

# **MIGRATION OR MGNREGA, WHAT DO RURAL WOMEN PREFER AND WHY?**

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## **Introduction**

Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Development Act (MGNREGA), which was enacted a decade ago, guarantees manual work on demand in rural India. The program provides infrastructure for the villages and the rural families. This program has proven to be useful to small farmers, marginal farmers and landless labourers.

Though the significance of MGNREGA has been widely studied all over the world, the importance of this program to the rural women is not well studied. This program is especially helpful to women laborers for

- wages are linked to work output, so equal wages to men and women labourers
- provision to set up temporary crèche
- work available in the village
- reduces their drudgery of migrating to unknown places
- makes Water storage structures reducing pain of fetching water from long distances

## **Statement of the problem**

There are studies regarding Women in MGNREGA of Tamilnadu <sup>1</sup>, Haryana <sup>2</sup>, Assam <sup>3</sup> and such. There is a study by NIRD on this topic <sup>4</sup>. A study by IGIDR discussed MGNREGA with respect to Women using the Sample survey data <sup>5</sup>.

So, a study of women in Maharashtra might be useful, more so because Maharashtra has had employment guarantee for more almost four decades. Last decade as MGNREGA and earlier as Employment Guarantee Scheme. This study might prove important for the policy makers and the academia in general.

## **Hypotheses to be tested**

Do women prefer to work on MGNREGA instead of going for the usual seasonal migration?

## **Research design and Methodology**

The study is based on survey of women who have worked on the program MGNREGA. The survey coverage is households in the villages of the tribal belt of Nashik district, Peth, Trimbakeshwar and Igatpuri. We have covered 611 households from 30 villages of 3 Blocks of Nashik district. Sample has been selected from the list of women who have worked at least once in the last three years as per the nrega website data. ( [www.nrega.nic.in](http://www.nrega.nic.in)).

### **Tools used in data collection**

A structured questionnaire was and household interview were held by Surveyors. The study completed between January to May 2018.

### **Significance of the study**

The study draws its significance from the fact that MGNREGA has special provisions for women, giving them work with dignity. Yet this aspect has not been explored during the discussions on MGNREGA in Maharashtra. It is important to understand their preference between MGNREGA and migration for earning basic living for their families.

### **Limitations of the study**

Given the time period and resources, the study has assumed a limited scope. The sample is small and area of the study is based on organization's familiarity. Since the data collection is in the predominantly tribal villages, one may argue that this does not represent the entire State.

### **Findings of the study**

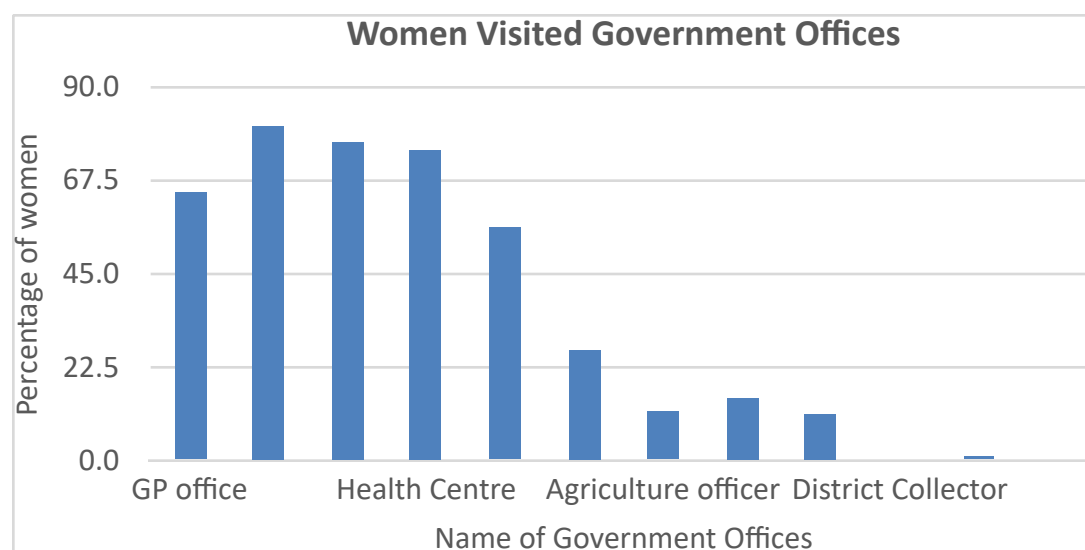
Nashik district has 15 Blocks, out of these almost 50% Blocks are with tribal population. This district is diverse, it can boast of grape farmers who export, pomegranate farmers who are progressive, onion farmers who experience market fluctuations and on the other hand farmers growing paddy, millets, oilseeds and pulses and manage subsistence. Sample of this study belongs to the latter category. Women who have been interviewed for this study belong to three Blocks of Nashik district – Peth, Triambakeshwar and Igatpuri, where 87%, 84% and 67% of households are of 'deprived' category as per Socio-Economic Caste Census (SECC2011). These blocks are predominantly tribal, experience high rainfall and are hilly with rainfed farming growing grains, millets, pulses and such.

Our sample shows that the most of the women are married, are illiterate or been to primary school, have 2-3 children and are mostly in the age group of 25 to 44 years. This corroborates with the age group seen during MGNREGA works and of the families who are seen migrating. Our sample shows that 91.7% and 92.3% of women have a bank account and Aadhaar card, respectively.

Women are engaged in as farm labour, work on MGNREGA and also migrate. This is in addition to taking responsibility of household chores, nurturing children and taking care of the elderly of the family. If there are cattle at home taking care of them is also their responsibility. If we consider ownership of land as one of important indicators of economic status then from this sample 75% of women-families own land. And, as high as 95% of women, have a ration card.

We have considered involvement in SHG as an indicator of the women that we interviewed, as being socially active. Here, we see that Age Group and Economic Status have no significant bearing on their participation. Contrary to our understanding, the illiterate and primary schooled women seem to be more active in participating in SHG activity.

Chart 1



This chart is quite revealing. The nearer the Government office, the likelihood of women visiting that office at least once, is higher. As we go further away from the village, their visits to

Government offices are negligible. As many as 62 per cent women said that they attend Gram Sabha, they have attended at least one Gram Sabha last year.

It is a good sign that only 3.8% women did not know about MGNREGA, but almost 35% said that work is not available! As per MGNREGA, for Works to start in any village, villagers need to put in demand application. Here it can be seen that only 48 women have put in demand. And out of 48 only 27 women could get receipt of their demand application. Though as per the Act, they can get work all through the year, they expect to get work at least for one month!

Table 1

| Wages earned in MGNREGA |                 |         |
|-------------------------|-----------------|---------|
|                         | No of responses | % women |
| Received Wages          | 339             | 55.5    |
| Per day wage            |                 |         |
| 100 to 150              | 67              | 11      |
| 180 to 200              | 179             | 29.3    |
| 201 to 250              | 111             | 18.2    |
| 251 to 300              | 1               | 0.2     |

As many as 55% of the women have said that they have received wages of MGNREGA works. Most of them have earned between 180 to 250 rupees in a day, this is when the wages were around 200 rupees in last three years. ( 2018 – 203; 2017 – 201; 2016 – 192). These wages are deposited by the Government into the bank accounts of the women laborers.

Table 8

| NREGA work in the village |                     |      |
|---------------------------|---------------------|------|
|                           | Number of responses | In % |
| Forest Pond               | 284                 | 46.5 |

|                                                                      |            |            |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|------------|
| Plantation                                                           | 393        | 64.3       |
| Earthen Dam                                                          | 34         | 5.6        |
| Village pond                                                         | 7          | 1.1        |
| Road                                                                 | 1          | 0.2        |
| Forest fire lines                                                    | 34         | 5.6        |
| <b>Total</b>                                                         | <b>611</b> | <b>100</b> |
| <i>*Total may not be equal to 100 because of multiple selection.</i> |            |            |

Most of works that have taken place as mentioned by women are related to water storage, water conservation. Thus, availability of water for a longer period reduces drudgery of fetching water which is predominantly responsibility of women. This clearly shows that MGNREGA has more to offer to women than just earning wages.

Table 2

| <b>Availability and benefits of facilities at MGNREGA work place</b> |                        |             |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|-------------|
|                                                                      | <b>No of responses</b> | <b>In %</b> |
| Drinking Water                                                       | 340                    | 55.6        |
| Shade                                                                | 111                    | 18.2        |
| crèche                                                               | 27                     | 4.4         |
| First Aid                                                            | 182                    | 29.8        |
| Benefit of the facilities                                            | 327                    | 53.5        |
| crèche and drinking water is benefited more                          | 308                    | 50.4        |

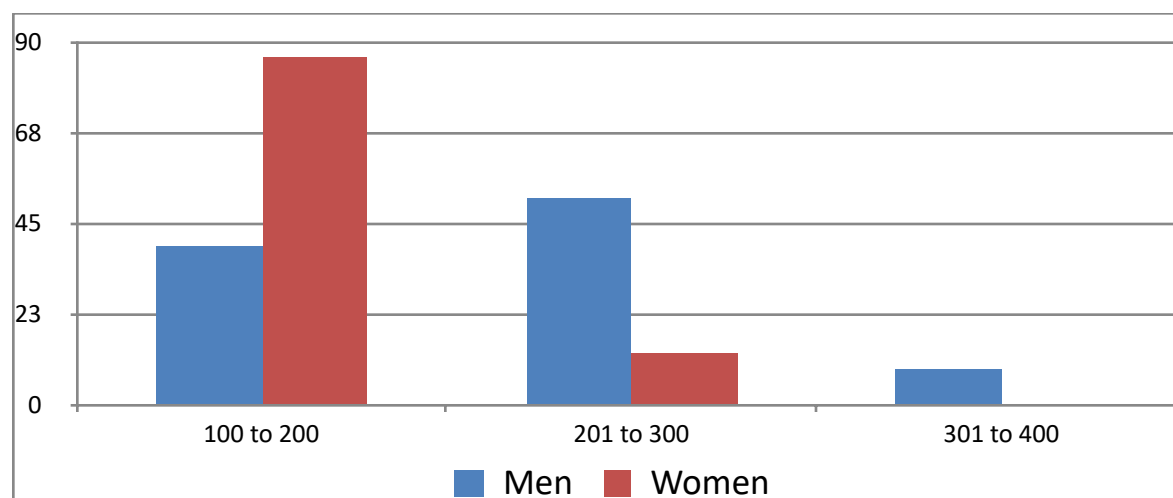
This table shows that women find the facilities useful especially drinking water being made

available at the worksite, otherwise they need to carry it from home. And the other most beneficial according to them is crèche since having a crèche allows them to work which otherwise would have left them deprived of the opportunity.

### **Women migrating out for earning income**

The women in our coverage area belong to families who won small plots of land, are engaged in kharif agriculture, they lack irrigation facilities. This leaves them with two options, either work on MGNREGA or migrate to nearby cities.

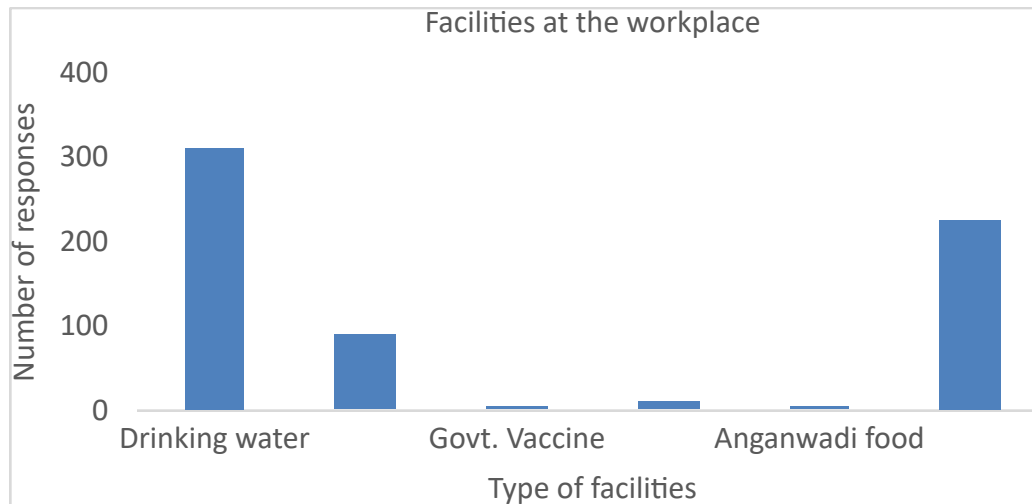
Chart 2 Daily wage earned during out migration



It is very striking to observe that women routinely get paid less than men. On an average, women get paid almost half of men's wages. Also it is important to notice that wages earned are on par with MGNREGA wages and not very high. There is a perception that when men and women migrate they earn much more as daily wage than on MGNREGA hence they prefer to migrate. But the daily wage rates mentioned by women defy that perception.

The data shows that of their earning, they need to spend around 100-200 per day for their routine expenses when they are staying out of their village. And so they manage to get home around half of their income earned.

Chart 3 Facilities at the place of migration



While the family is leaving away from their village, they look for a place which has drinking water facility and then put their make shift shelter there. Moving away from village, they loose out on subsidized food available in the ration shop in their village. Their children miss out on their doses of vaccination and Anganwadi supplementary nutrition. This is very crucial. This is a direct impact on the well being of the next generation. School going children miss out on school presence and also the Mid Day Meal given in the schools. These are direct losses to families who migrate out of their villages.

In the interviews, women have stated that they are home sick and are worried about their safety. They are tormented by their other responsibilities of taking care of children and the elderly of the family. They get worried about their cattle too.

### **Comparing working on MGNREGA and migrating**

Though MGNREGA has the potential to fulfill the basic requirements of the women, they are migrating. There is a puzzle here.

Women earn equal to men when they work on MGNREGA. Rather this is the only opportunity which gives them equal wages. In spite of the payment of Equal Wages Act, women while working on farms or as casual labor are routinely paid less than men, as much as half.

MGNREGA provides facilities like drinking water and creche. On the other hand, families lose out on their ration entitlements when migrate. Most importantly, MGNREGA works are near village, so they get to stay at home which reduces day to day expenses.

Their children continue to get vaccinations, children continue to get supplementary nutrition in Anganwadi, children continue to go to School and also get their Mid day meal and all this is missed during migration.

Therefore it is evident to the women that MGNREGA is more beneficial in multiple ways than migration. But MGNREGA works do not start on time and do not provide adequate amount of work. Women do think that migration is distressful.

### **Summary and Policy Implications**

This study has given us understanding of two very important factors which influence women's lives in rural areas.

Women need to engage in earning for the family since the rainfed, small plots of family farming is inadequate to fulfill even basic needs. There are two major options that are being assessed. One is MGNREGA and second is migration. From this study of getting opinion of 611 women, it is amply clear that women prefer MGNREGA for multiple reasons over migrating out of village for earning.

MGNREGA gives them equal wages, provides drinking water, facility for crèche at the worksite. The worksite is near the village so they stay put in their house. And the kind of assets that are built under MGNREGA are useful for their farming, it enhances their livelihood opportunities.

Contrast this with migration. They need to leave home, that makes them feel insecure and homesick. Their elderly are left to fend for themselves. Their cattle are back home which is an important asset. Most importantly, their children lose out on vaccinations, supplementary nutrition given at Anganwadi, miss out on School and also the mid day meal at school. So Government's efforts and families' efforts in tending for a healthy next generation get a set-back.

They live this situation, hence they know their options.

Though they prefer to work on MGNREGA, it can be seen from their experiences that getting work in their village has not been easy. They put in demand, they do not get receipt of the demand. On the contrary, the labor contractor networks are quite efficient and they provide work to the same families. Hence this is a case where these women have to take whatever is available rather than what they prefer.

MGNREGA is a very well designed program with adequate resources. Yet the implementation is tardy. *(MGNREGA needs a push in Maharashtra, The scheme can aid drought mitigation, but the metrics in the state show that the government has failed to fully utilize it. By Ashwini Kulkarni, Mint Published: Mon, Dec 25 2017)*

State Government has the responsibility to make it work for the needy. The list of deprived households as marked by the Socio-Economic Caste Census is a good indicator of the need for MGNREGA in a particular area. State Rural livelihood Mission has good contact with women through their SHG networks, they can give proper information and support to women to avail MGNREGA in their villages. Women work as laborers and can provide valuable input in preparing action plans too.

The migration experienced by the women that we interviewed is distress migration. It does not lead to growth for their family. District Administration needs to view migration as call to ensure MGNREGA in more efficiently and effectively implemented in their area. This study makes it amply clear that women prefer MGNREGA work in the villages rather than migrate out of village.

All our programs about women's health and well being are directly connected to their livelihoods. So a livelihood opportunity which gives them a chance to earn wages with dignity and provides basic infrastructure for the community is MGNREGA which needs to be

strengthened for the women of rural Maharashtra.

Hence effective implementation of MGNREGA is necessary to reduce distress of rural women.

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