

Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA): Promoting inclusion of women in the labour market

Introduction:

Lack of participation of women in the labour market is a major issue for the country. Due to reasons such as, distance between place of work and home, low wages, lack of creche facilities at workplace etc. women find it challenging to participate in economic activities.

Intervention:

With the introduction of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), which guarantees 100 days minimum wage employment to rural households in India, there has been some increase in rural women's participation in economic activities. It was enacted in 2005. It is a flagship programme, now reaching over 50 million households across the country.

The act focusses on women equality and inclusion through provisions such as, one-third quota in each state, provision for crèche facilities, and preference to women, especially single women, to work close to home (Ministry of Rural Development, 2008). There is emphasis on equal wages basis the provisions of the Equal Remuneration Act, 1976. It mandates that work is to be provided locally and there is a provision of on-site childcare for children under six years of age, if there are more than five at a given worksite.

In addition, the wages under the programme often surpasses real average wages received by women

From an administration point of view, there is gender sensitivity in its focus on inclusion of women at local-level committees, and the social audit. Overall, the act/programme reflect commitment to equality of women.

Impact/ Learning:

Even though the programme does not have a stated intention to enhance women's participation, it has made significant impact in this area (Azam, 2012; Das, Joshi and Vanneman 2015; Dasgupta and Sudarshan, 2011). Various studies highlight the contribution of the programme in increasing women's wages, women's employment in MGNAREGA leading to welfare of the families and the positive impact on women's empowerment

Sources:

Holmes, R. Sadana, N. Rath, R., 2011. *An opportunity for change? Gender analysis of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act*, Overseas Development Institute

Dasgupta, G. and Bárcia de Mattos, F., (2017). *MGNREGA, paid work and women's empowerment*, ILO