

# Women Empowerment through MGNREGA Programmes with Special Reference to Mavoor Grama Panchayat in Kerala

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## Abstract

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

**Keywords-**MGNREGA, Kudumbasree, Employment, women empowerment, Participation, Local administration.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) is a historic legislation passed by the Government of India in September 2005. It was introduced to address the crucial issues of unemployment and poverty in rural India. It is an employment guarantee programme, focused on asset-creating work that are labour-intensive at the same time could tackle problems of unemployment, environmental regeneration and agricultural growth in one stroke. It is as an employment generation programme intended to improve the role and standard of living standard of women. The programme was helpful for improving women's identity in terms of economic status and participation in social sphere.

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

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

## II. OBJECTIVES

The main objectives of the study are

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

## III. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

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

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

#### IV. METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The study employed both primary and secondary data. The primary data is collected using survey method by randomly selecting 200 workers of MGNREGA from Mavoor Grama Panchayath in Kozhikode district, Kerala. Secondary data was collected from Mavoor Grama Panchayath's annual reports and other official records.

#### V. MGNREGA

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

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

**Table 1 : MGNREGA - National Overview**

|  |                |                |                |
|--|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Total No. of Districts                 | 685            |                |                |
| Total No. of Blocks                    | 6,865          |                |                |
| Total No. of GPs                       | 2,62,795       |                |                |
| <b>Job Card</b>                        |                |                |                |
| Total No. of Job Cards issued [In Cr]  | 12.57          |                |                |
| Total No. of Workers [In Cr]           | 25.17          |                |                |
| <b>Progress</b>                        | <b>2017-18</b> | <b>2016-17</b> | <b>2015-16</b> |
| Approved Labour Budget [In Cr]         | 215.5          | 220.9274       | 239.112        |
| Person days Generated so far [In Cr]   | 112.65         | 235.8111       | 235.1465       |
| Total No. of Works Taken up [In Lakhs] | 128.28         | 164.75         | 123.12         |

|                                     |           |           |           |
|-------------------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Total Availability of fund (In Cr.) | 38,225.78 | 56,764.89 | 43,380.72 |
| Total Expenditure [In Cr]           | 32,192.19 | 58,293.28 | 44,002.59 |

Source: www.nrega.nic.in

#### VI. TYPES OF WORKS

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

#### VII. MERITS OF MGNREGA

MGNREGA has benefited the people especially the marginalized and the poor on several grounds. It ensured payment of minimum wages irrespective of the sex. The scheme brought stability and assured income to the families that were until recently desperately poor. A shift in the expenditure pattern on food and non-food took place. And the villagers are now purchasing livestock like sheep and goat.

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

#### VIII. MGNREGA PROGRAMME IN KERALA

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

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

A number of micro level organisations are involved in the formulation and implementation of MGNREGA programme at the panchayath level. The panchayat governing council, which has been strengthened by decentralized planning, has a pivotal role to play in the smooth functioning of MGNREGA. It is the gramapanchayat that takes a leading role in publicizing and executing the

programme. Kudumbhasree reaches to all households in the panchayat through Neighbour Hood Groups (NHGs). Involvement of Kudumbhasree is one of the most important aspects that makes the programme in Kerala unique.

**Table 2 : Kerala- A general Profile**

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

Source: [www.nrega.nic.in](http://www.nrega.nic.in)

**Table 3 : MGNREGA Financial Progress in Kerala**

|                                     | 2016-17     | 2015-16     | 2014-15     | 2013-14     |
|-------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Total Availability of Fund          | 175950.26   | 161084.19   | 164262.69   | 132096.19   |
| Percentage Utilization              | 137.9       | 92.1        | 98.42       | 98.44       |
| Total Exp(in Lakhs.)                | 2,42,634.3  | 1,48,350.81 | 1,61,672.64 | 1,30,040.97 |
| Wages(Rs. In Lakhs)                 | 2,14,423.75 | 1,40,219.19 | 1,49,777.95 | 1,20,293.39 |
| Average Cost Per Day Per Person(Rs) | 277.31      | 241.35      | 232.36      | 191.31      |
| % payments (within 15 days)         | 76.96       | 18.49       | 15.5        | 19.52       |

Source: [www.nrega.nic.in](http://www.nrega.nic.in)

### IX. WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN MGNREGA

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

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

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

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

### X. EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

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

**Table 4 : MGNREGA in MavoorGramaPanchayath: A general Profile**

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

Source: [www.nrega.nic.in](http://www.nrega.nic.in)

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

#### A. Sample Findings

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

**Table 5 : Profile of Sample Workers(%)**

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

Source: Primary survey

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

**Table 6 : Educational standard of sample household**

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

Source: Primary survey

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

**Table 7 : Participation of Women in MGNREGA**

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

Source: Primary survey

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

**Table 8 : Distribution of Respondents According Savings**

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

Source: Primary survey

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

**Table 9 : Distribution of members on the basis of economic independence**

| Before joining MGNREGA |            |     | After joining MGNREGA |             |     |
|------------------------|------------|-----|-----------------------|-------------|-----|
| Respon ses             | Freque ncy | %   | Respon ses            | Fre que ncy | %   |
| Yes                    | 16         | 10  | Yes                   | 137         | 86  |
| No                     | 144        | 90  | No                    | 23          | 14  |
| total                  | 160        | 100 | total                 | 200         | 100 |

Source: Primary survey

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

**Table 10 : Respondents' role in family decision making**

| Before joining in MGNREGA |            |     | After joining in MGNREGA |            |     |
|---------------------------|------------|-----|--------------------------|------------|-----|
| Resp onses                | Freque ncy | %   | Response s               | Frequenc y | %   |
| Yes                       | 61         | 38  | Yes                      | 137        | 86  |
| No                        | 99         | 62  | No                       | 23         | 14  |
| total                     | 200        | 100 | Total                    | 200        | 100 |

Source: Primary survey

Table 3.9 shows that 86% of the total population had a significant role in decision making in their family such as to buy and sell properties, to buy ornaments, to educate children, make personal

changes etc. after participating in the program. But before joining the program, it was only 38%. Thus through MGNREGA rural women became more powerful.

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

**Table 11 : Participation in socio-political activities**

| Before joining in MGNREGA |           |     | After joining in MGNREGA |           |     |
|---------------------------|-----------|-----|--------------------------|-----------|-----|
| Responses                 | Frequency | %   | Responses                | Frequency | %   |
| Yes                       | 80        | 50  | Yes                      | 128       | 80  |
| No                        | 80        | 50  | No                       | 32        | 20  |
| total                     | 160       | 100 | Total                    | 200       | 100 |

Source: Primary survey

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

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

### XI. IMPACT OF MGNREGA

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

- It guarantees to provide 100 days of work. In Kerala women get only 5-20 days of work. So income from MGNREGA is an important source to provide financial assistance to their family.
- Women who have no other sources of income to support their family, MGNREGA is an important avenue.

- There is notable progress in the saving pattern of women through participating MGNREGP.
- Women are completely satisfied with regarding to the working time and by measuring productivity in day by day. They feel that it will increase their productivity.
- Women workers get complete assistance from ADS, Kudumbasree, and GramaPanchayat with regard to the activities of MGNREGA.
- Many female respondents said the work provided under the MGNREGA opened up a new opportunity to them. It give them the opportunities to interact with new people and government authorities
- The wider acceptability of MGNREGA work, increased the social status of women labourers.
- As it is locally available, women workers can do their work within the periphery of their locality.
- Being government work MGNREGA provide regularity and predictability of work.
- It provides an opportunity to the female workers to come together and to share their problems and experiences.
- Helps them to stand against the exploitative aspects in the labor market, were women workers are considered as subordinate to male counterparts.
- It is also a better paid job than other work
- As the work is organized by women's groups, the gender perspective gets built in automatically.
- As women are comfortable working along with their neighbours, nearly 80% of the workers have been women.
- For the first time equal wages are really paid and this has boosted the earnings of women.
- As the wages are paid into Bank accounts the habit of thrift which was already inculcated through the Kudumbashree experiment has further been strengthened.
- As the Bank deposits are increasing, the intra-household status of the woman has also been improved as she controls cash resources.

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

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