

## MGNREGA: WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION AND ITS IMPACT

Kumari Supriya Roy\*

### **Abstract**

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), 2005, was notified on 7 September 2005. Launched in 2006, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) legally enshrines the “right to work” and ensures livelihood security in rural areas by providing at least 100 days of guaranteed wage employment in a financial year to every household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work. An important objective of MGNREGA has been to encourage women’s effective participation, both as workers and as administrators. For instance, according to MGNREGA guidelines, at least one-third of the beneficiaries shall be women who have registered and requested for work under the programme. MGNREGA was devised as a public work programme with a rights based approach to development, providing income security through guaranteed wage employment. The Purpose of this paper is to study of MGNREGA programme and to present an overview of woman participation and its impact on MGNREGA.

**Keywords:** Right to work, woman participation, volunteer, enshrines, MGNREGA, livelihood.

\* **Research Scholar V.B.U Hazaribag**

**Introduction:**

The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA), initiated in 2006, is considered to be a landmark event in the history of poverty reduction strategies in India. The law was initially called the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) but was renamed on

**\*Research scholar V.B.U Hazaribag, under the supervision Dr.Nakul Prasad, S.S.L.N.T.**

**College Dhanbad. Email [address-supriyaroy222@gmail.com](mailto:address-supriyaroy222@gmail.com).**

2 October 2009 on the eve of the birthday of the father of nation Mahatma Gandhi as Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA).The scheme intends to provide employment to the rural poor during the lean agricultural season. In addition to providing income when no work is available, the programme aims to create village assets and bring about inclusive and sustainable development. Further, the attempt is to provide adequate employment to women at equal wages. The programme therefore requires that one third of all workers are women. Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) is considered as a “Silver Bullet” for eradicating rural poverty and unemployment, by way of generating demand for productive labour force in villages. Rural poverty and unemployment in India have grown in an unprecedented manner during the last few decades. There is a growing incidence of illiteracy, blind faith, hungry people, mal-nourished children, anaemic pregnant women, farmer suicides, starvation deaths, migration resulting from inadequate employment, poverty, and the failure of subsistence production during droughts. In order to make solution of these problems and to provide livelihood security to rural unemployed, Government of India (GOI) enacted the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) in 2005. It is the biggest poverty alleviation programme in the world which is started with an initial outlay of Rs. 11,300 crore in year 2006-07 and is Rs. 40,000 crore (2010-11).

### Salient Features of the Process Implementation of MGNREGA

Salient features of the implementation process of the MGNREGA scheme are summarized below:

\*Cost sharing: Central government 3/4th, State Government 1/4th Adult members of rural households submit their name, age and address with photo to the gram Panchayats.

\*Adult members of a rural household may apply for employment if they are willing to do unskilled manual work. Such a household will have to apply for registration to the local Gram Panchayat, in writing or orally.

\*The Gram Panchayat after due verification will issue a Job Card to the household as a whole. The Job Card will bear the photograph of all adult members of the household willing to work under NREGA. The Job Card with photograph is free of cost.

\*A Job Card holding household may submit a written application for employment to the Gram Panchayat, stating the time and duration for which work is sought. The minimum days of employment have to be fifteen.

\*The Gram Panchayat will issue a dated receipt of the written application for employment, against which the guarantee of providing employment within 15 days operates.

\*Employment will be given within 15 days of application for work by an employment seeker.

\*If employment is not provided within 15 days, daily unemployment allowance in cash has to be paid. Liability of payment of unemployment allowance is of the States.

\*Work should ordinarily be provided within 5 km radius of the village or else extra allowance of 10% are payable.

\*At least one-third of persons to whom work is allotted have to be women.

\*Disbursement of wages has to be done on weekly basis and not beyond a fortnight.

\*Panchayat Raj Institutions [PRIs] have a principal role in planning and implementation.

\*Each district has to prepare a shelf of projects. The selected works to provide employment are

to be selected from the list of permissible works the different categories of permissible works are as follows:

- Water Conservation and water harvesting
- Drought Proofing (including plantation and afforestation)
- Irrigation canals including micro and minor irrigation works
- Flood Control and Protection Works
- Minor irrigation, horticulture and land development on the land of SC/ST/BPL and land reform beneficiaries
- Renovation of traditional water bodies including desilting of tanks
- Land Development
- Rural Connectivity

### **Woman Participation in MGNREGA:**

MGNREGA's own official data shows that women's participation in MGNREGA has been on the rise. At the national level, it increased from 40% in 2006-07 to 53% in 2013-14. However,

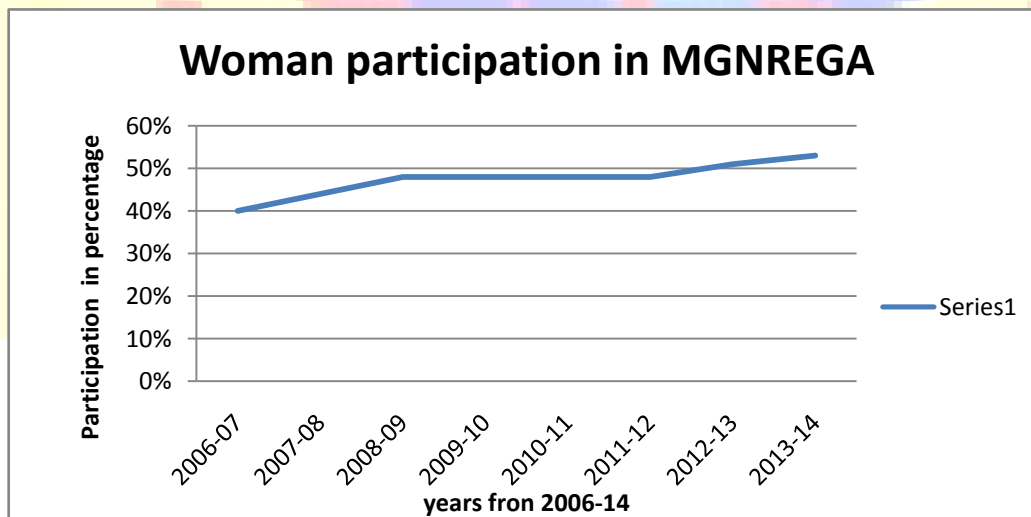
there are wide variations across states and across districts within a state. While the statute mandates that at least one-third of the beneficiaries shall be women, the actual proportion varies, ranging from 22% in Uttar Pradesh to 93% in Kerala in 2013-14. The southern states like Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh show a higher rate of participation. Among the northern and some eastern states, however, the pattern has been low, with Rajasthan and Himachal Pradesh being the exceptions. NSSO data shows that between 2004-05 and 2011-12, there has been a negative trend in women's labour force participation rate (LFPR or the proportion of labour force to total population) in rural India. Rural female participation fell from nearly 25% in 2004-05 to 21% in 2009-10 and then even lower to around 17% in 2011-12. However, a study by Mehtabul Azam using nationally representative National Sample Surveys (NSS) data found that MGNREGA has helped mitigate the situation. The study exploited the phase-wise expansion of the MGNREGA and found that the decline in labour force participation in MGNREGA districts has been lower than the decline observed in non-MGNREGA districts. This effect is found to be more pronounced in the case of female labour participation. Significantly, female share of works under MGNREGA is greater than their share of work in the casual wage labour market across all states.

### **Impact of Woman Participation in MGNREGA:**

Women are participating in the scheme much more actively than they participated in other forms of recorded work. The interstate variations in women participation can be attributed to a host of factors ranging from socio-cultural norms around female participation in labour force, mobility and intra household allocation of roles and responsibilities, opportunity costs in terms of wage differentials between private sector and MGNREGA, efficiency of implementing institutions at

the State and local government levels and influence of Self-Help Groups and NGOs. For instance, in the case of Kerala, where MGNREGA has turned out to be an almost “ladies only” affair, the fact that Kudambashree (a State government initiative for poverty eradication through networking of women's groups) has been placed in charge of its implementation has also made a striking difference to the level of women’s participation. This convergence has played its part in evolving the economic identity of the rural woman - as skilled labourer and farmer cultivator. It has also created a development interface for women to negotiate with local governments and power structures, giving new meaning to participatory governance. In Rajasthan, active youth groups and other social movements have been deeply involved and encouraged women participation in the programme. As a result, general levels of awareness are much higher than they would have been if advocacy had been left exclusively to the district administration. Unique features of the public wage programme turn it into a magnet for women

Graph 1: Woman Participation in MGNREGA from the year 2006-2014.



. Source: MGNREGA official website

MGNREGA's own official data shows that women's participation in MGNREGA has been on the rise. At the national level, it increased from 40% in 2006-07 to 53% in 2013-14. More women than men work under the national programme that guarantees employment to rural people. In the current fiscal, women availed of more than 50 per cent of employment created under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA). Their participation has been growing since the inception of the Act in 2006. This is remarkable given that only 28.7 per cent women form a part of the country's workforce, according to the National Sample Survey Organization data of 2004-05.

MGNREGA's own official data shows that women's participation in MGNREGA has been on the rise. At the national level, it increased from 40% in 2006-07 to 53% in 2013-14. However, there are wide variations across states and across districts within a state. While the statute mandates that at least one-third of the beneficiaries shall be women, the actual proportion varies, ranging from 22% in Uttar Pradesh to 93% in Kerala in 2013-14. The southern states like Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh show a higher rate of participation. Among the northern and some eastern states, however, the pattern has been low, with Rajasthan and Himachal Pradesh being the exceptions

### **Women's new found identity**

In spite of the absence of any direct focus on gender equality, MGNREGA seems to have benefited women in multiple ways. In fact, a large number of studies have shown that women have benefited from MGNREGA in many ways (Khera and Nayak 2009) These studies have shown that women have participated in MGNREGA on a large scale in most states in India; have received equal wages with men and earned incomes of their own; single women households and female –headed households have particularly benefited by MGNREGA.

### **Economic and social empowerment**

One of the most important observations is the emergence of women's identity and their empowerment with the coming of NREGA as an economic opportunity provider. Respondents in all the blocks have been found to be very optimistic about the importance of NREGA in their lives. Respondents said to have taken the decision to work on their own. Women workers in all the blocks have also been found to be taking their wages directly.

In more than 80 percent cases decisions about using MGNREGA incomes are taken by women and in the remaining cases the decisions are joint. This was found largely attributable to wages earned under MGNREGA being transferred into women's bank accounts in the bank, which they then felt empowered to spend. On the same note, since 10 percent households belong to single women and thus are headed by these women, decisions pertaining to spending wages in such cases are essentially made by the women themselves.

In the past as well public wage programmes attracted more than expected participation from women. Between 1970 and 2005, India implemented 17 major programmes with focus on employment or self-employment. By 2000, employment programmes— like the National Rural Employment Programme, Rural Landless Employment Guarantee Programme, Jawahar Rozgar Yojana and the Employment Assurance Scheme saw women accounting for a fourth of the total employment created. Self-employment generation programmes, like the Integrated Rural Development Programme and the Training for Rural Youth in Self-employment, had more women beneficiaries; 45 percent by 2000.

### **Woman's Participation in different state:**

Women's participation in MGNREGA points at some unique and often contradicting aspects. First, states not known for women's participation in workforce are reporting a high number of



women joining the programme. Take Kerala, where women account for about 15 per cent of the workforce. Under the Act they take up 79 per cent of the employment created. Two other states, Tamil Nadu and Rajasthan, with low share of women in workforce have 82 per cent and 69 per cent women workers under MGNREGA, respectively. Second, poor states with greater casual labour potential, like Odisha, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, report low women participation (22-33 per cent). This is contradictory to the assumption that poverty forces women to take up casual jobs. Third, it is believed that states with labour-intensive farming like paddy cultivation pull more women into workforce. The MGNREGA data shows the opposite in paddy-intensive Odisha and West Bengal. Till 2012 the total no of registered workers under MGNREGA in Dhanbad district of Jharkhand state is 4445 out of which 1084(24.49%) are woman.

Certain aspects of the Act must be contributing to the contradictory trends. Under the Act, a household is guaranteed 100 days of manual employment in a year. Adult members can share this guarantee and the wage is same for man and woman. This prompts household-level labour budgeting. While men migrate to towns and cities, women are left behind to work under MGNREGA. The Act increases household income since earlier women used to get less wages than men. Women take up this opportunity as economic freedom. More than wage parity the Act focuses on water conservation. It allows members belonging to the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe communities to take up work in their own fields and get paid for that. Women participating in the programme are reviving their degraded farms or making provision for water through other works. More than 90 per cent of woman workers are farm labourers or cultivators. A substantial part of their work is unpaid because they work in their farms. MGNREGA has changed this. Now parts of women's non-paid jobs, like land leveling and digging a pond in their farms, are paid for. In drought-prone districts, like Warangal in Andhra Pradesh and

Ahmednagar in Maharashtra, community members say this has attracted women to the programme.

### **Conclusion:**

Campaign for social audits should be conducted, in which women play a major role, has contributed to enhanced awareness and increased participation under MGNREGA. The state's MGNREGA work sites must have good facilities for children and women. Management of work sites and other logistics for implementation should be placed in the hands of women self-help groups under the poverty eradication mission Kudumbashree in the case of Kerala, where MGNREGA has turned out to be an almost "ladies only" affair, the fact that Kudumbashree (a State government initiative for poverty eradication through networking of women's groups). So most members of self-help groups have joined the programme. Increasing women's participation in MGNREGA can be used for effective delivery of its core objective: local ecological revival. It is now mandatory to have 50 per cent woman panchayat representatives who have nodal roles in the programmer's implementation, including preparing the village development plan. So if the supervisory roles in Panchayats and the dominant presence as workers converge, it will be a win-win situation for the programme as well as villages. Improved access to economic resources and paid work has had a positive impact on the socio-economic status of women. Studies indicate that women exercise independence in collection and spending of MGNREGA wages, indicating greater decision-making power within the households. Women have also reported better access to credit and financial institutions. The mandatory transfer of wage payment through bank accounts has ensured a greater financial inclusion of women. Despite these improvements, certain factors such as non-availability of work-site facilities like crèches, long work hours,

gender relations, implementation challenges continue to occlude women's full participation. Functional and safe mobile crèche services, flexibility in terms of women's working hours and provision for gender-specific life cycle needs are likely to provide women with more time and opportunity to participate actively in MGNREGA. This would be an important step in narrowing down the prevalent gender gap in rural India.

**References:**

- 1 .Annual Report, Ministry of Rural Development
2. Khera , Reetika (2006) ‘ Political Economy of State Response to Drought in Rajasthan, 2000-03; Economic and Political Weekly XLI/50 5163-72
- 3.MGNREGA official website.
- 4.Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act 2005.
- 5.Newspapers, Journals on local Sector of Dhanbad.
- 6.MGNREGA Darpan.