

ARE WOMEN EMPOWERED IN INDIA? A PERSPECTIVE OF WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN MGNREGA FROM LADNU BLOCK OF RAJASTHAN, INDIA

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Abstract

Women empowerment is about promoting their sense of self-worth and ability to make choices which may create social influence in society. Moreover, it emphasises sharing equal responsibility in the family as well as society in terms of accessing their choices without any hindrances, contributing economically to the family and society, and representing equally everywhere in the process of development. World's largest employment guarantee programme, i.e. Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) has provisioned providing 100 days of jobs to one-third of women in the country to ensure livelihood security and asset creation. The current paper tries to highlight the experiences of the beneficiaries from Ladnu block of Rajasthan about their improved lifestyles in terms of qualitative research and suggests ways to bridge the existing gaps to achieve the goal. In other words, it tries to explore whether women, as a beneficiary of the MGNREGA, are contributing to the programme or not, and creating assets for maintaining a better lifestyle. To answer this question, a blended methodology was implemented in two villages of Ladnu block of Rajasthan with 97 respondents. The results are positive from the numbers; however, to achieve the real goal of the Act, the government must actively mull over creating awareness among the community through Gram Panchayat (GP), orient the GP members towards implementing the Act with transparency, timely payment, increase the wage as per the inflation rate and converge different schemes with MGNREGA .

Keywords: MGNREGA, Women Empowerment, Asset Creation, 100 Days of Work, Livelihood Security.

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Introduction

Conceptualised in the year 2005 Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), the largest welfare programme in the world by the Government of India to address the issue of poverty, has brought smiles to many poor families in the country, with diversified experiences. The Act started with 200 districts in the year 2006, added 130 more districts in the year 2007-08, and was subsequently executed in most of the districts across the country. In Rajasthan, it has been implemented across all districts since April 2008 and the scheme was renamed "MGNREGA-2005". On one side, the Act mandates 33 per cent of women participation to ensure a minimum level of livelihood security and asset creation in rural areas. It has not only documented countless success stories but also brought forth challenges in terms of further expectations and transparency in the system. Migration from rural to urban India is a common phenomenon, which is studied by several researchers. Such studies have highlighted how it is adversely affecting the income of the family and other societal problems such as poor health, physical abuse, harassment of females, domestic violence, and extramarital affairs. The Indian migration is always shaped by the design of development activities and social arrangements. This process of migration is seen particularly during the non-agricultural season when people move out of their homes to earn money for meeting their livelihood requirements. To address the livelihood-earning opportunities of poor families and create assets, MGNREGA has been provisioned with gender-sensitive income by engaging the workers in a limited geographical area. Studies say the women's participation in MGNREGA at the national level was 47 per cent (Shah, 2012; Shah et al., 2015), whereas women display more active participation in the scheme than in all other forms of work (Ghosh, 2009). Due to this, many districts of the country reported migration of the local community in search of livelihood. The literature recorded that participation in MGNREGA significantly reduces short-term migration (Imbert & Papp, 2014). Coffey (2013) finds that women are

more likely to engage in MGNREGA, which decreases their short-term distress migration, thereby enhancing the well-being of their children.

A study undertaken by another eminent researcher brings out the relevance of income from MGNREGA for the poor (Jha et al., 2012). The salient features of research studies compiled in MGNREGA Sameeksha show that it has also caused a significant increase in monthly per capita consumption, and expenditure of rural households. It had also contributed to reducing traditional gender wage discrimination, particularly in the public works sector, and has had a positive impact on the socio-economic status of women. Field studies have shown that the statutory requirement of 33 per cent participation was not achieved in Haryana (8 per cent), Madhya Pradesh (13.0 per cent), Uttar Pradesh (9 per cent), Chhattisgarh (25.0 per cent), Bihar (13.0 per cent) and Jharkhand (18.0 per cent) (Dev, 2012). One of the negative aspects was that women used to leave their 14-16 years old daughters at the worksite after marking their attendance, and went to their respective homes to perform household chores.

NREGS was the most important "rights-based social protection programme" in India. It was working much better in Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh and Himachal Pradesh. The women participation in MGNREGA is 68 per cent in Rajasthan, which is 27 per cent higher than the national average (41.0 per cent) as on November 2007 (Poonia, 2012). MGNREGA plays a significant role in meeting the practical as well as strategic needs of women's participation. It has become an inspiration for rural women as they could contribute to their families economically, which in turn, bettered their decision-making capacity in the household (Kar. S., 2013). In light of these facts, many studies have been carried out to know the status of assets built by rural individuals in different parts of India, but none of them covered Ladnu block of Rajasthan so far. Hence, this current paper will help to understand whether the MGNREGA has helped in asset creation in female-headed households and improved their lifestyles or not.

Methodology

Women's participation in Rajasthan as of 2012-13 was 68.9 per cent; it was 67.7 and 68.2 per cent for the year 2013-14 and 2014-15, respectively. This shows women's participation was higher than the national average, which stands at 51.3 per cent for the financial year 2012-13, 52.8 per cent for the financial year 13-14, and 54.8 per cent for the financial year 14-15. As the Act is primarily gender-focused and ensures one-third of women get work, the benefits these women are getting after enrollment in the programme need to be understood. The researcher has not found any study in the villages of Ladnu block of Rajasthan related to the participation of women, their problems and their expectation from MGNREGA. The available review shows lack of an in-depth analysis using a qualitative approach with the women beneficiaries. Thus, the study tried to understand the outcomes of the MGNREGA in two selected villages of the block and the independent variables such as religion, family, family income, caste, gender, education, source of income, and duration of work on savings could make any significant changes. The researcher assessed and tested the reasons for the increase in women participation in the villages of Ladnu block to ascertain whether it was due to proper implementation of the Act, high wages, growing status of women or a safe and secure environment in the village.

This study was conducted in the year 2013 by adopting a blended methodology. An interview schedule with a guideline, checklist and pointers for case studies and focus group discussions (FGDs) were used for collecting primary data. Purposive sampling method was used for the selection of respondents and villages from two different Gram Panchayats due to the high concentration of BPL families and the implementation of MGNREGA. Out of 121 BPL families that received job cards from their respective Gram Panchayat in both villages, 97 families were selected randomly. Interviews were conducted with beneficiaries of MGNREGA, government officials, and Panchayat members; however, this paper primarily examines the

experiences of the MGNREGA beneficiaries. For comparison and discussion, the secondary sources of data were reviewed from the reports of the Planning Commission, Ministry of Rural Development, State Rural Development and Panchayati Raj Department, etc. Besides, to understand the issues more transparently, four FGDs were conducted with women beneficiaries of MGNREGA in both villages. Chi-square and ANOVA were also used to check the association between independent and dependent variables for a hypothesis - whether the number of days contributes to more income in beneficiaries' families or not. Analysis was carried out in SPSS 22.0 version and tables were presented followed by interpretation. Overall, the current study will help block-level officials, social work professionals/practitioners and educators understand the existing gaps during the process of MGNREGA implementation and Gram Panchayat to run the scheme smoothly.

Results and Key Findings

MGNREGA is the largest welfare programme to bring equity by balancing gender. Since the last one-and-a-half decades, many efforts have been done to bring transparency into its implementation. However, many challenges remain the same and it needs to be addressed to make it successful. Further rigorous research may help to streamline the effective implementation through digitalisation for accessibility and scalability. The primary respondents in the study were 97 women participants of the MGNREGA.

Socio-economic Profile of the Beneficiaries:

Table 1 describes the general profile of the respondents and it shows that 44 per cent of the 97 respondents were in the age group of 30-40 years followed by 32.9 per cent in the age group of 40-50 years and 11.0 per cent in the age group of 20-30 years. It was found that eight persons, who were demanding work under MGNREGA, were in the age group of 50-60 years and three persons in the age group of 60-70 years, who were forced to do work in their villages despite their weak health condition. Majority of women were housewives and

worked on their agricultural land. Sometimes, they used to work as a labourer in nearby villages. The data also shows that 54.6 per cent belonged to scheduled castes (SCs) and after enrollment, 91.8 per cent participated in the programme. This higher percentage of participation reflects greater participation of women in this job. Compared to the data of the studied villages, it was found that in Bakliya village, women participation was 82.8 per cent followed by 65.6 per cent in Dujar village which is nearer to Ladnun city. The participation of men was low due to the engagement of male members outside the village. The data further shows that in Bakliya, 17 per cent of male members were involved in MGNREGA works due to low wages. These low wages under the Act did not attract male workers for doing jobs and they get dropped after completion of one to two months or their spouses joined the job. In FGD, it was revealed by the male respondents that they had got better wages outside compared to MGNREGA works (Pattnaik, 2020). However, women prefer this job due to the safety, privacy, wage security and lower risks. They also said the worksites located nearby saved their time and they are satisfied because familiar persons from their villages are involved in the MGNREGA works.

Among the 97 beneficiaries, 54.6 per cent belonged to scheduled castes followed by 42.3 per cent from other back castes (OBCs). Bakliya is dominated by SCs (62 per cent), followed by OBCs (34.5 per cent) but in Dujar, OBCs are the dominating caste (45.6 per cent) followed by SCs (41.0 per cent). All the below poverty line (BPL) families had received BPL ration cards from their respective Panchayats. It was found that 16.5 per cent of families were single/female-headed households. Data shows that 61.8 per cent of households in Dujar were single families whereas, in Bakliya, it was 51.7 per cent. The educational status of residents is very poor in both villages. Even most of the women had no idea of putting their signatures. Due to this, work is not available

for the whole year in villages and even in nearby villages. Further, it can be reflected that most of the family income of the beneficiaries ranged from Rs 4000 to 6000 per month. Altogether, illiteracy, lack of employment opportunities and irregularities of MGNREGA, drove these job seekers in search of work, leading to migration for livelihood.

Table 2 highlights the opinion on work duration and time required to get the payment under the scheme. It shows that a vast majority of women workers have completed 30 to 90 days of work. Only 11.0 per cent had completed 100 days under MGNREGA. The women in Bakliya village get more days of work than those in Dujar village. Respondents also reported that they could not continue their work for 100 days due to hard labour and low payment. The discussion with women revealed that those having small children were unable to continue work due to the absence of daycare/childcare facilities and restrooms. Other causes were health problems, old age, lack of prior information about starting work, etc. Ninety-six per cent of beneficiaries mentioned that they got timely payments, and were contented. However, 10 per cent of Bakliya village expressed dissatisfaction due to lack of timely payment.

The analysis also shows that 86.8 per cent of the women from scheduled castes were getting an income of Rs.0-6000 compared to 54.5 per cent of others belonging to OBCs and other castes. Similarly, 13.2 per cent were having an income of more than Rs.6000 as a result of MGNREGA enrollment. It also concludes that nuclear families made better income compared to joint family beneficiaries who are earning up to Rs.6000. The Chi-square test result suggests that there is a significant difference between different castes and the income of the household. However, the test result was not significant for types of families. This means the income of the beneficiaries does not vary considerably in nuclear families and joint families.

Table 1*Profile of the Respondents in the Studied Villages of Ladnu Block, Rajasthan*

Background characteristics		Bakliya (n= 29)	Dujar (n =68)	Total (n = 97)	Chi-square value	P value
Age	20-30 years	4 (13.8)	7(10.3)	11(11.3)		
	30-40 years	13(44.8)	30(44.1)	43(44.3)		
	40-50 years	8 (27.6)	24(35.3)	32(32.9)		
	50-60 years	3 (10.3)	5 (7.4)	8(8.2)		
	60-70 years	1(3.3)	2(2.9)	3(3.1)		
Caste	Schedule Caste	18(62.1)	35(51.5)	53(54.6)		
	Other Backward castes	10(34.5)	31(45.6)	41(42.3)		
	Others	1(3.4)	2(2.9)	3(3.1)		
Participation in MGNREGA	Male	5(17.2)	3(4.4)	8 (8.2)	4.422	.035**
	Female	24(82.8)	65(65.6)	89 (91.8)		
Religion	Hindu	27(93.1)	60(88.2)	87(89.7)	.257	.612
	Muslim	2(6.9)	8(11.8)	10(10.3)		
Family type	Nuclear	15(51.7)	42(61.8)	57(58.8)	.846	.35
	Joint	14(48.3)	26(38.2)	40(41.2)		
Education	Illiterate	24(82.8)	65(95.6)	89(91.8)		
	Literate	1(3.4)	1(1.5)	2(2.1)		
	Up to Elementary	3(10.3)	1(1.5)	4(4.1)		
	Up to senior secondary	1(3.4)	1(1.5)	2(2.1)		
Sources of income of the family	Labourer	20(68.7)	55(80.9)	75(77.3)		
	Self-employed	5(17.2)	3(4.4)	8(8.2)		
	Government Pension	4(13.8)	10(14.7)	14(14.4)		
Income of families	Less than 4000	12(41.4)	19(27.9)	31(31.6)		
	4000-6000	9(31.0)	30(44.1)	39(40.2)		
	6000-8000	7(24.1)	16(25.0)	23(24.7)		
	Above 8000	1(3.4)	3(4.4)	4(4.1)		
New Income	1-6000 INR	21(30.0)	49(70.0)	70(72.2)	.001	.972
	Above 6000	8(29.6)	19(70.4)	27(27.8)		

Source: Primary data collected by the authors.**Table 2***Distribution of Work, Duration and Opinion on timely payment in Ladnu block, Rajasthan*

Response Category	Bakliya n=29	Dujar n=68	Total n=97
Duration of work			
Below 30 days	1 (3.4)	2 (2.9)	3 (3.1)
30 days to 90 days	21 (72.4)	62 (91.2)	83 (85.6)
Completed 100 days	7 (24.1)	4 (5.9)	11 (11.3)
Timely payment			
Yes	26 (89.7)	67 (98.5)	93 (95.9)
No	3 (10.3)	1(1.5)	4 (4.1)
Total	29 (100)	68 (100)	97(100)

Source: Primary data collected by the authors.

Table 3:*Result of Chi-square between Caste, Type of Beneficiaries' Family with Income*

	Indicators	0-6000 INR	> 6000 INR	Total	Chi-square value	P value
Caste	SC	46 (86.8)	7 (13.2)	53 (100.0)	12.446	.000***
	OBC & others	24(54.5)	20(45.5)	44 (100.0)		
Family Type	Nuclear	41 (71.9)	16 (28.1)	57 (100.0)	.004	.951
	Joint	29 (72.5)	11 (27.5)	40 (100.0)		

Pearson Chi-Square value is 12.446 (p=.000), P < 0.05

***p<0.001, **p<0.05, *p<0.10

Further, the study tried to compare the difference between the means of two variables named duration of work (below 30 days, 30-90 days and completed 100 days) and income of the beneficiaries as the dependent variable. One-way ANOVA was performed and the result $F(1, 95) = 5.505$, $p < .05$ shows that there is a significant difference between the two selected variables,

namely duration of work and family income. This means more working days under MGNREGA facilitates more income for the beneficiaries who had work for 100 days compared to the other two categories. Hence, the implementors must try to provide 100 days of work to all in the study area (Tables 4 and 5).

Table 4*Descriptive Statistics between Duration of Work and Total Household Income of the Beneficiaries*

Duration of work								
Family income	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
0-6000	70	2.03	.339	.041	1.95	2.11	1	3
Above 6000	27	2.22	.424	.082	2.05	2.39	2	3
Total	97	2.08	.373	.038	2.01	2.16	1	3

Source: Primary data collected by the authors.

Table 5*ANOVA Results for the Duration of Work with Total Family Income*

Duration of work	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	.731	1	.731	5.505	.021***
Within Groups	12.610	95	.133		
Total	13.340	96			

Dependent variable: Income of the family.

Source: Primary data collected by the authors.

Table 6 depicts the sources of information regarding MGNREGA in Ladnu block, Rajasthan. Beneficiaries mentioned that they came to know about the scheme from neighbours and friends (69.0 per cent) and it was the key source of information. On further comparison, it was found that in Bakliya village, 20 per cent of women received information about this scheme from Anganwadi workers. Women beneficiaries stated they did not receive any communication from Gram Panchayat about the work under MGNREGA. Therefore, MGNREGA job card holders were unaware of the work and joined late in this process. In this context, similar findings emerged from the

study on the impact assessment of the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme conducted in Uttar Pradesh. Beneficiaries were aware of MGNREGA and heard about this scheme but were unaware of the provisions of the Act. It was reported that no hoardings were placed or Padayatras or street plays were conducted to spread awareness of the Act. The beneficiaries said the payment was less than the minimum wage, while half of them mentioned getting Rs.60 per day. They had little idea of the reasons for the low payment and Panchayat members never inform them about it.

Table 6

Sources of Information about MGNREGA in Ladnu block, Rajasthan

Response Category	Bakliya n=29	Dujar n=68	Total n=97
Panchayat	5(17.2)	8(11.8)	13(13.4)
Friends and Neighbours	17(59.6)	50(73.5)	67(69.1)
Media	1(3.4)	3(4.4)	4(4.1)
AWCs	6(20.7)	7(10.3)	13(13.4)
Total	29 (100)	68(100)	97(100)

Source: Primary data collected by the authors.

Women empowerment always speaks about decision-making in household economy development and asset creation. The study tried to understand the expenditure pattern of the respondent against the money they received, and the finding is summarised in Table 4. The data shows that in Bakliya village, the women were using their wages mainly for buying household assets (89.7 per cent) and it also helped them for fulfilling the daily needs of their family (86.2 per cent). But in Dujar village, 91 per cent of women used their wages for fulfilling their daily needs. They added that they spent on stationery items, education fees for their children and medicine. Earlier, they were dependent on their husband's income for everything; now, they feel elated over their income source.

In Dujar village, 66 per cent of women utilise the transport facility to make regular visits to Ladnun city located at a distance of five kilometres from the village, and they spent money on artificial ornaments, clothes and food items. Women showed no hesitation to talk to others, and they were even going to the Government hospital, Ladnun and private clinics independently for their health-related problems. Sharing of experiences was the major change observed among women. Dev (2012) discussed that the income from MGNREGA made a very significant contribution towards children's well-being such as reducing hunger and improving health and education. Utpal and Bhattacharya also highlighted that 17.3 per cent of beneficiaries (most of whom are women) expressed that the scheme allows them to work within the village and simultaneously creates an

opportunity to earn some extra income safely (De & Bhattacharyya, 2013). Additionally, the main reason cited by women to join MGNREGA was the option to earn extra income with less workload (Table 7). The responses to the query about saving from income were discouraging. A vast majority of the beneficiaries, i.e. 93.8 per cent in both villages, were unable to save money received from MGNREGA due to inadequate payment and

expenditures incurred in day-to-day life. Due to lack of savings, they were unable to repay debt. But in contrast, the findings of a study state that MGNREGA helps to reduce the debt burden of women workers (30 per cent) to some extent, but the amount earned is insufficient to repay debt (Borah & Bordoloi R., 2014). This needs to be researched more systematically.

Table 7

Responses Regarding Utilisation of Money and Saving Earned under MGNREGA

Response Category	Bakliya n=28	Dujar n=68	Total n=97
Main areas of expenditure*			
Daily needs	25 (86.2)	62(91.2)	87(89.7)
Medicine	9(31.0)	10(14.7)	19(19.6)
Creation of Assets	26(89.7)	25(36.8)	51(52.6)
Education of children	11(37.9)	23(33.8)	34(35.1)
Others	10(34.5)	45(66.2)	55(56.7)
Saving			
Yes	4(13.7)	3(4.4)	5(5.2)
No Saving	25(86.2)	65(95.6)	91(93.8)
Total	29 (100)	68(100)	97(100)

Source: Primary data collected by the authors.

*Due to Multiple Responses, the distribution will not be 100 per cent when added.

Further, to understand the migration status, the opinions of the community members were analysed, which shows that women migration decreased during MGNREGA works. Women had stopped going to nearby urban areas in search of jobs, and it had decreased their physical exploitation too. Women working as domestic helpers in cities suffer from poor health conditions due to long hours of work and tension. In MGNREGA, they could work within a distance of five kilometres from their village. In case the distance is more than five km, they were earning extra money at the rate of 10 per cent of the wage per day. About the utility of this programme, the women beneficiaries mentioned that they need not have to beg for money always from husband now, as it was earlier. Four women opined that they had

earned Rs.5000- 7000 while working in MGNREGA during the year 2012, which they used to buy ornaments. These responses received from FGDs were similar to the replies received in a recent study conducted in Assam with 400 MGNREGS workers (target groups) and 400 non-workers (control group) spread over 40 Gram Panchayats in five districts. A significant 81 per cent of the MGNREGS workers admitted that MGNREGS had improved their standard of living. Regarding food security, 88 per cent opined that MGNREGS had ensured them food security to some extent. Seventy-three per cent of the members confirmed that their children attended schools, whereas 60 per cent from the control group had their children attending schools (Panda, 2015).

During FGDs in Dujar village, women beneficiaries said that they were making market visits twice a week for purchasing vegetables, stationery items and clothes apart from trips to Ladnun city. It was easy for them to visit the city by paying Rs. 10 as conveyance charge due to the continuous availability of transport services. It was mentioned that women were getting Rs. 60 to 90 per day due to the non-completion of the specified quantum of work at the worksite. Further, money was used for purchasing assets and clothes, which means that MGNREGA has a significant impact on converting unpaid work into paid work and widening the scope of the decision-making role of women in household matters. They also mentioned that earlier they were unaware of Panchayat meetings or other schemes. But now, they visit the Gram Panchayat for clarification of doubts and also attend the monthly meeting in the Gram Panchayat office often.

During the interview with block-level officials, it was found that the programme has contributed to reducing migration only during the period of MGNREGA works. This programme also brought a feeling of cooperation and coordination among villagers. One of the field reports from Manipur shows that there has been some improvement in consumption of the poor, reduction of distress migration and participation of women (Singh & Singh K. T., 2013).

A discussion was also held with the lower divisional clerk (LDC) of MGNREGA at the Panchayat Office in Dujar. She said that MGNREGA remains suspended from 'July to October' every year because women are busy working on agricultural land. They are not interested in working during November due to fear of rainfall. During this period, the villagers depended exclusively on their cultivation. Persons who had completed 100 days of work were entitled to get an extra amount of Rs. 2100 as an incentive from the government for their continuous involvement without break. Job cards were issued to beneficiaries for a duration of five years. The official also share that Dujar was famous for growing vegetables, and it was supplied to dwellers

of Ladnun city. Some women are working in the agricultural fields of others along with as growing vegetables for their consumption. Therefore, villagers prefer to work in their fields to derive double benefits rather than working in MGNREGA. She also highlighted a few problems encountered in the smooth implementation of this programme. Elderly women and married women with infants demanded work but they never delivered the expected performance. Women could do work up to a lesser extent; however, they lodged complaints to get full wages. Also, creche facilities were not available at the worksite.

The income of BPL households had increased due to benefits received from MGNREGS. Sometimes, they bought food from the market. In contrast, the study (Bhatia & Weekly, 2006) on Employment Guarantee in Jharkhand: Ground Realities reported by Jaga Devi of Kusumatand village of Palamu district says the scheme could not make any change in living conditions. Those who used to survive on 'saag' and roots in the past are eating the same nowadays too.

Case Study

Suman, a 45-year-old illiterate widow belonging to the Muslim community of Bakliya village of Ladnu block was residing with her nuclear family i.e., with her two sons, aged 25 and 18 years. She was living in her semi-pucca house, which was lacking basic amenities. For meeting the daily need of Rs.25, she worked in the lands of other villagers and did not wish to go out for the fear of her safety and reasonable transportation charge. The elder son was married and working as a labourer while the younger one, who had a 70 per cent locomotor disability, was continuing his education. A few years back, her elder son who migrated to Jaipur City in search of better wages, returned to the village to extend his financial support to the family.

In the year 2010, a person from the village, who holds a good relationship with Sarpanch and Gram Sevak, helped her to get registered in the

BPL list two years ago from this current study. Before registering her name for the scheme, she was unaware of the detailed provision of MGNREGA and hesitated to share her problems with her male counterparts during the village meeting. Earlier, she had to buy wheat from the market at a cost of Rs.18 per kilogram. Sometimes, to manage emergencies, she had to borrow money from the villagers. Her youngest son has been getting Rs. 500 per month under the disability pension scheme for the last two years, which they specifically used for his education purposes. The rest of the household chores and requirements were managed through the widow pension scheme.

Her life saw changes after getting registered in the BPL list and getting work under the 100 days employment scheme. Under the scheme, the first-year income was Rs. 10000; due to her poor health, it fell to Rs. 4000 in the second year. She used her savings to create assets, buy clothes, etc. Now, her younger son's thinking has changed and he is determined to improve the situation at home through higher studies. MGNREGA is a source of income and ensures a safe environment along with other benefits. Due to the BPL card, now she is getting free health check-ups and special care in the government hospital. She suggested launching financial vocational training courses for girls and women to help them generate income. She wanted MGNREGA to be made a regular wages-based work. This case highlights the positivity established among the family members, especially women, due to their involvement in the MGNREGA scheme.

Discussion, Conclusion and Policy Implication

MGNREGA has a positive impact on the employment pattern of women, and it was also evident from the findings; however, earlier studies show the presence of variation (Bishnoi et al., 2012). Women are getting benefitted exclusively, and they have started enjoying a better status in families owing to their monetary contribution (Gupta et al., 2013; Roy et al., 2014). At the community level, their status has also been admired. Now, women have started discussing government

schemes and programmes for availing the benefits. Women's understanding of the importance of education has resulted in their children getting better facilities in this connection. They are not hesitant to go outside for availing health services or shopping. MGNREGA is providing an opportunity to women for empowering them at the individual level, family, group and community levels. Though they are satisfied with the way in which this scheme is functioning, lack of proper facilities at the worksite has demotivated them to completion of 100 days of work and this issue needs to be addressed (Bhattacharjee, 2017; Himanshu et al., 2015; Pankaj & Tankha R, 2010). To encourage women's participation, wages need to be increased and it must be made uniform across the country (Banik N. et al., 2021; Modi & Baruah, 2021). Restrooms or childcare facilities may be provided for nursing mothers and those having small children. Works on agricultural land may be included under MGNREGA for the development of production, especially in Ladnu block.

Secondly, awareness creation regarding MGNREGA provisions among village dwellers is essential. Gram Panchayat should actively organise meetings at regular intervals and share the details of the schemes with the beneficiaries by maintaining transparency (Choudhary, 2020). But, the government is confronting huge challenges, such as lack of skilled manpower, transparency in the system and convergence (Narayana S, 2016). Women need to be motivated to participate freely in meetings; however, it is a big concern in the male-dominated Indian society. Social audit, which is mandated in Act, needs to be done effectively for the proper functioning of MGNREGA. Notice boards displaying accurate information in the local language should be placed on the wall of the Gram Panchayat Office, besides using loudspeakers for updating information about schemes and programmes. Strict monitoring is necessary for the smooth functioning of the programme, and it could bring positive results with respect to the engagement of beneficiaries and development work (Badodiya et al., 2011). This will ensure the livelihood security of poor families and women

empowerment as evidenced in this study.

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Author's Contribution:

Hemanta Kumar Mishra: Conceptualisation, developing the paper and methodology, conducting analysis, and revising the manuscript.

Bijayalaxmi Panda: Data collection, providing input to the paper while developing at initial stage.

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