

MGNREGS: It's Impact on Women Empowerment in Meghalaya

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Abstract: Empowerment enables lives become stronger and one became more confident in controlling one's life and one's rights. Empowering a woman creates power in her life, society and community. Government policies and programmes are important to create opportunities without restrictions. Specific targeted policies of government and their effective implementation can help women equipped and empowered. The implementation of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee scheme (MGNREGS) under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act-2005 (MGNREGA) in Meghalaya is a very important milestone in so far as women participation in the grassroot development process is concerned. This paper attempts to analyse the rate of women's participation in the MGNREGS and the impact of the scheme on women empowerment in Meghalaya. The paper also tries to comparatively study women's participation rate in Meghalaya with the all India level performance rate. **Objective:** The highlighted objective of the paper is to analyse the impact of MGNREGS on women empowerment in Meghalaya through women's participation in different projects under the said scheme. **Methodology:** This paper is basically descriptive in nature. The study relies purely on secondary sources available from books, articles, reports and internet sources.

Keywords: Women, Empowerment, Government, Schemes, MGNREGS

1. Introduction

The process whereby women's lives are transformed from an inferior situation where they experienced limited power as a result of gendered barriers, to a situation where they can enjoy equal power with men is called women empowerment. (Oxfam: 2017). According to Charmes and Wieringa (2003) Women's Empowerment consists of six elements - physical, socio-cultural, religious, economic, political, legal – and six levels: individual, household, community, state, region, and global. Grown (2008) defines three domain or scope of empowerment (adopted by the Millennium Project Task Force on Education and Gender Equality): the capabilities domain, the access to resources and opportunities domain, and the security domain. Women empowerment and improvement of their social, political and economic status is highly important because empowering women benefits the whole society at large.

“Women's economic empowerment relates to the enhancement of women's capacity for strategic choice and agency in the sphere of the economy and to the possibilities this opens up for change in other spheres of their lives” (Kabeer: 2009). “Economic empowerment is the capacity of poor women and men to participate in, contribute to and benefit from growth processes on terms which recognise the value of their contributions, respect their dignity and make it possible for them to negotiate a fairer distribution of the benefits of growth” (Eyben: 2008). “Economic empowerment increases women's access to economic resources and opportunities including jobs, financial services, property and other productive assets, skills development and market information” (DAC Network on Gender Equality:2011). In order to achieve potential and advanced their rights, economic empowerment is one of their most powerful routes. “A woman is economically empowered when she has both the ability to succeed and advance economically and the power to make and act on economic decisions” (ICRW: 2011)

The Government of India has implemented various schemes which have special components for women empowerment. These schemes were operated by different department and ministries. Since the paper focuses mainly on the impact of MGNREGS in Women's empowerment in Meghalaya, a brief background about the economic status of women is highlighted. Meghalaya, one of the states in the Indian union, is known for its respectable position held for women. In Meghalaya, women are seen to be involved in wider economic activities. An educated woman has economic independence by going to government offices and jobs or any other occupation and does not have to depend on her husband financially. The uneducated women find their place in the markets where they are seen to sell different commodities that helps support her family. Yet the economic participation of women in the state is less when compared with males.

Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS)

The scheme was sponsored by the Centre and the beneficiaries to the scheme include any adult member in rural areas demanding employment and are willing to do unskilled manual work. It is valid upto 31st December, 2028. In Meghalaya the scheme runs through the Community and Rural Development Department The Government of India passed the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, in September 2005. The objective of the Act is to guarantee 100 days wage employment to rural household whose adult members are willing to do manual work. The NREGA was formulated through the National Rural Employment Guarantee Schemes. The Meghalaya Government implemented the scheme known as the Meghalaya Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme on 28th July, 2006. The ratio of the cost sharing scheme between centre and state is 90:10. As instructed by the Government of India, a society known as the State Rural Employment Society (SRES) was created in Meghalaya for the purpose of implementation of the scheme. Since Meghalaya was not under the purview of

part IX of the Indian Constitution which stresses on the setting up of Panchayati Raj Institutions as part of the democratic decentralisation process, new Institutions has to be set up for the implementation of MGNREGS viz. Village Employment Council (VEC), Area Employment Council (AEC), MGNREGS focuses on the economic and social empowerment of women. The implementation of the MGNREG scheme in Meghalaya is very important as it reflects the participation rate of women in the development process at the grassroot level. The said scheme permits women as members and office bearers of the Village Employment Council (VEC) and Area Employment Council (AEC). The role of VEC is worthy of attention not only for providing employment and livelihood, but also it gives ample scope for women empowerment in Meghalaya. The membership of the AEC should not exceed 20 numbers and 30 percent of the total members of the AEC must be women. This ensured participation of women in planning and implementation of the schemes at different levels.

Table 1: Percentage of Women’s participation in MGNREGS in Meghalaya

2012-2013	41%
2013-2014	47.22%
2014-2015	42.53%

Source- Annual Report, State Rural Employment Society (2012-2015) Meghalaya

According to Table 1, in the year 2013-2014, the percentage of women’s participation in MGNREGS is 47.22 percent, whereas in the year 2014-2015 is 42.53 percent. The year 2012-2013 recorded 41 percent of the women’s participation rate. Thus it is revealed that from the year 2012-2015, the participation of women as work force in MGNREGS in Meghalaya is more than the obligatory guidelines of 33 percent.

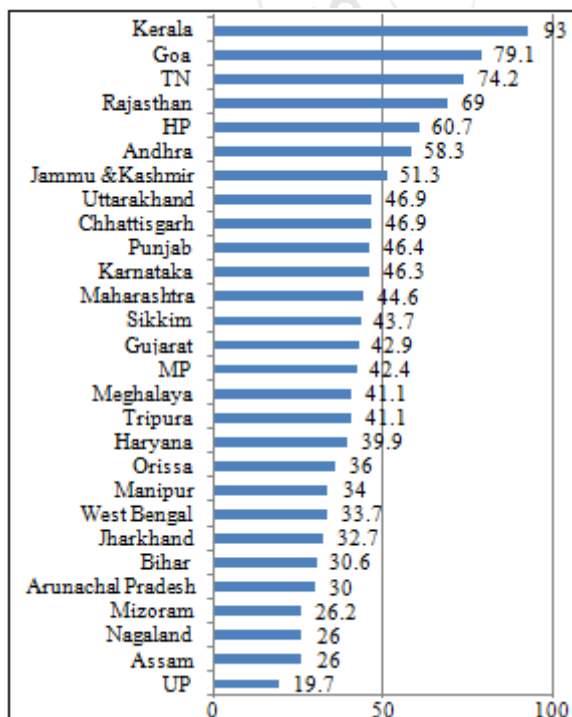


Chart 1: Statewise Person Days generated for women in Financial year 2012-13 (in %)

Source- Nationwide Evaluation of the Flagship Programme of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) 2012-2013.

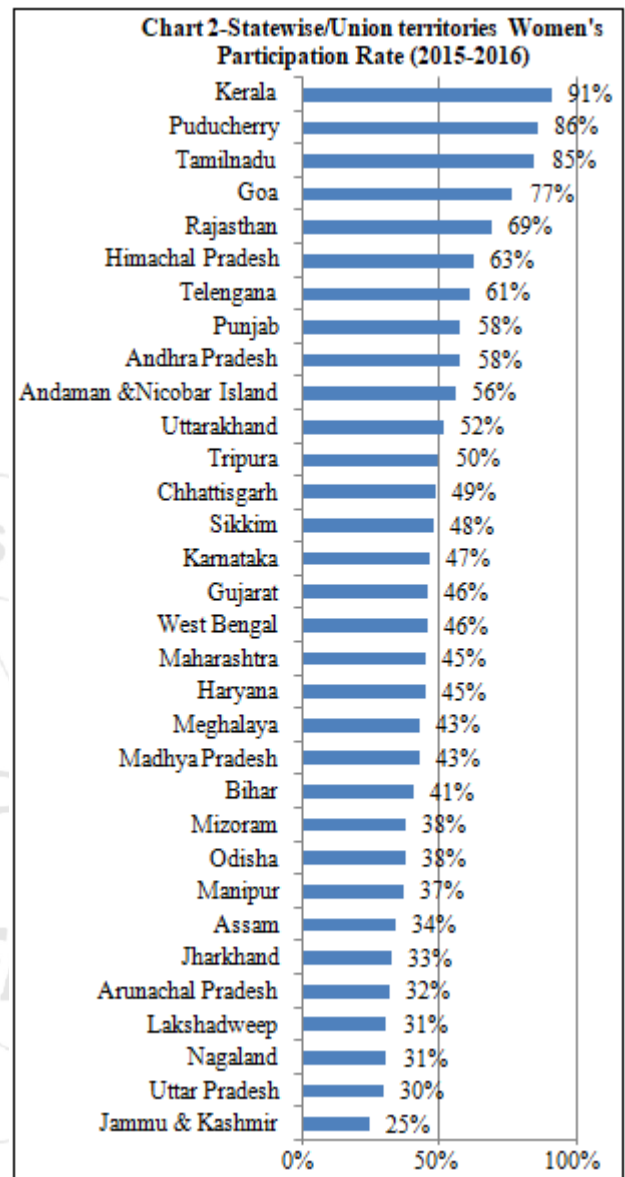


Chart 2: Performance Report Card in MGNREGA Women’s Participation Rate in FY 2015-2016

Source- MGNREGA, Performance, Initiatives & Strategies (FY 15-16& 16-17), MGNREGA Division Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India

As shown in Chart 1 and 2 when a state- wise analysis is performed, a different picture emerges. In the year 2012-2013, Kerala is found to be the state with the highest percentage of 93 percent of the persondays generated by women workers. Goa is the second and Tamilnadu backed the third place. Meghalaya stood at 15th position in the list. In the year 2015-2016, the interstate and union territories variations revealed that Kerala again had the highest female participation rate at 91%, followed by Puducherry and Tamilnadu with 86% and 85% respectively. Meghalaya stood at the 17th position compared to its overall women’s work participation in the country.

2. Conclusion

The MGNREGS in India is a livelihood enhancement scheme especially when it comes to the question of women's economic empowerment. It is observed that the performance of MGNREGS in Meghalaya, with a particular reference to women's participation, is above the expected mandate of thirty three percent. Hence a positive impact of the scheme is revealed in the state. However, when it comes to statewise analysis at the all India level, Meghalaya is yet to catch up with other high performance state in terms of female participation in MGNREGS.

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