



## EMPOWERMENT OF RURAL POOR WOMEN IN ANDHRA PRADESH THROUGH MAHATMA GANDHI NATIONAL RURAL EMPLOYMENT GUARANTEE SCHEME (MGNREGS)

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### **Abstract**

*A process that aims to change the form and direction of systemic factors that marginalise women and other disadvantaged sectors in a particular setting is known as empowerment. When it comes to a country like India, gender is an unavoidable aspect in the growth and development of the country. Women make up a disproportionately large portion of India's population of people living in persistent poverty. A significant portion of Indian femininity continues to be subjected to hardship and attitudes of discrimination. If the nation is going to make any forward in any area of development, it is imperative that the immense potential of its female population be put to use. The process of empowering women is a lengthy and challenging one that needs to be promoted with the full support of the public. 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 are able to rise up and claim their rightful place in their own society. In spite of the challenges that have arisen during the process of putting the law into effect, significant benefits have already begun to accrue to women. These benefits include better access to local employment at wages at or above the minimum, as well as relatively decent and secure working conditions. The government has established a variety of programmes and plans in an effort to rescue women especially, rural poor women from the poverty and precariousness of their lives. The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), which was passed into law in 2005, is an example of such a scheme that is favourable toward women. The MGNREGS plays a vital role in addressing the requirements of women's involvement, both in a tactical and a strategic sense. It has become a guiding light in the process of empowering rural women and has made a significant contribution to the improvement of living and economic conditions by ensuring that male and female employees are paid the same amount of money for their labour. This report examines the current situation of women's engagement in MGNREGS programmes in the state of A.P. In addition, this article discusses the obstacles that prevent women from participating in MGNREGS programme and offers recommendations to improve the program's usefulness for female participants.*

**Keywords:** *Employment, MGNREGS, Rural Poor, Women, Wages, Workers.*

### **Introduction**

This article discusses the background information of MGNREGS, including its goals and objectives, institutional mechanism, total number of workers participated in MGNREGS work, particularly rural poor women with reference to the state of Andhra Pradesh, objectives of the study, research methodology including sample of the study, sources of data and methods of data collection, data processing and analysis, and other topics. India is mostly an agricultural economy, and its rural areas are home to 68.84 percent of the country's population (2011 census). In spite of the fact that India has been independent for more than 60 years, the level of poverty in the country's rural parts continues to worsen, and an increasing number of people are moving to the cities in search of better job opportunities. In



other words, even after 60 years of independence, we still have a population that is over forty percent of the total that is living below the poverty level.

Every Five Year Plan and many other poverty alleviation programmes for the rural poor have come up with various income production and Employment Guarantee Schemes, but their results seem to be unsatisfactory. This is true despite the fact that these schemes have been developed. In the past, public wage programmes attracted a greater number of female participants than was originally anticipated. Between the years 1970 and 2005, India carried out 17 important programmes that were mostly geared at employment or self-employment. By the year 2000, employment programmes such as the National Rural Employment Programme, the Rural Landless Employment Guarantee Programme, the Jawahar Rozgar Yojana, and the Employment Assurance Scheme had women accounting for a quarter of the total employment that had been produced. More women than male participated in programmes designed to generate self-employment opportunities, such as the Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP) and the Training for Rural Youth in Self-employment (TRYSEM).

### **National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme**

One of the most forward-thinking pieces of legislation that has been passed since the nation's independence is the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA). Its importance may be seen when seen from a number of different angles. To begin, it is a daring and one-of-a-kind venture in terms of the delivery of employment opportunities in rural areas of India and, indeed, the entire world. Second, it is the first time that the right to labour has been formally articulated as a legally enforceable entitlement. Gainful employment is a precondition for the realisation of other fundamental rights, such as the right to life, the right to food, and the right to education, in a nation in which the only economic asset that millions of people own is their ability to work. The NREGA, which has now been renamed as MGNREGS and is a component of the government's Common Minimum Programme, was initially implemented in February 2006 in the country's 200 most backward districts. During the course of 2007, the programme was expanded to include an additional 130 districts. Under the MGNREGS, the remaining districts have been informed, and the new regulations will go into force on April 1, 2008.

Therefore, MGNREGS extends its coverage to the entire nation except for those districts that are wholly comprised of an urban population. The Act guaranteed that the system would produce pay employment during the lean agricultural season by making a public works programme accessible on demand. It was anticipated that the scheme would provide wage jobs. It was believed that in addition to providing a floor for income, a stop would be put to migration caused by desperation, assets would be established for villages, and a process of sustainable development would be launched. The rural employment guarantee enshrines in law the right to work for a total of one hundred days, is driven by consumer demand, now has coverage over the entire country, has procedures for accountability, and was designed with some degree of gender sensitivity. Importantly, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGS) is a rights-based policy, in contrast to past employment systems.

Workers who are paid under the MGNREGS programme are entitled to a number of benefits, including employment on demand, minimum wages, gender parity in earnings, payment of payments within 15 days, and the supply of basic workplace amenities, amongst other benefits. A registered household is entitled to a statutory minimum of one hundred days of employment throughout the course of a calendar year. That the government is legally obligated to provide employment within 15 days of the application for work by a job seeker; that in the event of a delay or failure to provide employment to the job seeker, there is provision for unemployment allowance; and that the government is legally obligated to provide



employment within 15 days of the application for work by a job seeker. That any anyone interested in obtaining such a job should first register with the Gram Panchayat, which is the local administrative body, and then, following any necessary checks, the household should be given a job card.

### **Specific Characteristics of MGNREGS**

- The MGNREGS operates under the presumption that every adult in the country has a legal entitlement to a minimum standard of employment that pays the statutory minimum wage.
- The objective of the MGNREGS is to eliminate food insecurity, foster community empowerment in rural regions, and develop assets that are of practical value to those communities.
- Full participation of the Gram Panchayat in the selection and choosing of employment activities, as well as its planning and execution.
- Full openness and the performance of social audits.
- Registration of social audits and rural assessments.
- The registering of those who work in rural households and the distribution of employment cards.

### **Key Features of MGNREGS**

- Individuals not only receive a promise but also the right to find gainful job.
- There would be work available for each family for a total of one hundred days every year.
- It is proposed that the daily minimum salary not be less than Rs.60/-
- Additional compensation if the distance between the community and the job is greater than five kilometres.
- Unemployment compensation in the event that work is not made available.
- Financial support in the event that a worker at the work site is injured or dies.
- Facilities on-site such as potable water, first aid, shelter, and creches for the children of women who are doing manual labour.
- The growth of the village is centred.
- It is required that to invest in long-term investments.
- It is recommended to schedule an appointment with the Gram Rozgar Sevak.
- The people and the Gram Sabha are given some powers.

This program's primary objective is to reduce both unemployment and poverty in the target population. This plan offers employment to those with no experience or training at a rate of 60%, while only 40% go to those with experience or training. It is carried out with the assistance of NGOs, Zilla Parishads, and Gram Panchayats. This programme is made possible through funding from the government, with the Central Government contributing 90% and the State Government contributing 10% respectively. In order to accomplish the goals of the People's Participation Scheme, NGOs, Gram Panchayats, and Gram Sabhas as well as National and State Councils are suggested. Gram Sabha was also offered as a means of conducting social audits as part of the plan.

### **MGNREGA in India and in Andhra Pradesh**

There have been a total of 12,36,78,008 households that have been issued job cards, and out of those 12,36,78,008 households, 3,35,00,842 households have been provided with employment, as stated by the information that was provided by the Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India with regard to the status of MGNREGS across India for the year 2011-12. There were a total of 10089.52 lakhs of person days of employment made available, of which there were 2313.06 for Scheduled Castes, 1504.92 for Scheduled Tribes, 5484.03 for women, and 6271.51 for other people. Out of the total of 7165538



works that have been started, there have been 5,99,682 finished thus far. On February 2, 2006, the Honourable Prime Minister of India initiated the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) in Andhra Pradesh's Anantapur district for the first time. At the moment, the MGNREGS programme is being carried out in 22 districts (excluding Hyderabad).

According to the information that was provided by the Office of the Commissioner, Department of Rural Development, Government of Andhra Pradesh (2011-2012), a total of 2,91,28,697 individuals were registered in the MGNREGS across 22 districts of the state (excluding Hyderabad). Of these individuals, 1,49,53,158 are male and 1,41,75,539 are female. Hyderabad was excluded from these figures. In addition, 37,40,802 men and 46,20,375 women out of the total number of people who registered are employed accordingly. The district of Nalgonda has the largest proportion of all female workers in the state, followed by those of Warangal, Vizianagaram, Srikakulam, Kurnool, and Visakhapatnam. Kurnool has the lowest proportion of all female employees.

### **Women in MGNREGS**

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) did not initially intend to empower rural poor women, and empowering rural poor women is not one of its primary goals. Neither of these things happened. However, the Act was amended to include measures such as preference for women in the ratio of one-third of total employees, equal remuneration for men and women, and creches for the children of women workers, with the goal of guaranteeing that rural poor women profit from the plan in a particular way. Provisions such as work within a radius of five kilometres from the house, lack of supervisor and contractor, and flexibility in terms of picking time and months of working were not created specifically for women, but have nevertheless proved favourable for rural women's employment. In comparison to other job generating programmes, such as the Sampoorna Gramin Rojgar Yojana (SGRY) and the Maharashtra Employment Guarantee Scheme, the number of women participating in MGNREGS is significantly higher (MEGS). The participation of women in MGNREGS has increased significantly beyond the share of 33 percent, and this appears to have taken place of its own. Participation rates of women in MGNREGS programmes are not uniform throughout the states. Their involvement, measured in terms of person days, is quite high in states like Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka, Rajasthan, and Tripura, as well as in other states like Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand, Chattisgarh, West Bengal, Maharashtra, and Orissa.

### **Objectives of the Present Study**

- To understand the socio-economic and demographic profile of the women engaged in MGNREGS and their families in the study area.
- To study the benefits accruing from the assets created through MGNREGS scheme and its impact on the socio-economic empowerment of women.

### **Research Methodology**

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

### **MGNREGA Act and Women**

On August 25, 2005, legislation known as the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) was approved. And in 2009, it was officially renamed as the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA). The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Work Guarantee Act



(MGNREGA) ensures that every rural family would get a legally binding guarantee of at least one hundred days of pay employment throughout each fiscal year. Guaranteeing employment up to 100 days a year to poor rural households on demand, though women employment was not the soul objectives of the scheme; however, with its developmental goals, it comes automatically. The Act became effective at the state level in 200 districts, and it guaranteed employment up to 100 days a year to poor rural households. It has been envisioned that the MGNREGS will be a gender sensitive programme due to its provision of a guarantee of 100 days of unskilled labour for each household. The gender neutrality of this scheme may be attributed to the design aspects of this scheme. The legislative minimum criterion of 33 percent for the involvement of women in the workforce has been exceeded, and as a result, the justice and rights of women have been maintained. The Act grants women certain privileges in order to make it easier for them to take part in all aspects of society. These are the following:

- 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.nic.in)

### **MGNREGS in Andhra Pradesh**

MGNREGS was initially implemented in Andhra Pradesh in 2006 in the state's 200 poorest districts, then in 2008 it was expanded to cover all 615 rural districts. Participants were from the most underprivileged social and economic backgrounds. 45% of them were members of a Scheduled Caste, 5% belonged to a Scheduled Tribe, and 51% were female. As of March 2010, 4.1 million works have been started in the state of Andhra Pradesh, with 45 percent of those works having been finished (Reddy et al. 2010). According to the findings of Reddy et al. (2010), all 481 households in the Andhra Pradesh component of their sample possessed job cards (the study was also carried out in Bihar and Rajasthan). Seventyone percent of people asked for employment, and more than ninety percent of those people obtained job within the first 15 days. The typical household worked 74 days per year, while more than half of all families reported working between 75 and 100 days. According to the findings of Reddy et al. (2010), payments were made on time and were much greater than agricultural earnings.

Furthermore, the researchers estimate that these payments accounted for 9.6% of household income. The number of people migrating due to distress had decreased; nonetheless, migration of men in search of greater salaries persisted. A history of MGNREGS projects being delayed while awaiting approval or investigation of an irregularity, or postponed to accommodate peak agricultural periods after requests from landowners, contributed in part to this perception that MGNREGS work is sporadic and of short duration. This perception was formed as a result of a history in which MGNREGS projects were delayed while awaiting approval or investigation of an irregularity. Because of the high degree of population knowledge of the scheme, relative to other States such as Jharkhand, and technical advancements,



several studies have put Andhra Pradesh in the forefront in implementing MGNREGS. Examples of such studies include CBGA (2006) in Drèze (2006). The grief shown by the people of Andhra Pradesh when the scheme's continuation was endangered by the passing of the Chief Minister who had initiated it was proof of the program's widespread appeal within that state. Only 3% of participants in MGNREGS programmes in Andhra Pradesh are considered to have incomes that are higher than the federal poverty level. This indicates that the programme is doing a good job of targeting those with lower incomes (Reddy et al. 2010).

However, Reddy and colleagues warn that these very characteristics of the participating households, that is, the fact that they are predominantly poor and marginalised, may also create the conditions for misuse and neglect of processes, and therefore call for effective institutional and governance structures. They remark that despite the political leadership's commitment, the local panchayats are weak, which inhibits their capacity to organise people in the planning and monitoring of the work. This is the case despite the fact that the political leadership is committed (a core function identified by Moore and Jadhav 2006). Additionally, Reddy et al. (2010) point out a few caution indicators in connection to the scheme's potential in the future. There is a lack of local technical experience, which impacts the quality of work, and it is difficult to track the awarding of unemployment assistance. The rules and record-keeping requirements are seen as being demanding. However, the fact that these organisations are frequently caste- or gender-based generates dynamics that have the potential to be discriminatory. For instance, hazardous labour may be assigned to Scheduled Caste groups, and single women may have a difficult time finding a group to join (Sai Nath 2007; Young Lives data in Poompuhar echo this finding). Finally, there is some dissatisfaction that the advantages flow to landholders rather than the landless in Andhra Pradesh because land development accounts for 45 percent of the state's total work. This percentage contributes to the state's high unemployment rate.

### **Role of MGNREGS in Women Empowerment**

The MGNREGS plays a vital role in addressing the demands of women's involvement, both in a tactical and a strategic sense. It has become a guiding light in the process of empowering rural women and has made a significant contribution to the improvement of living and economic conditions by ensuring that male and female employees are paid the same amount of money for their labour. The following parameters can be used to investigate the effect that MGNREGS has had on the level of involvement of women:

### **Effects on Income and Consumption**

We refer to a rise in the income of working women as having income-consumption consequences, which means that as a result of this increase, working women have more control over what they put in their shopping baskets. Women are given the opportunity to become financially independent through the MGNREGS programme, which enables them to do so while also providing for some of their personal requirements.

### **Intra-Household Effects**

Women undertake a substantial amount of unpaid labour, which means that although they play a big role in the process of accumulating financial resources for their family, this aspect of their contribution is often overlooked. It has been observed that male in rural regions have a greater influence on the decisions that take place inside the households. MGNREGS has had a considerable influence in transforming certain unpaid employment into paid job and expanding the scope of women's decision-making roles in topics pertaining to the home. In spite of the 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment Act, only a



small number of women participate in the decision-making process at the municipal and district levels of government. This has a negative impact on the community. However, the engagement of women has grown once the MGNREGS programme was put into place in many different places. The meeting that was organised in connection with MGNREGS and Gram Sabah was attended by a significant number of female workers. One of the many significant accomplishments of this Act is the empowering of women on the level of their communities.

The nature of the work, which does not require skilled workers, the limited hours of work, the availability of work locally, a reduction in the migration of male members, a substantial jump in the wage rate, etc., are some of the factors that encourage the participation of women workers in this scheme. Other factors that encourage their participation include: The level of participation of women varies greatly from one region of the country to another. Person days are the unit of measurement for women's involvement in the MGNREGS. There has been a notable rise in the percentage of participating women at the national level, which reached 53.01 percent in 2012-13. The highest levels of voter turnout were recorded in the state of Kerala (92.66 percent), followed by Pondicherry (83.96 percent). In spite of the fact that the percentage of women participating in the workforce under the Scheme is higher than the statutory minimum requirement of 33 percent, the Act requires that preference be given to women. When it comes to the actual execution of the programme, it stipulates that at least one-third of the beneficiaries must be females who have registered and asked for work. However, in a perfect world, there would be no difference between the sexes in terms of involvement in MGNREGS. This indicates that the percentage of women who participate and who put in person-days of labour should be approximately equal to one another. There are a few problems that make it difficult for women in the state to participate in the MGNREGS.

### **Problems in the Way of Women's Participation in MGNREGS**

Corruption is the primary element that either directly or indirectly hinders the very spirit and efficacy of MGNREGS. Corruption may take many forms.

Societal attitude and Discrimination - In many rural regions of India, there are ingrained social conventions and stigmas that discriminate against women who work outside the house. These attitudes are perpetuated by discriminatory social attitudes. It was a popular misconception that women "cannot" work on construction sites, that they are "too weak," and that it is "socially undesirable" for them to engage in this line of labour.

In the event that there are more than five children under the age of six present at a workplace, the Act mandates that a female employee be selected to take care of the children in the event that there are more than five of them. However, the failure to put these regulations into effect has a negative effect on the number of working women.

Low wages and inconsistent payment are common problems for employees in the many places. In many states, the minimum wage is not paid. The situation is made much more challenging for working women when wage payments are delayed. In addition, every person who has an employment card is required to have a bank account at one of the local financial institutions, which is a process that is not simple for rural women to complete. This almost always results in complexities and delays in the process of calculating and paying wages.



**Low levels of Awareness:** In many states, the low levels of awareness among rural women on the process and rights of the programme contribute to their relatively low levels of involvement.

The majority of research indicates that the nature of employment is not good for rural women employees. This is something that should be taken into consideration. The majority of the work on the projects that required the application of physical force was assigned to male workers rather than women workers.

**Inadequate Workplace Facilities:** MGNREGS money have been allotted for the provision of clean drinking water, a place to relax, and first aid services. However, the majority of research found that, with the exception of facilities to provide drinking water, all other types of infrastructure were largely non-existent.

### **Suggestions for Making MGNREGS More Effective for Rural Poor Women**

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

- The Gram Panchayat is tasked with raising MGNREGS-related consciousness among the populace of the area. It is important to educate women on their legal rights and responsibilities, as well as the MGNREGS's laws and operating processes.
- Non-governmental organisations have only participated in MGNREGS to a very little extent. The education and empowerment of women should be driven primarily by non-governmental organisations and other Self-Help Groups. This aspect of the rights-based MGNREGS programme has to be improved in order to achieve greater levels of success and significance.
- When it comes to the planning, carrying out, and assessing of the MGNREGS programmes, the participation of women should be prioritised. In addition, from the level of policy to the level of execution, there should be the engagement of Anganwadi workers, Health workers, Self-Help Groups, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), village committees, cooperatives, and other local authorities.
- Since, only male members receive work cards, women are forced to rely on them. Thus, women should also be given access to job cards. It is necessary for each individual employee to have their own job card.
- There should be the option for women to have joint bank accounts, which would make it simpler for them to access their funds when necessary. This will decrease their reliance on male workers to withdraw money from bank accounts.
- Some of the projects have to be rethought in order to make it simpler for women to complete them. This is due to the fact that women should not undertake every project. In order for women to be able to participate in rural literacy and health missions as well as infrastructure initiatives in the villages, the MGNREGS should encourage semi-skilled and skilled vocations such as social services and rural health.
- In each home, there should be a specific provision made for individuals who fall into certain categories, such as widows, women with disabilities, single women, and women who have been abandoned.
- The programme design contains a proposal that mobile creches need to be provided at workplaces in order to meet the requirements of the programme. The programme ought to raise the standard of the day-care offered.





- Extending reservation privileges to Dalits, with special attention paid to Dalit women.
- Lastly, it should be emphasised that effective information flows and distribution regarding the many aspects of this provision of the Scheme through all different kinds of media and channels in the rural regions are necessary. This point may be made by mentioning that it may be emphasised here.

## Conclusions

The passage of MGNREGA into law and its subsequent application in the year 2005 represent the nation's most significant step toward improving the lives of the country's less fortunate citizens. The Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD), which is part of the Indian government, is in charge of implementing this initiative, which has a direct impact on the lives of the less fortunate in order to encourage inclusive growth. It ensures that low-income households living in rural parts of the country will have a stable means of subsistence. The provision of 100 days of paid employment for those who are looking for it and the requirement that one-third of those who are employed should be women are the two most essential norms of this Act. The other norms of this Act may be found here.

The primary objective of the MGNREGS is not to improve the status of low-income women but rather to provide chances for low-income households to improve their standard of living. However, one of the unintended consequences of this policy might be the empowerment of low-income women. This would be accomplished by providing women with the same number of workdays and earnings as male workers. Because the wages are paid directly to the workers through banks and post offices, the female workers are more likely to not only have control over their earnings but also an increased say in the decision making process within their households. This is because the wages are paid directly to the workers. If the things that have been said up to this point are true at least to some degree, then it is reasonable to believe that women will at least partially acquire some kind of empowerment.

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