

An executive summary of the final report of work done on the Minor Research Project of Ms Maria Shaila D Souza, entitled “Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme and Women Empowerment- A case study of Meenja Grama Panchayath”, sanctioned by UGC, vide sanction letter No. 1436-MRP/14-15/KAMA002/UGC-SWRO dated 4th feb 2015.

Gender is the significant factor for the growth and development of any society. Women especially in rural sector, do have lesser means of education and skills and fewer productive assets than men. Given their added responsibilities within the household, their range of employment option are severely limited, most of them are either in agriculture or in home-based work such as beedi rolling, tailoring, which are informal. Thus, they are vulnerable in all spheres of life and their empowerment is a great concern in today's competitive world. Women Empowerment is possible if women living at the lower strata, who lack education and are poor, can rise up to claim their rightful place in their own society. The Women being aware of their Constitutional Rights of quality health care, economic security, and access to education and political power can transform the society to a larger extent. Given the shift in the welfare state, the Indian State has introduced several schemes as safety nets to uplift the women from poverty and vulnerability. National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) 2005 is one such women friendly programme to provide 'livelihood security'. The Act, mandates the Government to offer 100 days guaranteed manual employment at the prevailing minimum statutory wage rate to every rural unskilled adult (job-card holder). The Act states that one third of its beneficiaries are supposed to be

women. To ease women worker Worksite must be well equipped with facilities like crèches, rest room, etc. Furthermore the Act includes encouraging provision like unemployment allowance in the absence of employment. The present study attempts to understand the implementation procedures of MGNREGA and its impact on Women work, participation in Meenja Grama Panchayath of Kasaragod District, Kerala. This study, focused on the role of Grama Panchayath to generate sufficient employment opportunities to women, implementation of welfare and developmental schemes, the procedures for registration, issuance of job cards, and application for employment. This would enable us to understand and examine the institutional mechanisms under which the entire programme is being implemented. The problems and prospects of MGNREGA can then be better understood and accordingly, necessary measures can be devised to make the programme realize its set objectives. Though it deals with the entire Meenja Panchayath, for the sake of convenience, 100 samples were selected only from eight villages. A structured questionnaire which covers the socio economic background is monitored. The educational level, income level, occupation, place of residence and other details relating to age and awareness of the respondents were collected. The major findings of the study are: It is observed in the present study that there is a swift shift from unpaid domestic work to NAREGA. It has improved their consumption and saving patterns. Further, it has influenced their decision making capacity in the family and society at large. About 69.3 percent of beneficiaries expressed their happiness about NAREGA as it converted their unpaid domestic work into a paid one. More than 80 percent of the women beneficiaries feel confident as NAREGA improved their decision making capacity in the family. Over 75 percent of the beneficiaries expressed that their family

members feel proud of their NAREGA work. Nearly 74 percent of the beneficiaries expressed their contentment with NAREGA as it helped them to grow socially and politically. Despite these positive remarks there are few grey areas in implementation of the NAREGA project. More than 50 percent of the beneficiaries expressed their unhappiness about the poor quality of basic facilities in the workplace. Around 46 percent of the beneficiaries expressed their discontent with regard to poor quality of crèche and other basic facilities at work sites. Further it was suggested to include NAREGA workers under the schemes of ESI, PF, and other social security benefits. Thus in this direction both central and state governments must work together for better implementation of the project. The outcome of the study will help in understanding the problem of implementation of the project. It will help in formulating the better policy and strategy for the future.

Key words: NAREGA, women, empowerment, awareness, schemes.