

Mitigating impact of MGNREGA on migration

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Introduction

Migration represents the mobility of labour force from one place to another, from. It is viewed from multiple ideological and disciplinary positions. In that point of view it is a contested issue for policy makers as well as practitioners and researchers (United Nations Development Programme, 2015). Generally migration takes place due to lack of economic opportunities in rural areas along with land shortages and poor infrastructure. It also occurs because of perceived better employment prospects elsewhere and improved communication (FAO, 2010). Broadly, migration can be categorized into two forms namely, aspirational and distress (Shah, 2016). In case of aspirational migration whether it is within the country or outside, most migrants get benefitted in the forms of higher incomes, improved access to education and health as well as better prospects for their children (United Nations Development Programme, 2009). Distress migration, on the other hand, is a resultant of economic distress. There are multiple reasons for economic distress in a household. It is not only the extreme poverty that often culminates into economic distress but several seasonal trends and factors such as crop failure or continuing debt also lead the households to acute distress. For alleviating distress as well as for escaping from poverty household strategy like migration offers good solution to both. In rural areas, in coping with the crisis of labour market, vulnerable groups such as landless and small farmers often resort to migration (United Nations Development Programme, 2015).

India's Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA or MNREGA or the Act) was implemented with effect from 2006 in order to ensure 100 days of guaranteed employment in a financial year to every rural household whose adult members are willing to do unskilled manual work. It is considered to be the largest ever social safety net programme in the world (Liu & Deininger, 2010). Migration or more specifically the distress migration is a matter of concern in the rural areas which have got a special reference in the Act. Through its self-selection mechanism the programme has unleashed acceptability to the least privileged section of rural areas (Liu & Barrett, 2013). Side by side, by recognizing agricultural labour force as workers and legislating them an entitlement to work, it has attempted to curb distress migration from rural to urban areas for the most marginalized and the vulnerable populations (United

Nations Development Programme, 2015). It has had a more direct and positive impact on reducing distress migration in comparison to migration taken up for economic prosperity or other reasons (Ministry of Rural Development, 2012).

This study is based on the following two objectives

- to find out whether the migration occurring in rural West Bengal is aspirational or of distress kind
- to evaluate the extent to which the MNREGA has been able to have an impact in curbing migration in rural areas.

Methodology

The findings of this paper are based on an extensive survey carried out during 2016-2017 at the household level in eight *Gram Panchayats* selected randomly from four Blocks of Nadia District of West Bengal, India. The sampling procedure is multi-stage. In District Nadia there are 17 Blocks. In the first stage, four Blocks have been selected randomly. From these four Blocks eight *Gram Panchayets* have been chosen randomly again in the second stage. In the third stage 500 odd households working in the MNREGA works have been selected randomly from these *Panchayets*, but the target has been to reach to the female workers only. For the purpose, a well-designed structured questionnaire consisted of variables relating to the objectives and concepts of the study has been used to collect both qualitative as well as quantitative data from the concerned sources.

Results and discussion

Demographic profile - As far as the socio-economic features of the sample are concerned, out of 500 women workers, 62 are general category women, 181 are Scheduled Castes, 140 are Scheduled Tribes and 103 are from OBC_a (Other Backward Classes) category i.e Muslims. Out of total sample 207 women belong to APL (Above Poverty Level) category and 293 women workers are from BPL (Below Poverty Level) category.

During the survey three years average MNREGA work-days enjoyed by the women have been considered for analysis, the last year being 2015-2016. Considering the aggregate data it can be stated that around 69 percent women in the sample have enjoyed on average 31-100 days of job under the scheme during last three years while the rest 31 percent women in the sample have got only 0-30 days of employment under the scheme during the said period.

Migration status - A migrant is an individual who changes his/her usual place of residence, either by crossing an international border or moving within their country of origin to another region, district or municipality (United Nations Development Programme, 2009). The question of migration in the labour market is not limited only to head of the family, rather every adult member of a family

is subject to migration. This point has been taken into cognizance in the study. In the study, migration status has been taken into account from two dimensions namely, migrant and the destination of migration. The study reflects three types of migrants such as self i.e the women themselves, their husbands and other members of the family. Four types of migration destination have been identified viz. outside *Panchayet*, outside Block, outside District and outside State. It transpires from the data that 11 percent in the sample in which the case of migration occurs in some way or other. In question of migrant, in 35 cases migrants are the women themselves, in six cases their husbands and in 14 cases other family members are the migrants. In respect of destination, in 17 cases migration occurs outside the *Panchayet*, 18 cases each for outside Block and outside State and in 2 cases it occurs outside District.

Table 1 Migrant vs annual family income without MNREGA earning

Migrant		Annual Family Income without MNREGA Earning (Rs)					Total
		0-10000	10001-30000	30001-60000	60001-100000	100001-200000	
Self	Count	0	18	17	0	0	35
	%	0.0	51.4	48.6	0.0	0.0	100
Husband	Count	0	0	4	1	1	6
	%	0.0	0.0	66.6	16.7	16.7	100
Other	Count	0	1	2	5	6	14
	%	0.0	7.1	14.3	35.7	42.9	100
Total	Count	0	19	23	6	7	55
	%	0.0	34.6	41.8	10.9	12.7	100

Migration- distress or aspirational- The micro level data clearly depict that in rural West Bengal people do migrate in quest of jobs. Even in the presence of the scheme the problem of migration remains. In order to know whether this migration has been of distress type or it is aspirational, a cross tabulation was done between annual family income without MNREGA earning (in rupees) and the migrant, the results are presented in Table 1. It pinpoints whether the persons in the sample are migrating out of distress or for economic prosperity. In case of women, all of them belong to income group of Rs. 10001-60000. Table 1 presents mixed picture in case of husband, although majority of the husbands migrating are in low income group. But in case of other members of the family who migrate, majority of them consisting 78.6 percent belong to income group of Rs. 60001-

200000. Basically the women workers migrate out of economic distress while the migration type in respect of other members of the family is purely aspirational. Factors contributing to Migration - What are the factors which work behind the issue of migration? In general there is no single issue made responsible for migration due to inherent spatial diversity. As per several studies education or community specific skill like masonry or lack of landholdings; opportunity and access to work in proximity or the lack of access to work or caste and community networks may give an insight into the likely patterns of migration (United Nations Development Programme, 2015). In view of all these whether MNREGA can offer a good answer to the issue of migration has been the concern of the research for which a Logistic regression has been attempted in the study where the response variable migration is considered to be a binary one where migration =1 if yes, otherwise=0.

The following logistic equation was estimated:

$$L = \text{Log} \left(\frac{p}{1-p} \right) = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + u_i$$

Where; p is the probability of migration and

X_1 = Poverty Level where BPL=1, APL=0

X_2 = Women Workers Other Work=1 if yes, 0 otherwise

X_3 = Women Workers 3 Years Average Participation in MNREGA

u_i = error term

The results of the Logistic analysis for migration are presented in Table 2. The table presents the estimated coefficients and exp.(coefficient) for various covariates under study. The results describe the relationship between the independent variables and the response variable, where the response variable is on the logit scale. All the three coefficients of the explanatory variables have come out to be highly significant.

Results indicate that people below the poverty level have the higher propensity to migrate. Poverty defines the distress which compels a person to migrate other place for better employment opportunity. Similarly, women workers having other work have higher propensity to migrate. In the study it has been found that all of the migrating women workers are agricultural labour. They all hail from tribal families in which they are to take a lot of burden in running the families as the male members of these families are alcoholics. Male members also work as agriculture labour. But their wage earning is wasted on alcohol. As the women are to shoulder the family burden and there is scarcity of work in the locality, they need to migrate outside the *Panchayet* territory or outside the Block as per availability of the job.

Table 2 Results of Logistic Regression for migration

Variables	Coefficients	S.E	Wald	p value	Exp(B)
Constant	-2.977	0.522	32.579	<0.001	0.051
Poverty Level	0.906	0.336	7.258	0.007	2.475
Female Other Work Women Workers 3	1.894	0.355	28.414	<0.001	6.647
Years Average Participation in MNREGA	-0.020	0.008	5.841	0.016	0.980

Considering the coefficient of MNREGA participation of women it can be stated that women participation in MNREGA decreases their migration. MNREGA participation has clear mitigating impact on migration especially the distress type which has also been documented by previous studies (Jandu, 2008; Khera & Nayak, 2009, Shah, 2016). In case of acute distress MNREGA has provided a choice particularly to women (United Nations Development Programme, 2015).

Conclusion

The issue of migration has been incorporated in the study in order to make a causal relation between participation under MNREGA and mitigation of migration problem in the study area. In aggregate there have been 55 households i.e 11 percent in the sample in which the case of migration occurs in some way or other. Eventually the women are found to be the majority among migrants. In the study area both types of migration are prevalent. While the women workers migrate out of economic distress, the migration type in respect of other members of the family is purely aspirational. Women workers themselves have a particular type of occupation and scarcity of work in the particular occupation in their local areas have compelled them to migrate to other places. But in case of other members of the family have migrated to other places mostly for economic prosperity.

As explanatory factors for migration the study has identified the variables which have pinpointed the causes of migration and at the same time provided the answer to them. Women living below the so called poverty line have found to have more propensity to migrate in order to arrest the economic distress they are facing. Similarly, paucity of employment opportunity at the local level have been compelling women to migrate to a formidable extent as they need to shoulder the economic burden of their families due to existing typical social fabric. On the other hand, increased MNREGA participation has found to have clear mitigating effect on migration especially of women experiencing economic distress.

MNREGA has been formulated with a view to arresting poverty by way of generating employment opportunity in rural areas. So, effective implementation

of the scheme would mitigate not only the persistent problems of poverty but also the paucity of work in rural .

Keywords: *Aspirational migration, distress migration, economic distress, employment, MGNREGA.*

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