

Socio-Economic Impact of MGNREGA among the Beneficiaries of Nirmand Block of District Kullu Himachal Pradesh

Sunil

Himachal Pradesh University Summerhill, Shimla, Himachal Pradesh, India

Abstract: *The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) is a key program launched by the Government of India to support rural livelihoods. Enacted on August 25, 2005, and implemented on February 2, 2006, this scheme aims to strengthen the economic and social conditions of rural communities when carried out effectively. Given that agriculture is the backbone of the rural economy, MGNREGA introduced a rights - based approach that marked a major shift from earlier employment initiatives. Under this Act, the government is required by law to provide up to 100 days of wage employment to individuals seeking work. Beyond job creation, the program promotes sustainable development by conserving natural resources and building productive assets. It has played a vital role in transforming rural India by protecting the environment and reducing the migration of workers to urban areas. This research examines the actual effects of MGNREGA in the Nirmand block of Kullu district. The study was carried out in four panchayats within the Nirmand block, chosen due to their effective execution of MGNREGA projects. These panchayats have consistently ranked among the top five in MGNREGA implementation over the past five years. The research is primarily based on firsthand data and assesses public awareness regarding essential aspects of MGNREGA. It also evaluates its influence on the financial well - being of beneficiaries, the effectiveness of social audits, the empowerment of women, educational opportunities for children, dietary patterns, access to healthcare, sanitation, rural infrastructure, and trends in migration.*

Keywords: MGNREGA, socio - economic change, women empowerment, child education, food habits, medical facilities, sanitization, rural connectivity, and migration

1. Introduction

Any nation is called developed only when the citizens living in it progress. The progress of citizens does not happen only by providing them with political rights, but their social and economic progress is a better scale to measure their development. In India, many attempts were made by governments to provide its citizens with economic stability and social upliftment. MGNREGA is also an important program of social change that has greatly affected the lives of people. This flagship program directly touches the lives of the rural poor. It aims to enhance livelihood security in rural areas by providing at least 100 days of wage employment in a financial year to at least one member of every household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work (Chitravanshi Ruchika, 2015). The initiative designed to guarantee economic stability in rural regions holds immense potential to transform the social and economic landscape of rural communities (Sharma, Chauhan & Thakur, IJBGM, 2020). This program has been implemented in the state of Himachal Pradesh for approximately the past twenty years. However, it is crucial to understand how the recipients perceive MGNREGA and identify the key challenges they encounter.

2. Objectives of the Study

- To study the level of awareness amongst the general rural public about the MGNREGA Scheme.
- To study the impact of MGNREGA on day - to - day life of rural people.

- To study the impact of MGNREGA on women's empowerment and people's migration.

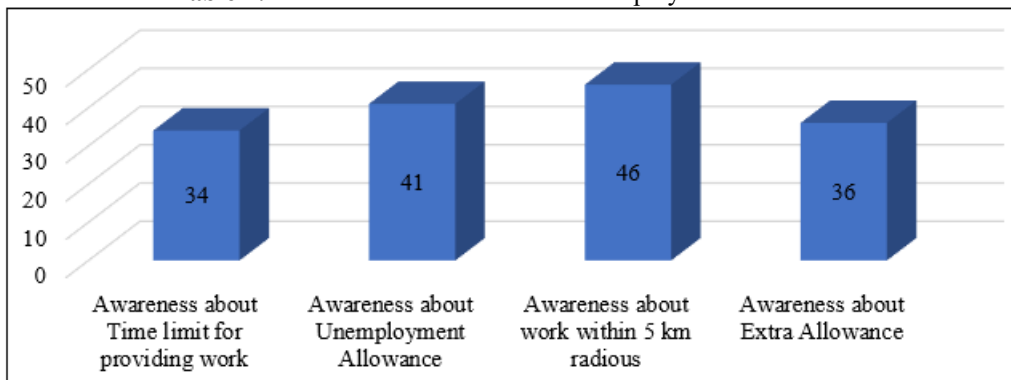
3. Methodology

The research was carried out in the Kullu district of Himachal Pradesh. Among the five Development Blocks in the district, Nirmand Block was specifically chosen for this study. Within this selected block, four Gram Panchayats were identified, and from these Gram Panchayats, a total of 25 villagers engaged in MGNREGA activities were randomly selected from each, leading to an overall sample size of 100 participants.

A combination of various research approaches, including historical, descriptive, analytical, and empirical methods, was employed to ensure a comprehensive analysis. Different techniques such as the survey research method, observation technique, and interview procedure were utilized to gather relevant information.

During the data collection process, the researcher meticulously applied observational skills to capture the genuine and unfiltered responses of the participants. Careful attention was given to various aspects, including environmental surroundings, modes of communication, verbal and non - verbal cues, facial expressions, and overall body language of the respondents. This approach ensured that the findings accurately reflected the ground realities of MGNREGA's impact in the study area.

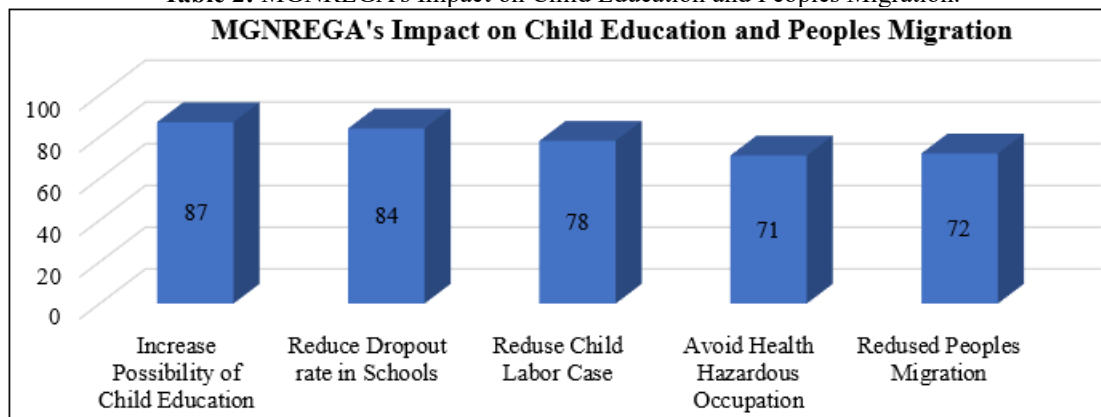
4. Major Findings

Table 1: Awareness about Work and Unemployment Allowance

Source: Primary Data

Table 1 presents data regarding the respondents' knowledge of MGNREGA - related employment and their level of awareness concerning the provision of an unemployment allowance. As per Section 7 (1) of the Mahatma Gandhi NREGA: "If a job seeker under the scheme is not offered employment within fifteen days of submitting their application for work, or from the date when employment was requested in the case of an advance application—whichever is later—they shall be eligible for a daily unemployment allowance under this section" (Annual Master Circular). The findings of this research indicate that most respondents are unaware of the additional allowance they are entitled to if their worksite is located beyond a 5 km radius. There is also a general lack of awareness regarding the unemployment allowance. Only 46%

of the participants understand that employment should be provided within a 5 km range from their village, while 42% acknowledge their awareness of the minimum wages they are entitled to for their labor. Furthermore, just 41% of respondents are informed about the unemployment allowance; however, they struggle to claim it due to the lack of initiative from panchayat officials. The study also reveals that merely 36% of the surveyed individuals are aware of the additional financial compensation stipulated under the MGNREGA Act if the job location is situated beyond 5 km. According to the provisions of the Act, if the worksite exceeds this distance, laborers are entitled to an extra 15% payment as an additional allowance.

Table 2: MGNREGA's Impact on Child Education and Peoples Migration.

Source: Primary Data

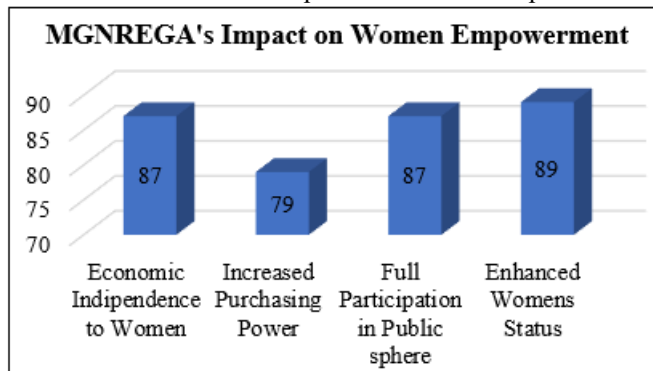
Education is an essential requirement in today's world. Without proper education, individuals struggle to secure dignified employment for their livelihood. In rural areas, many families are unable to provide quality education to their children due to limited job prospects. As a result, a significant number of children in villages are unable to complete their schooling.

In the study region, the researcher observed a rise in the likelihood of children receiving an education. The findings indicate that 87% of respondents acknowledged that MGNREGA has contributed to improving educational opportunities for children in the area. This positive shift can be attributed to various welfare initiatives implemented by the government for the children of MGNREGA workers and other laborers.

In Himachal Pradesh, the *Building and Construction Workers Welfare Board*, established in 2009 under Section 18 (1) of the *Building and Construction Workers (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act, 1996*, has played a crucial role in supporting underprivileged families through several welfare programs. Specifically, in the field of education, the board offers annual financial aid to students from primary school up to Ph. D. and research studies. Students in the first grade receive financial assistance of ₹8,400 per year, while those pursuing research and medical courses receive ₹1,20,000 annually. The study also revealed that 84% of respondents agreed that MGNREGA has helped in reducing school dropout rates, while 78% stated that the program has played a role in curbing child labor in villages. Due to insufficient employment options in rural areas, many people are forced to migrate to urban regions in search of

work. Surviving in cities is challenging for villagers, as they must pay for every necessity. Many of these migrants are either completely illiterate or have minimal education, making them unsuitable for most jobs and leaving them without basic knowledge and essential life skills. With the implementation of the MGNREGA Act, job opportunities have been provided to unskilled laborers within their own villages, significantly decreasing migration to urban areas. The study indicates that 72% of respondents acknowledged a decline in migration due to MGNREGA. Thus, it is evident that MGNREGA has played a substantial role in reducing rural - to - urban migration.

Table 3: MGNREGA'S Impact on Women's Empowerment

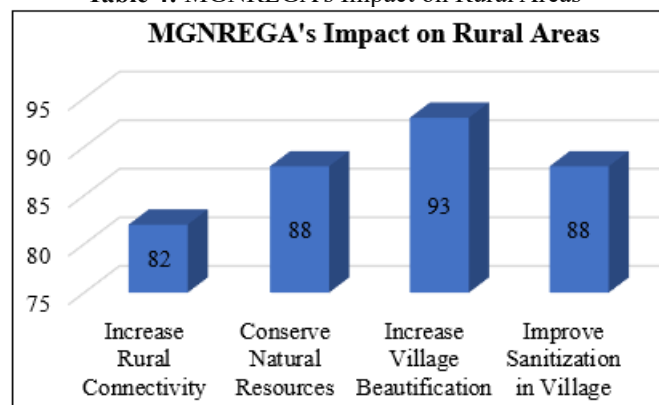


Source: Primary Data

MGNREGA has played a crucial role in transforming employment patterns and enhancing the empowerment of women in recent years. The scheme is designed to strengthen livelihood security by ensuring a minimum of 100 days of guaranteed wage - based employment in a financial year for every rural household, with a particular focus on women. Over time, female participation in the program has increased significantly, with many viewing it as a means of achieving independence and financial stability. Women are an indispensable part of society, contributing significantly to both social development and national progress. While the perception of women may differ across individuals and cultures, certain fundamental aspects remain unchanged regardless of nationality, caste, ethnicity, or occupation. When women are empowered, entire communities benefit—families become more stable, and society flourishes. Therefore, fostering women's empowerment is essential for holistic development. Women's empowerment refers to their ability to influence and make decisions for themselves. In the study area, research findings indicate that 87% of respondents acknowledged that women engaged in MGNREGA have attained financial independence. This is a significant accomplishment of the scheme, as it has enabled many women to reduce their financial reliance on men in several aspects of life. Additionally, the study highlights that MGNREGA has contributed to economic security for individuals in the region. The *International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)* defines economic security as the capacity of individuals, families, or communities to meet their fundamental needs in a sustainable and dignified manner, which varies depending on personal requirements, environmental conditions, and prevailing cultural norms (ICRC, 2015). Furthermore, data reveals that 89% of female respondents believe that achieving financial stability through MGNREGA has instilled in them a sense of equality with

men. Similarly, 87% stated that their participation in the program has encouraged them to actively engage in public affairs. Additionally, 79% of respondents affirmed that their purchasing power has increased due to MGNREGA, further reinforcing its role in uplifting women's financial status

Table 4: MGNREGA's Impact on Rural Areas



Source: Primary Data

Rural development is a major objective of MGNREGA. Through this act, special schemes are run for rural development and rural beautification. Be it rural connectivity or the conservation of natural resources, MGNREGA has made special provisions for development in these areas. Apart from this, it has also helped in making the rural environment clean and in bringing awareness about cleanliness among the people. Researcher found a positive effect of MGNREGA in the development of rural areas. Table 4.9 shows the data on MGNREGA's impact on rural areas. The data shows that a majority of 93% of the respondents agreed that the beautification of villages has been promoted by MGNREGA. For the beautification of villages, different types of schemes are being run through this act. According to this study, 88% of the respondents believe that Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act has helped in the conservation of natural resources in rural areas. In the direction of the conservation of natural resources, through this act, tree plantation is also promoted along with the conservation of water resources. Panchvati Yojana and Amrit Sarovar Yojana are the major examples of this direction. According to Para 4 (1) IV (ii) of Schedule - I of (Mahatma Gandhi NREGA) reads as: "Providing all - weather rural road connectivity to unconnected villages and to connect identified rural production centers to the existing pucca road network; and construction of pucca internal roads or streets including side drains and culverts within a village." The present study reveals the data of 87% of respondents agreed that through MGNREGA rural connectivity is increased in rural areas. The study also shows the data of 93% of respondents who believed that the MGNREGA scheme, there is a positive impact on village beautification followed by 88% of the respondents are agreed that after MGNREGA sanitation facilities are increased in rural areas. Under this act, in addition to the construction of community toilets and bathrooms in rural areas. Work is also done for the disposal of garbage, which has promoted cleanliness in rural areas.

5. Conclusion

Studying the data obtained from the field survey shows that there is a positive impact on the lives of the people through the MGNREGA Act. People have employment opportunities at their doorstep and they also become familiar with the government work method related to the MGNREGA Act. Due to this act, there has been a positive impact on the economy of the people due to which they have been able to improve the education of their children. Enrollment of children in schools has increased and the school dropout rate has come down. Under the MGNREGA Act, provision has been made for the treatment of people who are injured in the workplace. Financial assistance is provided to people for treatment. Due to this, people have been able to get their treatment done and people have become health conscious. People have got freedom from village money lenders and are self-sufficient for their daily needs. The living standard of people has increased and people are spending more on their food requirements. Due to the availability of employment near home, migration from the village has reduced. Rural connectivity has increased through MGNREGA and work has been done in the direction of village beautification. Keeping cleanliness in mind special encouragement is given to make sanitation facilities in the village. This act has made a special impact on the lives of women. Economically their dependence on men has reduced and they have become financially independent. Thus, we see that despite many irregularities, this act has made a positive impact on the lives of rural people. Work is being done by the administration to make this scheme effective so that this can do more public welfare.

Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act is an important scheme to improve the living conditions of the people. The purpose of this scheme is to provide easy employment to rural people to meet their daily needs. Apart from improving the standard of living of the people, it has also given priority to rural development. This act has, directly and indirectly, affected the everyday lifestyle of the people. It has improved the economy of the people. This has also had a positive impact on the education of poor family children. This act has increased the habit of money savings in rural areas. It has mainly improved the lives of women. They have become financially independent and they are being employed at their doorstep. Rural development has also gained momentum through this act. Thus, we see that MGNREGA has greatly influenced the development of rural areas and the lives of the people here. Despite many shortcomings, the importance of this scheme cannot be denied.

References

- [1] Annual Master Circular 2020 - 21, Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India. 2419Annual_Master_Circular_2020 - 21_English. pdf (nrega. nic. in)
- [2] Chitravanshi Ruchika, 2015, Nationwide review of rural job scheme NREGS ordered by government - timesofindia - economictimes (archive. ph)
- [3] Gerhard Lenski (1966). *Power and Privilege: A Theory of Social Stratification*. Mc
- [4] Graw - Hill.
- [5] Giddens, A. and Duneier, M. Introduction to Sociology (3rd edition), New York and London: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 2000.
- [6] Himachal Pradesh Building and Other Construction Workers Welfare Board - About Us (hpbocwb. nic. in)
- [7] International Committee of The Red Cross, What is economic security, 18 June 2015. What is Economic Security? | International Committee of the Red Cross (icrc. org)
- [8] Rajalakshmi V & Selvam V, Impact of Mgnrega on Women Empowerment and Their Issues and Challenges: A Review of Literature from 2005 To 2015 *Journal of Internet Banking and Commerce*
- [9] Sharma, D. D, Chauhan Raman & Thakur Ankita, 2020., International Journal of Business and General Management (IJBGM) ISSN (P): 2319–2267; ISSN (E): 2319–2275 Vol.9, Issue 5, Jul–Dec 2020; 59–66.