

## Impact of NREGA on Empowerment of the Beneficiaries in West Bengal

Shubhadeep Roy<sup>1</sup> and Baldeo Singh<sup>2</sup>

1. Scientist (Agricultural Extension), NAARM, Hyderabad. 2. Joint Director (Extension), IARI, New Delhi  
Corresponding author e-mail: [extensionroy@yahoo.co.in](mailto:extensionroy@yahoo.co.in)

### ABSTRACT

*The study was conducted in two districts, Burdwan and Dakshin Dinajpur of West Bengal with 200 beneficiaries as respondents to assess the impact of MNREGA on the empowerment of the beneficiaries. Significant positive changes were found in the level of aspiration, self confidence and self reliance of the respondents after commencement of the scheme. Hundred per cent respondents were found to be in low empowerment category before MNREGA and 75.5 per cent of the respondents were found under low empowerment category and 24.5 per cent were found under medium empowerment category after working under MNREGA. So a positive impact of the programme was observed on the empowerment of its beneficiaries in the study area.*

**Key words:** Empowerment; Social participation; Level of aspiration; Self confidence; Self reliance; Self esteem;

The factual development of any community or society is only possible when the members of that community or society learn to help themselves or in other words when they are being empowered. Pecuknois (1994) said that when several members of a community are able to share their empowering experiences, a collective self-efficacy emerges. Goals that are visualized by community members as external to their control are then viewed as within the grasp of their collective force. In this regard observed that, empowerment gives the people of a community; the ability and opportunity to take part in decision making process with regard to socio-economic and political issues are affecting their existence. Empowerment of the deprived begins with their ability to voice their opinion through the process of consensual politics and dialogue. But the history of rural development or employment generation programme in India reveals that, none of the programme succeeded to empower the rural people at desired level as most of them were supply driven. Community participation in programme development and implementation was very negligible. Who would be the beneficiary of the developmental programme or who would get work under employment generation programme were solely decided by the government stakeholders and local political functionaries. As a result

a 'mi baap' syndrome developed among the rural poor for getting work or to get benefit of the developmental programme. To get out of this shameful situation the central government started Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MNREGA), 2006, in which one of the major goals is to empower the rural people. The works under MNREGA are 'demand driven' rather than supply driven. Every adult member of the registered households under MNREGA may demand work when they are in need and the government is bound to provide hundred days of guaranteed wage employment to every household who so ever has been registered under the scheme. Central government is making large public expenditure under MNREGA. In the recent budget (2009-10), an allocation of Rs 39,100 crore has been made for MNREGA, which is an increase of 144 per cent over the 2008-09 budget (16,000 crore). Under such circumstances it became necessary to assess how far the programme is achieving its desired goals in terms of empowering the rural people. That's why a study was taken up to assess the impact of MNREGA on the empowerment of its beneficiaries.

### METHODOLOGY

The study was undertaken in West Bengal purposively because it was one of the states of India where NREGA was first introduced. Two districts,

Burdwan and Dakshin Dinajpur were selected randomly. From each of the districts two blocks were randomly selected. Katwa-I and Katwa-II were selected from Burdwan district and Gangarampur and Tapan were the selected blocks from Dakshin Dinajpur district. From each block two Gram Panchayats (GP) were randomly selected and from each GP one Gram Sabha (GS) was selected randomly for the study. The study was conducted in total eight Gram Sabhas. Twenty five beneficiaries from each of the eight gram sabhas were selected randomly. It accomplished a total of two hundred MNREGA beneficiaries as respondents. *Before-After method* was restored to assess the impact of MNREGA on the empowerment of the beneficiaries. An empowerment index was developed for the study comprising the following components which were selected after reviewing literature and consultation with the experts.

(i) *Social participation*: Social participation was operationalized in this study as the extent of involvement of an individual in any formal organization in his/ her community. The scale used by *Sherin (1998)* was followed here in this study with slight modification. The social participation was measured in terms of the membership of an individual in any organization as well as his/ her frequency of participation in its activities. The scoring pattern of the variable was as follows.

<i>For membership in organization</i>	<i>Score</i>
1. No membership in any organization	1
2. Membership in any organization	2
3. Office bearer in any organization	3
<i>Frequency of participation</i>	<i>Score</i>
1. Never attending any of the activities	1
2. Sometimes attending	2
3. Regularly attending	3

(ii) *Level of aspiration*: Aspiration refers to a person's wishes and hopes to attain higher standard of living. Level of aspiration was measured using ladder technique. Respondents were asked to locate himself/ herself in a ladder consisting of 10 steps after telling that top of the ladder represented the best possible life for him/ her and the bottom represented the worst life possible for him/ her. Then the same respondent was asked to place him/ her in the ladder before commencement of NREGA. The difference between the above two responses was computed to get level of aspiration.

(iii) *Self confidence*: Self confidence was operationalized as the extent to which a person has confidence in himself/ herself as his/ her ability. This was measured by asking the respondents to indicate how much self confidence he/she possesses on percentage basis. Based on the responses, the respondents were categorized into following categories:

S No	Per centage	Category	Score
1	100%	Very high confidence	4
2	75%	High confidence	3
3	50%	Moderate confidence	2
4	Not at all	No confidence	1

(iv) *Self reliance*: Self reliance was operationalized as the extent to which the respondents perceive and perform the different activities related to his/ her life by himself/ herself. The scale developed by *Sherin (1999)* was used to measure this variable. This scale consists of a statement and response was rated on a four point scale weighted as 4, 3, 2 and 1 for always, sometimes, rarely and never response.

(v) *Self esteem*: Self esteem is the degree to which a respondent perceives himself/ herself to be successful and worthy. Self esteem of an individual was measured on the basis of his/ her own perception about himself/ herself in terms of his/ her worthiness and image of successfulness in life and was rated as per the responses on a four point scale developed by *Renjitha (2003)*.

S No	Response	Score
1	Very much	4
2	To quite some extent	3
3	To some extent only	2
4	Not at all	1

*The empowerment index* for each respondent was calculated with the following formula:

**Scores obtained by the individual respondent X 100**

**Maximum score possible (28)**

Categorization of the respondents was done as follows

<i>Empowerment of the respondents</i>	<i>Index score</i>
Very low	0-20
Low	20-40
Medium	40-60
High	60-80
Very high	80-100

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The mean score obtained by the respondents on the components of empowerment index was displayed in the Table 1. It was evident that there was a change in the mean score for every components of empowerment index before and after MNREGA.

Table 1. Mean score obtained by the respondents on the components of empowerment index before and after NREGA, ( N=200)

S. No.	Particulars	Before NREGA	After NREGA
1.	Social participation	2.14	2.16
2.	Level of aspiration	1.58	2.94
3.	Self confidence	1.30	2.30
4.	Self reliance	1.06	1.90
5.	Self esteem	1.48	1.50

Mean score obtained by the respondents on social participation before MNREGA was 2.14 and after MNREGA it was 2.16. A very little change in the mean score of social participation before and after MNREGA was observed. Very few among the respondents became the member of Village Nirman Committee, which helped to prepare work plan for MNREGA at grass root level. Otherwise there was no change in the social participation of the respondents before and after MNREGA.

Mean score obtained by the respondents on the level of aspiration before MNREGA was 1.58 and after MNREGA it was 2.94. After commencement of MNREGA, the beneficiaries got employment opportunities. Under the programme, average days of employment generated per household in the study area were only 15 days. Though it was very little, but the respondents perceived that their purchasing power had increased with the money they earned working under MNREGA. Better rural connectivity was provided to the villagers. Irrigation facilities of the area were developed. As a result, the farmers shifted to the hybrid rice cultivation. Many traditional water bodies of the study area were renovated under the MNREGA scheme. According to the respondents fish production of the area had also increased. Many among the respondents got the benefit of land developmental scheme of the programme.

Mean score obtained by the respondents on self confidence before MNREGA was 1.3 and after MNREGA it was 2.3.

Mean score obtained by the respondents on self reliance before MNREGA was 1.06 and after MNREGA it was 1.9.

Mean score obtained by the respondents on self esteem before MNREGA was 1.48 and after MNREGA it was 1.5.

Table 2. Components of empowerment before and after NREGA ( N=200 )

Particulars	Paired Difference	t-value	Mean SD
1. Social participation	0.025	0.186	1.902
2. Level of aspiration	1.355	0.633	30.262*
3. Self confidence	0.995	0.526	26.767*
4. Self reliance	0.835	0.372	31.734*
5. Self esteem	0.030	0.198	2.140
<i>Empowerment</i>	<i>10.169</i>	<i>3.804</i>	<i>43.473*</i>

\* Significant at 1% level of significance,

\*\* Significant at 5% level of significance

Table 3. Empowerment of NREGA beneficiaries (N=200)

Categories	Before		After	
	N	%age	N	%age
Very Low (0-20)	0	0	0	0
Low (20-40)	200	100	151	75.5
Medium (40-60)	0	0	49	24.5
High (60-80)	0	0	0	0
Very High (80-100)	0	0	0	0
Total	200	100	200	100
Mean	26.928		64.88	
Standard deviation	3.355		10.04	
Range	21.43 to 35.71		49.13 to 83.04	

An effort was made to find out whether the changes in the mean scores of the above mentioned components were statistically significant or not, and for that paired t-test was applied. The result of the paired t-test is displayed in the Table 2. It was found that, changes in the mean scores of the level of aspiration, self confidence and self reliance were statistically significant with 199 degrees of freedom and one per cent level of significance as the calculated t-value of the above said components were more than the table value i.e. 2.576. The changes in the mean score of social participation and self esteem before and after MNREGA were found statistically insignificant with 199 degree of freedom and one per cent level of significance as the calculated t-

value of the above said two components were less than the tabulated t-value i.e. 2.576. The result of the paired t-test showed that, the change in the empowerment of the beneficiaries before and after MNREGA was statistically significant with 199 degree of freedom and one per cent level of significance as the calculated t-value (43.473) exceeded the table value of t i.e. 2.576.

All the respondents (100%) were found to be in low empowerment category before MNREGA (Table 3). According to the result shown in the above figure there was a change in the empowerment of the respondents after MNREGA. 75.5 per cent of the respondents were found to be fallen under low empowerment category and 24.5 per cent of the respondents were found to be fallen under medium empowerment category.

## CONCLUSION

Positive change occurred among the respondents in terms of empowerment after commencement of MNREGA in the study area. So it can be said that MNREGA achieved one of its desired goals, that is empowerment of the rural people. But effort should be made to enhance it farther. Before commencement of MNREGA in the study area, 100 per cent of the respondents were found to be fallen under low empowerment category. After commencement of the programme some of them moved towards medium empowerment level. No respondents were found to be in high and very high empowerment category. Necessary effort should be taken so that the rural people become more empowered.

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