
Women Empowerment and MGNREGA: Myth or Reality!

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The economic growth in India has been accelerating but it is necessary to grow in all sphere of development. In a male dominated society, women have always been underestimated and discriminated in all spheres of life, be it their family or social life or their economic and political life. Despite being a major part of the population, Indian women still don't get equal rights and live in utmost poverty. Women empowerment refers to a broader term, which means increasing the social, economic, political and spiritual strength of the women. Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) is one of the scheme which was enacted in 2005 by the Government of India. Various provisions under the Act and its Guidelines aims to ensure that women have equitable and easy access to work, decent working conditions, equal payment of wages and representation on decision- making bodies. Infact the MGNREGA programme has not been designed with the aim of women upliftment or gender equality. However, there are some provision made under this act that has benefited women in various ways. It offers minimum thirty three percent employments to women, guarantees child care facility at the workplace and provides scope for the women empowerment.

The results exhibit that the level and quality of awareness about MGNREGA scheme among the respondents in district Pauri Garhwal is quite high as compared to other districts. The government should focus on elevating the working conditions along with proper child care facilities to the women workers so that the scheme can be implemented properly and the women can actively participate in the Mahatma Gandhi NREGA scheme.

Key words: MGNREGA, Women Empowerment, Level of awareness, Uttarakhand, Challenges.

INTRODUCTION

Empowerment is the process of obtaining basic opportunities for marginalized people, either directly by those people, or through the help of non-marginalized others who share their own access to these opportunities. It also includes actively thwarting attempts to deny those opportunities. Empowerment also includes encouraging, and developing the skills for, self-sufficiency, with a focus on eliminating the future need for charity or welfare in the individuals of the group. This process can be difficult to start and to implement effectively. The economic growth in India has been accelerating but it is necessary to grow in all sphere of development. In a male dominance society, women always been underestimated and discriminated in all spheres of life, is it their family or social life or their economic and political life. Despite of a major part of population, Indian women still don't get equal rights and live in utmost poverty. Moreover the traditional duty of managing households creates obstacles in their social and economic empowerment. Women empowerment refers to a broader term, which means increasing the social, economical, political and spiritual strength of women. Sometimes it involves the empowered developing confidence in their capabilities. Since Independence, Government of India has been framing a number of different programmes, policies and schemes to uplift the women and the other deprived group of population from poverty. Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) is one of the scheme

which was enacted in 2005 by Government of India. Various provisions under the Act and its Guidelines aims to ensure that women have equitable and easy access to work, decent working conditions, equal payment of wages and representation on decision-making bodies. From FY 2006-07 up to FY 2013-14 (upto Dec, 2013) the women participation rate has ranged between 40-51 per cent of the total person-days generated, much above the statutory minimum requirement of 33 per cent. Infact, the participation rate of women under the Scheme has been higher than in all forms of recorded work. Research studies also indicate that Mahatma Gandhi NREGA is an important work opportunity for women who would have otherwise remained unemployed or underemployed. With an increased rate of participation and large amounts being spent on wages for women, studies and field evidence suggest a positive impact of the Scheme on the economic well-being of women. The Scheme has also led to gender parity in wages. The NSSO 66th round indicated that Mahatma Gandhi NREGA has reduced traditional wages discrimination in public works. Access to economic resources has also had a favourable impact on the social status of women, for example women have a greater say in the way the money is spent in households. A large percentage of these women spend their money to avoid hunger, repay small debts, paying their child's schooling, etc.

MGNREGA in India

To get relief from rural unemployment, hunger, and poverty the Central Government started this very ambitious programme as on 2nd Feb., 2006 from the Anantpur district at Andhra Pradesh, inaugurated by the then Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh. Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act in implemented by Ministry of Rural Development. The flagship programme of the Indian Government touches the rural poor's lives and promotes inclusive growth. The primary objective of the National rural Employment Guarantee Act 2005 is providing wage employment. With effect from second February 2006 the Act was

notified in 200 most backward districts in the first phase and then extended to additional 130 districts in the financial year 2007-08. The Act has been implemented in the whole country with effect from first April 2008. MGNREGA aims at enhancing livelihood security of households in rural areas of the country by providing at least one hundred days of guaranteed wage employment in a financial year to every household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work. Unique features of the Act include; time bound employment guarantee and wage payment within 15 days. As per the Government rules, in this scheme it is necessary that out of the total workforce in a particular place there should be one-third women participants. Various provisions under the act and its guidelines aim to ensure that women have equitable and easy access to work, decent working conditions, equal payment of wages and representation on decision making bodies. Above all this scheme has made significant positive impacts on the society in order to bring the people from poverty to prosperity. The MGNREGA ranks first among the most powerful initiatives ever undertaken for transformation of rural livelihood in India. The MGNREGA provides basis for permanent social security system and even act as an instrument for planned and equitable rural development (Roy and Dev 2005)¹.

Salient features of the Act

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act is aiming at providing the guarantee of work to every household member of the rural area. Along with it the Act also has some other features which are discussed as below:

Registration: The adult member of every household residing in any rural area and willing to do unskilled manual work may submit the names, age and the address of the household to the Gram Panchayat at the village level, in whose jurisdiction they reside, for registration of their household to the local Gram Panchayat.

Job Card: After due verification of place of residence and age of the member the registered household is issued a Job Card. A job card is to be issued within fifteen days of registration.

Unemployment Allowance: In case employment is not provided within fifteen days from the date of registration of the demand for work, he/she shall be entitled to a daily unemployment allowance.

Provision and Execution of work: Work is provided within 5 kilometers (kms) radius of the village. In case, work is provided beyond 5 kms, extra wages of 10 per cent are payable to meet additional transportation and living expenses. Priority is given to women, such that at least one-third of the beneficiaries under the Scheme are women. Efforts should be made to increase participation of the single and the disabled women.

Wages: Payment of wages shall only be made based on the measurements taken at the worksite by the authorized personnel within three days of closure of the must

MGNREGA in Uttarakhand

Uttarakhand became the 27th State of the republic of India in 9th Nov, 2000. It covers more than eighty

percent of the hill area and covers mostly the rural part. The economy of this state is called money-order economy, which implies that for the purpose of earning their livelihood the rural population used to migrate in the other parts of the country. This results in heavy migration from this region. To stop such type of situation there is a need of proper policy making, its effective implementation and creating employment opportunities. In Uttarakhand, the MGNREGA was initially launched in three districts in the year 2006 and another two districts have been added in the year 2007-08. In 2008 the Act is prevailing in all the thirteen districts. Major part of Uttarakhand is covered with hills.

The above table shows the data which is calculated from the data provided by the ministry of rural development, on the NREGA web site. It shows the situation of the employment provided to the household in the financial year 2014-15 of the Uttarakhand state along with those districts from which the primary data for the study has been taken. The table shows the details of the Uttarakhand State. The report shows that the amount provided for the employment in Tehri Garhwal district is more than the other districts of the sample. The share of women's in the total person days is highest in Tehri

Table No. 1. National Report of MGNREGA (2014-15)

	Uttarakhand State	Pauri Garhwal	Tehri Garhwal	Rudrapur	Chamoli
Employment provided to households:	4.01748 (lakhs)	0.56385 (lakhs)	0.81376 (lakhs)	0.09911 (lakhs)	0.45197 (lakhs)
Person days (in lakh):					
Total:	160.55	21.53	30.43	3.14	21.19
SCs:	28.93 (18.02%)	2.87 (13.3%)	3.21 (10.54%)	0.53 (16.98%)	3.85 (18.19%)
STs:	4.31 (2.68%)	0.06 (0.29%)	0.03 (0.09%)	0.01 (0.2%)	0.48 (2.27%)
Women:	73.84 (45.99%)	13.11 (60.92%)	20.36 (66.91%)	1.46 (46.59%)	10.7 (50.51%)
Others:	127.31 (79.3%)	18.59 (86.36%)	27.19 (89.37%)	2.6 (82.81%)	16.85 (79.54%)
Total Works Taken up:	69364	5363	7206	1319	13773
Works Completed:	7888	1504	479	255	1160
Works in Progress:	61476	3859	6727	1064	12613

Source: www.nrega.nic.in

Garhwal 20.36(66.91%) and lowest 1.46(46.59) in Rudraprayag district. But in the all four districts from where the sample is collected the share of women participation is more than the provision of 33 percent participation of the women.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

MGNREGA is expected to play a significant role in poverty alleviation and rural development. The need, therefore, is to share experiences and materials which will help not only in understanding successes and failures but also provide knowledge and guidelines to strengthen and expand MGNREGA programme. Below we present some previous work done in this field. Since the date of implementation of NREGS various social scientists have made attempt to study the impact of NREGS and also its implementation procedures.

Savaiah Channaba H.M and Jayaraj M.(2004)found that since independence, the Government initiated several five year plans, programs, policies and laws and has made efforts for gradual socio-economic development of women's , but they still remain the weakest sections of the society. During the various five year plans, there has been a considerable increase in the fund allocation for the women's. But most of the tribal's & rural women's are not able to draw benefit from the facilities provided by government because of large- scale corruption among officials and improper implementation of women employment & development schemes .

Chaudhary Neetu, Parhsarathy D. (2007)examined that women are pivots of household food security: on the whole women are responsible for more than 70 percent of their families' food security requirements, that too if value is assessed at female wage rate. They play a crucial role in all the four pillars of food security, viz, availability, accessibility, utilisation and stability of access. The fact women are “key” to food security despite being engulfed by severe resource constraints and lack of

independence underscores the need for greater access and control over resources for them.

Mohammadreza Iravani and Y.S.Siddegowda (2008) concluded that the governments must pay more attention to the women activities in their home and provide them social insurance and encourage them to have a job of their own and see their homework as a job. The women must determine the kind and direction of development programs by accessing to better health, gaining more income, learning new skills and technologies, and having equal rights with men and having control over their own body.

Narasimhappa K. (2008) explored that the women are generally consulted more for selected agricultural decisions like amount of grains stored and sold, getting credit and it's repayment, employment of family and casual labour for operations like sowing, weeding and harvesting, use of new variety seeds, selling and buying of new cattle, buying new equipments and selling and buying of land and property etc. The sustainable agricultural growth in the country, farm women will have to be given more prominence in agricultural and allied vocations through provisions of critical resources, education and training that handicap them in modern agriculture. India which is predominantly an agricultural country cannot afford to ignore the women-the important segment of our rural population engaged in farming and hence in nation building.

Dey Moitri (2010)concluded in his study that the Act will be very effective in addressing the acute problem of poverty in India. The need of the present time is to take this Act seriously and check the loopholes of the Act.

Pankaj Ashok and Tankha Rukmini (2010)discussed that empowerment of rural women has emerged as an unintended consequence of NREGS. This has helped women in registering their tangible contribution to the household's income. The overall effects of these have translated into an increased say

for women in household affairs.

Bordoloi Jotin (2011)observed that the NREGA is a new lifeline of the rural people who earn their livelihood as wage earners. It also gears up the social relationship among the rural people which is a pre-requisite condition to build a strong society or a nation. It also reduces the gender difference for some works which are in practice in rural areas.

Kadrolkar M.Vilas (2012)identified that the Act is providing employment to some extent, but the implementation of the Act has many flows. People should be made aware about the details of the Act.This can be done by with the help of workshops, nukkad nataks (plays) etc.

Nayak Kumar Praful and panda Bijaylaxmi (2012) examined that the status of women improved significantly. They were living within the boundaries of custom and tradition before the implementation of MGNREGA but afterwards they were participating in the gram sabha meetings and in social audits at the Panchayat level as a result of MGNREGA which eradicated superstitions and paved the way to development. They are also more aware of their rights and now participate in decision making.

Joshi and Lohani (2013)conducted a study to know the socio-economic status of women. The study also made an attempt to find out the change in the social and economical status of the general as well as scheduled caste women's workers belonged to the Mahatma Gandhi NREGA work. The results of this study shows that the women belonged to the general category uplifted their status more than the scheduled caste women workers. The reason behind this was the level of awareness among the general category women' participants.

Ahangar Bashir Gowhar (2014) examined that in this programme women are benefited most as a worker, than as a community. They are found to take this opportunity as freedom from their routine and

tiresome family activities. Thus empowerment of women has emerged as an unintended consequence of MGNREGA. SHGs become a part of its successful implementation, which helped to increase the number of workers under this programme. Payment of wages through bank helps the workers to increase their deposits in the bank which helps the bank in financial inclusion process. Equal wages for men and women helps to reduce the gender inequality to some extent. And payment of unemployment allowances in the event that the local administration fails to provide work, is also an attracting feature of this programme. The old people, widows are the benefited group of this job. They get more respect from their family and society. The women become an earning member of the family. Any person, who is a NREGP card holder, gets this job. No basic qualification is required for it. Therefore the programme benefited all the rural people and women especially.

RESEARCH GAP

MGNREGA scheme is beneficial for the rural poor in so many aspects. With the intervention of this scheme people are getting employment near to their homes. As per the provision made in this scheme the women's also started doing work and getting the earnings. As Uttarakhand is a hilly state, the employment opportunities here are not as per the requirement. With this reason the youth of this state is forced to go in other states in search of their livelihood. The center and the state government initiated schemes and programme to minimize this problem. Mahatma Gandhi NREGA scheme is one among the employment generating programme. Many authors explored the different areas of this Act. Some of them analyzed the impact of this scheme with special reference to SCs and STs; some have study the use of ICT in the MGNREGA scheme and some work is done to check the role of this scheme to uplift the status of rural peoples. The researchers have taken different regions of India for their study. There are very few studies which analyzed the

awareness level of women about MGNEGA in Uttarakhand. Since the women of this region is regarded as the backbone of the state, so it seems very important to uplift the status of rural women by making them financially, socially, and politically independent. Therefore with the findings of this study we are capable to see the real picture of growth of women after the intervention of this scheme in this region.

Objectives:

1. To analyze the level and quality of awareness about MGNREGA of women workers in Uttarakhand.
2. To propose some suggestions to counter the challenges in women empowerment through MGNREGA.

Research Hypothesis:

Hypothesis: There is a significant association between the education level of the women respondents and their level and quality of awareness about the scheme.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Sample Size

Four districts of Uttarakhand have been taken for the study i.e., Pauri Garhwal, Tehri Garhwal, Rudraprayag and Chamoli. A sample of one hundred women workers is selected from each district on the basis of stratified random sampling by personal interview method.

Data Collection

The study is based on the primary as well as secondary data. The secondary data is collected from the MGNREGA website, research papers, articles, magazines and primary data is collected from the field survey conducted in the four districts namely Pauri Garhwal, Tehri Garhwal, Rudraprayag, and Chamoli of the Garhwal Mandal region in Uttarakhand.

Statistical tools

To analyze the level and quality of awareness of women workers about MGNERGA, percentage

Table No. 2. District-Wise Level and Quality of Women's Awareness about the MGNREGA (% of Respondents)				
Provisions	Pauri Garhwal	Tehri Garhwal	Rudraprayag	Chamoli
Upto 100 days of employment	86	72	79	65
Minimum wages	88	84	90	81
Equal wages	92	90	88	85
Wage payment within 15 days	48	37	62	53
Worksite facilities	66	60	58	56
Work within 5 km from residence	29	32	25	27
Unemployment allowance	18	11	21	18
Provision of one third women	6	12	5	16
Arithmetic Mean	54.12	49.75	53.50	50.12
Standard Deviation	31.68	29.15	30.14	27.31
Variance	1003.62	849.75	908.62	745.62

(Source: Primary data)

method, average, standard deviation and variance are used and chi-square test is used in the study to find out the significant level of awareness of the respondents on MGNREGA when compare to their education level and also it was used to test the hypothesis.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

The analysis of the collected data describes the real situation of the women workers after their participation in the MGNREGA work. As we check the level of women empowerment through the analysis of awareness of selected women respondents about MGNREGA. The analysis of the data describes as below:

Awareness: In this section we find out the awareness level of the women workers about the MGNREGA scheme and other aspects of this scheme. Procedural participation is important for the realization of entitlement. The first and foremost issue is to know one's entitlements and the process of realization. Most women workers were aware of the basic provision of 100 days of guaranteed employment. But the level of awareness about the details of

provisions, including women-specific ones, was low and varied across districts.

The result of the above table shows the level and quality of awareness at the district level. The awareness is related to the different provisions of the Mahatma Gandhi NREGA scheme. Awareness in this table is checked with the help of some statistical tools i.e., Average, Standard Deviation and Variance. The awareness level is highest with 54.12 values in Pauri Garhwal district and lowest with 49.75 mean score in Tehri Garhwal. The value of the standard deviation with 31.68 score is maximum in district Pauri Garhwal and minimum with 27.31 value in Chamoli district. The variance in the above table shows the range of awareness between the sample districts.

The above analysis shows the awareness among rural women about the Mahatma Gandhi NREGA scheme. For the measurement, the provisions of the scheme are discussed with the respondents and the level of awareness is checked through the values of Average, Standard Deviation and Variance. The result shows maximum level of awareness about the provision of equal wages to all (this implies that

Table No. 3. Level and Quality of Awareness about the NREGS (% of Respondents)								
Districts	Upto 100 days of employment	Minimum wages	Equal wages	Wage payment within 15 days	Worksite facilities	Work within 5 km from residence	Unemployment allowance	Provision of one third women
Pauri Garhwal	86	88	92	48	66	29	18	6
Tehri Garhwal	72	84	90	37	60	32	11	12
Rudraprayag	79	90	88	62	58	25	21	5
Chamoli	65	81	85	53	56	27	18	16
Total	302	343	355	200	240	113	68	39
Mean	75.50	85.75	88.75	50	60	28.25	16	9.75
S.D.	7.38	8.67	10.37	9.03	3.74	2.55	3.81	4.50
Variance	54.50	75.25	107.5	81.50	14	6.50	14.50	20.25
χ^2_{cal} at d.f.1	.99	.12	.42	2.04	.04	.03	1.07	.80

(Source: field survey)

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Table No. 4. How did women searched for the MGNREGA job? (In percent)

Sources	Pauri Garhwal	Tehri Garhwal	Rudraprayag	Chamoli	Total
Searched herself	4	11	6	6	6.75
Family member	12	18	15	21	16.50
Self help group/women's group	5	10	3	11	7.25
Gram Pradhan	76	61	69	58	66.00
Others	3	00	7	4	3.50

(Source: Primary data)

there should be no discrimination on the basis of caste, gender and income level). To test the significance level of awareness about the scheme, the respondent's awareness is checked with their education level. For this the chi-square test is used. The calculated value of chi-square at degree of freedom 1 and at 0.05% level of significance is 3.841. Because the calculated value is less than the table value, the hypothesis is accepted. The result shows that awareness about the MGNREGA provisions is not affected by the literacy level of the respondents.

The above table shows the different sources from where the women respondents know about the MGNREGA work. The results show that the gram pradhan is the main source of information of the MGNREGA scheme, because sixty six per cent respondents got information from them, following approx. sixteen per cent respondents who got the information about the MGNREGA scheme from their family members.

Challenges

Empowerment of women is a long and difficult process, which is to be promoted with full public support. MGNREGA provides them the opportunity to get an equal chance of work and wages. The work done under this scheme is basically relates with the physical nature of work.

There are some challenges which should be discussed so that right steps should be taken for their effective solutions:

Lack of the availability of Child Care Facility: One of the major shortcomings of the Act is non-availability of proper crèche facilities at the work site even though the Act includes this provision. Due to this reason the mothers of the young babies find it difficult to work under Mahatma Gandhi scheme.

Lack of awareness: In some areas of the sample, the women's are less aware about the MGNREGA scheme. Women are aware of some of the provisions of this Act but not for the all. Due to this they can't even take the benefit of any provision particularly made for them. This is due to the lack of formal education among the women workers.

Lack of safety measures: At the MGNREGA work site, there is also the lack of proper and safe working conditions, which demoralized the rural women workers. In case any miss happening at the work site the safety measures are not sufficient for the immediate relief.

Poor Worksite Conditions: Under this Act, there is a provision of proper worksite facilities including drinking and resting places but the researcher observed that the working conditions are weak in MGNREGA work. Poor availability of the safe and pure drinking water is also a hindrance in this work place.

Suggestions

According to the views of the participants, they want some changes in the Mahatma Gandhi NREGA scheme. At the time of collecting the sample from the

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field, some questions were also asked which were relating to the useful suggestions regarding their MGNREGA work.

1. There should be proper child care facilities for the women workers because the mothers of the young children find it difficult to work without any proper child care facilities. This demand was very strong from those women's who currently do not but would work under MGNREGA if child care is provided at work place.
2. The total person days provided to the workers in a year should be increased from the provision of one hundred days.
3. The lower level of women's participation is due to the unawareness about the MGNREGA scheme. This awareness level should enhance by providing them the proper education. The adult education system has also improved so that the literacy may benefit to empower the women when they will join the scheme. With the increased level of basic education the workers are capable to ensure their full participation in MGNREGA work. This leads to earn their earnings.
4. At the MGNREGA worksite there should be safe and proper working conditions for all workers especially for the women workers. The workers should provide pure drinking water supply, first aid kit etc.
5. According to the study, women respondents want an increase in the wage rate. Because the prevailing rate of wages is not sufficient for the meeting of their day to day requirements.

CONCLUSION

MGNREGA plays a significant role to meet out the practical as well as strategic needs of women's empowerment. It has become an important tool in the path of women upliftment. The women respondents of the sample area show an increased level of awareness about the scheme. Active participation in any scheme is the basic requirement

for the women's empowerment. The government's provision made in the MGNREGA work, for the minimum number of women workers is the step to provide them the chance to participate in the work. The participation in this work requires the write and timely information. From the field survey it is concluded that the village pradhan is the main source of information about the MGNREGA work. The women workers also get information from the other sources i.e., from their family members, from the women's groups and in some cases they self searched the MGNREGA work. This shows the different sources that made an overall contribution regarding the information of the work.

The awareness level of the women workers pertaining to the MGNREGA work is also shows the popularity of this scheme. After the analysis of the data that is collected from the field survey, the results show the highest tendency of the awareness in Pauri Garhwal district of the sample area, whereas this level of awareness is lowest in Tehri Garhwal district, this may be due to the lack of proper formal education. Further it is also concluded from the survey that the women's who are working in the Mahatma Gandhi NREGA work even don't have any knowledge that they are working in which scheme.

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