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CONSTRAINTS OF MGNREGA AS A TRANSFORMATIVE SOCIAL PROTECTION POLICY: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY IN ASSAM

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ABSTRACT

Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), a social Protection programme was notified on September 7, 2005 and first of its kind in the world (Bordoloi, 2011). It was implemented throughout the state of Assam in three phases. MGNREGA has a potential to bring out transformative social protection if the beneficiaries avail all the benefits it intends to give and if implemented effectively. But there are certain constraints in achieving this goal. The present empirical study in Assam tries to highlight the constraints faced by women beneficiaries in availing the benefits of the programme. The study was conducted by taking two districts of Assam namely Bongaigaon and Dhemaji where MGNREGA was implemented under the first phase and Morigaon from the second phase of MGNREGA implementation, on women beneficiaries of MGNREGA. The sample consisted of 1382 respondent randomly selected from four gram panchayat from each district on the basis of highest number of women beneficiaries enlisted in MGNREGA. A semi structured interview schedule was administered to the respondents to collect the required information. The findings of the study show that the operational constraints (75.16 MPS) were the major constraints faced by the beneficiaries followed by personal and (68.52 MPS) and awareness constraints (54.05 MPS) respectively.

KEYWORDS

Constraints, Jobcard, Social Protection.

INTRODUCTION

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) is a flagship programme of Government of India with a potential for transforming the lives of socially marginalized people of rural India by providing them with a guaranteed income through employment. It is a landmark in the economic history of Independent India which provides legal rights on employment to the rural citizens (Chabra and Sharma, 2010). The first phase of MGNREGA was started on February 2, 2006 in 200 districts of the country including seven districts of Assam. The second phase of MGNREGA started in the year 2007 when next five districts of Assam were included. The remaining fourteen districts of Assam came under MGNREGA on 1st April 2008 in the third phase of its implementation. Women's opportunities to benefit from social protection programmes are limited by their primary responsibility of childcare, domestic chores and cultural inhibitions on their public mobility. Success of any social protection programme having transformative potential depends on its effective implementation and participation by women in the programme. Constraints faced by women are the speed breakers in the path of gaining benefits of any social protection programme which slow down the accessibility of the beneficiaries towards achieving them. Thus, to strengthen the effectiveness of any social protection programme it is very essential to identify the constraints faced by the beneficiaries in availing the benefits of a programme. An attempt has therefore, been made to highlight the constraints faced by the women beneficiaries of MGNREGA in Assam which hinders MGNREGA's potential as a transformative social protection programme.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Garg, 2008, in his study found that most of the respondents (97%) revealed that they were facing family problems after joining MGNREGA. The study found that long working hours and children's left uncared were the greatest impediments in availing the opportunity of joining the MGNREGA works. Pankaj and Tankha, 2009, observed that inadequate worksite facilities, gender insensitivity of the nature of, work measurement and schedule of rates and in some cases of single women in the definition of household were certain factors which inhibit participation of women in MGNREGA. Hazarika, 2009, through her study revealed that nature of work under MGNREGA is also not conducive for women workers as most of the works involving MGNREGA involve heavy physical labour where male workers are preferred to women workers. Tiwari N. and Upadhaya R., 2012, found in their study conducted in Faizabad district of Uttar Pradesh that a family and personal constraints with MPS of 79.16 were the major constraints faced by women beneficiaries followed by worksite constraints with 53.57 MPS and operational constraints with 24.37MPS respectively. Shah Roy C., 2013, observed from different studies that continued illegal presence of contractors and delay in payments is a significant negative factor affecting the availability of work.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study was conducted by taking two districts of Assam namely Bongaigaon and Dhemaji where MGNREGA was implemented under the first phase and Morigaon from the second phase of MGNREGA implementation, on women beneficiaries of MGNREGA. Two blocks from each district and two gram panchayats from each block was selected on the basis of maximum number of women beneficiaries enrolled in MGNREGA. Random sampling method was used to select 5% of the women beneficiaries from the enlisted women jobcard holders which gave a sample size of 1382. A semi structured interview schedule was the instrument used to collect the required information. Mean Percentage Score (MPS) was used to analyze the data statistically which indicated the extent of constraints faced by the women beneficiaries. MPS was calculated by dividing the sum of scores obtained by the respondents in an item by maximum possible scores and multiplied by hundred

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

TABLE 1: AWARENESS CONSTRAINTS OF MGNREGA BENEFECIARIES WITH REGARD TO ENTITLEMENTS OF THE ACT

S.NO	Entitlements of the Act	Mean Percentage Score (MPS)
1	Right to work	47.70
2	Right to information	45.20
3	Maximum no. of days of employment guaranteed in a year	79.53
4	Unemployment allowance in absence of work	21.93
5	Distance between house and worksite	85.52
6	Time limit for issue of job card	33.59
7	Minimum wages	61.15
8	Mode of payment of wages	60.57
9	Time limit for payment of wages	42.99
10	Worksite facilities	62.11
11	Pooled mean percentage score (MPS)	54.05

Source: Field Survey

FIGURE 1: AWARENESS CONSTRAINTS FACED BY THE BENEFICIARIES

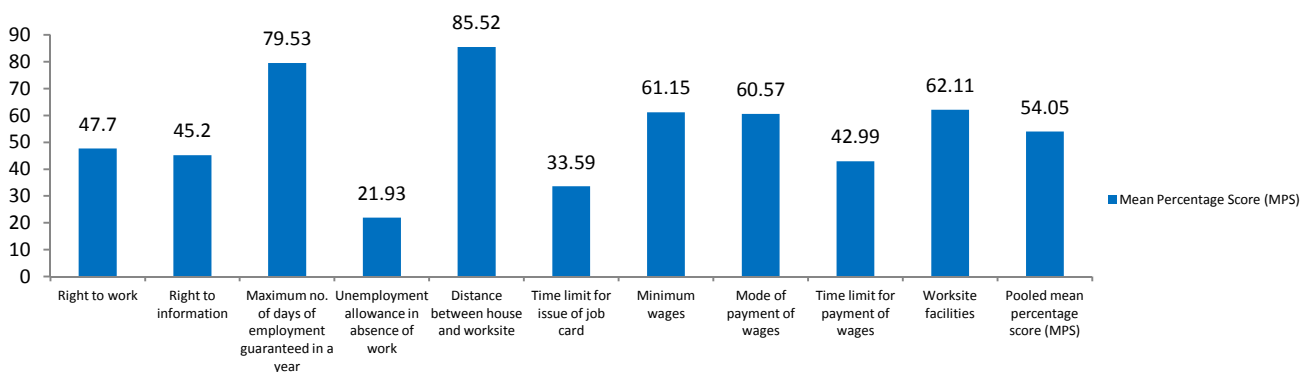


Table 1 and Figure 1 depict that the beneficiaries have some knowledge about the entitlements of the Act where the MPS of awareness about the entitlements of the act is 54.05. But it is interesting to know that knowledge about the entitlement of distance between worksite and house has the highest MPS of 85.52 which is a very attractive provision for the women to work in MGNREGA. The beneficiaries are aware of the maximum no. of days of employment guaranteed for them with MPS of 79.53 but the MPS for knowledge about unemployment allowance is only 21.93. The MPS for knowledge about other entitlements such as right to work, right to information and time limit for payment of wages are 47.70, 45.20 and 42.99 respectively. The beneficiaries are quite aware of the entitlement of mode of payment of wages with a MPS of 60.57. They are also aware of the entitlement of worksite facilities to be provided to the women beneficiaries for which the MPS is 62.11.

TABLE 2: PERSONAL CONSTRAINTS FACED BY THE MGNREGA BENEFECIARIES

S. NO	Personal constraints	Mean Percentage Score (MPS)
1	Load of housework more	55.14
2	Non cooperation from the family members	80.65
3	Unable to take extra work due to fatigue	57.70
4	Children left uncared	82.28
5	No access or control over the income earned through MGNREGA	66.87
6	Pooled mean percentage score (MPS)	68.52

Source: Field Survey

FIGURE 2: PERSONAL CONSTRAINTS FACED BY THE BENEFECIARIES

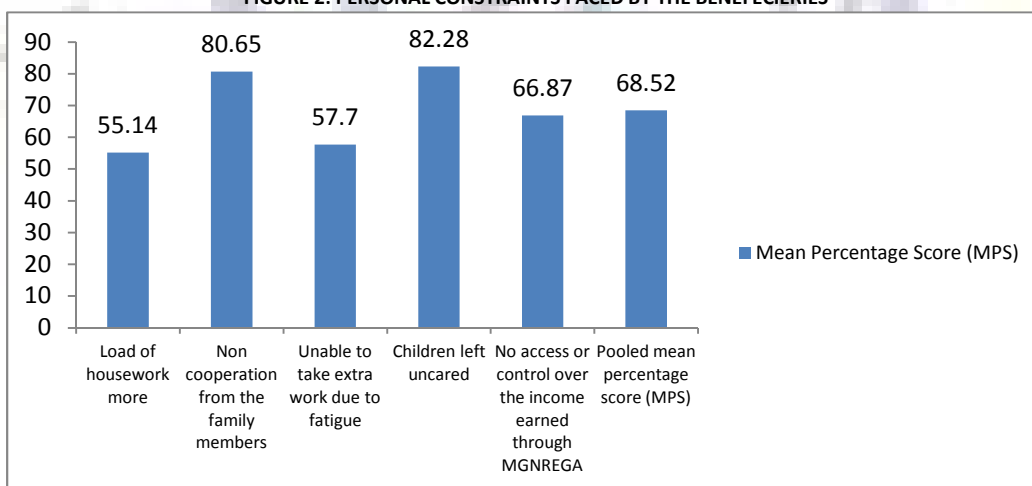


Table 2 and Figure 2 depict that MPS for personal constraints is 68.52 which is more than the awareness constraints (54.05 MPS). The data in the table 2 depicts that the highest percentage of respondents face the constraint of children left uncared at home with a MPS of 82.28 followed by non cooperation from the family members (80.65 MPS). Women also reported that they do not have access and control over the income earned (66.87 MPS) which also hinders their interest to work under MGNREGA. Much load of housework (55.14 MPS) and inability to take extra work due to fatigue (57.70 MPS) were also some constraints faced by the beneficiaries. This is due to the reason that MGNREGA provides unskilled manual work.

TABLE 3: OPERATIONAL CONSTRAINTS FACED BY THE BENEFICIARIES

S.NO	Operational constraints	Mean Percentage Score (MPS)
1	Jobcard not issued on time	66.76
2	No unemployment allowance in absence of work	98.71
3	Delay in payment of wages	85.95
4	Unable to avail 100 days of employment in a year	97.95
5	Wages lower than the market	50.50
6	Unequal wages	33.30
7	Absence of worksite facilities	85.31
8	Long working hours	82.62
9	Pooled mean percentage score (MPS)	75.16

Source: Field Survey

FIGURE 3: OPERATIONAL CONSTRAINTS FACED BY THE BENEFICIARIES

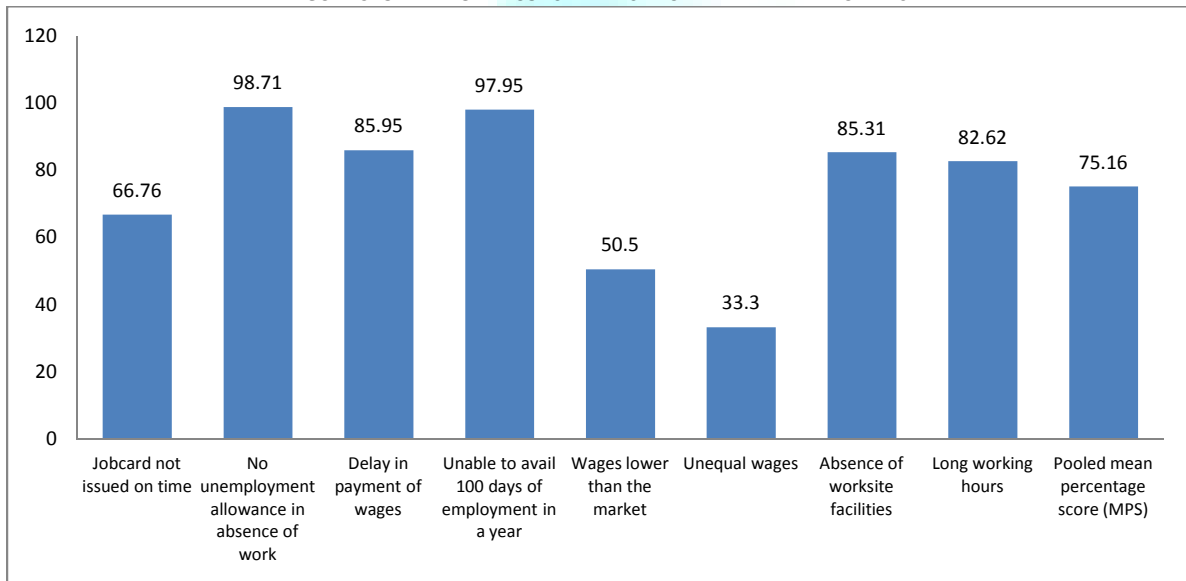


Table 3 and Figure 3 reveal the operational constraints faced by the women beneficiaries of MGNREGA. No unemployment allowance is given in the absence of work was the main constraint faced by the beneficiaries (98.71 MPS) followed by unavailability of 100 days of work (97.95 MPS). Other operational constraints reported by the beneficiaries were delay in payment of wages (85.95 MPS), absence of worksite facilities (85.31 MPS), long working hours (82.62 MPS) and jobcard not issued on time (66.76 MPS). The Mean Percentage Score for wages lower than the market (50.50 MPS) and unequal wages (33.30 MPS) were relatively low revealing the fact that though women face such operational constraints but these were of less importance to them when compared to other operational constraints faced by them.

Further an effort was made through the study to rank the various constraints faced by the beneficiaries on the basis of Mean Percent Scores (MPS) computed for different constraints.

TABLE 4: RANK WISE DISTRIBUTION OF CONSTRAINTS FACED BY THE BENEFICIARIES OF MGNREGA

S.NO	Constraints	Pooled MPS	Rank
1	Awareness constraints	54.05	III
2	Personal constraints	68.52	II
3	Operational constraints	73.26	I

Source: Field Survey

FIGURE 4: RANK WISE DISTRIBUTION OF CONSTRAINTS FACED BY THE BENEFICIARIES OF MGNREGA

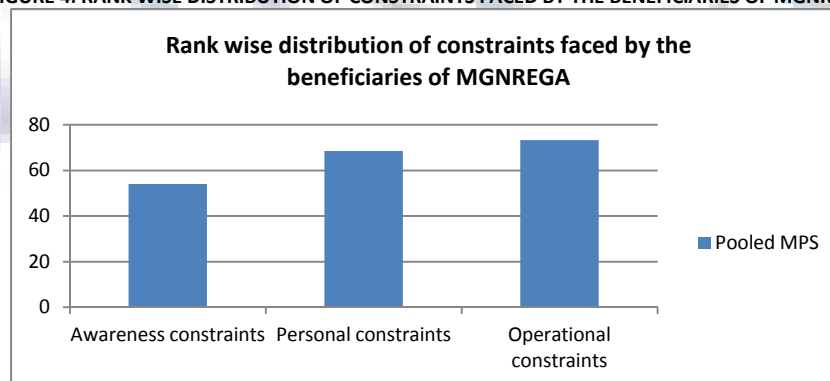


Table 4 and Figure 4 show operational constraints were the major constraints (73.26 MPS) standing at first rank followed by personal (68.52 MPS) and awareness constraints (54.05 MPS) faced by the beneficiaries standing at second and third rank respectively.

CONCLUSION

It can be concluded from the findings of the study that the various constraints faced by the women beneficiaries of MGNREGA limited their accessibility to the programme. Also it hampered them towards achieving the benefits of this social protection programme optimally. The implementing agencies should try to minimize the operational constraints to achieve the goals of the programme. Further, steps should be taken to increase the awareness level of the beneficiaries with regard to the entitlements of the programme by the implementing agency. Finally, women should be given cooperation by the family members and worksite facilities should be provided to increase their participation in the programme which would help them to gain the benefits of MGNREGA as a transformative social protection policy.

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