



MGNREGA: A Milestone for Women Empowerment

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Abstract: MGNREGA has widely improved the socio-economic condition of women which could be seen through different eyes such as; Literatures, print and electronic media as well as through public opinion. The democratic government of India has been trying to provide holistic development including all the sects of Indian society. Time to time special focus was given on different needy groups such as; physically disabled, women, SC, ST and other underprivileged people. This paper tried to reveal the increasing importance of women empowerment in the Indian society and role of MGNREGA in recent past. It also has provided some of the exemplary states which have shown role model for women empowerment through MGNREGA in India.

Background on Women Empowerment: In developing societies, participation by all is the most fundamental requirement of growth and development. Largely, the privileged men have superseded women in various affairs including socio-economic, political as well as physical power since beginning. Recent development in global world has given special and equal importance to women in order to make them significant human resource. Women empowerment is not only a burning issue for India but for entire world because it affects freedom, equality, strength and increasing importance of women. Generally, the meaning of women empowerment is making them powerful and prosperous in all the affairs of life whereas the broad meaning of women empowerment is much deeper and intense. Empowerment connotes sharing of power by women in socio-political agencies. And power of decision making can be considered as measuring standard of women empowerment. Women empowerment also denote equal legal, political, physical, intellectual, social and economic power as men enjoys in order to make decision in social cultural and national perspective. In the contemporary changing worldview, developing society needs compulsory inclusion of women empowerment where an educated and healthy woman indeed is a national resource. The global movement of women empowerment was initiated on 8th march 1975 by beginning celebration of “international women day”. After this event, United Nations continuously organized world women summit throughout the countries. United Nation Women Development Fund has been created as separate fund under United Nation Development Programme in 1984. Objective of women empowerment in India is to improve their socio-economic status in order to bring them in mainstream of the society and nation at large and provide equal status to women as compared to men. In order to rationalize this, Integrated Child Development Scheme under MHRD in 1985 and constitution of National Women Commission in 1992 were established. National Policy on Women was formulated in 2001 and declared it as women empowerment year. Many laws were formulated to eradicate women harassment and exploitation such as; Protection against domestic violence Act 2005, Protection against Sexual exploitation Act 2005 and Anti Dowry Act 1961. Programs of government of India for women empowerment were largely divided into three parts; Health, Education and Welfare. In order to achieve its objective, gender budgeting or women sensitive



budget process has been quickly adopted in India in last few years. Ten important grants were included for the first time by the central budget in the year 2005-06 related to women empowerment. Next to this, Bihar government also included 13 departments under the gender budgeting system. Planning commission also included women empowerment as primary target for the first time under ninth five year plan (1997-2002) in India. Tenth five year plan (2002-07) also emphasized on triple strategy; social empowerment, economic empowerment and equitable justice for women. Eleventh five year plan (2007-12) again focused on women empowerment through inclusive growth along with socio-economic empowerment and equitable justice for women. One third reservation for women in triple layer Panchayati Raj institution and Local Corporation provided by 73rd and 74th constitutional amendment in April 1993 in order to make political empowerment of women. In this system, thousands of women could come into political power for developing capacity of decision making and leadership among them. More than 1.2 million women representatives have been elected till now in India which is the highest in the world. Among these elected representatives, Dalits, Tribes, Backwards and Muslim women are included. Here, most of the electives members are from Below Poverty Line (BPL). It is important to note here that Bihar has become the first State to implement 50% reservation to women candidates for women empowerment and showed a role model before the country.

MGNREGA and Women Empowerment: Government has been launching several programs and schemes in recent past for the rise and entitlement of women in Indian society. Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGA) is one of the largest governmental schemes launched in 2006 for social development in general and women empowerment in particular in India. This scheme did not only make women economically powerful but also improved family and social dignity which led to social empowerment of women. MGNREGA could intervene for the empowerment of rural women and bring women nearer to equality, discrimination free environment and provided opportunity for self-employment. This scheme has also recognized the importance of gender equality and empowerment. This scheme includes several provisions and directions for women empowerment such as; equal labour and wages, accessibility to work, friendly work place, equal decision making power with salary and their equal representation in construction body were ensured. Making women sensitive towards their rights and including them in the mainstream of the national development are some of the main objectives of MGNREGA. One of the provisions in this scheme is to provide 1/3 work employment to women by the village panchayat some others are; Adequate provisions and facilities for women at workplace and for their children's care, Provision of one woman with equal wages to take care of minimum six children of women workers at workplace, Provision of drinking water at workplace, Register maintenance of women workers, Open inspection of workplace Maximum distance of workplace is five kilometers from the house of workers. Providing employment opportunity keeping in mind the roles and responsibilities of women could also be assured which proved the increasing importance of this positive scheme for women empowerment. Participation of women in MGNREGA is highest among all programs and schemes in India with 47% contribution of labour by women alone in this scheme. It also provides an important opportunity for wage based work to those unemployed or less employed in the society.



Goal and Objectives: The goal of Empowerment of Women Policy is to bring about the advancement, development and empowerment of women. The Policy will be widely disseminated so as to encourage active participation of all stakeholders for achieving its goals. Specifically, the objectives of this Policy include

Creating an environment through positive economic and social policies for full development of women to enable them to realize their full potential. The de-jure and de-facto enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedom by women on equal basis with men in all spheres - political, economic, social, cultural and civil. Equal access to participation and decision making of women in social, political and economic life of the nation and Equal access to women to health care, quality education at all levels, career and vocational guidance, employment, equal remuneration, occupational health and safety, social security and public office etc.

Methodology: The present paper is based on secondary data like book, journal, net, internet etc. The diversity within women empowerment is now well established. The plural of women empowerment reflects both the contemporary diversity of motivation, method, and experience among women empowerment academics, and feminism's political commitment to diversity.

Statistics related to Women Participation: As far as participation/ empowerment of women through MGNREGA is concerned, Kerala has been in top position with 93% whereas on the other hand states like Uttar Pradesh and Jammu Kashmir contributed as low as 18% and 17% respectively. Bihar has done considerably well with women participation of 29% in MGNREGA program. MGNREGA has affected entire affairs of life of women in terms of social, economic, political and family level which can be proved by the participation of women in different states in India. This scheme has left behind the national minimum requirement of women participation of 33% in the recent years and has reached at the level of 46-47% as revealed by the document on Review of MGNREGA (2006-12); Ministry of Rural Development GOI. In the financial year 2011-12 alone, women employment and labour-day in MGNREGA could reach about 50% against which in the financial year 2006-07, it was merely 40%. Incidentally the labour-day by women kept increasing every year as 43% in the financial year 2007-08, 48% in the year 2008-2011 and right now it is at the state of 47% in the year 2011-12. Under this scheme, women participation recorded maximum in the state of Kerala which is 93% in the year 2011-12 but it is important to note that Kerala already began with 66% women participation in MGNREGA in the beginning year of 2006-07 as well. Kerala too kept growing in labour day contribution by women every year respectively 71% in 2007-08, 85% in 2008-09, 88% in 2009-10, 90% in 2010-11 and in the last year 2011-12 it reached at the level of 93%. Kerala has proven the model before the entire Indian community about the women participation and empowerment through MGNREGA. But, situations quite differing in different states regarding women participation i.e. Tamilnadu stands second position in term of women participation of about 74% in the last financial year 2011-12 whereas Rajasthan stands third with 69% women participation in MGNREGA program. This programme could not attract women in Jammu and Kashmir states which stands last in term of women participation even in last financial year 2011-12 with merely 18%. Most surprisingly in the beginning year of 2006-07, this state had merely 4% women participation in this scheme. Bihar has also shown little improvement in women empowerment and improvement in women condition which



strengthened socio-economic status of women in the state. By starting with merely 17% women participation in MGNREGA in the beginning year 2006-07 Bihar could reach 29% in the year 2011-12. Here all the status of different states shows differing participation of women in this scheme. Some of the states which could not touch the women participation level of expected 33%, these states are; Uttar Pradesh, Jammu Kashmir, Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal and most of the north-eastern states. Different states have shown varying status of women participation in MGNREGA in India. But, some of the states given in the table show significant improvement such as; Bihar, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, West Bengal and Kerala. Bihar began with merely 17% women participation in the year 2006-07 and could reach upto 29% in last financial year 2011-12 with about 70% growth in just five year. Most surprisingly Himachal Pradesh could increase women participation in MGNREGA about 400% in just five financial years which can be the role model for the states in India followed by West Bengal, Uttarakhand and Kerala respectively about 77%, 50% and 40% in just five financial years.

Conclusion: MGNREGA has widely improved the socio-economic condition of women which could be seen through different eyes such as; Literatures, print and electronic media as well as through public opinion. The democratic government of India has been trying to provide holistic development including all the sects of Indian society. Time to time special focus was given on different needy groups such as; physically disabled, women, SC, ST and other underprivileged people. This paper tried to reveal the increasing importance of women empowerment in the Indian society and role of MGNREGA in recent past. It also has provided some of the exemplary states which have shown role model for women empowerment through MGNREGA in India.

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