



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

IMPACT OF MGNREGA ON RURAL MIGRATION: INSIGHTS FROM LITERATURE

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Abstract: The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) stands as one of India's most significant social welfare initiatives, aiming to enhance rural livelihoods and prevent distress migration. However, the effectiveness of MGRREGA in curbing rural-to-urban migration remains a subject of debate and needs to be studied systematically. This paper tries to analyse the effectiveness of MGNREGA in controlling rural migration based on the review of the literature. It is found that MGNREGA has contributed positively to mitigating rural distress and reducing migration in certain contexts. There are some challenges in realizing its full potential.

Keywords: MGNREGA, rural migration, livelihoods, rural development, India

1. INTRODUCTION

Rural migration has been a longstanding issue in India, with millions of people annually leaving their villages in search of better economic opportunities in urban areas. This phenomenon has profound socio-economic implications, including strain on urban infrastructure, family disintegration, and persistent poverty in rural regions. In response to these challenges, the Indian government introduced the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) in 2005, aiming to provide livelihood security and prevent distress migration by guaranteeing 100 days of wage employment to rural households.

The MGNREGA aims to strengthen the livelihood security of rural populations by ensuring that households in rural areas receive a hundred days of wage-employment per fiscal year if their adult members are willing to undertake unskilled manual labour. MGNREGA functions as a crucial safety net for the unemployed, particularly during periods of famine and drought, by supplementing household incomes and mitigating the need for rural villagers to migrate to cities in search of work. It not only provides cash assistance to the economically disadvantaged but also fosters the creation of sustainable assets. Additionally, the Act tries to construct lasting assets and enhance the resource base for rural livelihoods. The types of projects outlined in the Act address root causes of persistent poverty such as drought, deforestation, and soil erosion, thereby ensuring that the process of employment generation is sustainable. Theoretical frameworks such as the push-pull theory and New Economics of Labor Migration (NELM) provide insights into the factors driving rural migration. According to these theories, individuals migrate due to a combination of factors, including economic disparities between rural and urban areas, lack of employment opportunities, and social networks. MGNREGA intervenes in this process by providing employment opportunities in rural areas, thereby addressing some of the push factors contributing to migration. Over the years, MGNREGA has emerged as a cornerstone of India's social welfare policies especially in controlling distress migration. However, its impacts still need to be studied systematically. Hence, this paper tries to analyse the impact of MGNREGA on rural migration based on the available literature.

2. FINDINGS BASED ON LITERATURE

This section presents the impact of MGNREGA on migration based on various studies. Furthermore, it offers insights into the complexities of addressing migration through rural employment schemes. Through a synthesis of various studies conducted across different states, it sheds light on both the successes and shortcomings of MGNREGA in mitigating migration pressures and fostering rural development

MGNREGA being the largest public program has drawn a lot of attention from the leading economists and authors. They have brought in focus to a lot of problems regarding MGNREGA and its implementation. Though every one of them believed that it had some or the other drawbacks, they also believe that the government of India has finally come up with a scheme that could escape the failings of the past and reach the common man in a way all other schemes have been unable to. Ahuja, Tyagi, Chauhan, and Chaudhary (2011) conducted a study in Haryana to check the implementation of MGNREGA in two districts — one agriculturally advanced (Karnal) and the other agriculturally backwards (Mewat). In this, they found that the farmers owning large size of landholdings and a greater number of livestock are not very interested in participating in MGNREGA works as they are busy in their activities. The farmers who have small land and livestock resources work in MGNREGA works. So employment scheme of MGNREGA is providing livelihood security to the resource-poor rural people. Thus, if the size of the holding is large, the chances of working in MGNREGA work are less. It can be inferred that in agriculturally-developed areas MGNREGA did not check the migration as the people were earning more income from migration.

The study conducted by Peter and Maruthi (2020) in Devaragudinihal Gram Panchayat (GP) in Karnataka aimed to analyze the impact of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) on household migration over three years from 2014-15 to 2016-17. They surveyed 30 beneficiary households using a transit walk method to gather data. The study revealed that households from various socio-economic backgrounds, including Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), and Other Backward Classes (OBC), experienced migration during the study period. The primary reasons cited for migration included dissatisfaction with the provision of 100-man days by the government, with a majority of households expressing that this allocation was insufficient for their entire family. Additionally, some households reported dissatisfaction with the wages provided under MGNREGA, stating that they were lower compared to local market rates. Most households indicated a need for more man-days to sustain their livelihoods. The study's findings underscore the importance of addressing the limitations of MGNREGA in meeting the needs of rural households. To mitigate migration and improve the purchasing power parity (PPP) of rural communities, the study suggests that the government should consider increasing the number of man-days provided under the program and ensuring competitive wage rates aligned with local market standards. These recommendations highlight the potential for policy adjustments to enhance the effectiveness of MGNREGA in reducing migration and supporting rural livelihoods.

Bhagat (2009) has the view that the push and pull factors have dominated much of the understanding of migration. Push factors like low income, low literacy, dependence on agriculture and high poverty are cited as some examples associated with place of origin. On the other hand, high income, high literacy, and the dominance of industries and services are the pull factors associated with place of destination. It has been found in this study that both in and out-migration rates have a significant positive association with per capita income, the percentage of the workforce and the share of GSDP in the non-agricultural sector. This means that higher income and sectoral transformation of the economy from agricultural to the non-agricultural sector are associated both with higher in-migration as well as out-migration rates. Jacob (2008) recommends that the aspect of MGNREGA where it can be used to curb rural-urban migration is conditional on the MGNREGA being implemented well in that region, otherwise, if work is not supplied, if wages aren't paid on time and if money is just being siphoned off, then workers will have no incentive to stop migrating. Bhagat (2012) thinks that temporary and seasonal migration has long been an important income diversification and risk-coping strategy in many agriculture-based economies in the developing world. Jaswal (2009) found that migration has reduced by more than half since MGNREGA was introduced. Solinski (2012) suggested that MGNREGA may benefit Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and those with little or no access to positive migration opportunities – in other words, it may be a good way to curb distress migration, which is commendable. However, it is unlikely to succeed in reducing mobility for work in general – which is not desirable anyway.

The study conducted in Jodhpur district Choudhary Rekha (2020), Rajasthan State, provides valuable insights into the impact of MGNREGA on migration and employment dynamics. Through a household-level survey and data analysis, the study highlights the program's role in reducing distress migration, particularly among female workers, and increasing participation in non-agricultural and construction sectors. While MGNREGA has contributed to better wage rates and income growth, challenges remain, including timely payment, duration of employment, and inflation-adjusted wage rates. Moreover, MGNREGA has had positive spill-over effects on food security, healthcare, housing, and awareness about other government schemes among participants. However, stakeholders emphasized the need for improvements, such as proper measurement of work, fresh surveys for job card allotment, and infrastructure development to enhance access to beneficiary households. In summary, while MGNREGA has made significant strides in reducing distress migration and enhancing livelihood security in rural areas, there is room for improvement. Addressing implementation challenges, increasing the number of employment days, and ensuring fair wage rates aligned with inflation are crucial steps to maximize the program's impact and realize its full potential in fostering rural development and curbing migration.

In the state of Jharkhand, MGNREGA continues to suffer from various loopholes; the most glaring ones being, not getting the hundred days of wage employment and irregularities in payment of wages. In the current financial year, of the 32 lakh job card holders, only 30,000 have got the 100-day work which does not even amount to 1 percent of the number. As a natural corollary to the increasing criminalization of this job guarantee scheme, demand for work under it is decreasing. Villagers have now resorted back to migrating to the cities in search of job opportunities. Hence, one of the basic objectives of which MGNREGA was launched; that is, reducing the incidence of migration, has now been destroyed.

Thus, the existing literature on MGNREGA and rural migration presents a nuanced understanding of the program's impact. While some studies highlight the positive outcomes of MGNREGA in reducing migration and improving rural livelihoods, others point to limitations such as implementation challenges, leakages, and the seasonal nature of employment. Additionally, research emphasizes the role of complementary policies and local governance structures in maximizing the benefits of MGNREGA and addressing the root causes of migration.

3. CONCLUSION

The studies indicate that the MGNREGA has made a significant effort to address rural distress and prevent migration by providing employment opportunities and income support to rural households. However, its effectiveness in curbing migration depends on various contextual factors and implementation challenges. By addressing these challenges and complementing MGNREGA with targeted interventions, India can foster sustainable rural development and reduce the vulnerability of rural communities to migration pressures.

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