Assessment of Mgnrega in Enhancing Employment and Livelihood Stratergy of Tribals with Special Reference to Nilgiris District

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Abstract: Scheduled Tribes (STs) are indigenous, have their own distinctive culture, geographically isolated and are low in socio-economic conditions. For centuries, the tribal groups have remained outside the area of the general development process due to their habitation in forests and hilly tracts. After independence, Government of India has scheduled the tribal groups in the Constitution and provided special necessities for their welfare and development. In India, Tribal constitute 8.61% of the total population numbering 104.28 million (2011 Census) and cover about 15% of the country's area. There are about 654 ST communities across the States and 75 of the STs are most backward and are termed as Primitive Tribal Groups. Thirty six (36) STs have been notified in Tamilnadu by the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Order (Amendment) Act, 1976. Of that, six Primitive Tribals have been identified in the Nilgiris District. They are Toda, Kota, Irula, Kurumba, Kattunayakan and Paniya.
Keywords: employment, livelihood, tribals, Nilgirigs

These tribal are settled in rural places and largely depend on agricultural sector for their daily needs, but still they are not able to provide adequate and basic needs for their children because of their poverty and lack of employment opportunities. So the government as implemented many developmental programmes to improve the standard of living of the tribal people. Some of the tribal development programme implemented for tribals in the Nilgiris District are **HADP, Western Ghat Development programmes, Indira Awas Yojana (IAY), Kalaignar Veedu vazhangum Thittam or Kalaignar Housing Scheme, Tamil Nadu Housing and Development Corporation (THADCO), Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGA), Large sized multi purpose co operative societies (LAMP) etc.**

Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) is considered as a "Silver Bullet" for eradicating rural poverty and unemployment, by way of generating demand for productive labour force in villages. The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005 (Mahatma Gandhi NREGA) was notified on September 7, 2005. The basic objectives of the programme are i) social protection for the most vulnerable people living in rural India; ii) livelihood safety measures for the poor through creation of durable assets, improved water security, soil conservation and higher land productivity; iii) drought-proofing and flood management in rural India; iv) empowerment of the socially disadvantaged, especially women, scheduled castes and schedules tribes, through the processes of a rights-based legislation; v) strengthening decentralized, participatory planning through convergence of various anti-poverty and livelihoods initiatives. It provides an alternative source of livelihood which will have an impact on reducing migration, restricting child labour, alleviating poverty, and making villages self sustaining through productive assets creation such as road construction, cleaning up of water tanks, soil and water conservation work, etc. For which it has been considered as the largest anti-poverty programme in the world. But the success of this Act depends upon its proper implementation. MGNREGA is one such scheme that created employment in rural belts but generated no asset from the investment done by the state and central government for funding the scheme and the work done is arbitrary that lacks proper planning and implementation. Therefore the present study analyses the overall picture about the MGNREGA which provides employment opportunities and improve the livelihood for the tribal communities in the Nilgiris District.

Introduction

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II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

➢ To observe the socio-economic profile and living conditions of the tribal households.
➢ To determine people's participation and involvement in MGNREGA programme.
➢ To review the impact of MGNREGA in improving the quality of life of the tribal households.
➢ To ascertain the outlook of the respondents about the MGNREGA schemes and make suitable recommendations there on.

III. METHODOLOGY

Research methodology is the way to systematically solve the research problems. It may be understood as a science of studying how research is done analytically. It explains various steps that are adopted by a researcher in conducting the research problem along with the logic behind them. This study focused on "**Assessment of MGNREGA in Enhancing Employment and Livelihood Strategy of Tribals with special Reference to the Nilgiris District**". In agreement with the objectives of the study, Nilgiris district of Tamil Nadu was purposively selected because it is one of the districts in Tamil Nadu where the percentage of tribal population is higher and there are 6 particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PTGs) viz., Toda, Kota, Kurumbas, Irular, Paniyan and Kattunayakan lives in the Nilgirs district. Primary data is used and convenience sampling method is used to collect data from the respondent. Totally 150 sample were collected from the Tribal households.

For concise presentation of the information collected, the respondents were classified on the basis of per-capita income into two groups, namely, (i) BPL households whose monthly per capita income was less than 639; and (ii) APL households whose monthly per capita income was more than 639. The cut-off limit was resolute on the basis of the Tendulkar Committee Report which defined below poverty line family as those earning less than 639 per month in rural areas for Tamil Nadu (2009-10).

IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

TABLE 1

The following schedule depicts the number of Tribal population in different blocks of the district

S. No	Block	Percentage
1	Pandalur	32.08
2	Kotagiri	24.10
3	Gudalur	14.33
4	Kundah	13.16
5	Udhagamandalam	9.27
6	Coonoor	6.96
Total		100

Source: Tribal Education Status Documentation (2010-11)

Table 1 reveals that out of the total tribal population in the Nilgiris district of Tamil Nadu, about 32 percent of the tribal population residing in Pandalur taluk of the district. The next highest numbers of tribes are living in Kotagiri taluk with 24 percent. The lowest number of tribes found in Coonoor taluk of the district. The reason behind for the increase in tribal population in Pandalur and Gudalur taluk of the Nilgiris district is that most of the people are employed in tea estates. As tea estates are found more in those areas, people who got employment in those places got settled their itself.

TABLE – 2
SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROFILE OF THE RESPONDENTS
      (In percentage)

S.No	Particulars	BPL households	APL households	All
1	Number of respondents	27.0	73.0	100.0
2	**Family size:**			
	1 to 4	92.5	80.0	83.3
	5 to 8	7.5	20.0	16.7
3	Average size of the family (in numbers)	2.35	3.73	3.37
4	**Age composition of the members (in years):**			
	0 to 14	12.2	11.4	11.6
	15 to 59	79.4	84.8	83.4
	60 and Above	8.4	3.8	5.0
5	Dependency ratio:	25.96	17.89	19.90
6	**Education:**			
	Illiterate	77.5	83.6	82.0
	Literate	22.5	16.4	18.0
7	**Occupation:**			
	Farm work	95.0	72.7	78.7
	Nonfarm work	5.0	23.6	18.7
	Unemployed	0.0	3.7	2.6
8	**Family income (in Rs):**			
	Less than 1500	87.5	9.1	30.0
	1501 to 2500	5.0	10.9	9.3
	2501 and above	7.5	80.0	60.7
9	Average family income (in Rs.):	1295.50	3216.82	2704.47

Source: Field Survey

Distribution of households:

Out of 150 households surveyed 27 per cent households belonged to BPL families and the remaining 73 per cent were APL families.

Family Size

Information gathered concerning the size of household of the respondents highlights the single largest group of the respondents for both BPL (93 per cent) and APL (80 per cent) households have been formed by those having less than 4 members. About 8 percent of the BPL households and 20 per cent of the APL households have been formed by more than 5 members. The standard size of the family was marginally higher (3.73) for APL households than for the BPL households (2.35). Thus the survey reveals that tribal households were practicing small family norms irrespective of their income level.

Age Composition of the Household Members

An understanding of the age composition of the households enables us to know the dependency status and thereby clarify the nature and extent of pressure for increasing the earnings. Data pertaining to age composition of the members in the households of the respondents highlights that the single largest group of the family members in the BPL households (79 per cent) and APL households (84 per cent) were in the active age group of 15 to 59 years. The proportion of members in the age group of less than 14 years was 12 per cent in BPL households and 11 per cent in the APL households. Similarly the percentage of members in above 60 years age group was 8 per cent and 4 per cent

respectively in the BPL and APL households. The dependency ratio was significantly higher for BPL households (25.96) when compared to APL households (17.89).

Educational Status of the Respondents

Education not only creates knowledge and understanding but also generates attitude and behavior patterns and thereby plays an important role in all kinds of decision. Information concerning the highest level of education of the respondents unravels that among the BPL households 78 per cent were illiterate and 23 per cent were literate. Among the APL households 84 per cent were illiterate and 16 per cent were literate. Thus, the illiteracy was quite rampant both among the BPL and APL tribal households. The low educational status among the tribal households was also highlighted in reports of Planning Commission. (2007).

Occupation

Occupation is essential for survival because it is a means of earning livelihood. Occupation-wise, the rural households have hardly any choice. Most of them are engaged in agriculture and allied activities. Secondary and tertiary occupations have very limited penetration as sources of livelihood, though nearness of urban centers provides some job opportunities especially for male workers. Information concerning the occupation of the head of the family reveals that 95 per cent of the BPL households were engaged in farm activity while this percentage was 73 per cent among the APL households. About 5 per cent of the BPL households and 24 per cent of the APL households were engaged in non-farm activity. While 4 per cent of the APL households were unemployed, the proportion of unemployed person among the BPL households was nil. Thus the low economic status of the BPL households had driven them to find some jobs to meet their basic continuation.

Total Family Income

Level of income is an important indicator of economic welfare. Hence an analysis of income becomes the key stone of any comprehensive study. The analysis of the total family income of the respondents reveals that while majority (88 per cent) of the BPL households belonged to the income bracket of less than ` 1500, while 80 per cent of the APL households were earning more than 2500 per month. The section of families earning 1501 to 2500 per month was less (5 per cent) among the BPL households than the APL (nearly 11 per cent). Thus the income distribution was highly skewed towards lower income scale for the BPL households and higher income scale for the APL households.

TABLE-3

EMPLOYMENT PATTERN OF THE HEAD OF THE SAMPLE HOUSEHOLDS

(In percentage)

S. No	Particulars	BPL households	APL households	All
A.	Type of employment:			
1	(i) Primary activity	85.0	63.6	69.3
	(ii) Secondary activity	15.0	30.9	26.7
	(iii) Both primary and secondary activity	0.0	5.5	4.0
2	Days of employment /year before joining MNREGA			
	(i) 50 to 100 days	85.0	73.6	76.7
	(ii) 100 to 150 days	15.0	26.4	23.3
3	Days of employment /year after joined MNREGA			
	(i) 150 to 200 days	85.0	73.6	76.7
	(ii) 200 to 250 days	15.0	26.4	23.3
4	Form of payment:			
	(i) Cash only	72.5	72.7	72.7
	(ii) Cash and kind	27.5	27.3	27.3

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TABLE – 3   (Contd…)

S. No	Particulars	BPL households	APL households	All
B. 1	Participation in employment scheme:	100.0	100.0	100.0
2	Source of information about employment scheme:			
	(i) Panchayat president	50.0	67.3	62.7
	(ii) Members of panchayat	35.0	21.8	25.3
	(iii) Friends / relatives	15.0	10.9	12.0
3	Register for the MNREGA:	100.0	100.0	100.0
4	Provided job card:	100.0	100.0	100.0
5	Cost of card:			
	(i) Free	100.0	100.0	100.0
	(ii) Not given	0.0	0.0	0.0
6	Days between registration and job			
	(i)Less than 3 days	60.0	63.6	62.7
	(ii) Above 3 days	40.0	36.4	37.3
7	Maintenance of attendance:	100.0	100.0	100.0
8	Wages received from MGNREGA			
	(i) Less than 15000	0.0	0.0	0.0
	(ii) 15000 to 20000	42.5	26.4	30.7
	(iii) Above 20000	57.5	73.6	69.3
9	Payment of Wages:			
	(i) Per day	0.0	0.0	0.0
	(ii) Per week	100.0	100.0	100.0
10	Decision made:			
	(i) Husband only	15.0	11.0	12.6
	(ii) Wife only	15.0	20.9	18.7
	(iii) Jointly husband and wife	50.0	52.7	52.0
	(iv) Elders in family	5.0	3.6	4.0
	(v) Joint family decision	15.0	11.8	12.7

Source: Field Survey

The data connecting to days between registration and employment reveals that more than 60 per cent of all the households got employment within 3 days. More than 90 per cent of all the households received wages above 2500.

The decision to join the scheme was made jointly by the husband and wife among more than 50 per cent of the surveyed households.

Levels of living of Tribal Households

In development economics, poverty is usually discussed in terms of consumption expenditure, minimum calorie intake norms and income. However, there is a general perception that one dimensional measurement of poverty is an inadequate basis for identification of the poor. It has been suggested that a more practical way of identifying the poor is to use a number of indicators rather than income. Hence in present study the Quality of Life Index (QLI) of the tribal households were constructed by using 11 indicators namely caste, education (EDU), occupation (OCC), annual income (AI), annual per capita income (API), calorie intake (CAL), annual food expenditure (AFE), number of rooms per person (RPP), annual expenditure on clothing per person (AECP), type of housing (TH), and living area per person (LA). To make the poverty yardstick a more realistic one, these indicators are

measured in terms of their relative position on the composite index. The distribution of the households on the basis of the composite index is shown in table 4.

TABLE - 4
DISTRIBUTION OF THE HOUSEHOLDS ON THE BASIS OF COMPOSITE INDEX

Composite index	BPL HHS	APL HHS	All
Less than 20	19 (35.8)	-	19 (12.7)
20 – 30	31 (58.5)	-	31 (20.7)
30 -40	3 (5.7)	89 (91.8)	92 (61.3)
40 and above	-	8 (8.2)	8 (5.3)
	53	97	150

Source: Estimation based on field survey.

Majority (59 per cent) of the BPL households were in the index range of 20 – 30, followed by 36 per cent in the range of less than 20 and 6 per cent in the range of 30 – 40. In contrast nearly 92 per cent of the APL had a composite index of 30 – 40, 8 per cent between 40 and above and none below 30. Thus, the concentration of the BPL households was in the lower range of the composite index while the APL households were concentrated in upper range of the composite index. Thus, there were significant inequalities in the distribution of resources in the selected tribal households and quality of life of the BPL households was considerably lower when compared to APL households.

Regression Analysis

An effort was made to determine whether there is any statistical relationship between quality of life index and per capita income. The income – index relationship was estimated by using the following functional relationship:

$$Y = e^{b0 + b1X + u}$$

Where Y is the per capita income of the household;

X is Tribal quality of life index;

b_0 is intercept;

b_1 is parameters estimate; and

u is disturbance term.

The graphic model was expressed in an econometric model as well. Graphical (Scatter diagram) test showed the existence of the log-linear model in Fig. 1

FIGURE - 1
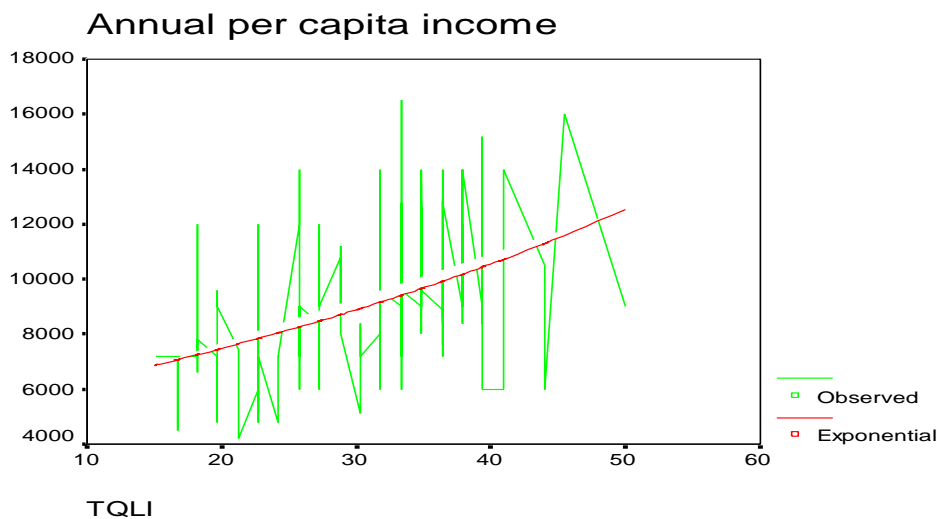**SCATTER DIAGRAM – PER CAPITA INCOME IN THE VALUES OF TQLI**

Table 5 shows the regression results of household income on Tribal quality of life index.

TABLE – 5
REGRESSION RESULTS OF HOUSEHOLD INCOME ON TQLI

Variable	Coefficient	Standard error	t value	R²
Intercept	5308.35	465.35	11.41*	0.46*
TQLI	0.0172	0.0027	6.327*	

Source: Estimation based on field survey
*Significant at 1 percent level.

The explanatory power of the model was 0.46 signifying nearly 46 per cent of the variations in per capita income was explained QLI. The coefficient of TQLI was positive and significant at 1 per cent level indicating that the QLI was positively responsive to per capita income (i.e.) when the QLI increased by 1 unit, per capita income increased by 0.017 units. Hence it can be concluded that the QLI was significantly associated with per capita income and any improvement in QLI will change the number of poor households as given by the measure of per capita income.

BENEFITS AND NEGATIVE IMPACTS OF MGNREGA SCHEME

➢ The major issues addressed by the MGNREGA according to the selected respondents were enhancement of socio-economic environment and better community life.

➢ The major concerns expressed by the respondents were dissatisfaction with work, corruption in the implementation of the scheme, low remuneration and lack of security. Hence to make the programme more efficient in enhancing the status of the tribal households the government should take effective measures to address these issues and concerns.

To sum up, under the MGNREGA scheme the sample beneficiaries have marginally gained in terms of better employment opportunities and increased days of employment, while the benefits in terms of real income and expenditure has been very modest. The quality of life index prepared revealed that the tribal households especially those below poverty line had poor socio-economic index and the need to restructure the living standards by enhancing their income levels. There is huge potential for using the MGNREGA programme as an approach to reduce the vulnerability in the livelihood of tribal household both the short term and long term. In this context, the following recommendations are made:

❖ For effective completion of the programme a comprehensive plan of action need to be formulated by taking into consideration the tribal specific issues such as high rate of illiteracy, lack of employment and income generating activities, land alienation, indebtedness, distress migration, displacement etc. The tribals should be given priority in the process of implementation of their developmental programme.

❖ Necessary modification may be effected in the guidelines of the scheme to provide employment for 120 days and linking the wages with the cost of living index for rural areas for ensuring fair returns to the tribal households.

❖ Investment should be focused more on activities providing benefits at the community level so that the poor derive maximum benefits.

❖ Job cards should be issued to the households on the basis of their economic status.

❖ Registration of benami members seeking employment has to be abolished and care is to be taken to ensure that only the registered members with job cards participate in the work.

❖ Employment should be generated during the lean season which does not affect the other modes of the beneficiary's livelihood.

❖ Imbursement to the beneficiaries should be made in time and social audit should be a regular feature to strengthen vigilance, transparency and accountability.

❖ Above all, the success of any programme of this nature depends on increase in political consciousness along with awareness among the poorest section of the society.

Conclusion

The study clearly shows that MGNREGA offers income guarantees to the rural households. The poor, particularly women households, prefer to work with MGNREGA as the jobs accessible are close to their residence. Employment opportunities through MGNREGA seem to have raised expectations among the women

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workers. The major impact of the scheme was seen in the enhancement of food security. It enabled the rural poor with sufficient purchasing power to buy at least basic necessities such as food. It has also ensured equal wages for male and female workers without any variability. To some extent the wages earned from MGNREGA enabled the workers to sustain a number of tasks such as paying their debts, spend on children's health and education, invest in chit funds, and so on. Besides, it will enable them to improve fallow land and start new business ventures. The MGNREGA created community assets have had varying degrees of impact. The multiplier effects of MGNREGA would significantly contribute to enhance the socio-economic status of the rural poor and can effectively reduce poverty. However, it may take a longer time before any significant impact is visible. What is necessary is long term sustainable implementation of the programme and constructive new initiatives by the government.

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