

# A study of Women's Empowerment Through MGNREGA: Issues, Challenges, and Impact

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**ABSTRACT**-There is inequality and vulnerability of women in all sphere of life. They need to be empowered in all walks of life. Without the active participation of women, establishment of a new social order may not be a successful one, because women constitute half of the population. Women should realize that they have constitutional rights to quality health care, economic security, and access to education and political power. Mahatma Gandhi firmly states that the status of women would not change merely by bringing legislations; it must be supported by change in the women's social circumstances and situations and also man's sexist attitude to women. 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. The paper discusses status of women participation in UT-TAR PRADESH in comparison to other States and issues and challenges for women's participation in MGNREGA.

**Key words :** MNREGA, Issues ,Challenges, Empowerment, impact.

**INTRODUCTION**- 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. 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. 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. 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 has provided a unique opportunity to people from rural India to earn their own income without any discrimination of caste or gender. Most remarkable feature of NREGA is that it pays women the same as men, something that was virtually unimaginable in rural India. However, some States have registered high percentage of women workers getting enrolled in the scheme whereas others have registered a very low percentage of women availing benefit under MGNREGA.

**OBJECTIVE OF STUDY**- One of the biggest problems with the MGNREGA is that there has been many attempt to academically examine about issues and challenges in way of it. This paper attempts to throw light on the conceptual issues associated with MNREGA as well as recent changes in society. The present study is exploratory in nature to provide a clear guidance for empirical research. It is also descriptive where the focus is on fact finding investigation with adequate interpretation. For this purpose secondary data were collected. The secondary data were collected through newspapers, magazines, books, journals, conference proceedings, Government reports and websites.

## Objective of Study

1. To investigate the impact of MGNREGA on women empowerment in India.
2. To identify the real issue and challenges faced by women beneficiaries under MGNREGA in India
3. To Analysis the impact of MNREGA on women.

**Research Methodology**-It is a cross sectional study which is exploratory in nature. It involved secondary data collection and The researchers conducted descriptive study and secondary data was used for this study. Basically, the required materials have been derived from various journals, articles from newspaper, magazines, and web-sites which deal directly or indirectly with the topics related with issues challenges were included in this study. After searching the important newspapers and web-sites, relevant information was down loaded and examined to address the objectives of present study. No primary data was used for this study.

## Literature review-

**Women Empowerment through MGNREGA: Literature Review**-The literature review on women empowerment reflects the findings of various researchers and academicians on MGNREGA through reputed national and international journals, magazines and annual reports are presented by the authors below for easy understanding.

The scheme has truly a positive impact on women empowerment, in so far as it has addressed a number of practical

gender needs [1]. The study is trend of women taking membership in MGNREGS is definitely increasing after becoming a part of MGNREGS, women cultural activities has increased from 66 to 93% after participating in MGNREGS [2]. The majority of the women respondents 68.3% are using MGNREGA income to satisfy their family food consumption [3]. MGNREGA has becomes a powerful instrument for women empowerment in rural India through its effect on livelihood security and democratic governance and social protections [4]. Women participating in the scheme said they had become less dependent on their husbands for money and didn't need to submit the entire amount they earned to their mother in laws [5]. The major goal of the scheme is to ensure enhanced empowerment of poor women, it is more desirable that institutional efficacy to generate employment should be improved and social environment should be promoted accordingly to enable rural women increasingly participate in the program [6]. The economic conditions of the women beneficiaries improved after joining MGNREGA which is a good sign of development. Women beneficiaries had also started repaying their debt [7]. Women's involvement and their share in NREGA jobs is hindered by various factors such as structural problems, improper implementation of scheme and ineffective, social attitudes, corruption and exploitation [8]. The village women can be active participation in the process of planning and inclusion of MGNREGA framework [9]. Ensuring the establishment of crèches for women workers, abolition of contractors, effective implementation of transparency mechanisms and the establishment of a schedule of rates more favorable to women will go a long way in removing the short-term barriers to women's participation in MGNREGA [10]. The latter indicates that where women's real wages as a share of men's is lesser in the private sector, women are flocking to work in this government administered programme. This will have an impact on women's agricultural wage and their bargaining power, and is potentially a critical factor in reducing gender disparities in the labour market.

**Issues in MGNREGA: Literature Review-**The literature review set for this study focuses on the issues in MGNREGA formed in India. It redirects the findings of various professionals based on their studies. "MGNREGA aids in enrichment of agriculture productivity (through water harvesting, check dams, ground water recharging, improve moisture content, check in soil erosion and micro-irrigation), stemming of distress migration, increased access to markets and services through rural connectivity works, supplementing household income, increase in women workforce participation ration, and the regeneration of natural resources[11]". India is one of the largest developing countries in the world. The economy of India fundamentally depends upon the cultivation sector. Yet today most of the people live in 7 lakh rural communities of India. Therefore the difficulties of the rural India are more important rather than the overall problems in India [12]. The present study signifies to evaluate the extent of growth made and the dimensions of various issues associated with the programme in the most backward state of Bihar and Jharkhand. There is a gross mismatch between the needs of the community and the actual work undertaken, which is the major challenge faced by the MGNREGA in the states [13]. Highlighting the critical role played by the MGNREGA, this paper exemplifies the issues and significance of MGNREGA particularly in the context of rural India.

Further it makes a proportional analysis between the select fifteen states of the Indian union which provides the structure for policy approval for the poor performing states with respect to various parameters [14]. The critical issues involved in processes such as registration, proof of application, problem of job cards, allocation for employment, application for employment, selection and execution of work, transparency, payment, staffing and monitoring etc. It also tries to highlight the progress of the scheme in brief [15]. MGNREGA is designed as a safety net to reduce migration by rural poor households in the lean period through a hundred days of assured unskilled manual labour provided when required at minimum wage on works concentrated on land development, water conservation, and drought proofing

**Challenges in MGNREGA: Literature Review-**The literature reviews on Challenges in MGNREGA in India faced by women reflects the findings of various researchers based on their studies were presented below.

The best performing states includes Tripura, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland and Andhra Pradesh. The average performing states includes Sikkim, Chhattisgarh, Meghalaya, Himachal Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. The poor performing states include Madhya Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Rajasthan and Jharkhand [16]. MGNREGA scheme to access development opportunities through other programmes for transiting from wage employment to sustainable livelihood. This scheme was successfully carried out in the state Bihar [17]. MGNREGA wages plays an important role in the financial life of the job card holder's family. But there are some areas of improvement i.e., less contribution of women, no unemployment allowance for number of work days, incomplete target of 100 days employment and no skill work for further development of human resource [18]. His research, aims to test the challenges causing barriers in the accomplishment of the object of MGNREGA. For this, data have been taken from Topchanchi Block, and interviews were done with Block programme offices in Topchanchi and other MGNREGA assistants of that Block [19].

Another author pointed out that this act has been introduced aiming towards improving the purchase power of rural people and to provide job to unskilled labour interested to work. The management aspect to implement MGNREGA effectively has been discussed with a view to provide employment according to intention of act, payment of remuneration to workers, and planning and inspection of work leaving behind no lapse [20]. “Poor administrative, planning skills, inadequate awareness, plagued with discrimination, corruption and irregularities, delay in payment of wages. So far, works related to rainwater harvesting and conservation, desalting of canal distributaries, desalting and renovation of old ponds/tanks and digging up of new farm ponds are mainly being carried out under NREGS. There is a need of development in identifying/creating new employment chances and dovetailing various programmers routed by the Central and the State Governments with NREGA” [21]. “MGNREGA is perhaps the most ambitious anti-poverty scheme launched anywhere in the world. It may be understood that the problems and challenges are from both, government and public”. Poor administrative and planning skills, inadequate awareness, plagued with discrimination, corruption and irregularities, delay in payment of wages. Public in adequate awareness, no purposive spending, being unorganized [22].

**Impact of MGNREGA: Literature Review**—The literature review prepared for this study on Impact of MGNREGA reflects the findings of various professionals and researchers were presented below.

The programmes like MGNREGA would create a positive impact on increasing the quantum and level of employment [23]. Agricultural incomes have increased across the country, in which the impact of MGNREGS is considerable. The female agricultural wage has been much higher than male wages [24]. MGNREGA is providing employment to the tune of 18.1 % of the total work of the households. The study has thrown light on the employment differential in the underdeveloped and developed areas [25].

**1. WOMEN THROUGH MGNREGA**—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:

**i) 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.

**ii) 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 intrahousehold 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.

**iii) 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.

**2. WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION UNDER MGNREGA**—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 States. Women participation under MGNREGS is measured in person days. At the national level women participation has increased significantly to 53.01% in 2012- 13 (till January, 2013). Highest participation is seen in states like Kerala(92.66%) followed by Poducherry (83.96%). In comparison to these States Odisha ranked 20 with women participation rate of 37.39%. 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 MGNREGS. 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 MGNREGS in the State. The rate of participation of women and the computed women person-days in Mahatma Gandhi NREGS during the last three financial years and current financial year 2022-23 is given below:

| Financial Year                       | 2018-19 | 2019-20 | 2020-21 | 2021-22 | 2022-23 |
|--------------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Women participation rate (%)         | 54.59   | 54.78   | 53.19   | 54.78   | 56.62   |
| computed women person-days(in crore) | 125.12  | 145.36  | 206.96  | 187.38  | NA      |
| computed women person-days(in % )    | 54.59   | 54.78   | 53.19   | 54.82   | 57.43   |

The MGNREGA Act requires that priority be given to women in such a way that at least one-third of the beneficiaries be women. The above table reveals that women participation stood at 54.59% in 2018-19, 54.78% in 2019-20, 53.19% in 2020-21 and 54.78% in 2021-22 and in 2022-23 it remains 56.62%. “The MGNREGA Act requires that priority be given to women in such a way that at least one-third of the beneficiaries be women. Several measures have enhanced participation of women, which is more than 50%, far ahead of the minimum percentage of 33% as mandated by the Act,” The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act that guarantees employment of every rural household for 100 days has different progressive provisions to incentivise participation of women in the programme. Official data suggest that 47% of all MGNREGA workers are women. The extent to which the programme is inclusive of women, with a particular focus on sub-populations of women such as widows and mothers of young children who typically face serious constraints in the context of labour market participation, is examined in this study using data from the National Sample Survey. The study finds that while the MGNREGA has indeed been inclusive of women, the substantial variations both across states and the exclusion of vulnerable groups of women demand attention.

### 3. ISSUES RELATED TO WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN MGNREGA

**(i) Non-availability of Child Care Facilities:** One of the major shortcomings of the Act is non-availability of proper crèche facilities at the work site even though the Act includes this provision. Different studies show that women remained worried about their children while they are working at MGNREGA worksite even some women do not accept the job facilities of MGNREGA because of non-availability of proper child care facilities.

**(ii) 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.

**(iii) Nature of Work:** Most of the studies reveal that nature of work is also not helpful for women workers. In most of the projects selected being related to rural connectivity and renovation of local water bodies involving earth work requiring application of physical force, male workers were preferred to women workers (Hazarika, 2009).

**(iv) 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.

**(v) Delay in Payments:** Delay in payments is also responsible for poor participation of women particularly in case of single women if they are the main earners in the family. Because the Banks are far from the village, it becomes difficult for the women to open Bank Account and draw cash which discourage women participation.

**4. POLICY ISSUES** – The effectiveness of MGNREGA crucially depends on what type of schemes it gives priority to lack of focus of social, gender inequality in creation of productive assets has been a major reason for limited success of wage employment programme. Compared to men, the proportion of unskilled, subsidiary workers among women is much larger under MGNREGA. Given poor health and literacy as well as the predominant responsibility of house work and caring, women have recourse only to work that is available. Generally, women lack any productive assets other than their own labour. Often they do not even possess a homestead within which they could raise livestock or set up a shop to meet daily food requirement. There is thus the need to maintain to inform and assist public policy to institute implementation of programs for a gender responsive political economy, with adequate measures for building women’s ownership and control rights to productive assets. Needless to say such measures are compatible with development needs of the country. That equal rights to productive assets of women with those of men, can lead to greater economic activity, change in the perception of dependence on men, and thus results insubstantially reducing exclusion of women from social processes and promote development of diverse capabilities, thereby enhancing productivity and reducing inequality.

**5. RECOMMENDATIONS- Recommendations for policy and program design** : Suggestions for policy and programme design emerging from the study include the following.

**A: Strengthening active citizenship**—Women’s participation in Gram Sabhas is likely to be increased as they become more aware of their citizenship rights and duties. Investing in informal groups is one way of doing this – policy has prioritised investment in training of elected leaders, which needs to continue, but democratic processes require active citizenship by all and this fact needs to find a place in resource allocations too.

**B. Broadening the understanding of poverty to include needs of women** - The programme could have a greater impact on poverty reduction and on development if there were a broader understanding of the nature of poverty, and especially the constraints faced by women. The programme needs to find ways of improving its relevance to the daily lives of people (especially women) and addressing ecological poverty, not just income poverty, through suitable modifications to programme design. This will not happen through ad hoc creation of small and isolated tanks or wells. It requires an explicit framing of the development discourse within which MGNREGA is located.

**C. Systems of wage payment** -Women are employed as unskilled labour on MGNREGS worksites. Over a longer period, enhancement of skills and productivity will be one way of increasing earnings. To overcome the difficulties faced by the women in drawing cash from bank, provision can be made to provide door step delivery of the wages.

**D. Complementing the NREGS for different needs of women** -The programme design is perceived to be inclusive, as it is open to all irrespective of age or any other consideration. As a social protection system, NREGS reaches out to the able-bodied; to reach out to meet the needs of women who are at different stages in their lifecycle, a cash transfer or other kind of intervention may be better and more efficient.

**E. Improving quality of childcare-** The program design includes a recommendation that mobile crèches need to be available at workplaces. From a policy stand point, the issue of quality needs to be brought to the forefront and not treated as something to be addressed at a later stage after issues of access or infrastructure have been dealt with.

**6.CONCLUSION** –MGNREGA has positive impact on employment pattern of women. Women have benefited both as individual and community. Women are benefited individually because they are able to earn independently, spend some money for their own needs, contribute in family expenditure etc. The gained benefits of women as community can be understood by increased presence in the Gram Sabha, increasing number of women in speaking out in the meetings, increasing capacity of interaction etc. But the poor implementation across the nation (such as lack of child care facility, worksite facility and illegal presence of contractors) accrued the gender sensitiveness of this act mainly in north-eastern state. Certain initiatives and changes should be taken to remove these barriers. The valuable gains should not be derailed for poor implementation.

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