

Achieving Gender Equality as a Sustainable Development Goal through Rural Road Connectivity: A case study of Chenani Block of Udhampur District of J & K

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Abstract: Gender inequality constitutes one of the most continual and prevalent forms of injustice, eliminating it will call for one of the biggest movements for change. Girls and women continue to suffer discrimination and violence in every part of the world. Gender equality is not only a fundamental human right, but also a necessary foundation for a peaceful and sustainable world. Achieving women's equality and empowerment is one of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. Since independence Government of India has initiated numerous programmes for the empowerment of the women in order to achieve gender equality. In the year 2000, Government of India started a rural connectivity scheme that is Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY). The construction of roads under PMGSY is not only concern for growth and development of the rural India, along with this, it is equally important that it must ensure overall development of female in the rural areas. It is acknowledged that PMGSY roads have improved physical, social, educational and financial conditions of the female population of the connected villages. So, PMGSY is not only developing rural India but it will also help the female to come up and progress with the nation. It is a stepping stone to the success of India as well as a step towards achieving of Sustainable Development of Gender equality. Gender equality is the most talked about issue in India. The focus of the present study is to analyze whether the construction of rural roads under PMGSY are helping the nation to achieve a sustainable development goal. The present study is based on the primary data that have been collected through well structure interview schedule from Chenani Block of Udhampur District of Jammu & Kashmir.

Key words: PMGSY, Gender Equality, Sustainable Development Goals & PMGSY

I. Introduction:

India being a male dominant society has often failed to provide equal opportunities to the female. Among the 17 SDGs, 5th Sustainable Development Goal is to achieve Gender Equality. Gender equality can be achieved through number of ways. Among them, rural connectivity plays an important role. Rural connectivity makes a crucial contribution to the growth and development of each and every economy, whether it is developed and underdeveloped and also brings important social benefits. Rural road infrastructure is an important factor which compensates the absence of other private and public assets. Once we get the road connectivity, we would get everything else like employment, post-office, telephone etc. (Reardon and Corral, 2001). Road connectivity plays a critical role not only in economic growth and development of the country but also in progressing the human development. Rural roads provides the access and the mobility for the rural dwellers, also provides social, economic, physical, and political links and facilitating the exchange of raw material of the rural areas and the products of the urban areas. (Bahadur, 2011). In other words, rural connectivity is the only means through which the country can get the all round progress of rural people including accessibility of better education, banking, transportation and working facilities etc. (Barwell, 1996). The most considerable effect of rural road infrastructure could be on the changing attitude and values of the rural people. Transport and communication infrastructure development increases information and mobility of rural people through decrease in time and cost, resulting into the increase in interaction of the rural people, which in turn helps to change in attitude and human development.

These attitudinal changes are reflected in the decreasing faith in superstition and increasing adoption of family planning practices. (Ahmed, 1996). Numerous positive impacts of roads like access to health care, education, more employment opportunities, scope for self-employment, and the increase in frequency of visits by government officials to number of government programs in rural areas has been observed after the construction of PMGSY. (Jain, 2012). Rural road infrastructure has its great importance in India because the country is predominately rural in nature. It has been seen that the investments in rural roads helps in lifting the rural people above the poverty line. (Hossain and Ahmed, 1990). After the construction of rural roads parents are no longer in that state of mind to marry their children's in remote villages. The role of women increased day by day in the various social activities. (Gahlot, 2011). The role of women is fundamental in sustaining world economy. Apart from their contribution to formal economy, they contribute through various unpaid tasks of care giving and homemaking. Better opportunities in education, employment, health as well as policy making leads to better well being for women, which in turn contribute to social and economic well being of the economy. Rural road plays an important role in the upliftment of the women by creating opportunities to access goods and services located in nearby village and town. Rural road also plays a key role in the overall development of the women by providing them the opportunities to access higher education and the employment is also being created for the female either directly or indirectly. PMGSY has also created the opportunity for self-employment and market accessibility for the women. After the construction of the rural roads frequency of bringing fuel wood by the female in the rural areas has decreased. Construction of rural road has benefited the men as well as women and hence it would to achieve one of the SDG of Gender Equality by benefiting the rural women and providing them the opportunities which male population have already enjoyed.

II. Relevance of the study

Numerous studies have been done on rural roads and PMGSY by researchers in different parts of the country and at different point of time. These studies highlighted various aspects of rural road connectivity through PMGSY but neglected the role of PMGSY in achieving gender equality as a Sustainable Development Goal. Achieving of gender equality through the availability of road infrastructure can contribute significantly to sustainable development. Therefore, focus of the present study is to examine the role of PMGSY in achieving the gender equality in Chenani block of the Udhampur district of J&K. This aspect of the scheme has not been adequately explored and therefore the present study would contribute to existing knowledge on the subject. The conducting of this study in the selected area will help us to examine how far this scheme is helpful in achieving one of the SDG of gender equality in the study area.

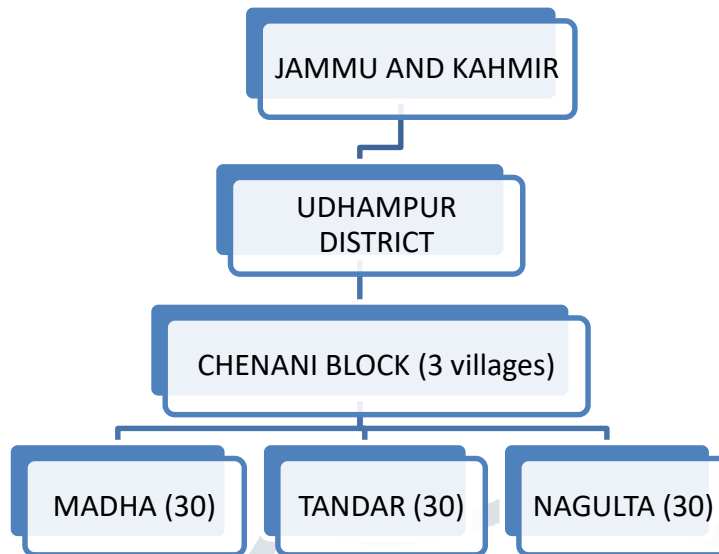
III. Objectives of the study

- To assess whether the PMGSY has decreased the frequency of bringing fuel wood by the women from nearby forests.
- To examine whether PMGSY has increased the income and employment of female.
- To assess whether the construction of the PMGSY road has increased the market accessibility for the women in the study area.

IV. Methodology of the study

The present study is based on the primary data. The data has been collected through well structured interview schedule. The respondent households have been selected by using random sampling method. The study involves use of multi stage purposive random sampling. Out of the 22 districts of Jammu and Kashmir, one district has been selected namely Udhampur. In the next stage one block that is Chenani has been selected randomly and in the next stage three villages- Madha, Tandar and Nagulta have been selected purposely in which work under PMGSY is under process. In the last stage, from each village, 30 households have been selected for the study and the total size of sample for the study is 90.

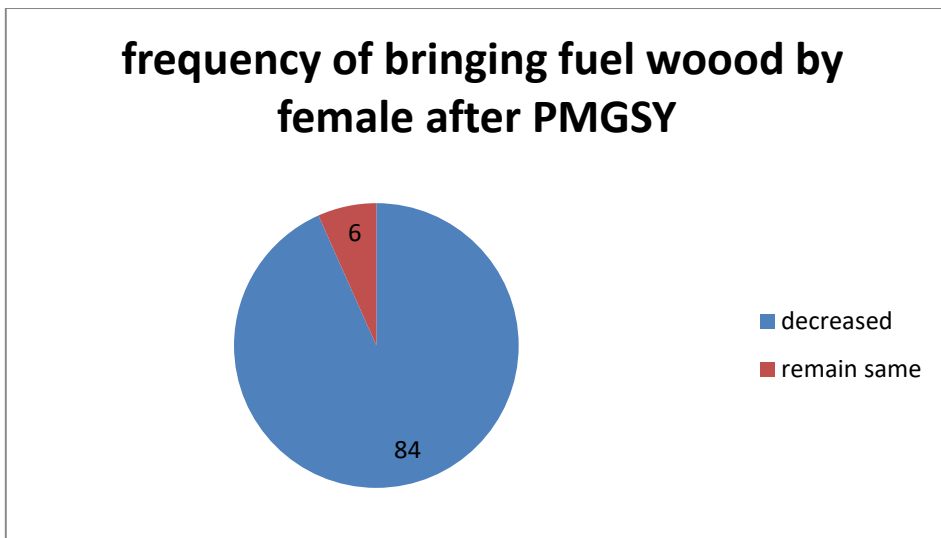
Selection of sample size for the study



Analysis of data collected

Table 1 is shows the frequency of bringing fuel wood by the female after PMGSY

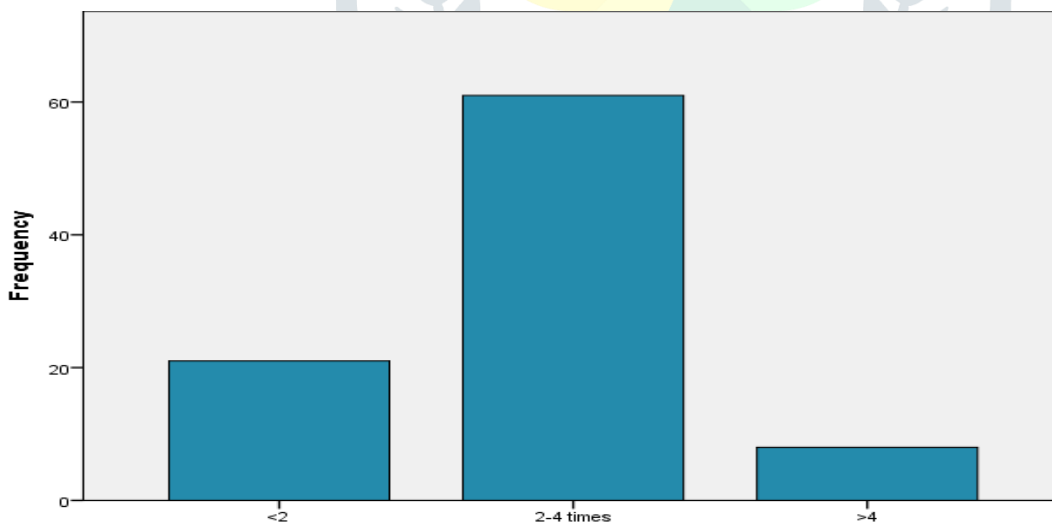
No. of Visits for Fuelwood collection.	Frequency	Percent
Decreased	84	93.3
remain same	6	6.7
Total	90	100.0



The above table and pie chart shows that out of the total sample of 90, 84 respondent households agreed with the fact that the construction of the road has decreased the frequency of bringing fuel wood by the female from nearby forests. And the 6 respondents were of the view that the frequency has remained same after the construction of the road.

Table 2nd shows the responses regarding frequency of bringing fuel wood before PMGSY on weekly basis.

No. of Visits(Weekly)	Frequency	Percent
<2	21	23.3
2-4 times	61	67.8
>4	8	8.9
Total	90	100.0



Number of visits after PMGSY (Weekly)

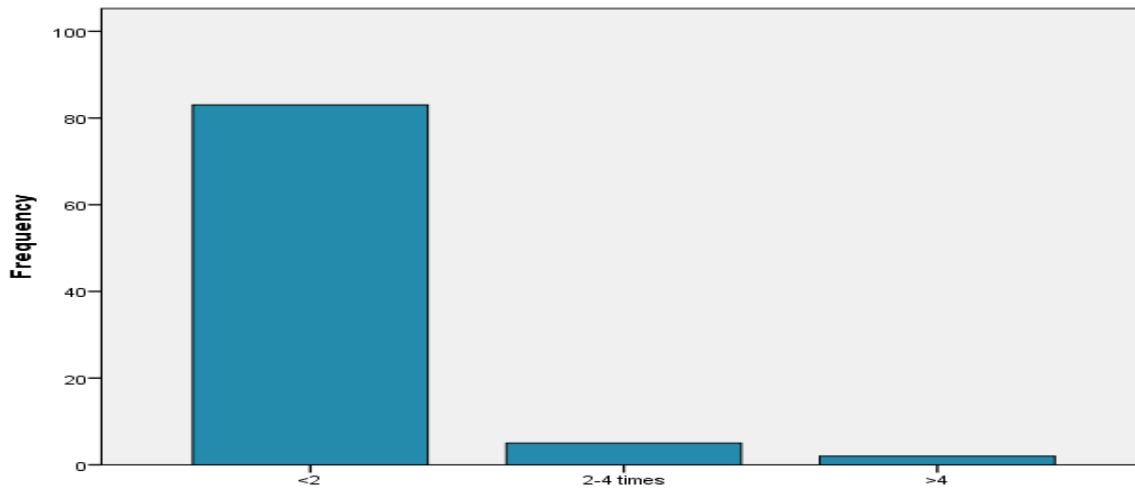
The above table and bar diagram shows the frequency of bringing fuel wood by the females from nearby forests before the construction of the PMGSY road. Out of the total 90 respondent households, 21, 61 and 8 respondents are of the view that on an average they visit less than 2 times in a month, 2-4 times in a week and >4 times per week respectively.

Table 3rd shows the responses regarding frequency of bringing fuel wood after PMGSY (Weekly).

No. of Visits(Weekly)	Frequency	Percent
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<2	83	92.2
2-4 times	5	5.6
>4	2	2.2
Total	90	100.0





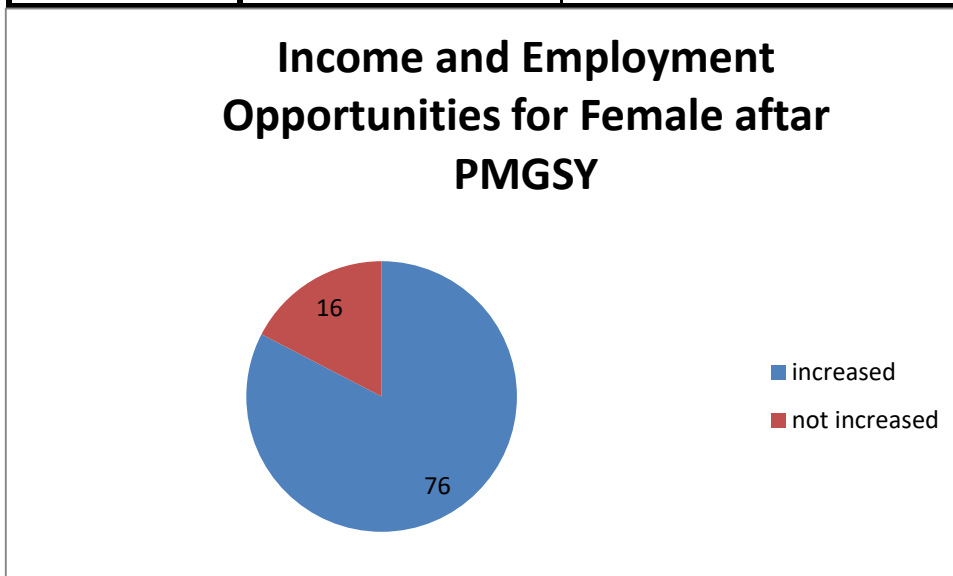
Number of visits after PMGSY (weekly)

The above table and diagram shows the frequency of bringing fuel wood by the females from nearby forests after the construction of the PMGSY road. Out of the total 90 respondent households, 83, 5 and 2 respondent households are of the view that on an average they visit less than 2 times in a month, 2-4 times in a week and >4 times per week respectively.

Table 4th based on responses of respondent households regarding construction of PMGSY has increased income and employment opportunities for the female:

Income and Employment Opportunities after PMGSY.

Opportunities	Frequency	Percent
Increased	74	82.2
Not increased	16	17.8
Total	90	100.0

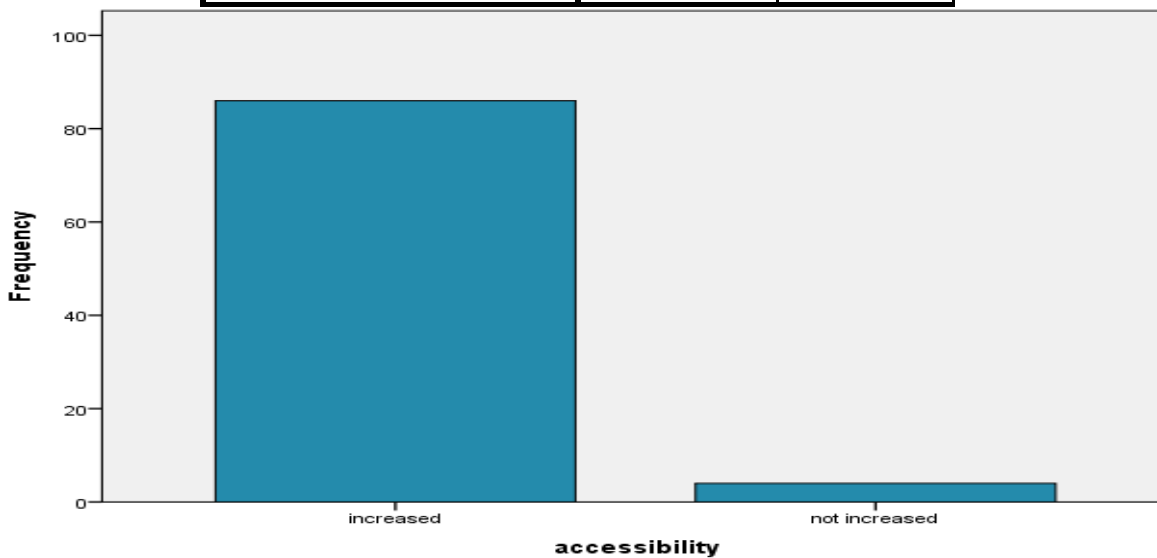


The above table and pie chart shows that the construction of the PMGSY road has increased the income and employment for the female. Out of the total 90 respondent households 74 are of the view that the construction of the road has increased income and

employment for the female and 16 respondents are saying that there is no increase in income and employment opportunities for female

Table 5th based on respondent’s response regarding market Accessibility for the women after PMGSY

Accessibility	Frequency	Percent
Increased	86	95.6
not increased	4	4.4
Total	90	100.0

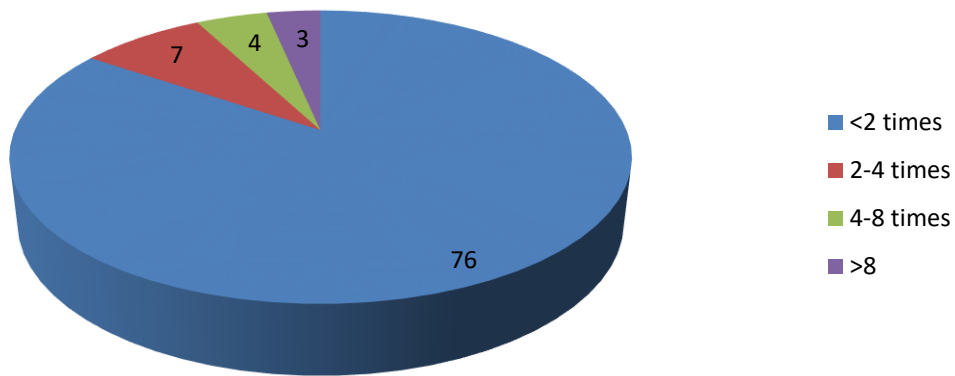


The above table and diagram shows that out of the total 90 respondent households, 86 were of the view that PMGSY has increased the accessibility for the women to nearby markets and to move outside the village. Only 4 respondent households were of the view that accessibility has not been increased by PMGSY

Table 6th shows the frequency of women travelling outside the village (Monthly) before PMGSY

No. of visits(monthly)	Frequency	Percent
<2	76	84.4
2-4 times	7	6.7
4-8 times	4	4.4
more than 8	3	3.3
Total	90	100.0

Frequency of Travelling before PMGSY

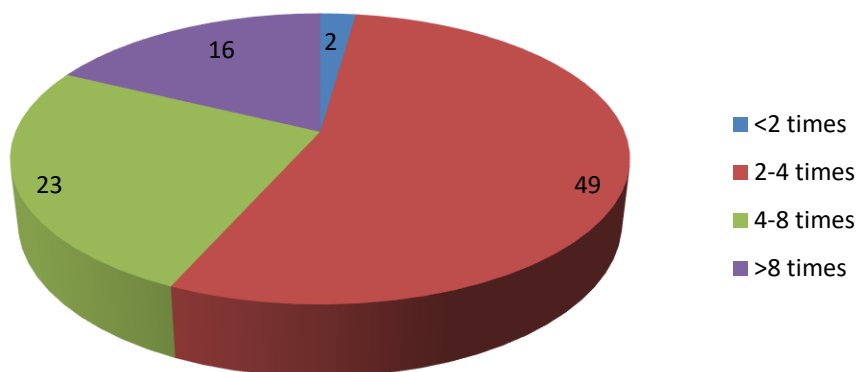


The above table and pie chart shows the frequency of women travelling outside the village before the construction of PMGSY road. Out of the total 90 respondent households, 76, 7, 4, and 2 respondent households are of the view that on an average they travel <2, 2-4, 4-8 and >8 times per month respectively.

Table 7th shows the frequency of women travelling outside the village (Monthly) after PMGSY.

No. of visits(monthly)	Frequency	Percent
<2	2	2.2
2-4 times	49	54.4
4-8 times	23	25.6
more than 8	16	17.8
Total	90	100.0

Frequency of Traveling after PMGSY



The above table and pie chart shows the frequency of women travelling outside the village after the construction of the PMGSY road. It is clear from the table that the frequency has increased after the construction of PMGSY road. Women are now travelling more number of times outside the village.

V. Findings

- ✚ Construction of PMGSY roads has increased the income and employment of female within the habitation as well as outside the habitation. After the construction of the roads women of the habitation got engaged in the SHGs, and other small jobs such as Anganwadi worker which make them self-dependent.
- ✚ Another role that PMGSY roads have played is that the women are now travelling outside the habitation for employment and for other purpose also. Before the construction of the roads women were not frequently move outside the village like male.
- ✚ Another role of the PMGSY roads is that the frequency of bringing fuel wood by the women from the nearby forests has been decreased drastically in the study area, as people are moving towards the LPG connections. This can contribute to the improvement in the health of female population.
- ✚ PMGSY roads directly or indirectly provided the opportunities for women population. Thus, road connectivity played an important role in reducing poverty up to some extent by providing employment opportunities to the women.
- ✚ Construction of road under PMGSY has provided the opportunities for the female population to compete with the male population on several grounds and hence, PMGSY has played an important role to achieve the Sustainable Development Goal of Gender Equality.

VI. Conclusion

Rural road connectivity played an important role in the upliftment of socio-economic condition of the society especially women. Improved market accessibility through rural road connectivity has decreased dependence on firewood collection as well as opportunities for higher education outside the village and employment have contributed significantly in the upliftment of females in the society and making them self-dependent. Gender equality as a sustainable development goal aims at treating women at par with men through the provision of equal opportunities Thus, PMGSY is a step towards the gender equality. Hence, we can say that construction of rural road plays an important role in achieving the SDG of Gender equality.

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