

A Critical Appraisal of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MNREGA) in Haryana

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Abstract

It has been well recognised by policymakers that sustainable development can be achieved only when the benefits of economic growth reach the poor and underprivileged sections of society. Despite over half a half-century of planned development, poverty and unemployment continue to plague the Indian economy, particularly in rural areas. One of the major problems facing India is the continued migration of people from rural to urban areas, which is essentially an indicator of the lack of development in the villages. Keeping this in mind, policymakers have taken many policy initiatives and launched many programs for the rural development of the country, focusing on inclusive development. Currently, Inclusive rural development has become a more specific and broader concept and is preferred by policymakers and researchers over the concept of rural development. More specifically, inclusive rural development consists of three highly interrelated dimensions. Economic dimension, Social dimension and Political dimension. One of the major initiatives of the government for the inclusive and sustainable growth of the nation is the launch of MNREGA in India in 2005. The present study attempts to analyse the performance of MNREGA in the state of Haryana from 2017-18 to 2022-23. An attempt has also been made to analyse the role of MNREGA in the state during the pandemic period.

Keywords:

Sustainable Development, Rural Development, MNREGA, Employment Generation, Rural Households.

Introduction

The Indian economy is among the fastest-growing economies of the world, but we cannot deny the fact that despite planned development over the decades, poverty and unemployment continue to plague the Indian economy, particularly in the rural sector. According to a recent report by NITI Aayog (2020), “while 25.01 % of the population was multidimensionally poor in the country, the poverty ratio was as high as 32.75% in rural regions during that year, while this ratio was 8.81 % in urban areas”. This calls for a more inclusive approach as far as the development strategy of the country is concerned. One of the major problems facing India is the continued migration of people from rural to urban areas, which is essentially an indicator of the lack of development in the villages. Keeping this in mind, policymakers have taken many policy initiatives and launched many programs for the rural development of the country, focusing on inclusive development. Currently, Inclusive rural development has become a more specific and broader concept and is preferred by policymakers and researchers over the concept of rural development. More specifically, inclusive rural development consists of three highly interrelated dimensions. Economic dimension, Social dimension and Political dimension. One

of the major initiatives of the government for the inclusive and sustainable growth of the nation is the launch of MNREGA in India in 2005. The present study attempts to analyse the performance of MNREGA in the state of Haryana from 2017-18 to 2022-23. An attempt has also been made to analyse the role of MNREGA in the state during the pandemic period.

Launch of MNREGA: The world's Biggest Employment Guarantee Act

The failure of the trickle-down theory of growth in India highlights the need for a more comprehensive and inclusive approach, as the benefits of economic growth have often failed to reach the most vulnerable sections of society. Therefore, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) was introduced in India in 2005 to provide livelihood security and employment opportunities to rural households. The programme guarantees 100 days of wage employment to every rural household willing to do unskilled manual work. The statute is hailed by the government as **“the largest and most ambitious social security and public works programme in the world”**. In its **World Development Report 2014**, the World Bank termed it a **“Stellar example of Rural Development.”** MNREGA is a powerful initiative that ensures inclusive growth in rural India as it exerts a huge impact on social protection, livelihood security and democratic empowerment. The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Rural Development has recommended a hike in the guaranteed days of work under MNREGA to at least 150 days in a year, from 100 now, for every rural household, though most of the states have not implemented this.

Review of literature

Many studies have been conducted on MNREGA at the national as well as state levels. The following literature review is based on a few studies that are relevant to the present research paper:

Mukherjee (2018) analysed that in West Bengal, the participation of those female workers in MGNREGA was more, whose mobility and social interaction were not restricted by social norms. It was also found that due to their participation in this program, these women have better learning, stronger bargaining power, higher welfare, and better well-being for their children.

Mathur & Bhati (2017) in their study on employment generation for Scheduled Tribe and Schedule Caste through MNREGA in Rajasthan concluded that the share of SC and ST workers in MNREGA was more than their proportion in total population leading to enhancement in their earnings and their status in the family but no household got employment for 100 days as envisaged.

Dhawan and Kumar (2017) evaluated the socio-economic impact of MNREGA in Shimla and Kinnaur districts of Himachal Pradesh. The results revealed that MNREGA had a very positive impact on the state of Himachal Pradesh through enhancing the standard of living, cooperation among people and self-dependence of women.

Dhawan and Kumar (2017) studied social audit and financial aspect of MNREGA in Himachal Pradesh. Results conclude that MNREGA strengthened rural development but financial promises made in scheme were not fully kept due to procedural formalities.

Hussain (2017) investigated the performance of MNREGA in Jammu and Kashmir. The study revealed in comparison to other states, the participation of women was very low in Jammu and

Kashmir. It was also recommended to provide more facilities at the workplace to attract more women to this program.

Ranaware et al (2015) investigated impacts of MNREGA on Maharashtra. It was revealed that MNREGA has been instrumental in the state of Maharashtra through land development, horticulture, water works, infrastructure development and creation of long term assets . Majority of respondents gave very positive feedback about the impact of MNREGA on development of agriculture, roads, toilet and irrigation projects in the state.

Singh et al. (2015) assessed MNREGA's performance in Uttarakhand's Pauri Garhwal area using secondary data. According to the study's findings, a significant number of women participated, many assets were generated, beneficiaries' wages increased, job chances increased, and MNREGA workers' livelihoods and food security improved. In general, MNREGA has either directly or indirectly contributed to the acceleration of rural growth and the reduction of poverty.

Using data mining, Sugapriyan and Prakasham (2015) assessed MNREGA performance in the Kanchipuram district. It was determined that MNREGA has had a major impact on the rural economy by lowering poverty, giving rural residents financial support, and improving their standard of living, financial standing, and employment prospects. The MNREGA's primary flaw was its inefficient grassroots implementation.

Rajamohan and Dhanabalan (2013) noted that MNREGA contributed to the prosperity and poverty eradication in rural areas. The study's findings showed that MNREGA has significantly contributed to rural upliftment through improving wage incomes, reducing poverty, creating job possibilities, fostering gender and caste parity, financial inclusion, insurance coverage, and lowering migration. The MGNREGA's performance in Haryana's Jind district was assessed by Sharma and Didwania (2013). People have a very high level of awareness of socio-economic schemes, according to the report. MNREGA did a great job in terms of the district's financial and physical development.

Chakraborty (2014) using secondary data indicated that procedural delays and structural deficiencies affect the attainment of desired results of employment generation programme. Performance of MNERGA was not satisfactory due to lack of crèche facility, improper drinking water and poor monitoring and supervision of the program .

Esteves et al. (2013) assessed how MNREGA activities' benefits contributed to a decrease in livelihood and agricultural vulnerability. In Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, and Rajasthan, the study compared MNREGA data from 2006–07 and 2011–12. MNREGA had a key role in water conservation, irrigation, land development, drought-proofing through afforestation and tree planting, improving soil fertility, crop productivity, and lowering soil erosion, according to the results.

Konch (2013) examined the effectiveness of MNREGA in creating jobs in India's rural areas. According to the survey, only 46.62% of cardholders received employment through MNREGA for 46.30 days per household annually, indicating that its performance was subpar. Effective training programs, sound financial management, and public involvement in decision-making are all necessary to enhance the scheme's performance.

Using secondary data, Prasad (2012) described the MNREGA's idea, features, funding structure, and performance. The MNREGA program was the only one that significantly contributed to rural workers' employment and poverty alleviation, according to the results. Along with helping to enhance rural infrastructure, this act also decreased the number of rural residents moving to cities in pursuit of employment.

Tiwari et al. (2011) came to the conclusion that MNREGA activity mostly enhanced resource availability and conservation in the Karnataka state. MNREGA had numerous short- and long-term advantages in enhancing environmental services and lowering production and livelihood vulnerability.

Ahuja and Tyagi (2011) concluded that MNREGA gave the rural poor a stable source of income. Although MNREGA was unable to prevent migration in agriculturally developed regions, it did increase the participation of people in agriculture in impoverished areas where it offered paid jobs.

Harish et al. (2011) investigated how MNREGA affected Karnataka's workforce supply and agricultural revenue creation. Wage employment prospects have increased as a result of MNREGA. Additionally, it was noted that labour shortages were a consequence of MNREGA's adoption. In order to solve this problem, jobs under the program should only be offered during the off-season for planting and harvesting.

Dasgupta and Sudarshan (2011) investigated women's involvement in NREGA and the issue of labour market disparity. According to the report, all states saw an increase in women's NREGA participation. Women were paid less than men for doing the same work. Women's participation has been hampered by local conditions, gender relations, and difficulties with NREGA implementation.

NREGA's operations in Maoist states and their effects on the development of those states were examined by Banerjee and Saha (2010). The research was carried out in Odisha, Chhattisgarh, and Jharkhand. The study found that while migration from rural to urban areas steadily decreased, purchasing power, household income, and employment generation all increased following the implementation of NREGA.

Gopal (2009) investigated Andhra Pradesh's social audit issues. According to the study, social audit was an effective method for holding officials accountable for their work performance. During the implementation of NREGA, many crucial factors were overlooked.

Kareemulla et al. (2009) evaluated how MNREGA improved rural livelihoods through soil and water conservation efforts. MNREGA increased wage incomes, decreased migration, and developed rural assets. Instead of giving households 100 days of average employment, the program has only given them 25 days. The program's earnings were mostly utilised for education, food, and health security.

The effect of NREGA on the migration of Tamilnadu's rural-urban population was examined by Jacob (2008). According to the findings, NREGA improved productivity, built infrastructure, closed the divide between rural and urban areas, and offered full employment between agricultural seasons. Due to fewer working days and a lack of childcare facilities at the workplace, rural residents' participation in the program was limited. Biometric employment

cards and social audits contributed to increased transparency and a decrease in unethical behaviour.

Research gap

As evident from the literature review, there is no dearth of studies available on MNREGA. Most studies have been conducted on the role of MNREGA on employment, environmental protection, empowerment of women, reducing income inequalities, migration from rural areas to urban areas and women participation in the context of other states, but there are very few studies in the context of Haryana state. The present study is an attempt to fill this gap. Moreover, no study is available to analyse the role of MNREGA on the rural economy of the state during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Objectives of the study

1. To analyse the performance of MNREGA in the state of Haryana with respect to employment generation, work completed and financial progress.
2. To evaluate the role of MNREGA during the COVID-19 period.
3. To discuss a few challenges related to the MNREGA and suggest a few measures for effective implementation of MNREGA for enhancing the rural development of Haryana.

Research methodology

The present study is descriptive, based on secondary data covering the period from 2017-18 to 2022-23. Data has been collected from the website of the Ministry of Rural Development as well as from the websites specifically designed by the government to study and evaluate the performance of MNREGA at national and state levels, such as <https://nrega.nic.in>, mnregaweb2.nic.in, mnregaweb3.nic.in, mnregaweb4.nic.in, mnregaweb5.nic.in. Also, various other online resources as well as published work have been used to collect the relevant data required for the study. As the study is descriptive in nature, to analyse the collected data, simple statistical tools have been used, such as percentages and graphs, etc.

Mnrega At a Glance – All India Level

MGNREGA has had a positive impact on rural India between 2017 and 2022 by providing employment, reducing poverty, empowering women, promoting social inclusion, and contributing to sustainable development, as shown in the following table :

Table 1- Progress made by MNREGA (2017-18 - 2021-22)- National Level

Progress	FY 2021-2022	FY 2020-2021	FY 2019-2020	FY 2018-2019	FY 2017-2018
Approved Labour Budget[In Cr]	283.7	385.67	277.63	256.56	231.3102
Person days Generated so far[In Cr]	233.92	389.17	265.35	267.96	233.744
% of Total LB	82.45	100.91	95.57	104.44	101.05
as per Proportionate LB	92.94	0	0	0	0
14. SC person days % as of total person days	19.64	19.86	20.38	20.77	21.56

ST person days % as of total person days	17.96	17.91	18.51	17.42	17.49
Women Person days out of Total (%)	54	53.19	54.78	54.59	53.53
Average days of employment provided per Household	38.15	51.52	48.4	50.88	45.69
Average Wage rate per day per person(Rs.)	208.82	200.72	182.09	179.13	169.44
Total No of HHs completed 100 Days of Wage Employment	15,01,597	71,99,849	40,60,463	52,59,502	29,55,152
Total Households Worked[In Cr]	6.13	7.55	5.48	5.27	5.1159
Total Individuals Worked[In Cr]	8.75	11.19	7.88	7.77	7.5916
Differently abled persons worked	4,87,017	6,06,439	4,62,917	4,61,880	4,72,218

Source: mnregaweb5.nic.in

The above table shows the progress of MNREGA at the national level based on various parameters. It is clear from the table that the program has been successful towards achieving more gender equality and also assisting socially unprivileged and differently abled persons in the country. It is also very evident that during the pandemic, the program has created more and more opportunities for employment to fulfil the basic needs of poor people living in rural areas on one hand and also contributed to increasing aggregate demand required for the economic growth of the country during the pandemic. As the variables shown in the table indicate the gradual increase during the period of the study but in the pandemic period there has been significant increase in most of the variables which is a clear proof that government has given a very critical role to MNREGA for protecting the most vulnerable sections of the society living in rural areas. For example, the approved budget was 39% higher in 2020-21 in comparison to the previous year, likewise, there has been a significant increase of 77% in terms of the total number of households that completed 100 days of wage employment in 2022-21 in comparison to 2019-20. As far as women employment is concerned, more than 50% of person days generated under MNREGA are attributed to women only. No doubt, it is a very welcome step taken by the government towards the empowerment of women, leading to the sustainable development of the country.

Performance of MNREGA in Haryana

Since its inception, MNREGA had a significant impact on the economy of Haryana. The program has been instrumental in providing employment opportunities and hence enhancing the rural livelihood of the people in the state. Historically, Haryana is an agrarian state, but as a result of government initiatives, today it is a well-developed industrial state.

A few data support this, including the fact that the state is one of India's major auto hubs and produces 60% of the nation's motorcycles, 50% of its tractors, and two-thirds of its passenger cars. Additionally, the state has become a hub for the biotechnology and IT sectors of the knowledge economy. One of the top locations for IT/ITeS facilities and the third-largest software exporter is Haryana. Notwithstanding these facts, we cannot deny that Haryana remains an agrarian state because 65 per cent of its people reside in rural

villages. Given these data, it is clear that MNREGA plays a significant role in the state's economic development. Naturally, one would also want to know how the initiative is doing in the state of Haryana. To assess MNREGA's performance in Haryana, the following three criteria have been selected for this study:

- Employment Generation
- Works Completed
- Financial Progress

Employment Generation

The program has been instrumental in providing employment opportunities to the rural population facing unemployment due to the pandemic. The program has been used to generate employment opportunities for the rural households, who were affected by the lockdown and subsequent disruptions in the agricultural supply chain. The following tables show the progress of MNREGA concerning Job cards issued and active workers in the state as on May 10, 2023:

Table 2- Job Cards Status As on 10-05-2023

State: HARYANA	As on 10-05-2023
Total No. of Districts	22
Total No. of Blocks	143
Total No. of GPs	6,245
I Job Card	
Total No. of Job Cards issued[In Lakhs]	12.68
Total No. of Workers[In Lakhs]	22.37
Total No. of Active Job Cards[In Lakhs]	6.05
Total No. of Active Workers[In Lakhs]	9.02
(i)SC workers against active workers[%]	46.87
(ii)ST worker against active workers[%]	0

Source: mnregaweb5.nic.in

As shown in the above table, the total number of cumulative job cards issued till May 10, 2023, was 12.68 lakh, while out of this, 6.05 lakh job cards were active. Likewise, out of the total 9.02 lakh active workers, 46.87 % of workers were from the SC category. The impact of MNREGA on Haryana has been significant, with the program providing employment opportunities to millions of rural households in the state. The state government has been implementing the program effectively, with a focus on employing the most vulnerable sections of the population, including women, scheduled castes, and scheduled tribes.

The following tables show the progress of MNREGA with respect to employment generation from 2017-2023:

Employment Generation	FY 2022-2023	FY 2021-2022	FY 2020-2021	FY 2019-20	FY 2018-19	FY 2017-18
Approved Labour Budget [In Lakhs]	125	141	185	100	100	100
Person days Generated so far [In Lakhs]	96.5	146.39	179.62	91.19	77.9	90.37
% of Total LB	77.21	103.83	97.09	91.19	77.9	90.37
% as per Proportionate LB						
SC person days % as of total person days	52.61	42.67	36.54	42.14	45.58	47.66
ST person days % as of total person days	0	0	0	0	0.01	0.01
Women Person days out of Total (%)	59.48	52.67	48.8	50.59	50.05	48.64
Average days of employment provided per Household	31.33	36.26	39.31	35.37	33.73	33.12
Average Wage rate per day per person (Rs.)	327.07	312.75	308.29	286.37	281.27	277.85
Total No of HHs completed 100 Days of Wage Employment	3,455	11,041	14,077	4,831	3,789	3,924
Total Households Worked [In Lakhs]	3.08	4.04	4.57	2.58	2.31	2.73
Total Individuals Worked [In Lakhs]	4.41	5.7	6.51	3.64	3.27	3.96
Differently abled persons worked	571	587	724	514	464	638

Table 3: Performance of MNREGA with respect to Employment Generation
Source: mnregaweb5.nic.in

It is evident from the above table that the amount of approved labour budget has gradually increased during the period of study. It is clear that from 2017-18 to 2019- 20, this amount has been constant at Rs 100 lakh but has drastically increased during the pandemic, 85 % higher in 2022-21 and 45% higher in 2021-22 in comparison to 2019-20. This significant increase in the amount of budget during the pandemic is a reflection of the government's intention to use this program as an instrument to protect the livelihood of the rural poor. Besides, the average daily wage rate has also been increased from Rs 286 per person in the pre-pandemic year to Rs 308 in the pandemic year, showing approximately a 7.7 % increase in a single year, which is the maximum annual increase during all the years of the present study. The total number of households that completed 100 days of wage employment in 2020-21 was 14,077, while this number was just 4831 in pre pre-pandemic year. 27% increase during the COVID-19 year has been a great hope for all those workers who had lost their regular employment due to COVID-19. The total number of households that worked in MNREGA in 2020-21 was 4.57 lakh, while this number was only 2.58 lakh in 2019-20, showing an approximately 77% increase in one

year. All these facts are a clear-cut indication that MNREGA has provided a safety net to the rural poor in Haryana, particularly during the COVID-19 crisis.

By generating more employment opportunities, MNREGA has contributed to the income and consumption patterns of the rural population during the COVID-19 pandemic. The program has provided a source of income for the rural households, who were facing a loss of livelihoods due to the pandemic. This has led to an increase in the purchasing power of the rural households, which has had a positive impact on the local economy. The program has also played a crucial role in addressing the food security challenges in rural areas during the pandemic.

One noteworthy fact is that under this program, on average, 50% of beneficiaries have been women. Thus, this program had a positive impact on the empowerment of women in Haryana. The program has a special focus on employing women, and the state government has been successful in implementing this aspect of the program. Women have been actively participating in the program, which has led to increased economic independence and empowerment of women as well as gender equality.

Work Progress

The program has been instrumental in creating rural assets such as roads, water bodies, and irrigation facilities. This has led to the improvement of connectivity, accessibility, and productivity in the rural areas. Moreover, the program has also contributed to the conservation and rejuvenation of natural resources, which has had a positive impact on the environment. The program requires that 30% of the funds be spent on creating durable assets, such as water conservation structures, rural roads, and public buildings. This has led to the creation of rural infrastructure that has improved the living standards of people in rural areas and increased their access to basic amenities. The following table shows the status of works completed under MNREGA in Haryana from 2017-2023:

Works	FY 2022- 2023	FY 2021- 2022	FY 2020- 2021	FY 2019- 20	FY 2018-19	FY 2017 -18
Number of GPs with NIL exp	1,603	498	496	1,219	1,934	2,002
Total No. of Works Taken up (New+Spill Over) [In Lakhs]	0.3	0.42	0.43	0.29	0.26	0.28
Number of Ongoing Works [In Lakhs]	0.22	0.16	0.21	0.13	0.11	0.16
Number of Completed Works	8,265	26,402	21,451	15,920	15,132	12,407
% of NRM Expenditure (Public + Individual)	69.9	64.07	52.04	61.36	57.81	59.84
% of Category B Works	29	27.37	33.82	20.76	46.45	48.32
% of Expenditure on Agriculture & Agriculture Allied Works	66.95	63.56	56.45	60.71	59.58	63.32

Table 4- Performance of MNREGA in Haryana in terms of Work Progress

Source: mnregaweb5.nic.in

The data shown in the table states that in most of the years of the study, there has been a gradual reduction in the number of Gram Panchayats with nil expenditure. The number of Gram Panchayats with nil expenditure was as low as 496 in 2020-21, while this number was as high as 1219 in 2019-20 and 1934 in 2018-19, just before the pandemic. Significant increase in expenditure by Gram Panchayats during the COVID period has provided wage income to the most needy people who lost their livelihood due to the lockdown in the pandemic. Also, on average, 60% of total expenditure has been incurred on Agriculture and Allied Activities, which is the main occupation of 65% of the total population living in rural areas. The same is applicable regarding the number of works completed; this number was 15920 in 2019-20, which rose significantly to 21451 and 26402 in 2020-21 and 2021-22, respectively. As the number of works completed has increased significantly, it has resulted in the development of rural infrastructure in Haryana.

Financial Progress

To assess the performance of MNREGA in terms of financial progress based on the parameters as shown in the following table :

Table 5- Performance of MNREGA in Haryana in Terms of Financial Progress (In Lakh Rs)

Financial Progress	FY 2022-2023	FY 2021-2022	FY 2020-2021	FY 2019-20	FY 2018-19	FY 2017-18
Total center Release	37797.96	66003.58	77666.71	34526.69	35625.15	30140.64
Total Availability	55438.53	72132.52	83154.97	37582.34	40281.99	33245.24
Percentage Utilization	84.88	98.02	96.51	103.02	91.33	96.18
Total Exp (Rs. in Lakhs.)	47,057.77	70,706.36	80,255.41	38,716.43	36,788.40	31,976.24
Wages (Rs. In Lakhs)	30,572.27	45,333.39	54,907.59	26,572.96	22,464.22	24,868.42
Material and skilled Wages (Rs. In Lakhs)	15,271.48	24,236.09	24,021.98	10,984.03	13,045.23	5,962.28
Material (%)	33.31	34.84	30.43	29.25	36.74	19.34
Total Admin Expenditure (Rs. in Lakhs.)	1,214.02	1,136.88	1,325.83	1,159.44	1,278.95	1,145.54
Admin Exp (%)	2.58	1.61	1.65	2.99	3.48	3.58
Average Cost Per Day Per Person (In Rs.)	460.05	397.21	406.59	346.67	369.72	330.99
% of Total Expenditure through EFMS	99.99	99.83	99.85	99.65	99.71	99.58

% payments generated within 15 days	87.23	99.85	99.57	95.44	89.26	81.52
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Source: mnregaweb5.nic.in

It is evident from the data that central government has released significant amount for the implementation of MNREGA in the state but there has been extra ordinary increase in this amount during Covid period. For example 125% increase in 2020-21 and 91% increase in 2021-22 in comparison with 2019-20 speaks volume about government intentions and efforts to safeguard rural poor from adverse impact of pandemic.

The state government has also discharged its duty towards protecting the rural poor by increasing total expenditure on MNREGA, which was 107% and 82% higher in 2020-21, 2021-22, respectively, in comparison to 2019-20, the pre-pandemic year. Moreover, most of the expenditure has been done on paying wages to the workers, which has recorded a significant hike of 106%, 70 % in 2020-21 and 2021-22, respectively, in comparison to 2019-20. It is also noteworthy that the proportion of admin expenditure in the total expenditure has declined radically, indicating that the state government has left no stone unturned as far as a safety net for the rural poor is concerned. One of the welcome steps taken by the state government is a significant increase in the daily wage rate of MNREGA workers during the pandemic, as shown in the table below :

Table 6- Daily MNREGA Wage Rate in Haryana

Year	Daily Wage in Rs
2009-10	141
2010-11	179
2011-12	179
2012-13	191
2013-14	216
2014-15	237
2015-16	251
2016-17	259
2017-18	277
2019-20	284
2020-21	309
2021-22	315
2022-23	357

Source: mnregaweb5.nic.in

It can be seen from the above table that the wage rate in Haryana has increased with the passage of time. The wage rate, which was just Rs 141 in 2009-10, has been increased to Rs 309 in 2020-21. In the most recent years, wages have shown a relatively steady increase. From 2019-20 to 2022-23, wages increased from Rs 284 to Rs 357. This indicates a more consistent growth pattern during this period. Currently, Haryana ranks top among all the Indian states as far as the wage rate is concerned. The daily wage rate in Haryana is currently Rs 357, while in Madhya Pradesh is the lowest wage rate of Rs 221. It is amazing to know that the wage rate in Haryana is 61.5 % higher than in comparison to Madhya Pradesh.

Challenges Faced by MNREGA in Haryana

While the program has been successful in addressing unemployment and poverty in rural areas, it also faces several challenges in the state of Haryana. Some of these challenges include:

- **Delayed Payments:** One of the major challenges faced by MNREGA in Haryana is the delay in wage payments to the workers, which affects the beneficiaries' financial stability.
- **Limited Awareness and Information:** Lack of awareness and information about the scheme among rural communities in Haryana is another challenge. This results in the underutilization of the program and prevents deserving households from benefiting from it.
- **Corruption and Leakage:** Corruption and leakage of funds within the MNREGA system is a common challenge faced across various states, including Haryana. Instances of fake job cards, ghost workers, and misappropriation of funds have been reported, leading to a significant loss of resources meant for rural development and employment generation.
- **Insufficient Funds Allocation:** Inadequate budgetary allocation for MNREGA can limit its effectiveness. If the allocated funds are insufficient to meet the demand for work, it can result in a shortage of employment opportunities and dissatisfaction among rural job seekers.
- **Lack of Diverse Work Opportunities:** The availability of diverse work opportunities is crucial for the success of MNREGA. In Haryana, the program primarily focuses on unskilled manual labour, such as digging trenches or constructing small-scale infrastructure.
- **Gender Disparity:** Gender disparity is another challenge faced by MNREGA in Haryana. Despite efforts to promote women's participation in the program, there are still cultural and social barriers that prevent women from accessing and benefiting from the scheme.

Suggestions for Effective Implementation

To effectively implement MNREGA in Haryana, several measures can be taken as mentioned below :

- **Awareness and Outreach** of the program should be enhanced to educate the rural population about the benefits and provisions of MNREGA. This can be done through workshops, community meetings, radio programs, and informational pamphlets.
- **Availability of adequate staff and resources** at the block and district levels to manage MNREGA implementation is very necessary. Regular training of officials and staff involved in the process to enhance their skills and knowledge is equally important.
- **Timely issuance of job cards** to eligible individuals will ensure easy accessibility of the program to all eligible individuals.
- **Development of a comprehensive and realistic annual plan** that identifies projects based on local needs and priorities, and proper execution of the planned projects will ensure timely completion and quality work.
- **Encouraging the creation of durable assets** that benefit the community in the long term and focusing on projects like water conservation, irrigation, rural infrastructure development, and afforestation will contribute to sustainable rural development.
- **Establishment of robust mechanisms for fund management and transparency** in financial transactions is necessary to monitor the flow of funds, prevent leakages, ensure timely payment of wages. Digital platform can play a significant role for ensuring transparency in this regard to ensure better transparency in all transactions related to the program. Conducting regular social audits to involve local communities in monitoring and evaluating MNREGA projects will ensure transparency and accountability. Establishment of a grievance redressal mechanism at various levels will address workers' complaints and concerns promptly.
- **Promoting skill development** among MNREGA workers to enhance their employability will enable them to undertake other income-generating activities.

- Fostering convergence between MNREGA and other rural development schemes, such as the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY), Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM), and National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM), can maximise the impact and outcomes of these programs.

Conclusion

No doubt that MNREGA has played a vital role in the rural development of Haryana by providing employment, empowering women, creating assets, improving rural infrastructure, and leading to sustainable development. Still, a lot is left to be achieved. Certain critical issues create hurdles in the effective implementation of the program. Addressing these challenges requires a multi-pronged approach to ensure that MNREGA reaches its intended beneficiaries and effectively contributes to poverty alleviation, generating rural employment and contributing to sustainable rural development in the state.

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