

## **A study of correlation between MGNREGA and women empowerment**

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**ABSTRACT:** “National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) was enacted by legislation on August 25, 2005 and it was later renamed as the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) on 2nd October 2009. The MGNREGA has completed fifteen years since its beginning in India”. The target of the scheme is to improve livelihood security of the household in rural areas of the country by giving at least 100 days of guaranteed employment in every financial year of every household whose adult member volunteers to do the unskilled work. The rationale of the study is to examine the women empowerment, issues and challenges and impact on MGNREGA scheme in India since its inception. The concept of women’s empowerment has got wider recognition and acceptance in India. The study concludes that empowering women economically through MGNREGA scheme lays the basis for greater independence and also for their self-esteem. It has become a beacon of light in the empowerment of the rural women and contributed substantially in improving their lifestyle and economic conditions.

**Keywords:** MGNREGA, Rural Development, Women Employment, Issues, Challenges and Impact

### **INTRODUCTION**

The empowerment of rural women is vital for the development of the rural India. Women must empower themselves from bottom so that the government can empower themselves from above through their policies. In the other words “empowering women is a requirement for creating a prosperous nation, when women are empowered, societal stability is assured”. The MGNREGA has made positive impact on empowerment and employment of women since its inception. It aims at improving livelihood security by providing at least 100 days of guaranteed wage employment in a financial year to every rural household especially for women. Women participation has improved significantly and it has given them a sense of independence and security. Women play important role in the growth of the society as well as the country. It is very important to empower women. Empowerment of women refers to the influence of decision making on their own. The word “empower has become equal with the word women”. “The present review takes a

critical look at the selected studies such as: women empowerment, issues, challenges and unraveling various impacts of MGNREGA both at micro and macro level; beginning from its inception in 2005 to till now. The study focuses on performance of MGNREGA by relevant performance indicators, in various states in together micro and macro settings, underlining the common and unique issues emerged across these study sites related to the implementation of the MGNREGA and its functioning”.

Gender is the unavoidable push factor for growth and development of a poor nation like India. Though women have been contributing to economic productivity since the dawn of human history, their role has been visualized as an inactive one. Moreover it is observed that women often experience the situation of extreme poverty which is further aggravated by household and social discrimination. In spite of the various provisions in our constitution, the harsh reality is of deprivation and degradation for women. The old system of considering women as their property of men is still deep rooted as an instinct in the society. The changes have taken place in a significant portion of urban women, but their counterparts living in rural areas are only marginally affected by these changes. Women empowerment especially economic empowerment is the only way by which it can be possible to give equal status to women in a male dominated society. To be empowered, women should come forward and realize that they are not second class citizen of the society and at the same time also equally capable with men in all aspects of livelihood. Their empowerment has a huge potential in leading the country to an impressive development. The accomplishment of inclusive growth and overall development is highly dependent on the gender equality and prosperity of women in the rural society. The Eleventh Five Year Plan marks an important departure from the conventional way of looking at women in plan document. It tries to mark the centrality of women in all sectors. It clearly recognizes that women are not just equal citizens but agents of economic and social growth. A major scheme taken by the Government of India in the Eleventh Five Year Plan to raise the level of socio-economic status of the rural people under the Ministry of Rural Development is the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA). The implementation of MGNREGA has been positively affecting the rural life as well as empowering the women of India in various aspects.

### **MGNREGA AND EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN: AN ANALYSIS**

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) is a milestone legislation approved by the parliament of India after a successful struggle for employment guarantee legislation. MGNREGA as a flagship programme of Government

of India and it was notified on September 7, 2005 in 200 rural districts in its first phase of implementation which took an effect from February 2, 2006.

In 2007–08, an additional 130 rural districts were added under this scheme. The rest districts were notified later under MGNREGA with effect from April 1, 2008. After this period MGNREGA has covered the whole country with the exclusion of districts that have a hundred percent urban population. The main purpose of the Act is to enhance livelihood security of the rural household by providing at least 100 days of guaranteed wage employment in a financial year to every household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work. It was fundamentally a programme to provide fundamental income and employment opportunities to poor households in rural areas where opportunities of work did not exist or was very limited. The programme is dissimilar from earlier wage employment programmes in terms of its right based and demand driven approach to public work. This Act is the largest ever public programme that goes beyond poverty alleviation and recognizes employment as a legal right. There is much that the MGNREGA promises from the perspective of women empowerment as well. Although, the programme was never conceived as an exclusive programme for empowerment of women, some provisions in the act, the scale and flexibility of operation of the programme and the prevailing societal and economic realities of the country made it to come out as a programme with overtones for empowerment of poor rural women.

### **PROVISIONS OF THE ACT RELATED TO WOMEN EMPOWERMENT**

There are following provisions that are related to women empowerment in the act of MGNREGA.

- ❖ The Act of MGNREGA is inclusive in nature. It clearly says that a minimum of one-third of the beneficiaries of the scheme are to be women who have registered and demanded employment under the scheme.
- ❖ The MGNREGA in India is an example of significant safety nets for women, allowing childcare facilities to be provided on worksites and requiring provision of work close to participants' homes.
- ❖ The Act is also gender sensitive. It makes provision that there shall be no discrimination solely on the ground of gender in providing employment and equal wages between men and women have also been a major incentive for women.
- ❖ MGNREGA is seen to be a policy response of the Government of India to a situation of poverty and inequality.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE:**

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.

Ramesh & Kumar (2009) in their study also find that MGNREGA holds the powerful prospect of bringing major changes in the lives of women. MGNREGA is playing a substantial role in empowering women economically and laying the basis for greater independence and self-esteem.

Hazarika (2009) examined the impact of MGNREGA on gender empowerment in Morigaon and Bongaigaon district of Assam. The study concluded that almost 70 to 80 percent of sample workers had meaningful income other than unpaid family work during the pre-NREGA. Majority of the worker felt that they are now in better position to fulfill their own requirement without looking at others.

Khera and Nayak (2009) through their sample survey in six Hindi speaking states of North India focuses on impact of NREGA in the lives of women workers. Their study reveals that there is significant benefits reported by women include increased food security and better ability to avoid hazardous work.

Ashok Pankaj and Rukmini Tankha (2010) in their article 'Empowerment Effects of the NREGS on Women Workers: A Study in Four States' examines the empowerment effects of the NREGA on rural women in Bihar, Jharkhand, Rajasthan and Himachal Pradesh. In their research paper, they analyzed that women have gained more opportunity because of cash payment in hand through the scheme as a result they have benefitted through incomeconsumption effects, intra-household effects, and the enhancement of choice and capability than before.

Lavanya and Mahima (2013) dogged the scope of women empowerment through MGNREGA in Palakkad. The results of the study showed that MGNREGA had made the women beneficiaries economically independent and it was also concluded that the programme had laid a foundation for self-esteem and independence for women beneficiaries.

K. Borah & R. Bordoloi (2014) in their research paper, MGNREGA and its wages on Daily Waged Workers: A case study of Sonitpur District of Assam has discussed about the impact of MGNREGA on women empowerment and identified the obstacles in the

path of the implementation of the scheme. The paper discovered that female workers have significant benefits from MGNREGA and also identified some limitations in the implementations of the Act.

### **SIGNIFICANCE OF MGNREGA**

The government of India has frequently redesigned various employment generation programmes to meet the problem of poverty and unemployment from time to time. MGNREGA is the first programme in India that has promised to give the legal right to work. Though the main aim of the Act is to create employment in rural areas, but apart from this, there are several secondary benefits lies in the Act in the form of women empowerment. The women cannot take decision on their own without consulting their husbands or fathers neither do they have control over household productive activity such as farming. But these women usually contribute to farming activities such as harvesting and storage of farm produce which are controlled by the male members of the house. Therefore it is necessary to assess their opinion regarding the programme to get a clear picture about the success of MGNREGA.

### **OBJECTIVES OF MGNREGA**

- 1) To provide meaningful employment to rural people
- 2) To create assets and rural infrastructure
- 3) To provide women equal opportunities in employment

### **METHODOLOGY**

The study is based on secondary data. The sources of secondary data included various books, magazines, journals, internet and official website of MGNREGA.

### **RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS**

Women's participation in the scheme has enabled them to come out of their homes not only for the purpose of work but to visit panchayat offices and banks, which was absent in the earlier days. This has elevated the women in the society to a higher status of becoming income earning workers. Though there is absence of ample amount of studies on the issues of change in gender roles of the women employed on MGNREGS sites yet researches have noted on the increased confidence among women. Women remains confined to the household chores, occupation and in the formulation of social safeguard policy. There is a refusal to accept the dual role of women in the as care givers and income earners in the family as a collective concern of the state. Since women remain as

caregivers of the family, their comfort zone of work area is near their home with flexible timings etc. all of which are fulfilled by the MGNREGS. The central governments have taken more initiative, but still there are lot of issues and challenges there in working place among women who take part in the scheme. The government should create more awareness programme for rural women so that they could know the important provisions made for them in MGNREGA and payments be made through bank accounts only and on time in particular. It is evidenced from the literature review the research implications for the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme will definitely help policy makers, government, panchayats, rural women, and human resource practitioners to provide suitable suggestions and help practitioners and both the state and central government to look at the existing solutions for the problems in domain and adopt the methodologies for new sectors such as MGNREGA.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- ❖ Lack of awareness regarding the scheme has reduced its success rate. To create awareness among the women regarding MGNREGA, apart from brochures, newspapers, television, radio etc., proper campaigning through street drama, loudspeaker, writing on the wall about MGNREGA can be effective measures to increase awareness.
- ❖ To increase awareness, women need to be educated. More initiation and awareness should be given to the rural poor women about MGNREGA, that they should know the benefits of the scheme which will increase the women participation rate.
- ❖ Transparency and accountability ensure efficient utilisation of resources under the scheme. Therefore provision for regular social audit must be carried out by Gram Sabha which enable in bringing transparency and accountability.
- ❖ Government should give more importance to productive works based on local need which will cover more women under the umbrella of MGNREGA.
- ❖ The Govt. must take stringent and immediate steps to curb corruption in implementation of MGNREGA and be vigilant so that without delay wages reach to the women workers for whom it is meant for.

## **CONCLUSION**

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) is the largest poverty alleviation and well thought legislation in Indian history of social security programme since independence. By providing guaranteed wage employment to its registered workers, the Act has brought about a silent revolution in rural areas of the country. MGNREGA has come as a ray of hope for the rural households as the main focus of the scheme is to enhance livelihood security in the form of generation of guaranteed wage employment by creating village infrastructure. This act really leads to women empowerment through active participation of women in this scheme. MGNREGS was not envisaged as a women's empowerment programme, yet, it has brought economic and social empowerment of women. MGNREGS has certainly empowered women workers economically and socially, "Gender - Neutral Measures" such as increase in participation of women in planning and social audits of MGNREGA implementation of better worksite facilities, proper payment of wages, planning of works in phases and speedy grievance redressed will encourage women to demand more work under this scheme.

## **LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH**

The limitations for the study are that, it purely based on secondary data only. The reviews are taken from the various articles published in reputed national and international journals. The opinion given in the various articles may not help to take important managerial decision and also the studies are done only in few parts of the country and we cannot generalize the study. Further, the scope for future study is that the researcher may needs to conduct a dis-aggregate level of investigation to understand the impact, awareness, benefits, empowerment, socio-economic development financial inclusion of rural women, and also there is a necessity of comprehensive research in India to study the MGNREGA.

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