

MGNREGA and an Assessment of Empowerment of Women in Kerala

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Abstract

Kerala has the potential to make remarkable progress through MGNREGA by smoothing the employment, income and consumption of women. Women are excluded category from the mainstream economy. Previous studies have shown that MGNREGA work gave them a sense of independence and security. MGNREGA enabled them to participate in the decision making process within the family and community level participation of women also widened the choice of women. Women benefited in terms of availability of economic opportunity, space for social participation and involvement. This study tried to examine whether there is any inclusion of women occurred due to the programme despite of its shortcomings. Kerala is one of the well doing states in India, in the context of inclusive character of MGNREGA through higher level of participation of women under the scheme. Gender empowerment index was used to measure the economic empowerment of women. It was found that MGNREGA has made significant changes in the economic, social and political life of women workers thus making it a platform for inclusiveness of women in Kerala. In Kerala, where female unemployment rate is a matter of concern, MGNREGA could bring unemployed women into the employment arena to make them economically empowered.

Key Words: MGNREGA, Gender Empowerment, Inclusion

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I Introduction

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), 2005, was notified on 7 September 2005. It came into force in 200 districts of India on February 2, 2006. It was an act for the enhancement of livelihood security of the households in rural areas of the country by providing at least 100 days of guaranteed wage employment in every financial year to every household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work. MGNREGA can essentially be regarded as a tool for promoting inclusive growth in rural India. The Act stipulates that priority shall be given to women and it mandates that a minimum of one-third of the beneficiaries registered for work should be women. Provisions under MGNREGA ensure that women have rightful and easy access to work, decent working environment, equal payment of wages and representation on decision-making bodies. This paper tried to look into the inclusive aspect of MGNREGA in the context of employment participation and economic empowerment of women in Kerala.

This work is organized into six parts. Apart from this section, next section makes review of relevant studies and is delineating the study gap. The third part set the objectives and methods of study. Data analysis is made in the ensuing two sections and the sixth part summarises the findings.

II Literature Review and Setting of Research Problem

One of the noble objectives of MGNREGA is enhanced participation of women in employment. In several states in India, participation of women surpassed men's participation (Narayan, 2008). The factors which stimulated women participation are unskilled work, availability of work locally, reduction of migration of male members, increase in wage rate etc. (Das, 2013). Dutt et. al, (2012) examined through income consumption effects i.e. increase in income of women enhancing the ability to choose the consumption baskets. Community level participation of women widened the choice of women by giving independent income earning opportunity. Women benefited due in terms of availability of economic opportunity, space for social participation and involvement. Naik(2018) studied the difference in MGNREGA wage and market wage and seen that male- female wage differential had strong effect on women participation in MGNREGA. One third reservation for women in workforce, guaranteed wage employment with gender equality in wage payment, women friendly environment and child care facilities etc. were the attractive factors which encouraged women participation in MGNREGA in the KBK region of Odisha.

Spandikar (2013) observed that women participating in MGNREGA enjoyed benefits both at the individual level and community level. Women profited individually as they earned a living and contributed to household expenditure. Community level benefits could be understood by their increased participation in Gram Sabha's, planning process etc.

Sudarshan (2011) and Poonia (2012) revealed that the level of women participation was positively influenced on the demand side by gender wage differences in the market and the differences between market wage and minimum wage. The strong factor which influenced the participation on the supply side was the effective management by the Kudumbashree mission in Kerala. Female workers in Kerala shifted from agriculture sector to MGNREGS as minimum wage paid under MGNREGA was far greater than the market wage for female rural workers (Sudarshan, 2011; Poonia, 2012). Sameeksha (2006) and Hemalatha (2016) pointed out that MGNREGA made a drastic and positive impact upon the lives of women in the form of provision of employment to female workers and thereby attained social and economic empowerment in the form of spending their wages on children's education, medical services as well as repayment of debt.

Das (2012) identified women empowerment as a major objective of MGNREGA. By examining the aspect of gender equality in MGNREGA wage payment and generating employment for rural women, he found that this programme played a significant role in the economically and socially empowering of women. Ensuring the participation of women in social audit, Gram Sabha and planning laying the basis for independence and self – esteem job opportunity within 5km radius, flexibility in choosing the period of employment, facility for child care, participation in management, monitoring and social audit of the programme, preference to the single women etc. made the programme gender sensitive and enabled the upliftment of women from poverty and vulnerability of life. MGNREGA work enhanced standard of living of women through increased income and expenditure of households compared to pre-MGNREGA period (Xavier and Mari, 2014; Sharma, 2012). It considerably enhanced the social and economic decision-making power to women in the male dominated society (Xavier and Mari, 2014; Rajalakshmi, 2016). Gender –Neutral measures such as increase in the participation of women in planning and social audits of MGNREGA, better worksite facilities timely payment of wages, speedy grievance redressal would inspire women to demand more wage (Rajalakshmi, 2016). Sharma (2012) identified that high status of women among the SC/ST groups due to MGNREGA income had vital effect on generating community assets and enhancing their spending capacity.

Jandu(2009) found that women workers did not generally take part in Gram Sabha's showing their absence in the political decision making. Absence of crèches, poor worksite facilities, delayed wage payments and lack of awareness etc. were some of the weakness identified under the scheme (Borah and Bordolio, 2014). Women participated MGNREGA had more decision-making power in intra household matters (Joshi and Vanneman, 2015). MGNREGA participation had a positive impact on decision making power of women (Joshi and Vanneman, 2015; Naik, 2008). MGNREGA participation and the index of decision making had a positive relationship. Intra household status of women increased which meant that she had the control over cash resources as it could be withdrawn only at her own decision (Das, 2013). MGNREGA seemed to have positive impact on education of children in the family (Naik, 2008). He examined the extent of empowerment of the rural women in KBK region of Odisha through MGNREGA and found that increase in household income, better standard of living and household decision making, increase in bargaining power, and improvement in social esteem were possible through MGNREGA.

Women are excluded category from the mainstream economy. In Kerala, there was immense potential to make progress through MGNREGA by smoothing the employment, income and consumption of women because of highest participation of women in MGNREGA work. As per the previous studies, MGNREGA work gave them a sense of economic independence and security of women which enhanced their freedom and ability to choose their consumption baskets and encouraged participation in the decision making process within the family and community level. Even though the women participation is higher in Kerala, the implementation side of the programme was not observed as women friendly as prescribed by the programme objectives. How far MGNREGA helped them to achieve economic independence in their family, and, freedom and choice in society is a matter of question. In the light of these issues, MGNREGA's role in making women inclusive and economically and socially empowered needs to be examined. So, this study particularly examined the extent of empowerment of women in Kerala through MGNREGA.

III. Objectives

- 1) To examine the trend of women participation under MGNREGA in Kerala
- 2) To analyse the impact of MGNREGA on economic empowerment of women workers in Kerala

Area and Methods

Theorization and conceptualization of the study has been done on the basis of ADB framework on inclusive growth. The concept of inclusive growth in ADB's Strategy suggested three policy pillars supported by good governance and institutions (Zhuang, 2010) such as:

- i) High, Efficient and Sustained Growth to Create Productive Jobs and Economic Opportunities,
- ii) Social Inclusion to Ensure Equal Access to Economic Opportunities
- iii) Social Safety Nets.

Study takes the nature of explanatory and analytical one. This study particularly examined the inclusion of women by analyzing their participation in MGNREGA using time series data of women participation for ten years in Kerala. Secondary sources such as MGNREGA website, Economic review of Kerala, NSSO etc. have used to obtain the data. Tools such as percent, CAGR etc. were used for analysis.

To analyse the impact of MGNREGA on economic empowerment of women workers in Kerala, primary data are collected from MGNREGA workers in three districts in Kerala– Kottayam, Palakkad, and Wayanad in 2018. These three districts have been chosen on the basis of average ranking of districts in terms of five criteria such as number of SC households provided employment, ST households provided employment, number of women provided employment and number of SC completed 100 days of employment, ST families completed 100 days of employment under MGNREGA in Kerala. Total of 730 households were covered under the survey. Gender empowerment measure was used to measure the economic empowerment of women as per the UNDP HDR framework. Empowerment is “liberation of both men and women from oppression, where each can become a whole being regardless of gender and use their fullest potential to construct a more humane society for all”. People must participate fully in the decisions and processes that shape their lives. Empowerment of individuals has certain requisites that include resources (finance, knowledge, technology), skills training and leadership formation, democratic processes, dialogue, participation in policy and decision making and techniques for conflict resolution (UNDP,2009).

IV Decadal Employment Generation under MGNREGA

It was found that MGNREGA made commendable changes in the economic, social and political life of women workers and thus a platform for inclusiveness of women in

Kerala. Person days generated is an important indicator to assess the effectiveness of the programme in terms of its objectives. District wise share of person days of employment to women in Kerala is discussed below.

Table 1. Percentage Share in Person Days Generated for Women

	Percentage share in Person days generated for women										2008-09 to 2017-18
Districts	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2008-09 to 2017-18 CAGR
ALAPPUZHA	44.4	47.9	72.0	96.2	96.4	96.6	95.3	95.3	94.9	94.6	0.38
ERNAKULAM	50.0	46.2	71.0	95.8	95.8	95.4	93.3	91.9	92.5	92.0	0.21
IDUKKI	46.7	41.8	59.4	77.0	77.1	78.0	76.2	75.4	74.0	73.8	0.11
KANNUR	50.0	47.8	71.7	95.6	95.9	96.5	95.2	94.6	94.6	95.4	0.20
KASARGOD	45.8	45.5	68.8	92.2	92.9	93.5	93.6	92.9	92.5	92.4	0.11
KOLLAM	44.4	46.9	69.2	91.6	91.8	91.9	90.2	89.1	89.6	89.3	0.33
KOTTAYAM	50.0	50.0	73.2	96.5	96.8	97.0	95.1	93.4	93.8	94.9	0.44
KOZHIKODE	45.5	48.8	72.0	95.1	95.5	95.3	95.4	93.9	93.6	93.4	0.31
MALAPPURAM	42.9	47.7	70.4	93.0	92.6	93.0	92.3	90.4	90.6	90.4	0.20
PALAKKAD	47.1	48.3	72.0	95.7	95.6	95.3	93.5	92.6	92.1	91.8	0.04
PATHANAMTHITTA	50.0	46.2	70.9	95.6	95.4	95.6	93.6	92.5	91.8	91.6	0.26
THIRUSSUR	50.0	50.0	72.2	94.3	94.4	94.2	93.2	92.3	92.2	90.7	0.26
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM	45.0	47.4	71.9	96.4	96.2	96.2	95.3	93.7	94.8	94.2	0.16
WAYANAD	42.6	43.9	65.2	86.5	87.0	88.5	90.0	88.2	88.1	88.3	0.04
Total:	45.6	46.9	69.9	92.9	93.0	93.4	92.2	91.3	91.1	90.8	0.18

Source: Computed from www.mgnrega.nic.in

Average person days generated for women in Kerala during the last 10 years was 80.7 per cent which reflected greater amount of gender sensitivity of the programme. Women participation had been high as near 90 per cent in almost all districts in Kerala during the last 7 years. In the event of female unemployment rate is a matter of concern in Kerala, MGNREGA can bring unemployed women into the employment arena to make them economically productive. It is very pertinent by looking into NSSO report that female work participation rate in Kerala had been declining from 31.6 per cent in 1987-88 to 22.1 per cent in 2011-12 (Economic Review, 2017). In 2008-09, national level women participation under

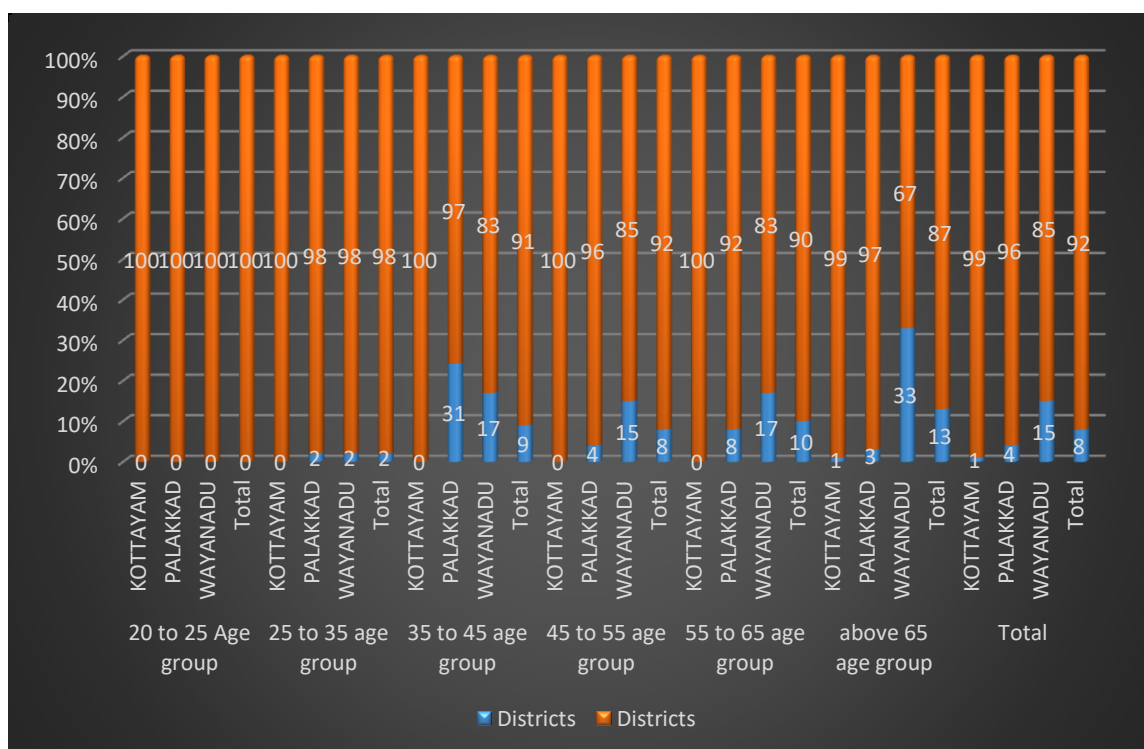
the programme was 48 per cent. By 2017-18, women person days as a percentage of total person days increased to 53.53 per cent but many miles away from Kerala. In Kerala, women participation rate under MGNREA rose substantially to reach more than 90 per cent in 2017-18 from 45.6 per cent in 2008-09.

V. Gender Composition and GEM

A) Gender Wise Distribution of MGNREGA Workers by Age groups

Distribution of MGNREGA workers by age groups and by gender is vital to see the inclusiveness of women. Participation of women in work above 65 age group clearly reflects the inclusion of aged women under the programme. From the field experience, it is understood that economic backwardness and women headed families in their old age are the reasons that stimulate the participation of women under MGNREGA even in their late stage of life.

Figure 1 :Gender Wise Distribution of MGNREGA Workers by Age Groups in Selected Districts



Source : Primary data

Even though the female WPR in Kerala is low as per economic review (2017), high level of women participation could be observed under MGNREGA. It reflects the accessibility of women to the economic and political opportunities (Fig.1). In the case of less

than 35 age group, there was no or significantly low participation of men in the districts chosen. So, the women now could reap the social and economic opportunities available under MGNREGA. Female participation significantly surpass the male participation in all the age groups and districts. But Palakkad and Wayanad districts are shown greater participation of men compared to economically advanced Kottayam district.

B) Constructing Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM)

First step involved in the construction of GEM is setting dimensions and indicators and further assigning weight to each of the indicators. Weight to dimensions and indicators are provided as per the UNDP formula for GEM. A simple method with equal weights was applied to all indicators.

Table 2. Dimensions and Indicators of GEM

Dimensions	Weights
Dimension 1: Political participation and decision making power. I. Percentage share of workers having political association II. Participation in work planning III. Social Auditing	One-third weight One third weight One third weight One third weight
Dimension 2; Economic participation and decision making power. I. Decision making power in financial matters in family has increased II. Economic status of women has increased III. Percentage households having regular income IV. Percentage households having regular employment	One third weight One-Fourth weight One-Fourth weight One-Fourth weight One-Fourth weight
Dimension 3: Power over economic resources I. Percentage share of households having land holdings II. Percentage households with bank account in commercial banks. III. Percentage households having asset holdings (buildings)	One third weight One third weight One third weight One third weight

Source: www.in.undp.org

Calculating the GEM:

Primary data for MGNREGA workers (2018) in Kerala was used for the calculation of GEM. Detailed calculation of each dimension is given in the appendix.

Dimension 1: 'Political Participation & Decision-making Power' Index

- Indexed EDEP (Equally Distributed Equivalent Percentage) for 'Political Participation & Decision-making Power' is obtained as $(0.284 + 0.976 + 1.0)/3 = 0.753$

Dimension 2: 'Economic Participation and Decision-making Power' Index

- Indexed EDEP for 'Economic Participation & Decision-making Power' is obtained as $(0.9702 + 1.0 + 1.0 + 1.0)/4 = 0.992$

Dimension 3: 'Power over Economic Resources' Index

- Indexed EDEP for 'Power over Economic Resources' is obtained as $(0.976 + 1.0 + 1.0)/3 = 0.992$

Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM)

GEM is calculated as a simple average of the three Dimension Indices mentioned above, 'Political Participation and Decision-making Power', 'Economic Participation and Decision-making Power' and 'Power over Economic Resources.'

GEM for MGNREGA workers in Kerala (2018) = $1/3(0.753 + 0.992 + 0.992) = 0.912$

High GEM indicates high level of gender empowerment among the MGNREGA workers in Kerala. GEM scores calculated by UNDP for India and Kerala (table 3) clearly indicate that the overall GEM is not found healthier at that time (1996 & 2006). Compared to the other indicators, PoER shows least value indicating poor access to economic resources by women in both India and Kerala. But, this study pinpoints that women under MGNREGA are capable of claiming their right over the economic resources. Higher scores in both economic participation and power over economic resources designate the level of economic empowerment gained by the female workers through MGNREGA as stated in the review of literature. UNDP's GEM measurement for Kerala for the year 2006 was 0.52 (table.3). GEM score obtained from the data of MGNREGA workers in the selected three districts is 0.91 which is fairly better than previous scores. Another thing is to be noted that Kerala gained a better score for political participation and decision making than the other two indicators as per UNDP measure. Results from the present study display low score for political participation and high value for other two indicators. But, reverse is true as per UNDP scores for India and Kerala.

Table 3 GEM Scores for India and Kerala in 2006 and 1996

Year		PI	EI	PoERI	GEM
2006	India	0.625	0.546	0.319	0.497
	Kerala	0.61	0.537	0.426	0.525
1996	India	0.573	0.443	0.231	0.416
	Kerala	0.561	0.505	0.393	0.486

Source: UNDP Note: PI = Index of 'Political Participation & Decision-making Power'; EI = Index of 'Economic Participation and Decision-making Power'; PoERI = Index of 'Power over Economic Resources'; and GEM = Gender Empowerment Measure

VI

Findings and Conclusion

In Kerala, where female unemployment rate is a matter of concern, MGNREGA could bring unemployed women into the employment arena to make them economically empowered. It meant that the achievement in women's participation had been doubling within a decade. Results showed that women workers under MGNREGA gained in the form of employment opportunities, empowerment and inclusiveness. Average person days generated for women in Kerala during the last 10 years was 80.7 per cent which reflected greater amount of gender sensitivity of the programme. Women participation had been high as near 90 per cent in almost all districts in Kerala during the last 7 years. High value GEM reflects higher level of empowerment of women through MGNREGA outcomes. Index of 'Economic Participation and Decision-making Power' and Index of 'Power over Economic Resources' provide better scores compared to the index of political participation and decision making power. Survey results showed that MGNREGA essentially helped them to gain economic and social empowerment of women and thus pave the way for inclusive growth.

Appendix: An Illustration based on Data for MGNREGA workers (2018) in Kerala

Computation of GEM

Step 1: Estimate the percentage share of women and men for each of the three indicators. The estimates are:

- i. 86.6% women and 13.4% men having political association
- ii. 92.4% women and 7.6% men were participated in work planning
- iii. 91.2% women and 8.8% men were participated in social auditing

Step 2: Calculating the Equally Distributed Equivalent Percentage for each of these Indicators

The Equally Distributed Equivalent Percentage for the given indicator

$$= \{[\text{female population share (female index -1)}] + [\text{male population share (male index -1)}]\} -1$$

$$\text{Female Population Share} = 0.92$$

$$\text{Male Population Share} = 0.08$$

Equally Distributed Equivalent Percentage of Parliamentary Seats

$$= \{[0.08 (13.4) -1]\} + [0.92 (86.6) -1]\} -1 = 14.21$$

Similarly, Equally Distributed Equivalent Percentage for the second indicator

$$= \{[0.08 (7.6) -1]\} + [0.92 (92.4) -1]\} -1 = 48.82$$

Equally Distributed Equivalent Percentage for the third indicator

$$= \{[0.08(8.8) -1]\} + [0.92(91.2) -1]\} = 52.14$$

Step 3: The EDEP for each of the above Indicators is then indexed by dividing it by 50.

$$\text{The Indexed EDEP 1} = 0.2842$$

$$\text{The Indexed EDEP2} = 0.9764$$

$$\text{The Indexed EDEP 3} = 1.0$$

Step 4: The Indexed EDEP values obtained above for each of the three indicators are added and divided by three or equal weights are given to all the three indicators and the Indexed EDEP for 'Political Participation & Decision-making Power' is obtained as

$$(0.284+0.976+1.0)/3= 0.753$$

Step 1: Estimate the percentage share of women and men for each of the four indicators. The estimates are:

- i. 92.5% women and 7.5% men have the opinion of increased decision making power in financial matters
- ii. 91.7% women and 8.3% men having the opinion of increased economic status
- iii. 88.4% women and 11.6% men having the opinion of regular earning
- iv. 90.3% women and 9.7% men having the opinion of regular employment

Step 2: Calculating the Equally Distributed Equivalent Percentage for each of these Indicators

The Equally Distributed Equivalent Percentage for the given indicator

$$= \{[\text{female population share (female index -1)}] + [\text{male population share (male index -1)}]\} -1$$

$$\text{Female Population Share} = 0.92$$

$$\text{Male Population Share} = 0.08$$

Equally Distributed Equivalent Percentage of first indicator

$$= [0.92(92.5) -1]\} + \{[0.08 (7.5) -1]\} -1 = 48.51$$

Equally Distributed Equivalent Percentage of second indicator

$$= [0.92 (91.7) -1]\} + \{[0.08 (8.3) -1]\} -1 = 50.8$$

Equally Distributed Equivalent Percentage of third indicator

$$= [0.92 (88.4) -1]\} + \{[0.08 (11.6) -1]\} -1 = 57.79$$

Equally Distributed Equivalent Percentage of fourth indicator

$$= [0.92 (90.3) -1]\} + \{[0.08 (9.7) -1]\} -1 = 54.24$$

Step 3: The EDEP for each of the above Indicators is then indexed by dividing it by 50.

The Indexed EDEP 1 = 0.9702, The Indexed EDEP 2 = 1.0, The Indexed EDEP 3 = 1.0

The Indexed EDEP 4 = 1.0

Step 4: The Indexed EDEP values obtained above for each of the four indicators are added and divided by four or equal weights are given to both indicators and the Indexed EDEP for 'Economic Participation & Decision-making Power' is obtained as

$$(0.9702 + 1.0 + 1.0 + 1.0) / 4 = 0.992$$

Step 1: Estimate the percentage share of women and men for the three indicators. The estimates are:

- i. 92.4% women and 7.6% men had access to operational holdings
- ii. 91.9% women and 8.1% men had credit accounts in commercial banks.
- iii. 91.9% women and 8.1% men had access to asset holdings (buildings)

Step 2: Calculating the Equally Distributed Equivalent Percentage for each of these Indicators

The Equally Distributed Equivalent Percentage for the given indicator

$$= \{[\text{female population share (female index - 1)}] + [\text{male population share (male index - 1)}]\} - 1$$

Female Population Share = 0.92

Male Population Share = 0.08

Equally Distributed Equivalent Percentage of men and women for the first indicator

$$= \{[0.08 (7.6) - 1]\} + [0.92 (92.4) - 1]\} - 1 = 48.82.$$

Equally Distributed Equivalent Percentage of men and women for the second indicator

$$= \{[0.08 (8.1) - 1]\} + [0.92 (91.9) - 1]\} - 1 = 50.28$$

Equally Distributed Equivalent Percentage of men and women for the third indicator

$$= \{[0.08 (8.1) - 1]\} + [0.92 (91.9) - 1]\} - 1 = 50.28.$$

Step 3: The EDEP for each of the above Indicators is then indexed by dividing it by 50.

The Indexed EDEP 1 = 0.976

The Indexed EDEP 2 = 1.0

The Indexed EDEP 3 = 1.0

Step 4: The Indexed EDEP values obtained above for all three indicators are added and divided by 3 or equal weights are given to all 3 indicators and the Indexed EDEP for 'Power over Economic Resources' is obtained as

$$(0.976 + 1.0 + 1.0) / 3 = 0.992$$

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