



## MAHATMA GANDHI NATIONAL RURAL EMPLOYMENT GUARANTEE ACT & ENVIRONMENT

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### **Abstract**

Women rely heavily on natural common property resources like water, fuel etc, and since Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act plays an important role in natural resource regeneration, the scheme seems to be strengthening livelihood security for women. Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act is recognized as an ecological Act that aims to create sustainable livelihoods through regeneration of the natural resource base of rural India. In the process it provides resilience and adaptation to climate change. Evidence of the suitability of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee works in terms of their usefulness for environment and ecology is emerging. Environmental services have an impact at the local level on natural resources, water availability, etc. In the long run these may have regional implications for climate change mitigation and carbon sequestration as well.

**Key words; MGNREGA, Environment, Livelihood, Rural Development.**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Factors such as low crop and livestock productivity, water shortage for drinking and irrigation and scarcity of fuel wood and grass lead to rural poverty. This can be linked to degradation of natural resources such as soil, water resources, grazing lands and forests. Soil erosion and loss of soil fertility, silting of water bodies and low water percolation rates, excessive groundwater extraction, over grazing, and over harvesting of forests are all factors that result in low crop and livestock production and water scarcity. The only way to increase and sustain crop and livestock production and water supply (for drinking and irrigation) is through conserving natural resources and enhancing their capacity to provide higher levels of environmental services.

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Dreze (2007), observed that under MGNREGS, the grama panchayath needs to plan ahead for works to ensure that the groups of households have applied for work and are provided work in the grama panchayath within 15 days of receiving the application of work. In the scheme importance is given to unskilled manual labour which can be focused on building roads, water conservations, plantations, and afforestation, flood protection, land development, drought proofing, minor irrigation, horticulture and rural connectivity.

Pancayati Raj updates, (2008), the study in Andra Pradesh exposed that the female participation at 52% is higher than that of their male counterparts. MGNREGA has been playing a vital role and makes a mark in the lives of many rural poor nationally in general, and particularly in AP. Multi-stage systematic random technique is adopted for the study. The study first selected 3 divisions from the district, viz, Nagarkurnool, Wanaparthy and Narayanapet. From each division one Block/ Mandal was randomly selected. Logistic regression model is applied to determine the likelihood of being migrant households by examining their basic amenities, fixed resources, participation in labour and credit market. Binary logistic regression model constructed by taking some of the vital characteristics of households such as, MGNREGA status, caste, land ownership and occupation with regard to migration.

Katharina Raabe et al. (2012), evaluated certain challenges in the MGNREG scheme i.e., elite capture in the definition of works, exclusion in issuing job cards, misappropriation of funds, and lack of capacity due to staff shortages and lack of training. Process Influence Mapping can help to better understand the intricacies of implementing complex large-scale programs such as the MGNREGA and to assess possible solutions.



Richard Mahapatra(2010), in his article “How women seized NREGA” reported that the unique features of a public wage programme turned it into a magnet for women. In the study, women availed more than half of employment opportunities are created under MGNREGA during the first half of the financial year. It is a remarkable change that only 28.7 per cent women form a part of the country’s workforce, according to the NSS data of 2004-05, women take up this opportunity as economic freedom. Women participation is high and effective campaigns contributed more in Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Rajasthan. In Rajasthan the campaigns for social audit, in which women play a vital role, has contributed to enhance awareness and increased participation under MGNREGA. In Kerala, management of worksites and other logistics for implementation is placed in the hands of women self help group under the poverty eradication mission, Kudumbasree. He also reported that the 50 per cent of women have represented in panchayat’s compulsorily and have a vital role in implementing the scheme and also prepare village development plan. The panchayat’s members have a dominant role in supervising the work-site; it will be a win-win situation for the scheme as well as villages.

### **ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES BY MGNREGA**

The activities under the NREGA are largely linked to water, soil and land, which are the key natural resources determining agricultural and livestock production. They can have a positive or negative influence on these natural resources, affecting their ability to provide environmental services. Environmental services include recharging groundwater, increasing rain water percolation, conserving water, increasing the area irrigated, reducing soil erosion, increasing soil fertility, conserving biodiversity, reclaiming degraded crop and grazing lands, enhancing the supply of leaf manure, fuel wood and non-wood forest produce, and carbon sequestration. The goal of NREGA activities has to be conserving natural resources and enhancing environmental services to sustain food and livestock production, increasing the supply of fresh water for drinking, and increasing grass and forest product production. The benefits accruing from the activities implemented under the NREGA can be described as “services provided”. The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MEA 2005) considers humans an integral component of the natural ecosystem unlike classical approaches, which differentiate humans as non-natural. The approach also addresses the sustainability of resources and livelihoods by considering human wellbeing a parallel theme to the functioning of the natural ecosystem. The impact of NREGA activities may be manifested immediately or over the long term. Some of the effects can be directly measured, as with a quantifiable increase in the area irrigated, the storage capacity of a water body, the area afforested, the production of food, fodder or grass and other parameters linked to the functioning of the ecosystems. However, the linkages between various resources and processes in village ecosystems are highly complex and changes or interventions are likely to have broader and wider implications, some in the long term. Identifying the potential environmental services that result from NREGA activities is crucial to understanding and quantifying their impact. As the MEA (2005) points out, the linkages and the trade-offs of interventions or changes in an ecosystem are very complex. In this study, the key environmental services of NREGA activities are measured. The definition of “services” in this context has been expanded to incorporate measurable physical, biological and socio-economic indicators, including livelihood indicators. Global concerns related to food security, water security, adaptation to climate change and variability, and sustainable livelihoods have been given adequate importance. Indicators have been developed for assessing and quantifying the effect NREGA activities have on delivering these services. Services having direct implications within the ecological boundary of the activity and related components of the system are considered local. Village or micro-watershed boundaries have been considered local. Global services include those that have implications beyond regional boundaries (for example, climate change mitigation through carbon sequestration). These services are classified as provisional and regulatory.

### **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

1. To know about the role of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) in environmental activities.
2. To understand the women participation in MGNREG programme.
3. To identify the role of women in environmental protection.



## METHODOLOGY

The sample for the purpose of the study has been collected from the 80 respondents of MGNREGP workers in Thrissur District. Data collected through structured questionnaire and collected data has been presented through different tables. Both primary and secondary data are collected for this study. Primary data are collected from 80 respondents, who belong to different age, sex and income group. Among them 76 are female respondents and 4 are male.

**Table-1 Employment before Joining MGNREG**

Mode.of Activity	No.of Respondents	%
MAT WEAVING	21	26.25
HAND LOOM	2	2.5
ANIMAL HUSBANDRY	3	3.75
AGRICULTURE	2	2.5
NO.EMPLOYMNT	52	65

Source: Primary Data.

The above table shows that participation level of workers before joining MGNREG. 65% of the workers have no income earning activity 26.25% have mat weaving and 2.5% have hand loom work and 3.75% have animal husbandry.

**Table-2 MGNREG Activities And Key Environmental Services**

MGNREG Activities	Local Environmental Services	Regional & Global Environmental Services
Water conservation and harvesting.	Irrigation, drinking water and improving soil quality.	Water conservation
Irrigation provisioning and improvement	Improved agriculture and livelihoods, increased crop production	Reduce the need for methane producing large dams.
Renovation	Improved storage capacity. Ground water recharge.	Water conservation
Land development	Agriculture and livelihood improvement.	Environment protection
Drought Proofing	Protection and soil quality, biomass production and local climate regulation.	Water conservation, carbon sequestration, biodiversity conservation
Flood control	Better drainage, higher land productivity and flood control.	Water conservation

Source: R.Tiwari, H.I.Somashekhar. V.R.Ramakrishna. I.K.Murthy, A.Sengupta, R.Kattumuri, N.H.Ravindranath, *Economic Weekly*, vol.66, no.20, 14 May 2011.

## WORKS/ACTIVITIES

The MGNREGA aims to achieve twin objectives of rural development and employment. The act stipulates that work must be targeted toward a set of specific rural development activities, such as water conservation and harvesting, afforestation, rural connectivity, flood control and protection such as construction and repair of embankments, etc. Digging of new tanks/ponds, percolation tanks and construction of small check dams are also given importance. Work includes land leveling, tree plantation, etc.



**Table-3 Work Category of Women Employment (F.Y2012-13)**

Work Category	Women	Men	Workers Involved (Out Of 80)	%
Land Development	65	3	68	85
Pond Cleaning	75	4	79	98.75
Flood Control	76	4	80	100
Canal works	65	4	69	86.25
Agriculture	75	2	77	96.25
Plantation	70	3	73	91.25

Source: Primary Data.

From the above table, 100 percent of respondents are engaged in flood control activities during the year 2012-13, 98.75 percent are participating in pond cleaning i.e. renovation of existing water bodies, 96.25 percent are engaged in agricultural activities, and 86.25 percent are participated in cleaning the canals in the study area.

**Table-4 Works -Category of Women Employment F.Y 2012-13**

Type of Works	Total No.Ofworks Completed	On Going Works( In Lakhs)	%Of Total Works
Water Conservation And Water Related Works	40.9	74.7	51
Works On Land Of Sc/St Bpl Etc	13.0	19.9	14
Land Development (Contour Bunds, Field Bundetc.)	13.9	18.8	13
Rural Connectivity (Village Road)	16.0	28.3	19
Others ( Bharat Nirman Kendras)	2.8	4.6	3
Total Works	86.6	146.3	100

Source: Mahatma Gandhi National RuralEmployment guarantee Act official website,<http://www.mgnrega.nic.in>.

### WORKS AND THEIR EXECUTION

The intention of the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) is to provide a basic employment guarantee in rural areas. The Act indicates the kinds of works that may be taken up for this purpose. As per Schedule I of the Act, 28 NREGA Guide lines the focus of the Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (REGS) shall be on the following work:

- a) Water conservation and water harvesting.
- b) Drought proofing, including afforestation and tree plantation.
- c) Irrigation canals, including micro and minor irrigation works.
- d) Provision of irrigation facility to land owned by households belonging to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, or to land of the beneficiaries of land reforms, or to land of the beneficiaries under the Indira Awas Yojana;(IAY).
- e) Renovation of traditional water bodies, including de-silting of tanks.
- f) Land development;
- g) flood-control and protection works, including drainage in waterlogged areas;
- h) Rural connectivity to provide all-weather access. The construction of roads may include culverts where necessary, and within the village area may be taken up along with drains.
- i) Any other work that may be notified by the Central Government in consultation with the State Government.



## CONCLUSION

MGNREGA allows for asset creation, such as water conservation works, provision of irrigation facilities, land development, etc. on public land. The Act also provides for taking up of works such as irrigation, horticulture and land development, on private land belonging to the SCs, STs, or families below poverty line or to the beneficiaries of land reforms or IAY of the Govt. or the small or marginal farmers etc. MGNREGA works have been described as 'Green' and 'Decent'. The scheme creates decent working conditions by ensuring workers rights and legal entitlements, providing social protection and employment and environmentally sustainable works that regenerate the ecosystem and protect bio-diversity. MGNREGA creates green jobs, Green jobs are decent jobs which ensuring productive and secure employment, social protection, rights, participation in planning and contribute to environmental sustainability which protect the ecosystem, reliance on renewable source of energy and are directly related to climate change mitigation and adaptation activities. Decent work also incorporates working with dignity and without harassment at workplace.

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