Case Study Overview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case Study Title</th>
<th>Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Implemented by</td>
<td>Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD) &amp; UN Women</td>
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<td>Funded by</td>
<td>Government of India, with project funding from UN Women</td>
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<td>Location</td>
<td>India</td>
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| Focus Areas                      | 1. Legal barriers  
                                       2. Women workers in the informal economy |
| Budget                           | N/A | Start Date | 2005 | End date | Ongoing |
| Abstract                          | The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), a flagship programme of the Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD), Government of India, was introduced in the year 2005 to provide legal guarantee for livelihood security through waged employment. The Act provides a strong opportunity for women in informal employment in rural areas to access their right to work. It is a powerful instrument for ensuring inclusive growth in rural India through its impact on social protection through wage employment, livelihood security through asset creation and democratic governance through strengthening of local bodies. MGNREGA legally enshrines the right to work for 100 days in a demand driven mechanism.

In the ten years of its implementation, MGNREGA is estimated to have generated 19.8 billion days of work, with nearly 65 percent of all works contributing to the development of agriculture and allied sectors, and disbursed over USD 33 billion as wage payment. MGNREGA’s positive impacts on curbing rural poverty and creating public infrastructure has led to its expansion from 200 districts in 2006 to a total of 661 out of 688 districts in 2016 with a registered workforce of over 0.27 billion persons, making it one of the largest public works programmes in the world.

MGNREGA has been particularly significant in providing waged employment opportunities to rural women. The Act mandates a minimum of 33 percent participation of women workers in the total employment generated. As per the national average, women’s proportion to the total number of individuals who received work under the Act was 55.4 per cent in 2016. This is a significant increase

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from about 41 per cent in 2006-07 when the programme began. Till date, 3.3 million women workers have got jobs under this programme\(^4\). However, there remain states where their participation is below even the legally mandated 33 per cent. Uttar Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, Punjab and Haryana are among the poorest performing states under MGNREGA.

**UN Women’s initiatives under MGNREGA programme**

Learnings from UN Women’s on-ground experience through a UN Women Fund for Gender Equality (FGE) project, in partnership with Gender at Work, which demonstrated a 30% increase in Dalit women’s participation in MGNREGA, showed that a threefold strategy of organising, awareness generation and ensuring institutional accountability leads to greater participation and empowerment of women. It clearly demonstrated that where facilitated women have actively accessed and participated meaningfully in MGNREGA, while being empowered socially, economically and politically (Ojha 2012).

### Problems Being Addressed

Within a macroeconomic paradigm that privileges capital-intensive economic growth and fuels inequalities, MGNREGA was introduced by the Government of India, with its long tradition of policies for social and economic justice, to address livelihoods needs of the poorest rural workers. Hence, the first barrier to be overcome is the prioritisation of such a programme within national budgets.

Moreover, while it was realised early on the transformative potential that such a programme can have on livelihoods for the most marginalised workers, such as women, particularly those belonging to Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe communities, this does not easily happen in the absence of information, awareness and agency.

Studies have shown that large numbers of women are in the work force, particularly in the unorganized sector in rural India. And yet their participation is not recognised and rights are compromised. Despite the legal guarantees for employment, women’s participation continues to remain low due to various gender related structural and ideological barriers that prevent women from entering the workforce on equal terms.

Furthermore, these gender stereotypes impact the nature of women’s work within MGNREGA. The participation of women under MGNREGA has been limited to manual work, typically carrying mud and digging. The semi-skilled and skilled jobs within MGNREGA, such as Rozgar Sewaks (Employment Secretary), Technical Assistant, Mate (Worksite Supervisor) and Computer Operators remain out of reach for women\(^5\). Given their already low social and economic status, marginalised Dalit women find themselves once again, at the peripheries of the MGNREGA hierarchy. MGNREGA’s own lack of focus towards women and their participation add to the challenge of ensuring their rights and entitlements.

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\(^5\) A cadre of workers is employed on a daily-wage/contractual basis to assist in the technical aspects of implementation of the program on the ground. Their function is to provide secretarial and/or technical support either at the Panchayat or at the Block/District level.
It was observed that while the MGNREGA programme laid emphasis on ensuring employment to each rural house-hold, marginalised Dalit women and single women were not prioritised, often because they were subsumed within the household, and not recognised as individual economic agents.

Therefore, supporting effective and gender-responsive implementation and monitoring of this programme, with a focus on Gender Action Plans that are specially designed to include the most marginalised, has been the focus of UN Women’s partnership with the Ministry of Rural Development.

Approach and Implementation

UN Women under its threefold strategy, adopted the approach of (a) Institutional Strengthening; (b) Awareness Building regarding rights and entitlements; and (c) Sustainable Gender Responsive Livelihoods.

- **Institutional Strengthening**: UN women’s programme on engendering MGNREGA undertook expansive training workshops of state, district and block administration on understanding and addressing gender gaps in the implementation of MGNREGA. This also entailed in the initial stages, building ownership and commitment at the highest levels of the national and state governments, and was operationalised through revising and issuing guidelines and Government Orders to ensure inclusion of the most marginalised.
  - A strategic approach adopted by UN Women is to bridge the grassroots and policy domains, by bringing together the relevant experts that work on gender and development, to contribute formally to the government’s planning and monitoring mechanism. UN Women therefore provides the relevant technical assistance and advisory support through the experts, while the government itself implements the programme.

- **Awareness Building**: Focusing on single women and the most marginalised women workers such as scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and women belonging to religious minorities, communications materials were created to spread awareness among women workers on their rights and entitlements. Under this initiative, women were also made aware of the benefits of MGNREGA programme, and possibilities of elevating themselves from ‘unskilled’ manual labourers to skilled or semi-skilled work like Mates. A specially designed curriculum for women mates was transacted, and skills imparted. The initiative also covered the importance and their right to select and participate in the planning of the work they want implemented in their locality. A one of a kind district help-desk was established in select districts, for helping women to access information, to interface with government functionaries for their rights, and to network with other women’s groups for sharing and learning.

- **Sustainable Gender Responsive Livelihoods**: For sustained support to rural women under MGNREGA, the programme undertook advocacy initiatives, demanding for villages to have 100 per cent coverage of women workers in job card distribution, implementation of gender responsive shelf of work, availability of worksite entitlements including crèche, drinking water and shade. Establishment of all women worksites was also strongly emphasised on, to implement gender responsive shelf of work and ensure all worksite entitlements specified under the Act. Policy briefs and policy guidance was prepared in this regard. Additionally, the Block Development Officers and Assistant Programme Officers were encouraged to ensure inclusion of women workers in MGNREGA, especially in works that targeted convergence with other...
livelihoods programmes, such as for tree plantation, pond construction and housing construction under the Indira Awaas Yojana⁶.

### Results

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<tr>
<th>Year(s)</th>
<th>Results</th>
<th>UN Women budgets (to supplement government funds)</th>
<th>Potential for upscaling</th>
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<td>2016</td>
<td>As a result of UN Women’s advocacy with and for Dalit women under the MGNREGA action research, the Uttar Pradesh state government issued a government order for MGNREGA employment to include liberated women manual scavengers who have condemned and given up this caste-based practice.</td>
<td>US$94,500</td>
<td>Work will be intensified now at the sub-national level, based on recommendations and requests of the Ministry.</td>
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<td>2013-15</td>
<td>Gender Action Plans were adopted in the three key states of Jammu and Kashmir, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA). This advance was influenced by UN Women’s action research and advocacy to increase women’s participation in rural wage employment. The Plans focus on innovative strategies to increase marginalized women’s participation through women-only worksites, quotas for women in supervisory roles, campaigns to issue MGNREGA Job Cards to single women and special measures to ensure wage parity with men and have secured greater allocations from the central government for the year 2016-17 for this. A formidable six-fold increase in women’s labour force participation in MGNREGA has already been seen in the first six months of the action research, in one of the pilot districts in Uttar Pradesh.</td>
<td>US$105,000</td>
<td>There has been a formal request to expand this programme to 4 new states; which UN Women will be supporting in 2016-17.</td>
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<td>2010-12</td>
<td>Successful demonstration for Dalit women’s participation and leadership in MGNREGA in two states, accompanied by documentation and policy advocacy at local, state and national levels, led to</td>
<td>US$517,400</td>
<td>Learnings already mainstreamed into national policies and guidelines for</td>
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Indira Awaas Yojana (IAY) is a social welfare flagship programme of Ministry of Rural Development, created by the Indian Government, to provide housing for the rural poor in India.
mainstreaming of gender issues in MGNREGA. Based on recommendations made at a UN Women consultation, the Union Minister for Rural Development issued guidelines for all states in India to promote women’s economic empowerment through issuing Job Cards to single women, opening individual bank accounts, appointing 50 per cent women worksite supervisors, and involving women’s groups in MGNREGA implementation. UN Fund for Gender Equality project successfully demonstrated an increase in Dalit women’s participation in MGNREGA from 62 per cent to 97 per cent across 102 project villages in 2 states, for enhanced access to social protection, productive resources and skills. Innovative strategies like women’s collectives, all-women worksites and trained women supervisors impacted 30,000 women in terms of enhanced information, participation and leadership as well as financial inclusion (9000 women opened bank accounts). Over the project period about 150 women across all the project sites were trained as worksite supervisors (mates). The number of women that have worked as mates increased from 1.2 per cent to 21 per cent during the project period.

Links for Further Information

• Making the NREGA more Gender Responsive: Reflections from the Field (Co-authored by Rebecca R. Tavares, Representative, UN Women India MCO and Subhalakshmi Nandi, Programme Specialist, Women’s Economic Empowerment, UN Women India MCO) - [http://www.ipc-undp.org/pub/IPCPovertyInFocus27.pdf](http://www.ipc-undp.org/pub/IPCPovertyInFocus27.pdf)

• Photographs - [https://www.flickr.com/photos/unwomenasiapacific/sets/72157632150073243/](https://www.flickr.com/photos/unwomenasiapacific/sets/72157632150073243/)

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