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NREGA and Child Well-being

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The views expressed in this paper are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the policies or views of UNICEF and the Institute for Human Development.

Foreword

Children below the age of 18 years account for nearly 40 per cent of India's population. It goes without saying that enabling all children to realize their full creative potential is critical for sustaining India's economic growth and accelerating human development. Not all children have benefited equitably from the remarkable progress and transformation that the country has witnessed in recent years. Tens of millions still face basic challenges of survival and healthy development.

Children are first and foremost individuals, born with indivisible and inalienable human rights. They also belong to families and communities that need to have access to resources and services, as well as capacities to ensure realization of their rights. Policy approaches are needed that address both the income and non-income dimensions of children's deprivations. Continued neglect of material, human and psycho-social dimensions of child well-being can prevent children from living a full life and from making informed decisions later on in their life. India too would miss out on the dividends that can accrue from a full expansion of children's capabilities.

The Institute for Human Development (IHD) and UNICEF are partnering to offer a platform for examining different dimensions of child rights. Experts and commentators were invited to explore the impact of development policies on children and women and suggest alternative approaches to the elimination of children's deprivations. They have explored how best to ensure that all children benefit from equal and non-discriminatory access to basic social services. They have looked at ways of capitalizing on the demographic dividend, creating fiscal policy space for investing in children and strengthening the legislative and institutional framework for protecting children.

These contributions are being brought out as IHD - UNICEF Working Paper Series *Children of India: Rights and Opportunities*. We hope that the series will contribute to enriching public discourse and strengthening public action to promote the rights of children.

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NREGA and Child Well-being

S. Mahendra Dev

Summary

There have been many evaluation studies on the impact of NREGS but there are hardly any systematic studies relating to impact of the scheme on children. This paper tries to fill this gap. There is a huge literature on awareness, implementation problems, impact on the livelihoods, women, migration, agricultural wages, marginalised sections, etc. This paper makes use of some of the in-depth studies on various states of India. We have also undertaken limited focus group discussions in Rajasthan on the implementation and impact of the scheme on women and children. Specifically, the paper addresses the following issues: (a) the pathways in which NREGS affect households, particularly those leading to better outcomes for children; (b) impact on children in terms of changes in child labour patterns - by reducing child labour as a coping strategy of poor households or by - inadvertently - encouraging child labour; (c) changes in expenditure patterns of families based on additional income earned, leading towards greater expenditures on girl and boy children, especially on education, health and nutrition; (d) impact on women's well-being, empowerment and intra-household decisions; and (e) availability of child care facilities at worksites, and coverage of 0-6 age group by these crèche

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facilities. The paper presents the evidence based on empirical studies in the literature relating to the impact of NREGS on households, empowerment and well being of women, child labour, health, education, nutrition of children and child care facilities at work sites.

The evidence on NREGS impact on child well-being is mixed. The positive impacts on household incomes, empowerment and well being of women have helped in improving nutrition, health and education of children and reduction in child labour. The income from NREGS made very significant contribution to children's well-being, such as reduction in hunger, improvement in health and education. For example, in a survey in six North Indian states (Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh), around 69 per cent of the sample workers reported that it helped them avoid hunger, while 47 per cent said it helped them cope with illness. Around 38 per cent of the workers mentioned that it contributed towards the education of their children.

Around two-thirds of child labour is involved in agriculture. Related to this issue, especially with regard to girls, is the gender aspect of recognising women as producers and farmers and its links to household food security. Strengthening extension training curriculum on gender and child protection issues in agriculture can help in reducing child labour.

NREGS is the most important rights based social protection programme in India. There are significant regional variations in the working of NREGS. It is working much better in Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh and Himachal Pradesh. On the other hand, it is not working well in states like Bihar, Jharkhand and Uttar Pradesh. The programme has demonstrated varying degrees of success across the country. The achievements are still short of potential. This potential can be harnessed in order to improve the right to employment which in turn can enhance the rights of the children.

NREGS and Child Well-being

1. Introduction

India has been experiencing a consistently high growth rate in the last two decades. It has done well in indicators like economic growth, exports, balance of payments, resilience to external shocks, service sector growth, significant accumulation of foreign exchange, Information technology (IT) and stock market, improvements in telecommunications, etc. and is now considered as a major emerging economic power. The result has been a reduction in income poverty levels and improvements in several indicators of human development including food security, literacy, health and access to basic amenities. In spite of these positive developments, India still has some of the lowest indicators of human development in the world. Exclusion occurs among regions, social and marginal groups, women and children. The Constitution's commitment to equality, coupled with increasing emphasis on equality of women, has had only a limited impact in reducing disparity and discrimination against them. Health, nutrition and quality education have failed to reach all children.

The 11th Five Year Plan has advocated inclusive policies for reducing poverty and achieving equity. In this context, social protection programmes can play an important role in improving inclusive development.

By now it is recognised that presence of social protection can maintain social cohesion and improve or prevent irreversible losses of human capital. Social protection programmes thus also contribute to promotion of human development. Improvements in welfare of the poor and equity have been two important justifications for public interventions in social protection programmes. But recent research has shown that risk and vulnerability should also evoke public interventions since the poor do not have formal instruments for risk-mitigation and coping. Social protection measures ranging from labour market interventions,

unemployment or old-age insurance, targeted income-support programmes to child-specific schemes can be used to improve or protect human capital. These are necessary to reduce chronic poverty and to safeguard the poor from increasing risks or shocks. Such programmes are also particularly important for the well-being of women and children.

Child well-being has always occupied an important place in India's development process, with many social protection programmes (both universal and targeted) which protect people from 'cradle to grave'. Some of the child-sensitive social protection programmes implemented include the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), mid-day meals scheme, etc. Public works programmes like the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS), which are also an important component of social protection policies, can also have significant impact on the well-being of children.

In India, provision of employment has been extensively used as a tool of entitlement protection for many centuries. From the 4th Century BC when ancient Indian political economist Kautilya wrote his *Arthashastra*, there has been an emphasis on public relief works, especially during famines. After Independence in 1947, many schemes were sponsored by the central government, beginning with the Rural Manpower Programme in 1960. However, the most important state-level programme was the Maharashtra Employment Guarantee Scheme (EGS), introduced in 1972. At the national level, Jawahar Rozgar Yojana (JRY) and Employment Assurance Scheme (EAS) are the important programmes in rural areas. The most important programme in the present context is the NREGS.

The National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme was notified in September, 2005 and its name was subsequently modified to Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Scheme. Its objective is to enhance livelihood security in rural areas by providing at least 100 days of guaranteed wage employment per financial year to every household. The primary objective of the scheme is employment creation, while the auxiliary objective is regenerating a natural resource-base and creating productive assets. The final 'process' objective is to strengthen grass-root democracy by infusing transparency and accountability in governance. This is the first time a rights-based approach for employment was introduced throughout India and it is also the largest ever public employment programme visualised in human history. Under the scheme, if the government does not provide work to those who have applied for it, they are bound to give an unemployment allowance. To ensure transparency and accountability Gram Sabhas have the power to conduct social audits of all works taken up within a Gram

Panchayat, which includes scrutiny and verification of all records, works procedures and expenditure.

In the first phase, the scheme was implemented in 200 districts of the country from February 2006. In April 2007, additional 130 districts were included under phase II, bringing the total districts under it to 330 districts. From April 2008, under phase III, NREGS has been extended to all 596 rural districts in the country. The government has allocated nearly Rs. 40,000 crore in 2010-11 under the scheme.

The NREGS has been subject to much scrutiny and assessment in terms of its effectiveness as a social protection intervention¹. These assessments have yielded mixed findings, in terms of the effectiveness of the programme design and objectives, its impact on the socially disadvantaged (especially children and women), and its implementation problems and unanticipated side effects.

The objective of this paper is to examine the impact of NREGS on the well-being of children, particularly with regard to reduction in child labour, improvements in health, education, nutrition etc. It is well known that women's well-being and empowerment are crucial for the well-being of children. Therefore, this study also examines the impact of the scheme on women. Any increase in the effective functioning of NREGS will result in a concomitant increase in the well-being of women and therefore children. The rights approach enshrined in NREGS also has a positive impact on protecting the rights of children, further ensuring their well-being. As mentioned below, the rights approach puts pressure on governments to deliver more effectively as compared to earlier public works programmes.

Many evaluation studies have been done on the impact of NREGS, but there are hardly any systematic studies relating to impact of the scheme on children. This paper tries to fill this gap. Examination of social protection initiatives and their impact on child labour are central to the ongoing child well-being and equity studies being developed by UNICEF's Social Policy Planning, Monitoring & Evaluation (SPPME) Programme in partnership with the Institute for Human Development (IHD), and this paper will contribute to the larger study being prepared on inclusive social protection.

1. See Dreze and Oldiges (2007), Dreze and Khera (2009), Khera (2008).

The paper is mostly based on secondary data, review of reports, studies already available in the literature, select discussions with researchers and with monitoring bodies in civil society. Large number of literature is available on awareness, implementation problems, impact on livelihoods, women, migration, agricultural wages, marginalised sections etc. This paper makes use of some of the in-depth studies on various Indian states.

We have also undertaken a limited focus group discussion (FGD) in Rajasthan on the implementation and impact of the scheme on women and children.

Specifically, the paper addresses the following issues:

- Pathways in which NREGS affects households and, in particular, those leading to better outcomes for children;
- The impact on children in terms of changes in child labour patterns – by reducing child labour as a coping strategy of poor households or by – inadvertently – encouraging child labour;
- Changes in expenditure patterns of families based on additional income earned, leading towards greater expenditures on girl and boy children, including education, health and nutrition;
- Impact on women’s well-being, empowerment and their role in intra-household decisions; and
- Availability of child-care facilities at work sites, and coverage of 0-6 age group by these crèche facilities, and through linkages with Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) and ICDS to ensure that children of workers receive adequate care.

The paper is organised as follows. Section 1 examines the pathways in which NREGS affects the well-being of children. Section 2 presents the evidence based on empirical studies relating to the impact of NREGS on child labour, health, education, nutrition of children and child-care facilities at work sites. And finally, Section 3 provides conclusions.

2. NREGS: Creating pathways for better outcomes for children

Social protection programmes such as NREGS create several pathways for better outcomes in nutrition, health and education of children. These pathways can be grouped under three heads: (1) indirect effects of reduction in risks and vulnerabilities and increase in livelihoods and incomes of households (2) women's well-being and say in intra-household decisions (3) direct effects of child-care facilities and linkages with SSA and ICDS.

2.1 Household risk and vulnerability reduction and rise in incomes

Social protection programmes like NREGS can reduce vulnerability to risks, increase incomes and reduce chronic poverty. Such programmes thus have a positive impact on child well-being.

Poor households are vulnerable to health 'shocks' like illness, injury, accidents, disability; labour market risk as many work in the informal sector and face a high risk of unemployment and underemployment; harvest risks; life-cycle risks; social risks; and special risks for vulnerable groups. In addition, they face risks as a community during droughts, floods, cyclones, and also when structural adjustment policies are put in place.

The occurrence of any, some, or all of these events can have a short- and/or long-term impact upon children. In the face of such crises, poor households first reduce expenditure on non-food items such as health and education. They sell their productive assets, their children drop out of schools, incidence of child labour increases, and the family goes into debt. For instance, in neighbouring Bangladesh an increase in food prices led around 43 per cent of households in rural areas to reduce their educational expenses and nine per cent of rural households even took their children out of school.

The households' loss of purchasing power also affects consumption of other goods and services essential for health and nutrition, water, sanitation, education, lighting, etc. Meanwhile if no positive intervention occurs, food consumption also declines which further impacts child nutrition and health: households spend more on cheaper, high-calorie staples and less

on foods rich in protein and vitamins, such as meat, fish, dairy products, and fruit and vegetables, reducing the quality of their diet. This significantly affects morbidity, mortality, cognitive abilities, and growth.

In such a situation, households follow coping mechanisms such as borrowing, sale of assets, spending from savings, assistance from relatives and government, family members working as labourers (child labour, bonded labour), reducing consumption, migration, etc. In India, borrowing seems to lead the list. However, excessive borrowing leads to disastrous consequences like farmer suicides. Migration affects children's education and health adversely. Thus all these crises, left to follow their natural course, have long-term impacts, reduce the ability of individuals and households to fight poverty, and have adverse consequences for children of these households. Persistence of such crises leads to irreversible damage to human capital among the poor.

NREGS is an intervention aimed at achieving economic inclusion through guaranteed wage employment at minimum wage levels, is self-targeting, and implicitly designed to reach the socially excluded, most vulnerable and economically weakest groups. Therefore, it is expected to reduce poverty and increase expenditure on children. It protects the poor by reducing vulnerability, prevents them from resorting to costly coping mechanisms, and adds to their income. A rise in income reduces poverty and increases expenditure on food and on non-food items such as health and education. In other words NREGS can buffer poor households against the adverse impact of such crisis and can improve (a) the nutrition status of pregnant and lactating women and of pre-school children; (b) health status of women and children; and (c) reduce the incidence of child labour and withdrawal of children from school; (d) cut down on distress sale of productive assets; and (e) halt distress migration and thereby save them from getting exploited in cities and other places. If employment is made available locally with same or higher wages, the incidence of migration can be brought down.

2.2 Women's empowerment, well-being and intra-household decisions

Studies have shown four dimensions of women's empowerment, viz., 'power from within', 'power to', 'power with' and 'power over' (Jones *et al.*, 2007). 'Power within' refers to psychological power, and empowerment is the process whereby someone develops a sense of self-confidence and self-respect that was previously lacking. It is critical in terms of

overcoming internalised oppressions. ‘Power to’ is the capacity to make decisions and take actions to change one’s circumstances. This is typically linked to notions of human capital development stemming from access to economic resources, information, education and other services. ‘Power with’ focuses on collective action, and the ability to solve problems and claim citizenship rights through co-operation and networks. ‘Power over’, however, can be viewed as both negative and positive. It can be negative in the sense that it entails forcing others to do something against their will, but such power may be necessary to overcome unequal power structures and bring about more fundamental social, political and economic transformation. Ideally, this four-fold framework should be seen as inter-connected and dynamic, and about both process and outcomes. Given the traditional responsibility of women for nurturing and care, it is often assumed that advances in women’s status will have a positive spill-over on child well-being through access to greater power and resources in the private and public spaces (ibid.).

A recent concise and comprehensive review on the linkages between women’s empowerment and child well-being clearly brought out four mechanisms for transmitting the effects of women’s empowerment to child well-being.² They include maternal education, economic empowerment, intra-household decision-making power (‘power to’ dimension) and community-level empowerment (power with and power over dimensions) (ibid.). Maternal education, a critical dimension of women’s empowerment – is positively associated with better education, health and nutrition outcomes for children. Women’s economic empowerment, i.e. greater access for women to financial resources, not only improves the status of women within the household but also leads to more investment in their children. As a result of greater economic resources, psychological confidence and/or knowledge, women’s empowerment may translate into better outcomes for children because mothers are more likely to advocate the interest of their children in intra-household bargaining and to be taken seriously by their male partners. Greater individual and household-level empowerment may spill over to empowerment of women at the community-level and provide them a more active role in demanding or even providing better child-related services (ibid.).

According to NREGA guidelines, at least one-third of the beneficiaries shall be women who have registered and requested for work under the scheme. Also, women are supposed to

2. Also see Rustagi (2003) on women’s empowerment.

obtain equal wages as men for the same job. These features can lead to women's empowerment which in turn improves child well-being. NREGS can impact women through three inter-related processes and outcomes: (a) income-consumption effects; (b) intra-household effects (decision-making role) and; (c) enhancement of choice and capability (Pankaj and Tankha, 2010). The latter impact can be explained at the larger community-level and through: "(1) process participation; (2) wage equality and its long-term impacts on rural labour market conditions; and (3) changes in gender relations, if any, because of the above and other factors" (ibid.).

The relationship between nutrition and women's well-being explains the role of women in enhancing child development. Women's agency (health, education and empowerment) and intra-household issues are important determinants of under-nutrition in South Asia in general and India in particular. Two of the three differences between South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa relate to women: (a) low birth-weight is the single largest predictor of under-nutrition; (b) women in South Asia tend to have lower status and less decision-making power than women in Sub-Saharan Africa. This limits women's ability to access resources needed for their own and their children's health and nutrition, and is associated with lower birth-weight as well as poor child-feeding behaviours in the first 12 months of life.

One important dimension of accessibility of food is intra-household disparity in consumption. It is widely believed that in India, food distribution in the household is not based on 'need'. The breadwinner gets sufficient food, the children get the next share, and women take the remnant. In times of scarcity, the dietary intake of women and children is likely to be most adversely affected. We do not find widespread discrimination for girls in distribution of food. National Family Health Survey (NFHS) data shows slightly higher malnutrition among girls as compared to boys. Generally there is not much difference. Amartya Sen and Sunil Sengupta studied the question of undernourishment in a few villages in West Bengal. Based on weight-for-age indicator they found a bias, favouring boys over girls. Amartya Sen (2001) has, however, cautioned about the interpretation of this causal process. The lower level of nourishment of girls may not relate directly to their food intake vis-à-vis boys. The differences may arise in particular from neglecting the health-care of girls as compared to boys.

Adequate nutrition during pregnancy and first six months of life are critical. Thus, problems often start before, during and after pregnancy as malnourished mothers are more likely to produce low birth-weight babies. Poor nutritional status at birth is perpetuated by inadequate

breast-feeding and supplementary feeding habits. Subsequently in the first two years, babies do not receive sufficient quality food –particularly from mothers who are poorly educated or uneducated.

The regional experience in India shows that differences in health provisioning, improvements in child care, and health status of women explain malnutrition differences across states (Kumar, 2007). The high performing states in India have shown: (a) rise in women’s nutrition status; (b) increase in the proportion of children under the age of three breast-fed within one hour of birth (c) rise in the percentage of children who received oral rehydration solution (ORS) when they had diarrhoea; (d) women’s empowerment in Tamil Nadu, Kerala and the north-eastern states. To conclude, a significant part of the South Asian ‘Enigma’ as compared to Sub-Saharan Africa can be explained by women’s agency, given the income growth.

2.3 Impact on child labour

India probably has the largest number of child labourers in the world and they constitute one of the most vulnerable groups in our society. Two-thirds of child labour is concentrated in agriculture sector in the country. From tending sheep or harvesting crops to handling machinery, these children work in crop and livestock production, help supply some of the food and drinks we consume and the fibres and raw materials we use to make other products. Examples include cocoa/chocolate, coffee, tea, sugar, fruits and vegetables, along with other agricultural products such as tobacco and cotton.

There are significant regional disparities in the incidence of child labour in India. Several supply and demand side factors determine the incidence of child labour. Poverty is one of them and is considered a determinant of the proportion of child labour: poor families use child labour to augment their income. On the other hand, economic development is supposed to reduce child labour, with better opportunities for adult labour and increasing education for children. Nevertheless, economic development may increase the incidence of child labour because the demand for labour may concomitantly increase; development also provides better earning opportunities for the family if all hands are put to work. Here the wage rate becomes a crucial determinant. If wages are high for adults, there is a possibility of reduction in child labour.

Policy prescriptions for tackling child labour include income generating programmes for parents of working children and improving the overall conditions of adult labour. However, the economic dependence of the families is only a part of the explanation for the persistence of child labour. Across states, there is a very weak correlation between incidence of poverty and incidence of child labour. For example, poorer states like Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Orissa have a lower incidence of child labour than better-off states like Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. Some time utilisation studies for the children suggest that most children who drop out from school do not end up doing much work either. Also, the direction of causation does not necessarily run from child labour to non-attendance. It can be the other way round, that the children dropping out from school take up productive work of their own choice or through parental pressure as a 'default occupation'.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child recognises that every child should have a right to education. Many children in India are being deprived of this right.

NREGS can have an impact on child labour through its income effects and by improving women's well-being and empowerment. Since child labour is concentrated in the agriculture sector, NREGS can have a significant positive impact on it by increasing income through higher wage rates, raising agricultural wages, and bringing about a decline in migration, etc. Decline in migration reduces child labour in cotton cultivation, including seed preparation, as children also migrate to work in cotton crop areas. NREGS can also reduce risks and vulnerabilities which lead to withdrawal of children from school and precipitates child labour. Similarly, women's empowerment due to NREGS has a positive effect on child labour as it gives them a greater say in intra-household decisions which in turn can raise the participation of children in education.

On the other hand, rise in income and agricultural wages and increase in women's participation rates can also escalate participation rates for child labour. For example, rise in adult agricultural wages and labour shortages during peak seasons like the harvest time, can encourage child labour. Women's participation in the labour force can also increase child labour, especially in the absence of care facilities for their children. The piece-rate system in NREGS also leads to an increase in incentives for family labour. It may be noted, however, that child labour is not allowed under MGNREGS.

2.4 Child-care facilities

As shown in the empirical work later, while women's work in NREGS can empower them and improve household incomes, which in turn improves child well-being, the fact is that working women have lesser time for child-care. This can have a negative impact on children (child malnutrition, for instance, is determined by the time allocated for care-giving by mothers). The absence of care facilities at work sites also leads to children working alongside mothers.

The NREG Act states that “in case the number of children below the age of six years accompanying the women working at any site are five or more, provisions shall be made to depute one of such women workers to look after such children” (Schedule II, Para 28). Further, the person who is deputed to look after young children is entitled to the same minimum wage as other labourers. Other facilities to be made available at the work sites include safe drinking water, shade for children and periods of rest, first-aid box with adequate material for emergency treatment for minor injuries and other health hazards connected with the work.

It may be noted that availability of quality child-care services is an important contributor to women's status because it enhances their participation in work without adversely affecting the well-being of children. Thus, safe drinking water, shade for children and crèche facilities at work sites will not only ensure the well-being of children but also bring about an improvement in women's status as earners. Crèche facilities can thus help in the reduction of child labour. It can also reduce the incidence of school drop-outs as older siblings mostly drop out of school to take care of the younger ones.

3. Evidence on impact of NREGS on child well-being

There have been a number of studies on the impact of NREGS on household incomes, women's empowerment and child-care facilities. In this review, this paper draws from the following major studies.

- (a) Survey by G.B. Pant Social Science Institute (GPSSI), Allahabad, 2008

An NREGA survey was conducted in May-June 2008 by GPSSI in ten districts spread over six north-Indian states (Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh). The survey involved unannounced visits to 100 randomly selected work sites spread over the six states and interviews with a random sample of about 1000 workers employed at these work sites.

- (b) 'Study on women's empowerment', by Institute for Human Development (IHD), 2009

This study examined the processes and impacts of NREGS on women's empowerment in four selected north-Indian states namely, Bihar, Jharkhand, Rajasthan and Himachal Pradesh. It was undertaken in 2008-09 by Ashok Pankaj and Rukmini Tankha of IHD and sponsored by UNIFEM. One district each was purposively selected from all four states: Gaya (Bihar), Ranchi (Jharkhand), Dungarpur (Rajasthan), and Kangra (Himachal Pradesh). Data were collected through two semi-structured schedules: (a) beneficiary, and (b) work sites schedules. The beneficiary schedule was canvassed to 428 women workers. Twelve work sites were randomly selected and groups of women interviewed.

- (c) A report on 'Management of National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme: Issues and Challenges' (2009), Chhabra *et al.*, Lal Bahadur Shastri Institute of Management

This was a nationwide research study carried out in six states: Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa and Uttar Pradesh, involving the participation of leading social science research institutes³. The study was based on primary as well as secondary data collected from the six states. Four districts from each state were selected from a list of 200 districts identified for Phase I of NREGS, with the exception of Haryana, where only one district was selected. Data was collected from 21 districts, 42 blocks and 108 villages in all.

- (d) Evaluation of NREGS in Rajasthan (2008). Joshi *et al.*, Institute for Development Studies, Jaipur.

3. Giri Institute of Development Studies, Lucknow (Uttar Pradesh); Centre for Economic and Social Studies, Hyderabad (Andhra Pradesh); Madhya Pradesh Institute of Social Science and Research, Ujjain; Gujarat Institute of Development Research, Ahmedabad; and, Nabakrushna Choudhury Centre for Development Studies, Bhubaneswar (Orissa).

The districts covered under the study included Dungarpur, Jhalawar, Banswara, Jalore and Karauli. A comprehensive schedule was administered to a sample of persons (with job card and who were employed). The study covered 689 projects (5 per cent of completed projects with minimum of five projects). A sample of job card-holder households was drawn and approximately five persons per project were covered (total 3,293 households) in the five districts. The sample gave special consideration to coverage of social groups (SC/ST) and women participants.

(e) 'Issues of governance and transparency in NREGS in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh' (2009), Surjit Singh, IDSJ.

The study covered two districts in each state: Barwani (NGO-dominated) and Shivpuri in Madhya Pradesh; and, Sirohi and Udaipur in Rajasthan. Two blocks were selected in each district. However, an additional block was selected in Rajasthan because it was greatly influenced by the NGOs. Thus, in all 10 blocks were covered. In all, 56 panchayats were selected in these blocks and ten job-card workers were covered in each panchayat. Thus, the study is based on information collected from 560 job card workers/households.

As mentioned earlier, there are very few studies on the direct impact of NREGS on child well-being. We therefore, start with evidence relating to its direct impact on children.

3.1 Impact on child well-being: Study based on 'Young Lives' data

Young Lives is a long-term international research project which commenced in 2002, investigating the changing nature of childhood poverty in four developing countries. Young Lives tracks the development of 12,000 children in Ethiopia, India (Andhra Pradesh), Peru and Vietnam through quantitative and qualitative research over a 15-year period. Since 2002, the project has been following two groups of children: (a) 2000 children in each country who were aged between 6-17 months in 2002; (b) 1000 children in each country aged between 7.5-8.5 years in 2002. Two surveys were done between 2002 and 2006.

The studies show that household and community characteristics – particularly ethnicity, rural-urban divide (which affects access to services), education level of parents and community-level effects – are important factors that contribute to child poverty. There were four droughts during 2002-2006 which adversely affected child well-being in drought-affected households.

Using Young Lives project data, Uppal (2009) examined whether NREGS acts as a safety net for children. He studied access to the NREGS among Young Lives families and its impact on child outcomes in Andhra Pradesh. Four districts viz., Cuddapah, Karimnagar, Anantapur and Mahbubnagar were included in Phase I of NREGS. These districts have also been covered by the Young Lives project. Uppal's 2009 study specifically looks at "the access to and impact of the scheme in its first phase in Andhra Pradesh".

This study analysed two aspects of NREGS functioning. First, it looked at the targeting of the scheme and the characteristics of those who are self-selected. Second, it estimated the impact on children in the participating households, particularly on nutrition as an indicator of health outcomes and the incidence of child labour⁴. The main findings of the study are as follows.

- Broadly the self-targeting strategy seemed to be working. Those who were worse-off and disadvantaged participated in the scheme.
- There seemed to be a positive correlation between programme participation and anthropometric scores as indicators of health outcomes, although this did not remain robust across all the specifications.
- On the other hand, the study found robust results on child labour. The programme registration reduced the probability of a boy entering child labour by 13.4 per cent. The programme seemed to have an impact through the income transfer that it generates by reducing child labour for girls. Participation in the scheme was likely to reduce child labour by 8.9 per cent for girls.

3.2. Child-care facilities at NREGS work sites

As mentioned above, child-care and other facilities can increase the well-being of children. Here we will look at evidences from different states of India on whether the NREGS work sites have these facilities.

4. The study uses econometric techniques like probit models to examine the impact of NREGS on child health and child labour. For more details, see Uppal (2009).

The GBPSSI (2009) study of six north-Indian states shows that basic work site facilities were missing in most of the cases. Table 1 indicates that these facilities are better in case of drinking water, first-aid kits and child-care facilities in Rajasthan, as compared to the other five north-Indian states of Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh. However, it is disconcerting to note that only 17 per cent of sample work sites had child-care facilities even in Rajasthan, though in other states this percentage was zero.

Table 1: Work-site Facilities in Rajasthan and Other States

Proportion (%) of sample work sites with facilities		
	Rajasthan	Other states
Drinking water	95	52
Shade for periods of rest	37	45
First-aid kit	60	20
Child-care facility	17	0

Source: Dreze and Khera (2009) based on GBPSSI study

These findings are corroborated by the studies carried out by the Institute of Development Studies, Jaipur (IDSJ) in Rajasthan. Study by Varsha *et al.* (2008) shows that the status of work site facilities in Rajasthan is not good in most of the cases. Creche facilities are lacking at many work sites, which discourages women with young children from participating in the scheme.

Table 2 shows that the responses regarding the availability of first-aid box with some routine medicines varied across districts with a high of 99 per cent in Jalore and a low of 80 per cent in Karauli. The highest response regarding sheds came from Jalore (96 per cent) and lowest from Banswara (37.4 per cent). Crèche facilities were not available in most of the districts. The response regarding child-care facilities was less than five per cent in Karauli and Banswara, around five per cent in Jhalawar, and between 30 and 40 per cent in Dungarpur and Jalore. The total response for crèche facilities was less than 20 per cent in the selected districts of Rajasthan. Crèche facilities were not found in any of the sites visited by the research team and small children were left unattended in these places. They also found that women were either hesitant in bringing their children to the sites or were forced to rethink about applying for work.

Table 2: Work-site Facilities in Rajasthan (District-wise)

Facilities	Karuali	Banswara	Dungarpur	Jhalawar	Jalore	Total %	Total No.
First Aid Box	79.64	89.37	96.09	95.60	98.75	91.31	3007
Shed	52.30	37.39	86.40	58.07	96.25	60.83	2003
For Keeping Children	3.99	3.06	38.04	5.66	32.50	16.25	535

Source: Varsha *et al.* (2008)

In one of the work sites, the *Sarpanch* and *Sachiv* (village elders) mentioned that storing a tent and cradles were a major hassle, therefore, they preferred not to have them at all. In some panchayats, tents and cradles have been supplied recently. A few *sarpanchs* also quoted odd reasons for not providing these facilities, like, (i) these are misused by outsiders (people other than the workers); (ii) villagers not working at the site also come for chit-chats with the workers, leading to disruption in the work; and (iii) in some instances outsiders came and passed comments on women working there.

Surjit Singh's study (2009) on Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh also reveals that crèche facilities were not provided at work sites. Workers were asked two questions: whether they were aware that child-care should be provided at the work site and whether such facilities were actually being provided at their work sites. Except for Sirohi district in Rajasthan where such awareness was high, other districts in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh recorded low awareness.

The responses of the NREG workers are given in Tables 3 and 4 respectively. Awareness was the highest in Sirohi with 69.2 per cent, followed by Abu Road block (47.5 per cent) and Udaipur district (35.8 per cent). However, awareness was very low in Barwani and Shivpuri. It is surprising to know that only eight per cent workers were aware about these facilities in the block dominated by NGOs in Udaipur (Table 3).

Regarding provision of crèche facilities, 57.5 per cent of respondents in Sirohi stated that child-care facilities were being provided at the work site (Table 4). However, only 17.5 per cent reported child-care facilities in the non-NGO dominated block in Udaipur district in Rajasthan; a similar response was echoed in Barwani and Shivpuri districts of Madhya Pradesh, where a very few respondents affirmed the availability of crèche facilities at the work sites. Again it is surprising to note that in the NGO-dominated block of Udaipur, 100 per cent respondents said that child-care facilities were not available at the work sites.

Table 3: Awareness on Provision of Child-care Facilities at Work-sites (in %)

	Districts	Yes	NO
Rajasthan	Sirohi	69.2	30.8
	Udaipur	35.8	64.2
Madhya Pradesh	Barwani	15	85
	Shivpuri	10	90
Rajasthan (NGO)	Sirohi	47.5	52.5
	Udaipur	7.5	92.5

Source: Singh (2009)

Table 4: Child-care Facilities Actually Being Provided at Work-sites (in %)

	Districts	Yes	NO
Rajasthan	Sirohi	57.5	42.5
	Udaipur	17.5	82.5
Madhya Pradesh	Barwani	12.5	87.5
	Shivpuri	9.2	90.8
Rajasthan (NGO)	Sirohi	50.0	50.0
	Udaipur	0.0	100.0

Source: Singh (2009)

3.3. Impact on households

The positive impact of NREGS on households also engenders child well-being. In this section, we look at the evidence with regard to the effect NREGS has in terms of the participation of the poor, contribution to household income, contribution to the village, usage of NREGS wages and migration.

Participation of the poor, vulnerable and disadvantaged

As NREGS is a self-targeted scheme, we were interested in assessing whether the programme was reaching the poor and vulnerable. Many field studies have shown that NREGA is reaching the poor and socially and economically backward sections like the Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST).

Dreze and Khera (2009), based on their GBPSSI study, said that 73 per cent of the sample households belonged to SC/ST families in the six states of north India (Table 5). Their

study also showed that 81 per cent of them lived in a *kaccha* house, 71 per cent did not have electricity and 61 per cent were illiterate.

Table 5: NREGA Labourers – Rural India's Working Class

Proportion (%) of sample workers who:	
live in a <i>kaccha</i> house	81
belong to SC/ST families	73
are illiterate	61
have no electricity at home	72

Source: Dreze and Khera (2009)

Data from the Ministry of Rural Development also shows that the share of SC households had risen while that of ST households declined over time (Table 6)⁵. The decline in the share of ST households is exaggerated as Phase I and II have more ST-dominated districts. The total share of SCs and STs was more than 50 per cent in 2009-10, even after decline in the share of STs.

Table 6: Share of SCs/STs in Total Participant Households in NREGS (%)

Year	Share of SCs	Share of STs	Total of SCs and STs
2006-07	25.4	36.5	61.9
2007-08	27.4	29.3	56.7
2008-09	29.3	25.4	54.7
2009-10	30.5	20.7	51.2

Source: Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India

Contribution to household income

The contribution of NREGS wages to household income is one of the indicators of the importance of the scheme. Very few studies have estimated the share of NREGS wages in the total income of households.

A study on Bihar and Jharkhand shows that contribution of NREGS to total income was significant in Bihar as compared to Jharkhand (Pankaj, 2008)⁶. Tables 7 and 8 show that in

5. On the share of SCs and STs, also see Ghosh (2008).

6. Also see Dreze and Bhatia (2006) on Jharkhand.

Bihar, the contribution of NREGS to total income was 8.4 per cent, while in Jharkhand it was only 2.4 per cent. The contribution was the highest for SCs, landless and marginal farmers in Bihar. It may be noted that the influence of the scheme on households could be much higher in states like Rajasthan and Andhra Pradesh, where its performance was much better.

Table 7: Contribution of NREGA to Total Household Income in Bihar 2007-08

Category	Total Income (Rs.)	Income from NREGA (Rs.)	NREGA Income as % of the Total
Caste			
Upper Caste	23,718	780	3.29
OBC-I	25,570	1314	5.14
OBC-II	21,508	907	4.22
SC	16,894	1983	11.74
ST	19,810	544	2.74
Land			
Landless	18,178	1619	8.90
Marginal	23,253	1817	7.81
Small	38,103	885	2.31
Medium	-	-	-
Total	19,707	1649	8.37

Source: Pankaj (2008)

Table 8: Contribution of NREGA to Total Income of Beneficiary Households in Jharkhand (2007-08)

Category	Total Annual Income of HH (Rs.)	Income from NREGA (Rs.)	NREGA Income as % of the Total %
Caste			
Upper Caste	33,706	91	0.27
OBC-I	25,853	400	1.55
OBC-II	22,475	531	2.36
SC	19,496	190	0.97
ST	22,989	900	3.91
Land Category			
Landless	20,465	183	0.89
Marginal	21,982	699	3.18
Small	37,080	750	2.02
Medium	37,393	518	1.39
Total	23,414	564	2.41

Source: Pankaj (2008)

Chhabra *et al.* (2009) show that average number of working days in five out of the six states covered in the study was only around 11 days per annum (Table 9). Among these five states, Andhra Pradesh reported the highest number at 20 days. As shown in Table 10, the contribution of NREGS to total income was only 4.3 per cent in Gujarat. However, estimates for Madhya Pradesh show that if we take income from NREGS as a share of total wage income, it was substantial at 18.6 per cent, 25.8 per cent and 16.6 per cent respectively in the *kharif*, *rabi* and summer seasons (Table 11).

Table 9: Number of Working Days Granted under NREGS (State-wise)

	Andhra Pradesh	Gujarat	Madhya Pradesh	Orissa	Uttar Pradesh	Total (mean)
Working days under NREGS	19.8	8.7	12.4	4.4	8.6	10.8

Source: Chhabra *et al.* (2009) based on field surveys

Table 10: Share of NREGS in Total Income in Gujarat (in %)

	Sabarkanta	Banaskanta	Narmada	Valsad	Total
Share of NREGS income	3.7	5.2	3.5	5.0	4.3

Source: Chhabra *et al.* (2009) based on field surveys

Table 11: Share of NREGS in Total Income in Madhya Pradesh (in %)

	<i>Kharif</i> season	<i>Rabi</i> season	Summer season
Share of NREGS income	18.6	25.8	16.6

Source: Chhabra *et al.* (2009) based on field surveys

Usage of NREGS wages

What is the evidence on the use of NREGS wages? Dreze and Khera (2009), based on GBPSSI study, indicate that wages earned through NREGS helped the workers in financing food and health requirements. Around 69 per cent said that the income generated through NREGS was spent on food while 47 per cent spent on illness (Table 12). The study also shows that 38 per cent of the workers mentioned that the income helped them in sending their children to school. They also bought school books and uniforms from the NREGS earnings.

Table 12: A Lifeline for Rural Poor

Proportion (%) of sample workers who stated that	
NREGA is 'very important' for them	71
NREGA has helped them to avoid hunger	69
NREGA helped them to avoid migration	57
NREGA helped their family to cope with illness	47
NREGA helped them to avoid demeaning or hazardous occupations	35

Source: Dreze and Khera (2009)

Chhabra *et al.* (2009) provide perceptions about the role of NREGS in six states. This is important because it tends to capture both the importance of NREGS in terms of actual impact, and its potential role. As shown in Table 13, more than 50 per cent and 54 per cent of the participating households respectively reported that NREGS was very important for the family and had brought significant changes. These percentages are more than 90 per cent for Gujarat and Haryana.

Around 46 per cent of households reported that NREGS helped in avoiding hunger and/or migration, while 36 to 37 per cent mentioned that it helped them in sending their children to school and also coping with illness in family. In Haryana and Orissa, a large majority reported that NREGS income helped them avoid hunger and migration, send children to school and cope with illness in the family. In the case of Gujarat, however, NREGS income has not helped in redressing these issues. Surprisingly, these percentages are lower even for Andhra Pradesh where NREGS is doing reasonably well.

Table 14 provides perceptions of social groups on the role of NREGS. Not surprisingly, the percentages reported for SCs, STs and Other Backward Castes (OBCs) are higher than for Other Castes (OCs) in avoiding hunger, migration, sending children to school and helping

Table 13: Perceptions about NREGS Roll in Six States (2007-08)

	Proportion of Households Reported NREGS as:						
	Andhra Pradesh	Madhya Pradesh	Gujarat	Haryana	Orissa	Uttar Pradesh	Total
Very important for the family	30.8	55.6	98.1	57.5	34.5	27.8	50.8
Somewhat important	59.0	19.1	91.6	13.8	54.1	72.2	51.6
Brought about a significant change in life	44.9	43.1	90.9	93.8	27.8	24.7	54.2
Avoided going hungry	19.3	45.6	2.2	85.0	84.7	41.9	46.4
Avoided migration	24.3	48.1	20.6	90.0	62.8	30.9	46.1
Able to send children to school	13.5	40.3	3.4	90.0	40.3	30.6	36.4
Helped to cope with someone's illness	26.3	29.4	17.2	100.0	50.0	-	37.1
Helped repay our debts	21.8	38.4	10.0	100.0	46.6	26.6	40.6
Helped to give up work we did not want to do	23.0	36.3	37.5	78.8	44.4	12.8	38.8
Helped to create useful assets in the village	75.6	44.7	98.4	100.0	98.4	16.3	72.3
Helped to raise market wage	94.0	42.8	65.3	100.0	52.4	33.1	64.6
Resulted in scarcity of labour in peak season	86.0	38.8	18.4	98.8	16.3	24.7	47.1
Resulted in productivity of labour	49.3	40.3	1.6	77.5	10.6	15.6	32.5

Source: Chhabra *et al.* (2009) based on field surveys.

Table 14: Participants' Perceptions about NREGS – Social Groups in Six States (2007-08)

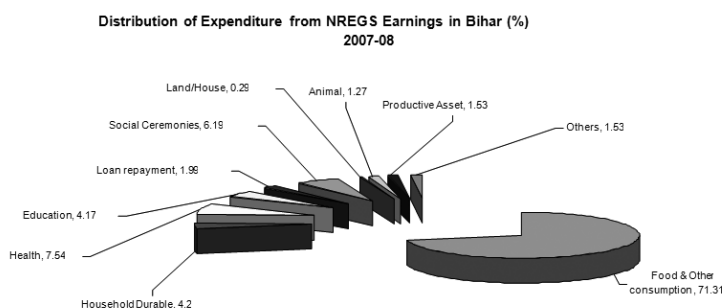
	Proportion of households reported NREGS as			
	SC	ST	OBC	OC
Very important for the family	44.9	51.2	50.6	42.0
Somewhat important	40.3	32.1	42.4	31.3
Brought about a significant change in life	57.4	55.6	56.7	30.0
Avoided going hungry	48.4	46.1	49.5	30.1
Avoided migration	45.7	52.8	45.8	32.6
Sent children to school	37.8	34.1	36.2	21.5
Helped to cope with someone's illness	38.0	34.9	38.5	23.1
Helped repay debts	40.5	46.1	41.7	24.5
Helped to give up work we did not want to do	39.0	38.9	33.3	40.7
Helped to create useful assets in the village	67.9	62.7	72.4	47.9
Helped to raise market wage	67.1	56.9	66.4	56.2
Resulted in scarcity of labour in peak season	50.0	41.6	48.3	29.5
Resulted in productivity of labour	28.5	24.5	35.6	24.4

Source: Chhabra *et al.* (2009) based on field surveys

to cope with illness. Around 45 to 50 per cent of the households among SCs, STs and OBCs reported that NREGS helped them ward off hunger and migration.

A study by Pankaj (2009) shows that 71 per cent of the earnings were spent on food and other consumption, 7.5 per cent on health and 4.2 per cent on education in Bihar (Figure 1). Apart from food, substantial amounts of the earnings were also spent on health and education, which are beneficial for child well being.

Figure 1: Usage of NREGS Earnings in Bihar



Source: Pankaj (2008)

Varsha *et al.* (2008) also show that in Rajasthan NREGS earnings were useful for supplementing food, health and education (Table 15). Between 90 per cent (Banswara) to 98.7 per cent (Dungarpur) workers used the wages for daily consumption. Spending on health expenditure was another important aspect, with the responses as high as 70 per cent in Jalore and a low of 16 per cent in Banswara. NREGS wages were also spent on children's education. Although education was one of the positive impact of NREGS-induced cash-flow into households, there were, however, inter-district variations (Table 15). In three districts viz., Karauli, Dungarpur and Jalore, the response on education varied from 23-31 per cent. The response on education was very low in Banswara and Jhalawar districts.

Box 1 shows that the earnings were quite useful for the family of Haju Devi of Dungarpur in buying proper clothes and food for her children.

Singh's study (2009) on Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh indicates that the majority of respondents felt the money earned through NREGA was a big support for the family. As

Table 15: Usage of NREGS Wages

Items of Consumption	Karuali	Banswara	Dungarpur	Jhalawar	Jalore	Total %	Total No.
Daily Consumption	97.80	90.27	98.67	90.99	91.25	94.41	3109
Domestic Purchase	4.99	18.56	37.60	28.30	45.00	25.05	825
Health	30.34	15.95	69.51	21.59	70.00	38.57	1270
Child Education	23.35	5.50	31.47	6.50	28.75	17.80	586
Repayment of Debt	0.20	0.81	3.02	1.68	5.00	1.70	56
Festivals	6.19	3.51	52.36	13.21	41.25	22.93	755
Social Ceremonies	0.40	5.95	0.27	2.52	1.25	2.55	84
Purchase/Repair of Land/house	5.39	0.09	1.69	-	-	1.43	47
Purchase of Animals	0.80	0.18	4.89	0.21	1.25	1.91	63
Purchase & Maintenance of Prod Assets	-	0.99	0.36	0.21	-	0.49	16
Others	0.20	5.05	0.09	1.68	-	2.00	66

Source: Varsha *et al.* (2008)

Box 1. Consumption from Earnings in Dungarpur

“Thanks to earnings from NREGA we are able to buy clothes and food for our children today,” says Haju Devi of Dungarpur. “Earlier we had to very often eat a meal without vegetables, but no longer. We don’t need to take petty loans for daily household expenditure any more,” she adds, recalling that, “earlier when my husband went outside the village for work I had to meet my daily expenses by borrowing. But since the last two years I have not taken any loan.” Haju Devi earned Rs. 5,951 for hundred days of work in 2006-07. In 2007-08 she earned Rs. 6,154. She now has given up her earlier work of collecting firewood from the nearby forest for sale in town. She prefers to work under the Scheme as she is able to earn more than by selling firewood.

Source: Varsha *et al.* (2008)

shown in Table 16, 75 per cent of the respondents from Sirohi district affirmed it, compared to 93.3 per cent in Udaipur. However, the percentage came down to 70 per cent in two blocks of Sirohi and Udaipur district that have a high NGO presence. Around 85-95 per cent of the workers in Madhya Pradesh responded that the earnings were a big help to them.

Table 16: Was the Money (from the Payment) a Big Help to Your Family (%)?

	Districts	Yes	NO
Rajasthan	Sirohi	75	25
	Udaipur	93.3	6.7
Madhya Pradesh	Barwani	86.7	13.3
	Shivpuri	95	5
Rajasthan (NGO)	Sirohi	70	30
	Udaipur	72.5	27.5

Source: Singh (2009)

Where did the money go? As Table 17 shows, a major share of these wages went for home expenditure. The proportions vary from a low of 57.5 per cent in the NGO-dominated block in Sirohi and a high of 81.7 per cent in Shivpuri. The second and most important share was occupied by agricultural activities: this was more than one-tenth in Barwani and the NGO-dominated blocks of Rajasthan. Thus, NREGA helped marginal and small farmers invest in the development of the small plots of land they till to supplement household incomes. Some households used the money earned on illness, repayment of old debts, and on marriages/deaths. A significant proportion of respondents in some blocks also mentioned that the money had been of no help.

Table 17: In What Ways NREGS Helped? (in %)

	Districts	Home expenditure	Illness	Repayment of debt	Social function (Marriage/Death)	Agriculture	Others
Rajasthan	Sirohi	62.5	5	0	2.5	4.2	0.8
	Udaipur	72.5	8.3	4.2	3.3	0.8	4.2
Madhya Pradesh	Barwani	66.7	5	1.7	0.8	12.5	0
	Shivpuri	81.7	5	0	2.5	5.8	0
Rajasthan (NGO)	Sirohi	57.5	0	0	0	12.5	0
	Udaipur	73.3	6.7	0	3.3	13.3	0

Source: Singh (2009)

Contribution to village economy

Apart from its contribution to households, NREGS is also beneficial to the community and village economy. Dreze and Khera (2009) reveal that 92 per cent of the sample workers said

that the NREGA work was useful and 83 per cent said that NREGA had led to the creation of useful assets (Table 18). The survey team also felt that useful assets were being created in 87 per cent of the work sites.

Table 18: Benefits of NREGS to Village Economy

Proportion (%) of sample workers who feel that:	
NREGA has led to the creation of useful assets in their village	83
The work they were doing on NREGA was useful	92
Proportion (%) of sample work sites where the survey team felt that:	
the asset being created or repaired was very useful	87 (32)
the work being done was very useful	81 (29)

Source: Dreze and Khera (2009)

Varsha *et al.* (2008) show that significant changes have taken place in the villages of Rajasthan due to NREGS (Table 19). Significant proportion of respondents indicated that there was improvement in employment avenues, road connectivity and the water table level in the villages. Some respondents also mentioned improvements in the economic conditions, soil erosion, drinking water for animals and reduction in social ills like untouchability.

Table 19: Changes in the Village Due to NREGA

Improvement	Karuali	Banswara	Dungarpur	Jhalawar	Jalore	Total %	Total No.
Employment	54.38	28.48	36.37	40.55	58.23	37.48	1216
Connectivity	12.50	23.69	6.68	9.98	12.66	13.96	453
Water Table	20.21	14.74	17.06	17.41	21.52	16.89	548
Economic Situation	1.67	5.15	12.64	11.04	1.27	7.95	258
Soil Erosion	1.46	11.12	8.12	4.88	5.06	7.61	247
Drinking Water for Animals	8.96	5.61	9.03	15.07	1.27	8.54	277
Decline in Migration	0.42	0.45	9.03	0.64	-	3.39	110
Untouchability Reduced	0.21	-	0.27	-	-	0.12	4
Grazing Land Development	0.21	1.08	0.18	-	-	0.46	15
Less Encroachment	-	0.90	-	0.21	-	0.34	11
Village Development	-	0.09	0.09	0.21	-	0.09	3
Others	-	8.68	0.54	-	-	3.14	102
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	
No.	480	1106	1108	471	79	3244	

Source: Varsha *et al.* (2008)

Reduction in migration

Another impact of NREGS on child well-being relates to the reduction in migration. Pankaj's study (2009) on Bihar reveals that there has been a decline in migration since the advent of the NREGA (Table 20). About 35 per cent of the beneficiary households consisted of migrants in 2006, but this figure came down to 23 per cent in 2008, indicating a decline of about 12 per cent in two years, which is not insignificant. Reduction in migration is quite high among OBC-I and OBC-II categories. Similarly, reduction in migration has been quite high among the landless as compared to marginal and small farmers.

Table 20: Reduction in Migration of Beneficiaries

Social Category	2006	2008
OBC-I	55.56	31.43
OBC-II	45.83	17.65
SC	25.37	19.15
ST	30.00	n.a.
Land Category		
Landless	32.74	19.23
Marginal	40.82	33.33
Small	33.33	33.33
Total	34.73	22.55

Source: Pankaj (2008)

Varsha *et al.* (2008) indicated that those who were migrating for certain reasons earlier were now able to earn in the village itself. For those women who could not migrate with their husbands because of household responsibilities, work was now available in the village itself. The study found that in all the districts migration was a major survival strategy. Post NREGA, migration from these districts certainly decreased but did not completely stop. When asked about the impact of NREGA, the respondent's first reply was that it has decreased migration as "*gbar baithey rozgar mil jata haey*" (you can get employment at your doorstep). In Jhalawar, Varsha *et al.* learnt that most of the villagers used to migrate with their families to neighbouring states like Madhya Pradesh for work. But once work started under NREGA, more and more women stayed back and found work under the scheme.

Table 21 indicates that though migration showed a decline thanks to NREGS, it continued to persist. Only 11 per cent of families reported that their family members had migrated to

Table 21: Whether Family Member Migrated in Search of Employment

Items	Karuali	Banswara	Dungarpur	Jhalawar	Jalore	Total %	Total No.
Yes	5.59	12.61	16.00	2.52	22.50	11.48	378
No	94.41	87.39	84.00	97.48	77.50	88.52	2915
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	3293

Source: Varsha *et al.* (2008)

bigger cities like Jaipur, Ahmedabad, Mumbai, Surat, etc. Such households were reported from the three districts of Jalore (22.5 per cent), Dungarpur (16 per cent) and Banswara (12.61 per cent) in Rajasthan. At the time of survey, the migrant household member had been away from 10 days to 2,920 days (a little over eight years) making it clear that this involved both seasonal migration and long-term migration.

3.4. NREGS and impact on women

It is known that the empowerment of women leads to the well-being of children. According to the NREGS guidelines, 30 per cent of all work is reserved for women. Ministry of Rural Development data shows that the share of women in NREGS has increased significantly from around 41 per cent in 2006-07 to 49 per cent in 2009-10. The fact that almost half of the NREGS participants now are women also proves its importance.

Based on field studies, Chhabra *et al.* (2009) revealed that in the states of Gujarat and Andhra Pradesh, the share of women far exceeds the targeted employment for women at 30 per cent

Table 22: Share of Women in Total Participant Households in NREGS (%)

Year	Share of Women
2006-07	40.7
2007-08	42.5
2008-09	47.9
2009-10	48.7

Source: Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India

(Table 23). On the other hand, participation of women is very low in Haryana (7.5 per cent), Uttar Pradesh (9.4 per cent) and Madhya Pradesh (13.1 per cent). Dreze and Khera (2009) show that women's empowerment is quite high owing to NREGS. Around 79 per cent of women collected their own wages and nearly 70 per cent kept their own account.

Table 23: Shares of Men and Women in Total Participation in NREGS

Gender	Andhra Pradesh	Gujarat	Haryana	Madhya Pradesh	Orissa	Uttar Pradesh
Female	52.0	57.6	7.5	13.1	39.3	9.4
Male	48.0	42.4	92.5	86.8	60.7	90.6

Source: Chhabra *et al.* (2009) based on Field surveys

Table 24: A Job of One's Own

Proportion (%) of female sample workers who:	
collect their own wages	79
keep their own wages	68
earned any cash income (other than NREGA wages) during the last three months	30

Source: Dreze and Khera (2009)

In Rajasthan villages, the NREGS has also been successful in helping the women break off *pardah* restrictions. Varsha *et al.* (2008) reveal that women of upper castes (such as Brahmins and Rajputs), who never used to go out to work, have started working at the construction sites. In most cases, women themselves had taken the decision to go to work. Box 2 provides a case study of Pramila Devi of Rajasthan and shows how NREGS has empowered her.

One noticeable negative phenomenon is that women often marked their attendance but left their 14-16 year old daughters at the work sites to proceed with household chores (Varsha *et al.*, 2008). This has also been brought out by the CESS study (2009) in two districts of Andhra Pradesh showing how participation of women in NREGS can lead to situations wherein education of school-going children is interrupted so that they may look after younger siblings when the mother goes to work.

Surjit's study (2009) provides reasons for women taking more interest in NREGA: mostly greater opportunities to work and that too within the village. In all, 77.5 per cent respondents in Sirohi and 66.7 per cent in Udaipur mentioned that getting more opportunities for work

Box 2: Empowerment of Women through NREGS

Forty-year old Pramila Devi is an upper caste Brahmin and lives in Barbodani Panchayat. Her husband works at a tea stall in Mumbai. She, her two daughters and a son live in the village and are totally dependent on her husband's income. Her family, like other families in the neighbourhood, got job cards made thinking that these could be used like ration cards. She very innocently said "*sab banwa rahay they tob hum naey bhi banwa lia*" (Everybody was getting it made, so I too got it done.).

One day a group of women from her caste in the neighbourhood discussed that since women were largely working at the work sites, why couldn't they work and earn some money. As it is, once they are through with the household work, they are largely free. Pramila Devi, with the consensus of women in the group, met the Mate (supervisor) who happened to be from her caste. The Mate immediately asked them to come for work. "That's how we started. Initially we were not only shy but a bit hesitant also. But we told ourselves that we are working at a public site and not for any individual household. What gave us more confidence was the fact that *Rajput* women too were working at the site."

Pramila did 79 days of work and when her husband came to visit them he did another 21 days of work. Pramila initially did not have a bank account. She has since opened an account in the Mahila Mini Bank. She now operates the account on her own. She said, "Earlier I used to feel shy and could not talk to strangers and officers, but now I am more confident." She withdraws as much money as she needs for household expenditure from the bank, and is able to save some money also.

Pramila said, "It is because of this extra income that we are now able to afford vegetables and fruits and snacks for tea." Her daily routine has also undergone a change. She gets up early and finishes household work in time to go for work.

NREG has also helped in promoting social cohesion as these women now rely more on each other and collectively go for work. There is no class conflict among them and they maintain friendly relations with other women workers, irrespective of their caste. Moreover, they do not discriminate between each other and drink water from the same source.

During 2006-08, Pramila earned about Rs. 12,000 from the scheme. She happily says that apart from spending on household expenses and on the education of her children, she was also able to save some money.

Source: Varsha et al. (2008)

was a major reason for interest in NREGS (Table 25). However, this percentage was at 44.2 per cent in Barwani and much higher at 63.3 per cent in Shivpuri. Among the two blocks with NGO presence, 70 to 80 per cent indicated that there are more opportunities for women to work because of NREGS.

Table 25: Different Reasons for Women Taking More Interest in NREGA

States	Districts	Getting more opportunity for work	Easy work than others	Safety	Help in household consumption	Using free time	Others
Rajasthan	Sirohi	77.5	22.5	18.3	18.3	6.7	6.7
	Udaipur	66.7	12.5	5.0	16.7	9.2	30.8
Madhya Pradesh	Barwani	44.2	2.5	0.8	5.8	0.0	5.8
	Shivpuri	63.3	11.7	6.7	7.5	2.5	7.5
Rajasthan (NGO)	Sirohi	80.0	12.5	5.0	2.5	0.0	12.5
	Udaipur	70.0	7.5	5.0	10.0	2.5	5.0

Source: Surjit (2009)

The same study presents reasons for women having gained a greater role and importance due to NREGS. These are: (a) safety of working in one's own village (b) easier to get work in one's own village, i.e. within a five km. radius; (c) husband's income not enough for the family; (d) difficulty in leaving children at home and going to work; (e) one can work in one's own time; and (f) uncomfortable working in towns. The benefits to women according to the study are: (1) women can offer financial support to husbands with regard to the family budget; (2) improvement in women's self-confidence; (3) women earn some pocket money; and (4) women have learnt how to operate a bank or post office account.

Pankaj and Tankha (2010) have presented an analysis of the empowerment effects of NREGS on women workers based on their study of four states, namely Bihar, Jharkhand, Rajasthan and Himachal Pradesh. The study showed that the share of NREGS income in the total earnings pertaining to households of women workers was around 18 per cent for all the four states put together (Table 26). The share ranged from 13 per cent in Gaya (Bihar) to 27 per cent in Dungarpur (Rajasthan).

Table 26: NREGS Share in Total Earnings of Women Workers' Households (2008-09)

	Dungarpur	Gaya	Kangra	Ranchi	Total
Share of NREGS in Total Income (%)	26.95	12.86	17.90	16.19	18.46

Source: Pankaj and Tankha (2010)

Women's contribution to household income through NREGS is also substantial at 14 per cent for all the four states put together (Table 27). This share again ranges from eight per cent in Gaya (Bihar) to 21 per cent in Dungarpur (Rajasthan).

Table 27: Women's Contribution to Household's Income Through NREGS

Districts	Average Income of hhs. From NREGS (Rs.)	Women's income from NREGS as % of total NREGS income of hhs.	Share of women's NREGS in the total annual income of hhs
Dungarpur	7855	78.79	21.23
Gaya	2755	61.47	7.90
Kangra	7399	82.12	14.70
Ranchi	4394	67.38	10.91
Total	5459	76.64	14.14

Source: Pankaj and Tankha (2010)

Regarding collection of wages, 98 per cent of women collected their wages themselves in Dungarpur (Rajasthan) while 60 per cent did so in Kangra (Himachal Pradesh) (Table 28). In the case of Gaya (Bihar) and Ranchi (Jharkhand), the percentage was less than 40 per cent. In other words, male household members collected the wages of more than 60 per cent women workers in the states of Bihar and Jharkhand.

Table 28: Who Collects Wages (%)

Districts	Women themselves	Male household members	Sometimes, male household members
Dungarpur	97.5	2.5	0.0
Gaya	33.3	66.7	0.0
Kangra	60.0	9.1	30.9
Ranchi	38.6	61.4	0.0
Total	68.2	23.2	8.6

Source: Pankaj and Tankha (2010)

Post-NREGS, women's own income to meet their personal needs had increased significantly in Dungarpur (Rajasthan) and Kangra (Himachal Pradesh) while it marginally declined in Ranchi (Jharkhand) (Table 29). Taking all four states together, the percentage rose from 44 per cent in pre-NREGS days to 71 per cent post-NREGS.

Table 29: Income to Meet Personal Needs – Pre and Post NREGS (%)

Districts	Pre-NREGS income to meet personal needs	Post-NREGS own income to meet personal needs
Dungarpur	32.0	70.9
Gaya	59.1	74.5
Kangra	19.8	74.6
Ranchi	63.3	62.4
Total	43.9	70.5

Source: Pankaj and Tankha (2010)

As mentioned by Pankaj and Tankha (2010), NREGS has broadened the choices for rural women in two ways: (a) it opened a new avenue of paid employment; and (b) it broadened choices and capabilities. It increased choices by reducing the dependence of women on other family members⁷. Table 30 shows that 58 per cent of women workers joined NREGS of their own choice.

7. Also see Kelkar (2009) and Sudarshan (2009) on the empowerment of women due to NREGS.

Table 30: Intra-household Decision on Participating in NREGS

Districts	Dungarpur	Gaya	Kangra	Ranchi	All
Self (women worker)	75.7	37.3	78.3	42.2	57.9
Head of the Household	20.4	59.1	20.8	49.5	37.9
Other family members	3.9	3.6	0.9	7.3	4.0
Others	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.9	0.2

Source: Pankaj and Tankha (2010)

Post-NREGS, more women met and interacted with government officials. Around 97 per cent women workers in Kangra (Himachal Pradesh) and 77 per cent in Dungarpur (Rajasthan) interacted with officials while these percentages were very low in Gaya (Bihar) and Ranchi (Jharkhand). Similarly, percentages in Dungarpur and Kangra were high in the cases of women attending the gram sabha meetings and also speaking at these.

Table 31: Women Workers Participation in the Gram Sabha (%)

Districts	Women attending gram sabha	Women speaking in gram sabha	Woman interacting with officials
Dungarpur	55.3	78.9	76.7
Gaya	13.6	13.3	5.5
Kangra	88.7	85.1	97.2
Ranchi	25.7	53.6	10.3
Total	45.3	73.2	46.5

Source: Pankaj and Tankha (2010)

One of the reasons why NREGS is becoming strongly women centered could be the migration of men. It is possible that more and more women are taking up work to provide a back-up income for the family while the men migrate. One can argue that empowerment of women can also take place regardless of the work in NREGS. It may be noted that NREGS has many secondary effects which increase the empowerment of women. For example, a rise in agricultural wages owing to NREGS can be cited as an empowerment effect of the scheme.

The NREGS can also mitigate the drudgery of women through multiplier effects in the village economy. Hirway (2009) goes beyond multiplier effects and says that impact on women is much more if we take into account the System of National Accounts (SNA) and non-SNA work of women, as shown below.

Impact on health status in the village

Hirway states, “The NREGS works that reduce unpaid SNA and non-SNA work of women and the poor is likely to improve the health status of the village population.

- Regular availability of potable water is likely to protect the population from water-borne diseases and improve the general health of the population.
- Construction of drainage will improve cleanliness in the village, and thereby reduce the chances of occurrence of diseases through poor disposal of waste water.
- Construction of toilets will also improve the level of cleanliness in the village and also improve public health status.
- Reduction in unpaid drudgery of women will reduce their time stress and provide them with more time to relax or work.
- Construction of child-care centres will improve the general health of children, who will receive nutritious food and a clean environment. It will support their healthy physical and intellectual development.”

(p.26, Hirway, 2009).

Thus, the kind of NREGS works proposed here will improve the health status of the population and will reduce their private expenditure on health. Ill-health is one of the major risks that lead to increase in poverty; improved health will go a long way in reducing vulnerability and poverty of people.

Impact on education status in the village

Hirway’s study (2009) also indicates that NREGS will have a positive impact on the status of education in the village. It is known that many children of school-going age are frequently engaged in collection of fodder, fuel-wood and water and animal grazing. Assuring water

supply at the door step, regeneration of common land for fuel and fodder as well as child-care centres will reduce the unpaid work of children. Children will be able to regularly attend the school if this drudgery is reduced. It will particularly benefit girls who stay back at home either to take care of younger siblings or to help in collection of water, fodder etc. or other household work. Construction of pre-school rooms will also ensure healthy intellectual development of pre-schoolers in the village, Hirway concludes.

3.5. Focus group discussion in Rajasthan

This sub-section covers a focus group discussion (FGD) on the impact of NREGS on livelihoods and children in Chaksu block near Jaipur in Rajasthan. Paul of the Centre for Community Economics and Development Consultants Society (CECOEDECON) and, Surjit Singh and Gopal Singh Rathod of IDS, Jaipur organised the FGD.

The interaction mainly happened with the members of *Kisan Seva Samiti* (KSS, or farmers welfare federation), members of the village development council (VDC) and self-help groups (SHGs) promoted by CECOEDECON. The KSS functions at the block level. Roughly 20 members were present during the session. The discussions mainly veered on implementation, organisation and impact of NREGS on livelihoods and children. The members were organised in their discussions, the summary of which is given below.

Positive aspects of NREGS

- Empowerment of women and social equity.
- Opening of bank accounts for wages has also contributed to empowerment of women.
- Impact on education: NREGS workers are spending 30 to 35 per cent of the wages on educating children. Due to extra earnings from NREGS, local traders are giving loans for the purchase of school uniforms, books, etc. It has also led to reduction in dropout rates.
- Villagers are able to get food items on loan from traders due to NREGS income.

- There has been a 50 per cent reduction in migration. It has also reduced child labour in Dungarpur district, as migration for cotton cultivation in Gujarat declined.
- Social interaction among women has improved.
- There is increased awareness about the right to work and it has bestowed upon them a sense of dignity.
- Agricultural wages in the villages have increased.
- Immunisation for children has improved.

Negative aspects of NREGS

(These mostly refer to organisational and implementation issues).

- There are issues concerning work measurement. Around 80 per cent of the work is not measured properly as engineers do not go to work sites.
- Due to measurement issue, workers do not get the minimum wage of Rs. 100. Many workers get around Rs. 65 per person.
- There should be a cut in the salary of an engineer in case of problems.
- There are delays in payment of wages. Sometimes it takes four months to receive wages.
- Workers do not want to open accounts in co-operative banks as it leads to delays. They prefer opening accounts in commercial banks.
- Quality of assets generated is mixed.
- There are no crèche facilities at work sites.
- Under NREGS, youth should be provided training programmes, for example on pump set repairing, motor cycle repairing, etc.
- Link with agricultural development should be on a catchment basis rather than working on SC/ST fields because bunding cannot be done in a few farms as it depends on the catchment.

- Corruption is rampant under NREGS, which can be controlled by the Block Development Officer (BDO) and the *Pradhan*.

The participants in the discussion concluded that the experience of NREGS was a mixed one. It was effectively working in some places and not working in some others. Corruption could be controlled if the villagers are active and a social audit is done. Similarly, some *panchayats* were working effectively while others were not up to the mark.

4. Conclusions

NREGS is expected to help reduce chronic poverty, risks and vulnerabilities of households, particularly the poor. It also seems to have a significant positive impact on child well-being. This will have long-term benefits for children in terms of reducing child labour, malnutrition, ill health, and improving educational outcomes. In this respect, the rights-based approach followed for NREGS will also help in protecting child rights.

The objective of this paper is to examine the impact of NREGS on the well-being of children. It is well known that women's well-being and empowerment are crucial for the well-being of children. Therefore, this study also examines the impact of the scheme on women. First, it examines pathways through which NREGS affects the well-being of children. Next, it presents evidence based on empirical studies in literature relating to the impact of NREGS on households, empowerment and well-being of women, child labour, health, education, nutrition of children and child-care facilities at work sites.

Summary and conclusions of the paper are enumerated below:

4.1 Impact on child well-being: Study based on 'Young Lives' data sets

This study on Andhra Pradesh shows a positive correlation between programme participation and anthropometric scores as indicators of health outcomes although the results are not

robust. On the other hand, the study finds robust results on child labour. NREGS reduced child labour by 13.4 per cent for boys and by 8.9 per cent for girls.

4.2 Provision of on-site facilities as stipulated by the Act

Work-site facilities are missing in many cases. Although drinking water and first aid are provided, crèche facilities are not available. As a result, women with small children hesitate to participate in the scheme. This is one of the gaps in the functioning of NREGS that adversely affects child well-being.

4.3 Impact on households

This was gauged in terms of participation of the poor, contribution to household income and to the village, usage of NREGS and migration.

(a) Since it is a self-targeted programme, one expects the poor to participate in it. National-level official data shows that the share of SCs and STs together was around 51 per cent in 2009-10. Many field studies have also shown that NREGA is reaching the poor as well as socially and economically backward sections like the SCs and STs.

(b) According to field surveys, the contribution of NREGA to total income is less than 10 per cent in the sample states. The shares were 2.4 per cent in Jharkhand, 4.3 per cent in Gujarat and 8.4 per cent in Bihar. However, the share of NREGS income in the total wage income in Madhya Pradesh was 19 per cent in the *kharif* season and 26 per cent in the *rabi* season.

(c) The income from NREGS made very significant contribution to children's well-being by reducing hunger, improving health and educational outcomes. For example, in a survey of six north-Indian states (Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh), around 69 per cent of the sample workers told that NREGS income helped them avoid hunger, while 47 per cent said it helped them cope with illness in the family. Around 38 per cent of the workers mentioned that it also helped them send their children to school.

(d) There are, however, significant inter-state and inter-district variations in the use of NREGS income on food, health and education. The percentages are high for Rajasthan, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh. In Orissa, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh, around 30 to 40 per cent mentioned that it helped in coping with illness and also helped them in providing education to their children. In the case of Gujarat, NREGS income had not helped in redressing these issues. Surprisingly these percentages were also lower for Andhra Pradesh where NREGS is reasonably doing well.

(e) NREGS also improved assets in the village economy. Significant proportion of respondents indicated that it brought about an improvement in employment, connectivity, water table, drinking water, reduction in soil erosion, etc. Village development indirectly helped in improving child well-being.

(f) Various field studies indicated that NREGS helped in reducing migration. It helped in improving nutrition, educational and health outcomes of children. The scheme also helped in reducing child labour. For example, the FGD in Rajasthan revealed that the percentage of child labour going to Gujarat from Dungarpur in Rajasthan during cotton cultivation season had declined by around 50 per cent.

(g) Based on field surveys, NCEUS (2009) identified several positive externalities due to NREGS. “They include reduction in distress out-migration, improved food security with wages being channelled into incurring expenses on food, health, education and repaying of loans, employment with dignity, greater economic empowerment of women workers, and sustainable asset creation” (p.219, NCEUS, 2009).

4.4 Impact on empowerment and well-being of women

(a) One of the successes of the NREGS is that the participation of women in the scheme is higher than the stipulated 33 per cent. The share of women in the programme increased from 41 per cent in 2006-07 to 49 per cent in 2009-10. Thus, almost half of the NREGS participants now are women. However, there are significant inter-regional disparities in the participation of women. Field studies have shown that the statutory requirement of 33 per cent participation is not met in Haryana (8 per cent), Madhya Pradesh (13 per cent), Uttar Pradesh (9 per cent), Chhattisgarh (25 per cent), Bihar (13 per cent) and Jharkhand (18 per cent).

(b) NREGS had brought about improvement in the empowerment of women. Field surveys reveal that the share of NREGS income in total earnings of women workers' was around 18 per cent for four states (Rajasthan, Bihar, Jharkhand and Himachal Pradesh) together. Majority of women collected their own wages. The NREGS had broadened the choices and capabilities of women working under it. Their income from NREGS also helped in improving their educational, health and nutrition standards.

(c) One negative phenomenon observed was that women often marked their attendance and then left their teenaged (14-16 year old) daughters at the work sites to proceed with household chores. The study in two districts of Andhra Pradesh showed how participation of women in NREGS can lead to situations wherein education of school-going children is interrupted as they may have to look after younger siblings when the mother goes to work.

(d) NREGS can mitigate the drudgery of women through its contribution to village development and child well-being. The NREGS works can improve health status and the educational status of village population. Regular availability of potable water, construction of drainage, construction of toilets, reduction in unpaid drudgery of women, construction of child-care centres can help improve nutrition and health of children. Assuring water supply at the door step, regeneration of common land for fuel and fodder and availability of child-care centres can reduce unpaid work of children and thereby allowing them to attend the school regularly.

To conclude, the evidence on NREGS' impact on child well-being is mixed. The positive impacts on household incomes, empowerment and well-being of women have helped in improving nutrition, health and education outcomes of children and reduction in child labour. Around two-thirds of child labour is in agriculture. Related to the issue of employment of children in agriculture, especially girls, is the gender aspect of recognising women as producers and farmers and its links to household food security. Strengthening the curriculum on extension training on gender and child protection issues in agriculture can help in reducing child labour.

The NREGS is the most important rights-based social protection programme in India. There are significant regional variations in the working of NREGS. It is doing well in states like Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh and Himachal Pradesh, but not that satisfactory in states like Bihar, Jharkhand and Uttar Pradesh. The programme has demonstrated varying degrees

of success across the country. The achievements are still short of potential. This potential should be harnessed in order to improve the right to employment which in turn can enhance the rights of the children.

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