



## Empowerment of Dalit Women: MGNREGS and its impact on Dalit Women

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### ABSTRACT

To address issues of deep poverty and unemployment, the Mazdoor Kissan Shakti Sanghantana (MKSS) and the National Campaign for People's Rights to information (NCPRI) as well as many other people's movements and organizations campaigned for an employment guarantee scheme that was passed by the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government in 2005. The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA), renamed as the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) in 2009 is one of the largest initiatives of its kind in the world. It represents an important step towards creating a social security mechanism for the very poor. This far-reaching intervention seeks to provide a solution to the problem of unemployment and under-employment in rural areas.

MGNREGA has become a powerful tool for women's rights and other NGOs to initiate social, economic and political change. Despite the fact that rural women across the country have benefited from this Act, the NGO Gender At Work found that Dalit women in Andhra Pradesh were not claiming these rights.

### I. INTRODUCTION:

To address issues of deep poverty and unemployment, the Mazdoor Kissan Shakti Sanghantana (MKSS) and the National Campaign for People's Rights to information (NCPRI) as well as many other people's movements and organizations campaigned for an employment guarantee scheme that was passed by the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government in 2005. The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA), renamed as the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) in 2009 is one of the largest initiatives of its kind in the world. It represents an important step towards creating a social security mechanism for the very poor. This far-reaching intervention seeks to provide a solution to the

problem of unemployment and under-employment in rural areas.

MGNREGA represents a partnership scheme between the Federal State and local government. It aims at enhancing the livelihoods of people by providing 100 days of wage employment in a financial year to a rural household whose adult members volunteer to do public work related unskilled manual work at wage. Other progressive features include the inherent commitment to accountability and transparency. For example, work provided must be within a periphery of five kilometres of the applicants' residence. It requires 33% reservation for women, and equal wages between men and women are stipulated. The Act has built-in anti corruption protections which include the applicant attaining a Job Card, and wages being paid to individuals through bank accounts. The obligations of the State are clearly articulated. For example, if the requested employment is not provided by the duty bearers within 15 days of the demand to work, the Act includes a provision that the applicant can claim for Unemployment allowance. Similarly, the Act also includes a provision for safe worksite facilities such as providing drinking water, shade, childcare and healthcare to workers.

The Act has been in operation throughout India since 2005 and it is a path breaking Act which legalised the right to work for the first time in India it guarantees job security for unorganized sector in the rural areas and is a rights- based demand driven Act. This means that the work is given when work is demanded. However, the MGNREGA is radically different from previous employment generation efforts in rural areas, mainly because the employment is treated as a right rather than a privilege. Thus it has created a justifiable right to work for all households in rural India. This pro-poor, pro-women legislation is very significant and along with the Right to Information Act (RTI), and the current debate on the Right to Food Act, if passed, represents very significant, large scale commitments to deal with the



issue of widespread poverty and government corruption in delivering of public goods and services.

MGNREGA has become a powerful tool for women's rights and other NGOs to initiate social, economic and political change. Despite the fact that rural women across the country have benefited from this Act, the NGO Gender At Work found that Dalit women in Andhra Pradesh were not claiming these rights.

## II. Review of Literature

Jandu (2009) argues that the NREGA empowers women by offering them opportunities for non-domestic work and helping them to contribute to household-income, which would increase their independence and self-esteem. Acknowledging the practical shortcomings with regard to effective provision of worksite facilities like toilets and childcare facilities, she nevertheless stresses the huge empowerment potential of the Act with regard to the earning component. Kheera and Nayak (2009) emphasize the potential of the Act to alter gender relations through increased independence and visibility of women's contribution to the economy.

Sudarshan (2009) compares the gender sensitivity of the NREGA to former public employment programs and highlights the focus in gender and development (GAD) is not solely on women but rather on gender relations such as the relations between men and women in a variety of settings for example in a work place setting. This approach has become popular since the mid 1980s when there was a growing consensus in the development community that meaningful development required the understanding of both men's and women's roles and their relationship with each other. Therefore, improving the status women requires not just the participation of women but also the participation of men.

National Federation of Indian Women (NFIW) (2008) made a study on, 'Socio-economic empowerment of women under National Rural Employment Guarantee Act in Rajnandgaon District of Orissa and Cuddalore District of Tamil Nadu' and came out with the findings that (i) Women, in general, was taking MGNREGS with pride. They were able to substantially contribute to family expenditure which was seen to have brought a marked change in the traditional women's role and place in their family. When women were asked about the importance of MGNREGS for them, majority of them said to have felt the importance because of employment opportunities, growing spending capacity and creation of community assets. (ii) In Cuddalore it was 81 per cent and 96 percent in Rajnandgaon which is

said to have spent for food and consumer goods. On the whole there were good number of workers who were fond to be spending on children's education and very few workers who claimed to have spent on clearing small debts.<sup>58</sup>

Amita Sharma (2010) has revealed that (i) Women's new found identity and economic empowerment, (ii) Taking the wages directly through their accounts, (iii) Increased spending of earnings from MGNREGS on food, consumer goods, education of children and offsetting debts. (iv) Work availability in villages increased post MGNREGS. (v) Decision-making power for incentive, (vi) Work easily available. (vii) Breaking caste and community issues, (viii) Sociowomen increased post MGNREGS with additional income, (ix) Fixed working hours an economic benefits and. (x) Easy access to credits. could be attributed to MGNREGS.

Rakesh Tiwari et.al., (2011) from their survey reported that, the activities undertaken under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act in Chitradurga Karnataka, were assessed for their potential to enhance and provide environmental services. Key programmes implemented in 20 villages during 2009 were studied using rapid scientific assessment methods. An indicator approach was adopted to analyse environmental services such as water for irrigation and improvement in soil quality. The status of environmental services before and after implementation of the activities was examined and vulnerability indices were constructed and compared. Their findings clearly indicate that the NREGA has provided multiple environmental services and reduced vulnerability, apart from providing employment and income to rural communities. The environmental services include groundwater recharge, water percolation, and more water storage in tanks, increased soil fertility, reclamation of degraded lands and carbon sequestration.

From the foregoing analysis of relevant literature as also specific studies, it is revealed that adequate research has not been done to study the role of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, particularly in empowering Dalit women where the scheme is held successful. Hence, the present study was made to find the relevance of MGNREGS scheme in empowering Dalit women in the selected area of study

Objectives/Hypothesis and Research questions

The literature review carried out above reacts that, very few people have emphasized on implementation aspects of NREGS. Social, economic



and political empowerment of Dalit women is not much highlighted. The present research study will discuss the "Empowerment of Dalit women through MGNREGA with reference to Chittoor district in Andhra Pradesh".

The Key objectives of the propose research:

1. Understanding the impact of MGNREGS on the socio-economic and political empowerment of Dalit women.
2. To examine the entitlement approach and its relevance in designing the MGNREG Act and to what extent it is helping the Dalit women rights perspective.
3. To examine the theory of change. as an outcome of the implementation of MGNREGS and participation of Dalit women. The hypothesis that is going to be examined:
  1. MGNREGS has been successful in creating social and political awareness among Dalit Women.
  2. MGNREGA has a positive impact on the empowerment of Dalit women

According to the 2011 census Chittoor district has a population of 4,170,468. This gives it a ranking of 47th in India (out of a total of 640) and 6th in its state. The district has a population density of 275 inhabitants per square kilometre (710/sq mi). Its population growth rate over the decade 2001-2011

was 11.33%. Chittoor has a sex ratio of 1002 females for every 1000 males and a literacy rate of 72.36%. In 2007-2008 the International Institute for Population Sciences interviewed 1010 households in 38 villages across the district. They found that 92.7% had access to electricity, 99.6% had drinking water, 33.3% toilet facilities, and 53.8% lived in a pucca (permanent) home. 29.3% of girls wed before the legal age of 18 and 88.2% of interviewees carried a BPLcard .

In 2006 the Indian government named Chittoor one of the country's 250 most backward districts (out of a total of 640), It is one of the thirteen districts in Andhra Pradesh currently receiving funds from the Backward Regions Grant Fund Programme (BRGF). The progress and performance of MGNREGS in Andhra Pradesh and Chittoor district at a glance is presented in Table 1. The scheme covers entire state in 13 districts and the scheme intends to provide employment opportunity to rural poor. The total number of mandals and Grama Panchayats the scheme in Andhra Pradesh is 661 and 13083 respectively during the year 2014-15. The job cards issued under the scheme are 92.67 lakh as on 31 March, 2015 and the number is to be increased day by day. The average wage rate per day per person in Andhra Pradesh is 116.24 which is below the standard of National average rate of Rs.120 where as it is up to the mark in Chittoor district i.e., Rs. 119.99

**Table 1:** MGNREGA in Andhra Pradesh and Chittoor District at glance (2014-15)

Indicator	Andhra Pradesh (2014-15)	Chittoor District (2014-15)
Total no of Districts	13	01
Total no of Mandals	661	66
Total no of GPs	13083	1380
Total no of Job Cards (in lakhs)	92.67	7.21
Total no of workers (in lakhs)	208.91	17.1
(i)SC workers % as of total workers	18.83	17.03
(ii)ST workers % as of total workers	6.4	3.39
Total no of Active Job cards (in Lakhs)	42.03	2.41
Total no of Active workers (in Lakhs)	75.62	4.06
Person days Generated (in Lakhs)	1555.39	99.61
SC Person days % as of total Person days	22.8	31.3
ST Person days % as of total Person days	11.87	3.67



Women Persons days out of total (%)	58.66	58.15
Average days of employment provided Household	47.18	54.72
Total no of HHs completed 100 days of wage Employment	380448	38671
% of Men worked	45.98	45.16
% of Women worked	54.02	54.84
% of Expenditure on Agriculture and Agriculture Allied works	76.98	81.85

The Table-1 clearly indicates that Chittoor district occupies 10 percent of the total number of mandals and Grama Panchayats (GPs) in Andhra Pradesh. The percentage of SC person days to total person days generated is 31.3 in Chittoor district where as it is only 22.8 percent at state level. The ratio of men and women workers is same in state as well as district levels. The percentage of women workers is more than male with 54 per cent. 76.98 per cent of the total expenditure under MGNREGA in the state is on Agriculture and Agriculture allied works where as it is 81.85 per cent in Chittoor district. The average rate per day per person and the average days of employment provided, both are above the state level percentage in Chittoor district.

After getting the detailed statistics with breakups on Dalit women and other category of women availed the program sample will be worked out.

There are few accusations where Dalit women in the district raised their voices for their rights. In this context the proposed research study will be more appropriate to find out the changes that have taken place in the empowerment process of Dalit women in the district.

The research approach will be developed through the initial review of all programme documents and programme design tools, information regarding the outcome and output indicators and associated baseline data (if any), monitoring reports, discussions with relevant stakeholders Dalit women, representatives of Panchayat Raj institution, Local cast and political leaders. NGOs and SHGs. The research will try to use the theory of change approach to examine the links between outcome, activities and results.

Similarly, it will focus on to what extent and which outcome contributed to "Dalit women in Andhra Pradesh effectively bringing their perspectives to bear on social accountability mechanisms and processes as part of the implementation of the Mahatma Gandhi National

Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme." A set of questions will be designed to measure the standard research criteria of relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, sustainability and impact. This will be formulated with a gender and human rights perspective. An "research matrix" was prepared utilizing targeted evaluation questions, sub-questions. indicators, data source and method of data collection. The questions and sub-questions based in this matrix. constitute the roadmap of the evaluation and are compiled.

### III. Conclusion

As guided by research framework, this proposed research study blends quantitative and qualitative methods for data gathering and data analysis. This mix facilitates the triangulation of data, increasing reliability and validity, as well a proving useful for exploring whether/why different stakeholders groups benefited differently from the activities undertaken. The data analysis used simple descriptive statistics such as percentages and frequency counts to capture variations among the target population. The achievements attained were compared with the planned indicators and/or baseline indicators. The data will be analysed according to relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, sustainability and impact.

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