Role of MGNREGA in Empowering the Women of Mandya District

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ABSTRACT: *Poverty and unemployment remains the central issue in India. These issues are mostly found in the rural areas. The Government of India has been formulating various programmes to for rural development and poverty eradication. One such programme is the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) which has been a successful programme in promoting gender equality, empowering women and creating long lasting infrastructure in rural areas by providing employment. The study was conducted in Mandya district of Karnataka covering a sample of 160 beneficiaries. The collected data has been analysed using simple frequency and percentage analysis, descriptive statistics and correlation analysis. The results have revealed that the programme was successful in empowering the women of the district.*
KEYWORDS: *Beneficiaries, Empowerment, Income, Marginalised, Poverty.*

I.   Introduction

Since our independence, poverty and unemployment remains an unsolved issue to this date. There is rural distress in India and the rural people lack basic facilities like access to drinking water, medical aid and nutrition. Unemployment remains an everlasting problem, even though there is abundant human resource in the country. Such human resource is under-utilised and is under-developed. Such human resource, if directed towards the development of our country can make a huge change for our people. The Government of India has been formulating various programmes for rural development, since 80 percent of Indian poor live in rural areas. One such programme is the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) which has been a successful programme in promoting gender equality, empowering women and creating long lasting infrastructure in rural areas by providing employment. The programme was implemented initially in the year 2006 and has managed to sustain and be successful despite many political changes

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1.1. Women Empowerment

Empowerment of women has become a vital issue in today's socio-economic environment and is one of the major concerns of the Government. Rural women are still hesitant to take decisions and lack individuality in themselves. They are always under the shelter of the male members of their family and do not speak out in public. The provisions of MGNREGA such as equal wages for men and women and 33.33 percent reservation for women labourers show that the act supports women empowerment. Many studies have proven that MGNREGA has been successful in empowering the marginalised women across many states in India. The provisions of the act which support women empowerment are:

* The act requires 1/3rd of the labourers engaged in a particular area to be women labourers.
* The 100 days of employment are guaranteed even to women and equal wages are provided to both men and women.
* The act requires a local vigilance and monitoring committee to be formed consisting of members from the locality or nearest village, in which SC/STs women are also represented.
* Importance is given to women for participation in social audits. Single women and old women are required to be given work within 5 km of their residence as per the act.
* The act provides support for child-care at work and has also mentioned the provisions of facilities at worksite which should be convenient.
* Single women are also considered as household and work is given to them which helps the divorced and widowed women to be self-reliant and independent.
* Individual bank/post office accounts must be opened by the women to which their wages will be credited. This gives them a control over their earnings.

- As per the act, at least 50% of the supervisors at the worksite must be women.
- The act ensures that lactating mothers and pregnant women (at least up to 8 months before their delivery and after 10 months of delivery) are given work which does not require much effort and also provides that the worksites should be close to their houses.

Hence MGNREGA is being a catalyst of social change and is helping the government in eradicating poverty and unemployment and empowering the rural women. Under MGNREGA, 56.18 lakh households were employed in Karnataka in the year 2016-17 out of which 26.58 lakh were women. In Mandya district, 71285 women were provided employment under this programme.

II. Review Of Literature:

MGNREGA has been a very attractive Government scheme for research. Numerous studies have been conducted on the programme to bring out how well the programme has been implemented across India and the extent of its success in alleviating the status of the rural poor. The following literature reviews will give an extensive view about MGNREGA. Ritesh Singh and Vinay Vutukuru (2009) in their study "Enhancing Accountability in Public Service Delivery through Social Audits: A case study of Andhra Pradesh, India", made a comparative assessment of the performance of NREGA in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka for the years 2007-08 and 2008-09. The results indicated that there was a significant improvement in the reach of the programme with regards to man-days of the employment in Andhra Pradesh when compared to Karnataka. It was found that the programme does not have stability in Karnataka. The study recommended that the social audit process of Andhra Pradesh should be implemented in other states of the country.

Channaveera et al (2011) in their paper "Impact of MGNREGA on Input-use Pattern, Labour Productivity and Returns of Selected Crops in Gulbarga District, Karnataka", analysed the impact of MGNREGA in two villages of Gulbarga district. The research was based on a sample of 120 farmers from whom the primary data was collected through personal interview schedule. The study observed a significant difference between the partially-implemented and fully implemented MGNREGA villages, in the use of machine power and labour for the cultivation of red gram. Further, in the cultivation of rabi jowar, a significant difference was observed only for labour between the two villages. The study also revealed that there was a lower labour productivity of male and female in villages where MGNREGA was fully implemented. The study suggested the use of MGNREGA labour for productive activities and continuous monitoring by the village panchayats for the effective working of the scheme.

Kant and Ashvine (2013) studied the participation of women in MGNREGA across various states in India, focusing even on some districts of Uttar Pradesh. It was observed that many states had employed more than 33.33% women under the programme, which was commendable. Also, there was high level of satisfaction among the women beneficiaries since they received equal wages as their male counterparts. The study concluded that the programme had brought economic independence in women, which had led to their empowerment.

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

Vinita Arora, Kulshreshtha and Upadhyay (2013) examine the significance of MNREGS on empowering women in Rohtak district of Haryana. The study was based on primary data collected from 250 beneficiaries and was analysed using simple percentage analysis. The results indicated that MNREGS had a significant benefit for the women. Further, the programme had succeeded in raising the employment level of rural women by providing income to them and increased their purchasing power and confidence.

Bhuvana (2013) The study analyses the impact of MGNREGA on the women beneficiaries in Rural Bangalore, Karnataka. In the interview, the beneficiaries opined that there were poor worksite facilities, delay in payment of wages and delay to issue job cards. The study recommends an increase in employment days and bringing of skilled work to MGNREGA. Further, the author found that employing locally for the work would reduce migration and be beneficial to the women.

III. Statement Of Problem:

It has been a decade since MGNREGA has been implemented and the programme has managed to exist even today despite many political changes. Many critics opine that the programme must be stopped because of lack of successful implementation. But what matters is the opinion of the workers who are a part of the programme. It is necessary to know their opinion regarding the programme to get a clear picture about the success of MGNREGA. Though many studies have been conducted on women empowerment through MGNREGA, Mandya district remains under-researched in this aspect. Hence the present study aims to fill this gap.

Objectives of the study

- To study the socio-economic profile of the beneficiaries
- To study the various factors that lead to empowerment by analysing the agreement level and relationship among the variables.

IV.   Research Methodology:

The data for the study has been collected from four taluks of Mandya district in Karnataka namely Nagamangala, Srirangapattana, Krishnarajapet and Pandavapura. From each taluk 40 respondents have been selected based on purposive sampling and the sample size is 160.The primary data of the study is collected using a structured interview schedule. The secondary data has been collected from the official websites of MGNREGA and other published sources. IBM SPSS software version 21 has been used for data analysis. The data is analysed using statistical tools such as simple frequency and percentage analysis, pie-chart, descriptive statistics and correlation analysis.

Analysis and interpretation

6.1 Socio-economic profile of the beneficiaries

TABLE1: Socio-economic profile of the beneficiaries

SL NO	Variables	Frequency(n = 160)	Percentage(%)
1	Age (in years) a) 18 – 30 b) 31 – 40 c) 41 – 50 d) Above 50	24 47 51 38	15.0 29.4 31.9 23.8
2	Category a) Scheduled Caste (SC) b) Scheduled Tribe (ST) c) General Merit (GM) d) Other Backward Class (OBC)	90 19 1 50	56.3 11.9 0.6 31.3
3	Education a) Never been to school b) Up to 5th Standard c) Up to SSLC d) PUC e) Degree	106 44 10 0 0	66.3 27.5 6.3 0 0
4	Marital Status a) Single b) Married c) Widowed d) Divorced	2 117 41 0	1.3 73.1 25.6 0
5	Number of members in the family a) Less than 3 members b) 3 – 5 members c) More than 5 members	14 72 74	8.8 45.0 46.3
6	Beneficiaries having BPL/Anthyodhaya card? a) Yes b) No	160 0	100 0
7	Are you a Landless Agricultural Labourer? a) Yes b) No	148 12	92.5 7.5
8	Monthly Income from Other Sources a) Nil b) Less than Rs. 10,000 c) Rs. 10,001 to Rs. 30,000 d) Rs. 30,001 to Rs. 50,000 e) Above Rs. 50,000	7 150 3 0 0	4.4 93.8 1.9 0 0
9	Income from MGNREGA for 100 days a) Nil b) Less than Rs. 5,000 c) Rs. 5,001 to Rs. 15,000 d) Rs. 15,001 to Rs. 25,000 d) More than Rs. 25,000	42 99 12 7 0	26.3 61.9 7.5 4.3 0
10	Source of Knowledge of MGNREGA a) Relative/Friends b) Panchayats c) SHGs	29 131 0	18.1 81.9 0

Source: Computed from primary data

Inferences from TABLE 1:

1. Age: Majority of the respondents belong to the age group of 41 – 50 years (31.9 percent), followed by the age group 31-40 years (29.4 percent). It can also be inferred that younger women show less interest to join MGNREGA (15.0 percent). Further, a combined total of 55.7 percent of the age group 41 – 50 and above 50 years indicates that middle-aged women display a greater interest to join the programme.

2. Category: MGNREGA gives utmost priority to lift the status of the marginalised women belonging to Scheduled Caste/Tribes and OBC categories. The study shows that majority of the respondents belonged to SC category (56.3 percent), 11.9 percent of the respondents belonged to ST category, 0.6 percent belonged to General Merit Category and 31.3 percent belonged to OBC category. This indicates that the programme has reached the right persons and is helping them by providing additional income. The scheme has proven to be an attractive one among the marginalised groups and is being instrumental in lifting their levels by solving the problems of unemployment and poverty.

3. Education:66.3 percent of the respondents have never been to school. 27.5 percent of the respondents have studied upto 5th standard and only 6.3 percent have completed their SSLC. This makes them dependent on others for day to day decisions or transactions and schemes like MGNREGA have come to their rescue by providing unskilled labour work.

4. Marital Status: Majority of the respondents are married (73.1 percent). 1.3 percent are single and 25.6 percent were widowed. The widowed respondents opined that the scheme was supportive to them along with their farm labour, since it provided them with additional income. Even for the married respondents, the additional income from MGNREGA was useful to meet their family expenses.

5. Number of members in the family: Majority of the respondents had more than 5 members in their family (46.3 percent). 45.0 percent of the respondents had 3-5 members in their family and 8.8 percent had less than 3 members in their family. By being working members of the family, the women made contribution to the family income which helped them to run their family in a better way.

6. BPL card/Anthyodaya card: 100 percent of the respondents have Below Poverty Line (BPL)/ Anthyodhaya card. Most of them mentioned that they have the anthyodhaya card which is issued by the government for citizens in extreme poverty level. The focus of the programme is on this marginalised category, to alleviate their status and provide them with a better livelihood.

7. Landless Agricultural Labourers: Majority of the beneficiaries are landless agricultural labourers (92.5 percent). They work in the fields owned by others for their livelihood. Such women are enhancing their income by joining MGNREGA.

8. Monthly Income from other sources: 93.8 percent of the respondents earn less than Rs. 10,000 per month. For most of them, their earnings were from the fields they worked. Some of them also engaged in basket making and broomstick making. 7 percent of the respondents had no income from other sources and MGNREGA was helping them to receive some income for their livelihood. 1.9 percent of the respondents earned Rs. 10,001 to Rs. 30,000 by having petty shops in their village.

9. Income from MGNREGA for 100 days: Majority of the respondents (61.9 percent) earned less than Rs. 5,000 from a 100-day labour in the programme. Further, 26.3 percent of the respondents had not received any income at all. This shows the inefficiency of the panchayats to implement the scheme properly. 12.0 percent of the respondents received income between Rs. 5,001 to Rs. 15,000 and 7.0 percent of the respondents' income from the programme ranged between Rs. 15,001 to Rs. 25,000. This indicates that the programme has added some level of additional income to the beneficiaries to alleviate their status and improve their standard of living.

10. Source of Knowledge of MGNREGA to the beneficiaries: Majority of the respondents said that the Panchayats and Rural offices educated them about MGNREGA and motivated them to join the programme since it has many benefits (81.9 percent). 18.1 percent of the beneficiaries said that Relatives and friends forced them to join the programme since it would give additional income to the beneficiary.

6.2. Empowerment through MNREGA

This section of the study verifies whether MGNREGA has been successful in empowering marginalised women of Mandya district. Women empowerment is achieved when they are economically as well as socially empowered. Economic empowerment is measured by the ability to control economic resources in the family, earning income on their own and being self-reliant. Social empowerment occurs when women are respected in the society, have freedom for their own decisions, ability to take household decisions and are independent. Hence, in this section the variables considered are:

a) MGNREGA has made you self-reliant and independent.
b) Able to take household decisions.
c) MGNREGA has gained you a respect in the society.
d) Ability to control economic resources in your family.
e) Reduced dependence on male members of your family.

f)   Improved confidence to deal with banks
g)   Improvement in standard of living

The variables were measured on a five-point scale as follows: 1 = Strongly Agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Disagree and 5 = Strongly Disagree.
6.2.1. Agreement levels regarding different variables of empowerment.

TABLE2: Descriptive statistics showing the agreement levels for different variables of empowerment

SL NO	Variables	Mean	S.D.
		N = 160	
a)	MGNREGA has made you self-reliant and independent.	2.01	0.824
b)	Able to take household decisions.	2.39	0.884
c)	MGNREGA has gained you a respect in the society.	2.51	0.990
d)	Ability to control economic resources in your family.	2.40	0.992
e)	Reduced dependence on male members of your family.	2.14	0.948
f)	Improved confidence to deal with banks	2.26	1.000
g)	Improvement in standard of living	1.67	.807

V.   Discussion:

TABLE2 shows the descriptive statistics of the variables. The mean values indicate the agreement levels and the standard deviations indicate the similarity of opinions.

a)   MGNREGA has made you self-reliant and independent: The mean value 2.01 indicates that the beneficiaries agree that MGNREGA has made them self-reliant and independent. This self-reliance is achieved by them by earning their own income and being on their own. The income they earn from the scheme is helping them to meet various expenses and has made them independent.

b)   Ability to take household decisions: The mean value 2.39 indicates agreement to the variable that the beneficiaries are able to take household decisions. The beneficiaries are now able to discuss what they feel about house-hold matters because they have become an earning member of the family. They have a satisfaction of contributing to the family income and feel that it is their right to take part in household decisions. This is also a way of empowering them and gives them happiness that they are considered for family decisions.

c)   MGNREGA has gained you a respect in the society: The average value 2.51 indicates that the members have gained respect in the society after being an earning member. Though majority of them were into farm labour, the mandatory reservation in MGNREGA for women and allotment of jobs to them have given them a recognition in the society. The women were happy that they are recognised in their society that too being from marginalised category.

d)   Ability to control economic resources in your family: The mean value 2.40 indicates that majority of the respondents are able to control economic resources in their family. They believe that MGNREGA is also responsible for this change, since the farm labour income and the additional income from MGNREGA has made them bear a share of their family expenses which also gives them the right to control the economic resources in their family.

e)   Reduced dependence on male members of your family: In rural areas, women do not have much freedom and are always under the shelter of their male counterparts. There is always a dependency on the male members of the family. Empowerment occurs only when the female members of a family become independent and can be on their own even in the absence of the male members of their family. To get over this dependency, women need sufficient education, confidence and self-reliance. The mean value 2.14 indicates that there is reduced dependence on male members of the family by the beneficiaries.

f)   Improved confidence to deal with banks: Thanks to the compulsory bank account mandated by MGNREGA, now many women have overcome that fear and are at least learning small transactions in banks. This can be clearly seen in this variable mean value (2.26). The respondents agreed that they only opened a bank account for the purpose of wages to be credited under MGNREGA. Many respondents admitted that they have learnt to fill slips in banks and are able to ask the bank staff what they need. They said that through this scheme, they have learnt to transact without any hesitation and are able to make adequate savings in the banks for their future expenses. This can be considered as a significant achievement of the scheme.

g)   Improvement in standard of living: MGNREGA aims to improve the standard of living of the poor and the marginalised sector by providing employment to them. Since women are also included in this programme, the additional income that they receive contributes to the family income and there is an

improvement in the standard of living of their family. The mean value 1.67 indicates a stronger agreement level of the beneficiaries with regard to this variable. They are able to handle their expenses better and are able to save more. Also, many beneficiaries have increased their possession of assets, which also indicates an improvement in standard of living.

6.2.2. Ranking of different variables of empowerment based on the agreement levels

This section of the study analyses the extent of empowerment through the different variables considered for empowerment. The mean values that indicate the agreement levels have been considered to rank the variables and to know which variable has the highest influence on empowerment. The variables of empowerment are categorised as highly influential, moderately influential and least influential based on their mean values as follows:

i.   Average score below 1.7 – Highly influential
ii.   Average score between 1.7 to 2.3 – Moderately influential
iii.   Average score above 2.3 – Least influential.

FIGURE1: Ranking of variables of women empowerment
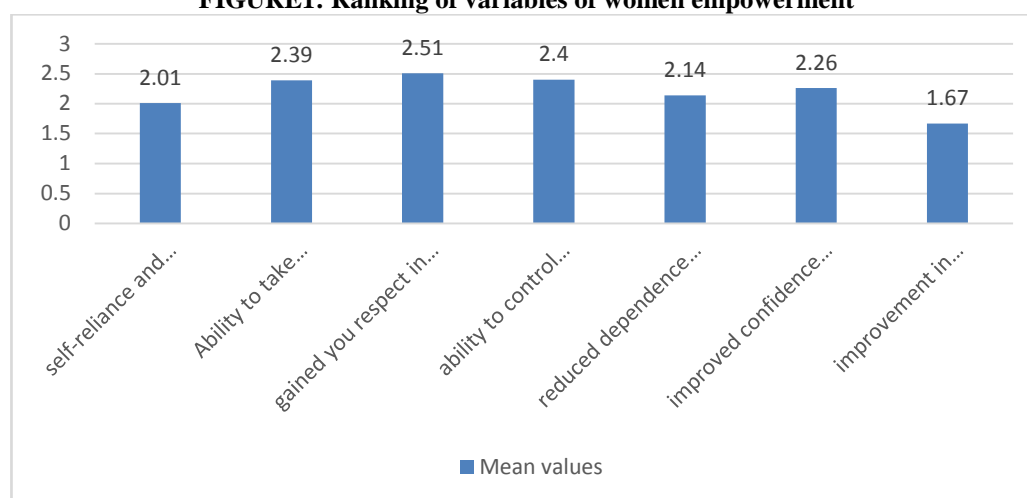
TABLE 3: Categorisation of variables having influence on women empowerment

High influence	Moderate influence	Least influence
a) Improvement in Standard of living	a) MGNREGA has made you self-reliant and independent. b) Reduced dependence on male members of your family. c) Improved confidence to deal with banks	a) Able to take household decisions. b) MGNREGA has gained you a respect in the society. c) Ability to control economic resources in your family.

Inferences:

From TABLE3 it can be inferred that improvement in standard of living has the highest influence to empower women. Self-reliance and independence, reduced dependence on male members and improved confidence to deal with banks have moderate influence in empowering women through the programme. Ability to take household decisions, respect in the society and control over economic resources have the least influence in empowering them.

6.2.3 Relationship with different variables of empowerment of women through MGNREGA

This section of the study analyses the impact of MGNREGA on empowerment of rural marginalised women. The variables considered may have relationship among themselves that are significant for empowering the women. One variable may influence another variable and lead to empowerment of the beneficiaries. The analysis is made by studying the correlation between different variables that have been considered for empowerment. The important variables considered for correlation analysis are:

a)   MGNREGA has made you self-reliant and independent
b)   MGNREGA has gained you respect in the society
c)   Reduced dependence on male members
d)   Improved confidence to deal with banks.

Self- reliance and independence, respect in the society, reduced dependence on male members are important indicators of empowerment of women. Also, a significant achievement of MGNREGA is that it has forced the women to transact with banks by having a provision of compulsory bank accounts. Hence these variables are considered for testing the correlation between them. The following hypotheses have been formulated:

1) H_0: There is no significant correlation between 'self-reliance and independence' and 'reduced dependence on male members' through MGNREGA.

H_1: There is a significant correlation between 'self-reliance and independence' and 'reduced dependence on male members' through MGNREGA.

2) H_0: There is no significant correlation between 'ability to control economic resources' and 'reduced dependence on male members' through MGNREGA.

H_1: There is a significant correlation between 'ability to control economic resources' and 'reduced dependence on male members' through MGNREGA.

3) H_0: There is no significant correlation between 'improved confidence to deal with banks' and 'MGNREGA has gained you respect in the society'.

H_1: There is a significant correlation between 'improved confidence to deal with banks' and 'MGNREGA has gained you respect in the society'.

Table 9: Correlation Matrix showing relationship between variables

SL NO	Variables	Pearson correlation value (r)	Significance (2-tailed)
1	'Self-reliance and independence' and 'reduced dependence on male members' through MGNREGA	0.191	0.016*
2	'Ability to control economic resources' and 'reduced dependence on male members' through MGNREGA.	0.195	0.013*
3	'Improved confidence to deal with banks' and 'MGNREGA has gained you respect in the society'.	0.390	0.000*

*Significant at 0.05.

Inferences:

Table 9 shows the results of correlation analysis between the variables. Since the p-value obtained for all the three hypothesis is less than 0.05, the null hypotheses are rejected and the alternative hypotheses have been accepted.

There is a significant positive correlation between the variables 'Self-reliance and independence' and 'reduced dependence on male members' through MGNREGA (0.191). This implies that the beneficiaries have achieved self-reliance and independence by reducing their dependency on the male members of the family.

There is a significant positive correlation between 'Ability to control economic resources' and 'reduced dependence on male members' through MGNREGA (0.195). This reveals that when women also get control over economic resources of the family, they start depending less on their male members.

There is a significant positive correlation between 'Improved confidence to deal with banks' and 'MGNREGA has gained you respect in the society' (0.390). This displays a view of the society that when women are able to transact in banks and are independent by earning their own income, society gives them more respect which can be seen as their empowerment. Specially, when this occurs in the marginalised groups, it broadens their views on women and makes the society respect them for what they are. Hence it is seen that there is inter-relationship among the empowerment variables that are considered. One variable influences the other and therefore there is a collective influence of these variables on the empowerment of women.

VI.   Conclusion:

The study observed that the respondents have seen an improvement in their standard of living. Majority of them have become self-reliant and independent, have reduced dependency on male members and have improved their confidence to deal and communicate with banks/post office staff. This shows that the objectives of implementing MGNREGA in rural areas have been achieved, with respect to women empowerment through the programme. The overall findings indicated that the programme has been successful in empowering the marginalised women of Mandya district. Creating more awareness programmes regarding the provisions of MGNREGA, the rights that the beneficiaries are entitled to receive and conducting redressal programmes will help to enhance the effectiveness of the programme.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY
- The study was conducted for few taluks in Mandya district.

- The study is based on the opinions and feelings that are expressed by the respondents, which may or may not be unrestricted from biases and their individual perceptions that are subjective.
- Due to a limited sample size, the results are only indicative and cannot be generalised.

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