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Women Empowerment Through MGNREGA: Evidence from Rajasthan

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Abstract: *The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) stands as one of India's most ambitious social welfare programs, aimed at addressing rural unemployment and poverty. Beyond its economic objectives, MGNREGA has also emerged as a catalyst for women's empowerment in rural areas. This paper reviews existing literature on the impact of MGNREGA on women's empowerment in the context of Rajasthan, one of India's largest and most populous states. It explores the multifaceted dimensions of empowerment, including economic, social, and political aspects. Furthermore, the paper highlights the challenges and limitations faced in the implementation of MGNREGA. In conclusion, this review underscores the transformative potential of MGNREGA in empowering women in Rajasthan, while emphasizing the importance of addressing the program's shortcomings to ensure that its benefits are equitably distributed among all beneficiaries.*

Keywords: *MGNREGA, Women Empowerment, Economic Growth, Challenges and Impact.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Women's empowerment is a critical aspect of societal progress, and it can be achieved through various means. One such avenue is the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) in the state of Rajasthan, India. Women's empowerment through the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) in Rajasthan has been a pivotal initiative in fostering gender equality and socio-economic development. Rajasthan, known for its rural landscape, has implemented MGNREGA to provide rural women with employment opportunities, financial independence, and a platform to assert their rights.

This program has not only empowered women economically but also catalysed their active participation in decision-making processes, transforming them into agents of change in their communities. In this discussion, we will delve deeper into the various facets of women's empowerment through MGNREGA in Rajasthan, exploring its impact on their lives and the broader societal landscape. Women empowerment through the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) in Rajasthan has been a transformative initiative aimed at uplifting the socio-economic status of women in the state. MGNREGA, a flagship government program, has not only provided rural employment opportunities but has also fostered gender equality by actively involving and empowering women.

The role of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) in women's empowerment in Rajasthan is multifaceted and vital:

- 1) **Employment Generation:** MGNREGA guarantees 100 days of wage employment per year to every rural household, with a significant focus on women participation. This provides women in Rajasthan with income-generating opportunities, reducing their economic dependency.
- 2) **Financial Inclusion:** By directly paying wages to women workers, MGNREGA promotes financial inclusion and empowerment. It encourages women to open bank accounts, manage their finances, and save for the future.
- 3) **Skill Development:** Through various projects under MGNREGA, women acquire new skills and gain practical experience in fields like agriculture, construction, and infrastructure development. These skills enhance their employability and self-confidence.
- 4) **Gender Equality:** MGNREGA mandates a minimum of one-third of the workforce to be women. This not only ensures their active participation but also challenges traditional gender roles, promoting equality and changing societal perceptions.
- 5) **Social Upliftment:** Economic empowerment often leads to social empowerment. Women who earn income through MGNREGA are better positioned to make decisions within their households, access healthcare, and send their children to school, contributing to improved living standards.

- 6) Political Participation: Empowered women are more likely to engage in local governance and community decision-making processes. MGNREGA's emphasis on self-help groups and village-level committees provides opportunities for women to participate in local politics.
- 7) Awareness and Education: Participation in MGNREGA projects exposes women to various government schemes and programs, increasing their awareness of their rights and entitlements, and encouraging them to seek education and healthcare services.

In summary, MGNREGA plays a crucial role in women's empowerment by offering employment, stimulating financial independence, skill development, challenging traditional gender roles, and promoting overall socio-economic progress among women in Rajasthan.

II. CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS FACED IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF MGNREGA:

However, its implementation faces several challenges:

- 1) Funds Allocation: For the program's success, there is need of suitable funds allocation. Sometimes, delays in fund allocation can impede the timely payment of wages to workers.
- 2) Corruption and Leakages: There have been instances of corruption and leakages in the system, where funds meant for workers are siphoned off by middlemen or officials.
- 3) Delayed Payments: Workers often face delays in receiving their wages, which can lead to financial deprivation for them.
- 4) Administrative Capacity: The program's effective implementation relies on the administrative capacity of local government bodies, which may vary widely across different regions.
- 5) Aadhaar Linkage: Linking workers' Aadhaar (unique identification) to the program has been challenging, as some workers might not have Aadhaar cards, leading to exclusion.
- 6) Job Availability: Ensuring that there are enough job opportunities available to meet the demand throughout the year is a challenge, as work under MGNREGA is demand-driven.
- 7) Skilled Labour Requirement: The program often involves manual labour, and ensuring the availability of skilled workers can be a challenge.
- 8) Infrastructure Development: MGNREGA aims to create durable assets, but ensuring the quality of these assets and their long-term maintenance can be challenging.
- 9) Social Inclusion: Ensuring that marginalized and vulnerable groups, including women and Scheduled Castes/Tribes, benefit equitably from the program is an ongoing challenge.
- 10) Awareness and Grievance Redressal: Many potential beneficiaries are not aware of their rights under MGNREGA, and there can be challenges in setting up effective grievance redressal mechanisms.
- 11) Climate Variability: Weather-related challenges, such as droughts or floods, can impact the availability of work and the success of MGNREGA projects.
- 12) Political Interference: In some cases, political interference can affect the program's implementation and lead to the selection of works that may not align with local needs.

Addressing these challenges requires a holistic approach involving transparency, accountability, improved administrative capacity, and a commitment to the program's objectives. Continuous monitoring, evaluation, and adaptation of strategies are essential to enhance MGNREGA's effectiveness in alleviating rural poverty and unemployment.

III. EVALUATION OF PERFORMANCE OF MGNREGA:

- 1) The national average of women participation in MGNREGA is 57.4 per cent. A report by State Bank of India indicated that almost all major states have women participation of more than 33% in MGNREGA. According to government data Rajasthan is among the leading states in terms of women participation in MGNREGA i.e. 67.76%.
- 2) The Central Government gave information about the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGA) in the Lok Sabha. The Center said that under this scheme in the financial year 2022-23, the participation of women in the formal workforce in rural areas has been the highest in the last decade at 56.62 percent. This figure was 51.30 percent in 2012-13.

3) Employment given to women according to job category for the financial year 2023-2024 in Rajasthan:

Job Category	Working staff (Women)	Person days(in lakhs) (Women)	Amount earned during the current financial year (in lakhs) (Women)
Rural contact	1375746	304.56251	61041.5379
Water conservation and water conservation	2096168	547.09332	105900.35867
Renovation of traditional water bodies	529812	117.84148	22856.40585
Flood control	88858	18.1712	3484.84629
Drought proofing	291712	60.39535	12271.31566
Irrigation canals	369766	88.19562	17504.18035
Irrigation facilities for SC/ST/Indira Awas Yojana/LRD category	433617	107.21024	23838.99197
Land development	237953	47.83715	9109.27822
Bharat Nirman Rajeev Gandhi Sewa Kendra	0	0	0
Coastal areas	456	0.12379	26.4704
Rural Drinking Water	0	0	0
Fisheries	90	0.01596	3.5501
Rural sanitation	15041	2.52032	529.77258
Other tasks	0	0	0
Total	5439219	1293.96694	256566.70799

Source: <http://nregastrep.nic.in>

MGNREGA provides employment opportunities for women in rural areas, allowing them to earn a wage. This economic independence has empowered women by giving them control over their finances and reducing their economic dependency on male family members. With their own income, women often gain more say in household financial decisions. This increased involvement in decision-making can lead to better allocation of resources, including for children's education and healthcare.

- Job cards are being made for women and SC, ST by setting up camps in the villages. In Rajasthan 114.77 lakh job cards were issued till September 2023.
- Project Unnati – empowering women' is a platform to make the workforce more gender-inclusive. The approach of this project is to provide Skill and prepare women for formal employment. To increase female workforce they provide financial incentives and logistics support to women.

IV. CHALLENGES AND ISSUES RELATED TO WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN MGNREGA PROGRAMME:

- 1) In some rural areas, women participation is low because of limited awareness of their rights and entitlements under MGNREGA, which can lead to their underutilization of the programme.
- 2) Traditional gender roles and societal norms can restrict women's mobility and participation in public works projects.
- 3) Access to work under MGNREGA may not be equal for women, as they may have fewer opportunities to participate due to factors like discrimination, favoritism, or unequal distribution of work.
- 4) Despite mandated equal wages for men and women under MGNREGA, wage disparities can still exist due to non-compliance or underreporting of work hours.
- 5) Safety concerns, especially during travel to and from worksites, can deter women from participating. Inadequate infrastructure and the absence of proper facilities like toilets can exacerbate these safety issues.
- 6) In many households, women have limited decision-making power regarding their participation in MGNREGA or the use of their wages, as these decisions may be controlled by male family members.

- 7) Some women may face difficulties in obtaining necessary documents or accessing banking services required for MGNREGA wage payments, which can hinder their participation.
- 8) Complex administrative processes and bureaucratic hurdles can make it challenging for women to access the benefits of the program.

V. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) has played a significant role in promoting women empowerment in Rajasthan. By providing job opportunities, financial independence, and avenues for skill development, MGNREGA has empowered women to take control of their lives and contribute to the economic growth of their communities. However, challenges such as wage parity and social barriers still exist and require continuous efforts to ensure that women truly benefit from the program and achieve lasting empowerment.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

Here are some suggestions to enhance women's participation in the program:

- 1) Launch awareness campaigns in rural areas to educate women about their rights and entitlements under MGNREGA. Ensure that women are informed about the program's benefits and opportunities.
- 2) Make information about MGNREGA easily accessible to women through local government offices, community centres, and mobile apps. Ensure that program-related documents are available in the local language.
- 3) Encourage women's active involvement in the planning and decision-making processes at the village level. This includes the selection of projects and allocation of work.
- 4) Establish childcare facilities near work sites to enable women with young children to participate in MGNREGA activities without worrying about childcare.
- 5) Provide financial literacy and training programs to help women manage their wages effectively, save, and invest in income-generating activities.
- 6) Offer skill development and training programs that align with MGNREGA projects. This can enhance women's skills and make them more competitive in the labour market.
- 7) Implement the provision for one-third of the total workforce to be women in MGNREGA projects. Ensure that these reserved seats are genuinely accessible to women.

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