

IMPACT AND IMPLICATIONS OF WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN MGNREGA: A STUDY OF RANGA REDDY DISTRICT OF TELANGANA

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ABSTRACT

Mahatma Gandhi NREGA belongs to a long history of wage employment guarantee Act. It is preceded by various wage employment programmes in different Five Year Plans. Trends show that it is the poorest of the poor and the most vulnerable groups who seek employment under the programme. The Mahatma Gandhi NREGA has been designed to allow women equity in both access to work and in the payment of wages. The participation of women in the workforce has surpassed the statutory minimum requirement of 33 per cent and the trends also indicate an increase in the participation rate at the national level. The participation of women in the workforce is high irrespective of the literacy levels of women. The study makes an assessment of the impact of MGNREGS on the women beneficiaries in drought prone Ananthapuramu district.

Key Words: *Women; Equal Wage; Savings; Empowerment; Agricultural Wages*

INTRODUCTION

As a rural wage employment programme, MGNREGA recognised the relevance of incorporating gender equity and empowerment in its design. Various provisions under the Act and its Guidelines, aim to ensure that women have equitable and easy access to work, decent working conditions, equal payment of wages and representation on decision-making bodies.

Gender and NREGA

The NREGA with its guarantee of 100 days of unskilled work for every household has been envisaged as gender sensitive scheme'. The main way in which a scheme for social protection can to be made gender sensitive is to suggest that a certain percentage of beneficiaries must be women, which have been provided for in the Act:

'While providing employment, priority shall be given to women in such a way that at least one-third of the beneficiaries shall be women who have registered and requested for work under the scheme. (NREGA, Schedule II, Section 6: 19)

The Act also provides for some explicit entitlements for women to facilitate their full participation. These include:

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.'

Participation in Management and monitoring of the programme - As per the guidelines, a local Vigilance and Monitoring Committee is to be appointed with members from the immediate locality or village where the work is undertaken, to monitor the progress and ensure the quality of work. 'The gram sabha will elect the members of the committee and ensure that SCs/STs and women are represented on it.

Participation in social audit - The guidelines mention about social audit forum, convened by the 'gram sabha' every six months as part of the continuous auditing process. There is stress on the quorum of these meetings maintaining female participants alongside those from other disadvantageous groups. '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 marginalised communities.

Providing support for child care, and convenience to households - The guidelines mention that the need for a creche at the worksite, and for the works to be convenient for families: 'If some applicants have to be directed to report for work beyond 5 kms. of their residence, women (especially single women) and older persons should be given preference to work nearer to their residence.'

Also, 'If several members of a household who share the same job card are employed simultaneously under the scheme, they should be allowed to work on the same work site.'

Ensuring that single woman is eligible - By recognizing a single person as a 'household', the Act makes it possible for widows and other single woman to access work.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Mathur (2007) thinks that a system of regular and continuous flow of authoritative information is essential. The author felt that there is room for government to take up concurrent evaluations, more effective monitoring, time-series studies, and focused reports on critical aspects like minimum wages, muster rolls. To improve implementation the author says that the government need to solve problems, modify policy directives, and issue operational guidelines for the

district, block and village levels. The government must take the lead, be proactive, mobilize institutions and groups, and use the media effectively. The implementation of NREGS involves several government officials, panchayat functionaries, elected representatives, NGOs and community based organisations. They play a critical role but had little preparation for the challenge. NREGS in fact is a programme of national importance which has been marginalized. While the ministry of Rural Development is the nodal ministry at the centre, every relevant department and agency requires being involved.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- 1 To study various provisions of MGNREGA, with particular reference to women workers.
- 2 To critically examine the impact of MGNREGS on socio-economic empowerment of rural women.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

For the present study exploratory research design is applied. The statistical data for the study have been mobilized both from the primary and the secondary sources. Primary data has been collected from the women beneficiaries of Ranga Reddy district of Telangana region of Andhra Pradesh through a well-designed interview schedule. The secondary data has been collected from different reports published by the Government of India and Government of Andhra Pradesh.

Sampling

The provisions of MGNREGS have been extended to all sections of the society irrespective economic, social and political status of the rural families. All the Mandals, revenue villages and hamlets in the district are covered by the programme. For effective study a purposive random sampling method was followed. For the collection of women beneficiaries views and ideas on the impact of the MGNREG scheme, two revenue mandals from each of three revenue division, two revenue villages from each mandal, 30 women workers from each revenue village were selected by random sampling method. This altogether covers 3 revenue divisions six revenue mandals, twelve revenue villages and 360 women workers who are engaged in MGNREGS from beginning of the scheme in their respective villages

MGNREGA: A New Identity for Rural Women

Among all the policies MGNREGA is distinctive for its capacity to provide immediate hope and actual economic opportunities, that it has started to generate. In the wake of MGNREGA, women in rural areas seem to have become confident about being integral contributor to family expenditure and about being assertive about their identity space in public sphere.

From 2006-07 up to 2011-12, around Rs 53,000 crore have been spent on wages for women and around 47 per cent of the total person-days generated have been by women. Overall, MGNREGA has been a positive and important Scheme for women.

Aggregate Participation: At the national level, the participation of women in this Scheme has surpassed the statutory minimum requirement of 33 per cent; in 2011-12 alone, women person-days of employment were close to 50 per cent. The percentage of women participation from 2006-07 up to 2011-12 is provided in Table 1.

Significantly, female share on works under MGNREGA is greater than their share of work in the casual wage labour market across all States. Women are participating in the Scheme much more actively than they participated in all forms of recorded work. This may support the hypothesis that MGNREGA creates decent and favourable work conditions for women. For instance, MGNREGA's stipulation of work within 5 kilometers (kms) of the village where the job applicant resides makes participation in the Scheme logistically feasible for women who may have limited employment opportunities available to them, given their role and responsibilities in their households.

Impact of MGNREGS on Equal Wage

In spite of the "Minimum Wages Act" and other regulations, the agricultural wages in rural India are very low and discriminatory in nature. There is a lot difference between the wages of men and women workers. With the passage of MGNREGA-2005, the scenario totally changed. The act specifically mentioned that both the men and women shall be paid equal wages. The impact of the MGNREGS on equal wages as reported sample respondents was presented in table 1.

Table-1: Impact of MGNREGS Equal Wage rates for both Men & Women on Agriculture works

S. No.	Item	Caste Category				Total
		ST	SC	BC	OC	
1	Increased	17 (47.22)	39 (37.50)	89 (52.05)	12 (24.49)	157 (43.61)
2	Marginally Increased	6 (16.67)	14 (13.46)	24 (14.04)	16 (32.65)	60 (16.67)
3	Status Quo	11 (30.56)	48 (46.15)	54 (31.58)	19 (38.78)	132 (36.67)
4	No Response	2 (5.56)	3 (2.88)	4 (2.34)	2 (4.08)	11 (3.06)
Total		36 (100.00)	104 (100.00)	171 (100.00)	49 (100.00)	360 (100.00)

Source: Field Data

* Figures in parenthesis are Percentages

Table 1 reveals that there is an impact of MGNREG programme on equal wages for both men and women on agriculture works. As per the reports of 52.05 per cent of the BC respondents, the wage rates for both men and women on agriculture works are equal in the study area. Among the ST respondents 47.22 per cent declared that the wage rates for both men and women on agriculture works has increased. Nearly 37.50 per cent of the SC and 24.49 per cent of the OC respondents also stated some amount of increase in paying equal wages for both men and women on agriculture works due to MGNREGS. With regard to marginal increase in equal wages for both men and women on agriculture works OC respondents stood at the top of the ladder with 32.65 per cent and followed by ST, BC and SC respondents with 16.67 per cent, 14.04 per cent and 13.46 per cent respectively. Nearly 46.15 per cent of the SC respondents reported no change with regard to equal wages for both men and women on agriculture works. About 38.78 per cent of OC, 31.58 per cent of BC and 30.56 per cent of ST respondents also reported status quo in case of equal wages for both men and women on agriculture works due to MGNREGS. As many as 5.56 per cent of ST respondent have no opinion on the equal wages for both men and women in study area. In the same way 4.08 per cent, 2.88 per cent and 2.34 per cent of OC, SC and BC respondents were also reported no opinion.

The study indicates that the equal wages for both men and women in agriculture works increased due to the implementation of MGNREGS in the study area has been expressed by 157 (43.61 %) respondents. Only negligible percentage of (3.06 %) respondents has no opinion on the equal wages for both men and women in study area. Nearly 36.67 per cent have expressed that there is no change in equal wages for both men and women in spite implementation of MGNREG programme in their area and 16.67 per cent are at the opinion that there is some improvement in paying equal wages for both men and women due to MGNREGS.

Impact on Savings

With the introduction of MGNREG Scheme the rural households got employment in major part of the year. The increased employment opportunities will increase income of the families and which in turn motivate them for savings. The impact of the scheme on savings of sample households is given in table 2.

Table – 2: Impact of MGNREGS on Personal Savings

S. No.	Item	Caste Category				Total
		ST	SC	BC	OC	
1	Increased	11 (30.56)	46 (44.23)	116 (67.84)	3 (6.12)	176 (48.89)
2	Marginally Increased	8 (22.22)	26 (25.00)	34 (19.88)	29 (59.18)	97 (26.94)
3	Status Quo	16 (44.44)	31 (29.81)	18 (10.53)	16 (32.65)	81 (22.50)

4	No Response	1 (2.78)	1 (0.96)	3 (1.75)	1 (2.04)	6 (1.67)
Total		36 (100.00)	104 (100.00)	171 (100.00)	49 (100.00)	360 (100.00)

Source: Field Data

* Figures in parenthesis are Percentages

As per table 2 the MGNREGS increased the personal savings of the sample respondents in the study area as stated by 67.84 per cent of BC, 44.23 per cent of SC, 30.56 per cent of ST and only 6.12 per cent of OC respondents. Marginal improvement regarding Personal savings is reported nearly 59.18 per cent of OC respondents and they were followed by SC, ST and BC respondents with 25 per cent, 22.22 per cent and 19.88 per cent respectively. As per the reports of 44.44 per cent of ST respondents no change is observable with regard to personal savings. Status quo respondents sharply declined to 32.65 per cent in case of OC respondents and it further declined in case of SC (29.81 %) and BC (10.53 %) respondents. 1 out of 49 constituting 2.78 per cent of ST respondents have no opinion on the increasing personal savings. In the same way 2.04 per cent of OC, 1.75 per cent of BC and 0.96 per cent of SC respondents have also no opinion.

As per the present study nearly half (48.89 %) of the sample respondents reported that there is significant improvement in the increasing of personal savings due to employment created by MGNREG programme. Moreover nearly 26.94 per cent of the respondents observed marginal improvement regarding personal savings in the study area with regard to MGNREGS. About 22.50 per cent of the respondents stated that there is no change on the increasing of their personal savings. Nearly 1.67 per cent of the respondents have not framed any opinion on the personal savings in their households.

Impact of MGNREGS on Cash availability

The women in rural India have little source of income. For their personal expenses they have to depend upon the male head of the family. Under the MGNREGS the wages of every worker are directly paid to worker. This gives scope for women to keep certain amount of money for their personal expenses. The impact of MGNREGS on the cash in the hands of sample women is given in table 3.

Table – 3: Impact of MGNREGS on Cash availability in the hands of the Respondents

S. No.	Item	Caste Category				Total
		ST	SC	BC	OC	
1	Increased	29 (80.56)	59 (56.73)	121 (70.76)	12 (24.49)	221 (61.39)
2	Marginally Increased	4 (11.11)	16 (15.38)	25 (14.62)	18 (36.73)	63 (17.50)
3	Status Quo	2 (5.56)	27 (25.96)	22 (12.87)	19 (38.78)	70 (19.44)

4	No Response	1 (2.78)	2 (1.92)	3 (1.75)	0 (0.00)	6 (1.67)
Total		36 (100.00)	104 (100.00)	171 (100.00)	49 (100.00)	360 (100.00)

Source: Field Data

* Figures in parenthesis are Percentages

Table 3 reveals that among all the four social category respondents, there are no wider variations in reporting significant improvement on availability of Cash in the hands of Respondents due to MGNREG programme in the study area. Around 80.56 per cent of ST, 70.76 per cent of BC, 56.73 per cent of SC and 24.49 per cent of the OC respondents reported significant increase on availability of Cash in the hands of Respondents. With regard to marginal increase on availability of Cash in the hands of Respondents OC respondents tops the list with 36.73 per cent. They are followed by SC respondents with 15.38 per cent and they in turn followed by BC and ST respondents with 14.62 per cent and 11.11 per cent respectively. According to 38.78 per cent of OC, 25.96 per cent of SC, 12.87 per cent of BC and 5.56 per cent of ST respondents, there is no change on availability of Cash in the hands of Respondents in the study area due to MGNREG programme. Around 2.78 per cent of ST, 1.92 per cent of SC, 1.75 per cent of BC and none of OC respondents has not given any opinion on the impact of MGNREG programme on availability of Cash in the hands of Respondents.

It can be found that as many as 61.39 per cent of the sample respondents declared that MGNREG programme have positive impact on availability of cash in the hands of respondents. Among them 17.50 per cent reported marginal increased and 28.06 per cent reported significant change. Nearly 19.44 per cent reported status quo on availability of cash in the hands of respondents due to MGNREG programme in the study area. Negligible percentage (1.67 %) of the respondents has no opinion on the increase on availability of cash in the hands of respondents.

Impact of MGNREGS on Clearing of Old Debts

The increased opportunities of employment are expected to improve the income levels of households and which turn is expected to reduce the debt burden of the respondents are presented in table 4.

Table – 4: Impact of MGNREGS on Clearing of Old Debts

S. No.	Item	Caste Category				Total
		ST	SC	BC	OC	
1	Increased	9 (25.00)	14 (13.46)	18 (10.53)	12 (24.49)	53 (14.72)
2	Marginally Increased	19 (52.78)	68 (65.38)	125 (73.10)	8 (16.33)	220 (61.11)

3	Status Quo	8 (22.22)	21 (20.19)	27 (15.79)	29 (59.18)	85 (23.61)
4	No Response	0 (0.00)	1 (0.96)	1 (0.58)	0 (0.00)	2 (0.56)
Total		36 (100.00)	104 (100.00)	171 (100.00)	49 (100.00)	360 (100.00)

Source: Field Data

* Figures in parenthesis are Percentages

It is clear from table 4 that the ST (25 %) respondents stood at the top of ladder with regard to significant increase in clearing old debts through MGNREG Programme in the study area. They are followed by OC respondents with 24.49 per cent in second place, SC respondents with 13.46 per cent in third place and BC respondents with 10.53 per cent in fourth place. Marginal increase in clearing old debts through MGNREG Programme is reported by 73.10 per cent of BC respondents and they are immediately followed by SC respondents with 65.38 per cent and they in turn followed by ST respondents and OC respondents with 52.78 per cent and 16.33 per cent respectively. In case of status quo in clearing old debts through MGNREG Programme, there are no wider variations among the four social categories. The OC respondents stood at the top of list with 59.18 per cent. In this regard the second, third and fourth places were occupied by ST (22.22%), SC (20.19 %) and BC (15.79 %) respondents respectively. Among the SC category respondents 0.96 per cent has no opinion. In the same way 0.58 per cent of BC respondents have also no opinion. None of the respondents from ST and OC categories denied to respond.

It can be found that nearly 75.83 per cent of the respondents reported that the MGNREG Programme have positive impact in clearing old debts through creation of employment opportunities. Of them 61.11 per cent reported marginal increase and 14.72 per cent reported significant change. Status quo or no change was reported by 23.61 per cent of the respondents. About 0.56 per cent has no opinion.

Purchase / Procurement of Gold and Silver ornaments

The increased income increases economic independence of women. Which in turn gives the scope to women to purchase gold and silver ornaments. The impact of MGNREGS on the purchase/ procurement of gold and silver ornaments by sample women respondents is given in table 5.

Table – 5: Impact of MGNREGS on Purchase / Procurement of Gold and Silver ornaments

S. No.	Item	Caste Category				Total
		ST	SC	BC	OC	
1	Increased	6 (16.67)	29 (27.88)	55 (32.16)	7 (14.29)	97 (26.94)
2	Marginally Increased	14 (38.89)	47 (45.19)	73 (42.69)	15 (30.61)	149 (41.39)
3	Status Quo	15 (41.67)	24 (23.08)	41 (23.98)	26 (53.06)	106 (29.44)
4	No Response	1 (2.78)	4 (3.85)	2 (1.17)	1 (2.04)	8 (2.22)
Total		36 (100.00)	104 (100.00)	171 (100.00)	49 (100.00)	360 (100.00)

Source: Field Data

* Figures in parenthesis are Percentages

It is clear from table 5 that the BC (32.16 %) respondents stood at the top of the ladder with regard to significant increase in improving the purchasing capacity of gold and silver ornaments by the respondents in the study area. In this regard they are followed by SC respondents with 27.88 per cent in second place, ST respondents with 16.67 per cent in third place and OC respondents with 14.29 per cent in fourth place. Marginal increase in the purchasing of gold and silver ornaments is reported by 45.19 per cent of the SC respondents and they are immediately followed by BC respondents with 42.69 per cent and they in turn followed by ST respondents and OC respondents with 38.89 per cent and 30.61 per cent respectively. In case of status quo in purchasing of gold and silver ornaments there are no wider variations among the four social categories. The OC respondents stood at the top of list with 53.06 per cent. In this regard the second, third and fourth places were occupied by ST (41.67 %), BC (23.98 %) and SC (23.08 %) respondents respectively. Among the SC category respondents 3.85 per cent have no opinion. In the same way 2.78 per cent of ST and 2.04 per cent of OC and 1.17 per cent of BC respondents have also no opinion.

It can be found that nearly 68.33 per cent of the respondents reported that the MGNREGS has positive impact on the purchasing of gold and silver ornaments in the study area. Of them 41.39 per cent reported marginal increase and 26.94 per cent reported significant change. Status quo or no change was reported by 29.44 per cent of the respondents. About 2.22 per cent have no opinion.

Impact of MGNREGS on possessing Pairs of Cloths

The poor rural women in rural areas lead life with one or two pairs of cloths. The increased economic freedom through MGNREGS wages may have some impact on possession pairs of cloths. The total number of pairs of cloths possessed by sample respondents is given in table 6.

Table – 6: Impact of MGNREGS on possessing Pairs of Cloths

S. No.	Item	Caste Category				Total
		ST	SC	BC	OC	
1	Increased	16 (44.44)	38 (36.54)	82 (47.95)	10 (20.41)	146 (40.56)
2	Marginally Increased	7 (19.44)	15 (14.42)	29 (16.96)	18 (36.73)	69 (19.17)
3	Status Quo	11 (30.56)	47 (45.19)	57 (33.33)	21 (42.86)	136 (37.78)
4	No Response	2 (5.56)	4 (3.85)	3 (1.75)	0 (0.00)	9 (2.50)
Total		36 (100.00)	104 (100.00)	171 (100.00)	49 (100.00)	360 (100.00)

Source: Field Data

* Figures in parenthesis are Percentages

As per table 6 that nearly 47.95 per cent of the BC respondents reported that MGNREGS helped in the improvement of possession of pairs of cloths of the sample respondents. In the same way, 44.44 per cent of ST, 36.54 per cent of SC and 20.41 per cent of OC respondents recognized significant impact of MGNREGS on the possession of pairs of cloths. Some kind of positive impact of MGNREGS on improvement of possessing of pairs of cloths is reported by 36.73 per cent of OC, 19.44 per cent of ST, 16.96 per cent of BC and 14.52 per cent of SC respondents. There are some variation among BC and ST respondents and other two social categories of respondents with regard to no change. Nearly 45.19 per cent of SC and 42.86 per cent of OC respondents stated status quo on the possession of pairs of cloths. Nearly one third of (33.33 %) BC category respondents reported to no change and 30.56 per cent of ST category respondents reported the same with regard to the possession of pairs of cloths through the employment opportunities by the MGNREGS. On the other hand 5.56 per cent of ST and 3.85 per cent of SC respondents reported no opinion. About 1.75 per cent of the BC respondents have no opinion on the impact of MGNREG programme on possessing of pairs of cloths. None of the respondents from OC category have any opinion with regard to possessing of pairs of cloths.

The study shows that only 59.73 per cent of the sample respondents found that the MGNREGS have positive impact on possessing of pairs of cloths. To be precise, 40.56 per cent reported clear increase in possessing of pairs of cloths, while 19.17 per cent observed only little increase in possessing of pairs of cloths. About 37.78 per cent of the respondents declared no change or status quo in the crop productivity. Around 2.50 per cent have no opinion on the impact of MGNREGS in the possessing of pairs of cloths.

SUGGESTIONS

- ☞ There is a low awareness among some women workers of MGNREGA. To come out of this anomaly more awareness campaigns have to be conducted to educate the people about the provisions of the programme.
- ☞ There is delay in making the payment of wages in the case of some workers. To avoid this appropriate steps are to be taken by the government to maintain the uniformity in wage payment.
- ☞ Steps are to be taken to mitigate the problem of harassment of women at the worksites.
- ☞ Some of the worksite facilities are very poor. So the steps should be taken to provide adequate worksite facilities. For this purpose separate mechanism should be evolved.
- ☞ For comprehensive participation of women the women should be allowed to involve in planning for MGNREGS.
- ☞ Women participation can be enhanced by appointing female supervisors on MGNREGS works and in conducting social audits
- ☞ Women should be involved in the selection of works, which can create further mainstream employment in the village
- ☞ The provision of food for women at the work sites creates enthusiasm among women to participate in MGNREGS works.
- ☞ Designing special Statement of Rates (SOR) for women, preferably through conducting a systematic time and motion study, to ensure that they earn the set minimum wages.
- ☞ Providing 100 days of work should be made mandatory to all including women workers, as this will accelerate the process of women's empowerment.

While concluding this study, one can observe that the positive and negative impacts of MGNREGA on women's empowerment cannot be ignored on the grounds that these are unintended or not covered under the main objectives of MGNREGA. By addressing these impacts will not only help women's empowerment but it will also help in achieving medium and long term goals of MGNREGA and help in moving towards optimum use of labour in the economy. It will also help in moving towards some desirable national level social policies.

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