

# Changing Women's Lives: A Review Of Mgnrega's Impact In Bhiwani

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## Abstract

*This review paper explores the impact of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) on the lives of women in Bhiwani district, Haryana, through a descriptive analysis of existing literature and secondary data sources. MGNREGA, as a landmark social welfare initiative, has played a pivotal role in enhancing rural livelihoods, with a particular emphasis on promoting gender inclusion. The paper examines how the scheme has contributed to improving women's economic status, social visibility, and participation in community development. By synthesizing findings from government reports, academic studies, and policy reviews, the study highlights both the progress made and the persistent challenges faced by women in accessing and benefiting from the scheme. Issues such as wage disparities, limited awareness, and socio-cultural barriers are discussed in the context of Bhiwani's unique demographic and cultural landscape. The review concludes that while MGNREGA has opened new avenues for rural women, sustained efforts and gender-sensitive reforms are essential to ensure its long-term effectiveness and inclusivity.*

**Key Words:** MGNREGA, Socio-Economic Change, Inclusive Development, Bhiwani District.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), enacted in 2005, stands as one of India's most ambitious and inclusive social welfare programs. Designed to provide at least 100 days of guaranteed wage employment annually to every rural household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work, MGNREGA has become a cornerstone of rural development policy. Its significance lies not only in its economic impact but also in its potential to bring about transformative social change, particularly for marginalized groups such as rural women. MGNREGA is unique in its legal guarantee of employment, its emphasis on transparency and accountability, and its decentralized implementation through Panchayati Raj Institutions. By offering employment close to home, the scheme reduces migration pressures and strengthens local economies. More importantly, it opens up avenues for women to participate in the workforce, often for the first time, thereby challenging traditional gender roles and contributing to their empowerment.

### 1.1 Women's Participation in Rural Employment Schemes

Historically, rural women in India have faced multiple layers of exclusion from economic opportunities, education, healthcare, and decision-making processes. Patriarchal norms, limited mobility, and lack of access to resources have kept many women confined to domestic roles. Employment schemes like MGNREGA offer a pathway to break these barriers by providing paid work, financial independence, and a sense of agency. Women's participation in MGNREGA has been notable. According to national data, women constitute nearly half of the total workforce under the scheme. This is significant in a context where female labor force participation in rural areas has traditionally been low. The scheme's provisions such as equal wages, worksite facilities, and preference for women workers have contributed to making it more accessible and appealing to women. Beyond income generation, MGNREGA has the potential to influence broader aspects of women's lives. It can enhance their status within the household, improve their bargaining power, and foster greater involvement in community affairs. Studies have shown that women who participate in MGNREGA often report increased confidence, better health outcomes, and improved educational prospects for their children. However, challenges remain, including irregular payments, lack of awareness, and gender-based discrimination at worksites.

## **1.2 Relevance of Bhiwani District in the Context of the Study**

Bhiwani, located in the state of Haryana, presents a compelling case for examining the impact of MGNREGA on women's lives. Haryana has traditionally been characterized by strong patriarchal norms, skewed gender ratios, and limited female workforce participation. In such a socio-cultural context, the implementation of MGNREGA offers a unique opportunity to assess how a national employment scheme interacts with local gender dynamics. Bhiwani is a predominantly agrarian district, with a significant portion of the population dependent on agriculture and allied activities. Seasonal unemployment, landlessness, and poverty are common challenges faced by rural households. For women, these issues are compounded by social restrictions and limited access to formal employment. MGNREGA, by providing wage employment within the village, has the potential to address these issues and bring about meaningful change.

The district has seen a steady increase in women's participation in MGNREGA over the years. Anecdotal evidence and local reports suggest that women in Bhiwani have begun to assert their rights, demand work, and engage more actively in community development activities. However, the extent and nature of this transformation remain underexplored in academic literature. A review of existing studies, government data, and policy documents can help illuminate the pathways through which MGNREGA is influencing women's lives in Bhiwani.

## **1.3 Purpose and Scope of the Review**

This paper aims to critically examine the impact of MGNREGA on women in Bhiwani district through a descriptive and literature-based approach. Rather than conducting primary fieldwork, the study synthesizes findings from existing research, government reports, and secondary data sources to provide a comprehensive understanding of the scheme's influence on various dimensions of women's lives. The review focuses on key areas such as economic empowerment, social mobility, decision-making power, and changes in gender norms. It also considers the challenges and limitations faced by women in accessing and benefiting from MGNREGA. By analyzing the available evidence, the paper seeks to identify patterns, highlight success stories, and point out areas where policy interventions are needed. The scope of the review is limited to the Bhiwani district, but the insights generated may have broader relevance for other regions with similar socio-economic and cultural contexts. The paper does not aim to provide statistical analysis or field-based validation but rather to offer a narrative synthesis that can inform future research and policy-making.

## **2. Conceptual Framework**

Understanding the impact of MGNREGA on women's lives in Bhiwani requires a clear conceptual foundation. This section defines key concepts empowerment, social change, and rural development and explores the role of employment schemes in promoting gender equality. It also draws upon relevant theoretical perspectives to frame the analysis of women's development in the context of rural India.

### **2.1 Role of Employment Schemes in Gender Equality**

Employment schemes like MGNREGA play a vital role in advancing gender equality, especially in rural contexts where women's participation in the labor force is traditionally low. These schemes offer structured opportunities for women to engage in paid work, thereby addressing economic and social disparities.

#### **Economic Empowerment**

Access to income is a fundamental aspect of empowerment. MGNREGA provides women with a reliable source of earnings, which enhances their financial autonomy. This economic empowerment often translates into greater decision-making power within households and increased investment in children's education and health.

#### **Social Inclusion**

Participation in employment schemes fosters social inclusion by integrating women into community development processes. MGNREGA encourages collective work, which helps women build networks, share experiences, and gain confidence. It also promotes recognition of women's contributions to society, challenging the notion that their labor is confined to domestic spaces.

#### **Reduction of Gender Gaps**

MGNREGA includes provisions for equal wages and prioritizes the inclusion of women in the workforce. These measures help reduce gender-based disparities in income and employment. However, challenges such as limited awareness, cultural resistance, and inadequate facilities at worksites still hinder full participation.

## **Empowerment Beyond Economics**

While economic benefits are significant, the impact of employment schemes extends to psychological and social dimensions. Women who participate in MGNREGA often report increased self-esteem, awareness of rights, and willingness to engage in civic activities. These outcomes contribute to a broader sense of empowerment and agency.

### **2.2 Theoretical Perspectives on Women's Development**

To analyze the impact of MGNREGA on women, it is essential to draw upon theoretical frameworks that explain the processes of empowerment and development. These perspectives offer insights into the structural and cultural factors that shape women's experiences.

#### **Liberal Feminism**

Liberal feminism advocates for equal rights and opportunities for women within existing social and political structures. It emphasizes access to education, employment, and legal protections. From this viewpoint, MGNREGA is a progressive policy that promotes gender equality by ensuring women's inclusion in wage labor and public life.

However, liberal feminism also highlights the need for institutional support to overcome barriers such as wage discrimination and lack of childcare facilities. It calls for reforms that make employment schemes more accessible and responsive to women's needs.

#### **Capability Approach**

The capability approach, developed by Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum, focuses on enhancing individuals' freedoms and abilities to lead lives they value. It goes beyond income to consider factors like education, health, and social participation. In the context of MGNREGA, this approach underscores the importance of expanding women's choices and capabilities through employment.

By enabling women to work, earn, and engage with their communities, MGNREGA contributes to the development of capabilities that are essential for well-being and empowerment. The approach also encourages evaluation of outcomes in terms of real freedoms rather than just economic indicators.

#### **Intersectionality**

Intersectionality examines how various social identities such as gender, caste, class, and religion interact to shape experiences of privilege and oppression. In rural India, women's access to employment schemes is influenced by these intersecting factors. For example, Dalit women may face additional barriers due to caste-based discrimination. This perspective is crucial for understanding the diverse impacts of MGNREGA on different groups of women. It calls for inclusive policies that address layered inequalities and ensure that all women benefit equitably from employment schemes.

#### **Empowerment Theory**

Empowerment theory focuses on processes that enable individuals to gain control over their lives and influence their environments. It emphasizes participation, access to resources, and capacity building. MGNREGA aligns with this theory by providing women with opportunities to engage in meaningful work and contribute to community development. Empowerment theory also stresses the importance of supportive structures such as training, awareness programs, and institutional accountability to sustain empowerment. It suggests that employment schemes must be accompanied by efforts to build women's skills, knowledge, and confidence.

### **3. MGNREGA: Policy Overview**

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), enacted in 2005, represents a landmark initiative in India's approach to poverty alleviation and rural development. It is one of the largest public employment programs in the world, designed to provide livelihood security to rural households through guaranteed wage employment. Beyond its economic objectives, MGNREGA has evolved into a powerful tool for promoting social inclusion, especially for women, by creating opportunities for participation in the workforce and community development.

#### **3.1 Objectives and Features of MGNREGA**

MGNREGA was introduced with the primary objective of enhancing the livelihood security of rural households by guaranteeing at least 100 days of wage employment in a financial year to every household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work. The Act is rights-based, meaning that

employment is a legal entitlement, not a discretionary benefit. This shift from welfare to rights marks a significant transformation in India's social policy framework.

Key features of MGNREGA include:

- **Legal Guarantee of Employment:** The Act mandates that eligible households must be provided work within 15 days of application, failing which they are entitled to an unemployment allowance.
- **Decentralized Planning:** Implementation is carried out through Gram Panchayats, ensuring that planning and execution are locally driven and responsive to community needs.
- **Transparency and Accountability:** Provisions such as social audits, job cards, and muster rolls are designed to prevent corruption and ensure that beneficiaries receive their due wages.
- **Asset Creation:** The work undertaken under MGNREGA is intended to create durable assets such as roads, ponds, and irrigation facilities, contributing to long-term rural development.
- **Environmentally Sustainable Work:** Many projects focus on water conservation, afforestation, and land development, aligning with ecological goals.

MGNREGA is demand-driven, meaning that employment is provided based on requests from workers, not on predetermined quotas. This approach empowers rural citizens to assert their rights and participate actively in the development process.

### 3.2 Gender-Sensitive Provisions in the Scheme

MGNREGA has embedded several genders-sensitive provisions aimed at promoting women's participation and addressing gender disparities in rural employment. These provisions reflect a recognition of the structural barriers that limit women's access to work and seek to create an enabling environment for their inclusion.

#### Equal Wages for Equal Work

One of the most progressive aspects of MGNREGA is the guarantee of equal wages for men and women. In many informal sectors, women are paid less than men for the same work. MGNREGA challenges this norm by ensuring wage parity, thereby promoting economic justice and dignity for women workers.

#### Worksite Facilities

The Act mandates the provision of basic facilities at worksites, including drinking water, shade, and first aid. For women, especially those with children, the availability of crèche facilities is crucial. Although implementation varies across regions, the inclusion of such provisions reflects an effort to make the workplace more accessible and safer for women.

#### Priority to Women Workers

MGNREGA encourages the participation of women by giving them priority in the allocation of work. In many states, women constitute nearly half of the total workforce under the scheme. This is a significant achievement in a context where female labor force participation is generally low.

#### Empowerment through Participation

By engaging in public work, women gain visibility and recognition in their communities. This challenges traditional gender roles and contributes to their social empowerment. Participation in MGNREGA also exposes women to administrative processes, such as attending Gram Sabha meetings and interacting with local officials, which can enhance their civic awareness and confidence.

Despite these provisions, challenges remain. In some areas, women face social resistance to working outside the home, and the lack of proper facilities can discourage participation. Addressing these issues requires stronger enforcement of gender-sensitive guidelines and community-level awareness campaigns.

### 3.3 Implementation Structure and Guidelines

MGNREGA is implemented through a multi-tiered structure involving central, state, and local governments. The Ministry of Rural Development at the central level provides policy direction, funding, and monitoring. State governments are responsible for coordinating implementation, while Gram Panchayats play a central role in planning and execution.

#### Planning and Execution

At the village level, Gram Panchayats prepare annual work plans based on community needs and available resources. These plans are approved through Gram Sabha meetings, ensuring transparency and local participation. Once work is sanctioned, job cards are issued to eligible households, and workers are assigned tasks.

The execution of projects involves maintaining muster rolls, recording attendance, and ensuring timely payment of wages. Payments are made directly into workers' bank accounts or post office accounts to reduce leakages and promote financial inclusion.

### **Monitoring and Evaluation**

MGNREGA includes robust mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation. Social audits are conducted regularly to assess the quality of work, verify records, and address grievances. These audits are participatory, involving community members and civil society organizations.

The scheme also uses Management Information Systems (MIS) to track progress, expenditures, and worker participation. Real-time data is available on the MGNREGA portal, enhancing transparency and accountability.

### **Funding and Financial Flow**

Funding for MGNREGA is shared between the central and state governments. The central government bears the cost of wages and materials, while the state government covers administrative expenses. Funds are released in tranches based on performance and demand, ensuring that resources are available when needed.

### **3.4 Challenges in Implementation**

While the structure is comprehensive, implementation faces several challenges. Delays in wage payments, inadequate staffing at the local level, and lack of awareness among beneficiaries can hinder the effectiveness of the scheme. In some cases, political interference and corruption have also been reported. For women, specific challenges include limited access to information, social restrictions, and inadequate facilities at worksites. Addressing these issues requires capacity building, stronger monitoring, and community engagement.

## **4. Women and MGNREGA: National Context**

MGNREGA has emerged as a transformative policy in India's rural landscape, particularly in its potential to empower women through guaranteed wage employment. Across the country, the scheme has witnessed significant female participation, often exceeding expectations in traditionally male-dominated labor sectors. This section reviews national-level studies, highlights success stories and challenges from various states, and offers comparative insights to contextualize the experience of women in Bhiwani.

### **4.1 Review of National-Level Studies on Women's Participation in MGNREGA**

Numerous studies across India have documented the positive impact of MGNREGA on women's lives. According to data from the Ministry of Rural Development, women consistently account for nearly 50% of the total workforce under the scheme, with some states reporting even higher participation rates. A study by the Institute of Social Studies Trust (ISST) found that MGNREGA has contributed to increased financial autonomy among rural women, enabling them to make independent decisions regarding household expenditures, children's education, and healthcare. Similarly, research conducted by the National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER) highlighted that women who participated in MGNREGA reported improved self-esteem and greater involvement in community affairs. In states like Tamil Nadu and Kerala, where implementation has been relatively efficient, women's participation has been particularly high. These states have adopted proactive measures such as awareness campaigns, women-centric worksite facilities, and timely wage payments, which have encouraged sustained engagement.

However, studies also point to regional disparities. In northern states like Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, social norms and administrative challenges have limited women's participation. In these areas, women often face resistance from family members or lack access to information about the scheme.

### **4.2 Success Stories from Different States**

#### **Tamil Nadu**

Tamil Nadu stands out as a model for gender-inclusive implementation of MGNREGA. The state has consistently maintained high levels of female participation, often exceeding 70%. Women in Tamil Nadu have formed self-help groups and community networks around MGNREGA work, which has strengthened their collective bargaining power. The state's emphasis on transparency, timely payments, and crèche facilities has made the scheme more accessible and effective for women.

## **Kerala**

Kerala's decentralized governance and strong Panchayati Raj institutions have facilitated effective implementation of MGNREGA. Women in Kerala have benefited from skill development programs linked to MGNREGA, allowing them to transition into semi-skilled roles. The integration of MGNREGA with other social welfare schemes has further enhanced its impact on women's lives.

## **Rajasthan**

In Rajasthan, MGNREGA has played a crucial role in addressing seasonal unemployment and drought-related distress. Women have actively participated in water conservation projects and land development activities. The visibility of women in public workspaces has led to a gradual shift in gender norms, with increased acceptance of women's economic roles.

## **Chhattisgarh**

Chhattisgarh has demonstrated success in mobilizing tribal women through MGNREGA. The scheme has provided a stable source of income in remote areas, reducing dependence on migration and informal labor. Women have reported greater control over their earnings and improved access to basic services.

### **4.3 Challenges Faced by Women in MGNREGA**

Despite its achievements, MGNREGA faces several challenges in ensuring equitable participation for women:

- **Delayed Wage Payments:** In many regions, delays in wage disbursement discourage women from participating, especially those who rely on daily income for household needs.
- **Lack of Awareness:** Limited knowledge about entitlements and procedures prevents women from demanding work or registering complaints.
- **Inadequate Worksite Facilities:** Absence of crèches, toilets, and drinking water at worksites creates barriers for women, particularly those with young children.
- **Social Norms and Restrictions:** In conservative regions, women face pressure to remain within domestic spaces, and their participation in public work is often stigmatized.
- **Administrative Inefficiencies:** Shortage of staff, poor record-keeping, and lack of grievance redressal mechanisms affect the overall effectiveness of the scheme.

Addressing these challenges requires targeted interventions, including gender sensitization of officials, community engagement, and improved infrastructure.

### **4.4 Comparative Insights**

A comparative analysis of different states reveals that the success of MGNREGA in empowering women is closely linked to the quality of implementation and local governance structures. States with strong Panchayati Raj institutions, proactive administration, and community involvement have achieved better outcomes.

For instance, Tamil Nadu and Kerala demonstrate that when women are actively involved in planning and monitoring, their participation increases and the benefits are more sustainable. In contrast, states with weak institutional support and entrenched patriarchal norms struggle to achieve similar results.

The experience of Bhiwani, situated in Haryana—a state known for its gender disparities—must be viewed in this broader context. While MGNREGA has opened new avenues for women in Bhiwani, the extent of its impact depends on how effectively the scheme is implemented and whether local challenges are addressed.

## **5. MGNREGA in Bhiwani: A Regional Review**

The Bhiwani district of Haryana, located in the northwestern part of India, presents a unique socio-cultural and economic landscape for analyzing the impact of MGNREGA on women. Known for its agrarian economy and deeply rooted patriarchal norms, Bhiwani offers both challenges and opportunities in implementing gender-sensitive employment schemes. This section explores the socio-economic profile of women in the district, reviews available data and studies, assesses observed changes in women's lives, and identifies barriers to effective implementation.

### **5.1 Socio-Economic Profile of Women in Bhiwani**

Women in Bhiwani, like in many parts of Haryana, have historically faced limited access to education, employment, and public life. The district has a predominantly rural population, with agriculture being the primary source of livelihood. Despite gradual improvements in literacy and health indicators, gender disparities remain significant. Female labor force participation in Bhiwani has traditionally been low due to social norms that restrict women's mobility and prioritize domestic responsibilities. Many women are engaged

in unpaid agricultural labor or household work, which is not recognized in formal economic statistics. The skewed sex ratio and prevalence of early marriages further reflect the socio-cultural constraints on women's autonomy.

However, recent trends indicate a slow but steady shift. Government initiatives, including MGNREGA, have begun to create spaces for women to engage in paid work and community development activities. The presence of self-help groups and increasing awareness about rights and entitlements are contributing to this transformation.

### **5.2 Review of Available Data, Reports, and Studies Specific to Bhiwani**

While comprehensive academic studies focused solely on Bhiwani are limited, government data and regional reports provide valuable insights into the implementation of MGNREGA in the district. According to official records, Bhiwani has seen a consistent increase in the number of women registered under MGNREGA, with female participation rates approaching the national average in recent years. Local reports suggest that women in Bhiwani have been involved in various types of work under MGNREGA, including road construction, pond renovation, and afforestation. These activities not only provide income but also contribute to community assets. The decentralized nature of the scheme, implemented through Gram Panchayats, has allowed for greater local engagement, although the effectiveness varies across villages.

Some studies have highlighted the role of MGNREGA in reducing seasonal unemployment and distress migration in the region. For women, the scheme has offered an alternative to unpaid labor and created opportunities for financial independence. However, the lack of gender-disaggregated data at the district level remains a challenge in assessing the full impact.

### **5.3 Observed Changes in Women's Lives**

#### **Income and Financial Independence**

One of the most visible changes brought about by MGNREGA in Bhiwani is the increase in women's access to income. For many women, this is the first time they have earned wages for their labor. The direct transfer of wages into bank accounts has promoted financial inclusion and allowed women to manage their own money. This shift has led to greater confidence and a sense of ownership over household decisions.

#### **Mobility and Public Participation**

Participation in MGNREGA has also enhanced women's mobility. Engaging in work outside the home has helped break social taboos and increased women's visibility in public spaces. Women who were previously confined to domestic roles are now seen contributing to community development, which has gradually altered perceptions about gender roles.

#### **Decision-Making and Social Status**

With increased income and exposure to administrative processes, women in Bhiwani have reported greater involvement in household decision-making. Their opinions are being considered in matters related to children's education, healthcare, and financial planning. In some cases, women have taken leadership roles in local committees or self-help groups, further elevating their social status.

#### **Awareness and Civic Engagement**

MGNREGA has indirectly contributed to raising awareness among women about their rights and entitlements. Participation in Gram Sabha meetings and interactions with local officials have familiarized women with governance processes. This civic engagement is a critical step toward long-term empowerment.

### **5.4 Barriers and Limitations in Implementation**

Despite these positive developments, several barriers continue to hinder the full potential of MGNREGA for women in Bhiwani:

#### **Cultural Resistance**

Deep-rooted patriarchal norms still discourage many women from participating in wage labor. In some households, women face opposition from family members who view public work as inappropriate or unnecessary. This cultural resistance limits the reach of the scheme.

#### **Lack of Awareness**

Many women are unaware of their rights under MGNREGA, including the entitlement to 100 days of work, equal wages, and worksite facilities. This lack of awareness prevents them from demanding work or reporting grievances.

### **Inadequate Worksite Facilities**

The absence of basic amenities such as drinking water, shade, toilets, and crèche facilities at worksites makes it difficult for women, especially those with young children, to participate consistently. These shortcomings reduce the scheme's accessibility and effectiveness.

### **Delayed Payments and Administrative Gaps**

Delays in wage payments and irregular work availability discourage participation. In some cases, women are registered under the scheme but do not receive timely work due to poor planning or lack of coordination among officials. These administrative inefficiencies undermine trust in the system.

### **Limited Skill Development**

While MGNREGA provides employment, it does not offer significant opportunities for skill enhancement. As a result, women remain confined to unskilled labor, limiting their prospects for upward mobility or transition to better-paying jobs.

## **6. DISCUSSION**

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) has emerged as a significant policy instrument in India's efforts to promote inclusive rural development and gender equality. This discussion synthesizes findings from national and regional literature, critically evaluates the scheme's role in transforming women's lives, identifies gaps in research and policy execution, and draws lessons from the specific context of Bhiwani district.

### **6.1 Synthesis of Findings from Literature**

Across various states, MGNREGA has demonstrated its potential to empower women economically and socially. Studies from Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Rajasthan, and Chhattisgarh consistently highlight increased female participation, improved financial autonomy, and enhanced visibility of women in public spaces. These outcomes are attributed to the scheme's gender-sensitive provisions, such as equal wages, priority for women workers, and decentralized planning.

In Bhiwani, although comprehensive academic studies are limited, available data and local reports suggest similar trends. Women have increasingly engaged in MGNREGA work, gaining access to income and participating in community development activities. The scheme has helped reduce seasonal unemployment and offered an alternative to unpaid domestic labor.

However, the literature also points to persistent challenges. Delayed payments, inadequate worksite facilities, and limited awareness among women continue to hinder full participation. Moreover, regional disparities in implementation quality affect the consistency of outcomes.

### **6.2 Critical Analysis of MGNREGA's Role in Transforming Women's Lives**

MGNREGA's impact on women extends beyond economic benefits. By providing wage employment within the village, the scheme enables women to step out of traditional domestic roles and engage in productive labor. This shift contributes to changes in household dynamics, with women gaining greater say in financial and social decisions. In Bhiwani, where patriarchal norms are deeply entrenched, MGNREGA has played a subtle but meaningful role in challenging gender stereotypes. Women who participate in the scheme report increased confidence, awareness of rights, and a sense of agency. Their presence in public workspaces has begun to alter community perceptions, fostering a more inclusive environment. However, the transformative potential of MGNREGA is not automatic. It depends on the quality of implementation, local governance, and community support. In areas where officials are proactive and Panchayats are responsive, women benefit more significantly. Conversely, in villages with weak institutional structures, the scheme's impact is limited. Furthermore, while MGNREGA provides employment, it does not necessarily lead to long-term skill development or upward mobility. Women remain confined to unskilled labor, and the absence of training programs restricts their ability to transition to better-paying jobs. Thus, the scheme's role in transformation is foundational but requires complementary interventions for sustained change.

### **6.3 Lessons Learned from Bhiwani's Experience**

The experience of Bhiwani offers valuable insights into the localized dynamics of MGNREGA implementation:



- **Cultural Context Matters:** In districts with strong patriarchal traditions, policy interventions must be accompanied by community sensitization efforts. Awareness campaigns and engagement with local leaders can help shift attitudes and encourage women's participation.
- **Visibility Leads to Empowerment:** Even limited participation in public work can have a ripple effect on women's confidence and social status. MGNREGA's role in creating such opportunities is crucial, especially in conservative regions.
- **Administrative Efficiency is Key:** Timely wage payments, proper record-keeping, and responsive grievance redressal systems enhance trust in the scheme and encourage sustained engagement.
- **Need for Complementary Programs:** To maximize the impact of MGNREGA, it should be linked with other initiatives such as skill development, financial literacy, and health services. This integrated approach can support holistic empowerment.
- **Local Leadership Can Drive Change:** In villages where women leaders or active self-help groups are present, MGNREGA tends to be more effective. Encouraging women's leadership at the grassroots level can amplify the scheme's benefits.

## 7. CONCLUSION

The review of MGNREGA's implementation in Bhiwani district reveals a complex but promising picture of how rural employment schemes can influence women's lives. The scheme, designed to provide wage employment and build rural assets, has also emerged as a platform for promoting gender inclusion and empowerment. Key insights from national and regional literature show that MGNREGA has contributed to enhancing women's financial independence, increasing their visibility in public spaces, and improving their participation in household and community decision-making. In Bhiwani, where traditional gender roles are deeply entrenched, the scheme has offered women a rare opportunity to engage in paid labor, assert their rights, and gain recognition for their contributions. However, the impact of MGNREGA is not uniform. Its effectiveness depends on several factors, including administrative efficiency, community support, and the enforcement of gender-sensitive provisions. Challenges such as delayed payments, inadequate worksite facilities, and limited awareness continue to restrict women's full participation. The overall impact of MGNREGA on women in Bhiwani is encouraging but incomplete. It has laid the foundation for change, but sustained efforts are needed to build on this progress. The importance of maintaining a gender-focused lens in rural employment policies cannot be overstated. Empowering women through inclusive development is not only a matter of equity but also a driver of broader social and economic transformation.

## 8. Policy Implications

To enhance gender inclusivity and effectiveness of MGNREGA in districts like Bhiwani, policy recommendations should focus on integrating gender-sensitive planning with robust implementation mechanisms. This includes ensuring the mandatory provision of worksite facilities such as crèches, toilets, and drinking water to support women's participation, conducting regular awareness campaigns to educate women about their entitlements, and strengthening monitoring systems to track gender-disaggregated data and wage payments. Additionally, linking MGNREGA with skill development programs and encouraging women's leadership in local governance can foster long-term empowerment. These measures, supported by targeted budget allocations and community engagement, can transform MGNREGA into a more inclusive and sustainable tool for rural women's development.

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