

Impact and Implications of Women's Participation in MGNREGA: A Study of Anantapuramu District

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ABSTRACT

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme is one of the major flagship initiatives that enhances rural development and employment opportunities in rural areas. The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act aims to enhance livelihood security in rural areas by providing at least 100 days of guaranteed wage employment in a financial year to every household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work. Rural development has different aspects, covering long-term and short-term aspects. Certain activities like sanitation, agriculture, roads, electricity, health facilities, skill development, market linkage, awareness about basic facilities, digital inclusion, etc. Rural populations get wages if a drought-like situation erupts, so it should be continued to stop migration to cities, and for rural mass uplift, it is necessary. Labour-intensive tasks like creating infrastructure for water harvesting, drought relief, and flood control are preferred in MGNREGA, which helps the economic development of rural areas. An important objective of MGNREGA has been to encourage women's effective participation, both as workers and as administrators. For instance, according to MGNREGA guidelines, at least one-third of the beneficiaries shall be women who have registered and requested work under the programme. Further, since employment is provided within a 5-kilometre radius of the village, it has the potential to bolster women's participation. But how far has MGNREGA been successful in fulfilling this objective? This article focuses on the impact and implications of women's participation in MGNREGA in Ananthapuram.

INTRODUCTION

The empowerment of rural women is vital for the development of the rural India. Women must empower themselves from bottomso that the government can empower themselves from above through their policies. In the other words "empowering women is a requirement for creating a prosperous nation, when women are empowered, societal stability is assured". The MGNREGA has made positive impact on empowerment and employment of women since its inception. It aims at improving livelihood security by providing at least 100 days of guaranteed wage employment in a financial year to every rural household especially for women. Women participation has improved significantly and it has given them a sense of independence and security. Women play important role in the growth of the society as well as the country. It is very important to empower women. Empowerment of women refers to the influence of decision making on their own. The word "empower has become equal with the word women. Provisions of the act related to Women Empowerment

There are following provisions that are related to women empowerment in the act of MGNREGA.

- The Act of MGNREGA is inclusive in nature. It clearly says that a minimum of one-third of the beneficiaries of the scheme are to be women who have registered and demanded employment under the scheme.
- The MGNREGA in India is an example of significant safety nets for women, allowing childcare facilities to be provided on worksites and requiring provision of work close to participants' homes.
- The Act is also gender sensitive. It makes provision that there shall be no discrimination solely on the ground of gender in providing employment and equal wages between men and women have also been a major incentive for women.
- MGNREGA is seen to be a policy response of the Government of India to a situation of poverty and inequality.

As a rural wage employment programme, MGNREGA recognised the relevance of incorporating gender equity and empowerment in its design. Various provisions under the Act and its Guidelines, aim to ensure that women have equitable and easy access to work, decent working conditions, equal payment of wages and representation on decision-making bodies.

Gender and NREGA

The NREGA with its guarantee of 100 days of unskilled work for every household has been envisaged as gender sensitive scheme'. The main way in which a scheme for social protection can to be made gender sensitive is to suggest that a certain percentage of beneficiaries must be women, which have been provided for in the Act:

'While providing employment, 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 under the scheme. (NREGA, Schedule II, Section 6: 19)

The Act also provides for some explicit entitlements for women to facilitate their full participation. These include:

Equal wages for men and women - 'Equal wages shall be paid to both men and women workers and the provisions of Equal Remuneration Act, 1976 shall be complied with.'

Participation in Management and monitoring of the programme - As per the guidelines, a local Vigilance and Monitoring Committee is to be appointed with members from the immediate locality or village where the work is undertaken, to monitor the progress and ensure the quality of work. 'The *gram sabha* will elect the members of the committee and ensure that SCs/STs and women are represented on it.

Participation in social audit - The guidelines mention about social audit forum, convened by the '*gram sabha*' every six months as part of the continuous auditing process. There is stress on the quorum of these meetings maintaining female participants alongside those from other disadvantageous groups. 'The timing of the forum must be such that it is convenient for people to attend - that it is convenient for REGS (*Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme*) workers, women and marginalised communities.

Providing support for child care, and convenience to households - The guidelines mention that the need for a creche at the worksite, and for the works to be convenient for families: 'If some applicants have to be directed to report for work beyond 5 kms. of their residence, women (especially single women) and older persons should be given preference to work nearer to their residence.'

Also, 'If several members of a household who share the same job card are employed simultaneously under the scheme, they should be allowed to work on the same work site.'

Ensuring that single woman is eligible - By recognizing a single person as a 'household', the Act makes it possible for widows and other single woman to access work.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Ramesh & Kumar (2009) in their study also find that MGNREGA holds the powerful prospect of bringing major changes in the lives of women. MGNREGA is playing a substantial role in empowering women economically and laying the basis for greater independence and self-esteem.

Hazarika (2009) examined the impact of MGNREGA on gender empowerment in Morigaon and Bongaigaon district of Assam. The study concluded that almost 70 to 80 percent of sample workers had meaningful income other than unpaid family work during the pre-NREGA. Majority of the worker felt that they are now in better position to fulfill their own requirement without looking at others.

Khera and Nayak (2009) through their sample survey in six Hindi speaking states of North India focuses on impact of NREGA in the lives of women workers. Their study reveals that there is significant benefits reported by women include increased food security and better ability to avoid hazardous work.

Ashok Pankaj and Rukmini Tankha (2010) in their article „Empowerment Effects of the NREGS on Women Workers: A Study in Four States“ examines the empowerment effects of the NREGA on rural women in Bihar, Jharkhand, Rajasthan and Himachal Pradesh. In their research paper, they analyzed that women have gained more opportunity because of cash payment in hand through the scheme as a result they have benefitted through income consumption effects, intra-household effects, and the enhancement of choice and capability than before.

Lavanya and Mahima (2013) dogged the scope of women empowerment through MGNREGA in Palakkad. The results of the study showed that MGNREGA had made the women beneficiaries economically independent and it was also concluded that the programme had laid a foundation for self-esteem and independence for women beneficiaries.

Gowhar Bashir Ahangar (2014) analyzed the women participation in MGNREGA special reference to Anantnag Districts in Jammu and Kashmir. The study examine that 90% of the surveyed respondents believe after joining in MGNREGA their socio-economic status has improved and the participation of women in Gram Sabha is also increased.

Objectives of the Study

1. To study various provisions of MGNREGA, with particular reference to women workers.
2. To critically examine the impact of MGNREGS on socio-economic empowerment of rural women.

METHODOLOGY

The study is exploratory in nature. The statistical data for the study have been mobilized both from the primary and the secondary sources. Primary data has been collected from the women beneficiaries of Anantapuramu district of Rayalaseema region of Andhra Pradesh through a well designed interview schedule. Apart from canvassing the interview schedule, relevant field level data/information was also collected through formal discussions with the implementing staff at field level. The secondary data has been collected from different reports published by Panchayat and Rural Development Department (Government of Andhra Pradesh), Ministry of Rural Development (Government of India), Census of India (2001), Directorate of Economic and Statistics (Government of Andhra Pradesh), the information is also collected from MGNREGS implementing agency of Anantapuramu district (DWMA) and reports submitted by vigilance teams, social audit teams and annual reports, books, journals and periodicals. The data thus collected, have been analyzed for specific interpretation.

Sampling

The provisions of MGNREGS have been extended to all sections of the society irrespective sex economic, social and political status of the rural families. All the Mandals, revenue villages and hamlets in the district are covered by the programme. For effective study a purposive random sampling method was followed. For the collection of women beneficiaries views and ideas on the impact of the MGNREG scheme, two revenue mandals from each revenue division, two revenue villages from each mandal 30 women workers from each village three Gram Panchayats from three Revenue Divisions of Anantapur district were selected by random sampling method. From each selected Gram Panchayat 30 women workers were selected on simple random sampling method. This altogether covers 3 revenue divisions six revenue mandals, twelve revenue villages and 360 women workers who are engaged in MGNREGS from beginning of the scheme in their respective villages

MGNREGA: A New Identity for Rural Women

Among all the policies MGNREGA is distinctive for its capacity to provide immediate hope and actual economic opportunities, that it has started to generate. In the wake of MGNREGA, women in rural areas seem to have become confident about being integral contributor to family expenditure and about being assertive about their identity space in public sphere.

From 2006-07 up to 2011-12, around Rs 53,000 crore have been spent on wages for women and around 47 per cent of the total person-days² generated have been by women. Overall, MGNREGA has been a positive and important Scheme for women.

Aggregate Participation: At the national level, the participation of women in this Scheme has surpassed the statutory minimum requirement of 33 per cent; in 2011-12* alone, women person-days of employment were close to 50 per cent. The percentage of women participation from 2006-07 up to 2011-12* is provided in Table 1.

Significantly, female share on works under MGNREGA is greater than their share of work in the casual wage labour market across all States. Women are participating in the Scheme much more actively than they participated in all forms of recorded work. This may support the hypothesis that MGNREGA creates decent and favourable work conditions for women. For instance, MGNREGA's stipulation of work within 5 kilometres (kms) of the village where the job applicant resides makes participation in the Scheme logistically feasible for women who may have limited employment opportunities available to them, given their role and responsibilities in their households. A study conducted across ten sample districts of Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh seems to confirm these findings; only 30 per cent of the women in the sample recalled earning cash income from a source other than MGNREGA, in the three months preceding the survey. Of the total women in the sample, 50 per cent said that in the absence of MGNREGA they would have worked at home or would have remained unemployed.

Table-1: Percentage of women Person Days From 2006-07 to 2011-12*

State	Women person-days (% of total person-days in the State) 2006-07	Women person-days (% of total person-days in the State) 2007-08	Women person-days (% of total person-days in the State) 2008-09	Women person-days (% of total person-days in the State) 2009-10	Women person-days (% of total person-days in the State) 2010-11	Women person-days (% of total person-days in the State) 2011-12*
Andhra Pradesh	55	58	58	58	57	58
Assam	32	31	27	28	27	25
Bihar	17	28	30	30	28	29
Chhattisgarh	39	42	47	49	49	45
Gujarat	50	47	43	48	44	45
Haryana	31	34	31	35	36	36
Himachal Pradesh	12	30	39	46	48	60
Jammu and Kashmir	4	1	6	7	7	18
Jharkhand	39	27	29	34	33	31
Karnataka	51	50	50	37	46	46
Kerala	66	71	85	88	90	93
Madhya Pradesh	43	42	43	44	44	43
Maharashtra	37	40	46	40	46	46
Odisha	36	36	38	36	39	39
Punjab	38	16	25	26	34	43
Rajasthan	67	69	67	67	68	69
Tamil Nadu	81	82	80	83	83	74
Uttar Pradesh	17	15	18	22	21	17
Uttarakhand	30	43	37	40	40	45
West Bengal	18	17	27	33	34	32
All India	40	43	48	48	48	47

Source: Mahatma Gandhi Rural Employment Guarantee Act (official website), www.mgnrega.nic.in.

Note: (1) Union Territories and some States are not included in the table. (2) All-India total is for all States and Union Territories.

*Provisional Data. At the time of the preparation of the report, data entry for States was still open for the year 2011–

Inter-State Variations: However, the large interstate variation in women participation has remained an issue for further analysis. In FY 2011-12 Kerala had the highest female participation rate at 93 per cent, Tamil Nadu and Rajasthan followed with 74 per cent and 69 per cent respectively. Nine states below the requirement of 33 per cent were Uttar Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Mizoram, Assam, Nagaland, Bihar, Jharkhand, Arunachal Pradesh and West Bengal.

The southern states, like Kerala and Tamil Nadu, show a higher rate of participation in MGNREGA as compared to their overall work participation in all recorded works. Among the northern and some eastern states, however, the pattern has been generally different, with proportionately fewer women working in the Scheme than in other rural work; Rajasthan is the only exception. These gaps are especially marked in Punjab and Jammu and Kashmir, where women participation in MGNREGA is particularly low.

Some of the possible factors responsible for a high rate of participation in the southern states could be:

- ❖ Cultural acceptance of female participation in the labour force,
- ❖ Influence of Self-Help Groups (SHGs),
- ❖ Effective institutions at the State and local government level that are committed to promoting female participation in MGNREGS,
- ❖ Wage differentials between private sector and MGNREGS,
- ❖ Higher rationing in poorer states such that there are still a higher percentage of women in casual wage structure.

Impact of MGNREGS on Equal Wage

In spite of the “Minimum Wages Act” and other regulations, the agricultural wages in rural India are very low and discriminatory in nature. There is a lot difference between the wages of men and women workers. With the passage of MGNREGA-2005, the scenario totally changed. The act specifically mentioned that both the men and women shall be paid equal wages. The impact of the MGNREGS on equal wages as reported sample respondents was presented in table 2

Table-2: Impact of MGNREGS Equal Wage rates for both Men & Women on Agriculture works

S. No.	Item	Caste Category				Total
		ST	SC	BC	OC	
1	Increased	17 (47.22)	39 (37.50)	89 (52.05)	12 (24.49)	157 (43.61)
2	Marginally Increased	6 (16.67)	14 (13.46)	24 (14.04)	16 (32.65)	60 (16.67)
3	Status Quo	11 (30.56)	48 (46.15)	54 (31.58)	19 (38.78)	132 (36.67)
4	No Response	2 (5.56)	3 (2.88)	4 (2.34)	2 (4.08)	11 (3.06)
Total		36 (100.00)	104 (100.00)	171 (100.00)	49 (100.00)	360 (100.00)

Source: Field Data

* Figures in parenthesis are Percentages

Table 2 reveals that there is an impact of MGNREG programme on equal wages for both men and women on agriculture works. As per the reports of 52.05 per cent of the BC respondents, the wage rates for both men and women on agriculture works are equal in the study area. Among the ST respondents 47.22 per cent declared that the wage rates for both men and women on agriculture works has increased. Nearly 37.50 per cent of the SC and 24.49 per cent of the OC respondents also stated some amount of increase in paying equal wages for both men and women on agriculture works due to MGNREGS.

With regard to marginal increase in equal wages for both men and women on agriculture works OC respondents stood at the top of the ladder with 32.65 per cent and followed by ST, BC and SC respondents with 16.67 per cent, 14.04 per cent and 13.46 per cent respectively. Nearly 46.15 per cent of the SC respondents reported no change with regard to equal wages for both men and women on agriculture works. About 38.78 per cent of OC, 31.58 per cent of BC and 30.56 per cent of ST respondents also reported status quo in case of equal wages for both men and women on agriculture works due to MGNREGS. As many as 5.56 per cent of ST respondent have no opinion on the equal wages for both men and women in study area. In the same way 4.08 per cent, 2.88 per cent and 2.34 per cent of OC, SC and BC respondents were also reported no opinion.

The study indicates that the equal wages for both men and women in agriculture works increased due to the implementation of MGNREGS in the study area has been expressed by 157 (43.61 %) respondents. Only negligible percentage of (3.06 %) respondents has no opinion on the equal wages for both men and women in study area. Nearly 36.67 per cent have expressed that there is no change in equal wages for both men and women in spite implementation of MGNREG programme in their area and 16.67 per cent are at the opinion that there is some improvement in paying equal wages for both men and women due to MGNREGS.

IMPACT ON SAVINGS

With the introduction of MGNREG Scheme the rural households got employment in major part of the year. The increased employment opportunities will increase income of the families and which in turn motivate them for savings. The impact of the scheme on savings of sample households is given in table 3

Table – 3: Impact of MGNREGS on Personal Savings

S. No.	Item	Caste Category				Total
		ST	SC	BC	OC	
1	Increased	11 (30.56)	46 (44.23)	116 (67.84)	3 (6.12)	176 (48.89)
2	Marginally Increased	8 (22.22)	26 (25.00)	34 (19.88)	29 (59.18)	97 (26.94)
3	Status Quo	16 (44.44)	31 (29.81)	18 (10.53)	16 (32.65)	81 (22.50)
4	No Response	1 (2.78)	1 (0.96)	3 (1.75)	1 (2.04)	6 (1.67)
Total		36 (100.00)	104 (100.00)	171 (100.00)	49 (100.00)	360 (100.00)

Source: Field Data

* Figures in parenthesis are Percentages

As per table 3 the MGNREGS increased the personal savings of the sample respondents in the study area as stated by 67.84 per cent of BC, 44.23 per cent of SC, 30.56 per cent of ST and only 6.12 per cent of OC respondents. Marginal improvement regarding Personal savings is reported nearly 59.18 per cent of OC respondents and they were followed by SC, ST and BC respondents with 25 per cent, 22.22 per cent and 19.88 per cent respectively. As per the reports of 44.44 per cent of ST respondents no change is observable with regard to personal savings. Status quo respondents sharply declined to 32.65 per cent in case of OC respondents and it further declined in case of SC (29.81 %) and BC (10.53 %) respondents. 1 out of 49 constituting 2.78 per cent of ST respondents have no opinion on the increasing personal savings. In the same way 2.04 per cent of OC, 1.75 per cent of BC and 0.96 per cent of SC respondents have also no opinion.

As per the present study nearly half (48.89 %) of the sample respondents reported that there is significant improvement in the increasing of personal savings due to employment created by MGNREG programme. Moreover nearly 26.94 per cent of the respondents observed marginal improvement regarding personal savings in the study area with regard to MGNREGS. About 22.50 per cent of the respondents stated that there is no change on the increasing of their personal savings. Nearly 1.67 per cent of the respondents have not framed any opinion on the personal savings in their households.

Impact of MGNREGS on Cash availability

The women in rural India have little source of income. For their personal expenses they have to depend upon the male head of the family. Under the MGNREGS the wages of every worker are directly paid to worker. This gives scope for women to keep certain amount of money for their personal expenses. The impact of MGNREGS on the cash in the hands of sample women is given in table 4

Table – 4: Impact of MGNREGS on Cash availability in the hands of the Respondents

S. No.	Item	Caste Category				Total
		ST	SC	BC	OC	
1	Increased	29 (80.56)	59 (56.73)	121 (70.76)	12 (24.49)	221 (61.39)
2	Marginally Increased	4 (11.11)	16 (15.38)	25 (14.62)	18 (36.73)	63 (17.50)

3	Status Quo	2 (5.56)	27 (25.96)	22 (12.87)	19 (38.78)	70 (19.44)
4	No Response	1 (2.78)	2 (1.92)	3 (1.75)	0 (0.00)	6 (1.67)
Total		36 (100.00)	104 (100.00)	171 (100.00)	49 (100.00)	360 (100.00)

Source: Field Data

* Figures in parenthesis are Percentages

Table 4 reveals that among all the four social category respondents, there are no wider variations in reporting significant improvement on availability of Cash in the hands of Respondents due to MGNREG programme in the study area. Around 80.56 per cent of ST, 70.76 per cent of BC, 56.73 per cent of SC and 24.49 per cent of the OC respondents reported significant increase on availability of Cash in the hands of Respondents. With regard to marginal increase on availability of Cash in the hands of Respondents OC respondents tops the list with 36.73 per cent. They are followed by SC respondents with 15.38 per cent and they in turn followed by BC and ST respondents with 14.62 per cent and 11.11 per cent respectively. According to 38.78 per cent of OC, 25.96 per cent of SC, 12.87 per cent of BC and 5.56 per cent of ST respondents, there is no change on availability of Cash in the hands of Respondents in the study area due to MGNREG programme. Around 2.78 per cent of ST, 1.92 per cent of SC, 1.75 per cent of BC and none of OC respondents has not given any opinion on the impact of MGNREG programme on availability of Cash in the hands of Respondents.

It can be found that as many as 61.39 per cent of the sample respondents declared that MGNREG programme have positive impact on availability of cash in the hands of respondents. Among them 17.50 per cent reported marginal increased and 28.06 per cent reported significant change. Nearly 19.44 per cent reported status quo on availability of cash in the hands of respondents due to MGNREG programme in the study area. Negligible percentage (1.67 %) of the respondents has no opinion on the increase on availability of cash in the hands of respondents.

Impact of MGNREGS on Clearing of Old Debts

The increased opportunities of employment are expected to improve the income levels of households and which turn is expected to reduce the debt burden of the respondents are presented in table 5.

Table – 5: Impact of MGNREGS on Clearing of Old Debts

S. No.	Item	Caste Category				Total
		ST	SC	BC	OC	
1	Increased	9 (25.00)	14 (13.46)	18 (10.53)	12 (24.49)	53 (14.72)
2	Marginally Increased	19 (52.78)	68 (65.38)	125 (73.10)	8 (16.33)	220 (61.11)
3	Status Quo	8 (22.22)	21 (20.19)	27 (15.79)	29 (59.18)	85 (23.61)
4	No Response	0 (0.00)	1 (0.96)	1 (0.58)	0 (0.00)	2 (0.56)
Total		36 (100.00)	104 (100.00)	171 (100.00)	49 (100.00)	360 (100.00)

Source: Field Data

* Figures in parenthesis are Percentages

It is clear from table 5 that the ST (25 %) respondents stood at the top of ladder with regard to significant increase in clearing old debts through MGNREG Programme in the study area. They are followed by OC respondents with 24.49 per cent in second place, SC respondents with 13.46 per cent in third place and BC respondents with 10.53 per cent in fourth place. Marginal increase in clearing old debts through MGNREG Programme is reported by 73.10 per cent of BC respondents and they are immediately followed by SC respondents with 65.38 per cent and they in turn followed by ST respondents and OC respondents with 52.78 per cent and 16.33 per cent respectively. In case of status quo in clearing old debts through MGNREG Programme, there are no wider variations among the four social categories. The

OC respondents stood at the top of list with 59.18 per cent. In this regard the second, third and fourth places were occupied by ST (22.22%), SC (20.19 %) and BC (15.79 %) respondents respectively. Among the SC category respondents 0.96 per cent has no opinion. In the same way 0.58 per cent of BC respondents have also no opinion. None of the respondents from ST and OC categories denied to respond.

It can be found that nearly 75.83 per cent of the respondents reported that the MGNREG Programme have positive impact in clearing old debts through creation of employment opportunities. Of them 61.11 per cent reported marginal increase and 14.72 per cent reported significant change. Status quo or no change was reported by 23.61 per cent of the respondents. About 0.56 per cent has no opinion.

Purchase / Procurement of Gold and Silver ornaments

The increased income increases economic independence of women. Which in turn gives the scope to women to purchase gold and silver ornaments. The impact of MGNREGS on the purchase/ procurement of gold and silver ornaments by sample women respondents is given in table 6

Table – 6: Impact of MGNREGS on Purchase / Procurement of Gold and Silver ornaments

S. No.	Item	Caste Category				Total
		ST	SC	BC	OC	
1	Increased	6 (16.67)	29 (27.88)	55 (32.16)	7 (14.29)	97 (26.94)
2	Marginally Increased	14 (38.89)	47 (45.19)	73 (42.69)	15 (30.61)	149 (41.39)
3	Status Quo	15 (41.67)	24 (23.08)	41 (23.98)	26 (53.06)	106 (29.44)
4	No Response	1 (2.78)	4 (3.85)	2 (1.17)	1 (2.04)	8 (2.22)
Total		36 (100.00)	104 (100.00)	171 (100.00)	49 (100.00)	360 (100.00)

Source: Field Data

* Figures in parenthesis are Percentages

It is clear from table 6 that the BC (32.16 %) respondents stood at the top of the ladder with regard to significant increase in improving the purchasing capacity of gold and silver ornaments by the respondents in the study area. In this regard they are followed by SC respondents with 27.88 per cent in second place, ST respondents with 16.67 per cent in third place and OC respondents with 14.29 per cent in fourth place. Marginal increase in the purchasing of gold and silver ornaments is reported by 45.19 per cent of the SC respondents and they are immediately followed by BC respondents with 42.69 per cent and they in turn followed by ST respondents and OC respondents with 38.89 per cent and 30.61 per cent respectively. In case of status quo in purchasing of gold and silver ornaments there are no wider variations among the four social categories. The OC respondents stood at the top of list with 53.06 per cent. In this regard the second, third and fourth places were occupied by ST (41.67 %), BC (23.98 %) and SC (23.08 %) respondents respectively. Among the SC category respondents 3.85 per cent have no opinion. In the same way 2.78 per cent of ST and 2.04 per cent of OC and 1.17 per cent of BC respondents have also no opinion.

It can be found that nearly 68.33 per cent of the respondents reported that the MGNREGS has positive impact on the purchasing of gold and silver ornaments in the study area. Of them 41.39 per cent reported marginal increase and 26.94 per cent reported significant change. Status quo or no change was reported by 29.44 per cent of the respondents. About 2.22 per cent have no opinion.

Impact of MGNREGS on possessing Pairs of Cloths

The poor rural women in rural areas lead life with one or two pairs of cloths. The increased economic freedom through MGNREGS wages may have some impact on possession pairs of cloths. The total number of pairs of cloths possessed by sample respondents is given in table 7.

Table – 7: Impact of MGNREGS on possessing Pairs of Cloths

S. No.	Item	Caste Category				Total
		ST	SC	BC	OC	
1	Increased	16 (44.44)	38 (36.54)	82 (47.95)	10 (20.41)	146 (40.56)
2	Marginally Increased	7 (19.44)	15 (14.42)	29 (16.96)	18 (36.73)	69 (19.17)
3	Status Quo	11 (30.56)	47 (45.19)	57 (33.33)	21 (42.86)	136 (37.78)
4	No Response	2 (5.56)	4 (3.85)	3 (1.75)	0 (0.00)	9 (2.50)
Total		36 (100.00)	104 (100.00)	171 (100.00)	49 (100.00)	360 (100.00)

Source: Field Data

* Figures in parenthesis are Percentages

As per table 7 that nearly 47.95 per cent of the BC respondents reported that MGNREGS helped in the improvement of possession of pairs of cloths of the sample respondents. In the same way, 44.44 per cent of ST, 36.54 per cent of SC and 20.41 per cent of OC respondents recognized significant impact of MGNREGS on the possession of pairs of cloths. Some kind of positive impact of MGNREGS on improvement of possessing of pairs of cloths is reported by 36.73 per cent of OC, 19.44 per cent of ST, 16.96 per cent of BC and 14.52 per cent of SC respondents. There are some variation among BC and ST respondents and other two social categories of respondents with regard to no change. Nearly 45.19 per cent of SC and 42.86 per cent of OC respondents stated status quo on the possession of pairs of cloths. Nearly one third of (33.33 %) BC category respondents reported to no change and 30.56 per cent of ST category respondents reported the same with regard to the possession of pairs of cloths through the employment opportunities by the MGNREGS. On the other hand 5.56 per cent of ST and 3.85 per cent of SC respondents reported no opinion. About 1.75 per cent of the BC respondents have no opinion on the impact of MGNREG programme on possessing of pairs of cloths. None of the respondents from OC category have any opinion with regard to possessing of pairs of cloths.

The study shows that only 59.73 per cent of the sample respondents found that the MGNREGS have positive impact on possessing of pairs of cloths. To be precise, 40.56 per cent reported clear increase in possessing of pairs of cloths, while 19.17 per cent observed only little increase in possessing of pairs of cloths. About 37.78 per cent of the respondents declared no change or status quo in the crop productivity. Around 2.50 per cent have no opinion on the impact of MGNREGS in the possessing of pairs of cloths.

CONCLUSION

The impact of MGNREGS in changing the status of women working under MGNREGS. Base-line information on socio-economic indicators of women was collected with which changes in those indicators after women were employed under MGNREGS was compared to analyse the changes. The focused effort was made to ascertain the awareness level of women beneficiaries about registration process under MGNREGS for works and the facilities provided by the Government to women workers. The changes in living standard of these women beneficiaries have also been assessed. It has also been explored as to how MGNREGS employment has helped women in getting better education to their children. Employment of women under MGNREGS has also been assessed in bringing about changes in family structure. It has been found that the women beneficiaries of MGNREGS have now more say not only in family matters but also in community matters and it has increased particularly after getting employment. It has helped them in gaining self-esteem and increased their freedom to decide about expenditure to be incurred out of earned wages. There is confidence among women to impart better and higher/ professional education to their children. A certain shift in the family structure from joint to nuclear families was also observed among the families of MGNREGS women workers. The MGNREGS in Ananthapuram district has helped in economic and social empowerment of women. The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) is the largest poverty alleviation and well thought legislation in Indian history of social security programme since independence. By providing guaranteed wage employment to its registered workers, the Act has brought about a silent revolution in rural areas of the country. MGNREGA has come as a ray of hope for the rural households as the main focus of the scheme is to enhance livelihood security in the form of generation of guaranteed wage employment by creating village infrastructure. This act really leads to women empowerment through active participation of women in this scheme. MGNREGS was not envisaged as a women's empowerment programme, yet, it has brought economic and social empowerment of women.

MGNREGS has certainly empowered women workers economically and socially, “Gender - Neutral Measures” such as increase in participation of women in planning and social audits of MGNREGA implementation of better worksite facilities, proper payment of wages, planning of works in phases and speedy grievance redressed will encourage women to demand more work under this scheme.

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