

Examining the NREGA: Women's Participation and Impacts



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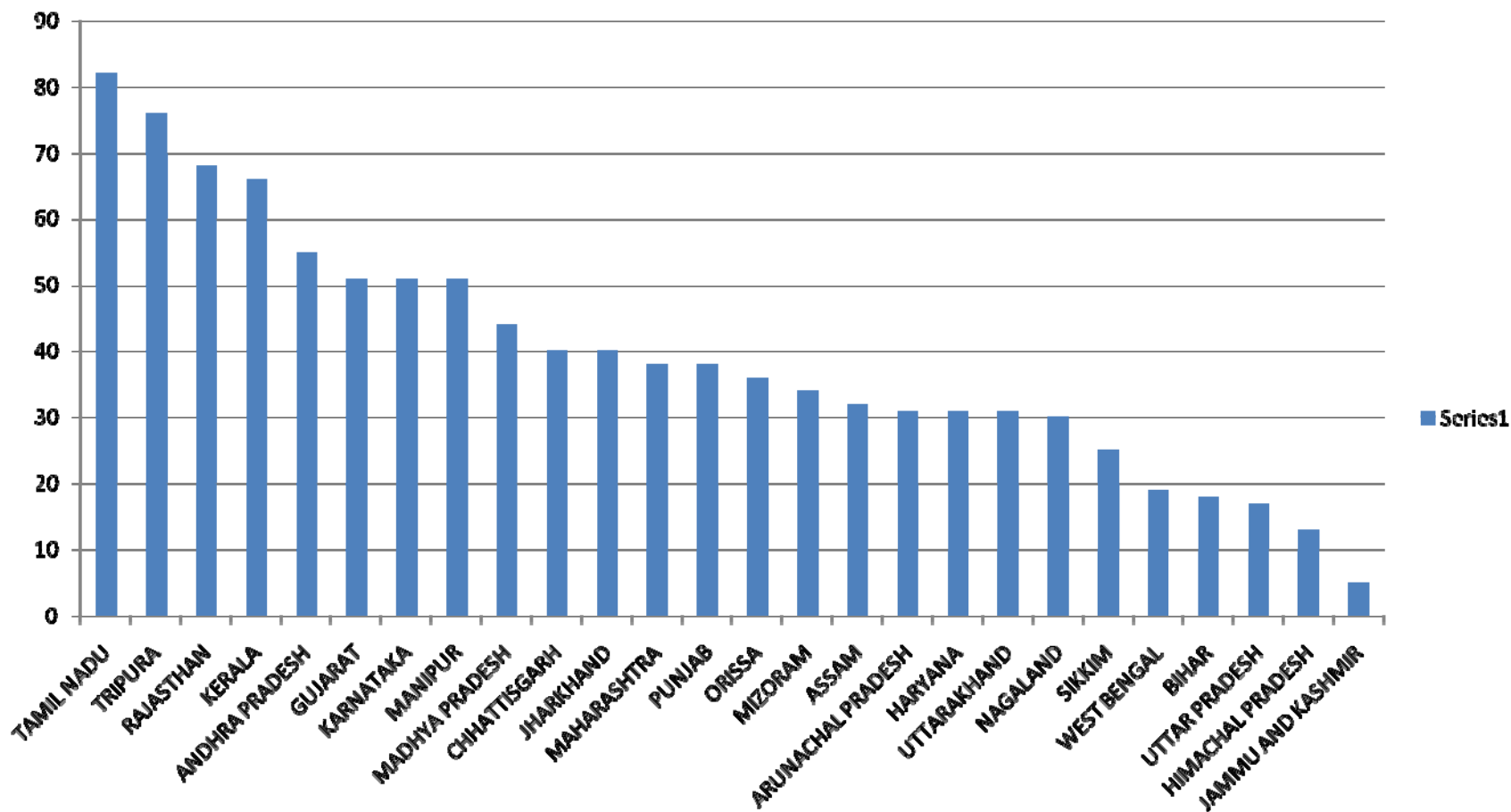
Objectives

- NREGA data shows varying levels of women's participation across states
- Objective to understand
'given the context, the underlying opportunities and constraints, what initiatives could improve women's levels of participation and/ or the impact of such participation on their well being'

Choosing a sample

- Study the outliers – states with very high and very low participation by women
- Kerala, Himachal
- State with high poverty levels and high participation - Rajasthan
- To identify: what works? ‘good practice’ in terms of desirable wider impacts

Level of women's participation (as on November 2007)



Methodology of data collection

- Choice of state and district based on secondary data
- choice of villages based on advice of local officials and other privileged observers
- Methods include field visits to work sites and interviews with 'mates'; interviews with all stakeholders (including officials, villagers, women who participate in NREGA and women who have not participated, local NGOs) – to permit triangulation
- Review of district records
- Review of any available reports, articles or studies on the areas being studied

Work completed up to June 2009

- Kerala: meeting with NREGA programme Co-ordinators in Palakkad
- Fieldwork in Malampuzha and Attapady blocks of Palakkad district
- Himachal: meeting with District Commissioner, and other officials at Nahan, Sirmour
- Fieldwork commenced

Key Findings: Kerala

- High participation by women
- Wages earned on NREGA worksites at minimum wage of Rs 125 well above market rate for women (70-80): increase in no of women willing to work + preference for NREGA work over agriculture
- Not attractive for men for whom market wage is over Rs 200; very limited male participation

Key Findings: Kerala

- Management of worksites entrusted to Kudumbashree (state poverty eradication mission)
- Area Development Supervisor (women) maintain muster rolls, etc. Typically educated, between 32-45 years, attends a minimum of 10 meetings a month.
- State decision to ensure payment of minimum wage – measurement of ‘work completed’ reportedly lenient (contrast with Rajasthan for example, similar to Himachal)

Key Findings: Kerala

- Payment into bank accounts – takes time, hence daily household needs now being met by men's earnings; savings in bank; targeted spending;
- Two reactions to shortage of labour for agriculture: creation of NREGS calendar by panchayat; or forcing upward revision of wages/ also some reduction in cultivated area

Key Findings: Kerala

- Who does not participate
 - Young women with young children (< 30 years)
 - Tribal areas – Attapady – difficult to mobilise into groups, distance to site greater, activities not always suitable to area; formation of Kudumbashree adivasi only groups in progress

Initial findings: Himachal

- High proportion of 'local' population own some land/ low demand for manual work
- 'Migrant but settled' population seeks manual work but market wages for both men and women > minimum wage of Rs 100
- Demand for NREGA from groups with weak position (age, geographic location, caste/ social group, lack of household support etc)

Initial findings: Himachal

- Puzzle: other districts in Himachal started with very low participation of women but has gone up in last 3 years; continues to be very low in Sirmour

Some general observations

- General awareness not enough: women mobilised through Kudumbashree in Kerala; state government/ panchayat leadership in Himachal
- Wider impacts on market wages, supply of women's labour, savings, intra household allocation of responsibilities, can be observed in varying degrees

Some general observations

- Choice of works reflects standard choices (roads and connectivity; water bodies and irrigation)
- Clear evidence of ‘strong developmental state’ in both Kerala and Himachal – Himachal did not implement ‘task based measurement’ till April 2009, no system of ‘mates’ (panchayat secretary maintained muster roll)

Rajasthan

- Previous fieldwork by ISST shows high women's participation in Rajasthan, but very varying earnings; task based measurement; system of 'mates'; strong role of civil society groups/ NGOs in advocating for better implementation and higher awareness; more evidence of conflict around worksites

Future workplan

- Complete fieldwork in Himachal and Rajasthan (by end September)
- Draft report (end October)
- Policy workshop (Sept/ October – dates TBA)

Policy dissemination

- Key messages regarding what influences women's participation and what are deficits in resulting well being outcomes to be shared locally with NREGA programme officers (informal meetings)
- Summary of state level findings to be presented at seminars as possible (eg. CDS in Trivandrum)
- Policy workshop
- Policy brief
- Report/ website + papers/ publications as possible