

Empowerment of Rural Women through MGNREGA Implementation in Shivamogga District, Karnataka

Dr. Somya Agarwal¹, Girish. K.S², Ganashyam³

¹ Assistant Professor, Department of Management Studies, Faculty of Management and Commerce,
M.S. Ramaiah University of Applied Sciences, Bengaluru

² Research Scholar, Department of Management Studies, JNN College of Engineering, Shivamogga

³ Faculty of Commerce, ATNCC, Shivamogga

Abstract

In most parts of the world, women do not have the same decision-making authority as their male counterparts. This pre-existing prejudice indicates an inequality in family decision-making, making women's empowerment an essential requirement for the health and prosperity of our communities.

*The purpose of this research work is to evaluate the significance and effect of **Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA)** which provides secured as well as guaranteed employment to rural households across India and to understand more about boosting women's engagement, during the study period, in gram panchayats (10 in number) in Shivamogga District of Karnataka. It also concentrates on different perspectives, methods, and challenges on ground. The Covid-19 outbreak impacted economic growth adversely, which was already suffering downturn. Research states that if MGNREGA is effectively executed, this act has the potential to improve economic and social position of women recipients in the long run.*

Keywords: MGNREGA, Women Empowerment and Gram Panchayats

Introduction

Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) operates in a five-tiered system with the Gram Panchayats at the bottom followed by Block Panchayats, District Panchayats, State Governments, and ultimately the Central Government. MGNREGA is social security legislation as well as Indian labour law that intends to guarantee the 'right to employment'. The government defines the legislation as the world's largest and most proactive public work and social security programme.

MGNREGA is critical in meeting both operational and strategic requirements with regards to inclusion of women. Women empowerment refers to the ability of women to make their own decisions. The act has made a significant contribution towards

empowerment of rural women and improvement of their living and financial conditions by forming a responsible attitude towards remuneration of both male and female workers. Women have an important role in the growth of communities as well as the nation. When women are given the means to liberate themselves, families make progress and in turn, the whole society is benefitted. Therefore, women's empowerment is critical for upliftment of the society.

The Act's measures have shown to be extremely effective for women in terms of boosting their level of empowerment, as one-third of the participants of the scheme are women and gender security is guaranteed on the job site. The research work is an endeavor to assess the effect of MGNREGA on the socio-economic

empowerment of women in ten Gram Panchayats of Shivamogga District, identify implementation challenges and suggest measures for successful on ground implementation.

Literature review

One of the Scheme's weaknesses, according to **Kar (2013)**, is the lack of suitable crèche facilities on the job site, though it is specifically mentioned in the Act. The research established the fact that women's involvement was low in several states of the country due to lack of understanding of the program's methodology and benefits. Except for drinking water facility, it was found that all other amenities were mostly non-existent. Delay in payments was also a factor leading to low engagement of women, particularly among single women who were the source of primary income for the family. Also, due to the long distance between rural households and the nearest bank branch, women found it harder to access financial services and transfer cash, further inhibiting their involvement.

Smita Nayak (2013) made an attempt to determine MGNREGA measures that influenced tribal women's socio-economic empowerment in Odisha. The study discovered that indigenous women's participation in the MGNREGA programme was minimal in Rajagangapur Block of Odisha's Sundargarh district, and pointed towards the grim fact that whenever they were participating, they faced abuse. The research found various barriers as lack of engagement of local women at the design stage of the project, lack of childcare facilities at workplace, insufficient knowledge, lack of access to employment cards and bank accounts by women, income disparities among men and women, harassment and discrimination at the workplace and an insufficient ecosystem of information transmission techniques.

According to the researcher, in order to be effective, MGNREGA should resolve governance issues, formulate awareness programmes to ensure better ground implementation and provide free legal support to participants who have been denied benefits.

Ahangar (2014) investigated women's engagement in MGNREGA in Shahabad block of Anantnag district in Jammu & Kashmir. It was found that job opportunities in the scheme were confined to agriculture sector, suggesting that growth in other sectors was greatly required. In order to plug frauds and leakages, the social audit of MGNREGA needed to be reinforced by more innovative use of information technology. It was put forth that it was necessary to establish a system for quick registration and distribution of work cards. Strategies were proposed to boost women's participation in the Scheme.

Borah and Bordoloi's (2014) research showing consistency with the CAG Report of 2007, identified lack of specialized management and administration of employees under MGNREGA as the primary cause for procedural breaches. Lack of child care services on the job site was a major drawback of the Scheme, though the availability of such services was stipulated by law. Women were concerned about the safety of their children at work place and several women declined taking up opportunities due to lack of adequate child care facilities. The study exposed the fact that apart from drinking water facility, all other amenities were typically unavailable.

Objectives of the Study

1. To determine the source of revenue and income for households in the selected area, with an emphasis on women participants, during the study period i.e. Covid-19 pandemic.

2. To evaluate impact of MGNREGA on female beneficiaries and decision-making power in their households during Covid-19.
3. To determine opinions regarding women's empowerment by female beneficiaries during the study period.

Methodology

For the purpose of study, ten Gram panchayats were chosen in Shivamogga District of Karnataka. The overall sample size is 50, with 5 samples taken from each village panchayat, with women participants of MGNREGA acting as the target population of study.

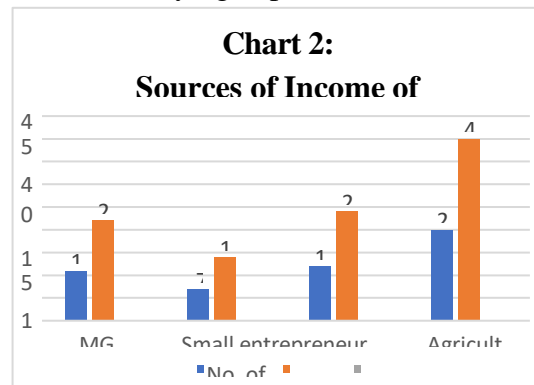
The research is based on both primary and secondary sources. Personal interviews and Q&A sessions were employed to collect primary data. A well-defined and planned questionnaire was constructed in order to understand the impact of MGNREGA on the social and economic empowerment of rural women in India. Secondary data was collected from a wide variety of sources as books, periodicals, journals, internet and the MGNREGA website.

Observations and Results

Table 1 shows that the dominating age group is 18-35 years old, accounting for 46% of the overall sample of 50, followed by 36-50 years old, accounting for 32%. In addition, 12% of the female employees are between the age of 51 and 65. Only 10% of the population is above the age of 65 which is actively participating in MGNREGA.

One of MGNREGA's key goals is to promote involvement of women in income generation for their families. According to table 2, during Covid-19 period, majority of women derived their revenue from agricultural activities (40%), followed by non-agricultural activities (24%). Around 14% of women were small entrepreneurs and 22% women were MGNREGA workers. It has been noticed that

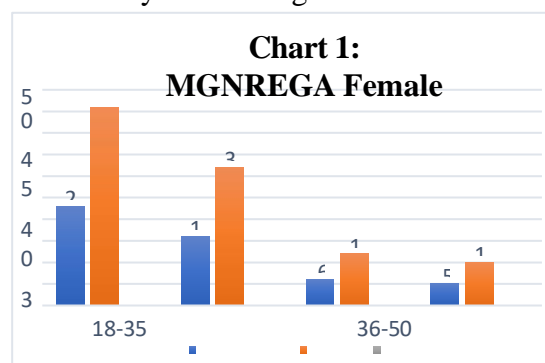
MGNREGA has ensured that cash revenue reaches women participants directly, leading to greater financial autonomy and increased buying power of female



employees.

Chart 3 shows that majority of the respondents (46%) believed that MGNREGA had supported their engagement in family decision-making.

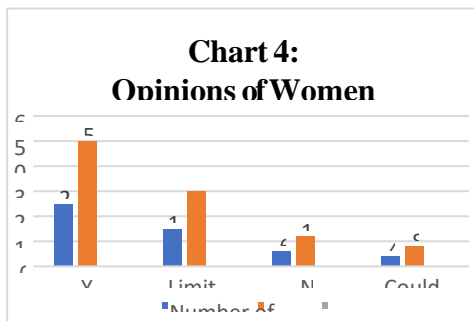
Rural households and communities have always been seen as male dominated. Women have an important role in providing financial resources for their families, but their involvement goes unnoticed since they largely perform tasks which are unpaid. MGNREGA had a considerable influence in transforming certain unpaid tasks into paid jobs thereby increasing women's decision-



making authority in domestic issues. Women's empowerment has increased in rural areas, which is an unforeseen result of the Scheme.

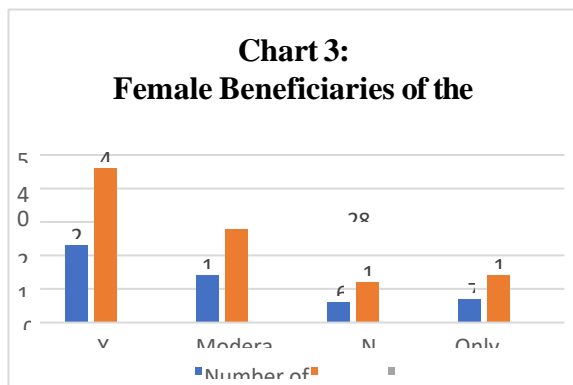
Rest of the women workers i.e., 28%, 12%, and 14% were dissatisfied and had low or no contribution in decision making in households.

Table 4 demonstrates that the majority of women beneficiaries (50%) claimed that they felt empowered due to MGNREGA while 30% believed that they had been empowered to some extent. While 12% of female respondents said that they didn't feel empowered, 8% of female workers were not sure about their responses.



Conclusion

It has been witnessed that MGNREGA has been a fairly effective and well-implemented initiative in Shivamogga district. In fact, during the study period, it was found to have a greater positive



influence on women beneficiaries' engagement and income in Karnataka, in comparison to other states. The legislation is beneficial, strategic, and promising and leads to the upliftment of rural women. The study indicates that this Act effectively contributes towards empowerment of rural women through continuous engagement, during the pandemic period. Initially, MGNREGA was not intended to be a women's empowerment initiative but it has resulted in women's economic and social empowerment in the true sense.

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