

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT THROUGH MGNREGA PROGRAMMES

With special reference to MavoorGramaPanchayat in Kerala

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Abstract: Women experiences inequality in all spheres of our society. So they should be supported and encouraged to be empowered in all domains of life. Their active participation is important for the establishment of the orderly society as they constitute half of the population. By empowering the women we mean the improvement in totality of all human capabilities like their role the process of decision making in economic, social and religious spheres. The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act is a historic legislation passed by the Government of India in September 2005 It is an employment guarantee programme, focused on asset-creating work that are labour-intensive at the same time could tackle problems of unemployment, environmental regeneration and agricultural growth. MGNREGP, which entitles rural households to 100 days of casual employment on public works at the statutory minimum wage, has opened up a new opportunity for women workers. As it is locally available, regular and predictable in working hours and socially acceptable, women are attracted to MGNREGA work as an important avenue to be socially empowered. MGNREGP provide opportunities to women in playing significant role in the Kerala society. This paper analyse the role of MGNREGP in achieving these goals.

Key words: MGNREGA, *Kudumbasree*, Employment, women empowerment, Participation, Local administration.

Introduction

The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) is a historic legislation passed by the Government of India in September 2005. It was introduced to address the crucial issues of unemployment and poverty in rural India. It is an employment guarantee programme, focused on asset-creating work that are labour-intensive at the same time could tackle problems of unemployment, environmental regeneration and agricultural growth in one stroke. It is as an

employment generation programme intended to improve the role and standard of living standard of women. The programme was helpful for improving women's identity in terms of economic status and participation in social sphere.

Unemployment and poverty are strongly related and hinder the economic growth and development of the country. These two problems are severe in rural areas, leaving it outside the growth path. To eradicate unemployment and poverty in rural areas government undertook MGNREGP. In order to reduce the extent of unemployment in rural areas government introduced this programme. Through it each household get 100 days of manual work if they were ready to work. The MGNREGA's potential in empowering women by providing work opportunities is appreciable.

In this study we try to analyse the socio-economic impact of MGNREGA programmes and its role in improving the living standard of women. In other words this programme was helpful for improving women's identity in terms of economic status and participating social sphere.

Objectives: The main objectives of the study are

- i. To examine the awareness and asserting of women's identity in terms of economic status and participation social sphere.
- ii. To examine whether MGNREGA has made successful inroads into rural women's empowerment in Kerala.

Review of Literature : There are many studies were conducted on this topic, the important literature related to the issue are;

Pankaj Ashok and Rukmini Tankha argues that if it is effectively implemented, MGNREGA would ensure many outcomes like employment guarantee, sustainable growth, reduction of poverty generation of employment opportunities. *Reetika Khera and Nandini Nayak* highlighted the importance of MGNREGA for women labour as work is available for them at the statutory minimum wage. *Yamini Aiyar and Salimah Samji* drafted an article to articulate some key design principles that can strengthen the effectiveness of the Act. *Pramathesh Ambasta, P S Vijay Shankar and Mihir Shah*, conclude their study by saying that MGNREGA ranks among the most powerful initiatives ever undertaken for transformation of rural livelihoods in India.

Methodology of the study: The study employed both primary and secondary data. The primary data is collected using survey method by randomly selecting 200 workers of

MGNREGA from Mavoor Grama Panchayath in Kozhikode district, Kerala. Secondary data was collected from Mavoor Grama Panchayath's annual reports and other official records.

MGNREGA: The government of India passed the NREGA Act in September 2005, as a 'historic piece of legislation' and people's act'. The act provides the enhancement of livelihood security of the households in the rural areas by providing at least one hundred days wage employment in every financial year to every household, volunteers to do unskilled manual labour. The act came in to force initially in 200 districts.

The ministry for rural development implements various schemes for employment generation and alleviation of rural poverty and infrastructure development in the rural areas. The major schemes being implemented by the ministry is the NREGA. The NREGA is a wage employment programme for providing livelihood security in rural areas. It was initially called the NREGA but was renamed on 2nd October, 2009 as Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA). This act introduced with an aim of improving the purchasing power of the rural people, primarily semi or unskilled work to people living in rural India, whether or not they are below the poverty line. Around one-third of the stipulated work force is women.

Table. 1
MGNREGA - National Overview

Total No. of Districts	685		
Total No. of Blocks	6,865		
Total No. of GPs	2,62,795		
Job Card			
Total No. of Job Cards issued [In Cr]	12.57		
Total No. of Workers [In Cr]	25.17		
Progress	FY 2017-2018	FY 2016-2017	FY 2015-2016
Approved Labour Budget [In Cr]	215.5	220.9274	239.112
Person days Generated so far [In Cr]	112.65	235.8111	235.1465
Total No. of Works Taken up [In Lakhs]	128.28	164.75	123.12
Total Availability of fund (In Cr.)	38,225.78	56,764.89	43,380.72
Total Expenditure [In Cr]	32,192.19	58,293.28	44,002.59

Source: www.nrega.nic.in

Types of Works: The important works undertaken in MGNREGA include water conservation and water harvesting, Drought proofing, Irrigation canals, Renovation of traditional water bodies, Land development, Flood-control and protection works.

Merits of MGNREGA: MGNREGA has benefited the people especially the marginalized and the poor on several grounds. It ensured payment of minimum wages irrespective of the

sex. The scheme brought stability and assured income to the families that were until recently desperately poor. A shift in the expenditure pattern on food and non-food took place. And the villagers are now purchasing livestock like sheep and goat.

Distress migration was an important problem in rural areas. Survey reports indicated that the beneficiaries no longer have to move places to places looking for work. The programme was helpful to Strengthen *Panchayathraj* mechanism.

MGNREGA Programme in Kerala: Kerala has one of the highest unemployment rates in the country. But most of the unemployed are educated. Thus MGNREGA has only limited application in tackling the problem of unemployment among the people of Kerala. Yet it has an ideal attempt to provide employment opportunity for about 4 to 5 lakh people who are willing to do physical labour. It also instrumental in Women empowerment, Creation of Social capital assets and also facilitate in the process of preventing corruption.

In Kerala, the programme was initiated in February 2006 in the rural areas of 2 districts, Palakkad and Wayanad. The programme was extended to Kasargod and Idukki by February, 2007 and to the remaining districts by January 2009. The government of Kerala has issued detailed guidelines for implementing MGNREGA. The responsibility has been assigned primarily to Local self-governments.

A number of micro level organisations are involved in the formulation and implementation of MGNREGA programme at the panchayath level. The panchayat governing council, which has been strengthened by decentralized planning, has a pivotal role to play in the smooth functioning of MGNREGA. It is the gramapanchayat that takes a leading role in publicizing and executing the programme. Kudumbhasree reaches to all households in the panchayat through Neighbour Hood Groups (NHGs). Involvement of Kudumbhasree is one of the most important aspects that makes the programme in Kerala unique.

Table 2 Kerala: A general Profile

Total No. of Districts	14
Total No. of Blocks	152
Total No. of GPs	941
Total No. of JobCards issued [In Lakhs]	32.65
Total No. of Workers [In Lakhs]	50.49

Source: www.nrega.nic.in

Table 3: MNRGA Financial Progress in Kerala

	2017-18	2016-17	2015-16	2014-15	2013-14

Total Availability of Fund	50405621.13	175950.26	161084.19	164262.69	132096.19
Percentage Utilization	0.06	137.9	92.1	98.42	98.44
Total Exp(in Lakhs.)	31,694.14	2,42,634.3	1,48,350.81	1,61,672.64	1,30,040.97
Wages(Rs. In Lakhs)	21,374.48	2,14,423.75	1,40,219.19	1,49,777.95	1,20,293.39
Average Cost Per Day Per Person(Rs)	355.39	277.31	241.35	232.36	191.31
% payments generated within 15 days	94.7	76.96	18.49	15.5	19.52

Source:www.nrega.nic.in

Women Participation in MGNREGA:There are many provisions in the MGNREGA act that are attractive for women workers, because the act insist that at least onethird of the workers should be women, wage is the same in case of both men and women and there is a special provision for child care and other facilities.

In fact, MGNREGA has opened up a new opportunity for women workers. As it is locally available, regular and predictable in working hours and socially acceptable, women like MGNREGA work. MGNREGP provide opportunities to women in palying significant role in the Kerala society.

By women empowerment we mean the improvement in totality of all humancapabilities like their role in decision making , their access to information and resources for taking proper decision, their ability to exercise assertiveness in collective decision making. It also indicate the power of positive thinking on the ability to make changes, Ability to learn skills and increasing one's positive self image.

Implementation of MGNREGA has contributed to very high levels of women empowerment in Kerala. It contributed a lot in their empowerment, particularly their role in society, family and in decision making.

Empirical analysis:For conducting the study and to evaluate the role of MGNREGA in promoting the process of women empowerment, samples were collected from *MavoorPanchayath*of Kozhikode district. By using the data collected from *MavoorPanchayath*, sampleanalysis was conducted to find out the role of MGNREGA in empowering the female population.

Table 4

MNREGA in MavoorGramaPanchayath:A general Profile

II Progress	2017-18	2016-17	2015-16	2014-15	2013-14
Persondays Generated	17,889	1,15,413	1,15,082	1,24,471	1,23,028
Women Persondays out of Total (%)	90.4	92.59	93.36	94.54	94.54
Average days of employment per Household	15.93	74.7	61.57	79.33	79.89
Average Wage rate per day per person(Rs.)	260.71	242.78	231.37	213.87	180
Total Households Worked	1,123	1,545	1,869	1,569	1,540

Source: www.nrega.nic.in

The important works undertaken in the panchayath include house construction, water conservation, and the development of Infrastructure like road, footpath, wells, ponds bunds etc.

Sample findings: On the basis of the objective, a micro level survey was conducted among MGNREGA workers to highlight the attainment of socio-economic self-empowerment of women. For the sample survey, 200 random samples were collected from *Mavoor Grama Panchayath*.

Table 5
Profile of Sample Workers(%)

Item	Men	Women
Proportion of NREGA workers who are	20	80
Proportion of NREGA workers who are		
Scheduled castes (SC)/scheduled tribes	18	54
Illiterate	12	18
Had other sources of cash income	45	23
Prefer payments through banks	64	43
Agricultural work	47	56
Other casual labour	53	46

Source: *Primary survey*

From the table above it is clear that 80% of the sample households are women, and among these 80%, 54% belong to scheduled tribe. Another feature is the percentage of illiterate in the total sample is less.

Table 6
Educational standard of sample household

Education	No. of persons	%
Below SSLC	64	32
SSLC	108	54
PDC	28	14
Total	200	100

Source: *Primary survey*

Table above represents the educational status of members of MGNREGA. It shows that 54% of sample population is having SSLC level education. 14% of the sample is having +2/ PDC level education.

Table 7
Participation of Women in MGNREGA

Item	No
Number of women in the sample	160
Participation of women (%)	80
Days of MGNREGA employment in the past 12 months	134
Proportion of women workers who	
Collect their own wages	75
Keep their own wages	65
Had other sources of cash income	41
Prefer payments through banks	43

Source: Primary survey

Table above indicates that out of 200 sample 160 are women. It itself indicate the increased role of female population in the MNREGA activities. And the average number of employment is 134 days in the past year.

Table 8
Distribution of Respondents According Savings

Before joining MGNREGA		After joining MGNREGA	
Amount of income	No.of people	Amount of income	No. of people
No saving	88	No saving	0
Below 500	60	Below 500	10
500-1000	40	500-1000	10
1001-5000	12	1001-5000	44
Above 5000	0	Above 5000	136

Source: Primary survey

From the table it is clear that before joining MGNREGA majority of the people never had the habit of saving. Only a few had a bit high amount of saving and it was out of their partner's income. But from the given data we are able to identify that after joining in the program, there is no one without having any sort of savings.

Table 9
Distribution of members on the basis of economic independence

Economic independence					
Before joining MGNREGA			After joining MGNREGA		
Responses	Frequency	%	Responses	Frequency	%
Yes	16	10	Yes	137	86
No	144	90	No	23	14
total	160	100	total	200	100

Source: Primary survey

Table 3.8 shows that the majority (86%) of the women workers have become economically independent after joining the programme. Only 10% of the members were economically independent earlier. This shows that participation in MGNREGA helped them very much for improving their situation.

Table 10
Respondents' role in family decision making

Before joining in MGNREGA			After joining in MGNREGA		
Responses	Frequency	%	Responses	Frequency	%
Yes	61	38	Yes	137	86
No	99	62	No	23	14
total	200	100	Total	200	100

Source: Primary survey

Table 3.9 shows that 86% of the total population had a significant role in decision making in their family such as to buy and sell properties, to buy ornaments, to educate children, make personal changes etc. after participating in the program. But before joining the program, it was only 38%. Thus through MGNREGA rural women became more powerful.

Participation in community based organizations and civil society institutions helps to build social capital among the members of the community. The distribution of respondents based on their social participation shows that almost all are members in one or the other local social organizations. The participation in these socio political activities has increased after actively joining the MNRGA. It is clear from the table given below.

Table 11
Participation in socio-political activities

Before joining in MGNREGA			After joining in MGNREGA		
responses	frequency	%	responses	frequency	%
Yes	80	50	Yes	128	80
No	80	50	No	32	20
total	160	100	Total	200	100

Source: Primary survey

Table 3.10 shows the distribution of the members on the basis of their courage to go out and mingle with others. Before joining MGNREGA, 50% of the members lacked enough courage to participate in socio-political activities such as election to local bodies and others. But after joining MGNREGA, it has reduced to 20%. Now 80% of the population have become active in participating in socio-political activities and they have become courageous to go out and experience the free healthy interactions with others.

From this analysis it is clear MGNREGA provide better opportunities for rural women than any other programmes in the current scenario. Through MGNREGA women get job opportunities and decent wages. MGNREGA provide equal job opportunities and equal wage to all.

Impact of MGNREGA:MGNREGA is devised to support people's right to seek work in a legal frame work and approached development through the economic and social empowerment of the rural people especially the rural women. Study put forward some findings regarding the nature of economic activities under MGNREGA programme in Kerala and also its socio-economic impact.

- It guarantees to provide 100 days of work. In Kerala women get only 5-20 days of work. So income from MGNREGA is an important source to provide financial assistance to their family.
- Women who have no other sources of income to support their family, MGNREGA is an important avenue.
- There is notable progress in the saving pattern of women through participating MGNREGP.
- Women are completely satisfied with regarding to the working time and by measuring productivity in day by day. They feel that it will increase their productivity.
- Women workers get complete assistance from ADS, *Kudumbasree*, and *GramaPanchayat* with regard to the activities of MGNREGA.
- Many female respondents said the work provided under the MGNREGA opened up a new opportunity to them. It give them the opportunities to interact with new people and government authorities
- The wider acceptability of MGNREGA work, increased the social status of women laborers.
- As it is locally available, women workers can do their work within the periphery of their locality.
- Being government work MGNREGA provide regularity and predictability of work.
 - It provide an opportunity to the female workers to come together and to share their problems and experiences.
 - Helps them to stand against the exploitative aspects in the labor market, were women workers are considered as subordinate to male counterparts.
 - It is also a better paid job than other work
 - As the work is organized by women's groups, the gender perspective gets built in automatically.
 - As women are comfortable working along with their neighbors, nearly 80% of the workers have been women.

- For the first time equal wages are really paid and this has boosted the earnings of women.
- As the wages are paid into Bank accounts the habit of thrift which was already inculcated through the *Kudumbashree* experiment has further been strengthened.
- As the Bank deposits are increasing, the intra-household status of the woman has also been improved as she controls cash resources.

In short MGNREGA has brought in several benefits to the rural households especially to the women population in rural area. It helped them to have improved family income; improved household expenses guaranteed employment, support to children education, improved family status, Improved social and political improvement, increased role in rural administration and so on. The members participated in the in the study across the *MavoorGramapanchayat* invariably expressed the fact that the scheme has guaranteed employment, income and social status.

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