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Tamil Nadu ranks second in employing women under job scheme

CHENNAI: Rural [Tamil Nadu](#) may finally be catching up with its urban counterpart on women's liberation. Data put out by the central government in the Economic Survey shows that the state ranks second in employing maximum number of [women](#) under the rural [job scheme](#) — MNREGS.

In 2011-12, more than 73.3% of women in rural Tamil Nadu were employed under the [Mahatma Gandhi](#) National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MNREGS), second only to Kerala where 92.7% women were employed.

Experts, however, said the numbers are rising due to growing [unemployment](#) in rural areas. "There are not many men left in villages anymore," said Sheelu, president of a women's collective. "Most of them have migrated to cities in order to try their luck at higher paying jobs at construction sites and other forms of unskilled labour. So, in the villages, it is mostly women and elderly who sign up for

MNREGS

work," she said.

Arupathy Kalyanam, general secretary of Federation of Farmers in Cauvery Delta districts, said, "When men take to drinking and idling all through the day, women have no choice but to sign up for this job. Having said that, it is also true that the main reason men don't take up any rural job because they get paid a minimum of Rs 300 if they take up other jobs, whereas under MNREGS, they get paid only Rs 132."

On the other hand, MNREGS is the only job opportunity where men and women get paid equally. While the pay given may be lower for men than private jobs, women get paid more in MNREGS than in other jobs. "That's a primary reason for more women signing up for this scheme. Moreover, the work is light; they can leave for work at 10am and return home by 2pm," said Sheelu.

But Sheelu said MNREGS work in Tamil Nadu, though employing more people, is not as productive as other states, particularly Kerala. "In Kerala, they have significantly increased their agriculture productivity through this scheme," she said. "Kerala pays them remuneration for working in their own or others' fields as well as creating water harvesting tanks in government land. In Tamil Nadu, it's mostly confined to digging work."

In Tamil Nadu, MNREGS has resulted in shortage of labour in farm lands during harvest season. "Labourers demand higher

pay from farmers than what they get under the MNREGS scheme," said Kalyanam.