

**Study on Gender and Shock
Responsiveness of MGNREGS during
Covid-19**



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Executive Summary

Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) was enacted in 2005 with the objective and commitment to providing livelihood security to the rural poor. MGNREGA's overt aspirations for women due to its design goes farther than most public welfare. In this context, the report highlights the Act's key features which are gender sensitive and enables women's participation within planning process and reduces the barriers to participating under MGNREGA interventions.

Madhya Pradesh accounted for the highest number (7.3 lakhs) of migrants returning during lockdown, while 17% of workers seeking employment did not receive work on demand. Lockdown and restricted movement during the COVID-19 period, affected many people in Madhya Pradesh, experientially since they were stranded in different states, lost their jobs and lacked access to any social security measures. In this regard the proposed study aims to capture the characteristics and key gaps of the scheme within the state of Madhya Pradesh. The report is based on the primary data collected from field surveys and secondary data accessed from the website of MGNREGS to highlight some of the provisions and parameters envisaged to be women and child sensitive and shock responsive. The study is an attempt to understand the effectiveness of the scheme in Madhya Pradesh and reviews the best practices, achievement, challenges, bottlenecks and impacts of the scheme in providing social security in selected rural areas of the districts.

The key findings of the report are:

- The study found that 95.2% of vulnerable households reported decreasing their annual income in FY 2020-21.
- It was found that 13% of vulnerable households do not have a job card and are still excluded and face various hurdles to get a job card.
- The study also finds that the govt official has misused job cards to extract wages under MGNREGS. The irregularities were reported in both districts. On the question where the job card was generally kept, 34% of the participants indicated that the card was kept either with the sarpanch or Sachiv or contractor or gram-rojgar sevak or elsewhere but not with them
- From the survey, it was analysed that participation of women in MGNREGS during Covid-19 was mostly limited to 11 to 20 days, while men worked for a longer duration.
- Out of the total interviewed, 85.93% of the women expressed a desire to work.
- Many women, especially young mothers (31.25%), said *“that leaving children behind for work is not an option due to lack of safe childcare facilities.”* The situation becomes more difficult for mothers with infants that need full-time supervision and care.
- Average, 67.5% of the women say that the presence of illegal contractors hampers their participation in MGNREGS work.

This report highlights how MGNREGA has been utilized as a “Shock responsiveness” strategy during the Covid-19 pandemic, specifically for women and children has been discussed in the subsequent sections of the report.

Abbreviations

MGNREGS	Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme
NREGA	National Rural Employment Guarantee Act
CEO	Chief Executive Office
ICT	Information Communication Technology
PRI	Panchayat Raj Institution
HHs	House holds
RFP	Request for proposal
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
BPL	Below Poverty Line
APL	Above Poverty Line
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
ICT	Information and communication technology
NSSO	National Sample Survey Organisation
NFHS	National Family Health Survey
IAY	Indira Awas Yojana
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
PTGs	Primitive Tribal Groups
OBC	Other Backward Caste
SC	Schedule Caste
ST	Schedule Tribe
SHG	Self-help Groups
VG	Vulnerable Groups
VRP	Village Resource Person
MIS	Management Information System
NGOs	Non-Government Organization

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Study on Gender and Shock Responsiveness of MGNREGS during Covid-19

1. Background

In 2020, more than 4 million Indians below the age of 30 years lost their jobs during the pandemic (International Labour Organization and Asian Development Bank 2020). Migrants and casual daily labourers faced significant economic distress (ILO 2020) as employment opportunities continued to dwindle along with rising consumption expenditure and food insecurity concerns (World Bank Group, et al. 2021). The crisis has pushed the large section of labour on the verge of starvation due to lockdown, disruption of business, and prolonged restrictions due to rise in Covid-19 cases. The pandemic and the subsequent prolonged lockdown created a global humanitarian crisis, the effect of which spilled over from health sector to other development sectors, especially livelihood. In India and especially in Madhya Pradesh, the livelihood crisis led to migrants returning from the cities to their home-districts creating new vulnerabilities of over-burdened livelihood sector, unemployment, and extreme poverty. Madhya Pradesh accounted for the highest number (7.3 lakhs) of migrants returning during lockdown, while 17% of workers seeking employment did not receive work on demand. Lockdown and restricted movement during the COVID-19 period, affected many people in Madhya Pradesh, experientially since they were stranded in different states, lost their jobs and lacked access to any social security measures.

Madhya Pradesh, the “heart of India,” is the second-largest state in the country by area and sixth largest by population, with around 52 districts. It covers most of central India and took its current shape in the year 2000 when the new state of Chhattisgarh was separated from it. Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) in Madhya Pradesh has significant importance, and it is a much-needed scheme for the rural mass of the state. It is backward in many indicators in terms of crisis of livelihood, drought, and distress migration. It is also one of the poorest states in India, with a high concentration of SC and ST households. Most households rely on agricultural labour, receiving low wages, and are highly dependent on migration as a livelihood strategy. (Narayan et al, 2009). In Madhya Pradesh, MGNREGS plays a significant role in enhancing rural economy. It has especially played a crucial role during Covid-19 period when the Central Government announced a nationwide lockdown, and thousands of workers returned to their native states. The state provided the highest employment of rural workforce under MGNREGA, and the state budget for the programme increased from 20 crores in FY 2019-20 to 34 crores in 2020-21.

Following the Covid-19 outbreak as households lost their incomes, rural women bore the burden of the pandemic and the lockdowns heavily, losing jobs and forced into destitution while also ferrying for water and firewood, taking care of their homes and ailing family members. According to a survey conducted between August 2020 and April 2021, the major reasons for women’s plight have been increase in unpaid care work, constraints in mobility, collapse of women-intensive industries and displacement by returning male migrants (Nikore Associates, 2021). A surge in issues like gender-based violence was also reported due to financial insecurity and alcohol consumption. In this context, MGNREGS intervention to provide social protection for vulnerable section, especially women, has been applauded especially during COVID-19 outbreak. It provides

a fall-back option for workers in rural areas, corroborated with data indicating an increase in wage employment from 3.6 million in FY 2019-20 to 5.5 million households in FY 2020-21. The inherent nature of the scheme to provide at least 100 days of employment to the rural poor households enhances their opportunity to earn cash incomes indicating the immense shock absorption capacity of the MGNREGS.

During the pandemic induced lockdowns, the scheme was expected to attract greater participation of women and other marginalized sections of the rural strata to reduce distress and deprivation through three major indicators of inclusive growth i.e., social protection, democratic governance, and livelihood security. At the national level, women constitute of a large number of MGNREGS unskilled workers, whereas their proportion has been 34.9% in the rural workforce according to Census of 2011. A number of reasons have been identified to understand women's preference to work in MGNREGS. The wages are nearly equal to what women get in private unskilled work whereas these are lower for women. The proximity of the worksites also allows them to cater to household needs.

The social protection and women and child responsiveness of the scheme is empirically highlighted in various studies by measuring an improvement in welfare outcomes through the additional income earned, with direct impacts on health and nutrition of children (Menon, 2019). It is correlated that increase in household finances is linked with increase in expenditures on food and health care, primarily in reduction of hunger in children. The increased participation of women in the labour force and subsequent improvement in their bargaining capacity has been observed to have a positive effect on child human capital (Mani, 2016). The second aspect of MGNREGS is the production of rural infrastructure assets to assist development and mitigate the effects of environmental shocks. These have the potential to improve welfare of women and prevent distress migration and reduce drudgery in women who are given the responsibility to run the household and walk long distances for collecting water. Shock responsive measures of the scheme are therefore also responsive towards women and children- those who are left behind socially, financially and geographically. In light of the above facts, it is important to study various gender responsive dimensions of MGNREGS to study its response in the period of Covid-19 shock.

1.1.Salient Features of Mahatma Gandhi NREGA

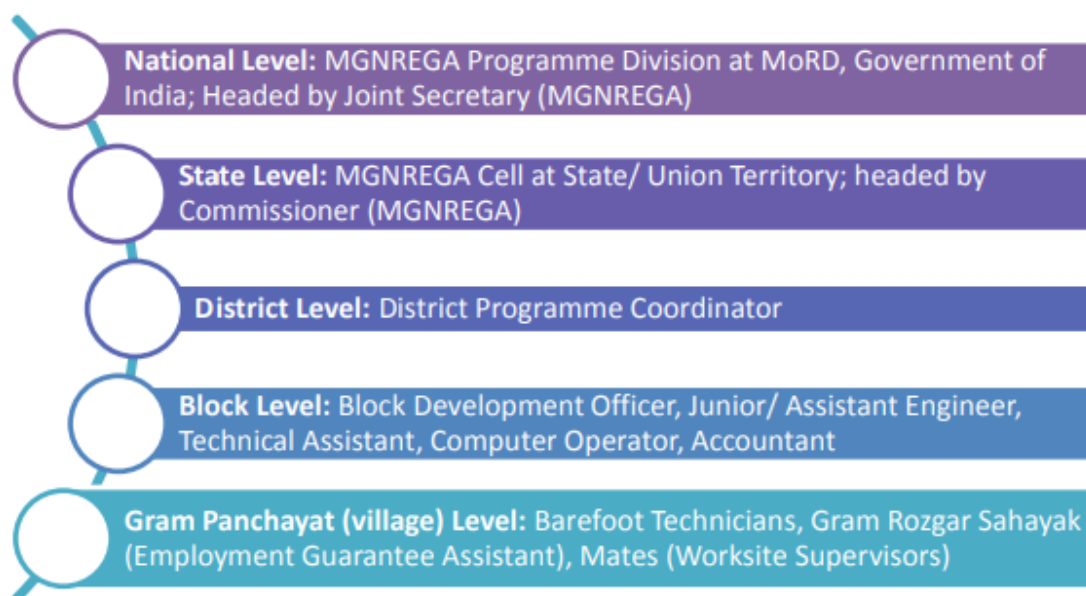
The NREGA, enacted in 2005, guarantees the right to employment for about 5.4 crore rural poor of the country. The Act has aimed to bring about a radical socio-economic change in rural areas through generation of employment and creation of sustainable assets. The rationale of MGNREGS is based on combining the productive capacity of villagers to build and nurture assets, alleviate poverty and provide opportunities to develop rural infrastructure through watershed development, forestry, land development, soil erosions and flood control and construction and repair of infrastructure. The key features of the scheme have been identified above.

- a) Provision of at least 100 days of wage employment in one financial year to every household, given that adult members of the household volunteer to do unskilled manual work.
- b) Any adult registered in a job card, the employment guarantee document provided to each household, can demand for work which should be provided within 15 days of applying. In case work is not provided within 15 days, the applicant is entitled to get an unemployment allowance.

- c) Labourers are entitled to receive a statutory minimum wage for agricultural labourers in the state and gender-based discrimination in the amount paid is not permitted. Payment is done through DBT and directly paid into bank accounts.
- d) Work has to be provided within 5 kms of residence of the worker. If worksite is beyond 5 kms, then an additional allowance of 10% of the wage is paid to the worker.
- e) Mandatory worksite facilities like drinking water, first aid kit, and shaded area for rest and crèche are to be provided to the workers at the worksite. Private contractors are banned under the scheme and the usage of machinery is strictly restricted.
- f) Gram Panchayats is responsible for maintaining a shelf of project based on the recommendations of the Gram Sabha.

Administration

In order to administer this scale of programme, a dedicated administration cadre has been set up across all levels, from the local to the central government. MGNREGA also allows states to utilise up to 6% of its annual expenditure towards meeting administrative expenditure. Bundling administrative expenses as a percentage of the budget of a state thus allows creating and supporting the 'right-size' support systems from state to local levels, and further enables high programme efficiencies and abilities to mobilise and monitor as part of the PEP design. The decentralised nature of MGNREGA enables the planning process for MGNREGA to be bottom-up, starting at the village level in local governments. Programme implementation is also carried out at this level, while the personnel in higher levels are mostly involved in planning and monitoring activities.



1.2.Key Gender Responsive Features of MGNREGS

It is pertinent to underscore that the Right to Employment Act recognizes the social limitations that bound women in rural India and hence prescribes equitable measures to ensure participation of women. It strictly mandates equal wages for women and provision of crèche facility for children accompanying women. The recognition of corrective measures for gender related inequalities is hence observed as an 'effort to encourage equal participation and equal and fair distribution of

benefits' (Nelson, 2015). The gender responsive features and provisions of MGNREGS have been given below:

All India Level:

- a) One third of the employment in unskilled work are reserved for women.
- b) Vulnerable category households, including women headed households are entitled to receive a special job card
- c) Preference for selection as a mate is given to women and persons with disability with a condition that the Mate should have passed at least class 8th. In Madhya Pradesh, only a person with disability can be given the role of a mate.
- d) Both women and men are given equal wages and gender-based discrimination is not permitted.
- e) Special shelf of work should be maintained for physically weaker people including pregnant, lactating, disabled and elderly women. They should receive less physically strenuous work which is closer to their homes.
- f) Women headed households are included in vulnerable category (Paragraph 5, Schedule I) which are entitled to receive individual assets which can improve productivity or act as an additional source of livelihood.
- g) Special care has to be taken to involve the SHG network in the planning processes. It also includes a door-to-door survey of the most vulnerable to assess their decision on-demand generation, asset creation, and skill-building.
- h) Vigilance and Monitoring Committees (VMC) must be set up in each Gram Panchayat. They should consist of 5 persons, with adequate representation from Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribe households, half of whom shall be women.

Madhya Pradesh:

- a) MGNREGS in Madhya Pradesh has mandated to include a minimum of 50 workers per day at work at the GP level which should include workers that are more vulnerable like single women, women headed and SC/ST households.
- b) Decentralization of payment mechanisms of wages by building a network of Bank Sakhi, Bank Correspondent is a positive step of the MP Government to ensure access to payments at the doorsteps. It is an empowering mechanism to ensure control over wage income.
- a) If minimum of 50 workers are not employed per day from the vulnerable strata, the Rojgar Sahayak must identify one "Priya Mitra" from that particular community or a woman, who can spread awareness among poor families.

1.3. Need for the Study

Globally, over 2.7 billion women are legally restricted from having the same choice of jobs as men (UN Women, 2019). The gender discrimination in the labour market continues to hamper chances and opportunities for millions of women affecting both developing and developed economies in all regions. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) recognize the tremendous work left to be done to advance women's economic empowerment. In this context, MGNREGS is a well-known instrument of social protection and a tool for poverty reduction and women's empowerment. The scheme has been designed to achieve a number of goals together, which demands an effective coordination across departments and administration. States schemes have innovated the national

Act building different administrative structures for its implementation. The scheme has also been dynamic over time and has been evolving as a programme which may not always be necessarily for the better in its impact (Narayanan, 2020).

In this regard the proposed study aims to capture the characteristics and key gaps of the scheme within the state of Madhya Pradesh. The pandemic phase could serve as a critical marker, measuring the degree to which the scheme fulfils its purpose of addressing social protection amongst the most vulnerable communities. The report is based on the primary data collected from field surveys and secondary data accessed from the website of MGNREGS to highlight some of the provisions and parameters envisaged to be women and child sensitive and shock responsive. The study aims at guiding the research team to capture trends and variations in performance based on prefixed parameters. Sample based primary data was collected in two diverse districts of Madhya Pradesh- Sehore and Panna to conduct a reality check on the performance of the scheme. The study is an attempt to understand the effectiveness of the scheme in Madhya Pradesh and reviews the best practices, achievement, challenges, bottlenecks and impacts of the scheme in providing social security in selected rural areas of the districts.

2. Research Design and Methodology

2.1.Objectives

The project proposes to undertake an impact assessment of gender and shock responsiveness of MGNREGS in Madhya Pradesh between May 2020 and March 2021 with the following expected outcomes:

1. Impact of MGNREGS on individual HHs and local labour market during the pandemic
2. Access of the scheme by women and vulnerable HHs
3. Awareness and perception of stakeholders on MGNREGS
4. Assess the efficacy of assets created in MGNREGS in terms of their gender responsiveness
5. Identify constraints in the scheme captured from the grassroots level
6. To determine appropriate lessons, bottleneck issues and recommend comprehensive framework, strategies and approaches to improve the gender responsiveness of MGNREGS

2.2.Key Research Questions

1. During the Covid-19 pandemic, to what degree MGNREGS remained Gender and shock responsive in select districts in terms of employment and asset creation?
2. Was MGNREGS successful in creating livelihood supporting assets for vulnerable communities that were most deprived, and what is the actual status of such works?
3. What are the various constraints in the scheme at the grassroots level in being women friendly and shock responsive?

2.3.Research Methodology

The study was undertaken following simple random sampling and adopted a mixed-method research approach that includes both qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis in parallel form. The overall design for this study provided an opportunity for considering different aspects of the problem with a systematic random sampling design. A mix-design approach enabled the use of best-fit quantitative and qualitative tools. Both the tools were used to understand the constraint of the scheme at grass root level from the lens of women, child, and shock responsiveness. The study purposively covered respondents who have also been the beneficiaries of the creation of assets on their individual land or benefitting from the community assets. Special efforts were made towards assessing the impact of works undertaken on individual or community land on the lives of women-headed households, small and marginal farmers, SC/ST & IAY, and assessed the level of change in the overall condition. The study broadly captures the perceptible change in income, agriculture & livelihood of the beneficiaries due to the assets created under MNREGA. The emphasis in this study was on understanding the ground reality on the impact of MGNREGS as a shock responsive scheme for women and children. The study also looked into the district-level variations and made an attempt to identify the possible reasons contributing towards the same.

A. Selection of Villages

The study was conducted in two districts of Madhya Pradesh, i.e., Sehore and Panna. Both the districts were selected based on two criteria. Firstly, they reflect heterogeneity both geographically and in the situation of women workers and their socio-demographic profile.

Secondly, Samarthan has extensively worked in these two districts which helped in extracting qualitative data from the field. Block were selected purposively, and Villages were selected based on district average of expenditure compared with block expenditure. Cumulative expenditure of the Sehore block was 1600.21 lacs and divided by total panchayat (144) and estimated 11.11 lakh rupees as average and similarly in Panna block with a cumulative expenditure of 2089.24 lakh with average expenditure is 25.79 lakhs. Based on average in Sehore, one from below the average, like Badnagar account for a low expenditure of 8.85 (lacs) and from a high expenditure of Leelakhadi 14.97 (lacs). Similarly, in Panna, based on block average, Mutwakala 25.29 (lacs) and Tara 62.12 (lacs) from high expenditure have been selected. From each Gram panchayat, one village with diverse assets has been identified to collect data. The population of ST households was also checked to ensure that the surveys include vulnerable social groups.

2.4. Instruments for Data Collection

The type of research is conceptually classified into three broad categories based on application, objectives, and type of information sought. Accordingly, the present work is a systematic research study based on objectives, descriptive research based on application and qualitative and quantitative analysis from the type of information sought. Standard statistical designs for analysis were planned; however, semi-structured instruments were used for collecting data with different tools and methods for data analysis.

Both primary and secondary data was used for analysis. Firstly, primary data specifically related to the objective of the study was collected through verification of the assets from MIS data and interviews with MGNREGS beneficiaries to understand the impact of MGNREGS in their lives. The data was collected during October and November 2021 and comprised a total of three quantitative components. A total of three instruments were prepared that drew on and modified instruments translated to Hindi. Secondary data have been used from different sources like journals, articles, and research reports.

A. Quantitative study

Target group: For the quantitative study, the target group was the households of small and marginal Farmers, SC/ST and IAY beneficiaries on whose land the assets have been created under MGNREGA. The base period while referring to the MIS was FY 2020-21, i.e., only those beneficiaries were selected on whose land asset creation was completed during 2020-21. However, it is imperative to state that owing to the ground reality, in case of a shortfall in the required number of such beneficiaries, the interviews were conducted with beneficiaries from the subsequent years following the records available from the MGNREGS MIS portal.

The following instruments were used for the study; the details of the questionnaires are given below:

- a) **Semi-structured questionnaire:** A semi-structured interview schedule was prepared to derive rich- first-hand information on a different component of MGNREGS. Interviews were conducted for the household belonging to the vulnerable category (bottom 25%). Second, semi-structured interview for the individual beneficiary and beneficiary from community assets created under the MGNREGS.

- b) Verification tool:** It is pertinent to understand the assets created under MGNREGS and their benefit. To understand the impact of these assets in general or in particular to vulnerable groups, this tool was used to compare the data available in the NREGA MIS portal with the ground reality. Moreover, this tool also helped to cumulate the expenditure in creating assets and the benefit derived from it.

B. Qualitative study

The tools used for collecting qualitative data have been detailed below:

- a) Stake holder In-depth interview:** Sarpanch and/or Sachiv/or GRS of the Panchayat were interviewed to get their views on the impact of the scheme. In-depth interview from the sample Gram Panchayats on operational details. It captured information on the number of families in the village, the BPL families, and the constraint and bottlenecks in MGNREGS for women. The In-depth interview schedule also captured information on the participation of women, gender-responsive works, financial inclusion of women, wages paid, involvement of Gram Sabhas in planning, and Panchayat's perspective on operational issues. Additionally, it captured the timeliness in technical sanctions, measurement, and payment of wages. The availability of manpower to maintain records, and implementation and key challenges with regard to staff availability at Panchayat level were also explored.
- b) Focus Group Discussions:** FGDs with women was conducted to understand the reliability of assets, whether it is gender-responsive or not. The tool helped data collectors in collecting qualitative data on different dimension of MGNREGS, with reference to women, child and shock responsiveness. FGD was also conducted to focus on women's perception of types of assets created in current times and their expectation/suggestion on type of assets to be created in future, and that can be more Gender responsive and generate an alternative source of livelihood. FGDs were also carried out with men to understand their perception of MGNREGS and making policy more gender-responsive and fruit full.
- c) Case Studies:** The best practices and success of the MGNREGS implementation were documented in the form of case studies.

C. Sample Details

A multi-stage sampling approach was adopted for this study. The sample size covered during the study is as follows:

Table 1- Sample size

Target Population Groups	Sample Size
Single Women HH household, SC/STs/IAY beneficiaries, Vulnerable HHs	230
Asset verification (community and individual)	70
Interview with assets beneficiary and community assets	60

In-depth Interview	24 (3 each woman and Men)/village
FGD - MGNREGS Beneficiaries	16 (2 each Woman and Men)/village

2.5. Profile of the Study Area

A. District Profile of Sehore

Sehore district is a part of Bhopal division of Madhya Pradesh, located 39 km away from state capital Bhopal toward the south. The district boundary is aligned with natural features on three sides by the Parvati, Narmada, and Bina rivers. Subsequently, Sehore has developed extensive means of irrigation, mainly through canals, tube wells, wells, and other water sources. A total area of 287,647 Ha, i.e., 41%, is irrigated out of the total cultivated area. The region is also home to Gond, Bhilala, and Korku tribes. MGNREGS scheme in Sehore District aims to enhance livelihood security in rural areas consisting of 5 blocks by providing 100 days of employment in a financial year to every household whose adult member volunteers to do unskilled manual work. There was a total of 208650 were registered, and 94480 were active workers registered in MGNREGA consist ratio of 2.2:1. It means that out of a total of 2.2 per registered worker, there is 1 active worker in the District in FY 2020-21. Sehore district also has a huge gender gap between registered and active workers. The proportion of registered men and women workers in the district is 1.6:1. It means for every 1.6 men workers, there is only 1 woman, and similarly, in active workers, the proportion of men and women is 1.8: 1. Moreover, there are 57264 (52.71) active job cards in the district against 108646 total issued job cards. It can be observed that half of the registered households are only active, and this number makes it significant to explore the reason behind less participation of rural poor, especially during distress.

B. District Profile of Panna

The district derives its name from the headquarter town Panna, named after the emerald gem extensively found in the belt of about 80km. It is located in the northeastern part of Madhya Pradesh and was originally a Gond settlement up to the 13th century. The economy of the district is mainly dependent on agriculture. MGNREGS scheme in Panna District aims to enhance livelihood security in rural areas consisting of blocks by providing 100 days of employment in a financial year to every household whose adult member volunteers to do unskilled manual work. A total of 301844 were registered, and 198798 were active workers registered in MGNREGA consist ratio of 1.5:1. It means that out of a total of 1.5 registered workers, there is only 1 active worker in the District in FY 2020-21. Sehore district also has a huge gender gap between registered and active workers. In the district, the proportion of registered men and women workers is 1.3:1. It means for every 1.3 men workers there is only 1 woman, and similarly, in active workers, the proportion of men and women is 1.3:1. Moreover, in the district, there are 93940 (70.03) active job cards against 134151 total issued job cards. Although compared to Sehore, the Panna district consists of a large number of poor and depends on MGNREGS work for their survival.

C. Demography of Study districts:

Both Sehore and Panna differ considerably both in size and socio-demographic indicators. Within districts too, differences in these indicators between the selected blocks are observed. The demographic profile of Madhya Pradesh and the two districts have been given below in the following table:

Table 2 A- Demographic Profile of Panna and Sehore district in Madhya Pradesh

	Madhya Pradesh	Sehore	Panna
Population, 2011 – Total	7,26,26,809	13,11,332	10,16,520
Males	3,76,12,306 (51.79%)	6,83,743 (52.14%)	5,33,480 (52.48%)
Female	3,50,14,503 (48.21%)	6,27,589 (47.86%)	4,83,040 (47.52%)
Female literacy rate	60.0	65.1	54.4
Blocks	333	5	5
Villages	51527	1072	1011
Revenue villages	-	1037	1015
Total household	1,50,93,256	2,57,311	2,28,260
Proportion of rural population to total population	72.36	81.1	87.67
Sex ratio	931	918	905
Work participation Rate	47.0	44.7	43
Working population to total population	-	56.9	-
SC population (%)	15.62	20.69	20.46
ST population (%)	21.09	11.10	16.81

Table 3 Block wise working Population: Sehore and Panna

Block	Persons	Main Workers	Marginal Workers	Total Workers	Non-Workers
		Number	Number	Number	Number
Sehore	Total	77,893	31,879	1,09,772	1,65,306
	Male	60,564	12,958	73,522	70,017
	Female	17,329	18,921	36,250	95,289
Panna	Total	51,902	27,021	78,923	1,05,084
	Male	36,620	13,094	49,714	47,452
	Female	15,282	13,927	29,209	57,632

Table 2- B Block wise Working Population 1Table 2- B Block wise Working Population: Sehore and Panna Block

Census: 2011

D. Socio-Economic Profile of the Samples

Through the analysis of semi-structured interviews with households belonging to the vulnerable category (bottom 25% poor households of the GP), the socio-economic profile was observed to be as follows:

Table 4 Number of Respondents from each GP and District

District	Gram Panchayat	Number of Respondents
Panna	Basai	70
	Tara	57
	Total	127
Sehore	Badnagar	50
	Bheelkheda	53
	Total	103
Total	State	230

Out of the total respondents (n=230), 64 were females and 166 were males. It was also observed that out of the total, 113 belonged to SC HHs, 62 were from ST HHs, 53 from OBC HHs and 2 were from general category HHs

E. Poverty Indicators of the District

In 2018, Madhya Pradesh ranked 4th poorest in the multi-dimensional poverty index. A report by state planning commission Madhya Pradesh analysed the State and Central sample of Consumer Expenditure Survey 2004-05 for the state of Madhya Pradesh to estimate the percentage of population living below poverty line by districts. Report highlights that in case of rural population below poverty line by district shows and categories district in two categories i.e., District with 50 % less poverty than State Average Poverty and more than 50 % higher poverty than state average. Sehore place in the district with 50% less poverty than state average poverty and Panna place in 50% higher poverty more than the state average poverty. The details of BPL HH are given in the following table:

Table 5 Estimates of Population and Households living below Poverty Line in Rural MP 2004-05

District	Projected population	Projected population below poverty line	% Of population below poverty line	Number of Household below poverty line (based on Avg. HHsize)	Number of households below poverty line (based on
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					Avg. HH size of BPL HHs
Panna	858985	409073	47.6	87856	71624
Sehore	814420	400152	49.1	71571	63019

*Consumer Expenditure Survey 2004-05

Such a high proportion of population living below poverty line results in various problems such as hunger, malnutrition, low level of education etc. This can be observed from the following table:

Table 6 HDI ranks of State and Study area

S. No	Parameter	Madhya Pradesh (State Average)	Sehore	Panna
1	HDI rank	33	22	41

Source: The Human Development Index for Madhya Pradesh 2001

The State average of human development indicators have improved over the last decade from 0.5687 to 0.606, it is still among the lowest in the country and rank 33. Similarly, Sehore has better rank 22 then panna 41 in terms of all the three-indicator education, Life Expectancy and Per capita income These values are closely related to poor health and welfare indicators of women and children in rural areas. According to NFHS-5,

Table 7 Status of Districts

S. No	Indicator	Madhya Pradesh (State Average)	Sehore	Panna
1	Sex ratio of the total population (females per 1,000 males)	976	894	956
2	Women whose Body Mass Index (BMI) is below normal (%)	25.2 (men:21.8)	27.1	26.8
3	All women age 15-49 years who are anaemic (%)	55.8 (men:22.9)	45.3	59
4	Pregnant women age 15-49 years who are anaemic (%)	54.9	58.8	63.4
5	Women who are literate (%)	59.2 (men: 78.7)	64.3	55.7
6	Women with 10 or more years of schooling (%)	21.7 (men:35.0)	28.2	24
7	Women age 20-24 years married before age 18 years (%)	26.6 (men: 35.1) *	21.7	22.8

Source: National Family Health Survey (5) 2019-21

These values indicate that poverty has a disproportionate impact on the health and welfare of women in the population. In this context, MGNREGS is an important scheme to assist families that need cash income and in creation of assets that can improve livelihoods or help

create resilience against economic or environmental shocks. MGNERGS along with other schemes like Balram Talab, Deen Dayal Antyodaya Upchar Yojana and many others have also started showing the impact on income, thus in reduction of poverty. The following section analyses the gender responsive impact of MGNREGS in Madhya Pradesh.

3. Gender Responsive impact of MGNREGS in Provision of Employment during Covid-19

This chapter examines the status of women's paid employment through MGNREGS and the transformative gender equality. It explores the contribution of the scheme in women's empowerment from the lens of shock responsiveness. The section is divided into 3 main parts, namely access of employment for women, barriers and constraints in women's participation and equal opportunities for women.

3.1. Status of Employment and Livelihood

The Covid -19 pandemic-induced lockdowns had a major impact on the livelihoods of rural households. Employment opportunities came to a halt, and adults, both women, and men, in the working-age group were forced to stay at home struggling for subsistence. Migrant families stranded in cities returned to their villages and added to the market competition for limited opportunities. From the field survey, it can be construed that vulnerable category households were more dependents on labour work. In Badnagar and Leelakhadi, workers that are mostly men, travel to Sehore and Bhopal regularly for work. Similarly, in Panna, which has a significantly large tribal population, a large number of people, 36%, worked for the forest department and rest dependent on other labour work. Therefore, women are an active part of the rural workforce. In fact, in Madhya Pradesh, the participation of women in the rural casual labour force is 39.2%, which is 33.2% for men. Many were dependent on livestock rearing as a critical source for subsistence. This highlights the critical role of the employment guarantee scheme in such periods of shock.

Following the Covid-19 pandemic labourers from both the district are unable to do work as in, the study found that 95.2% of vulnerable households reported decreasing their annual income in FY 2020-21. Out of the 230 people from vulnerable households interviewed in Sehore and Panna, 106 (46.08%) stated a reduction in their income due to unavailability of work, and 40 (17.39%) respondents specified that there were more labourers and less work available, and 17.39% was not able to work due to afraid of pandemic. For workers who travelled to nearby towns and cities, fear of the pandemic and police beatings also deterred them from seeking jobs that were once readily available.

However, there are some examples too, those who have worked under MGNREGS and used earning as capital. In Sehore, four women who worked under MGNREGS, have invested in purchasing capital assets like jewellery and livestock to generate an alternative source of livelihood. The case study below depicts the better utilization of MGNREGS wages by women.

Case Study 1: MGNREGS sustaining Livelihood for Rural Households

“MGNREGS enabled me and my husband to procure life stock as a sustainable livelihood option.”

This was a common experience narrated by four women residing in BheelKheda village in Leelakhedi GP Sehore district in Madhya Pradesh. A largely remote village is notified as “Van Gram” forest village, where land lease entitlements are provided to the poor tribal families to till the land. Monocropping is the primary income source, which does become unproductive over long periods.

*Four women were identified and interviewed on how MGNREGS helped sustain them as a source of income generation. A majority of the women mentioned their spouses, and they were employed in MGNREGS and earned between 12,000-15,000 annually. Since MGNREGS does ensure strengthening financial inclusion of women, through wage payment in bank accounts, all respondents confirmed their wages was credited to bank accounts. A critical marker to measure the impact of MGNREGS on women’s inclusion is her control over wages and wage expenditure. **“Both my husband and myself decided that we should use the wage earnings from MGNREGS to purchase a buffalo and begin selling milk. This would be a long-term livelihood asset that would help safeguard and increase our HH income,”** beams a confident Reena Bai. Similarly, the second women Beena Bai expressed procuring livestock as an income-generating asset.*

***“I decided to buy silver jewellery by adding to the wages earned from MGNREGS. This could always be bartered at a time of emergency”**, states Jasma Bai. While Meena bai mentioned, she spent her wages on daily necessities like food and clothing for herself and her children.*

It is significant to note that opportunity for paid work under MGNREGS did enable these four women gain a greater control over expending their wages for sustainable livelihood options, which has positively benefited their children and families. Indirectly, the inclusion of women in HH financial decision-making would, in the long run, help promote gender equality and empowerment.

A. Status of Employment in MGNREGS

Job Cards: In order to realize the rights-based and demand-driven aspect of MGNREGA, all rural households are entitled to register for MGNREGA employment. To enhance transparency in this process, all households receive a ‘Job Card’ upon registration which serves as an identity document within MGNREGA. This card enables beneficiaries to track the number of days worked under MGNREGA and provides proof in case of failure to provide work, delayed payments, or other grievances. In this way, each registered household can monitor program performance and whether administrative processes are completed in line with program objectives and timelines.

From the field area, most of the respondents surveyed were aware of MGNREGS, while others recognised it as ‘panchayat works. The primary requirement for availing of the benefits of the scheme is registration in a job card.

Table 8 Status of Job Cards in GPs

S. No.	Districts	Gram Panchayat	Issued Job card	No. of Active Job Cards (from NREGA MIS)
1	Sehore	Badnagar	205	76
2		Leelakhedi	272	162
3	Panna	Mutwakala	331	183
4		Tara	259	214
Total			1067	635

Source. nrega,nic

The HHs that are registered in a JC according to MIS data are nearly 50% in the study area. This can be attributed to low coverage of HHs or exclusion of those that do not need the scheme. From the above table, it was observed that out of the total issued job card in Badnagar, only 37.07% of the job card are active. The researcher has observed the reason for this that sarpanch in Badnagar is Tribal women and panchayat-related tasks generally performed by the other “Panch,” and they were not active in MGNREGS work. Although in the next panchayat from the Sehore District, Leelakhedi has a higher percentage (59.56) of the active job card. Leelakhedi is a forest village, and most of the households are tribal and largely depend on labour work. In Panna district, the proportion of active job cards to issued jobs is almost half in both villages. It was observed that mostly the higher number of workers migrate in search of work and due to low wages and non-availability of work in the district, are not interested in working in MGNREGS.

However, the study also found a very similar response to those who do not have job cards from the sample household. Out of total respondents, 87% were registered in a job card. That means 13% of vulnerable households are still excluded and face various hurdles to get a job card. Out of those that did not have a JC, 54% responded that they had tried to get registered in a job card but failed due to reasons like lack of document (7%), their Panchayat did not make one (31%) or were unaware about the process (63%). It was also observed that out of the vulnerable HHs, ST and SC HHs were more likely not to have a JC than as compared with OBC HHs, indicating social inequality in accessing the scheme. Out of the total number of persons who do not have job cards, 23.3% were from the ST category, 70% were from SC, and the remaining 6.66% were from the OBC category. These numbers reflect that vulnerable households are still excluded from the MGNREGS. Most of the respondents said that any attempt to procure a JC is thwarted by the Sarpanch or the sachiv (Secretary) on the basis of lack of appropriate documents or even confiscating their documents. In this regard, one of the women- age 36 in Panna district said,

Those who are well-off or friends of Sarpanch or Secretary, their cards were made, but those who want job cards, their cards were not made.

Many without JCs are unaware of the scheme, while others either do not know the procedure or their JCs are confiscated for illegally filling musters and generating demand for work. Then the JC holder is only approached during the time of payment. Such cases of fraud have been discussed below.

B. Misuse of Job cards:

Job cards in both districts have been misused blatantly by the govt. officials. The study finds that the govt official has misused job cards to extract wages under MGNREGS. The irregularities were reported in both districts. On the question where the job card was generally kept, 34% of the participants indicated that the card was kept either with the sarpanch or Sachiv or contractor or gram-rojgar sevak or elsewhere but not with them. It was observed that the job card has been taken by govt officials and generated fake attendance and withdraw wage amounts. Once the money is deposited in the bank account of the MGNREGS worker, they are asked to accompany the Sarpanch or secretary who withdraws the amount. These workers are receive meagre amount of Rs. 500- Rs. 1000, for simply accompanying local officials to the bank. One of the respondents say that:

“A female member in our home approached the kiosk, where she was asked to scan her thumb impression to verify/ update her Aadhar Status. Little did she know that her wages from MGNREGS would be withdrawn by the Government official along with meagre savings in her bank account.” Low levels of literacy and lack of awareness regarding work shelves and wages amongst rural households usually compounds the problem. “We get little or no information regarding the work shelf under MGNREGS from the Sarpanch and Panchayat office, which does lead to low uptake of service.”

This kind of fraud has been observed in both districts. The study also finds that control of govt. officials on job cards affect demand patterns as well. Job cards are with held by village Sarpanch, Sachiv or contractor, gram-rojgar sevak, who falsify attendance in their registers and escalate work days to 50-100 days. In that case, those who demand work were excluded under MGNREGS.

C. Demand and Participation in MGNREGS:

Demand for work and participation are two important aspects under MGNREGS. There are several studies highlighting the demand pattern and participation at the ground level. During covid when large number of migrants returned from metropolitan cities, most of them were seeking work to sustain at the times of crisis. Therefore, MGNREGS responded as a critical program to provide relief to the rural poor. In the field area, MIS data reports a surge in employment provided to women in both the districts. Where in 2019-20, a total 98,256 individuals employed in Panna and 60,547 employed in Sehore, rose to 1,48,687 in panna and 72,932 in Sehore. The percentage change in Panna has been an increase of 51.32% and 20.45% in Sehore respectively. But in reality, through the field survey, such rise in employment was not found.

According to the MIS portal, 828 HHs (1707 individuals) demanded for work in FY 2020-21, out of which employment was provided to nearly 100% of them. The portal informs that 611 HHs (1144 individuals including 529 women) were employed in FY 2020-21. From the survey

of vulnerable HHs, only (51%) responded that they had participated in MGNREGS work in their Panchayat during the pandemic, while a larger number of individuals were willing to participate but did not receive work. As 89.5% of the vulnerable category HH respondents were dependent on labour work, most of the individuals, irrespective of gender, were desperate for a reliable, long-term source of employment. A general lack of awareness on the functioning of the scheme was observed and a very limited number of individuals followed-up with officials to demand for employment, and were mostly turned down as contractors were assigned.

One of the most perplexing findings that needed verification was percentage of women in total persons employed in the two districts. In the selected GPs, MIS portal shows that percentage of women employed increased from 74.67% to 91.94% in Sehore and from 78.46% to 83.75% in Panna. These values are unrealistically higher than what was found through interviews and discussion. A possible explanation for such large percentages was given by Men _age 45, __ (District co-ordinator Samarthan),

During covid more fund has been released by the center to cater the need of the vulnerable household in MGNREGS. In that case, to show the greater number of workers in the portal, officials registered extra name in muster from the same job card. Mostly women from those households who are family members of friends of govt. officials. That is why the percentage of women employed rose during covid.

The uploading of false data of an unusually large number of women was checked by comparing the large number of female participants against their share of person-days generated. According to the MIS portal, a total of 32,514 person days were generated in the four GPs, out of which 14,675 (45%) were contributed by women. The portal provides a database of a number of women employed and person-days generated by women. Based on that data, the following calculations were made:

Table 9 Calculation of Person days generated per person from MIS Portal

District	Person days generated by Women	Person days generated by Men	No. of women Employed	No. of men employed	Person days generated per woman employed	Person days generated per man employed
Sehore*	5243	5716	194	17	27	336
Panna *	9432	12123	335	65	28	187

*Only data from GPs surveyed has been included

If the number of workers enrolled in the muster on the basis of gender is assumed to be correct, then against each unskilled male worker, 336 and 187 person-days were generated in FY 2020-21 in Sehore, and Panna, respectively, which is not possible since person-days per household is limited to 100 days in an FY. Therefore, the unusually high percentage of women workers is incorrect. As per individual interviews with people belonging to vulnerable households in the GPs, 63% of the female respondents and 50% male respondents said that

they had worked in MGNREGS during the pandemic but for very few days. None of the respondents had completed 100 days of work—the following table given the distribution of number of person-days generated wrt Gender.

Table 10 Person days generated by women and men from survey of vulnerable category HHs

Person days Generated	Gender		Total
	Female	Male	
11- 20	52.6%	47.4%	100
21-30	16.7%	83.3%	100
31-40	25.0%	75.0%	100

From the survey, it was analysed that participation of women in MGNREGS during Covid-19 was mostly limited to 11 to 20 days, while men worked for a longer duration. One of the reasons can be that in situations where the family was dependent on MGNREGS, men might have substituted for women's positions for labor-intensive work, and women provided employment on specific types of assets creation such as plantation, and these works usually last for 10 to 15 days. The other reason is in cases when individual assets were made, the labour work would be taken by male family members while women continued to work on farms. For works related to the construction of roads which is one of the most typical works undertaken in MGNREGS, the perception of a few men and women was that road works were not for women.

In this regard one of the respondents, Gaura Banskar, age 40, told that

"What is the work of women on work like road construction. This is very hard work, and women cannot do such work. They should have simple tasks."

This statement shows a patriarchal notion of rural men. One of the main reasons for women's exclusion is management problems from the state side and the gendered mindset. These issues prevent women from availing employment in labour-intensive works.

From the women's perspective in terms of employment, 85.93% of women were willing to work in MGNREGS due to its central feature to avail work within the radius of 5 km. But due to administrative failure, women are not able to get work. One of the Tribal women respondents says that:

"Tribal women do all types of work, but at least we should get some work. When we go out to work (except MGNREGS), all the type of work we have to do, so why not here (in MGNREGS)?"

The below section highlights some of the key barriers women face to working in MGNREGS.

3.2. Gendered Constraints in Women's Participation

However, the large variation in women's participation continues to be a relevant concern because it is indicative of many potential issues. On the one hand, it could be the case that women opt out of the MGNREGA involuntarily or voluntarily. Women perhaps seek work but are not employed due to administrative discrimination. In the latter, there could be insurmountable social barriers, including but not restricted to norms for women working outside, especially for widows, for child care roles, etc. A lack of awareness is also a significant problem in many parts of India including the field area. The opportunity cost of seeking NREGA work might be too high for many. If there is uncertainty about whether or not they will get work, they might prefer to seek work elsewhere or not work at all.

On the question of what prevented women from joining the MGNREGA in larger numbers in the field area, the answer by Gram Panchayat functionaries was that women were not interested in MGNREGA work. A contrary view emerged when the researchers spoke to women directly. Out of the total interviewed, 85.93% of the women expressed a desire to work and highlighted the barriers that prevented their participation, the primary reason being that they were not provided work by the Sarpanch

Many women, especially young mothers (31.25%), said *"that leaving children behind for work is not an option due to lack of safe childcare facilities."* The situation becomes more difficult for mothers with infants that need full-time supervision and care. In many areas, inflexible social norms also prevent women from working outside the house. Some of these issues have been discussed below.

A. Administration Discrimination:

The proportion of the rural population interviewed (n=230) from the field area suggests that one of the major constraints to women's participation is "administrative discrimination"; the proportion of adult women seeking work on MGNREGA is lower than the proportion of adult men seeking work. Women from the both the districts were found to suffer from administrative discrimination mainly due to the presence of contractors and provision of work farther than 5 kms. MGNREGS is aimed at providing livelihood security to the poor, but a blatantly corrupt nexus between village and block officials, contractors, and powerful people has led to irregularities of unforeseen sorts. This results in the exclusion of the poorest and most deserving individuals within rural communities, who are unable to access benefits from social protection schemes like MGNREGS.

Researchers have conducted Focused group discussions with women. In all the FGD, on average, 67.5% of the women say that the presence of illegal contractors hampers their participation in MGNREGS work. Contractors prevented locals from working in their own village since contractors hired their own labour and most of the works are done by machines. Gender-based discrimination is also more prevalent since they do not have administrative pressure to enhance participation of women. Further, when women demanded work from the sarpanch or Sachiv, they were instructed to talk to contractor.

An agitated respondent states, *"I checked the MGNREGS portal, where despite so many people being registered, those with active JC cards were assigned work. Coincidentally these were often wealthy farmers and close aids of the Sarpanch."*

As per Schedule 1 of MGNREGA does not permit the presence of contractors and labour displacing machines, but 79% of total respondents interviewed mentioned that this provision remains floored in reality. “A concrete road was being constructed in our village, which provided a scope for many local workers to be employed. However here too the work was assigned to a contractor who used lowly paid labourers, from another village and automated machines to get this completed.” States an aggrieved respondent from Badnagar village in Sehore District. This is highlighted in the following case study:

Case Study 2: “My Right to Work”

“When we saw a contractor employing labour from the nearby village, we demanded to the Sarpanch that local women from the village should be given an opportunity for wage employment under MGNREGS.”

Sentiments expressed by an adamant Mithlesh bai a 29-year-old woman residing with her family in Basai village in Panna district. MGNREGS has been instrumental in ensuring paid employment for rural women like Mithlesh bai – for many married women it is the first opportunity for paid work, which could significantly impact women’s control overall household decisions and in a way, help combat gender equality. Driven by the need to sustain herself and her children, Mithlesh bai mentioned that when they did witness a contractor hiring outside labour, she demanded to know why local villagers were not being employed as a right guaranteed to them. She was brushed off by the Sarpanch, who was quick to blame the contractor and the lack of uptake of works in MGNREGS by villagers due to wage rates being lower than agricultural wage rates. Disillusioned and despaired Mithlesh bai indicated how nexus between the local administration within the village and influential persons, further perpetuate illegal practices. While being asked about how this could be addressed, she expresses,

“It is our right to demand for wage employment and we should not be denied this right. We have been

“It is our right to demand for wage employment and we should not be denied this right. We have been undertaking forest development work at Rs. 200 per day and would eagerly take up MGNREGS work even if it pays us a little less.”

The problem of women’s participation transcends age, with older women like Girija, a 60-year-old woman residing in the same village, who claims she has been issued a Job Card by the local Panchayat but is yet to receive any work in MGNREGS. The low levels of awareness about the scheme coupled with the physical nature of Manual work in MGNREGS tends to exclude older yet vulnerable women like Girija. The current pandemic has further affected rural households and induced job loss, in these situations MGNREGS plays a critical role in ensuring social protection for the most vulnerable especially women and children.

Experiences shared by women like Mithlesh bai and Girija, suggests an urgent need for greater transparency and accountability in planning and implementing gendered provisions under MGNREGS by local administration.

Apart from factors that constrain demand for work, there might also be problems at the worksites themselves. It could be the case that women do seek work but are rationed out. An explanation for the low participation rates of women could then be that women face a higher rationing rate than do men, given comparable rates of seeking work. In general, it could be a combination of the two issues described above. Indicators should thus be assessed in conjunction with one another. A particular concern of this section is whether specific vulnerable populations and household types are most likely to face severe constraints.

B. Lack of worksite facility

MGNREGA's uniqueness lies in the gendered provisions whereby worksite facilities are to be equipped with adequate drinking water facility, shaded area for taking rests and a first aid box. Data reveal that the most critical problems faced by the women workers were lack of worksite facilities like drinking water, shade to rest, and Creche facility. Most of the respondents say that "*Lack of safe drinking water*" (78.12%) "*and*" "*No shade during rest period*" (60%) is some of the major constraints to work. It may be because the MGNREGA works are taken up during slack season, i.e., summers when water requirement is high, and there is a scarcity of water in rural areas.

The second big hurdle was the lack of child-care facilities which were found to be absent through the field investigation. For lactating mothers' provision for crèche facilities should be provided, while marginalized women from within the village should be employed to provide childcare services. A majority of the respondents mentioned that worksite facilities did not provide these benefits, and many women (31.25%) with young infants were forced to carry them to worksites or forfeit paid work. "*If we opt for MGNREGS, we have no option but to take our infants with us to the worksites. There are hardly any proper shaded areas, and our children susceptible to insect snake bites.*" The response indicates the lack of childcare facilities in worksites, deterring many vulnerable women from accessing wage employment. Safe worksite facilities for both women and children continue to challenge many rural women in these districts.

One woman in Sehore age (48yrs) had never heard of worksite facilities and said,

"We get a 1-hour break for having lunch. There are trees in this region, so we have a place to rest and keep the child there." (FGD-4, Leelakhadi)

These are some of the most important worksite facilities which are needed to enhance women's participation in MNGREGS; those are in very much need of the work. While being asked about what could be done to improve MGNREGS for women, respondents were quick to mention the need for work to be assigned closer to their homes (24.35), lighter tasks (30.43), employment in a group (14.78), and timely wages (28.70), others (1.74%) and better childcare facilities at the worksites. There is a need for more gender-sensitive work planning for vulnerable sub-sets of women and their inclusion in Gram Sabha meetings. In order to support the safe and dignified sanitation rights of women, a provision of mobile toilets within the worksite has been proposed. "*We women usually drink less water while working since there*

are no toilets for us to use.” The provision would encourage women’s participation as well as improve women’s reproductive health and hygiene.

3.3 Equal Opportunities for Women

A. Participation of women as Skilled Worker

MGNREGS also reserved a specific role to the skilled workers who assist in managing and completing work. Skill work such as mason and semi-skill work such as mate (site supervisor) are paid higher than the unskilled wage. Participation of women as skilled and semiskilled workers in MGNREGA is a critical lens to understand the extent of MGNREGS gender responsiveness. Management Information portal of MGNREGS, a record for skilled workers who are working. The below table highlights the block-wise skilled and semiskilled workers under MGNREGS in the FY 2020-21.

Table 11 Skilled and Semi-Skilled workers in Sehore and Panna based on gender

S.no	Block	Skilled worker		Semiskilled Worker	
		Male	Female	Male	Female
1	Sehore	530	4	70	23
2	Panna	612	18	450	145

Source nrega.nic

From the above table, it can be observed that women are disproportionately represented in skilled work. In Sehore, only 4 skilled and only 23 are semiskilled women worked in FY 2020-21, and similarly in Panna, 18 skilled and 145 semiskilled workers. It is essential to see these figures, where Madhya Pradesh state has a specific provision for semiskilled work as mate to be 100 percent women. But data reflects that very few women work in MGNREGS as skilled and semiskilled workers.

In the year, the state govt realized the potential need for the Mate in MGNREGS and started training for mates in 2021. But in the sampled district found male mates are more compared to women. While interviewing GRS, it was found that recently training for mates has been conducted with a particular focus on the inclusion of women. He said:

“Mates were trained in 2012-13; then, they were not deployed. Now in this year 2021, the training of Mates has started again, and this time the government intends that all the Mates should be women.”

(GRS Panna, age 34 years)

Mates were also interviewed to cross-check the current state of the new circular issued for mates and found that training for mates has been done but is a very unsystematic way, falling short of enhancing their understanding on MGNREGS works. Training lasts for only one day, and very few things such as taking attendance through the mobile app or photo uploading

have been taught. But there is a need to train them on measurement issues and demand generation-related constraints women face. In an interview, one mate (male, age 25) said,

“Janpad panchayat me ek hi din ka training hua hai aur, Wahaa par ye btaya tha- kaam kaise karwana hai, mobile monitoring system se kaise attendance chadegi. Unhone kewal btaya – panchayat me documents jama kar dena, fir panchayat se app milega. Training me kareeb 50 log honge. Hamari panchayat se kewal ekhi gaya tha. Mahilaaye jyada thi. Abhi meri patni ne bhi shuru kiya hai.

One day's training was complete in Janpad Panchayat and, we were taught on - how to do the work, how to enter attendance through the mobile monitoring system. They only told me - submit the documents in the panchayat; the app will be provided to you soon. In training there were 50 mates trained, and only I have attended from our panchayat. There are women too who were trained, but we do not know when we will start working as mates.”

Based on the narration, it can attribute that training is being done to include semiskilled workers with a special focus on women. But still, one of the significant concerns is the inclusion of skilled workers. There is no such provision from the state site to provide training or workshop to the skilled workers.

Other stakeholders such as Sarpanch and Sachiv also welcomed the recent initiative by the state govt. on the inclusion of female semiskilled workers as Mate. One of the Gram Rojgar Sahayak says that

“If women work as a mate, then they will earn more money. Those women who are educated in the village will benefit from semi-skilled work in their own village.”

(GRS, Sehore)

It can be observed from the above narrations and figures that still males are higher than the women skilled workers. The conditions in the case of skilled female workers like masons also remain unchanged. They are neither registered as skilled workers nor trained under the programme. Hence, they continue to perform manual work and receive unskilled wages.

By law, contractors or brokers have no place in NREGA's implementing structure, and mates are responsible for supervising schemes; and The gram Sabha should identify female skilled workers such as mason. The study found only 1 women skilled worker, but there is a higher chance of more women skilled workers. Skilled and semi-skilled women motivate other women to be skilled rather than depend on manual work.

3.4 Importance of Wage Employment for women and Bank payments for NREGA workers

A. Wages:

Paid employment remains the privilege of few women globally, although it is fair to say all women work. However, it is widely acknowledged in the literature that one of the main factors inhibiting women from having control over household decisions is the perceived value of the work they do. Women take on the huge bulk of unpaid household and care work – taking care of family members, cleaning and keeping house – which remains undervalued, unacknowledged, and invisible (Beneria, 1982; Donahoe, 1999; Hirway, 2005). Even within the small share of women in paid employment, 13.4 percent of all working-age women in India, for example, issues exist. Many women are in vulnerable or informal employment, and wages are often not at par with those of men (ILO, 2016).

In this context, MGNREGS plays a significant role in bringing women to the center of labour force. The study finds that MGNREGS workers face severe issues like delayed payment, bogus job cards, illegally taking out their payment through corrupt bureaucrats and politicians of rural areas. In the study, the respondent on asking wage related question says that the delay payment in MGNREGS work hampers our daily routine. Those who work in MGNREGS are generally poor and require daily money for their survival. But payment got delayed to one to two months. In that case, they have to borrow money or have to migrate. One of the respondent's Ramratan, age 52 years, says that: he worked in NREGS work for three months, but his wage is delayed. Like Ramratan, many of the workers are facing delayed payment issues. Who worked during a pandemic, out of those, 28.81% of the respondent says that their wage is delayed.

Delayed payments came in the mode of participation of poor women, particularly in the case of single women, who could not afford to wait as they were the sole earners in the family. When the wages did not come on time, women workers were often forced to return to previous, less-preferred forms of employment—considering the control on wages aspect.

B. Wage rate:

MGNREGA has been particularly innovative in terms of conditions of employment, and particularly, the wages. It has developed modalities to set the wage equitably and preserve its value by means of indexation. It has also adopted payment approaches to increase efficiency and promote mass financial inclusion, provide compensation for delayed wages or failure to provide employment, and, arguably, created an income floor for casual wage labourers in some states.

While the section from the Act above specifies minimum wage as INR 60/day in 2005, the current minimum MGNREGA wage rate is INR 193 in Madhya Pradesh. The Central Government follows Section 6 (1) of the Act and notifies wage rates for each state during the start of every financial year, although states may provide a higher wage rate if they finance the additional cost from state funds. In this context, the study found that due to less wages, poor workers are not willing to work under MGNREGS. It was observed from the field study

that 17% of respondents were not willing to work under MGNREGS primarily due to low wages.

One of the respondents says that:

“Itne me hota kya hai” aaj kal kitni mehngai hai”

The study also finds that of the total women interviewed, 86% say they were willing to work under MGNREGS at the wage rate of RS. 193. Since MGNREGS wage rate is close to what women normally receive in agriculture and forest department works, they were willing to work in MGNREGS too, if the issue of delay payment was resolved. Some of the respondent women have worked during covid in MGNREGS and utilized their earned money to generate alternative livelihood sources. A perfect example of women's participation reflects that if the wage payment is being done on time and work provided to women leads to the family's economic security.

C. Wage Payment through Bank:

Another area of concern relates to the en masse bank payments of NREGA wages. This is a ‘administrative innovation’, which is perceived by the government as a ‘magic pill’ for ending corruption. The introduction of bank payment has important implications for women workers. The main reasons in favour of bank payments include the perception that it will increase the possibility of saving and a reduction in the possibility of being cheated by those who distribute wages in the village. During Focused Group Discussion in all the four villages on average 60% of women said that a lump sum of money will be available in one installment (stated by respondents). Interestingly, for women, it is also seen as an effective tool for increasing their control over the use of this money (e.g., some (20%) women said when wages are paid in cash, it is easier for husbands to take control over it). It was also observed that banks are often at a distance from the place of residence, in some instances in distant (larger) villages or towns, and getting there involves additional costs and would lead to some loss of liquidity. However, it is important to note that respondents in the current survey were asked for their opinion on bank payments in general. They were not asked their opinion of bank payments if the payment is made to one bank account per job card, for instance. It is possible that the responses might have differed if respondents were asked a more detailed set of questions about bank payments.

As per official data, the total number of Bank accounts in both places indicated a good number of women holding accounts. There is a total of 141567 women's bank account in Sehore and 167587 in Panna. But despite having a good amount of bank account and access to formal financial institutions, MGNREGS workers are dependent on the non-institutional source of loan.

D. Reliance on Money lenders rising:

Villages and households participating in MGNREGA started with a high degree of reliance on moneylenders for loans. One of the respondents says that their dependency on money lenders has declined in the earlier years. But during lockdown large number of migrants returned with having very minimal money to survive. In that case, money lenders became the only source of money to survive. The study found that 79.6% of the respondents borrowed

money from different sources during the crisis, like 18.6% borrowed money from the bank, 22.4% from the SHG groups, 26.8% from relatives, and 26.2% from money lenders, and 6.0 % from other sources. Borrowing from moneylenders is typically a last resort since their usurious rates—often as high as 10% a month—make this an extremely expensive form of credit, typically used only by poor households who cannot qualify for formal credit can be observed from the data that more than 50% of the MGNREGS workers borrowed loans from non-institutional agencies like money lenders and relatives at a higher interest rate.

Usually, workers borrow money for a specific period, like for a week or month. But due to covid outbreak and lockdown, workers were not able to go for work outside the village, and MGNREGS was the last resort left for them. It was highlighted that no household got work more than 40 days in the previous FY 2020-21 and where the wage rate is only 193. Assuming that there are 5 members in each household then there are very less chances to manage household expenditure in limited work and money. When researchers asked a respondent about household expenditure from MGNREGS wages, he said,

“Ek din ka majdoori 193 hai aur itne ka to sirf meetha tail aata hai. Parivar nahi chalta itni majdoori se. Aur kam din ka kaam bhi milta hai aur lock down ke samay bahar jana bhi allowed nahi tha to logo se udhar lena pada”

4. Status of Works started during Covid-19 Pandemic

4.1 Assets creation under MGNREGA:

NREGA seeks the creation of durable and sustainable assets by the community and also managed by it (Mehrotra, 2008: 33). For creation of such assets using the guaranteed employment, the act has codified the different types of gender and shock responsive assets such as Anganwadi, playground, plantation, and other drought proofing & water conservation-related assets. In this regard, this study aims to verify the actual status of works compared to MIS status. Moreover, the study also emphasizes understanding the complex interrelationship between gender relations and income and productive assets by analysing the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act in both districts. Assets were verified physically and categorized based on various parameters discussed below.

4.2 Concentration of Works in the study area

The MGNREG scheme is not merely about transferring cash to people in rural India rather; it is about creating durable assets that will ultimately reduce people's dependence on MGNREGA. Under MGNREGS, there are 262 types of permissible works listed in both individual and community land.

Table 12 Types of works under MGNREGS

Type of Work	Nature of Work
Water conservation and harvesting	Digging new tanks/ ponds, small check dams, etc.
Draught proofing and plantation	Afforestation, tree plantation, etc.
Flood control and protection	Drainage in waterlogged areas, construction, and repair of embankment, etc.
Land development	Plantation, land levelling, etc.
Micro irrigation Works	Minor irrigation canals, etc.
Renovation of Traditional Water Bodies	Desilting tanks/ponds, desilting of old canals, desilting of traditional open wells, etc.
Provision of irrigation facility -land owned by	Scheduled caste and schedule tribes, beneficiaries of land reform, etc.
Rural connectivity	Construction of roads, etc.
Any other activity approved by ministry of rural development	Other works, etc.

During shock when the covid outbreak affected the poor and vulnerable mass of rural India, MGNREGS response has been applauded for its effective design and framework in Madhya Pradesh. The study cross-checked and verified the assets created during the pandemic between April 2020 to March 2021.

The study first gathered the data on assets creation from the MIS portal of MGNREGS and verified it physically in both districts. Data from the MIS reflect the numbers of the total individual and community assets created between April-2020-March-2021. The assets created under the MGNREGS scheme can be broadly classified into two categories: First, Assets created in individuals' land, and second, assets created in community land. The table below highlights the district-wise total works that have been completed according to the MIS portal.

Table 13 Works and Expenditure on Individual and community Land in Panna and Sehore

District		Works on Individuals Land			Total Community Work			Total		
		Comp.	Ongoing/Suspended	Approved not in progress	Comp.	Ongoing/Suspended	Approved not in progress	Comp.	Ongoing/Suspended	Approved not in progress
PANNA	No. of works	14497	26636	6612	1736	3305	1408	16233	29941	8020
	Expenditure (in lacs)	3392.71	987.22	0	4294.25	2678.66	0	7686.95	3665.88	0
SEHORE	No. of works	1327	7506	2106	2654	6144	2435	3981	13650	4541
	Expenditure (in lacs)	485.32	729.04	0	2038.92	3434.29	0	2524.24	4163.33	0
State level	No. of works	548668	846093	216234	174244	281794	147417	722912	1127887	363651
	Expenditure (in lacs)	171041.76	71354.33	0	404105.7	216047	0	575147.4	287401.3	0

Source: nrega.nic

From the above table, it was observed that total of 76366 works had been taken up during FY 2020-21, and out of them, only 20214 (26.47%) were completed, and 43591 (57.08%) are ongoing, and the rest are approved and not started. The proportion of individual works completed was the highest in Panna (89.13%) and Sehore (33.33%). And proportion for community assets that were completed was the highest in Sehore (66.67%) and Panna (10.69%).

During the pandemic when many rural poor were depended on MGNREGS work state increased the fund flow in MGNREGS and expenditure rose to 207574 (40.27%) lakhs rupees extra compare to last FY 2019-20. Compared with the district-wise classification on expenditure in Panna, 34.35% of expenditure rose compared to last FY 2019-20. But in Sehore, expenditure has decreased by 47.15% compared to last FY 2019-20. During the Covid period in FY 2020-21 total of 2524.24 lakh expenditures were made, and in the earlier year, the amount was 4776.28 lakhs. Therefore, the expenditure in Panna total 7686.95 lakhs rupees

accounted that is only 2.82% of the entire state expenditure, and similarly in Sehore, only 2524 lakhs that is 0.44% of the entire state expenditure.

If we look at the expenditure by the type of assets (individual or community), then it was observed that in Panna, 44.14% of the total spending is being made on individual assets and 55.86% on community assets, and similarly in Sehore, only 19.23% on individual and 80.77 on community assets.

Both the districts are very different in terms of geography and transport connectivity. On the one side, Panna is predominantly tribal-dominated and depends on agriculture and labor work. But most people in Sehore are engaged in animal husbandry like goat rearing, cow, and buffalo rearing, leading to a good income source. Due to its connectivity in the state's capital, most workers came for work in Bhopal and then return to their homes in the evening. This might be the reason for fewer individual assets and less expenditure in the Sehore district. But there is a possibility of focusing on individual assets where most rural poor are engaged in animal husbandry. They only concentrate on one type of alternate source like milk supply when there are alternative chances of livelihood opportunities like poultry. If different types of individual assets were focused in Sehore, there would be less dependency on MGNREGS work by the rural poor.

The study also found that in Panna, around 53.92% of the total community assets account for 8.38 % of the total expenditure related to rural connectivity like C.C road and Khet Sadak. Similarly, in Sehore, around 47.48% of the community assets account for 28.77% of the total expenditure in rural connectivity. Rural connectivity is essential from the lens of gender and shock responsiveness. Still, there is a need to focus on other assets directly related to women and reduce women's drudgery. According to official data, out of total community work, only 13.31 % in Panna and 6.33 % in Sehore, rural infrastructure like Anganwadi were created.

Similarly, other works like rural drinking water (0.05% in Panna and 0.11 % in Sehore), playground (0.35% in Panna and 0.08% in Sehore), and Rural sanitation (1.79% in Panna and 15.03% in Sehore) were focused on. It can be observed from the figure that these women and child-centric assets were less concentrated. Generally, taking drinking water from distant places works to be done by women, and if these kinds of works might focus through MGNREGS, it can reduce women's drudgery to some extent.

Moreover, work like a playground is related to children and was not focused in both districts. One of the most essential aspects of rural India is sanitation and hygiene-related issues, and it can be observed that work related to sanitation like toilet construction and drainage construction directly impacts health. If these kinds of works should be focused on, there are high chances of fewer health-related problems. As per the Indian council of applied economic research, most household expenditures share 70 to 80% of health care.

Based on the above analysis, it seems that the state has disbursed a varying amount to the districts during distress. That is well acknowledged that in Panna, a decent amount of money is spent, but in Sehore, it has decreased. Many migrants need work during a time of crisis that has been neglected due to the smaller number of assets sanctioned. Based on MIS Data, the study also physically verified the assets and discussed below.

4.3 Verification of assets

During the pandemic FY 2020-21, 195 individual and community assets were started in all the study areas. Out of them, 60% of the assets got completed and 40% of the assets are ongoing. It was observed that the construction of the asset mainly started during the lockdown, and still, most (40%) of the assets are ongoing, and some of them have deteriorated. The below table highlights the actual status of the individual and community works.

A. Ongoing assets

Table 14 Verified assets

Portal		Verified	
Indi.	Com.	Indi.	Com.
51	27	21	18
(26.15)	(13.85)	(41.18)	(66.67)

Source- Primary Survey

During the time of the survey total of 78 assets were ongoing in all the sampled villages, and out of those, 41.18 % individual and 66.67 community assets were physically verified. It was found that there is much variation in status showing in the portal to the actual status at the grass-roots level.

Table 15 Actual status of works

Complete		Incomplete/ongoing		Suspended	
Indi.	Com.	Indi.	Com.	Indi.	Com.
17	10	3	2	1	6
(80.95)	(55.56)	(14.29)	(11.11)	(4.76)	(33.33)

Source- Primary Survey

The study found that out of total assets verified; those are ongoing, 80.95% of individual and 55.56% community assets are completed and did not update in the portal. One of the main reasons is server errors and officials could not update the portal.

The study finds that incomplete individual works (14.29%) are due to a delay in releasing the money. But for those whose payments are still pending; their assets are incomplete. It was observed that delay in payment sometimes is due to corruption. The study found from the FGDs that officials demand a bribe to release funds, and sometime after completion of the assets, the beneficiary will get rest of the amount. One of the beneficiaries of Kapil Dhara-kup well, whose asset is incomplete, says that only 1 lakh rupees he got so far out of 2.46 lakh sanctioned amount. He was advised to complete asset construction as soon as possible to get the rest of the amount. He borrowed money from the moneylender, relatives, and other informal financial sources at a higher interest rate to complete the well. This kind of delayed payment in assets generation is widespread in the field area and in the state. And those individuals who couldn't afford to invest in their assets then their assets got suspended. Assets like horticulture plantations are also kept in this category, as due to delay the release of

money, a beneficiary who is poor and unable to invest in buying fertilizer. Their plants die due to improper maintenance. It is imperative to focus on payment-related aspects so that individual assets can be utilized and fruitful for the beneficiary.

There is a crucial aspect to note about community assets; it was observed that most of the community assets are incomplete (11.11%) or suspended (33.33%) to manage the extra wage paid to labourers. Govt. officials say that labor does not work at a notified wage rate of RS.193 and demand for work at the wage rate of Rs. 300 or 400. To manage this extra wage cost, they generate a work code and withdraw labour costs.

B. Completed Assets

Table 16 Verified Assets

Portal		Verified	
Indi.	Com.	Indi.	Com.
93	24	30	13
(47.69)	(12.31)	(32.26)	(54.17)

From the above table, it was observed that out of total assets, 47.69 % individual and 12.31% of the total community assets got completed, and from those, 32.32% individual and 54.17 community assets were verified. The table below depicts the figure of actual status verified.

Table 17 Actual status of the verified assets

Complete		Incomplete		Suspended	
Indi.	Com.	Indi.	Com.	Indi.	Com.
30	8	0	1	0	4
(100%)	(61.54)		(7.69)		(30.77)

From the above table, it can be observed that out of total verified individual assets, all the assets were completed and updated in the portal. These assets were constructed during the lock down such as PM Awaas, Plantation, and Farm Bunding. But a large proportion of community assets are suspended due to delayed payment of vendors. Most of the govt. officials such as Sarpanch/Sachiv and APO MGNREGS say that vendors' payment for material usually got delayed 3 to 6 months, and sometimes they have to manage from their money. Generally, vendors cannot provide material for delayed payment for a more extended period. Due to delayed payment to vendors, work got suspended and must deal with poor material quality.

The study also relies on a subjective perception of the usefulness of works. This may vary widely, depending on the larger context of living conditions and/or whether a respondent has worked to create the asset in question. For example, a household in an inaccessible GP or one

that has effort might regard a road of a certain quality as being useful, relative to a household in a well-connected GP. Subjective measures thus entail challenges and limitations of their own, but from the perspective of the goals of this project, they seemed an appropriate approach. Nevertheless, they are best viewed as indicators that complement benefit-cost studies from a user's perspective.

For each work we recorded through field visit, a customised set of benefits and problems that household or community associated with it. For example, contour trenching, earthen and stone bunds, farm ponds, compartment bunding, and afforestation conserve soil and water. Land development, horticulture, and wells potentially support agriculture-based livelihoods and food security, while possibly stemming migration. Road helps promote overall activity in villages, and by providing increased access to markets, schools, and health services, potentially reduce the cost of human capital investments. Based on these parameters, we have access to the usefulness of the assets and found that out of total verified assets, 48.10% of the total individual and 37.78% of the community assets are useful. Under the "Useful" category, works like plantations, houses, roads, and food grain storage were included. These works reduce women's drudgery and create an alternative source of livelihood for women through plantation and increase social status through housing.

Further, the study also found that a total of 33.34% individual and 28% community assets are useful to some extent. In this category, works like Farm Bunding and contour trench have been kept. It was observed that asset like Farm bunding does not sustain for a more extended period. The beneficiary of Farm bunding reported that the work lasts till the rainy season and after rain it all flow with water. And rest, 18.56% individual and 29.28 community works are not useful. In this category, non-functioning works are included like well- if there is no water and community sanitary complex when beneficiaries cannot access. An example of a well-constructed sanitary complex, but there is no use of it due to lack of water. When enquired with the village secretary about the closed sanitary complex, he says water is the main problem. Many village dwellers living near the sanitary complex also responded that if we do not have water, then why has the state spent this much on constructing the sanitary complex? The state should also arrange the water facility to use it.

One pattern was that works on individual land were rated as better and more useful than those on common lands. Works on individual lands had a natural custodian who had a stake in ensuring the asset was maintained. It was also the case that the choice of the asset would have been the most useful one for the household in question.

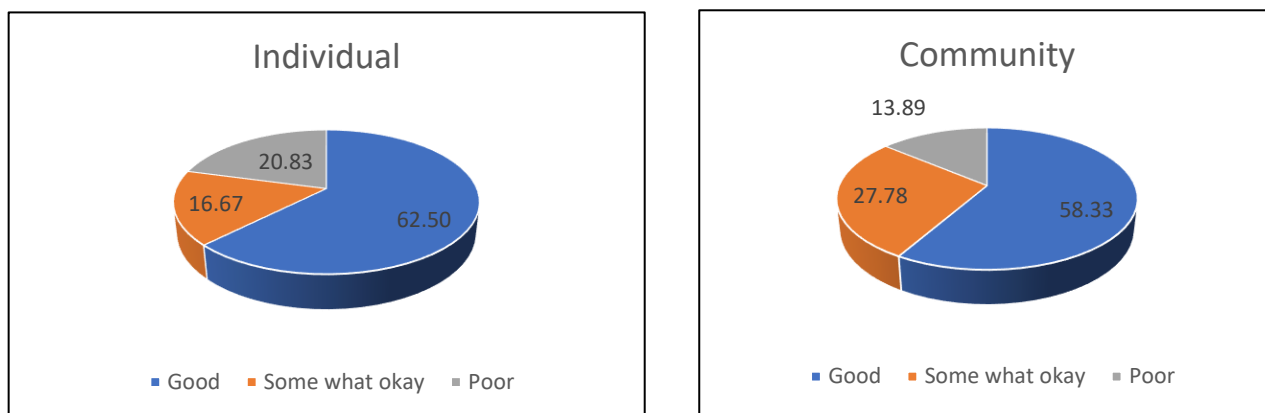
The study also collected information from the user perspective on the quality of assets constructed during Covid.

C. Quality of Assets from Users' Perspective

One shared, and oft-voiced concern pertains to the quality of the MGNREGS works and their maintenance, which derives from a perception that they are of good, somewhat ok, or poor quality. Judgement of quality on technical sense can be made on the basis of design specifications, the quality of materials used, and so on. In this study, we captured the perception of users on quality- their own ideas of what they consider of unacceptable or poor quality. Moreover, in the somewhat okay category, the response was recorded where the

respondent believed that the design was faulty or that the works size or state of completion was not satisfactory.

Graph 1 - Quality of Assets from Users Perspectives (in%):



Source: Primary Survey

Though there are technical aspects to assess the quality of assets, we have attempted to get the users' perspective on how they view the quality of assets created on individual and community land. Surprisingly, as many as 62.50% of households thought the quality of assets for individuals and 58.33 % beneficiary of the community assets believed that the quality of assets when created was good in contrast to common perception about public works programs. Moreover, 16.67 for individuals and 27.78% of respondents thought assets quality was somewhat ok when created. These perceptions are possibly based on the faulty design of the works. These responses suggest a vast scope for improvement in design. Moreover, 20.83% of the individual beneficiary and 13.89 % of the community assets beneficiary reported that the quality of assets had deteriorated. For this set of works, respondents categorised based on status, either damaged or washed away.

Apart from the quality and quantity of assets, the study also assessed whether these assets are Gender or shock responsive. The study found that out of total verified assets total of 80% of the individual and 70% of the community assets are directly and moderately related to women. These works include such as Anganwadi, Food grain storage, plantation, and farm bunding. Where we also found some of the assets like boulder check, stop, and check dam are not related to women and constitute 30% of the total verified assets.

However, the causes, the extent, and impact on women and productivity have not received sufficient concern in policy and practice through the state, mainly during covid. Insufficient attention to some work those is Gender and shock responsive such as Anganwadi construction, Playground for children and dug well, pond construction has meant that women's contribution and concern remain invisible in planning and thus are ignored in making gender sensitive MGNREGS. Further, the stress on self-employment and dependence on institutional credit in most land based economic activities that women, who are mostly landless in state, would not be eligible for assistance beyond rearing of livestock for income.

4. Key Findings

- Following the Covid-19 pandemic labourers from both the district are unable to do work as in, the study found that 95.2% of vulnerable households reported decreasing their annual income in FY 2020-21. Out of the 230 people from vulnerable households interviewed in Sehore and Panna, 106 (46.08%) stated a reduction in their income due to unavailability of work, and 40 (17.39%) respondents specified that there were more labourers and less work available, and 17.39% was not able to work due to afraid of pandemic.
- However, there are some examples too, those who have worked under MGNREGS and used earning as capital. In Sehore, four women who worked under MGNREGS, have invested in purchasing capital assets like jewellery and livestock to generate an alternative source of livelihood.

Job card

- The HHs that are registered in a JC according to MIS data are nearly 50% in the study area. This can be attributed to low coverage of HHs or exclusion of those that do not need the scheme. It was observed that out of the total issued job card in Badnagar, only 37.07% of the job card are active. Although in the next panchayat from the Sehore District, Leelakhedi has a higher percentage (59.56) of the active job card.
- It was found that 13% of vulnerable households do not have a job card and are still excluded and face various hurdles to get a job card. Out of those that did not have a JC, 54% responded that they had tried to get registered in a job card but failed due to reasons like lack of document (7%), their Panchayat did not make one (31%) or were unaware about the process (63%).
- The study also finds that the govt official has misused job cards to extract wages under MGNREGS. The irregularities were reported in both districts. On the question where the job card was generally kept, 34% of the participants indicated that the card was kept either with the sarpanch or Sachiv or contractor or gram-rojgar sevak or elsewhere but not with them

Demand and participation

- MIS data reports a surge in employment provided to women in both the districts. Where in 2019-20, a total 98,256 individuals employed in Panna and 60,547 employed in Sehore, rose to 1,48,687 in panna and 72,932 in Sehore. The percentage change in Panna has been an increase of 51.32% and 20.45% in Sehore respectively. But in reality, through the field survey, such rise in employment was not found.
- From the survey of vulnerable HHs, only (51%) responded that they had participated in MGNREGS work in their Panchayat during the pandemic, while a larger number of individuals were willing to participate but did not receive work.
- From the survey, it was analysed that participation of women in MGNREGS during Covid-19 was mostly limited to 11 to 20 days, while men worked for a longer duration.

Gendered Constraints in Women's Participation

- Out of the total interviewed, 85.93% of the women expressed a desire to work and highlighted the barriers that prevented their participation, the primary reason being that they were not provided work by the Sarpanch
- Many women, especially young mothers (31.25%), said *“that leaving children behind for work is not an option due to lack of safe childcare facilities.”* The situation becomes more difficult for mothers with infants that need full-time supervision and care. In many areas, inflexible social norms also prevent women from working outside the house. Some of these issues have been discussed below.
- Average, 67.5% of the women say that the presence of illegal contractors hampers their participation in MGNREGS work. Contractors prevented locals from working in their own village since contractors hired their own labour and most of the works are done by machines.
- Most of the respondents say that *“Lack of safe drinking water”* (78.12%) *“and “No shade during rest period”* (60%) is some of the major constraints to work.
- The second big hurdle was the lack of child-care facilities which were found to be absent through the field investigation in all the working site, many women (31.25%) with young infants were forced to carry them to worksites or forfeit paid work.
- Respondent’s women suggested that the need for work to be assigned closer to their homes (24.35), lighter tasks (30.43), employment in a group (14.78), and timely wages (28.70), others (1.74%) and better childcare facilities at the worksites.
- Many of the workers are facing delayed payment issues. Who worked during a pandemic, out of those, 28.81% of the respondent says that their wage is delayed.

Works

- The study found that gender sensitive and shock responsive assets were less focused. As per official data works related to rural drinking water (0.05% in Panna and 0.11 % in Sehore), playground (0.35% in Panna and 0.08% in Sehore), and Rural sanitation (1.79% in Panna and 15.03% in Sehore) was least expenditure made.
- The study finds that payment to vendors is one of the significant issues faced by beneficiary as well as officials. So far 14.29% of the of the total individual works are incomplete due to due to a delay in releasing the money.
- The study also found that out of total verified assets, 48.10% of the total individual and 37.78% of the community assets are useful. Further, the study also found that a total of 33.34% individual and 28% community assets are useful to some extent. And rest, 18.56% individual and 29.28 community works are not useful.
- Surprisingly, as many as 62.50% of households thought the quality of assets for individuals and 58.33 % beneficiary of the community assets believed that the quality of assets when created was good in contrast to common perception about public works programs. Moreover, 16.67 for individuals and 27.78% of respondents thought assets quality was somewhat ok when created.
- Apart from the quality and quantity of assets, the study also assessed whether these assets are Gender or shock responsive. The study found that out of total verified assets total of 80% of the individual and 70% of the community assets are directly or moderately related to women.

5. Way forward:

1. Pay greater attention to lifecycle vulnerabilities, for example by providing alternative options to heavy manual labour such as direct support or less physically demanding work during pregnancy and nursing.
2. Recognise the unequal division of labour in the household and in intra-household bargaining power, through flexible working hours.
3. Pay attention to the different impacts of the structure and demography of the household, as this influences access to MGNREGA, and the benefits gained from employment. An approach is needed that supports appropriate work for single women and ensures they have equal access to MGNREGA days.
4. Create community assets to reduce gender-specific vulnerabilities and broaden the narrow scope of types of work appropriate to rural productivity. This could include public works activities to reduce women's time poverty, such as: improving fuelwood and water collection sources, or, more broadly, addressing discriminatory access to common property resources and sources of drinking water for SC/ST women; healthcare, nutrition, and literacy/skills programmes; improving market access and infrastructure for women; and supporting investments and training in other agricultural activities.
5. Promote the participation of women in community planning and the monitoring of MGNREGA works through community meetings and social audit processes. This can be better achieved through quotas for women's representation, flexible meeting times, awareness-raising about the importance of women's participation, and mechanisms to strengthen women's confidence to voice their opinions in community decision-making processes.
6. Invest in technical capacity-building for staff at all levels of government, including the Department of Women and Child Development, to articulate the importance of gender equality for rural development and poverty reduction and build the capacity of implementing bodies to apply the gender-sensitive features of the programme. More work is needed, for example, to improve awareness on gender equity at the Panchayat level, to break down cultural norms on the gender division of labour that result in the allocation of 'soft' work for women, fewer days of employment, lower wages based on male productivity norms and/or the preference of employment for men.
7. Increased budget allocations for capacity-building for gender-related programme dimensions.
8. Institutionalise inter-sectoral coordination between gender and rural development ministries to promote the understanding of, and a greater focus on, gender in the rural sector. Strengthening linkages between MGNREGA, skills training programmes and access to agricultural inputs and credit would help maximise livelihood opportunities for rural men and women.
9. Finally, it would be beneficial to share best practice on the promotion of gender equality in MGNREGA between and within states. For instance, in some parts of Madhya Pradesh, the decision to appoint worksite supervisors across the state is an important way to support women's opportunities for alternative skills development and to enable them to take on more of a supervisory role.