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MGNREGA: A BOON TO RURAL WOMEN IN HIMACHAL PRADESH

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ABSTRACT

Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) Act 2005 was launched on 2nd Feb, 2006 from Anantapur in Andhra Pradesh and initially implemented in 200 rural poorest District and later on extended throughout the country. It was started with the objectives of 100 days of wages employment in a financial year to any rural adult household willing to do unskilled work, strengthening the rural women employment by enforcing that 33 percent of the total work force should be women and equal wages to men and women. In the present paper attempt has been made to study the role of MGNREGA on the socio-economic conditions of rural women, their participation and percentage of women person days in all the Districts of Himachal Pradesh and its comparison at the national level. The primary and secondary data has been taken to draw the conclusion.

KEYWORDS

Employment, MGNREGA, Respondent, Rural area, Women.

INTRODUCTION

Dr. Jean Dreze, a Belgian born economist at the Delhi School of Economics has been the major influence on the project of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) 2005. The Act was enacted by legislation on 25th August 2005 got the assent of the President on Sept 5th and modified on Sep 7th, 2005. It was launched on 2nd Feb, 2006 from Anantapur in Andhra Pradesh and initially implemented in 200 rural poorest Districts extended to an additional 113 rural districts on 1st April, 2007, 17 more districts were notified on May 15, 2009 and remaining districts were covered under the scheme from 1st April 2008. It was renamed on the birthday of the father of the nation on 2nd October, 2009 as Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA).

OBJECTIVES OF MGNREGA

MGNREGA the poverty alleviation programme of the Govt. is a tool of economic and social change in rural areas under which equal wages are paid to all workers without any discrimination of caste or gender. It has following main objectives.

- To enhancing the livelihood security of the people in rural areas by guaranteeing 100 days of wages employment in a financial year.
- Empowering of rural women, SC and ST.
- Poverty alleviation and promoting social security.
- To create durable assets and strengthening the livelihood base of the rural poor people, stopping soil erosion, increasing land productivity and solving water shortage problem.
- Strengthening natural resource management.
- Restoration and maintenance of ecological infrastructure
- To reduce rural-urban migration.
- Strengthening grass root process of democracy, transparency and accountability in governance.
- To have multiplier effects in the overall development of the rural economy.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To study the socio-economic impact of MGNREGA on women in rural area in Kangra District of H.P.
- To study the women participation and their share in total person days generated under MGNREGA in H.P.

METHODOLOGY

In the present study primary and secondary data has been used. The primary data has been collected through the questionnaire by direct interactions with the respondents. A sample of 200 women from the 10 panchayat in Kangra District has been taken.

LIMITATIONS

There is some variation in the official data in the different official reports that can lead to very little variation in the percentages. The education level of the women at work site also stand upto some extent in the way of understanding the question properly and due to which sometime the desired level of detail information could not be obtained.

H.P. AT A GLANCE

Himachal Pradesh is a beautiful land and inhabited by people of various caste, creed and religions group. H.P. came into being on April 15, 1948 as a centrally administered territory by integrating of 30 erstwhile provincely states and attained statehood on 25th Jan. 1971 as 18th state. H.P. is the composition of 12 districts, 82 tehsils, 35 sub-tehsils, 77 blocks, 3243 panchayats. Out of the total population of the state 6856509, 50.67 percent are males and 49.33 percent are females. The literacy rate of the state is very high i.e. 83.78 percent of which 90.83 percent males and 76.60 percent females.

MGNREGA IN HIMACHAL PRADESH

MGNREGA was implanted in HP in three stages. In the first phase MGNREGA was introduced in Chamba and Sirmour Districts on 2nd Feb. 2006 along with 200 districts on national level. In the second phase it was extended to Kangra and Mandi Districts from April 1, 2007 and in the third phase it cover all the districts of the state from April 1 2008.

In the first year of the scheme 99446 job cards were issued out of which 67187 households demanded work and number of household provided employment was 63514 and there were only 16815 household who has completed 100 days of employment in a financial year. There is more than 11 times increase in the number of job card issued and increase in women, SC and ST person days but there is decrease in the average person days from 47 in 2006-07 to 40 in 2012-2013. It shows that scheme is not able to achieve the desired goals, but it is true that it has provided jobs to many households in rural area which is an impressive achievement.

TABLE NO. 1: OVERVIEW OF MGNREGA IN HP

	2006-07	2012-13
Job card issued	99,446	11,26,008
Job demanded	67,187	5,00,991
Job provided	63,514	4,49,581
No. of household completed 100 days of employment	16,815	13,842
Average person days per household	47	40
Women person days	3.66 lacs	103.41 lacs
SC person days	9.09 lacs	51.07 lacs
ST person days	6.70 lacs	12.48 lacs
Disabled persons	14,999	1737
Centre release (Lakh)	4207.04	32,13.4
No. of work started	8726	35093
No. of work completed	4722	6203

Source: MGNREGA Annual Reports 2006-07 to 2012-13.

ENCOURAGING FACTORS

There are various factors which encourage the rural women to make their presence in maximum in MNREGA such as:-

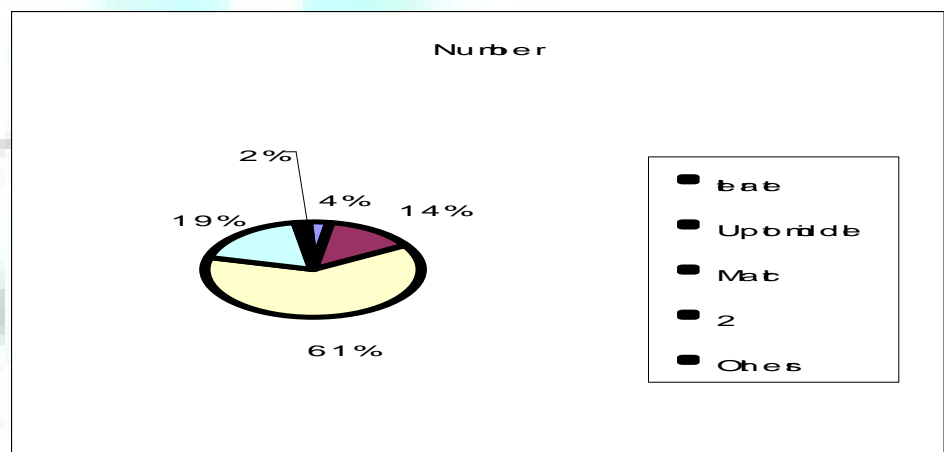
- Work not required technical and managerial skill and special knowledge.
- Employment opportunities with in small radius of local panchayat or at door-step.
- Equal wages to men and women.
- Opportunity of economically empowerment of women of rural area especially in marginalized group.
- Internal motivation to raise the standard of living of the family and self status in the society.
- Timely payment.
- Encouragement and mobilization by SHG, NGO, social movements and involvement of active youth groups.
- Increase in the wages with price index.
- Higher wages than market wages for women.
- Absence of contractors.
- Weak financial position.
- Delay/cut in payment of wages by contractors or land lords.
- Support from the family members i.e. husband and elders.
- Free hours at home.
- Flexibility in choosing period and months of employment.
- 50 percent woman panchayat representatives.
- Exploitive working condition in the private labour market.
- Free from caste and community based restrictions.
- Feasible, safe, socially acceptable and dignified work at work place.
- No migration from one place to another and humiliating conversation for work..

EDUCATION LEVEL OF THE WOMEN RESPONDENTS

The literacy rate of the women in the Kangra district is 80.62 percent as per the 2011 census. It is clear from the table that only 3.5 percent of the women respondents are illiterate and all of them are of the age group above 50 years. More then 75 percent respondents are in the age group of 30-50 years. 12 percent are above 50 years and remaining is in the age below 30 years. Majority of the respondents are married. The socio-economic conditions of the women in the sample study is relatively better as compare to the women of the other states as stated in the various studies of MGNREGA.

TABLE NO. 2: EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATION OF WOMEN WORKERS

Sr.No	Standard	Number	%age
1	Illiterate	7	3.50
2	Upto middle	28	14.00
3	Matric	123	61.50
4	+2	38	19.00
5	Others	4	2.00
	Total	200	100.00



Source: Data through Questionnaire.

WOMEN WORKERS RESPONSE REGARDING MGNREGA

India's star programme MGNREGA has raised the confidence of the rural women who now works outside their home and enjoy equal status with their fellow men workers in the field. It has increased the scope of independent earning and they spend their self earned amount for their own needs. MGNREGA has increased the choice of women to use their earnings such as saving, better education to their children and cope up with illness. The table shows that 86 percent of the sample women workers reveal that MGNREGA has increased their confidence level and 56.5 percent fell that the act has played very important role in improving their standard of living and managing the family expenditure. It is also clear from the table that 24 percent of the sample respondents have meaning full saving after joining MGNREGA.

TABLE NO. 3: WOMEN WORKERS RESPONSE REGARDING MGNREGA

	Yes %	No %
MGNREGA has increase their confidence	172 (86.00)	28 (14.00)
MGNREGA has improve their standard of living	113 (56.5)	87 (43.5)
MGNREGA has increase their saving	48 (24.00)	152 (76.00)
MGNREGA helps provide better education to children	63 (31.50)	137 (68.50)
MGNREGA has increase their purchasing power	108 (54.00)	92 (46.00)
Delay in payment of wages	52 (26.00)	148 (72.00)
Need of crèche at workplace	08 (4.00)	192 (96.00)
Knowledge of RTI	36 (18.00)	164 (82.00)
Knowledge of minimum wages	71 (35.50)	129 (64.50)
Knowledge of unemployment allowance	73 (36.50)	127 (63.50)
No. of women bring their infants children along with them.	0	200 (10.00)
MGNREGA has affected the school going of minor children.	0 (0.00)	200 (100.00)
Whether your husband/elders stop from going to MGNREGA work	29 (14.50)	171 (85.50)
Are you receiving your wages themselves	168 (84.00)	32 (16.00)
Do you face any problem from male workers	16 (8.00)	184 (92.00)
Due you get the work with in 15 days	132 (66%)	68 (34%)
Do you got the unemployment allowance	0 (00)	68 (100.00)
Do you attend the Gram Sabha Regularly	141 (70.5)	59 (29.5)
Before MGNREGA do you have bank account in your name	48 (24.00)	152 (76.00)
Are you satisfied with wages rate provided under MGNREGA	129 (64.5)	71 (35.5)
Normal distance women workers require traveling for MGNREGA work.	Maximum 3 KM	

Source: Data through Questionnaire

There are only 4 percent women workers who have raised the problem of crèche at the work place. The level of full knowledge and awareness about the RTI, unemployment allowance and operational guidelines is low. The full knowledge/awareness about the rules and procedure of the MGNREGA among the rural women can lead to minimize the corruption and irregularities and help in realizing the true and fundamental potential of MGNREGA. On the other hand majority of the respondents have the knowledge regarding the minimum 100 days of work in a year. More than 85.5 percent of the respondents reveal that the decision to work at MGNREGA worksites was their own and supported by the family members i.e. husband and elders. Only 14.5 percent women disclose that they were denied at the earliest stage by the family members but with the passage of time their feeling towards scheme has changed.

None of the women with children under the age of five brought them at work place but left them with the elders or at anganwari which is functioning in each gram. The study of school going minor children also not affected as reported by the respondents. Before the introduction of MGNREGA the percentage of the women respondents having bank account in their own name was dismally very low i.e. only 24 percent. By opening the bank account in their own name it has encourage the rural women to take the decision to enter the sphere of cash economy. By putting cash income of their own earnings into their hands has made them more assertive and confident about their space in the public sphere. Their choice and freedom to use their earnings has increased, earliest it was restricted and very limited. Their earning now has the influence on the spending and investment decision that empower them to have their hold in the family matters. MGNREGA income may be small but it has made them independent, less dependence on spouse or family members and raised their social status and self esteem. Another important finding which has emerged from the survey that majority of the women workers receiving their wages from the counter of the bank themselves rather than through their spouse. The banking facility is easily available in the Kangra district. Only 10 percent respondents disclose that they were accompanied by their family members for receiving the payment from the bank. The self collection of the wages from the counter by the women leads to better income consumption ratio and better control. The delay in the payment of wages was also reported by 26 percent of the respondents and discloses that it become difficult for them to sustain for so longer without money. Sometime they have to make several visits or phone enquiry to the banks only to find out whether their wages have been credited into their account or not.

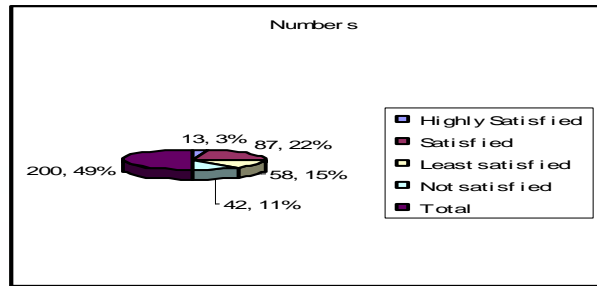
It is also disclosed by some workers that MGNREGA has provided them an opportunity to mix up with other and share their problem which leads to reduce their stress. It has made them more punctual in performing all the house hold activities before and after MGNREGA hours. 8 percent of the women also reported that they have to listen the comments of the male workers in certain works which requires more physical force or in digging work. It is also disclosed by the majority of the women respondents that they make their presence in almost all the gram sabha and raise their problem and ask the question but their involvement in management is not acceptable to the males.

There is a provision in the MGNREGA act that employment is provided with in 15 days from the date of application for employment. It is clear from the table that 66 percent of the respondents got the employment with in the stipulated period and remaining got it later. It may be the violation of the norms of the act for the short period. None of the respondent got the unemployment allowance as they were not aware of the depth of such provision in the beginning. 93 percent of the women stated that they prefer to work under MGNREGA mentally and heartily where as 7 percent disclose their disinterest may be due to their own personal reasons. 64.5 percent of the respondents are satisfied with the rate of wages under MGNREGA as something is better than nothing, where 35.5

percent stated that it is not sufficient in the present scenario of inflation. The normal distance which the women workers requires to travel for MGNREGA work is 3 KM in certain cases otherwise majority of them get the work in their own village or in adjoining village.

TABLE NO. 4: SATISFACTION LEVEL OF RESPONDENTS (ARE YOU SATISFIED WITH MGNREGA)

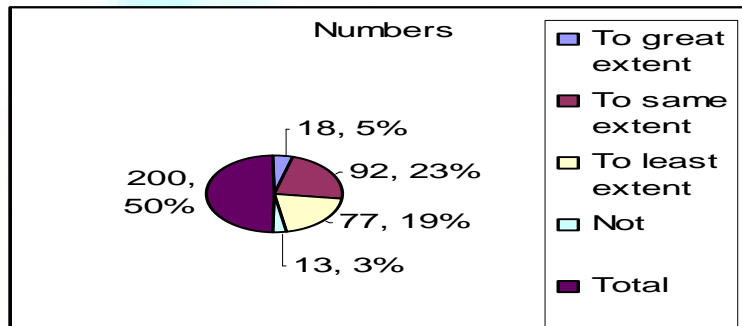
Opinion	Numbers	Percentage
Highly Satisfied	13	6.50
Satisfied	87	43.50
Least satisfied	58	29.00
Not satisfied	42	21.00
Total	200	100.00



Source: Data through Questionnaire

TABLE NO. 5: OPINION REGARDING SOCIO-ECONOMIC STANDARD OF WOMAN (WILL MGNREGA IMPROVE SOCIO ECONOMIC STANDARD OF WOMEN)

Opinion	Numbers	Percentage
To great extent	18	9.00
To same extent	92	46.00
To least extent	77	38.50
Not	13	6.50
Total	200	100.00



Source: Data through Questionnaire

From the table 4 it is clear that 6.5 percent of the respondent is highly satisfied. These are those respondents whose financial position was not upto the mark earlier and with the introduction of MGNREGA now they are earning something. 43.50 percent of the respondent has shown their response as satisfied followed by 29 percent least satisfied and 21 percent not satisfied. It is observed during the survey that the main reason behind the least or not satisfied are less number of days and lack of continuity in the working day in the era of high inflation.

It is also disclosed by the respondent that there is lot of change in the socio economic standard of the women workers and their families. It has not only increase their income, saving, standard of living etc. but also change the look of the village by developing the assets which has now started paying the dividend to the society as a whole.

6.50 percent respondent have the opinion that scheme will not have the positive impact on the socio-economic standard of the women, because of the income earned by the women from the MGNREGA activities but not allowed to spent for fulfilling their requirement or taken by the husband for drink/gambling then it is not the sign of empowering rural women.

WOMEN PERSONDAYS IN HP

The table no.6 presents the female population, literacy rate, sex ratio and percentage of women persondays through MGNREGA in the different district of H.P. The share of women in total persondays in HP was relatively low from 2006-07 to 2009-10 as compare to national average. The percentage share of the women in Kinnaur District in 2008-09 was 61.90 percent; it was bit higher as compare to other districts. But there are six districts where the average share of the women persondays was below the average. In 2009-10 Lahaul and Spiti is at the top of the ladder followed by Mandi and Kinnaur. On the other hand the share of women in total person- days was less than state average in Chamba, Sirmour, Kullu, Shimla and Solan. The highest percentage of women person days can be seen in 2010-11 in Mandi district with 66.00 percent. This is followed by Hamirpur 64.13 percent, Kinnaur 60.03 percent and Lahaul-Spiti 58.10 percent. The least percentage is shown by Sirmour with a meager 12.74 percent followed by Chamba 32.72 percent.

The figure of 20011-12 indicates an impressive participation of women in MGNREGA activities. The highest percentage of women person- days can be seen in Kinnaur 77.09 percent and this is followed by Mandi 74.69 percent and Hamirpur 74.36 percent. The lowest percentage of women persondays is represented by Sirmour again with 23.79 percent. The data pertain to 2012-13 indicates that the average women persondays in HP has increased to the national average. This is sharply a higher percentage in terms of women person days as compare to the first year of the scheme in 2006-07.

One of the remarkable conclusions that can be drawn from the data is that Chamba and Sirmour are the two districts of the state where MGNREGA was started in the beginning along with 200 districts of the country in 2006-07, the percentage of the share of the women persondays is below the average of the state in all the years.

TABLE NO. 6: FEMALE POPULATION, FEMALE LITERACY, SEX RATIO AND %AGE OF WOMEN COMMUTATIVE PERSONDAYS OUT OF TOTAL GENERATED UNDER NREGA IN HP

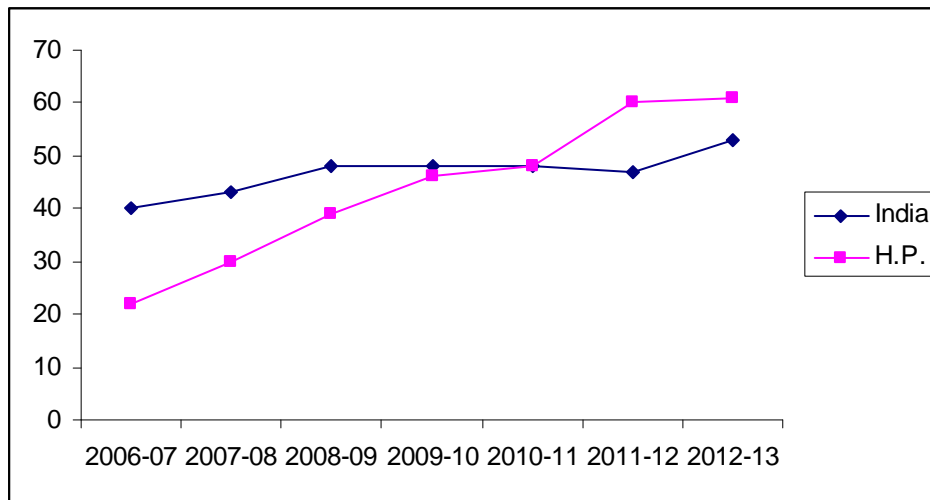
Name of the Distt.	Female population	Female literacy	Sex ratio	Percentage of Women person days				
				2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13
Chamba	48.73	62.14	989	20.68	31.35	32.72	42.83	45.90
Sirmour	47.79	72.55	915	1.31	13.78	12.74	23.79	28.09
Kangra	50.34	80.62	1013	53.09	54.37	50.57	66.87	69.68
Mandi	50.30	74.33	1012	49.71	61.56	66.00	74.69	74.06
Bilaspur	49.53	78.70	981	28.30	43.44	51.02	56.02	55.89
Hamirpur	52.29	83.44	1096	32.85	45.08	64.13	74.36	74.11
Kinnaur	45.04	71.34	818	61.90	57.89	60.03	77.09	75.40
Kullu	48.72	71.01	950	37.72	42.96	42.17	58.36	55.79
L & S	47.81	66.50	916	39.04	64.86	58.10	68.29	65.22
Shimla	47.81	77.80	916	27.19	33.17	46.34	47.18	49.61
Solan	46.91	78.02	884	19.12	32.67	38.56	41.30	40.77
Una	49.24	81.67	977	35.41	49.29	48.73	57.74	60.55
Total	49.33	76.60	974	39.01	46.08	48.25	59.581	61.08

Source: Census 2011 and MGNREGA Annual Reports 2006-07 to 2012-13

TABLE NO. 7: WOMEN AVERAGE PERSONDAYS IN INDIA AND HP UNDER MGNREGA

Name/Years	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13
India	40	43	48	48	48	47	53
HP	22	30	39	46	48	60	61

Source: MGNREGA Annual Reports 2006-07 to 2012-13



The reason may be low percentage of female population, low percentage of literacy and sex ratio, geographical conditions, lack of awareness etc. Solan and Sirmour districts where the cash crops plays very important role in the income of the household and the women may prefer to remain in their own field to nurture cash crops. On the other hand Shimla and Kullu districts are famous for their different varieties of apples and women prefer to work in the orchards rather than in MGNREGA. In the Kinnaur district where the women population percentage is least in the state but the percentage of women person days is bit higher in all the years from 2006 to 2013. Kangra and Mandi are the two leading districts of HP where the female population, literacy rate and sex ratio is above the average and percentage share of the women persondays is also higher than the average in all years.

CONCLUSION

Earlier the main reason of subjugation of the women in rural India was their economic dependence on their spouse or family members or elders. But MGNREGA has been proved as a boon for the rural women in certain ways. It has begun to make a difference in the life style of the women and their family. It has increase their income, saving, confidence level, purchasing power, standard of living self respect, command in family matter decisions, presence in queue at bank and in the gram sabha.. The unrecognized and unaccounted hours spent by the women on the unpaid work has been converted into paid hours after the introduction of MGNREGA. The impressive participation of the women in the MGNREGA has made lot of change in the traditional male dominant bishop society. Thus overall impact of MGNREGA on the life style of women is quite impressive and positive in many ways and in order to enhance it in future number of working person days for women specially may be increased to 150.

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