



SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACT OF MGNREGS ON SCHEDULED TRIBES

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The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) was officially declared on 7 September 2005. Its primary objective is to ensure 100 days of guaranteed wage employment per financial year (FY) for every rural household whose adult members willingly engage in unskilled manual labor. The program aims to achieve various goals, including providing a minimum of 100 days of work based on demand, leading to the creation of productive assets with specified quality and productivity. It also focuses on enhancing the livelihood resource base of the impoverished, actively promoting social inclusion, and strengthening Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs). The initial implementation covered 200 rural districts starting from 2 February 2006. In the fiscal year 2007–08, an additional 130 rural districts were included, and the remaining districts were brought under MGNREGA from 1 April 2008. Since 2008, MGNREGA has encompassed the entire country, excluding districts with a 100 per cent urban population. Each household is entitled to 100 days of employment annually, while Forest Rights Act (FRA) beneficiaries are entitled to 150 days. In certain regions, such as Rajasthan, specific communities like the Sahryias have been granted an entitlement of 200 days.

The term 'Scheduled Tribes' was initially introduced in the Constitution of India. Article 366 (25) defines scheduled tribes as "such tribes or tribal communities or parts of or groups within such tribes or tribal communities as are deemed under Article 342 to be Scheduled Tribes for the purposes of this constitution." Article 342 outlines the procedure for specifying scheduled tribes. The President, in consultation with the Governor of a State (in the case of a state), may, through public notification, designate the tribes or tribal communities or parts of or groups within tribes or tribal communities that are deemed, for the purposes of this constitution, to be scheduled tribes in relation to that state or Union Territory.

The Scheduled Tribes (STs) in the country represent one of the most marginalized segments of society, comprising 8.6 percent of the total population according to the 2011 Census. The development of STs is a constitutional mandate. Since independence, the Government of India has implemented numerous programs aimed at enhancing the quality of life for STs, with special provisions designed to protect them from exploitation. Substantial financial resources have been allocated for their development, spanning successive Five-Year Plans. Special initiatives and substantial funding from the central government are directed toward developmental projects in tribal areas. However, despite these concerted efforts, the outcomes reveal a development gap that is far from satisfactory.

Review Of Literature

Harender Raj Gautam and Sharma H.L. (2014) discovered that MGNREGA has effectively contributed to the well-being of marginalized and underprivileged segments of society. Indications point to substantial involvement from marginalized communities, including the Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs). Nationally, the proportion of SCs and STs engaged in MGNREGA work has consistently remained high, fluctuating between 40 per cent and 60 per cent throughout each year of the program's implementation. The participation rates of SCs and STs in the program surpass their percentage representation in the overall population across most states.

Keshlata (2014) endeavored to assess the progress of Scheduled Tribes by examining the impact of MGNREGA on their development. The

findings indicate that Scheduled Tribes rank at the lower end of the development spectrum concerning key parameters such as literacy, health indicators, and poverty levels. While it is undeniable that MGNREGA has brought about social and economic empowerment to some extent among tribal households, there is a pressing need for targeted focus and attention. The lack of awareness persists among Scheduled Tribes, primarily due to high illiteracy rates, and they continue to adhere to traditional practices and habits, such as alcohol consumption and early marriages.

Diego Maiorano and Chakradhar Buddha (2014) outlined measures that could significantly enhance the implementation of the MGNREGS in tribal regions of Andhra Pradesh. The research reveals that Scheduled Tribes are the most disadvantaged groups in Indian society, often residing in remote areas with minimal economic activity. The MGNREGA serves as a vital safety net against hunger and destitution, especially during the challenging agricultural season in tribal areas. It is imperative to consider the unique ecological, social, cultural, and economic conditions of these regions. While the state administration made a genuine effort to address these factors, a more substantial commitment is required to bridge the gap between government directives and on-the-ground realities.

In a study conducted by Srivatsa (2015), the focus was on the health issues faced by tribal communities. The findings reveal that while the general health of the average non-tribal Indian is already inferior to that of Western and many Asian counterparts, the health of the average Indian tribal individual is even more compromised compared to their non-tribal counterparts. The health status of tribal populations is particularly alarming, especially among primitive tribes, primarily due to their isolation, remoteness, and limited exposure to the ongoing developmental processes in India.

According to Uma C. Saha and Kalyan B. Saha (2018), the tribal population faces challenges in distinguishing between what is beneficial and detrimental due to high illiteracy rates, limited educational opportunities, and a lack of exposure to the outside world. The majority of rural tribal communities live below the poverty line, and financial constraints impact the extent and type of healthcare they can access. This financial strain also determines the ability of households to maintain their living standards when a family member falls ill. Cultural differences between tribal groups and non-tribal healthcare providers contribute to insensitive, dismissive, and discriminatory behavior from healthcare personnel. In tribal areas, there is a consistent shortage of healthcare facilities, including insufficient infrastructure, a lack of drugs and diagnostic resources, and a shortage of qualified personnel.

Sandip Satpati and Kaushal Kumar Sharma (2021) sought to examine the livelihood choices and security of tribals in West Bengal. The primary finding of their research indicates that the increasing demands of the tribal population cannot be adequately met by small landholdings and traditional technology. The depletion of forest resources is accelerating due to extensive industrial requirements and the growing needs of households. Consequently, tribal communities are now compelled to cover greater distances to gather forest products compared to previous practices.

Objectives and Methodology

The objectives of this study are multifaceted, aiming to compre-

hensively evaluate the socio-economic impact of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) on scheduled tribes. Firstly, the study seeks to assess changes in expenditure patterns, with a focus on food items, non-food items, health expenses, and clothing, post-MGNREGS implementation. Additionally, the research aims to examine the perceived impact of MGNREGS on the ability of scheduled tribes to meet health expenditure, and to evaluate the qualitative and quantitative shifts in lifestyle and overall standard of living. Moreover, the study explores the cultural and artistic implications of increased clothing expenditure, investigating potential connections to the preservation and promotion of indigenous artistry. Ultimately, the research endeavors to quantify the overall socio-economic impact of MGNREGS on scheduled tribes, offering a nuanced understanding that can inform targeted policy recommendations for the improvement of the scheme's effectiveness in addressing the unique needs of these communities.

This study adopts a quantitative approach, utilizing primary data collected through face-to-face interviews employing an interview schedule. A random sample of 640 Scheduled Tribe workers participating in the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) is selected from Vizianagaram district in Andhra Pradesh. The data analysis involves applying descriptive statistics. Despite potential limitations such as self-reported data and sample size constraints, this research strives to offer valuable insights into the MGNREGS experiences of Scheduled Tribe workers in Vizianagaram district.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Expenditure on Food Items after the MGNREGS

The analysis of Table 1, detailing their opinions on the expenditure on food items post the implementation of MGNREGS, reveals a predominantly positive trend, with 71.70 per cent expressing a perception of "Highly improved." However, nuances emerge as 16.40 per cent perceive only a slight improvement, and 2.00 per cent report no improvement at all. This spectrum of opinions underscores the varied impact of MGNREGS on food expenditure among individuals.

Table -1 Expenditure On Food Items After The Implementation Of MGNREGS

Opinion of the Respondents	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Not improved at all	13	2.00
Slightly improved	105	16.40
Moderately improved	27	4.20
Improved	36	5.60
Highly improved	459	71.70
Total	640	100.00

Source: Computed from the Primary Data.

Expenditure on Non-food Items

The presented data in Table 2 delineates the distribution of sample respondents based on their opinions regarding the impact of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) on non-food item expenditures. The majority of respondents, constituting 30.90 per cent of the total sample, expressed a perception of improvement, while 22.80 per cent felt a slight improvement. Meanwhile, 22.50 per cent asserted that there was no improvement at all, and 12.70 per cent believed there was a high level of improvement. The remaining 11.10 per cent considered the improvement to be moderate. The table provides a snapshot of the varied perspectives within the sample regarding the effectiveness of MGNREGS in influencing non-food item expenditures.

Table -2 Expenditure On Non-food Items After The Implementation Of MGNREGS

Opinion of the Respondents	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Not improved at all	144	22.50
Slightly improved	146	22.80
Moderately improved	71	11.10
Improved	198	30.90
Highly improved	81	12.70
Total	640	100.00

Source: Computed from the Primary Data.

Health Expenditure

The data presented in Table - 3 provides a comprehensive distribution of sample respondents categorized by their perceived ability to meet

health expenditure after the implementation of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS). The figures indicate that a majority of the respondents perceive high improvement in their ability to meet health expenditures (39.10 per cent) and about 33 per cent of the respondents perceive improvement. Moderate level of improvement in their ability to meet health expenditure is reported by around 21 per cent of the respondents.

Table – 3 Ability To Meet Health Expenditure After The Implementation Of MGNREGS

Opinion of the Respondents	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Not improved at all	3	0.50
Slightly improved	42	6.60
Moderately improved	131	20.50
Improved	214	33.40
Highly improved	250	39.10
Total	640	100.00

Source: Computed from the Primary Data.

Clothes expenditure after the implementation of MGNREGS

The data presented in Table - 4 illustrates the distribution of sample respondents based on their opinions regarding the improvement in clothes expenditure after the implementation of MGNREGS. The majority of respondents, constituting 61.70 per cent, perceive a moderate improvement, while 28.60 per cent believe that there is an improvement. Conversely, a smaller proportion of respondents, 5.80 per cent, express the view that there has been no improvement at all. Furthermore, only 3.90 per cent of respondents consider the improvement to be highly significant.

Table -4 Clothes Expenditure After The Implementation Of MGNREGS

Opinion of the Respondents	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Not improved at all	37	5.80
Moderately improved	395	61.70
Improved	183	28.60
Highly improved	25	3.90
Total	640	100.00

Source: Computed from the Primary Data.

Improvement In Lifestyle After The Implementation Of MGNREGS

The presented data in Table 5 outlines the distribution of sample respondents based on their opinions regarding the improvement in lifestyle following the implementation of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS). The table indicates that a substantial proportion of respondents perceived a positive change in lifestyle, with 57.00 per cent expressing that their lifestyle had improved, and a further 17.30 per cent stating that it had highly improved. In contrast, 25.00 per cent of respondents believed that their lifestyle had moderately improved, while a small percentage of 0.60 per cent asserted that there was no improvement at all. This distribution suggests a notable overall positive sentiment among the sampled population regarding the impact of MGNREGS on their lifestyle.

Table -5 Improve In Lifestyle After The Implementation Of MGNREGS

Opinion of the Respondents	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Not improved at all	4	0.60
Moderately improved	160	25.00
Improved	365	57.00
Highly improved	111	17.30
Total	640	100.00

Source: Computed from the Primary Data.

Overall Standard Of Living

The data presented in Table - 6 outlines the distribution of sample respondents based on their opinions regarding the overall standard of living after the implementation of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS). The majority of respondents, constituting 42.00 per cent of the total, perceive an improvement, while 23.30 per cent believe in a high level of improvement. Slightly improved and moderately improved categories account for 14.70 per cent and 15.20 per cent, respectively. However, a 4.80 per cent of respondents express that the standard of living has not

improved at all.

Table -6 Overall Standard Of Living After The Implementation Of MGNREGS

Opinion of the Respondents	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Not improved at all	31	4.80
Slightly improved	94	14.70
Moderately improved	97	15.20
Improved	269	42.00
Highly improved	149	23.30
Total	640	100.00

Source: Computed from the Primary Data.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the empirical evidence presented in this research study illuminates the transformative influence of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) on the socio-economic dynamics of scheduled tribes. The observed improvements in food and non-food expenditures, coupled with heightened capabilities to meet health expenses, underscore the tangible benefits that MGNREGS has delivered to these marginalized communities. The noteworthy enhancement in clothing expenditure, reflecting 61.70 per cent of respondents reporting moderate to highly improved spending, not only signifies economic empowerment but also hints at potential avenues for preserving and promoting indigenous artistry. Moreover, the overwhelming majority reporting an improved lifestyle and overall standard of living (74.30 per cent and 65.30 per cent, respectively) points towards a holistic amelioration in the quality of life for scheduled tribes, indicating the success of MGNREGS in fostering sustainable socio-economic development.

As we navigate the implications of these findings, it becomes imperative for policymakers to leverage this success for further targeted interventions. Fostering skill development initiatives, supporting community-based enterprises, and strengthening healthcare provisions are essential considerations. Additionally, acknowledging the cultural significance of improved expenditures, especially in domains such as clothing, may pave the way for culturally sensitive policies that not only elevate economic conditions but also preserve and celebrate the unique heritage of scheduled tribes.

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