

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

India ranks 131 amongst 188 countries on the Human Development Index as per the UNDP Human Development Report(2016). We as a country are lagging behind in terms of our indicators pertaining to health, education, gender, etc. The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) which has evolved as one of the largest wage employment programmes in the world has the potential for improving the human development indicators considering that it has high participation of women (about 55 percent) which translates into a fund flow of about Rs 20000 crores per year to them as wages.

We therefore try to understand to what extent women participation under MGNREGS has been able to impact upon indicators of health, education, women empowerment.etc. For this purpose we have calculated the correlation coefficient and used simple linear regression analysis between the women participation under MGNREGS and the human development indicators. For this exercise, the Statewise data is drawn from the MGNREGA website and National Family Health Survey (NHFS) 2015-16.

We find that the performance of States in terms of women participation is not uniform. The top ranking States in terms of women participation are Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Goa, Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh and Punjab (over 55 per cent). The middle ranking States (40 to 55 per cent women participation) consist of Uttarakhand, Chhattisgarh, Tripura, Sikkim, Karnataka, West Bengal, Gujarat, Haryana, Maharashtra, Meghalaya, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Manipur. The States exhibiting high growth over the past decade in terms of women participation are Kerala, Himachal Pradesh , Punjab, Sikkim, Bihar, Uttarakhand, West Bengal, Haryana and Meghalaya. The States of Jharkhand.

Karnataka, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Tripura and Manipur are exhibiting negative growth of women participation even though they are all above the threshold of 33 per cent.

We find that while the women participation has enhanced incomes, its effect on human development indicators has been mixed. We find high correlation with financial inclusion and moderate correlation with use of clean cooking fuel, literacy levels, infant mortality rate, child mortality rate, vaccination of children and menstrual hygiene. However we find women participation under the scheme has not been able to make a significant impact on access to clean drinking water, sanitation facilities, child sex ratio, health of women and children, status of women in terms of age of marriage of women, house/land ownership, decision making and domestic violence.

Thus while women participation under MGNREGS has the potential to take us on a trajectory of human development, we have not been able to harness this latent power. For this purpose we have to strengthen the scheme and step up its convergence with schemes/initiatives being taken in the human development sectors. In addition there are several socioeconomic barriers that women face which also need to be addressed.