



THE IMPACT OF THE MGNREGA AND ITS APPLICATION ON THE EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES IN THE DISTRICT OF PANNA, MADHYA PRADESH, INDIA

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ABSTRACT

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) provides opportunities for adults to work unqualifiedly at a minimum income of 132.00 INR per day for 100 days. In this study, we focused on Panna, Madhya Pradesh, which has limited employment opportunities for people. Research is focused on the objectives of consciousness, its accessibility, and effectiveness that have helped deepen the roots of the actual scenario. The methodology that served the best were Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and Random sampling

method for door-to-door surveys and interviews approach. After doing all the research/selection, what comes to mind is very different from what is shown. The main problem, particularly in the district of Panna, is the irregular wage system because people lose interest in the system. Other issues include ignorance, the inefficiency of the process, inaccessibility of the system in remote areas, inadequate development of their way of life, and higher migration rates. Finally, we can conclude that MGNREGA plays a vital role in determining the development of our country to achieve its dreams. With such heartbreaking studies and analyses, it is clear that we must improvise and make MGNREGA the most powerful tool for the poor.

KEYWORDS : MGNREGA; Panna; Madhya Pradesh; Employment Opportunity; survey.

INTRODUCTION

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) aims to provide social security to provide jobs and livelihoods in rural areas of our country (Das, 2016). The scheme's main objective is to guarantee 100 days of employment to all who register for rural employment for non-qualified work. The other main aim of MGNREGA is to create sustainable assets such as roads, wells, canals to improve employment opportunities. Job must be provided within 5 km of residence, and minimum wages must be paid to respondents. If wages are not delivered in time, respondents have the right to unemployment allowance within 15 days of application. Minimum wages have increased steadily, and now they have reached INR 132, especially in Madhya Pradesh (revised wage rate: 1st April 2012) (Vij, 2013).

Gram Panchayats must implement the MGNREGA, and any intervention by mediators or contractors is prohibited because the real benefits of the scheme did not reach the rural population. Creating dam infrastructure, water extraction, flood control, etc., are more labor-intensive tasks. MGNREGA focuses not only on economic security but also on social security, such as protecting the environment, women's

empowerment, reducing rural migration, and promoting social equality (Ministry of Rural Development, 2015).

Both the central and state governments share the financing of MGNREGA; 100% of the wages for unqualified work, 75% of the material costs, including the payment of wages, are managed by the central government. On the other hand, the state contains 25% of the material, including the cost of qualified and semi-qualified workers and 100% of the unemployment allowance (Das, 2016).

In the district of Panna, MGNREGA has not been done, so the search for literature on the functioning of MGNREGA in Panna was complicated and what could only be found was the literature of the scheme. One of the reasons why we chose the district of Panna in the Bundelkhand region of Madhya Pradesh is that the area is the backward part of the region. MGNREGA's functioning in Panna was also related to the lowest possible opportunities of employment there, which will reveal a very different outlook of this World's largest employment generation scheme (World Health Organization, 2016) (Panna District, 2016).

Reviewing the existing literature for the scenario of MGNREGA, in 2005, the scheme came as the savior for unemployment. Names of this scheme kept changing due to Political influences, and many micro-level changes and amendments came like massive hikes in Wages over the years. Wages under the system vary from state to state ranging from 500 to 100 INR. The process of wage distribution also kept changing due to corruption and other issues. It was altered from direct wage distribution by Village authorities to direct Bank transfers of the registered candidate. Existing literature for the administrative structure of MGNREGA is well distributed at all levels Village level, Block level, District level, State level, and Central level. Governance of the scheme is that at the Village level, there is a specific post of a "Gram Rozgar Sahayak" to make the implications strong at ground level. There are people in charges or combined authorities looking at the scheme's functioning at all other groups.

After reviewing the scheme literature, some gaps that came into consideration are such that there was no study or connected reports of the scheme or employment issues in the Panna district. There were a lot of topics in conducting this study.

METHODOLOGY

The study is the research of a social scientific method. It analyses the functioning of MGNREGA and its impact on the consumption patterns of households with employment cards in the Panna District. The reason for selecting this region is that the Bundelkhand region is considered the most disadvantaged region of Madhya Pradesh. Panna, the most backward and least developed district, is among this region. The block-level research method was used in data collection. There are a total of about five blocks in Panna. In each block, we chose two panchayats. The sample was collected from 10 selected local council areas in the Panna district. These 10 village councils were randomly selected from the village council area with the chosen method in each block. Because time is short, only a limited number of households, i.e., only 20 working days, can be covered, so random sampling is the best approach in this scenario. We focused on our goal during the data collection period and observed that the maximum number of people are from the age group 35-40, and the full participation was from men compared to women. People seemed very interested in FGD because it seemed to be a solution to their problems. With the help of the survey method, we have obtained the exact state of the MGNREGA situation and its effectiveness. Initially, people were hesitant to share their information, but later, they were all very cooperative. And all these observations helped us make the profile of the village.

This study mainly focused on focus group discussion (FGD), door-to-door survey, and interviews.

OBSERVATIONS

Based on age: From the data, it can be observed that the maximum participation was from the age group of 30-45 as they were the most active and aware people among all the participants and the least was in 60 and above category as they are the weakest and unaware section of our society. This also depicts the interests and capabilities of different age groups with a preference for MGNREGA (**Table 1**).

Table 1. Based on age

S. NO	Age of people	No. of respondent
1	15-30	49
2	30-45	66
3	45-60	57
4	60 and above	28
	Total	200

Based on gender: It is very clearly visible that the percentage of the male is 38% more than female workers. Being a very backward area, there is still a lot of dominance of Patriarchy society in the region. Females are not very aware of their surroundings and are still confined to mere household work. The concept of equal status to women in terms of work is still dominated by patriarchy in this region, so women don't have equal status (Table 2).

Table 2. Based on gender

S. No	Gender	No. of respondent
1	Male	138
2	Female	62
	Total	200

Based on the social category: The region is located in the central part of India, which is also the Tribal belt of our country, so a considerable percentage of ST people's participation was there. There are more SC/ST workers than General and OBC workers. The General category's condition is still better than SC/ST community people, plus being the upper caste people, they have ego clashes and working with the lower ones (Table 3).

Table 3. On the basis of social category

S. No	Social category	No. of respondent
1	GN	26
2	OBC	43
3	SC	75
4	ST	56
	TOTAL	200

Based on poverty status: From the above data, it is identified that poverty is very high in the region. Below Poverty Line people are ahead by 91% because mostly are landless and unemployed. Illiteracy is one of the significant factors that 91% of people are in the state of Below Poverty in this region. On average, in India, the BPL is around 40% but focusing on the Panna District, it is 91%, whose main reason is the backwardness and very low employment (Table 4).

Table 4. Based on poverty status

S. No	Category	No. of respondent
1	APL	19
2	BPL	181
	TOTAL	200

Based on income: The maximum number of people is upholding INR 1000-2000 per month, which is the bare minimum for survival, and the rest 28 are surviving even below that. The status of Poverty is very high in this region as people don't have any permanent source of income. Maximum are seasonal laborers who receive payment in specific seasons only. Unequal distributions of land force others to work on someone else field and earn mere income, no profit. The collection method was a door-to-door survey of their salary per annum and, most importantly, expenditure (Table 5).

Table 5. Based on income

S. No	Annual income (in rupees)	No. of respondent
1	LESS THAN 100	
2	100-1000	28
3	1000-2000	77
4	2000-3000	34
5	3000-4000	29
6	4000-5000	19
7	5000 and above	13
	Total	200

Based on the type of occupation: There are two broad categories of employment division: Main activities that constitute the primary income and Allied Activities those who generate their secondary income. The region's main activities are Labor, who work for others for daily wages, and Agriculture is the ones who own their land, each constitutes 158 and 52 people. The allied activities which are not carried by all a significantly less % of people practice allied activities like Pension, Dairy, and Others like drivers, shop owners, barbers, and professionals, etc. (Table 6).

Table 6. Based on the type of occupation

S.No	Type of occupation	Work	No. of Respondent
1	Main	Labour	148
2		AGRICULTURE	52
3	Allied activities	Pension	9
4		DAIRY	13
5		OTHERS	8
	Total main occupation		200

OUTCOMES & DISCUSSION

Initially, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act was the most successful in regularly providing people of rural areas with employment. People were happy with the wages that they were getting for the work. Thus, there was an increase in the household income of the people. They could buy more and live a little better life than their previous one. It provided them with financial stability, which further affected their social capital and made them more confident about themselves. It also helped in decreasing the Urban Migration of the people. People go to urban areas in search of work, but urban migration was reduced due to the implementation of this act. The number of women going out of their homes to work was also increased since the implementation of MGNREGA.

But again, at present, there have been some irregularities that have resulted in the improper working of this scheme. People are most affected by the non-payment or delay in payments, resulting in people being reluctant to work. In the early years of implementation, it was working in much better condition than now. These days, on average, it takes up around 6 months for people to get paid for their work. It becomes challenging for people to live without being paid for all their hard work. Even when they were paid, getting the cash in their hand was another big issue that they had to deal with. Since most of the villages that we visited were in secluded areas, the banks were situated far away and required a lot of money to travel.

Another thing we experienced while interacting was that if a husband and wife were working under MGNREGA, then the wages came to their different accounts and not in any one of their accounts. So, this required both the persons to travel to a bank, increasing the travelling cost that would have been less if only one of them had to travel. So, getting the wages in cash was one of the main problems these villagers had to go through every time they got paid for their work. Respondents also mentioned the impact of MGNREGA on agriculture which included non-availability of labor due to laborers getting employment under the scheme. Since people were more comfortable working under the government scheme than under

landowners, there was a lack of laborers in the agriculture sector. This made it difficult for the landowners to get the laborers to work on their land and hence increased the rates of labor. The officials were also responsible for the scheme to come under a bad light in the rural population. A lot of villagers get employment through a contractor. These contractors take up a part of the wages when these hard workers are paid. There were many problems compared to the benefits of the scheme.

Unawareness of the scheme was also one major problem for implementing this scheme. People knew the scheme not by the scheme's name but by various other different names. They knew about the work under this scheme but not what it is called. A good thing regarding this scheme is that it had provided people of this region with employment when there was a lack of employment. So, it has helped people by providing them with constant work.

SOCIAL BARRIERS

The fieldwork of a remote area consists of a few challenges that a person must overcome to get accurate data. In this fieldwork, even we got through many challenges or barriers. One of the main barriers was the language problem. Most villagers were comfortable speaking Bundeli as it is the region's primary language. The surveyors, not being from that region, could not understand much of the language that the people were speaking. Hence, to overcome this problem, we took help from some locals knowledgeable about Hindi and Bundeli. Due to this step, the people became more comfortable in speaking. It helped in making the people more at ease with the surveyors. The other thing that proved to be a barrier was the influential people that were not letting the people from backward communities speak. This made it difficult for us to get a viewpoint from people of each and every community. Hence, we made it a rule to talk to people from backward communities without influential people. Differences in the class of the people and the surveyors made it more challenging to get an authentic survey. Because of this difference, they could not relate with the surveyors and hence were not able to speak freely without any hesitation. Thus, we decided to interact with people before asking them survey questions. This made them talk freely without any hesitation. Talking to the women population in the village also proved to be complicated. Women in the village were shy to come out of their homes. They were busy with the household chores and preferred to stay inside instead of coming out and interacting with the surveyors. Still, we managed to view some of the women we found outside their houses. Not having any female surveyors also proved to be a barrier to interacting with the villages' women. Another major thing that proved to be a challenge was talking to the sarpanch of the villages. In most of the villages, the sarpanch was usually the person who had no power. According to the reservation, he was put up to the post just for the namesake and according to the reservation. There used to be some other influential person, mainly from an upper caste, who was generally looking after the village and considered the one in charge by the people. Thus, we could not talk to the sarpanch of the many villages but just the in-charge person.

EMPLOYMENT OPTIONS CREATED

The people in the villages that we visited agreed on one point related to the MGNREGA scheme, that it has generated employment for the region's rural population. They all, during the FGD, have decided that the scheme initially on a large scale reduced urban migration and provided people with an opportunity to earn through other means than agriculture. Still, now due to non-payment of the wages, the condition has become worse. People get employment within a 5 km radius of the village, which helps keep families together by earning money near their villages. Hence the scheme promotes the social cohesion of people.

It has also provided the backward classes with work opportunities. Earlier the only way for them to earn money was through some menial jobs particular to their caste. By introducing MGNREGA, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled tribes have been given a better platform to earn their livelihood. Thus, it has helped them in gaining social stability in society.

The scheme has also affected the lives of the women of the villages. India, a patriarchal society, never allowed its women to go out and work for others. Still, since the introduction of this scheme, the men have started sending their women out to work under MGNREGA. This is mainly to earn more and be

financially stable in society. This has also proven to increase the self-confidence in women as now they no longer have to be dependent on the men of the household for survival. It had made them independent.

INCOME GENERATION LEVEL

The scheme's introduction has increased the income generation of the households. Earlier, there was only one person (preferably male) responsible for the survival of a family. Still, after its implementation, the women population in the villages has also started working. This has increased the household's total income as now more than one person is working in the family. MGNREGA has also provided the people with a constant source of money compared to agriculture where there is income but not sure how much a person will earn. The income generation through agriculture is variable. It requires a lot of hard work where the result is not known. So, the introduction of MGNREGA has provided people with a constant income to keep their lives running. But now, the condition is bad for the people who are mainly dependent on MGNREGA for survival. This is due to the non-payment of their wages. They can now not live their lives, and hence, income generation has decreased than before.

QUALITY OF LIFE

The introduction of a scheme like MGNREGA has helped the rural population increase the Quality of life by generating a little more income for the household. This scheme has provided people with a constant source of income which implies that now they will be able to buy more for themselves. They can spend more on Food (which means that their nutrition intake has increased), Sanitation (which has resulted in more minor illnesses), and Education (which means they have a better future aspect than before). The way people live their life has been majorly connected to how much they earn. So, when the condition of MGNREGA gets bad, it affects every aspect of their life and majorly their Quality of Life as this is an aspect which they can neglect easily. They won't have any problem eating only two meals a day instead of having three; they won't be having any trouble shifting from a clean area to a dirty one.

Similarly, they won't have any problem keeping their children at home instead of sending them to school. This all results when the scheme provides no employment, which has been the condition for the past two years. It has been two years since the proper functioning of the scheme. So, I would suggest that the Quality of rural people largely depends on working of such employment schemes as MGNREGA.

ACCESSIBILITY

Accessibility has proven to be one of the significant problems in these villages. No matter what the people have to do, they must travel to the nearest urban settlement. Even hospitals and police stations are not there in the village. Whenever a person suffers from sickness, they have to travel a considerable distance to get treatment. Covering this distance has proven to be another primary task requiring a certain amount of money. Another major problem that arises due to accessibility problems is getting the cash in hand for the work under MGNREGA.

The people who work for MGNREGA get their wages directly into their account, which means that to get that money in hand, they have to go to the nearest bank, which is likely to be very far away. This again requires a lot of travel expenses which is difficult for these poor people to bear. The water condition in most of the villages was good due to a government scheme called 'Nal Jal Yojana.' Under this scheme, most households were connected with a tank through taps. Thus, water was accessible to most of the homes.

In conclusion, the people living in these villages were in some way or another dependent on the nearby urban settlement for which there was not proper accessibility. Hence accessibility was a huge problem for these villages.

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

MGNREGA has been a step forward towards women's empowerment in rural society. Due to MGNREGA, men, to earn more, have started sending the female members of the household to work. It has provided women with employment that has made them independent and self-confident. Being an earner in the family made them an essential part of the household. Now they no longer had to ask their husbands for

even the smallest of their expenses. Still, all the household work rests on the shoulders of the women but compared to earlier times, and they have been more empowered now.

In conclusion, I would say that the situation of women in the villages is still very much subordinate to the men of the village. Also, the critical position of the panchayat is still ruled over by the men. Even if there is a woman sarpanch in the village, there is always a man behind her, might be her husband or her son who is making all the decisions on her behalf. So, she is still there a very long distance to go for women empowerment in the villages.

MIGRATION

People under this scheme get employment within a 5km radius of the village, which helps keep families together by earning money near their villages. Since the people were getting jobs close to their villages, they preferred not going out to the cities to make money. Despite getting a little lower wage compared to the private employment in the cities, people selected these jobs due to their proximity from their homes. Hence because of MGNREGA, urban migration decreased in the early stages. Due to irregularities with the scheme, some people have again started migrating to cities searching for work. The other reason for this is the lack of white color jobs in this region, resulting in irregular income of the people.

ACHIEVEMENT OF A SCHEME TO HOUSEHOLDS

There have been many different achievements for households because of the scheme. The road connectivity in many villages has become better due to work under the plan. People are now able to travel to places much more quickly. There are few villages where the people saw cars and buses when they were connected through roads for the first time. The water system has also benefited from the scheme. Many Wells and lakes have been dug up because of the scheme that has provided the villagers with ample water supply. But in some villages, there was a problem faced by the people, the water level in some villages was deficient due to which most of the wells that were dug up under scheme had all dried up. Under the scheme, it was only allowed to dig wells up to 40ft, resulting in a lot less than what was required.

The scheme has also benefited many landowners. There was *Medh Bandhan Madan* which benefited a lot of the farmers. Almost everyone in the FGD appreciated *Medh Madan* work under the scheme. There was also a request to indulge more work that would benefit the farmers into the scheme.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

The importance of MGNREGA in Panna is due to limited sources of employment. The mentioned highlights of the studies will assist the new researchers related to this field.

MAJOR OUTCOMES:

- a) The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act has been most successful in providing the people of rural areas with limited employment regularly.
- b) A gradual increase in household income of the people.
- c) It provided them with financial and social stability, which further affected their social capital and made them more confident.
- d) People go to urban areas in search of work. Still, since the implementation of this act, the urban migration had decreased initially, but currently, due to the late wage circulation the migration rate has again increased.
- e) The number of women going out of their homes to work has also increased since the implementation of MGNREGA.

Problems:

- Low wages delivery system leads to the disinterest of people towards the scheme.
- People in the village are aware of the scheme, but only by some other name; significant provisions under the scheme like the compensation given after the delay in employing by the government are not told to them by panchayats.

- Non-payments and less payment of the government's workers result in them migrating to urban areas for private laboring work.
- Due to money deposited into the accounts of MGNREGA workers, they have to spend one-day time/wages to travel to the nearest bank's branch/ATM's, which is situated in the nearest town/city.
- The work under the MGNREGA must require proper planning before implementation by the gram sabha /gram panchayats. (As finding -Most of the wells dug up under this scheme have dried up and are of no use now.)
- Improper Coverage of Scheme as there was a lack in spreading the complete information about the scheme to the people.
- The migration of the workers is increasing due to the low wages given under the MNREGA scheme compared to the private sector.

SUGGESTIONS:

- Spreading awareness about MGNREGA.
 - Required to make the process of MGNREGA more smooth and transparent.
 - They are making MGNREGA more accessible to all and removing all barriers like distance to banks and ATMs in town/city, which happened to be far from the villages and for that the workers have to travel. The travel almost consumes their one-day time and wage, high illiteracy, the formal requirement at workplace like day-care center, toilets. Etc.
 - They are improving the wage delivery system of MGNREGA in the Panna district.
 - There should be new strategies implemented so that people don't migrate to cities in search of work
- Thus, overall this research gives the exact present situation of MGNREGA in the Panna district at the most grass root level.

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