

Rising Women Participation in MGNREGS: A Case Study of Rajasthan

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Abstract

MGNREGS has contributed to women empowerment by giving them independent income-earning opportunities. The high participation of women, equal wages and organizing of work by women groups has enhanced the position of women. Bank deposits in women's name have increased. As she controls substantial cash resources that can be withdrawn only by her, the intra household status of woman has also been improving commensurately. However participation of women is not uniform across the country. There is wide variation across states, within states and across districts with respect to the share of women working days. The paper examines women's participation in Rajasthan and points to its successes as well as challenges ahead to make it more effective.

Keywords: Women empowerment, MNREGS, Rajasthan

Introduction

Indian society is extremely hierarchical with virtually everyone ranked relative to others according to their caste, class, wealth, power and gender. Different standards of behavior for men and women carry over into the work environment. Women are expected to be submissive and modest in all actions. This may constrain their ability to perform in the workplace on an equal basis with men. Another related aspect of life in India is veiling and seclusion of women. Fewer women, especially younger women, observe veiling today, but those who still do face constraints beyond those already placed on them by other hierarchical practices. These cultural rules place some Indian women, particularly those of lower caste, in a paradoxical situation: when a family suffers economically, people often think that a woman should go out and work, yet at the same time, woman's participation in employment outside the home is viewed as "slightly inappropriate, subtly wrong, and definitely dangerous to their chastity and

womanly virtue" (Ramna, 2011). When a family recovers from an economic crisis or attempts to improve its status, women may be kept at home as a demonstration of the family's morality and as a symbol of its financial security. As in many other countries, working women of all segments of Indian society face various forms of discrimination including sexual harassment.

Although most women in India work and contribute to the economy in one form or another, much of their work is not documented or accounted for in official statistics. Women plough fields and harvest crops while working on farms; women weave and make handicrafts while working in household industries; women sell food and gather wood while working in the informal sector. Additionally, women are traditionally responsible for the daily household chores (e.g., cooking, fetching water, and looking after children). Although the cultural restrictions women face are changing, women are still not as free as men to participate in the formal economy. In the past, cultural restrictions were the primary pediments to female employment; now, however, the shortage of jobs throughout the country contributes to low female employment as well. The report on Employment & Unemployment Survey (2009-10), published by Ministry of Labour & Employment, Government of India (Table-1) shows that Labour Force Participation Rates (LFPR) is low for females (163 per 1000) compared to 538 for males. The Unemployment Rate (UR) for females is much higher (146) compared to males (80), especially in rural areas.

Table 1. Parameters of Labour Force

(Per 1000)

Indicator	Rural			Urban			Rural + Urban		
	Male	Female	Person	Male	Female	Person	Male	Female	Person
LFPR	539	176	365	534	129	340	538	163	359
WPR	492	150	329	503	111	314	495	140	325
PU	46	26	37	32	18	25	43	24	34
UR	87	148	101	59	138	73	80	146	94

Note: Based on usual Principal status approach. LFPR – Labour Force Participation Rate, WPR – Worker Population Ratio, PU – Proportion Unemployed, UR – Unemployment Rate.

Source : Report on Employment & Unemployment Survey (2009-10), Ministry of Labour & Employment, Government of India.

Table-1 shows distribution of rural female according to principal activity.

Table 2. Distribution of Rural Female in Principal Activities

S. No.	Name of the State/UT	Agriculture, forestry etc.	Mining & quarrying	Manufacturing	Electricity	Construction	Wholesale Retail etc.	Transport, storage	Financing, insurance	Community services	Others
1.	Andhra Pradesh	678	28	106	3	37	41	3	7	28	69
2	Assam	572	43	38	9	15	31	4	0	124	164
3	Bihar	481	16	103	22	32	43	1	4	175	123
4	Chhatisgarh	734	31	16	16	36	33	2	7	51	74
5	Delhi	94	1	64	31	21	39	41	85	624	
6	Goa	248	0	53	0	0	10	27	30	247	385
7	Gujarat	745	11	40	0	66	28	7	3	68	32
8	Haryana	451	11	26	4	34	48	3		408	15
9	Himachal Pradesh	703	3	0	5	68	10	7	3	168	33
10	Jammu & Kashmir	130	29	311	0	56	13	0	0	274	187
11	Jharkhand	571	45	56	13	30	31	1	15	147	91
12	Karnataka	684	14	103	2	38	49	4	1	34	71
13	Kerala	447	2	120	13	20	114	12	86	115	71
14	Madhya Pradesh	712	18	45	11	55	1	1	0	80	77
15	Maharashtra	866	5	34	3	8	24	6	3	16	35
16	Meghalaya	819	0	0	0	25	31			125	
17	Orissa	555	44	23	12	106	35	14	4	87	120
18	Punjab	226	15	49	12	55	0	0	59	190	394
19	Rajasthan	613	90	59	4	103	29	4	4	31	63
20	Sikkim	335	0	329	0	61	220	55			
21	Tamil Nadu	633	6	105	3	58	33	2	4	99	57
22	Uttaranchal	771	0	7	1	37	30	9	4	67	74
23	Uttar Pradesh	556	13	51	20	68	63	23	7	94	105
24	West Bengal	437	3	299	0	39	41	2	0	105	74
25	Chandigarh	10	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	233	753
26	Daman & Diu	852	0	0	0	0	148	0	0	0	
27	Pondicherry	390	340	0	0	0	154	116	0	0	
	Overall	670	21	77	6	44	35	5	6	67	69

Source : Report on Employment & Unemployment Survey (2009-10), Ministry of Labour & Employment, Government of India.

Table-2 clearly indicates that majority of rural females are engaged in the primary sector viz. agriculture, forestry etc. Manufacturing and community services come next to it respectively. Inter-state disparities are also visible in the table.

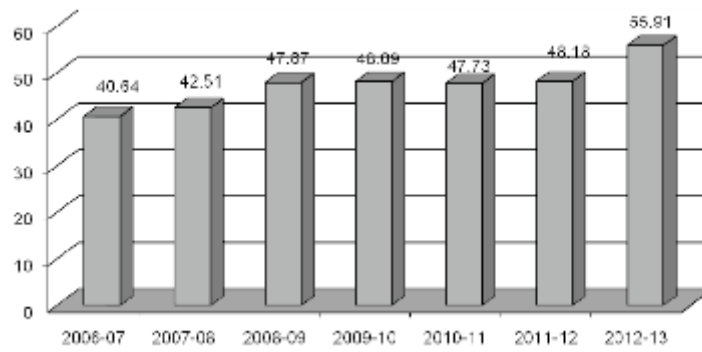
MGNREGA and Women Empowerment

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act aims to provide for the enhancement of livelihood security of the household in rural areas of the country by providing at least one hundred days of guaranteed wage employment in every financial year to every household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work. In the first phase, the programme was being implemented in 200 districts with total budget of 11300 crore in 2006-07. It was implemented in an additional 130 districts in

Phase II 2007-08 with increased budget allocation of 12000 crores. The Act was notified in the remaining 285 rural districts of India from April 1, 2008 in Phase III with allocation of 30000 crores. MGNREGA has impacted the life of poor. According to Mathur (2007), large numbers of unlettered households have made the effort to come forward to register; wages less than the minimum wage were raised in many states; the participation of women increased significantly even in the districts of Rajasthan and eastern UP; unemployment allowances were sought and actually paid in Madhya Pradesh and Odisha; the maintenance of muster rolls has become a feature in several districts.

Women's empowerment was not among the original intentions of the MGNREGA, 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. Provisions like work within a radius of five kilometers 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 been conducive for rural women. Women have availed of the paid employment opportunity under MGNREGS in large numbers.

Implementation of MGNREGA has contributed to very high levels of women empowerment, particularly in the following aspects. Firstly, as work is organized by women's groups, the gender perspective gets built in automatically second, equal wages are really paid and this has boosted the earnings of women. As wages are paid in bank, deposits held by women are increasing, the intra-household status of the woman has also been improving commensurately as she controls substantial cash resources and withdrawal can be only on her decision. There are wide variations across states, within states and across districts in the share of work days going to women. At national level the participation of women has increased significantly from 40.64 percent in 2006-07- to 55.91 percent in July 2012-13 (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Women Participation in MGNREGS

Source : Ministry of Kural Development, Govt of India.

In several states participation of women has surpassed men's participation. Women perceived that MGNREGS is giving them a sense of independence and security. Wages earned under MGNREGS has helped women in several ways. It helped them to pay the debt and retrieve the pawned gold; helped them in taking care of children's education; enabled them to meet the day-to-day household expenses and facilitated them to save money (Sudha Narayan, 2008).

There are various explanations for the varying participation of women workers under employment guarantee schemes that preceded MGNREGS. It has been shown that 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 Maharashtra Employment Guarantee Scheme - EGS); outmigration of male family members (Bhatty, 2006; Mehrotra, 2008; Talukdar, 2008); the employment opportunity being available at the doorstep (Bhatty, 2006; Khera & Nayak, 2009); a tradition of rural women working in others' fields (Narayanan, 2008); the provision of equal, non-discriminatory wages (Khera & Nayak, 2009); and innovative experiments in implementation like the female mate system in Rajasthan (Khera, 2008), synergisation of NREGS with Kudumbashree in Kerala (Vijayakumar & Thomas 2008), and in Bihar, gender differential tasks for uniform (minimum) wages (Pankaj, 2009).

Data Source & Methodology

In Rajasthan MGNREGS has been effective w.e.f. 2nd February, 2006. In first phase, this scheme was introduced in six districts, viz., Banswara,

Dungarpur, Udaipur, Sirohi, Karauli and Jhalawar. During 2007-08, in second phase, six more districts were included in this programme. They were, Jaisalmer, Jalore, Barmer, Chittorgarh, Sawai Modhopur and Tonk. From 1st April 2008, MGNREGS was extended to entire state in third phase. In the present study in order to analyze the performance of MGNREGS, secondary data has been used which has been collected from related books, journals and publications of different government agencies such as Ministry of Rural Development Government of India, Planning Department, Annual Plans of Rajasthan as well as Rajasthan Annual Administrative Reports of Government of Rajasthan. Main purpose of this study is to examine at what extent this programme has succeeded to generate employment opportunities for women in Rajasthan.

Review of Literature

There are so many studies which have supported the fact that MGNREGS has positively affected the lives of women by ensuring better responsiveness of local government to community needs and rejuvenating natural resources and by stopping the local population from migrating for work to the cities. Santosh Mehrotra (2005) stated that employment guarantee related works would have positive effect on household income by raising agricultural wage and investment in human capital. Jean Dreze (2005) stated that the main purpose of the employment guarantee is to protect rural households from economic insecurity. Yamini Aiyar (2006) has analysed the superiority of Employment Guarantee Act in providing or strengthening social security and community mobilization. Manohar Puri (2006) concluded that the main objective of rural employment guarantee scheme is to rejuvenate natural resources to stimulate the local economy and to stop population from migration to the cities. Balbinder Singh (2006) stated that MGNREGA is not only towards poverty alleviation but also for empowerment of those who are living at the margins. It is a significant achievement for the rural poor. Lalit Mathur (2007) examined the performance of MGNREGA and worked out that some 'backward' states have done better than several of the progressive ones. Sudha Narayanan (2008) worked out that this scheme has brought about major change in the lives of women. There are so many other studies such as: Raghendra Jha (2008), Anish Vanaik (2008), Santosh Mehrotra (2008), Reetika Khera (2008), Farzana Affridi (2008), Reetika Khera (2009), and Adhikari (2010) have appreciated MGNREGA in one way or the other that it has become a beacon of light in the rural areas and contributed substantially for the

increasing living and economic conditions by reducing income imbalance in the rural area. It has contributed to the reduction of migration from rural area to urban area for searching petty jobs. Some of them have also appreciated the transfer of wages into workers bank account. But some studies such as: Anish Vanaik (2008) have observed the under utilization of funds in some states and payment through bank accounts could not eliminate corruption under the scheme.

Results and Discussions

District Wise Cumulative Person Days Generated for Women under MGNREGS

It is clear from Table-3 that 354322689 total cumulative person days have been generate in Rajasthan in the financial year 2009-10, out of which 226451381 (63.91%) number of cumulative person days have been generated for women. District Rajsamand (78.55%) leads all district followed by Pali (77.01%) Sirohi (75.54%), Jaipur (75.03%) and Bhilwara (73.63%) District Dholpur (34.44%) had lowest participation of women followed by Bikaner (48.15%) and Sri-Ganganagar (48.66%)

The table also shows that 259518753 total cumulative person days have been generated in the financial year 2010-11, out of which 176641924 (68.06%) number of cumulative person days have been generated for women. District Rajsamand (83.51) lead all districts followed by Pali (79.78%) Sirohi (78.95%), Jaipur (78.79%) and Jalore (78.14%). District Dholpur (40.05%) has lowest participation of women, followed by Bikaner (50.02%) and Sri Ganganagar (51.16%).

In the year 2011-12, 210778887 total cumulative person days have been generated out of which 145767439 (69.15%) number of cumulative person days have been generated for women. District Rajsamand (83.64%) lead all district followed by Pali (82.51%), Sirohi (81.72%), Jaipur (81.58%) and Bhilwara (80.70%). District Dholpur (44.64) has lowest participation followed by Bikaner (51.61) and Sri Ganganagar (54.59).

51470285 total cumulative person days have been generated in the financial year 2012-13 (upto June 26, 2012), out of which 36150185 (70.23%) number of cumulative person days have been generated for women. District Pali (84.28%) lead all districts followed by Rajsamand (83.99%), Ajmer (82.69%), Sirohi (82.12%) and Jaipur (82.02%). District Dholpur (47.03%) has lowest participation followed by Bikaner (55.72%) and Bharatpur (61.43%).

Table 3. District Wise Cumulative Person Days Generated Under MGNREGS in Rajasthan

S. No.	Districts	2009-10		2010-11		2011-12		2012-13	
		Total	Women	Total	Women	Total	Women	Total	Women
1.	Banswara	15642195	9359271 (59.83)	14299334	8849050 (61.88)	14968610	9183041 (61.34)	7260583	4485982 (61.78)
2.	Dungarpur	18211862	9359271 (59.83)	14323241	10410598 (72.68)	16647883	12041341 (72.32)	5091930	3719006 (73.03)
3	Jhalawar	6725153	3626479 (53.92)	4513746	2644329 (58.58)	4637188	2820088 (60.81)	1146431	737288 (64.31)
4	Karauli	5896077	3730917 (63.27)	4703373	3045389 (64.74)	4175741	2656958 (63.62)	428967	285014 (66.44)
5	Sirohi	6623977	5004227 (75.54)	4160591	3285014 (78.95)	2568152	2098916 (81.72)	562185	461670 (82.12)
6	Udaipur	17760397	10672210 (60.08)	13656064	9287811 (68.01)	11565104	8019837 (69.34)	3414145	2385948 (69.88)
7	Barmar	21497248	13490160 (62.75)	16520629	11130575 (67.37)	16218727	9798631 (60.41)	4486955	2768319 (61.69)
8	Chittorgarh	8353122	5353150 (64.08)	7287290	4950190 (67.92)	4541071	3227810 (71.08)	1018265	755161 (74.16)
9	Jaisalmer	4781108	2845867 (59.52)	3406990	2237787 (65.68)	3442156	2094779 (60.85)	367957	248719 (67.59)
10	Jalore	10695767	7905540 (73.91)	6183237	4832068 (78.14)	4003827	3085653 (77.06)	796786	620030 (77.81)
11	Sawai Madhopur	3485662	1720355 (49.35)	6852074	2153441 (55.90)	2716032	1593751 (58.67)	1083684	644620 (59.48)
12	Tonk	9919946	6575025 (66.28)	5874355	4104653 (69.87)	3103713	2353144 (75.81)	719593	554464 (77.05)
13	Ajmer	18867723	13530237 (71.71)	14365059	10731703 (74.70)	12901211	10269696 (79.60)	2476518	2048022 (82.69)
14	Alwar	6499819	3526430 (54.25)	4784252	3023968 (63.20)	3728822	2362744 (63.36)	508656	345922 (68.00)
15	Baran	5164060	2924416 (56.62)	4672886	2804016 (60.00)	3788623	2307658 (60.91)	918767	571408 (62.19)
16	Bharatpur	7889820	3992601 (50.60)	4338758	2405235 (55.43)	4308285	2445050 (56.75)	818779	503012 (61.43)
17	Bhilwara	26088546	19209407 (73.63)	18675679	14495169 (77.61)	13849149	11177435 (80.70)	2898698	2334076 (82.52)
18	Bikaner	12779866	6153537 (48.15)	9280393	4642149 (50.02)	8313261	4290592 (51.61)	630079	351105 (55.72)
19	Bundi	6346725	3768072 (59.37)	5630863	3580668 (63.59)	2910543	1938001 (66.58)	557445	394651 (70.79)
20	Churu	13929098	7414942 (53.23)	11956579	6983999 (58.41)	6895602	4231223 (61.36)	1953941	1248154 (63.87)
21	Dausa	7931053	5318383 (67.05)	3411619	2535140 (74.30)	2228171	1739157 (78.05)	543709	443401 (81.55)
22	Dholpur	3427398	1180400 (34.44)	1806342	730676 (40.45)	1446071	645632 (44.64)	364849	171601 (47.03)
23	Hanumangarh	8187780	4331331 (52.89)	6947685	4005330 (57.64)	4724288	2951891 (62.48)	507580	332927 (65.59)
24	Jaipur	19363738	14530395 (75.03)	11663078	9190469 (78.79)	8170522	6666040 (81.58)	1088377	892791 (82.02)
25	Jhunjhunu	4959448	2527406 (50.96)	2721224	1581991 (58.13)	1821288	1064951 (58.47)	528374	347296 (65.72)
26	Jodhpur	17029523	12179162 (71.51)	15524332	11853499 (76.35)	13688591	10409502 (76.04)	3485433	2743561 (78.71)
27	Kota	4576061	2701004 (59.02)	4032850	2541045 (63.00)	3214944	2127828 (66.18)	1250514	831947 (66.52)
28	Nagaur	19684636	12902980 (65.54)	11316435	7846424 (69.33)	10362329	7387670 (71.29)	2505040	1866176 (74.49)
29	Pali	12190330	9388674 (77.01)	8948318	7139085 (79.78)	6941837	5728293 (82.51)	1312355	1106169 (84.28)
30	Pratapgarh	4625118	2653953 (57.38)	3662974	2183273 (59.60)	3610231	2239972 (62.04)	1183767	742694 (62.73)
31	Rajsamand	9414455	7395262 (78.55)	5668459	4733844 (83.51)	4008694	3352963 (83.64)	829892	697075 (83.99)
32	Sikar	7589359	4709328 (62.05)	4764442	3344249 (70.19)	3353118	2406136 (71.75)	481227	353573 (73.47)
33	Sri Ganganagar	8185073	3982938 (48.66)	6565602	3359087 (51.16)	1925103	1051056 (54.59)	248804	158403 (63.66)
	Total	354322689	226451381 (63.91)	259518753	176641924 (68.06)	210778887	145767439 (69.15)	51470285	36150185 (70.23)

Note: Data as in June 2012. Figure in the parenthesis shows percentage of total Source : Ministry of Rural Development. Government of India.

Conclusion

It can be concluded from the above study that MGNREGS has succeeded in providing employment for women in Rajasthan. The data presented shows that share of women in cumulative person days generated is rising. The demand driven nature of MGNREGS has benefited women more as worker than the community. The paid employment opportunity has helped women to earn independently. This has increased their consumption choices and reduced economic dependence. Women contribution in household income has increased their participation in decision making. The increased presence in gram sabha, frequent interaction with government official and PRI representatives and access to bank and post offices are new developments.

However there are still many challenges to make this programme more effective. The first is the horizontal and vertical expansion of benefits. This can be done by ensuring greater participation of women especially in low participating areas and also ensuring that women from all categories are forth coming in availing this paid job opportunity. Secondly, working conditions need to be made more conducive by enforcing and strengthening existing provisions and adding new ones. For example breast feeding breaks for lactating women and flexibility in working hours may be considered. Crèche provision may be linked with the Anganwadi or Integrated Child Development Service (ICDS) centres, panchayat bhawans, local school building, etc. to make them more practical. Among others, maternity relief for women, make-shift toilets at the worksite and innovation 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. Thirdly, wage rates should be raised and timely payment of wages through individual accounts will increase women participation. Non-manual work should also be considered under this scheme and funds should be used in right way. There must be Zero tolerance for corruption. Apart from these implementation issues, there are social and cultural context that restrict women participation in some places. Persistent social and community mobilization and a proactive role for the state can compensate for some of this social and cultural deficit.

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