This has enhanced the status of tribal women as income earning workers.
- It has led to interactions and sharing of their experience, perception and sufferings among themselves.
- It has also guaranteed community feelings among them.
- However, most of the women respondents agreed that their engagement under the scheme have some way or other affected their family life, being women they have multiple duty at home and at worksite which they cannot ignore.
- Good thing about MGNREGA is that women workers are now more aware of their rights and entitlements.
- Tribal women worker are doing a lot of hard work which causes physical strain and body pain but they opined that when they receive their wage they forget their pain.

Problems

- It was found from the survey that there was no record of Job demand and Job allocation in Malidihi GP.
- Photographs of the beneficiaries were not there in Job Cards.
- Participation of the job card holders was very poor in Social Audit Gram Sabha because they were not aware of the importance of their presence.
- It was also found that records were not maintained properly in Malidihi GP.

- Vigilance committee was also not active Malidihi GP neither the respondents were not aware of importance of their presence in the committee.
- Names found in muster role were not matching to the voters list.
- It was also found in some cases Gram Sathi putting signature of workers on Muster roll.
- Delay payment for more than 3 months also very discouraging for some of the job card holder to migrate.
- In Malidihi GP works were carried out by contractors and there were also fake entries in muster roll.
- It was verified from field survey that except 100 days guaranteed job and job card no one was aware of the provision for unemployment allowances or importance of participation in the Gram Sabha and Social audit meetings.

Furthermore, the Right to Information (RTI) is a meaningful tool to ensure accountability and transparency. As most of the respondents were not aware of RTI though very few of them (9%) were aware of this still illiteracy and lack of confidence prevent them from using this tool for any difficulties in NREGS. One of the most important objectives of the MGNREGA is of reducing starvation and starvation death and distress migration which has actually reduced the starvation and starvation death of the vulnerable household. It is found from respondents that majority of those have already migrated for a shorter period, not interested to come back to the village because of irregular and less payment and town life that have attract them.

MGNREGA would be more effective and generate more employment and higher income and assets if sincere steps are undertaken to restructure the formulation and properly monitored the implementation of the programmes. Necessary changes depending on the region and the target group would minimize the deteriorating poverty situation in the respective area of Orissa and enhance the prospects of the rural development in general and tribal development in particular.

Concluding Observation

The findings of the micro study conducted in Rajgangpur Block revealed that though women constitute almost 50% of the population of the state (Odisha). The involvement of the tribal women in the NREGS programme in the study area was found to very marginal as compared to men. Where women are involved in NREGS, they are more likely to be exploited than their male counterparts. The study finding revealed that various bottle neck such as lack of tribal women's involvement at the time of planning for NREGS work, lack of awareness, lack of crèche facilities at worksites, lack of women's ownership of job cards and bank accounts, wage discrimination between men and women, harassment at the workplace and lack of appropriate gender friendly methods of information dissemination etc have adversely impacted and thus questioned the efficacy of the MGNREGA in enhancing the status of the tribal women in the study area.

The present study highlights important facts that have either been sidelined hitherto or not properly recognized/understood like job-card holders not given jobs are not required to apply for the unemployment allowance since they are to be paid the same automatically, job-cards retained by the 'Gram Sathi' etc. The paper, concludes with recommendation that the operational guidelines must declare unequivocally that the muster roll is basically a Register of daily wages and must incorporate an explanatory role that the vacant box in the column for each day should be filled with the exact amount of wages received by the particular worker on that day along with his/her initial or thumb impression and the attestation of the same.

It recommends that format like For C-2 prescribed under OREGS, which are found to be ultra-vire the NREG Act, need to be abolished altogether, or alternatively be amended in a suitable manner, and format like B-2, which are found to be deficient in an essential feature be amended to accommodate the requisite.

To sum up, unless the assault on various provisions of the Act by the implementing authority at various levels is not stopped, the illiterate tribal women will continue to face the challenges. This will also not enable the Act as a piece of progressive legislation to fight rural/tribal poverty and will fail to improve the status of the tribal women. The scheme in order to be effective in fighting tribal poverty and empowering tribal women need to address governance lapses and sensitized the implementers of the scheme and should provide free legal aid to the beneficiaries who are deprived of their entitlement.

To conclude, to deal with bottlenecks and implementation lapses, besides governmental measure a high degree of participation from the community and civil society is essentially needed, which can enable the poor ignorant and illiterate tribal women to seek their entitlement and make them rise above their marginalized and subordinated sub-human status.

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