



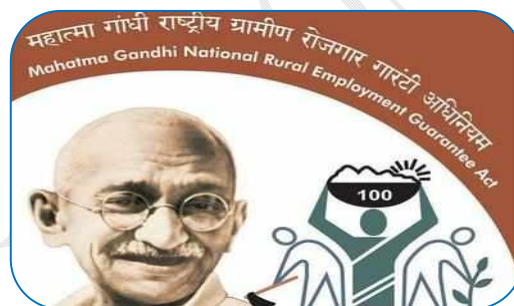
## WOMEN EMPOWERMENT THROUGH MAHATHMA GANDHI NATIONAL RURAL EMPLOYMENT GUARANTEES ACT (MGNREGA): IN FEW BLOCKS OF SOUTH 24 PARGANAS DISTRICT OF WEST BENGAL.

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### ABSTRACT :

*The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), which guarantees employment of every rural household for 100 days, has different progressive provisions which incentivize higher participation of women in the programme. Official data suggest that 47% of all MGNREGA workers are women. Empowerment of women is pre-condition for sustainable and inclusive growth for any society. Empowerment aims at building capacities and creating suitable conditions to enable women to index overall development. This paper analyzes the role of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee in bringing about change in the lives of women and thereby contributing to their empowerment and the reasons for migration in slack seasons in few blocks of South 24 Parganas.*



**KEYWORDS :** MGNREGA, women empowerment, migration, lag in payment, EGS.

### 1. INTRODUCTION:

Employment Guarantee Schemes (EGS) in India have offered a unique prospect for women to earn cash incomes. Several studies propose that women often participated tremendously in these schemes in such an extent that some of them were even referred to as “women’s schemes” (Dev, 1995). EGS have therefore been a subject of considerable interest from the perspective of gender (Quisumbing and Yisehac, 2005). Such schemes that provide safety nets may offer women equal access to risk-coping opportunities. This becomes more important when women are more vulnerable to income and other distress because of the absence of insurance mechanisms (e.g., lack of assets to be used as collateral, ill health, shorter duration of paid employment). Moreover these schemes may provide resources to poor women that would enable human capital investment especially for children’s education and nutrition apart from improving women’s bargaining power within the household (Quisumbing and Yisehac, 2005).

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), implemented in 2006, guarantees at least 100 days of work per year to all the beneficiaries who intend to work as unskilled manual labour. The act provides that the work is to be made available to anyone who demands it within 15 days of receiving an application to work, failing which the state government is liable to pay an unemployment allowance. In its design, the MGNREGA perhaps goes farther than most EGS in its explicit hope for women (Government of India, 2012; Holmes, et al. 2011; Khara and Nayak, 2009; Sudarshan 2011).

The three main features of the MGNREGA make itself different from other EGS in respect of the opportunities it holds for women are:

- i. The Act recommends that at least one third of all workers shall be women.
- ii. The Act grants for equal wages for men and women which is especially important where women often receive a lower wage than men do even for similar works.
- iii. A hundred days of work is entitled at the household level. Thus, the allocation of the work within the household is left to the household members allowing space for the participation of women (Khera and Nayak, 2009).

In addition to these three features, there are also provisions such as:

- i. Facilities of childcare at the worksites.
- ii. The condition that the work should preferably be within 5 kilometers of an applicant's residence. The guidelines recommend that women be given preference on worksites closest to their dwelling (page 22, MGNREGA Operational Guidelines 2013).
- iii. The operational guidelines also incorporated measures sensitive to gender-related issues (Holmes, et al., 2011), like opening bank accounts for wage payments. Here the recommendation is that the local government should consider joint accounts to avoid crediting earnings solely to the male head of household.
- iv. It also recommends that social audits must be suitably scheduled for MGNREGA workers so that women and marginalized communities can participate without constraints.
- v. Moreover, the Act itself also afford women's representation in local committees and state and central councils, in staffing (page 37, Government of India, 2013, Section 4.6.7) and in the selection of mates (worksite supervisor).

These elements of the MGNREGA as a whole try to address the declared objective of the MGNREGA to empower women (page 3, Government of India, 2013).

In the following years since its inception, there is evidence from administrative data that the MGNREGA has indeed drawn a large number of women to worksites. Proofs from field surveys support the idea that the MGNREGA has been inclusive and empowering of women (Dheeraja and Rao, 2010; Pankaj and Tankha, 2009; Sudarshan, 2006). At the same time, however, women continue to face some hard challenges. There are some preliminary evidences that women who seek MGNREGA work face a greater probability of not obtaining work more than do men, given that they have sought work (Dutta, et al., 2012).

## **2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:**

- a. To analyze the factors responsible for the women beneficiaries of the MGNREGA to work abroad.
- b. To analyze the impact on the economic independence of women beneficiaries participating in the MGNREGA programme.
- c. To analyze the consequence on the status of health, sanitation and child education of the women beneficiaries participating in the MGNREGA programme.

## **3. METHODOLOGY AND DATA SOURCES OF THE STUDY:**

The research methodology of the present study is based on two steps:

- a. Data collection – including sampling and questionnaire survey, and
- b. Data processing – through statistical techniques.

### **3.1. Data collection:**

The sources of data for the present study are primary. Primary data of the present study is collected after proper sampling and questionnaire survey. The present study is intended to cover few blocks of the South 24 Parganas district of West Bengal, India. The selection of these blocks is done through purposive sampling. Out of the 29 blocks in the district of South 24 Parganas 7 blocks (viz; Baruipur, Budge Budge-II, Canning-I, Diamond Harbour-I, Kakdwip, Kulpi and Sonarpur) are selected at random for the present study. Subsequently Gram Panchayats under randomly selected blocks are also

selected at random. Then gram sangsads under randomly selected Gram Panchayats are also selected at random. Finally the women beneficiaries living in the randomly selected villages are selected at random for the present study. The sampling technique which is used for the present study is multi-staged sampling. In the next step a suitable questionnaire is constructed after a pilot survey to gather data from the beneficiaries on major focus areas as per the objectives.

### 3.2. Data processing:

The data of the present study is processed through a typical regression technique known as Binary Logistic Model and statistical inferences are done through 'p' test.

## 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS:

### 4.1. The Probit model is therefore:

$$P(Y_{imt} = 1) = F(\beta_0 + \beta_1X_1 + \beta_2X_2 + \beta_3X_3 + \beta_4X_4 + \epsilon_{imt})$$

$Y_{imt} = 1$  indicates an individual  $i$  is migrating at time  $t$  and  $Y_{imt} = 0$  otherwise.  $F(.)$  is a standard normal distribution function and  $X_1$ ,  $X_2$ ,  $X_3$ , and  $X_4$  are interval of payments in weeks, land holding in acres, number of working days and assets created after participating in NREGA.

The variable  $X_1$  is the time lag in getting the NREGA wages by a beneficiary. As per the act the state government is supposed to pay the wages within 15 days i.e.; 2 weeks. The migration may depend on land holding because people with lesser land holding may not financially support their family with the earnings from the land and as well as from the NREGA works. People getting less work in NREGA are bound to migrate to other works for steady income. Lastly the asset (value > Rs. 5000) created after participating in NREGA programme may support non migration.

### The Probit analysis:

probit y x1 x2 x3 x4

Iteration 0: log likelihood = -253.50527

Iteration 1: log likelihood = -246.64378

Iteration 2: log likelihood = -246.64101

Iteration 3: log likelihood = -246.64101

Probit regression	Number of obs =	368
	LR chi2(4) =	13.73
	Prob > chi2 =	0.0082
Log likelihood = -246.64101	Pseudo R2 =	0.0271

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y	Coef.	Std. Err.	z	P> z	[95% Conf. Interval]
x1	.2881831	.0826013	3.49	0.000	.1262875 .4500787
x2	-.0193797	.0343582	-0.56	0.573	-.0867206 .0479611
x3	.0013925	.0026393	0.53	0.598	-.0037804 .0065654
x4	.1695935	.1682636	1.01	0.314	-.1601971 .4993842
_cons	-.7225956	.3228697	-2.24	0.025	-1.355409 -.0897825

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The variable x1 is significant at 1% level of significance.

The Probit analysis shows that the variable  $X_1$  which is lag in payment is only significant at 1% level of significance. Other variables  $X_2$ ,  $X_3$  and  $X_4$  are not significant. This implies that the migration of

the women beneficiaries to other places or jobs during slack seasons when there are no or very little NREGA jobs is due to lag in payment only.

4.2 The aspect 'Economic independence of women' in the present study is best understood mainly by to variables i.e.; 'average working days' and 'status of bank account'. The first variable 'average working days' is analyzed in terms of the economic independence of women when women get the MGNREG jobs at least equal to or more than the men.

#### 4.2.1 Economic independence of women based on average working days in MGNREG:

Paired t test

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Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Err.	Std. Dev.	[95% Conf. Interval]
m	35	38.74286	2.589034	15.31693	33.48131 44.00441
f	35	32.62857	2.486294	14.70911	27.57581 37.68133

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diff	35	6.114286	4.458355	26.37598	-2.946181 15.17475
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mean(diff) = mean(m - f)                      t = 1.3714  
Ho: mean(diff) = 0                                  degrees of freedom = 34  
Ha: mean(diff) < 0                                  Ha: mean(diff) != 0                                  Ha: mean(diff) > 0  
Pr(T < t) = 0.9104                                  Pr(|T| > |t|) = 0.1792                                  Pr(T > t) = 0.0896

The results infer that the Alternate hypothesis ( $H_a$ : mean-diff > 0) is rejected which means that in the present study the women get at least equal amount of jobs as that of men in the MGNREG programme.

4.2.2 The variable status of functioning bank account implies that the beneficiaries recurrently access the bank account. The economic independence can be understood if the women operate or access their bank account equally or more than that of men.

Two-sample test of proportions                      0: Number of obs = 170  
1: Number of obs = 198

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Variable	Mean	Std. Err.	z	P> z	[95% Conf. Interval]
0	.7411765	.0335922		.675337	.8070159
1	.7626263	.0302371		.7033627	.8218898

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diff	-.0214498	.0451964		-.1100331	.0671335
under Ho:	.0451107		-0.48	0.634	

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diff = prop(0) - prop(1)                                  z = -0.4755  
Ho: diff = 0  
Ha: diff < 0                                  Ha: diff != 0                                  Ha: diff > 0  
Pr(Z < z) = 0.3172                                  Pr(|Z| < |z|) = 0.6344                                  Pr(Z > z) = 0.6828

The result of the present study infers that  $H_a$ : diff < 0 and  $H_a$ : diff  $\neq$  0 is rejected. This implies that in the present study women operate their bank accounts equally as that the men do.

Both the results suggests that in the present study the economic independence of the women has increased after their participation in the MGNREG programme.

4.3 The women beneficiaries were asked, whether there is any increase in the status of health, child education and sanitation after their joining in the MGNREG programme.

One-sample test of proportion      edu\_hlt\_san: Number of obs =    368

Variable	Mean	Std. Err.	[95% Conf. Interval]	
edu_hlt_san	.8125	.0203464	.7726217	.8523783

p = proportion(edu\_hlt\_san)      z = 11.9896

Ho: p = 0.5

Ha: p < 0.5      Ha: p != 0.5      Ha: p > 0.5

Pr(Z < z) = 1.0000      Pr(|Z| > |z|) = 0.0000      Pr(Z > z) = 0.0000

The result infers that the Alternative Hypothesis (Ha: p < 0.5) is rejected. This implies that there is a positive increase or upliftment in the field of health, education and sanitation after their participation in the MGNREG programme.

## 5. CONCLUSION:

This paper explores the reasons for migration of women beneficiaries from MGNREG Programme. There is a clear support that migration is arising from wage payments delays. The present study examined the impact of other variables like land holding, number of working days and asset creation on migration and found no significant impact on migration by these factors. Politics appears to play an important role in administrative rationing. Moreover MGNREGA which guarantees employment of every rural household for 100 days, has different progressive provisions which incentivize higher participation of women in the programme. Official data suggest that 47% of all MGNREGA workers are women. The official data is in conformity with the observed data in the present study. The present study infers that the economic independence, which is studied under two parameters like number of days working abroad and bank a/c status suggests that the women beneficiaries participating in the MGNREGA programme are economically independent. Moreover the present study also infer that the status of health, sanitation and child education has significantly increased after participating in the MGNREGA programme. Thus present study clearly portrays that the women beneficiaries participating in the MGNREGA programme are becoming more empowered.

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