



## MGNREGP AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT



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### ABSTRACT

*One of the most significant social changes over the past 25 years in Tamil Nadu is the entry of women in to the local political bodies at the village and village union levels through the 33% Reservation system. Simultaneously, women are now, to a significant extent, organized in self-help groups. Through these about one-fourth of the households can access loans for small entrepreneurship or, rather more frequently, for smaller emergency/consumption loans. There has also been increased participation of women in the non-agricultural labour market and the emergence in Tamil Nadu of a rudimentary "barefoot" welfare. The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, which entitles rural households to 100 days of casual employment on public works at the statutory minimum wage, contains special provisions to ensure full participation of women examines the social-economic consequences of the NREGA for women workers. In spite of the drawbacks 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.*

**KEYWORDS:** *NREGA, Women, Rural, Employment, Income, Saving, Empowerment*

### INTRODUCTION

The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) is one of the most progressive legislations enacted since independence. Its significance is evident from a verity of perspectives. First, it is a bold and unique experiment in the provision of rural employment –in India and indeed in the World at large. Second, it is the first expression of the right to work as an enforceable legal entitlement. In a country where labour is the only economic asset for millions of people, gainful employment is a prerequisite for the fulfillment of other basic rights- the right to life, the right to food, and the right to education. There is much that the NREGA promises from the perspective of women's empowerment as well. Most boldly, in a rural milieu marked by stark inequalities between men and women- in the opportunities for gainful employment afforded as well as wage rates- NREGA represents action on both these counts. The act

stipulates that wages will be equal for men and women. It is also committed to ensuring that at least 33% of the workers shall be women. By generating employment for women at fair wages in the villages, NREGA can play a substantial role in economically empowering women and laying the basis for greater independence and self-esteem. Government figures indicate an impressive participation of women in the NREGA . It is above 33 per cent in 15 states. Tamil Nadu, with 82 per cent, shows the highest participation with Kerala and Rajasthan.

The MGNREGA is being implemented in 27 states of the country. In the first phase, the programme was being implemented in 200 districts with total budget of 11300 crore in 2006-07. It was implemented in an additional 130 districts in Phase II 2007-2008 with increased budget allocation of 12000 crores.



The Act was notified in the remaining 285 rural districts of India from April 1, 2008 in Phase III with allocation of 30000 crores. Though the objective of 100days of employment was not achieved in any state, MGNREGA is seen as having impacted the poor. For example, according to Mathur, large numbers of unlettered households have made the effort to come forward to register; migration has reduced in several villages in Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Orissa and Rajasthan; wages less than the minimum wage were raised in many states; the participation of women increased significantly even in the districts of Rajasthan and eastern UP; unemployment allowances were sought and actually paid in Madhya Pradesh and Orissa; the maintenance of muster rolls has become a feature in several districts.

The most remarkable change is that a process for the empowerment of the poor is emerging around MGNREGA with NGOs and activists discovering in it a vehicle for meaningful interventions. The administrative capabilities, technical capabilities, and ability to plan and execute projects, commitment of political leadership, setting up of implementation mechanisms, role of civil society, and finally, the demand from the community in seeking works etc., even socio cultural dimensions, particularly relating to wage labour work of women, appear to be important factors influencing the programme. The Employment Guarantee Act can also help to empower women, by giving them independent income-earning opportunities.

MGNREGA provides that 30 percent of the employment provided, should be given to women. Many studies shows that having once tasted the value of bringing home a money wage from their own labour, they had developed a sense of confidence and also release from the authority of the family and had started to gain the confidence to take up other types of work in the area and also argues that the payment of equal wages to men and women is one reason for their highest participation in this scheme. In areas where rural women are traditionally homebound, such as Uttar Pradesh, the Employment Guarantee Act has an even more significant role to play as a means of empowering rural women and curbing gender discrimination. Thus it shows that the underprivileged majority is not completely marginalised in this elitist political system. With adequate political organisation, their demands can prevail over privileged interests.

## **WOMEN INVOLVEMENT IN MGNREGA**

The MGNREGS offers a household guarantee. The number of earners in the household is an important factor in determining who would go for NREGS work, or if anyone would go. In a household with a single earner, wage work with daily payment is preferred and NREGS is not the first option. The poorest, particularly single women households prefer daily wage payments to NREGS, where payments are made usually after a month. Where there are two or more earners, given the male female disparity in market wages it is usually the woman whose time is allocated for NREGS the participation of women is a significant measure of MGNREGA's success, it is important to identify variables that help account for the varying levels of participation of women in MGNREGA among states. The following variables were thought to potentially influence female participation on MGNREGA worksites: female literacy, the rural poverty rate of women, female rural unemployment and female rural labor participation rates, and the ratio of the MGNREGA wage to the state minimum wage. These variables were chosen by virtue of being factors that would induce women to demand work through MGNREGA. Women experiencing poverty and unemployment in rural areas have limited employment options and sources of income, so they stand to benefit the most from participation in MGNREGA. The female rural labor participation rate and the MGNREGA wage are also of interest, since the presence of MGNREGA in a district may create substitution and income effects. Women who already participate in the rural labor market may seek out MGNREGA work if the wages and employment conditions are better than at their current employment.

## **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

MGNREGA works create public assets for poor women at its best and act as a catalyst and set in motion a virtuous cycle of development. It is important for this to happen that the assets being created are embedded in the existing local economic Activity and the social framework. It is presumed in this programme design that the Central role given to the gram panchayat ensures such embeddedness. The potential of the programme for allowing women to make some savings was observed everywhere. Facilitating their ability to save toward specific purchases through easily accessible bank accounts

is a way of enhancing well being. At present, even when money is deposited in a bank or post office, access is often difficult, Making frequent withdrawals inconvenient, and hence encouraging withdrawal of the full amount. Better systems of mobile banking might be able to improve this Situation.

### **Collectives and Consolidation of Savings:-**

The participation of women in the workforce in Kerala is 87 percent. Mahatma Gandhi NREGA has catalyzed links with earlier institutions that sought to empower women, for example with Kudumbashree and Self Help Groups (SHGs) of women. Mahatma Gandhi NREGA has also helped in increasing the saving of women. In the year 2008-2009, women's savings were INR 67.50 crore (approx. US\$ 14.97 million), which has increased to INR 115.52 crore (approx. US\$ 25.61 million).

### **Women Augment Family Income:-**

India's rural employment guarantee scheme in Tripura is giving women the opportunity to earn. The government scheme has proved to be a breather for the women in a state where two-thirds of the population is still below the poverty line. However, since the Mahatma Gandhi NREGA schemes have been implemented in Their locality, the women have been able to augment their family incomes. Be it for an increase in the family income or a crucial tool for living, Tripura engages a Substantial number of women in Mahatma Gandhi NREGA projects as compared to other north-eastern states. Participation of women in Mahatma Gandhi NREGA works is amazing. Also, the state has moved for multi-cropping agriculture practices instead of traditional single cropping, which also keeps the men busy in fields, giving women more opportunities to avail of Mahatma Gandhi NREGA. Another reason is that women feel safe at the work place in a better socio-economic environment.

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) Provides a legal Guarantee of 100 days of wage employment in a financial year to every rural household. 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.'
- ✦ **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.'
- ✦ **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.'
- ✦ **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. (nrega.nic.in)

### **Working processes in MGNREGP**

Since MGNREGP is a right based programme, articulation of demand by the rural poor is the basic premise of its operation. The process of MGNREGA distinguishes it from other wage employment programmes and also constitutes its biggest challenge, especially if wage seekers are not literate and not organized. As observed by Verma generating awareness among local rural communities through information, Education Communication (IEC) becomes critical for enabling the rural poor to articulate demand, states have forged a variety of methods for communication and social mobilization that include preparation of communicatuion material on MGNREGS processes in simple local language, one day orientations of Sarpanch/Ward members, convening Gram Sabha, using district teams for village level interactions, local vernacular newspapers, Tv, Radio advertisements, pamphlets and brochures and local cultural forms.

**Table-1 Showing fund availability and actual expenditure on MGNREGA**

Year	Central Budget In crore	Total fund available in crore	Actual Expenditure in crore
2006-07	11.300	12,073.62	8,823.35
2007-08	12.000	19,278.77	15,858.44
2008-09	30,000.19	36,300.45	27,250.68
2009-10	39.100	45,682.46	37,909.77
2010-11	40.100	52,648.89	39,377.27
2011-12	31.000	41,563.51	37,548.78

**Table-2 Showing No. of Job Card Issued and Employment Provided under MGNREGA**

Year	No. Households Issued Job cards in lakh	No. Households Demanded Employment in lakh	No. Households Provided Employment in lakh	Persondays Employment provided in lakh
2006-07	378.5	211.88	210.16	9,050.54
2007-08	647.4	343.26	339.09	14,367.95
2008-09	1,001.45	455.18	451.15	21,632.86
2009-10	1,125.50	528.64	525.30	28,359.57
2010-11	1,198.24	557.63	549.54	25,715.25
2011-12	1,227.50	503.48	498.62	21,142.04

**Table-3 Showing Details of Employment provided to women, ST&SC people**

Year	Total employment provided-persondays in lakhs	Employment To women-to persondays in lakh	Employment ST- persondays to in lakh	Employment SC- persondays in lakh	Employment To others persondays in lakh
2006-07	9,095.54	3,679.01	3,298.73	2,295.23	3,456.59
2007-08	14,367.95	6,109.10	4,205.60	3,942.34	6,219.98
2008-09	21,632.86	10,357.32	5,501.64	6,336.18	9,795.06
2009-10	28,359.57	13,640.51	5,874.39	8,644.83	13,840.35
2010-11	25,715.25	12,174.23	5,361.80	7,875.65	12,477.81
2011-12	21,142.04	10,186.80	3,838.49	4,660.57	12,643.00

**Table-4 Fund Utilization Average Person days generated and ratio of Women, and ST/SC**

Year	Fund utilization %	Average persondays generated	Women %	ST %	SC %
2006-07	73	43	40.64	36.44	25.36
2007-08	82	43	42.51	29.27	27.43
2008-09	75	48	47.87	25.43	29.28
2009-10	82	54	48.09	20.71	30.48
2010-11	75	47	47.73	20.85	30.62
2011-12	90	42.4	48.18	18.18	32.04

Source: Ministry of rural Development [www.mgnregs.nic.in](http://www.mgnregs.nic.in)

Innovative methods like information counters on local market days, village information walls, fixing a ROZGAR day in the week and establishing a Helpline have also been used. Hence, there is more employment as there is more demand of jobs due to enabling articulation through IEC under this Act which were earlier dormant.

## CONCLUSION

Viewed in a wider outlook, MGNREGP signals a possible reshaping of priorities in India through a democratic determination to provide real livelihood opportunities for the rural poor women. The MGNREGA is a wage employment program, providing minimum wage employment to casual, unskilled

labour, women, disabled especially during those days in which they are jobless or free from agriculture work. Gender has never been at the centre stage of the program as a policy. But still due to its provision for women, MGNREGA has emerged as a very powerful tool for women empowerment. This programme of government has taken care of that corner which remained untouched from changes in society from last many years.

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