

## **Review of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA)**

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### **Abstract**

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) was introduced on February 2, 2006, making it the first of its kind globally to provide an economic safety net and a right to work for around two-thirds of India's population. One of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the Decent Work and Economic growth by the year 2030 is to attain full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for youth and equal pay for work of equal value. Decent work comprises all the aspirations of persons throughout their working lives. It comprises work opportunities that is profitable, delivers a decent wage and social security to everyone, better opportunities for personal development and societal integration, the rights of citizens to state their views, organize and participate in decision-making which has an influence on their lives as well as equal treatment between women and men. This research evaluates the growth rate of average employment days provided and average wage rate under MGNREGA during 2011-12 and 2021-22. By considering the growth of employment of 100 days and real wage rate per day, MGNREGA caters to the objectives of eight Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) of decent work to some extent. The major findings of this study are that funding by government for the MGNREGA scheme increased in 2021-22 due to the overwhelming impact of COVID-19 and reverse migration, leading to an increase in demand. Most states experienced a sharp decline in

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families completing 100 days of work, with Kerala and Tamil Nadu recording a 100% fall. Real wage trends were inconsistent, which exhibits program's failure to warrant sustained employment for the poor.

Key words: Decent Work, Wage rate, Employment, Growth, Unskilled Worker

## **1. Introduction**

The employment program the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) was passed on August 25, 2005, but it was initially implemented in 200 selected backward districts on February 2, 2006. After April 1, 2007, it was extended to 130 more districts. After April 1, 2008, this Act was prolonged to all districts of India. Finally in 2009, its name was changed to Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA). Under this Act, 100 days of assured employment are provided to the rural poor. It also offers an extra 50 days of unqualified physical work, over and above the 100 days assured to job card holders, residing in the areas prone to drought and natural calamities (Singh, 2017). Under MGNREGA Act, within 15 days of obtaining a job application, the applicants must be provided with the work; otherwise, the applicants will be eligible to get unemployment benefits from the state government. It is the Gram Panchayat's responsibility to search the suitable work that is beneficial for the welfare of the villagers (Dutta et al., 2012). Under MGNREGA, 2005, four categories of works are provided, named as A, B, C, and D. Category A includes public works such as natural resource management, water conservation, afforestation, restoration of dried water resources, irrigation facilities, common land development and watershed management are provided. Category B includes provision of community and individual assets for the most unshielded households. The unshielded households include Schedule Caste (SC), Schedule Tribes (ST), Below Poverty Line (BPL), denotified tribes<sup>2</sup>, nomadic tribes, women headed households, and households headed by the physically challenged, beneficiaries of land reforms and Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY) and traditional forest dwellers. Category C makes available common infrastructure for the National Rural Livelihood Mission-Complaint Self-Help Groups (SHGs) that promote agricultural

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<sup>2</sup> Locally known as *Banjaras*

productivity by building infrastructure for bio-fertilizers, warehouses for post-harvest storage and common work sheds for livelihoods activities of SHGs. Category D comprises the facilitation of rural infrastructure such as all-weather roads, rural sanitation-related works like individual household's latrines, school toilets, playgrounds, surrounding walls for schools and building of Gram Panchayat structure etc. (Pankaj & Bhattacharya, 2022). This Scheme has covered about 193 million beneficiaries (16 percent of population) in 2013 and it has been considered the largest social safety net program (World Bank, 2014). The Union Budget had allocated Rs.480 billion for this scheme during the financial year 2017-18 (2017).

The government-run program MGNREGA by providing the employment to rural needy people ensures a minimum level of economic activities to the poorest in the rural areas. This is the largest government-run program for the welfare of rural unemployed people and it is implemented by considering the Keynesian macroeconomic of public expenditure. There was an expectation of an increase in the income of rural people many times greater than what has been spent by government through the multiplier effect in rural India. The work provided under this program is devoted to the conservation of natural resources, irrigation, plantation, horticulture, land development, renovation of traditional water bodies, work for controlling floods and providing drainage connectivity, etc. By conserving natural resources, this program contributes to the environmental sustainability (Panda & Mishra, 2015).

There are 17 goals in Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and it consists of 169 targets which focus on ending poverty without imposing heavy cost on Earth's life-support systems. The eighth SDG goal is "Decent work and economic growth" (Gaffeny, 2014, as cited in Kreinin et al., 2022). As per the (ILO, 2018), the decent work is a work that is productive for men and women and it also ensures the conditions of liberty, fairness, security and human prestige.

The Goal of the Decent Work and Economic Growth by 2030 is to achieve complete and creative engagement and decent work for all persons, including youth, and identical pay for work of equal value. Decent Work contains all the aspirations of people throughout their working lives. It includes opportunities for work that is profitable, delivers a decent wage and social security to everyone, better opportunities for personal development and

societal integration, the rights of citizens to express their views, organize and take part in decisions which have an impact on their lives as well as equal treatment between women and men. A work is regarded decent in the following conditions: (1) when fair income is provided by the employer; (2) when it provides secure employment and safe working conditions; (3) when it ensures equal chance and treatment irrespective of gender, race and color; (4) when it provides social security to workers along with their families; (5) when it focuses on personal development and social integration; and (6) when workers are given the right to express their concern and to organize themselves (International Labor Organization, 2018).

This study aims to show the impacts of MGNREGA in providing employment to rural people and the growth of real wage rate of workers. It also analyzes the growth rate of 100 days of employment completed under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act during 2011-12 to 2021-22 in major states in India. This paper provides a descriptive analysis of MGNREGA in terms of number of days of employment, wages given to the workers and the budget allocated to the program.

This paper has been organized into five sections. Section 1 had discussed the overview of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) and eighth goal of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Section 2 provides a review of literature; Section 3 describes the data sources; and Section 4 describes the result and data analysis of the MGNREGA workers. Section 5 provides the conclusion and suggestions.

## **2. Review of Literature**

Fernandez (2015) investigates the execution of MGNREGA in Madhya Pradesh and its impacts on rural areas. The coverage of MGNREGA has been quite impressive in rural areas but still the enactment of this program remains inefficient. The social status of women has improved due to working outside as it is an addition in the household income. However, the study also accentuates the need for awareness of this program among rural population in the state. Ranware et al. (2015) have analyzed MGNREGA impact on Maharashtra. The outcome of the program has been fruitful in terms of creation of useful assets in rural areas. They explore that this program is conceived as anti-farmers due to

hiring of large number of workers. Therefore, work performed under this program is considered pro-agriculture and primarily benefit small and marginal farmers in a significant way. Bhaskar et al. (2016) have assessed the returns from investments in irrigation wells created under the MGNREGA program in Jharkhand. Nearly 95 percent of all fully constructed wells are used for irrigation purpose. Hence the agricultural income of irrigation well containing areas has almost tripled. The real rate of return of wells was about 6 percent. (Panda & Mishra, 2015) examines the effectiveness of MGNREGA and the results show that those who were working under MGNREGA are better than those who were not working, in terms of food security and annual income. The social networking, empowerment and awareness have increased significantly among workers who are working under MGNREGA. In the study, it is revealed that the MGNREGA workers had an edge over the control group in terms of children education, reduction of distress migration and better networking. Ghosh (2017) study examines those districts where MGNREGA was started early, the financial position of people of that area have improved significantly. The differential effect of program across districts has been witnessed in terms of gender composition, rural mix, and income profile. Pankaj & Bhattacharya, (2022) examines the importance of MGNREGA for increasing income and livelihoods through increase in the productivity of land. The rural households received benefits through creation of new sources of livelihoods, additional utility of their assets and increase in their income levels. The rural community benefitted due to increase in food security, increase in crop acreage and yields per acre and crop diversification etc. Lokhande & Gundimeda (2021) examine the effectiveness of MGNREGA in providing employment to returning migrants due to Covid-19 lock-down in India. For getting estimates of population, total migrants, and seasonal migrants for the year 2021 in each 595 districts linear extrapolation was used on the census 2011 data. In the month of November and December 2021, Azim Premji University did a survey with the National Consortium of Civil Society Organizations on MGNREGA and Collaborative Research and Dissemination (CORD) for analyzing the role of MGNREGA for providing employment to the needy people during pandemic. The study shows that 39 percent card holders have not received single day employment during pandemic while on average only 36 percent households received wages for work done. Although there are many shortcomings even then MGNREGA has played a significant role during pandemic for compensating the loss of income of households from 20 percent to 80 percent. Lokhande

and Gundimeda (2021) show that during the Covid-19 pandemic, approximately 7.5 million seasonal migrant workers approached to MGNREGA for employment. These workers were employed for about 23 days and they were able to compensate 28 percent of their lost income during the lockdown. The study explores that MGNREGA provided employment to one-third of the returning seasonal migrants while two-third were out of reach of MGNREGA.

### **3. Methodology**

This paper is primarily based on secondary data. This is a descriptive analysis based on previous reports and articles. The sources of data are Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, Government of India (GOI). The variables used in the study are Budget/Revised Estimates, Funds Released and Expenditure under MGNREGA in India (Rs. in Crore), Real wage rate per day, and number of family units who completed 100 days of employment. To analyze the real wage rate per day of MGNREGA workers during 2016-17 and 2022-23, State-wise Number of Family unit who accomplished 100 days of work (2011-12 to 2021-2022) under MGNREGA is used to calculate the compound annual growth rate (CAGR). The data such as actual release, budget estimates and revised estimates are available from 2009-10 to 2022-23.

### **4. Result and Analysis**

Table 1 gives, the budget estimates, revised estimates and actual estimates for the years 2009-10 to 2022-23 for MGNREGA. The budget estimates have increased till 2010-11 and then fallen to Rs.33,000 crore in 2013-14 but after that, there was consistent growth till year 2022-23. Revised estimates starting with Rs.39,100 crores in 2009-10 and increased to Rs.40,100 Crore in 2010-11. Later, there was consistent growth till 2020-21 but declined after that. The similar trend has been followed by actual release funds. One important point is that budget estimate was always greater than the revised estimate. The budget estimate was greater than actual release during 2009-10 to 2014-15 but after that actual release is greater than budget estimate till 2021-22. The revised estimates and

actual release were Rs. 111,000 crore and Rs. 98,000 crore during 2020-2021 and 2021-22. This is the highest; the reason is devastating effect of Covid-19 and reverse migration. Therefore, the demand for employment under MGNREGA increased significantly during these two years.

Table 1: Budget/Revised Estimates, Funds Released and Expenditure under (MGNREGA) in India (Rs. in Crore) (2009-2010 to 2023-2024)

Year	Budget Estimates	Revised Estimates	Actual Release
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
2009-2010	39100	39100	33539.38
2010-2011	40100	40100	35841.49
2011-2012	40000	31000	29215.05
2012-2013	-	-	30274.69
2013-2014	33000	33000	32994.12
2014-2015	34000	33000	32977.43
2015-2016	34699	37345.95	37340.72
2016-2017	38500	48220.26	48219.05
2017-2018	48000	55167.06	55166.06
2018-2019	55000	61830.09	61829.55
2019-2020	60000	71001.81	71687.71
2020-2021	61500	111500	111170.86
2021-2022	73000	98000	98467.85
2022-2023	73000	89400	36677.793

Source: Ministry of Statistics and Program Implementation, GOI

Table 2 represents the number of households who have completed 100 days of employment under MGNREGA statewide in India during 2011-12 to 2021-2022. The compound annual growth rate (CAGR) has been calculated for each state and CAGR shows that each state experienced a decline in the 100-day employment during the given years. Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra have experienced a drastic decline in the employment days after 2015-16, but all other states and Union Territories have experienced a decline soon after 2014-15. The southern states like Kerala and Tamil Nadu CAGR have a CAGR of 100 percent. It shows that the number of 100 days employment has fell to zero during the 10-year period. When looking at Bihar, Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh, the CAGR is close to -60 percent. This means in these states the number of 100 days of employment has decreased by approximately 60 percent each



year. The CAGR value of Odisha is -36.6 percent, which is the lowest among the states. Hence, it shows that each year, the 100 days of employment declined at a constant rate of 36.6 percent. Other states have also experienced a constant percentage decline in the range of 45 percent to 55 percent.

Table 2: State-wise Number of Family unit Who Accomplished 100 Days of Work under (MGNREGA) in India (in Lakhs)

States/UT (1)	2011-12 (2)	2012-13 (3)	2013-14 (4)	2014-15 (5)	2015-16 (6)	2016-17 (7)	2017-18 (8)	2018-19 (9)	2019-20 (10)	2020-21 (11)	2021-22 (12)	CAGR (13)
Andhra Pradesh	948.87	1014.09	752.62	378.28	69.25	5.8	5.95	8.67	5.82	8.65	2.4	-45
Bihar	170.23	180.61	123.49	32.13	0.81	0.14	0.16	0.25	0.2	0.35	0.02	-59.5
Chhattisgarh	207.64	244.43	346.29	48.05	2.88	1.73	3.24	4.28	4.18	6.12	0.22	-49.6
Gujarat	41.77	52.32	29.32	16.48	1.08	0.08	0.11	0.34	0.13	0.17	0.1	-45.3
Himachal Pradesh	48.04	40.42	55.44	21.54	0.31	0.11	0.14	0.7	0.61	0.89	0.01	-57.2
Jharkhand	58.08	86.66	68.86	82.42	6.77	0.37	0.58	0.26	0.31	1.14	0.05	-50.6
Karnataka	45.14	104.36	117.73	41.71	0.44	1.96	0.3	2.11	1.87	2.41	0.05	-49.4
Kerala	124.82	340.48	406.61	98.43	0.01	1.13	1.17	4.41	2.51	4.7	0	-100
Madhya Pradesh	304.48	196.33	175.65	158.03	2.18	1.41	1.35	0.77	0.91	3.23	0.33	-49.5
Maharashtra	197.19	231.21	122.63	165.45	44.81	1.68	2.02	1.92	1.24	1.37	0.21	-49.6
Odisha	47.63	75.09	156.78	81.96	1.35	0.36	0.68	0.47	1.61	4.18	0.5	-36.6
Rajasthan	335.62	421.84	446.1	281.02	15.9	4.27	2.28	5.88	8.49	12.31	0.05	-58.6
Tamil Nadu	602.62	1348.72	920.78	332.24	2.99	13.21	1.5	2.6	1.21	1.79	0	-100
Telangana	-	-	-	160.84	19.07	1.75	2.04	2.27	1.76	3.42	1.17	-50.5
Uttar Pradesh	309.03	70.55	160.6	110.2	4.43	0.41	0.43	0.72	1.33	7.8	0.02	-61.9
West Bengal	119.6	253.09	280.63	158.29	0.45	2	5.58	13.37	3.66	6.79	0.08	-51.9
<b>India</b>	<b>4166.07</b>	<b>5173.8</b>	<b>4659.45</b>	<b>2488.73</b>	<b>173.91</b>	<b>39.91</b>	<b>29.55</b>	<b>52.22</b>	<b>40.47</b>	<b>71.77</b>	<b>5.25</b>	<b>-48.7</b>

Source: Ministry of Statistics and Program Implementation, GOI

Table 3: Per day real average wage rate of MGNREGA Workers (in Rs.) Base year 1986-87

States	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-22	2022-23	CAGR (%)
Andhra Pradesh	15.14	15.46	19.36	17.98	19.29	17.4	16.1	1.04
Bihar	24.31	24.35	23.6	21.37	22.79	40.76	28.74	2.84
Gujarat	62.28	63.5	82.03	84.1	84.61	42.68	56.02	-1.75
Haryana	39.02	38.35	28.77	25.41	26.94	95.5	51.31	4.67
Himachal Pradesh	36.09	37.79	37.55	36.5	37.82	35.9	32.73	-1.62
Karnataka	21.93	22.37	23.91	22.14	22.84	30.22	40.92	10.95
Kerala	26.11	26.62	27.36	26.25	27.72	26.55	25.92	-0.12
Maharashtra	19.25	19.74	19.61	17.69	19.1	20.1	17.48	-1.59
Odisha	23.03	22.59	22.3	21.61	24.43	22.12	21.86	-0.87
Punjab	22.71	23.53	23.64	22.44	23.52	23.16	22.35	-0.26
Rajasthan	13.07	14.41	13.77	13.38	15.6	15.9	15.04	2.36
UP	21.51	21.99	20.86	20.07	21.66	20.84	20.26	-0.99
Tamil Nadu	14.71	14.91	16.16	14.8	15.4	16.43	16.95	2.39
<b>All India</b>	<b>18.58</b>	<b>19.06</b>	<b>19.74</b>	<b>18.59</b>	<b>19.42</b>	<b>21.13</b>	<b>20.69</b>	<b>1.8</b>

Source: Ministry of Statistics and Program Implementation, GOI

Table 3 represents the average real wage rate and compound annual growth rate of real wage rate of 13 major States of India under the program MGNREGA during 2016-17 to 2022-23. The real wage rate has been calculated by using Consumer Price Index for Agricultural Labour (CPI-AL), base year 1986–87. As is visible, Karnataka, with a CAGR of 10.95 percent, is one of the best-performing states. This means there is a



constant yearly growth rate of real wages at 11 percent. The real wage rate has increased from Rs. 21.93 per day to Rs. 40.92 per day during the stated period.

The states such as Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Kerala, Maharashtra, Odisha, Punjab and Uttar Pradesh show a negative CAGR. It shows that real wage growth rate has declined constantly in these states over the given time periods. In the case of Gujarat, the negative growth rate of the real wage for MGNREGA worker is highest. When looking at the remaining states such as Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Haryana, Rajasthan and, Tamil Nadu along with India, the value of CAGR is positive. These values indicate a consistently positive annual growth of real wage rate of MGNREGA workers over the given years. In the case of India the real wage rate has augmented from Rs. 18.58 per day in 2016-17 to Rs. 20.69 per day in 2022-23 and the value of CAGR is 1.80 percent. Based on CAGR, the performance of Karnataka and Bihar is better than other states. All-India average real wage rate CAGR of workers under MGNREGA is 1.80 percent only. Thus, these descriptive statistics show that there were some fluctuations in the growth of real wage rates of 13 given states under the Program. The performance of a few states is satisfactory, while some states show relatively fluctuating trends with some ups and downs. In the case of some states the growth rate is negative, that puts the question mark for the government of those states. Reddy et al. (2014) examine the impact of MGNREGS on rural labor markets and agriculture. This scheme has been helpful in raising agricultural wages, particularly for women, narrowing the gender wage gap. MGNREGA has led to an increased bargaining power, work conditions, and reduced distress migration among the rural populations. Although many small and marginal farmers benefit from this scheme but those excluded from the scheme face suffer due rising cultivation costs without support.

This paper provides a descriptive analysis of MGNREGA in terms of the number of days of employment, wages given to the workers and the budget allocated to the program. In the case of the actual release of funds for MGNREGA, there was little fluctuation until 2015-16 but after that there was steep rise in the actual release of fund and it reached at a peak of Rs. 111,170.86 Crores in 2021-22; however, after this, there was a sharp decline. Although employment provided under MGNREGA does not provide full employment throughout the year but it provides some kind of income security to the vulnerable households. When discussing the number of households who have accomplished 100 days

of work, then all states experienced negative growth. It means employment level have declined during 2015-16 to 2021-22. In the case of the average real wage of MGNREGA workers, the increase is a mix of rises and falls across different states. In some states the real wage rate has shown positive growth rate while others show a negative growth rate. But in the case of the all-India level, the real growth rate is positive during 2015–16 to 2022–23. Agrawal (2019) critically evaluates the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) and further identifies both design and implementation failures. The motto of this program is to provide 100 days of employment but it achieved only 50 days on average by 2018–19. The program faces structural contradictions, administrative inadequacies, and weak monitoring systems. Mallik & Paltasingh (2023) show that the Government run Scheme (MGNREGA) have affected the lives of underprivileged group. This scheme was not successful in increasing the income of marginalized households, reducing gender discrimination, empowering women and provision of food security to rural households. There are many problems faced by the MGNREGA workers such as discrimination in terms of gender, class and wages, poor planning, prevailing corruption, delay in wage payments etc.

Therefore, by considering budget estimates, actual fund releases for MGREGA, number of family circle who have completed 100 days of work, the average real wage rate MGNREGA workers during the given years, it is quite clear with that MGNREGA have provided employment to the vulnerable rural households. Further it can be asserted that the work provided under Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) caters to the objectives of the 8th Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) of decent work, to some extent.

## **5. Conclusion**

The revised estimates and actual release were Rs. 111,000 crores and Rs. 98,000 crores during 2020-2021 and 2021-22. This is the highest; the reason is the devastating effect of Covid-19 and reverse migration. Therefore, the demand for MGNREGA increased significantly during these two years. In the case of actual release of funds for MGNREGA, there was little fluctuation until 2015-16 but after that, there was steep rise

in the actual release of funds and it reached a peak of Rs. 111,170.86 Crore in 2021–22. However, after this, there was a sharp decline. When discussing the number of households who have accomplished 100 days of work, all states have experienced a fall in the number of families, but in case of Kerala and Tamil Nadu, the CAGR is negative 100 percent over the study period. In the case of remaining states, the rate of decline is too high, except for Odisha the CAGR is in the range of -62 percent to -48 percent. In the case of average real wage of MGNREGA workers, the increase in the real wage is a mix of rise and fall in different states. Hence, and finally, it can be said that MGNREGA failed to provide employment to the poor who really need it. Therefore, the government should take the initiative to effectively utilize the funds and increase the fund allocation for providing more employment through MGNREGA.

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*Ravindra Kumar*: Conceptualized the research, conducted the literature review, collected and analyzed data, and prepared the manuscript.

*Prof. Sivasankar. V*: Provided guidance throughout the research process, critically reviewed the manuscript, and contributed to the interpretation of results and final editing.

The data utilized in this research were drawn from publicly available government reports, such as the MGNREGA Management Information System (MIS), and datasets provided by the Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India. Primary data were also collected through field surveys and structured interviews conducted in select rural districts. While every effort was made to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the findings, this study acknowledges the limitations inherent in self-reported data and regional specificity. Further research is recommended to explore the long-term implications of MGNREGA in different socio-economic contexts.

### **Availability of Data and Materials**

All data analyzed during this study are included in this published article. Additional information or materials can be made available upon reasonable request to the corresponding author at [ravindran.kumar2013@gmail.com](mailto:ravindran.kumar2013@gmail.com).

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