IMPACT OF MGNREGA ON WOMEN EMPOWERMENT AND THEIR ISSUES AND CHALLENGES: A REVIEW OF LITERATURE FROM 2005 TO 2015

RAJALAKSHMI V
Research Scholar, Department of Commerce, SSL, VIT University, Vellore, Tamil Nadu, India, Tel: +919789574855;
Email: rajalakshmi.v@vit.ac.in

SELVAM V
Professor, Department of Commerce, SSL, VIT University, Vellore, Tamil Nadu, India

Abstract

“National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) enacted by legislation on August 25, 2005 and it was renamed as the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) on 2nd October 2009. The MGNREGA has completed ten years since its inception in India”. The aim of the scheme is to enhance livelihood security of the household in rural areas of the country by providing at least 100 days of guaranteed employment in every financial year of every household whose adult member volunteer to do the unskilled work. The purpose of the study is to examine the women empowerment, issues and challenges and impact on MGNREGA scheme in India from 2005 to 2015 and this review paper helps new and young researcher who wants to do research under this area may really helpful to them in order to identify the
research problem and research gap. Women participation is very high with 80% of the total beneficiaries under the scheme. The concept of women’s empowerment has got wider popularity and acceptance in Tamil Nadu with the launching of decentralized planning in the state. The study concludes that economically empowering women on MGNREGA scheme lays the basis for greater independence and also for self-esteem. It has become a beacon of light in the empowerment of the rural women and contributed substantially for improving their lifestyle and economic conditions.

Keywords: MGNREGA, Rural Development, Women Employment, Issues, Challenges and Impact

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INTRODUCTION

The empowerment of rural women is crucial for the development of the rural Bharat. Women have to empower themselves from below in order to make the government to empower them from above. In the words “empowering women is a precondition for creating a good nation, when women are empowered, society with stability is assured”. The MGNREGA has positive impact on empowerment and employment pattern of women in recent years. It aims at enhancing livelihood security by providing at least 100 days of guaranteed wage employment in a financial year to every rural household especially for women. Women participation has increased significantly and perceived it giving them a sense of independence and security. Country should be alerted with proper education and also they should be entrusted with all sorts of works as per their physical capability”. Women are needed part of the world. They play important role in the growth of the society as well as the country. The definition of women is actually different for different persons but there is an essential base that cannot change regardless of nationality, caste, color, profession etc., when women support to empower themselves the whole society benefits and families are healthier. Therefore, it is very important to empower women. Empowerment of women refers to the influence of decision making of their own. The word “empower has become equal with the word women”. “The present review takes a critical look at the selected studies such as: women empowerment, issues, challenges and unraveling various impacts of MGNREGA both at micro and macro level; beginning from its inception in 2005 to till 2015. The study focuses on performance of MGNREGA by relevant performance indicators, in various states in together micro and macro settings, underlining the common and unique issues emerged across these study sites related to the implementation of the MGNREGA and its functioning”.

Progress and Achievements of MGNREGA in India

For almost a decade of application, MGNREGS in India has been positive in ensuring livelihood for the deprived people in rural areas. During the year 2013-14, 3.8 crores household were given employment and a total of 135 crores person-days of
employment have been produced. Out the 135 crore, 73.33 crore were for women, 21.09 crore for STs, and 31.53 crore for SCs. A total of 111 lakhs job were taken up of which 11.17 lakhs have been completed so far and remaining jobs are in progress. In the 1st phase of execution of NREGA 2006-07, 2.10 crore publics got 100 days employment during the period. This comprises water harvesting and conservation 3.40 lakh, face-lift of traditional water bodies 96 thousand, provision of irrigation amenity 1.58 lakh, and small irrigation works 53 thousands, land growth 1.17 lakh, rural connectivity 2.03 lakh. Drought proofing nearly 1.13 lakh, flood control and safety 20 thousand. A budget delivery of Rs.12,000 crores has been made during financial year 2007-08, Rs.30,000 crores in 2008-09, Rs. 39,100 crores in 2009-10 and 40,100 crores in 2010-11 respectively for execution of the scheme (MoRD,2012). The apportionment of funds for 2011-12 financial years has been the government has allocated Rs.38,500 and 39,699 crores correspondingly for 2015-16 and 2016-17. The following Table 1 indicates progress of MGNREGA at a glance during the year 2013-14 in India.

Table 1: Progress of MGNREGA in India.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Particulars</th>
<th>2013-14 Financial year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Person days (in Crore) total</td>
<td>134.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment provided to Households (in Crore)</td>
<td>3.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCs</td>
<td>31.53 (54%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STs</td>
<td>21.09 (16%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>73.33 (54%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Budget outlays (in Rs.Crore)</td>
<td>33,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Works completed (in Lakhs)</td>
<td>11.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total work taken up (in Lakhs)</td>
<td>111.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total job card issued (in Crore)</td>
<td>12.72</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To investigate the impact of MGNREGA on women empowerment in India.
2. To identify the real issue and challenges faced by women beneficiaries under MGNREGA in India.

METHODOLOGY

The researchers conducted descriptive study and secondary data was used for this study. Basically, the required materials have been derived from various journals, articles from newspaper, magazines, and web-sites which deal directly or indirectly with the topics related with issues challenges were included in this study. After searching the
important newspapers and web-sites, relevant information was down loaded and 
examined to address the objectives of present study. No primary data was used for this 
study.

**Women Empowerment through MGNREGA: Literature Review**

The literature review on women empowerment reflects the findings of various researchers and academicians on MGNREGA through reputed national and international journals, magazines and annual reports are presented by the authors below for easy understanding.

The scheme has truly a positive impact on women empowerment, in so far as it has addressed a number of practical gender needs [1]. The study is trend of women taking membership in MGNREGS is definitely increasing after becoming a part of MGNREGS, women cultural activities has increased from 66 to 93% after participating in MGNREGS [2]. The majority of the women respondents 68.3% are using MGNREGA income to satisfy their family food consumption [3]. MGNREGA has becomes a powerful instrument for women empowerment in rural India through its effect on livelihood security and democratic governance and social protections [4]. Women participating in the scheme said they had become less dependent on their husbands for money and didn't need to submit the entire amount they earned to their mother in laws [5]. The major goal of the scheme is to ensure enhanced empowerment of poor women, it is more desirable that institutional efficacy to generate employment should be improved and social environment should be promoted accordingly to enable rural women increasingly participate in the program [6]. The economic conditions of the women beneficiaries improved after joining MGNREGA which is a good sign of development. Women beneficiaries had also started repaying their debt [7]. Women’s involvement and their share in NREGA jobs is hindered by various factors such as structural problems, improper implementation of scheme and ineffective, social attitudes, corruption and exploitation [8]. The village women can be active participation in the process of planning and inclusion of MGNREGA framework [9]. Ensuring the establishment of crèches for women workers, abolition of contractors, effective implementation of transparency mechanisms and the establishment of a schedule of rates more favorable to women will go a long way in removing the short-term barriers to women’s participation in MGNREGA [10]. The latter indicates that where women’s real wages as a share of men’s is lesser in the private sector, women are flocking to work in this government administered programme. This will have an impact on women’s agricultural wage and their bargaining power, and is potentially a critical factor in reducing gender disparities in the labour market [11]. This programme enhances their standard of living of the vulnerable section of the society, particularly women who are social political and economic empowerment of women [12]. MGNREGS was not envisaged as a women’s empowerment programme yet, MGNREGS has brought economic and social empowerment of women. MGNREGS has certainly empowered workers economically and socially [13]. Women worker feels highly satisfied with MGNREGA the wages equal to both male and female. Main aim of scheme is economic independence among women [14]. Women workers are more self-confident about their roles as contributors to
family expenses and taking part in the family decision and also spend some earning money by their own hand. The Scheme act as an instrument of women’s empowerment deserves much more attention than it has received so far [15]. Women workers are the major participants of this scheme. The major aim of this study is to identify role and relevance of MGNREGA in rural women growth and development [16].

It is interesting to see that the Act appears to be quite meaningful and powerful for rural development in general and women empowerment in particular for the entire nation [17]. Role of women’s in MGNREGA is still in a distant dream in Kashmir women [18]. Women are seen to be contributing actively to the economy and their contribution to economic activity becomes more visible. Additionally, female participation in vigilance committees under the MGNREGA may, over time, allow women to take advantage of such provisions, and make their own space in public and social life [19]. Wage equality for men and women helps to reduce the gender difference to some extent. Women get additional respect from their society and family [20]. Women are promoted individually because they are able to earn self-sufficiently and use some cash for their own needs, and contribute in their family expenditure [21]. Women who are earning member of the family are the beneficiaries of the scheme including all rural people. These programmes were introduced by the central and state government in India [22]. The women spent wages earned at MGNREGA works on regular food and buyer goods [23]. Women have registered their real contribution to the household’s income. Women speaking in the gram sabha and also women having access to post offices and banks are new developments [24]. The rural development, women authorization and employment generation policies conversed above are of enormous help for the rural women so as to start income generating activities independently or give at least 100 days of employment for the rural women [25].

**Issues in MGNREGA: Literature Review**

The literature review set for this study focuses on the issues in MGNREGA formed in India. It redirects the findings of various professionals based on their studies.

“MGNREGA aids in enrichment of agriculture productivity (through water harvesting, check dams, ground water recharging, improve moisture content, check in soil erosion and micro-irrigation), stemming of distress migration, increased access to markets and services through rural connectivity works, supplementing household income, increase in women workforce participation ration, and the regeneration of natural resources[26]”. India is one of the largest developing countries in the world. The economy of India fundamentally depends upon the cultivation sector. Yet today most of the people live in 7 lakh rural communities of India. Therefore the difficulties of the rural India are more important rather than the overall problems in India [27]. The present study signifies to evaluate the extent of growth made and the dimensions of various issues associated with the programme in the most backward state of Bihar and Jharkhand. There is a gross mismatch between the needs of the community and the actual work undertaken, which is the major challenge faced by the MGNREGA in the states [28]. Highlighting the critical role played by the MGNREGA, this paper exemplifies the issues and significance
of MGNREGA particularly in the context of rural India.

Further it makes a proportional analysis between the select fifteen states of the Indian union which provides the structure for policy approval for the poor performing states with respect to various parameters [29]. The critical issues involved in processes such as registration, proof of application, problem of job cards, allocation for employment, application for employment, selection and execution of work, transparency, payment, staffing and monitoring etc. It also tries to highlight the progress of the scheme in brief [30]. MGNREGA is designed as a safety net to reduce migration by rural poor households in the lean period through a hundred days of assured unskilled manual labour provided when required at minimum wage on works concentrated on land development, water conservation, and drought proofing [31]. The main objective of MGNREGA is to provide guaranteed employment for at least 100 days to a major member of a family is rural areas. This will help in creating employment opportunities in rural areas of India. Initially it has been imitated in 200 districts and will be implemented in other areas as notified by central government [32]. MGNREGA was launched in February 2006. There is clear evidence to suggest that, while implementation has been very uneven across states and districts, four positive impacts are visible (i) agricultural wages have increased (ii) distress increased (iv) specifically water conservation structures have been built and, in many cases, have been revived [33]. The MGNREGA is one of the largest initiatives of its kind in the world. The national budget for the financial year 2006-2007 was Rs.113 billion and now fully operational, it costs Rs.391 billion in financial year 2009-2010 [34].

Challenges in MGNREGA: Literature Review

The literature reviews on Challenges in MGNREGA in India faced by women reflects the findings of various researchers based on their studies were presented below.

The best performing states includes Tripura, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland and Andhra Pradesh. The average performing states includes Sikkim, Chhattisgarh, Meghalaya, Himachal Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. The poor performing states include Madhya Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Rajasthan and Jharkhand [35]. MGNREGA scheme to access development opportunities through other programmes for transiting from wage employment to sustainable livelihood. This scheme was successfully carried out in the state Bihar [36]. MGNREGA wages plays an important role in the financial life of the job card holder's family. But there are some areas of improvement i.e., less contribution of women, no unemployment allowance for number of work days, incomplete target of 100 days employment and no skill work for further development of human resource [37]. His research, aims to test the challenges causing barriers in the accomplishment of the object of MGNREGA. For this, data have been taken from Topchanchi Block, and interviews were done with Block programme offices in Topchanchi and other MGNREGA assistants of that Block [38].
Another author pointed out that this act has been introduced aiming towards improving the purchase power of rural people and to provide job to unskilled labour interested to work. The management aspect to implement MGNREGA effectively has been discussed with a view to provide employment according to intention of act, payment of remuneration to workers, and planning and inspection of work leaving behind no lapse [39]. “Poor administrative, planning skills, inadequate awareness, plagued with discrimination, corruption and irregularities, delay in payment of wages. So far, works related to rainwater harvesting and conservation, desalting of canal distributaries, desalting and renovation of old ponds/tanks and digging up of new farm ponds are mainly being carried out under NREGS. There is a need of development in identifying/creating new employment chances and dovetailing various programmers routed by the Central and the State Governments with NREGA” [40]. “MGNREGA is perhaps the most ambitious anti-poverty scheme launched anywhere in the world. It may be understood that the problems and challenges are from both, government and public”. Poor administrative and planning skills, inadequate awareness, plagued with discrimination, corruption and irregularities, delay in payment of wages. Public in adequate awareness, no purposive spending, being unorganized [41].

Impact of MGNREGA: Literature Review

The literature review prepared for this study on Impact of MGNREGA reflects the findings of various professionals and researchers were presented below.

The programmes like MGNREGA would create a positive impact on increasing the quantum and level of employment [42]. Agricultural incomes have increased across the country, in which the impact of MGNREGS is considerable. The female agricultural wage has been much higher than male wages [43]. MGNREGA is providing employment to the tune of 18.1% of the total work of the households. The study has thrown light on the employment differential in the underdeveloped and developed areas [44].

The MGNREGA is a programme which has been making opportunities for the people to enhance their economic condition. The tribal people getting benefits from the MGNREGA scheme [45]. Providing only unskilled manual labour work through the scheme does not appear to be a strong idea for the future. Provision for the skilled and semi-skilled workers should be implemented into the Scheme [46]. The study proved that there is an increase in the welfare of the family for both male and female workers like spending more for family, children’s education and enables those savings in bank/post office after working under MGNREGA [47]. MGNREGA in the State of Jammu and Kashmir which need to be addressed and so for the state wants to better its performance on major socio-economic indicators. In the context of Jammu and Kashmir, the capacity and skill building of panchayat functionaries and government officials, awareness campaigns, monitoring of the implementation by state vigilance at various levels, participation of local people in identification and execution of works under NREGA in the state has to be promoted significantly [48]. The scheme improve the work involvement rate under MGNREGS, farmer-related works like agriculture works need be
introduced. Besides, works have to be identified for skilled labour to benefit from the scheme. Reduce the irregularities in the implementation of the scheme vigilance and observing mechanism needs to be supported [49]. The MGNREGA is being implemented everywhere in the country including Assam yet it has not achieved its goal fully owing to the lack of adequate information. The effectiveness of this programme would improve if the poor could be made fully aware of this programme [50].

Research Implications on MGNREGA

Women’s participation in the scheme has enabled them to come out of their homes not only for the purpose of work but to visit panchayat offices and banks, which was absent in the earlier days. This has elevated the women in the society to a higher status of becoming income earning workers. Though there is absence of ample amount of studies on the issues of change in gender roles of the women employed on MGNREGS sites yet researches have noted on the increased confidence among women. Women remains confined to the household chores, occupation and in the formulation of social safeguard policy. There is a refusal to accept the dual role of women in the as care givers and income earners in the family as a collective concern of the state. Since women remain as caregivers of the family, their comfort zone of work area is near their home with flexible timings etc. all of which are fulfilled by the MGNREGS. The central governments have taken more initiative, but still there are lot of issues and challenges there in working place among women who take part in the scheme. The government should create more awareness programme for rural women so that they could know the important provisions made for them in MGNREGA and payments be made through bank accounts only and on time in particular. It is evidenced from the literature review the research implications for the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme will definitely help policy makers, government, panchayats, rural women, and human resource practitioners to provide suitable suggestions and help practitioners and both the state and central government to look at the existing solutions for the problems in domain and adopt the methodologies for new sectors such as MGNREGA.

CONCLUSION OF THE STUDY

This study concludes by an observation through literature reviews on women empowerment, issues, challenges, and impact through MGNREGA, this act is really leads to women empowerment through active participation of women in this scheme. MGNREGS was not envisaged as a women’s empowerment programme, yet, it has brought economic and social empowerment of women. MGNREGS has certainly empowered women workers economically and socially, “Gender - Neutral Measures” such as increase in participation of women in planning and social audits of MGNREGA implementation of better worksite facilities, proper payment of wages, planning of works in phases and speedy grievance redressed will encourage women to demand more work under this scheme.
LIMITATIONS OF THIS STUDY AND SCOPE FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The limitations for the study are that, it purely bused on secondary data only. The reviews are taken from the various articles published in reputed national and international journals. The opinion given in the various articles may not help to take important managerial decision and also the studies are done only in few parts of the country and we cannot generalize the study. Further, the scope for future study is that the researcher may needs to conduct a dis-aggregate level of investigation to understand the impact, awareness, benefits, empowerment, socio-economic development financial inclusion of rural women, and also there is a necessity of comprehensive research in India to study the MGNREGA.

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