



MGNREGA- A RAY OF HOPE FOR WOMEN OR A MYTH

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Abstract: *Mahatma Gandhi NREGA is a vehicle for growth that guarantees wage employment at an unprecedented scale. It aims to provide a steady source of income and livelihood security for the poor and marginalized, especially for women.*

Thinking on the lines that 'big things come in small packages,' we must appreciate the efforts of the Government. From FY 2006-2007 to 2012, women participation has been 40% to 47%, which itself is the indicator of rise in women participation and alertness in MGNREGA.

The paper will discuss the level of women participation and how the scheme is beneficial for them. Further, it will also take into consideration the States where women participation is low and the factors which act as hindrances for this gender group in villages.

Keywords: *MGNREGA, Women Participation, Hindrance Factors*

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INTRODUCTION

“Aiding in the empowerment of the marginalized communities, especially women, Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs), through the processes of a rights-based legislation”.

“Priority is awarded to women, such that at least one-third of the beneficiaries under the Scheme are women”.

Above mentioned are few mandates and objectives of the Mahatama Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), 2005, which was notified on 7 September 2005.

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LEVEL OF PARTICIPATION AND STATES WITH LOW PARTICIPATION

MGNREGA has millions of workers on its rolls but women's participation remains uneven across the states. A January 2012 study, MGNREGA Implementation: A Cross-State Comparison, by the Woodrow Wilson School's Graduate Policy Workshop found that the all India average for women workers in the programme was 42%. (Goswami, ET Bureau, 2012)

According to Khera and Nayak (2009), participation of women in NREGA was below the stipulated minimum of 33 percent and in Uttar Pradesh & Bihar being at the bottom, with women accounting for only 5 & 13% of the NREGA workforce respectively.

Although the participation level at Kerala is totally in a different form. A feature specific to Kerala is that the sites are managed by women and most of the women coming for work have been mobilized into self-help groups. (Ratna M Sudarshan. 2010).

Study also suggests there is wide variation across States, 5 States had less than 25 percent and 11 had over 40 percent. Kerala and Rajasthan showed a very high proportion of work days generated being taken up by women, Himachal Pradesh is a contrast with very low share of women participation. (Ratna M Sudarshan, 2010).

The study found that in states like Tamil Nadu women accounted for 82%, while Uttar Pradesh "has yet to meet the one-third female participation requirement, as stipulated under Article 29 of the Act". (Goswami ET Bureau, 2012)

BENEFITS OF MGNREGA FOR WOMENS

The scheme shows contrast in women participation but there is no doubt about the benefits it carries for them.

Few amongst them are discussed as under-



- 1) MGNREGA has given an opportunity to the rural based women to come out from their respective houses to work and earn in a safe environment. In the view of Sudarshan, 2010 it is for the first time that women has come out to work in the response of this program.
- 2) Another key factor is proximity of home with work place. The programme provides the field work, which is close to home and thus removes the worry of spending time to commute for work and also to spend any money on transportation.
- 3) The programme has come as a women empowerment scheme which allows rural females to move in their society with respect and pride. Himachal Pradesh is rewarded for MGNREGA implementation for maximum women participation and promoting women empowerment. (Jagran, 2013)
- 4) Finances must not be forgotten as the scheme has improved the household well-being and enabled women to undertake some personal expenditure.
- 5) The pay rate being minimum Rs 125 per day is well above the prevalent market wage rate for women (70-80 Rs per day).
- 6) MGNREGA scheme has encouraged non-working women, widows and the elderly to participate.

PITFALLS FOR WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN MGNREGA

Although reports indicate a positive and high level of women participation in MGNREGA we need to take into consideration the pitfalls in the programme relating to women participation.

Several study brings out the following limiting factors -

- 1) In Himachal, women are very less in number because they are busy in collecting fodder for animals.
- 2) Adding to the above point it is also noted that there are no natural resources of water, so it is difficult for women to balance household work with NREGA.
- 3) In few places like Rajasthan females reported that they are unable to go for work outside as there is nobody to look after their children at home. (Sudarshan, 2010).
Child-care facilities were not provided at the worksite, which poses a big problem for women, especially those with breast feeding babies. (Frontline, 2009)



- 4) Gender is again the constrain for women to access NREGA. They can do agricultural work on their own fields and it is not the convention for women to work on other people's land.
- 5) Panchayats lack in closely communicating with women in all the States resulting in lack of awareness.
- 6) In States like Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, women are of opinion that they have not been able to register and were told that NREGA program is not meant for them. Women in Sitapur, Uttar Pradesh reported that they were teased, ridiculed or verbally abused by male workers (Frontline,2009)
- 7) Delayed payments also come in the way of participation of poor women, specially who are the sole earners of family. Such delay forces them to get back to their previous sources of livelihood.
- 8) Illelegal presence of contractors at many worksites which affects the availability of work and its benefits for women. In Madhya Pradesh, contractors offered work only to young, able-bodied men.(Frontline,2009)
- 9) More work is given for male and women are ignored at every stage. There is also a high level of politicization of this scheme.

CONCLUSION

The adage, "there is no short-cut to success" is precisely the right fit for MGNREGA and women participation. Understanding the regional differences related to culture and conventions, basic amenities, awareness level, etc, we see that there is no parity amongst the States in our country for women participation in MGNREGA.

However, we cant overlook the positive aspect of this programme initiative of providing employment to women of rural mass and making them empowered by making them financially stable and allowing them to put their steps out to work.

No, doubt about its failure in few States but that does not dissolves the efforts of Governemnt in the States where it is doing extremely well.

Participation, is not a miracle to happen in a day. Therefore, a changed methodology of increasing awareness through Panchayats and citing other State's example of women participation and sharing stories of their success will gradually increase the participation all over India.



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