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Impact of MGNREGA on socio-economic status of women in Rural Haryana: Block level analysis of Charkhi Dadri district

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Abstract

The key indicators of inclusive growth are the socio-economic and infrastructural development, particularly in the rural areas where disparities are still high. This study will look at the socio-economic empowerment of women in the Charkhi Dadri district of Haryana and how this has been achieved, particularly with the help of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA). The study examines the involvement of women in employment, income earning and decision making based on primary data collected on 200 households in four blocks. The result shows that MGNREGA has increased financial inclusion and livelihood security but still there is inequality because of the socio-cultural limitation and unequal implementation across blocks.

Keywords: Women empowerment, MGNREGA, socio-economic status, rural development, gender disparities, Charkhi Dadri, Haryana

Introduction

Women empowerment and the minimization of gender differences have become some of the main pillars in sustainable development globally. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in particularly Goal 5, focus on attaining gender equality and empowering all women and girls as a precondition to inclusive and equitable development. Although the world has achieved success in empowering women by giving them access to education, health services and job opportunities but gender disparities still persist in many aspects. The Global Gender Gap Report (2023) ^[42] reveals that less than 68.4% of the world gender gap has been bridged, and with the current rate of progress, it might take more than a century to attain complete equality. Women are still structurally disadvantaged in the economic arena, political representation and leadership globally.

The gender gap in economic participation is one of the chronic international problems. The participation of women in the labour force is still considerably less than that of men, and particularly in the developing and agrarian economies, when the traditional gender roles are predominant. Women are often restricted by social norms to stay at home without any paid labour, which does not allow them to get paid jobs and achieve financial self-sufficiency. In addition, discrimination against women in terms of wages, occupational segregation and access to productive resources are further limiting factors to their social-economic development. These issues underscore the need to focus on policy interventions that can not only improve the access of women to work and education, but also help deal with deeply rooted socio-cultural constraints that limit their empowerment.

Gender inequality is a critical issue of development in the Indian context even though there are significant economic growth and policy measures. India is relatively low on gender indices worldwide and the differences are seen in education, employment, health and political representation. The participation of female labour force in India is also one of the lowest in the world which shows systemic limitations like inequality in wages, absence of appropriate jobs and responsibilities that women have to carry out without pay. Although there has been positive progress on female literacy and political representation in local governance, there are still huge gaps, especially in the rural setting where women are still restricted by socio-cultural norms on their mobility and opportunities.

At the state level, Haryana is a paradoxical state of the socio-economic situation in India. On the one hand, it is among the economically developed states with high agricultural output and a fast pace of the industrial progress; on the other hand, it can be characterized by strong gender inequalities. The state has a history of the lowest sex ratio in the nation, as well as low female labour force participation and deep-rooted patriarchal values. Such gender inequalities are especially evident in the rural regions where the social structure and cultural practices limit access of women to education, healthcare and economic opportunities.

In this larger state scenario, Charkhi Dadri district can be taken as a significant micro-level region to analyze the socio-economic conditions of women and the processes of empowerment. Charkhi Dadri is largely a rural district, created in 2016 when the area was split off Bhiwani. The district is indicative of most of the structural issues prevalent in the state of Haryana such as gender disparities in literacy, employment and access to health services. Women in the district are quite active in farm and household work, but their efforts are not considered serious and their work is not appreciated and overvalued economically.

The interaction between socio-economic systems and socio-cultural norms has a profound effect on the socio-economic position of women in Charkhi Dadri. The employment of women in the labour market is mostly in the informal and poorly paying industries, such as agricultural labour and household work. Women have little ownership of land and other productive resources even though they contribute a lot to the household and agricultural economy and this limits their ability to make their own decisions and influence their economic independence. Moreover, social institutions like early marriage, gender discrimination, and mobility limits remain in control of the lives of women and perpetuate inequality processes.

In that regard, government policies to encourage women to work in rural areas and gender equality are very important to change the socio-economic status of women. The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) that provides 100 days of wage employment to rural households is one of the most important policy initiatives in this respect. The programme especially benefits women, since it states that men and women should get equal wages and it promotes women to work in the rural areas. MGNREGA can increase the economic freedom of women and their bargaining power within households and contribute to their involvement in the decisions at the community level because it offers them a stable income source.

In rural areas such as Charkhi Dadri, MGNREGA is not only a means of earning a living, but also a means of social change. This programme has seen women go beyond their usual domestic roles and is now able to participate in paid employment, hence becoming more visible in the public arena. MGNREGA participation has also led to financial inclusion as it has made women open bank accounts and participate in formal financial systems. In addition, the group work within the programme helped in social interaction and solidarity among women, which promote rising awareness and empowerment.

But not every woman is equally empowered by MGNREGA and socio-cultural conditions in the area tend to mediate

these effects. Although the programme has enhanced access to income and employment opportunities by women, issues like late payment of wages, inadequate provision of work opportunities and unawareness about their entitlements have remained issues that have influenced the performance of the programme. Also, higher earnings cannot always be converted into more decision-making power because in many cases, women have fewer opportunities to control their finances due to the patriarchal norms. Hence the critical question of the degree to which MGNREGA can lead to substantive empowerment, rather than just economic participation is crucial.

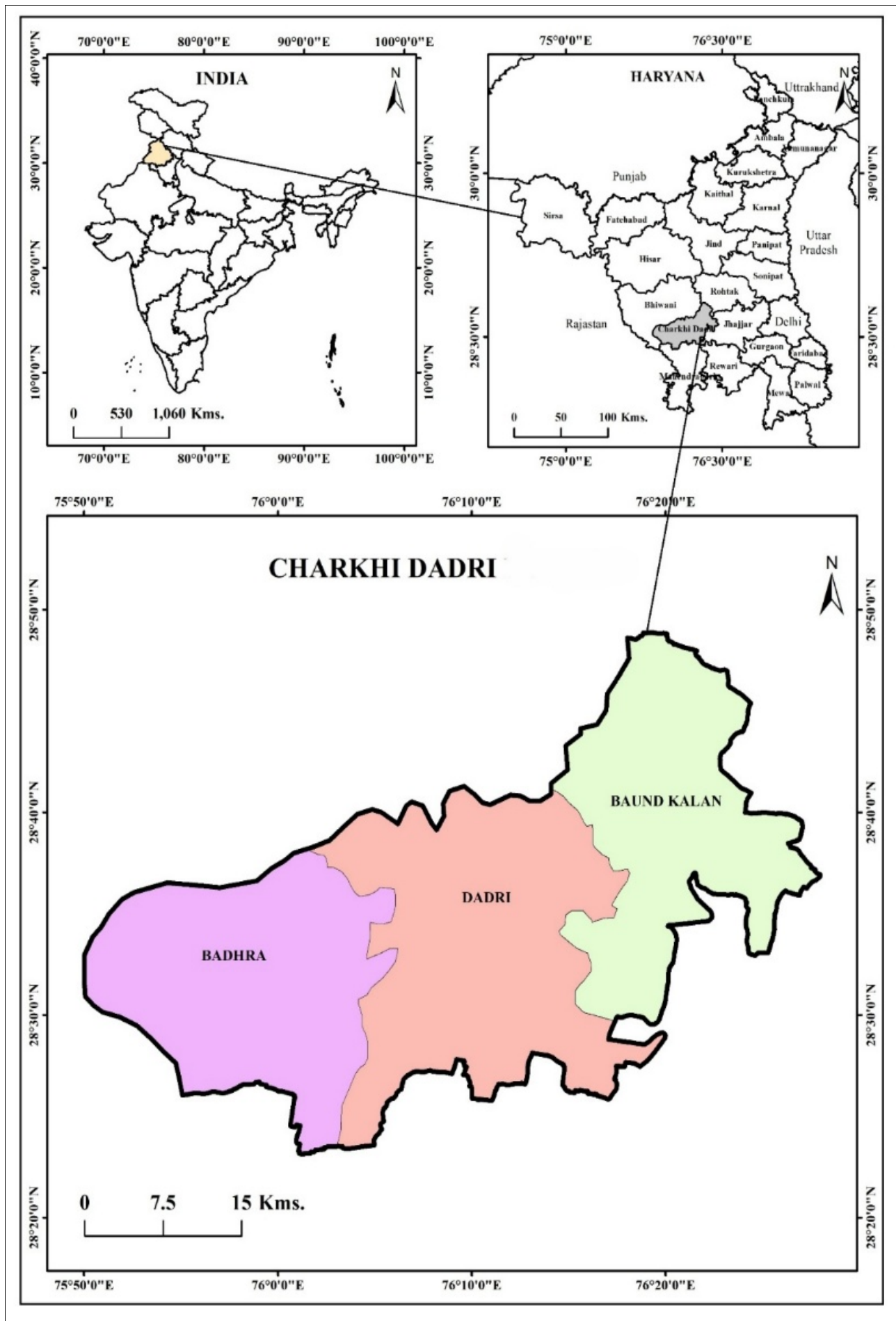
The current study aims at investigating the position of women in Charkhi Dadri district with a specific emphasis on how MGNREGA has helped to enhance empowerment. Through micro-level approach, the study seeks to reveal the finer aspects of the lives of women, which is usually lost in macro-level analysis. It combines socio-economic measures like education, employment, health and decision-making to give a holistic picture of the status of women in the district.

Study Area

Charkhi Dadri district is a rural and mostly agricultural area in the south of Haryana, characterized by unique socio-economic and gender dynamics. It was cut out of the district of Bhiwani and formally declared the 22nd district of the state on 1 December 2016. The district is geographically located between 28°26'N to 28°59'N and 75°28'E to 76°18'E with an area of approximately 1,431 sq. km (Map 01). It shares its borders with Jhajjar district in the north and east, Mahendergarh district in the south and Bhiwani in the west. It is administratively divided into two tehsils, Charkhi Dadri and Badhra, and a sub-tehsil, Baund Kalan, and three development blocks: Dadri, Badhra and Baund Kalan.

The area is physiographically flat and gently rolling, which is typical of the Indo-Gangetic plains, semi-arid and with some extensions of the Aravalli hill chain in the south. Climate is severe and there are hot summers (above 45 °C), cold winters (below 5 °C) and average rainfall is 400-450 mm. The soils are mainly alluvial with agriculture being the staple of the local economy. Rabi season has major crops as wheat, mustard and gram, and Kharif season, bajra, cotton and guar with dairy farming as supplement.

The population of the district is approximately 5 lakh (Census 2011) ^[4] with almost 89 percent of the population in rural locations. The literacy rate (67.04) is lower than the states average and sex ratio (881 females per 1000 males) is an indicator of gender disparities. The social and economic statuses of women in Charkhi Dadri are influenced by patriarchal values, low involvement in the labour market, and lack of access to resources, particularly in rural regions. The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) in this scenario is very relevant in improving the socio-economic status of women. It offers wage labour, fosters financial inclusion and motivates women to engage in decision-making processes at the household and community levels. Despite the persistent challenges of irregularity in the availability of work and social constraints, MGNREGA has helped to enhance income security, mobility, and empowerment of rural women in the district.



Source: Prepared by Research Scholar using Arc GIS

Map 1: Location Map of Study Area

Objectives

1. To examine block wise pattern of women workers under MGNREGA in Charkhi Dadri District.
2. To examine differences in women access to jobs, income and decision-making opportunities by various blocks of Charkhi Dadri district.

Data Sources and Research Methodology

The current study is based on both primary and secondary data sources in order to have a comprehensive view of socio-economic empowerment of women in Charkhi Dadri district. Secondary data relating to various indicators such as women's participation, registered and active workers and gender-wise skilled and semi-skilled employment has been collected from various MGNREGA Reports. The collected data were systematically analysed using appropriate statistical and graphical techniques, including bar diagrams and comparative figures, to interpret trends and discuss the results effectively. Structured questionnaire and interview schedule have been used to collect primary data by conducting the interview with the respondent women in the four development blocks namely Badhra, Baund Kalan and Charkhi Dadri and Jhojhu in the selected villages. Total 200 households surveyed in 20 villages from all four blocks. The questions on employment under Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), income levels, involvement in making household decisions, access to healthcare and education and awareness of government schemes were included in the questionnaire.

Multi-stage sampling method has been utilized in collecting primary data. Previously, the district comprised three blocks, however, with the recent inclusion of Jhojhu block, the total number of blocks has increased to four blocks. Accordingly, the present study has been conducted across all four blocks of the district. Four blocks were firstly chosen namely Badhra, Baund Kalan and Charkhi Dadri and

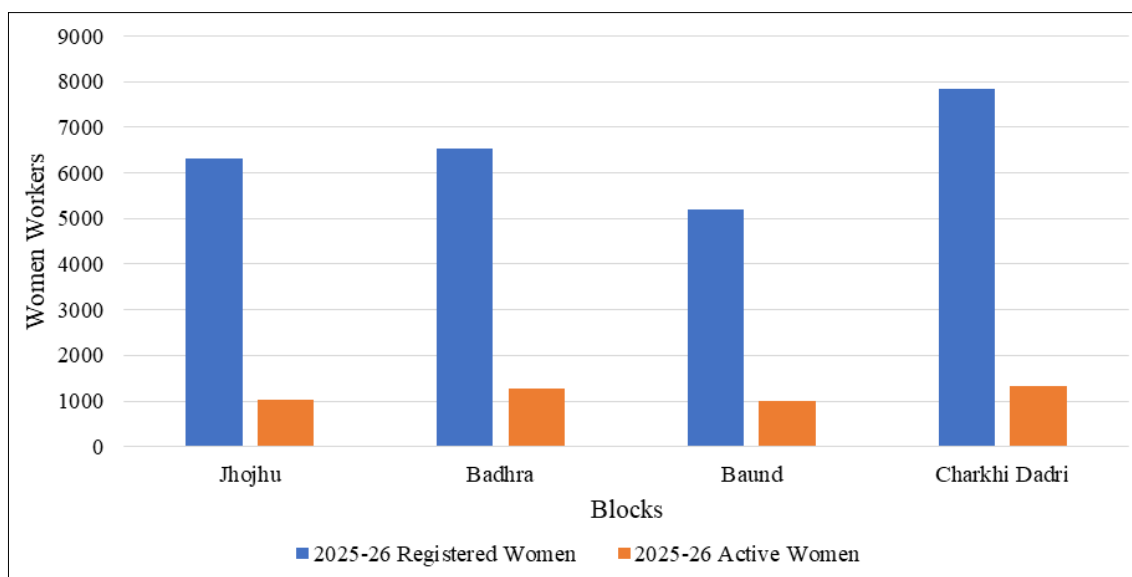
Jhojhu. A systematic/random sampling technique was used to select five villages per block, making the total 20 villages. In these villages, stratified random sampling was done to select households to provide a representation of various socio-economic groups. About 10 respondents from each of the chosen villages were selected to be surveyed, resulting in the overall sample size of 200 respondents.

The analytical framework entails descriptive and spatial analysis. The degree of participation of women in MGNREGA, level of income and decision-making are analysed with descriptive statistics (percentages, averages and comparative tables). Block-wise comparisons have been conducted to study intra-district inequalities. Qualitative observations based on fieldwork and informal interactions with the respondents are also included in the study and contribute to a better comprehension of socio-cultural constraints and ground realities.

Results and Discussion

1. Women's Participation in MGNREGA in Charkhi Dadri District (2025-26)

An analysis of the block-wise registered and active participation of women workers under MGNREGA in Charkhi Dadri district in 2025-26 reveals significant trends of women's participation. The total registered women workers are highest in Charkhi Dadri block (7,834), followed by Badhra (6,522), Jhojhu (6,314) and Baund (5,184) (Figure 01). But there is a significant drop in active participation across blocks when compared to the total number of registered women. The number of active women workers is 1,321 in Charkhi Dadri, 1,281 in Badhra, 1,025 in Jhojhu and 990 in Baund. This suggests that a relatively small percentage of registered women are actively participating in the MGNREGA employment program, which could be attributed to factors such as the availability of work, socio-cultural factors or bureaucratic issues.



Source: MGNREGA Reports on Charkhi Dadri, Haryana, 2025-26

Fig 1: Charkhi Dadri: Block wise Registered and Active Women Workers under MGNREGA

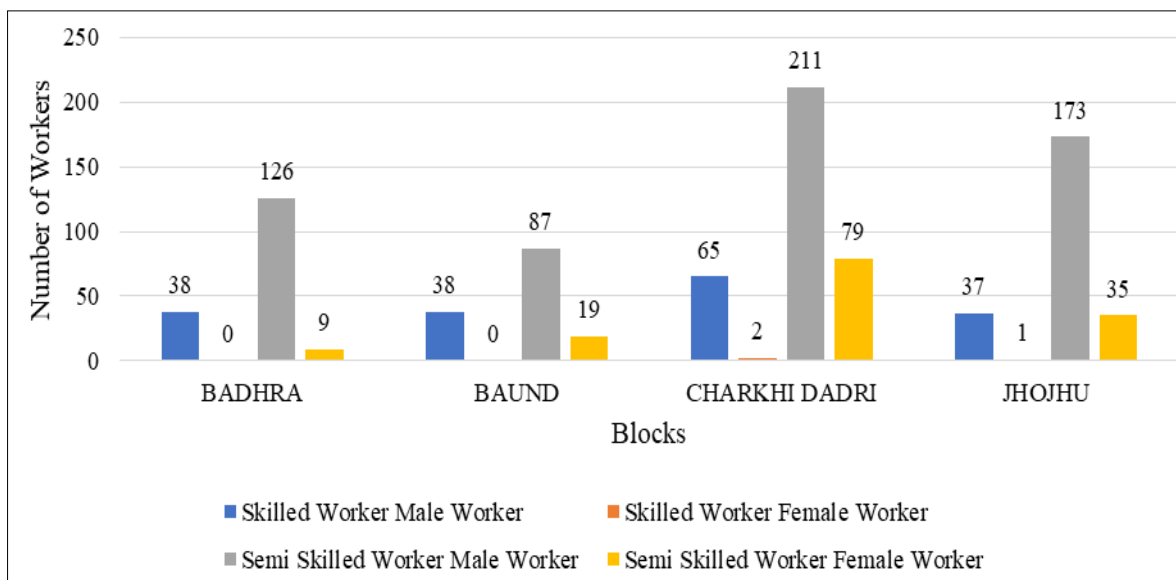
Comparatively, while Charkhi Dadri block is highest in registration, its active proportions are relatively low, whereas Badhra block has done well in terms of conversion of registered to active proportions. Baund block has the lowest number of registered and active workers, suggesting

relatively low level of outreach or participation. In conclusion, the difference between the number of registered and the active women workers represents under-employment of the workforce, and indicates the need for enhancing the efficiency of implementation and outreach of

the scheme.

It is worth mentioning here that currently, the Charkhi Dadri district has four blocks (Jhojhu, Badhra, Baund and Charkhi Dadri). But in the study area, three blocks - Badhra, Baund Kalan and Dadri has been shown as 2011 Census-based administrative boundaries (shapefiles) are available for these three blocks only. As a result, Jhojhu block has not been shown in the study area map, but has been included in the statistical analysis.

1.1 Gender-wise Skilled and Semi-Skilled MGNREGA



Source: MGNREGA Reports on Charkhi Dadri, Haryana, 2025-26

Fig 2: Charkhi Dadri: Number of Skilled and Semi-Skilled Workers under MGNREGA

In terms of blocks, Charkhi Dadri has the highest number of workers in both categories: 65 skilled male workers and only 2 skilled female workers, and 211 semi-skilled male workers and 79 semi-skilled female workers (Figure 02). There are no female skilled workers in Badhra and Baund blocks, implying the total exclusion of women from skilled labour in these regions. Jhojhu block has a very small number of female workers in skilled labour (only 1 worker), but a relatively larger number of semi-skilled female workers with a gender disparity with males.

This trend is clearly a signal that the female participation in skilled and semi-skilled work is very low in all the blocks of Charkhi Dadri district, as shown in the figure 02. Very few women are engaged in skilled work, which is a sign of the structural constraints, including lack of training, gender division of labour and socio-cultural constraints. Even in semi-skilled labour, where female participation is relatively high, there is still male dominance. In summary, the data shows that although the MGNREGA scheme offers employment opportunities, it has so far failed to address issues of equal participation of women in higher-skilled labour, thereby restricting their economic empowerment and social mobility.

2. Impact of MGNREGA on Socio-Economic Status of Women

Assessing the effects of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) on rural

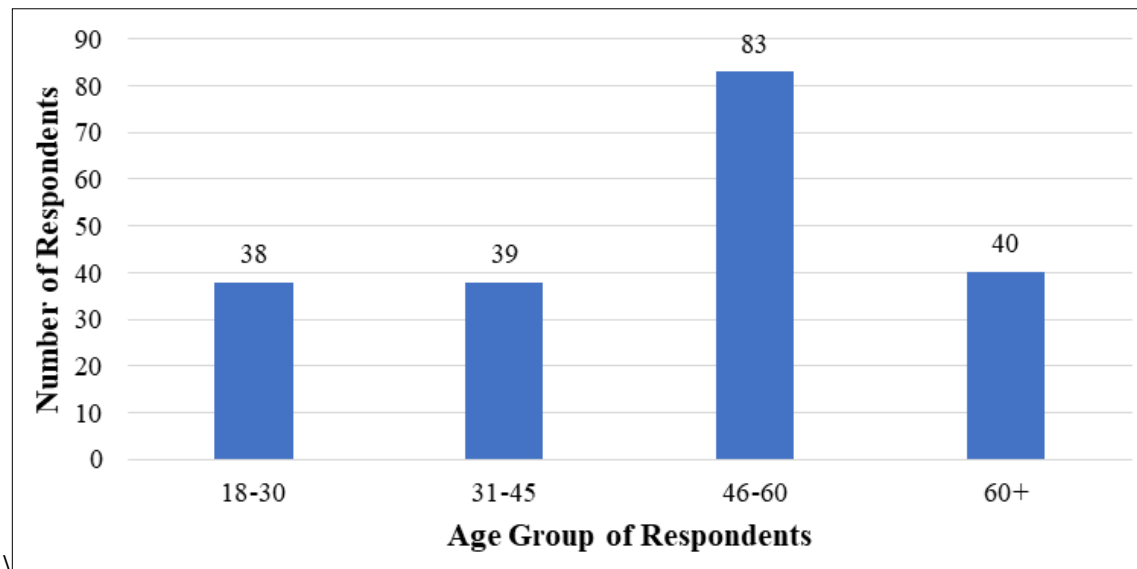
Workers, in Charkhi Dadri District

The block-wise distribution of skilled and semi-skilled workers under the MGNREGA in Charkhi Dadri district shows an unequal gender participation in the workforce. Across blocks, the number of skilled male workers (178) is significantly higher than that of skilled female workers (just 3). Similarly, in the semi-skilled category, while the number of female workers (142) is relatively higher compared to skilled category, it is still much lower than male semi-skilled workers (597).

women's socio-economic status forms an important aspect in the study of rural development and women's empowerment. This section of the paper explores the impact of women's participation in MGNREGA on their labour force participation, wages and household power relations. The study examines various indicators including employment opportunities, wage payment mechanisms, income control, financial inclusion and autonomy and mobility using primary data collected from all four blocks of Charkhi Dadri district. Examining these factors is crucial because simply engaging in wage employment does not necessarily lead to empowerment; rather, it is important to understand whether participation in wage employment makes a significant impact on the economic autonomy, social status and power of women. This study therefore offers a holistic approach to assess the impact of MGNREGA in improving the overall socio-economic status of rural women.

2.1 Age Composition of Respondents

The age distribution of the study's sample shows a wide representation of women from different age groups, from young women (18-30 years) to the elderly (60+ years). The middle-aged groups (31-45 and 46-60 years) are well represented in the sample, suggesting that women involved in economic activities and household management are the main work force under MGNREGA (Figure 03).



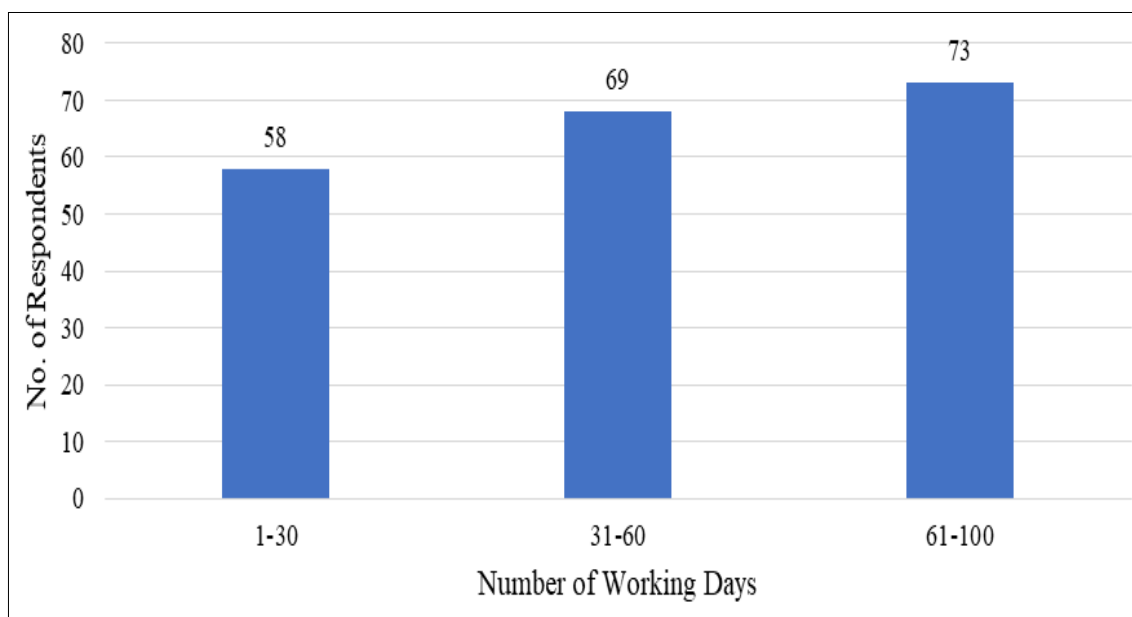
Source: Fieldwork in study area, 2026

Fig 3: Charkhi Dadri: Age Composition of Respondents

Involvement of young women indicates the scheme's significance for early employment opportunities and financial exposure, while the participation of older women, especially over 60 years, suggests the scheme's role in providing livelihood opportunities in the absence of other sources of income. This age distribution is crucial for analysing differential work, income and empowerment outcomes as age is a factor affecting physical stamina, authority and control over economic resources in households.

The distribution of days worked by women under the MGNREGA in various blocks of Charkhi Dadri district reveals a moderate, yet varied, share of employment opportunities. Figure 04 reveals that approximately 58 women agreed that they are working between 1 to 30 days, 69 women reported working in the range of 31-60 days and more than 70 women reported working between 61-100 days which suggests that the scheme is successfully offering continuous employment to a significant number of women, especially in blocks such as Badhra and Baund Kalan where higher levels of engagement are more apparent.

2.2 Days Worked by Women under MGNREGA



Source: Fieldwork in study area, 2026. Source: Fieldwork in study area, 2026

Fig 4: Charkhi Dadri: Number of Working Days Reported by Women under MGNREGA

But a substantial proportion of respondents spread across blocks like Dadri and Jhojhu are in the lower category of 1-30 days, which may be due to intermittent availability of work or lack of employment opportunities. This distribution indicates that although MGNREGA is providing wage employment to women, it is not necessarily delivering the

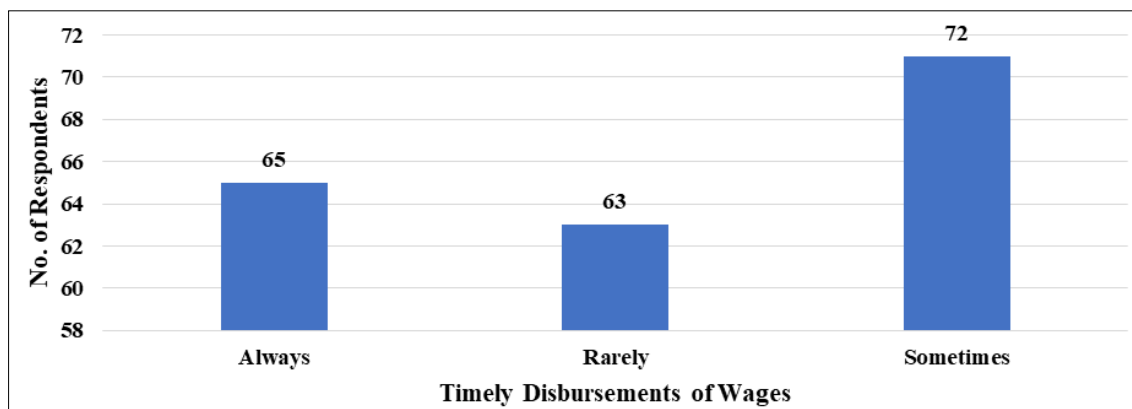
full 100 days of guaranteed employment to all of them.

2.3 MGNREGA Wage Timeliness in Charkhi Dadri

The study of wage timeliness in all blocks of Charkhi Dadri district shows a combination of timely and delayed disbursements of MGNREGA wages. Out of the total

respondents, 65 participants reported they always get their wages on time, 72 reported the wages are sometimes

delayed and 63 reported the wages are rarely paid on time (Figure 05).



Source: Fieldwork in study area, 2026

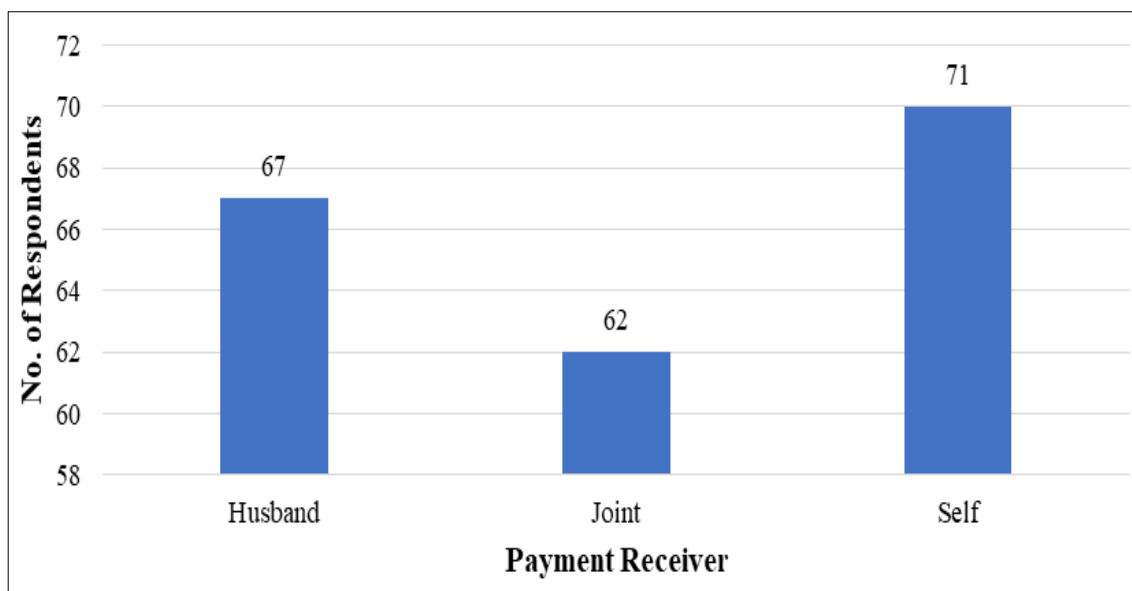
Fig 5: Charkhi Dadri: Disbursement of Wages under MGNREGA

This breakdown reveals that while there is a significant proportion of women that receive timely payment of wages, the greater percentage experience inconsistencies and delays. These variations are seen in blocks such as Badhra, Baund Kalan, Dadri and Jhojhu, indicating that this is not a localised problem but more widespread. The more frequent "sometimes" and "rarely" responses indicate procedural and administrative issues in wage payments, which can have implications on the livelihoods of women and the effectiveness of MGNREGA as a source of employment.

2.4 MGNREGA Payment Receiver in Charkhi Dadri

District

The wage receipt practices of women workers in all the blocks of Charkhi Dadri district show different levels of financial inclusion and control over income. Among the total sample, 71 women reported receiving of wages in their own hands, suggesting a fairly commendable inclusion of women in the direct receipt of wages under MGNREGA. But 65 women reported that their husbands receive the payments and 62 women reported that they share wage payment with their husbands, suggesting the dominance of family structures in managing women's earnings (Figure 06).



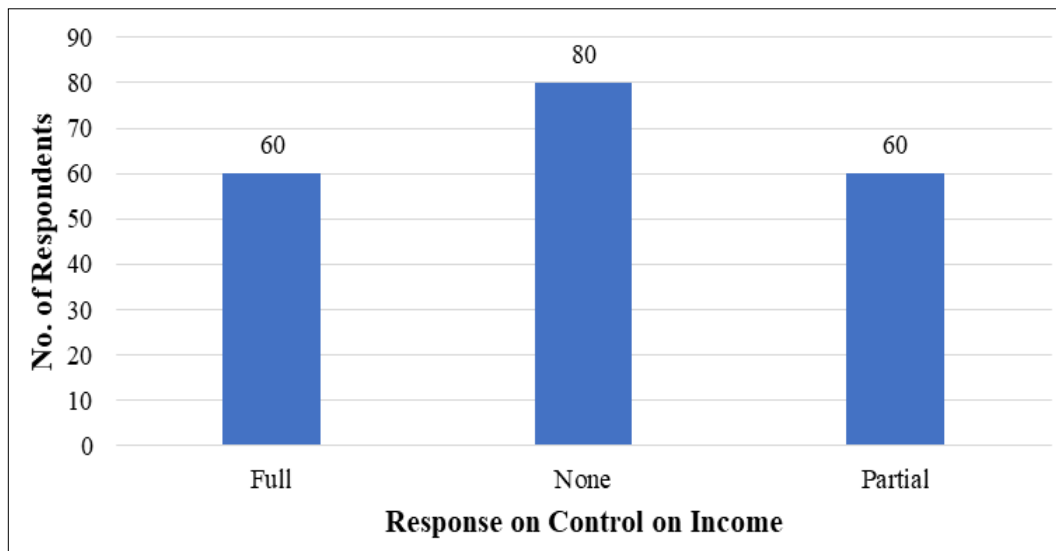
Source: Fieldwork in study area, 2026

Fig 6: Charkhi Dadri: Wage Receiving Status of Women Workers

This reflects that while a slightly greater share of women has direct control over their payments, many still rely on male family members or joint receipt for their wages. The existence of joint and husband-dominated payment patterns in blocks such as Badhra, Baund Kalan, Dadri and Jhojhu suggests that socio-cultural practices still play a role in controlling finances, thereby constraining the potential for economic empowerment, despite women's participation in the scheme.

2.5 Women's Control over Income under MGNREGA

The study of income control among women in all blocks of Charkhi Dadri district reveals considerable differences in women's economic power, despite their engagement with MGNREGA. Out of the total respondents, 80 women reported no control, 60 indicated partial control and 60 women reported full control over their income (Figure 07).



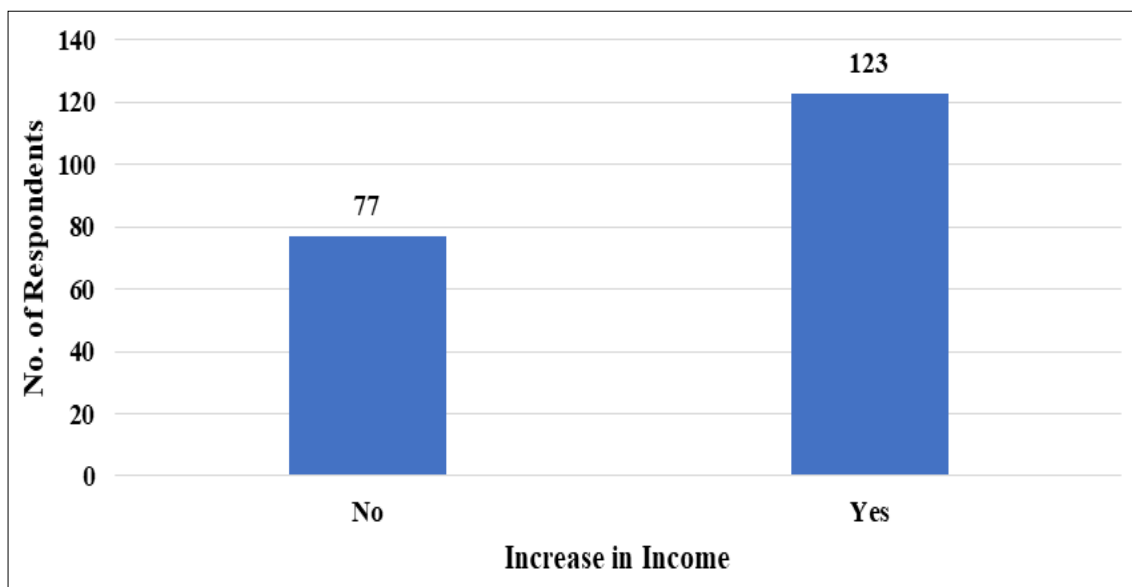
Source: Fieldwork in study area, 2026

Fig 7: Charkhi Dadri: Women Control on MGNREGA Income

This pattern reveals that most women continue to lack direct control over their income, which is an indication of the persistence of patriarchal practices in many households. While a significant number of women reports having partial or full control, which reflects a shift towards financial empowerment, the fact that a majority report having "no control" suggests that a large number of women are still unable to achieve economic independence.

2.6 Increase in Income after Participation in MGNREGA

The evaluation of the change in income following participation in the MGNREGA works of all the blocks in the Charkhi Dadri district suggests that, overall, it has improved women's livelihoods. Out of the total sampled women respondents, 123 women reported a rise in income, with 77 saying that there was no change (Figure 08). This implies that the majority of women have experienced a positive impact on their income from their participation in the programme, which offers an additional and more stable source of wage employment opportunities in rural areas.



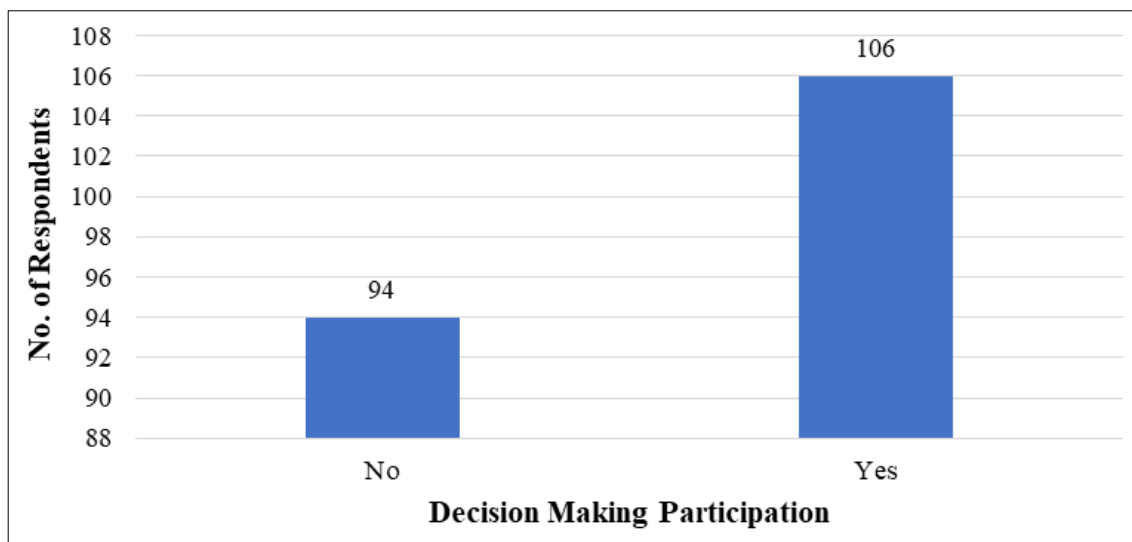
Source: Fieldwork in study area, 2026

Fig 8: Charkhi Dadri: Increase in Women Income after Participating in MGNREGA

However, the boost in income seems to be more of a marginal nature as a considerable number of women do not report any increase. This block-wise difference is due to variations in the number of days worked, regularity of wage payment and work opportunities. In conclusion, although MGNREGA has improved women's income situation, it has been variable and affected by local socio-economic and administrative factors.

2.7 Women's Role in Household Decision-Making

The study on women's participation in household decision-making across all the blocks of Charkhi Dadri district shows a relatively equal but also unequal empowerment structure. A total of 106 women expressed that they are involved in decision-making, while 94 women said they are not (Figure: 09).



Source: Fieldwork in study area, 2026

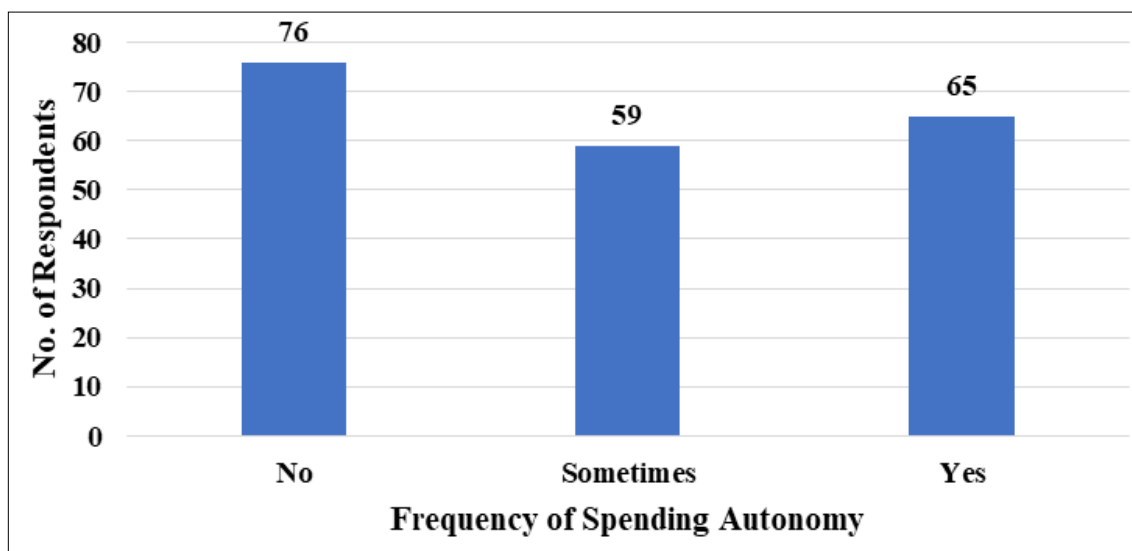
Fig 9: Charkhi Dadri: Women Participation in Household Decisions

This indicates that while a marginal majority of women participate in household decision-making, a large percentage of women are still not involved in decision-making. The results show that engagement with MGNREGA has helped to improve the social awareness of women to some extent, but it has not led to equal decision-making power for all women. The presence of a significant number of non-participating women shows the continued prevalence of traditional gender roles and power relations in blocks such as Badhra, Baund Kalan, Dadri and Jhojhu, which tend to restrict the empowerment outcomes that have resulted from

their economic activities.

2.8 Women's Spending Autonomy on MGNREGA

An examination of the spending autonomy of women from all the blocks of Charkhi Dadri district shows a diverse picture of their capacity to exercise control over the expenditure of their income. Among the total number of respondents, 76 women reported no autonomy in spending, 59 reported they have "sometimes" and 65 reported they have "full" spending autonomy (Figure 10).



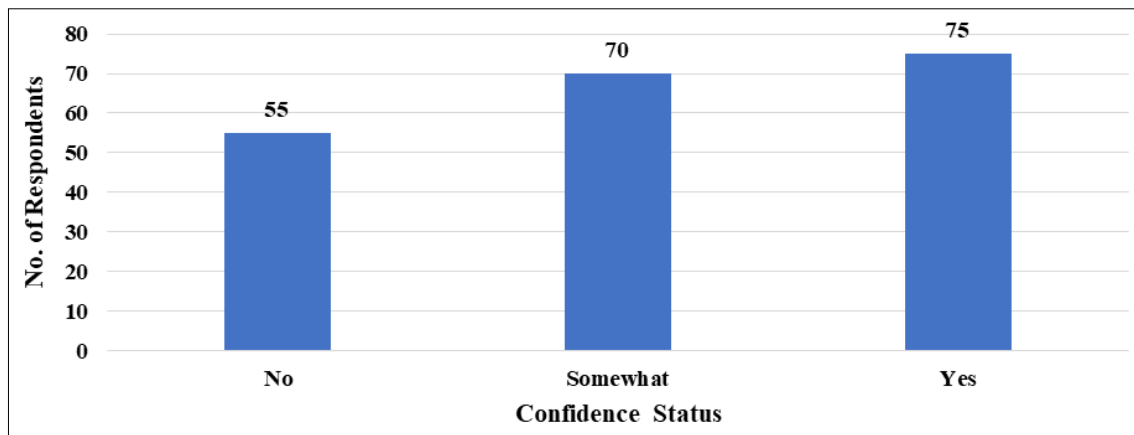
Source: Fieldwork in study area, 2026

Fig 10: Charkhi Dadri: Women's Spending Autonomy on MGNREGA

This breakdown reveals a proportion of women who have achieved some degree of autonomy in financial matters, but the majority still do not have the autonomy to independently control spending. The notable "sometimes" category also suggests conditional autonomy, in which women's spending choices might still be constrained by family members. This phenomenon, evident in blocks like Badhra, Baund Kalan, Dadri and Jhojhu, suggests that while women have earned livelihoods through MGNREGA, they still face sociocultural barriers to full economic empowerment.

2.9 Women's Confidence after Participating under MGNREGA

The survey findings on confidence level of women in all the blocks of Charkhi Dadri district show that there has been a slow but positive increase in their confidence and empowerment. Out of the total respondents, 75 women report an improvement in confidence, 70 report that their confidence has improved marginally and 55 report no change (Figure 11).



Source: Fieldwork in study area, 2026

Fig 11: Charkhi Dadri: Women Confidence after MGNREGA Participation

This breakdown demonstrates that most women have reported some improvement in confidence levels following their participation in MGNREGA, indicating the impact of the programme on enhancing their exposure to the workplace, social interactions and financial decision-making. But the substantial number of women who report no improvement indicates that empowerment effects are not universal and may depend on factors like household dynamics, control of income, and social norms. In summary, though MGNREGA has enhanced the confidence of women, this effect is not uniform across all women and blocks.

Conclusion and Suggestions

It is evident from the study that the MGNREGA programme has contributed immensely to the employment of women and improvement in their socioeconomic position. Findings of the study show the increased involvement of women in the labour force participation, increased supplementary earnings and improved confidence. At the same time, the study has revealed some limitations of the program. First, there is a big difference between the number of women enrolled in the project and those actively engaged in activities. Also, the inconsistency in terms of days of employment and the delay in payment of wages have undermined the benefits of the program. Although women are earning wages, they do not have full autonomy and control over their finances and are not part of decision-making within their families.

The effective implementation of MGNREGA as an instrument to promote women's empowerment needs the development of proper mechanisms for implementation at the grass root level. Providing 100 days of guaranteed employment, timely payment of wages and making them aware of their rights can play a key role in enhancing their participation and making them economically secure. In addition to this, developing capacities among institutions, removing any delays on the part of the bureaucratic structure and increasing transparency regarding the wage disbursement system can prove instrumental in ensuring success. Efforts can also be made to promote their participation in skilled and semi-skilled occupations by conducting training programs for them.

In order to further ensure their effective empowerment through MGNREGA, some additional measures may be taken. These include addressing socio-cultural barriers to promote greater income control and decision-making

capacity among women. Their empowerment in the realm of finance can be achieved by encouraging financial inclusion, having separate bank accounts for women, directly paying the wages to them and promoting awareness about financial rights. In addition to this, awareness campaigns and gender sensitization measures can help in changing existing cultural norms.

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