

***Gender and productive assets:
implications of national rural employment guarantee
for women's agency and productivity***

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NREGA: Three Questions

- NREGA, A rights-based programme, is both employment generation and creation of productive assets.
- What has been policy component in NREGA for overcoming gender discrimination and inequality?
- Has it been indifferent to women workers' needs and interests, and in turn reproduced institutional norms and practices that treat women as dependent category?
- To what extent the workers have enhanced their agency and productivity through employment based income and creation of productive assets?

The Key features of NREGA

- One third of employees are to be women
- Shortening the chain of intermediaries
- Decentralized planning of works and monitoring of implementation
- Social audits through Gram Sabhas, in reality by NGOs and local officials
- Creation of environmentally sound productive assets under administration of Panchayats

Gendered Change and continuity

- In July 2008, all-country level women's employment as a percentage of total employment in NREGA was 40 percent
- NREGA wages are higher than market wages
- Control rights: 79% women employees collect their own wages; 68% keep their own wages
- By and large gender parity of wages; yet reports say:
 - Lack of worksite facilities
 - Gender division of labour: skilled work for men
 - Single women are excluded
 - Absence of women in planning, management and social audits

Gender is not a sub set of Decentralization

- Social relations within a community are not gender neutral
- The use of household as a unit of intervention: the case of single women
- Community perceptions and social norms tend to overlook gender inequalities in access to assets, voice and vulnerability to economic risks
- Political silence on sensitizing the local institutions for gender concerns, with exception of gender wage parity
- Policy focus on reducing poverty and building productive capacity of local economy, not the dynamic of gender inequality
- The parity of wages between women and men in NREGA is generally interpreted as a sufficient measure for addressing the gender question in poverty reduction programme

Productive Assets: Gender Concerns

- Assets created include: water conservation, drought proofing , irrigation canals, land development, flood control, rural connectivity and irrigation works on land owned by SC/STs
- Women are not included in management of production assets, despite some attention to feminization of agriculture
- Attempts at reducing poverty and inequality continue to be seen contradiction in terms
- Economic rights and security: policy and institutions do not realize that women's ownership and control rights to productive assets can lead to higher and better quality production
- Productivity and efficiency of resource use: convergence between community productive assets and smallholder productive assets may add value to the overall strength of NREGA rather than undermine the effectiveness thereof

Effective Policy Framework

- Measures for women's unmediated ownership and control rights to productive assets
- Research and social understanding on economic implications of gendered asset inequality
- Building capacities of women farmers in new technologies
- Gender sensitization and rearranging of institutional norms for elimination of gendered poverty and inequality