



# **MGNREGA AS A TOOL OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT: A STUDY OF WAZIRGANJ AND MANPUR BLOCK IN GAYA DISTRICT**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study examines the role of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) as a tool of women empowerment in Wazirganj and Manpur blocks of Gaya district, Bihar. The study is based on primary data collected from 150 women beneficiaries through structured questionnaires and field interviews, supported by secondary sources. The findings show that MGNREGA has contributed to employment generation and provided income support to rural women, which has improved their financial independence and participation in household decision-making. However, the level of employment remains limited, and most women receive fewer workdays than the guaranteed level. The study also identifies moderate awareness among beneficiaries and highlights key challenges such as delay in wage payments, irregular work availability, and lack of basic facilities at worksites. The results suggest that while MGNREGA has positively influenced women's economic and social status, its overall impact remains partial due to implementation issues. The study concludes that improving awareness, ensuring timely wage payment, and providing regular employment opportunities are essential to strengthen the role of MGNREGA in women empowerment at the grassroots level.



## 1. Introduction

Women empowerment has become an important area of discussion in development studies, particularly in rural contexts where gender inequality is more visible. In many parts of India, women continue to face economic dependency, limited access to resources, and restricted participation in decision-making processes. These conditions affect not only their personal development but also the overall progress of rural society. Therefore, empowering women is considered essential for achieving inclusive and sustainable development.

Women empowerment refers to a process in which women gain the ability to control their lives, access resources, and participate actively in economic and social activities. It includes various dimensions such as economic independence, social recognition, awareness of rights, and participation in decision-making. Empowerment is not limited to income generation; it also involves building confidence, improving status within the household, and ensuring equal opportunities in society. In rural areas, where traditional norms are strong, empowerment becomes even more significant.

The socio-economic condition of rural women in India continues to present several challenges. A large number of women are engaged in unpaid household work or informal labour, which often remains unrecognized. Limited access to education and skill development reduces their employment opportunities. In many cases, women depend financially on male a member, which restricts their role in household decisions. In states like Bihar, these issues are more pronounced due to poverty, low industrial development, and strong social traditions. As a result, women's participation in economic and public life remains limited.

In this context, the Government of India introduced Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act in 2005 as a rights-based programme aimed at enhancing livelihood security in rural areas. The scheme guarantees at least 100 days of wage employment to rural households and focuses on creating durable assets through public works. One of the key features of this programme is the provision of equal wages for men and women, which promotes gender equality. The scheme also encourages women's participation by ensuring inclusive access to employment opportunities.

Over time, MGNREGA has emerged as an important tool for rural development and poverty reduction. It provides employment during periods of agricultural uncertainty and reduces the need for migration. For women, the programme offers an opportunity to earn income within their local environment, thereby improving their financial independence. Participation in MGNREGA has also been associated with increased confidence, greater mobility, and improved social



interaction among women. In addition, the system of wage payment through bank accounts has contributed to financial inclusion and awareness. However, the impact of MGNREGA is not uniform across all regions. Its effectiveness depends on factors such as implementation quality, awareness among beneficiaries, local governance, and socio-economic conditions. In this regard, micro-level studies are important to understand the actual outcomes of the programme.

Gaya district in Bihar provides a meaningful context for such an analysis. The district has a predominantly rural population and faces challenges related to poverty, unemployment, and limited livelihood opportunities. Women in this region often have restricted access to economic resources and limited participation in decision-making processes. Wazirganj and Manpur blocks, in particular, reflect typical rural conditions where the role of MGNREGA can be examined in detail. The present study aims to analyze MGNREGA as a tool of women empowerment in these two blocks. It focuses on examining changes in women's economic condition, participation in household decision-making, and social status as a result of their involvement in the programme. By adopting a micro-level approach, the study attempts to provide a realistic understanding of the ground-level impact of MGNREGA.

The paper is structured as follows. The next section reviews existing literature related to women empowerment and MGNREGA. This is followed by the objectives and research methodology of the study. Subsequent sections present data analysis and discuss the role of MGNREGA in empowering women. The paper further highlights key findings, identifies challenges, and offers policy suggestions. The final section concludes the study with important observations and implications.

## **2. Review of Literature**

At the same time, earlier studies show that empowerment is shaped by social conditions. Mukherjee (2018) observed that the benefits of employment schemes are not equal across caste and religious groups. Chopra (2019) explained that wage employment alone is not sufficient because women continue to carry major responsibility for unpaid household work. Basu (2015) and Ranjan (2016) also pointed out that social norms and structural inequalities influence women's access to opportunities and their ability to benefit from development programmes. A large body of research has examined Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act as an important rural employment programme in India. Studies indicate that the scheme has contributed to employment generation, income stability, and livelihood security, especially during agricultural off-seasons. Das (2016), Diwate (2018), and Kumar (2018) reported that MGNREGA increased access to wage employment, although the full 100 days of guaranteed work is rarely achieved. Chahal and Kumar (2020) also highlighted its role in reducing rural unemployment, while Hazarika



(2025) identified gaps between demand for work and actual employment due to implementation issues.

Studies focusing on women's participation show positive outcomes. Biswas et al. (2024) found that higher work participation increased women's income. Mahanta et al. (2024) and Mandal et al. (2025) observed that regular employment improved financial independence and strengthened women's role in household decision-making. Mahanta and Choudhury (2025) also confirmed a positive relationship between participation in MGNREGA and empowerment.

Earlier studies by Benni and Nagaraja (2017), Ganguly and Narayan (2017), Rani and Pokhriyal (2016) similarly reported that the scheme increased women's labour force participation and improved their economic position. Goyal and Datta (2020) highlighted issues such as delayed wage payments, lack of childcare facilities, and restrictive social norms. Dey (2016), Biswas (2015), Srinivas and Pandyaraj (2017) pointed out problems related to planning, implementation, and quality of assets. These studies show that the success of MGNREGA depends on effective local governance and proper execution of the programme.

Recent studies also highlight broader impacts of the scheme. Singh and Agnihotri (2024) explained that women gradually move from being wage earners to active contributors in rural development. Cirappa and Shivanna (2025) showed that the scheme improved financial independence and dignity even among elderly women. McCord and Paul (2019) discussed MGNREGA as a model of rights-based employment with wider relevance beyond India.

The existing literature also reveals an important gap. Most studies are based on secondary data and focus on national or state-level trends. Micro-level studies that examine income, expenditure patterns, and empowerment at the block level are limited.

## **2. Research Objectives (RO)**

The present study has been carried out with the following objectives:

**RO<sub>1</sub>:** To assess the extent and pattern of employment generation for women under MGNREGA in the selected study area.

**RO<sub>2</sub>:** To evaluate the impact of MGNREGA on women's economic empowerment, particularly in terms of income and financial independence.

**RO<sub>3</sub>:** To examine changes in women's participation in household decision-making and their social status.



**RO4:** To identify the major challenges and implementation issues faced by women workers at the local level.

### 3. Research Methodology

The study followed a descriptive and analytical research design and was based on both primary and secondary data. Primary data were collected from **150 women beneficiaries** of MGNREGA through a structured questionnaire and field interviews. Secondary data were obtained from official reports, government publications, and relevant academic literature. A multistage sampling technique was used. Villages were selected purposively from the two blocks based on the implementation of MGNREGA, and respondents were selected using simple random sampling. The data were analysed using percentage, averages, and tabular methods. The analysis focused on employment generation, economic empowerment, decision-making role, and challenges faced by women workers.

### 4. Result and Analysis

The analysis focuses on employment generation, economic empowerment, decision-making role, awareness, and challenges faced by women under Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act.

#### 4.1 Employment Generation under MGNREGA

**Table 4.1: Number of Workdays Received by Women Respondents**

<b>Workdays Category</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Less than 30 days	34	22.67
30–60 days	52	34.67
60–100 days	46	30.67
More than 100 days	18	12.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100.00</b>

**Source:** Author's work

The table shows that the largest proportion of women (34.67%) received employment for 30–60 days, followed by 30.67% who worked for 60–100 days. Only 12.00% of respondents reported receiving more than 100 days of work. This indicates that although MGNREGA is generating employment, the full guarantee of 100 days is not being achieved for most women. A significant proportion (22.67%) received less than 30 days of work, which reflects irregular availability of employment. This



limited duration of work reduces the overall effectiveness of the scheme in ensuring livelihood security.

#### 4.2 Economic Empowerment of Women

**Table 4.2: Monthly Income Contribution from MGNREGA**

Income Range (₹)	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Below 2000	39	26.00
2000–4000	58	38.67
4000–6000	34	22.67
Above 6000	19	12.66
<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100.00</b>

**Source:** Author's work

The data indicate that the majority of women (38.67%) earned between ₹2000–4000 per month from MGNREGA, while 26.00% earned less than ₹2000. Only 12.66% of respondents reported earnings above ₹6000. This suggests that the scheme provides supplementary income rather than a stable or sufficient source of livelihood. Although the income helps meet basic needs such as food, education, and healthcare, it remains limited in improving long-term financial security. Therefore, MGNREGA contributes to economic support but does not fully ensure financial stability for most women.

#### 4.3 Improvement in Financial Independence

**Table 4.3: Change in Financial Independence**

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Significant Improvement	62	41.33
Moderate Improvement	54	36.00
No Change	34	22.67
<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100.00</b>

**Source:** Author's work

A considerable proportion of women (41.33%) reported a significant improvement in their financial independence, while 36.00% experienced moderate improvement. This shows that participation in MGNREGA has enabled many women to earn their own income and reduce dependence on male family members. However, 22.67% of respondents reported no change, indicating that the benefits are not uniform for all participants. Factors such as irregular work availability, low wage



levels, and household responsibilities may limit the extent of financial empowerment for some women.

#### 4.4 Decision-Making Role

**Table 4.4: Participation in Household Decision-Making**

Level of Participation	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
High	48	32.00
Moderate	67	44.67
Low	35	23.33
<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100.00</b>

**Source:** Author's work

The findings show that 44.67% of women reported moderate participation in household decision-making, while 32.00% reported high participation. This indicates that MGNREGA has contributed to improving women's involvement in decisions related to household expenditure, children's education, and daily needs. However, 23.33% of respondents still reported low participation, which suggests that traditional social norms and gender roles continue to influence decision-making power. Thus, while improvement is visible, complete empowerment in decision-making has not yet been achieved.

#### 4.5 Awareness about MGNREGA

**Table 4.5: Awareness Level of Women Respondents**

Awareness Level	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
High	45	30.00
Moderate	63	42.00
Low	42	28.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100.00</b>

**Source:** Author's work



The table shows that 42.00% of respondents have moderate awareness of MGNREGA provisions, while 30.00% have high awareness. However, a significant proportion (28.00%) still has low awareness. This lack of awareness may affect women's ability to demand work, understand wage entitlements, and access scheme benefits. It indicates the need for awareness programmes and better communication at the local level to ensure effective participation.

#### 4.6 Challenges Faced by Women Workers

**Table 4.6: Major Problems Faced under MGNREGA**

<b>Problem Identified</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Delay in wage payment	61	40.67
Lack of work availability	38	25.33
Hard physical work	27	18.00
Lack of basic facilities	24	16.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100.00</b>

**Source:** Author's work

The most common problem reported by respondents is delay in wage payment (40.67%), which directly affects their financial planning and reduces trust in the scheme. Lack of work availability (25.33%) further limits income opportunities. Some women (18.00%) reported that the work is physically demanding, which may discourage participation, especially among older women. Additionally, 16.00% highlighted the lack of basic facilities such as drinking water, rest areas, and childcare at worksites. These issues indicate that while MGNREGA has positive impacts, administrative and infrastructural challenges still reduce its effectiveness.

#### 5. Discussion

In terms of employment, the results show that most women received limited workdays, mainly between 30 and 60 days. Only a small proportion accessed employment beyond 100 days. This pattern suggests that while the scheme provides work opportunities, it does not fully ensure continuous employment. As a result, women continue to depend on additional income a source, which reduces the effectiveness of the programme as a complete livelihood support mechanism. The analysis of income indicates that MGNREGA provides supplementary earnings rather than a stable source of income. Most respondents reported moderate monthly earnings, which helped in meeting basic household needs. This income has improved



women's financial contribution within the household and reduced economic dependency to some extent. However, the level of income remains insufficient for long-term financial security, which limits the depth of economic empowerment. The study also shows improvement in women's role in household decision-making. A considerable number of respondents reported increased participation in decisions related to expenditure and family needs. This change reflects a shift in household dynamics, where earning income has strengthened women's position. At the same time, a section of women continues to have limited involvement, indicating the continued influence of traditional social norms.

Awareness about the scheme is found to be moderate among respondents. A significant proportion of women are not fully aware of their rights and entitlements under MGNREGA. This affects their ability to demand work and question delays or irregularities. Limited awareness reduces the overall effectiveness of the programme and restricts its potential impact on empowerment. The study further identifies several implementation-related challenges. Delay in wage payment emerges as the most serious issue, affecting financial planning and trust in the scheme. Irregular availability of work and physically demanding tasks also act as constraints. In addition, the lack of basic facilities at worksites creates difficulties for women, particularly those with household responsibilities.

## **6. Conclusion**

MGNREGA has provided employment opportunities to women and enabled them to earn their own income. This has reduced their financial dependence and increased their contribution to household expenses. The study also found that women's participation in household decision-making has improved, indicating a gradual change in their social position within the family. These changes reflect that access to wage employment can strengthen women's confidence and role in everyday life. At the same time, the benefits of the scheme remain limited in several ways. Most women received work for fewer days than the guaranteed limit, and the level of income remained moderate. Awareness about scheme provisions was not complete, which affected women's ability to fully utilise their entitlements. In addition, issues such as delay in wage payments, irregular work availability, and lack of basic facilities at worksites reduced the effectiveness of the programme.

The study therefore concludes that MGNREGA has the potential to act as an important tool for women empowerment at the grassroots level. It has created opportunities for income generation and social participation, but its impact is not yet fully realised. Improving implementation, ensuring timely wage payments, increasing awareness, and providing regular employment opportunities are necessary to strengthen its role in empowering women.



Overall, the study highlights that MGNREGA can contribute significantly to rural development and gender equality when supported by effective execution and local-level participation.

## 7. Suggestions

Based on the findings of the study, the following suggestions are proposed to improve the effectiveness of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act in promoting women empowerment:

- **Ensure timely wage payment:** Delays in wage payment should be minimized through effective monitoring and improved digital systems, as delays directly affect women's financial stability and reduce trust in the scheme.
- **Increase availability of work:** Adequate and regular work opportunities should be ensured so that women can receive employment closer to the guaranteed number of days. This will strengthen income security.
- **Enhance awareness among women:** Awareness programmes should be organized at the village level to inform women about their rights, entitlements, and procedures under MGNREGA.
- **Improve worksite facilities:** Basic facilities such as safe drinking water, rest areas, and childcare support should be provided at worksites to encourage greater participation of women.
- **Promote women's participation in planning:** Women should be encouraged to actively participate in Gram Sabha meetings and in the planning of MGNREGA works so that their needs are properly addressed.
- **Strengthen local governance and monitoring:** Panchayati Raj Institutions should be supported with proper training and accountability mechanisms to improve transparency and efficiency in implementation.
- **Provide skill development opportunities:** MGNREGA may be linked with skill development programmes to help women access better employment opportunities and achieve long-term economic empowerment

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