

MGNREGA and Women Participation in Andhra Pradesh: Performance and Challenges

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Abstract: *Towards the attainment of the women empowerment and bridging the gender imbalances at the household and community levels in rural areas, MGNREGA is a great milestone. The gender disparities prevailing in the countryside have been adversely affecting the quality of life of rural women. The gender sensitive, demand-led MGNREGA has the potential to correct the anomalies in labour market along with gender based discrimination. The effective delivery system with pro-women bias may be promising and efficacious to ensure the process of women participation in development programmes and also to have access and control over the use of resources. Andhra Pradesh is one of the few states in the country with high participation of women in MGNREGA. This also underlines the fact that female wages are much higher in the MGNREGA scheme in Andhra Pradesh than the non-public casual works in the state. The paper explores the MGNREGA to look into the status of rural unemployment and poverty rate in Andhra Pradesh with special reference to gender and rationale for the MGNREGA in Andhra Pradesh, to study the role of MGNREGA in providing employment to rural women and offer suggestion and recommendations for more women participation in MGNREGA in Andhra Pradesh.*

Introduction & Background

Women empowerment has been emphasized since the ninth Five Year Plan. The social development and women-centric initiatives have made some dent in reducing the gender imbalances at the household and community levels. As most of the rural (poor) women earn their livelihoods largely from agriculture and allied activities as workers, the gainful employment opportunities from this sector and improvements in labour market functioning are expected to enhance the socio-economic status of women. But the rise in unemployment and underemployment of rural women is cause of concern. The gender disparities prevailing in our rural society have been adversely affecting the quality of life of rural women. It is assumed that the gender sensitive livelihood security interventions will make a positive impact on the gender relations and also on the personality of women. These outcomes together would result in empowerment of the women.

Andhra Pradesh is one of the foremost states in the country in terms of overall development. However, it has a number of challenges to address; significantly, the poverty and unemployment levels are high, especially in the rural areas. The vast majority of people in rural Andhra Pradesh depend on employment for their primary source of income. Rural poverty in the state dropped from 32.2 per cent in 2004-05 to 11 per cent in 2011-12, compared with the national average of 25.7 per cent in 2011-12 against 41.8 per cent in 2004-05. As per the latest Census (2011) the total population of Andhra Pradesh is 846.65 lakh in which the female constitute about 50.2%. According to the Usual Principal and Subsidiary Status (UPSS) (2009-10), about 60.6 per cent of rural males and 44.7 per cent of rural females belonged to the labour

force in Andhra Pradesh. During the period 2004-05 to 2009-10, the Labour Force Participation Rates (LFPR) according to UPSS remained almost the same for rural males but decreased by about 3.8 percentage points for rural females. The gender differential in the worker population ratio (WPR) was distinct. The WPR for rural males was 59.8 per cent while it was 44.3 per cent for rural females. Similar to LFPR, during the period 2004-05 to 2009-10, the WPR according to UPSS remained almost the same for rural males but decreased by about 4 percentage points for rural females. Similarly, the unemployment rates as per Current Daily Status (CDS) in rural females in Andhra Pradesh was 7.8 per cent in 2009-10 compared to 7.3 per cent during the same period for rural males. The corresponding figures for the same period at all-India level are 8 per cent and 6.4 per cent for rural females and males respectively.

Several different socio-economic and political instruments or interventions have been launched during the last six decades to bring harmony in gender relations, of course with varying degrees of success. The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) is one such intervention in the labour market with built in gender bias in favour of women, as an affirmative action for bringing about a derogatory term of equality. The scale of finance, universalisation in targeting and a minimum of one third coverage of women are expected to make a significant dent on the gender related issues. Even under the Maharashtra Employment Guarantee Scheme (1979), a forerunner of the MGNREGA, employment on public works was seen to attract women, and in turn women reported an improvement in family food/nutrition as a result of the MEGS work (Devaki Jain/ISST 1979; Krishnaraj et.al, 2005).

The launching of gender sensitive, demand-led and massive wage employment programme i.e., MGNREGA has the potential to correct the anomalies in labour market functioning as also the gender based discrimination. The effective functioning of the delivery system with pro-women bias would expedite the process of women participation in not only development programmes but also in accessing the resources and gaining control over the use of resources. The Act fosters conditions for inclusive growth ranging from basic wage security and recharging to a transformative empowerment process of democracy. Its emergence as a fall back employment source is designed to make a significant difference to livelihood security in rural India. In the process, the Act also envisages being a growth engine for the rural economy. The guarantee of a hundred days of employment a year for a rural household is designed to ensure livelihood security. The provisions of the Act also provide for a significant initiative in social transformation. There are specific measures to improve the economic conditions of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and other disadvantaged groups especially women. The MGNREGA stipulates that at least a third of the beneficiaries should be women. As MGNREGA is rights based program, people who were not in the labor force might be induced to get into labor force knowing that they will get work. The wage earnings on par with men as a response to the MGNREGS (stimulus) would generate multiplier effects and strengthen the role of women in decision making at the household and also at the aggregate or societal level. Further, there are many positive incentives inbuilt in MGNREGA for female workers which encourage more women participation.

Literature Review

There are many studies available on evaluation of the MGNREGA. The literature reviewed here focuses on different studies that look at problems in the implementation of the scheme pertaining to women and at possible ways to deal with these problems. They aim to assess MGNREGA's

impact on the rural women and propose different changes how the scheme could be improved in order to meet its goals.

It is to be noted that MGNREGA is not designed with the objective of promoting gender equality. In spite of the absence of any direct focus on gender equality, MGNREGA seems to have benefited women in multiple ways. In fact, a large number of studies have shown that women have benefited from MGNREGA in many ways (Khera and Nayak 2009, Datar 2008, Pankaj and Tankha 2010, Sudarshan 2009, Hanumantha Rao 2008). These studies have shown that women have participated in MGNREGA on a large scale in most states in India; have received equal wages with men and earned incomes of their own; single women households and female-headed households have particularly benefited by MGNREGA as it provided them minimum incomes and food security; and participating women in general are frequently feeling empowered as they have now some say in decision making.

A “Research study on changing gender relations through MGNREGS” in the states of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu done by NIRD Hyderabad (2010) found that MGNREGS acted as social security measure to the aged women, widows divorced/deserted women. The study further stated that female dependency level has declined after execution of MGNREGS.

Richard Mahapatra (2010) mentions that unique features of the public wage programme turned it into a magnet for women. More women than men work under the national programme that guarantees employment to rural people. Their participation has been growing since the inception of the Act in 2006. In Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Rajasthan, history of women mobilisation for schemes and campaigns seems to have contributed to their higher participation. In Rajasthan, the campaign for social audits, in which women play a major role, has contributed to enhanced awareness and increased participation under MGNREGA. The State’s MGNREGA worksites have good facilities for children and women. In Kerala, management of worksites and other logistics for implementation is placed in the hands of women self-help groups under the poverty eradication mission, Kudumbasree.

The study entitled, “Socio-Economic Impacts of Implementation of Mahatma Gandhi NREGA” by Council for Social Development, 2010, has noted increase in the frequency of Gram Sabha meeting in most places in the post-MGNREGA situation. There has been a significant improvement in the participation of women in almost all the places.

Trishna Kalita (2010) found that women like MGNREGA work for various reasons. Firstly, it is locally available. Secondly, there is less chance of exploitation. Thirdly, there are regularity and predictability of working hours. Fourthly, such works are socially acceptable and dignified. And finally, they are better paid in comparison to other works. In spite of better possibilities of women’s participation in MGNREGA work, there are certain problems associated with it. We have certain social taboos, and it is said that women are too weak to work and that going for work outside home in their case is socially unacceptable. The hostility of the panchayat functionaries and male relatives of women to female participation in MGNREGA has resulted in the exclusion of the names of many women from job cards in many places. Since men want more access to the highly paid MGNREGA work, they very often put resistance to women’s participation. The presence of illegal contractors has led to the harassment of women workers, and the condition of work run by contractors has been exploitative. Since women are ignorant about the legal entitlement to get work on demand, they are very often turned away by the contractors who think they (women) are less efficient. A study of “NREGA process and practices in Andhra Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh: Appraisal cum research study”, by Central for

Educational Research & Development (2010) found that NREGA helps in women in general and lactating women in particular, to meet their basic needs, like food by ensuring regular income.

Khera and Nayak (2009) reported that significant benefits have already started accruing to women through better access to local employment, at minimum wages, with relatively decent and safe work conditions.

Pankaj and Tanka (2010) examined the effects of the MGNREGA on rural women empowerment in Bihar, Jharkhand, Rajasthan and Himachala Pradesh. They find that women workers have gained from the scheme primarily because of paid employment opportunity and benefits have been realized through income- consumption effects, household effects and the enhancement of choice and capability. A study conducted by the “National Federation of Indian Women (2008)” on “Socio-economic empowerment of women under MGNREGA” in selected districts of Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha and Tamil Nadu found out that there was enhanced women’s identity and empowerment as MGNREGA provided an economic opportunity. Respondents in all the states have been found to be very optimistic about the importance of MGNREGA in their lives. Another aspect of understanding MGNREGA is the growing contribution of women workers to the sources of their households’ livelihood. The study reveals that in spite of all the grey areas in the implementation of MGNREGA, a silent revolution is taking place in rural India with respect to women in disguise.

The major findings of the study are that with MGNREGA, women workers are getting empowered as visible in the form of growing contributions to household expenditure, bearing cost of children’s education and healthcare, women have also started to appear more actively in the rural public sphere as they take up their work and responsibilities and there is a general trend of low migration in the areas where assessment was carried out and workers have started to repay their debts. The study reveals that despite numerous problems, MGNREGA is a programme that has begun to make a difference in the lives of women. Furthermore, it is popular among the workers, who routinely ask if more work could be made available to them under the MGNREGA.

Panda.B, Dutta. A.K and Prosty. S (2009) mentions that one of the poignant and most visible link impacts of MGNREGA in Meghalaya and Sikkim is promotion of women empowerment. Provision of equal wages for men and women in the Act, the opportunity to share information during the course of work in MGNREGA worksite, the opportunity and necessity of interacting with the bank/post office/government officials have all in a fundamental way empowered the rural tribal women by enhancing their confidence level and by ensuring some degree of financial independence. Working in MGNREGA has given an opportunity to workers particularly women workers to share information among fellow workers. This has led to Knowledge Empowerment in the tribal society. Similarly, MGNREGA has also brought in improvement in the health status of the women workers. About 96 per cent of women workers surveyed are of the opinion that they have been able to gather information on health related problems through interaction with their co-workers while working in MGNREGA.

Database and Methodology

Objective

During the last two decades, a number of development interventions such as social mobilisation, formation and networking and capacity building of women self-help groups have been put in place to empower women and MGNREGA is one out of them. However, active participation of women in any programme is a pre-requisite for the empowerment and thus this paper focuses on

the following objectives: (a) to analyse the status of rural unemployment and poverty rate in Andhra Pradesh with special reference to gender and rationale for the MGNREGA in Andhra Pradesh (b) to study the role of MGNREGA in providing employment to rural women in Andhra Pradesh and (c) to explore the suggestions and recommendations for more women participation in MGNREGA in Andhra Pradesh.

To fulfil the objective of the paper the following research issues have been outlined:

- i. Whether the Performance of MGNREGA is in consonance with the rate of poverty and unemployment in the State?
- ii. What are the programmatic and implementation issues and challenges in MGNREGA in Andhra Pradesh?
- iii. What kind of further steps are needed to facilitate more women to participate under the programme?

Data

The paper analyses secondary data collected from various rounds of NSS Employment and Unemployment Survey and Consumer Expenditure Survey to know and understand about employment, unemployment, work participation by women. The data on poverty rate and numbers have been collected from Planning Commission. The MGNREGS performance reports have been collected from MGNREGA Programme MIS (www.nrega.nic.in and www.nrega.ap.gov.in).

Section Plan

The paper is structured as follows. The Section III examines the level and trend of poverty, employment and unemployment and work participation in Andhra Pradesh with special focus on female. Rationale of the MGNREGA in Andhra Pradesh, and performance of women in Andhra Pradesh under MGNREGA have been discussed in section IV. The Section V summarizes and concludes.

Status of Poverty and Unemployment in Andhra Pradesh

Reductions in unemployment and poverty alleviation measures are the main pre-requisites for an “inclusive growth” model. However, during the last two decades, a divergent trend has been experienced in employment and poverty reduction, i.e. even though poverty figures have shown a declining trend, employment growth has been fluctuating in Andhra Pradesh. It is well recognized that employment leads to poverty alleviation if it is accompanied by a reasonable level of income. Workers in the unorganized sector, agricultural labourers and many self-employed in agriculture and other informal activities constitute a majority of the poor, not only because they are unemployed, but because their productivity and income are low and often irregular and uncertain. In this context, it is important to examine the rural situation because a vast majority of Andhra Pradesh population still live in rural areas.

Rural Poverty Rate and Numbers in Andhra Pradesh

This section is based on the findings of the latest National Sample Survey (NSS) 68th round consumer expenditure data (2011-12) as well as the findings of 66th (2009-10) and 61st round (2004-05). Comparison of these rounds enables an understanding of the progress made in the

area and allows for an examination of the level of deprivation. The poverty estimates presented in this section are based on the Tendulkar methodology.

Table 1: Population Below Poverty Line (Rural/Total) in Andhra Pradesh and All India (Lakh) (2004–05, 2009–10 and 2011–12)

State	2004–05		2009–10		2011–12	
	Rural	Total	Rural	Total	Rural	Total
Andhra Pradesh	180 (32.3)	235 (29.6)	127.9 (22.8)	176.6 (21.1)	61.8 (11.0)	78.7 (9.2)
All-India	3258.1 (41.8)	4072.2 (37.2)	2782.1 (33.8)	3546.8 (29.8)	2166.5 (25.7)	2697.8 (21.9)

Note: Figures are based on Tendulkar Methodology; All-India includes figures for rest of the UTs. Figures in parenthesis indicate percentage of poverty below poverty line

Sources: Press Note on Poverty Estimates, 2009–10, Planning Commission, Government of India website (http://planningcommission.nic.in/news/press_pov1903.pdf, accessed on 4 April 2013); Press Note on Poverty Estimates, 2011–12, Planning Commission, Government of India website (http://planningcommission.nic.in/news/pre_pov2307.pdf, accessed on 26 August 2013).

As per the latest estimates of the Planning Commission released in 2013, for the year 2011-12 (Tendulkar Methodology), the poverty ratio in Andhra Pradesh was 9.2% (78.7 lakh) compared to 29.6% (235 lakh) in 2004-05. Similarly, the poverty ratio at all India has come down to 21.9% (2697.8 lakh) in 2011-12 from 37.2% (4072.2 lakh) in 2004-05. The rural poverty in Andhra Pradesh has come down from 32.3% (180 lakh) in 2004-05 to 11% (61.8 lakh). On the other hand, the figure at all India level was 41.85 (3258.1 lakh) in 2004-05 and 25.7% (2166.6 lakh) in 2011-12. A noteworthy feature is that the faster rate of poverty reduction has led to a fall in absolute number of poor in the state. The rate of poverty reduction in 2011-12 compared to 2004-05 in Andhra Pradesh is quite impressive, particularly in rural areas compared to all India figure. Table 1 depicts the number and percentage of people below the poverty line in Andhra Pradesh and at All India level for different time periods (Table 1).

Rural Employment-Unemployment Scenario in Andhra Pradesh

In Andhra Pradesh, agriculture is the predominant source of livelihood for the majority of the population and employment is largely unorganized, rural and non-industrial in nature. Despite rapid economic growth in recent years, the unemployment problem remains well-entrenched. The National Sample Survey estimated unemployment rate of 5.5 % in urban areas and 7.5% in rural areas on a CDS basis for 2009-10 in Andhra Pradesh. In addition, a large part of the labour force in Andhra Pradesh is underemployed. This problem of unemployment/underemployment poses a serious challenge.

An important qualitative dimension of employment is the composition of the workforce in terms of their status of employment: self-employment, regular or salaried employment and casual employment. It has been observed from table 2, that in rural areas, over the year's self-employment base is gradually eroding and that of the casual employment share is increasing, while the proportion of workers in regular employment is stagnating in Andhra Pradesh and at national level. In Andhra Pradesh, the share of self employed in rural areas has come down to 40.8 per cent in 2009-10 from 47.9 per cent in 2004-05. However, the share of casual employed

in rural Andhra Pradesh has increased from 45 per cent in 2004-05 to 52.2 per cent in 2009-10 respectively. Even though at all-India level the share of self-employed has come down and share of casual employed has increased, still the share of self-employed (54.2%) in 2009-10 is more than casual employed (38.6%).

Table 2: Percentage Distribution of Workers by Category of Employment in Rural Areas in 2004-05 and 2009-10

Category	Andhra Pradesh		Karnataka	
	2004-05	2009-10	2004-05	2009-10
Self Employed	47.9	40.8	60.2	54.2
Regular Employed	7.2	6.9	7.1	7.3
Causal Employed	45	52.2	32.8	38.6

Note: Figures related to UPSS

Source: Collected from respective large sample of NSSO Employment and Unemployment Survey.

The MGNREGA was introduced in February 2006; thus the comparative analysis of NSSO data from 61st (2004-05) and 66th round (2009-10) will shed some light on how the Act was designed and implemented to tackle the issue of employment guarantee in rural Andhra Pradesh, whether it has been able to achieve its purpose and what further improvements can be suggested by analysing the unemployment data.

Rural Labour Force Participation Rate

Persons categorized as working (employed) and also those who are seeking or available for work (unemployed) together constitute the labour force. The estimates of rural Labour Force Participation Rate based on UPSS in Andhra Pradesh and all-India level by male and female between 2004-05 and 2009-10 are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Rural Labour Force Participation Rates for all ages (in per cent): 2004-05 and 2009-10

Gender	Andhra Pradesh		All India	
	2004-05	2009-10	2004-05	2009-10
Female	48.5	44.7	33	26.5
Male	61.2	60.6	55.4	55.6
Persons	54.8	52.7	44.5	41.4

Note: Figures correspond to UPSS

Source: Collected from respective large sample of NSS Employment and Unemployment Survey.

During 2009-10, LFPR for males and females in rural areas in Andhra Pradesh were higher compared with all India level. The rate quite higher among females. Even though the LFPR is significantly lower among females than males in rural Andhra Pradesh and at all-India level, the rate of labour participation by rural females in Andhra Pradesh is quite higher compared to females at all-India. To elaborate, in 2009-10, the LFPR for males was 60.6 per cent and females 44.7 per cent in rural Andhra Pradesh. During the same period at all-India level the LFPR in rural areas for males and females is 55.6 per cent and 26.5 per cent respectively. Across gender, it is evident from the table 3 that decline in LFPR in 2009-10 compared to 2004-

05 is much higher among rural females. Among the rural females, the LFPR declined by 3.8 per cent in Andhra Pradesh compared to about 6.5 per cent at the all-India level.

Rural Work Participation Rate

Persons engaged in any economic activity constitute the work force. Like the LFPR, the WPR is in rural female s is considerably lower than the male WPRs during 2009-10 both Andhra Pradesh and at all-India level. Like the LFPR, the Work force participation rates in rural areas and among males and females are higher in Andhra Pradesh in general compared to all India figures. Further, the rate of work participation by rural females in Andhra Pradesh is quite higher compared to females at all-India. Details are given in Table 4.

Table 4 : Rural Work Participation Rates/Worker population ratio (in per cent): 2004-05 and 2009-10

Gender	Andhra Pradesh		All India	
	2004-05	2009-10	2004-05	2009-10
Female	48.3	44.3	32.7	26.1
Male	60.5	59.8	54.6	54.7
Persons	54.4	52.1	43.9	40.8

Note: Figures correspond to UPSS

Source: Collected from respective large sample of NSS Employment and Unemployment Survey.

The gender differential in the WPR was distinct in Andhra Pradesh. The WPR for rural males was 60 per cent while it was 44 per cent for rural females during 2009-10 in Andhra Pradesh. During the same period WPR among males and females at all-India level is 55 per cent and 26 per cent respectively. In Andhra Pradesh, in rural females the WPR has declined to 4 percentage point in 2009-10 compared to 2004-05, whereas at all-India, decline in WPR among rural females is about 6.6 percentage point during the same period. The decline in male WPR in rural Andhra Pradesh is very marginal. Similar to LFPR, during the period 2004-05 to 2009-10, the WPR according to usual status remained almost the same for rural males at all-India level.

Rural Unemployment Ratio

Persons are considered unemployed, if he or she was not working, but was either seeking or was available for work for a relatively long time during the reference period. This in effect gives the unutilized portion of labour force. It is a more refined indicator of unemployment in population than the proportion of unemployed, which is nearly the number of unemployed per 1000 persons in the population as a whole. This higher rate of unemployment in CDS measure indicates prevalence of high seasonal unemployment. For unemployment rate, the CDS-measure has been used, as this measure has been widely agreed to be the one that most fully captures open unemployment.

Table 5 indicates that the unemployment rate in rural areas in Andhra Pradesh and in All-India.

Table 5: Rural Unemployment Rates (in per cent) : 2004-05 and 2009-10

Gender	Andhra Pradesh		All India	
	2004-05	2009-10	2004-05	2009-10
Female	12.2	7.8	8.7	8
Male	10	7.3	8	6.4
Persons	10.9	7.5	8.2	6.8

Note: Figures related to CDS

Source: Collected from respective large sample of NSS Employment and Unemployment Survey.

The rural unemployment rates in Andhra Pradesh as well as at All India levels decreased from 2004-05 to 2009-10. In Andhra Pradesh, the rural unemployment rate has however decreased from 10.9 per cent in 2004-05 to 7.5 per cent in 2009-10. Similarly, at All India level, the rural unemployment rate has declined from 8.2 per cent to 6.8 per cent during the same period. This shows that, the rural unemployment in Andhra Pradesh are relatively higher than the all-India average in 2009-10.

The gender differential in unemployment rate in 2009-10 is observed in rural areas of Andhra Pradesh. The unemployment rate among females in rural areas in Andhra Pradesh is higher than those of the males. The rural female unemployment rate in Andhra Pradesh is 7.8 per cent which is higher compared to 7.3 per cent for rural male. At the all-India level also female unemployment rate in rural areas is higher than that of the males. However, the decline in unemployment rate from 2004-05 to 2009-10 in Andhra Pradesh is 4.4 and 2.5 percentage points in rural females and males respectively. During the same period, at all-India level, in rural females the decline is 0.7 percentage point, whereas in male the reduction same as males in rural Andhra Pradesh. The decline in unemployment rates in rural areas especially rural females during 2009-10 in Andhra Pradesh may be due to implementation of MGNREGS in the State and at all-India.

Rural Wages and Earnings

The wages and earnings is one of the indicators to judge the quality of employment and important determinant that has profound implications for bettering employment and productivity of the workers. It is well known that regular employment is considered better, secure and durable and returns associated are usually higher than casual and intermittent nature of employment.

Table 6: Average Wage/salary earnings (in Rs) per day received by Causal labourers (15-59 years), engaged in works other than Public works in Rural Areas

Andhra Pradesh			All India		
Male	Female	Persons	Male	Female	Persons
2009-10					
115.41	75.71	98.47	101.53	68.94	93.06
2004-05					
50.3	30.88	42.13	55.03	34.94	48.89

Source : 61st and 66th Round of Employment and Unemployment Survey, NSSO

Average wage/salary earnings of casual labourers in Andhra Pradesh are higher for males and females in rural areas compared to rural areas at all- India level during 2009-10 (Table 6). Similarly, during the same period, in Andhra Pradesh, rural wages/salary earnings differences among male and female casual labourers engaged in works other than Public works is higher (Rs.39.70) compared to difference in all-India level (Rs.32.59). Further, the percentage increase wage rate in rural Andhra Pradesh in 2009-10 compared to 2004-05 for male is 130% and female is 145%. Similarly, during the same period, the increase at All India level is 85% and 97% respectively for male and female respectively.

As shown in table 7, the average wages received by males and females casual labourers (15-59 years), engaged in public works in rural areas of Andhra Pradesh during 2009-10 is lower than the corresponding figures for males and females at all-India.

Table 7: Average Wages (in Rs.) per day received by rural Casual labourers (15-59 years), engaged in Public works other than MGNREGA in Rural Areas

Andhra Pradesh			All India		
Male	Female	Persons	Male	Female	Persons
2009-10					
91.28	85.44	88.06	98.33	86.11	93.11
2004-05					
39.43	37.55	38.01	65.33	49.19	59.33

Source : 61st and 66th Round of Employment and Unemployment survey, NSSO

The percentage increase in wage among males and females in rural Andhra Pradesh in 2009-10 compared to 2004-05 is 132 per cent and 128 per cent respectively. Whereas, in All-India level during the same period, the percentage increases in wage rate is only 51 per cent and 75 per cent for males and females respectively.

Under Section 6 (1) of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), the unskilled wage rates are notified by the Central Government State-wise. The wage rates so notified were indexed to the Consumer Price Index for Agricultural Labour (CPI-AL) with effect from 01.01.2011. The MGNREGA notified wage rate in Andhra Pradesh is Rs. 80 in 2009-10, which has increased to 100 in 2010-11, and Rs.121 and Rs. 137 in 2011-12 and 2012-13 respectively. MGNREGA wage rate in Andhra Pradesh is lower than those notified by State government in respect of unskilled agricultural labourers under the Minimum Wages Act, 1948.

The wage difference between male and female is very huge in public works other than MGNREGA and non-public works in rural areas. On the other hand, there is non-discriminatory wage under MGNREGA. Since the female wages are far above in the MGNREGA scheme in Andhra Pradesh than the non-public casual works in the state. It attracts females in large numbers in MGNREGA works.

As per Sections 3(2) & 3(3) of MGNREGA, every person who has done the work given to him shall be entitled to receive wages at the wage rate for each day of work and the disbursement of daily wages shall be made on a weekly basis or in any case not later than a fortnight after the date on which such work was done. The MGNREGA works have immensely contributed to the gender-neutrality in wages. For the first time, women wage-earners began to earn equal wages and this has a positive impact on the women-wages in non-MGNREGA works. The female workers are paid much less in non-public works than their male counterparts, and the

statutory minimum wages. A higher wage offered in MGNREGA works compared to prevailing wages adds additional incentive for female workers to work. Similarly, the Act stipulates that work be provided locally, within five kilometers of the residence. This makes participation in MGNREGA work feasible for women as they continue to bear the main responsibility of household work (Khera and Nayak, 2009).

MGNREGA in Andhra Pradesh

In order to raise the level of income of rural poor, there is imperative need to tackle problem of unemployment & underemployment among the rural people in Andhra Pradesh especially rural females. The poor cannot afford themselves to stay out of work for a longer period. In rural areas, the people are not only irregularly employed but are also largely classified as casual wage earners/labourers. The poor are poor not because they are unemployed but because they are irregularly employed as 'casual wage labourers' at very low and uncertain wages, or derive sporadic, volatile, and uncertain incomes from self-employment, mostly in the unorganised and informal sectors. This employment at very low levels of productivity and income, sometimes lower than what is considered to be necessary for basic sustenance is a bigger problem than that of unemployment. Further, workforce participation rates in rural areas declined, more for women than men.

The work participation rates of men and women hover around 60 per cent and 44 per cent respectively in rural Andhra Pradesh in 2009-10 indicating the limited opportunities available for women. Most of the women workers are marginal workers suggesting a low employment status enjoyed by them. The gender discrimination in wages is very conspicuous and rarely the women workers are paid the minimum wages as stipulated by the State. Majority of women workers are casual labour and thereby are exposed to risks of non-availability of regular work as well as adequate wages. The time period and duration of the women's participation in the labour market are decided by the adult males and the latter have greater control over the earnings of women. Therefore, any gender sensitive intervention in the rural labour market is the answer to these anomalies.

Against this background, the Government of Andhra Pradesh has formulated the Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme called Andhra Pradesh State Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme in January 2006 in conformity with National Act, in the first phase MGNREGS-AP was launched simultaneously in 13 districts viz., Anantapur, Adilabad, Chittoor, Kadapa, Nizamabad, Karimnagar, Vizianagaram, Ranga Reddy, Medak, Khammam, Mahabubnagar, Warangal, and Nalgonda. In 2007-08 as part of phase II, the scheme was extended to six more districts viz., Srikakulam, East Godavari, Prakasam, Nellore, Kurnool and Guntur. By 2008-09 it was extended to the remaining three districts to guarantee at least 100 days of wage employment to every rural household every year and to reinforce the commitment towards livelihood security in rural areas.

The participation of women in the gender sensitive development programmes such as MGNREGA can correct such discrimination against gender. The rights based and women centric MGNREGA can make a significant change in the gender relations. The MGNREGA could be regarded as having significant achievements in terms of coverage of households, inclusion of women and socially disadvantaged groups as well the relevance of the types of assets created. It has generated more employment for the rural poor than any other program. The average persondays generated per household in Andhra Pradesh and at all-India is shown in table 8.

Table 8: Average Persondays of Employment Per Participating Household in Andhra Pradesh and in all -India under MGNREGA

FY	Andhra Pradesh	All India
2006-07	31	43
2007-08	42	42
2008-09	48	48
2009-10	66	54
2010-11	54	47
2011-12	59	44
2012-13	56	46

Source: Ministry of Rural Development (www.nrega.nic.in)

Since the work guarantee is limited to one hundred days per household and year, the purpose of the MGNREGA, however, is not to provide full employment but to offer temporary earning opportunities in periods of low labour demand such as during the agricultural lean seasons or in times of drought, floods, and other natural calamities. The average person days per household in Andhra Pradesh has been increasing since the inception of the scheme and more than national average since 2009-10. Being a drought year, during 2009-10, there was a sudden jump in average person days per household due higher demand for employment.

Women Participation under MGNREGA in Andhra Pradesh

As MGNREGA is a right-based programme, participation of the community enriches the spirit of the programme. The Act empowers ordinary people to play an active role in the implementation of employment guarantee schemes through Gram Sabhas, social audits, participatory planning and other means. It is very important to make sure that the disadvantaged groups, low status groups, minority groups and poorer groups are not left out in consultation process and participation process.

No doubt, that the MGNREGA has opened up a new opportunity for women workers. It provides some explicit entitlement for women to facilitate their full participation. The several gender sensitive features that are attractive for women workers into MGNREGA works are as under:

- i. Para(6) of Schedule II of MGNREGA stipulates that while providing employment priority shall be given to women in such a way that at least 1/3rd of beneficiaries shall be women who have registered and requested for work under the scheme.
- ii. The guidelines spell out clear instruction for equal payment of wages for men and women. 'Equal wages shall be paid to both men and women workers and the provision of the Equal Remuneration Act, 1976 shall be complied with.'
- iii. An individual account must compulsorily be opened in the name of all women MGNREGA workers and their wages directly credited to their account for the number of days worked by them.
- iv. As per the guidelines, a local Vigilance and Monitoring Committee is to be appointed with members form the immediate locality or village where the work is undertaken, to

- monitor the progress and quality of work. ‘The gram sabha will elect the members of this Committee and ensure that SC/STs and women are represented on it.’
- v. The guidelines mention a 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 meeting maintaining female participants alongside those from other disadvantage groups. ‘The timing of the forum must be such that it is convenient in particular for REGS (Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme) workers, women and marginalized communities.’
 - vi. Para 27 of Schedule II of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) provides the facilities of safe drinking water, shade for children and periods of rest and first-aid box with adequate material for emergency treatment for minor injuries and other health hazards connected with the work being performed shall be provided at the work site.” Further the guideline mention the need for a crèche at the work site, and for the works to be convenient for families: ‘if some applicants have to be directed to report for work beyond 5 km of their residence, women (especially single women) and older persons should be given preference to work on the work sites 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.’
 - vii. As per para 28 of Schedule II of the Act, “In case the number of children below the age of six years accompanying the women working at any site are five or more, provisions shall be made to depute one of such women worker to look after such children.”
 - viii. Finally, through recognising a single person as a ‘household’, the Act makes it possible for widows and other single women to access this work.

Table 9 : Generation of Employment by Women in Andhra Pradesh and in All- India under MGNREGA

FY	Andhra Pradesh				All India			
	No. of Households Provided Employment (in Cr.)	Person days Generated (in Cr.)	Women Person days (Cr.)	Percentage of Women Persondays	No. of Households Provided Employment (in Cr.)	Person days Generated (in Cr.)	Women Person days (in Cr.)	Percentage of Women Persondays
2006-07	0.22	6.79	3.92	58	2.10	90.5	36.4	40
2007-08	0.48	20.10	11.61	58	3.39	143.6	61.2	43
2008-09	0.57	27.35	15.91	58	4.51	216.3	103.6	48
2009-10	0.62	40.44	23.50	58	5.26	283.6	136.4	48
2010-11	0.62	33.52	19.12	57	5.49	257.2	122.7	48
2011-12	0.50	29.39	16.99	58	5.00	219.0	105.3	48
2012-13	0.58	32.39	18.89	58	4.98	229.8	117.9	51

Source: Ministry of Rural Development (www.nrega.nic.in)

Table 9 presents the summary fact sheet of physical performance of MGNREGA especially women developed based on the official data from the Ministry's website. Obvious as it may be, the first point to note is the extraordinary scale of the MGNREGA. In the FY 2006-07, in Andhra Pradesh about 6.79 crore person-days of employment was generated by 0.22 Crore participating households. Persondays generation and participating households increased to 32.39 crore and 0.58 crore respectively in the FY 2012-13. The performance of 2009-10 was significantly higher than other years due to severe drought situation in the state and cry for employment from rural workforce due to lack of employment opportunities in agriculture sector.

No doubt that MGNREGA is the first Act in its type which is more inclusive in nature. When it comes to the inclusion of women labourers in MGNREGA, nearly half of the whole workforce is women since 2008-09 if seen from aggregate data at national level. Since inception, the women persondays of employment generated, as reported by the State, indicate substantial participation of women. The share of women in total persondays generation is 58 per cent on average every year. Andhra Pradesh is one of the few states in the country with high participation of women in MGNREGA. Further, percentage of women participation in Andhra Pradesh is higher than all-India average in all the years since inception of the scheme. At all India level, the share of women persondays has increased from 40 per cent in FY 2006-07 to 51 per cent in FY 2012-13. Even though the participation of women in Andhra Pradesh under MGNREGA is much higher than stipulated 33 per cent as per the Act, there is further need for increasing the absolute number of days of employment per household especially women in Andhra Pradesh to tackle the problem of unemployment in rural females.

Women like MGNREGA work for various reasons. Firstly, it is locally available. The Act provides that work is to be provided within five kilometers of the residence of a worker. Therefore, women's participation in the work has been feasible. Secondly, there is less chance of exploitation. There is a statutory minimum wage, and hence wage earned in MGNREGA work is much more than the works under a private employer, more so in backward areas. The piece rate wages and formation of small and mixed / solely women groups, have given leverage to evolve their working norms to suit to their conditions. Thirdly, there are regularity and predictability of working hours. As such, not only the members of the existing workers group prefer MGNREGA work, but there is also the possibility of new entrants into the women workers group. Again, as per the revised schedule of MGNREG Act, work is limited to seven hours a day, which is seldom expected in other works.

MGNREGA work can also protect women against migration in search of work. This leads to an improvement in the quality of their life through avoidance of costs and risks associated with migration. Because of these measures, it is mentioned that a large number of women are keen to get into MGNREGA work.

The increased contribution to the household income would also enhance their say particularly in decisions relating to food consumption, health care and schooling of her children. Enhanced regular cash flow holds promise of improved savings and credit worthiness in the market and thereby facilitates better access to credit. Thus, improved wage incomes to the women would help in better investment resulting in health and nutrition status and education of the children.

Issues and Challenges in the implementation of MGNREGA in Andhra Pradesh

Mobilizing, organizing and enabling the poor are necessary conditions for empowerment of rural poor particularly women. In socially backward environments, the magnitude of economic

benefits flowing to the poor women is a critical factor. Additionally, the allocations for IEC and provision to form workers' associations (labour groups), participatory planning, provision to entrust the execution of works to Community Based Organisations (CBOs), community based monitoring, and social audit provide the needed framework for the empowerment through MGNREGA. Therefore, proper and complete information dissemination about the rights, entitlements and grievance redressal mechanism amongst the worker community is a necessary condition to make the poor empowered. GPs and SHGs are the key sources of information on MGNREGA. The women members of GP should be entrusted with the task of sensitization and mobilization of women workers and even provision of counselling services. The media should reach the rural community and more so women by using simplified and local dialect. The information sharing through visuals and in particular films besides involving NGOs would be more effective. The formation and capacity building of Vigilance and Monitoring Committees is another measure for wider dissemination of MGNREGA related information.

The membership in SHGs *ceteris paribus*, has made favourable dent on the gender relations in the social and economic spheres at the household level in Andhra Pradesh. Implementation processes are key to improve the quality of participation of marginalised especially poor and women in the programme. Gender sensitivity of the delivery system has a major role in motivating the women wage seekers for participation. Women functionaries in MGNREGS are also expected to influence participation of women in a positive way, as it is assumed that women tend to respond more quickly to the needs of women.

Even though, the women participation is quite high in percentage-wise however, number of days of employment to household especially women has to be increased considering the rate of unemployment among rural females in Andhra Pradesh. The successful implementation of MGNREGA depends on several critical issues and actions, which include the following:

- i. As per the Act and operational guidelines of Government of India, IEC activities have to be undertaken to popularize the scheme and to bring awareness among the rural households & general public to know about the objectives of the scheme & their basic entitlements wherever the low ground awareness is noticed.
- ii. Realistic estimation of labour demand through household survey of job card holders, appropriate planning of works and their execution to ensure adequate worker participation rate in MGNREGA is very much essential
- iii. The works on the land of marginalized sections viz., SC, ST households should be given more priority and special efforts should be made to provide full 100 days of employment to these households.
- iv. Focus should be given for the productivity and durability of the works to avoid unproductive expenditure. Therefore establishment of a robust quality management system by recruiting independent quality monitors to ensure quality of durable assets created under MGNREGA is essential.
- v. Through convergence of MGNREGA with other programmes/schemes, we will be able to attain more effectively the objective of creation of durable assets and strengthening the livelihood resource base of the rural poor. The convergence efforts will enable planned and coordinated public investments in rural areas and more employment opportunities.

Creating awareness among the poorest of the poor, apart from other stakeholders, about MGNREGS and convergence with other patterning departments should be done on a campaign mode.

- vi. To ensure more women participation in MGNREGA, worksite facilities such as crèches, drinking water, shade etc. should be provided
- vii. Identify widowed women, deserted women and destitute women, who qualify as a household under the Act, to ensure that they are provided job cards and are given 100 days of work.
- viii. Conduct time and motion studies to formulate gender sensitive Schedule of Rates (SoRs) and also ensure accurate capturing of work done by women at worksites.

By ensuring the above mentioned provisions in the implementation of MGNREGA in the State, the participation of women both in terms of percentage and number of days of employment per household per year would further be increased.

Conclusion and Way Forward

Even though, the women participation in MGNREGA is quite high in Andhra Pradesh, to eradicate the problems of rural unemployment and underemployment especially in women and to reduce the differentials in unemployment rate among male and female, the further more participation of women in MGNREGA is required. The high incidence of poverty is directly related to prevalence of under employment and unemployment on large scale. The rural workforce especially women, continues to suffer due to excessive seasonality of employment, lack of wage employment opportunities and low wage rates. Migration of labour, discrimination between wages paid to men and women, distressed child labour etc. are therefore, common features of rural areas. The 'rights based' and 'gender sensitive' MGNREGA is an opportunity to correct the prevailing gender bias in the labour market. The participation of women in MGNREGS in Andhra Pradesh is largely on account of lack of sufficient agriculture works in the villages and high wages in MGNREGS. The women have to realize that participation in MGNREGS is their right and can demand work from the delivery system. The women workers need to be well informed, organized and enabled. The IEC strategy has to be effectively implemented. Further, the MGNREGA women workers have to be organized into SHGs, if they are not members. The members of SHGs have to be sensitized on social issues and members be provided with counselling services to redress their grievances. The delivery system comprising officials and elected representatives has to be proactive and involve community more so women and socially disadvantaged in all phases of MGNREGS.

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