



COVID19 – IMPACT OF MGNREGA (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act 2005) LABOURERS IN ANDHRA PRADESH

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Abstract

Covid-19 has brought a renewed emphasis on health and sanitation, as well as, in unexpected ways, the need for productive employment opportunities in rural India. MGNREGA, the rural employment guarantee program, has a mixed record of success in terms of providing adequate employment to those in need, the quality of asset creation, and the adequacy of wages offered. This paper makes the case for reorienting a small portion of MGNREGA spending to create micro-entrepreneurs from the reverse migrating masons, electricians, plumbers, and others in rural areas who directly contribute to augmenting health and sanitation infrastructure in the likely new normal. This will provide relief to those whose livelihoods have been severely impacted and, in the long run, will reduce reliance on government funds. We propose approving a new work type for sanitization works under MGNREGA without any complex asset creation and enlisting the private sector for project management skills to quickly skill up returning migrants and match work with workers on an ongoing basis.

Keywords: Covid, Sanitization, MGNREGA, Employment, Migration, Livelihoods

Introduction

MGNREGA (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act-2005) is the country's most comprehensive work guarantee programme, with the primary goal of providing rural households with 100 days of wage employment per year. The programme emphasizes decentralization by giving Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) a significant role in planning and implementing these works in rural areas. The scheme's emphasis is on rural employment and asset creation. A total of 100 days of work are guaranteed per household, with the budget divided 90:10 by the Centre and the States. Although there is significant interstate variation in wages paid, the Centre recently increased the daily wage to Rs. 202. (Increased wage rates effective from 01 April 2020 and notified on 23 March 2020).

In many cases, the scheme wage rates are lower than the state's minimum wage. MGNREGA projects must spend at least 60% of their budget on wages for unskilled labour, with the remaining 40% on semi-skilled/skilled labour and materials. There are, however, exceptions to this rule. One notable example is the construction of toilets. This results in periodic withdrawal from the labour force, particularly among marginal labourers, who alternate between what is reported as domestic and gainful work. In search of work, many workers relocate to other parts of the country. The primary reasons for migration from rural areas are a lack of alternative livelihoods and skill development. India is facing a severe challenge of unemployment and reverse migration as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Migrant workers are returning to their home countries in the hope of surviving better than they would in hostile living conditions in host countries with limited job opportunities. The majority of migrant workers earn a daily wage, and being out of work for extended periods makes it difficult to afford the high cost of living in cities. This is compounded by the uncertainty surrounding the timelines for the current situation's normalisation.

MGNREGS (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme) in Andhra Pradesh:

The MGNREGA was implemented in three stages in Andhra Pradesh. Only one of Andhra Pradesh's 23 districts is entirely urban, namely Hyderabad. As a result, MGNREGA is being implemented in 22 districts throughout Andhra Pradesh. The scheme comes into place on February 2, 2006, in the rural areas of Andhra Pradesh four districts, namely Vizianagaram, Chittoor, YSR Kadapa, Ananthapur, and 6 districts East Godavari, Guntur, Kurnool, Nellore, Prakasam, and Srikakulam (with effect from 1.4.2007). Finally, Phase III includes the remaining three districts of West Godavari, Krishna, and Visakhapatnam (with effect from 1.4.2008). The programme is now being implemented in 12,933 Gram Panchayats located in the state of Andhra Pradesh. Job cards have been issued to 87.01 lakh people, and 83.15 lakh people are currently employed. In the form, 175.52 lakh workers are available to work, and 49.11 lakh workers have active job cards.

Employment generation of MGNREGS in Andhra Pradesh

From 2014-2015 to 2018-2019, MGNREGA was implemented in Andhra Pradesh. The number of generated person days increased from 1559.04 lakh in 2014-15 to 2122.55 lakh in 2017-18. During the 2018-2019 year, 40.23 percent of programme beneficiaries were men, while 59.77 percent were women. Members of the Scheduled Castes have received 22% of all person-days of employment, while Scheduled Tribes have received 9.57%.

Land development, road connectivity, flood control and protection, water conservation and harvesting, drought proofing, desilting of ponds, minor irrigation works, and providing irrigation facilities to Scheduled Caste/Tribe families and other land reform beneficiaries were among the jobs undertaken.

Role of MGNREGS on Migration in COVID -19 Pandemic

MGNREGS is one of the most essential and most significant public programs in India. This program's main objective is to provide 100 days of assured employment to rural households and create a sustainable asset. MGNREGS main aim is to reduce migration and create a sustainable investment in rural areas. Migration is a complex process; it is not always done due to poverty and desperate situations, but complex factors (facilities, education).

People migrate due to a lack of adequate agricultural land, inadequate agricultural production, fewer irrigation facilities, and acute water scarcity. At the micro-level analysis, the correlation between MGNREGS and Migration is very weak. From the literature as well as supported by the micro-assessment, MGNREGS is helping a flawed and more vulnerable section of the community by employing at a critical period of a year (seasonal migration). In principle, MGNREGAS can reduce temporary migration but is ineffective for an extended period, when several factors would change together (Nandini Singh 2013).

Review of Literature

India, as a country prior to the onset of this financial crisis, was already facing a decline in GDP growth and an increase in unemployment rates. There was a demand slowdown, and the Covid-19 lockdown further degenerated the demand and supply collapse in the economy. So this study shows the realities of the employment wages of MGNREGS in Andhra Pradesh for Migrant Laborers' Global recession and trouble and impact.

World Bank Group, (2020). However, this piece focuses more on internal migrants, especially seasonal migrants since they are more likely to be from socially marginalised and low-income households and therefore more vulnerable to economic shocks such as the one presented by COVID-19 (Rajan, Sivakumar, & Srinivasan, 2020). According to Census 2011, there are around 455 million migrants in India, out of which close to 42 million have migrated for work/employment. Seasonal migrants were hit the hardest because of the nationwide lockdown that was imposed on March 21, 2020, to contain the

spread of the virus. In the days leading to this lockdown, most of them lost jobs and no longer had any source of income to send back as remittance (Khanna,2020). In fact, a lot of them had to wait for the money to be sent from their homes to fund their travel back home. All this was reflected in the Aadhar-Enabled Payment System witnessing the second steepest decline in remittance flows since its inception while most of the Payments Banks reported up to 80 per cent decline in remittance flows and predicted a prolonged impact due to the prevailing uncertainty over when economic activities would resume (Shukla & Manikandan,2020). This was in addition to the large human cost that was borne by migrants, as was evident with stories emerging in the media of migrants being stranded without food and shelter in the middle of their painstaking journeys back home in peak summer. Scholarly estimates put the number of migrants returning home anywhere between 5 and 35 million, in the absence of official government data. Despite enduring these journeys, their situation back home has been much worse. A majority of migrants hail from states such as Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan and Odisha, which perform below the national average in terms of healthcare capacity, and are also characterized by low job opportunities, especially in rural areas. Their return has further widened the labour demand-supply gap in their towns and villages, as has been reflected in increased demand for MGNREGA jobs in subsequent months (Myadam& Ramesh, 2020).

Many surveys which have since been conducted in these states show the dismal conditions of migrant households and the coping mechanisms they have adopted for survival. One survey conducted in Uttar Pradesh's Bundelkhand region—where 80 percent of households send at least one migrant to states like Gujarat, Maharashtra and Delhi—showed there was widespread hunger and desperation among migrant households for a source of livelihood. There was near total dependence on state-run PDS and employment guarantee schemes for basic sustenance. Faulty exclusions and delays in payments from these schemes pushed these households to the brink of starvation. Even households included in the schemes got only rice and wheat and had to resort to means such as bartering and high-interest borrowing to buy other essentials like cereals, pulses and vegetables. The reverse migration increased demand for work in the source states substantially and might have brought down wages further. Lack of job opportunities has left them with no choice but to return to urban centres as soon as possible, despite having endured hardships to reach their homes just a few months before (Bera, 2020).

Another survey in Maharashtra reported that more than 70 per cent of migrants did not receive any payments during the lockdown, nor did they have any alternate source of livelihood back home. Only 16 percent of them had managed to retain their earlier income, but even fewer found their incomes sufficient to manage household expenses. This forced them into total dependence on social welfare measures from the government, but more than a quarter of them reported not getting any government assistance. Almost the same fraction of respondents reported having starved, and almost a half of them said arranging food supplies were their biggest concern (Sriraman & Singh, 2020). Yet another survey by IFPRI also showed similar results. Households with returnee migrants were found to be financially worse off than households without migrants. These households were coping by reducing the number of

food items in their meals, limiting the number of meals, borrowing in kind from their friends and relatives, borrowing cash from moneylenders, and selling their assets. Women were found to be facing a disproportionately higher burden because of the crisis with the increased workload, and women from migrant households were especially worse off (Limaye, Chandurkar, & Choudhury, 2020).

Census (2011) as a reference document (India Spend, 2020). It is common knowledge that migrants generally have very poor access to PDS in destination states since their ration cards are usually tied to their native place. While the portability of ration cards under the One Nation One Ration scheme can potentially rectify this, there have also been calls including by the Supreme Court of India to universalize PDS (Jadhav, 2020). Sarma & Sunder, 2020). The government efforts have been directed at internal migrants while there has been no major policy measure aimed at easing the situation of international migrants (Kuttappan, 2021). While several state governments such as Kerala and Odisha have announced plans for absorbing these returnee migrants into the local labour force, not much has happened on the ground yet to help them earn an alternate source of livelihood.

Above Studies support the researcher to examine his study route causes and impact with wage employment Programmes have required to achieve multiple benefits.

Need for the study and objective of the study

Direct provision of wage employment is an attractive instrument for poverty alleviation. The poor depend heavily upon wage employment for their income and suffer from considerable unemployment and underemployment. Wage employment Programmes have sought to achieve multiple objectives. They not only provide employment opportunities but ultimately provide food security for the poor. Several studies have shown that MGNREGS is reaching the poor and socially and economically backward sections. There is no uniform opinion among the scholars and authors on MGNREGS. Some are positive, and some are negative. Many scholars mention different works taken up by the Scheme, but they did not explain those works' sustainability. In this regard, the study is proposed to estimate the impact of MGNREGS days on the level of deprivation, and its determinants in Andhra Pradesh.

Objective

The study's focus is on understanding the impact of COVID-19 on MGNREGS labourers in Andhra Pradesh state.

Research Methodology

The broad methodology used encompasses both qualitative and quantitative variables, allowing for a more in-depth understanding of the study on the role of MGNREGA on migration—with a focus on Krishna District, Andhra Pradesh and also collected primary data from the wage labourers in MGNREGS and secondary data at different sources in the concern departments.

Data Analysis

MGNREGA continues to attract rural laborers who have been pushed into distress as a result of the Covid-19 crisis, prompting calls to increase the mandatory workdays to 200 and the minimum wage under the scheme to Rs 600 per day. Under MGNREGA, the law currently guarantees 100 days of work, though the actual days of work provided are much less, and the minimum wage for 2020-21 is around Rs 200 per day.

According to collected data from the MGNREGA website as of July 1, approximately 43.7 million households sought work under the scheme in June, the highest number in the last seven years, continuing a trend begun in May. This was a 21% increase over the number of households who requested work under the scheme in May 2020. In May 2020, 36.1 million households needed to work, the highest number for that month in the previous seven years. In contrast, preliminary data show that MGNREGA provided 382.9 million person-days of work in June 2020, which is nearly 32% less than the previous month (May 2020). The scheme provided 567.4 million person-days of work in May. "This needs to be closely examined because if the demand for work increases, so should the demand of work. Especially since over 500 million person-days of work were provided in May" an expert stated.

The increased demand for work under the scheme comes after more than 20 million migrants returned to villages from cities to avoid the COVID-19 lockdown announced in March.

To provide more work to migrant laborers, the Central government increased the scheme's budget by Rs 40,000 crore in May, bringing the scheme's full-year allocation to more than Rs 100,000 crores for the first time.

Table: 1. Community wise Participation from 1.4.2020 to 2.12.2020 in A.P
(Expenditure and employed days)

(Amount Rs. in Crores)

SI. No.	District Name	BC- Total wage	BC-Days worked	SC- Total wage	SC- Days worked	ST- Total wage	ST- Days worked	Min orities - Total wage	Minor ities- Days worked	Othe rs- Total wage	Others -Days worked
1	Anantapur	312.97	13514054	103.26	4470150	27.67	1192760	8.28	355918	93.29	4011630
2	Chittoor	164.04	7012629	112.92	4845432	16.55	703656	7.14	301769	88.21	3753742
3	East	157.12	6728977	131.0	55961	76.2	32684	0.27	11348	55.58	238138

	Godavari			9	49		49				8
4	Guntur	62.8	2832589	79.57	35611 32	15.59	69330 5	6.92	31055 0	55.41	249651 0
5	Kadapa	114.29	4860042	72.77	31011 89	8	33868 2	10.4	44048 7	102.1 6	431102 1
6	Krishna	96.69	4273038	100.7 5	44715 48	8.96	40038 1	2.3	10297 4	35.6	155924 6
7	Kurnool	159.37	7210564	67.33	30807 51	9.57	41796 0	12.9 4	58501 7	21.8	984354
8	Prakasam	181.55	8108523	149.7	67439 39	17.32	76525 3	6.74	29979 5	181.7 1	806831 8
9	S.P.S Nellore	72.6	3287083	64.63	29676 21	12.55	57148 8	3.18	14231 9	44.02	194025 7
10	Srikakulam	326.21	14678413	45.94	20729 51	51.99	23010 94	0.18	7945	12.71	570597
11	Visakhapatnam	172.16	7375702	27.66	11881 00	225.25	94651 29	0.59	25444	91.5	393864 0
12	Vizianagara m	431.73	17884836	66.64	27648 16	73.86	30497 47	0.45	18980	13.67	565759
13	West Godavari	115.55	5199597	106.5 2	48271 78	25.46	11402 57	1.18	53035	34.17	153555 8
	Total	2367.0 8	10296604 7	1128. 78	49690 956	568.97	24308 161	60.5 7	26555 81	829.8 3	361170 20

Source: State NRGES Report

The above table shows the District wise job details at the community level. Implementation of MGNREGS during COVID-19 Pandemic

Table: 2.

**District wise days employed and expenditure for the BC
community**

S.No	District Name	(Rs in Crs)	Days worked
1	Anantapur	312.97	13514054
2	Chittoor	164.04	7012629
3	East Godavari	157.12	6728977
4	Guntur	62.8	2832589
5	Kadapa	114.29	4860042
6	Krishna	96.69	4273038
7	Kurnool	159.37	7210564
8	Prakasam	181.55	8108523
9	S.P.S Nellore	72.6	3287083
10	Srikakulam	326.21	14678413
11	Visakhapatnam	172.16	7375702
12	Vizianagaram	431.73	17884836
13	West Godavari	115.55	5199597
	Total	2367.08	102966047

Table: 3

District wise days employed and expenditure for the SC community			
S.No	District Name	(Rs in Crs)	Days worked
1	Anantapur	103.26	4470150
2	Chittoor	112.92	4845432
3	East Godavari	131.09	5596149
4	Guntur	79.57	3561132
5	Kadapa	72.77	3101189
6	Krishna	100.75	4471548
7	Kurnool	67.33	3080751
8	Prakasam	149.7	6743939
9	S.P.S Nellore	64.63	2967621
10	Srikakulam	45.94	2072951
11	Visakhapatnam	27.66	1188100
12	Vizianagaram	66.64	2764816
13	West Godavari	106.52	4827178
	Total	1128.78	49690956

Table: 4

District wise days employed and expenditure for the ST community			
S.No	District Name	(Rs in Crs)	Days worked
1	Anantapur	27.67	1192760
2	Chittoor	16.55	703656
3	East Godavari	76.2	3268449
4	Guntur	15.59	693305
5	Kadapa	8	338682
6	Krishna	8.96	400381
7	Kurnool	9.57	417960
8	Prakasam	17.32	765253
9	S.P.S Nellore	12.55	571488
10	Srikakulam	51.99	2301094
11	Visakhapatnam	225.25	9465129
12	Vizianagaram	73.86	3049747
13	West Godavari	25.46	1140257
	Total	568.97	24308161

Table: 5

District wise days employed and expenditure for the minority community			
S.No	District Name	(Rs in Crs)	Days worked
1	Anantapur	8.28	355918
2	Chittoor	7.14	301769
3	East Godavari	0.27	11348
4	Guntur	6.92	310550
5	Kadapa	10.4	440487
6	Krishna	2.3	102974
7	Kurnool	12.94	585017
8	Prakasam	6.74	299795
9	S.P.S Nellore	3.18	142319
10	Srikakulam	0.18	7945
11	Visakhapatnam	0.59	25444

12	Vizianagaram	0.45	18980
13	West Godavari	1.18	53035
	Total	60.57	2655581

Table:6

District wise days employed and expenditure for the others			
S.No	District Name	(Rs in Crs)	Days worked
1	Anantapur	93.29	4011630
2	Chittoor	88.21	3753742
3	East Godavari	55.58	2381388
4	Guntur	55.41	2496510
5	Kadapa	102.16	4311021
6	Krishna	35.6	1559246
7	Kurnool	21.8	984354
8	Prakasam	181.71	8068318
9	S.P.S Nellore	44.02	1940257
10	Srikakulam	12.71	570597
11	Visakhapatnam	91.5	3938640
12	Vizianagaram	13.67	565759
13	West Godavari	34.17	1535558
	Total	829.83	36117020

Table: 7 Abstract of community wise employed days and expenditure

Name of the community	Expenditure Crs.	Days
BC	2367.08	102966047
SC	1128.7	49690956
ST	568.97	24308161
Minorities	60.57	2655581
others	829.83	36117020

Figure: 1 Abstract of community wise employed days

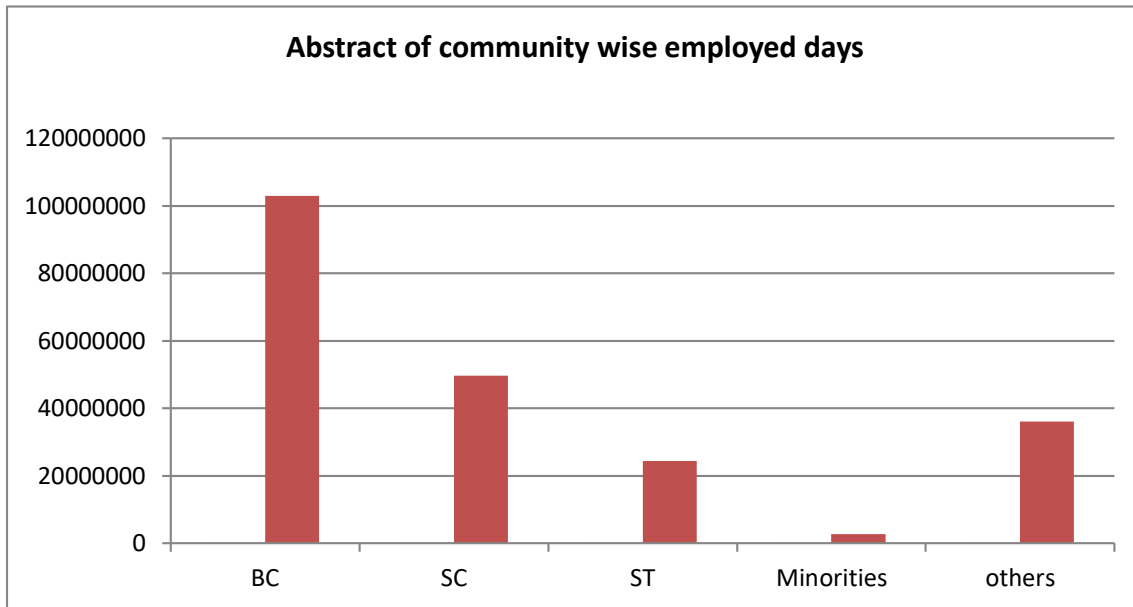
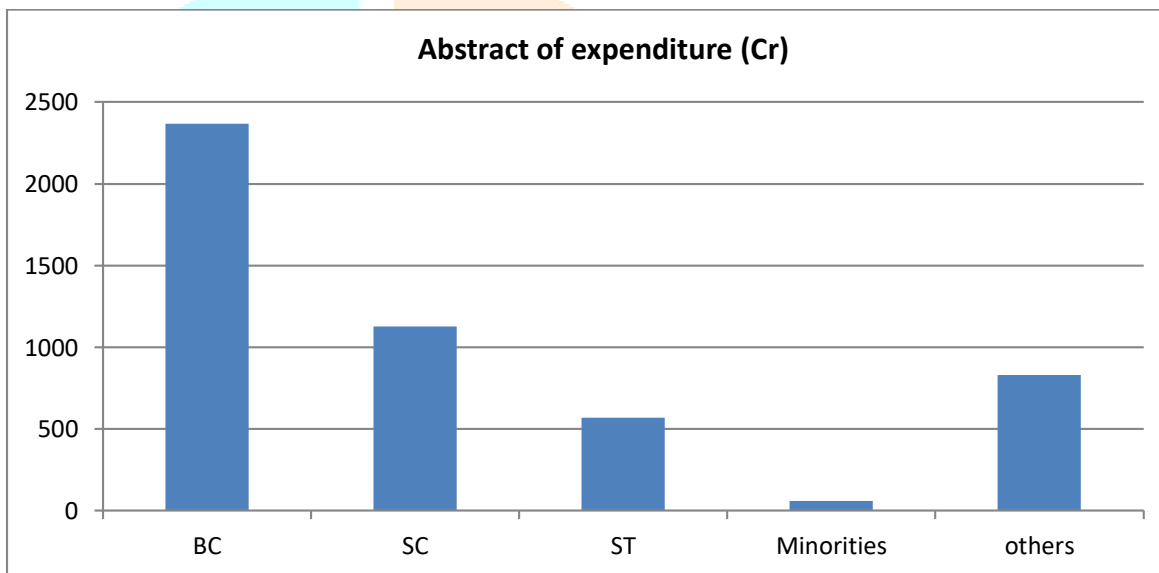


Figure: 2 Abstract of community wise expenditure (cr)



As per the above mentioned tables (1, 2,3, 4,5 and figure 1 and 2) majority of the employed days availed by the BC community (102966047) , secondly by the SC community (49690956) and others (36117020) and ST (24308161) and finally less days acquired by the minorities (2655581) and similarly the expenditure mostly sent for BC (2367.08cr), secondly for SC (1128.7cr) , others (829.83cr) m ST (568.97cr) and Minorities(60.57cr).

Mahatma Gandhi NREGS is a demand-driven wage employment scheme. Every adult member of a household in a rural area, having a job card (as per Mahatma Gandhi NREG Act), is eligible for a demand for a job under the scheme. There is no provision to register a Job cardholder categorized as migrant laborers/ family in the scheme's job card. A job card can be issued to a migrant labor/family as per the Act's provision against a demand by the migrant labor/family. A total of 86,81,928 new job cards during the current FY so far have been issued as compared to 64,95,823 new job cards issued during the

FY 2019-20. State-wise fund released/spent under Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (Mahatma Gandhi NREGS) from April 2020 to August 2020.

So far as enhancement of guaranteed days of employment is concerned, the Mahatma Gandhi NREGA envisages providing 100 days of guaranteed wage employment in a financial year to each household in rural areas whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work. There is a provision for additional 50 days of unskilled wage employment in a financial year in drought/natural calamity notified rural areas. As per Section 3(4) of the Mahatma Gandhi NREG Act, 2005, the State Governments may make provisions for providing additional days beyond the period guaranteed under the Act from their funds.

State-wise release/expenditure under wage for Mahatma Gandhi NREGS for financial years 2018-19, 2019-20 and 2020-21 (from April 2020 to August 2020, between March-August 2020 and the corresponding period in 2019).

Table: 8 Distributed monthly employment in COVID-19

Employment Provided			
Months	2019	2020	Increase
April	273940403	141308625	-48%
May	369515900	568693697	54%
June	321428565	640708960	99%
July	194174791	391630385	102%
August	153052762	238976142	56%

Source: Central Report of NREGS

Conclusion

Due to the sudden lockdown and resultant job losses, over one crore people have returned to their homes, some walking hundreds of kilometers, others using all reasonable means of transport. A sizable number may take several months to return to the cities and towns to earn a living. This great scenario of a pandemic poses a formidable challenge for the 'home states' governments to arrange suitable job opportunities for securing their livelihoods. Arrange scale social security programmers like MGNREGA are subjected to undergo several stumbling blocks in times of ongoing pandemic. Government and NGOs must study the impact of MGNREGA in rural areas to ensure that this massive anti-poverty

scheme is not getting diluted from its actual path. Since the adverse effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on employment will persist in 2020-21, the government can ensure more effective implementation and strengthening of the oversight of MGNREGA through mandated social audit. The scheme is not only an ocean of possibilities for the jobless migrants, but it has also given the Central government a chance to get a second bite at the cherry after the devastating economic and job creation figures now officially out for FY 2019-20.

At this point, what is needed is neither dismantling of the program nor its slow suffocation. Rural households urgently need cash-in-hand, and so the emerging demand is for immediate payment to workers. NREGA payments are frequently delayed by weeks or months. Given the circumstances, such delays will be entirely counterproductive. It is recommended that wage payments be made in cash and paid on the same day in remote areas.

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