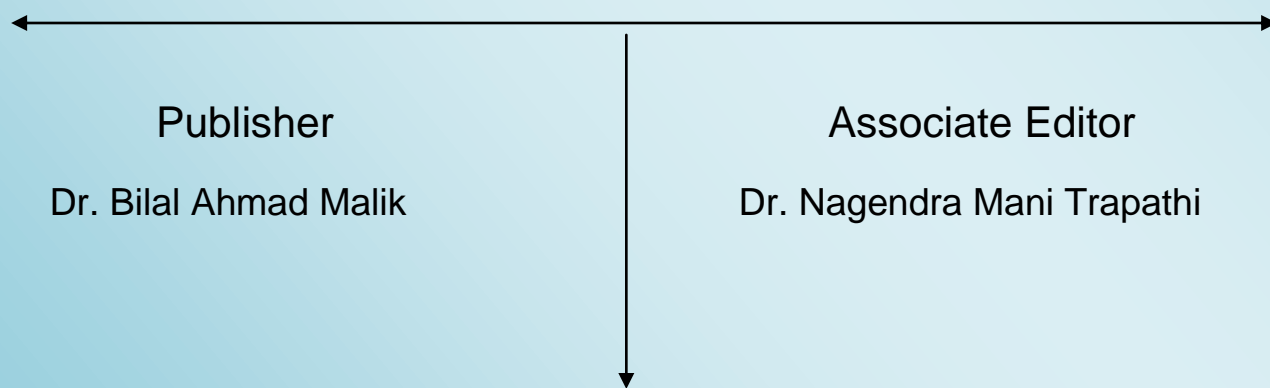


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THE PARTICIPATION OF LABOURERS IN MGNREGS: A CRITICAL EVALUATION IN ANANTHAPURAMU DISTRICT OF ANDHRA PRADESH

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ABSTRACT

The present study was undertaken to examine the pros and cons of the MGNREGS with special reference to participation levels of labourers. The study was carried out with the objectives of tracing the origin of wage employment programs, to discuss the role of administrative agencies in the implementation of the scheme. The study also intended to discuss the socio-economic profile and progress of the scheme in study area. The study also focuses on financial administration of the scheme and perceptions of beneficiaries on the scheme. To assess the participation levels of the labourers in MGNREG scheme, two Mandals from each Revenue Divisions of Ananthapuramu district covering 30 respondents from each social category of labourers were selected. The data for the study was collected both from primary and secondary sources. The primary data was collected through a specially designed interview schedule. The secondary data was collected from the reports of Central, State, District and Mandal level and from official records.

INTRODUCTION

India is predominantly rural. Large number of people is living in rural areas. In rural India, unemployment, under-employment, poverty, lack of infrastructure facilities is prevalent. To mitigate these problems, the Government of India has identified number of rural development programs. Among them, wage employment programs are in force since Independence. The important aim of different Five-Year Plans is to create employment opportunities for millions of rural poor every year. These wage employment programs are basically intended to provide employment opportunities to rural poor, during lean agricultural seasons and at the time of famine, floods and other natural calamities takes place.

The most important wage employment programs are: Rural Works Program (1960-61), Crash Scheme for Rural Employment (1971-72), Pilot Intensive Rural Employment Projects (1972), Employment Guarantee Scheme of Maharashtra (1972), Food for Work Program (1977), National Rural Employment Program (1981),

Rural Landless Employment Guarantee Program (1983), Jawahar Rojgar Yojana (1989) and Jawahar Gram Samridhi Yojana (1999). These wage employment programs are unable to yield desired results, as they are not statutory. As such the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) in its Common Minimum Program (CMP) of 2004, promised to provide statutory 100 days wage employment in a financial year to the rural poor. Soon after taking the reins of government, the UPA government started to prepare modalities for introduction of a draft bill in Parliament. The bill was passed by both the Houses of Parliament in September 2005. A Special National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme was formally launched in February, 2006 in Ananthapuramu District of Andhra Pradesh by the then Prime Minister Mr. Manmohan Singh. The scheme was renamed as Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) on 2nd October, 2009, in honour of Father of Nation, Mahatma Gandhi, who strongly believed that India lives in villages.

Direct provision of wage employment is obviously an attractive instrument for poverty alleviation wherever the poor depend heavily upon wage employment for their income and also suffer from considerable unemployment and underemployment. Wage employment programs have sought to achieve multiple objectives. They not only provide employment opportunities during lean agricultural seasons but also in times of floods, droughts and other natural calamities. They create rural infrastructure which supports further economic activity. These Programs also put an upward pressure on market wage rates by attracting people to public works Programs, thereby reducing labour supply and pushing up demand for labour. While public works programs to provide employment in times of distress have a long history, major thrust to wage employment programs in the country was provided only after the attainment of self-sufficiency in food grains in the 1970s.

The NREGA bill essentially guarantees employment for the unemployed in rural areas for 100 days in a year, through work such as constructing roads, improving water supply and works that are necessary to improve the village infrastructure. The uniqueness of this bill is that it carries emphasis on issues like equality of wages for men and women, elimination of work contracting middlemen, payment of wages only through bank and post office accounts to prevent corruption, creating transparency in workers muster rolls etc. Any individual, irrespective of his socio-economic status can ask for employment (either in writing or verbally) with the Gram Panchayat. The act guarantees that if work is not provided within a 15 day time frame (including the eligibility verification and issuing of the job cards) then the applicant is eligible for unemployment allowance. Work to be done is decided by the Gram Panchayat. Emphasis is given to unskilled manual labor focusing on constructing roads and other public village infrastructural facilities, water conservation, afforestation, land development &

drought proofing. All adults in a house hold are eligible to work. If the work site is not within 5 kilometers from the applicant's residence then the applicant is eligible for an additional 10% of the wage. This law can be a big boost for nomadic tribal communities since locally domiciled but migrant population is also eligible for employment.

MGNREGA also has the potential to address other major sociological issues like the spread of AIDS, stop farmers suicides etc. (Migration of rural population is one of the leading causes for the spread of AIDS). And it seems to me that in the long term, EGA might have a huge impact on our countries environment and gross agricultural output. Without any doubt, MGNREGA has the potential to change the socio-economic landscape in rural India in the long term. But as with any other legislation, it is practically impossible to make it foolproof. Middlemen coming into Illegal nexuses with corrupt govt. officials to swig away the EGA funds are to be expected. The only way corruption can be stemmed is by proactive people's involvement in the implementation process. People should start questioning the officials for transparency in the process and get proper information about creation of muster rolls and disbursement of funds. And as such, it feels like RTI (Right to Information Act) should and will become the primary weapon for people.

RATING OF MGNREGS WORKS

The respondents rating of works undertaken under MGNREGS in their local area is presented in table 1.

Table -1
Respondents rating of the quality of work executed under MGNREGS

S. No.	Items	Caste Wise Coverage of Respondents				Grand Total
		ST	SC	BC	OC	
1	Very good	41.25	32.94	28.39	38.71	33.13
2	Good	18.75	23.92	27.74	24.52	25.00
3	Average	16.25	20.39	24.19	21.94	21.75
4	Poor	11.25	11.76	11.29	09.68	11.13
5	Very poor	12.50	10.98	08.39	05.16	09.00
Total		30 (100.00)	30 (100.00)	30 (100.00)	30 (100.00)	120 (100.00)

Source: Field Data

It is welcome move to note that as many as 55.13% of sample respondents rated the MGNREGS very good to good. To be more precise, nearly 33.13% of respondents rated the works undertaken under MGNREGS

as very good. About 25% rated them as good. The works under taken in the study area under MGNREGS are rated as average by 21.75% of respondents. Around 20.13% of respondents rated the works as very poor and poor. Very poor rating is given by 9% of respondents and poor scoring is given by 11.13% of respondents. With regard to very poor and poor scoring the ST respondents top the list with 23.75%. They are immediately followed 22.75%. Around 19.68% and 14.84% of BC and OC respondents also assigned very poor and poor ratings to the works executed under MGNREGS.

REGULARITY OF ATTENDANCE TO MGNREGS WORKS

The MGNREGS works in a particular village will go on throughout the year with some intervals. As such, due to one cause or another cause the households may lose the opportunity to work under the scheme at one pint of time or other. The details of regularity of sample respondent households to MGNREGS works are given table 2.

Table 2
Respondents Regularity to MGNREGS works

S. No.	Status of Regularity to MGNREGS work	Caste Wise Coverage of Respondents				Grand Total
		ST	SC	BC	OC	
1	Regular	72.50	76.47	74.19	79.35	75.75
2	Irregular	27.50	23.53	25.81	20.65	24.25
Total		30 (100.00)	30 (100.00)	30 (100.00)	30 (100.00)	120 (100.00)

Source: Field Data

It is crystal clear from table 5.18 that a preponderant majority i.e. 75.75% of sample respondent households are regular to MGNREGS works. But there are slight variations among various social categories with regard to regularity of works. Around 79.35% of OC respondents are regular to works. It slightly decreased to 76.47% in case of SC respondent households. It further declined to 74.19% in case of BC respondent households. The decline is further evident in case of STs i.e. 72.50%. On the whole, 24.25% of sample respondent households are irregular to the MGNREGS works. This irregularity results low percent of household in completion 100 days of employment. The statistical chi-square value is lower than the table value. This implies that there is a close relationship between regularity of MGNREGS works and participation of people in MGNREGS works. So the null hypothesis is accepted.

NUMBER OF HOUSEHOLDS AVAILED 100 DAYS OF EMPLOYMENT

The MGNREGS guaranteed 100 days employment to interested rural households. But due to various reasons all the households are not availing 100 days of employment. The details of number of households got 100 days of employment during 2003-07 to 2011-12 are given in table 3.

Table 3
Number of years the Household got 100 days of Employment during 2006-07 to 2011-12

S. No.	No. of years households got 100 days employment	Caste Wise Coverage of Respondents				Grand Total
		ST	SC	BC	OC	
1	None	76.25	76.08	73.55	74.84	74.88
2	First Year	11.25	10.59	10.65	10.97	10.75
3	Second Year	07.50	08.24	08.71	07.74	08.25
4	Third Year	03.75	03.92	03.87	03.23	03.75
5	Fourth Year	01.25	00.78	01.61	01.29	01.25
6	Fifth Year	00.00	00.39	01.29	01.29	00.88
7	Sixth Year	00.00	00.00	00.32	00.65	00.25
Total		30 (100.00)	30 (100.00)	30 (100.00)	30 (100.00)	120 (100.00)

Source: Field Data

It is regrettable to note that as many as 74.88% of households not availed 100 days of employment, during first 6 years of its implementation in the study area. About 10.75% of sample households availed 100 days of employment only one year out of six years. Nearly 8.25% of sample households got 100 days of employment for 2 out of 6 years of study. The number of households who got 100 days of employment for three years is confined 3.75%. The percentage further declined to 1.25% in case of households got 100 days of employment during four years out of 6 years of study. Only 0.88 per cent of the sample households got 100 days of employment for 5 years. The households which got 100 days of employment for six years are negligible. The statistical chi-square value is lower than the table value. This implies that there is a close relationship between number of days of employment and participation of people in MGNREGS works. So the null hypothesis is accepted.

IMPACT ON OVERALL ECONOMIC STATUS

The impact of MGNREG Scheme on overall Economic Status of sample respondent households is given in table 4.

Table-4
Impact of MGNREGS on Overall Economic Status of Households

S. No.	Responses	Caste Wise Coverage of Respondents				Grand Total
		ST	SC	BC	OC	
1	Increased	53.75	26.67	28.06	49.68	34.38
2	Decreased	22.50	22.75	22.58	31.61	24.38
3	Status Quo	11.25	28.24	29.35	07.10	22.88
4	Can't Say	10.00	22.35	20.00	11.61	18.38
Total		30 (100.00)	30 (100.00)	30 (100.00)	30 (100.00)	120 (100.00)

Source: Field Data

It is evident from table 4 that nearly 34.38% of respondents reported that their household overall economic status increased after participating in MGNREG Scheme. There is a large variation in this regard between SC respondents and other categories of respondents. More than half 53.75% of Scheduled Tribe respondents reported positive impact of the scheme on their overall economic status. While, only 26.67% of Scheduled Caste respondents stated positive impact of the scheme. Around 24.38% of the total sample reported negative impact of the scheme on their overall economic status. About 22.88% of respondents reported no change in their economic status. Nearly 18.38 % of total sample denied responding. The statistical chi-square value is lower than the table value. This implies that there is no close relationship between overall economic status of households and people participation in MGNREGS works. So the null hypothesis is rejected.

EXPECTED CONSEQUENCES IN THE ABSENCE OF MGNREGS

During field survey the sample respondents at last were asked to answer to an assumed question “What would happen to your lives if MGNREGS would not be there”. The responses of the respondents are given in table 5.

Table 5
Respondents Responses on the Expected Consequences in the absence of MGNREG Scheme

S. No.	Items	Caste Wise Coverage of Respondents								Total		Grand Total
		ST		SC		BC		OC		Yes	No	
		Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No			
1	Distress Migration	51.25	48.75	76.47	23.53	58.06	41.94	61.29	38.71	63.88	36.13	120 (100.00)
2	Labour Rates Will be Decreases	72.50	27.50	71.37	28.63	62.58	37.42	52.26	47.74	64.38	35.63	120 (100.00)
3	No works in the villages	61.25	38.75	69.80	30.20	56.13	43.87	43.87	56.13	58.63	41.38	120 (100.00)
4	No Food Security	78.75	21.25	61.96	38.04	68.06	31.94	58.06	41.94	65.25	34.75	120 (100.00)
5	No Savings in Our Family	55.00	45.00	63.92	36.08	64.84	35.16	55.48	44.52	61.75	38.25	120 (100.00)
6	No Bargaining Power	80.00	20.00	59.22	40.78	54.19	45.81	55.48	44.52	58.63	41.38	120 (100.00)
7	Life will be More worst	85.00	15.00	64.71	35.29	59.03	40.97	50.32	49.68	61.75	38.25	120 (100.00)

The data in table 5 shows that about 61.75% of respondents reported that the absence of MGNREG Scheme they can't save money for future needs. The expected outcome in the absence of Scheme is distress of migration as reported by 63.88 % of respondents. As per the opinion of 65.25% of respondents the important expected consequence in the absence of MGNREGS is that there will be no food security. If the government withdraws the scheme it results in the decrease of labour rates as per 64.38% of respondents. The absence of scheme results lack of works in villages as reported by 58.63% of sample. Life will be worst and no bargaining power is reported by 61.75%, 58.63% and 54% respectively. The statistical chi-square value is lower than the table value. This implies that there is no close relationship between expected consequences in the absence of MGNREG scheme and people participation in MGNREGS works. So the null hypothesis is rejected.

CONCLUSION

The introduction of MGNREGS in the district is considered as a boon for rural labourer irrespective of their social status. The participation of backward classes is high, compared to other social categories. The percentage of registered households, participating in the program works is different in different social categories as well as in different years. But there is gradual increase in the participation rates. The average household wage ranges between Rs.83.45 to 97.55. The participation rate of women is higher than the men during four years of study. But the average wage of men is slightly higher than women wages. The number of households which completed 100 days is gradually increasing, but it is not up to the mark. Still more than half of the households provided employment is less than 50 days. The number of works in progress outnumbering the number of works completed. As the district is drought prone, the works relating to water conservation and harvest tops the list of works. In the district more than 97% of works were executed by the Gram Panchayats. The participation rate of SHG women and disabled is also gradually increasing. In case of sample Mandals, more or less same trends can be observed with small variations.

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