



# CHALLENGES AND OPTIONS OF WOMEN WORKERS IN MAHATMA GANDHI NREGS: A KALEIDOSCOPIIC VIEW

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## **Abstract**

The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA), passed in 2005 is the largest SSN programme ever launched in India. Apart from the provision of employment, the Act also considers the creation of durable economic assets to strengthen the resource base of the rural poor as the prime motive of the scheme. One of the striking feature of the MGNREGA is that the Act incorporates the principles of gender equity and empowerment in its design as opposed to other development initiatives which are gender neutral. Though women empowerment was not among the original intentions of the Act, the distinctive features of the Act has attracted more women into the scheme. The paper seeks to examine the salient features of the Act pertaining to women workers and the challenges and options opens up through the scheme in enhancing the capabilities of women.

**Keywords: NREGA, durable assets, gender equity, empowerment, gender neutral**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Rural development policies have been framed and executed in India since 1951 with the inception of planning process. The focal theme of these policies and programmes is to provide a social safety net to the vulnerable rural population in the country. Like many other developing economies, persistence of poverty and unemployment is the main feature of the rural economy in India. Accordingly, the Social Safety Net (SSN) programmes in India strives to ensure food security by extending new avenues for employment. The ultimate motif of these programmes is to enhance rural livelihood and to provide targeted welfare support to the poor and the vulnerable groups in the society. Women are also included in these vulnerable groups since they suffers from social and economic disadvantages which may in turn impede them from leading a better life when compared to their male counterparts. Lack of resources, ill health, socio-cultural norms and practices, short duration of paid employment, poor bargaining power etc. aggravated the penury of rural women in India. In this context, it is ascertained that public funds used to provide safety nets could and indeed should assure women equal access to risk-coping opportunities (Narayanan and Das, 2014).

The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA), passed in 2005 is the largest SSN programme ever launched in India. Initially, the scheme was launched in February 2006 in 200 districts of India. Later in April 2007, it has been extended to 130 more districts and the entire country has been covered from April 2008. The Act was renamed as Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) in 2009. The basic objective of the Act is To enhance the 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 (NIRD, 2009) is the basic objective of the Act. Apart from the provision of employment, the Act also considers the creation of durable economic assets to strengthen the resource base of the rural poor as the prime motive of the scheme. Right based approach to employment distinguishes MGNREGA from the erstwhile public employment schemes launched in India. The Act addressed many of the flaws of the predecessor schemes through its features in design such as introduction of a rights-based framework, a legal guarantee of work as opposed to a government scheme which can be withdrawn by a government at will, incentive structure for performance, disincentive for non-performance, time bound guarantee of work within 15

days of demand for work, demand based resource availability and accountability of public delivery system through social audits (Mahrotra, 2008). Albeit MGNREGA is an employment programme aimed to generate employment and to create productive assets, its unique characteristics and the operational structure unravels the potential of the scheme as a development initiative which can accentuate the growth process.

One of the striking feature of the MGNREGA is that the Act incorporates the principles of gender equity and empowerment in its design as opposed to other development initiatives which are gender neutral. Though women empowerment was not among the original intentions of the Act, the distinctive features of the Act has attracted more women into the scheme. During the first two years since its inception in 2006, the participation of women in MGNREGA increases marginally from 40 percent in 2006-07 to 44 percent in 2007-08 (Khera and Nayak, 2009). Now, Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) has completed a decade in implementation, at this juncture too, administrative data shows that the scheme has indeed drawn a large number of women to the work fields. Economic Survey, 2018 shows that among 4.6 crore households who have given employment under MGNREGS, 54 percent were women. The locally available nature of work, reputation as a work offered by government, regularity and predictability of working hours, better and equal payment of wages, less chances of exploitation etc. has attracted women to work under MGNREGS. Thus MGNREGS gives a space for rural women to work as a group and to earn a living so that they can lead a better life. Moreover, they are freed from poorly paid and irregular employment opportunities given by the private labour market. Nevertheless, anecdotal evidences shows that there are some barriers such as social norms, rationing of work and other fraudulent practices in several places that may in turn impede them from demanding MGNREGS works. MGNREGS has the potential to address the vulnerability of women in conditions of poverty and their subtle positions within the household and society by guaranteeing them work and by empowering them socially and economically through its operational structure and design of the Act. Studies have highlighted that MGNREGS heralds a new trajectory to women development and empowerment (Khera, 2008; Narayanan, 2008; Khera and Nayak, 2009; Pankaj and Tankha, 2010; Narayanan and Das, 2014; Vij et.al, 2017;). The scheme has a number of direct and indirect benefits to empower rural women socially and economically. Women's participation in the MGNREGS has been encouraging in various states in India though there are inter-state variations. Khera (2008) has rightly remarked MGNREGA as the 'Empowerment Guarantee Act'. Hence, it is pertinent to highlight the importance of MGNREGS with regard to women workers and to identify the factors which impede them from enjoying the full potential of the legislation. Against this backdrop, the paper attempts to examine MGNREGS as a development and an empowerment initiative which can stimulate the development process and foster women development. The rest of the paper is organized as follows. Section II presents different approaches to women development. Section III examines effects of MGNREGS on women workers and section IV provides the summary and conclusion.

## II

### DIFFERENT APPROACHES TO WOMEN DEVELOPMENT

World Bank describes empowerment as 'the expansion of freedom of choice and action. It means increasing one's authority and control over resources and decisions that affect one's life (Acharya et.al, 2012). Women empowerment also mandates freedom and autonomy of all kinds and improvement of their social, political, economical and health status. Women's equal access to and control over economic and financial resources is crucial for the accomplishment of economic growth and development. The distribution of economic and financial resources in the country shall be gender neutral. This will increase positive multiplier effects in attaining the development goals such as poverty reduction and welfare of children. United Nations World Survey (2009) on the role of women in development noted that development rationales for enhancing women's access to economic and financial resources include women's role as 'safety net of last resort' in economic downturns. Thus, it is imperative that women's participation, development and empowerment is a means to achieve the goals of development. Over the years, many approaches have evolved out to secure women's development. The major approaches are briefly discussed below:

#### *The Welfare Approach*

This approach addressed the needs of women within the context of their reproductive roles. This approach was practiced during 1950's and 1960's. Due importance was given to mother and child health, child care and nutrition. Women are perceived as passive beneficiaries in the development process. There was a general belief that economic policies of modernization and growth

would trickle down to the poor women and they would get the benefit. Unfortunately these policies have placed women at a disadvantage relative to men. Their capability to participate, contribute and to benefit from these development policies are in fact unutilized. As a result, the pace of economic development was slow and uneven. This was the approach followed during the colonial periods.

### *The Equality Approach*

The Equity Approach dealt with gender equality and to eliminate discrimination based on sex. In contrast to the Welfare Approach, Equity Approach identifies women as active participants in the development process. The contribution of women was also considered as indispensable for development. Similarly, the benefits that accrued from development should also be divided equally between men and women. The emphasis on revaluing women's contribution and share of benefits strides that this approach dealt with the issues of policy and legal measures as a method of bringing about equity. Equality Approach was the first Women in Development approach emerged during the UN Decade of Women.

### *The Anti-Poverty Approach*

The pitfalls in the Equity Approach gave path to the emergence of the Anti-Poverty Approach which focuses on improving poor women's income generation capacity. This approach considers both the productive and reproductive role of women. Lack of access to resources such as land, education, credit, skills etc. increased the poverty levels of poor women especially in rural areas. To overcome these deficiencies, the Anti-Poverty Approach (second WID approach) strives to provide women sustainable income generating skills which involves micro enterprise development, cash cropping and opportunities for income diversification at the household level. Enhanced income increases financial independence, improves the decision making power, and raises self-confidence. Nevertheless, a major limitation of this approach is that women's reproductive roles, social and cultural constraints are not addressed under this approach. The approach completely focuses on reinforcing the basic needs and ignored the strategic needs of women.

### *The Efficiency Approach*

Efficiency approach also focuses on women's income generation in order to reduce poverty. But, unlike the anti-poverty approach, the ultimate goal of efficiency approach is not only to reduce poverty but also to bring women to the mainstream of the economy. Education and training programmes are the key strategies of the approach. The decision making power of women can be enhanced through these programmes. Efficiency approach recognises that without the active involvement of women in economic activities, human resources remains under-utilised and slacken the development process. Women labour force in economic activities utilises human resources fully, improves gender equity, enhances production and thereby stimulates economic growth and development. The Efficiency Approach is a by-product of 1980's Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP) of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.

### *The Empowerment or Autonomy Approach*

The Empowerment Approach proliferates with the emergence Gender and Development Approach (GAD) during 1990's. This approach associates with third world feminist and grass roots organisations' struggle to increase the self-reliance of women and to impact change at the policy, legislative, societal, economic and other levels to their advantage. They supposes that women's subordination is purely the outcome of male-claimed superiority and underlying social structures. The strategy of empowerment approach is awareness raising and place women firmly as active participants to ensure change. Due priority is given to building organisational skills and self-esteem of women so as to equip them as the active participants and to extend choices and decisions at their advantage. Moreover, this approach addresses key aspects such as discrimination, good governance, women's rights and empowerment, alleviating gender disparities, strengthening women's group and organisations, improving gender relations and working towards gender equality.

## WOMEN IN MGNREGS

The MGNREGA passed in 2005 is a landmark event in the history of rural employment programmes in India. The design and organisational structure of the Act is widely debatable especially in relation to coverage, targeting and auditing. The labour market implications and participants' welfare in MGNREGS has raised inquisitiveness among social scientists and policy makers (Vij et.al, 2017). Apart from the immediate goal of being a form of social security for the rural poor, by extending them local employment, it is expected that MGNREGS would contribute to other second round effects such as building a robust and active Gram Panchayats, empowering women and strengthening the resource base of rural areas. The uniqueness of MGNREGS can be exhibited through the percentage of women participation. Since the inception of the programme in 2006 till now, official data reveals that more than half of the workers in MGNREGS is women. With a national participation rate of 47 percent, evidence reveals that women are participating in the scheme more actively than in other works. The scheme extends work opportunity for women who would have otherwise remain unemployed or underemployed (MGNREGA Sameeksha, 2012). The gender dimension of the MGNREGS gives social scientists, researchers and policy makers an impetus to divulge MGNREGS's potential in empowering women by providing them work opportunities.

## AN OVERVIEW OF MGNREGS

Table 1: MGNREGS\*- At a glance

Total No of Job Cards issued (In Cr)	12.8
Total No. of Workers (In Cr)	25.08
Total No. of Active Job Cards (In Cr)	7.38
Total No. of Active Workers (In Cr)	11.42
SC worker against active workers (%)	19.95
ST worker against active workers (%)	16.28

Source: [www.nrega.nic.in](http://www.nrega.nic.in); \*MGNREGS data until 10/10/2018

Implemented in 2006 over three phases, the MGNREGS guarantees 100 days of work in a year to all rural households residing in India whose adults are willing to do unskilled manual work at a statutory minimum wage notified for the programme. Every adult member whose name appears in the Job Card shall be entitle to work under MGNREGS. Employment will be provided by the village panchayat within 15 days of work request. Employment shall be provided within a radius of 5 kilometres of village from where the applicant resides at the time of applying. There is provision of unemployment allowance if the work is not provided within 15 days of the application form. The act accomplishes the objective of decentralized planning by the involvement of local self-governments and ensures transparency and accountability in decision making and implementation of this scheme. Labour intensive works need to be promoted under MGNREGS, with 25% of the expenditure funded by State governments and the remaining 75% by the Central Government. Though the list of permissible works under MGNREGS is confined to some works, there is ample scope for undertaking projects that assures economically useful assets.

Table 2 depicts a brief progress report of MGNREGS implementation in India for the last five years from 2014-15 to 2018-19. During 2014-15, on an average, 166.21 lakh person days were created in the country. In 2017-18, this went up to 234.26 lakhs person days. The average days of employment provided also depicts an increasing trend over the years. The average wage rate per day per person increases from 143.92 in 2014-15 to 177.58 during 2018-19. Similarly, the total number of works taken up under the scheme during 2014-15 was only 29.44 lakhs, but in 2016-17, this increases to 65.46 lakh. With regard to the fund available and utilised, the data shows a hike throughout the years. Percentage of utilisation of funds increases from 95.84 percent during 2014-15 to 101.18 percent in 2016-17, but in 2017-18, this get reduced to 93.48 percent. These pictures unravels a general picture on the progress of MGNREGS implementation in the country. Considerable variations can be pointed in different states in all the above discussed variables. For instance, the present wage rate in Haryana is Rs.281, the highest in the country, followed by Kerala (Rs.271).

Items	Year				
	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19
Person days generated (In Lakhs)	166.21	235.14	235.64	234.26	128.55
Average days of employment provided per household	40.17	48.85	46	45.77	33.49
Total number of households completed 100 days of wage employment	24,92,654	48,47,975	39,91,202	29,60,191	7,13,307
Average wage rate per day per person (Rs)	143.92	154.08	161.65	169.46	177.58
Total number of works taken up (In Lakhs)	97.65	123.12	162.54	187.37	159.23
Number of completed works	29.44	36.18	65.46	61.18	39.62
Total fund availability	37,588.03	43,380.72	57,386.67	68,106.12	49,301.87
Total expenditure (Rs In Lakhs)	36,025.04	44,002.59	58,062.92	63,668.88	37,640.12
Percentage of utilisation	95.84	101.43	101.18	93.48	76.35

\*The figure for 2018-19 is not for the full year.

Source: [www.nrega.nic.in](http://www.nrega.nic.in)

The crux of the MGNREGS is the provisions which are of special importance to women workers. Unlike the erstwhile labour market interventions, two key features of the Act holds the plank of MGNREGS from the perspective of opportunities for the women workers. Firstly, Schedule II (6) of the Act mandates that at least one-third of the total workers be women. Secondly, since the entitlement to 100 days of work is at the household level, the allocation of work is left to the household members giving space for the participation of women in the programme (Narayanan and Das, 2014). Besides this, Schedule II (34) prescribes equal wages for men and women and Schedule II (28) prescribes crèches for the children of women workers. In addition to these provisions the Act also recommends preference to women on allocating worksites closest to their dwelling. General provisions such as allocation within five kilometres from the house, absence of supervisors and contractors, flexibility in choosing period of employment are also conducive for rural women. Moreover, the Social Audit forum of MGNREGS provides women and the marginalised communities to organise themselves and participate in decision making process without any constraints.

#### WOMEN EMPLOYMENT THROUGH MGNREGS

In 2016, MGNREGS implementation in the country has completed a decade. Official data on the participation of women suggests that the scheme has drawn a large number of women to worksites. The data further reveals that almost half of the person days generated was accounted for by women against the mandated one-third proportion of women participation. Another notable feature is that percentage share of women participation over the years is moderately higher than the share at inception. Narayanan and Das (2014) reveals that, as per the Census 2011, the proportion of women in total rural workforce is 34.9 percent while their representation in the MGNREGS work force is 48 percent on average for 2010-12. Apart from the women workers who seek employment under MGNREGS, the Act also provides for women's representation in local committees, state and central councils and in selection of mates and supervisors. Table 3 depicts state-wise percentage share of women in the total person days generated under MGNREGS in India for the last five years.

Table 3: The Share of Women in the Total Person days Generated in MGNREGS from 2014-15 to 2018-19

State/UTs	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19*
Andhra Pradesh	59	58	58	60	60
Arunachal Pradesh	30	32	34	36	39
Assam	28	34	36	39	41
Bihar	37	41	44	47	50
Chhattisgarh	50	49	49	50	51
Goa	75	80	78	79	72
Gujarat	43	46	45	42	45
Haryana	42	45	46	49	49
Himachal Pradesh	61	63	62	62	62
Jammu and Kashmir	25	25	27	28	27
Jharkhand	32	33	36	37	39
Karnataka	47	47	47	47	49
Kerala	92	91	91	91	90
Madhya Pradesh	43	43	41	37	36
Maharashtra	43	45	45	45	46
Manipur	38	37	42	45	46
Meghalaya	43	43	44	47	49
Mizoram	40	38	35	34	35
Nagaland	31	31	30	29	34
Odisha	34	38	40	42	42
Punjab	57	58	60	63	61
Rajasthan	68	69	67	65	65
Sikkim	48	48	48	48	51
Tamil Nadu	85	85	86	86	85
Tripura	49	50	49	47	45
Uttar Pradesh	25	30	33	35	36
Uttarakhand	51	52	54	54	53
West Bengal	41	46	46	48	48
Andaman and Nicobar Islands	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Chandigarh	25	27	38	23	0
Daman and Diu	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Lakshadweep	37	28	0	20	47
Puducherry	86	86	86	86	88
India	55	55	56	53	53

\*The figure for 2018-19 is not for the full year.

Source: Compiled from data available at [www.nrega.nic.in](http://www.nrega.nic.in)

The whole India figure for women's share in total person days generated under MGNREGS is well above the mandated one-third. However, there is substantial variation across states. The share of women in total person days is relatively high in Kerala, Puducherry and in Tamil Nadu. It is worth noting that in all the five years, the share of women participation in Kerala was above 90 percent. A robust Panchayat Raj Institutions, better human development and gender indices, active involvement of women Self Help Groups

(SHGs) etc. stimulates the participation of women in Kerala. Similarly, in Tamil Nadu and Puducherry, the past five years data shows that women participation exceeds the national average and the share was above 85 percent in all the years. It was observed that Tamil Nadu showed a high degree of participation of older people in MGNREGS (Saxena, 2015). On the other hand, the share of women in total person days was less than the national average in Jammu and Kashmir, Assam, Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand, Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim, Meghalaya, Bihar, Odisha, Chhattisgarh, Karnataka, Mizoram, Gujarat, Tripura, West Bengal and Nagaland. The lowest participation rate was noted in Jammu and Kashmir in all the five years. The four southern states namely Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka Kerala and Tamil Nadu with relatively better development factors have ensured high participation of women in all the five years. The northern states of Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, and Mizoram that traditionally have a larger proportion of women in the work-force, the share of women MGNREGS workers is lower than their corresponding share in total rural work-force (Narayanan and Das, 2014). It is vivid that the extent of women participation has been somewhat stable over the years. However states like Madhya Pradesh and Mizoram marked a decline in women participation rate over the years. In all the five years from 2014-15 to 2018-19, the national average of women participation in MGNREGS was above 50 percent against the stipulated 33 percent in the Act. Ministry of Rural Development (2012) has mentioned the possible factors responsible for high rate of women participation in the southern states of India, such as, cultural acceptance of women participation in the labour force, active Self Help Groups, wage differentials between private sector and MGNREGS, effective institutional mechanisms etc.

### IMPLICATIONS ON WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

The operational structure and the extraordinary set of guidelines issued by the Ministry of Rural Development itself paves the way for the increased participation of women in MGNREGS. The Act mandates that work shall be provided locally within five kilometres of the residence. Women, in most cases bearing the responsibility of household work finds MGNREGS work more feasible, since they need not travel for long distances in search of work. Moreover, women finds the MGNREGS work more comfortable since they are working along with their neighbours and relatives. The dignity of paid work offered by the government in turn gives them the presumption of MGNREGS work as a 'government job' which is socially acceptable. This dignity also frees women from caste and community based discrimination to do a particular work (Khera and Nayak, 2009). Another reason that attracts women to MGNREGS work is the provision of statutory minimum wage stipulated in the Act. The average wage earned by rural women by engaging in self-employments and through other private employer is much low and it is not stable. The provision of minimum wage which is stable and assured enhances the prospects of rural women in MGNREGS. Fixed working hours also facilitates women to avail work under MGNREGS. Long working hours and other harassments in other paid works impedes them from undertaking such works. The provision of child care facility in MGNREGS work sites assures adequate care to children of these workers who accompany them to the worksites. If the children accompanying women workers exceeds six, the MGNREGA mandates deputation of one worker to look after the children and she shall be paid accordingly. These provisions inflated the participation of women workers in MGNREGS.

A majority of the MGNREGS workers belongs to the most disadvantaged sections in the society mainly Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and women. The emergence of these groups especially women as independent income earners with control over their earnings has significant empowerment effects. Along with the income, they also earn the potential to be the decision maker role in the family, the discretion to wisely use and control their earnings for the betterment of their family and confidence to appear and participate in public meetings. Paid employment opportunity in MGNREGS have increased their consumption choices and ensured food security. The economic independence so gained through MGNREGS also helped them to use the money for the educational purposes of their children and to buy medicines for the elder ones in the family. Khera and Nayak (2009) opines that MGNREGS seems to be functioning as a "healthline" for many rural households, since the scheme has helped them cope with the illness in the family to a great extent. Many women workers came across banking experiences through MGNREGS. A study of MGNREGS in Kasaragod District of Kerala (2009) noted that the savings in the bank was a matter of great confidence and dignity to the women workers. Until the inception of MGNREGS in 2006, they did not have any kind of connection with any banks and banking procedures. Another effect is that the scheme has substantially increased the credit worthiness of rural women. The guarantee of work and wage under MGNREGS made them more accessible to local money lenders. MGNREGS also stands unique as an agent of socialisation. Group work has provided the rural women a platform to share their personal problems offered them much relief, which in turn empowers the women workers socially (ibid, 2009). The assets created under the scheme also intended to serve the needs of rural people, which in

turn assist women to lead a better life. The work provided under MGNREGS has allowed them to stop doing hazardous work or work they did not want to do (Khera and Nayak, 2009). Increased women participation in the Gram Sabha strides for a revolutionary change in the character of decision-making at the level of grass-roots democratic institutions, which appeared to be male-dominated even after the 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment which gives special importance to women representation (Pankaj and Tankha, 2010). These empowerment effects (both social and economic) augments the guarantee of empowerment through MGNREGS. Ministry of Rural Development (2012) noted that the qualitative and quantitative improvements in gender relations across various spheres coupled with positive changes in self-perception gradually result in the empowerment of women and engender lasting social change.

Notwithstanding these positive outcomes, the implementation of MGNREGS has been marked for several criticisms which in turn retards women participation. The most persistent obstacle to women participation is the rigid social norms and practices which prevents women working outside the home. The male dominants of the family and sometimes the implementing functionaries itself considers MGNREGS work as something external which is not in tune with the societal norms. Similarly, in some cases, women were excluded from doing some work and they were denied work on the ground that women cannot do that particular work. Hence, social norms and customs and the strenuous nature of work are the major barriers to women participation in MGNREGS (Vij et.al, 2017; Khera and Nayak, 2009). As stipulated in the Act, child care facilities were not provided adequately in several work sites. Women often find it difficult to take children to work sites due to insufficient care at the worksites. Lack of child care facilities also poses great barrier to participation in MGNREGS. Complete ban on contractors is one of the unique feature of the scheme. In contrast to this, most of the MGNREGS work sites are affected by the illegal presence of contractors. Presence of contractors in the work sites also reduces women participation mainly because of the exploitative nature of these contractors. Delay in wage payments is the most important implementation failure as noted by several studies. The participation of women in the programme is also affected by this delays since they cannot afford to wait for work and wages and they are forced to undertake some other wage earning activities.

#### IV

#### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

As aforesaid earlier, the empowerment of rural women has emerged as an unintended consequences of MGNREGS. It provides ample opportunities for women to earn independently and become a bread earner in the family. Economic independence is one of the immediate outcome of rural women out of MGNREGS. The overwhelming proportion of workers from the disadvantaged sections of the society reflects the self-targeting nature of MGNREGS. The potential of the scheme to reduce gender differences of wages through the provision of equal wage rates for both men and women is also notable. The higher participation of women in Gram Sabha, the increasing number of women speaking out in Gram Sabha meetings, continuous interactions with government officials and Panchayat Raj Institution representatives, increased interaction with banking institutions etc. have triggered the trajectory of women development and consequently the empowerment of rural women.

On the flipside, there are some key challenges to the participation of women in the scheme. These challenges should be reckoned for the effective participation of women in MGNREGS. Heavy burden of domestic duties, social and cultural norms, arduous nature of works, presence of contractors etc. are key barriers to women participation. Despite the increased worker participation of women, deputation of women as worksite managers, participation in conducting social audits and in other staff appointments, the participation rate is not encouraging. The future prospects of women participation in MGNREGS mandates adequate measures to enhance worksite facilities to women especially crèche facilities, favourable schedule of rates, increased participation in procedural aspects, creation of skill-generating assets and effective monitoring mechanisms. Thus, the largest public employment programme visualised in human history holds out the prospect of transforming the livelihoods of the poorest and guarantees women empowerment.

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