



IMPACT OF MGNREGA IN EMPOWERMENT OF RURAL WOMEN

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Abstract

In the present paper an attempt has been made to study the impact of MGNREGA in the empowerment of rural women of Himachal Pradesh. In Himachal Pradesh MGNREGA has implemented in twelve districts on 1st April 2006. Present paper critically analysed the role of MGNREGA in empowering rural women and participation of women in this scheme at District Kangra of Himachal Pradesh. For development and progress changes of present and future of the nation empowerment of women is an important aspect. Empowerment enables women self-reliant, economically independent and makes them also able to take decisions for their life. In India, rural people contribute a lot in the development of Nation. So for the progress and welfare of rural people many programmes launched by the government from time to time. Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) is the programme launched by Government of India for rural people. By MGNREGA rural women take opportunity for employment, earning money and provide financial independence. By this programmes women enhance their abilities and identification in the household and in the society. By earning, women become financial strong and able to invest their earning for family needs like children's education, nutrition and health. MGNREGA promote employment and self-dependence of women which is considered necessary for women empowerment. The present study is based on the primary and secondary data sources. For the analysis of data percentage was used.

Keywords: *Empowerment, MGNREGA, Rural Women, Financial independence, Employment and Education.*

Introduction

Empowerment is basically internal power or strength of an individual or group of people. This strength gives positive affect at every aspects of their life. Women empowerment

specially refers to enhancement of internal strength and abilities to make them able to live their life as they want. At developing countries and in the rural community women empowerment is most important factor. But most of the women are facing many constraints all over the world at different spheres of life like, labour and employment, education, health and nutrition, political and social etc (Srinivas and Pandyaraj, 2018). Gender gap in the labour market like wage discrimination, lack of opportunities gender discrimination etc. present all over the world. The participation of women in the labour market is limited. In India context same situations prevails related to gender gap (Mattos and Dasgupta, 2017). For promotion of employment of rural people and especially for rural women, government of India has launched many schemes. Among these schemes Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) is the scheme launched by Ministry of Rural Development for Welfare and Development of rural people.

Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA): National Rural Employment Guarantee Act was implemented by Government of India on 2nd February 2006. Initially in the Phase I, it covered 200 districts of the country. In the Phase II, it was implemented at additional 130 districts during 2007-2008 (Ministry of Rural Development, 2023). It is a major flagship programme and renamed as Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) on 2nd October 2009 and enhance the employment opportunities at rural area (Jaggi, G.S., 2023). The main aim of the scheme is to provide employment to poor people, provision of equal wages and development of the villages.

Objectives of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA): The main objective of MGNREGA is to provide one hundred days employment guarantee to every household in financial year. Employment based to manual work which does not need any skill. This scheme strengthens people with low income or belongs to below poverty line. To provide income security and strength to Panchayati Raj Institution (PRIs) (Ministry of Rural Development, 2023) According to Para 15 of Schedule-II of the MGNREGA stated that, "Priority shall be given to women in such a way that at least one third of the beneficiaries shall be women who have registered and requested for work. Efforts to increase participation of single women and the disable shall be made" (Ministry of Rural Development, March 2022). This programme promotes gender equality by providing equal wage opportunity with men. Special provision like crèche, shed for children and child care services and provision of work near home are the main features of this scheme.

Women Participation in MGNREGA

Empowering rural women is the main priority area of this scheme. Provision of work within five kilometres from the house, flexibility in terms of choosing periods and months of employment, provision of equal wages to men and women, worksite facilities helped women for their development and empowering them in all the ways (H.P. State Institute of Rural Development HIPA, 2017). Women participation in MGNREGA scheme differ from region to region in the country, it is due to the features of local economy in the states like wage in the market, men's wages compare to women's market wages. Women participation in MGNREGA mainly affected due to the household duties of women (Sudarshan, 2011). For enhanced women participation in MGNREGA, there should be need to enhance the role of Federation of Women Self Help Groups as implementing Agencies at the Gram Panchayat level, Block and District level (Govt. of India, 2023). According to the central government data which is released in Lok Sabha reveals that women participation in MGNREGA has increased in the last 10 years in 2022-23. Kerala, Himachal Pradesh and Tamil Nadu are the states where women workers are higher than men workers; In Himachal Pradesh women participation in MGNREGA was 60.69%, in the financial year 2012-13 which has increased to 64.66% in the year 2022-23 (ABP news, 2023). It has also been highlighted that the demand of work and women participation has increased in India during pandemic time.

Women Participation in MGNREGA at Himachal Pradesh

MGNREGA is a centrally sponsored scheme in which women in rural area mostly targeted as beneficiaries by providing wage employment and earn money. Initially this scheme was introduced in Chamba and Sirmour district on 2nd February 2006 in Himachal Pradesh. On 1st April 2007 it was started in districts Kangra and Mandi and from 1st April, 2008, scheme was implemented in the remaining 8 districts of Himachal Pradesh (Planning Department of Himachal Pradesh, Evaluation Report 2022). Now MGNREGA was implemented in 12 districts, 88 blocks and 3616 Gram Panchayats of Himachal Pradesh. The status of MGNREGA in Himachal Pradesh as per financial year 2023-24 is given in Table – 1.

Table - 1 Status of MGNREGA as per Financial Year 2023-24

Employment provided to household	5.38968 lakhs
Total no. of workers	27.47 lakhs
Total no. of active workers	13.87 lakhs
Total person days	282.08 lakhs
Women person days	176.36 lakhs

Source: Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act 2005, Ministry of Rural Development

https://nregastrep.nic.in/netnrega/homestciti.aspx?statecode=13&state_name=HIMACHAL%20PRADESH&Iflag=eng

The comparison of women participation at national level and state level is given in table -2.

Table – 2, Comparison of Women Participation at National level and State level

Sr. No.	Financial year	Women Participation Rates (in percentage) at National level	Women Participation Rates (in percentage) in Himachal Pradesh
1.	2018-19	54.60	63.26
2.	2019-20	54.79	62.75
3.	2020-21	53.20	61.05
4.	2021-22	54.82	62.53
5.	2022-23	57.43	64.77

Source: Ministry of Rural Development <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1942377>

Table - 2 reveals that women participation slightly declines to 53.20% and 61.05% respectively at the national and state level during the financial year 2020-21. But after the financial year 2020-21 women participation in MGNREGA has increased rapidly. In the financial years 2021-22 and 2022-23, women participation in the state (Himachal Pradesh) was more as comparison to national level participation. Moreover in the financial year 2022-23, the participation was increased to 64.77% in Himachal Pradesh which is higher than National level participation i.e. 57.43 percent.

Review of Related Literature

The review of related literature is presented as under. Sudarshan, R.M.(2011) examined women participation in National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS) at three districts i.e. Kerala, Rajasthan and Himachal Pradesh. The study observed that women's participation in the scheme varies significantly within three states. NREGS has achieved success in women empowerment at social and economic level. Malhotra et al. (2014) conducted study at Sitapur District of Uttar Pradesh to examine the Impact of MGNREGS on Women Empowerment. A sample of 78 beneficiaries was selected for the study. The study reveals that MGNREGS has played a vital role in empowering women. But there are many factors which affect the participation of women and implementation of the scheme. These factors include social and cultural norms and the role of implementing authorities. Srinivas and Pandyaraj (2018) studied the impact of MGNREGA in women empowerment, gender equality and factors attributed to potential of women empowerment under MGNREGA. The study was conducted at Pannur village in Chittoor District of Andhra Pradesh. The study

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concluded that MGNREGA has enhanced the women empowerment by providing employment, equal wages, minimum income and food security. Kaur (2020) studied the impact of MGNREGA on women empowerment. The study found that MGNREGA has positive impact on women empowerment and employment pattern of women in rural areas. It was observed that participation of women has increased remarkably. It was concluded that MGNREGA leads women empowerment with the active participation of rural women and giving them a sense of security. Alka and Batra (2022) examined the role of MGNREGA in employment generation, empowerment, promoting gender equality, natural conservation and eradicating poverty in their study. The study suggested that for more participation of women and for realization of the benefits of this scheme, good governance at grassroots level is necessary. There is need to give more attention towards the proper implementation of this scheme at all levels especially at ground level. Jaggi (2023) examined the role of MGNREGA in employment generation in Himachal Pradesh from the year 2015 to 2022. The study revealed that MGNREGA is an important programme for employment generation and it is successful scheme to provide income generation to poor rural people in Himachal Pradesh. Muthumari et al. (2023) studied empowerment of rural women through MGNREGA at Virudhunagar District in Tamilnadu state. In this study 350 sample of beneficiaries of MGNREGA were taken for the study. The study found that through MGNREGA economic independence of rural women contributed much in their overall empowerment. This scheme has improved the status of women, reduced poverty and provided opportunity to employment.

Need and Significance of the Study

MGNREGA is one of the best employment generation programmes for rural people in India. Himachal Pradesh is hilly state and most of the people are residing in rural areas. So MGNREGA is more suitable and valuable programmes for rural areas in Himachal Pradesh. Women in rural area restricted by social and cultural norms so they needed more economically independence and financially security. This programme benefits women in many ways and helpful in empowering women socially as well as economically. It is important to study the impact of MGNREGA in the life of rural women and to assess the objectives of this programme by the opinion of women beneficiaries.

Objectives

The objectives of this study are as under:-

1. To study the participation of rural women in MGNREGA.
2. To study the provisions available for women in MGNREGA.

3. To study the impact of MGNREGA in Women Empowerment with respect to social and economic context.

Delimitations of the Study

The study will be delimited to the district Kangra of Himachal Pradesh only. Data will be collected from women beneficiaries of MGNREGA only. Only socio- economic empowerment aspect will be taken for study

Methodology

Survey method under descriptive method of research was used in this study. The present study is based on the primary and secondary data sources. Primary data was collected with the help of questionnaire by conducting field survey in district Kangra of Himachal Pradesh. The secondary data was collected from different sources like reports of Rural Development Department, research reports from Planning Department of Himachal Pradesh, research paper, articles, press release and different data from internet sources etc. Among the twelve districts in Himachal Pradesh, Kangra is most populated District. Kangra has 1,650,512 estimated population in the year 2024, comprising of 820396 females which constitute 49.70 percent of the total population (indiacensus.net). Therefore, Kangra District is selected for the present study. There are 16 Blocks in District Kangra of Himachal Pradesh where the MGNREGA has implemented. Three blocks of district Kangra i.e Baijnath, Panchrukhi and Lambagaon has highest number of women beneficiaries in the financial year 2023-24, on that ground these three blocks were purposively selected for the present study. From each block, two Gram Panchayats were conveniently selected. Furthermore, from each Gram Panchayat 20 women beneficiary of MGNREGA were randomly selected for the study. Therefore, in this way the sample selected for the present study comprises of 120 women beneficiaries. The distribution of the sample is shown in Table -3. The data collected from women beneficiaries has analysed by percentage analysis method.

Table- 3 Distribution of Sample

District	Name of the Blocks	Name of the Gram Panchayats	No. of women beneficiaries
Kangra	Baijnath	Chambi	20
		Haled	20
	Panchrukhi	Vand Vihar	20
		Moli Chak	20
	Lambagaon	Sansai	20
		Mahakal	20
Total			120

Analysis and Interpretation of Data

The analysis of data is given as under objective wise.

With respect to objective 1 i.e. participation of rural women in MGNREGA is given in Table 4.

Table -4, Age of the Respondent

Age of the beneficiary (in years)	Frequency (Total no. of respondent=120)	Percentage (%)
18-30	5	4.17
31-40	30	25.00
41-50	51	42.50
51-60	18	15.00
61-70	14	11.67
Greater than 71	2	1.66

From Table- 4, it is found that majority (42.50%) of women beneficiaries belong to the age group 41-50 years, 25 percent women beneficiaries were from the age group of 31-40 years and very few that is only 1.66% have age greater than 71 years. Furthermore, during survey it was found that in terms of marital status the percentage of married women respondent were 89.6 percent, 10.4 percent were widow beneficiaries. In the poverty status, 15.4 percent women belong to APL (Above Poverty Line) families and 84.6 percent belongs to BPL (Below Poverty Line) families. Thus it indicates that maximum beneficiaries of the scheme belong to Below Poverty Line.

With respect to objective 2 i.e. views regarding provisions under Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) are given in Table – 5.

Table- 5, Provisions available under MGNREGA

Sr. No.	Provisions	Yes		No	
		Frequency	%	Frequency	%
1.	Job card received after registration of 15 days	110	91.67	10	8.33
2.	Work provided within 5km of home	120	100	Nil	0
3.	Wages received without delay after work	98	81.67	22	18.33
4.	Rate of wages are equal for every worker	120	100	Nil	0
5..	Received Unemployment allowance	Nil	0	120	100
6. Worksite facilities	a) Drinking water	103	85.83	17	14.17
	b) Shade for children	80	66.67	40	33.33
	c) First aid facility	95	79.17	25	20.83
	d) Periods for rest	118	98.33	2	1.67

Table -5 reveals the information related to provisions of MGNREGA, which was collected from 120 women beneficiaries. The data reveals that 91.67 percent women beneficiaries accepted that they had received Job card after registration for work of 15 days while 8.33 percent answered no for this statement. The entire women respondent received work within 5 km from their home and get equal rate of wages. It was also found that 81.67 percent women received wages on time and 18.33 percent found delay for payment. None of the women beneficiary received unemployment allowance. However, 85.83 percent have admitted the drinking water facilities, 66.67 percent accepted the shades for children, 79.17 percent were in favour of first aid and 98.33 percent admitted the provision of rest period. With respect to objective 3 i.e. the impact of MGNREGA in socio-economic empowerment of rural women the detail is given in Table – 6 & 7.

Table - 6, Impact of MGNREGA in Social Empowerment

Social Empowerment					
Sr. No.	Statement	Yes		No	
		Frequency	%	Frequencies	%
1.	Make self-identity within home and society	113	94.17	7	5.83
2	Feel equal in the society	105	87.50	15	12.5
3	Become self confidence	115	95.83	5	4.17
4	Decision is now important for family and society	92	76.67	28	23.33
5	Improve status of family	103	85.83	17	14.17
6	Participated in community welfare programmes	109	90.83	11	9.17

Table - 6 shows that 94.17% respondent mark accepted that they made self-identity within home and society while 5.83 % mark no for this statement. It means majority of women have recognition in the society after working under MGNREGA. 87.5% women feel equal in the society, 95.83 % become self-confident. 76.67% of them feel that their participation in decision making is an important for family and society, while 23.33 % women said 'no' for this statement. 85.83 % women found improvement in the status of their family and 90.83% women participated in community welfare programmes. The findings of this data show that MGNREGA is reaching its target of empowering rural women in social aspect at its maximum level.

Table - 7, Impact of MGNREGA in Economic Empowerment

Sr. No.	Statement	Yes		No	
		Frequency	%	Frequency	%
1.	Become economic independent	118	98.33	2	1.67
2.	Feel independent for spend money	117	97.5	3	2.5
3.	Good source of earning near home	120	100	Nil	0
4.	Help financially for family needs	111	92.5	9	7.5
5.	Improvement in saving and investment	114	95	6	5
6.	Improve family income	120	100	Nil	0

Table -7 shows that all women respondent accepted that MGNREGA provided good source of earning and improve their family income. 98.33% women respondent feel economic independent after working in MGNREGA, 97.5 % women respondent feel free for spending money by their own, 92.5% admitted that they help financially for their family needs and 95 % women are in favour of improvement in their savings and investment. The results show that there is positive impact seen in the life of women at economic aspect.

Findings

According to the data collected from field survey the findings are given as under:

- The study shows that women participation in MGNREGA at Himachal Pradesh is higher and appreciable than the national level from the financial years 2018 to 2023 which shows in the Table-2.
- The study reveals that majority of women beneficiaries accepted that they had received Job card after registration for work of 15 days, wages on time, worksite facilities like drinking water facilities, shades for children and time for rest. The entire women respondent received work within 5 km from their home and get equal rate of wages. None of the women beneficiary received unemployment allowance which shows in Table 5. The result shows that women beneficiaries received all the provisions given by MGNREGA at maximum level.
- Table - 6 shows that majority of women have recognition in the society after working under MGNREGA, equal in the society, self-confident, their participation in decision making is important for family. Maximum women found improvement in the status of their family and women participated in community welfare programmes. The findings result shows that MGNREGA is reaching its target of empowering rural women in social aspect.
- The results in Table - 7 shows that there is positive impact seen in the life of women at economic aspect. All women respondent accepted that MGNREGA provided good source of earning and improve their family income. Majority of women respondent feel economic independent, improve their savings and investment, feel free for spending money by their own and help their family financially after working in MGNREGA.

Suggestions for Improvement of Women Participation in MGNREGA

Most of the respondent gave the suggestions that more provision of budget should be given by state government for more participation of women under MGNREGA and more employment facilities for women, proper observation should be done by higher authority for

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the implementation of this scheme. To raise the awareness level of women regarding the provisions, facilities available under this scheme, awareness camp be organised in the villages from time to time. Properly execution of work should be made under MGNREGA (Planning Department Himachal Pradesh, 2022).

Summary

In the hilly rural areas of Himachal Pradesh women's working outside village is still restricted. After implementation of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) rural women gain employment opportunity near home and within village. MGNREGA contributed for the better living and economic condition of the rural women. Provision of equal wages for both men and women, special provisions for women workers etc. motivated women to participation under this scheme (H.P. state Institute of Rural Development HIPA, 2017). Women in all sections of society like women belongs to all categories, lower economic section, single, widow and divorcee have participated in this scheme which shows the inclusive development conditions in Himachal Pradesh (Planning Department Himachal Pradesh, 2022). In the present study it is found that working under MGNREGA is empowering women socially and economically. This scheme is helpful to improve the social and economic status of women. Women become more confident and self-reliant by becoming in paid worker under MGNREGA (Kaur, 2020). Women participation in the recent years has increase in Himachal Pradesh; it means this programme achieved its primary objectives to some extent.

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