



IMPACT OF MGNREGS ON WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

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ABSTRACT

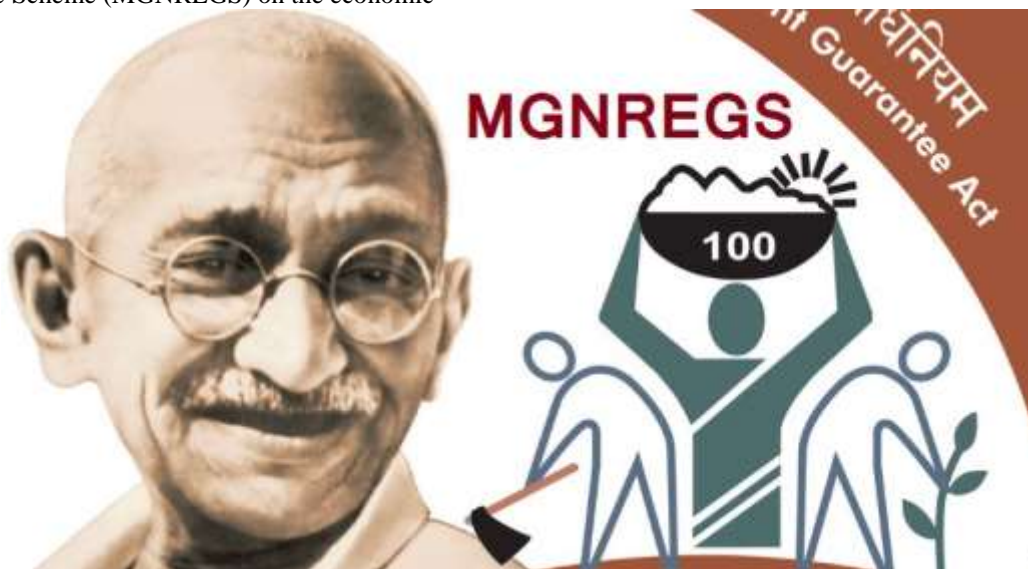
MGNREGS (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme) is special for the kind of self-selection opportunity that it provides which no other scheme in the country does. In order to capture the demand for work successfully, it is mandatory that Rozgar Divas be held every month, possibly at the ward level. The aim is to provide employment to all the job seekers. The event is for registering demand for work, issue of job cards, allocation of work, disclosure of information, payment of wages, payment of unemployment allowance, etc. and to generate awareness about the programme. Yet, a large amount of rationing is evidenced for reasons rarely known. Rationing is believed to be due to various reasons such as lack of awareness in the poorer states, mismatch between demand and supply especially enhanced with men and women competing for manual labour where men generally have an advantage, incapability of state institutions to implement MGNREGS effectively. Thus, the high demand for work and less capacity to implement MGNREGS may lead to a build-up of a vicious cycle for the poorer states. Further, the rationing is also attributed to conscious efforts of state governments to not distort market wages during particular seasons. We find that with rationing in place, employment guarantee in the field far from being demand driven is actually a supply driven scheme. This paper explains the impact of MGNREGS on women empowerment

KEYWORDS: MGNREGS, rozgar, women, empowerment, scheme, labour, employment, employment

INTRODUCTION

Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) on the economic

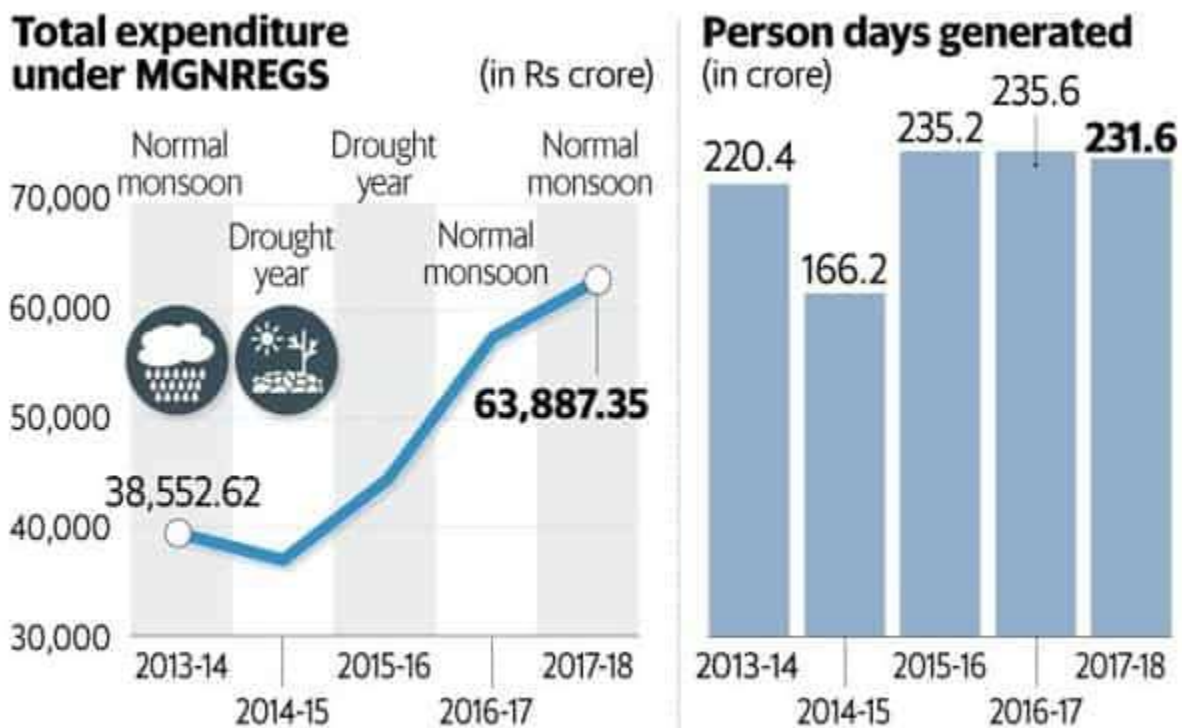
empowerment of women labourers is applied in India for their empowerment.





MGNREGS plays a significant role to meet the practical as well as strategic needs of women’s participation. It has become a beacon of 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. By putting cash incomes into hands, MGNREGS is beginning to create a greater degree of economic independence among women. This was one of MGNREGS’s main aims: with the increased participation of women in household income-generation a positive contribution to gender relations can be made. The survey data in India (both qualitative

and quantitative) suggest that women workers are more confident about their roles as contribution to family expenditure and their work decision, and that they are also becoming more assertive about their space in the public sphere . The significant contribution of MGNREGS was that it has removed these constraints as the wage employment was made available within or closer to the village. It has provided them with the opportunity to earn without having had to forgo their other familiar obligations. Looking at the response from widows separately, MGNREGS was also considered “very important” for widows. [1,2]



Source: Ministry of rural development; Data table comparing MGNREGS wages with minimum wages from press statement issued by rights group NREGA Sangharsh Morcha

Employment, Empowerment and Emancipation are the buzz words that deal with the issues of development be it at the macro level or micro level. Moreover, in countries like India, the micro-level development of the most deprived, disadvantaged, and marginalized and the weaker sections of the society especially the women are the prerequisites for the macro-level development of the society. Although women comprise nearly half of the population, their status is not at par with the men in Indian society. The status of women is undermined historically either by the customs or by the law in their personal, social and political life . Women had inferior ascribed status in

traditional India. They were seen only as a member of the family or a group but not as individuals with identity, aspiration and right of their own . They are being deprived, discriminated and subjugated in all spheres. In fact, “the subordination of women in society is an extension of their subordination in the family” .They are under the control of their parents before marriage and husband/sons after marriage. Therefore, it has been envisaged that the development of women is imperative for the development of the nation. Perhaps, the eleventh five-year plan goes beyond empowerment and considered women as agents of sustained socio-economic growth and change. Moreover, the twelfth



five-year plan emphasized that women and children should be given special attention as they constitute about 79 per cent of the population. Perhaps emphasized women participation in all the development process wherein the work participation of women occupies a pertinent place. [3,4]

DISCUSSION

The workforce participation rate of women not only reflects the economic status or empowerment in society but also significant in reducing poverty and enhancing the social status of women. In India, although women constitute almost half of the population, their work participation is less than one third (this is in terms of economic activity outside the family).

**MGNREGS and Rural Livelihoods :
Experience, Opportunities and Emerging Pathways**

Session 1: Large Scale experiences of strengthening Rural livelihoods building on NREGS
Session 2: Lessons, insights on creating systemic solutions around NREGS to cater Rural Aspirations

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Perhaps, their work contribution is under enumerated and undervalued . This describes the domination of the socio-cultural and structural aspects (chauvinistic and economic deterministic aspect) of the society. Though economic growth is viewed as a pivotal mechanism for reducing poverty, the role of social and cultural institutions play a crucial role in determining everything including empowerment and development of women .

“Women are the vital human infrastructure and their empowerment does make changes in the development scenario of a nation” . In a country like India where labour is the only economic asset for millions of people, gainful employment is a prerequisite for the fulfilment of other basic rights such as the right to life, the right to food, and the right to education etc. Moreover, one of the empowerment strategies is to assist the marginalized people with

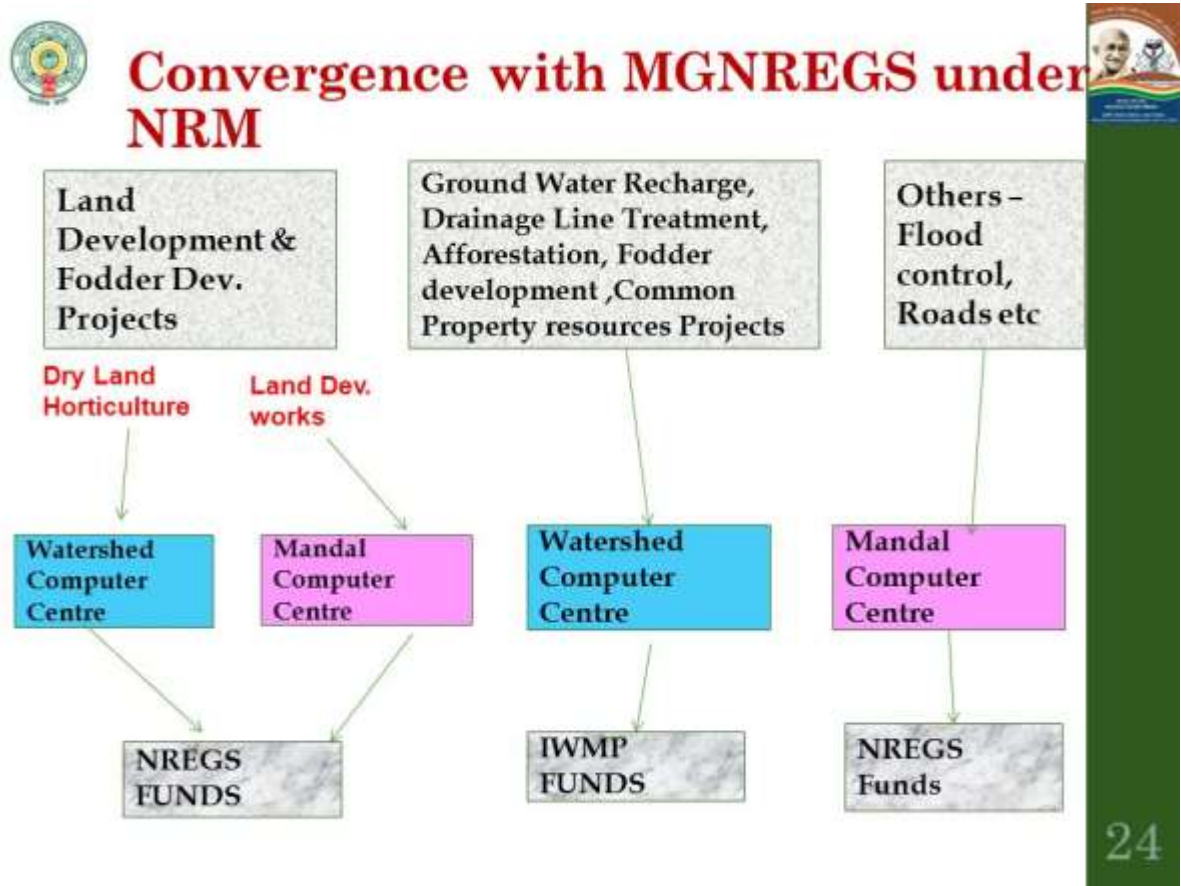
employment opportunity and work participation which would in turn enable them to empower themselves . In the context of developing nations, public actions play a pivotal role in providing food security, reducing poverty and gender disparity, promoting equality, liberty and fraternity . The introduction of MGNREGS ranks among the most powerful initiatives ever undertaken for the transformation of rural livelihoods in India. It is a legally guaranteed employment programme. MGNREGS is a gender sensitive programme besides its primary aims of ending food insecurity, creating productive assets in rural areas and empowering the rural communities on the whole . Perhaps, the various provisions of the scheme such as equitable and easy access to work, decent working conditions, the equal wage for both men and women, one-third reservation for women and representation of women on decision-making bodies did play a pivotal



role for the higher participation of women in the scheme . Moreover, MGNREGS came in as a safety-net when employment opportunities were scarce and seasonal for women in the rural areas which eventually pushed them to the more vulnerable position. Hence, overwhelming participation of women has been observed in MGNREGS throughout the nation.[5,6]

Implications

Work participation for sure whether brings economic/political development or not but it will certainly reduce the dependency and marginality of women . Though India has implemented at least 17 types of major works programmes between 1970-2005, hardly one-fourth participation of women was observed



Similarly, although women constituted only 28.7 per cent of the nation's workforce (NSS, 2004-05), the official MGNREGS web data indicates impressive participation of women in the scheme. This was also true in the case of Rajasthan wherein the work participation rate of women was 33 per cent but their participation rate in MGNREGS was 70 percent , e.g. women participation rate was about 40 per cent in 2006-07 and 44 per cent in 2007- 08 without many hikes at the beginning at the national level but it did exhibit a constant increase in the following years up to 56 per cent .However, there were great variations observed across the states. The data indicates

impressive participation of women more than 33 per cent in 15 states wherein Tamil Nadu topped with 82 per cent and Kerala and Rajasthan with 71 and 69 per cent respectively during 2008-09 . [7,8]

MGNREGS has made a significant contribution to improve the wellbeing of women by paying decent wages and make women more productive in rural areas . It has made women economically independent and it was the first time that women are paid on par with men. Secondly, women's economic contribution in the family became more visible , and it gives economic freedom to women .Studies have revealed that wage earned from MGNREGS has enabled the people to meet various



expenditure such as meeting the household expenditure, paying back their debts, retrieving pawned gold, children's education, medicines, and saving. Hence, it has become the lifeline especially for the poor women and they consider it indispensable. It has substantially reduced the rate of rural unemployment along with a significant contribution to the

independence and social empowerment of rural women. [9,10]

RESULTS

Though MGNREGS guarantees 100 days of employment per household, it is at the discretion of the household members to decide who would participate.



MGNREGS came in as an employment opportunity available within the village when the women had scarce employment opportunities to take care of the household expenses on her own and feels independent. Secondly, women were able to interact with others and officials. Moreover, MGNREGS has greatly benefited the widows viz able to mingle with all and share their feelings and get self-respect and participate in the Gram Sabha meetings. Thirdly, MGNREGS is perceived as a major intervention for the empowerment of women in rural areas by providing livelihood security, democratic governance and social protections. Women can contribute to the family income and have a say in the family besides spending their earning for their personal needs. Independence and

self-esteem among women are the major outcomes of MGNREGS. [11]

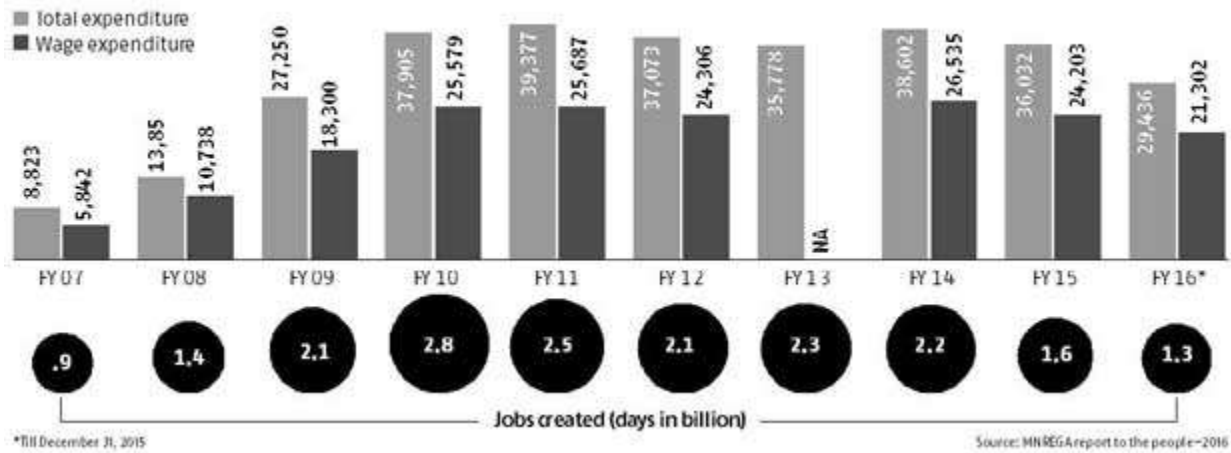
The structure of a society determines the social position of women in society. Women have remained largely invisible even though they are employed and enjoy a degree of economic independence. Though the quantum of employment generated under MGNREGS at the macro level gives a positive figure, in reality, it is an eye-wash and does not empower the women. The women seemed to face invisible social constraints such as that they could work in the fields of their community or where persons from their community work. Though it was claimed that MGNREGS provided a culture of economic independence among women, it was learnt that it gave economic gains but it did not transform into gender empowerment. Because, women in India are



perceived as housewives, mothers and their productive works at home and farm are not considered as works. It is neither the society nor the women who have perceived their economic role at home and in the society at large. Moreover, besides education, the

culture of the society determines the status of women across the country irrespective of their religion, caste and state/community. The women have to adjust their entire lives according to the stereotyped or chauvinist social structures in which they live. [12]

MGNREGS: JOURNEY IN THE LAST 10 YEARS



CONCLUSIONS

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) reduced poverty by up to a third and gave a large number of women their first opportunity to earn cash income, a new research has found. Officials from the Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD) and the National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER) released a new report which used data from two rounds of the India Human Development Survey (IHDS) – 2004-5 and 2011-12. The survey was conducted by the NCAER and University of Maryland, involving over 26,000 rural households across the country. Comparisons between the two survey rounds found that the programme reduced poverty overall by up to 32 per cent and prevented 14 million people from falling into poverty. “Economic growth contributed to overall poverty reduction during this period, but we found that the MGNREGS also played a significant role.[13]

Overall, while the period of 2004-5 to 2011-12 saw a sharp rise in rural wages, MGNREGS plays only a modest role in wage increases, the report notes. The United Nations Development Programme also released a review of recent research studies on the MGNREGS which found similarly, and found that the scheme’s uptake is far greater in the lean season than in the peak agricultural season.

The part of the rural job market that the MGNREGS did seem to have a more significant

impact on was for female work. About 45% of female MGNREGS workers were either not working or worked only on a family farm in 2004–05, indicating that the MGNREGS “may well be the first opportunity many women have to earn cash income”. As a result, there was a substantial increase in women’s control over resources — including cash in hand and the likelihood of having a bank account — and improvement in women’s ability to make independent decisions about their health, the report found. Children from MGNREGS households were likely to obtain higher levels of educational attainment than their non-MGNREGS peers, the report found, and were less likely to be working. While financial inclusion rose in general during this period and reliance of moneylenders declined, the effect was much greater for MGNREGS households, as was the decrease in the overall interest paid by the household. Simultaneously, accessing of formal credit grew.[14]

What holds the MGNREGS back is “work rationing” — the inability of all interested households to get 100 days of work — as a result of mismanagement or pressures, and affects the poorest the most, the report finds. “These findings clearly show that there is a large unmet demand for MGNREGS work,” Jugal Kishore Mohapatra, secretary, Ministry of Rural Development, said, adding that a paucity of funds at the level of implementations and erratic fund flows, particularly



in 2014-15 had affected both demand and supply.
[15]

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