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## WOMEN EMPOWERMENT THROUGH MGNREGA-A STUDY



### First Author Details :

**B. Sakunthala**

Lecturer in Commerce, Govt. Degree College, Karveti Nagaram.



### Co - Author Details :

**S. Vijayulu Reddy<sup>2</sup> and M. Sriramulu<sup>3</sup>**

<sup>2</sup>Associate Professor in Commerce, Visvodaya Govt. College, Venkatagiri.

<sup>3</sup>Assistant Professor in Commerce, Visvodaya Govt. College, Venkatagiri.

### ABSTRACT

MGNREGA stipulates that wages will be equal for men and women. It is also committed to ensuring that at least 33 per cent of the workers shall be women. By generating employment for women at fair wages in the village, MGNREGA can play a substantial role in economically empowering women and laying the basis for greater independence and self-esteem. In contrast to the high participation of women in the pro-gramme as workers, their participation in processes like work se-lection, social audit, mobilisation of civil



society, and share in the control and management of assets created is not encouraging. The emergence of women workers as independent bread-earners with control over their earnings has significant empowerment effects, such as a greater decision-making role in the family, discretion to spend and control the use of their earn-ings, and confidence to earn independent of male family mem-bers.

**KEYWORDS :** *MGNREGA, Social Audit, Empowerment, decision making.*

### INTRODUCTION :

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) is one of the most progressive legislations enacted in India, since independence. It's a bold and unique experiment in the provision of rural employment in India and indeed in the world at large. Further, 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 MGNREGA 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 – MGNREGA 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 per cent of the workers shall be women. By generating employment for women at fair wages in the village, MGNREGA can play a substantial role in economically empowering women and laying the basis for greater independence and self-esteem.

### 2. Participation of Women in Panchayati Raj Institutions and Gram Sabhas

MGNREGA is designed to be largely implemented through Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) and at least 50 per cent of all sanctioned works are to be implemented by the Gram Panchayats. The Gram Sabha too plays a crucial role in the selection of works and the conduct of social audits.

1. Lecturer in Commerce, Govt. Degree College, Karveti Nagaram.
2. Associate Professor in Commerce, Visvodaya Govt. College, Venkatagiri.
3. Assistant Professor in Commerce, Visvodaya Govt. College, Venkatagiri.

Participation of people at large and women in particular in programs is, then, critical to realising the participatory potential of the Act. Before the implementation of MGNREGA, women workers did not generally take part in Gram Sabhas. This is due to lack of awareness about the significant role to be played by the Gram Sabhas in making a shelf of projects and conducting social audits of MGNREGA works. Women are increasingly visible as part of the MGNREGA workforce, there is still much scope to increase their involvement in PRIs to tackle issues like water, sanitation, health, education and of course the implementation of MGNREGA through social equity and reciprocity.

### 3. OBJECTIVES

- + To study the implementation of MGNREGA at gross root level
- + To analyse the empowerment women through MGNREGA
- + To identify the problems of women in MGNREGA works

### 4. PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN MGNREGA IN ANDHRA PRADESH

Women's participation in the NREGS, however, varies across re-gions. The share of women in total person-days was relatively high (exceeding 50 per cent) in Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Rajasthan, and Tripura in the last three years, It exceeded the national average i.e 47.88 per cent in Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Rajasthan, and Tripura. In contrast to the high participation of women in the pro-gramme as workers, their participation in processes like work se-lection, social audit, mobilisation of civil society, and share in the control and management of assets created is not encouraging. This being the case, in some places, women's participation in the gram sabha has still increased, and there is even an increase in the number of women who speak in the gram sabha. Even though, the emergence of women workers as independent bread-earners with control over their earnings has significant empowerment effects, such as a greater decision-making role in the family, discretion to spend and control the use of their earn-ings, and confidence to earn independent of male family mem-bers. Moreover, reports of their increased participation in the gram sabha are encouraging, and might change the character of decision-making at the level of grass-roots democratic institu-tions, which continue to be male-dominated even after the in-creased representation of women following the 73rd Constitu-tional Amendment Act. The participation of

women in MGNREGA at National level as well as in Andhra Pradesh is presented in following Table1.

Table1: Participation of Women MGNREGA-2014-15

Indicator	India (2014-15)(in Cr)	Andhra Pradesh (2014-15)(in Lakhs)
Total no. of Job Cards	12.98	92.67
Total no. of workers	27.33	208.91
Person days Generated	166.28	1555.39
SC Person days % as of total Person days	22.4	22.8
ST Person days % as of total Person days	17.02	11.87
Women Person days out of Total (%)	54.87	58.66
Total Individuals worked	6.22	55.52
% of Men Worked	49.78	45.98
% of Women Worked	50.22	54.02
Average Wage rate per day per person (Rs.)	143.91	116.24

Source: Compiled from MGNREGA web data

The above Table 1 indicates that the percentage of women person days out of total person days is 54.87 per cent where it is more than the share of male person days. The participation of women in MGNREGA is gradually increasing and it is more than the male participation. The per cent of women worked is 50.22 at national level where as it is higher than the national level in Andhra Pradesh with 54.02 per cent. In spite of regular household activities, the rural women is actively participating in the MGNREGA for their livelihood as well as the maintenance of family. The participation of women in Grama Shaba is also improved and they are taking decisions in the family maintenance, children education, etc.

## 5. Empowerment of Women through MGNREGA

### Household-Level Effects

Women's contribution to household income and to the national economy remains largely unaccounted for as they undertake a significant amount of unpaid work. The MGNREGA has helped women in converting some unpaid hours of work into paid hours of work with significant effects, especially for those women for whom MGNREGA is a primary work opportunity outside the home.

### Income-Consumption Effects

By income-consumption effects, we mean an increase in the paid income of a woman worker and, consequently, her ability to choose her consumption baskets. It was observed that sometimes women collect their wages, but hand it over either to the male heads of their households or to their husbands. Sometimes, they retain a portion and surrender the rest. Nevertheless, self-collection increases the chances of retaining control over wages.

### Decision-Making

The dominance of males in intra-household decisions in rural areas is unmistakable. As per the National Family Health Survey 2014, only 29 per cent of married women in rural areas take decisions about the purchase of daily household needs; 26 per cent decide about their personal healthcare; 7.6

per cent take decisions about purchasing major household items; and only 10 per cent decide on visits to relatives. If we compare this with observed changes in the case of NREGS women workers, the impact is remarkable. Now, 71 per cent retain portions of their income to spend as per choice. These relate to purchase of household items, healthcare, visits of relatives, etc. Moreover, the domain of their decision-making has also widened. The MGNREGA has broadened choices for rural women in two ways. First one, it has opened for them an entirely new avenue for paid employment. Second one, it has broadened their choices and capability as a result. An important fact is that a large number of women decided on their own to work under MGNREGA.

### Community-Level Effects

Women's participation in grass-roots community development processes in general, and decision-making in particular, remain weak in spite of their increased representation. One of the objectives of the MGNREGA is to strengthen community development processes through grass-roots Institutions and to make decision-making at that level more inclusive and participatory. Women's participation in procedural aspects under MGNREGA, say, selection and implementation of works, social audit, asset management, etc, remains low, even though their participation as workers has surpassed the benchmark of 33 per cent at the all-India level in all three years of implementation. The low procedural participation is a fact even in panchayats headed by women.

### 6. Difficulties and Obstacles for Women Workers in MGNREGA

However, MGNREGA benefits have not come easily – working hours for women have increased; their leisure time has vanished; and they have to bear with physical and emotional strains. Women in MGNREGA told that they get up quite early to fetch water, prepare food, and make arrangements for the children before going to the worksite. Even during the official lunch break, some of them return home to take care of the children and other family members. Wage payment is linked to a task-based SOR, and since the SOR is prepared based on the average output of a healthy, invariably male worker, women have to work very hard to earn minimum wages. This is much more difficult for old, physically weak, and lactating women.

Lactating women and women with young children work under emotional strain, as they remain separated from their children for long hours. Some adolescent girls are reported to have left their studies to avail of the job opportunity under MGNREGA. In the absence of (proper) crèche facilities, lactating women and women with young children leave their children at home while working at the worksite.

### 7. CONCLUSION

Empowerment of rural women has emerged as an unintended consequence of MGNREGA. Women have benefited more as workers than as a community. Women as individuals have gained because of their ability to earn independently, made possible due to the paid employment opportunity under MGNREGA. Independent and monetised earnings have increased consumption choices and reduced economic dependence. This has helped women in registering their tangible contribution to the household's income. The overall effects of these have translated into an increased say for women in household affairs. Women as a community, however, have been slow in realising the potential benefits of the scheme. Nevertheless, their increased presence in the Gram Sabha, the increasing number of women speaking out in the Gram Sabha, frequent interactions with government officials and PRI representatives, and access to banks and post offices are new developments.

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