

# Gender Impact of MGNREGA: Evidence from 10 Selected Semi-Arid Tropics (SAT) Villages in India<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) aims to provide 100 days of work to a household in rural area who is willing to do manual work and demands for such work from the local government. The programme involves flexible working hour and payment on 'piece rate' basis which will further help women to participate, after attending their routine household chores. Not surprisingly, the extent of participation of women in MGNREGA rose to 50% during 2011, with many states showing an overwhelming response of more than 90% for women. The present study is based on the filed work of 10 villages in semi-arid areas from Gujarat, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh states of India, which involves in total of 484 women from 326 households, who had participated in MGNREGA work at least once between 2006-13, spread across the three states. The results shows the women acknowledges positive impact of the programme on themselves and their households in various aspects. Many also opened their bank account first time after involving in the MGNREGA work. Women reported that the additional income has helped them and their household to increase food consumption, improvement in social standing for their household, as well as their own status in the household. It helped them to support education of their children and meet health care needs of their own and their households. The benefits from the assets created under the programme were also helpful in improving ground water level and increasing the greenery in the villages they live, which also positively impacted both women and men and also to non-participatory households, as well. However concerns were raised over declining opportunity for work under the programme in many of the villages surveyed, lack of measures to ensure participation of women in gramshabhas to decide about the projects to be undertaken, low wage rate than the statutory fixed minimum wage rate, and increasing additional burden of work on women as they have to take care of their household chores, as well. Many women are hardly aware about their share in the amount received by the household from the programme and many of them do not own the money. Still, many of the women respondents who we interviewed want the programme to be strengthened and expanded. They want the duration of work to be increased with better wages, similar to what prevails in agriculture in their respective villages.

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# **Gender Impact of MGNREGA: Evidence from 10 Selected Semi-Arid Tropics (SAT) Villages in India**

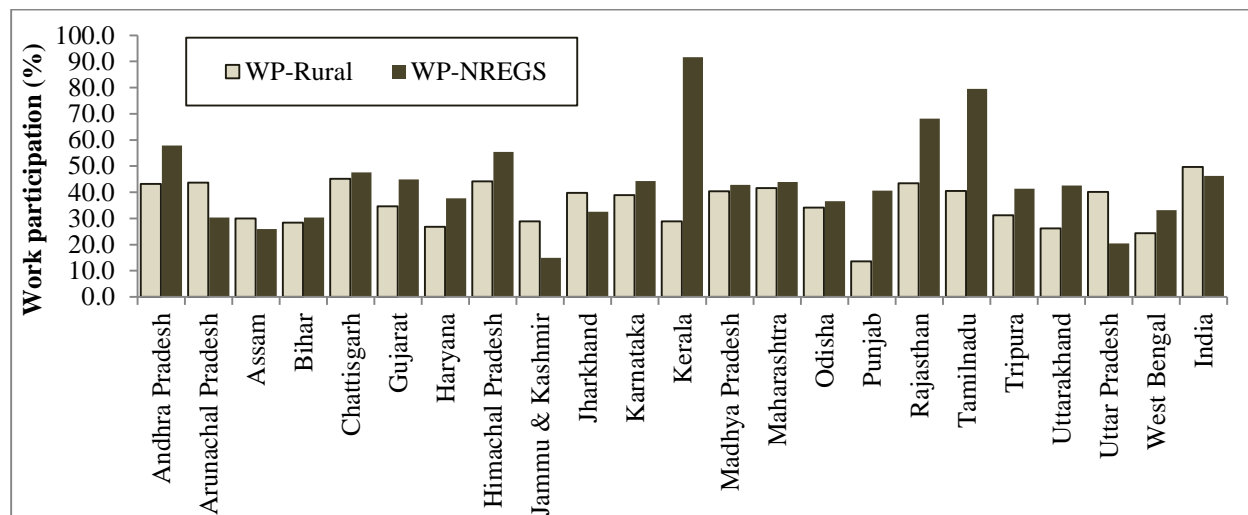
## **1. Introduction**

One of the unique features of the MGNREGS, launched in 2005, has been large number of participation of women members for the program, and its impact on gender empowerment across states irrespective of their overall status of economic development. At the aggregate level, the share of women in the total 'NREGS work force' had increased from 40.6% during 2006-07 to almost 53% during 2013-14, indicating an overall increase of 13% during the eight year period with an annual average increase of 1.6%. In absolute terms, the employment generated for women increased by more than 57% from 16 million during 2009-10 to 25.2 million during 2013-14, registering an annual average increase of 11.5% during the reference period. More importantly, the most crucial and socially beneficial outcome of this increased work participation in the NREGS has been the narrowing down the gender wage gap across states. Besides the narrowing down of the gender wage gap, other benefits, like flexible working hours, less hazardous nature of work undertaken as well as the proximity to the work sites (as work is provided within 5 km radius of the worker's residence) have resulted in increased women participation in the nation-wide flagship programme. Further, reduced influence of work contractors and the formation of social groups within work sites reduce the fear of exploitation and encourage women to participate in large numbers (Viswanathan and Mandal, 2012).

In fact, the high levels of gender work participation (GWP) in the NREGS assumes relevance especially in a context when the aggregate (national) level rural work participation by women has been hovering around 35-37% as per the various NSSO surveys between 2005-06 and 2010-11. A comparison of gender work participation (GWP) rates in the rural labour market (as observed from the primary census abstract) *vis a vis* the MGNREGS reveals (Figure 1) that in most states, the GWP rates in the MGNREGS is well above that of GWP in the rural labour market and this underscores that the flagship programme has certainly boosted greater women participation in it, enabling them to be an important stakeholder in the process of rural transformation. In fact, the outcome of increased women participation in the NREGS and the

resultant women empowerment is considered to be an unintended (or incidental) benefit of the MGNREGS across states<sup>1</sup> in India (Pankaj and Tankha, 2010).

**Figure 1: Gender work participation in NREGS and Rural Labour Market across major states**



Note: The figures are averages for the period 2009-10 to 2013-2014. Female Work Participation Rate has been interpolated from the Primary Census Abstract data of 2001 and 2011. Post 2011 gender work participation data has been extrapolated using CAGR method.

Source: <http://nrega.nic.in/Netnrega/stHome.aspx> (for MGNREGS data).

Against this backdrop, this paper tries to explore some of the important gender-specific impacts of the MGNREGS as emerge from few selected villages that form part of the ‘Village Dynamics South Asia’ (VDSA) project implemented by the International Crops Research Institute for Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT), Hyderabad. The empirical analysis contained in the paper is based on the village level data (information) gathered during the period September 2013 – May 2014. The analysis covers a sample of 486 women NREGS beneficiaries (326 households) drawn from 10 villages located in three states, viz., Gujarat (4 villages), Madhya Pradesh (2 villages) and Maharashtra (4 villages). The sample represented small farm (with holdings less than 5 acres per household) and landless labour households. The sample women were selected from all the households in the study villages representing the categories (small farm and landless labour) for which a separate questionnaire has been administered. Thus, the study covered a reasonable number of households, where only women participated in the programme.

Rest of the paper is organised into three sections. While Section 2 discusses about methodology in brief, section 3 presents the results of the empirical study of the various gendered impacts of

MGNREGS in the study villages, Section 3 concludes the paper by highlighting the important messages and policy relevant points emerge from the empirical analysis.

## **2. Methodology for the Study**

The objective of this study is to understand what changes MGNREGA has brought to the women in the household and themselves. The survey was conducted with semi-structured questionnaire during September, 2013 to May, 2014. The villages were suggested by International Crops Research Institute for Semi-Arid Tropics, Hyderabad. All together there were 10 villages, 4 each in Gujarat and Maharashtra and 2 in Eastern Madhya Pradesh. In Gujarat these out of these 4 villages, 2 were from tribal dominated Panchmahals district and rest 2 were from non-tribal region from Junagadh district. These 2 districts are 400 km.apart. In Maharashtra the 4 villages were, 2 each from South-Western Maharashtra (Solapur district) and Vidarbha region (Akola district). In Madhya Pradesh the 2 villages are from Raisen district from Eastern part of the state. The villages were predominantly depends upon agriculture, but some of them were near industrial belt. For the above region we found no takers for MGNREGA in 3 out of 10 villages in Gujarat and Maharashtra. They were Makhiala from Junagadh district in Gujarat and Kalman and Shirapur in Solapur district of Maharashtra. In Chhattha village from Panchmahal district and Kinkhed village of Akola district have very little or no MGNREGA implementation. So the figures presented in tables below mostly comes from Babrol village for Panchmahals district representing tribal region of the state, from Karmdi-chingariya in Junagadh district representing non-tribal region in Gujarat. In Maharashtra no figures related MGNREGA is presented for Solapur district in south-eastern Maharashtra (consisting Shirapura and Kalman) where as figures from Vidarbha mostly represents the findings from Kanzara village, as the Kinkhed village in same region has no significant MGNREGA activity. In total 326 households were visited in the survey consisting 486 women, who at least once worked in the programme. These households were drawn through systematic random sampling method from the list of all the households in that village. Before drawing sample the houselisting exercise to enumerate all the households in the village. Then sample was drawn in such a way that it represents the social-occupational structure of the given village. Approximately 20% households were surveyed from the prominent socio-economic

groups in the village. Here we are presenting the preliminary findings, mostly descriptives related to various aspects of MGNREGA. The analysis is still continuing.

### **3. Gendered impacts of MGNREGA in the VDSA-SAT villages**

A brief overview on the profile of the sample respondents is in order to understand the socio-economic status of the households. Total number of households in our sample for women's participation in MGNREGA comes to 326. Majority of these households where we found women having job card belonged to Tribal region of Gujarat (47%). From these 326 households we got 486 women who had job card. Out of the total sample of 486 women NREGS beneficiaries surveyed, Gujarat accounted for the largest coverage of 76% (54% from Tribal Region and 22% from non-tribal region), followed by 17% in case of Maharashtra (South-West Maharashtra 12%; Vidarbha 5%) and 7% in Madhya Pradesh (*see* Table 1).

The sample households differ in terms of social categories. For instance, majority of the households from three of the four Gujarat villages belong to ST category; larger proportions of households from Madhya Pradesh belong to SC and OBC categories, while Maharashtra villages report a mix of SC and OBC categories (see table-1 below). While majority of the respondents are married in all the villages, the proportion of widows is reported to be relatively high in Kinkheda village (17%) in Maharashtra, followed by Papda village (12%) in Madhya Pradesh and Chattha village (8%) in Gujarat (table not shown separately for villages).

The average age of the women participants range between 35-40 years (Table 1). Nearly half of them are illiterates. However at least 5-10 % of the women across the villages reported to have studied till 12<sup>th</sup> standard which is a positive sign in the sense that in the absence of other job options, educated women were also not hesitant to take up the MGNREGS activity. This proportion of women having studied at least 10<sup>th</sup> or more is found higher in Maharashtra villages. Nearly 90% of women in Gujarat's Panchmal villages were doing farming as the main occupation while in the villages of Junagadh (Gujarat), Maharashtra and MP, almost half of the women respondents worked as farm labour or casual labour. The average annual earnings of these women from NREGA work varied from Rs. 9000 in Gujarat (lowest), to Rs. 27000 for

Maharashtra, while in MP the same was Rs. 18000. However, significant variations observed in the annual wage earnings across beneficiaries (Table 1).

**Table 1: Socio-Economic Profile of Sample Women Respondents**

Characteristics	categories	Gujarat-Tribal region N=153	Gujarat-Non-Tribal region N=70	Madhya Pradesh-Eastern belt N=29	Maharashtra-South-West N=53	Maharashtra-Vidarbha N=21	Total N=326
Total number of women who had job cards		261	110	35	57	23	486
Average number of women per household		1.7	1.6	1.2	1.07	1.09	1.5
Social group of sample women (% of total women)	SC	0.0	59.1	51.4	24.6	34.8	21.6
	ST	100.0	30.9	5.7	0.0	0.0	61.1
	OBC	0.0	10.0	42.9	43.9	52.2	13.0
	Others	0.0	0.0	0.0	28.1	13.0	3.9
	Not responded	0.0	0.0	0.0	3.5	0.0	0.4
Marital status (% of total women)	Married	85.8	88.2	85.7	94.7	91.3	87.8
	Unmarried	10.7	9.1	5.7	1.8	0.0	8.4
	Widow	3.4	2.7	8.6	3.5	8.7	3.9
Mean age of sample women (S.D)		38.0 (14)	39 (14)	38 (12)	39 (10)	39 (8)	38 (13)
Education status (% of total women)	Uneducated	60.2	44.5	54.3	42.1	34.8	52.9
	Primary	9.6	23.6	25.7	28.1	34.8	17.3
	Secondary	14.9	28.2	17.1	24.6	21.7	19.5
	Higher secondary & above	15.3	3.6	2.9	5.3	8.7	10.3
Primary occupation of women ((% of total women)	Farming	76.2	10.9	22.9	19.3	13.0	47.9
	Farm labour	1.1	59.1	0.0	52.6	34.8	21.8
	Non-farm work	0.4	5.5	68.6	28.1	52.2	12.1
	Housewives	22.3	24.5	8.6	0.0	0.0	18.2
Average annual income of the household (S.D.)		8841 (6024)	9253 (6844.7)	18530.5 (22553.4)	28035.7 (20540.8)	27165 (18873)	1349 (14315)

*Note:* The 'N' refers to number of households in which the women were interviewed.

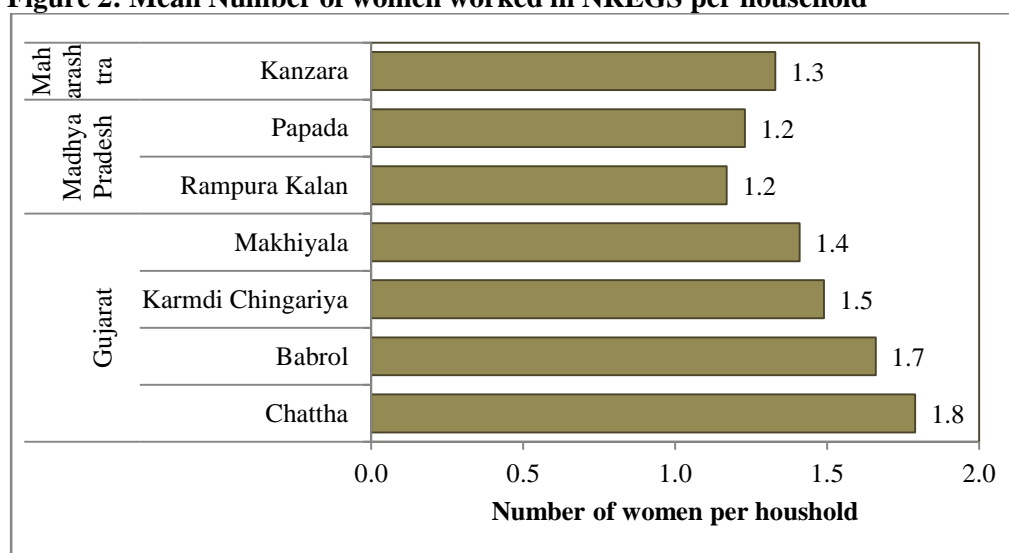
*Source:* Field Survey of ICRISAT villages (2013-14).

For benefits from different state provided safety net programmes, most of the beneficiaries across states agreed that PDS is very important for their households, while the help from relatives and neighbours also mattered a lot. Very few households hardly received any benefit from state provisioning for agriculture, credit, health systems and other promotional schemes.

### 3.1. Participation in the NREGS

All the villages report a reasonably higher share of economically active women members (58-91% across villages), with an exception in case of Chattha village (Gujarat), where, the proportion of economically active members was only 47%. Four of the Maharashtra villages reported the highest proportion of economically active women members (average being 91%). The participation of economically active women members in the NREGS was reported to be almost complete in all the villages, except Chattha village, where the participation was about 60%. The reasons indicated by members in Chattha for non-participation in NREGS were: (a) generally women do not go for work outside (34%); (b) NREGA work being strenuous (32%); (c) customs in the village prevent daughters and sisters working outside (25%); and (d) engagement in domestic activities, including caring of children (9%).

**Figure 2: Mean Number of women worked in NREGS per household**



Source: Field Survey of ICRISAT villages (2013-14).

When asked about the average days these women got work from MGNAREGA, the responses varied across the states (Table 2). In Gujarat's tribal region the average days of work has gone up from 20 odd days in initial years (2006-09) to 26 odd days till 2011, after which there were no works in the villages. In Non-tribal region of Gujarat representing 2 villages in Junagadh, the average number of days women get work has gone up from 20 days to 34 days in same period, but the number of women participating in the work had declined (number of women not shown separately).

**Table 2: Participation in MGNREGS for Sample Women**

Characteristics	Period	Gujarat-Tribal region N=153	Gujarat-Non-Tribal region N=70	Madhya Pradesh-Eastern belt N=29	Maharashtra-South-West N=53	Maharashtra-Vidarbha N=21	Total N=326
Total number of women who had job cards		261	110	35	57	23	486
Total number of women who actually worked at least once in MGNREGS (%)		152 (58.0)	70 (63.0)	25 (71)	0.0	18 (78.0)	265 (62.0)
Mean number of days women got work in MGNREGS (number of women)	2006	25.0 (21)	0.0 (2)	0.0 (0)	0.0	0.0	26.0 (23)
	2007	29.0 (83)	0.0	0.0 (0)	0.0	0.0	29.0 (83)
	2008	41.0 (11)	0.0	17.0 (6)	0.0	0.0	33.0 (17)
	2009	32.0 (24)	15.0 (30)	31.0 (21)	0.0	0.0	25.0 (75)
	2010	32.0 (13)	38.0 (14)	31.0 (14)	0.0	25.0 (2)	34.0 (43)
	2011	31.0 (9)	42.0 (32)	26.0 (13)	0.0	34.0 (5)	36.0 (59)
	2012	0.0 (0)	30.0 (25)	36.0 (15)	0.0	37.0 (11)	34.0 (51)
	2013	0.0 (0)	25.0 (23)	33.0 (18)	0.0	46.0 (6)	31 (47)
Women receive wage equal to men (%) - Those reporting Yes		100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	12.5	95.1
Average number of days women got work in MGNREGS	2006	20.0	32.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	20.0
	2007	20.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	20.0
	2008	25.0	0.0	17.0	0.0	0.0	22.0
	2009	11.0	12.0	26.0	0.0	0.0	17.0
	2010	16.0	34.0	24.0	0.0	25.0	26.0
	2011	24.0	34.0	24.0	0.0	35.0	32.0
	2012	0.0	26.0	35.0	0.0	42.0	33.0
	2013	0.0	20.0	32.0	0.0	49.0	30.0
Average daily wage earned by the women	2006	66.0	65.0	0.0	0.0	151.0	88.0
	2007	70.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	161.0	79.0
	2008	74.0	0.0	89.0	0.0	129.2	94.0
	2009	90.0	65.0	86.0	0.0	136.5	87.0
	2010	78.0	64.0	104.0	0.0	148.0	97.0
	2011	102.0	64.5	114.0	0.0	187.0	113.0
	2012	0.0	67.0	114.0	0.0	144.0	120.0
	2013	0.0	68.7	127.0	0.0	148.0	121.0
Average income from MGNREGS*	2006	2753.0	4250.0	0.0	0.0	3108.0	2906.0
	2007	2151.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	3223.0	3180.0
	2008	4306.0	0.0	1633.0	0.0	4150.0	2436.7
	2009	2336.0	1607.0	26823.0	0.0	5260.0	2605.8
	2010	2636.0	4187.0	3458.0	0.0	4766.7	3601
	2011	5729.0	4667.0	3602.4	0.0	6686.9	4643.8
	2012	0.0	3433.0	3602.0	0.0	7224.06	5641.9
	2013	0.0	2397.4	5267.7	0.0	11246.8	6129.0

Note: % calculated from total number of women who reported having job cards.

- Since job cards are issued in name of the household head the total wage amount is deposited in the account holder's name. It was difficult for women to say how much was the women's share in the total income received by the household.

Source: Field Survey of ICRISAT villages (2013-14).



In MP the average number of days work available to women respondents rose from 16 days to 32 days between 2006-09, while it came down in 2010-12 and after that it is mostly around 30 days (see Table 2).

In Solapur (from south-western region) in Maharashtra, no body has taken up work in MGNAREGA because of alternative economic options available for both men and women, while in Vidarbha (Akola district consisting Kanzara as in Kinkhed there were no MGNREGA works), the average working days have increased from 25 days in 2010 (when the programme started in the village) to 45 days in 2012-13. Except for Kanzara in all other village women beneficiaries informed that they received equal wages in respective years, while in Kanzara women reported that they get less wage than men. The annual income however has gone up for the households. However these figures has to be considered in the light of the fact that the number of women participated in each year in MGNREGA varied considerably.

### **3.2. Use of MGNREGA Money by Women or their households**

The major head of expenditure for the income from MGNREGA was for domestic expenses followed by education of children and health needs of the family members (Table 3).

**Table 3: Use of Money Earned from MGNREGS for Sample Women**

Characteristics Major heads on which money is spent by women	Gujarat-Tribal region N=153	Gujarat-Non-Tribal region N=70	Madhya Pradesh-Eastern belt N=29	Maharashtra-South-West N=53	Maharashtra-Vidarbha N=21	Total N=326
Domestic expenses	30.4	62.4	60.5	0.0	43.8	38.4
Education	21.5	19.3	16.3	0.0	31.3	21.2
Health needs	20.8	13.0	16.3	0.0	21.9	19.3
Agricultural expenses	22.9	5.3	2.3	0.0	0.0	17.5
Gives to husband	2.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.5
Wages not received	2.3	0.0	2.3	0.0	0.0	1.8
To pay interest	0.0	0.0	2.3	0.0	0.0	0.1
For making home	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.3
Total no. of women who responded	480	114	43	0	33	670

Source: Field Survey of ICRISAT villages (2013-14).

When asked about their participation in gram sabha meetings to decide about the work to be taken under MGNREGA for a given year, the participation of women in Gujarat's tribal region is

almost 80% in terms of responses(the participation was better in Babrol than Chhatha) where as for Vudarbha it is 100% (for Kanzara only). In non-tribal region of Gujarat only 50% of women responses were found to be affirmative. In MP, the women’s participation was lowest (see Table 4 below).

**Table 4: Participation of Women in Decisions regarding Works to be undertaken in MGNREGA**

Participation in decision making (%)	Gujarat-Tribal region N=153	Gujarat-Non-Tribal region N=70	Madhya Pradesh-Eastern belt N=29	Maharashtra-South-West N=53	Maharashtra-Vidarbha N=21	Total N=326
No idea about their role	8.5	3.8	18.8	0	21.4	9
They are not consulted	11.2	44.9	43.7	0	78.6	24
% of women who say they are part of decision making process	80.3	51.3	37.5	0	100	67
Total responses	224	78	32	0	14	348

Source: Field Survey of ICRISAT villages (2013-14).

It is evident from table 5 that most of the women have expressed lack of basic facilities as mandated under the act at worksite (see Table 5 below).

**Table 5: Facilities for women at worksite (% Responses)**

Responses (%)	Gujarat-Tribal region N=153	Gujarat-Non-Tribal region N=70	Madhya Pradesh-Eastern belt N=29	Maharashtra-South-West N=53	Maharashtra-Vidarbha N=21	Total N=326
No facilities	74.2	19.2	15.9	0.0	7.1	47.9
Drinking water available	23.2	68.5	50.0	0.0	92.9	42.3
Place for resting available	1.9	0.0	6.8	0.0	0.0	2.4
First aid available	0.0	12.3	11.4	0.0	0.0	4.9
Child care facilities available	0.0	0.0	9.1	0.0	0.0	2.4
Total responses	155	73	44	0	14	286

Source: Field Survey of ICRISAT villages (2013-14).

### **3.3. Women’s responses about the difficulty in MGNREGA work**

In general it is found that women found MGNREGA work easier than the farm work or any other work (Table 6). One reason could be the MGNREGA work is flexible about the working hours as in many cases the work is based on piece rate basis.

**Table 6: Women's responses about the difficulty in MGNREGA work**

Responses (%)	Gujarat-Tribal region N=153	Gujarat-Non-Tribal region N=70	Madhya Pradesh-Eastern belt N=29	Maharashtra-South-West N=53	Maharashtra-Vidarbha N=21	Total N=326
Work under NREGA is strenuous	6.5	15.7	20.7	0	7.1	10.4
It is manageable	14.4	8.6	27.6	0	7.1	13.8
Easier compared to farm work	79.1	75.7	48.3	0	85.7	75.7
Total responses	153	70	29	0	14	266

Source: Field Survey of ICRISAT villages (2013-14).

### 3.4. Management of household affairs in view of MGNREGA participation

Table 7 shows that the MGNREGA does put additional work burden women across all study areas. They have to get up early and also prepare children for school. Overall burden on women has increased due to MGNREGA.

**Table 7: Management of household in view of MGNREGA participation**

Impact of MGNREGA on women's work burden and coping strategy	Gujarat-Tribal region N=153	Gujarat-Non-Tribal region N=70	Madhya Pradesh-Eastern belt N=29	Maharashtra-South-West N=53	Maharashtra-Vidarbha N=21	Total N=326
Has to get up early	72.8	82.9	67.8	0	72.2	74.7
Difficulty in managing children	14.5	2.9	9.7	0	0	10.3
Have to prepare children for the school early	6.3	0	3.2	0	0	4.1
More work has to be done	1.73	5.7	3.2	0	22.3	4.8
No additional burden	4.6	8.5	9.7	0	5.6	6.2
Total responses	173	70	31	0	18	292

Source: Field Survey of ICRISAT villages (2013-14).

**Table 8: How Other members in the Household Play Role in Supporting Women**

Support received from the household (%)	Gujarat-Tribal region N=153	Gujarat-Non-Tribal region N=70	Madhya Pradesh-Eastern belt N=29	Maharashtra-South-West N=53	Maharashtra-Vidarbha N=21	Total N=326
Get help from in-laws and other family members	63.4	42.9	42.9	0	64.3	55.4
Found spousal support	0.0	5.7	21.4	0	14.3	4.5
From neighbors	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	7.1	1.1
No household support	36.6	51.4	35.7	0	14.3	39.0
Total responses	153	70	28	0	14	265

Source: Field Survey of ICRISAT villages (2013-14).

However most of the women found support from their kins to participate in MGNREGA. As Table 8 above shows, in-laws and spouse are the major source of support as most of the participating women in our sample are married, only exception being the non-tribal region in Gujarat. Some of these households where women do not get any support are smaller households or households having old age members who can not help them.

### 3.5. Changing status of women in the Family and Society

The table 9 shows that the working in MGNREGA and earning money has definitely improved the status of the women in the family and the community across the states.

**Table 9: Women’s perception about changing status in the family and community**

Changes in status	Gujarat-Tribal region N=153	Gujarat-Non-Tribal region N=70	Madhya Pradesh-Eastern belt N=29	Maharashtra-South-West N=53	Maharashtra-Vidarbha N=21	Total N=326
<b>1. Change in status of women in the family (%)</b>						
Had gained respect in family	53.3	85.5	82.8	0.0	84.2	66.9
Cooperation from other members have increased	44.1	14.4	13.7	0.0	15.8	31.2
Cannot say, my status has changed	2.6	0	3.4	0.0	0	1.9
Total responses	152	69	29	0	19	269
<b>2. Change in status of women in the community (%)</b>						
Honor and respect increases in community	71.0	15.5	77.3	0.0	75.0	76.3
Gender discrimination reduced	12.9	2.8	9.1	0.0	5.0	10.0
Opportunity to take decisions	3.9	0.0	0.0	0.0	10.0	2.9
No change in status	12.3	2.8	13.6	0.0	10.0	10.8
Total responses	155	71	22	0	20	272

Source: Field Survey of ICRISAT villages (2013-14).

### 3.6. Positive impacts on Children education and Household Welfare

MGNREGA seems to have positive impact on education of children in the family. The sample women does tell that additional income has helped them to ensure education of their children (see Table 2 above). One spill over benefit could be education of girl children. However there could be impact of other dedicated programmes in recent years to encourage the parents to send their girls to schools. However our data does show 40 to 70 percent of responses from the sample

women are affirmative that post MGNREGA, the households are able to send their girl children to schools (Table 10).

**Table 10: Impact of MGNREGA on education of girl children**

Impact on education/ enrollment (%)	Gujarat-Tribal region N=153	Gujarat-Non-Tribal region N=70	Madhya Pradesh-Eastern belt N=29	Maharashtra-South-West N=53	Maharashtra-Vidarbha N=21	Total N=326
No improvement has been seen	58.0	53.6	55.6	0	30.8	54.8
Proportion of girls in the school has increased	42.0	46.4	44.4	0	69.3	45.2
Total responses	150	69	27	0	15	261

Source: Field Survey of ICRISAT villages (2013-14).

### 3.7 Women's Perception of Various Impact of MGNREGA on household

When asked about whether the MGNREGA has improved the overall welfare of households for sample women, the response was mostly no significant change (see Table 11). But 33% respondents in non-tribal region of Gujarat, 24% in Eastern MP and 50% of women in Vidarbha does say MGNREGA has improved the general welfare of their households. However this response is contradictory when we asked them about specific economic impacts of the programme on their household consumption.

**Table 11: Impact of MGNREGA on Welfare of the Household**

Responses (%)	Gujarat-Tribal region N=153	Gujarat-Non-Tribal region N=70	Madhya Pradesh-Eastern belt N=29	Maharashtra-South-West N=53	Maharashtra-Vidarbha N=21	Total N=326
General welfare of the household has improved (%)	5.9	32.9	24.1	0.0	50.0	18.2
The welfare level has not changed (%)	94.1	67.1	75.9	100.0	50.0	81.8
Total respondents	152	70	29	0	16	267

Source: Field Survey of ICRISAT villages (2013-14).

From women's point of view MGNREGA have beneficial impact on economic status of the household in general, especially for sample households in Gujarat and Vidarbha. In Madhya Pradesh, 44% of responses from sample women, reported MGNREGA helped in improving

purchase of food items. Another major impact is availability of cash in the household, highest being in Vidarbha and non-tribal region of Gujarat (see table 12 below).

**Table 12: Impact of MGNREGA on Economic Condition of Household in Women’s Own Perception**

Responses (%)	Gujarat-Tribal region N=153	Gujarat-Non-Tribal region N=70	Madhya Pradesh-Eastern belt N=29	Maharashtra-South-West N=53	Maharashtra-Vidarbha N=21	Total N=326
Economic situation in general has improved	57.8	50.7	33.3	0.0	33.3	52.4
Household is financially stable with additional income	16.3	7.5	16.7	0.0	11.1	13.6
Cash availability has improved	14.3	20.9	0.0	0.0	27.8	19.2
Difficulty in purchasing food items lessened	9.5	16.4	44.4	0.0	5.6	10.8
Overall dignity of the household has improved	2.0	4.5	5.6	0.0	0.0	4.0
Total responses	147	67	18	0	18	250

Source: Field Survey of ICRISAT villages (2013-14).

In terms of social impact on households participating in MGNREGA from women’s point of view one finds the programme has given an identity to most of these households and their general status in their respective communities across the states. In Madhya Pradesh and Vidarbha, which are traditionally male dominated societies, the women appreciate the fact that they can work with men and get same wage as that of men (see table 13 below).

**Table 13: Impact of MGNREGA on Social Condition of Household in Women’s Own Perception**

Responses (%)	Gujarat-Tribal region N=153	Gujarat-Non-Tribal region N=70	Madhya Pradesh-Eastern belt N=29	Maharashtra-South-West N=53	Maharashtra-Vidarbha N=21	Total N=326
New identity to the household	47.9	28.4	23.5	0.0	25.0	39.3
Respectability in the neighborhood has improved	21.8	55.2	35.3	0.0	25.0	32.2
Participation in the activity of the community has improved	30.3	16.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	22.3
It enables men and women to work together and earn equal	0.0	0.0	41.2	0.0	25.0	4.5

wage						
Could not say	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	25.0	1.7
Total responses	142	67	17	0	16	232

Source: Field Survey of ICRISAT villages (2013-14).

In terms of institutional impact we found women acknowledges the fact that the earnings from MGNREGA has given new identity to women in the village set up dominated by patriarchy for a long. In case of Madhya Pradesh 80% of women acknowledges the above fact. In Gujarat the responses from women acknowledges that the programme has helped to create a sense of identity among the women, highest being 57% in non-tribal region of Gujarat followed by 47% in tribal region (see table 14). The programme is also helpful to women to send their children to school. This may be due to the fact as the households got additional money, they can use it to support the education of their children.

**Table 14: Institutional Impact of MGNREGA for Households in Women's Own Perception**

Responses (%)	Gujarat-Tribal region N=153	Gujarat-Non-Tribal region N=70	Madhya Pradesh-Eastern belt N=29	Maharashtra-South-West N=53	Maharashtra-Vidarbha N=21	Total N=326
It gives new identity to women in the society as they also earn for their household	47.5	55.6	80.0	0.0	33.3	39.1
Able to send children to the school	44.6	44.4	20.0	0.0	33.3	36.7
Part of village dairy	7.9	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	4.3
Cannot say	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	66.7	19.9
Total responses	139	54	10	0	6	256

Source: Field Survey of ICRISAT villages (2013-14).

In terms of environmental impact the increase in ground water level in respective villages across the 3 states gets highest response from women, most notably in non-tribal region of Gujarat followed by Madhya Pradesh. Improvement in green cover in the villages including forests also admired by the women. In Karandi-chingariya village of non-tribal region of Gujarat we found the deepening of the village pond has improved the ground water level to an extent that the bore wells in the village give water throughout the year. Reduction in soil erosion is also highlighted by those women because of checkdams, farm ponds and check holes (table-15).

**Table 15: Environmental Impact of MGNREGA for the Community in Women's Own Perception**

Responses (%)	Gujarat-Tribal region N=153	Gujarat-Non-Tribal region N=70	Madhya Pradesh-Eastern belt N=29	Maharashtra-South-West N=53	Maharashtra-Vidarbha N=21	Total N=326
Ground water level rose	30.7	47.8	44.4	0.0	26.7	36.1
Natural environment improved	29.3	23.3	0.0	0.0	20.0	25.8
Soil erosion reduced	16.4	17.4	11.1	0.0	0.0	15.5
Growth of village forest	16.4	4.3	22.2	0.0	13.3	12.9
Helps trees in village to survive and grow	5.7	1.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	3.9
Water level in well rises	0.0	0.0	0.0	0	13.3	0.9
Water scarcity in the village came down	1.4	5.8	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.6
Due to construction of road air pollution due to dust came down	0.0	0.0	11.1	0.0	0.0	0.4
Construction of school sanitation facilities help better environment for children	0.0	0.0	11.1	0.0	0.0	0.4
Cannot say	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	26.7	1.5
Total responses	140	69	9	0.0	15	233

Source: Field Survey of ICRISAT villages (2013-14).

A large number of sample women reported that the additional income from the MGNREGA helps them during medical treatment. This corroborates the finding from table-3, where the women reported that the third major head of expenditure for the wage they received from the work is to meet health needs of the family. It also helps the households to purchase non-cereal food items like pulses and vegetables to supplement their staple food consisting mainly cereals. In other words, these households get a more balanced diet (table 16). Nearly 18% of households in Gujarat (both the regions) also reported, they feel the physical ability to do manual work has increased post MGNREGA. The pathways must be through intake of better diet which helps the families to get healthier and increase their ability of manual labour.

**Table 16: Impact of MGNREGA on Health and Nutrition of Women in their Own Perception**

Responses (%)	Gujarat-Tribal region N=153	Gujarat-Non-Tribal region N=70	Madhya Pradesh-Eastern belt N=29	Maharashtra-South-West N=53	Maharashtra-Vidarbha N=21	Total N=326
The additional income helps women to take care of health needs of themselves and their household	49.4	47.9	38.1	0.0	15.0	45.7
Additional income has helped in better food consumption which improves general health of the	19.8	17.8	19.0	0.0	25.0	19.6



family						
Family getting more pulses and vegetables to eat	12.3	17.8	33.3	0.0	30.0	16.7
Physical energy increased	18.5	16.4	9.5	0.0	10.0	16.7
No effect	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	20.0	1.4
Total responses	162	73	21	0	20	276

Source: Field Survey of ICRISAT villages (2013-14).

Despite the positive picture that emerges from tables 11-16 about various aspects of impact of the programme on households from which the sample women are interviewed, the major drawbacks were lesser participation of women in deciding the works to be undertaken, increase in work burden for women and the lesser availability of work, especially in Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh. In none of the states we found any sample household which has worked 100 days as per the mandate of the act. Another disturbing finding from the study is that in Barol village from Gujarat's tribal region there were no works from 2012 onwards, Chhattha the other village has not got any substantial work all these years. Similar is case for Eastern Madhya Pradesh and Vidarbha. In Vidarbha, the Kinkhed village is yet to get any work even after 8 years of launch of the programme. We also found women hardly know about how much amount they earned as wages, as many of them depend upon their spouse to operate the account. Many of the women also could not tell us whether they are part of the decision making in the household regarding the spending of the money (table not shown separately). Also, many of the responses on various impacts of the programme, we could not quantify and mainly based on perception of these women. This is one of the limitations of this study. The MGNREGA has one crucial objective; which is to reduce gender disparity in the society and to provide them opportunity to participate in meaningful economic activity. Unless the adequate number of days are provided under the act, the impact of the programme on women and their household will remain partial. It is evident from the analysis above, the women or their household had hardly purchased any asset from their income.

#### **4. Conclusions and policy imperatives**

The analysis brings out an important aspect of inability of women in decision making as regards NREGS works undertaken in the villages. It was found that except for Babrol in Panchmahals, in all other villages women complained of their limited or no role in deciding about the works to be undertaken in MGNREGA. The Gramsabhas hardly listen their voices or even in most cases they were not informed about the meeting related to MGNREGA. Most of these women respondents also deny of getting any facility other than the provision of drinking water at the worksite. The water is mostly collected by few women members whose houses were nearby. Nearly 75%

women in Gujarat appreciate the MGNREGA work is easier than the routine farm work, while in Maharashtra (for Kanazara alone) the satisfaction is 88%. In MP the satisfaction level is only 43% for women, as the MGNREGA work mostly consists of digging well in individual farms under 'Karnaladhara' scheme of MP government, since beneath the black soil, the hard black granite rock is found in this region, they found it difficult to dig through.

As far as the impact of MGNREGA on women households is concerned, nearly 90% of the respondents reported that there is no marked improvement in their household economic status (despite acknowledging that the total income of the household has increased) as the wage is very low compared to the prevailing farm wages in the village and the wages are often paid late. Majority of women respondents also acknowledged that the work load on them had increased after they choose to work in MGNREGA and the main coping mechanism is to get up early to finish the routine household chores, though many of them acknowledge help they get from their spouses and in-laws. The money earned is controlled by the husband as in most cases the job card is issued in husband's name, in whose name account was also opened. This is further evident, as many of the women failed to recall how much money were paid against the number of days they had worked. The overall impacts of the programme tend to be bleak, as there were hardly any woman out of 486 respondents, who had acquired any durable asset, like land or live-stock from the money earned from MGNREGA.

The study also reveals that MGNREGA still has a long way to go to accommodate women in the decision making process for jobs to be taken up under the programme. In these 3 states where patriarchy rules the roost, women opening the account in their name seemed to be a remote possibility. In most cases, account was in the name of the eldest male member, who is enrolled as the job card holder. This nullifies the intended objective of empowering women through interventions like MGNREGA. It is also found women were hardly aware of the provisioning of the programme and merely obey the decisions by the household elders to go or not to go for work under the programme. We came across in most cases the young daughters and daughter-in-laws hardly participated in MGNREGA. There were also hardly any noticeable facility in the ongoing worksites for women or their children. These loopholes definitely need to be addressed

to realise the goal of women empowerment as envisaged by the proponents of the MGNREGA scheme.

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#### **Notes:**

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<sup>1</sup> Empowerment of rural women has emerged as an unintended consequence of MGNREGA. 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 MGNREGA. Independent and monetized 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. Their increased presence in the gram Sabha, the increasing number of women speaking out in the gramsabha, frequent interactions with government officials and PRI representatives, and access to banks and post offices are new developments. Additionally, the participation of women in MGNREGA has reversed the traditional gender roles, albeit in a limited manner (Pankaj and Tankha, 2010: 54).

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