



## Women participation in MGNREGA in Northeast India: A Comparative Analysis

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The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) is a flagship social security programme in India that aims to provide 100 days of guaranteed wage employment to rural households. The programme has several design features to promote gender equality, such as a one-third quota for women's participation, equal wages for men and women, and provision of childcare facilities at worksites. But the implementation of MGNREGA varies across different regions and states, and may not always reflect the gender-sensitive principles of the programme. Based on the secondary data this study will examine the level of women employment generation in the eight states of north eastern state and to analyse the impact of MGNREGA on gender and social empowerment in northeast India, a region that is characterized by diverse ethnic groups, high poverty rates, and low human development indicators.

Key words: Northeast, MGNREGA, Women, Empowerment, women participation, employment generation.

### MGNREGA: AN INTRODUCTION

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act 2005 (MGNREGA) is a law passed by the Indian government that guarantees the "right to work" to rural citizens of India. Under this act, the government assures a minimum of 100 days of unskilled manual work in a financial year to an adult member of any household willing to do public work at the statutory minimum wage. This is a social security programme aims to alleviate the poverty by providing wage guaranteed employment, create rural infrastructure and empowering women.

Some of the main objectives of MGNREGA are:

1. To enhance livelihood security in rural areas by providing at least 100 days of wage employment in a financial year to at least one member of every household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work.
2. To create durable assets and strengthen the livelihood resource base of the rural poor.
3. To empower rural women by ensuring one third of the jobs made available under the act
4. To promote social inclusion and equity by providing equal opportunities to Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, women, and other marginalized groups.
5. To foster democracy and transparency by involving local self-government institutions and social audit mechanisms in the planning, implementation, and monitoring of the act.

MGNREGA is implemented by the Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India, in collaboration with the state governments and the local self-government institutions. The act provides a legal framework for the implementation and monitoring of the employment guarantee schemes and the unemployment allowance. The act also establishes the National and State Employment Guarantee Funds and the audit mechanisms for the same.

MGNREGA is one of the largest social security programs in the world, covering more than 270 million rural households in India. It has been widely praised for its positive impact on rural poverty, employment, empowerment, and environment.

### MGNREGA AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) stands as a transformative policy initiative in India, not just for its economic implications but also for its profound impact on gender dynamics and women's empowerment. Enacted in 2005, MGNREGA aimed to guarantee the 'right to work' and ensure livelihood security in rural areas by providing at

least 100 days of wage employment in a financial year to every household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work.

Within the larger framework of poverty alleviation and rural development, MGNREGA holds a special significance in fostering women's empowerment. It has played a pivotal role in challenging traditional gender norms by not only recognizing women as active participants in the workforce but also ensuring their equal participation and rights in decision-making processes. Women's inclusion in the scheme has not just been about providing them with employment opportunities but has also served as a catalyst for social change, challenging deeply entrenched gender disparities.

Besides social inclusion and employment generation, the programme is designed in such a way to help in bridging gender equality and also the development of women. Women related provisions are-

1) At least one-third of the beneficiaries shall be women (NREGA, 2005, Schedule II, 6).

2) If the number of children under six years of age accompanying women employed at some site is five or more, there is a way to depute one of these women working to take care of the children. (NREGA, 2005, Schedule II, 28).

3) No discrimination is permitted solely on the grounds of gender, as maintained by the terms of the Act of Equal Remuneration, 1976 (25 of 1976) (NREGA, 2005, Schedule II, 34).

4) This scheme also allows women to plan and implement MGNREGA as Gram Sabha and Gram Panchayat members. Women represent not fewer than one-third of the overall number of non-official members of the Central Council (NREGA 2005, Part II, and Sec-3i)

Through its emphasis on gender parity and inclusivity, MGNREGA has aimed to provide women with economic independence, a voice in community affairs, and increased agency over their lives. The scheme's focus on women's participation, provision of equal wages, and measures to ensure their involvement in decision-making processes. Along with providing social security, eliminating poverty from the grassroots level, and creating a productive asset, and employment guarantee programme can reduce gender inequalities in numerous ways. MGNREGA has been playing a significant role in bringing significant changes in the lives of women. MGNREGA is empowering women economically and helping them in becoming independent and gain self-esteem (Ramesh & Kumar, 2009). MGNREGS has increased female worker participation in many Indian states like Kerala and Karnataka. However, MGNREGA has not produced a minimum of 33 per cent women participation, the desired benchmark set in all states (Nidhi, 2011)

## Literature Review

**Sarah Tahmeen et al. (2021)** The paper Aims to analyses the implementation of MGNREGS with a comparative view of Assam and Meghalaya. The paper is based on secondary data. The qualitative-quantitative mixed-model method is used and explores women's participation in India's North-eastern states through the programme. The study found that the programme is not satisfactory and states not able to successfully implement the programme due to the lack of awareness, absence of childcare facilities, lack of work sites facilities, delay in disbursement payment and absence of social edit.

**Panda et al. (2009)** observed that one of the distinctive effects of MGNREGS in the state of Sikkim and Meghalaya is the development of women empowerment. The study was based on primary as well as secondary sources of data. A purposive sampling was used for selecting 240 beneficiaries in these states. It is only due to MGNREGS the women get the opportunity of equal wages, the opportunity of interacting with the bank officials, which in turn have raised the confidence level among the women workers. Under MGNREGS, women were given the opportunity of sharing data among co-workers, which has enhanced the knowledge empowerment among women workers in the tribal society. Change in health status has also acquired by women workers. Around 45 percent of MGNREGS women workers responded that they have been able to collect data on health related issues through interacting with their co-workers working in MGNREGA.

**Madhusmita Kanungo (2012)** objective of the paper is to analyse the role of microfinance in context of rural development by incorporating the role of MGNREGA in empowerment and rural development. Research is purely based purely on the secondary data. The study found that the MGNREGA and Microfinance has helped the rural poor and weaker section to achieve inclusive growth. The implementation of MGNREGA and microfinance scheme has given rise to alertness among the rural poor and women on continuous basis for their all-round development to support a faster and sustainable growth of rural sector.

**Dey (2010)** studied the functioning of MGNREGA in the Birbhum district of West Bengal. The study used the primary date. The study found out that all the respondents were well aware of the MGNREGA program. Sixty percent of surveyed respondents were ignorant about the details of the payment procedure. Beneficiaries were not given any kind of unemployment allowance. More than 80 percent of households were provided the job cards. The number of job days created was very less. For example in 2006 -

07, the job days were created up to 14 days, and in 2008-09, it increased to 26 days, but it remains below 100 days of employment. It was also observed that the respondents did not demand job at the wage rate of Rs. 80 a day. Moreover, the study found that the timely payment of wages was not provided to the beneficiaries. For example, in 2006-07, the gap between the work foundation and wage payments was about 42 days. Though the delay has declined in the consecutive year.

**Minati sahu (2013)** to find out the impact of participation in MGNREGA on women empowerment in nelia village of cuttack district in odisha. The study used both primary and secondary data. Primary data is collected through survey that was carried out in 2012-2013. A random sampling was done to select a sample of 50 female workers working under MGNREGA from this panchayat. Different website, journals were used to get secondary data. Wages, low levels of awareness about programme and low participation of women workers, overall impact of MGNREGA on women's lives has been quite positive in many ways, whether its is by enhancing their economic independence and self-confidence by helping them to have greater role in decision in household, contributing to food security, or fostering better awareness of minimum wages.

**Malla (2014)** aimed to correlate the official figures with the impact of the policy on the socio- economic vulnerabilities in the state. His analysis was based on time series field study, which was conducted in 2010 and 2012 in the Kage block of district Budgam. He found that at all India levels, the statutory 33 percent reservation for women in the workforce surpassed its limits to 51.92 percent, but in Jammu and Kashmir, the participation of women under MGNREGA is still only 20.05 percent. He also compared the proportion of women's inclusion in the workforce with the SCs/STs and found that the positions of SCs and STs in MGNREGA work are better than women workers during the beginning of the program.

**Sumitra naha (2020)** the study is an attempt to analyses the potential of MGNREGA in terms of poverty alleviation and rural development in north- east India. The study uses secondary data to analyse how far the scheme had been successful region relation to the economy as a whole. Secondary date is obtained from the official website of mgnrega. Methodology involves a comparative study based on a set of indicators. The study had found that the scheme had potentially far- reaching effects with effects with respect to employment generation among the rural people of the region. Although exist a divergence between employment provided and employment demanded; the problem of job holder not getting the guaranteed job was much less acute in north eastern region.

**Karma Loday (2016)** this paper mainly focuses on the achievements made by the scheme so far and also to highlight the various constraints of this scheme in Sikkim. The study is based on secondary sources for the collection of information. The study found out that MGNREGA has helped in strengthening Panchayati Raj Institutions by bringing real Democracy to the grassroots and facilitate the transformation from Contractor Raj to Panchayati Raj.

**Bai Koyu (2015)** A study on the impact of MGNREGA in the north-eastern state of Arunachal Pradesh was conducted during October, 2014 to March, 2015. The focus was on assessment of the performance of the scheme in terms of job creation, efficiency in creation of durable social assets vis-a-vis work completion rate; efficiency in fund utilization to examine as to which extent this massive flagship programme could attain its promised deliverables during the periods in between 2008-09 to 2013-14. Though an impressive quantum of 240.21 lakh person days could be generated in the state and 10.26 lakh job cards were distributed during the entire span of study period. The work completion rate in the state was found to be very low i.e. 8.05% as large volume of funds remained being unspent. The study reveals that the MGNREGA in the state of Arunachal Pradesh is failed to guarantee 100 days jobs to the poor people as per promise.

**Techi Sissal and Ashok sharma (2014)** the study conducted to know the general profile of MGNREGA Beneficiaries in Doimukh Panchayat of Papum Pare District of Arunachal Pradesh. The study is based on both primary and secondary data. The study found that most of the beneficiaries of Doimukh Panchayat don't have proper knowledge about the MGNREGA programme. The job cardholders don't get actual wage amount as per MGNREGA. Most of the respondents do not have proper knowledge about the schemes, benefits available, etc under MGNREGA. Some of the beneficiaries do not have bank account and their wages are not being credited in bank account.

## Objectives

- 1.To find out whether the eight states of north eastern India is providing minimum 33% of employment to women under MGNREGA.
2. To analyse the level women employment generation in eight states of north east India and compare with the national level.

## Data and Methodology

The study is descriptive in nature. It compares the Level of women employment generation across the north-eastern state of India. The study uses secondary data to analyse how far the scheme has generated women employment across the state during the financial year of 2019-20 – 2023 -24. Secondary data is obtained from official website of MGNREGA. Methodology involves a comparative study based on set indicators.

**Table.1. shows the percentage of employment generation for the women in eight north eastern states of India**

NAME OF STATES	FINANCIAL YEAR FROM 2019-20 -to -2023-24				
	FY-2019-20	FY-2020-21	FY-2021-22	FY-2022-23	FY-2023-24
<b>Arunachal Pradesh</b>	41.6	45.42	48.2	48.92	49.09
<b>Assam</b>	62.61	65.66	70.67	73.76	75.29
<b>Manipur</b>	52.51	56.52	55.56	54.13	52.51
<b>Meghalaya</b>	74.84	75.3	76.23	73.99	73.58
<b>Mizoram</b>	53.55	60.89	48.6	49.29	49.96
<b>Nagaland</b>	40.08	39.89	44.9	51.01	51.97
<b>Sikkim</b>	58.32	59.76	60	61.96	60.67
<b>Tripura</b>	66.32	69.96	72.57	72.57	69.83

*Source: Data compiled by author from MGNREGA official website, nrega.nic.in*

**Table.2. shows the national level average percentage employment generation for women in India**

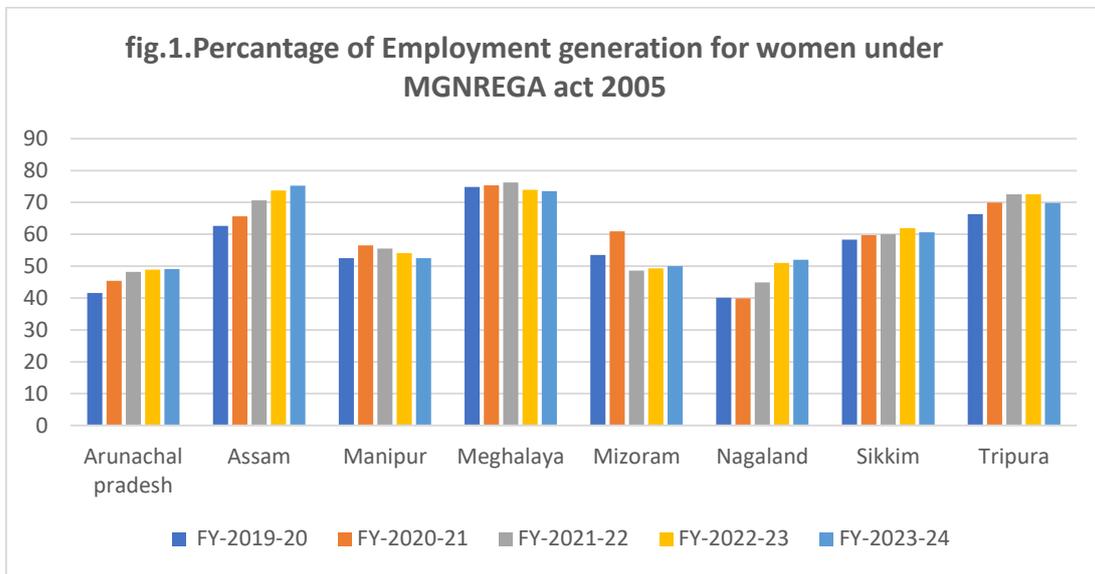
INDIA	FINANCIAL YEAR FROM 2019-20 TO 2023-24				
	FY 2019-20	FY 2020-21	FY-2021-22	FY- 2022-23	FY – 2023-24
	75.53	74.92	75.91	76.54	76.58

*Source: Data compiled by author from MGNREGA official website, nrega.nic.in*

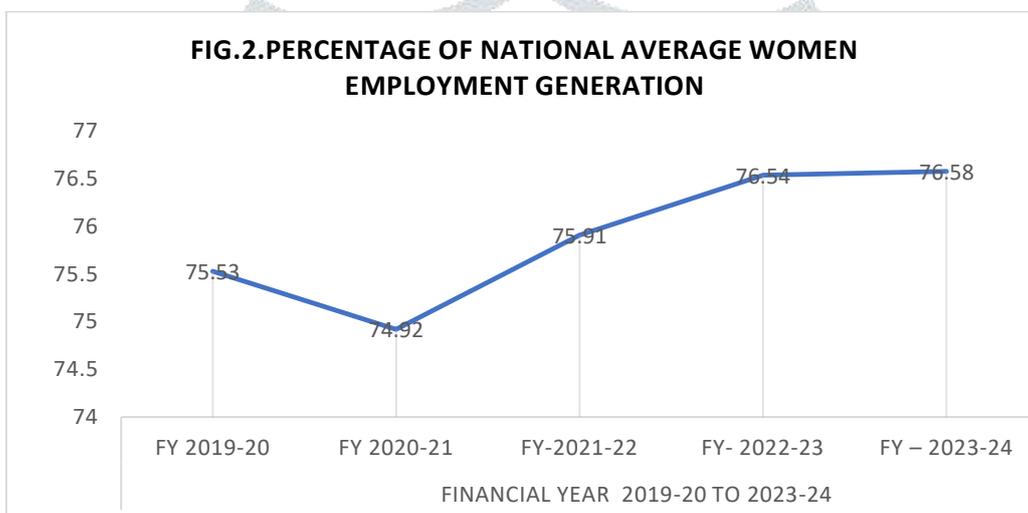
Table.1. shows percentage of employment generation for the women in the eight state of north east india viz. Arunachal pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura during the financial year from 2019-20 to 2023-24.

The percentage of women's employment generation varies across states and fluctuates over the years within each state. Some states exhibit consistent or incremental growth in women's employment percentages (e.g., Assam, Manipur), while others show fluctuations or slight decreases in certain years.

It is evident from the table that the state Arunachal pradesh is able to generate higher than minimum rate of employment generation for women i. e 33% which is enshrined in the MGNREGA Act. But it is much lower than the national average which is ranging from 74.92% to 76.58%. Though the women employment generation in Arunachal predseh is lower than national average its shows increasing trending that is shown in the fig. 1.



Source: Data compiled by author from MGNREGA official website, nrega.nic.in



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It can be seen from table, the state like Assam and Nagaland shows the positive trending of women employment generation. Both the state generate women employment higher than minimum level of 33% set by the MGNREGA Act. But in case of rate of women employment generation in Nagaland it is much lower than the national average. When it comes to assam it is close to the national average of 73 in the FY 2022-23.

The state like Meghalaya, Manipur, Tripura experienced fluctuation trending as it is evident from the table, in case of Meghalaya its was 74.84% in FY 2020-21 which increase to 76.23 in FY 2021-22 and again it reduces to 73.58 in FY 2023-24. Other state like Manipur, Tripura, Mizoram, Sikkim shows the similar result which can be seen from fig.1. All these state are generating higher than the minimum level of women employment that is mention in the act but the level of women employment generation is much lower than the national average level.

**Conclusion**

Review of the women employment generation of MGNREGA for the period five years i.e 2019 to 2023 gives the idea that all the state of north east India are achieving One of the most important objectives of Mahatma Gandhi national rural employment guarantee Act 2005 that is to ensure that at least 33% of workers shall be women. That means all the state of north east India is generating women employment higher than 33%. By generating employment for women at fair wages in the village, MGNREGA can play a substantial role in economically empowering and lying on the basis of higher independence and self-esteem. Various provision under MGNREGA act aims to ensure that women have equitable and easy access work equal payment and representation in decision making bodes. There is so much in the act to empower women but the question is, does providing employment really empower women? Answer to this question requires further research.

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