



MGNREGA DEPLOYMENT AND EMPOWERMENT OF RURAL TRIBALWOMEN: A STUDY OF GUDUR DEVELOPMENT BLOCK OF KURNOOL DISTRICT IN ANDHRA PRADESH

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Abstract

The equality of the genders is a driving factor in India's progress and prosperity. Even though women have contributed to economic advancement since the dawn of human history, they have traditionally viewed their roles as less active. It's been established that women are disproportionately affected by extreme deprivation, which is worsened by gender and racial disparities in the home and society. Economic independence is the only way women in a patriarchal culture can achieve equality. Women need to walk outside their homes to realize they are not part of the second-grade culture and are just as deserving as males of all the good things life has to offer. The potential for the country to flourish after its liberation is enormous. Sustainability and general success in rural India depend heavily on women's empowerment and gender fairness. There has been a dramatic shift from prioritizing women in policy reports, but that has changed with the eleventh five-year plan. It's an effort to pinpoint the areas where women reign supreme. It recognizes women as human beings deserving of respect and active contributors to economic and social progress. To improve the economic and social conditions of rural Indians, the Ministry of Rural Development enacted "The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA)." The implementation of MGNREGA has improved rural life and inspired women in India in various ways. The topic of this paper will be the impact of the MGNREGA on ST women's empowerment in the Gudur Development Block of the Village Panchayats in the Kurnool district of Andhra Pradesh. In addition, it considers the benefits and drawbacks of ST women's empowerment through MGNREGA and provides concrete suggestions for overcoming the disadvantages.

Keywords: Empowerment, Employment, MGNREGA, Rural Women.

1. Introduction

In a country like India, gender is the driving force behind progress. While women have always played an important role in the global economy, their status has often been portrayed as inferior. Additionally, it is recalled that women are disproportionately affected by extreme poverty, which family and social inequality exacerbate. Unfortunately, despite the safeguards guaranteed by our constitution, suffering and devastation continue to be a part of our daily lives. The cultural norm of seeing women as men's property is deeply rooted and unlikely to change very soon. Many women in the city also experience shifts, though these alterations are often tempered by the examples set by their rural counterparts ^[1]. Women's emancipation, especially economic emancipation, is the only path toward gender parity in a patriarchal society. Women need to "come out and identify that they are not a member of the society of second grade yet at the same time equally capable of males in all aspects of lifestyle" to be inspired. With their help, the country might see exponential development. To achieve long-term growth and fundamental improvement in India's rural areas, gender parity and women's prosperity are crucial. The



Eleventh Five-Year Plan represents a radical departure from past policy statements regarding the status of women. Its ultimate goal is to establish women as leaders in all spheres of society. It recognizes women as human beings deserving of respect and active contributors to economic and social progress. As part of India's 11th Five-Year Plan, the Ministry of Rural Development passed the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) to improve the living conditions of rural residents ^[2].

After a long struggle for a law guaranteeing jobs, MGNREGA was finally passed. "One of India's most significant legislation is the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA). The cornerstone program of the Indian government, MGNREGA, was first introduced in 200 rural districts on September 7, 2005, via a notification that went into effect on February 2, 2006. In 2007-2008, it was rolled out to an additional 130 rural areas. The MGNREGA's remaining districts were given the news on April 1, 2008, with immediate effect. Since then, MGNREGA has spread over the entire region, except for those districts that are entirely urban ^[3]. The Act's primary goal is to ensure that families in rural areas have access to at least one hundred days' worth of guaranteed wage jobs per fiscal year if an adult household member is willing to perform unskilled manual labor. Thus, the plan's goal was to provide low-income families in rural areas with some form of financial security and the opportunity to find gainful employment despite the relatively slim pickings in that sector. It differs from previous pay jobs programs because it takes a demand-driven, rights-based perspective to public service.

Beyond poverty alleviation, this Act recognizes employment as a fundamental human right, making it the largest public undertaking of its kind to date. When considering gender equality, MGNREGA still has a lot to offer. Although the program was not designed as an explicit women's empowerment proposal, it has evolved into one due to provisions in the Act, the scope and flexibility of the channel's deployment, and the nation's current social and economic circumstances, all of which have had a significant and positive impact on rural life and inspired ST women in India to take action in various aspects ^[4].

2. Review of the literature

Several articles discuss how MGNREGA has helped to strengthen the position of ST women. In this study, the researcher has just looked at a handful of the most relevant ones to explain and comprehend the notion. That would be: **Sharma, S., Mehra, D., Akhtar, F., & Mehra, S. (2020)**^[5]. They have entitled their study "**Evaluation of a community-based intervention for health and economic empowerment of marginalized women in India.**" In this study, researchers from two districts in India assessed the effectiveness of a peer-led community-based program to increase low-income women's knowledge of and use of maternal and child health (MCH) services and their ability to earn a living and build savings. The most efficient and cost-effective methods of increasing women's access to health care are community-based initiatives that focus on organizing women into groups to raise understanding of MCH. Peer educators were utilized to facilitate knowledge sharing among females and to foster a nurturing atmosphere at home and in the neighborhood. Banda and Kaushambi, two disadvantaged districts in Uttar Pradesh, were chosen to pilot the initiative. Ninety percent of Banda women and eighty-five percent of Kaushambi women attended at least sixty percent of the training sessions. After the session, women showed signs of having a greater understanding of MCH. The ladies participating in the livelihood initiative placed their earnings and daily savings into a bank account. The



women could start businesses and pay for medical care and schooling for their children and other essentials using the money they had saved. A peer-led intervention can be investigated to improve underprivileged women's health and economic outcomes.

Roy, S., & Ghosh, A. (2020)^[6] Entitled their study "**Dimensions of MGNREGA and its impact on Rural livelihood in Haringhata Block of West Bengal, India.**" The purpose of the study was to determine the current state of women's empowerment through the MGNREGA program and to investigate the role that the MGNREGA plays in maintaining a healthy environment and reducing potential health risks. To further ensure rural residents' ability to make a living, legislation known as the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) was passed into law. First announced on September 7, 2005, the law was rechristened by the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) on October 2, 2009. The Millennium Villages Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) is an Indian law that focuses on guaranteeing the "right to work" and ensuring livelihood security in rural regions by delivering at least 100 days of assured wage employment in a financial year to each household whose adult participants volunteer to do non-skilled manual work for a wage. West Bengal, India, was used for the research, specifically the villages of Maliadanga and Dighalgram in the Fatepur and Nagarukhra 2-gram panchayats. Roughly 25 people were chosen at random from each town. Fifty people participated in the study. The study included two dependent variables (Thematic Approaches to Rural Empowerment, Year 1), and two independent variables (Sustainable Environment Issues, Year 2), for a total of fifteen. The system has contributed significantly to improving ecological safety, environmental sustainability, and the movement of health risks. The MGNREGA is meant to strike a harmony between human effort and natural resources, leading to long-term financial stability. In addition, some restrictions on the scheme's potential have been recognized. The current research makes it clear that the adopting institutions must adopt certain measures to ensure the program's continued success.

Maurya, S. K (2020)^[7]. Entitled his paper "**Empowerment of rural women through MGNREGA-a study of MGNREGA implementation in Ghorawal block of Sonbhadra district of Uttar Pradesh.**" This study's primary goal is to examine how the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) has contributed to the advancement of women in the five gaon panchayats of the Ghorawal Block in the Sonbhadra district of Uttar Pradesh. When it comes to driving a country like India forward, gender is a force that can't be ignored. While women have been active participants in economic activity from the beginning of human history, this has not been reflected in popular conceptions of their position. It has also been noted that poverty disproportionately affects women, which is often exacerbated by prejudice at home and in the community. The only way to give women equal status in a male-dominated society is to increase their economic independence. Women need to step up and accept that they are equal to males in every part of life and every aspect of society to feel empowered. The country could experience amazing growth thanks to its empowerment. Gender parity and women's economic success are crucial for rural areas to experience sustainable growth and progress.

In contrast to previous five-year plans, the eleventh one takes a new and progressive approach to the status of women in society. It's an effort to highlight women's significance across fields. It states unequivocally that women contribute to economic and social development as equal citizens. The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act is a significant program launched by the



Government of India's Ministry of Rural Development to improve rural residents' economic and social conditions (MGNREGA). The lives of rural people and women's status in India have improved because of MGNREGA. Equal attention is paid to the potential challenges of women's empowerment through MGNREGA, and suggestions for addressing these gaps will be offered.

Chopra, D. (2019)^[8] entitled his paper "**Taking care into account: Leveraging India's MGNREGA for women's empowerment.**" The purpose of this paper is to suggest that fostering 'women's empowerment does not benefit from focusing solely on increasing the number of women who participate in a given activity. The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) in India can advance women's status. The excellent encounters women have had while working in MGNREGA have been confirmed by studies exploring gender issues in MGNREGA. The drafting and execution of the Act fall short of the goal of women's empowerment because they disregard the dimensions and practices of unpaid care work. This study argued that the gender-specific dynamics of the relationships between formal and informal institutions, which have contributed to the development of MGNREGA, are the root cause of the invisibilization of care. This study considers the gendered aspect of the Act's execution and looks at the gendered arguments that took place during the Act's drafting. It concludes that women's real-world perspectives, particularly those involving their unpaid care obligations, must be considered if there is to be a genuine emphasis on women's empowerment. Changes to the formal and informal structures that underpin policy processes are necessary if MGNREGA is to realize its potential for women's empowerment through effective execution and supervision of its gender provisions.

Farooqi, S. A., & Saleem, I. (2015)^[9]. Entitled their paper "**Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) and Empowerment of Women from BPL families in rural areas. A case study of district Aligarh (India)**". This paper seeks to answer the question, "To what degree is MGNREGA beneficial for women's empowerment by elevating their benchmark of living through the stipulation of 100 days assured employment?" by surveying rural regions of district Aligarh (Uttar Pradesh) and by the in-depth interview of women beneficiaries. In India, the greatest forward piece of legislation is the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA). The major goal of this flagship program, which the Ministry of Rural Development administers, is to ensure that rural residents from Below Poverty Line (BPL) families have access to at least 100 days of annual unskilled manual work. The Act has become law in rural areas, and the provision that women perform 33% of all work gives the means to improve the economic standing of rural women from BPL households. In addition, the article calls attention to how women are offered work prospects and the necessity of evaluating the institutional and governance system involved in the scheme's execution.

3. Research Problem

It is an undeniable truth that following India's independence, the government implemented several programs to help reduce poverty and create jobs (including the "Community Development Programme" in 1952, the "Food for Work Programme" in 1977–1988, the "Antyodaya Yojna" in 1980, the "Integrated Rural Development Programme" in 1980, the "National Rural Development Programme" in 1980, the "Rural Landless Employment Guarantee Programme" in 1983. MGNREGA has attracted a growing number of people to participate in rural areas. Women's rights and rural population growth are two other areas where it makes a big difference. The elimination of gender roles in society is aided by



the participation of women in this movement. Women are seen as more valuable contributors to society after they achieve financial autonomy. Therefore, this research looks at how MGNREGA has affected women in the Gudur Block of the Kurnool district in Andhra Pradesh.

4. Study Area

Kurnool district is divided into 25 blocks, one of which, Gudur Development Block, has been chosen for research and has 9 Grama Panchayats. Most people living in Gudur Block, one of the more impoverished locations, live off farming.

5. Study objectives

In this study, we go into various areas that expose the inner workings of MGNREGA and its positive impact on ST women. It factors in your analysis of all this after hitting a few carefully chosen targets...

1. This study aims to learn how involved ST women in Gudur Block have been with MGNREGA.
2. It impacts the lives of the people who participate in the program.
3. To assess the significant gains made by rural ST women as a result of this project, taking into account a variety of relevant criteria.
4. Examining the challenges faced when pursuing the plans.

6. Methodology

Primary data for this study was gathered during fieldwork conducted by the researcher in August 2022. Secondary data from government sources were collected from several different Grama Panchayats. A random sampling method was employed to select 100 samples for analysis. Primary data and the prearranged questionnaire survey were processed through an in-person interview.

7. Analysis of data

The MGNREGA program has already spanned 15 fiscal years and is currently in its 16th year of operation. As will be made clear below, the timeline for this research ends on November 7, 2022. Table.1 displays the total number of registered houses, persons, and the percentage of ST women in the 9 Gram Panchayats that are part of the plan. ST Women's involvement in the 100-day labor program is unsatisfactory across the 9 Gram Panchayats. Among the Gram Panchayats that took part in MGNREGA, the percentage of women who did so ranged from 47.40% in the Regadi khanapuram GP to 51.50 % in the K. Nagalapuram GP^[10].

Table-1: Gudur Block, Kurnool District, Andhrapradesh (as of 7th November 2022)

SL. No	Grama Panchayats	No. of Reg. families	No. of Reg. Persons	ST Women in %
1.	Budidapadu	871	2354	1160 (49.27)
2.	Chanugondla	2327	6761	3314 (49.01)
3.	Gudipadu	1063	2880	1475(51.25)
4.	Julakallu	549	1604	826(51.49)
5.	K. Nagalapuram	878	2458	1266(51.50)
6.	Mallapuram	302	888	441(49.66)
7.	Munagala	975	2708	1358(50.14)
8.	Penchikalapadu	807	2115	1015(47.99)
9.	Regadi khanapuram	376	1002	475(47.40)
	Total	8,148	22,770	11,330(49.75)

Source: www.nrega.nic.in



As shown above, ST women are significantly more likely to participate in this plan than males. This is a huge and important achievement for an impoverished, backwater rural area.

Table 2: The participants' social status.

Category	No. of Respondents	% of Respondents
Married (women)	54	54
Unmarried (Women)	30	30
Widow	16	16
Age group		
Below 30	15	15
31-50	68	68
Above 50	17	17
Educational Qualification		
Below 5th	29	29
5th -10th	30	30
10th -Intermediate	35	35
Above Intermediate	6	6
Categorization of Workers		
APL	20	20
BPL	80	80

Source; Field Study

Table 2 provides background information about the respondents' families and other social relationships. Most of the men there have said they haven't given this any thought because they have no interest in the topic. If women work at a location further from their homes, they can save money and time by reducing their reliance on personal vehicles. Many women would be pleased to have jobs in the industries close to their villages if it meant not having to commute too far. They were able to achieve greater enjoyment by exercising control over all aspects of their families and the business run by the family.

Statistics show that married people make up the majority of program participants (54%), as seen in table-2. As a result of the unsatisfying nature of the labor market, 30% of the single population is effectively jobless, with most focusing solely on meeting their necessities. Even more so, 16% of widow finds this work more appealing than the widow's pension because it provides extra income.

As seen in Table 2, the vast majority of the female respondents in this field fall between the ages of 31 and 50, and 68 percent of the individuals who participated in the survey work in this industry. The data in the table reveal that 35% of the labor force has completed their Intermediate education, and 6% of the labor force has completed education beyond the Intermediate level. In addition, 29% of those involved had not even completed fifth grade. These data suggest that the average education level of the region's workforce is poor. It's proof that you don't need a degree to get the job done under the system, only the skill set.

In addition, as seen in table-2, eighty percent of the individuals interviewed come from BPL households. Additionally, they have demonstrated the importance of the 100-day jobs initiative.



Table-3: Socio-Economic Condition of the Respondents

Category	No. of Respondents	% of Respondents
Spouse employed under the scheme		
Yes	75	75
No	25	25
Earning of NREGP workers		
NREGP	47	47
Agriculture	35	35
Non-agriculture	18	18
Change in income		
Yes	80	80
No	20	20
Savings		
Below 500	55	55
500-750	37	37
Above 750	8	8

Source: Field data

The table gives us a clear picture of the economic changes experienced by the study groups. 3. According to the analyzed surveys, the vast majority of women (75%) in the workforce participated in MGNREG, with 47% of their total income coming from the program, with contributions from other sources (mostly agricultural and non-agricultural). Additionally, 80% of employees in the analyzed samples reported an increase in revenues due to participating in this plan. Consequently, the data shows that MGNREGA has significantly improved poor rural individuals' income and living standards.

In the research, individuals' motivations for joining the plan were probed with a few well-placed questionnaire items. The data presented in the table above demonstrates that fifty percent of the tribal women surveyed admitted they feel comfortable working within the system.

Table-4: Reason for selecting work under NREGA

Category	No. of Respondents	% of Respondents
Another job is not available	4	4
Scope of doing less work	6	6
Work is suitable for women of different age	9	9
Easy to get a job under the scheme	10	10
Getting a job under own GP	6	6
Getting a job within a 5km radius	14	14
Timely getting of wages	15	15
Family supports	23	23
Social status increased	13	13
Total	100	100

Source; Field data

They explain that the method makes it possible for them to easily obtain work within a range of 5 kilometers. The fact that they may unwind with their families after a hard day's work is a major incentive for them to participate in the system. Survey results also show that 23% of people whose



families are on board with their participation do it without any hesitation. 13 percent of those polled also reported an increase in their social standing due to their involvement in the program. They have reached such high social prosperity that they can provide for virtually every family member.

Table-5: Areas of Expenditure

Category	No. of Respondents	% of Respondents
Meeting home needs	53	53
Medicine	25	25
Repayment of loan	7	7
Traveling	3	3
Education of children	9	9
Others	3	3
Total	100	100

Source; Field data

When analyzing the respondents' budgets, it becomes clear that they spent 53% on necessities for the home and 25% on healthcare. A tiny number of individuals, however, were discovered to have used their revenues to pay back microloans. Unfortunately, just nine percent of the funds were allocated to the participants' children's education.

8. Impact on women

Without a doubt, rural communities benefit greatly from MGNREGA. It helps women and low-income communities maintain a comfortable lifestyle. Here is some of how MGNREGA has impacted ST women in the Gudur Block:

Increasing Income: There is evidence that MGNREGA has increased tribal women's economic independence by putting more money into their hands. Table.3 shows that 37% of MGNREG scheme members are planning to put away earnings of 500–750 rupees. Based on the results, these women had a more positive outlook on their roles as breadwinners, career decision, and social activists than their male counterparts.

Managing Consumption: Tribal Women's earnings under the MGNREG scheme should not be seen as increasing their financial contribution to the household. Results showed that most respondents reported spending their monthly income on necessities like food and household goods. The positive effect on family food and child nutrition security will surely help reduce childhood hunger.

Low debt: The debt burden of working tribal women is alleviated, in part, thanks to MGNREGA. Seven percent of respondents (Table.5) reported using some compensation to settle small study-related obligations. Nonetheless, the fact remains that MGNREGA's funding is insufficient to cover its financial obligations.

Literacy Improvements: ST Women make up the bulk of the workforce, and many are illiterate; therefore, many were interested in finding out more about their children. They don't worry about money anymore and spend 9% of their salary on their children's education (Table.5).

Improved Healthcare: ST Women in the Gudur block study area are more likely to spend their money on healthcare than men. At least 24% of the total MGNREGA income was spent on healthcare for the



participants. Therefore, MGNREGA has significantly improved the health condition (particularly of women) in the examined area.

The eradication of poverty: Even before MGNREGA was implemented, tribal women's situation in the Gudur Block was deemed noticeable. The scheme's implementation, however, almost guarantees that there will be noticeable changes. According to the study's results (Table.3), 37% of program participants, primarily women, want to put away between 500 and 750 rupees. The result has been a slowing of the rate of rural-urban migration and an expansion of the rural economy.

Advancement within the family: Tribal Women in rural areas nowadays unquestionably participate in and often make important decisions for their families. MGNREGA is useful since it broadens the impact of choice on the family by transforming such voluntary work done by women into paid work.

9. Hurdles in MGNREGA towards the participation of ST women

Interviews with one hundred underprivileged and jobless women from the Gudur Block were conducted to understand the challenges women face when trying to participate in the MGNREGA program in the Gudur Block. Their points of view and viewpoints are discussed in more detail below:

There is a deficiency of time job cards: Many Tribal women surveyed said they did not have identification badges at their places of employment. Because of this, the program's monetary benefits are transferred to the husbands' accounts. Tribal Women continue to rely on social networks for their meager financial support. To put it another way, the male members have job cards and block the female members from using MGNREGA.

Social aspects: Most of the Gudur Block's population works in agriculture. As a result, agriculture is critically important in minimizing women's participation in MGNREGA. Women from SC and ST communities who are economically disadvantaged are less likely to participate in community activities and the MGNREGS.

Insufficient safeguards: A common sight in any workplace is the cradle tree, where working mothers can rest their infants while they tend to other tasks. Following the MGNREG Act, crèches must be established to enable working mothers to bring their children to the office without worrying about their care. Without these supports, women in the assessed area are hesitant to participate in the program.

Consciousness insufficiency: Female employees in the study area are generally uninformed about their workplace. In their defense, they have no idea that this is a system predicated on protecting individual rights. Even if the government cannot provide them with work within 15 days of applying, they will still be eligible for unemployment benefits. Nevertheless, they are unaware of their obstacles in achieving their goal of working 100 days in a fiscal year.

Recommendations

The NREGA might benefit from a few suggestions and rules of thumb to bolster its support system:

- Full-time specialists should be assigned to ensure that the various phases of NREGA's rollout run smoothly and encounter a few bureaucratic roadblocks.



- At frequent times throughout the day, people (especially women) should be exposed to information technology-aided awareness campaigns and workshops.
- NREGA workers in rural areas should make concerted efforts to reduce the time it takes for them to get paid for their services.
- Quicken the process of signing up, getting identification cards, and launching the software for the future improvement plan. An official registration desk and information center needs to be established in each community.
- Establishing a powerful local and state-level council in each community is essential for overseeing the initiative and identifying fraudulent cardholders.

Conclusion

Since no formal education is required to participate in the MGNREGA program, it is clear from the above that it is a boon for economically disadvantaged rural residents, particularly ST women. The numbers show that more and more tribal women are taking advantage of this program. From the viewpoint of a breadwinner, they have achieved complete financial independence and have become an integral part of the family unit. They are crucial members of the decision-making process in their households. Also, because this study was conducted in a relatively small area with a limited number of samples, it cannot speak to the MGNREG program's overall effectiveness. There will be regional variations. The initial evaluation is merely an attempt to ascertain the scheme's advancement rate and its impact on women.

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