



Department  
for International  
Development

## How Gender & Climate Change Dimensions Enhance the Rural Employment Guarantee Programme (MGNREGS) in India

### The ICRG Case Study

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## Infrastructure for Climate Resilient Growth in India (ICRG) Programme

Submitted By:



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## Introduction

Climate change affects the most vulnerable – women, especially pregnant women, differently abled, children, tribal populations are extremely vulnerable. Increased climate variability makes agriculture unpredictable. The impact of changing rainfall patterns increase in temperature and loss of productivity has started showing immense impact on human health, food and livelihood security. Climate change and variability is expected to cause adverse impacts on the local crop production and other natural ecosystems functions that are critical for livelihoods of millions of people in the world (Mortan, 2007; Sathaye *et al*, 2006; Siva Kumar *et al*, 2005). Though the projected magnitude of such changes and its impacts are diverse across regions and sectors (Stern, 2007), it is expected to be more in case of tropical and sub-tropical regions (UNFCCC, 2009; Parry *et al*, 2007). In the developing countries, it is again the poor and marginalized groups who are the most fragile because of their extensive dependence on the natural resource base (Tucker *et al*, 2014). The National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC) of India, acknowledges that the impacts of climate change on (poor) women will be ‘particularly severe,’ worsening the deprivations already faced by women (NAPCC, 2008 pg. 12).

Even after so many years of independence, sixty-five percent of women are literate as compared to 80 percent of men. India has amongst the lowest female labour force participation rates. This also gets reflected in the household decision making process. According to a World Bank report, 2009, women receive wages up to 20 percent lower than those for men in casual labour for the same tasks. The 2008 report of National Alliance of Women's Organisations (NAWO) mentions that in India women constitute two-thirds of the agricultural workforce but own less than one-tenth of agricultural lands.

As per the World Bank, both those living in poverty and those just barely above the poverty line, are the most at risk from climate change. They have the fewest resources to adapt or recover quickly from shocks, and they often live on the most vulnerable land because it tends to be the most affordable, such as homes along creeks that flood or on hillsides prone to landslides, or farmland with limited water access.<sup>1</sup> In the Indian context the most vulnerable would include women, and the most marginalized including SCs, STs and persons with disabilities. The Government of India in September 1982 brought the Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas (DWCRA) under the schemes of Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP) for women below the poverty line in rural areas to form women groups to take up economic activities to generate income.

‘As far back in 1995, the second assessment report of IPCC, declared that the conventional approach to address climate risks is suboptimal, in that it leads to the marginalization and immiseration of vulnerable groups who are forced to carry a disproportionate burden of the adjustment’ (Kelkar, 2011). The second assessment report by the IPCC had expressed concern about equity and social impacts of climate change and emphasized the need to strengthen institutional capacities, especially in developing countries.

To address these concerns a pilot project: **Infrastructure for Climate Resilient Growth (ICRG)**, was piloted under an MoU between the UK Governments’ Department for International Development (DFID) and the Ministry of Rural Development Government of India. It was envisioned that the positive

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<sup>1</sup> World Bank Feature Story: Climate Change Complicates Efforts to end Poverty, Feb 6, 2015.  
<http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2015/02/06/climate-change-complicates-efforts-end-poverty>

results of the project would be taken up by the Indian Government and would help other nations engaged in planning climate change resilience. The programme was implemented in 103 Blocks of the three states of Bihar, Chhattisgarh and Odisha. The three states are among the most backward and disaster prone in the country. Many among the selected ICRG blocks are highly climate vulnerable with continued depletion of existing natural resources.

The goal of ICRG was to ensure that the poorest and the most vulnerable people in the project areas can tackle the impact of climate extremes. Through a better understanding of climate factors and building capacities of field practitioners and improving design of works being taken up, ICRG, will synergise its resources with MGNREGA in building climate resilience of the most vulnerable communities. This will be achieved by improved quality and climate resilient assets under MGNREGA (ICRG Inception Report).

The **Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act** was enacted in September 2005 as *“An Act to provide for the enhancement of livelihood security of the households in rural areas of the country by providing at least one hundred days of guaranteed wage employment in every financial year to every household”*. The Act was implemented in a phased manner. In Phase One it was introduced in 200 of the most backward districts of the country, an additional 130 districts were included in Phase Two in 2007-2008 and all the remaining rural districts were brought under MGNREGA in Phase Three in 2008-2009. The fourth edition of the Operational Guidelines outlines seven goals of MGNREGA, one of which (Goal iv)) pertains to the *‘empowerment of the socially disadvantaged, especially women, Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Schedules Tribes (STs), through the processes of a rights-based legislation’*. The others include: (i) social protection for the most vulnerable people living in rural India by providing employment; (ii) livelihood security for the poor through creation of durable assets, improved water security, soil conservation and enhanced land productivity; (iii) strengthening drought proofing and flood management in rural India; (iv) strengthening decentralized, participatory planning through convergence of various antipoverty and livelihood initiatives; (v) deepening democracy at the grassroots by strengthening Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs); (vi) effecting greater transparency and accountability in governance. (Ministry of Rural Development, 2013).

## Methodology

This paper is based on literature reviews and empirical evidence from the field. There are some **case studies** from the ICRG programme in three states viz. Bihar, Chhattisgarh and Odisha which have served as evidence.

Research Questions answered through the course of the paper and case studies include:

- Participation in MGNREGS Gram Sabhas and processes - how well this has happened and if not why.
- Assets built and decision making - how assets built are benefiting women and were they involved in the decision making on which assets should be built in the village from the planning phase
- Labour Budget – how much women related information was added or that prompted by women.

- Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) of households and women- whether it has increased.
- How MGNREGS structures (CRWs) have impacted women, their farming and agricultural land - whether this has increased household nutrition security.
- Financial inclusion of women - in formerly patriarchal societies how this has improved thanks to the Act
- Where convergence has impacted women and women groups.

### **Gendered Impacts of Climate Change**

It is well known that women face greater hardships in the face of climate change and are more vulnerable than males and, women at the margins like Dalit and Tribal women are more disadvantaged than their counterparts.

Women are financially not as strong as their male counterparts. For one women possess lesser money and they also do not have the decision making power over household money and expenses. Little or no education, small children to take care of restrict their income and employment opportunities leaving only unskilled work options.

In many countries, women are supposed to look after and protect little children and the elderly which restricts their own opportunities to seek safety and be rescued in any kind of natural disaster (Oxfam International, 2005). Because of their involvement in and reliance on livelihood activities directly dependent on natural resources, poor women are generally at the receiving end of environmental degradation. An oft cited example is how environmental degradation surrounding rural communities could increase the distances that women must walk in search of clean water and firewood in order to perform their daily household chores.

Even though it is widely acknowledged that women handle most of the household water and thus have special expertise and experience in water conservation, they are rarely consulted and their needs rarely stated upfront (Kelkar, 2011). There are many barriers faced by women both socially and institutionally. Socially the patriarchal structures prevalent across the country restrict the roles they can be involved in to mostly those within the house and leave them with less decision making powers. For a long time, the prevalent patriarchy impacted institutional structures as well, which led to lesser women's participation in village meetings and Gram Sabhas and not much involvement in decision making processes. Institutionally the MGNREGA set out to change these norms.

### **Social Protection and Climate Resilience**

Social Protection and Climate Change interventions have become two important public policy programmes of any developing country and both seek to build the resilience of poor and climate vulnerable households by strengthening their capacity to absorb and/or transfer risks.

Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005, (MGNREGA) one of the largest social protection programmes in the world was the first of its kind. Nationally and internationally, MGNREGA with its rights-based framework and focus on the creation of 'durable assets' and propelled by proactive disclosure rules of right to information, has the potential to address the challenges of rural unemployment, food security and regenerate the village economy in India. For MGNREGA to deliver both social protection and climate resilience outcomes, households need guaranteed,

predictable, timely, transparent and inclusive wages; durable assets that are responsive to livelihood needs; and wages and assets that are responsive to changing climate contexts' (Steinbach et al, 2016). Several mechanisms ensure that MGNREGA achieves both social protection and climate resilience outcomes. In brief, the Act mandates provision of guaranteed employment within a stipulated period on demand by workers; payment of statutory minimum wages in a timely manner based on well-defined criteria and work assessment methods and using transparent modes of payments; provision of legal entitlements of facilities, unemployment and other allowances and creation of decentralized participatory and democratic planning, monitoring, quality control, vigilance and grievance redressal structures and mechanisms; while ensuring transparency and public accountability through proactive disclosure of documents and records for public scrutiny at all levels including monitoring of critical parameters in public domain. Government-issue legal circulars in response to climate shocks guarantee more paid workdays for households, making them more resilient to climate impacts (Steinbach et al, 2016). The MGNREGA's most significant impact has been on the Minimum Wages Act 1948, as awareness about minimum wages has increased considerably and the 'vibrancy in agricultural wages has been restored'. The notified minimum wage rates have gone up, especially after the Government of India decided to provide "a real wage of Rs 100 a day as an entitlements under MGNREGA", (Indian Financial Budget Speech, 2009). The average wage per day for MGNREGA labourer has risen from Rs.65 in 2006-07 to Rs. 179.88 in 2019-20.

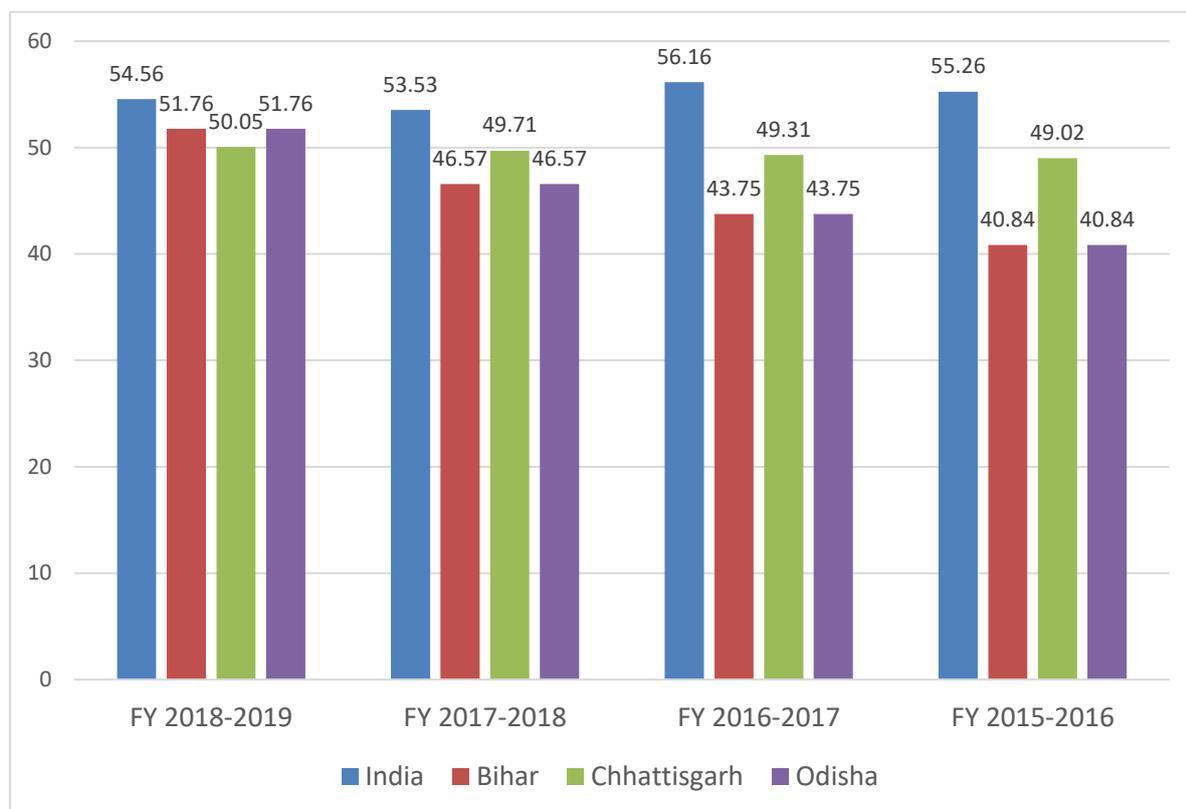
Evidence from series of focus group discussions and interviews within the ICRG programme suggests that the Act could achieve its core social protection aim which was to secure the livelihoods of rural populations and allowing them to 'hang in' by both protecting rural household incomes and improving the capabilities of women. Importantly, since MGNREGA has mainstreamed climate-responsive mechanisms into its programme, with the support of ICRG in the states of Bihar, Chhattisgarh and Odisha households whose members are active workers in the programme are better equipped to hang in, despite increasing climate vulnerability.

### **Social Protection, Gender and MGNREGS**

Schedule II, Section 6 of the MGNREGA Act states '*while providing employment, priority should be given to women in such a way that at least one third of the beneficiaries shall be women who have registered and requested for work under the scheme.*' This is the first scheme in the country which ensures the employment of women through legislation. Various provisions under MGNREGA aim to ensure that women have equitable access to work, equal wages and representation on decision-making bodies. Some of these are-at least 33 per cent women participation Gram Sabhas, equal wages for men and women, worksite facilities etc.

MGNREGA's provision to provide work within five kilometers of home has encouraged women, who are constrained by their responsibilities at home and unable to venture far, to work. It is these special gender sensitive features of the Act that have ensured close to 50 per cent women work participation annually (see graph below), while making changes in the institutional structures at village level itself. This was a departure from the wage employment programmes running in the country hitherto.

### Women Person-days out of Total Percent of Workers



Source: [nrega.nic.in](http://nrega.nic.in). Accessed on 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2019

Importantly, MGNREGA has provided a foundation to specifically support women to ‘hang in’ (Steinbach et al, 2016) by increasing their purchasing power parity, their decision making powers through institutional reform. The 2005 MGNREGA Act asserts that the Equal Remuneration Act 1976 should be complied with, and there should be no gender discrimination about work. Work is to be provided within 5 kilometers under the Act. The Act also stipulates that not less than one-third of the non-official members of the Central and District Employment Guarantee Council should be women (Ministry of Law and Justice, 2005, Government of India). The 2010 MGNREGA Circulars specified that trolleys should be provided for women who supply water at worksites; suggested linking crèches at worksites to the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) and recommended that states should consider reserving 50 percent of posts of ‘mates’ for women (Ministry of Rural Development, 2010, Government of India). In 2013, a guideline was formulated stating that “as far as possible” individual bank/post office accounts should be opened for workers for transfer of wages (Ministry of Rural Development, 2013). A directive was issued in 2012 by the Minister of Rural Development to the Government of Maharashtra to identify, give job cards to and provide 100 days employment to widowed women, deserted women and destitute women who qualify as a household under the Act. It also suggested special works for pregnant women and lactating mothers, works that are closer to their house and require less effort. Another recommendation was to carry out special time and motion studies to formulate age, disability, gender and terrain/climate specific schedules of rates (Minister of Rural Development, 2012).

*It is in this background the government brought MGNREGA version 2. in 2013 and subsequent additions of different rules from time to time has enabled this rural development flagship programme of the Government of India to be seen as a climate adaptation programme with significant potential to reduce the vulnerability of the poor and marginalized (Godfrey-Wood and Flower, 2018) to climate change. As per the instruction from the Ministry of Rural Development to the different districts, it is now mandatory for a district to undertake a minimum 60 per cent of work under MGNREGA from the FY 2015-2016 relating to agriculture activity linking to schemes like development of land, water and trees. The District Programme Coordinator has further been instructed to ensure that the planning of works would be in such a manner that at least 65 percent of the expenditure under MGNREGS is on NRM works from the FY 2017-18 in the identified 2264 Blocks under Mission Water Conservation. As a result, now MGNREGA generates employment by creating productive durable assets that include construction and renovation of water bodies, provision of irrigation facilities to the poor, plantation, road connectivity, and land development and so on in the rural areas. These assets aim at rejuvenating the rural natural resource base and hence are expected to enhance adaptive capacity of the rural communities.*

### **Analysis on the Gender and Climate Change Aspects within MGNREGS**

- **Financial Inclusion of Women**

A study conducted in the year 2019, by the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) in Chhattisgarh for the Infrastructure for Climate Resilient Growth programme found that 65 percent of wage income of households comes from the MGNREGS programme. During the implementation of the Act, many women have made bank accounts where the money they earn through the Act gets deposited<sup>2</sup>. The number of women having beneficiary accounts compared with the total women workers in the three states of Bihar, Chhattisgarh and Odisha is quite high (see table below), with over 90 percent of the women workers having accounts in some cases. Having women's access to a formal financial service is a good step enabling them to gain more confidence and have money readily available to cater to their needs. Many women associated with the ICRG programme have stated that the MGNREGA has increased their incomes and allowed them to make expenses on the things they want such as their children's education, health of family members, for their agriculture etc. One respondent from the ICRG field area stated: *'I am now sending my children to private schools, thanks to the wages received through the MGNREGS'*- Laxmi Marandi, Chheligadhuli Village, Dur Dura GP, Jashipur Block, Mayurbhanj District<sup>3</sup>. This increase in the purchasing power parity goes on to strengthen resilience in times of any climate related incidents/ disasters.

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<sup>2</sup> Provisional data in the MGNREGA MIS shows that women have access to accounts in individual names as well as in joint names.

<sup>3</sup> Focused Group Discussions on 17<sup>th</sup> October at the village with the ICRG Team

**Women bank accounts against total number of women workers in Million**

States	Job Cards	Women Workers	Women accounts FY 18-19	Women accounts FY 17-18	Women accounts FY 16-17	Women accounts FY 15-16
<u>Bihar</u>	15.6.99	9.79	4.147645	3.709284	2.866605	2.270028
<u>Chhattisgarh</u>	3.7.65	4.245	4.025803	3.954408	3.677068	3.718365
<u>Odisha</u>	6.6.48	7.824	4.421042	4.171140	4.015390	3.533943
<b>India</b>	<b>134.097</b>	<b>121.901</b>	88.538214	84.916833	80.079506	76.292132

Source: *nrega.nic.in*. Accessed on 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2019

The Act in many ways has also enabled women's work (who otherwise had limited work opportunities outside their homes), since work is usually within four kilometers a space women can easily get to. An article in the People's Archive of Rural India (PARI)<sup>4</sup> found that women are earning back in their villages while the husbands have migrated temporarily for work, this is the case in many areas. Many women also benefit with the MGNREGS mandating childcare and creche facilities wherever there are more than five children. MGNREGS helps the other non MGNREGA workers too by increasing the wage amounts in the market.

In the box below is a case from the Jhiriya Gram Panchayat in Chhattisgarh which depicts how systematic planning through diversified livelihood promotion has helped a women headed household bring changes not only to her life but also in the lives of her family members. These women informed the team from ICRG which interviewed them that because of the construction of assets they are able to earn extra income. This additional income has helped to meet the daily household consumption, children's school fees, death rituals expenses, etc. In addition to this, the additional income helped them to take part in the decision making processes at home. They have also become financially literate.

**Jhiriya Gram Panchayat**, in Chhattisgarh has 237 HHs according to the 2011 Census and increased to 371 HHs as per the Mission Antyodaya report 2018, of which 349 are Schedule Tribe HHs, 39 Houses belonging to Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTG) and 189 are deprived Households. 201 HHs are involved in cultivation and 24 HH are involved in manual casual labour. The total number of job cards is 352 of which 313 are active. The total number of workers is 702 and 605 are active. However, Jhiriya Gram Panchayat suffers from a few crucial problems like high soil erosion leading to severe sheet erosion in the cropland area and on the scrub and waste land area. Second, due to no irrigation facilities, agriculture is primarily rainfed. The level of education is very poor as more than 50 percent of the population are illiterate and another 20 percent have below primary level literacy. As a result, the benefits of MGNREGA are limited due to lack of planning and awareness of different NRM activities at the Panchayat level.

<sup>4</sup> <https://ruralindiaonline.org/articles/manoeuvring-through-mgnrega-in-bhilwara/>

Jonha Bai is a 60 year old who heads her household herself, belongs to the ST community and has a family of six members. Jonha has not gone to school. Her family does farm, wage labour under MGNREGA and NTFP collection from the forest to maintain their basic needs. She has received 5 acres of land from the Government under the Forest Rights Act. Before the construction of a farm pond she used to get around 4-5 quintals of paddy per acre of land but now after the construction of a farm pond in 2018-19 she harvested 7 quintals of paddy per acre amounting to 35 quintals. Out of the total she sold 20 quintals in the market and earned Rs 50,000/-. For the first time she sowed wheat in the *Rabi* season and harvested 15 quintals. She also did vegetable cultivation in half acre of land for her household consumption. On the bunds of the farm pond she cultivated chickpea and maize received from the Horticulture Department. Apart from this she received three packets of fingerlings free of cost consisting of 1000 pieces from the fishery department to do pisciculture in her farm pond. In addition to this the household earns Rs 3000 by selling NTFP products like *Mohua* flowers and *Tendu* leaves.

Jonha Bai has worked under the MGNREGA for 73 days in FY 2018-19 and earned Rs 11,767/-. She informed the interviewers from the ICRG programme that after her husband's death she was worried about how she would take care of her family with very little money. But the government's plan to develop their land and increase their income by distributing fish fingerlings as an alternative livelihoods helped them earn more income. She thanked the government and ICRG programme for this initiative.

- **Impact of MGNREGS structures/CRWs on Women**

In a series of studies conducted on the MGNREGA, Murthy, 2005 noted that: 'One-third of the 12 studies with a conclusion noted that women's mobility has expanded and women's incomes have increased through their participation in the MGNREGA, and that they have invested their income in strengthening food security, health and education, as well as purchase of durable goods and livestock.'

The case below illustrates how careful planning of CRWs and MGNREGA assets benefits local communities and could be a life saver for vulnerable populations especially women. The ICRG programme also made efforts to work with women Self-Help Groups (SHGs), *Jankar Dals* (Local Resource Teams) and Women's Groups in the village, in order to ensure that women were involved in decision making of the assets and benefits of these assets would reach them too.

Nalanda district is a highly drought prone area of Bihar. Majority of its population are dependent on rainfed agriculture for livelihood. The average annual rainfall of the district is 1002.2 mm of which about 92.55 percent of the rainfall is received during June to October in the monsoon season. In the last couple of years repeated droughts have created many challenges in the life of the farmers in the district, majority being small and marginal with average land holding of 0.80 Hectare.

The main source of irrigation in the district is either traditional irrigation channels (Pynes) connected with rivers or groundwater sources (tube wells or wells). During the monsoon period and Rabi season these irrigation channels and groundwater sources are used as a major source of irrigation

for agriculture. There are many water bodies and channels in the area but most of them are non-functional and not in use due to siltation over a period of time. Moreover, supplementary irrigation through canals is used but canal beds and side beds are not properly maintained, this situation has led to severe soil erosion and siltation during the rainy season due to high velocity of water and high surface runoff in the area. All these contribute to severe lack of irrigation in the district which affects livelihoods of the farmers.

**Kachiyawan GP in Nagarnausa block of Nalanda district** faces similar challenges, it was selected as an ICRG demonstration site. It has total population of 8635 with majority being SC and OBC population.

### **The ICRG intervention**

An earthen irrigation channel, which is one of the main irrigation sources for the villagers for *Rabi* season crops and for critical irrigation of kharif crops for the farmers was made available by this CRW. This channel is directly connected with a river- *Phalgu*. This channel covers around 40 percent of the agriculture area of the village for irrigation purpose.

Prior to the ICRG Teams intervention in the area, MGNREGA had proposed only desiltation of Pyne at the site. Upon interaction with the community and studying the water catchment area, the ICRG team suggested the construction of a check dam on the channel to maximize benefits of harvested water and its possible use for conveyance from the village to agriculture field on the other side. Moreover, the proposed structure has direct impact on the livelihoods of villagers and will help in maintaining the biodiversity of the area through the promotion of plantation of fruit trees and shrubs near the structure. ICRG worked on revising the design of the pyne (irrigation channel) and Check-dam. The pyne side slope has been maintained considering the historic and future rainfall using climate modeling study. Based on interaction with the villagers, the check-dam was constructed at the appropriate site which was the junction point of three pynes. Additionally, the design of the dam included a ramp and handle for helping the differently abled, pregnant women, elders and children. Apart from these inclusive design changes in the CRW, women friendly measures were incorporated during the implementation of the CRW like ensuring a creche at the work-site and selection of a woman for serving water during the implementation.

Additionally, efforts were done through capacity building and orientation trainings through SHGs on livelihood opportunities of eight SHG groups around the Saidpur CRW. The women participation in the Gram Sabha and Labor budget exercises were ensured through door to door campaigns during Gram Sabha/Aam Sabha and Labor budget preparation time. Also, women participation in the MGNREGA worksite and linkage to other Government schemes were facilitated through registration with Agriculture Department, Fisheries, MGNREGA individual works like cattle sheds, vermicomposting pits and the like.

### **The Impact**

44 households of Saidpur village covering 43.33 acre land are directly benefiting after the completion of work with additional production in each of the three seasons. Due to increased moisture content of the adjacent crop fields, the water required for irrigation has reduced. This allows farmers to save irrigation water for inception of the *Rabi* season and to engage in additional

and diversified crop options like vegetables, wheat, pulses etc. The additional water in the pyne flows through neighbouring seven villages covering 300 acres and is helpful for the kharif irrigation. The productivity of all crops in the irrigation area of the CRW has increased. Wheat productivity has increased from 10.50 quintal per acre to 15 quintal per acre, paddy and maize productivity has also increased by 11 percent and more.

The members of five SHG groups, agree about the positive changes in recent years brought by MGNREGS specially in the ICRG intervention blocks like wage employment and more say for women in the approval of works from the Gram Sabha. The financial condition of the households has also improved because of linkage with other Departmental schemes for agriculture technology trainings, vermicompost-pit preparation and seed-kits. Nearby 7 villages were also affected by floodwater in the rainy season from the pyne. The deepening of channel bed ensured smooth flow of water. In addition, 25 farmers were able to cultivate green gram for the first time which yielded 6 quintals and 6-7 farmers also cultivated vegetables for the first time.

Sabita Devi, 45, is a widow farmer having 3 bigha<sup>5</sup> of land in the command area of the CRW. She was born into a poor family in neighbouring Barbigha village. Due to the prevalent patriarchal customs at her home even though her brothers got proper schooling she did not get a chance to attend a regular school and remained illiterate. She was married in 2010 into a farmer family in Saidpur village, she helped her husband in farming on their small piece of land. Unfortunately, her husband died in an accident and the responsibility of sustaining 3 daughters fell on Sabita. Her only means of sustenance was her land. She started farming on her piece of land but due to limited production and water scarcity she was unable to cover her expenses, she also had to marry her daughter and educate another daughter. For catering to her household and children's needs she took Rs 70,000/- loan from the Jeevika SHG groups. Along with working as a labour in MGNREGS, she started doing farming on her land. This year when the water availability due to the pyne has increased, her hopes in farming grew, along with her 3 kattha<sup>6</sup> land she has taken 6 kattha land on lease for cultivation. This year she moved on to a three cropping system along with vegetables. Her total production from 3 seasons has increased by 50 percent along with production of additional crops which she was not able to cultivate earlier like red lentil. The obstacles in her life still haunt her, but she confidently says: *"I can sustain by eating rice and salt, but now since my hope in farming has increased, I am confident that I will be sending my daughter to school"*.

The women who are part of SHGs and those who have benefited from CRWs speak in unison and say *"We have more women participation in our Gram Sabha now and 4-5 ponds recommended by SHG members have been started. The additional income will be used for our children's education. We are going to the Aam Sabha being organized today and will put forward our other works in the work-plan"*

### ***Convergence, the way forward***

In most places it is seen that women struggle to access private assets such as plantations, well deepening etc. because of the land title not being in their name (Murthy,2005). However, there are

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<sup>5</sup> Bigha and Kattha are traditional units of land used in India. 1 Bigha=20 Kattha=14,400sqft

<sup>6</sup> Kattha is also unit of area used for measuring land parts. 1 Kattha=1,361sqft

also inspiring instances of collective action seen within the ICRG Project. In Odisha's Mayurbhanj District in the Dur Dura Panchyat, 40 households own a 'Badi' or agricultural plot together where they grow cashew nuts, guava, mango etc. Most of the families are tribal so they got some assistance from the Odisha ITDA Department to develop the plot, but they also included some SC families in the scheme. In Odisha, the ICRG programme found much support for convergence programmes from the ITDA, the Odisha Tribal Empowerment Programme and others. The boxed case in this section too shows how women (both landed and the landless) and women SHGs are benefitting through linkages with other Departments like Horticulture, Agriculture, Fisheries, the National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM) etc. Some of the landless women have received benefits like vermicompost pits, goat sheds and cattle sheds which has helped in enhancing their meager household incomes.

- **Assets Built & Decision Making About these (Participation in MGNREGS Gram Sabhas and processes including Labour Budget)**

A key step in transforming gender relations in public works programmes is to ensure that women are involved right from the planning phase. There are MGNREGA guidelines for this but the ICRG programme has ensured that this happens on the ground. In the state of Chhattisgarh for instance the ICRG programme ensured that the Jankar Dal (Local Resource Team) in each village would have maximum women participation and members and would enthruse other women to be a part of meetings especially Gram Sabhas. During the time when the MGNREGS Labour Budgets (where decisions are taken on what assets should be created) are made there must be special attention given for the involvement of women, as has been done by the ICRG programme in many places.

However, the non-ownership of property by women does become a stumbling block in some cases, since women do not come forward to participate if they do not see a benefit from the participation. A gender-sensitive response to this could be to choose to construct and improve assets which will benefit women equally, or more, than men (examples of vermicompost, goat sheds have already been illustrated). Since women also contribute as the labour force for public works, they should be given the responsibility to maintain, run, and benefit from the physical assets they create either as all-women groups or with gender-balanced representation.

Information Education & Communication (IEC) tools are a good gender neutral way to improve women's participation in the village. Wall paintings, posters, games etc. help in getting messages on the importance of climate planning and infrastructure down to the village. These could also give ideas on women's involvement from the inception and throughout the programme.

Gram Sabha meetings are held to decide what works should be taken up in the village - where at least 33 percent of those present must be women. However, women's groups both in Andhra Pradesh (Steinbach, 2016) and Odisha reported that these meetings are used more for interacting with officials, than the actual planning. Women groups met in Odisha<sup>7</sup> also reported that only few of them - mostly the representatives, can make it for Gram Sabha meetings which happen in the main village while others attend Palli Sabha (hamlet/village level) meetings because of the distances involved.

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<sup>7</sup>FGDs in Keonjhar and Jashipur on 17<sup>th</sup> October 2019 with the ICRG Team

## Conclusion

Evidence suggests that the MGNREGS is gradually able to achieve its objectives of empowering women while at the same time ensuring that climate resilience is taking place in programmes like the ICRG. Since MGNREGA has mainstreamed climate-responsive mechanisms into its programme, in the states of Bihar, Chhattisgarh and Odisha households whose members are active workers in the programme are better equipped to hang in, despite increasing climate vulnerability.

Through the paper we saw that the participation of women has gone up in Bihar, Chhattisgarh and Odisha. Nationally too women participation in the programme is more than 50 percent of the total work force. However, more evaluations and studies to be commissioned to review how women can be benefited better, have more decision making and to ensure gender equity.

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