



## **WOMEN EMPOWERMENT THROUGH MGNREGA: A CASE STUDY OF RANCHI DISTRICT**

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*The study aims to study how MGNREGA has provided empowerment to women. The study was conducted in four villages of Ranchi District. 120 households were selected on the basis of systematic random sampling. Tools like tabulation, means of central tendency, regression and trend line analysis were used. The analysis showed that MGNREGA had many positive impacts on women empowerment but the study also identified some sectors where more efforts were needed.*

**Keywords:** Women Empowerment, MGNREGA, Decision making

### **INTRODUCTION**

MNREGA was launched by the Lok Sabha on Aug 23rd, 2005 and notified on September 5th, 2005 and ensured guaranteed wage employment to be provided for 100 days for anyone who seeks it. This landmark legislation in context of social security was the culmination of the directed efforts of both social activists and government for achieving poverty alleviation, especially with respect to women. 'Rights' replaced 'needs' and the Schumpeterian 'Workplace though citizenship rights' replaced Keynesian concept of 'welfare'. (Amit Bhaduri, 2006) With one sweep, MGNREGA managed to cover areas like women employment, financial inclusion, sustainable rural development, environmental dimensions and much more. Jharkhand was one of the states where this programme was implemented in the first phase due to its high intensity of poverty, high dependence on agriculture, poor infrastructure, high migration rates, low level of employment opportunities and the need for creating public works.

MGNREGA is one rare employment guarantee programme that recognises the relevance of incorporating gender equity and women empowerment in its intrinsic design. There are various provision under the Act that ensure women have an easy access to work, decent work conditions, getting equal wage payments and representation in decision making bodies. Schedule II, Para 6 states that "priority should be given to women in the allocation of work in such a way that at least one-third of the beneficiaries shall be women". The Act encourages for women to apply for work and proactive steps will facilitate their participation in the Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme.

Women's empowerment, which attempts to strengthen women's economic, social, and political power, is a crucial topic in today's globe. Due to the fact that many organisations and countries now see the significance of gender equality for sustainable development, the empowerment of women has now been an important constituent of growth of any country. According to UN, there are five components of women's rights. These are: sense of self-worth, right to choose, right to opportunities, right of choice, ability to bring about social change. Certain steps which are needed to ensure women empowerment are to include them

in meetings, providing maternity and childcare needs, providing a safe environment for work, providing strong support groups, legal provisions, participation in social audits and panchayats, etc. Through a study conducted in Mewati (Haryana) on women empowerment, Ahmed, Shemin, Faizen Khan Sherwai, Mohammed Jamshed (2017) stressed that women empowerment could bring about a spectacular development in the economy. MGNREGA could greatly contribute to this by facilitating entrepreneurship, capacity building, education, health and hygiene of the rural folk.

Gyaneshwar, D (2016) stressed that it was necessary to mobilise the massive women power of the country if there has to be development in all spheres of the economy as women constitute a major share of chronically poor population of India. In spite of its drawbacks, MGNREGA has provided better access to employment, minimum wages and safe and decent working conditions for women. Ahangar, Goward Bashir (2011) observed that the condition of women has improved a lot due to various literacy programmes, awareness programmes and employment programmes like MGNREGA. Ghosh, Santanu, Abhinav (2017) in their paper titled 'MGNREGA and Women Participation: A Case study from Purulia District, West Bengal' stressed on the point that vulnerability and inequality was present for women in every sphere. But due to programmes like MGNREGA, there has been a boost in self-confidence and economic independence in women which has led to a cascading effect in every area. Pragabhal, Das K.V (2017) said that the economic development of women is a necessary condition for improving the quality of life, bettering the social opportunity structure, competing on equal terms, fighting against exploitation and violence.

#### **Providing Women with Employment Leads to**

- ♦ women's productive contribution to society,
- ♦ overcoming their inner fears and feelings of inadequacy and inferiority
- ♦ women having some control over their life
- ♦ equality and self-reliance
- ♦ strengthening women's support group
- ♦ assessing capacity to resist injustices imposed by a patriarchal society
- ♦ give them control over material assets
- ♦ challenge the existing power equations of a traditional society
- ♦ help in capacity building
- ♦ helps in creating awareness about the changing society

#### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This research has been conducted in four villages of Ranchi District. The study is mainly based on primary data which has been collected from 120 households working under the MGNREGA. Systematic random sampling technique was used for the selection of respondents. A carefully constructed schedule along with interview method was used for data collection. After data collection different statistical tools for analysis like tabulation, classification, diagrams, means of central tendency, regression analysis and trend lines.

**DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION**

An analysis of demographic profile of households shows that majority of females were in the age group of 30-50 years (37.5%). Nearly 25.8% were illiterates and only about 13.3% had studied upto middle school. 96.7% were married and most of them (68.6%) followed Sarna religion. Around 68.5% were St and 25.2% belonged to OBC caste. Majority of the respondents were working in Self-employed agricultural sector.

The different types of assets owned before and after MNREGA has been shown in the table given below:

**Table-1, Availability of Assets Before & After MGNREGA in Female Households  
(Figures in Percentage)**

	<b>Before MGNREGA</b>	<b>After MGNREGA</b>	<b>Increase</b>
<b>Electricity</b>	72.5	98.3	25.8
Fan	13.3	79.2	65.8
Television	2.5	50.8	48.3
Toilet	5.0	91.7	86.7
Motorcycle	4.2	39.2	35.0
Mobile	1.7	95.0	93.3
LPG Connection	1.7	90.8	89.2

The table clearly shows that the number of assets owned has visibly increased post MNREGA. Having a toilet at home falls under necessities but it was found that only 5 percent of respondents had a toilet in their homes before MGNREGA and this increased to 91.8 percent post MGNREGA showing a phenomenal rise of 86.7 percent of female respondents having toilets. This indicates that MGNREGA has led to a tremendous increase in basic facilities which the respondents can now afford. An overall analysis of assets owned before and after MGNREGA showed that the asset base of households has increased and hence the standard of living, health, and well-being of respondents has also shown development.

The impact of MNREGA on women empowerment was studied with the help of some important indicators like their role in household decision making, how much control do they have on their own earnings, has there been a change in their perceptions and attitudes about their life and do they involve themselves in social areas to make a difference.

When questioned about decisions regarding their health, nearly 72.5 percent of respondents said that they took these decisions on their own. They were asked if they visited a doctor and had medicines on their own and to this the response was positive. This meant that this domain was strong where empowerment was concerned and they could freely spend money on their treatment as well as their children's treatment. Nearly 26.6 percent said that they took their

health-related decisions jointly with their family members but the most positive thing about this survey was that except for 0.8 percent of respondents, all others were consulted about their health-related problems.

**Table-2, Decisions on Health Issues (Figures in Percentage)**

<b>Villages</b>	<b>Decision by respondent only</b>	<b>Joint decisions taken</b>	<b>No role of respondent</b>	<b>Total</b>
Agartoli	56.7	40.0	3.3	100.0
Janum	73.3	26.7	0.0	100.0
Kannoj	76.7	23.3	0.0	100.0
Kumbatoli	83.3	16.7	0.0	100.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>72.5</b>	<b>26.7</b>	<b>0.8</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Education of children is considered to be one of the most important sources of capital formation of a country. Even though the Government had been making consistent efforts in this direction by making education free and compulsory till the age of 14, it was ultimately the family who decided about matters related to their children's education. The analysis showed that only 30 percent of the respondents took sole decisions about the education of their children and the level to which they would study. 85 out of 120 respondents i.e. 70.8 percent said that the decisions were taken with consultations along with other members of the family. About 4.2 percent said that they were not asked about the education of their children. Thus, it can be said that since education is an important sector, decisions are taken jointly by all family members.

**Table-3, Decision About Children's Education and Level of Schooling (Figures in %)**

<b>Villages</b>	<b>Decision by respondent only</b>	<b>Joint decisions taken</b>	<b>No role of respondent</b>	<b>Total</b>
Agartoli	30.0	70.0	0.0	100.0
Janum	30.0	66.7	3.3	100.0
Kannoj	13.3	76.7	10.0	100.0
Kumbatoli	30.0	70.0	0.0	100.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>25.9</b>	<b>70.8</b>	<b>3.3</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Decisions related to employment also show the economic independence experienced by women. It was important to know whether women were given the freedom to choose their area of work or they were forced to take up employment according to the wishes of their family members. With this purpose in mind, the study found that nearly 63.3 percent of respondents decided to work under MGNREGA on their own, whereas 35.8 percent said that this decision had been jointly taken with other members of the family and only 0.8 percent

responded that they had not been asked but made to work under MGNREGA. This domain also shows satisfactory levels as women choose their work, but there may be another side also ie the unavailability of other types of work in their villages. Also, as stated before the level of education of women may be the reason why limited work was there for them.

**Table-4, Decision to Work under MGNREGA (Figures in Percentage)**

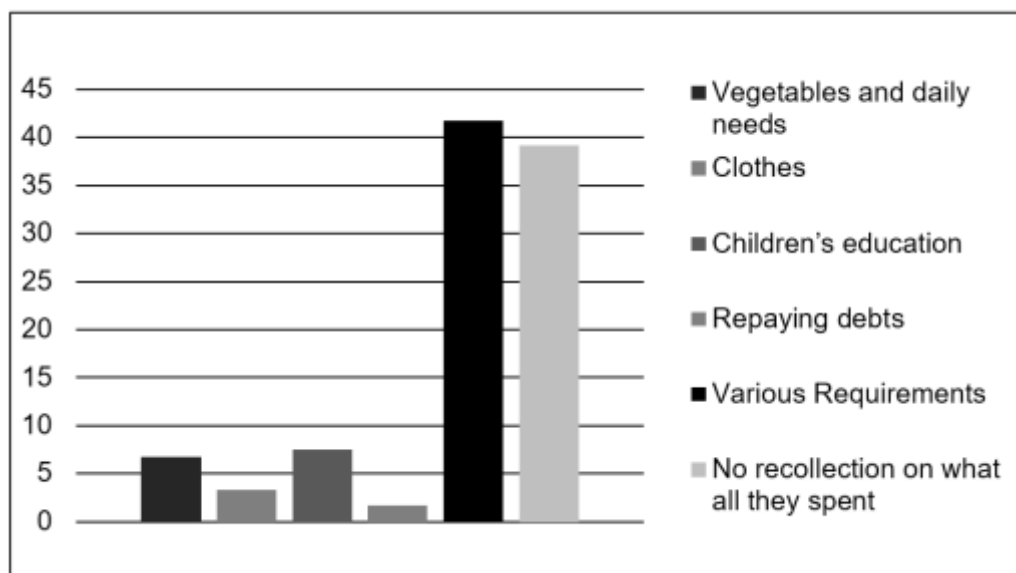
<b>Villages</b>	<b>Decision by respondent only</b>	<b>Joint decisions taken</b>	<b>No role of respondent</b>	<b>Total</b>
Agartoli	66.7	33.3	0.0	100.0
Janum	66.7	33.3	0.0	100.0
Kannoj	53.3	43.3	3.3	100.0
Kumbatoli	66.7	33.3	0.0	100.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>63.3</b>	<b>35.8</b>	<b>0.8</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Control over their income and the freedom to decide how to spend the income earned is a clear indicator of women empowerment. This involved questioning them on whether they were allowed to spend their income as they desired, what things did they spend their incomes on, how much control they had on their husband's earnings, who made all decisions regarding expenditure on expensive items, etc. In this regard, it was found that nearly 90 percent of the respondents claimed that all decisions about buying property or a house was made jointly along with their family members. 4.2 percent of respondents said that these decisions were taken solely by them, whereas, 5.8 percent replied that they were not consulted about any decisions taken regarding buying property or a house. 10 percent of respondents of Agartoli and Kannoj said that they were not consulted in such matters. This result was not a surprise as many important decisions in households are taken jointly by all family members even today.

**Table-5, Decisions About Spending (Figures in Percentage)**

<b>Villages</b>	<b>Husband's Income</b>				<b>Own Income</b>			
	<b>Decision by respondent only</b>	<b>Joint decisions taken</b>	<b>No role of respondent</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Decision by respondent only</b>	<b>Joint decisions taken</b>	<b>No role of respondent</b>	<b>Total</b>
Agartoli	33.3	66.7	0.0	100.0	60.0	40.0	0.0	100.0
Janum	23.3	66.7	10.0	100.0	56.7	43.3	0.0	100.0
Kannoj	23.3	56.7	20.0	100.0	63.3	36.7	0.0	100.0
Kumbatoli	16.7	83.3	0.0	100.0	53.3	46.7	0.0	100.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>24.2</b>	<b>68.3</b>	<b>7.5</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>58.3</b>	<b>41.7</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Spending Pattern Among Respondents**



Majority of the women spend their income on their requirements and miscellaneous items and not on daily requirements. This shows that the men are considered to be the main providers of the family and are expected to spend on education, food and repaying debts. This is also a clear indicator of women empowerment as it shows that women have the freedom to spend their income in any way that they wish.

## **CONCLUSION**

The study clearly indicates that there has been an improvement in the life of women workers under MGNREGA and they have become more empowered after they started to work under this scheme. Decisions regarding health and spending of their own income are made according to their needs whereas important decisions regarding education of children are jointly taken after discussing with other family members. To conclude, it can be said that MGNREGA has clearly made a major impact in empowering women in rural villages of Ranchi District.

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