Progressive reduction of unemployment has been one of the principal objectives of economic planning in India. It has been envisaged that the growth of the economy would not only increase production but also provide the capacity for absorbing the backlog of unemployment and under-employment and a substantial proportion of the additions to the labour force. The solution to the problem of unemployment and the poverty that goes with it has to be found ultimately through a high rate of overall economic growth. It is, therefore, necessary to have supplemental programmes for specific target groups/areas for employment creation, income generation and poverty alleviation. These have taken the form of direct employment programmes for providing seasonal employment to the agricultural labourers on rural capital works and infrastructure creation.
Employment generation as an objective does not mean the adoption of a static technology. It is not advisable to insulate the economy from the world trends in technological changes. Technological upgradation, modernisation and scientific advances in production process constitute the essence of growth of productivity whether it is in organized industry, agriculture or small industry. A clear view of efficiency and employment effects downstream should be formulated before setting about the management of technological change. There must be suitable arrangements and adjustment policies in terms of education, training and retraining and re-orientation workers in order to avoid dislocation effects and process of technology adoption smooth.

**Direct Employment Programmes**

Programmes to create direct employment opportunities for wage workers through public works have in the past focused on generation of supplementary employment opportunities, especially during lean periods. They have been considered as an important component of the anti-poverty strategy. These programmes are expected to create durable assets for the community and thus enhance further economic activities. Wage employment programmes also push up demand for labour and thus exert an upward pressure on the market wage rates by attracting people to public works programmes, thereby reducing supply of cheap labour, often at wages that would not even meet their bare basic needs.

Consistent with the approach for an employment-centred development strategy, public employment programmes are seen as an integral part of planning and policy. Apart from the advantages that would
accrue to the unemployed, underemployed and the poorly-employed, such programmes have a positive macroeconomic impact via increase in effective demand from the hitherto poor and vulnerable segments of the population.

Past experiences show that India’s poverty alleviation strategy— including the National Rural Employment Programme (NREP), Rural Labour Employment Guarantee Programme (RLEGP), Jawahar Rojgar Yojana (JRY), Employment Assurance Scheme (EAS), Sampoorna Gramin Rojgar Yojana (SGRY) leaned towards wage employment programmes.

The rationale for adopting wage employment programmes by the Government during the last many decades has been that they provide steady opportunities for employment to those who are, unemployed or underemployed. Beneficiaries include those who have labour as the only asset under their control† (owning neither capital nor skills), and are unable to take even the minimal risks associated with self-employment. State assistance in the form of such wage employment then acts as a valuable safeguard against risks and vulnerabilities. Other positive externalities of wage employment programmes include the upward pressure on market wages because of the higher wages from the government programmes and organizing the rural poor beneficiaries of the schemes into collectives.

The solution of the problem of unemployment lies in reversing the causes of unemployment. It means controlling the population growth,
speeding up the pace of industrialisation, adoption of labour-intensive
technology and making the education system job-oriented.

Since the initiation of reforms in early 1990s, many changes have
taken place in the social life and the institutions that govern the economy. In
science and technology, information system and communications,
revolutionary changes have occurred in recent times. New ideas have
emerged which have changed the way people all over the world look at old
ideas and the old institutions.

To deal with the unemployment problem, Government of India has
launched, from time to time, various employment schemes. Huge amounts of
public money are being spent on recurring annual basis to support wage
employment programmes. A constant monitoring of these programmes is
necessary to evaluate their contribution to employment generation vis-a-vis
expenditure incurred on them. The major programmes/schemes are
explained below.

**Rural Manpower Programme**

Towards the close of 1960-61, the Rural Manpower Programme (RMP)
was taken up in 32 CD Blocks on a pilot basis, with the object of providing
employment for 100 days to at least 2.5 million persons by the last year of the
Third Plan, particularly in areas exposed to pronounced seasonal
unemployment and underemployment. For the programme which covered
1,000 CD Blocks by the end of 1964-65, only a little over 20 per cent of the
originally contemplated outlay of Rs. 150 crore could be provided, due to
resource constraints. Nevertheless, it generated 137 million man days of employment until 1968-69, the year in which the programme was terminated.

**Crash Scheme for Rural Employment**

Realizing the need for providing employment opportunities through special programmes during the Fourth Plan, the Crash Scheme for Rural Employment (CSRE) was launched in April 1971 for a period of three years with an annual outlay of Rs. 50 crore. The scheme, with a total allocation of Rs. 142.7 crore and a total release of Rs. 122.6 crore out of it, was introduced with the objective of providing employment to at least 1,000 persons every year in each of the 350 districts of the country through labour intensive public works and creation of durable assets. This resulted in the generation of 316 million man days of employment as against the target of 315 million maydays, mostly on schemes pertaining to road construction, land development and minor irrigation.

However, as an evaluation by the Programme Evaluation Organisation of the Planning Commission showed that, under the scheme: (i) the benefits in terms of direct employment and asset creation were found to be too widely scattered; (ii) there was considerable lack of planning, in particular State Governments giving emphasis to road works to the extent of 10 per cent of the outlay; (iii) there was lack of preparedness on the part of the block/ Panchayati Raj institution to implement the projects; (iv) in most of the cases of road works, neither the cost nor labour potential was estimated, the floor wages varying between Rs. 1.50 per day in states like Maharashtra, Orissa
and Madhya Pradesh, and Rs.15 per day in Jammu and Kashmir; and (v) the assets created under the scheme were nondurable in many cases.

**Pilot Intensive Rural Employment Programme**

Alongside of the CSRE, in November 1972, a Pilot Intensive Rural Employment Programme (PIREMP) was started for a three-year period in 15 selected CD Blocks with the basic objectives of providing additional unskilled employment opportunities, creation of assets that have a multiplier effect, creation of new skills through project work on site, and finally and importantly to attempt some kind of manpower budgeting with respect to wage-seeking labour with a view to ultimately evolving comprehensive programme for the rest of the country. The programme generated 18.16 million man days of employment during the three-year period of its operation.

A Committee, set up in October, 1974 to review the implementation of this programme, felt that the entire development strategy should be base on labour-intensive technologies so that the maximum labour absorption takes place through regular development process leaving a small backlog of unemployed for tackling through special employment projects.

**Rural Works Programme**

During 1970-71, the Rural Works Programme (RWP) was launched in 54 selected districts of 13 States which were identified as drought-prone on the basis of well-defined norms such as extent of irrigated area, quantity and distribution of rainfall, and high frequency of drought, with the objective of mitigating gradually the severity of scarcity conditions in these areas. In terms of population and geographical area, the programme covered 600 lakhs or 12
per cent of the population, and 5.65 sq.kms. or about 20 per cent of the area in the country, respectively. The object was sought to be achieved through taking up of schemes of long term productive nature in areas prone to recurrent drought and providing employment opportunities to the people in these identified areas. The programme focused mainly on the execution of rural works such as medium and minor irrigation, soil conservation and afforestation, road-building, drinking water supply, and generation of employment opportunities through these rural works.

In the light of the mid-term appraisal of the Fourth Five Year Plan and the Report of the Task Force for Integrated Rural Development Programme set up by the Planning Commission in October 1971, the strategy of development under the Rural Works Programme underwent a change, after realizing that development of drought-prone areas demand long-term measures, and the need for a comprehensive programme in the direction of restoration of the proper ecological balance, and optimum utilisation of land, water, livestock and human resources. Accordingly, in 1973 the programme was reoriented with an area development approach, and redesignated as the Drought-Prone Areas Programme which is still in operation in selected areas in the country.

**Food-For-Work Programme**

In view of the comfortable food stocks of 15.4 million tonnes, the Government of India in April 1977 launched the Food-for-Work Programme as a non-plan scheme with the objectives of: (i) generation of additional gainful employment in the rural sector so as to improve their incomes and the
consequent nutritional levels; (ii) creation of durable community assets and strengthening of the rural infrastructure that results in higher production and better living standards in rural areas; and (iii) utilisation of the surplus food grains for human resource development.

During 1977-78 to 1979-80 (Sept., 1979), the programme generated a total employment of 979.32 million man days, and created a wide variety of assets. The programme became very popular and was regarded in the rural sector as a major instrument of rural employment and development, particularly in 1970-80 when the economy was faced with a severe drought. Despite this the evaluation of the programme by the PEO brought to the fore several of its deficiencies and weaknesses. These include erratic disbursement of food grains as wages, delays in measurement of earthwork, non-durable nature of the assets created, inadequate technical supervision of works, lack of supervision leading to dilution of technical requirement of the projects, continuation of the programme on a year-to-year basis, lack of attempts on the part of the State Governments to prepare the shelf-of-projects and to make adequate financial provision for financing the material component of works leading to taking up of Kacha roads which were non-durable.

**National Rural Employment Programme (NREP)**

In October 1980, the Government of India launched the NREP which replaced the then existing Food-for-Work Programme. With effect from April 1981, the NREP became a centrally-sponsored Plan programme on a 50:50 sharing basis between the Government of India and the State Governments.
The NREP was continued as a Plan programme during the Seventh Plan period also. Broadly speaking, the NREP sought to:

a) generate additional gainful employment opportunities in the rural sector;
b) create durable and productive community assets for strengthening rural infrastructure; and
c) improve the overall quality of life in rural areas.

Among the features of the NREP, the following are important:

1) the programme was being implemented through DRDAs;
2) works were being executed by the Panchayati Raj Institutions to a large extent in several States;
3) a shelf-of-projects and an Annual Action Plan were to be prepared for the works to be taken up in each district;
4) all rural works which result in creation of durable productive community assets could be taken up. Works for the benefit of individuals are however permitted only in case of members of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, etc.;
5) workers employed on the schemes were to be paid wages partly in cash and partly in food grains whose prices are subsidized;
6) wages payable to workers were to be in accordance with the wage rates notified under the Minimum Wages Act;
7) 50 per cent of the Central allocation to the States was based on the number of small farmers, marginal workers and marginal farmers in each state, and the balance of 50 per cent on the basis of incidence of rural poverty in each State;
8) 25 per cent allocation of NREP were earmarked for social forestry and another 10 per cent to works exclusively benefiting Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes;

9) not less than 50 per cent of the allocations for a district were to be spent on wage component;

10) preference to landless labourers in employment on schemes was given; and

11) contactors or middlemen were not permitted to be engaged for execution of works under the NREP.

During the Sixth Five Year Plan, a total sum of Rs. 1834.25 crore and 20.57 lakh MTs of food grains were utilized under the programme. The utilisation rate of cash funds was 75 per cent, while it was 72 per cent in the case of food grains during the Plan period. About 1775 million man days of employment was generated during the Plan period. Cost of man day over the entire Plan period worked out to Rs. 10.33 and the wage-non-wage ratio stood at 63:37 during this period. A large number and wide variety of community assets were created under the programme during this period which contributed to strengthening of rural infrastructure. However, the per capita utilization of food grains during the last four years of the Plan was less than one kilogram per man day.

Rural Landless Employment Guarantee Programme (RLEGP)

With a view to tackling in a direct and specific manner the hardcore of rural poverty, particularly pertaining to employment opportunities for the landless during the lean agricultural periods, the Government of India
launched the RLEG with effect from August 15, 1983. The programme was centrally-sponsored programme and was entirely funded by the Government of India.

The RLEG resembled the NREP to a large extent although these two nationwide programmes differed in the following important respects:

a) one of the specified objectives of the RLEG was to provide guarantee of employment to atleast one member of every landless household;

b) unlike the NREP, the RLEG was entirely funded by the Government of India;

c) under RLEG, work projects relevant to 20 Point Programme and Minimum Needs Programme could alone be taken up;

d) projects under the RLEG could be taken up for execution only after the Central Committee (GOI) sanctions the projects;

e) whereas not less than 50 per cent of the allocations for a district as a whole were to be utilized on wage component under the NREP, not less than 50 per Cent of the allocations of each project could be utilized on wage component under the RLEG.

For the RLEG, an amount of Rs.600 crores was allocated during the Sixth Plan period of which Rs. 385 crores was actually utilized by the States. This led to the creation of 263 million man days of employment against a target of 300 million man days.
During the six year period of its operation, the Government of India had invested a total sum of Rs.2793 crores, besides utilizing a little over 25 lakh MTs of food grains on the programme. The cost per man day worked out to Rs.19.73 while the per capita food grains utilized on the programme accounted for 1.78 kg. per day. Altogether 1416 million man days of employment were generated for the rural poor under the programme during this period. As in the case of NREP, while the States and UTs could not fully utilize the cash and food grain resources made available by the Government of India under the RLEGP, the employment were however achieved.

The Government of India launched a Concurrent Evaluation of NREP all over the country during 1987-88. Although the findings of the evaluation seem to convey an optimistic effect of the programme it throws light on certain operational problems. These included: lack of a systematic identification survey of the target group workers for whom employment is to be offered; inadequate staff support at the field level, lack of proper maintenance system for the assets created under the programmes; virtual absence of preparation of a shelf-of-projects, low level of wages being paid to the workers, inadequate arrangements for lifting and transport of food grains from the FCI; lack of continuity of employment to the rural poor, low rate of utilisation of food grains, difficulties being faced in ensuring guarantee of employment to the landless households for a specific period in the year; unsatisfactory and inadequate monitoring of implementation of the programmes, etc.
Jawahar Rozgar Yojana Programme (JRY)

The Jawahar Rozgar Yojana Programme which was launched by the Government of India in place of the NREP in 1989-90 differed from its predecessor rural wage employment programmes in several respects like (a) allocation of Central assistance entirely on the basis of incidence of rural poverty; (b) sharing the outlay of JRY by the Government of India to the extent of 80 per cent; (c) allotment of a minimum of untied district allocation to the Gram Panchayats in each district; (d) larger annual outlay on the programme; (e) freedom to the Gram Panchayats to select, plan and implement local development works based on the felt-needs of the local community, etc. The Government of India provided an illustrative list of works that could be taken up under the programme. Since 1989-90, the total public investment on the programme, including the value of food grains is about Rs. 2600 crores per annum, and the employment being generated each year is of the order of around 860 million man days.

During the last three years, significant progress was achieved under the JRY in the country. Compared to its predecessor programmes, the JRY has more positive features, although many of the deficiencies or less desirable features of the former programmes could still be found under the new dispensation. These are briefly listed below.

People’s participation in the planning and implementation of the programme is ensured through Gram Sabha, the convening of which at least twice in a year is made compulsory.
Employment Generation is made the ‘Primary’ objective of the programme but not as one of the objectives as was the case with the earlier programmes (NREP and RLEGP). Towards this end, the share of wage component in the total programme resources was increased from a minimum of 50 per cent to 60 per cent.

Reservation of 30 per cent of the employment opportunities under the programme, to women was provided. Employment opportunities were thrown open to the rural poor nearer to their shelter in view of the even spread of the programme and its resources.

Compared to its predecessor programme, JRY confers greater benefits on the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and bonded labour by earmarking the benefits of Indira Awaas Yojana (rural housing), Million Well Schemes (Irrigation wells and Minor Irrigation works), and 15 per cent of the untied resource of the programme to the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and other specified categories of the rural poor. Similarly, 60 per cent of the untied district pool of the Gram Panchayat resources is being distributed among the Gram Panchayats on the basis of the population of Scheduled Castes and Tribes in each Gram Panchayat.

Specific provision is made for utilizing a part of the programme resources for training of officials and non-officials associated with the programme.

Compared to the situation under the earlier programmes, the share of the construction works like school buildings, Village Panchayat buildings, and
of rural link roads in the total expenditure has decreased and of productive works like minor irrigation, land development, etc., has increased.

Inter-State allocation of Central funds is made entirely on the basis of incidence of rural poverty under this programme.

**Swarna Jayanthe Shahari Rozgar Yojana (SJSRY)**

In December 1997, this scheme came into force. This scheme is composed of Urban Self-employment Programme (USEP) and Urban Wage Employment Programme (UWEP). The aim is urban poverty alleviation. During 2008-09, an amount of Rs.540.67 crore has been spent on this programme and as many as 9,47,390 urban poor were assisted to set up individual/group micro enterprises and 14,84,209 urban poor were imparted skill training under SJSRY.

**Swarnjayanti Gram Swarojgar Yojana (SGSY)**

The employment created through self-employment programmes is more sustainable. Beneficiaries under these programmes get assistance for setting up their own ventures which give them employment on a sustainable basis. The crucial point here is identification of beneficiaries and proper project formulation.

Persistent efforts made by the government to fine-tune the self-employment programmes during various plan periods yielded some new concepts that emerged at various times and got consolidated. The need to integrate the cluster approach, capacity building, skill upgradation, infrastructure including marketing development and technology penetration
were felt more acutely with every passing year. Emphasis was also necessary on the development of micro enterprises with effective forward and backward linkages, so as to ensure best returns on the investment.

**Objectives of SGSY**

SGSY is a major on-going programme for the self-employment of rural poor. The programme was started from April 1, 1999 after restricting the erstwhile Integrated Rural Development Program (IRDP), Training of Rural Youth for Self Employment (TRYSEM), Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas (DWCRA), Supply of Toolkits in Rural Areas (SITRA) and Ganga Kalyan Yojana (GKY), besides Million Wells Scheme (MWS).

The scheme has been restructured as a National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM) which will function in a mission mode for target-based delivery of outcomes and follow a demand-driven approach. The mission aims at reducing poverty through promotion of diversified and gainful self-employment and skilled wage employment opportunities to increase income of the rural poor on a sustainable basis. The mission will broadly adopt objectives such as universal social mobilization, formation of people’s institutions, universal financial inclusion, training and capacity building, enhanced.

**Women and Empowerment**

Most societies do not explicitly value the work that (primarily) women do in the home. This can have significant public policy impact. For example, if pensions are calculated according to income, women are disadvantaged for they do not receive an income for the work they do. Similarly, if a woman
seeks to enter the labour market after staying at home for many years to raise her children, the skills she has acquired from running a household are usually not valued by employers, even though they are often directly relevant to the job market, e.g., financial management and budgeting, time management, interpersonal skills, and multi-tasking. She is considered to have “no job experience” and therefore has great difficulty finding paid employment. To compound this, even if she has a relevant education or previous job experience, she has probably been out of the job market for a considerable time, and therefore these former skills and achievements are un- or undervalued as well.

Undervaluing “women’s work” also has negative consequences for men. Men are deterred from taking on “women’s work” either in the domestic sphere or in professions such as nursing, kindergarten teaching, or as secretaries because of the stigma and stereotypes attached to this type of work. As a result, men not only suffer because they are denied the emotionally enriching and psychologically rewarding experience of looking after their children these stereotypes also limit the kind of work they can do. In times of economic crisis and transition, which many countries in the region are still experiencing, this inflexibility of gender roles can drastically limit economic opportunities and innovative strategies for coping with unemployment.

When communities are consulted about changes in the heating and electricity systems in their dwellings, women are not always encouraged to contribute. However, women have specific knowledge and experience about how energy gets used in the home (at what time of day and for which
purposes, and at what cost to women who must ensure the energy supply), so their opinions should be a key factor when considering new energy options.

For example, an international project in rural Karakalpakstan introduced sustainable energy systems intended to supply households with clean energy for lighting, radios, and television. However, women were not consulted. The failure to talk to women meant that the real energy needs of households were not prioritized. For example, the provision of extra trucks to carry firewood would have greatly reduced the drudgery of women who were primarily responsible for its collection. This choice would have been particularly important for the poorest women in the village who had to carry the firewood on their backs because they had neither a donkey nor could afford to hire a truck.

**Situation and Outcome**

Some critics of gender equality initiatives have pointed out that striving for equality of situation or outcome means that we are limiting men’s and women’s choices. Their argument states that even if men and women have the same rights and opportunities, they may not make the same choices, and therefore it is wrong to expect that the end result for men and women should be the same.

This criticism raises an important point: Part of gender equality should be to increase the choices of men and women, and certainly not to constrain these choices in any way. And, yes, it is true that men and women can and do make different choices. However, what this criticism does not attend to is
the way in which individual choices are overwhelmingly determined by the context in which these choices are made. In most cases, men and women cannot make the same choices because of the deeply engrained social, economic, cultural, and legal contexts in which they live and work. For example, in societies where violence against women is implicitly or explicitly tolerated (which is unfortunately still too often the case all around the globe), women are not able to make real choices. The threat of violence will always constrain them.

Currently, freedom to make real choices is limited to a privileged few, and is certainly not the norm. Moreover, because some individuals can make these choices, this does not address the systemic nature of gender disparities that limit choices overall. Until real choices are available to the majority of the population, differences in outcome and situation between men and women need to be interpreted as a signal of unequal opportunities, rights, and value.

Inequality in the situation of men and women is often a “red flag” that inequality of opportunities exist. That is why inequalities in outcome or situation should always be investigated further in order to see if any hidden barriers exist that make real choices impossible for either men or women.

Even though both men and women have the same right to get a job in the construction and building industry, men usually outnumber women in this profession. In some cases this difference in situation has arisen because women have chosen not to enter this profession. But is this always a real choice? What barriers exist for those women who wish to get a job in this
often well-paid and stable profession? Does the education system encourage women to get training in this area? What attitudes and stereotypes might prevent women from applying for such jobs? This difference in situation in fact points to an inequality of opportunity. At the same time, it is important to highlight that achieving equality of situation does not mean that women and men are the same, nor that the goal is to make them “identical.”

Agency

The final but equally important component of gender equality is agency. While the first four components for the most part consider the social, economic, cultural, legal and other contexts in which men and women live, they might leave the impression that gender equality is something that is simply “given” to us by the state or society. Although rights, opportunities, and value might be conferred through institutions and decision makers, we also need to stress that gender equality is something that men and women can claim through their actions and voice.

Policy Measures Against Gender Differences

The term “gender equality” is sometimes misleading, because we might think it means that women and men should be “identical.” Of course, men and women are not identical and they never will be (for no two people, not even “identical twins”, are truly identical!). Just as differences in age, culture, religion, race, and experience contribute to the diversity of our societies and communities, differences between men and women are a vital contribution to this diversity. Moreover, just as men differ from women in some ways, there is great diversity among women, and great diversity among men.
Some of these differences between men and women are biological, such as the ability to bear children, but most of these differences concern the social and cultural positions and values we assign to each gender in our society. Some of these differences may be embraced and enjoyed by men and women. However, many of these differences are not desirable neither from the point of view of individuals, nor from a human development perspective. We need to analyze the causes and effects of these differences to see whether they are related to any inequalities in rights, opportunities, value, or outcome.

**Equality vs. Protectionist Approach**

Because men and women have some biological differences, it is sometimes difficult to determine when “special treatment” is a valid public policy measure, and when it only makes inequality worse. For example, because women can become pregnant and bear children, public policy should take this difference into account. Women must be ensured safe and appropriate conditions for pregnancy, childbirth, and infant care, but not at the expense of denying them opportunities to be fully active in the labour force and community, if they so choose.

**Inappropriate Policy Measures**

- **Women are banned by legislation from working in certain professions (e.g., heavy industry):** This is often done because legislators want to “protect” women who might be or become pregnant. This attitude ignores the fact that not all women want to bear children, and suggests that a woman’s only destiny is to be a mother. This attitude might also
assume that women are always weaker and less capable than men in certain respects, which is not the case. Such generalizations do not offer all men and women the same opportunities. Moreover, this lack of opportunity often leads to other gender inequalities, as these jobs are often very well paid compared to other work requiring the same level of education. Everyone should be given the opportunity to pursue employment for which they are qualified.

- **Women are banned by legislation from working in certain environments or at certain times (e.g., at night):** Again, legislators may want to “protect” potential mothers from exposure to harm. This limits women’s opportunities and can increase economic inequalities between men and women. Moreover, if a job presents risks to women, it probably presents risks to all employees. All jobs should be safe for all employees male or female.

- **Parental leave is given solely to women:** Sometimes we incorrectly assume that during the first months or years of a child’s life, the father does not have an important role to play. For this reason paternity leave might not be offered as an option, or it might be actively discouraged by employers and colleagues. This limits the opportunities and resources available to men to participate in caring for their young children and creates obstacles to come to terms with the gender division of labour, which has long-term consequences for equality in the labour market.
Appropriate Policy Measures

- **Labour and education policies should ensure that both men and women have equal opportunity to pursue the career of their choice:** All employment should be open to both men and women. Both men and women should have equal opportunity to pursue careers of their choice, and be equally encouraged to do so through education, training, and incentives programmes. While it is not necessary that all professions be equally made up of men and women, research has shown that restricting jobs to only women or men can have negative effects on the overall economy.

- **Dangerous work situations are properly regulated to ensure the health and safety of all employees:** If a job is too dangerous for women who may become pregnant, then it is likely too dangerous for everyone. No one should be unnecessarily exposed to dangerous chemicals or asked to work in a situation that may jeopardize their health and safety. Moreover, men's reproductive ability can also be negatively affected by occupational hazards.

- **Policies are put in place to allow pregnant women to temporarily modify the demands of her profession, if her health or the health of her baby is at risk:** Because pregnancy can be particularly stressful on some women’s bodies, there should be the possibility to reduce the amount of physical stress normally demanded by her job, such as long hours spent standing or heavy lifting. If deemed necessary by a doctor, paid leave should be granted during her pregnancy. Such provisions should not negatively influence her job status, benefits, or seniority in any way.
Both men and women have the option to take parental leave to care for children: Men should be given the opportunity to bond with their young children, and couples should be given the option to decide for themselves which parent will stay at home to be a primary caregiver to the child. Adequate leave provisions should also be made for those who are self-employed or work only part-time.

Employers accommodate the needs of both men and women with young children to balance their work and family life: Employers should allow new parents the option of part-time work or “job sharing,” work-from-home options or other flexibility measures to allow them time to raise their families as well. Places of employment should provide an appropriate space for mothers to nurse young children. The provision of on-site creche facilities can greatly relieve the stress of new parents returning to work, and thus also enhances employee productivity and reduces turnover.

Gender Equality – A Global Problem

Obviously, gender equality is a women’s issue because it affects women, and women most often suffer disproportionately from gender inequality. However, gender equality is not only a women’s issue. If only women are involved in discussing and addressing gender inequality, the solutions will not work. This is both because women represent only a partial perspective of society, and because most often women are not in the decision-making positions necessary to implement the solutions. Men and women have to be equal stakeholders and equally committed to solutions in order for them to be accepted, both formally and in practice.
Moreover, while some problems and challenges are more pressing for women than others (e.g., receiving equal pay for equal work, or domestic violence), men also face specific problems and challenges that require special attention (e.g., high rates of unnatural causes of death such as suicide, occupational accidents, traffic fatalities).

Inequalities in Education

Central and Eastern European countries have often been used as examples of high gender equality in education. In fact, in many countries in this region women are better educated than men. For example, recent data from Latvia show that the number of women attending university is 1.7 times greater than the number of men. In these cases, we need to investigate why fewer men are achieving a postsecondary education and what the consequences will be for men and society more broadly.

However, this is not the case all over the region. In a striking example of women’s inequality, recent data from Tajikistan show that the percentage of girls in secondary education has dropped to 39 percent, whereas at the beginning of the transition period girls outnumbered boys 104 to 100. In 1998, only 26.6 percent of students enrolled in universities and other post-secondary institutes were women. This data is extremely worrisome.

The differences between these two countries clearly demonstrate that inequalities can apply to both men and women, and that these differences need to be addressed in both cases. But it is also important to note that the root causes and the end consequences of these disparities in education are likely to be very different. For example, while the higher level of education of
men in Tajikistan translates into better economic opportunities for men in that
country, in countries where women outnumber men in university, men are still
enjoying an advantage over women when it comes to income. In fact, in
Latvia, despite their high level of education, the situation of women in the job
market is now showing signs of worsening when compared to that of men.

Gender inequality affects both men and women directly; and, in turn,
families, communities, and entire nations are adversely affected by these
inequalities.

Other Issues

It is true that over the past decades many important gains have been
made in the name of global gender equality. These include formal gains (such
as amendments to many national constitutions to prohibit discrimination on
the basis of gender, and the adoption of equal opportunity policies and
legislation in countries across the globe) as well as real changes in the lives of
men and women (for example, women around the world today make up a
much larger percentage of the labour force than they did several decades
ago). Despite this progress, however, gender inequality remains a common
denominator across all nations on the globe.

More importantly, many of the advances in global gender equality are
not reflected by the reality in Central and Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, the
Balkans, and Central Asia. In the context of the social, economic, and cultural
upheaval that began with the transition to market economies and continues in
the era of globalization, many countries in this region are seeing the rise of
extremely worrisome trends in relation to gender equality.
As mentioned earlier, individuals experience discrimination and inequality due to many factors besides gender. These include low economic status, race or ethnicity, religious affiliation, age, physical or mental disability, and sexuality. Situational factors such as systemic poverty, environmental degradation, or rural neglect can also lead to serious hardship and inequality.

At the same time, it must be highlighted that gender inequality is often an additional dimension of discrimination within disadvantaged groups. So, for example, while an ethnic minority or a low socioeconomic class may face a particular hardship in some situations, the women within these groups are often even more disadvantaged.

Some Women are more “Equal” than others

Every country in the region can point to some very successful women who have been able to take advantage of the changes offered by the social and economic transformations in their countries. In most cases these are highly qualified, ambitious young women who work in high positions in multinational companies, do white-collar work in foreign countries, and have managed to procure a securely high standard of living in a capitalist, transnational environment. In other cases, women have attained extremely powerful positions in public office. It must be remembered, however, that these women represent an extremely small percentage of women in the region.

At the same time, other groups of women have obviously suffered from the consequences of social and economic restructuring. One such example is the Roma minority in a number of east-central and southeast European
countries. The position of minority women has not been extensively explored by experts in the region, even though their social situation is often appallingly difficult, and their rates of poverty and unemployment significantly higher than that of the majority.

**Causes of Gender Inequality**

There is no one cause of gender inequality that can be isolated. Rather, gender inequality works like a spiral whereby inequality in one place gives momentum to inequalities in other places. These instances of inequality overlap and reinforce each other, creating a tangled web that is difficult to unravel. Existing inequalities, if unchecked, lead to further inequalities. This is why addressing gender inequality is very challenging, and why it requires a multi-pronged approach. Moreover, because inequalities have existed for a very long time, the weight of history makes change even more difficult.

It is clear, however, that our norms, values, and attitudes play a key role in perpetuating gender inequalities. Long-standing cultural values influence us all and affect our actions sometimes without us even noticing. Unfortunately, in many cases these values include the belief that women are inferior or weaker than men, that women are poor decision makers, that men have no role or skills for raising children, and so on. Practical experience has proven all of these assumptions to be false. Still, we often uncritically follow the conventions that stem from these assumptions, because “this is how things have always been done” (even though history shows us that gender roles and conventions have indeed changed a great deal through the ages).
As a result we sometimes end up perpetuating discrimination or gender stereotypes, even if we consider ourselves to be fair and just people.

Norms and values about gender roles are very deeply rooted and we cannot expect to change these overnight. At the same time, not all of our values are negative! We must begin by taking note of the norms and assumptions that lay the groundwork for our gender roles, and then critically assess them to determine which values foster a positive culture of diversity, and which ones are actually barriers to achieving gender equality.

Law and public policy might also support gender inequality. These formal structures are a mirror for society’s values; if gender inequality is part of a society’s deep-rooted value system, then laws and policies will reflect this. Rather than protecting and promoting justice and welfare for all, these systems can actually cause and increase inequality between men and women.

For example, until recently women in Tajikistan did not share the same legal right to land ownership and use as men. Amendments to the law on land ownership were introduced in 2004. Now women can receive a Land Use Certificate (previously limited only to men), and women on maternity leave are no longer legally discriminated against in the land distribution process. These examples show that we need to be critical about our existing laws: Just because it is “the law” does not mean it is right. Laws reflect our values, and we need to update our laws to reflect our improved understanding of gender equality.
Institutional practices, such as education, political culture, business culture, and community leadership, also mirror norms and values of the societies in which they operate. So, again, instead of providing structures that all members of society can equally participate in and benefit from, these practices might in fact present very different opportunities and benefits to men and women. Ultimately, norms, values, and attitudes combine with laws, policies, and practices to produce a gender-based power structure in virtually all societies. This power structure generally permeates public and private institutions and the home, and has four main characteristics:

- The separation of people into two categories: male and female
- General privileging of the male side of this separation
- A view of the male side of this separation as the “norm”
- The gendered division of resources (money, time, skills, other)

Again, it is important to note that the differences between men and women are not in themselves problematic. Problems arise when the two sides of this separation come to be valued hierarchically, and the male side comes to be seen as representative of “humans” or “the population” in general.

Additional problems arise when resources are unequally divided between men and women. As we see in virtually all societies, this leads to such results as the division of the labour market into “jobs for men” and “jobs for women,” a significant gap between what men earn on average and what women earn, a general disregard of women’s experiences and opinions in many areas that concern society as a whole, and violence against women, to name but a few.
It is important to note that this gender-based power structure describes structural differences in society in other words, general trends that shape attitudes, institutions, and social, cultural, and economic practices. Even if we oppose gender inequality on an individual level, this age-old power structure probably still seeps into our interactions with other men and women at an unconscious level. Changing this structure will take changes not only in attitudes and individual behaviour, but targeted changes to the systems and institutions that shape our societies.

**Costs of Gender Inequality**

Gender inequality is not only disadvantageous to those directly affected by discrimination. It affects individuals, families, and the human development of the nation as a whole. Moreover, as noted above, inequality breeds inequality: That is, gender discrimination has a domino-like effect which creates ripples of inequalities and problems throughout society.

Gender inequality can have devastating consequences for individuals directly affected by it. Both men and women can be barred from earning a living because of it, or suffer the material and psychological effects of harassment, discrimination, and exclusion. In its most severe instances, gender discrimination can kill: Domestic violence is a common example of this. In countries across the world, the most common cause of unnatural death for women is murder at the hands of her partner. Gender discrimination also kills in indirect ways. For example, pressures associated with traditional gender roles have led to shocking suicide rates among young males in many countries.
These individual costs obviously result in a variety of costs for society as well. Still, if our societies are truly committed to human rights and democracy, the violation of even one person’s rights and the unjust treatment of any individual should be cause for our concern.

Equally important, gender inequality limits potential and innovation in a way that disadvantages the development of the entire nation. If we become stuck in traditional gender roles and tied to outdated notions about men’s and women’s position and value, we close ourselves off to possible solutions to challenges our societies might face. We fail to utilize our maximum creative and productive energies, and this has both economic and social consequences to our societies.

*Higher equality = More opportunities for growth*

Recent research from countries across the globe has shown that the gender bias in education and employment appears to have a significant impact on economic growth.

**Law and Policy for Gender-Based Discrimination**

Some of us think that if law and policy do not directly discriminate against women or men, we have done everything necessary to encourage gender equality. For example, some countries have reviewed all of their legislation and found that no laws specifically limit the opportunities for men or women and therefore assume that gender equality does not have to be considered any further.
The problem with this approach is that it does not take into account the many ways that policies or laws might indirectly limit the opportunities of men or women. Often, policies that maintain the status quo in regards to gender relations are indirectly responsible for encouraging gender inequality. Programmes and policies need to consider gender roles and relations in the larger context of the intervention.

Similarly, even if there is no direct discrimination against men or women in law or policy, this does not address the fact that there is also a need for specific laws and policies that pro-actively strive to make the opportunities for men and women in society more equal. “Gender neutral” policies often ignore the specific needs of both men and women.

Examples of laws and policies that can pro-actively enhance gender equality

- anti-discrimination laws
- reproductive and sexual health policies and laws
- policies and laws combating domestic violence and trafficking
- electoral reform laws and policies that enhance gender balance in the political arena
- parental leave provisions for both men and women
- gender-sensitive approaches in education and school curricula
- gender-sensitive taxation policies

Again, differences in the situation of men and women should alert us to the fact that law and policy are not adequately addressing gender inequalities. These laws and policies need to be strengthened and
complemented by other strategies. In other words, as long as significant differences persist between men and women in terms of income, education levels, health and welfare indicators, and participation in top decision-making positions, we have to assume that full gender equality has not been achieved. The fact is that no country in the world has achieved gender equal outcomes in all of these areas. Therefore, gender issues need to stay on the agenda.

**Affirmative Action**

Affirmative action is a measure taken when either men or women (or any other under-represented group) are granted specific assistance in order to try to correct massive inequalities. Such measures might include reserving a number of spaces for women in certain school programmes, decision-making bodies, or other institutions, or giving preference to women in hiring practices, as long as the female candidates possess all other specified qualifications.

This may seem to be inconsistent with the principles of gender equality, as such direct action involves enhancing opportunities for one specific group, but not for others. It must be remembered, though, that affirmative action measures are only taken in order to correct inequalities that already exist. Often, gender imbalance in institutions or certain jobs is the result of prejudices, stereotypes, and accepted practices that have been around for generations. These attitudes may be so entrenched that they are almost invisible, and it is difficult to remove them. Affirmative action measures can help us break bad habits and get out of the rut of discriminatory attitudes. Once a general balance is achieved, such measures would no longer be needed.
Achievement of Gender Equality

Because the causes of gender equality are deep-rooted and complex, we should not assume that achieving full equality between men and women is a short-term or even medium-term goal. This is a long-term process that should be judged according to the progress it continues to make. Progress will require addressing all of the factors that contribute to inequalities.

Rebuilding our norms, values, and attitudes

Increased awareness and education about the costs of gender equality and the hidden ways that it adversely affects everyone in society will gradually lead to a shift in norms and values. Even if we believe in human rights, justice, and equality, we still need to confront the indirect ways that inequalities are perpetuated if we wish to create a truly equal situation for men and women.

Reviewing and amending laws and policies

Formal guarantees are a crucial part of creating a context in which equality can flourish. While laws and policies themselves can not force people or institutions to change their practices or attitudes, they can create incentives for positive change (and consequences for those who do not comply with the law). They also send a message about the values of the government and nation as a whole. In this way they set standards and positive examples.

Transforming our institutions and institutional practices

Because the gender-based power structure creates a system that guides and shapes our behaviour and choices, we cannot rely on our individual best intentions alone to change this power structure for the benefit
of both men and women. We need to make formal changes to our institutions and systems. This includes everything from hiring practices and educational curricula to decision-making processes at the community level. It includes moving away from using men as a “norm” and officially making room in our systems for the different contributions and experiences of both men and women.

**Breaking down the gendered/sexual division of labour**

One of the key factors to creating a more equal society entails moving away from our current attitudes and practices that delimit “women’s work” and “men’s work”. This key change will necessarily involve all of the above changes: We will need to change our attitudes about what is appropriate for men and for women to do, we will need to increase the value that our societies place on so-called women’s work, we will need to make legislative and policy changes that encourage the breakdown of this division, and we will have to change our institutional practices accordingly as well.

The results of dismantling this division will be far-reaching: Both men and women will experience economic, social, and personal benefit from an enhanced (real) choice about what sort of work they do and how they spend their time. Only once the gender division of labour becomes less rigid will we be able to see substantial and sustainable progress towards gender equality.

**Statement of the Problem**

Several poverty alleviation and employment generation programmes were introduced by the various states government, UT’s and Government of India. But those schemes are not effectively and efficiently had worked to
reduce poverty and increase the living standard of the people in rural India especially women population. Hence 2005 onwards government of India had introduced MGNREGS a different scheme for the betterment of women empowerment and development of rural population. Under this scheme has been guaranteed to 100 days work providing every family in a financial year in rural India. The scheme is attractive especially for women because it stipulates that one third of the total workers should be women. But serious problems remain in implementation across states, such as the lack of availability of crèches for mothers of young children and the continued illegal presence of contractors. Given the critical gains made by women workers in – in accessing work and an income, food and healthcare for themselves and their families, and in leaving potentially hazardous work – accrued the gender sensitiveness of this act. Hence this study aims at analyzing the impact of this programme on employment and income levels of women with special reference to Kurnool district of Andhra Pradesh. The present study has been undertaken with reference to the following objectives.

**Objectives of the Study**

The specific objectives of the study are:

1. To assess the participation levels of women in Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme at national, State and District level.

2. To analyze the facilitating factors as well as hindering factors (socio-cultural and economic) for qualitative participation of women in Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme.
3. To know the extent to which Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme is successful in achieving women empowerment.

4. To evaluate the impacts of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme on income and employment status of women in Kurnool district of Andhra Pradesh.

5. To analyze various risks associated with the women during the working time of MGNREGA; and

6. To suggest measures for high participation of women in Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme.

Methodology

The methodological aspects of the study such as the area of the study, the sample, sources of data, analysis of data and the chapter scheme have been detailed hereunder:

Area of the study

The study was taken up in Kurnool District of Andhra Pradesh. The Kurnool district is one of the driest part of the state, where the rainfall is recorded below normal. The dry condition, of the Kurnool district often results in the loss of crops, which in turn forces the agricultural labour as well as small and marginal farmers to migrate to different parts of the state, sometimes neighbouring States like Tamil Nadu, Karnataka etc. Under these dire conditions, the launching of MGNREGS is considered by the labourers as the boon for their livelihood. The MGNREGS was extended to this district in second phase i.e. in 2008. Since the introduction of the programmes the
participation levels of women is higher than male in the district. The percentage of women working under MGNREGS in 2007-08 is 50.03 per cent and it gradually increased year by year. In 2008-09 it is 51.44 per cent, in 2009-10 it is 52.11 per cent, in 2010-11 it is 52.39 per cent, in 2011-12 it is 52.75 per cent, in 2012-13 and it is 52.76 per cent in 2013-14. As such, the Kurnool district was purposively selected for the study to examine the impact of the programme on various facets of women development.

**Period of Study**

The beneficiaries of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) during the period of April 1, 2013 to March 31, 2014 were interviewed for the study.

**Sampling**

The MGNREGS has been extended to all sections of the society irrespective economic social and political status of rural families. All the Mandals, revenue villages and hamlets in the district are covered by the programme. In Kurnool District there are three revenue divisions. For effective study multi-stage random sampling method was followed. In the first stage three revenue divisions were selected for the study. In the second stage one Mandal which has highest per cent of women participation and another Mandal which has lowest women participation in each revenue division were selected. In the third stage 2 Gram Panchayats which has highest per cent of women participation and another Gram Panchayat which has lowest women participation in each Mandal was selected. In the fourth stage 15 beneficiaries
of MGNREGS from each Gram Panchayat was selected by taking in to account the following criteria.

1. The women, who attended the MGNREGS works at least fifty days during the study period of 2013-2014.
2. Only one woman member from one job card is considered for the study.

Altogether the study covers one district and within the district three revenue divisions and within the revenue divisions six mandals and within the mandals 12 Gram Panchayats and within each Gram Panchayat 15 MGNREGS beneficiaries. So the total sample constitutes 180 women respondents. Table 1 gives the details of sampling.

Table 1
Sample Framework of the Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Revenue Division</th>
<th>Name of Mandal with Highest Women Participation</th>
<th>No. of Respondents</th>
<th>Name of Mandal with Lowest Women Participation</th>
<th>No. of Respondents</th>
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<td>Sugur</td>
<td>Gonegandla</td>
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<td>Madhvaram</td>
<td>Ontedudinne</td>
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<td>Kulumal</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Kolimigundla</td>
<td>Ankireddy Palle</td>
<td>Krishnagiri</td>
<td>15</td>
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<td>P. Kotakonda</td>
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<td>Total</td>
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<td>90</td>
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Data Collection

To examine the objectives of the study, relevant data were collected from both primary and secondary sources. Field Survey was undertaken for collection of primary data. For this purpose, a pre-tested interview schedule was employed. The data collected from the sample beneficiaries relating to
the implementation and impact of the MGNREGS in Kurnool district were thoroughly analyzed.

The secondary data regarding the origin of MGNREGS scheme in India and in Andhra Pradesh and data regarding MGNREGS in Kurnool district was collected from different published records which include reports of the Government of India, reports of the Ministry of Rural Development, Government of Andhra Pradesh, reports of DWMA Kurnool, Statistical Abstracts of Government of Andhra Pradesh and Kurnool District etc were observed.

**Analysis of data and use of statistical tools**

The collected data have been processed and analyzed both manually and with the help of a computer. Both primary and secondary data were tabulated to bring out systematic analysis of the impact of MGNREG scheme in terms of income generation, employment, asset creation etc.

**Outline of the Study**

The study is divided into six chapters. The first Chapter-*Introduction*- briefly discusses the history of wage employment programmes in India and also it elaborates the theoretical framework of the study. The second chapter-*Review of Literature-* makes an assessment of several studies carried in the field of wage employment programmes. The third Chapter- *MGNREGS and Women’s Participation-* discusses the salient features of the Act, participation of women and other downtrodden sections of people. The fourth chapter-*Profile of Study Area-* presents the demographic, socio-economic, employment and MGNREGS profile of Kurnool District. The fifth chapter-
Impact of MGNREGS on Employment and Income Levels of Women: An Analysis - presents the knowledge, awareness and impacts of the scheme on sample women beneficiaries. The final chapter - Summary and Conclusion - is entirely devoted to the summary and findings of the study along with the policy recommendations.

Concepts Used in the Study

The following concepts are frequently used in the study.

Job Card

Job Card is a key document that records workers’ entitlements under MGNREGA. It legally empowers the registered households to apply for work, ensures transparency and protects workers against fraud.

Mate

A mate is a worksite supervisor. At least one mate should be present for every 100 workers. A person working as a mate should not be a worker on the same MGNREGS worksite at the same point of time.

Social Audit

Social Audit is the critical stock-taking of any programme or scheme by the community with active involvement of the primary stakeholders. It includes audit of the quality of works being executed at different levels along with the details of disbursements made, the number of labourers employed and materials used. The people in coordination with local administration will conduct social audit.
Household

“Household” mean the members of a family related to each other by blood, marriage or adoption and normally residing together and sharing meals or holding a common ration card.

Household income

Household income is a measure of the combined incomes of all people sharing a particular household or place of residence. It includes every form of income, e.g., salaries and wages, retirement income, near cash government transfers like food stamps, and investment gains.

Employment

An activity in which one engages or is employed seeking some gainful employment.

Wage Employment

Wage employment is ‘a mutual agreement between two parties (known as employer and employee) in which the employee (generally an individual) agrees to work for the employer (generally a business firm, government office or sometimes an individual) under some specific terms and conditions and the employer agrees to pay him some remuneration (may be in cash or kind) for his work’. In wage employment, there are always two parties and the employee gets wage or salary from the employer for his work. Wage is normally an assured amount (which is agreed upon by both the parties) given to the employee on a daily or weekly basis for his work.
References


