



## ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER

## Management

### WOMEN EMPOWERMENT THROUGH - MGNREGA

**KEY WORDS:** Empowerment, Women Participation, Employment Programmes, and MGNREGA

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#### ABSTRACT

Empowerment is a process aimed at changing the nature and direction of systematic forces, which marginalize women and other disadvantaged sections in a given context. Gender is the inevitable push factor for growth and development of a nation like India. In India women constitute a major share of chronically poor population. A large segment of Indian womanhood still suffers deprivation and discriminatory attitudes. It is necessary to mobilize the vast women power, if the country has to progress in all sphere of development. Empowerment of women is a long and difficult process which is to be promoted with full public support and this could be successful only when those women living at the lower strata who have been suppressed by the male dominated society taking undue advantage of their lack of education and poverty can rise up to claim their rightful place in their own society. In spite of the draw backs in the implementation of the legislation, significant benefits have already started accruing to women through better access to local employment, at minimum wages, with relatively decent and safe work conditions. The Government has framed different programmes/schemes to uplift the women from poverty and vulnerability of life. One such women friendly programme is Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) which was enacted in 2005. MGNREGA plays a significant role to meet the practical as well as strategic needs of women's participation. It has become a beacon of light in the empowerment of the rural women and contributed substantially for the increased living and economic conditions by creating equal wages to male and female workers. The present paper discusses status of women's participation in MGNREGA in Telangana. This paper also presents challenges in the way of women participation in MGNREGA and suggestions for making MGNREGA more effective for women.

#### INTRODUCTION

Active participation of any community in the development process is recognized as a tool for its empowerment. In Indian social set up, the participation of women in the development process has to be ensured through tangible measures taken at various levels for their overall development. The government has taken a conscious view to make adequate provisions in its policies and programmes, through which it is to be ensured that the women of the country are not only empowered but also become active participants in the development process in the country. Various programmes of the Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD) are formulated keeping in view the above perspective. These programmes have special components for women. Major schemes, having women's component, implemented by the Ministry include the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), Swarnjayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY) now restructured as National Rural Livelihood Mission (Aajeevika) and the Indira Awas Yojana (IAY). The implementation of these programmes is monitored specifically with reference to coverage of women.

#### Review of Literature

By putting cash incomes into hands, MGNREGA is beginning to create a greater degree of economic independence among women. This was one of MGNREGA's main aims: with the increased participation of women in household income-generation a positive contribution to gender relations can be made. The survey data (both qualitative and quantitative) suggest that women workers are more confident about their roles as contribution to family expenditure and their work decision, and that they are also becoming more assertive about their space in the public sphere (Asha Sharma 2012). The significant contribution of MGNREGA was that it has removed these constraints as the wage employment was made available within or closer to the village. It has provided them with the opportunity to earn without having had to forgo their other familiar obligations. (Singh, Nauriyal, 2009). Looking at the response from widows separately, MGNREGA was also considered "very important" by 82% of widows in the sample. Of the total sample, more than two-thirds (69%) of

the sample workers stated the MGNREGA had helped them avoid hunger, while 57% stated the MGNREGA had helped them avoid migration and equal proportion of workers also said they had used MGNREGA wages to buy medicines in the last 12 months. (Khera, R. and Nayak, N. 2009) All the women workers according to Thomas, EM. (2010) are fully satisfied with MGNREGA works. The main reason for their satisfaction is that; today they are assured of 100 days of jobs. It means that no longer they have to fear the occurrence of seasonal unemployment and poverty. Likewise all of them unanimously opine that, the MGNREGA enabled them to participate effectively in the civil society. Now all they have no fear to enter in to a commercial bank or government office to hold discussions with the officials. The overall impact of MGNREGA on women's lives is quite positive in many ways, whether it is by enhancing their economic independence and self-confidence, contributing to food security, helping to reduce distress migration, or fostering better awareness (and wider enforcement) of minimum wages. The role of MGNREGA as a tool of women's empowerment deserves much more attention than it has received so far. (Jandu, N. 2008). Account payment of wages also creates some other effects. Apart from increasing the chances for greater control over earnings, it leads to the development of a saving habit. Initially, most of these workers used to withdraw their entire wages at one go. Gradually, they have started withdrawing as per their needs. This has an added advantage as women are able to save money from wasteful expenditure, if husbands or other male members tend to spend on items like liquor. Women were also found to invest in fixed deposit schemes in the same bank (Pankaj, A. and R, Tankha. 2010).

#### Need of the Study

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. During the last two decades, a number of development interventions such as social mobilization, formation and networking and capacity building of women self-help groups have been put in place to empower women and MGNREGA is one out of them. However,

active participation of women in any programme is a pre-requisite for the empowerment. Thus the present study proposes to assess empowerment of women through MGNREGA and their participation in MGNREGA.

### Objectives of the Study

- i. The role of MGNREGA in women's empowerment.
- ii. To find out the problems that gets in the way of women's participation in MGNREGA.
- iii. Suggestions to make MGNREGA more effective and responsive to the need of women.

### Research Methodology

The present study is a descriptive study based on secondary data collected from various published sources and websites.

### MGNREGA and Women

National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) was passed on 25<sup>th</sup> August, 2005, and it was renamed with Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) in 2009. it provides a legally Guarantee of 100 days of wage employment in a financial year to every rural household. The act became effective at the state level of implantation in phased manner, with covering of 635 rural districts, Guaranteeing employment days in financial year to poor rural households on demand, Through women employment was not the soul objectives of the scheme but with its developmental goals it comes automatically. MGNREGA with its guarantee of 100 days of unskilled work for every household, has been envisaged as gender sensitive scheme. The design features of this scheme make this scheme gender sensitive. The participation of women in the workforce has surpassed the statutory minimum requirement of 33 percent and through this it has protected the women justice and rights. The Act provides some explicit entitlements for women to facilitate their full participation.

### These include:

- **Equal wages for men and women**– 'Equal wages shall be paid to both men and women workers and the provisions of Equal Remuneration Act, 1976 shall be complied with.' (p.26)
- **Participation in Management and monitoring of the programme**– 'The gram sabha will elect the members of the committee and ensure that SC/STs and women are represented on it.' (p.44)
- **Participation in social audit**– 'The timing of the forum must be such that it is convenient for people to attend – that it is convenient for REGS (Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme) workers, women and marginalized communities.' (p.56)
- **Providing support for child care, and convenience to households**– The guidelines mention the need for a crèche at the worksite, and for the works to be convenient for families.
- **Ensuring that single women are eligible**– By recognizing a single person as a 'household', the Act makes it possible for widows and other single women to access this work for widows and other single women to access work.

### MGNREGA in Telangana

In Telangana MGNREGA was introduced in all 9 rural district in 2006. Participants were from the most marginal social and economic groups: 45 per cent were Scheduled Caste, 15 per cent Scheduled Tribe and 51 per cent female., 4.1 million works had been taken up in Telangana. 45 per cent of them completed found that 100 per cent of the households in the Telangana component of their sample had job cards, Seventy-one per cent requested work and more than 90 per cent received work within 15 days.

The average number of days worked per household was 74, and more than half of households claimed between 75 and 100 days. note that payments were timely and higher than

agricultural wages and estimate that they accounted for 9.6 per cent of household income. 'Distress' migration had been reduced; however, male migration for higher wages continued. This was partly due to a perception of MGNREGA work as sporadic and of short duration, which arises from a history of MGNREGA projects being delayed while awaiting approval or investigation of an irregularity, or postponed to accommodate peak agricultural periods after requests from landowners.

Many studies, have placed (Drèze. 2006), Telangana and Undivided Andhra Pradesh the forefront in implementing MGNREGA because of the high level of population awareness of the scheme, , and technological innovations. Its popularity within Telangana was evidenced by the popular distress evident when the death of the Chief Minister who started the scheme threatened its continuation. MGNREGA appears to be successfully targeting poorer people as only 3 per cent of participants in Telangana are above the poverty line (Reddy et al. 2010). However, Reddy et al. warn that 'these very characteristics of the participating households [i.e. that they are predominantly poor and marginalized may also create the conditions for misuse and neglect of processes, and therefore call for effective institutional and governance structures' (ibid.: 66). They observe that despite the commitment of the political leadership, the local panchayats are weak, which reduces their ability to mobilize villagers in planning and monitoring the work (Moore and Jadhav 2006). also note some warning signs in relation to the future of the scheme: guidelines and record-keeping requirements are perceived as burdensome, there is a lack of local technical expertise which affects the quality of work, and it is hard to track the granting of unemployment allowance. While many workers enjoy the experience of working in groups, the fact that these groups are often caste- or gender-based creates potentially discriminatory dynamics, for example, risky work being given to Scheduled Caste groups, or single women struggling to find a group (Sainath 2007; Young Lives data in Poompuhar echo this finding). Finally, as the majority of work in Telangana is land development (45 per cent), there is some resentment that the benefits accrue to landholders, not the landless.

### Role of MGNREGA In Women Empowerment

MGNREGA plays a significant role to meet the practical as well as strategic needs of women's participation. It has become a beacon of light in the empowerment of the rural women and contributed substantially for the increased living and economic conditions by creating equal wages to male and female workers.

### The role of MGNREGA on women's participation can be examined through the following parameters:

**Income-Consumption Effects:** By income-consumption effects we mean an increase in income of women workers and as a result, their ability to choose their consumption baskets. MGNREGA empowers women by giving them a scope of independent earning and spend some amount for their own needs.

### Intra-Household Effects:

Women play a major role in raising the economic resources for their family but their contribution remains uncounted because of they perform a significant amount of unpaid work. In rural areas, the dominance of males in intra-household decisions has been seen. MGNREGA has significant impact in converting some unpaid work into paid work and widen the scope of decision making role of women in household matters.

**Community-Level Effects:** Women's participation at the local and district level of governance process is low in spite of 73rd Amendments of the Constitution. But women participation has increased after the implementation of MGNREGA in many areas.

A large number of women workers attended the Gram Sabha meeting held in connection with MGNREGA. Community level empowerment of women is one of the great achievements of this Act.

There are various factors which encourage the women worker's participation under this scheme include nature of work, which do not need skilled worker, the limited hours of work, availability of work locally, reduction of migration of male member, substantial jump in the wage rate etc. Participation of women varies widely across the nation. Women participation under MGNREGA is measured in person days. At the national level women participation has increased significantly to 53.01% in 2019-20 Highest participation is seen in states like Kerala (92.66%) followed by Pondicherry (83.96%). Although, women workforce participation under the Scheme has surpassed the statutory minimum requirement of 33 per cent, 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 women who have registered and have requested for work. However, ideally, there should be gender equality in participation in MGNREGA. That means, women proportion should be around 50% both in terms participation and person-days of work. There are some issues which hinder women participation in MGNREGA in the State.

#### Problems in the Way of Women's Participation in MGNREGA

**Corruption-** Corruption is the foremost factor that directly or indirectly hampers the very spirit and effectiveness of MGNREGA.

**Societal attitude and Discrimination-** In many rural areas of India, there are tenacious social norms and stigmas against women working outside the home. It was commonly stated that women "cannot" work on worksites, that they are "too weak", and that it is "socially unacceptable" for them to undertake this work.

**Negligence of childcare facilities-** The Act requires that when there are more than five children under the age of six present at a worksite, a female worker be appointed to take care of them. But, non-implementation of these provisions has adverse impact on women labour force.

**Low wage and irregularity in payments-** In many states, workers do not earn minimum wages. Delays in wage payments make things particularly difficult for women. Moreover, every job card holder is supposed to have an account in nearby financial institutions, which is not an easy process for rural women. This often leads to complications and delay in the process of wage payment.

**Low level of Awareness:** In many states women participation is low because of low level of awareness about the process and entitlements of the programme.

**Nature of Work:** Most of the studies reveal that nature of work is also not helpful for women workers. In most of the projects work requiring application of physical force, male workers were preferred to women workers.

**Poor Worksite Facilities:** MGNREGA funds have been allocated for the provision of safe drinking water, resting place and first aid. But most of the studies reported that except drinking water facility all other facilities are generally absent.

#### Suggestions For Making Mgnrega More Effective For Women

There are problems and challenges that limit the participation of women under MGNREGA. The following important interventions can make MGNREGA more effective and result oriented for the cause of women-

- The Panchayat must create awareness among the local

people about MGNREGA. Awareness should be created among women regarding rights, entitlements, provisions and procedures under MGNREGA. Involvement of NGOs in MGNREGA has been very low. NGOs and self-help groups should spearhead the awareness programme among the women. This feature requires to be strengthened to make the rights-based MGNREGA more successful and meaningful.

- Women should be kept in the forefront of planning, execution and evaluation of MGNREGA programmes. Moreover, from policy to implementation level, there should be the involvement of anganwadi workers, health workers, self help groups, NGOs, village committees, cooperatives and other local bodies.
- Only male members get job card which makes women depend on them, Women should also be provided a job card. Every individual worker should have his or her own job card.
- There should be joint bank accounts so women easily can withdraw money according to their need. This will reduce their dependence on men for withdrawing money.
- Some of the projects should be designed in such a way that can be done easily by women as all projects are not appropriate for women. MGNREGA should promote semi skilled and skilled jobs such as social services and rural health, so that, women can get associated with rural literacy and health missions and infrastructural activities in the villages.
- A special provision should be made for the people such as widows, women with disabilities, single and deserted women in each household.
- The programme design includes a recommendation that mobile crèches need to be available at workplaces. The programme should improve quality of childcare.
- Extending reservation to dalits with particular reference to dalit women.
- Lastly it may be stressed here that effective information flows and dissemination about the various angles of this provision of the Scheme through all types of media and channels in the rural areas are essential.

#### CONCLUSIONS

MGNREGA has emerged as a very powerful tool for women empowerment due to its provision for women. This programme of government has taken care of that corner which remained untouched from changes in society from last many years. Since the introduction of scheme, there have been positive changes at the participation level of women in the MGNREGA. But there are also challenges that limit women participation at certain levels of women empowerment through employment opportunities. However, given the critical gains made by women workers, in accessing work and income, it needs to be ensured that the problems in implementation do not destroy the gains achieved so far and the objectives of MGNREGA. Women will go a long way in removing the short-term barriers to women's employment and participation to achieve longer term goals of gender equality. Effective levels of awareness and sustained public initiatives are crucial to ensure that the implementation problems are not only addressed but also resolved, and the objectives are met.

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