



Original Research Article

Gender sensitive policies and participation of women: a case of mgnregs in Kerala

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ABSTRACT

Gender equality and empowerment of women are widely recognized as catalysts for the rapid progress of the economy as women constitute half of the population in India. In a male centric society the overall human development is possible only with empowerment of women who currently lag far behind their male counter parts in terms of education, health, earnings and decision making both at household and parliamentary levels. Expanding opportunities for women plays a central role in the process of achieving developmental goal. To ensure gender equality and women empowerment, the specific policy intervention of government is required. One such gender sensitive policy by Government of India is MGNREGS. The present paper analyses the gender sensitive provisions of the MGNREGS and participation of women in employment. It also analyses the reason for high participation of women in MGNREGS in Kerala.

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1. Introduction

Women have always been considered as passive contributors to the development of society throughout human history.^{1,2} Though globally, women become victims of oppression and faced inequality, Indian women are under the threat of poverty and marginalisation as well. They are discriminated and deprived of certain fundamental rights like health and education. Studies show that India will only be able to gain progress in all sectors and have equal status with men if they achieve economic stability. Primarily the areas where women are discriminated must be identified, and holistic emancipation of women in these areas must be ensured (Farooqi Saleem Akhtar, 2015).³ They must have the freedom to make their choice. Specific initiatives have been made by the government to empower women, and one such programme is the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS). It is a historic employment scheme in India, providing 100 days guaranteed wage employment.⁴ Basically, MGNREGA is

a demand-driven scheme.² The funds are allocated as per the demand for work. The scheme maintains the principle of women empowerment as it provides one-third of its participation to women with equal pay (Smitha E K and Karunakaran N, 2020).^{5,6} This makes women more empowered and makes them active participants in the development process. MGNREGS plays a significant role in ensuring the active participation of women.

1.1. Objectives: The main objectives of the study include

1. To analyse the aims of MGNREGS concerning women empowerment, and.
2. To analyse the extent of participation of women in MGNREGS in Kerala.

2. Review of Literature

Darshana Das (2020) and Smitha E K and Karunakaran N (2020) studied the impact of MGNREGS on the empowerment of women. Keerthan Rose (2015) examined how it benefited women working under the

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scheme. Spandita Kar (2013) analysed the status of women's participation under MGNREGS in Odisha. Susmita Bhattacharya (2018), in the analysis, revealed that rural employment guarantee programme has women-centric approaches, play a vital role in providing freedom and self-esteem to women as an individual and a community. Gnyaneswar D (2016) analysed the status of women's participation in MGNREGS in A.P. Keerthi K (2016), Sami L and Khan A (2016) examined the employment opportunities generated by MGNREGS in selected Indian districts, revealed that the scheme considerably decreased the rate of poverty and unemployment and increased the quality of production and consumption.

3. Materials and Methods

The paper is based on descriptive arguments related to women's participation in MGNREGS activities in rural Kerala from 2006-07 to 2020-2021. The secondary data for the study is gathered from different books, research papers, reports,⁷ journals, newspapers and online databases.

4. Results, Analysis and Discussion

4.1. Profile of mgnrega

Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) is a Central-government sponsored wage employment scheme aim to provide livelihood security to the poor and rural households. In the beginning, the Act was implemented in 200 districts from 2nd February 2006 and then extended to 130 districts more in the financial year 2007-2008.⁸ 113 districts across the country and 17 districts in Uttar Pradesh were notified with effect from April 1st 2007 and from 15th May 2007 respectively. MGNREGA was imparted in rest of the districts from 1st April 2008.⁹

The scheme aims to provide 100 days paid employment for everyone registered under the scheme, to reduce urban migration, to empower rural women and the poor, to create productive assets, and to increase employability of rural people. The responsibility of effective enactment of this scheme is bestowed with the Ministry of Rural Development. Besides the ministry, a professional institutional network has been set up which acts as a monitoring assessment and research committee. It assesses the steady and sustainable development of the program. In Kerala, the scheme was initially implemented in Palakkad and Wayanad districts on 5th February 2006; later in April 2008, it was extended to all the 14 districts. The scheme now provides Rs 271 per person for a stipulated quantity of manual labour offered by the workers registered under the scheme. The impact of two devastating floods left, a lot of people deprived of their traditional employment opportunities, including farmers, small-scale entrepreneurs and people from the lower economic strata of society.⁹

The 'Rebuild Kerala', livelihood initiative along with MGNREGA scheme, helped to restore farmlands, canals, streams, wells and rivers, in addition to common public assets such as school playgrounds, Anganwadis, mangroves and streetlights.

4.2. Gender sensitiveness of mgnregs

Though MGNREGS had some specific provisions for women, it was never conceived as an exclusive programme for the empowerment of women. Women have been benefited due to the flexible working hours and payment on 'piece rate'.¹⁰ The Act also ensures the active participation of women as it provides one-third of the work for women. The scheme also mandates that no discrimination must be made based on gender in terms of participation and payment. As the scheme also provides childcare facilities on worksites and ensure work close to their home, women can work at ease and feel safe. Long experiences of economic dependency and poverty have been changing with the implementation of the plan.¹¹ Women are provided with a chance to be part of the management and monitoring of the programme. The scheme also considers single women as a household which has been a great relief for widows and other single women.

4.3. Implementation of mgnregs in Kerala

In Kerala, MGNREGS was initially implemented in Palakkad and Wayanad districts on 5th February 2006. Later, it was enacted throughout the state on 1st April 2008. The local governments are in charge of planning and implementation. A Technical Committee of engineers which consists of a government engineer, a retired engineer and an engineer working in an academic institution provides technical sanction of the work. An appellate system sorts out the disputes occurring within the program me. The Village Panchayat also assigns an NREGS coordinator to mobilise the workers and to assist the local governments in carrying out its duties.

Kudumbasree also plays a vital role in the implementation of the scheme. Kudumbasree identifies families in a locality that are below the poverty line and organises them into a Neighbourhood Group (NHG) consisting of 15 to 20 families. Each family is represented only by a woman.¹² The NHGs are federated into an Area Development Society (ADS) at the level of the Ward of the Village Panchayat. The Community Development Society (CDS) administers the working of ADSs. Each NHG, ADS and CDS has five volunteers carrying out different functional roles.

Kudumbasree played a vital role in the mobilisation, identification of work, planning and implementation of MGNREGS in Kerala. It was also able to ensure increased participation of women. The NHGs were successful in

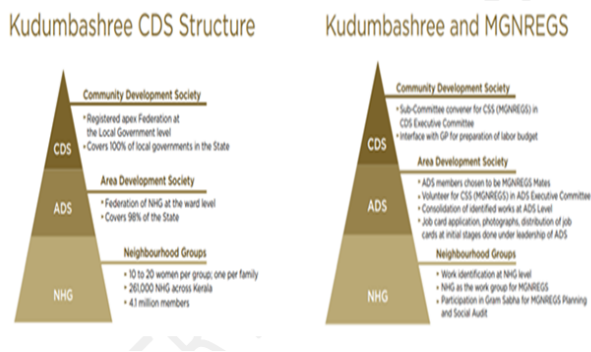


Fig. 1: Kudumbashree's role in MGNREGS Source: https://www.kudumbashree.org/storage/files/y8osd_mgnregs%20in%20kerala.pdf

creating labour groups in their respective localities. The Kudumbashree unit disseminates the information passed by the Gram Panchayat through Ward members and the CDS. Firstly work is identified at NHG level and the list is submitted to the ADS which consolidates the list at the Ward level. Then, workers are mobilised followed by a meeting organised by the Kudumbashree where the consolidated list is presented to the Ward member. Comparatively, the idea of ADS nominating the mate for MGNREGS has helped to make maximum utilisation of the project.

MGNREGS, along with the self-help groups of Kudumbashree, has enabled women to access economic and social opportunities quickly. The results show a glance at the broader benefits provided to women by the scheme. It has become a platform for the enhancement of the economic, social and governance capabilities of women. The mobilisation efforts undertaken by the Kudumbashree network has ensured that an overwhelming number of women participate in MGNREGS work.

4.4. MGNREGS and employment generation in rural Kerala

Table 1 explains the progress of employment generation in Kerala. Person-days employment generated during the year 2014-15 was 588.72 lakhs, and it increased to 802.3 lakh person-days in 2019-20. Above 90% of the beneficiaries of the scheme are women and the average days of employment provided per household were 55.75 during 2019-20. The total number of families who completed 100 days of wage employment was 98648 during 2014-15, but this increased to 251141 during 2019-20. Also, there was a hike in the employment generation during the year 2018-19 due to the flood and increased demand for employment.

4.5. Women's participation in MGNREGS

Table 2 explains the participation of women in MGNREGS in Kerala and India. Amongst the Indian states, Kerala

tops concerning the participation of women amongst the registered workforce of MGNREGA. Women comprise 90 percent of the workforce in the state since 2010.

As compared to the national level, the participation of women in MGNREGS in Kerala is higher because of the active role of Kudumbashree in the mobilisation, identification of work, planning and implementation. At the all India level the participation of women is only 55 percent in 2020-21 (Figure 2).

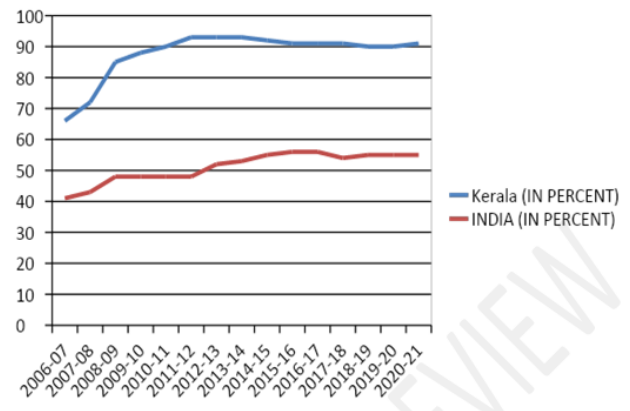


Fig. 2: Participation of women in MGNREGS (India and Kerala) Source: www.nregs.nic.in

In Kerala, 90 percent of the beneficiaries of this programme are women. Highest participation of women beneficiaries are from Alappuzha (95.42); and the lowest is in Idukki (72.67). Except for Idukki and Wayanad, the participation of women is more than 90 percent Table 3

5. Conclusion

MGNREGS has turned to be a stepping stone for the empowerment of women in Kerala. Though women working under the scheme lacked education and were financially unstable, the scheme made them self-sufficient and increased their participation in various spheres of societal development. It has also increased the participation and presence of women in public spaces as planners, mates, social leaders, trainers, and like boosted women's income and enhanced their skills. The Act ensures representation of women in local bodies, the social audit at state and central level councils. The entire scheme is timed according to the convenience of the workers which provides an extra benefit for women. The women-specific policies in the scheme have contributed largely to the holistic development of women in Kerala.

6. Source of Funding

None.

Table 1: Trend and progress of employment generation in Kerala

Progress	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Person days Generated [In Lakhs]	588.72	741.72	684.62	619.59	975.26	802.3
SC person-days % as of total person-days	16.2	15.96	17.1	16.2	15.94	15.53
ST person-days % as of total person-days	3.5	3.63	4.81	4.91	5.54	6.7
Women person-days out of Total (%)	92.16	91.27	91.08	90.76	90.41	89.8
Average days of employment provided per Household	42.65	49.26	46.97	47.24	65.97	55.75
Average Wage rate per day per person (Rs)	214.28	231.82	243.09	260.91	274.2	274.29
Total No of HHs completed 100 Days of Wage Employment	98648	1,65,988	1,13,186	1,17,370	4,41,479	2,51,141
Total Households Worked[In Lakhs]	13.8	15.06	14.57	13.12	14.78	14.39
Total Individuals Worked[In Lakhs]	15.13	16.93	16.44	14.71	17.08	16.54

(Source: nrega.nic.in)

Table 2: Participation of women in MGNREGS in Kerala and India

Year	Kerala (in percent)	India (in percent)
2006-07	66	41
2007-08	72	43
2008-09	85	48
2009-10	88	48
2010-11	90	48
2011-12	93	48
2012-13	93	52
2013-14	93	53
2014-15	92	55
2015-16	91	56
2016-17	91	56
2017-18	91	54
2018-19	90	55
2019-20	90	55
2020-21	91	55

Source: www.nregs.nic.in

Table 3: District wise participation of women in MGNREGS in Kerala

Districts	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021
Alappuzha	94.93	94.62	94.37	93.56	95.42
Ernakulam	92.51	92.01	91.44	90.94	93.65
Kannur	94.62	95.36	95.02	95.32	93.92
Idukki	73.98	73.79	73.15	73.34	72.67
Kasaragod	92.51	92.42	91.81	91.46	88.81
Kollam	89.63	89.26	88.6	88.27	90.29
Kottayam	93.78	94.91	92.95	93.28	93.38
Kozhikode	93.63	93.41	93.11	92.83	93.69
Malappuram	90.62	90.41	89.62	90.25	91.04
Palakkad	92.12	91.82	91.45	89.43	90.63
Pathanamthita	91.82	91.57	91.32	91.62	91.86
Thiruvananthapuram	92.19	90.71	90.92	89.33	92.34
Thrissur	94.78	94.17	93.35	93.07	94.09
Wayanad	88.05	88.26	86.66	87.03	87.88

Source: www.nregs.nic.in

7. Conflict of Interest

None.

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