

Empowerment Effects of the NREGS on Women Workers: A Study in Four States

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Using a field survey, this paper examines the empowerment effects of the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme on rural women in Bihar, Jharkhand, Rajasthan and Himachal Pradesh. It argues that women workers have gained from the scheme primarily because of the paid employment opportunity, and benefits have been realised through income-consumption effects, intra-household effects, and the enhancement of choice and capability. Women have also gained to some extent in terms of realisation of equal wages under the NREGS, with long-term implications for correcting gender skewness and gender discriminatory wages prevalent in the rural labour market of India. Despite the difficulties and hurdles for women, prospects lie, inter alia, in their collective mobilisation, more so in laggard states.

Women's empowerment was not among the original intentions of the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA), and is not among its main objectives. However, provisions like priority for women in the ratio of one-third of total workers (Schedule II (6)); equal wages for men and women (Schedule II (34)); and crèches for the children of women workers (Schedule II (28)) were made in the Act, with the view of ensuring that rural women benefit from the scheme in a certain manner.¹ Provisions like work within a radius of five kilometres from the house, absence of supervisor and contractor, and flexibility in terms of choosing period and months of employment were not made exclusively for women, but have, nevertheless, been conducive for rural women.

The flipside of the scheme is the nature of the job – hard manual work and wages based on piece rate – which make it difficult for women to earn minimum wages. Field reports suggest exclusion of single, divorced and separated, and old women in some places (Sainath 2007; Bhatta 2008). In addition, entitlement to 100 days of guaranteed employment is applicable at the household level. In a male-dominant patriarchal society, it is difficult to believe that women's decision to avail of employment under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS) would get precedence over the decision of male family members.²

Nevertheless, women have availed of the paid employment opportunity under NREGS in large numbers. Women workers had a national average share of 40.65% of total NREGS person-days in 2006-07, 42.52% in 2007-08, and 47.88% in 2008-09, exceeding expectations and the stipulated 33% share. Interestingly, this occurred largely spontaneously. Women's participation under NREGS, measured in person-days, also exceeded their participation in erstwhile employment generation programmes like the Sampoorna Gramin Rojgar Yojana (SGRY) and the Maharashtra Employment Guarantee Scheme (MEGS), except for a few years under MEGS. For example, in 2005-06, under the SGRY, the share of women in total person-days was only 25.7%, although it was a bit higher in some states like Rajasthan at 42.32%, Madhya Pradesh at 36.35%, Andhra Pradesh at 37.44%, and Chhattisgarh at 35.01% (CSO 2007: 65). Similarly, women on an average constituted 40% of MEGS workers between 1978-79 and 1986-87 (Acharya 1990: 63).

Women's participation in the NREGS, however, varies across regions. The share of women in total person-days was relatively high (exceeding 50%) in Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Rajasthan, and Tripura in all the three years, that is, 2006-07, 2007-08, and 2008-09 (except in Tripura where it was

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less than 50% in 2007-08). It exceeded the national average (viz, 47.88%) in Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Rajasthan, and Tripura in all the three years. On the other hand, the share of women in total person-days was less than the national average in Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh (HP), Jharkhand, Maharashtra, Orissa, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh (UP) and Uttarakhand (except in 2007-08), West Bengal and most of the north-eastern states. Further, there is a gap of about 80 percentage points between the states with the highest and lowest participation rates, that is, Kerala (85.01%) and Jammu and Kashmir (5.76%). Even if we consider Jammu and Kashmir as outliers, there is still a gap of about 67 percentage points between Kerala and UP (18.11%). Moreover, there are pronounced regional north-south variations. The four southern states, namely, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, and Tamil Nadu with relatively better human and gender development indices have ensured high participation of women in all the three years (as a share in total person-days), although average person-days is low in Kerala. Rajasthan, with its high women's participation is the exception among the north Indian states.

In contrast to the high participation of women in the programme as workers, their participation in processes like work selection, social audit, mobilisation of civil society, and share in the control and management of assets created is not encouraging. This being the case, in some places, women's participation in the gram sabha has still increased, and there is even an increase in the number of women who speak in the gram sabha. In MP, women form part of vigilance committees, and it is reported that women are the most vocal among the members of the vigilance committee in some places (Khera and Nayak 2009: 56). There are also some examples of women's groups playing an important role in the management of community assets, for example, in *Jatropha* plantations in Chhattisgarh.³ Nonetheless, the disjunction between work participation and process participation remains, and reduces the larger potential community-level impacts of the scheme.

Even so, the emergence of women workers as independent bread-earners with control over their earnings has significant empowerment effects, such as a greater decision-making role in the family, discretion to spend and control the use of their earnings, and confidence to earn independent of male family members. Moreover, reports of their increased participation in the gram sabha are encouraging, and might change the character of decision-making at the level of grass-roots democratic institutions, which continue to be male-dominated even after the increased representation of women following the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act.

This paper examines the empowerment effects of the NREGS on rural women at both the individual and community levels. At the individual level, this has been examined through: (1) income-consumption effects; (2) intra-household effects (decision-making roles); and (3) enhancement of choice and capability. The community-level effects have been assessed in terms of realisation of equal wages, increased participation in community development processes, and overall impact on gender relations, if any.

Section 1 describes the perspectives, definition and methodology used in this study. Section 2 explains the state and local contexts of variations in women's participation under NREGS. A brief description of characteristics of women workers and their households has been provided in Section 3. Individual and community-level empowerment effects, including difficulties faced by women workers, have been analysed in Section 4. The last section underlines the importance of NREGS for rural women and draws some general conclusions for policy purposes.

1 Perspectives, Definitions and Methodology

This study is informed by the Gender and Development (GAD) perspective that argues that gender-discriminatory power structures and relations lead to, and perpetuate, gender-lopsided development outcomes, which are the main causes of women's deprivation.⁴ The empowerment effects of the NREGS have the potential to address unequal gender relations in the long run; some of them have been explained in terms of household and community-level effects in this paper.

Under the rubric of GAD, Molyneux (1985) divided women's needs into practical and strategic. Practical needs are those related to food, clothes, housing, etc, and strategic needs are those related to the long-term issues of developing the ability to change the position of subordination and discrimination. The NREGS aims to meet the practical needs of women workers in the short run and their strategic needs in the long run. Women are able to buy food, clothes, medicines, etc, from their NREGS earnings that addresses their short-term needs. Their reduced dependence for these basic needs on male family members also addresses the issue of subordination and subjugation in the long-term.

Household Economics, Paid Employment and Women's Empowerment

Till recently, intra-household affairs were considered outside the domain of mainstream economics that deals mainly with market institutions. With the assertion of feminist economics, and emergence of bargaining (Folbre 1986; Becker 1981) and cooperation-conflict (Sen 1990, 1996) models, the notion of household being a non-market institution has been challenged. It is argued that the perception of the family as an undifferentiated unit where cooperation, harmony and altruism define relations between members camouflages the real nature of household affairs (Folbre 1986; Sen 1990). It is also contended that the notion of human behaviour guided by self-interest in the market and altruism in family/household relations, is inconsistent.

Male-female intra-household relations, then, are (also) defined by their differential bargaining power, and in turn, determined by their differential access to economic, political and social resources. Property ownership and access to paid employment opportunity outside the household, apart from other factors, increases the bargaining capacity of a woman by giving her a better fallback position (Agarwal 1994). Since, in India and elsewhere, male family members have greater control over property and other economic resources, including access to paid employment, they enjoy better bargaining positions inside their households. Moser (1993) holds that women's ability to earn

outside their households increases their own self-perception of their contribution to the household, and this has similar effects. The paid employment opportunity under NREGS holds similar prospects for rural women in India, who have little control over economic resources, and face social and other disadvantages in accessing paid employment outside the home.

The concept of empowerment gained prominence with the feminist movement in the 1980s. There are various views and perceptions on empowerment (Luttrell et al 2009). To some, it is a process and to others, it is an outcome. Many consider it to be

Table 1: HDI, GDI, and GEM of Selected States (2006)

States	2006		
	HDI [#]	GDI ^{##}	GEM ^{###}
States Selected for Study			
Bihar	0.552	0.525	0.385
Jharkhand	0.611	0.595	0.350
Rajasthan	0.591	0.577	0.387
Himachal Pradesh	0.705	0.702	0.473
Southern states			
Andhra Pradesh	0.627	0.617	0.509
Karnataka	0.658	0.647	0.480
Kerala	0.775	0.757	0.496
Tamil Nadu	0.694	0.683	0.482
Best performing state [§]	0.801	0.781	0.509
All India average	0.648	0.633	0.451

Human Development Index.

Gender-related Development Index.

Gender Empowerment Measure.

§ HDI (Chandigarh), GDI (Chandigarh), GEM (Andhra Pradesh).

Source: Ministry of Women and Child Development (2009: 9, 10, 13).

both a process and an outcome. The process approach emphasises organisational capacity building that enhances the access of disadvantaged groups to the process of development, while the outcome approach emphasises increased access to economic resources. To Kabeer, “empowerment refers to the expansion in people’s ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them” (2001a: 19). She elaborates three dimensions of empowerment: (1) resources (conditions); (2) agency (process); and (3) achievement (outcomes).

The present study takes a broader view of empowerment and defines it “both as a process and as an outcome that alters the position of women both inside and outside their households; with this altered position, women are able to realise better individual and social life”.

Methodology and Sample Population

This study is largely empirical, based on a primary survey conducted in the four selected states of north India. The survey was conducted using a two-stage purposive and random sample technique. In the first stage, states, districts and blocks were selected purposively and in the second stage, worksites and women workers were selected randomly. Methods of structured and non-structured interview and focused group discussions were also used for the purpose.

The selection of states from north India is based on two main considerations. First, the human and gender development indicators of these states, except those of HP, are poorer than those of their southern counterparts. It is believed that the empowerment effects (of NREGS) would be observed more sharply in states where women face poor socio-economic conditions, and where

their participation in social and community development processes has traditionally been weak. Second, because of these factors, the issue of women’s empowerment is more pertinent in these states than in others.

Further, the selected states consist of two pairs. Rajasthan and HP are two states with better implementation and Bihar and Jharkhand are two states with poor implementation records. This selection provides us with a contrast of two states with better implementation and two states with poor implementation across north India⁵ (Table 1).

Selection of districts and blocks was based on considerations like the scheduled caste (sc) and scheduled tribe (st) population, the overall and female literacy rates, agrarian conditions (irrigated area, etc), and overall implementation of the scheme in the district, particularly the participation of women, person-days per household, and the number of works undertaken. One district each was purposively selected from all the four states – Gaya (Bihar), Ranchi (Jharkhand), (Rajasthan), and Kangra (HP). In Gaya, Ranchi and Dungarpur the scheme has been implemented since 2 February 2006 and in Kangra, since 1 April 2007. This selection gives us a background of at least three years of implementation.

The selection of Kangra from HP, despite it being a Phase II district, was based on the high participation of women, which was low in Chamba and abysmally low in Sirmour, the only two districts of the first phase. The selection of Ranchi, despite the low participation of women, was guided by the consideration of the high st population. It has been observed that districts with high sc and st population generally show high participation of women. Ranchi defies this general trend, and that made it an interesting case to probe (Table 2).

From each district, three blocks were purposively selected, based on considerations like participation of women, the level of NREGS implementation, and the socio-economic conditions of the population. Another important consideration was the availability of women workers at the worksites during the fieldwork, so that they could be interviewed while working at the worksites.

Table 2: Demographic and Other Features of the Population; NREGS Person-days and Share of SC, ST, Others, and Women in Total Person-days (2008-09)

Demographic and Other Features*	Gaya	Ranchi	Dungarpur	Kangra
Rural population (%)	86.3	64.89	92.7	94.61
SC population (%)	29.64	5.17	4.15	20.88
ST population (%)	0.08	41.82	65.14	0.12
Literacy rate overall (%)	50.45	64.57	48.57	80.08
Literacy rate-rural males (%)	63.27	76.56	66.04	87.54
Literacy rate-rural females (%)	36.66	51.72	31.77	73.01
Rural female workforce participation rate (%)	28.15	46.81	39.48	38.6
Sex ratio	948	972	1031	1032
NREGS person-days and share of SC, STs, others and women**				
Average person-days per household	17.9	36.7	47.48	72.17
Percentage share of SCs in person-days	62.99	10.61	4.96	28.88
Percentage share of STs in person-days	0.00	58.22	79.29	7.02
Percentage share of others in person-days	37.01	31.17	15.74	64.1
Percentage share of women in person-days	34.98	14.4	75.53	53.09

** Calculated from data provided by the Ministry of Rural Development, on the NREGA web site.⁶

Sources: * Calculated from the Census of India (2001).

Active worksites (with working workers) and women workers were randomly selected. But in the case of Gaya district, since active worksites with women workers were not found in the selected blocks during the survey, women workers were selected from the most recently active worksites. A total of 428 women workers: 103 from (Rajasthan), 110 from Gaya (Bihar), 106 from Kangra (HP), and 109 from Ranchi (Jharkhand) were interviewed using a semi-structured questionnaire. Because of the selection of women in groups, the number is uneven across districts. Out of 428 women, 11% had completed 100 days and 41% had completed more than 50 days, whereas the national average of women's person-days is less than 50 in all the three years.

The sample consists of Hindus (86.2%), Muslims (4.2%), Christians (2.3%), and indigenous religious groups such as the Sarna, a tribe in Jharkhand (7.2%). In terms of caste, the distribution is as follows: scs 30.4%, sts 34.6%, and Other Backward Classes (OBCs) 34.6%, of which OBC-I comprised 7.71% and OBC-II comprised 26.87%.⁸

2 Explaining Women Workers' Participation under NREGS

There are various explanations for the varying participation of women workers under the NREGS. Factors that have encouraged women workers' participation include the nature of the job not requiring special knowledge and skill (Krishnaraj et al 2004 in the context of MEGS); outmigration of male family members (Bhatty 2006; Mehrotra 2008; Talukdar 2008); the employment opportunity being available at the doorstep (Bhatty 2006; Khera and Nayak 2009); a tradition of rural women working in others' fields (Narayanan 2008); the provision of equal, non-discriminatory wages (Sudarshan 2008; Khera and Nayak 2009); and innovative experiments in implementation like the female mate system in Rajasthan (Khera 2008), synergisation of NREGS with Kudumbashree in Kerala (Vijayakumar and Thomas 2008),⁹ and in Bihar,¹⁰ gender differential tasks for uniform (minimum) wages (Pankaj 2008a).

Slow implementation and the overall low level of job creation in states like Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, and Bihar, household-based job cards and a household definition based on common kitchen, thereby causing exclusion of single, divorced and separated women,¹¹ are all factors that have restricted women's participation in some cases. Local sociocultural factors also play a role. Women are subjected to discrimination at the level of household registration and issuing of job cards, including complete denial to single woman households in states like UP (Raja 2007). In most parts of the Hindi heartland, there is a notion among the upper caste landed communities that allowing women to work outside their home would amount to a loss of honour and dignity of the family. Khera and Nayak (2009: 54-55) have found that apart from sociocultural restrictions, the presence of contractors on the worksites (which is not legally permitted), a schedule of rates-based wages and delays in wage payment and lack of childcare facilities have restrictive effects on women's participation as workers under the NREGS.

Bihar, Jharkhand, Rajasthan, and HP

The four states present a varied picture. In Bihar and Jharkhand, the nature and capacity of local institutions and sociocultural factors are the main reasons for low women's participation. First, the scheme has been implemented in the backdrop of an administrative and institutional set-up not considered very efficient and effective in public service delivery. Bihar has improved its delivery efficiency since 2004-05, but in a top-down manner. The basic character of grass-roots institutions – local bureaucracy and panchayati raj institutions (PRIS) – has not changed much. On the other hand, Jharkhand is doing without formal PRIS; implementation by the bureaucracy in a centralised manner goes against the spirit of the NREGS.

Second, the demand for NREGS job is confined mostly to scs and OBCs in Bihar and scs, STs and OBCs in Jharkhand.¹² Most of these workers are landless (though participation is more widespread across land categories in Jharkhand) and characterised by low literacy and other economic deprivations (Pankaj 2008a: 19-59). Local institutions are effectively controlled by a combination of landed upper castes and upper middle ascendant castes in Bihar (Pankaj and Singh 2004). Following the 2006 panchayat elections in Bihar, the dominance of the erstwhile elite in local institutions has, however, declined (Pankaj 2008b). Similar problems exist in Jharkhand, where NREGS job seekers are unable to translate entitlements into effective demand, owing to the incapacity of local institutions. The problem is not unique to these two states.

In contrast, civil society in especially the southern part of Rajasthan and a proactive state in AP have overcome this problem. Third, participation of women from upper castes is negligible and from OBCs limited. Due to social restrictions, upper caste women, even from poor families, have not come forward. Upper OBCs have some amount of land and the women prefer to work on their own fields. The lower OBCs, mostly service castes, have traditionally been dependent on *ajmani* services, and vestiges of this still remain.

Rajasthan presents a different socio-economic context. First, the intensity of demand for wage employment is high and socially widespread in rural areas; since large parts of the state are rain-fed, agriculture is low intensity. Second, the history of drought relief through public works programmes has seen large numbers of people, men and women, coming out to work.¹³ Third, because of poor income and employment opportunities in local areas, men and women from rural Rajasthan have been migrating to nearby cities and towns inside and outside state. For migrant populations, local employment is preferable, as migration has both social and economic costs. Fourth, there is a strong presence of civil society organisations in some parts of Rajasthan. In the context of NREGA, the Mazdoor Kisaan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS), Vagad Mazdoor Kisan Sangathan (VMKS), and the Rozgaar Evam Suchana Adhikar Abhiyan (Right to Information Campaign) have played a critical mobilising role. Fifth, the southern districts of Rajasthan such as are tribal-dominated, and working of women outside of their home is not socially taboo. This, coupled with economic hardship, compels male and female members to work to earn their minimum livelihood.

In HP, women's work participation has increased over the years, although it continues to be low in the first-phase districts – Sirmour and Chamba. High levels of human and gender development indices and the better delivery capacity of grass-roots institutions are important factors. Social practices tabooing women's participation are not entrenched here. The high participation of women in Kangra, in turn, has a specific context. Unlike other places, most of the sampled women workers in Kangra were from relatively better off socio-economic conditions: 97% belonged to

Table 3: Women's Share in Total Person-days Worked by the Household (April 2008-March 2009)

Districts	Average Person-days of Women	Average Person-days of Other Household Members	Women's Share in Total Person-days of HH (%)*
Dungarpur	77	40	79.34
Gaya	26	23	61.17
Kangra	61	26	93.48
Ranchi	35	28	66.95
Total	49	29	77.19

HH: Household.

* This has been derived as women's person-days divided by total person-days, multiplied by 100. Source: Survey.

Table 4: Earnings from Various Sources and Share of NREGS (2008-09)

Various Sources of Earnings for Women Workers' Households	(Share in %)				
	Dungarpur	Gaya	Kangra	Ranchi	Total
Agricultural wages	2.22	34.10	0.84	14.46	10.54
Non-agricultural wages	42.98	42.34	43.62	45.46	43.80
Sale of agricultural products (grains)	0.67	3.25	0.07	5.36	2.04
Dairy	0.70	0.61	0.62	2.25	1.02
Sale of fruits and vegetables	0.00	0.00	0.87	0.64	0.45
Old age/widow and other pension	0.24	0.10	6.64	2.03	2.84
Remittances received	21.37	2.42	4.86	1.15	7.47
Others	4.86	4.31	24.58	12.45	13.38
NREGA	26.95	12.86	17.90	16.19	18.46
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Source: Survey; based on recall basis. Figures may be taken as approximate.

OBC households; 69% were literate, the highest among the four districts; and 92% came from landowning households, even if their landholdings were marginal.

The main reason for participation in the scheme by women here is not desperation to earn a livelihood. Situated in the valley and having a conducive climate, agriculture is intensive and productivity is high. Even marginal farmers are able to meet minimum livelihood requirements. Male family members were found to work in agriculture and, if necessary, supplement income through casual wage employment in non-agriculture sectors. Women were usually found to be confined to domestic chores or sometimes need-based work in their own farms, but were not regular wage seekers.

Women of Kangra were seen to view NREGS as an opportunity to earn independently. The *sarkari kaam* (government-sponsored work), timely payment of minimum wages and payment into the individual account of women workers were other attractions.¹⁴ The availability of a paid employment opportunity, not available earlier, at their doorsteps and *sarkari kaam* were factors that attracted women to join NREGS as workers in other states as well (Khera and Nayak 2009: 51). The liberal attitude of implementing agencies in issuing job cards facilitated participation of a large number of widows and single women.

3 A Brief Background of Women Workers

The empowerment narratives in the next section pertain to women of lower social and economic status.¹⁵ Two-thirds were illiterate and another one-fourth were only functionally literate. Most of them were married and were from nuclear families. Some 80% were in the fertility age group: 60.5% in the age group of 30-45 years and another 19% in the age group of 18-29 years. Another 15% were in the age group of 46-59 years, and 5% were also above 60 years.

The income and assets base of these households was poor. The average annual income of a woman worker's household was Rs 29,149 in Dugarpur, Rs 21,422 in Gaya, Rs 41,329 in Kangra, and Rs 27,140 in Ranchi. Two-thirds of these households were from below poverty line (BPL) families: 45.1% general BPL and another 25.5% Antyodaya card holders. 78.5% were living in *kachha* houses and another 16% in semi-*pucca* houses.

One-third of the households were landless and 93% of those having land were only marginal landholders. Casual work in non-agriculture was the primary occupation of 65% of these households, and casual work in agriculture of another 15%. Only a small proportion of households described their primary occupation as self-employed in agriculture and non-agriculture.

Sample women respondents were found to have earned a minimum number of days in the reference year (2008-09). A woman worker had completed 77 days on average in Dugarpur, 61 days in Kangra, 35 days in Ranchi, and 26 days in Gaya district. However, the average share of a woman worker in total person-days earned by the household was 93% in Kangra; 79% in Dugarpur, 67% in Ranchi, and 61% in Gaya (Table 3).

Wage earning was the main source of income of these households. Earnings from non-agricultural work constituted the highest proportion of the total annual income of women workers' household in all four districts. Income from agricultural wages constituted the second highest proportion in Gaya and was the third highest source of household contribution after NREGA in Ranchi. Remittances from migration were also a major source of household income in Dugarpur, after NREGA. Their other sources of income are shown in Table 4.

The contribution of NREGS wages in the total annual income of woman workers' households was 27% in Dugarpur, 18% in Kangra, 16% in Ranchi, and 13% in Gaya (Table 4). More importantly, it has become the third largest source of women workers' household income in Dugarpur, and the second largest in Gaya, Kangra and Ranchi districts. The relatively high share of NREGS in the total annual income of these households is due to their low-income base.

4 Empowerment Effects: Evidence

How has paid employment under NREGS transformed the (bargaining) position of rural women within their households? And to what extent have participatory development processes under NREGS been able to create larger social effects on women's empowerment? The former has been analysed at the household level and with respect to three interrelated processes and outcomes, which are:

- (1) Income-consumption effects;
- (2) Intra-household effects (decision-making role); and
- (3) Enhancement of choice and capability.

The latter has been explained at the larger community-level and through: (1) process participation; (2) wage-equality and its long-term impacts on rural labour market conditions; and (3) changes in gender relations, if any, because of the above and other factors.

Household-Level Effects

Women’s contribution to household income and to the national economy remains largely unaccounted for as they undertake a significant amount of unpaid work. To many, this remains a fundamental challenge of women’s empowerment (Boserup 1980; Folbre 2009; Hirway and Saluja 2009). A time use survey conducted by the Central Statistical Organisation (CSO) across six states (2007: 77) revealed that on an average, rural women spent about 22.53 hours of their weekly time on System of National Accounts (SNA) activities and 33.95 hours on extended SNA activities.¹⁶ This, in fact, reiterates that the average number of hours spent by women on unpaid work is high, and their contribution to the household’s income and overall welfare remains unaccounted for and unappreciated. The NREGS has helped women in converting some unpaid hours of work into paid hours of work with significant effects, especially for those women for whom NREG is a primary work opportunity outside the home.

Income-Consumption Effects: By income-consumption effects, we mean an increase in the paid income of a woman worker and, consequently, her ability to choose her consumption baskets. Though income and consumption are related, we emphasise consumption, because an increase in income sans the ability to consume or choose consumption baskets has little significance. For example, if a woman earns, but is unable to exercise any choice on how to spend those earnings and instead, say, surrenders her entire earnings to the head of the household, she does not influence the spending decision at all, and subsequently the element of empowerment is probably missing, in spite of the income effects. Paid work under NREGS has helped rural women in realising income-consumption effects through: (1) monetised earnings, and (2) better control over earnings because of monetised wages and account payment, leading to greater consumption effects.

A woman worker’s earnings from the NREGS constituted 14% of the total annual income of the household on average across the four districts, 21% in Dungarpur, 15% in Kangra, 11% in Ranchi,

Table 5: Women’s Contribution to Household’s Income through NREGS (2008-09)

Districts	Average Income of Households from NREGS (Rs)	Women’s Income from NREGS as % of Total NREGS Income of Households	Share of Women’s NREGS Income in the Total Annual Income of Households (%)
Dungarpur	7,855	78.79	21.23
Gaya	2,755	61.47	7.90
Kangra	7,399	82.12	14.70
Ranchi	4,394	67.38	10.91
Total	5,459	76.64	14.14

Source: Survey.

and 8% in Gaya districts (Table 5). The share might actually be more, as we have not accounted for the woman worker’s other contributions, in the form of either paid or unpaid work.

Underlining the significance of paid work and its effects on the self-perception of women, one woman worker told us in a lighter

vein that now that she earns, her husband is ready even to prepare tea for her, something quite unlikely earlier. Some also said that when they hand over either part or whole of their earnings to the head of their households or to any other male family members, they feel a sense of worth and importance.

Earning is important, but equally important is retaining and exercising choice over use of earnings. Sixty-eight per cent of the women workers (overall across the four districts) were collecting their wages themselves. This figure was higher in Dungarpur (98%) followed by Kangra (60%), and low in Ranchi (39%) and Gaya (33%) (Table 6). Similar results are found in another study (Khera and Nayak 2009: 51).

Table 6: Who Collects Wages (%)

Districts	Women Themselves	Male Household Members	Sometimes Male Household Members
Dungarpur	97.5	2.5	0.0
Gaya	33.3	66.7	0.0
Kangra	60.0	9.1	30.9
Ranchi	38.6	61.4	0.0
Total	68.2	23.2	8.6

Source: Survey.

It appears that account payment leads to greater incidence of self-collection and control over wages. The high proportion of women in Dungarpur and Kangra, who collected their wages themselves, was in fact co-terminous with 100% account payment. On the other hand, in two-thirds of cases in Gaya and slightly less in Ranchi, male household members collected women’s wages, as cash payment was still in practice and often payment was made to the male household member on behalf of the household. The local social set-up accepts the practice of the man collecting wages of female family members, as often a household is identified by the name of the head of the household. Local officials and PRI representatives easily cooperate with male members to earn their support and favour.

It was observed that sometimes women collect their wages, but hand it over either to the male heads of their households or to their husbands. Sometimes, they retain a portion and surrender the rest. Nevertheless, self-collection increases the chances of retaining control over wages.

The majority of women workers were found to collect and retain their wages. Significantly, it was found that 55.6% of sample women retained up to 25% of their wages. The proportion of women who controlled up to 25% of their NREGS wages for personal use/consumption was 50% in Dungarpur, 69% in Gaya, 50% in Kangra, and 52% in Ranchi. Interestingly, 8.1% of women retained more than 50% of their wage income. Still, 29% women surrendered their entire earnings (Table 7).

Table 7: Retention of Earnings by Women

Women Workers	Proportion of NREGS Earnings Retained by (%)				
	Dungarpur	Gaya	Kangra	Ranchi	Total
Up to 25%	50.5	69.1	50.0	52.3	55.6
25-50%	5.8	1.8	14.2	5.5	6.8
50-75%	4.9	0.0	3.8	0.9	2.3
75-100%	9.7	3.6	6.6	3.7	5.8
Nil	29.1	25.5	25.5	37.6	29.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Survey.

The large number of women who retained either part or whole of their NREGS wages, also retained choice over their use. They used it for all kinds of purposes – on daily consumption items, household durables, health and education of children, visiting relatives, and on social ceremonies, etc. They also used it to meet their personal needs. The most common items of personal need women spent on included clothes, cosmetics and bangles, personal health (medicines), visiting relatives and giving gifts at the time of marriage and festivals to near and dear ones.

The significance of this lies in reduced dependence on male and other family members. Before NREGS, 44% women said that

Table 8: Women's Own Income to Meet Personal Needs: Pre- and Post-NREGS

Districts	Pre-NREGS Own Income to Meet Personal Needs	Post-NREGS Own Income to Meet Personal Needs
Dungarpur	32	70.9
Gaya	59.1	74.5
Kangra	19.8	74.6
Ranchi	63.3	62.4
Total	43.9	70.5

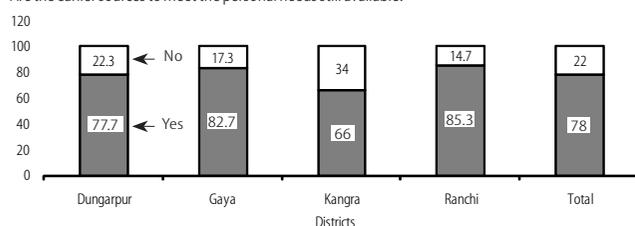
Source: Survey.

they were able to meet their personal needs through their own earnings. Now, 71% women were able to do so (Table 8). The pre- and post-NREGS difference is quite significant in case of Kangra and Dungarpur, where the overall earning of women workers was relatively high because of the greater number of person-days worked by them. It seems that women are able to spare for personal needs only when they earn a minimum income, as other priorities of the household are equally pressing. This also registers the significance of realising a critical minimum number of person-days and wages for improved effects on women workers.

Interestingly, the majority of women workers, even after getting their own income through NREGS, continue to receive money from earlier sources to meet their personal needs, as per necessity and exigency. Of all women workers, 78% (85.3% in Ranchi, 82.7% in Gaya, 77.7% in Dungarpur, and 66% in Kangra)

Figure 1: Substitution Effect on Women's Earlier Sources of Income (in %)

Are the earlier sources to meet the personal needs still available?



Source: Survey

continued to receive money from earlier sources (Figure 1). This underlines the fact that cooperation and understanding continue to play a role in household affairs in rural India, notwithstanding the bargaining model of the household.

Decision-Making: The dominance of males in intra-household decisions in rural areas is unmistakable. As per the National Family Health Survey III (2005-06), only 29% of married women in rural areas take decisions about the purchase of daily household needs; 26% decide about their personal healthcare; 7.6% take decisions about purchasing major household items; and only 10% decide on visits to relatives (as cited in CSO 2007:102).

If we compare this with observed changes in the case of NREGS women workers, the impact is remarkable. Now, 71% retain

portions of their income to spend as per choice. These relate to purchase of household items, healthcare, visits of relatives, etc. Moreover, the domain of their decision-making has also widened. One woman worker in Kangra used her NREGS income for the construction of a toilet inside her house, and interestingly, this was her own decision. Many of these women are now able to visit their relatives, mostly their maternal homes (called *mayka* in north India), more frequently. Earlier, their visits were doubly controlled both by permission and the money required for the visit. Additionally, a number of women workers in Dungarpur had invested in fixed deposits for the sake of their children, something that earlier would have been beyond the domain of their decision-making.

The NREGS has broadened choices for rural women in two ways. One, it has opened for them an entirely new avenue for paid employment. Two, it has broadened their choices and capability as a result. An important fact is that a large number of women decided on their own to work under NREGS. Out of the four districts, 57.9% joined NREGS out of their own volition, although 37.9% were asked to work by the head of the household (Table 9).

Table 9: Intra-household Decision to Participate in NREGS (in %)

Who Decides	Dungarpur	Gaya	Kangra	Ranchi	All
Self (woman worker)	75.7	37.3	78.3	42.2	57.9
Head of the household	20.4	59.1	20.8	49.5	37.9
Other family members	3.9	3.6	0.9	7.3	4.0
Others	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.9	0.2

Source: Survey.

Two, NREGS has increased the choice set for women by reducing economic dependence on other family members. When a woman worker depends on the head of her household, the latter's discretion limits the choice or indulgence of the former by amount and timing. For example, if a woman wants to give Rs 100 as *kanyadan* or gift on the occasion of the marriage ceremony of a girl, and the head of the household agrees to give only Rs 50, then the woman is restricted by the amount. Similarly, if she wants to purchase a sari for herself at the time of the Holi festival and the head of the household agrees to provide money on the occasion of Deepawali, her choice is restricted by timing. Paid employment under NREGS has enhanced both freedom and the choice to use earnings.

Community-Level Effects

Women's participation in grass-roots community development processes in general, and decision-making in particular, remain weak in spite of their increased representation, following the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act. Apart from low participation in the gram sabha and other decision-making fora, the problem of proxy (men performing the role of women representatives) is frequently found to occur.

One of the latent objectives of the NREGS is to strengthen community development processes through grass-roots institutions and to make decision-making at that level more inclusive and participatory. Women's participation in procedural aspects under NREGS, say, selection and implementation of works, social audit, asset management, etc, remains low, even

though their participation as workers has surpassed the benchmark of 33% at the all-India level in all three years of implementation. The low procedural participation is a fact even in panchayats headed by women.

Procedural participation is important for the realisation of entitlement. The first and foremost issue is to know one's entitlements and the process of realisation. Most women workers were aware of the basic provision of 100 days of guaranteed employment. But the level of awareness about the details of provisions, including women-specific ones, was low and varied across districts.

Women workers were better informed of those provisions that had already been implemented, either partially or fully, and were least aware of those provisions that they were not availing of at all. Moreover, the level of awareness/information was generally higher in places where implementation was better – Dungarpur and Kangra – and greater for provisions that were implemented effectively. Literacy was another factor. Women in Kangra were better informed of most of the provisions, because of relatively high literacy rates (Table 10). Social mobilisation by civil society organisations is another factor that can overcome the handicaps of low literacy rates.

Table 10: Level and Quality of Awareness about the NREGS (% of Respondents)

Provisions	Dungarpur	Gaya	Kangra	Ranchi	Total
Up to 100 days of employment	99.0	60.0	98.1	78.0	83.4
Minimum wages	47.6	25.5	92.5	59.6	56.1
Equal wages	87.4	39.1	93.4	58.7	69.2
Wage payment within 15 days	49.5	21.8	75.5	27.5	43.2
Worksite facilities	94.2	21.8	74.5	40.4	57.0
Work within five kilometres from residence	23.3	20.0	49.1	45.0	34.3
Unemployment allowance	7.8	11.8	37.7	10.1	16.8
One-third women workers	0.0	22.7	16.0	33.0	18.2

Source: Survey, Based on multiple-answer questions.

Table 11: How Did Women Search for the NREGS Job?

Who Helped the Woman in Getting the Job?	(%)				
	Dungarpur	Gaya	Kangra	Ranchi	Total
Searched herself	3.9	1.8	8.5	7.3	5.4
Family member	1.9	1.8	1.9	2.8	2.1
Fellow women worker	0.0	0.9	0.9	0.9	0.7
Mate	44.7	0.0	0.0	0.9	11.0
Self-help group/women's group/association	0.0	2.7	0.0	0.9	0.9
Gram panchayat head/ward member	46.6	70.0	75.5	38.5	57.7
Panchayat secretary/rozgar sevak	2.9	12.7	13.2	14.7	11.0
Others	0.0	10.0	0.0	33.9	11.2

Source: Survey.

Women's ability to search for the NREGS job themselves is another indicator of process participation. But only 5.4% of women were found to have searched the NREGS job themselves, with the gram panchayat head and panchayat secretary/rozgar sevak helping women in most of the cases. District-wise, the role of the different agencies varied, though the role of gram panchayat head/panchayat secretary/rozgar sevak was important in all the four districts. "Mates" especially played a critical role in Dungarpur (Table 11).

Women's participation in the selection of NREG works and social monitoring, including auditing, was almost negligible. They were hardly involved in the management of assets created, though such participation is important to derive lateral benefits

from the assets. This happened even in the panchayats headed by woman pradhans.

A positive development is increased participation of women in gram sabha meetings. Forty-five per cent of them had attended gram sabha meetings held in connection with the NREGS. Women's participation in gram sabha was the highest in Kangra (89%), followed by Dungarpur (55%), Ranchi (26%), and Gaya (14%). The high participation in Kangra and Dungarpur was also because of better institutionalisation and functioning of PRIs in both states, and greater social mobilisation in Rajasthan. It seems that women's participation in the gram sabha has been increasing. In another study of six north Indian states in 2008, only 33% of male and female workers had attended the gram sabha meeting (Khera and Nayak 2009: 56). It seems that the holding of gram sabha meeting itself has become a more regular phenomenon post-NREGS.

A large number of women also said they spoke in the gram sabhas – 73% of the women who had attended the gram sabha spoke in the meeting. The percentage of women who spoke in the meeting was once again the highest in Kangra (85%), followed by Dungarpur (79%), Ranchi (54%), and Gaya (13%). However, it was revealed that women speak mainly about the availability of jobs, wage payment, and other related issues of personal interests, not on community interests like the selection of work, social monitoring, etc.

More women (NREGS workers) now also meet and interact with government officials and PRI representatives. Forty-six per cent of them had the chance to interact with government officials, with the percentage of women interacting with officials being the highest in Kangra (97%), followed by Dungarpur (77%), Ranchi (10%), and Gaya (5.5%) (Table 12). This has larger effects in terms of increase in confidence levels.

Before NREGS, only 16% of women workers' households had an account in a bank or post office. The figure was dismally low in Dungarpur (3.9%), and no better in other places (Kangra 19%, Gaya 17% and Ranchi 25%). Now, 73% of these households have access to a bank or post office account. Access has increased to 100% in Dungarpur and Kangra. Moreover, pre-NREGS accounts were mostly in the name of male family members. Now, 72% of the women workers in Kangra, 33% in Ranchi, 24% in Dungarpur and 12.7% even in Gaya have accounts in their own names (Table 13). Since the government has given a direction for account payment of NREGS wages, it is likely to be universalised in other places as well.

Table 12: Women Workers' Participation in the Gram Sabha

Districts	% of Women Attending Gram Sabha	% of Women Speaking in Gram Sabha	% of Women Interacting with Officials
Dungarpur	55.3	78.9	76.7
Gaya	13.6	13.3	5.5
Kangra	88.7	85.1	97.2
Ranchi	25.7	53.6	10.1
Total	45.3	73.2	46.5

Source: Survey.

Table 13: Access to Bank/Post Office Account (Pre- and Post-NREGS in %)

Districts	Pre-NREGS Household Access	Post-NREGS Household Access	Post-NREGS Individual Account Women Workers
Dungarpur	3.9	100.0	24.3
Gaya	17.4	41.8	12.7
Kangra	18.9	100.0	72.6
Ranchi	25.3	78.2	33.0
Total	16.0	72.8	35.5

Source: Survey.

Account payment of wages also creates some other effects. Apart from increasing the chances for greater control over earnings, it leads to the development of a saving habit. Initially, most of these workers used to withdraw their entire wages at one go. Gradually, they have started withdrawing as per their needs. This has an added advantage as women are able to save money from wasteful expenditure, if husbands or other male members tend to spend on items like liquor. Women were also found to invest in fixed deposit schemes in the same bank. Greater linkage of women with financial institutions may trigger many individual and community-level social and economic effects (Kabeer 2001b; Mayoux 2001; Pitt et al 2006; Mayoux and Hartl 2009).

The practice of discriminatory wages in case of casual workers is found both in rural and urban areas. In 2004-05, the all-India average daily wage of a casual rural worker was Rs 55.03 for males and Rs 34.94 for females, a difference of about Rs 20 (Karan and Selvaraj 2008: 43). In other words, the average daily wage of a female casual worker was only 63% that of a male worker. The difference was much higher in some states. There was a difference of Rs 69.11 in Kerala, the highest among all the states.

Ensuring equal wages for male and female workers in the informal sector remains a major issue and challenge for gender equality. The NREGS has achieved it in some places and to some extent. In our survey, only in one out of 13 worksites were male and female workers paid different wages. The group measurement system, social mobilisations including social audits, the absence of contractors and the practise of a daily wage system have helped in realising equal wages.

But payment of minimum wages through the schedule of rates (SOR) still remains a challenge. Except HP, in all the other three states, the actual wage of a woman worker was less than the prescribed minimum, even though it was quite high compared to the prevailing rural wage for female casual workers. The differences between the prevailing market, actual and minimum wages under NREGS are shown in Table 14.

Table 14: Difference between Market, Actual and Minimum Wages under NREGS
(per day in Rs)

Districts	Average Earning of a Woman Worker	Minimum Wages under NREGS#	District-wise Average Rural Wages for Casual Workers, 2004-05
Dungarpur	81	100	52.06*
Gaya	65	89	36.17**
Kangra	100	100	na
Ranchi	83	92	50.21***

na - not available; # This was the prescribed minimum wage for unskilled workers at the time of the survey.

Source: Survey; * Institute for Human Development (IHD) (forthcoming); ** IHD (2009: 53); *** IHD (2008: 45).

Realisation of equal wages under NREGS has significant implications for the rural labour market.¹⁷ If women are able to earn higher wages under NREGS, there is a probability that in most cases, they would not be willing/available to work for less than what they are getting under NREGS. The reduction in the supply of the women labour force due to NREGS would create supply-side pressures on labour market that would push up the wage floor. It was observed that many tea gardens in Kangra were

finding it difficult to hire workers on the basis of their pre-NREGS wages. They had to increase the wages, and frequently this upward revision had to be done with consideration to NREGS wages. Some of these gardens were on the verge of closure, as they were finding it difficult to operate at a profit with increased wage costs.

Subtle changes in gender relations have been observed but mostly at the household level. Increased say of women in decision-making, greater recognition of their contribution to the household income, and reduced dependence on male family members for meeting expenditures related to personal needs are some of those changes.

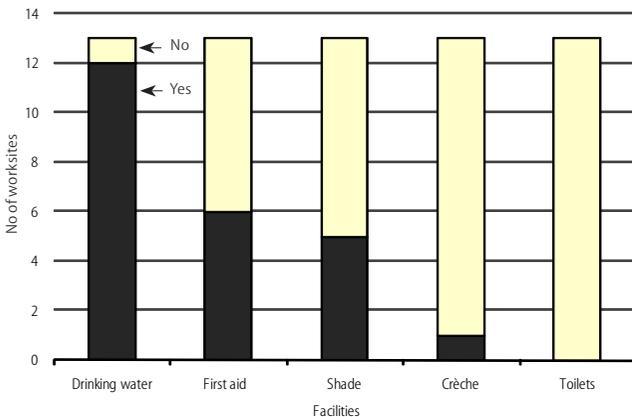
Due to weak participation in related processes, larger community-level effects remain to be realised. Even in the case of the increased presence of women at the gram sabha, male participants dominate the decision-making process. Entrenched gender relations are hard to dismantle. While we were interviewing women workers in Dungarpur, they refused to sit side by side on the cot in the presence of male members, as social norms prohibited them to do so.

Nevertheless, worksite experiences were enriching. The introduction of the female mate system has allowed women to reverse the role of a male mate/supervisor. For male workers, working under a female mate is a new experience. This may not change the character of gender relations immediately, but will have a definite impact in the long-run. Moreover, female mates were found to be more sensitive to the needs and requirements of women.

Working together gives women an opportunity to share grievances and personal problems, and helps in the development of women's solidarity. Women were observed to be exchanging help, for example, borrowing money and bartering goods among themselves for which they were earlier dependent on other people. Some old and physically weak women were found to be working on the sites. In spite of the group measurement system, nobody was complaining that these women were receiving the same wages, although their productivity was less. Rather, the group was considerate towards their old age and physical ability, and offered them easy and less strenuous tasks. In turn, some of the widows working at NREGS worksites said that coming out and working gave them a sense of purpose and belonging, compared to sitting at home and getting bored.

Difficulties and Obstacles for Women Workers

However, NREGS benefits have not come easily – working hours for women have increased; their leisure time has vanished; and they have to bear with physical and emotional strains. Women in Dungarpur told us that they get up quite early to fetch water, prepare food, and make arrangements for the children before going to the worksite. Even during the official lunch break, some of them return home to take care of the children and other family members. Wage payment is linked to a task-based SOR, and since the SOR is prepared based on the average output of a healthy, invariably male worker, women have to work very hard to earn minimum wages. This is much more difficult for old, physically weak, and lactating women.

Figure 2: The Status of Facilities at 13 Surveyed Worksites

The provision of going to toilet in privacy is not part of the official provision, although its necessity was emphasised by women workers.

In the absence of (proper) crèche facilities, lactating women and women with young children leave their children at home while working at the worksite (Figure 2). Only 28% of the women with children under the age of five brought them to the worksite; 62% left their children in the care of siblings/elders; and another 10% of women left their children without proper care. Since, they have to remain away from home for a minimum of eight hours at the NREG worksite, they remain anxious about the well-being of their children. Eighty-one per cent confessed that they remain emotionally strained while they are working at the worksite and their children are left at home, either unattended or in another's care.

There are also some reports of the continued presence of contractors and harassment of women workers. Khera and Nayak in their 2009 study found that at worksites where contractors were present, 35% of women reported various types of harassment. Also, worksite facilities were negligible on these worksites (Khera and Nayak 2009: 54).

5 Conclusions and Prospects

Empowerment of rural women has emerged as an unintended consequence of NREGS. Women have benefited more as workers than as a community. Women as individuals have gained because of their ability to earn independently, made possible due to the paid employment opportunity under NREGS. Independent and monetised earnings have increased consumption choices and reduced economic dependence. This has helped women in registering their tangible contribution to the household's income. The overall effects of these have translated into an increased say for women in household affairs.

Women as a community, however, have been slow in realising the potential benefits of the scheme. Nevertheless, their increased presence in the gram sabha, the increasing number of women speaking out in the gram sabha, frequent interactions with government officials and PRI representatives, and access to banks and post offices are new developments. Additionally, the female mate system has reversed the traditional gender roles, albeit in a limited manner.

On the flipside, working hours for women have increased; leisure time has vanished; and there are physical and emotional strains related to such work. Lactating women and women with

young children work under emotional strain, as they remain separated from their children for long hours. Some adolescent girls are reported to have left their studies to avail of the job opportunity under NREGS, especially in Dungarpur.

The challenges lie in horizontal and vertical expansion of benefits first. The high participation of women ensures horizontal spread of benefits. Realisation of greater numbers of person-days ensures better individual-level effects. Districts with high sc and st populations and states with high human and gender development indices and greater levels of state and civil society mobilisation have benefited more. However, other than sc, st, and obc women, others are not forthcoming in availing this paid job opportunity.

Apart from implementation issues, there are social and cultural contexts that restrict women's participation in some places. Persistent social and community mobilisation and a proactive role for the state can compensate for some of these social and cultural deficits. This will also be helpful in bridging the gap between work participation and process participation.

Certain initiatives and changes can also prove helpful. The realisation of sufficient numbers of person-days to earn a critical minimum income that triggers household-level effects is the first condition. Timely payment of wages through individual accounts of women workers encourages participation, and greater control over earnings. A daily wage system instead of wages as per the sor has been helpful in realising minimum wages. The experience of HP is proof of this and the Act does not prohibit it. Alternatively, a gender-sensitive sor, as has been introduced in Bihar,¹⁸ can be experimented within other states as well. Working conditions need to be made more conducive by enforcing and strengthening existing provisions and adding new ones. For example, breastfeeding breaks for lactating women and flexibility in working hours may be considered. Crèche provision may be linked with the Anganwadi or Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) centres, panchayat bhavans, local school buildings, etc, to make them more practical. Among others, maternity relief for women, along the lines of MEGS, make-shift toilets at the worksite and innovations in work instruments so as to reduce work drudgery may be adopted.

Increased participation in procedural aspects and greater control over the types and management of assets can increase social and community benefits. The Kerala model of linking NREGS with women's groups (Kudumbashree) may be useful for greater process participation. A minimum representation of women among the NREGS functionaries like programme officers, rozgar sevaks, ombudsmen, members of vigilance and monitoring committees, mates, etc, would be useful. Some of the assets created, if properly chosen, may reduce the load of unpaid work like fetching water, fodder, etc. Creation of skill-generating assets like horticulture or fisheries through ponds can also be further explored to ensure better lateral benefits from such assets.

NOTES

- 1 Government of India (2005), National Employment Guarantee Act, No 42 of 2005, Gazette of India, Extraordinary Part II, Section 1, No 48, New Delhi.
- 2 Note that vide an Amendment on 31 December 2009, in The Gazette of India, Extraordinary Part II, Section 1, No 53, the names of the Act and Scheme have been changed to respectively, Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) and Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment

- Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS). Since the beginning of our survey substantially pre-dates this change, we have used the older titles throughout.
- 3 See Zila Panchayat Bastar (nd), "Chhattisgarh Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme – Land Development of BPL/SC/ST Households' Land by SHGs and Jatropa Plantation Handover to SHGs", Chhattisgarh Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, Jagdalpur. Also at <http://nrega.nic.in/Attachments/Jagdalpur.pdf>
 - 4 There are three distinct but overlapping perspectives on women's development. These are Women in Development, Women and Development and Gender and Development (WID-WAD-GAD). In fact, they have evolved in phases and in a chronological sequence. See Boserup (1980), Rathgeber (1989), Moser (1993) and Razavi and Miller (1995).
 - 5 Because of little demand for wage employment in the developed states of Punjab and Haryana, their selection was ruled out ab initio. Uttar Pradesh is a large state with at least four cultural-economic zones. A single district sample is too small for a state such as Uttar Pradesh, and, hence, it was not included.
 - 6 Accessed on 15 September 2009: <http://nrega.nic.in/netnrega/home.aspx>
 - 7 The Sarnas claim and insist on a separate religious category and are offended when they are categorised as Hindus.
 - 8 OBC-I refers to lower OBC and OBC-II refers to upper OBC. This classification is applicable only in a few states. For example, in Bihar, upper OBCs include Yadav, Koeri, Kurmi and others, and lower OBCs include Kevat, Mallah, Kahar, Mehtar, Nai and others.
 - 9 Kudumbashree refers to a state poverty eradication mission set up by the Kerala government. It is organised into neighbourhood groups of 15-40 households, and each household is represented by a woman member. In terms of organisation, it comprises (1) an area development society (ADS) at the ward level and (2) a community development society (CDS) at the panchayat level. Synergisation of NREGS implementation with Kudumbashree has increased women's participation in Kerala.
 - 10 There is no conclusive evidence to show that the new gender differential schedule of rates (SOR) has improved women's participation in Bihar. Nevertheless, the share of women in total person-days has increased in the state.
 - 11 Sainath (2007) illustrates with the case of Anantapur district of Andhra Pradesh where the work was allotted to groups of two to three families to get high output and productivity. This led to the exclusion of single, widowed, and separated women. Bhaty (2008) finds exclusion of single women in Jhalawar district of Rajasthan.
 - 12 STs constitute only 1% of the total state population after separation of Jharkhand.
 - 13 Every alternative year is a drought year. While we were in the field, drought relief works were in progress, and households that had already exhausted 100 days under the NREGS were given additional employment under relief work.
 - 14 Due to the adoption of a daily wage system in HP, everybody was getting minimum wages.
 - 15 For detailed socio-economic conditions, see Pankaj and Tankha (2009).
 - 16 SNA activities refer to primary production activities such as crop farming, kitchen gardening, etc, animal husbandry, fishing, forestry, horticulture, collection of fruit, water, plants, etc, storing and hunting, processing and storage, mining, quarrying, digging, cutting, etc, and also secondary activities such as construction, manufacturing, trade, business and services. Extended SNA activities include household maintenance, management and shopping for own household, care for children, the sick, elderly and disabled for own household and community services and help to other households.
 - 17 Ratna Sudarshan (2008) has examined rural labour market conditions in Palakkad district of Kerala and found that differential wages existed for men and women in non-formal agriculture and non-agriculture sectors. A women worker in Palakkad district earned about Rs 70 upwards per day while a male worker earned about Rs 150 upwards per day. In contrast to this, the NREGS provided equal wages for both male and female workers (Rs 125).
 - 18 For earning the same minimum wages in Bihar, a male worker has to work 80 cubic feet in case of soft soil, 77 cubic feet in case of semi-hard soil and 73 cubic feet in case of hard soil. However, in order to earn the same minimum wages, women workers have to work 68 cubic feet in case of soft soil, 63 cubic feet in case of semi-hard soil, and 60 cubic feet in case of hard soil.

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