

Transforming Lives through MGNREGA: A Case of Mewat

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Abstract

MGNREGA is considered as an effective policy in making available the right to employment to every individual. Ever since its implementation, several debates have arisen regarding the effectiveness of the scheme in achieving the desired objectives. The official statistics portray the brighter side in terms of generating employment and facilitating rural development, however, as per some studies, the figures are always inflated. In view of the disparity, this paper attempts to foray into the ground realities and compare them with administrative figures to adjudge the effectiveness of the scheme in transforming the lives of the rural poor. As the scheme largely aims to address the plight of the poverty stricken rural poor, the case of Mewat district of Haryana has been taken. In Mewat, with no livelihood opportunities other than agriculture, the inhabitants are only left with the option to migrate. The misery magnifies with the local culture not encouraging migration. In this backdrop, MGNREGA is a boon to the natives. This paper attempts to examine whether the scheme has been a boon or a bane to the rural poor of Mewat.

Six Key Words: MNREGA, Impact, Ground reality check, Mewat, Employment, Implementation

1. Introduction

The era of 1990s is infamous for the ‘jobless growth’ it witnessed. Ever since, there has been declining employment growth in all major sectors of the economy (Hirway et al, 2010). Being a pre dominant agrarian economy, agriculture continues to be the only avenue of employment available with a major chunk of the rural populace. However, when such a sector is highly seasonal and experiencing very slow rate of growth¹, employment becomes a concern for the economy as a whole. Amongst the land owners, small and marginal farmers² are the most vulnerable as they have limited productive employment opportunities. Slow and gradual development of rural infrastructure and extensive depletion of natural resources also act as a deterrent in the growth of this sector. Impeding growth becomes a precursor to developing alternative livelihood opportunities for households who are directly affected by the seasonality and low productivity characteristics of agriculture.

To address the situation largely encompassing the rural milieu of the country, the Government of India launched the “Mahatama Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act” (MGNREGA) in 2005. The scheme strives to improve the economic and social condition of the poor people residing in the rural areas. The introduction of MGNREGA is seen as a giant leap towards making available the right to employment to every individual in a developing country context. It initially came into force in 200 districts with effect from February, 2006. An additional 130 districts were notified under phase II with effect from 15 May, 2007 and the remaining 266 districts have been notified under phase III with effect from 1 April, 2008. The act guarantees 100 days employment to any person willing to do casual manual labor at the proposed minimum wage for the purpose of enhancing livelihood of the poor rural households³. The basic objective of the Act is to enhance livelihood security in rural areas by providing guaranteed wage employment. It also aims at serving other objectives like creation of useful assets in rural areas, empowering women, reducing rural- urban migration and changing the power equations to bring in a more equitable social order.

To facilitate expansive implementation, the Act requires every State to formulate a State Employment Guarantee Scheme (REGS), which should conform to the minimum features specified under the Act. Once the Act comes into force, rural households have a right to register

¹ Agriculture output and productivity is quite uncertain and unstable because majority of the area under cultivation is rain fed and due to erratic monsoons and low supply of water through irrigation, the productive potential is not realized thereby leading to huge losses.

² Land owners having less than 5 acres of agricultural land

³ Under this act, job cards are to be issued to the persons who apply for work and employment is to be generated within 15 days of application guaranteeing a minimum wage as defined by the state scheme. In case of failure to provide the work opportunities to the ones seeking work, unemployment allowance will be provided by the state government. Work opportunities include creation of assets that do not require any skills and machines and are crucial for development of the rural villages. And decision regarding such asset creation will be based on discussions in the regular Gram Sabha Meetings held at village level. Muster rolls are to be maintained accounting for details of the work done and wages paid which are to be fully accessible to all and regular social audit to be done as well.

themselves with the local Gram Panchayats⁴, and seek employment under the Act. The scheme is therefore, entirely self targeting in principle, and follows a rights based approach. Work is to be provided within 15 days of the date of demand, failing which the State Government will have to pay an unemployment allowance at the stipulated rates. Employment must be provided within 5km of the applicant's residence or there is a 10% premium on the scheme wage. The state specific agricultural minimum wages will be used as the scheme rate, though based on rural schedules of rates which are output- based. The types of works eligible have a heavy focus on water/ irrigation activities, as well as connectivity. Contractors are explicitly banned at the worksites. The act also provides space for a capacity building option in the scheme's financing from which Gram Panchayats or the authorities can finance technical inputs on various aspects of work design, implementation and monitoring and evaluation.

Entering the 7th year of its implementation, there has been a lot of debate on whether the scheme has been a successful endeavor or not. A comprehensive analysis of the implementation status countrywide reveals that even though, the scheme has a lot of deficiencies, there is still, a lot of scope for improvement. As Aruna Roy has said, "corruption is eating into the scheme, but we have to guard against this" (Laskhman, 2006). This legislation has brought about a new ray of hope among the people and the civil society organizations. Comparing the initial period of implementation with the current position, the act has got a power direction in the state and things have started falling in line (Baisakh, 2008). However, there still lie a number of implementation issues in the field which need to be looked into and improved so as to bring about effective implementation of the Act. Consistent findings through studies and field reports indicate that operational leakages in the scheme primarily pertain to low awareness about the Act among people and implementing agencies. Thus, issues like passive efforts at higher levels of administration to implement the Act, lack of incentives at lower level of administration; low incentives of local officials vis-à-vis increasing awareness, proximity to the block/ Gram Panchayat and people's awareness regarding specific aspects of MGNREGA exist in the field. With respect to participation, discrimination is evident from field investigations. This is seen in the form of invisibilising of women from the worksites across many states, denial of work to single women, lower wages paid to women, and exclusion of the disabled due to unavailability of work as per their functional capacities. However, with respect to women's participation, data indicates that women's share for MGNREGA employment is not far from half in the past years, even though there are state specific variations.

A similar picture is unveiled in Mewat district, an extremely poverty stricken district in the prosperous state Haryana which stands way behind all the other districts in the state in terms of development indicators⁵. The geographical location of the region is such that it falls at a distance of around 30 kilometers from Gurgaon. However, despite the proximity, Mewat is untouched by development and lags behind other districts in the state on almost all indicators of growth and

⁴ A body serving in an administrative capacity; an elective village council in India.

⁵ In 2001 census, Mewat District population constituted 4.30 percent of total Haryana population, majority of which are engaged in agricultural activities. With low level of available water for cultivation and poor infrastructure, the Meo (local name for Mewat residents) people suffer hardships both economically and socially.

development⁶. The region falls under the Sub-Tropical, Semi-arid climatic zone and the agriculture in Mewat is mostly rain fed. The agro-climatic conditions makes Mewat region more resource poor leading to subsistence farming, limited alternative livelihood options and hence poverty.

In this backdrop, a rural employment guarantee scheme like MGNREGA can be of potential benefit to the inhabitants who have no alternative livelihood options to pursue beyond agriculture. MGNREGA was implemented in the rural pockets of the district in the year 2006. According to the data released by the Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India (collected on the basis of muster rolls maintained at the village level), for Mewat district in Haryana, the work done under MNREGA ranges from accelerating rural connectivity to water conservation and harvesting and to land development. The employment, expenditure and wages statistics show that the scheme has done quite well in terms of implementation.

As per 2011, the employment statistics provided by Ministry of Rural Development shows that Mewat contributed 5.6% to the total person days employment in Haryana. Majority of workers in Mewat belong to others' category while in Haryana, the proportion of SC and others' workers is almost the same. Very few (only 2.7% of the total works in Haryana) works were taken in Mewat but the work completion rate in Mewat is significantly higher than Haryana. Women participation in Mewat is higher than that of Haryana by 6 percentage points (Refer to table A1 in appendix)

Table 1: MGNREGA status of workers in Mewat district of Haryana for 2011-2012

Category		Registered	Job Issued Cards	Employment offered	Wage expenditure
SC	No. of Households	4596	4586	1207	141.221
	Percentage	13.13%	13.21%	13.03%	13.32%
ST	No. of Households	5 (0.01%)	0	0	0
	Percentage	0.01%	0.00	0.00%	0.00%
Others	No. of Households	30391	30125	8054	918.642
	Percentage	86.85%	86.79%	86.97%	86.68%
BPL	No. of Households	3678		7967	
	Percentage	10.51%		86.03%	
Total		34992	34711	9261	1059.863

Source: Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India

⁶ The overall sex ratio for the district is 906 females per 1000 males (Census of India, 2011). A high proportion of household heads belong to other backward classes. The average household size in Mewat is 7. Mewat has one of the lowest literacy rates in the country. In Mewat, the madrasah system of education is wide spread. Very few villages in Mewat have a proper health care facility. The health data indicates that Diarrhea and Acute Respiratory Infections form the main reasons for deaths among children. Regarding maternal health, almost all the village women have access to vaccination during pregnancy. More than 90% of deliveries in these villages take place at home in the absence of trained health personnel. The Mewat Development Agency, which is a nodal agency of the Haryana government reports that agriculture and livestock are the main occupation of the people of Mewat district.

Job cards are issued to the household members (above 18 years of age) who are willing and available to do unskilled work. The data indicates that 99% households who have registered for job cards have got them issued. Majority of the job card holders are from “others” category including OBCs. 10% households who have registered are BPL card holders and 86% of the total employment provided is offered to such households. Workers under MGNREGA are entitled to get Rs 189 as their piece rate wages. However, according to the statistics available in the Ministry records, 60% Panchayats are paying average wages greater than Rs 70. In rest of the villages, either there are no wages paid or there are no muster rolls to account for the same. Women participation in employment is around 42%. Work completion rate of different projects under MGNREGS in Mewat is around 81%. (Refer to Appendix Table A1 and A2).

Table 2: Range Wise Average wage paid for Financial Year 2011-2012

Average Wage	No. of Panchayats
Zero(No Wage paid/No Muster Rolls)	159
is less than 30	0
is between 30-50	0
is between 50-70	0
is greater than 70	242
Total	401

Source: Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India

The statistics clearly reflect that Mewat has outperformed in the implementation of the scheme which must have accelerated development in the region. However, whether these figures actually mirror the ground situation remains a question.

This paper attempts to provide an overview of the performance of MGNREGA in Mewat region of Haryana, using administrative data, primary data collated through field reports and qualitative discussions and forays into studying the impact of the scheme on rural households in socio economic domains. Apart from the introduction, this paper is organized in four sections. After the introduction in first section, the subsequent section deals with analysis of the status of implementation of MGNREGA scheme in Mewat using primary data from 57 villages which amount to 15% of the total villages in Mewat. Section three of the paper displays the results and findings from detailed socio-economic impact of the scheme in one of the villages, Madhi where MGNREGA has been implemented. The paper concludes with concluding remarks in section four.

2. Implementation of MGNREGA in Mewat: A Ground Reality Check

The statistics released officially reflect that MGNREGS has been quite successful and well implemented in Mewat. Even though, the scheme has been widely a success, field reports suggest that Mewat continues to witness low level of development and bleak livelihood options for its households. The disparity needs to be addressed for which primary data from 57 villages has been collected pertaining to the status of implementation of MGNREGA. The results are discussed below which show a contrasting picture when compared with the official statistics.

The primary data reveals that majority of households who have applied for job cards are Muslims. Poor rural households (69%) belonging to either BPL or *Antyodaya* category are largely, the applicants. This signals that employment is majorly demanded by the ones who are relatively poor and in need of a livelihood opportunity. (Refer to appendix Table B1)

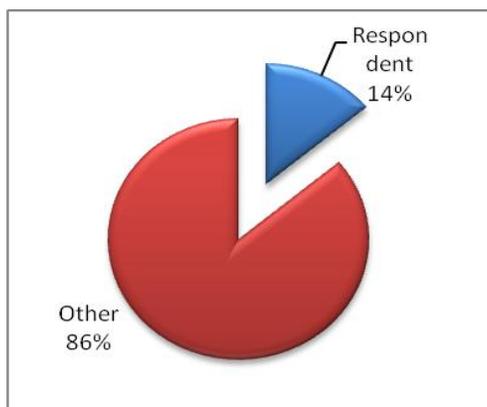
Under the Scheme, unemployed individuals who are willing and available to do unskilled work are entitled to receive job cards. A job card is an essential instrument for a job seeker under the scheme as this is supposed to hold a record of the details of the work done by the individual and the wages paid to him/her. However, in the 57 sampled villages, only 44% applicants have received job cards (Table 3). One of the stipulations under the scheme is that the job card should necessarily be in the possession of the job seeker. In the 57 sampled villages, only 14% applicants have their job cards with them and for the rest, the cards are either with the *Sarpanch* or the *Panchayat* (Figure 1).

Table 3: Frequency of eligible people who received Job cards

Job Card Received	Percentage
Yes	44.3%
No	55.7%

Source: Primary Data, RRC, IRRAD

Figure 1: Distribution of people in terms of custodian of Job Card



Source: Primary Data, IRRAD

To understand the ground situation extensively, an in depth case has been studied of Akheda village in Nuh block of Mewat. The box below details the status of implementation of MGNREGA in Akheda.

Rural Insight: A case of Akheda Village, Nuh Block

Akheda is a village located in the Nuh block of Mewat. Owing to its strategic location near the district headquarters, the village is expected to be utilizing the benefit of MNGREGA effectively. Qualitative discussions with key informants and resource mapping exercises however, reveal a different picture. Only a few job seekers in the village are found to have their job cards in their own possession. Furthermore, they are not aware of their right to demand job

work under the scheme. Resultantly, they assume that as and when work arises, work will be given to them by the Panchayat. Discussion related to MGNREGA has never happened in the *Gram Sabha* of the village. Qualitative discussions indicate that only a handful of Panchayat members and pro-Sarpanch group gather to make decisions regarding the work to be allocated under MGNREGA. Delay in wage payments has also been reported to be one of the problems encountered by workers under MGNREGA. The workers report delay ranging from 1 to 2 years for release of wages. None of the inhabitants mention receiving any facility at the work site.

With respect to work, it was last awarded in the year 2009 under MGNREGA. Thereafter, there has been no work done under the scheme. A pond was created in 2009 which has been given to contractors for fish rearing. The community is not allowed to access water from the pond. No other asset has been created in the village under the scheme. The limited amount of assets created in these villages point to a need to diversify such that the potential in the region can be tapped and the scheme can facilitate rural development.

The scheme entitles a job card holder with 100 days of employment but only a few (1.8%) could get that. The startling fact is that around 32% sampled households in these 57 villages could not obtain any employment at all under the scheme (Table 4). In 21 out of 57 villages, it was reported that no employment was generated at all until the year 2011. Averaging out the number of days of employment received by the job seekers, it emerges that only 21 days of employment was provided under MGNREGA as opposed to 100 days guaranteed under the scheme (Table 5). To further add to the plight, the wages being received by the workers is Rs. 78.51 as against Rs. 179 announced by the Haryana government. This wide gap evident between the guaranteed and realized employment and between the wages announced and received, lead the job seekers under MGNREGA to succumb to an annual loss of Rs. 16251 per household on an average.

Table 4: Distribution according to number of Workdays in a year under MNREGA

Days of employment In an year	Total
Zero	32.0%
1-98	66.1%
100	1.8%

Source: Primary Data, IRRAD

Table 5: Wages earned under MNREGA

Average number of days worked under MNREGA in a year	21 days
Average daily wage earned	Rs. 78.51 per day
Average daily wage under MNREGA	Rs. 179 per day
Average wage earned in a year	Rs. 1649
Average wage entitled to be earned in a year	Rs. 16251

Source: Primary Data, IRRAD

3. Impact on MNREGA on Socio-Economic Indices

Qualitative and quantitative data obtained from the field has been triangulated to assess the impact of MGNREGA on variables like occupation pattern, consumption expenditures, migration, health expenditures and saving behavior. For an in depth analysis, responses from 60 households from Madhi village⁷ have been used for the analysis where 30 households are the ones who have adopted MGNREGA and rest 30 are those who have not adopted MGNREGA.

3.1 Income from MGNREGA supporting livelihood

It is interesting to note that the wages received under the scheme differs within the geographical boundary of village Madhi. People have reported to receive piece rate wages ranging from Rs. 160-180 (Table 6). Since earnings in one day depend on the work potential of a laborer, wage earnings per day ranges from Rs. 160-900 and on an average, a worker earned Rs. 489.83. The total earnings accrued by a household upon working under the scheme average around Rs 3000.

Table 6: Wages and earnings details under MGNREGA

	Range	Average
piece rate wages	160-180	171.33
per day earnings	160-900	489.83
total earnings	1000-9600	3070.63

Source: Primary Data

It has been observed that most of the households have spent maximum amount of their earnings under the scheme on food, clothing and health (Table 7). The money has been basically used for subsistence. In very few cases, money has been spent on education, and debt repayment. There has also been no case of capital formation in agriculture or any other income generating activities.

Table 7: Usage of earnings from MGNREGA

spending level	food	clothes	education	health	luxury assets	agriculture assets	festivals and celebrations	debt repayment
not spent	0	10	27	7	29	30	27	28
less spent	10	20	2	20	0	0	0	2
more spent	20	0	1	3	1	0	3	0

Source: Primary Data

3.2 Education pattern

Table 8 below highlights that the rate of enrollment is higher in case of households who have adopted MGNREGA scheme as opposed to the ones who have not adopted. Additionally, the dropout rate is also found to be higher in the latter group. This is seemingly because this group

⁷ In this village, a lot of work under MNREGA has been carried out in the past 2 years

reports high migration levels and therefore does not allow their elder children to attend school. Instead, they prefer that the elder children look after the younger siblings in their absence.

Table 8: Education status of children (6-14 years) of sample households

Gender	Enrolled		Drop Out		Not attended	
	MGNREGA workers	MGNREGA non- workers	MGNREGA workers	MGNREGA non- workers	MGNREGA workers	MGNREGA non- workers
Boys	56.10%	36.89%	0.00%	0.00%	7.32%	17.48%
Girls	28.05%	28.16%	2.44%	1.94%	6.10%	15.53%

Source: Primary Data

3.3 Migration

It is evident that the ratio of people migrating outside the village for earning a livelihood is quite significant for the households who have not worked under the scheme. However, it is important to note that this migration is only on a temporary basis (either daily or weekly). The average wage earned by MGNREGA non- working households (Rs. 478.57) is little less than the average wage received under MGNREGA (Rs. 489.93) (Table 9). The opportunity cost of workers under MGNREGA is Rs. 257.14 on an average. These facts support that workers working under the scheme are probably unskilled workers and MGNREGA has helped increase their earnings.

Table 9: Migration of sample households

Column1	Migration	Wage Range	Average Wages
MGNREGA workers	46.70%	200-300	257.14
MGNREGA non-workers	70.00%	200-1000	478.57

Source: Primary Data

3.4 Savings and Debt

The households who have worked under MGNREGA do not report any savings during the last year and are found to be highly indebted. Contrastingly, majority of the non- participating households have saved money last year with only 36% being indebted. Average saving for this group is Rs. 10793.33 annually. However, the average debt for non participating households is approximately 10 times the average debt of the participating households which is seemingly because they are earning more, therefore saving more.

Table 10: Savings behavior of sample households

Savings and debt	MGNREGA workers	MGNREGA non-workers
Savings	0%	48.94%
debt	93.33%	36.17%
Average savings	0	10793.33
Average debt	4116.07	40583.33

Source: Primary Data

3.5 Health Behavior

The rate of incidence of diseases has been roughly the same for both the groups but average expenditure on health related issues has been more for the non- participant group of households. This could possibly be because this group belongs to a relatively prosperous class and can afford expensive medical treatment.

Table 11: Incidence and Health Expenditures

	MGNREGA workers	MGNREGA non-workers
incidence of diseases	14.21%	14.76%
average health expenditures	2242.86	3335.55

Source: Primary Data

4. Conclusion

The analysis concludes that the official statistics report effective implementation of the scheme in Mewat. The statistics for Mewat have outdone the statistics for Haryana as a whole despite being an extremely economically backward district. However, ground level surveys and analysis bring the actual scenario in limelight where implementation is still inefficient with a lot of loopholes. The eligible job seekers are not getting their job cards and even if they get, it's not kept with them. Rather, the cards are confiscated by the Sarpanch or Panchayat members. Wage payments being made are way less than the announced wage for the state and not even provided on time. The bottom up approach for decision making is not being followed and assets are created on a target based and not priority or need based approach. The range of assets being created under the scheme is very limited. For a village like Madhi, the scheme has shown positive impact on education and the wages have helped the poverty stricken households gain employment thereby contributing to their living for subsistence. Given the current scenario, the felt need is willingness of the sarpanch and other village functionaries' to make coordinated efforts to realize the scheme benefits. At the same time, there is a dire need to increase awareness among the targeted beneficiaries about their entitlements and the importance of Gram Sabha in decision making. Another step which is called for is to get an efficient monitoring mechanism in place so as to check corruption at various levels.

The analysis confirms the income stabilizing role of MGNREGA and suggests that a major motivation for participation may be the expected reduction of uncertainty associated with what amounts to a form of social insurance. As pointed out by Shah (2007), the scheme can only be made successful and effective, if a consensus is built creating sensitivity towards each others' needs, especially when those in power carefully listen to those in distress. A democracy will thrive only to the extent there is room for expression and redressal of the legitimate grievances of those who still suffer.

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APPENDIX

Table A1: MGNREGA statistics of Mewat in comparison to Haryana in 2010-11

	Mewat	Haryana
<u>Population Total (in lakhs)</u>	8.46	175
SCs:	0.57 (6.79%)	37 (21.14%)
STs	0	0
Others	7.89 (93.21%)	138 (78.86%)
<u>Employment provided to households (Persondays [in Lakh])</u>	0.09751 Lakh	2.77286 lakh
Total:	6.1	108.92
SCs:	0.9 [14.75%]	54.09 [49.66%]
STs:	0 [0%]	0.02 [0.02%]
Women:	2.59 [42.46%]	39.7 [36.44%]
Others:	5.2 [85.25%]	54.81 [50.32%]
<u>Total fund: Rs.</u>	29.31 Crore.	274.66 crore
Expenditure:	13.78 Crore.	316.6 crore
Total works taken up:	507	18738
Works completed:	364	3881
work completion percentage	71.79%	20.71%

Source: Ministry of Rural Development and Ministry of drinking water and sanitation, Government of India

Table A2: Asset creation and employment in Mewat district of Haryana

Type of work	Employment		work status					
	Women	Men	Completed		Ongoing/Suspended		Approval not in progress	
			Project	Expenditure (in lakhs)	Project	Expenditure (in lakhs)	Project	Expenditure (in lakhs)
Rural connectivity	5840	7797	401	914.307	31	111.611	30	0
Flood control	54	63	4	6.4887	1	4.1774	0	0
Water conservation and water harvesting	2210	2964	89	258.884	1	1.2494	34	0
Drought proofing	218	290	19	22.8487	0	0	5	0
Micro irrigation	445	641	31	51.2889	1	2.2876	0	0
Provision of irrigation facility of land development	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Renovation of traditional water bodies	85	103	3	1.9958	0	0	1	0
Land development	1676	2227	60	143.699	0	0	1	0
Any other activity approved by MRD	21	18	1	1.6862	0	0	0	0
Rajiv Gandhi Seva Kendra			0	53.6882	0	0	0	0
Total	10549	14103	608	1401.2	65	173.013	79	0

Source: Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India

Table B1: Category wise distribution of households who have applied for job cards

Category	Frequency of households	Percentage
On the basis of religion		
Hindu	135	28.48%
Muslim	338	71.31%
On the basis of caste		
General	2	0.42%
SC	114	24.05%
ST	0	0.00%
OBC	358	75.53%
On the basis of card holder		
APL	112	23.63%
BPL	271	57.17%
Antyodaya	56	11.81%
No card	25	5.27%

Source: Primary Data

Table C1: Income group classification of the sample households

Type of card	MGNREGA workers	MGNREGA non- workers
APL	10.00%	43.30%
BPL	40.00%	40.00%
Antyodaya	40.00%	3.30%
No Card	10.00%	13.30%

Source: Primary Data