



Socio-economic Empowerment of Women through NREGA in Gulbarga District: A Study on Problems and Challenges

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1. Introduction:

The civil and political rights are now joined by human welfare guarantees to employment and fair working conditions, health, food and social security, education and participation in cultural life of the community. These rights came from socialist and welfare state conceptions that emphasized economic social and cultural rights over political rights. The concept of human right underlines the point that every human being is entitled to enjoy certain basic conditions of civilized life irrespective of the socio – Economic system he lives in.

The socio-economic rights perhaps the most important social and economic rights that have drawn attention in recent years are the right to food and employment. In the 1940s and 1950s there was hardly any focus on the right to work although the need for full employment was emphasized. The constitution of India referred the “Right to work” under directive principles of State policy. Article 43 of the constitution of India requires, over all, the elected Government of the State to secure for all its citizens work, a living wage, conditions of work ensuring a decent standard of life. It has been stressed under article 41 that the state shall, within the limits of it, economic capacity and development make effective provision of securing the right to work.

Amith Bhaduri (2005) who made a strong case for full employment in the country, he says that in a market economy, the basic requirement for poverty eradication is to ensure that the poor have purchasing power. This is not to be achieved by disturbing cash to those who need it, because what people need is not cash as such, but goods & services, and these needs to be produced. The way out, therefore, is to provide employment to anyone who needs it at a reasonable wage rate, and to ensure that such employment generates goods & services that will come to be demanded by those who are employed newly. Thus, in a basically market driven economy, productive employment for the masses is the most reasonable and the surest way to lift everyone to tolerable level of living.

India accounts for an over whelming number of the poor in the world. The causes of poverty have been traced to lack of adequate employment opportunities and limited access to markets of the poor with the expansion of the economy, poverty in India has declaimed from 54.9% in 1973 -74 to 27.5% in 2004-05. But the absolute number of the poor continues to remain high.

Out of 260 million poor people in the country, about 200 million poor people are in rural areas. Around 100 districts are under constant threat of drought and semi – famine like situation every year. Other 90 districts are facing every year floods and torrential rains. While the NSSO (61st) reveals that unemployment rate based on current daily status in 2004-05, for female was 8.7% (up from 7% 1993-94) in rural areas and 11.6% (up from 9.4% in 1993-94) in urban areas. The corresponding figure for males was 8.0% (up from 7.2% in 1993-94) in rural areas, and at 7.5% (up from 7.3% in 1993-94) in urban areas.

Involuntary unemployed poor and women lack economic empowerment, which deprives them and also those dependent on them of access to goods and services required for their well being. Since the employment fetches income, it is therefore employment that too which guarantees the legal minimum wage rate will have to be paid. There by incomes of rural households will go up. Women are usually the primary sole care takers of family. In many developing countries, to lead a healthy life, to be able to send their children to school, to have access to basic necessities like power, transport, nutrition etc. A stable minimum income is required which can only be provided by assured employment in any form. This is how employment guarantee as human right can be used to empower the poor by elevating their economic condition. This may empower the poor and women economically. In this connection NREGA, the most flagship programme of UPA government is striving hard to reach the needy and unemployed people.

National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA):

The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act was notified on 7th September, 2005, aims at enhancing livelihood security of households in rural areas of the country by providing at least 100 days of guaranteed wage employment in a financial year to every household whose adult members' volunteers to do unskilled manual work.

The NREGA Act which came into existence on February 2, 2006, was initially implemented into 200 districts of the country in the I Phase. In the II Phase beginning 2007-08, it was further extended to 130 more districts for implementation. From April 2008, it extended across the country.

Progress of NREGA:

Over the three years since it became operational, NREGA (2005) has had a positive impact on the lives of millions of people across the poorest district in the country. In particular, it holds the powerful prospect of bringing major changes in the lives of women. It is rechristened as Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) on the occasion of 140th Birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi. After 5 years, the performance of NREGA at the national level is shown as under.

Table No. 1. Performance of NREGA (National Overview):

Particulars	FY2006-07 (200 District)	FY 2007-08 (330 Districts)	FY 2008-09 (614 Districts)	FY 2009-10 (614 Districts)
Total Job Card Issued	3.78 Crores	6.48 Crores	9.44 Crores	10.72
Employment provided to Households	2.10 Cr	3.39 Cr	4.50 Cr.	4.07Cr.
Person days (in Crores)				
Total	90.5	143.59	214.56	165.72
SC's	22.95(25%)	39.36(27%)	62.88(29%)	33.54(20.23%)
ST's	32.98(36%)	42.07(29%)	54.51(25%)	27.92(16.84%)
Women	36.79 (41%)	61.15(43%)	102.73(48%)	77.50(46.76%)
Others	34.56(38%)	62.16(43%)	97.17(45%)	104.26(62.91%)

Human Rights can be used to empower women within the community by elevating their status. As evident from the table the Women's work force participation was 41% in 2006-07 and has further increased to 48% during 2008-09 and 46.76% in 2009-10. In the last year with highest percentage of women participation in Tamil Nadu (79.16%) followed by Puducherry (77.15%). This again is a significant increase against the 25% women workforce participation under SGRY. However, in states like West Bengal (28%) Uttar Pradesh (14%), Jharkhand (30%) and Bihar (27%) where the less participation of women is also are noted. Empowering women is therefore basically means to provide them opportunities to live and work with dignity, the core principle of all human rights.

At the national level, average wage paid under NREGA has increased from Rs. 65 in 2006-07 to 84 Rs. in 2008-09. As agricultural women labourer earn a partly Rs. 30 per day for (some where Rs. 20 in Hyderabad Karnataka region) 6 to 7 hours of back breaking work. These enhanced wage rates have led to strengthening of the livelihood resource base of the rural poor in India. This is an unprecedented source of economic security and independence there by achieving economic empowerment.

The Government of India implemented NREGA with a broad intention to provide employment to the rural poor, actually who were living below poverty line all over country. The country also receive best compliments from all over the world not only by the under developed countries but also from the developed countries like USA and UK for implementing the programme of NREGA. Progress of NREGA revealed as under.

1. Under NREGA programme in India provided employment to the rural poor actually who were living below poverty line, when the other employment alternatives are scare or inadequate. for them.
2. Under NREGA in India, provided employment on works that address causes of chronic poverty such as drought, deforestation and soil erosion.
3. In India the NREGA strengthen the natural resources base rural.

4. Under NREGAS programme the Government of India made an effort to empower the rural poor through the right based law and it should be known by the implementation of the programme.
5. Through NREGA programme provided average which is more than 50 percent of the employment which is exactly more than the provision under NREGA programme, i.e 33 percent.
6. Majority of the households provided employment under NREGA among who demanded and registered under this programme for employment.
7. After implementation of the NREGA programme from the financial year 2006-07 to 2009-2010 was found to be goes on increases is financial assistance to all the states that, those coming under this act but in the financial year 2010-11 the financial assistance given by state and central government found to be very low.
8. All the states formed committees to deal with implementation and monitoring the NREGA programme launched by the central government.
9. For the first time NREGA programme was introduced in only 27 selected states all over the country and from the financial year 2008-09 this programme has been extended to 34 states in India.
10. After the implementation of NREGA programme defiantly it has transformed the geography of poverty through the country in different states.
11. Central, states, district, block, and panchayath level officials, people representatives, and common people plays crucial role in successive implementation and monitoring the programme.
12. Under this programme provided equal remuneration to both male and female job seekers under this NREGA programme and through this programme Equal Remuneration Act 1976 was successfully implemented.

Many of the news reports have reported many problems and challenges faced by the beneficiaries and certain irregularities in the implementation of the scheme. This scheme pays (on an average) Rs. 120 per day to every adult member of a rural family for 100 days in a year. Wages are supposed to be paid once a week or failing that at least once a fortnight. They aren't. Wages have to be paid through banks or where there aren't any banks, rural post offices so that the money actually reaches the poor. Many people have also argued that NREGA wages that keep the poor away from working as seasonal labourers on farms and that is another reason why food inflation has risen. It is also revealed from the press reports that the amount sanctioned is misappropriated by the officers and politicians and in many cases, the employment is made only in 'papers' but not in reality. Many of the people argue that women along with their child come for work and it is the human right violation as the NREGA restricts child to come to the place of work. It is observed that in some places women are discouraged from bringing children to the work site. Many of the human rights activists argue that it is human rights violation.

Of course, NREGA is playing a significant role in economic empowerment of rural women. But it is not free from problems and challenges. The statistical figures revealed that NREGA is playing a significant role in employment of rural poor, especially rural women. It is truly means of economic empowerment of rural women. Hence, there is need to study the role and usefulness of NREGA in the economic empowerment of rural women.

2. Review of Literature:

Review of literature is a key step in research process. Review of literature refers to an extensive, exhaustive and systematic examination and publications relevant to the research. The significance of the review of literature shows that it provides a basis for future investigations, justifies the need for replication, throws light on the feasibility of the study, indicates constraints of data collection and helps to relate the findings of one study to another.

It has been emphasized by many researchers and scientists that review of literature can play a vital role in a research project and it is a critical summary of research on a topic of interest. It is generally prepared to put a research problem in context or to identify gaps and weakness in prior studies so as to justify a new investigation. Review of collected literature is made as under.

Ambasta, et al (2008) have stated that it is not possible to realize the massive potential of the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act if we deploy the same ossified structure of implementation that has deeply institutionalized corruption, inefficiency and non-accountability into the very fabric of Indian democracy. On the other hand, if the reforms suggested in this paper are put into place, NREGA holds out the prospect of transforming the livelihoods of the poorest and heralding a revolution in rural governance in India.

According to Ambasta (2009), a humungous programme like NREGS needs an independent body that looks after IT, human resource development, evaluation, social audit and grievance redress, without which quality outcomes will remain elusive.

Employment Guarantee Act Primer (2007) is a manual, which states that NREGA 2005 is a law whereby anyone who is willing to do unskilled manual labour at the statutory minimum wage is entitled to being employed on public works within 15 days. If employment is not provided, an unemployment allowance has to be paid. However, the work guarantee in NREGA 2005 is subject to an initial limit of “100 days per household per year”. Workers' organisations have been demanding a national Employment Guarantee Act for many years, along with other legal safeguards for the right to work. The NREGA 2005 was enacted by the Indian Parliament after a long struggle, and much resistance from some quarters (including sections of the corporate sector, the business media, and the Finance Ministry). The Act is by no means perfect. In fact, it is a heavily “diluted” version of an earlier draft, prepared in August 2004 by concerned citizens. Nevertheless, NREGA 2005 is a potential tool of empowerment for rural labourers: guaranteed employment can protect them from economic insecurity, strengthen their bargaining power, and help them to organise and fight for their rights. None of this will happen, however, if NREGA 2005 remains on paper, or if it is implemented in a halfhearted manner. The history of every social legislation is that it takes a long struggle for people to enforce their entitlements, even after the law is in place. The success of NREGA 2005 requires a massive process of public mobilization. In particular, it depends on the strength of organised demand for guaranteed employment. The manual provided the information about the scheme in detail.

Mathur (2007) have stated that the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act is into its second year of implementation. It is easy to criticize the Act and its execution. However, even as we recognize its shortcomings and the scope for correction, we must consider what it has achieved so far and the promise it continues to offer.

Mehrotra (2008) examines the performance of the National Rural Employment Guarantee programme since its launch in mid-2005. It first provides a summary of progress in certain areas and then highlights specific weaknesses. Finally, it describes the challenges that lie ahead and suggests how these can be overcome.

Mihir Shah (2007) remarked that even as we celebrate sixty years of Indian democracy, with millions of our people hungry, cynical and insecure, living under the barrel of the gun (of the state or the extremists), we need to worry about the reach, depth and quality of our political process. The NREGA, which promises the largest ever employment programme in human history, has the potential to provide a "big push" in India's regions of distress. For NREGA to be able to realize its potential, the role of civil society organizations is critical. But this calls for a new self-aware, self-critical politics of fortitude, balance and restraint.

Mukherjee and Sinha (2011) bring out some facts of NREGA in their working paper. A developing economy like India is often characterized by a labour market with demand and supply of labour and a wage that even if competitively determined may not be adequate for the poor household to reach their target income; what they consider as means of a decent living. Envisaging situations like these, the Indian government has implemented the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) in recent past, to complement the income of the poor by providing them employment for certain number of labour days in a year. In this paper, using a simple theoretical model, we have analysed the impact of NREGA scheme on (i) rural labour market, (ii) income of the poor households and (iii) overall agricultural production. It is seen that the income from NREGA alone can be a substantial part of the target income of the poor. We show that in such a situation, the poor may exhibit a backward bending supply curve of labour which may lead to an aggregate reduction in agricultural output. This adverse production effect can happen even when the NREGA activities lead to a moderate improvement in agricultural productivity. Data on food prices tend to support our finding to some extent.

3. Statement of the Study:

Government has formulated many schemes and programmes for the welfare of women. These schemes aim at socio-economic empowerment of women in rural areas. As such, NREGA is also one of such scheme, which assured employment and minimum income for the women in rural areas. As discussed above, there are also problems and challenges faced by the NREGA women beneficiaries. The present study is planned to explore the problems and challenges of women beneficiaries of NREGA in Gulbarga district. Hence, the present study is entitled as **“Socio-economic Empowerment of Women through NREGA in Gulbarga District: A Study on Problems and Challenges”**.

4. Significance of the Study:

Gulbarga district is selected as profile for the present study. Actually Hyderabad-Karnataka area is considered as the most backward region in Karnataka state. Gulbarga district is a major district in the Hyderabad-Karnataka region. It is noted that the people of this region is backward, as majority are dependent on agriculture. As there is no irrigation facilities from any river, the people have to depend on rains for agriculture. As such, there is agriculture in dry land, where there is no guarantee of rains every year regularly. As such,

people are poor and backward. To assure their livelihood, the employment guarantee schemes such as NREGS are proved to be significant. Further, there are also many challenges faced by people in getting real benefits from these schemes. Hence, there is need to study the challenges and problems of the beneficiaries of NREGS in Gulbarga district. Hence, the present study is proved to be significant to assess the benefits got by rural women from NREGS and problems faced by them in getting the benefits from NREGS.

5. Objectives of the Study:

The prime objective of the present study is to explore the problems and challenges for successful implementation of NREGA in Gulbarga district and solve such problems. The Particular objectives are:

1. To assess the concept, strategy and implementation of NREGA in Karnataka state in general and in Gulbarga district in particular;
2. To explore the problems in implementation of NREGA in Gulbarga district;
3. To study the socio-economic benefits gained through NREGA by the rural women in Gulbarga district.
4. To study the role of Panchayat Raj Institutions in successful implementation of NREGA in the villages; and
5. To assess the problems faced by women who are beneficiaries of this scheme in Gulbarga district; and
6. To give suggestions for the challenges and problems in successful implementation of NREGA for the economic empowerment of rural women in Gulbarga district.

6. Hypotheses:

NREGA is playing a significant role in socio-economic empowerment of rural women in Gulbarga district is the main hypothesis of the present study. The specific hypotheses are:

1. There is wide gap between work done and release of wages for the NREGA workers.
2. There is need for health professionals and crèches for children to look into the health of women workers, who are beneficiaries of NREGA.
3. Lack of provisions for mandatory devolution of funds to Panchayati Raj institutions is an important lacuna of NREGA.
4. Panchayat Raj Institutions are not playing a significant role in getting the work from the NREGA workers and getting sanction of funds.

7. Limitations of the Study:

NREGA is basically village based employment guarantee scheme. The present study aimed to cover the women beneficiaries of NREGA living in remote rural areas in Gulbarga district. It is noted that there are total 07 talukas namely, Afzalpur, Aland, Chincholi, Chittapur, Jewargi, Gulbarga and Sedam, in the district. Further, on an average each taluka is having 100 villages. The present research study aims to cover 25 remote villages from each taluka. While selecting the rural areas for the present study, the population, conveyance, literacy, etc should be considered, which is clearly stated in the research methodology. The researcher visits personally totally 175 villages which are remotely located and lack of proper infrastructure like roads, drinking water, etc. It is not possible to cover all the beneficiaries of NREGA in each and every village covered under the study; a sample survey of 5 respondents

from each village should be made. Hence, the present study is limited to only 875 women respondents living in the rural areas of Gulbarga district.

8. Research Methodology:

The present study begins with literature search. The Sociological Abstracts, books, research journals, conference proceedings, reference sources, web sites, etc are referred. On the basis of the study of secondary literature, the relevant information and research gap should be identified, so as to get the clear idea about the present research study.

8.1. Collection of Primary Data:

The primary data is collected from the women beneficiaries from NREGA living in rural areas of Gulbarga city. For this purpose, the researcher visits the rural areas. Further, the researcher physically observes the work done by the beneficiaries of NREGA in the villages. As it is not possible for the researcher to visit all the villages located in Gulbarga district, the present study is made on the basis of sample survey.

8.2. Selection of Sample:

There are seven taluks in Gulbarga district. Each of these taluks has more than 100 villages. As the geographical territory is vast to cover, the researcher selects the sample on the basis of characteristics and infrastructure of the villages such as transportation facilities, population, etc. The women beneficiaries of NREGA are the units for the present study. The sample units are selected as under.

Table No. 2. Selection of Sample

Name of Taluk	Total Number of Villages and Municipal Wards	Number of Villages to be covered	Number of Respondents from each taluka
Afzalpur,	110	25	125
Aland	162	25	125
Chincholi	146	25	125
Chittapur	167	25	125
Jewargi	161	25	125
Gulbarga	199	25	125
Sedam	138	25	125
Total	1663	175	875

8.3. Research Tools and Techniques:

As the majority of the people living in these rural areas are poor and illiterates, interview schedule is the best tool for collecting primary data from the respondents. The interview schedule contains questions on different issues such as basic, personal, demographic, occupation, income, etc aspects of the respondents.

8.4. Analysis of the Primary Data:

The collected data is analyzed using tables and relevant pictorial diagrams and graphs. Further, percentages are calculated to represent the information that is collected. Statistical techniques are also used wherever necessary.

9. Organization of the Study:

After the research completed the research report is drawn and content of the research report is included the following chapters tentatively.

1. Introduction to the Study
2. Review of Literature
3. NREGA and its Development: An Overview
4. Universe and Research Methodology
5. Socio-economic Aspects of the Respondents
6. Challenges and Problems of Respondents
7. Findings and Conclusion

Apart from the above stated 8 chapters, three appendixes are given as under:

1. Bibliography
2. Interview Schedule

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