



A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY ON SOCIAL EMPOWERMENT OF WORKERS THROUGH MGNREGS IN KARNATAKA

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the sociological role of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) in facilitating social empowerment among various social groups in Karnataka. By providing guaranteed wage employment, generating income, alleviating poverty, creating durable assets, promoting social inclusion, and encouraging participation in decision-making processes, the scheme contributes significantly to the social empowerment of marginalized communities. The research examines how MGNREGS functions as a tool for socially inclusive development, particularly among disadvantaged groups in the state. The study is mainly two objectives: 1) to study the performance and functions of MGNREGS in promoting the social empowerment of workers in Karnataka and 2) to analyze the scheme's impact on employment generation across different social groups in the state. According to the exponential growth model result, employment generated under MGNREGS has grown at an average rate of 4.3% during the study period, and this growth is statistically significant at the 1% level. The model demonstrates a high goodness-of-fit ($R^2 = 34.3\%$). However, we reject the null hypothesis. Hence, this result implies that MGNREGS has played a significant role in generating employment among different social groups in Karnataka.

KEYWORDS : Performance, Functions, Employment Generating and Social Empowerment.

INTRODUCTION

The MGNREGS has emerged as a transformative policy tool aimed at increasing participation among different social groups in Karnataka. MGNREGS contributes to the social empowerment of workers by providing guaranteed wage employment, equal wages, improving economic security, enhancing women's participation and independence, fostering grassroots democracy through community involvement and planning, and creating durable assets and resources that enhance the overall quality of life for rural communities among different social groups. These outcomes foster a greater sense of participation and self-determination, thereby addressing entrenched societal inequalities.

Objectives

1. To study the performance and sociological elements of MGNREGS for social empowerment in Karnataka.
2. To analyse the impact of MGNREGS on social empowerment of workers in the state.

Hypothesis

1. The MGNREGS has played a statistically significant role in generating employment among different social groups in Karnataka.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study adopts a descriptive and analytical research design, relying primarily on secondary sources to examine the performance and impact of the MGNREGS on the social empowerment of workers at different social groups in Karnataka. The secondary data were collected from various reports including Government reports and official documents (Ministry of Rural Development, Government of Karnataka), MGNREGS official website and MIS portal, National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) reports, Census of India, scholarly articles, research papers, and academic journals. These sources provided both qualitative insights and quantitative data on worker participation, wage distribution, and job card issuance.

Statistical Tools and Techniques: To analyze trends in employment generation and participation among various social groups under MGNREGS in Karnataka, the Exponential Growth Model was employed as a statistical tool for this study. This model is particularly useful for examining the rate of change over time and identifying growth patterns through SPSS software and Gretl. The exponential growth model is expressed as:

$$Y = a \cdot e^{bt}$$

Where,

- Y = value of the variable at time t
- a = initial value
- b = growth rate
- e = Euler's number (approx. 2.718)
- t = time (in years)

The model was applied to time-series data spanning multiple years to determine whether MGNREGS participation and impact indicators show increasing, decreasing, or stagnant trends across various social groups in Karnataka.

Performance of MGNREGS in Karnataka

MGNREGA was introduced in 2005; it is one of the world's largest public works programmes. Its legal guarantee of employment makes it a unique rights-based approach to social protection at different social groups. The scheme not only cushions vulnerable populations against seasonal unemployment and economic distress but also strengthens rural economies through asset creation, water conservation, and improved land productivity. That means this scheme provides guaranteed employment and creates assets for vulnerable groups in Karnataka, including SC/ST households, women, and small farmers, fostering economic empowerment and improving living standards. The scheme is implemented through community participation and aims to create a social safety net by providing a source of wage employment and strengthening the natural resource base, thus transforming the geography of poverty in rural areas.

Sociological Elements of MGNREGS for Social Empowerment

Sociologically, the MGNREGS promotes social empowerment by fostering the social inclusion of women and marginalized communities through mandated reservations and equal wages. It enhances women's empowerment by increasing their economic power and bargaining ability, resulting in benefits for child education and household resource allocation. The scheme also fosters community participation through social audits and ensures economic stability by providing a safety net.

- **Guaranteed Employment:** The act guarantees at least 100 days of wage employment in a financial year to every rural household that is willing to do unskilled manual work.
- **Women's Empowerment:** A key element of MGNREGS is the provision for at least one-third of workers to be women,

directly addressing gender-based vulnerabilities in the labour market and incorporating women into the productive economy.

- **Improved Educational Outcomes:** Increased workers' wages from MGNREGS can lead to greater investment in children's schooling and improved educational attainment for children in participating households.
- **Vulnerable Groups:** The scheme is designed to provide a safety net for vulnerable groups, including SCs, STs, women-headed households, and other marginalized populations.
- **Empowerment Through Work:** By providing a reliable source of employment and income, MGNREGA seeks to enhance the livelihood security and economic independence of these communities.
- **Sustainable Development:** In addition to employment, the scheme promotes sustainable development through projects focused on water conservation, afforestation, soil health improvement, and other ecological restoration efforts.
- **Safety Net:** MGNREGS provides a vital social protection mechanism, guaranteeing wage employment to rural households, which helps to reduce poverty and prevent households from falling below the poverty line at different social groups.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Employment Generation in Different Social Groups Through MGNREGS in Karnataka

In Karnataka, the implementation of MGNREGS has led to the significant inclusion of social development in the different social groups. The MGNREGS has played a significant role in generating employment among various social groups in Karnataka, particularly focusing on directly targets economically and socially disadvantaged groups, including Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), Other Backward Classes (OBCs), landless labourers, and women. As a rights-based employment programme, MGNREGS guarantees 100 days of wage employment per household annually, creating a safety net for rural populations facing seasonal unemployment and income instability in different social groups.

Through this study, the number of registered households under MGNREGA in Karnataka increased by 8.6%. However, despite this rise in registration, the actual employment generated under the scheme declined by 7.1%. Additionally, the average number of workdays per household fell by 4.3%, indicating a reduction in employment intensity. Notably, only 7% of households were able to avail the full 100 days of guaranteed employment, highlighting significant gaps in the scheme's implementation and delivery in the year of 2024–25.

Table-1 Status of MGNREGS in Karnataka (As of 2025)

S. No	Particulars	As of 2025
1	Total No. of Districts	31
2	Total No. of Blocks	232
3	Total No. of GPs	5,958
4	Total No. of Job Cards issued (In Lakhs)	81.94
5	Total No. of Workers (In Lakhs)	185.68
6	Total No. of Active Job Cards (In Lakhs)	41.56
7	Total No. of Active Workers (In Lakhs)	75.63
	(i) SC worker against active workers (%)	18
	(ii) ST worker against active workers (%)	11.09

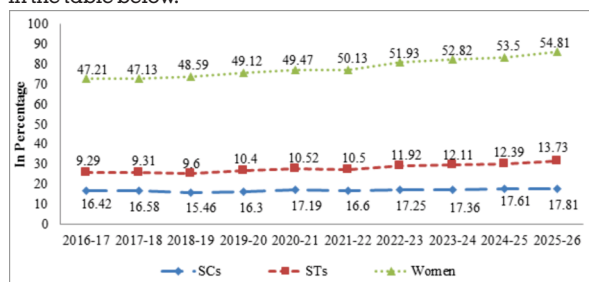
Source: Government of India (2025), Annual Report of Ministry of Rural Development, New Delhi-2025.

As of 2025, the MGNREGS is functional across all 31 districts, 230 blocks, and 5,958 Gram Panchayats in Karnataka. A total of 81.94 lakh job cards have been issued, of which 41.56 lakh are currently active. Out of 185.68 lakh registered workers, 75.63 lakh are active, indicating a substantial level of

workforce engaged under the scheme. Among the active workers, 18% belong to SC and 10.71% to ST, reflecting significant participation from marginalized and vulnerable communities. This scheme plays a vital role in not only generating rural employment but also promoting social empowerment and social equity across Karnataka.

Employment Generation and Participation of Women and Social Groups

MGNREGS aims to enhance the livelihood security of rural households, with a particular emphasis on the social empowerment of SCs, STs, and women. Data from the past decade reveal that these groups have consistently received significant shares of the total person-days generated under the program. On average, SCs accounted for approximately 16.64%, STs for 10.1%, and women for 49.04% of total person-days, highlighting the scheme's role in promoting inclusive and equitable access to rural employment opportunities. The participation of women and various social groups in MGNREGA is assessed based on their respective shares of the total person-days of employment generated, as presented in the table below.



Graph-1 Status of Women and Different Social Groups in Total Person-days under MGNREGS in Karnataka (2016 to 2025)

Source: Government of India (2025), Annual Report of Ministry of Rural Development, New Delhi-2025.

The above graph data indicate the share of women and different social groups in total person-days under MGNREGS from 2016 to 2025. Over the last decade, the share of women in total person-days under MGNREGA has steadily increased from 47.21% to 54.81%, highlighting the scheme's role in promoting gender-inclusive rural employment.

Table - 2 Employment Generation Under MGNREGS in Karnataka (2019 to 2023) (In Lakhs)

Year	Total Households Worked	Total Individuals Worked	Total Person-Days Generated
2018-19	28.01	52.12	1045.01
2019-20	29.58	53.16	1119.45
2020-21	29.12	51.74	1480.32
2021-22	33.85	63.61	1634.93
2022-23	29.95	54.02	1263.96
2023-24	19.74	33.93	1389.73
2024-25	20.17	34.01	1424.78

Source: Government of India (2025), Various Annual Reports of Ministry of Rural Development, New Delhi-2025.

The table above presents data on employment generated under MGNREGS in Karnataka from 2018 to 2024. In 2018–19, the total number of households that obtained work under the scheme was 28.01 lakh. This figure increased significantly to 33.85 lakh in 2021–22, indicating a rise in demand and coverage. However, in 2024–25, there was a sharp decline, with only 20.17 lakh households receiving employment, reflecting a substantial reduction in participation or demand. Through this study, the total number of individuals who worked under MGNREGS in Karnataka was 52.12 lakh in 2018–19. This number increased significantly to 63.61 lakh in

2021–22, indicating a peak in participation. However, it sharply declined to 34.01 lakh in 2024–25, reflecting a notable reduction in individual engagement with the scheme. The highest number of total person-days of employment generated under MGNREGA in Karnataka was recorded in 2020–21, reaching approximately 1,634.93 lakh person-days. Between 2018 and 2024, the total person-days of employment generated under the scheme ranged from 1,045.01 lakh to 1,424.78 lakh, indicating considerable year-to-year variation in employment demand and implementation levels.

Testing Hypothesis

H0: MGNREGS has not played a statistically significant role in generating employment among different social groups in Karnataka.

H1: MGNREGS has played a statistically significant role in generating employment among different social groups in Karnataka.

Table-3 Impact of MGNREGS on Employment Generation at Different Social Groups in Karnataka

Model Summary and Parameter Estimates							
Dependent Variable: Total Public funding							
Equation	Model Summary					Parameter Estimates	
	R Square	F	df1	df2	Sig.	Constant	b1
Exponential	.343	2.612	1	5	.000	1113.664	.043

The table above presents the results of the exponential growth model used to assess the role of MGNREGS in generating employment among different social groups in Karnataka. The analysis indicates that employment generated under the scheme has grown at an average annual rate of 4.3% during the study period. This growth is statistically significant at the 1% level, demonstrating the robustness of the findings. The model also shows a reasonably good fit, with a coefficient of determination (R²) of 34.3%, indicating that a substantial proportion of the variation in employment generation is explained by the model. Based on these results, the null hypothesis is rejected. Therefore, the findings suggest that MGNREGS has played a statistically significant role in generating employment among various social groups in Karnataka.

CONCLUSION

The sociological analysis of the MGNREGS in Karnataka reveals that the scheme has played a pivotal role in fostering social empowerment among marginalized communities, particularly SCs, STs, and women. Over the years, the active participation of these groups—evident through their substantial share in total person-days of employment—underscores the scheme's effectiveness in reaching the most vulnerable sections of society. Furthermore, the creation of durable assets and the strengthening of rural infrastructure have contributed to long-term improvements in the quality of life and social capital in rural areas. Despite challenges such as declining participation in recent years and administrative bottlenecks, the overall impact of MGNREGS in Karnataka demonstrates its significance as a tool for social inclusive development and grassroots empowerment. In conclusion, MGNREGS stands as a critical instrument for advancing social justice, reducing inequalities, and empowering rural communities in Karnataka. Continued efforts to strengthen implementation, ensure timely wage payments, and expand awareness are essential to sustain and deepen the scheme's sociological impact.

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