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WOMEN AND MGNREGA: A CASE STUDY OF LAWNGTLAI DISTRICT, MIZORAM

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: *The study intends to examine the inclusivity of women under MGNREGA in Mizoram. It highlights an insightful knowledge about MGNREGA and how it affects women workers with reference to Lawngtlai district from the state of Mizoram.*
Methodology: *This study was based on primary and secondary data. The unit of analysis of the propose study was the individual women MGNREGA workers in Lawngtlai block, Lawngtlai district, Mizoram.*
Results: *There exists equal pay for equal work among the male and female MGNREGA job card holders. From female perspective, there exists discrimination among male and female workers in the work – place. Female workers are exempted from difficult and complex tasks.*

KEY WORDS: *MGNREGA, Women Employment, Livelihood.*

INTRODUCTION

The problem of economic development is a matter of concern for both the rich and poor countries of the world. To accelerate the pace of such development it has become a more pressing concern for the poor countries as they have to ensure growth and justice despite being bothered by uneven distribution and under-utilization of resources leading to poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, low consumption, and low investment. Unless poverty is eradicated, growth potential of an economy cannot be allocated impartially. The key to the relocation of resources lies in the formation of employment opportunities for the poor. Employment induced growth has often been addressed as a demand driven approach to full employment (Nayak, S.,2012).

Rural Development, according to the World Bank (1975), is an approach designed to uplift the economic and social life of a specific group of people, the rural meagre. It involves encompassing the benefits of development to the poorest who seek livelihood in the rural area. The group includes small-scale farmers, tenants and the landless. The World Bank and other international agencies and institutions placed importance on whatever land, labour and capital factors of production available to increase production, raise productivity, increase employment and mobilization. At the same time, the pre-requisite for the reduction of rural poverty and inequalities through development involved values and quality of life issues and the participation of the underprivileged people in development activities and in decision-making. For the fore-mentioned people to take initiatives and participate in the developmental activities, the central government empowered Panchayati Raj institutions and other local self-government.

The MGNREGA Act aimed at providing livelihood security in rural India by providing work on demand to the rural households to do unskilled work for a period of 100 days at the prevailing minimum wage rate in the states *(MGNREGA Act, 2005)*. The focus of MGNREGA is on creating sustainable rural livelihood through regeneration of the natural resource base by creation of durable assets, enhancing productivity and strengthening rural governance through decentralized planning & built in system of accountability in the form of social audits *(MGNREGA Act, 2005)*.

This Act was introduced with the aim of improving the purchasing power of semi or un-skilled rural population of India, irrespective of whether or not they fell below the poverty line. Around one-third of the stipulated work force is women. The law was initially called the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) and was renamed with the prefix "Mahatma Gandhi" on 2nd October 2009, Gandhi's birth anniversary. The Act seeks to create durable assets and strengthen the livelihood resource base of the rural poor. The choice of works suggested in the Act address causes of continuing poverty like drought, deforestation, soil erosion, so that the process of employment generation is on a sustainable basis.

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Schemes (MGNREGS) is the largest wage employment programme in the world implemented by the Government of India under Centrally Sponsored Scheme (CSS) covering more than ₹ 68000/- Crores in the Central Annual Financial Statement/Budget of 2025 – 2026 (Union Budget, 2025).

The low allocation is directly related to suppression of demand. The Economic Survey had said that the employment was often unavailable when sought. The Act mandates that the worker should be provided unemployment allowance if work is not provided

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within 15-days of raising the demand. However, the Survey noted that the "work demanded is only reported on the portal when employment is actually provided." Thus, the real demand for the MNREGS work is never captured. (The Hindu, 01 Feb, 2025).

The first implementing District of MGNREGA in Mizoram were Saiha and Lawngtlai districts which were situated at the Myanmar and Bangladesh border in 2006 and later on in 2007, it was implemented in Lunglei and Champhai Disitricts. In 2008, during the third phase, the entire districts of Mizoram were covered under this scheme.

OBJECTIVES

1. To analyze whether equal pay for equal work is adopted under MGNREGA.
2. To examine whether women face any discrimination at the workplace under MGNREGA.

HYPOTHESES

1. Significant relationship between educational qualification and number of days employed under MGNREGA.
2. Significant relationship between increase in income and introduction of MGNREGA.

METHODOLOGY

This is a descriptive and analytical study based on primary data and secondary data. Primary data were collected using structured questionnaire. Secondary data was collected from online journals and articles from websites. The population evaluation is based on the results of a study conducted on 90 respondents by implementing the inclusion criteria and convenient sampling method. The study population for this research is the female MGNREGA job card holders from Lawngtlai district, Mizoram.

DATA SOURCE

The study relied on two data sources - primary and secondary data. The unit of analysis of the propose study was the individual women MGNREGA workers in Lunglei district, Mizoram. Women MGNREGA workers who had job cards were the respondents for this study. For the purpose of the study six villages namely, Bazar Veng, Chandmary, Kawlchaw 'W', Chawntlangpui, Sihtlangpui, Saikah 'L' were chosen from Lawngtlai block, Lawngtlai District.

Fifteen (15) women job card holders from each village were selected for the study by implementing inclusion criteria and convenient sampling method. A total of 90 sample sizes were drawn from the six selected districts.

At the same time secondary data was obtained from both published and unpublished sources like magazines, journals, e-resources, and books etc. for collecting necessary information.

ANALYTICAL TOOLS

The data collected are analyzed using statistical measures. The study hypotheses are tested using test statistics like chi – square, cross tabulation, whichever is appropriate to the empirical data.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Aggarwal, A[1] (2016) mentioned that adding bonuses to the somewhat modest salaries of MGNREGA employees that are tied to their performance on the level of employment generated, percentage of assets completed, and rate of timely payment of wages is a measure that has not been tried in the state but has enormous potential to revive the program.

Aggarwal, A[2] (2017) claimed that the MGNREGA earnings and assets produced by the program had made it possible for rural households to fend off hunger and battle poverty.

Carswell, G & De Neve, G[3] (2013) had shown that the gendered effects of MGNREGA are partially a result of the policy's universal, right-based, and women-friendly nature, which has made it particularly accessible and acceptable for women and other disadvantaged social groups. Some of the scheme's results were direct and deliberate, while others were indirect and unintended, but the majority of them have a positive and uplifting impact on gender equality and women's empowerment.

Fernandes, D[4] (2015) said that as a result of MGNREGA, 25% of households have ceased moving to other locations in pursuit of employment. The fact that MGNREGA guaranteed equal pay for male and female workers is one of the key factors contributing to its popularity among Madhya Pradesh's rural residents.

Malla, M.A[5] (2014) mentioned that the lack of gender equality in the local bureaucratic workforce requires attention. Institutional neglect, gender discrimination, and other socio-cultural issues have had a significant negative impact on the MGNREGA's inclusion of women as a whole, as well as their place in the workforce and decision-making process.

[1] *Aggarwal, A[1] (2016), 'The MGNREGA Crisis: Insights from Jharkhand', Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 51, No. 22 (MAY 28, 2016), pp. 38-43*

[2] *Aggarwal, A[2] (2017), 'Fairness of Minimum Wages for MGNREGA', Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 52, No. 44 (NOVEMBER 4, 2017), pp. 18-21*

[3] *Carswell, G & De Neve, G[3] (2013), 'Women at the Crossroads: Implementation of Employment Guarantee Scheme in Rural Tamil Nadu', Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 48, No. 52 (DECEMBER 28, 2013), pp. 82-93*

[4] *Fernandes, D (2015), 'Implementation of MGNREGA & Its Impact on Rural Madhya Pradesh', Indian Journal of Industrial Relations, Vol. 50, No. 3 (January 2015), pp. 505-516*

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Narayana, S & Das, U[6] (2014) emphasized that MGNREGA had a significant impact on women's engagement in wage employment. Policies must place a priority on enabling women to access the workforce and sensitizing the staff administering the program in places where women's participation is low and rationing suggests some form of administrative discrimination.

Pankaj, A & Tankha, R[7] (2010) remarked that one unforeseen effect of NREGS has been the empowerment of rural women. As workers, women have profited more than as a group. Women have benefited personally since they are now able to support themselves financially thanks to the paid employment opportunity provided by NREGS. Independent and monetized income has expanded consumer options and decreased reliance on one source of income. This has aided women in recognizing their concrete financial contribution to the household. The aggregate results of these have resulted into more influence for women in domestic matters.

Pellissery, S & Jalan, S.K[8] (2011) claimed that if women's organizations could jointly administer publicly owned assets, not only would members be able to share in the advantages, but the joint management would also give women opportunity to collaborate and strengthen their bonds. Women who earn money have more influence over how household resources are distributed. In the case of elderly women, salaries help them maintain their independence, a crucial aspect of transformative social safety, and the job that is prioritized for them is physically less demanding.

Ranaware, K, et.al[9] (2015) revealed that the majority of respondents believe the assets are somewhat or extremely valuable, denying the common belief that the MGNREGA does not produce anything useful or that many of its works exist only on paper. The MGNREGA would be more successful in assisting livelihoods if efforts were made to encourage local participation, more careful selection of works, and better design.

PROFILE OF THE RESPONDENTS

The study collected 90 sample sizes where the respondents are all women who are MGNREGA job card holders. The following table illustrates the demographic characteristics of the respondents.

Table 1: Demographic profile of the respondents

Characteristics	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Age	18-38 years	26	28.9
	38-58 years	44	48.9
	Above 58 years	20	22.2
	Total	90	100
Edu. Qualification	Middle	21	23.3
	Matric	35	38.9
	Hr. Sec	28	31.1
	UG	6	6.7
	Total	90	100
Marital Status	Married	59	65.6
	Single	6	6.7
	Widow	24	26.7
	Divorced	1	1.1
	Total	90	100
Main Occupation	Farming	17	18.9
	Cattle rearing	34	37.8
	Teacher	1	1.1
	Business	28	31.1
	Tailor	5	5.6
	Govt. Servant	2	2.2
	Pensioner	3	3.3
	Total	90	100
Sole Earner	Yes	43	47.8
	No	47	52.2
	Total	90	100
No. of days employed	100 days	79	87.8
	95 – 99 days	8	8.9
	60 – 80 days	3	3.3
	Total	90	100

Source: Computed Data

According to the above data, 48.9% of the total respondents are in the age group 38 – 58 years. 38.9% of the total respondents studied till matriculation standard. 65.6% of the total respondents are married and 26.7% of the respondents are widow. Cattle rearing are the main occupations of the respondents, consisting 37.8% of the total respondents occupation. 52.2% of the total respondents claimed that they are not the sole earner for their families. 87.8%

[6] *Narayana, S & Das, U (2014), 'Women Participation and Rationing in the Employment Guarantee Scheme', Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 49, No. 46 (NOVEMBER 15, 2014), pp. 46-53*

[7] *Pankaj, A & Tankha, R (2010), 'Empowerment Effects of the NREGS on Women Workers: A Study in Four States', Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 45, No. 30 (JULY 24-30, 2010), pp. 45-55*

[8] *Pellissery, S & Jalan, S.K[8] (2011), 'Towards transformative social protection: a gendered analysis of the Employment Guarantee Act of India (MGNREGA)', Gender and Development, July 2011, Vol. 19, No. 2, Social protection (July 2011), pp. 283-294*

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of the total respondents are employed in the scheme for 100 days in a financial year.

MGNREGA AND WOMEN INCLUSION

Table 2: MGNREGA and inclusivity of women

	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Adaptation of equal pay for equal work	Yes	70	77.8
	No	20	22.2
	Total	90	100
Discrimination at work place	Yes	64	71.1
	No	26	28.9
	Total	90	100

Source: Computed Data

From the above table, Table: 2, 77.8% of the total respondents stated the adaptation of equal pay for equal work under the scheme. The rest, 22.2% of them justified that equal pay for equal work is not adopted as male job card holders are often requested to do harsher works than female job card holders. 71.1% of the total respondents mentioned the gender discrimination at the place of work. This is because they feel that the officials gave works which required more strength more to their male counterparts.

Table 3: Pre – MGNREGA income and Post – MGNREGA income

Characteristics	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Pre – MGNREGA income	0-20k	18	20.0
	20k-40k	42	46.7
	40k-60k	24	26.7
	60k-80k	5	5.6
	Above 80k	1	1.1
	Total	90	100
Post – MGNREGA income	0-20k	1	1.1
	20k-40k	57	63.3
	40k-60k	26	28.9
	60k-80k	5	5.6
	Above 80k	1	1.1
	Total	90	100

Source: Computed Data

Table 3 showed the respondents Pre – MGNREGA and Post – MGNREGA incomes. 46.7% of the total respondents' income before MGNREGA was between Rs. 20000 to Rs. 40000 per month. 63.3% of the total respondents' income after MGNREGA was still Rs. 20000 to Rs. 40000 per month. But it can be seen that the percentage of respondents who earned below Rs. 20000 is only 1.1% after the introduction of MGNREGA.

EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATION, INCOME AND MGNREGA

Educational qualification and number of days employed under MGNREGA.

H_{01} proposed that there is a significant relationship between educational qualification and number of days employed under MGNREGA. Chi – square test of association is used to identify the relationship between educational qualification and the number of days employed under MGNREGA.

Table 4: Crosstab

		Edu_Qua				Total
		Middle	**Matric**	**Hr_Sec**	**Ug**	
No.of_days_employed	100days	19	33	22	5	79
	95-99days	1	1	6	0	8
	60-80days	1	1	0	1	3
Total		21	35	28	6	90

Source: Computed Data

a. Dependent variable: Educational Qualification of the respondents.
b. Independent variable: Number of days employed.

The chi – square statistics and P value are provided in the table below. It is found by calculating the observed and expected values provided in Table 4.

i.e., $x^2 = \sum \frac{(Observed\ value - Expected\ value)2}{Expected\ value}$

Table 5: Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	12.077[a]	6	.060
Likelihood Ratio	11.141	6	.084
Linear-by-Linear Association	1.184	1	.277
N of Valid Cases	90		

Source: Computed Data

Table 5 illustrated the relationship between educational qualification and number of days employed under MGNREGA. The p – value (probability value) from the chi – square test is 0.060 at a 5% level of significance and the p – value is greater than 0.05. Thus, the null hypothesis is accepted. Therefore, it is proved that there is no significant relationship between educational qualification and number of days employed under MGNREGA.

Relation between increase in income and introduction of MGNREGA

H_{02} proposed that there is a significant relationship between increase in income and introduction of MGNREGA. Chi – square test of association is used to identify the relationship between increase in income and introduction of MGNREGA.

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Table 6: Crosstab

		Post_Nreg_Income					Total
		0-20k	20k-40k	40k-60k	60k-80k	above80k	
pre_nreg_income	0-20k	1	17	0	0	0	18
	20k-40k	0	40	2	0	0	42
	40k-60k	0	0	24	0	0	24
	60k-80k	0	0	0	5	0	5
	above80k	0	0	0	0	1	1
Total		1	57	26	5	1	90

Source: Computed Data

a. Dependent variable: Post MGNREGA income
b. Independent variable: Pre MGNREGA income

The chi – square statistics and P value are provided in the table below. It is found by calculating the observed and expected values provided in Table 6.

i.e., $x^2 = \sum \frac{(Observed\ value - Expected\ value)2}{Expected\ value}$

Table 7: Chi-Square Tests

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	263.908[a]	16	.000
Likelihood Ratio	139.737	16	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	70.292	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	90		

Source: Computed Data

Table 7 illustrated the relationship between increase in income and introduction of MGNREGA. The p – value (probability value) from the chi – square test is 0.000 at a 5% level of significance and the p – value is less than 0.05. Thus, the null hypothesis is rejected. Therefore, it is proved that there is significant relationship increase in income and introduction of MGNREGA.

FINDINGS

From the study it is found that there exists equal pay for equal work among the male and female MGNREGA job card holders. Those respondents who are above 58 years felt that men work more compared to women as difficult tasks are usually assigned to them. The other respondents stated that they all worked hard within their own capability, so, both men and women workers earning the same income per day is permissible under MGNREGA. *(objective 1)*

From the study it is also found that there exists discrimination among male and female workers in the work – place. The respondents mentioned that even though their working hours are same, the male workers are given harsher chores compared to them. From female perspective, this can be interpreted as a positive favoritism as they are exempted from difficult and complex tasks. *(objective 2)*

It is also found that there exists no significant relationship between educational qualification and number of days employed under MGNREGA, as the null hypothesis is accepted. Regardless of their educational qualification, the respondent's days of employment in the MGNREGA are conforming in nature.

On the other hand, it is found that there is a significant relationship between increase in income and introduction of MGNREGA, as the null hypothesis is rejected. Even though the higher income groups are not very affected by incomes earned from MGNREGA, but the lower income groups are definitely affected.

LIMITATIONS

The study is not without limitations. The sample size and study area also have constraints. The study included only 90 female job card holders from only six villages in a particular district. So, future research in this field is encouraged to take a larger number of samples and a wider area in order to enhance this research area. Future research can be conducted in such a way that the respondents can express their thoughts that the researcher might not have been aware of, so as to improve the research area.

CONCLUSIONS

Even though there are many limitations of this study, the paper discussed about the inclusivity of women in MGNREGA in the state of Mizoram with reference to Lawngtlai district. The findings of this study can be used to promote the inclusivity of women and women empowerment in various aspects of development.

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