

Effect of MGNREGA Scheme on Participants' Employment, Nature of Work and Perception about the Scheme: A Case Study of Karur district of Tamil Nadu

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Abstract

A core objective of the flagship MGNREGA scheme is to guarantee 100 days of employment for every participating household. This scheme is backed by MGNREGA act. The objectives of the study are to assess the effect of the MGNREGA scheme on participant employment, to analyse the number of days of employment provided and the various types of work performed by beneficiaries and to examine participant perceptions regarding the scheme's strengths and effective practices. A multi-stage sampling methodology was utilized. The initial stage involved the selection of Karur district in Tamil Nadu. The second stage comprised the selection of three taluks—Manmangalam, Pugalur, and Aravakuruchi—which exhibited the highest concentration of completed works under the scheme within the district. In the final stage, three villages were randomly selected from within each of the chosen taluks. Five MGNREGA respondents were chosen at random from each village, resulting in a sample of 45 respondents for the study, including 22 scheme participants and 23 non-scheme participants. The study utilized both primary and secondary data sources. There is a clear indication of an increase in the average annual man-days of employment among participants of the scheme. While 100 days of employment per enrolled household are mandated by the MGNREGA Act, this target is frequently unmet by implementing agencies. Field channel cleaning is the prominent MGNREGA work, which is carried out for maximum number of days. Works carried out under the scheme are mostly soil and water conservation. Participants feel contented with the scheme, as it requires no special skill and education, but they also expressed their disappointment over the lack of supervision. Equal wage rate for both men and women, wage disbursement through bank accounts, and availability of basic facilities are considered as good practices associated with MGNREGA scheme as perceived by the participants of the scheme. Implementing agencies must be empowered to provide the full 100 days of employment sought by participants.

Key words: Welfare scheme, Employment creation, Wages, Public sector labor markets, Public investment.

JEL Classification: I380, J2, J3, J450, H400.

Introduction

The intent behind the introduction of MGNREGA Scheme was to provide 100 days of employment for enrolled households. Gram panchayats are the implementing agency in village level. It was expected to improve the status of the rural labours. The growth of wages in agriculture has accelerated at an unprecedented rate since the introduction of MGNREGA scheme in 2005. It is apparent that MGNREGA scheme has a noteworthy effect on both nominal and real agricultural wages; nonetheless, the extent of its influence warrants

more examination (Kumar and Chakraborty, 2016). The MGNREGA scheme has been noted for its varying impacts in agriculturally –advanced and agriculturally backward. Because of higher market wage rates at destinations, MGNREGA scheme has not been able to stop migration from the developed region even if it is a source of employment. Farmers with larger land holdings and more animals are less inclined to take part in MGNREGA scheme (Ahuja *et al*, 2011). By giving women the chance to realize their combined strength, the scheme has the ability to enhance women's empowerment. Participation in the scheme may also change how women and men associate (Pellissery and Jalan, 2011).

There are evidences of reduced infant malnutrition which was linked to MGNREGA scheme participation, potentially through an indirect mechanism including improved birth weight (Nair *et al*, 2013). This scheme is a major factor in the creation of employment. In addition to ensuring food security, it also promotes rural development (Chahal and Kumar, 2020). Despite not being intended as a climate change scheme, this scheme has a much higher possibility of building resilience since it grants rights to the poor. There is a good chance that the scheme can be strengthened in order to contribute more to resilience in the future (Godfrey-Wood and Flower, 2018). Because of the scheme, infrastructure is developed, which is crucial for the growth of both rural and urban areas. Protecting natural resources, such as land, water, and soil, is one of scheme's main objectives. MGNREGA scheme has a beneficial impact on women's employment patterns (Das, 2016). Following the implementation of the scheme, nominal earnings for unskilled workers increased by more than 16 per cent annually, while skilled salaries grew by more than 10 per cent annually. However, considering that the scheme tightened labour markets and that the rate of growth of wholesale agricultural prices more than doubled after it was implemented in 2005, it can be said that rising agricultural commodity prices restored farmers' purchasing power and that, as a result of the scheme's income assurance, which drove away agricultural labour from the farm sector, farmers had to offer higher real wages to retain farm labour. The proportion of employment in agriculture relative to employment in other important economic sectors decreases as the economy expands (Kumar and Chakraborty, 2016). Discrepancies were also discovered in the way the scheme was implemented nationwide (Singh, 2013). Scheme has increased the position of women and their ability to make decisions within the family. There has also been a rise in child enrolment for education (Bhargava, 2013). Through improving wages and expanding employment options, the scheme has reduced poverty. Additionally, by giving the Panchayat Raj Institutions major roles and decentralizing the economy, it has improved the structure of participatory democracy (Alam and Alam, 2014). While it is disputed that the scheme has been successful in reducing rural poverty, but it has been successful in reducing rural hunger. However, it has not been able to fully satisfy the needs of the rural man in terms of social responsibility and wage (Muneeswaran and Selvaraj, 2014). It has been noted that non-food consumption has increased more than food consumption among the recipients; this means that when recipients' income increases, the percentage of income allocated to food decreases, even as total spending increases (Katoch, 2022). The scheme created assets are not eligible to be classified as sustainable assets. Because of the GP's inefficiency, the primary implementing agency lacks the resources that are required, which causes low-value assets to be created with little thought given to their longevity (Dey, 2016). The rate at which the works

are completed is extremely low and has been progressively declining during the years of implementation. The full 100 days of employment are received by only a small number of participating households (Srinivas and Pandyaraj, 2017). Scheme proven to have a favourable effect on the creation of social capital and employment (Deka and Panda, 2015). After the MGNREGA scheme were put into place, workers' average annual person-days of employment grew significantly (Harish *et al*, 2011; Katoch, 2022; Keerthi, 2014; Prakash, 2022; Vanitha and Murthy, 2011). The study's objectives are threefold: (1) to assess the effect of the MGNREGA scheme on participant employment; (2) to analyze the number of days of employment provided and the various types of work performed by beneficiaries; and (3) to examine participant perceptions regarding the scheme's strengths and effective practices.

Data Sources and Methodology

Karur district of Tamil Nadu is the area selected for study purpose. Karur is located on the banks of Cauvery, Amaravathi and Noyal rivers with agriculture and textile industry as the major activities. The study area was finalized using multi stage sampling technique. In the first stage, Karur district was opted. With the help of data available in the national MGNREGA Scheme portal (Ministry of Rural Development), taluks exhibiting the greatest number of completed works were chosen for subsequent analysis. The selected taluks were Manmangalam, Pugalur and Aravakuruchi. Then consequently three villages from each taluk have been selected on the same criteria as of taluks.

The analysis is based on primary and secondary data collected for the 2021-22 fiscal year. To analyze the socioeconomic position of MGNREGA scheme participants and non-participants, primary data were gathered from them. Through the use of pre-tested and structured schedules, information regarding the labor availability for agriculture was gathered from the farmer. Gram Panchayat (GP) offices and the official MGNREGA scheme website served as sources for secondary data pertaining to the release and utilization of funds.

A total sample of 45 individuals was selected for the study. Five individuals were randomly selected from each of the nine villages, yielding a sample of 45 scheme recipients. However, the overall sample comprises of 22 participants of MGNREGA scheme and 23 were non-participants. Limitation of the sample size is due to the resource and time constraints. Data collected were analyzed using,

(i) Paired t-test Method

Paired t-test was used to examine the effects of implementation of MGNREGA scheme on employment. Paired t-test was used as advocated by previous literatures (Harish *et al*, 2011; Katoch, 2022; Kour, 2024; MAHAMMD, 2015; Prakash, 2022; Vanitha and Murthy, 2011). When

related observations are made by the same person under the assumption of randomization, the paired t-test is used (Albassam and Aslam, 2021). This test investigates the null hypothesis that the mean difference between paired observations for a given outcome is zero, against the alternative hypothesis that it is significantly different from zero (Katoch, 2022). Utilizing paired t-test, the level of employment of the participants before the implementation of the scheme was compared to the level of employment of the participants after the implementation of the scheme. The paired t-test given by Equation (1):

$$t = \frac{\sum d}{\sqrt{\frac{n(\sum d^2) - (\sum d)^2}{n-1}}}$$

Where,

d = Difference between the observations, and

n = Number of paired observations.

The decision rule for this hypothesis test is as follows: The null hypothesis is rejected if the computed t-statistic is greater than the critical t-value (or 2); otherwise, the null hypothesis is retained.

(ii) Likert scale

The Likert scale served as the instrument for measuring respondents' attitudes and perceptions regarding the MGNREGA scheme. (Arulraj and Rena, 2021; Naqshbandi and Fazili, 2018; Singh and Kaushal, 2023; Sivasankari and Bharathi, 2012). Likert scales utilize ordered categorical responses (e.g., "strongly agree," "agree," "disagree," "strongly disagree") to measure the degree to which respondents agree or disagree with a given statement. Numerical values are assigned to these categories to facilitate quantitative analysis. The responses were further analyzed by using frequency and percentage of each response category for every scheme aspect. Furthermore, an average scale value was calculated for each type of response to indicate the general perception, where the lower scale values indicate stronger agreement and higher values specify stronger disagreement. Both categorical and quantitative interpretation of the data was the motive behind using above techniques.

Results and Discussion

Performance of the MGNREGA Scheme

The study area recorded the generation of 310,000 person-days of employment (Figure 3). Total SC participation in the study area is 47.58 per cent on average (Figure 2). Female participation is on average of 83.17 per cent and it shows that scheme is predominantly utilized by women. Average number of days of employment per household is 58.97 in the study area (Figure 4). Somur village of Manmangalam taluk has the highest number of completed works numbering to 148 (Ministry of Rural Development).

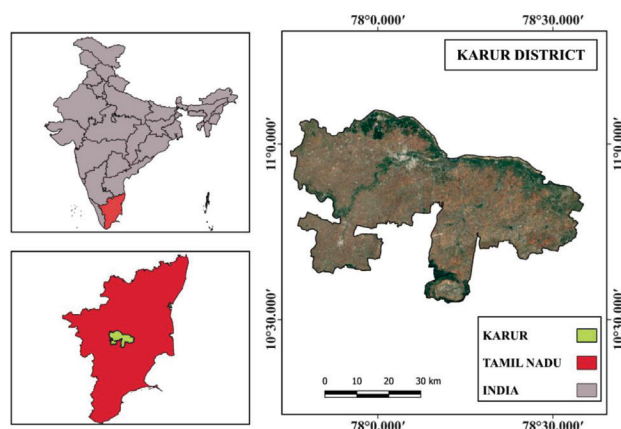


Figure 1: Study Area Map showing the district of Karur

Effect of MGNREGA scheme on beneficiaries' employment

The effect of MGNREGA scheme on beneficiaries' employment after its implementation is studied while comparing it with the employment of the beneficiaries before the scheme's implementation and is given in Table 1. The average employment days of a participant in their own farm before the implementation of the scheme were 72.36 days in a year, while it is 55.59 days after the implementation. So, there is a difference of -23.18 per cent. the study found participants average days of employment outside their own farm were 104.73 days before the scheme implementation and 76.18 days after the scheme implementation. Overall average employment days before the implementation of the scheme is 177.09 days in a year and after the implementation it is 204.23 days in a year, while the average days of employment received from MGNREGA scheme is 72.45 days. The difference is given in paired t value, as -4.8185 for employment days in own farm, 13.2279 for employment days outside the own farm and 6.1783 for total employment days in a year and all are found to be statistically significant. This observation is supported by previous literatures (Deka and Panda, 2015; Harish *et al*, 2011; Keerthi, 2014; Kour, 2024; Prakash, 2022; Vanitha and Murthy, 2011) also reported an increase in total man-days of employment following the implementation of the MGNREGA scheme. A recent study (Balasubramaniam *et al*, 2022) suggests that the rural wage labourers experience improved livelihoods through this scheme, which also enhances the socio-economic status of unskilled village workers and discourages their migration to urban areas. Women, who comprise a significant proportion of the labour force in this study, appear to derive considerable benefits from both increased consumption, enhanced earnings and employment as suggested by research (Balasubramaniam *et al*, 2022; Datta and Goyal, 2020; Mukherjee, 2018; Rodriguez, 2022).

Average duration of MGNREGA employment in various jobs

While the MGNREGA scheme mandates 100 days of employment per household annually, the present study found an average provision of only 72 days. Lack of adequate funds, excessive number of job seekers and limited number of worksites are explained as reasons for not achieving 100 days of employment. The scheme operates with the motive of providing minimum employment for all rather than providing 100 days of employment for a few. This discrepancy is consistent with previous research (Banik *et al*, 2021; Harish, 2020; Kareemulla *et al*, 2009; Kharkwal, 2017; Reddy *et al*, 2021; Viswanathan *et al*, 2014) highlighting the challenges in achieving this target. Figure 5 details the distribution of the 65 total workdays recorded in Manmangalam Taluk. The most prevalent activity was field channel cleaning (15 days, 23%), whereas tree planting constituted the least frequent

activity (2 days, 3%). As shown in the Figure 5 out of all the days worked, households in Pugalur Taluk were employed for a maximum of 9 days in Field Channel Cleaning. 5 per cent of the total number of days worked were spent on canal bunds, Desilting of irrigation tanks, Development of fallow land, which accounted for the least number of days worked. As shown in Figure 5, the most time-intensive MGNREGA activities were field channel cleaning and irrigation canal maintenance (9 days). Conversely, canal bund and farm pond creation required the least amount of time (3 days).

Strengths Associated with MGNREGA scheme

Respondents were asked to scale Strengths associated with the MGNREGA scheme from strongly agree to strongly disagree. This study was carried out in line of previous literatures which identifies MGNREGA scheme as a better option for off-season employment (Kannan and Pravin,

Table 1: Influence of MGNREGA scheme on employment

Particulars	Before MGNREGA Scheme Implementation	After MGNREGA Scheme Implementation	Percentage Change	T value (paired t test)
Average Employment days on the own farm	72.36364	55.59091	-23.18%	4.82*
Average Employment days outside the own farm	104.7273	76.18182	-27.25%	13.23*
Average Employment days under MGNREGA		72.45455		
Total Employment days	177.0909	204.2273	15.32%	6.1783*

*Mark indicates statistical significance ($p \leq 0.001$)

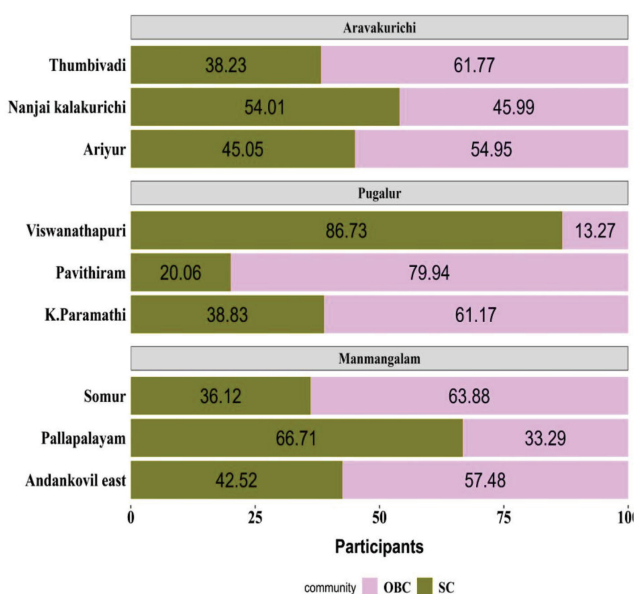


Figure 2: Community Level Distribution of Issued Job Card

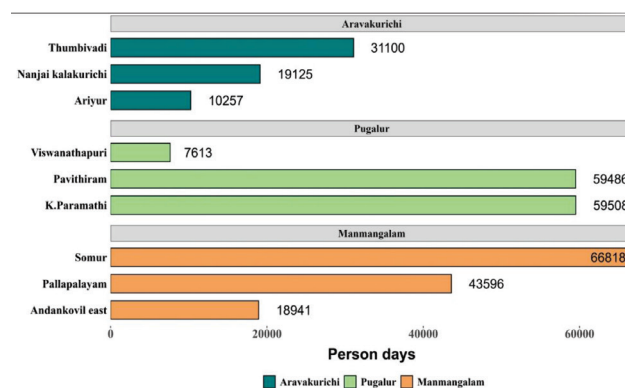


Figure 3: Total Employment Generated (Person-Days) in the Study Area

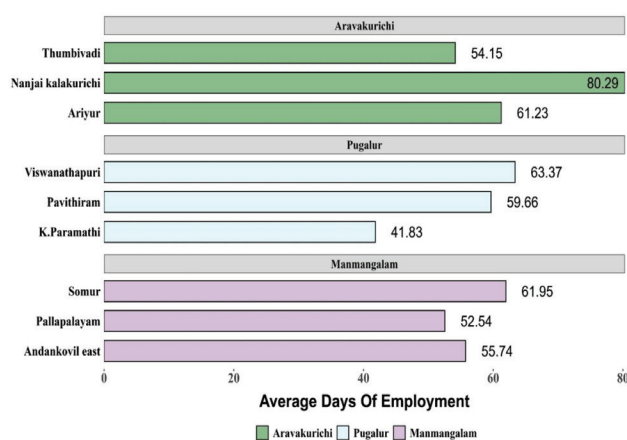


Figure 4: Average Household Employment (Days) Provided by the Program

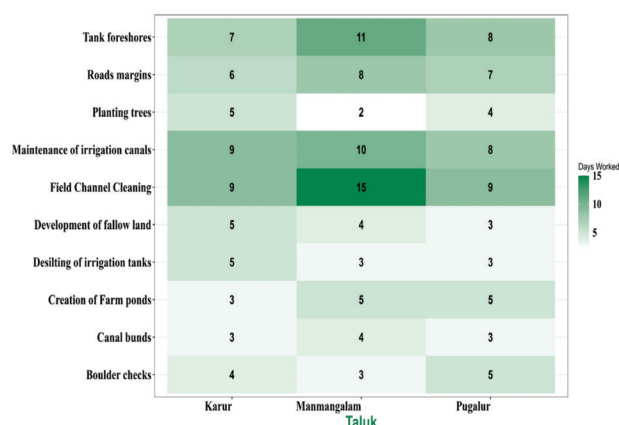


Figure 5: Average number of Employed days in various nature of work under MGNREGA program

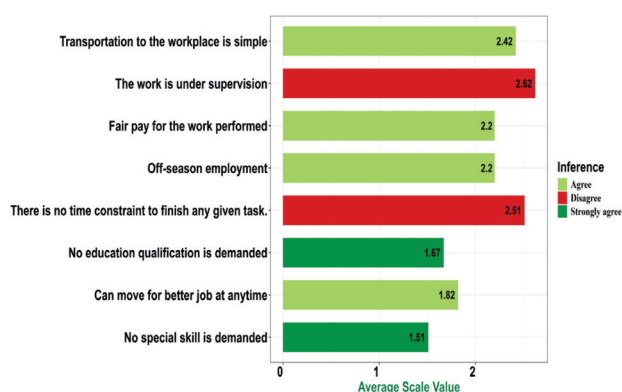


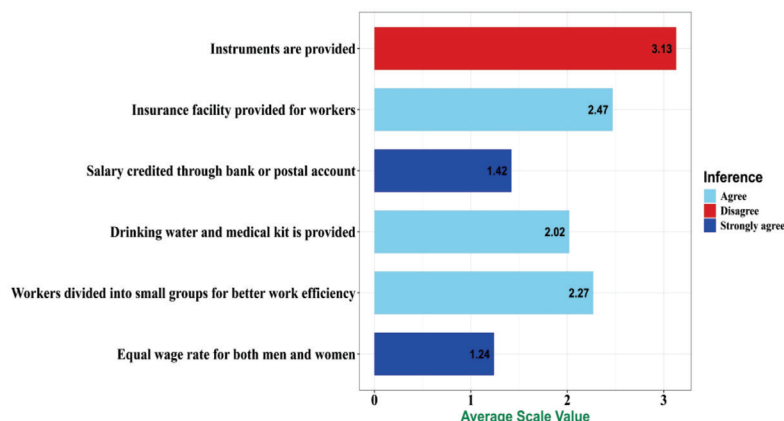
Figure 6. Participants' Perspectives on the Advantage and Strengths of the MGNREGA program

Table 2: Strengths of the MGNREGA Scheme

Particulars	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Average Scale Value	Inference
No special skill is demanded	58%	33%	9%	0%	1.51	Strongly Agree
Can move for better job at anytime	33%	51%	16%	0%	1.82	Agree
No education qualification is demanded	47%	40%	13%	0%	1.67	Strongly Agree
There is no time constraint to finish any given task.	5%	43%	43%	9%	2.51	Disagree
Off-season employment	22%	42%	29%	7%	2.20	Agree
Fair pay for the work performed	22%	49%	16%	13%	2.20	Agree
The work is under supervision	11%	24%	56%	9%	2.62	Disagree
Transportation to the workplace is simple	11%	47%	31%	11%	2.42	Agree

Table 3: Encouraging aspects about the MGNREGA Scheme

Particulars	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Average Scale Value	Inference
Equal wage rate for both men and women	80%	18%	0%	2%	1.24	Strongly Agree
Workers divided into small groups for better work efficiency	18%	47%	27%	9%	2.27	Agree
Drinking water and medical kit is provided	27%	44%	29%	0%	2.02	Agree
Salary credited through bank or postal account	59%	36%	5%	0%	1.42	Strongly Agree
Insurance facility provided for workers	20%	22%	49%	9%	2.47	Agree
Instruments are provided	2%	22%	36%	40%	3.13	Disagree

**Figure 7. Participants' Perspectives Regarding the Encouraging Aspects of the MGNREGA program**

2020). Previous literatures (Kannan and Pravin, 2020) state lack of supervision as weak characteristic of the scheme. These studies are matching with our results. When asked about the strengths under MGNREGA scheme, respondents agreed with benefits such as the ability to move to do a better job at any time, being an off-season employment, fair pay being provided for the work and transportation to the work place was easy (Sefiya and Santha, 2018) as strengths (as shown in Figure 6 and Table 2). No skill (Sefiya and Santha, 2018) (and no education qualification being demanded was strongly agreed as the strengths of the scheme. However, the lack of time constraints to finish any work and work being supervised was disagreed by the respondents.

Participants' Perceptions Regarding the Encouraging Aspects of the MGNREGA Scheme

When asked about the encouraging associated with MGNREGA scheme, respondents strongly agreed, Equal wage rate for both men and women and Salary being credited through bank or postal account as the good practices of

MGNREGA scheme (as shown in Figure 7 and Table 3). Though literature (Sefiya and Santha, 2018) shows a negative impression on mode of payment being bank account, our study finds it to be a very welcomed practice. While workers are being divided into small groups for better work efficiency, provision of workers being provided with drinking water and medical kit and Insurance facility provided for workers were agreed as good practices. The efficacy of the scheme is demonstrably influenced by the availability of childcare and workplace facilities. Studies by (Bhuvana and Krishnamurthy, 2020; Datta and Goyal, 2020; Goyal and Datta, 2020) indicate that deficiencies in these areas correlate with reduced scheme effectiveness. Though a recent study (Sharma and Chauhan, 2020) suggests negatively on the provision of Drinking water, our study finds out a better performance. The characteristic quoted as Instruments being provided under the scheme was disagreed.

Conclusions and Policy Implications

The MGNREGA scheme has been regarded as an

impactful employment opportunity for rural labours across the country. Results from our study also confirm its impact on the employment of rural labours. MGNREGA scheme has significantly contributed to the increase in employment of the rural labours. Though the implementation of the scheme falls short of providing 100 days of employment. Decade-old scheme is struggling with a lack of funds and structural inadequacies. Scheme has laid its deep foundation in the rural economy. Participants of the scheme have agreed upon many worthwhile aspects of the scheme, but are still concerned about the implementation of the scheme. The scheme needs a more decentralized approach in its implementation. Local administrations (Gram Sabha) can be authorized to locate work sites while followed up by auditing. Generalization of the findings are limited by a smaller sample size and it is recommended to study larger and more diverse samples to extend and validate the present findings.

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