

## Socio-Economic and Political Impact of MGNREGA on Rural Women of Himachal Pradesh

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### Abstract

*The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) has been considered as one of the most significant schemes of rural development and employment ever implemented in India. Unlike the previous other schemes of rural development and employment, it gives guarantee of minimum 100 days of unskilled manual labour per year. In case the requisite number of days work could not be provided, there is also a provision of unemployment allowance to be given to them. The policy goal behind this is to provide social protection and the employment to the disadvantaged workers, such as women, schedule castes, and schedule tribes. It is commonly considered that this scheme will change the socio-economic dynamics of the rural India. In Himachal Pradesh, where this scheme has been made fully functional, it has made considerable impacts in the socio-economic life of the rural people particularly women.*

MGNREGA has reduced the instances of distress migration among rural poor to cities. The programme impressively benefited the women, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes resulting in their empowerment. MGNREGA has strengthened them and has ensured that benefits reach to ultimate needy poor. This is a tremendous example of democratic decentralization. It has improved the literacy indicators among girls as working women sent their girl child to schools. It has reduced the poverty because of adequate economic power. Keeping in view its significant contribution in reducing distress in rural household, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) called it milestone for vulnerable sections, Landless labourer such as Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes mostly beneficiary, as it decreases gender wage gap. Providing guaranteed employment for rural areas it is improving

their standard of living. Provision for one-third women beneficiaries has enabled women empowerment and provision of social audit improves social capital among rural community helped empowerment of marginalised sections especially dalits. It assures the poor, especially marginal farmers, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes a life of dignity by assuring a steady flow of income over a certain period and helps in breaking the vicious cycle of debt caused by lending from local moneylenders who charge an exorbitant rate of interest.

With the advent of MGNREGA, the participation rate in Gram Sabha increased, this resulted in the better functioning of elected representatives and the local self government such as Panchayats. This movement was more remarkable in districts Kullu. Some of the households were members of caste organization, farmers union and trade unions. Women and men enjoyed the same right when they worked under MGNREGA, as a result every one worked equally and got equal wage, irrespective of gender, caste, etc. Thus MGNREGA helped to obliterate any sort of discrimination in society. This ensured social justice and promoted social capital.

MGNREGA is acting as safety net saving rural dwellers from falling into state of extreme poverty during extreme natural events. Besides it is creating rural infrastructure with 75 percent of construction activity associated with agriculture related infrastructure like ponds, embankments, roads, increasing purchasing power of rural poor.

The scheme has able to provide meaningful employment to rural poors in face of increased natural vagaries and declining employment. Nevertheless, a more serious and concerted effort towards implementation of scheme could further boost rural economy. MGNREGA, a social welfare scheme that intends to provide unskilled manual work to the adult member of a family has been criticized as well as praised for the social and economic impact on rural households. There is Increased wages of rural people by providing them work even during lean agricultural seasons. The increased wages were put in giving boost to rural entrepreneurship. Agricultural related works like rainwater harvesting and rural roads resulted in implicit savings. Payment of salaries in bank account improves financial inclusion and helps them avail new financial products. Improved health and nutrition indicators allowed them to better channelize their energies in work to get more money. It has helped in increasing the per capita income, although marginally of rural households. It has proved as an important step towards financial independence, especially of women. It freed the rural families from subsistence living and has assured extra money which could be put to enhance

their overall life standard. The present paper is an attempt to examine the socio-economic and political impact of MGNREGA on rural people particularly women in Himachal Pradesh.

## 1. Impact on Women Empowerment

There is much that the MGNREGA promises much from the perspective of women's empowerment. By generating employment for women at fare (equal) wages in their own villages, MGNREGA is playing a substantial role in economically empowering women and laying the basis for greater independence and self-esteem. The provision like priority for women in the ratio of one third of total workers, equal wages of men and women, crèche for the children of women workers, work within a radius of five kilometer from home, absence of supervisor and contractor and flexibility in terms of choosing period and months of employment are made in the MGNREGA act, with the view to ensuring that rural women benefit from the scheme in certain manner. Nevertheless, women have availed the paid employment opportunity under MGNREGA in large numbers. Their bank deposits are increasing, their intra house hold status has also been improving commensurately as she now control substantial cash resources. They are participating in planning of works and social audit. In this section of the chapter, we have tried to examine the implementation of certain provision of MGNREGA, which are related to women.

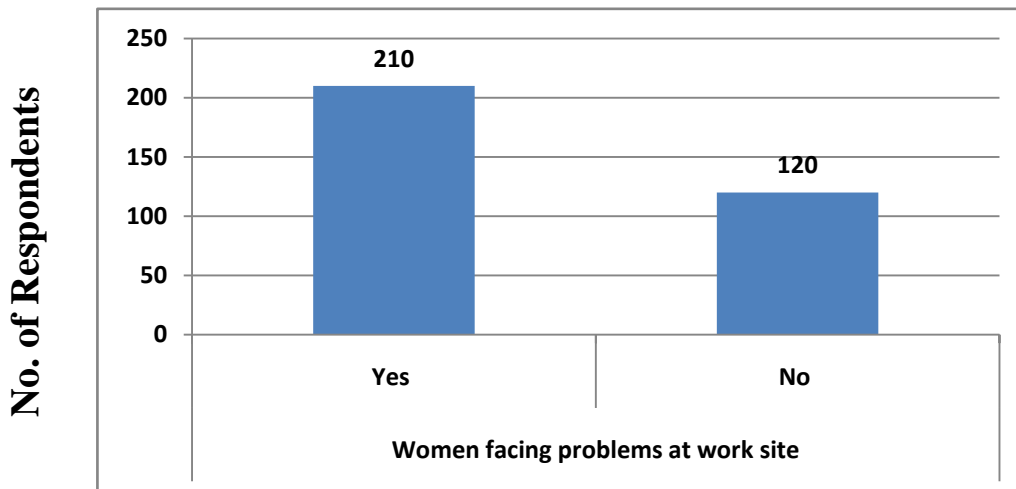
### 1.1 Whether women are facing any problem at worksite

Our sample consists of 125 women respondents table 1.1 deals with the issue that whether women are secure and comfortable at their workplace, or they are facing any problems at worksite.

**Table 1.1**  
**Whether Women are facing problems at Work Site**

Sr. No.	Women facing problems at work site	No. of Respondents	Percentage
1	Yes	210	63.63
2	No	120	36.37
	<b>Total</b>	<b>330</b>	<b>100.00.00</b>

**Figure 1.1**  
**Whether Women are facing problems at Work Site**



As per table 1.1 majority of the respondents (63.63 percent) seem satisfied with the worksite atmosphere of MGNREGA in respect of women. According to them women are not facing any type of problems at the worksite. However, 36.37 percent respondents said that women are facing problems at worksite.

### 1. 2 Crèche Facilities for the Children of Women Workers

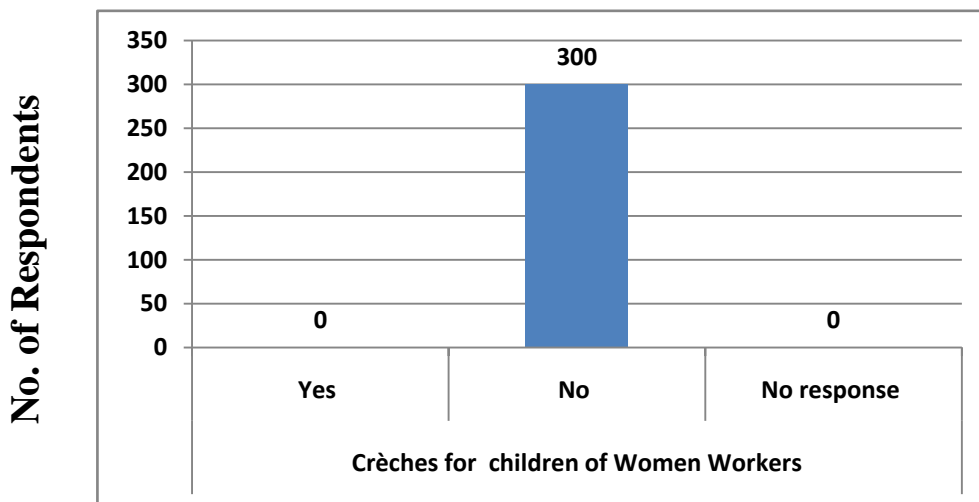
Next question is related to a very important provision under the scheme i.e the provision of crèches for children of the women workers.

**Table 1.2**  
**Crèches Facilities Provided for the Children of Women Workers**

Sr. No.	Crèches for children of Women Workers	No. of Respondents	Percentage
1	Yes	-	-
2	No	300	100.00
3	No response	-	-
	<b>Total</b>	<b>330</b>	<b>100.00</b>

On this issue, all the respondents said that there is no crèche facility available for the children of women workers in the study area (Table no 1.2). It shows the weakness of the implementing agencies in providing the basic facilities for the women workers.

**Figure 1.2**  
**Whether efforts made to ensure Participation of Women in MGNREGA**



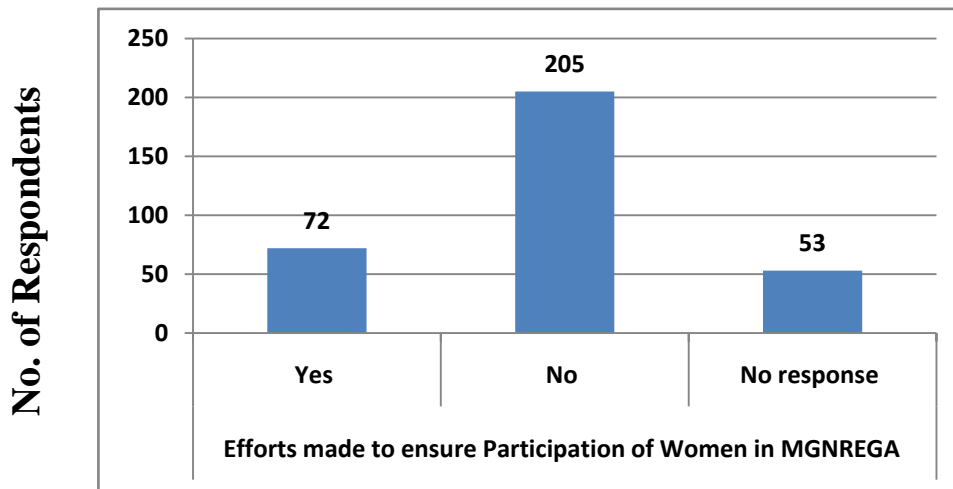
### 1.3 Efforts Made to Ensure More Participation of Women in MGNREGA Scheme and Social Audit

Another important question was related to the efforts made to ensure more participation of women in the scheme. Patriarchal character of our society does not allow women to go out for work and this is particularly evident in higher caste families as they relate this with their status in society. But this is not much prevalent in among lower caste families. Table 1.3 shows the responses of the respondents regarding whether utmost efforts have been made by the implementing agencies to ensure more participation of women in MGNREGA scheme.

**Table 1.3**  
**Whether efforts made to ensure Participation of Women in MGNREGA**

Sr. No.	Efforts made to ensure Participation of Women in MGNREGA	No. of Respondents	Percentage
1	Yes	72	21.81
2	No	205	62.13
3	No response	53	16.06
	<b>Total</b>	<b>330</b>	<b>100.00</b>

**Figure 1.3**  
**Whether efforts made to ensure Participation of Women in MGNREGA**



As shown in table 1.3, majority of the respondents (62.13 percent) are of the view that not much efforts have been made by the implementing agencies as well as rural communities to ensure more participation of women in MGNREGA. This faded the real objective of the scheme to ensure at least 30 percent participation of women in MGNREGA.

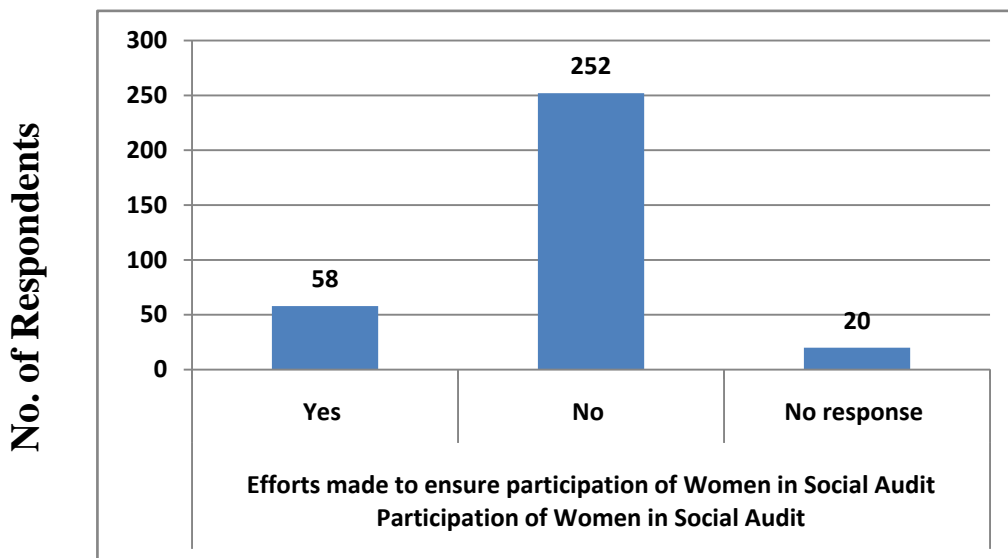
### 1.4 Efforts Made to Ensure Participation of Women in Social Audit

An important feature of the scheme is the participation of people in the social audit of the MGNREGA. As far as women are concerned they do not, or participate less in the social audit, and moreover they are generally not aware about the social audit. Views of the respondents were ascertained to know whether any efforts have been made to ensure participation of women in social audit.

**Table 1.4**  
**Whether Efforts made to ensure participation of Women in Social Audit**

Sr. No.	Efforts made to ensure participation of Women in Social Audit Participation of Women in Social Audit	No. of Respondents	Percentage
1	Yes	58	17.58
2	No	252	76.36
3	No response	20	06.06
	<b>Total</b>	<b>330</b>	<b>100.00</b>

**Figure 1.4**  
**Whether efforts made to ensure participation of Women in Social Audit**



In this regard table 1.4 shows that only 17.58 percent respondents accepted that efforts have been made by the officials and members of Gram Panchayats and the community leaders to mobilize women to take part in the social audit, whereas a vast majority of the respondents (76.36 percent) said that not such efforts were made to ensure more participation of women in social audit. This is again the failure of the officials and elected local representatives who do not make them aware about the social audit and need to participate in it.

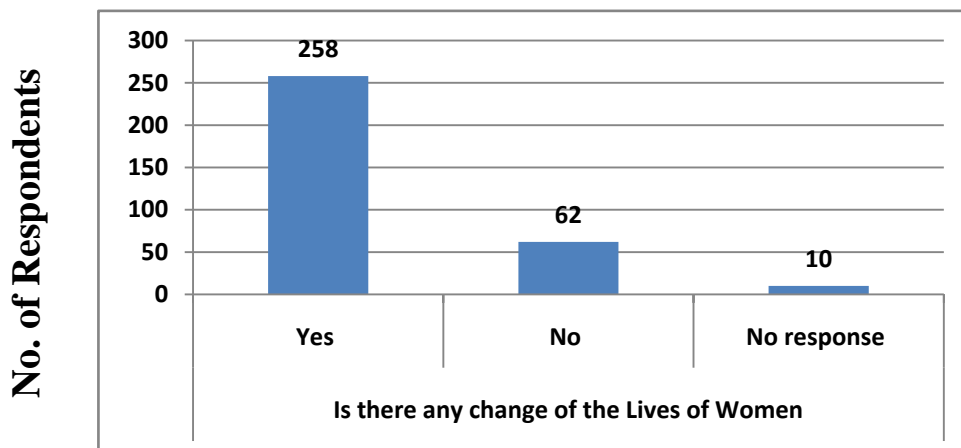
### 1.5 Change in the Lives of Women

Asking about a very important question about whether participation in MGNREGA scheme has brought about a change in the lives of the rural women.

**Table 1.5**  
**Change of the Lives of Women**

Sr. No.	Is there any change of the Lives of Women	No. of Respondents	Percentage
1	Yes	258	78.18
2	No	62	18.78
3	No response	10	3.04
	<b>Total</b>	<b>330</b>	<b>100.00</b>

**Figure 1.5**  
**Change of the Lives of Women**



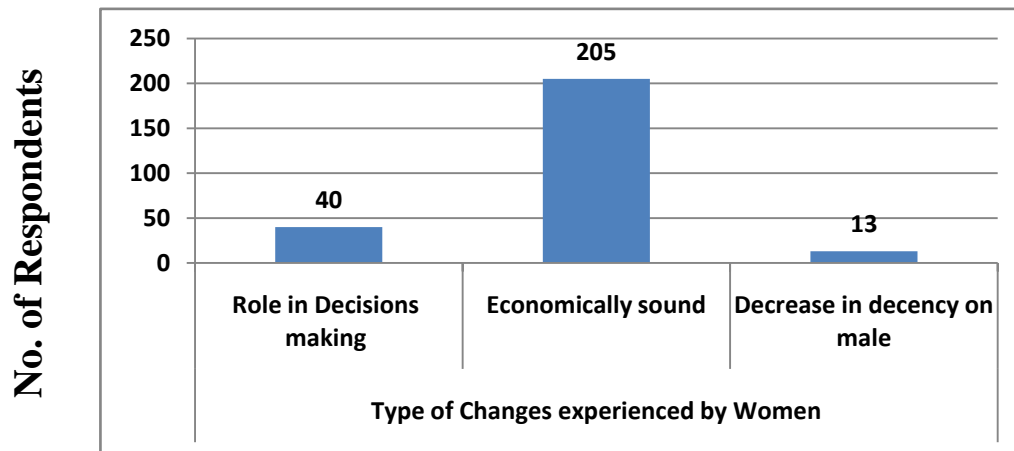
It is satisfactory to know that 78.18 percent respondents (table 1.5) feel that MGNREGA has brought about a significant positive change in the lives of rural women and infact this had proved a silver line despite many shortcomings at functioning level. If targeted population is getting well off and their life is getting improved and they are becoming economically and socially empowered at equitable basis, this is the brighter side of MGNREGA.

**Table 1.6**  
**Type of Changes experienced by Women**

Sr. No.	Type of Changes experienced by Women	No. of Respondents	Percentage
1	Role in Decisions making	40	
2	Economically sound	205	
3	Decrease in decency on male	13	
	<b>Total</b>	<b>258</b>	<b>100.00</b>



**Figure 1.6**  
**Type of Changes experienced by Women**



Supplementary to the previous question we tries to find out the kind of changes that women are experiencing. Table no 1.6 shows that out of the total 258 respondents who found a positive change in the lives of women(79.46 percent) are of the view that due to it the economic condition of women has been improved, whereas 15.50 percent opinions that due to self earnings, there role in the decision making process of the family has been increased. Further 5.04 percent respondents said that their economic dependency on male family member has been reduced. Women became economically sound and they could take decisions independently. In the family where women had subordinate position, through the scheme, economic self independence increased their position in family matters and their dependence on male decreased positively.

### 1.7 Spending Capacity of Women after Joining MGNREGA

A very important indicator of economic empowerment of women is their access to spending capacity. We tried to know about the spending capacity of the women after joining the scheme. The views of all the respondent whether male or female are ascertained in this respect because the male member of the household also know well about it.

**Table 1.7**  
**Spending Capacity of Women after Joining the Scheme**

Sr. No.	Spending capacity of women after joining the scheme	No. of Respondents	Percentage
1	Increased	218	66.06
2	No Change	82	24.85
3	No response	30	09.09
	<b>Total</b>	<b>330</b>	<b>100.00.00</b>

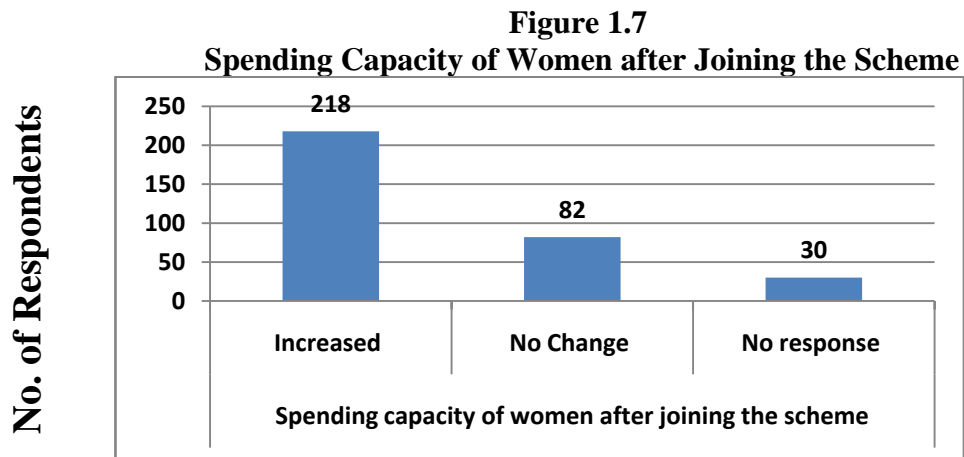


Table 1.7 shows that 66.06 percent respondents feel that after joining the scheme women’s capacity of spending has increased, which is the clear indicator of their economic empowerment after joining MGNREGA.

### 1.8 Women Getting Work near Home

It was also investigated whether women are getting work near home within the radius of 5 Kms, which is under the provision of MGNREGA . In this regard, there is very positive response from the respondents.

**Table 1.8**  
**Women Getting Work near Home**

Sr. No.	Women Getting Work near Home	No. of Respondents	Percentage
1	Yes	302	91.51
2	No	-	-
3	No response	28	8.49
	<b>Total</b>	<b>330</b>	<b>100.00.00</b>

**Figure 1.8**  
**Women Getting Work near Home**

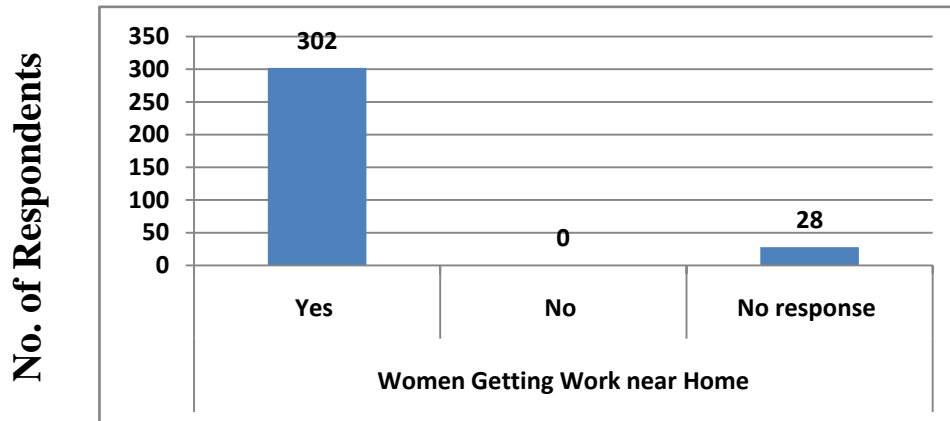


Table 1.8 shows that 92.51 percent respondents said that women are getting work near to their home, means within the radius of 5 KM from the home, whereas 8.49 percent respondents gave no response.

### 1.9 Whether Women are Getting Wage Equal to Men

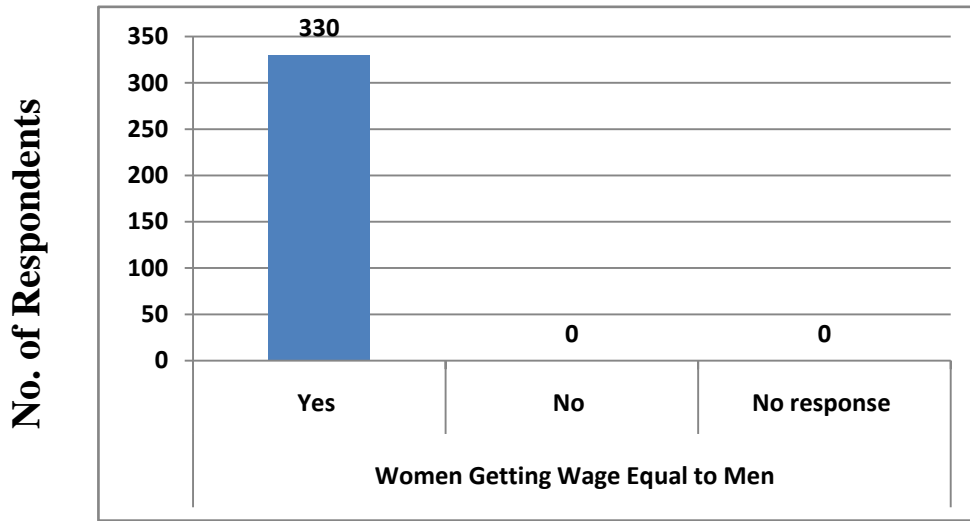
The next question asked was whether women are getting wages equal to men in MGNREGA or not.

**Table 1.9**  
**Women Getting Wage Equal to Men**

Sr. No.	Women Getting Wage Equal to Men	No. of Respondents	Percentage
1	Yes	330	100.00
2	No	-	-
3	No response	-	-
	<b>Total</b>	<b>330</b>	<b>100.00</b>

All the respondents (table 5.17) said that women are getting equal wages and there is no discrimination in this regard. Wage equality for men and women helps to reduce the gender difference to some extent.

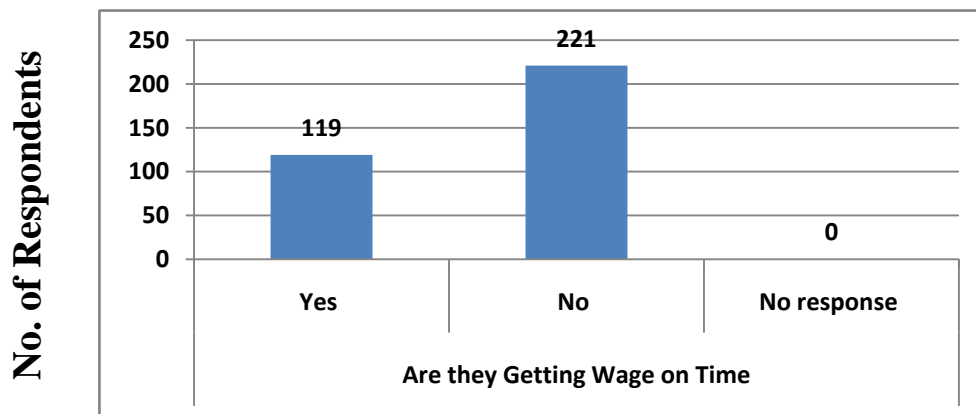
**Figure 1.9**  
**Women Getting Wage Equal to Men**



**Table 1.9**  
**Women Getting Wages on Time**

Sr. No.	Are they Getting Wage on Time	No. of Respondents	Percentage
1	Yes	119	33.04
2	No	221	66.96
3	No response	-	-
	<b>Total</b>	<b>330</b>	<b>100.00</b>

**Figure 1.9**  
**Getting Wages on Time**



It was also asked whether women are getting wages in time. It was not satisfactory answer as about 66.96 percent respondents said that there is delay in the release of payments (table 1.9). It is again the failure at the implementation part.

### 1.10 Co-operation of Male co-workers

On the question whether male co-workers are co-operate with women at workplace or not, there was very positive response.

**Table 1.10**  
**Cooperation of Male Co-Workers at Work Place**

Sr. No.	Whether Male Co-workers Co-operate Women	No. of Respondents	Percentage
1	Yes	272	82.42
2	No	40	12.13
3	No response	18	5.45
	<b>Total</b>	<b>330</b>	<b>100.00</b>

**Figure 1.10**  
**Cooperation of Male Co-Workers at Work Place**

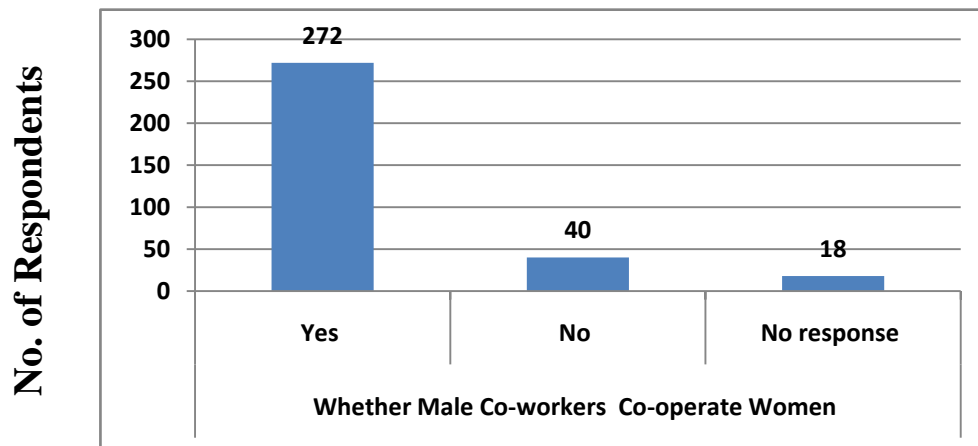


Table 1.10 shows that 82.42 percent respondents are of the opinion that there is positive cooperation of male workers with women workers at work place. A vast majority of the respondents feel that males co-operate women in every respect.

### 1.11 Whether MGNREGA has Improved the Economic Condition of Rural Women

On the most important question whether MGNREGA has improved the economic condition of rural women.

**Table 1.11**  
**MGNREGA has improved the Economic Condition of Rural Women**

Sr. No.	Rural Economic Condition of Women Improved	No. of Respondents	Percentage
1	Yes	296	89.69
2	No	26	7.87
3	No response	08	2.42
	<b>Total</b>	<b>330</b>	<b>100.00</b>

**Figure 1.11**  
**MGNREGA has Improved the Economic Condition of Rural Women**

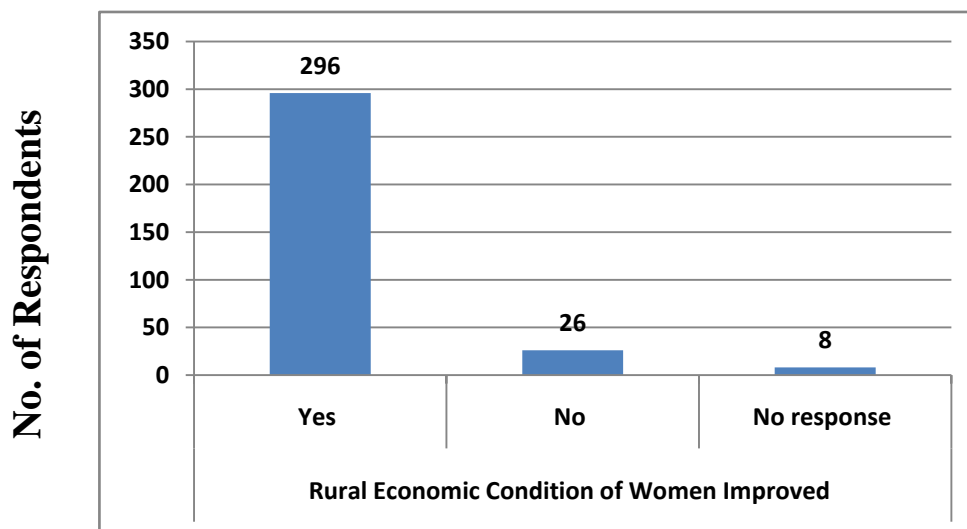


Table 1.11 shows that an overwhelming majority of the respondents (89.69 percent) feel that definitely the economic condition of rural women has been improved after their participation in the scheme and the poor rural women are feeling somewhat empowered.

Thus, it can be said that there is a mixed picture of outcomes related to MNGREGA. Indexing wages with rural inflation and introducing social audit for keeping check on quality of assets and the workforce being employed should be the way forward. However, other schemes have also seen similar hurdles, MGNREGA is not unique. Overall the performance of MGNREGA has been satisfactory.

## Conclusion

After going through the socio-economic and political impact of MGNREGA on the rural population, particularly the women, it can be concluded that MGNREGA as a scheme visualizes providing employment to the rural people, the assets creation in the rural setup, the agricultural development and finally the upliftment of marginalized sections particularly

women, scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. It is revealed from the study that MGNREGA is playing a substantial role in economically empowering women and laying the basis for greater independence and self-esteem. The provision like priority for women in the ratio of one third of total workers, equal wages of men and women, crèche for the children of women workers, work within a radius of five kilometer from home, absence of supervisor and contractor and flexibility in terms of choosing period and months of employment are made in the MGNREGA act, with the view to ensuring that rural women benefit from the scheme in certain manner. Nevertheless, women have availed the paid employment opportunity under MGNREGA in large numbers. Their bank deposits are increasing, their intra household status has also been improving commensurately as she now controls substantial cash resources. They are participating in planning of works and social audit. On the whole it is clear from the above analysis that it is working at satisfactory level. In order to make the “MGNREGA a ray of hope” for the rural people there is a greater need of transparency and full disclosure practices, honesty, dedication, self motivation punctuality and zero political interference.