

MGNREGA: wage work, unpaid work, and care

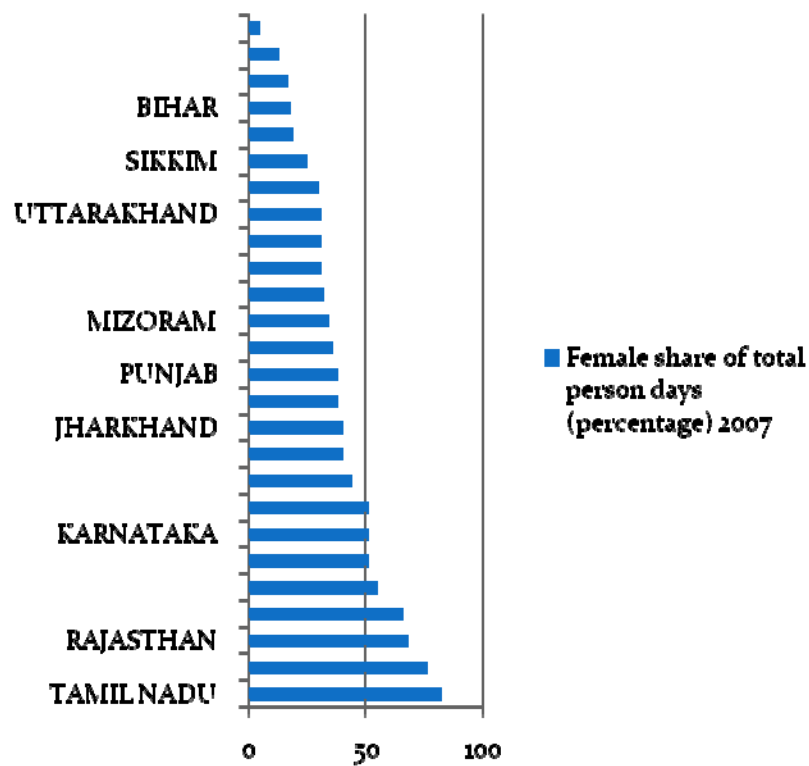
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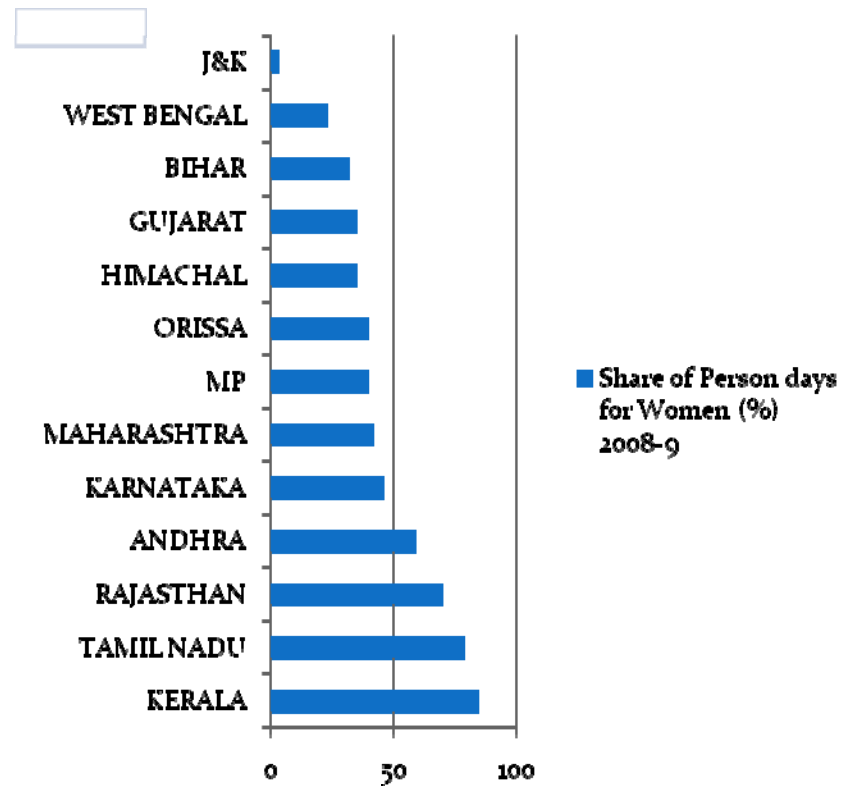
Participation

- The programme guidelines require 1/3 rd of work created to go to women
- Data shows wide variations around this proportion between states (also within states)
- Objective of this study was to examine through fieldwork in selected parts of Kerala, Himachal Pradesh and Rajasthan reasons behind and implications of the observed variations

Share of person days to women (%) 2007



Share of Person days to Women (%) 2008-9



Level of women's participation

- Programme designed for 'able bodied, willing to do manual labour'
- Labour market factors: Market wages for men and women in relation to minimum wages offered on NREGA sites; Non availability of other work within or near village
- Intra-household factors: No of earners in the household; Age and care responsibilities; unpaid work, other household responsibilities

- Context/ underlying factors
- Himachal: hill state: Scattered population, low density of population;
- Most households own some land, fetching water/ fodder/ fuel women's responsibility, no tradition/ time for wage work
- NREGA attractive mainly to hardest to reach migrant women

- Rajasthan: drought prone state; tradition of ‘famine works’ and women’s participation on these works
- Kerala and Rajasthan: much higher percentage of women in total NREGA work force than in overall work force

- Panchayat entrusted with overseeing implementation, choice of works
- Kudumbashree in Kerala – State poverty eradication mission, women’s self help group structure: embedded in panchayat structure pre existing management skills.
- Abu Road, Rajasthan – NGO and youth groups actively contest any observed irregularities
- Himachal –women’s groups not involved directly even where present

Some observations

- Little impact on male work choice/ short distance migration
- Reported shortage in female labour on farms
- Some evidence of upward pressure on women's market wages
- Impact on gender wage inequality not yet known - will depend on trends in market wages for both men and women
- Some savings reported; personal consumption expenditure by women

In conclusion

- Design assumes large numbers of able bodied manual work seekers – true of Rajasthan, Kerala, but not Himachal
- Potentially: women's participation on a regular basis may change attitudes towards wage work outside the home
- As of now: no evidence of changing gender norms – eg sibling care in Rajasthan, absence of young women on Kerala worksites

Policy recommendations

- ‘tweaking’ – creche +carer; for the old, pregnant women, designate lighter/ other work
- Cash transfers where low participation and very scattered, low density population?
- Engaging women’s groups where they already exist – choice of works, priorities
- Linking child care to women’s work programme design more fundamentally