

Participation of Women Workers in MGNREGA: A Case Study of Jaipur District of Rajasthan

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Abstract

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) is one of the most progressive legislations enacted for the rural India. The act, entitles rural households to 100 days of casual employment on public works at the statutory minimum wage. It is also committed to ensuring that at least 33 per cent of the workers shall be women for generating employment for women at fair wages in the village. MGNREGA is a powerful instrument for ensuring inclusive growth in rural India through its impact on social protection, livelihood security and democratic empowerment. This programme has completed almost nine years. Now, the implementation of the scheme has become an important issue of debate and research. The main focus of this paper is on women empowerment through women participation in MGNREGA in Jaipur districts of Rajasthan. This paper is based on both primary and secondary data. The major finding of this study is that most of the MGNREGA work is done by marginalized section women's.

Key Words: *MGNREGA, Empowerment, Rural labour, Gram shabha*

JEL Classification: *J08, J16, J21*

Introduction

In the context of developing countries like India, an employment guarantee programme is likely to address effectively a number of barriers to equality for women. Along with promoting poverty alleviation of the households at the bottom, generating productive assets and facilitating pro-poor growth in the economy, an employment guarantee can reduce gender inequalities in multiple ways. It can guarantee employment at the legal minimum wages to men as well as to women, can generate assets that reduce drudgery of women, give ownership of assets to women also, and can empower women in many other ways by giving wages in their hands. An employment guarantee programme can also encourage mobilization of women, giving them collective strength to bargain for a better deal in the economy (Hirway, 2011).

The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) which came into existence in 2006 and renamed as Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) on the occasion of 140th birth anniversary of the Father of Nation, in 2009 is a powerful instrument for ensuring inclusive growth in rural India through its impact on social protection, livelihood security and democratic empowerment. Its inbuilt design has helped in promotion of gender equality directly or indirectly. Priority is being given to women in such a way that at least one third of the beneficiaries shall be women (NREGA 2005, Schedule II, 6). In case the number of children below the age of six years accompanying the women working at any site is five or more, provisions are be made to depute one of such women working to look after the children (NREGA 2005, Schedule II, 28). In case of every employment under the scheme, there shall be no discrimination solely on the ground of gender and the provisions of the Equal Remuneration

Act, 1976 (25 of 1976), compiled with (NREGA 2005, Schedule II, 34). This scheme also provides opportunity to women to participate in planning and implementation of MGNREGA as members of *Gram Sabha* and Gram Panchayat. Not less than one third of the total number of non-official members of the central council shall be women (NREGA 2005, Part II, and Sec-3i). Some provisions like work within a radius of five kilometers from the house, absence of contractor, flexibility in choosing periods and months of employment etc. were not solely made for men but some way these are helpful for rural women (NREGA 2005).

Das, (2012) found that MGNREGA has positive impact on employment pattern of women. Women were benefited both at individual level and community as a whole. Women are benefited individually because they are able to earn independently, spend some money for their own needs, contribute in family expenditure etc. The gained benefits of women as community can be understood by increased presence in the *Gram Sabha*, increasing number of women in speaking out in the meetings, increasing capacity of interaction etc. Hirway (2011) highlighted increasing awareness and participation of women in post MGNREGA scenario. Their participation in *Gram Sabha* and in social audit acts as an instrument of political empowerment. MGNREGA has promoted collective strength of women in several spheres of village life. The foremost impact on the women from different villages is that they acquainted with each other, interact with each other and help each other. Viswanathan and Mandal (2011) examined the status of implementation of MGNREGS across states and brought out the fact that the states have shown clear variation in patterns of gender work participation in the MGNREGS among different states of India. Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Rajasthan and Andhra Pradesh continued to show extremely high levels of women work participation in the scheme. About a dozen of states have shown moderate levels of gender work participation, while majority of the states still lagged behind in terms of gender work participation. This underlies that the lower levels of women participation in some states could be attributed to the interplay of several socio-economic, institutional, political and cultural factors, besides the possible structural issues of the MGNREGS that limits engagement of women in MGNREGS activities. Pankaj and Tankha (2010) through field survey in Bihar, Jharkhand, Rajasthan and Himachal Pradesh revealed that a woman worker's earnings from MGNREGA constituted 14 per cent of the total annual

income of the household on average across the four sample States in 2008-09. Majority of women workers collected and retained their wages. Hazarika (2009) examined the impact of MGNREGA on gender empowerment in Morigaon and Bongaigaon districts of Assam and showed that almost 70 to 80 per cent of sample workers had meaningful income other than unpaid family work during the pre-NREGA. Majority of the worker felt that they were now in better position to fulfill their own requirement without looking at others. Khera and Nayak (2009) through their sample survey in six states of North India (Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh) focused on impact of MGNREGA in the lives of women workers. The study revealed that there was significant benefits reported by women include increased food security and better ability to avoid hazardous work. The scheme increased average wage rate comparing to private labour market also. The working hours limited to 7-8 hours a day were helpful to prevent harassment of women workers. Some women reported that work with private landlords and contractors are often replete with an underlying threat or possibility of sexual abuse and exploitation. MGNREGA has brought mental satisfaction especially to women work force.

The review of literature indicated that Rajasthan was one of the better performer states in terms of women participation rate in MGNREGA from its starting year (Sameeksha, 2012). The present research work provided an opportunity to explore the important issue of MGNREGA which is not touch by previous studies. The first objective of this paper is to understand the trend of women workers participation in MGNREGA. The second objective is to analyze the impact of MGNREGA on women empowerment.

Data Sources and Methodology

The present study is an analytical and empirical research to examine the implementation and performance of MGNREGA scheme of its various aspects with special reference to women participation in the scheme to enhance the women empowerment. This study is based on primary as well as secondary data. The primary data were collected with the help of structured questionnaire. The state of Rajasthan was purposively chosen as a universe of study among the states in all over India. The *Bassi* block of Jaipur district was purposively selected for the research work and village *Banskho* had been selected as a sample area the reason being that this village was an average village in

terms of population, which involved in agricultural activities and casual works only for fulfilling their needs of livelihood. A sample of 100 households was collected randomly along the breadth and length of the village. The population was then stratified into different land holding status on the basis of information gathered from Gram Panchayat. The secondary data was collected from various reliable sources like Report of Rural Development department, working papers, articles, journals, and funding report for MGNREGA and many more.

Results and Discussion

The extent to which Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act has enabled increased work participation of women across states depend on a variety of socio-economic, cultural, political as well as institutional. It is also needed to have a proper explanation whether the MGNREGA scheme works undertaken by states have been responsive or not

in terms of creating employment opportunities. The states have shown significant variations with respect to the gender dynamism defined in terms of women work participation over the last seven years of implementation of MGNREGA. Based on the reported rates of women work participation in the MGNREGA activities, the states may be classified into three categories. Category one is of States with extremely high levels of women work participation in the range of 57-84 per cent. The states are Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Rajasthan and Andhra Pradesh. Category two is of the States with moderate levels of gender work participation rates above the national average (33-47 per cent). This category comprises of ten states Karnataka, Gujarat, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Himachal Pradesh, Utrakhnad, Odisha, Haryana and Punjab. This category is of the States with rates of Women Participation below minimum 33 per cent (32-9 per cent). This category is having rest of the seven states (Jharkhand, West Bengal, Assam, Bihar,

Table 1. Women participation days (2006 - 07 to 2012 -13)

No	States/UTs & level of work participation	2006 -07	2007 -08	2008 -09	2009 -10	2010 -11	2011 -12	2012 -13	Average
I. States with high rates of Women Participation									
1	Kerala	66	71	85	88	90	93	94	84
2	Tamil Nadu	81	82	80	83	83	74	75	80
3	Rajasthan	67	69	67	67	68	69	69	68
4	Andhra Pradesh	55	58	58	58	57	58	58	57
	Average	67	70	73	74	75	74	74	
II. States with moderate levels of Women participation									
1	Karnataka	51	50	50	37	46	46	47	47
2	Gujarat	50	47	43	48	44	45	43	46
3	Chhattisgarh	39	42	47	49	49	45	47	45
4	Madhya Pradesh	43	42	43	44	44	43	43	43
5	Maharashtra	37	40	46	40	46	46	45	43
6	Himachal Pradesh	12	30	39	46	48	60	61	42
7	Uttarakhand	30	43	37	40	40	45	44	40
8	Odisha	36	36	38	36	39	39	38	37
9	Haryana	31	34	31	35	36	36	40	35
10	Punjab	38	16	25	26	34	43	47	33
	Average	37	38	40	40	43	45	46	
III. States with rates of Women Participation below minimum 33 per cent									
1	Jharkhand	39	27	29	34	33	31	32	32
2	West Bengal	18	17	27	33	34	32	33	28
3	Assam	32	31	27	28	27	25	23	28
4	Bihar	17	28	30	30	28	29	30	27
5	Uttar Pradesh	17	15	18	22	21	17	19	18
6	J&K	4	1	6	7	7	18	20	9
7	Average	21	20	23	26	25	25	26	
	All India	40	43	48	48	48	48	53	47

Table 2. Working Days during Last Four Years across Different Land Holding Class under MGNREGA

Land Size (Hectare)	Average no of 2009 - 2010	Average no of 2010 - 2011	Average no of 2011 - 2012	Average no of 2012 - 2013
Land less	41	72	17	12
0.01-0.5	43	77	12	5
0.51-1.0	42	86	23	10
1.01-1.5	38	80	20	7
Above 1.5	41	91	19	4
Average	41	81	18	8

Source: Field Survey, 2013

and Uttar Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir). Table 1 explains the categorization of states in detail. The four states in category one led by Kerala that reported extremely high levels of women participation with an increase in the rate of participation over the seven year period from 67 in 2006-07 per cent rises to 74 per cent in 2012-13. The other states in this category include Tamil Nadu, Rajasthan and Andhra Pradesh.

In the second category of states, the level of women work participation rates has slightly improved from 37 per cent during 2006-07 to 46 per cent during 2012-13 with significant inter-state variations. The highest levels of women work participation in this group of states was reported from Karnataka (47 per cent), followed by Gujarat (46 per cent), Chhattisgarh (45 per cent), Madhya Pradesh (43 per cent), Himachal Pradesh (42 per cent). The lowest level women work participation in this group of states was reported in Punjab (33 per cent). Female participation in MGNREGA is greater than their share of the casual wage labour market across all the States. Women are participating in the Scheme much more actively than they participated in all forms of recorded work.

Table 3. Male-Female Participation in MGNREGA across Different Land holding households (Days/year)

Land Size (Hectare)	Male participation	Female participation	Total
Land less	-	132 (100)	132 (100)
0.01 -0.5	17 (14.29)	102 (85.71)	119 (100)
0.51 -1.0	12 (4.96)	230 (95.04)	242 (100)
1.01 -1.5	9 (6.67)	126 (93.33)	135 (100)
Above 1.5	14 (16.66)	70 (83.33)	84 (100)
Total	52 (7.34)	656 (92.66)	708 (100)

Source: Field Survey, 2013, Figures in Parenthesis are Percentage

MGNREGA creates decent and favorable working condition for women. Kerala had the highest female participation rate at 84 per cent, Tamil Nadu and Rajasthan followed with 80 per cent and 68 per cent. Nine states below the requirement of minimum 33 per cent were Uttar Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Mizoram, Assam, Nagaland, Bihar, Jharkhand, Arunachal Pradesh and West Bengal.

The southern states, like Kerala and Tamil Nadu, show a higher rate of participation in MGNREGA as compared to their overall work participation in all recorded works. Among the northern and some eastern states, however, the pattern has been generally different, with proportionately fewer women working in the Scheme than in other rural work; Rajasthan is the only exception. These gaps are especially marked in Punjab and Jammu and Kashmir, where women participation in MGNREGA is particularly low. Some of the possible factors responsible for a high rate of participation in the southern states could be cultural acceptance of female participation in the labour force, influence of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and effective institutions at the state and local government level that are committed to promoting female participation in MGNREGA scheme. The low rates of women participation states has improved from 21 per cent to 26 per cent during the seven year period, with highest levels reported from Jharkhand (32 per cent), followed by West Bengal and Assam (each 28 per cent), Uttar Pradesh (18 per cent), Jammu and Kashmir, (9 per cent). It is quite interesting to note that gender work participation is abysmally low (ranging from 9 to 29 per cent) in states, such as West Bengal, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Assam, and Jammu and Kashmir. This gap is especially marked in Jammu and Kashmir where women participation in MGNREGA is particularly low.

Facts in the table 2 examined the performance of MGNREGA scheme in terms of average working days in different years across different land holding class.

This study came up with the finding that there was a negative relationship between land holding and MGNREGA participation. In the year of 2009-10 the average working days were around 41 days. In the year 2009-10, the scheme provided average working days is all most same in all land holding class. This scenario of providing average working days was changed in the financial year of 2010-11, as MGNREGA provided work for 81 days an average. It was double of the previous year but after this year the average working days in MGNREGA decreased drastically. The possible justification for drastically declined the average working days may be insufficient budget allocation on MGNREGA. In the financial year 2012-13 the highest MGNREGA working days were 12 in case of land less households and the lowest MGNREGA working days whereas, 4 days with the households having land holding above 1.5 hectare. Thus the study concluded that the performance of MGNREGA in terms of providing working days was so good during the financial year of 2010-11. On the other hand the very poor performance of MGNREGA was shown during the financial year 2012-13.

The study examined (table 3) the participation of male and female in MGNREGA during the financial year 2012-13 across different land holding households. It was found that female were the dominant participants in MGNREGA with each land holding class. It also undoubtedly symbolized that out of 708 days of the work done only 52 days of work was done by male and rest of work was contributed by women. The highest male participation was 17 days for the land holding class 0.01 to 0.5 hectare whereas; the highest female participation was 230 days for the land holding class 0.51 to 1.0 hectare. This

Table 4. Women participation among social groups across different Land holding households under MGNREGA (In Days /year)

Land Size (Hectare)	SC	ST	OBC	Total
Land less	132 (100)	-	-	132 (100)
0.01 -0.5	9 (9)	93 (91)	0 (0)	102 (100)
0.51 -1.0	10 (6)	25 (14)	137 (80)	172 (100)
1.01 -1.5	15 (8)	43 (23)	126 (69)	184 (100)
Above 1.5	10 (15)	56 (85)	0 (0)	66 (100)
Total	176	217	263	656

Source: Field Survey, 2013, Figures in Parenthesis are Percentage

phenomenon implied that there was no social barrier for women to participate in MGNREGA work in village. It was appeared that the village was more liberal in terms of women participation especially in MGNREGA. One of the most surprising fact reveled from the survey was that no male worker was found in MGNREGA in case of land less sample households. The reasons behind less male participation in MGNREGA were the due to risks associated with working under MGNREGA.

It was observed that the participation of women in the category of land less household among the total women participants in MGNREGA was remarkably higher at 100 per cent (table 4). Whereas, in case of households having land holding from 0.01 to 0.5 hectare in the class of ST, women participated for 93 days (91 per cent) and on the contrary, for SC it was just for 9 days. In case of land holding households, with 0.51 to 1.0 hectare, the women's participation share of for different social groups like ST, SC and BC was 14 per cent, 6 per cent and 80 per cent respectively. In the case of households having 1.01 to 1.5 hectare of land holding, the women participation rate was 23 per cent, 8 per cent and 69 per cent for ST, SC and OBC. For highest land holding class (above 1.5 hectare) the women participation rate was 85 per cent (ST) and 15 per cent (SC) working under MGNREGA. Out of 656 days of total women work, the OBC women workers participation was 263 days during the financial year 2012-13. The study revealed interesting result that in case of each land holding class the household among the total participation in MGNREGA work the participation from General caste was nil. Thus, on basis of the facts collected from the field survey, it was found that MGNREGA performed well to empowering the women in marginalized section of the society. As the participation in MGNREGA by marginalized section women work in every land holding class was remarkable.

The study examined the work participation of male and female under MGNREGA in the last financial year 2012-13 across different per capita income groups. It was observed that the (table 5) the females were the dominant participants in MGNREGA in each per capita income class. Out of total 708 work days, only 52 days of work was done by males whereas the rest of the work was done by women in the financial year 2012-13. The highest male participation was for 33 days in Rs 20001 to 30000 per capita income class while on the other hand; highest

Table 5. Per capita income wise men and women participation in MGNREGA

Per Capita Income (RS)	Male	Female	Total
10000 - 20000	12	346	358
20001 - 30000	33	246	279
30001 - 40000	4	25	29
40001 - 50000	0	14	14
50001 - 60000	0	0	0
Above 60001	3	25	28
Total	52	656	708

Source: Field Survey, 2013

female participation was for 358 days in Rs 10000 to 20000 per capita income groups. No male was found working under MGNREGA in case of per capita income from Rs 40001 - 50000 and 50001 - 60000 under the study. It was also interesting to note that the male participation decreased as the per capita income increased. The reason behind less male participation in MGNREGA was that the wage rate in MGNREGA was low as compared to market wage rate. On the other hand, the study showed that as the per capita income range increased the rate of female participation also decreased as it was showing the inverse relationship between per capita income and work days for women. The reason may be the backward sloping supply curve of labour. The impact of MGNREGA on agriculture wage rate for Women from 2008-09 to 2012-13. At the initial stage of MGNREGA in Jaipur district of Rajasthan agriculture wage rate for women was Rs 50. But after 2008-09 agriculture wage rate for women continuously increased from Rs 50 to Rs 150 in 2012-13 due to MGNREGA wage rate. Female are benefited through MGNREGA especially in terms of wage rate. Because female are the dominant participate in

Table 6. Women participation and social groups across Per Capita Income Class

Per Capita Income (RS)	ST	SC	OBC	Total
10000-20000	69 (19)	99 (29)	178 (51)	346
20001-30000	102 (42)	57 (23)	87 (35)	246
30001-40000	-	14 (56)	11 (44)	25
40001-50000	-	14 (100)	-	14
50001-60000	-	-	-	-
Above 60001	-	25 (100)	-	25
Total	171	209	276	656

Source: Field Survey, 2013. Note: The parenthesis value is in per cent

agriculture sector in the study area. As a result women member take independent decision accordance with prior needs of their family.

Women participation from different social groups in MGNREGA across different per capita income classes (Table 6) revealed that among the women participation in MGNREGA, OBC women participated for 178 days (51 per cent), whereas in case of SC women, it was for just 99 days (29 per cent) days and for ST women, it was for 69 days (19 per cent) in 10000 - 20000 per capita income group. In case of per capita income Rs 30001 – 40000 the SC and OBC women worked for 14 days and 15 days respectively. Out of total 656 women work days, OBC participation was of 276 days for the financial year 2012-13. It highlighted the fact that as far as the women participation in MGNREGA was concerned, in almost all lower cast group women workers, the lower per capita income group women, were more engaged.

According to MGNREGA guidelines, it was mandatory to have basic facilities such as safe drinking water, child care facility, first-aid kits, shades, period of rest and also crèche facility. The MGNREGA is committed to ensuring a workplace conducive to productivity and welfare of the workers. MGNREGA funds have been allocated for the provision of safe drinking water, shade for periods of rest, first aid and child care facilities at the worksite. The last of these, in particular, is significant in order to make MGNREGA work a viable option for women with young children who cannot be left alone at home.

From the field survey, the study (table 7) found that except drinking water other facilities no other provision was there at the worksite. The respondents claimed that even in some cases the drinking water was not sufficient. The operational guidelines of MGNREGA detailed the procedure of social audit forums to be held by *Gram Sabha* on 6 month basis. But in this village social audit was never held.

Empowerment can be viewed as means of creating a social environment in which one can make decisions and make choices either individually or collectively for social transformation. It strengthens the innate ability by way of acquiring knowledge, power and experience (Hashemi Schuler and Riley, 1996). If a woman earns but unable to spend for her own needs or surrender her income to the head of the household then the element of empowerment does not come true.

Table 8 showed that 100 per cent of the respondents had satisfactory women participation in

Table 7. Basic facilities at MGNREGA work site

Response	No of Respondents	
	Yes	No
Pure Drinking Water	100	-
First aid Facility at Work Site	-	100
Social audit	-	100
Child care Facility crèche	-	100

Source: Field Survey, 2013

MGNREGA and 100 per cent women had a role in family economic decisions. This was a positive sign of women empowerment. MGNREGA played a significant role to meet the practical as well as strategic needs of women's participation. By income-consumption effects it means an increase in income of women workers and as a result, their ability to choose their consumption baskets. While examining MGNREGA more emphasis was given to consumption because it was the important factor for judging income-consumption effects. MGNREGA empowered women by giving them a scope of independent earning and spent some amount for their own needs.

The fact explained that out of 100 sampled household all the women had freedom to spend whatever they earn from the MGNREGA. The women were the dominant in the MGNREGA scheme as workforce, so large part of income accrued to women only. Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act is designed to be largely implemented through PRIs. At least 50 per cent of all sanctioned works are to be implemented by the Gram Panchayat. The *Gram Sabha* also plays a crucial role in the selection of work and the conducting social audits. Participations of people at large and women in particular in these institution and assemblies are, then, critical to realizing the participatory potential of the Act. During the field survey it was observed that women workers did not generally take (active) part in *Gram Sabha*. None of the women participated in *Gram Sabha*. This was partly due to lack of awareness about the significant role to be played by the *Gram Sabha* in,

Table 8. Work satisfaction and women empowerment in MGNREGA

Response	Yes	No
Satisfaction level	100	-
Role in family decisions	100	-
Freedom to Spend	100	-
Role played in work decision	-	100
Total	100	-

Source: Field Survey, 2013

making a shelf of project and conducting social audits of MGNREGA works.

Conclusion and Policy Implications

From the analysis of the facts in the chapter it can be concluded that the women have done larger proportion of MGNREGA job compared to men. These phenomena imply that there is no social barrier of women participation in MGNREGA work in village. This simply states that the village is more liberal in terms of women participation. One of the major shortcomings of the Act is non-availability of child care and raring facilities at the work site even though the Act includes this provision. This further noticed that only 11per cent women performed as uncertain daily labour before MGNREGA and rest 89 per cent women performed as agriculture labour before and after MGNREGA in lean period. After 2008-09 agriculture wage rate for women continuously increased from Rs 50 to Rs 150 in 2012-13 due to MGNREGA wage rate. Female are benefited through MGNREGA in terms of wage rate and economically and socially empowered. As female are the dominating participants in agriculture sector in the study area. Women member take independent decision accordance with prior needs of their family. This shows the positive sign of women empowerment though MGNREGA. The major source of information for the villagers regarding MGNREGA Scheme is Panchayat Raj Institutions including from Panchayat member, from *Gram Sabha* and Gram Panchayat officials. This indicates that Gram Panchayat officials playing a significant role in spreading information on MGNREGA. *Gram Sabha* too plays a crucial role in the selection of works and the conduct of social audits. But during the survey it was found that MGNREGA women workers did not generally take part in *Gram Sabha*. This is partly due to lack of awareness about the significant role to be played by the *Gram Sabha* in, making a shelf project and conducting social audits of MGNREGA works.

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