

RGICS ISSUE BRIEF

(29th November, 2013)

MGNREGA IN IDUKKI AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

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MGNREGA : Introduction

- The primary objective of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) is to ensure livelihood security for all rural households, in addition to asset creation for a more productive rural economy, extending social safety to vulnerable households and aiding in tackling poverty and rural distress. The Act guarantees a minimum of 100 days of employment to every household whose adult members volunteer to undertake manual unskilled labour. In this light, the Act makes the following provisions:
 - Timely employment to whoever demands it.
 - Provision of an unemployment allowance on failing to do so.
 - Timely payment of full wages.
 - Adequate transparency in the processes involved.
- It is the Central Government that notifies the wage rate for each state and the State Governments that fix the schedule of rates for different categories of work ensuring that at least the minimum wage rates are paid. MGNREGA wage rates notified by the Central Government are now linked to the Consumer Price Index for Agricultural Labour (CPIAL) and are revised on 1st April every year.
- Kerala has the highest MGNREGA wage rate among the South Indian states.

State Wise Wage Rate for Unskilled Manual Workers notified by Central Government ¹	
(Dated 26th February, 2013. With effect from: 1st April, 2013.)	
Name of State	Wage Rate in Rs. per Day
Kerala	Rs. 180
Tamil Nadu	Rs. 148
Andhra Pradesh	Rs. 149
Karnataka	Rs. 174

Source: nrega.nic.in

- The principal beneficiaries of MGNREGA are BPL families. The works are chosen in such a way that most of the assets created under the scheme have a direct bearing on poverty reduction as majority are assets beneficial for the poor. Eg: rural roads, water harvesting structures, drought proofing works, micro irrigation systems, etc
- The Act stipulates that priority shall be given to women in such a way that a minimum of one-third of the beneficiaries are women who have registered and have requested for work. It also provides for gender parity of wages. Women participation for FY 2012-13 is 53%. The highest women participation for FY 2012-13 was reported in Kerala (93%) followed by Puducherry (84%).

¹ http://nrega.nic.in/netnrega/WriteReaddata/Circulars/Amendment_wage_rate13.pdf

Highlights of MGNREGA implementation in Idukki (2012-13):²

- 1.19 lakh households provided employment.
- 2.4 lakh persons provided employment.
Number of men employed: 71,015. Number of Women employed: 1, 69, 607³
Percentage of women employees: 70.50%
- Around 33000 households completed 100 days of employment. (rounded off)
- 75.93 lakh persondays were created. The share of women in persondays created: 77%
- Average number of days of employment is third highest in the state at 63.78%
- The only district in the state with 100% expenditure of total fund availability
- Average Wage per Day in 2013-14 is 179.83 (as of 20th November, 2013). Last year's average wage per day of Rs. 164.22 in Idukki was the highest in the state for 2012-13.
- 93% of the expenditure has gone to the workers as wages and only 3% was administrative expenditure, which implies that a very high percentage of the expenditure directly went into the hands of workers
- Delay in payment of wages is among the lowest in the State. Only 10% of the amount was delayed for more than 30 days
- % of water related works taken up: 32 %
- Total number of gram panchayats in the district: 53.
Number of gram panchayats where expenditure is more than 1 crore: 41

² Since the fiscal year 2013-14 is not yet over, data from 2012-13 has been taken for better clarity.
http://164.100.129.6/netnrega/dash_brd.aspx?page=S&lflag=eng&state_name=KERALA&state_code=16&fin_year=2012-2013

Impact of MGNREGA in Idukki:⁴

- *Increase in cultivation:* Vast areas of waste land could be made cultivable
- *Increase in employment:* The Panchayats in the plantation belt successfully enrolled the erstwhile labourers of the plantations under lock-out who were rendered helpless due to closing down of plantations.
- *Increase in wages:* MGNREGA paved way for increasing the prevailing market wages in the plantation and farm sectors.
- *Decrease in distress migration:* There has been considerable reduction in distress migration as the option of 100 days employment and an additional income of Rs.18000 is there.

Women's Participation in MGNREGA in Idukki

Women Employment in MGNREGA for the financial year 2012-2013			
Idukki District		Absolute number	Percentage
Workers Employed	Women	1,69,607	70.50%
	Men	71,015	29.50%
	Total	2,40,622	
Persondays (in lakh)	Women	57.1 lakh	77%
	Men	17 lakh	23%
	Total	74 lakh	
Amount earned during current financial year (in lakh)	Women	9,375	77%
	Men	2,781	23%
	Total	12,156	

Source: nrega.nic.in⁵

The table below shows that, in 2012-13:

- **Total wages earned by women is more than three time the wages earned by men**
- The share of women in persondays created: 77%
- 70.5% of MGNREGA workers were women.

⁴ <http://www.crd.kerala.gov.in/2011/march/idukki.pdf>

⁵ http://164.100.129.6/netnrega/dash_brd.aspx?page=S&flag=eng&state_name=KERALA&state_code=16&fin_year=2013-2014

Red Flags:

- Percentage of women's participation in Idukki is lowest in the state (2012-13). Hence, the persondays generated by women and the total amount earned by women are lowest for the district. However, compared to most other states, this is a high percentage of participation.

Impact of Women' participation in MGNREGA⁶

Certain provisions in the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Act promote participation of women in the scheme and hence pave way for their empowerment. Provisions in MGNREGA like priority for women in the ratio of one-third of total workers (Schedule II (6)), equal wages for men and women (Schedule II (34)) and crèches for the children of women workers (Schedule II (28)) were made in the Act, with the view of ensuring that rural women benefit from the scheme. Provisions like work within a radius of five kilometers from the house, absence of supervisor and contractor, and flexibility in terms of choosing period and months of employment were not made exclusively for women, but have, nevertheless, been conducive for rural women.

The following are some of the dimensions in which MGNREGA has empowered rural women:

- *Financial Independence and empowerment of women:* MGNREGA has given an **opportunity to women to earn for themselves** and be financially independent. They had **opened bank account for the first time** as wages were paid through banks only. Since funds are transferred through individual savings bank accounts, there is increased autonomous control over the wages earned by them. MGNREGA has led to increased financial literacy and financial inclusion of women. Women and tribal workers who had never visited financial institutions now go to the banks to avail of the banking services on their own. This has been an empowering process.

A study by Ratna M Sudarshan for the Centre for Social Protection of the Institute of Development Studies (IDS Sussex) highlights another interesting angle – the contrast between the women workforce participation in MGNREGA at 85 percent and their average workforce participation in the state at 35 percent. In other words, MGNREGA has brought a large number of women (almost three times more) who wouldn't have otherwise worked, out of their homes and employed them.⁷

One of the reasons for the active participation of women in MGNREGA is Kudumbashree which is playing a critical role in the implementation of the scheme. Kudumbashree and Panchayats have been very vigilant in spreading awareness about NREGA through radio, poster, television, notice board on gram sabhas, etc. The

⁶ <http://www.crd.kerala.gov.in/2011/march/idukki.pdf>

⁷ http://www.firstpost.com/economy/cag-backs-wha-comedy-shows-in-kerala-say-about-nrega-724843.html?utm_source=ref_article

manifold functions taken up by Kudumbasree members range from identification of projects to supervision of works and submission of records for wage disbursement.

- Increase in Self-Confidence of women:** The challenges thrown up by the present work have given them the **courage and self- confidence to take up semi-skilled work.**

The wage negotiation capacity has increased as the women working as a group has emerged as fraternity. In the cardamom plantation sector, women earlier used to work for a pittance. With the advent of NREGS where minimum wages are assured, women preferred to go for it. Later plantation sector was forced to increase wages.
- Increased welfare of women through the nature of MGNREGA projects, and not just the wages:**

In areas with water scarcity, it is women, due to their social roles, who have to bear the brunt of water shortage. They are the ones who are expected to walk for long distances and collect water for the entire household. With MGNREGA, many projects have been taken up to address water scarcity, the principal beneficiaries of which are women. In 2012-13, 30% of MGNREGA expenditure was on water related works. **Easy access to water implies decrease in the burden on women and increased productivity.** It gives them more time for other activities.
- Increased welfare of family:** Studies have shown that women generally tend to invest a higher proportion of their earnings in their families in comparison to men. Since wages are transferred to individual accounts, women have better control over the money they earn. Hence there is **more money available for meeting expenses like children’s education, health care of family and maintenance of their houses.**

MGNREGA Success Stories from Idukki⁸

- Solution to drinking water problem in Ward No. 21 of Kattappana GramaPanchayat**

There was acute scarcity of drinking water in *Nirmala City Oolanippady* in ward no.21 of Kattappana Grama Panchayat. After a pond was built in the area, the local people comprising 33 families, especially the women, do not have to go far to collect water. The project was undertaken with the help from a local NGO (*World Vision*).
- Transcending the barriers of disability**

Ms. Lissymol (Job Card No. KL-09-007-003-008/1446) lives with her parents in Karunapuram Grama Panchayat of Nedumkandam Block. Though she had studied up to matriculation, she could not find any gainful employment due to stunted physical growth. However she was elected as the Secretary of the Area Development Society (ADS) of the Kudumbashree and became a mate under MGNREGA She is rated as

⁸ The success stories are based only on the work done till 2011. Source: <http://www.crd.kerala.gov.in/2011/march/idukki.pdf>

one of the most efficient Mates in Karunapuram. She is now confident that as long as the NREGS is there, she can stand on her own.

- **Innovative paddy cultivation**

In Vathikkudy Grama Panchayat an innovative paddy cultivation programme was carried out in the *Mannathara-Perumthotty* watershed. An area of 10 acres of land which was left uncultivated for years was taken up for land development for paddy cultivation.

With the active involvement of the Watershed Committee and the Grama Panchayat authorities, land development for paddy cultivation was done successfully. This helped in sensitizing farmers on the possibilities of extending paddy cultivation to uplands.

- **Filling up critical gaps in infrastructure - construction of a road in a far-flung area**

Erattayar in Kattappana Block has fifty poor families living in the *Adayalatandu Thampan city One Lakh Housing (OLH) colony*. Due to the absence of road connectivity, the local people used to struggle with lot of difficulties. It was difficult for the children to get good education as schools were situated far away. It was difficult to market their farm produces and access emergency medical care. Under MGNREGA, the two-metre foot path that existed was developed into an eight metre road. The local people proudly say that they themselves have constructed the road with help from MGNREGA.

- **Mahatma Gandhi NREGS comes to the help of plantation workers**

For the workers of the tea plantations which have been locked in Azhutha and Kattappana Blocks, Mahatma Gandhi NREGS was a god sent blessing. About 20 tea plantations have remained locked for about 7 to 10 years. Previously the plantation workers used to collect and sell tea clones to the nearby tea factory for a pittance, earning just about Rs. 135/- for a four- day period. With the lock-out of the plantations that meagre income also ceased leading to indescribable miseries and hardships. Under MGNREGA their living conditions have improved drastically

- **Awareness building in schools on climate change along with NREGS**

During 2009 -10, in Vellathooval Grama Panchayat in Adimali Block, an extent of 10 acres of barren land in the Govt. High school was made cultivable and 3000 tree saplings were planted under MGNREGA. The protective wall with vegetative fence prevented wanton cattle and goats from wandering into the school premises. Subsequently more tree saplings could be planted to arrest rampant soil erosion. The work helped in creating awareness among students on climate change and afforestation programme.

Success Stories on Empowerment of Tribals through MGNREGA:

- **Construction of a road from Pettimudy to Edamalakkudy via Edalipparakkudy- an initiative for tribal development**

Altogether, 22 tribal habitats (Kudis) are situated within a radius of 8 to 20 kilometers. The absence of road connectivity has been one of the prime reasons for the extreme backwardness of the area, particularly in the field of health and education sectors. Under MGNREGA, it was decided to construct a road from Pettimudy to Edamalakkudy via Edalipparackudy. The entire skilled labour was done by the tribal community which has resulted in better wages for them. This can be taken as example of how MGNREGA can help in enhancing purchasing power of the vulnerable sections of people.

- **Safety of tribal community in Mankutthy**

Mankutthy tribal hamlet in the *Udumbanchola* Grama Panchayat of Nedumkandam Block has about 150 destitute tribal families living there. Since the hamlet has been in proximity to forest, animal menace was a common feature. Under the NREGA scheme elephant trenches of six feet deep and five feet wide were constructed for a length of 4000 meters thus giving fortification to the tribal families in Mankutthymedu, Chakkulathymedu, Bhoothappara, and Chathuarmgappara from the wild animals, particularly elephants. Also, the gravel removed from the trenches has helped in building a road and the water collected in the trenches has led to rise in groundwater level.

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