

# MGNREGA and its impact on Women's Empowerment: Evidence from KBK Region of Odisha

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**Abstract:** *This paper attempts to examine the different women friendly provisions of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) and to what extent it helps to empower the rural women in KBK region (undivided Kalahandi, Bolangir and Koraput) of Odisha. MGNREGA has several women friendly provisions that are attractive for empowering women and laying the basis for economic independence in the society. The Act provides greater scope for women's participation in planning and monitoring process. The scheme also mandates minimum one third of women's participation in workforce, guaranteed wage employment with equal wage to men & women, women friendly environment by providing child care facilities at worksite. The convenient time schedule of social audit forum encouraged the workers participation, especially women and marginalised communities. The degree of awareness on right and entitlement of the Act and fuller participation in MGNREGA process play vital role to induce women empowerment. Despite important women friendly provisions in MGNREGA, there are various factors which affect the women empowerment through the scheme.*

**Keywords:** MGNREGA, Social Audit, Women empowerment, Worksite facilities

## 1. Introduction

There are several initiatives and programmes formulated by Central and State Governments for the empowerment of women in the society [Some of the Central Govt. and State Govt. women empowerment programme are Indira Gandhi Matruva Sahyog Yojana (IGMSY), Support for Training and Employment Programme (STEP), Beti Padhao, Beti Bachao Scheme, Mission Shakti and Mamata Scheme]. Despite several initiatives and programmes, women are always lagging behinds in social and economic participation in the society. They are always deprived from the participation in the labour force and employment as compared to men. In terms of human development such as literacy, overall educational achievement, health status including morbidity and mortality, women are always lagging behind. There is also observed of less participation in leadership and political participation. They are deprived from many social and economic activities.

The gender equality plays an important role in economic development in the society. The lower female participation drags down economic growth and that empowering women has significant economic benefits in addition to promoting gender equality (World Bank 2012). There is a large gap in female labour force participation rate of men and women in India. A large number of initiatives have been formulated to address the gender equality in female labour force participation. In this context, the various women friendly provisions of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) has played important role to promote gender equality and boosts women empowerment. The act enacted in September, 2005 is a social mediated programme to enhance livelihood security in rural areas by providing at least 100 days of legal guaranteed wage employment in a financial year to every households whose

adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work. The main objective of the programme is to enhance livelihood security of the rural households by generating productive assets in rural areas.

MGNREGA is a right-based and demand driven employment programme for wage employment to the rural poor. The key attributes of the scheme are time bound guarantee, labour intensive work, decentralized participatory planning, women's empowerment, work site facilities, transparency and accountability through provision of social audit and right to information. The provision of payment of wages through bank and post office is another key attributes mentioned in the Act. Government legally bound to provide employment within 15 days from the date of application by job seeker, else unemployment allowances to be paid to the job seeker. Thus, MGNREGA is not just an employment scheme but also a tool of economic and social change in rural areas. The other aim of the scheme is to provide employment to the rural poor during lean agricultural season and to reduce distress migration, to bring inclusive and sustainable growth by producing durable assets and to provide adequate employments to the women at equal wage.

The various women friendly provisions of MGNREGA play vital role in the empowerment of women in the household as well as in the society. For instance, according to MGNREGA guidelines (NREGA 2005, Schedule II, 6) one third of the beneficiaries should be women those who have registered and demanded work under the programme. The Act provides childcare facilities at worksite, when more than five children under six years of age are present at the worksite (NREGA 2005, Schedule II, Sections 27 and 28). The Act mandates to provide an employment within 5 KM from their residence is specifically intends for women workers. An important objective of the programme of

MGNREGA is to provide adequate employment to women at equal wage. Under MGNREGA, the clause of equal wages for men and women helped to shape out better socio-economic scenario for rural women. MGNREGA encourage women's participation through Gram Sabha in planning, implementation and monitoring process in the grass root level. This programme has made provision for appointment women as a member in Village Monitoring Committee (VMC) to monitor the progress and quality of works under taken in the locality. This programme has also made emphasis on the women's participation in social audit. MGNREGA work can also protect women against migration in search of work. This leads to an improvement in the quality of their life through avoidance of costs and risks associated with migration.

Many research studies also indicate that MGNREGA is an important work opportunity for women and there is a positive impact of the scheme on the economic well-being of the women. The scheme also led to gender parity in wage. The NSSO 66<sup>th</sup> round indicated that MGNREGA has reduced traditional wage discrimination in public works. The access to economic resources has also a favourable impact on the social status of women. They have also independence to spend money in household expenditure. A large percentage of these women spend their money to avoid hunger, repay small debts, paying their child's schooling etc.

**Objective of the study**

To examine the ability of the programme to achieve gender equality by greater women's participation in MGNREGA.

- To examine the women's empowerment and its scope for greater economic independence.
- To examine the various factors affecting women's empowerment through MGNREGA.

**2. Methodology**

The study utilised both primary and secondary sources of information. The secondary data were collected from books, journal and the data from the web site of MoRD. The primary data was collected from two districts of KBK region of Odisha namely Bolangir and Nabarangpur districts. The study selected two blocks from each district based on their performance records in the implementation of MGNREGA. Muribahal block from Bolangir district and Chandahandi block from Nabarangpur district were selected for the study. Further, two Gram Panchayats were selected from each block based on their performance records. Haldi and Dangarpada Gram Panchayats were selected from Muribahal block. Similarly, another two Gram Panchayats Malgam and Gambhariguda were selected from Chandahandi block of Nabarangpur district.

A sample of 75 households from each Gram Panchayat is selected through stratified random sampling without replacement. Households are the final sampling design. The women respondents from each household are selected for interview to assess their participation in MGNREGA process and the various problems faced by them. The data collected from the women beneficiaries are analysed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The data

analysis is carried out through cross tabulation and frequencies of descriptive statistics.

**Women's Participation in MGNREGA Process**

As MGNREGA is a right based programme, the active participation of women plays an important role towards the successful implementation of the programme and boost women empowerment. Table-1 presents the women's participation in MGNREGA process across the social group in four sample GPs of the study area.

The poor participation of women in planning and monitoring is noticed across the sample GPs. The rate of women participation in Gram Sabha meeting is found to be 16 percent, 12.6 percent and 10.5 percent respectively for SC, ST and Others categories. About 84 percent, 87.4 percent and 89.5 percent women belong to SC, ST and Others categories respectively have not participated in Gram Sabha meeting. This programme has also made provision for women's participation in social audit. But the participation of the women in social audit process is very poor in all four samples GPs. This is due to lack of awareness about the programme among the women and poor information dissemination among the women workers.

**Table 1:** Women's Participation in MGNREGA process across the Social Groups

Particulars	Social Groups			Total (%)
	SC	ST	OTHERS	
Participation in GS meeting	4 (16.0)	13 (12.6)	18 (10.5)	35 (11.7)
Non Participation in GS meeting	19 (84.0)	90 (87.4)	154 (89.5)	265 (88.3)

**Source: Sample Survey**

**Note: Figures in the brackets are percentages**

The programme has made provision for appointment of women as a member in village monitoring committee. The duty of the women member is to monitor the progress and quality of works which are under taken in the locality. But this is not functioning properly in all four sample GPs.

**Women's Participation in MGNREGA works**

The impact assessment of the programme on the life of women workers of the sample households has been judged by measuring their participation in MGNREGA works and their subsequent income earning in a financial year. The higher the rate of participation in MGNREGA works, the higher will be their financial stability and the positive impact on their life.

Table-2 presents the women participation's in MGNREGA works across the social groups. About 40 percent, 62.1 percent and 46.5 percent women belong to SC, ST and Others category respectively have participated in MGNREGA work. About 60 percent, 37.9 percent and 53.5 percent women belong to SC, ST and Other categories respectively have not participated in MGNREGA work.

**Table 2:** Women’s Participation in MGNREGA Works across the Social Groups

Particulars	Social Groups			Total (%)
	SC	ST	OTHERS	
Participated in MGNREGA work	10 (40.0)	64 (62.1)	80 (46.5)	154 (51.3)
Not Participated in MGNREGA works	15 (60.0)	39 (37.9)	92 (53.5)	146 (48.70)

Source: Sample Survey

Note: Figures in the brackets are percentages

Table-3 presents the participation and non-participation of women worker across the sample GPs. About 90 percent and 89.3 percent women belong to Haldi and Dangarpada GPs

respectively have worked in MGNREGA, whereas only 17.3 percent and 8 percent women belong to Malgam and Gambhariguda GPs have worked in MGNREGA. On the other hand, only 9.3 percent and 10.7 percent women belong to Haldi and Dangarpada GPs respectively have not worked in MGNREGA, whereas maximum 92 percent women from Gambhariguda GP followed by 82.7 percent from Malgam GP have not worked in MGNREGA. Total number of women worked in MGNREGA is 51.3 percent and total number of women not worked in MGNREGA is 48.7 percent in the entire four sample GPs. The poor participation of women workers is noticed in Malgam and Gambhariguda GPs of Chandahandi block of Nabarangpur district.

**Table 3:** Women Participation in MGNREGA Works across Sample GPs.

Particulars	Name of GP				Total N (%)
	Haldi	Dangarpada	Malgam	Gambhariguda	
Participated in MGNREGA works	68 (90.0)	67 (89.3)	13 (17.3)	6 (8.0)	154 (51.3)
Not participated in MGNREGA works	7 (9.3)	8 (10.7)	62 (82.7)	69 (92.0)	146 (48.7)
Total (%)	75 (100)	75 (100)	75 (100)	75 (100)	300 (100)

Sources: Sample Survey

Notes: Figures in the brackets are percentages

From this analysis it is seen that about 90 percent women workers have received wage employment in Haldi and Dangarpada GPs whereas about 90 percent women have not received wage employment in Malgam and Gambhariguda GPs. It shows the better performance of MGNREGA in

Muribahal block and poor performance of MGNREGA in Chandahandi block. Table-4 presents the various reasons for non participation of women in MGNREGA works across the GPs.

**Table 4:** Reason for non participation of women in MGNREGA across GPs

Particulars	Name of GP				Total N (%)
	Haldi	Dangarpada	Malgam	Gambhariguda	
Due to manual work	1(1.3)	2 (2.7)	1 (1.3)	1 (1.3)	13 (4.3)
Social Obligation	2 (2.7)	0 (0.0)	6 (8.0)	9 (12.0)	17 (5.7)
Look after minor child	1 (1.3)	2 (2.7)	0 (0.0)	9 (12.0)	3 (1.0)
Sickness	2 (2.7)	0 (0.0)	1 (1.3)	0 (0.0)	6 (2.0)
Others	1 (1.3)	4 (5.3)	54 (72.0)	53 (70.7)	112 (37.3)

Sources: Sample Survey

Notes: Figures in the brackets are percentages

**Impact of MGNREGA on Women Workers**

The impact assessment of MGNREGA on women workers is discussed considering the expenditure of wages to meet household expenses by the women workers. The wages earned from MGNREGA has a variety of uses by the beneficiaries of the sample GPs. They have reported –they spent their MGNREGA wages for purchase of food grains, for medical treatment, to meet the children’s educational expenditure, saving, clothing for their family members, purchase of land, purchase of gold and celebrating the social ceremony like marriage. The utilisation patterns of MGNREGA wage money by the respondent across the selected GPs are presented in table-5

The additional income from the MGNREGA work enabled the women to meet the household expenditure. A majority of women workers (65.51 percent and 52.94 percent) in Haldi and Dangarpada GPs respectively have spent their wages in food items. About 23.61 percent and 22.22 percent women have spent their wages in terms of education for their children in Haldi and Dangarpada GPs respectively. Only 10.52 percent and 5.50 percent women workers have spent their wages in health problem. No women could able to save wage money in the entire GPs. Only 5.50 percent women have spent their money in debt repayment in Haldi GP. Hence, it is observed that the wage employment of MGNREGA by the women helped only for minimum necessity on food items in the entire GPs, whereas neglected in human development indicators like education and health in the study area.

**Table 5:** Wage expenditure of the women workers across the GPs

Sl No	Type of Expenditure	Name of Sample Village			
		Haldi	Dangarpada	Malgam	Gambhariguda
1	Food	65.51	52.94	22.22	28.0
2	Education	23.61	22.22	11.22	0.00
3	Heath	10.52	5.50	0.00	0.00
4	Saving	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
5	Debt repayment	5.50	0.00	0.00	0.00
6	Others	5.26	16.60	0.00	0.00

Source: Sample Survey

Figure-1 presents the social as well as economic impact of MGNREGA on women workers in all four GPs together. The aggregate picture shows that about 64 percent and 52 percent women respondent in Haldi and Dangarpada GPs told that the additional income earned from MGNREGA have helped them to increase their household income. But the same is only 8 percent in Malgam and 4 percent in

Gambhariguda. About 22 percent respondents from Haldi feel free to take household decision followed by 18 percent in Dangarpada GP. About 25 percent women belong to Haldi and 29 percent women belong to Dangarpada told that bargaining power has increased due to the MGNREGA. In terms of social impact of MGNREGA, about 24 percent women belong to Haldi and 16 percent from Dangarpada

told that they are getting social prestige in their respective communities. In Haldi, 14 percent women have increased their purchasing power followed by 13 percent in Dangarpada. It is observed that the impact of the scheme on women workers in Malgam and Gambhariguda is negligible and they lagging behind to their empowerment.

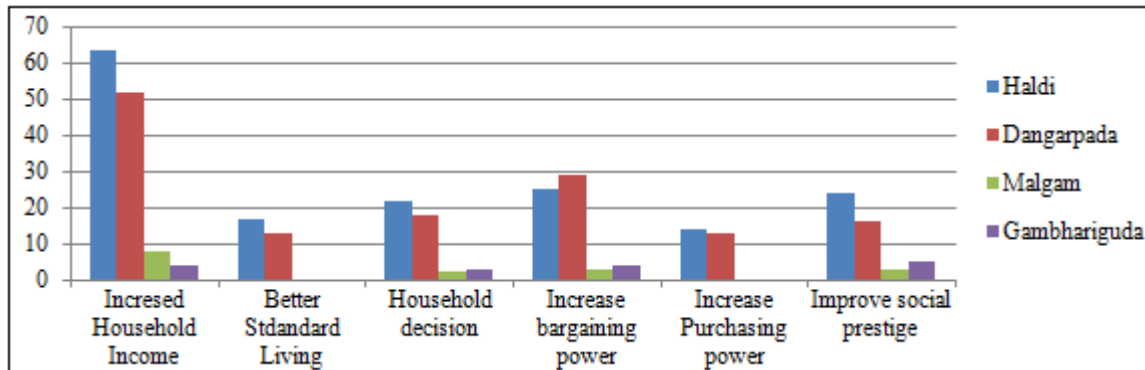


Figure 1: Impact of MGNREGA on women workers across the GPs

Source: Sample Survey

### Factors affecting women empowerment through MGNREGA

There are various factors which affect women empowerment through MGNREGA. These are discussed briefly as below.

#### 1) Institutional failure to generate employment opportunity,

Institutional failure is one of the main factor of women empowerment through MGNREGA. Despite women friendly provision of the scheme, the women's participation in MGNREGA works in Malgam and Gambhariguda is reported as low compared to other two GPs. This is due to the institutional failure to generate employment and illegal involvement of contractors responsible for lesser participation of women in MGNREGA work. It is noticed that the programme has been completely hijacked by contractor in Malgam and Gambhariguda.

#### 2) Social obligation,

Women's participation and their empowerment in the labour market through employment programme are greatly influenced by social norms. Many households did not allow their women to work the manual hard labour. Many women, especially young women hesitate to speak in the public sphere, when the family members are present in the meeting. Having a minor child in the house restricted themselves to participate in the labour market and the planning and monitoring process. The degree of households' pressure and responsibilities imposed on women stood as the barriers in the way towards the women's women empowerment in the scheme.

#### 3) Unequal wage payment prevailing corruption

Another women friendly feature of the act is equal wage for men and women working under MGNREGA. The provision of equal wage is completely violated in Malgam and Gambhariguda GPs of Chandahandi block. They are deprived from getting equal wage and it took months of time to receive the payment. However, the situation in Haldi and Dangarpada GPs is completely different from Malgam and Gambhariguda GPs.

#### 4) Illegal involvement of contractor and machineries

The illegal involvement of contractors in the implementation of MGNREGA destroyed the spirit of the scheme. The contractor collects wages from the Post Office and distributed among the workers which is the complete violation of the Act. The involvement of contractors in the scheme prevented women's participation resulting adverse impact on the social and economic life of the beneficiaries.

#### 5) Lack of adequate worksite facilities

The Act has made provision for childcare facilities at worksite when more than five children under six years of age are present at the worksite. But no child care facilities except drinking water and shade have been noticed in the entire sample Gram Panchayats. This could be one of the main constraints faced by the women workers in the worksite.

#### 6) Lack of awareness about the right and entitlement of MGNREGA

The women respondent of the study area said that due to lack of awareness about MGNREGA, they did not participate in this programme. Education is one of the main factor that affecting participation of women in MGNREGA. The level of education among the women determines the degree of awareness of the right and entitlement of the act which promotes their participation in the planning and decision making process. Due to low level of education among the women in the study area, the rate of women participation is very low.

### 3. Summary and Conclusion

The impact of MGNREGA on women workers in the four entire Gram Panchayats is analysed through increase households' income, better standard of living and households' decision making, increase bargaining power and improve social prestige. The women workers belong to Haldi and Dangarpada GPs spent their additional income to meet the food, education, health and payment of debt. MGNREGA seems to have positive impact on education of

children in the family. The additional income earned from MGNREGA has helped them to increase their household income and empowered them to take household decision. The purchasing power and bargaining power of women workers has increased by their participation in MGNREGA works. The impact of the scheme in Malgam and Gambhariguda GPs is negligible and women workers lagging behind to their empowerment. The gender sensitive of the act has not fully operational in Malgam and Gambhariguda GPs. However, in some extent it is found to have positive impact in women's empowerment in the study area. The paper, therefore recommends that there should be a strict compliance mechanism to facilitate women friendly environment for increasing their participation in MGNREGA process.

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