

## **MGNREGP Impact on Empowerment of Rural Women**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The Indian economy has failed to generate adequate 'decent' employment for the labour force. Public works programs, aimed at building a strong social safety net through redistribution of wealth and generation of meaningful employment, are becoming increasingly popular in developing countries. The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGP), enacted in August 2005, is one such program in India. This paper assesses impacts of NREGP on public works participation, labor force participation, and real wages of casual workers. we find that there is a strong gender dimension to the impacts of NREGA: it has a positive impact on the labor force participation and this impact is mainly driven by a much sharper impact on female labor force participation. Similarly, NREGA has a significant positive impact on the wages of female casual workers - real wages of female casual workers increased in NREGP.

**Key Words :** Economy, Employment, Infrastructure, Alleviation, Participation

### **INTRODUCTION**

The Indian economy has failed to generate adequate 'decent' employment for the labour force. The average growth rate of the economy in the last decade has been between seven and eight per cent per annum. Growth rate has been reaching almost nine per cent during the past four years. Against this, the growth rate of the employment is very low and it has declined from 2.01 per cent over 1983-1993/4 to 1.84 per cent (1.45 % in rural areas and 3.14 urban areas) over the following decade. This rate is much below the annual growth rate of the labour force (around three per cent, which is higher than the rate of population growth).

The anticipation about India's annual economic growth is now for real and is evident all over the world. Growth rates went up, doubling GDP in a six-year period. Increase income and salaries and suddenly nation had become more than 300 million middle class consumers, becoming the most inviting markets for the world's manufacturers and service providers. Economic reforms began in the mid eighties. Due to that automobile sector,

Japanese firms came to India, and Suzuki, providers the employment generation transformed the middle class Indians' tastes and preferences will be changed so far.

The growth has been attributed to factors on economic reforms, young population that India, currently enjoys of its demographic transition and a large pool of human capital, young talented and well-educated work force advantages for foster growth of India. Knowledge-based industry, especially information technology, biotechnology and pharmaceuticals also give the boost to the nation's growth. All to gather resurgence in exports have made India one of the fastest growing countries in the world. Opening of the economy, scope for Indian enterprises, access to 'modern' technology, especially, information technology have made India a sought-after destination for the foreign investments. Despite all the problems and struggles on the political and economic front, Indian economy recorded that, an impressive growth rate of 5.7 per cent per annum on an average for the more than two decades. In the post-reform period, the economy has shown a secular growth path of more than 6 per

cent per annum on an average, with growth rate per annum in the last five years being upwards of 7.5 per cent. For the fiscal year 2006 – '07, GDP growth per annum in the country is expected to be more than 8 per cent. As Goldman Sachs puts it, "India has the potential to deliver the fastest growth over the next 50 years...."

### **Characterizes rural India:**

Rural India has centre-stage of growth in the feature. However it continues to suffer from the lack of infrastructure. Caught in the vicious poverty-cycle, rural India finds it difficult to undertake activities that can accelerate economic growth. In the absence of infrastructure facilities, there is a lack of market access to rural population, slow growth in the organized retail and thus, limited livelihood opportunities. Absence of infrastructure also makes rural markets fragmented which are characterized by high costs of transactions and high information asymmetry. Two-thirds of India's consumers live in rural areas and a little more than half of the national income is generated from rural India.. In more than 630000 villages, there are almost twice as many 'lower middle income' households in rural areas as in the urban areas. The size of the rural market therefore will soon be more than double the size of the urban market.

### **The Rural Agricultural Sector:**

Indian reforms concentrated on industry and service, while the sectors that has left untouched are agriculture, land, labour and retail. Leading the pack of problems that has left unsolved, ironically, the sector where a bulk of population resides. The rural sector in India got completely sidelined by the reform process. In India, rural is synonymous with agricultural and therefore, with the exception of a few issues that are non agricultural. In the twentieth century agricultural growth stagnated as a result of a series of droughts and famine. The green revolution in the 1960 raised productivity levels rather on the one hand, but harshly criticized for widening income disparities between rich and poor farmers. The late 1960 and early 1970s witnessed a modernized agriculture with new equipment and farm technology. New fertilizers led to high yielding varieties, tractors replaced cattle and the immediate result was that the production of crops such as wheat and rice increased remarkably. But growth was far from uniform.

In this context, it is important to take a look at some of the critical areas of concern. Firstly, it is important to

focus on the skewed nature of agriculture production in India. Despite of repeated declarations of intent on the importance of crop diversification, agriculture sector is heavily dependent on food grains. The relationship between food grains and food security is so strong that effectively nothing is done towards diversification. As food crops suffer because of monsoons and prices. On the other hand, stocks pile up and lead to some embarrassment for the policy maker. Productivity levels continue to stagnate putting greater pressure on land and other resources. Intensive agriculture gives way to an extensive route and yields do not show any growth.

Secondly, there is a need to look at the rural employment scenario, an issue much neglected so far. The pattern of employment has emerged indeed a cause of concern. In 1954, 70 per cent of the total work force was engaged in agriculture and has dropped to 54 per cent. The proportion of laborers increased for 20 to 27 per cent and cultivators declined from 50 to 32 per cent. However these figures false in comparison to the developed world. In Australia, 6 per cent and in France, only 7 per cent of the work force is engaged in agriculture. In the US and UK the percentage are 3 and 2 per cent respectively. Even in Egypt, the work force in agriculture is less than 35 per cent.

Third is the disturbing trend in exports. Indian Agriculture, according to Tenth Plan estimates, contributes only 14.7% to total export earnings. What is worst that almost all of this is due to export of primary goods and very little produce has processed. Even within this, there is a predominance of just five or six crops namely, tea, rice, oilseeds, tobacco, spices and sugar. If overall export growth rate should be 6 per cent taken to the target of 25 per cent a year, it is imperative that agriculture exports are increased and that processed food replaces primary farm commodities in the export basket.

### **Wage employment programmers in India:**

Direct provision of wage employment is obviously an attractive instrument for poverty alleviation, wherever the poor depend heavily upon wage employment for their income and also suffer from considerable unemployment and underemployment. Wage employment programmers have sought to achieve multiple objectives. They do not only provide employment opportunities during lean agricultural seasons but also in times of floods, droughts and others natural calamities. Also put an upward pressure on market wage rates by attracting people to public work

programmes, thereby reducing labour supply and pushing up demand for labour. While public work programmes provide employment in times of distress have a long history. Major thrust to wage employment programmes in the country was provided only after the attainment of self-sufficiency in food grains.

Unemployment breeds poverty. Poverty is one of the most critical issues in the country. It is conventionally measured by the income and expenditure level that can sustain minimum standard of living. But measuring standard of living is a tricky issue. Income or consumption levels and access to minimum level of social amenities are the important aspects of living standards. The factors giving supplementary information of poverty, life expectancy, infant mortality rate, nutrition, literacy, access to primary schools, health clinic and drinking water etc., Absolute poverty views the poverty line as the expenditure required to purchase subsistence bundle of items by the individuals (Gogana, 2007).

Ramesh and Kumar (2009) in their study also found that MGNREGP holds the powerful prospect of bringing major changes in the lives of women. MGNREGP is playing a substantial role in empowering women economically and laying the basis for greater independence and self-esteem. It has become a beacon 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 and increasing the minimum wages.

Khera and Nayak (2009) have identified the impact of the MGNREGP in the lives of women workers. This study reveals that there is significant benefits reported by women include increased food security and better ability to avoid hazardous work. The study found that NREGFP work has allowed women to spend money on their own needs, while, earlier, they might not have been at liberty to do so. Some women reported that working with private landlords and contractors is often replete with an underlying threat or possibility of sexual abuse and exploitation. But this programme has brought mental satisfaction.

Sudarshan (2009) reviews the place of MGNREGP within the border of social protection and gender concern. Since the early 1990s public policy and public works in India tried to include women as a percentage of beneficiaries and have not paid much attention to gender sensitive design. But MGNREGP in its design has attempted some gender sensitivity. The minimum wages

paid under the MGNREGP is far greater than agricultural wages. He reveals that MGNREGP not only stimulate local development but also overcome the women's weak position in labour market.

Verma (2009). The attack on poverty has been sharpened and strengthened by restricting and revamping income and the levels of living of the poorest of the poor. The war on poverty is our priority our goal is to remove poverty and create fuller employment. The national employment Guarantee act (NREGA) is poised to bring cheer to the dives of millions of rural poor with the inclusion of new works under its ambit and the convergence with other flagship programmes. Efforts are on to bring in more transparency and accountability in it with district ombudsmen being envisaged to ensure that the benefits reach out to the poor and the needy villagers Property ownership and access to paid employment opportunity outside the household, apart from other factors, increases the bargaining capacity of a woman by giving her a better fallback position.

Since, in India and elsewhere, male family members have greater control over property and other economic resources, including access to paid employment, they enjoy better bargaining positions inside their households. Moser (1993) outside their households increases their own self-perception of their contribution to the household, and this has similar effects. The paid employment opportunity under NREGS holds similar prospects for rural women in India, who have little control over economic resources, and face social and other disadvantages in accessing paid employment outside the home.

Pankaj and Rukmini (2010) studied on empowerment effects of the NREGS on women workers: in four states viz., Bihar, Jharkhand, Rajasthan and Himachal Pradesh. They selected the field survey for data collection. From the study it was found that 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 NREGS.

Panda and Umdor (2011) Low level of awareness in many states women participation is low because of low level of awareness about the process and entitled of the programmes. Eg cumulative person days created in Assam for women have been only 24.85 per cent and in out of sample districts only. 17 per cent in 2010-11. Many of the male folks have withdrawn from Agricultural

activities and joined works in MGNREGS. This vacated space in Agriculture has been occupied by the women Folk.

Lavanya and Mahima (2013) determined 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.

Borah and Bordoloi (2014) they have reported in the paper on 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 revealed that female workers have significant benefits from MGNREGA and also identified some limitations in the implementations of the Act

Pandey and Ahmedwani (2014) study focused on women participation in MGNREGA in Kashmir. The study shows that role of women in MGNREGA is a distant dream of achieving for it was meant and finds that Kashmir has the lowest percentage of women participation.

Das and Darshana (2016) in the paper titled "Role of MGNREGA in Rural Employment: A Study of Barpeta District of Assam, India" states that India is an agrarian country and most of the population of the country belongs to rural population. The policy makers has implemented various schemes such as IRDP, NREP, RLEGP etc. but still the rural population was facing with the unemployment and acute poverty. To remove this problem govt. came up with the MGNREGA initiative. The study emphasizes on the object and implications of MGNREGA Act in rural areas and on the natural resources. It also focuses on the women participation in the scheme and role of MGNREGA in the sustainable rural development. It has been suggested that government should adopt more steps for its proper implementation.

Timeline of wage employment programmes:

In 1980 National Rural Employment Programm has started.

In 1983 Rural Landless Employment Guarantee Programme has started: this has added the Rural Landless Employment Guarantee Programme. This is the first initiatives towards central government sponsored schemes for wage employment.

In 1989 Jawahar Rozgar Yojana has started: NREP and RLEGP have merged in April 1989 under the Jawahar Rozgar Yojana (JRY). JRY has meant to generate meaningful employment opportunities for the unemployed and underemployed in rural areas .

In 1993 Employment Assurance Scheme has started. Employment Assurance Scheme (EAS) was launched on 2 October 1993 covering 1,778 drought – prone, desert and tribal and hill area blocks. It has extended to all the blocks in 1997-98. The EAS was designed to provide employment in the form of manual work in the lean agriculture season

In 1999 Jawahar Gram Samridhi Yojana has started: JRY was revamped from 1 April 1999, as the Jawahar Gram Samridhi Yojana. It became a programme for the creation of rural economic infrastructure with employment generation as the secondary objective. The programme is implemented by the village panchayats and provides for specific benefits to SC/STs, the disabled and maintenance of community assets.

In 2001 Sampoorna Grameen Rozgar Yojana has started. Sampoorna Grameen Rozgar Yojana was launched on 25 September 2001, by merging schemes of EAS and the JGSY with the objective of providing additional wage employment and food security, alongside creation of durable community assets in rural areas. The programme is self-targeting in nature with provisions for special emphasis on women, scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and parents of children withdrawn from hazardous occupations. The works taken up under the programme are labour-intensive and the workers are paid the minimum wages notified by the states. Payment of wages is done partly in cash and partly in kind - 5kg of food grains and the balance in cash. The Centre and the States share the cost of the cash component of the scheme in the ratio of 75:25.

In 2004 National Food for Work Programme has started : The food for work programme was started in 2000- 01 as a component of the EAS in eight notified drought – affected states of Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa Rajasthan, Maharashtra, and Uttaranchal. The programme aims at augmenting food security through wage employment. Food grains are supplied to states free of cost. This programme is now subsumed under the MGNREGP.

### **Objectives of the study:**

The following are the objectives of the present study

- To understand the socio-economic profile of the respondents.
- To assess and understand NREGP of the respondents.
- To understand the level of participation in NREGP of the respondents.
- To suggest suitable measures to improve the participation.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The methodological aspects of the study include selection of the district, selection of the village, universe, sample source of the data, tools of the data analysis and scheme of presentation.

### **Selection of the study:**

Chittoor district of Andhra Pradesh, has been purposefully chosen for the present study.

### **Selection of the village:**

The present study is based on successful implementation National Rural Employment Guarantee Programme in the village with special reference to tribal village. Kanikella Thanda village in the Molakala Cheruvu mandal of Chittoor district of Andhra Pradesh, has been purposefully chosen for the study.

### **Source of data and tools of data analysis:**

The present study is based on primary source of data. The primary data has been collected through well structured interview schedule it was filled with help of the respondents through a face to face conversation by the researcher. The data collected has been tabulated into tables for analysis purpose; simple statistical tools like percentage..

### **Local development and women's priorities:**

As a part of developing social protection umbrella in the country, NREGP can contribute in two ways. One is by transferring income to the poorest, though only to those who are able to perform manual labour. The other is in supporting local development and hence reducing the social protection deficits. There is a need to move away from a static approach to social protection to one that is equally concerned with developing the capacity to move out of poverty and vulnerability.

### **Empowering women:**

Participation in the scheme has meant that women are coming out of their homes, not only to work but also to visit banks and panchayat offices, which they may not have done previously. This enhanced mobility comes with the higher status of being income earning workers. It did find evidence of increased confidence among women. "Now I am not afraid of meeting officers at the site and explain what work has been done". Women can now be seen moving around in places like gram panchayat office, banks, schools, block office without anybody to accompany them.

### **Labour market impacts:**

Given the gender wage gaps prevalent in the market, the NREGP has made little difference to the labour market for adult male workers in the areas studied. However, there has been a substantial impact on adult female workers.

### **Strengthening active citizenship:**

Women participation in gram sabhas is likely to increase as they become more aware of their citizenship rights and duties. Investing in informal groups in one way of doing this policy has prioritized investment in the training of elected leaders, which needs to be continued, but the democratic processes requires active citizenship by all and this fact needs to find a place in resource allocation too.

### **Broadening the understanding of poverty to include needs of women:**

The programme could have a greater impact on poverty reduction and on the development if there were a broader understanding of the nature of poverty, and especially the constraints faced by women.

### **Income consumption effects:**

Income consumption affects means, an increase income of women workers. As a result, their ability to choose their consumption baskets. In examining the programme more emphasis is given to consumption because it is the main factor for judging income consumption. If a woman earns, but unable to spend for her own needs, surrenders her income to the head of the household, then the element of empowerment cannot be attained. The programmes empower women by giving them a scope of independent earning and spend some amount for their own needs.

**Intra household effects:**

Women play major role in raising the economic resource for their family, but their contribution remains uncounted, because of the significant amount of unpaid work. In rural areas, the dominance of males in intra-household decisions is a decisive factor. The programme has significant impact in converting some unpaid work into paid work, and to widen the scope of decision making role of women in household matters. As the wages are paid through post-office, intra-household status of women increases. She can control cash resources, because the withdrawal of the amount can be made in person according to her wish.

**Enhancement of choices and capability:**

The programme has widened the choice set for women by giving them independent income earning opportunity. If a woman depends on the head of the household then her choice is subject to the decision of the household direction has enhanced the choice of women to use earnings.

**Community level effects:**

Women’s participation at the local and district level of governance process is low in spite of 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment of the constitution. But women participation has increased after the implementation of the programme in many areas. A large number of women workers attended the gram sabha meetings held in connection with the programme. Community level empowerment of women is one of the great achievements of this act.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The following findings are recorded based on my field study (Table 1 to 5):

- 68 per cent of the respondents are in between 31–40 years age group. It reveals that the majority of the work force is getting into the employment. 83.30 per cent of the respondents are illiterate. It reflects that in this situation they require employment through NREGP.
- 98.30 per cent of the respondents are of nuclear family.
- 60.00 per cent of the respondents are 3–4 members.
- 56.70 per cent of the respondents have 5 acres of the land
- 53.30 per cent of the respondents have drought animal.

- 46.70 per cent of the respondents have loans with self help group.
- 46.00 per cent of the respondents have loans of Rs. 50,000
- 78.30 per cent of the respondents save Rs.50 per month
- 78.30 per cent of the respondents take treatment through RMP Doctor. It gives an understanding that, due

**Table 1 : Age distribution of the respondents**

Sr. No.	Age in years	Number of respondents with the percentage (%)
1.	20-30	8 (13.33)
2.	31-40	24 (40.00)
3.	41-50	22 (36.66)
4.	51-60above	6 (10.00)
	Total	60 (100.00)

**Table 2 : Educational wise distribution of the respondents**

Sr. No.	Education	Number of respondents with the percentage (%)
1.	Illiterate	53 (88.30)
2.	Can read and write	4 (6.70)
3.	Primary	2 (3.30)
4.	High School	1 (1.70)
	Total	60 (100.00)

**Table 3 : Land holding wise distribution of the respondents**

Sr. No.	Land	Number of respondents with the Percentage
1.	Land less	6 (10.00)
2.	Lee than 2.5 Acers	16 (26.70)
3.	5Acers	34 (56.70)
4.	10Acers	4 (6.70)
	Total	60 (100.00)

Table 4 : Income wise distribution of the respondents		
Sr. No.	Yearly Income	Number of respondents with the Percentage
1.	Less than 10,000	16 (26.66)
2.	10,000-20,000	18 (30.00)
3.	20,000-30,000	11 (18.33)
4.	30,000-40,000	10 (16.66)
5.	40,000-50,000	5 (08.33)
Total		60 (100.00)

Table 5: Source wise income distribution of the respondents		
Sr. No.	Source of Income	Number of respondents with the Percentage
1	Labour	28 (46.66)
2	Agriculture	14 (23.33)
3	Animal husbandry	08 (13.33)
4	Employment	06 (06.66)
5	Return on saving	6 (10.00)
Total		60 (100.00)

to poverty they cannot afford the service from authorized medical practitioner.

– The original objective of the Act was to arrest rural urban migration. This needs to be studied; it should indeed have helped to cut down distress migration.

– The impact of monsoon rains on infrastructure, like roads and check dams needs to be studied too, it enable more sustainable asset development.

– Maintenance of structures that are built with NREGP money is another aspect that has been ignored and could fritter away the benefits.

### Conclusion:

MGNREGP has positive impact on gender empowerment. 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 to 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. The positive impact on households due to MGNREGP can improve child well being. This is evidenced by the participation of the poor, contribution to household income and to the village, and usage of MGNREGP wages and migration. This limits their mobility and available time for paid work. Work site near the home and some flexibility of timings have drawn women out to work.

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