



## EMPOWERMENT OF RURAL WOMEN THROUGH MGNREGS

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## KEYWORDS :

In 2006, India embarked on an ambitious attempt to fight rural poverty. The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act of 2005 created a justifiable right to work for all households in rural India through the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, which was renamed as the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) in 2009. The Act was notified in 200 districts in the first phase with effect from February 2<sup>nd</sup> 2006 and then extended to additional to 130 districts in the financial year 2007-2008 (113 districts were notified with effect from April 1<sup>st</sup> 2007, and 17 districts in UP were notified with effect from May 15<sup>th</sup> 2007). The remaining districts have been notified under the MGNREGA with effect from April 1, 2008 covering 34 States and Union Territories, 614 Districts, 6,096 Blocks and 2.65 lakhs Gram Panchayats. Thus MGNREGA covers the entire country with the exception of districts that have hundred percent urban population.

The Mahatma Gandhi NREGA has given rise to the largest employment programme in human history and is unlike any other in its scale, architecture and thrust. Its bottom-up, people-centred, demand-driven, self-selecting, rights-based design is new and unprecedented. The Act provides a legal guarantee of wage employment. It is a demand-driven programme where provision of work is triggered by the demand for work by wage-seekers. There are legal provisions for allowances and compensation both in cases of failure to provide work on demand and delays in payment of work undertaken. The Act overcomes problems of targeting through its self-targeting mechanism of beneficiary selection. Unlike the earlier wage employment programmes that were allocation-based, Mahatma Gandhi NREGA is demand-driven and resource transfer from Centre to States is based on the demand for employment in each State. This provides an additional incentive for States to leverage the Act to meet the employment needs of the poor. There is also a concomitant disincentive for failing to provide work on time, as the States then bear the cost of the unemployment allowance.

MGNREGA has several gender sensitive features that are attractive for women workers. The Act stipulates that priority shall be given to women. In terms of implementation, it mandates that a minimum of one-third of the beneficiaries are to be women who have registered and have requested for work (Schedule II, Section 6 of MGNREGA). The state is obliged to ensure certain worksite facilities to enhance women workers' participation. The Act also stipulates payment of equal wages to male and female workers. Wage earnings of workers are to be paid directly to the person concerned either through bank or post office savings account. In fact, NREGA has opened up a new opportunity for women workers.

Women like NREGA work for various reasons. Firstly, it is locally available. The Act provides that work is to be provided within five kilometers of the residence of a worker. Therefore, women's participation in the work has been feasible. Working at a distant place is difficult for women who happen to take the main responsibility of household chores. Secondly, there is less chance of exploitation. There is a statutory minimum wage, and hence wage earned in NREGA work is much more than the works under a private employer, more so in backward areas. The piece rate wages and formation of small and mixed / solely women groups, have given leverage to evolve their working norms to suit to their conditions.

Thirdly, there are regularity and predictability of working hours. As such, not only the members of the existing workers group prefer NREGA work, but there is also the possibility of new entrants into the women workers group. Again, work is limited to eight hours a day, which is seldom expected in other works.

This paper presents impact of the MGNREGS on women. The study is based on primary data collected from 120 sample respondents from Kaza village of Guntur district using interview schedule.

**Changes in the wage rates**

Sample respondents are asked to state whether there is any change in the wage rates after MGNREGS. It is evident from the data that sample respondents, who expressed that wage rates are enhanced, constitute about 59 per cent of the sample respondents, while around 31 per cent of the sample respondents reported that wage rates are changed moderately. As against this, around one tenth of the sample respondents reported that wage rates are not changed due to MGNREGS.

**Changes in the income**

Sample respondents are asked to state whether there is any change in their income due to MGNREGS. It is striking to note from the data that by and large income is increased after participating in MGNREGS only in the case of about 35 per cent of the sample respondents, while about 31 per cent of the sample respondents reported that incomes are changed moderately. Further, it is observed from the data that one third of the sample respondents reported that there is no change in their income due to MGNREGS.

**Changes in the expenditure**

It is deduced from the data that increase in the expenditure is reported by a majority of the sample respondents (71.50 per cent), while around 11 per cent of the sample respondents reported moderate change in the expenditure after MGNREGS. As against this, about 16 per cent of the sample respondents reported no change in the expenditure due to MGNREGS.

**Changes in the savings**

It is noticed from the data that the largest percentage of the sample respondents reported no change in savings due to MGNREGS (71.90 per cent), while merely around 13 per cent of the sample respondents reported an increase in the savings due to MGNREGS. A moderate change in the savings after MGNREGS is reported by about 15 per cent of the sample respondents.

**Impact on the migration People migrate to other places in search of employment**

One of the objectives of MGNREGA is to arrest migration. It is deduced from the data that a vast majority of the sample respondents opined that migration is reduced after MGNREGS (63.10 per cent), while about 29 per cent of the sample respondents reported that migration is arrested to some extent. As against this, a tiny percentage of the sample respondents reported that there is no change in migration even after MGNREGA (7.70 per cent).

**Spending pattern of the wages earned under MGNREGA**

An attempt is made in the present study to know the spending pattern of the income earned by the respondents from the rural employment guarantee scheme. It is evident from the data that sample respondents use it for a variety of purposes such as buying of food grains, expenses on household activities, health expenses, buying durable assets and clearing debts. It is noticed from the data that one third of the sample respondents are spending this amount to meet household expenses, while another one third of the sample respondents spent this amount to clear their debts. Sample respondents constituting about 17 per cent of the respondents reported that they bought durable assets with this money, whereas around 16 per cent of the respondents stated that they spent this money for buying food grains.

#### **Improvement in overall livelihood conditions**

One of the objectives of the MGNREGS is to improve the livelihood conditions of the rural poor. Sample respondents are asked to state whether overall livelihood conditions of the sample respondents improved due to MGNREGS. It is revealed from the data that overall livelihood conditions changed in the case of 60 per cent of the sample respondents after MGNREGS, while a striking 39 per cent of the sample respondents reported that there is no overall improvement in their livelihood conditions.

#### **Conclusion**

To sum-up, it can be said that MGNREGS resulted in enhancing general wage rates in the opinion of the majority of the sample respondents. Only about one third of the sample respondents reported increase in income after MGNREGS, while around three fourths of the sample respondents reported increase in expenditure after working under the Scheme. No change in savings is observed in the case of a huge percentage of the sample respondents. A majority of the sample respondents reported that migration is arrested. Three fifths of the sample respondents opined that by and large their livelihood conditions changed. Sample respondents are spending wages earned under the scheme to meet household expenses, to clear debts, to buy food grains, etc. Thus, the study shows that women are being empowered due to MGNREGS.

#### **REFERENCES**

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