

Impact Assessment Of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme On Rural Women Empowerment

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ABSTRACT.

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MNREGA) provides a legal Guarantee of 100 days of wage employment in a financial year to every rural household. It is also committed to ensure that at least 33% of the workers shall be women. Thus MNREGA is playing a substantial role in improving women economically, thereby leading to greater independence and self respect. The present study aims to analyze the impact of MGNREGS on women empowerment in Tirunelveli District of Tamilnadu. The present study has followed stratified sampling method.

The study revealed that women participation under the scheme was much more than the men participation in the entire 8 sample Gram Panchayats (70.5 percent). Hence, the impact of the scheme on their income level was very high 5 sample Gram panchayats which has received 100 days of employment in a year. Consequently, 56 percent women respondents stated that the income level of women has increased after the implementation of the scheme. When one starts earning by herself, it is a kind of gaining more responsibility and attaining economic independence. The responses elicited by the women respondents on their participation in decision making in the family regarding expenditure and savings indicated that in spite of the income level having increased among the women beneficiaries, the percentage of women respondents were 55.8 percent participated in decision making process connected with economic matters.

Independent and monetized income have increased consumption choices and reduced financial dependence. This has helped women in registering their real contribution to the household's income. Their increased attendance in the gram sabha, the increasing number of women speaking out in the gram sabha, repeated interactions with government officials and access to banks and post offices are new developments. Then, the scheme will be very dynamic socio-economic energy to empower rural women in this century.

KEYWORDS:

employment, women empowerment, beneficiaries, composite development indicators, Gram Panchayat, economic independence.

INTRODUCTION:

According to the United Nations Millennium Campaign the overwhelming majority of the labour that sustains life – growing food, cooking, raising children, caring for the elderly, maintaining a house, hauling water – is done by women, and universally this work is accorded low status and no pay. The role of women in protecting the family members from hunger and poverty had been highlighted by Rosi Braidotti (1994) and Caroline Moser (1988, 1989). According to them, in 1980's the international economic conditions and debt crisis led to increasing poverty of populations in the south and to what was termed a 'feminization of poverty'.

An increasing number of women became providers of family subsistence, while men often migrated in search employment. In many societies around the world, women never belong wholly to themselves; they are the property of others throughout their lives. Their physical well-being – health, security and bodily integrity – is often beyond their own control. Where women have no control over money, they cannot choose to get health care for themselves or their children.

The word women empowerment essentially means that the women have the power or capacity to regulate their day- to- day lives in the social, political and economic terms -a power which enables them to move from the periphery to the centre stage. (Dasarathi, B. 2006). When women have economic empowerment, it is a way for others to see them as equal members of society. Through this, they achieve more self-respect and confidence by their contributions to their communities.

When women have the agency to do what she wants, a higher equality between men and women is established (Sughosh India Foundation 2010).The Constitution of India guarantees to all Indian women equality (Article 14), no discrimination by the State (Article 15(1)), equality of opportunity (Article 16), and equal pay for equal work (Article 39(d)). Women today are demanding their position in the society. Women have become increasingly aware of sexual inequalities in every sphere of existence and are in search of ways to battle them.

The Indian women have cast of their age old shackles of serfdom and male domination. Notwithstanding the remarkable changes in the position of women in free India, there is still a great divergence between the constitutional position and stark reality of deprivation and degradation (Dasarathi, B.2006). Whatever the changes has blown in society, has been enjoyed by the urban women, their population living in rural areas are still totally unaffected by the twist of changes.

In the Panchayati Raj system, however, women have been given representation as a symbol of empowerment and there are many elected women representatives at the village council level but they are members on documentation only as women representatives are not free from male dominance in the village administration and no noteworthy alteration in the power is seen in the villages. The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MNREGA) provides a legal Guarantee of 100 days of wage employment in a financial year to every rural household. It is also committed to ensure that at least 33% of the workers shall be women.

The Government of India has initiated Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MNREGA) which is not only a scheme but an Act that provides legal guarantee to work. The objective of this scheme is to improve the purchasing power of the people living below poverty line and to rural people by providing them semi or unskilled work in rural India. It aims to bridge the gap between the rich and poor in the country.

MNREGA also aims to strengthen the women employment. The Act stipulates that about one third of the stipulated work force should be women and also that there will be equal wages for men and women. Thus MNREGA is playing a substantial role in improving women economically, thereby leading to greater independence and self respect. The present study aims to analyze the impact of MGNREGS on women empowerment in Tirunelveli District of Tamilnadu.

MNREGA AND WOMEN

Presently, the MNREGA is being implemented in the all rural districts of the country. The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MNREGA) provides a legal Guarantee of 100 days of wage employment in a financial year to every rural household. The participation of women in the workforce has surpassed the statutory minimum requirement of 33 percent and through this it has protected the women justice and rights. MNREGA has resulted into major financial inclusion where in bank/post office accounts have been opened for the families getting employment. Ministry has advised all the states to ensure payment of wages fully through the accounts.

PREVIOUS STUDIES ON IMPACT OF MNREGS ON WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

By putting cash incomes into their hands, NREGA is beginning to create a greater degree of economic independence among women. This seems to sketch out the beginnings of a marked shift from the previous role of women. While women's labour (farm and non-farm) has always been an essential component in the functioning of rural households, it has been made invisible due to the absence of any monetary remuneration. By putting cash earnings in women's hands, NREGA has both increased and diversified the contributions that women are making to household incomes as wage earners. (Navjyoti Jandu. 2008)

All the women workers working under the MGNREGS are fully satisfied. The main reason for their satisfaction is that; today they are assured of 100 days of jobs. It means that no longer they have to fear the occurrence of seasonal unemployment and poverty. Likewise, the MGNREGS allowed them to take part efficiently in the civil society. Now all the women workers working under the MGNREGS have no fear to enter in to a commercial bank or government office to hold discussions with the officials. The overall impact of NREGA on women's lives is quite positive in many ways, whether it is by enhancing their economic independence and self-confidence, contributing to food security, helping to reduce distress migration, or fostering better awareness of minimum wages. (Thomas, EM. 2010)

The empowerment effects of the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme on rural women in Bihar, Jharkhand, Rajasthan and Himachal Pradesh revealed that women workers have gained from the scheme primarily because of the paid employment opportunity, and benefits have been realized through income-consumption effects, intra-household effects, and the enhancement of choice and capability. Women have also gained to some extent in terms of realization of equal wages under the MGNREGS, with long-term implications for correcting gender skewness and gender discriminatory wages prevalent in the rural labour market of India. Despite the difficulties and

hurdles for women, prospects lie, inter alia, in their collective mobilization, more so in laggard states. (Ashok Pankaj and Rukmini Tankha. 2010)

The income from MNREGS helped them to increase the expenditure on education of their children (37.1%), medical expenses (62.7%). At the same time 92% of the women had the view that today, only because of the MNREGS, they are able to support their families and 71% tells that, the income from the MNREGS works provided economic independence to them. They are no longer dependent on the income earned by their husbands. (Vinita Arora, L. R. Kulshreshtha, and V. Upadhyay. 2013)

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

To know the relevance of MNREGS for women empowerment, the primary objective of the research is to study the impact of MGNREGS on women empowerment. The survey was paying attention on women specifically; the interviews with women workers provided insights into the significance of MGNREGA work for these women and highlighted the “transformative” role of this scheme in enhancing the empowerment of women workers.

Selection of the Study Area

Tirunelveli district was selected for the present study. Tirunelveli District is one of the four districts in Tamil Nadu and among the 130 districts at the national level in the second phase selected by the Government of India for implementation of the scheme. In addition, the district has received ‘**Rozgar Jagrookta Puraskar**’ award from the central government in the year 2009 for implementing this scheme successfully. Hence, the above District was purposefully selected for the present research.

The Sampling Framework

The present study has followed stratified sampling method. In order to get adequate representation from different sections of the beneficiaries all the nineteen Development Blocks of Tirunelveli District were first ranked as More Developed Blocks (MDBs) and Less Developed Blocks (LDBs) based on Composite Development Indicators (CDIs) constructed by employing four development indicators viz., area cultivated more than once in a year, rural literacy rate, non-agricultural workers and households above poverty line to elicit salient features of differential contributions of Blocks in their development perspectives in the district.

While construction the Composite Development Indicators (CDIs) each of these development indicators were standardized by taking its ratios in relation to that of the district and then non-weighted average of the four standardized were derived for construction Composite Development Indicators (CDIs (table 1.1). Then, all the nineteen Development Blocks were ranked in descending order of Composite Development Indicator (CDIs) and grouped them as blocks having Composite Development Indicator (CDIs) above 0.06 as More Developed Blocks (MDBs) and between 0.01 and 0.05 as Less Developed Block (LDBs). After grouping the blocks, one block from each group was selected randomly.

Table 1.1
Composite Development Indicators (CDIs) of Gram Panchayats in Tirunelveli District

Sl. No.	Block	Ratio to that of the District				Non-weighted Average	Group
		Area Cultivated more than once in a year (area in hectare)	Total Households (Above Poverty Line)	Rural Literate Rate	Non-Agricultural workers		
1	Keelapavoor	0.08	0.08	0.08	0.10	0.09	More Developed Blocks (CDIs above 0.06)
2	Kadayam	0.09	0.07	0.06	0.06	0.07	
3	Ambasamudram	0.13	0.03	0.03	0.07	0.07	
4	Manur	0.07	0.08	0.06	0.04	0.06	
5	Alankulam	0.04	0.07	0.08	0.06	0.06	
6	Tenkasi	0.09	0.04	0.03	0.09	0.06	
7	Vasudevanallur	0.11	0.05	0.04	0.03	0.06	
8	Cheranmahadevi	0.13	0.02	0.02	0.06	0.06	
9	Kadayanallur	0.07	0.05	0.04	0.06	0.06	
10	Pappakudi	0.08	0.04	0.04	0.04	0.05	Less Developed Blocks (CDIs between 0.01 & 0.05)
11	Radhapuram	0.00	0.07	0.07	0.06	0.05	
12	Sankarankoil	0.00	0.06	0.06	0.07	0.05	
13	Valliyoor	0.00	0.05	0.08	0.06	0.05	
14	Shencottai	0.07	0.02	0.05	0.04	0.05	
15	Palayamkottai	0.03	0.06	0.04	0.03	0.04	
16	Kuruvikulam	0.00	0.06	0.06	0.04	0.04	
17	Nanguneri	0.00	0.06	0.07	0.03	0.04	
18	Melaneelithanallur	0.00	0.06	0.05	0.03	0.04	
19	Kalakadu	0.02	0.03	0.04	0.03	0.03	

Source: Computed based on the data available in the statistical handbook (2010) & G-Return 2010, Tirunelveli District, Tamil Nadu.

Further, the number of Job Cards issued under the Scheme was employed as a criterion for identifying Gram Panchayats below the level of Administrative Blocks. After obtaining the list of beneficiaries for each identified Gram Panchayat as mentioned above, 10 percent from among the beneficiary households who have received Job Cards before 31st March 2012 were drawn as sample randomly (table 1.2).

Table 1.2
Location of Sample Gram Panchayats and Sampling Framework

DISTRICT	Group (Employing four Development Indicators*)	Block	Sample Blocks	Sample Gram Panchayats (Selected based on Job Card Issued upto 31 st March 2012)	Beneficiaries (10% of the total beneficiary households from each Gram Panchayad)
TIRUNELVELI	More Developed Blocks (CDIs above 0.06)	Keelapavoor	CHERANMAHADEVI	Highest Two	
		Kadayam		(1) Moolachi	67
		Ambasamudram		(2) Pudukudi	65
		Manur		Least Two	
		Alankulam		(1) T.Ariyanayagipuram	24
		Tenkasi		(2) Venkatarengapuram	25
		Vasudevanallur			
		Cheranmahadevi		Sub Total (1)	181
		Kadayanallur			
	Less Developed Blocks (CDIs between 0.01 & 0.05)	Pappakudi	SANKARANKOIL	Highest Two	
		Radhapuram		(1) Karivalamvandanallur	192
		Sankarankoil		(2) Kalappakulam	191
		Valliyoor		Least Two	
		Shencottai		(1) Poigai	21
		Palayamkottai		(2) Punnaivanam	28
		Kuruvikulam			
		Nanguneri		Sub Total (2)	432
		Melaneelithanallur			
	Kalakadu				
Grand Total (1+2)		2 Blocks	8 Gram Panchayats	613 Households	

* Four Development Indicators deployed are: Area cultivated more than once, Total households Above Poverty Line, Rural Literate, Non agricultural workers.

Hence, the present research work covered six hundred and thirteen (613) beneficiary households located in eight Gram Panchayats under two Development Blocks in Tirunelveli district. In this article among total respondent only four hundred and thirty two (432) women beneficiaries alone analyzed.

GENDER DIMENSION

An Inter-Block comparative analysis of the two sample Blocks (table 1.3) reveals that women constitute an absolute majority among the beneficiaries constituting about 70.5 percent and male beneficiaries account for 29.5 percent. Further, women beneficiaries in Cheranmahadevi Block which is the more developed group constituted

67.4 percent and Sankarankovil Block which is the less developed group constituted 71.8 percent. Thus, there was more number of women beneficiaries covered under the scheme. The present article covered four hundred and thirty two (432) women beneficiaries household located in eight Gram Panchayat under two Development Blocks in Tirunelveli district.

Table 1.3
Respondents by sex

Variable	Cheranmahadevi Block					Sub Total (1)	Sankarankovil Block				Sub Total (2)	Grand Total (1+2)
	Moolachi	Pudukudi	Venkatarengapuram	T. Ariyanayagipuram	Karivalamvandanallur		Kalappakulam	Punnaivanam	Poigai			
	No.	No.	No.	No.	No.		No.	No.	No.	No.		
Sex;												
Male	28 (41.8)	16 (24.6)	06 (24)	9 (37)	59 (32.6)	54 (28.1)	54 (28.3)	07 (25)	07 (33.3)	122 (28.2)	181 (29.5)	
Female	39 (58.2)	49 (75.4)	19 (76)	15 (63)	122 (67.4)	138 (71.9)	137 (71.7)	21 (75)	14 (66.7)	310 (71.8)	432 (70.5)	
Total	67 (100)	65 (100)	25 (100)	24 (100)	181 (100)	192 (100)	191 (100)	28 (100)	21 (100)	432 (100)	613 (100)	

Source: Computed from the sample survey. **No.** Number of respondents. Notes: (i) Figures in parenthesis represent the percentage to their respective total sample respondent.

WOMEN'S CONTRIBUTION TO HOUSEHOLD'S INCOME THROUGH MGNREGS

The women contribution to household's income through MGNREGS in the study area is presented in table 1.4. The study infers that the share of women in MGNREGS income is the average income of households from MGNREGS in Cheranmahadevi Block is 68 percent and in Sankarankovil Block is 71.1 percent. The overall share of women's MGNREGS income is the average income of households from MGNREGS is 69.3 percent. Further, the share of women's MGNREGS income in the total average annual income of household in Cheranmahadevi Block is 16.1 percent and in Sankarankovil Block is 12.8 percent. The overall share of women's MGNREGS income in the total average annual income of household is 14.5 percent. The share might really be more, as we have not accounted for the woman worker's other contributions, in the form of either paid work like agriculture and non-agriculture work and unpaid work like teaching for their own children, and work carried out by the women within their family.

Table 1.4
Women's Contribution to Household's Income through MGNREGS

Variable	Cheranmahadevi Block				Sub Total (1)	Sankarankovil Block				Sub Total (2)	Grand Total (1+2)
	Moolachi	Pudukudi	Venkatarengapuram	T. Ariyanayagipuram		Karivalamvandanallur	Kalappakulam	Punnaivanam	Poigai		
	□	□	□	□		□	□	□	□		
Average annual income of household after joining the scheme	24838	23936	22623	24154	23888	23050	22183	25719	23977	23732	23810
Average income from MGNREGS*	5427 (21.9)	4998 (20.9)	6198 (27.4)	6067 (25.1)	5673 (23.7)	2881 (12.5)	2495 (11.2)	5787 (22.5)	5923 (24.7)	4272 (18)	4973 (20.9)
Average women's share from MGNREGS**	3159 (58.2)	3768 (75.4)	4710 (76)	3792 (62.5)	3857 (68)	2071 (71.9)	1790 (71.7)	4340 (74.5)	3949 (66.7)	3038 (71.1)	3448 (69.3)
Average share of women's MGNREGS income in the total average annual income of household*	3159 (12.7)	3768 (15.7)	4710 (20.8)	3792 (15.7)	3857 (16.1)	2071 (09)	1790 (8.1)	4340 (16.9)	3949 (16.5)	3038 (12.8)	3448 (14.5)

Source: Computed from the sample survey. □.Rupees.

Notes: * Figures in parenthesis represent the percentage to their respective Average annual income of the households after joined the scheme.

** Figures in parenthesis represent the percentage to their respective Average income of households from MGNREGS.

IMPACT OF MGNREGS ON ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

The MGNREGA 2005 gives special provision to women by reserving one third of the work at the worksite to be a woman. Further the Act states that 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), shall be complied with.

Hence, the perceptions of the respondents were sought and their responses are presented in table 1.7. When people participated more in public affairs and becomes more aware of the environment, definitely they will have more voice in the society. If a woman has more voice in the society it is a symbol of women empowerment. Among

the women beneficiaries in the study area, 71.3 percent and 39.4 percent of the women respondents in Cheranmahadevi Block and Sankarankovil Block respectively stated that women have now gained more voice in the society.

It is not surprising to learn that all the women respondents in 8 sample Panchayats stated that women were paid equal wage rate on par with men. But all of them informed that women were not consulted while choosing worksites under MGNREGS.

Table 1.5**Women respondents' perception on the impact of the scheme on economic and social women empowerment**

Proportion of respondents who responded that;	Cheranmahadevi Block					Sub Total (1)	Sankarankovil Block				Sub Total (2)	Grand Total (1+2)
	Moolachi	Pudukudi	Venkatarengapuram	T. Ariyanayagipuram	Karivalamvandanallur		Kalappakulam	Punnaivanam	Poigai			
	No.	No.	No.	No.	No.		No.	No.	No.	No.		
voice in the society	25 (64.1)	39 (79.6)	13 (68.4)	10 (66.4)	87 (71.3)	55 (39.9)	48 (35)	11 (52.4)	08 (57.1)	122 (39.4)	209 (48.4)	
wages on par with men	39 (100)	49 (100)	19 (100)	15 (100)	122 (100)	138 (100)	137 (100)	21 (100)	14 (100)	310 (100)	432 (100)	
Increase in women beneficiaries income	24 (61.5)	26 (53.1)	12 (63.2)	11 (73.3)	73 (59.8)	70 (50.7)	75 (54.7)	15 (71.4)	09 (64.3)	169 (54.5)	242 (56)	
decision making in expenditure and saving	21 (53.8)	29 (59.2)	11 (57.9)	08 (53.3)	69 (56.6)	74 (53.6)	71 (51.8)	16 (76.2)	11 (78.6)	172 (55.5)	241 (55.8)	
Women participation in work force	30 (76.9)	28 (57.1)	14 (73.7)	12 (80)	84 (68.8)	85 (61.6)	98 (71.5)	17 (81)	12 (85.7)	212 (68.4)	296 (68.5)	
Wants separate gram sabha meeting for women for selecting worksites	06 (15.4)	10 (20.4)	05 (26.3)	02 (13.3)	23 (18.9)	26 (18.8)	23 (16.8)	03 (14.3)	03 (21.4)	55 (17.7)	78 (18.1)	
1/3 reservation enhances women empowerment	39 (100)	49 (100)	19 (100)	15 (100)	122 (100)	138 (100)	137 (100)	21 (100)	14 (100)	310 (100)	432 (100)	

Source: Computed from the sample survey. **No.**Number of respondents. Notes: (i) Figures in parenthesis represent the percentage to their respective total women sample respondent.

Women participation under the scheme was much more than the men participation in the entire 8 sample Gram Panchayats (70.5 percent). Hence, the impact of the scheme on their income level was very high 5 sample Gram panchayats which has received 100 days of employment in a year.

Consequently, 56 percent women respondents stated that the income level of women has increased after the implementation of the scheme. But respondents in 3 Gram Panchayats answered differently stating that the income was very meager. This is due to the fact that in these 3 Gram Panchayats only 15-30 days of employment were received in a year. Viewed at the overall level, it was encouraging because 56 percent of women respondents stated that the income level of the women has increased after the implementation of the scheme. An inter-block comparative analysis showed that Cheranmahadevi Block (More developed Group) ranked first with 59.8 percent and Sankarankovil Block (Less Developed Group) ranked second with 54.5 percent.

When one starts earning by herself, it is a kind of gaining more responsibility and attaining economic independence. The responses elicited by the women respondents on their participation in decision making in the family regarding expenditure and savings indicated that in spite of the income level having increased among the women beneficiaries, the percentage of women respondents were 55.8 percent participated in decision making process connected with economic matters.

As per the responses of the sample women respondents, the scheme has brought about a new phenomenon indicating an increase in women's workforce participation to the extent of 68.5 percent at the overall level. The scheme has brought more workforce participation from the women's side. In an inter-block level comparative analysis, It showed that the participation of women workforce under the scheme was little higher in Cheranmahadevi Block (68.8 percent) than the Sankarankovil Block with 68.4 percent.

Opinion was sought from the sample women respondents with regard to separate Gram Sabha meeting (usually being held two times in a year) for women and their responses are presented in table 1.7. The study revealed that about less than 19 percent were in support of a separate Gram Sabha meeting for women in the sample Gram Panchayats.

On the maintenance of 1/3 reservation for women in employment, cent percent of the women respondents in the entire surveyed Gram Panchayats answered in the affirmative. Moreover, 1/3 reservation for women was maintained at all the worksites they have worked. Some even said that in the Gram Panchayats like Pudukudi and T. AriyanayagiPuram, in Cheranmahadevi Block hardly 3-5 men used to come for work and the rest 70-80 workers were women. The reason for this thin representation from the men's side was that men go for other work including agricultural work as they earn higher wages working elsewhere than in the present scheme. Also, they wanted to provide chance to women within the village to work under the present scheme.

OBSTACLES TO WOMEN WORKERS

Even though, MNREGS remuneration has not come without difficulty – their free time has lost with working hours for women and not only this have they to bear with physical and emotional strains. Some of the hindrance that we found during survey was as follows:

- The MNREGA guidelines provide certain positive action to encourage women participation in the program like facilities for crèche, drinking water, shade and first aid are required to be provided at every worksite. The findings show that with the exception of provision for drinking water, other worksite facilities viz. crèche, resting place, first-aid, recreational facility for children etc. and other facilities for the betterment of gender were generally absent.
- The awareness of MNREGA and workers entitlements is very low. In many villages, there has been an intentional attempt not to publish complete information regarding the MNREGA. Most people are not even aware of the fact that they should apply for work and also of getting unemployment allowance in case of not getting work.
- Another constraint is the introduction of wage payments through banks. When a single account is opened per job card the account is generally opened in the name of a male member of the family. This means that women are still relying on men to withdraw their wages. This decreases the participation of women in this programme.
- Late payments also come in the way of participation of poor women. Delays in wage payments make it difficult especially for single women, who cannot afford to wait as they are the only earners in the family.

CONCLUSION

Success of MGNREGA has added to very high levels of women empowerment, mainly in the following aspect that as the work is organized by women groups, the gender point of view gets built in automatically, for the first time the same wages are really paid and this has improved the earnings of women. As the Bank deposits are increasing, the intra-household status of the woman has also been improving commensurately as she controls considerable cash resources and withdrawal can be only on her decision. Independent and monetized income have increased consumption choices and reduced financial dependence. This has helped women in registering their real contribution to the household's income. Their increased attendance in the gram sabha, the increasing number of women speaking out in the gram sabha, repeated interactions with government officials and access to banks and post offices are new developments. Then, the scheme will be very dynamic socio-economic energy to empower rural women in this century.

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