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A Road Map for Women Empowerment through NREGA: a case study of Kalvakonda Panchayat.

³Dara. Ashok Kumar

*"Women are leaders everywhere you look from the CEO who runs a Fortune 500 company to the housewife who raises her children and heads her household. Our country was built by strong women, and we will continue to break down walls and defy stereotypes."*Nancy Pelosi.

Introduction:

All the nations those are developing and developed are always highlights the empowerment of women and gender equality since from centuries. But it was mostly on words not in practical. In practical most of the world we have the situation of gender discrimination from any of the corner of the world.

In recent trends situation start changing gradually, there are enough women getting empowered. In Indian scenario also there was change from five decades. Many of the policies and acts framed for women to empower in India but most are not that much successful. But NREGA scheme which came into existence in the year 2005 is laying path in maintaining gender equality and empowering rural women. The success of the programme is entirely dependent on the participation of the community in general and women in particular since the share of latter in employment is almost 50 per cent. As women are found to be better change agents of socio-economic transformation, efforts are needed to strengthen their participation for household livelihood security as well as better asset management.

Empowerment of Women through NREGA:

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Women's empowerment is a process and an outcome of the process, by which women gain greater control over material and intellectual resources. Empowerment is a dynamic but slow process, it will take long time to bring changes in women and particularly from those among poorer households. During the last two decades, a number of development interventions such as social mobilisation, formation and networking and capacity building of women self-help groups have been put in place to empower women through this NREGA scheme. However, active participation of women in any programme is a pre-requisite for the empowerment.

In NREGA scheme there will be protection women against migration in search of work. This leads to an improvement in the quality of their life through avoidance of costs and risks associated with migration. It also helps women who are to look after their children suffering from severe ills. Moreover, women are much empowering through NREGA works and also knowing that they can avoid harsh working conditions and hazardous works at private work place. Because of these type of advantages there was large number of women are keen to get into NREGA work.

Empirical study in Kalvakonda Panchayat:

Kalvakonda is one of the major panchayat in Chillakur Mandal as well as in Nellore district, Andhrapradesh consists of both Kalavakonda and Bestapalem villages located 17 kilometres from the head quarter of the mandal. Kalavakonda village has a geographical area of 1924 acres, in that 72 acres is forest area. In whole of 1924 acres of the village 213 acres are unproductive and uncultured land. Both Kalavakonda and Bestapalem villages consists of 329 households having total population of 1007 which contains 499 male and 508 are female population, with in this total population 525 scheduled caste population with 265 male and 260 female population. Scheduled caste (Mala and Madiga), Scheduled Tribe (Yanadi), OBC Golla and Besta (Fishermen) are the major communities residing in this village.

Socio conditions:

In this village predominantly there are three communities Scheduled caste, Mala lives in Harijanawada, Madiga lives in Arundathiwada. Scheduled tribes lives in ST colony and remaining are OBC lives in BC Colony or Besta colony. OBCs mainly Yadavas and Bestas (Fishermen). One of the good thing is that all are using common well for their drinking water and for daily use also.

Economic Conditions:

Only few people holding minimum lands in this village. Majority are seasonal agriculture labourers. Bestas basically goes for fish hunting but here majority of Bestas are guarding the aqua ponds (Prawn Cultivation Ponds). Villagers maximum go for sand work.

NREGA in Kalvakonda Panchayat:

There is a seasonal migration in search of work, which now been stopped with NREGA came in to exist, the village transformed from having kutchra house to pucca ones, the average economy has grown and they have included to be become part financial inclusion proposed by government, where in village trying to self-sustain, with other co-operative movements like SHG's where women groups are trying for self-sustain like most villages, it has long way to go but with enhanced technology the basic communication has improved, there is an improvement in the child education, as the village /Mandal is having per-primary and primary schools in proximity, the enrolment has gone up and all children below five years are attending anganwadi's and almost cent percent are re-joining the higher classes, with increase in the quality of education, also to extent mid-day meals schemes are working. The number of children going for higher education has gone up considerably, overall development of village/Mandal is far better than preNREGA days.

Women Empowerment through NREGA:

In this Panchayat majority of the NREGA workers are women from different communities and different religions which was one way of social inclusion. There was a positive response in assessment of the social capital of respondents with their participation, collective action and mutually supportive relations which must be appreciable. Women are very much active participation in SHG meetings, Gram Sabha, VDC meetings, participation in village developmental activities, membership in CBOs (education committees, watershed associations/groups, VSS etc.), tackling social issues (alcoholism, dowry etc.), taking up group income generating activities, and helping other members of the SHGs and Shramasakthi Sanghas etc.

In Panchayat women are identifying the work in village and taking that to higher officials of NREGA and working for that and earning as well thus they are moving forward to empower themselves. This is one way for creating assets in village which are very useful to village as well as the community.

Achievements of women through NREGA in Kalvakonda Panchayat:

Part of NREGA there are 26 Shrama Shakti Sanghas are in Kalvakonda panchayat among them 24 groups are led by women. In every group there will be 15 to 30 members consist of both men and women. Here clearly witnessing that majority of the representatives in Kalvakonda panchayat are women where they are representing village needs as village problems and sanctioning works from concerned officials. This is the ultimate empowerment of women because of our Indian patriarchal society women are always as second gender, but here women coming out of houses, raising voices and solving the problems.

Grama Sabha (governing body of village) and Social audit are playing crucial role in NREGA implementation. IN Grama Sabha women demanding work and in social audit questioning about the progress of work. In both Grama Sabha and social audit women are

playing important role in questioning and implementation of the scheme which will be the successful progress of the programme.

Villagers from all communities particularly women are very much progressive that they constructed road to ST (Scheduled Tribe) colony which is clearly indicating fraternity and equality in the village and expecting same in the society as our society is class and caste based society.

Women played an active role in asset creation through NREGA for the village and for themselves as well. Constructed Burial ground in the village, two cattle ponds, one Community hall, compound wall for elementary school in the village. Most appreciable thing is that constructing common well for drinking water facility which indicates social inclusion of marginalized communities and empowerment of women and deprived women too.

Recommendations and Findings:

NREGA implementation should be strengthened by effective provisioning of what is already available in the Act, such as worksite facilities, e.g. Shade and safe drinking water and especially childcare facilities so that women workers are ensured of the safety of children in work site.

Women working under NREGA scheme clearing bank loans with the money getting in scheme. Previously every women in the village was in part and parcel of DWACRA, for clearing debts they need to work some other place or to lend money from lenders with high price interest, to clear that lending money again from someone but now situation has changed they are quite good and happy with the money getting from scheme.

In Kalvakonda panchayat under land acquisition act they got lands in 1970s but as the lands are Doon lands in that village those are useless then. But after NREGA they made that lands plain and make it use for plantation. Now majority of the villagers had Eucalyptus plantation in those lands and earning additional income and maintaining savings for future generations.

Conclusion:

NREGA has several gender-sensitive features that are useful for women and also inclusive too which has both social and financial inclusion. Implementation processes are very much crucial to improve the quality of participation and involvement of women in every step of the work. Activities towards women's needs, accesses to resources and opportunities, control over yields and consequences are essential. Nevertheless, this scheme has the potential to enhance women's economic independence through cash earnings and social status through participation and active involvement. The appreciable prominent thing in this panchayat regarding NREGA scheme is giving training in stitching and providing machines, setting provision shop for the groups those who worked five years consecutively in this scheme so with this they are settled financially which leads to financial inclusion of all the sections in the village.

Finally as Ambedkar said "I measure the progress of a community by the degree of progress which women have achieved".

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