



Impact of MGNREGS on Agricultural Labour in Medak District

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1. INTRODUCTION

The effects of MGNREGS are expected to vary from village to village based on agro-climatic conditions, cultivated area, irrigated area, agricultural labour intensity, prevailing wage rates, employment levels, and proximity to marketing centres. If the current employment and wage rates for agricultural labourers in a village are significantly lower than those guaranteed by the system, then agricultural labourers are likely to gain from the scheme. If the current salary rate and employment level of agricultural labourers in a village much exceed those guaranteed by the scheme, the degree of gain for the agricultural working class is questionable. Moreover, the expenses associated with cultivation may increase significantly, potentially resulting in a decrease in cultivated land, employment opportunities, food grain supply, and cultivators' income. Consequently, it is planned to examine the effects of MGNREGS in an agriculturally disadvantaged district.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Adhikari and Bhatia (2010) in their study "NREGA, Wage Payments" indicated that the banking sector has mainly failed to safeguard against fund misappropriation due to disorganised account management, the influence of power factions during withdrawals, negligence in maintaining muster rolls, and deficiencies in other record-keeping systems.

Ambasta et al. (2008) and **Planning Commission Drafts (2009)** addressed "Reforms for NREGA," emphasising the management costs associated with NREGA. The reports clarified that Panchayats are required to allocate one-third of the management costs of NREGA. The utilisation of information technology must be expanded, and banking correspondents should be emphasised for all Panchayats to ensure the seamless operation of the NREGA plan.

Anand (2008), in his article "Women Programmes," elucidated several deficiencies in the execution of the NREG Act. Women in Madhya Pradesh lamented the absence of medical facilities, resulting in children being either left with family members or taken to the job site, where they remained unsupervised. If the child is unwell, the mom may not attend work. Certain children were dispatched to Anganwadi centres with schedules that differed from their employment commitments. Children were also left at home with a female child.

Ansari (2015) emphasised that, while robust economic growth, women's involvement in the labour force is declining. The female labour participation rate (WPR) has been notably low and decreasing in India during the inter-census periods. The findings from his study suggest that women, particularly those residing in underdeveloped and rural regions, do not derive significant benefits. The innate social disadvantages in a male-dominated society, inadequate education and skills, and restricted access to assets and resources are significant contributing factors.

Ashok (2008), in his examination of the processes, institutions, and mechanisms involved in the implementation of MGNREGA, reported that water conservation and harvesting, irrigation, and rural connectivity projects encompass various schemes adopted in the states of Jharkhand and Bihar. Both states possess extensively irrigated regions with low road density, notably in Jharkhand, where ample land is accessible for development. The characteristics of projects undertaken in diverse districts of these two states indicate that MGNREGA can significantly contribute to the development of essential infrastructure.

Ashok Pankaj (2010) in their article entitled "Empowerment Effects of the NREGS on Women Workers:" An inquiry in Four States aimed to assess the empowerment effects of the NREGS on marginalised and rural women at both individual and communal levels. The study indicates that NREGS aims to address the immediate requirements of women workers in the short term and their long-term strategic needs. The study evaluated the impact of the NREGS on household economics, paid employment, and women's empowerment.

Azhagaiah and Radhika (2014), in their research paper titled "Impact of MGNREGA on the Economic Well-being of Unskilled Workers: Evidence from Puducherry Region," asserted that the pervasive issue of unemployment transcends specific classes, segments, or societies, affecting not only educated, well-trained, and skilled individuals but also semi-skilled and unskilled labourers, landless workers, and small and marginal farmers. The study investigated the economic empowerment and wellbeing of the rural impoverished, revealing a substantial enhancement in family welfare for both male and female unskilled labourers, particularly in terms of increased expenditure on family, children's education, and the ability to save in banks or post offices following their employment under MGNREGA.

3. Background of Selected Villages

This study selected two villages, Nagalgidda and Chintakunta, from the Medak district. Nagalgidda village is situated within the Manoor mandal, encompassing a total geographical area of 1,750 acres. Of this, 1,600 acres are under cultivation. The agricultural practices in the village predominantly rely on rainfall, as only 100 acres of land possess guaranteed irrigation. The principal crops cultivated in the village are Jowar, Pulses, Paddy, and Sugarcane. The MGNREG scheme was initiated in 2006. Activities such as shrub clearance and bund construction were undertaken as part of the plan. Approximately Rs. 20 lakhs have been allocated thus far as salaries to farm labourers. The second village, Chintakunta, is located in Andole mandal. It is a comparatively larger village with a geographical area of approximately 2000 acres. Approximately 1,700 acres are devoted to cultivation. In Chintakunta, the majority of cultivators rely on rainfall, while only approximately 200 acres of land possess guaranteed irrigation. The area of land with guaranteed irrigation is comparatively greater in Chintakunta village. The principal crops cultivated in the village are maize, paddy, and sugarcane. MGNREGS was initiated in Chintakunta in 2006. Activities such as shrub clearance and the installation of field canals were undertaken as part of the program.

4. Data And Methodology

To ensure comparability, two villages have been selected: 1) Nagalgidda, a significantly underdeveloped village, and 2) Chintakunta, a comparatively more prosperous hamlet. From each chosen village, 150 agricultural worker households and cultivator households were picked. During the selection of agricultural labour houses, care was taken to choose labourers from various communities. Efforts were made to pick farmer households from various size categories. Data concerning geographical area, cultivated land, cropping patterns, and initiatives undertaken under MGNREGS were gathered in the village schedule. Data regarding the socio-economic status of selected households, employment levels, and wage rates before and after the scheme's implementation, as well as the scheme's effects on migration and consumption, were gathered in the agricultural labour schedule. Data regarding the scheme's effects on cultivation costs, manpower availability, and the quality of work undertaken were gathered in the cultivator schedule. Enquiries regarding sensitive matters such as expenditures on toddy cannot be directly directed to specific homes.

5. Results

Socio-Economic Background of Agricultural Labour Households:

The efficacy of a welfare program hinges on its capacity to access the disadvantaged segments of society. In this context, it is imperative to examine the socio-economic background of the households included in MGNREGS. Table 1 illustrates the socio-economic basis of agricultural labour households engaged in the Scheme.

Table 1: Allocation of Agricultural Labour Households by Caste**(In percentage)**

Village	SC	ST	BC	Minority	OC	Total
Nagalgidda	90	8	37	15	--	150
Chintakunta	30	7	104	9	--	150
TOTAL	40	5	47	8	--	100

Source: Field work

The data in Table 1 indicates that over fifty percent of houses in Nagalgidda village are classified as belonging to the SC category. In Chintakunta Village, Scheduled Castes comprise 20 percent, while Backward Classes constitute 70 percent. Consequently, in both chosen villages, 85-90 percent of the beneficiaries were classified as either Scheduled Castes (SC) or Backward Classes (BC). It is noteworthy that no OC family is engaged in the program. The majority of beneficiaries were from marginalised segments of society.

Table 2: Distribution of Agricultural Labour Households by Educational Attainment (In Percentage)

Village	Illiterate	Literate	Primary	Secondary	High School & above	Total
Nagalgidda	120	--	8	22	--	150
Chintakunta	90	--	31	20	9	150
TOTAL	70	--	13	14	3	100

Source: Field work

The majority of the beneficiaries were from marginalised segments of society. The educational attainment of the participating households, as illustrated in Table 2, corroborates this reality. In Nalgalgidda, an underdeveloped community, approximately three-fourths of family heads were illiterate. In Chintakunta, a comparatively developed community, the equivalent figure is much lower. The data indicates that certain households in Chintakunta village possessed superior educational attainment. Several household heads had attained a high school education. Consequently, based on social stratification and educational attainment, it can be inferred that the members of the Scheme were part of marginalised segments of society.

Table 3: Agricultural Labour Household Distribution by Size (Percentage)

Village	Members					Total
	3	4	5	6	Above 6	
Nagalgidda	8	--	38	36	68	150
Chintakunta	7	54	22	45	22	150
TOTAL	5	18	20	27	30	100

Source: Field work

Agricultural labour households by size are explained in Table 3. Nearly half of the houses in Nagalgidda village, a backward community, have more than six members. Five or six people live in another half of the households. In contrast, just 22% of the houses in Chintakunta village had more than six individuals. These discrepancies could be explained by the joint family system's predominance in underdeveloped communities like Nagalgidda. Joint families are probably going to have a comparatively higher number of wage workers.

Table 4 shows the distribution of agricultural labour households by number of earners (in percentage).

Village	Earners				Total
	2	3	4	5 & above	
Nalgidda	23	38	45	44	150
Chintakunta	100	22	9	19	150
TOTAL	41	20	18	21	100

Source: Field work

Table-4 shows the distribution of agricultural labour households based on the number of earners. For example, in Nagalgidda village, over 60% of households have four or more earners, whereas in Chintakunta village, the ratio is only 15%. It is observed that in Chintakunta village, up to 70% of homes have only two earners. It is worth noting that in both villages, no family has a single earner.

Socio-Economic Background of Cultivator Households:

In general, cultivator households are predicted to have a higher socioeconomic status than agriculture worker households. According to field data, 85 percent of cultivator households in Nagalgidda village were in the BC group, with just 15 percent in the SC category (Table 5).

**Table 5: Caste-wise Distribution of Cultivators
(In percentage)**

Village	SC	ST	BC	Minority	OC	Total
Nalgidda	15	--	135	--	--	150
Chintakunta	--	--	105	--	45	150
TOTAL	5	--	80	--	15	100

Source: Field work

In Chintakunta village, no cultivator households were classified as SC or ST. The BC category accounted for 80% of the homes, with the OC group accounting for the remaining 15%. When the social composition of agriculture labour homes and cultivator households was compared, over half of the agriculture labour households were SC and ST, whereas the corresponding proportion in cultivator households was only 5%. A similar tendency is evident in terms of literacy level.

Table 6: Distribution of Cultivators by Education Level**(In percentage)**

Village	Illiterate	Literate	Primary	Secondary	High School & above	Total
Nagalgidda	45	30	30	--	45	150
Chintakunta	90	--	--	30	30	150
TOTAL	45	10	10	10	25	100

Source: Field work

In Nagalgidda village, 80% of the heads of agricultural labour households were illiterate. However, agricultural households accounted for just 30% (Table 6). Surprisingly, Chintakunta hamlet, while being more developed, has a greater percentage of illiterates than Nagalgidda village. In both villages, the illiteracy rate among agriculture worker homes was significantly greater than that among cultivator households. At the same time, the percentage of cultivators with high school or higher education was significantly greater than that of agriculture labour households.

6. Summary

The study reveals that the majority of beneficiaries in both villages belonged to marginalized sections, with about 85–90 percent from Scheduled Castes and Backward Classes, and no participation from OC families among agricultural labour households. Illiteracy was very high among agricultural labourers, especially in Nagalgidda, while Chintakunta showed relatively better educational attainment. Nagalgidda also had larger households and a stronger prevalence of joint families, resulting in more wage earners per household, whereas most households in Chintakunta had only two earners. In contrast, cultivator households were socially and economically better placed, being mainly from BC and OC groups, and they showed significantly higher levels of literacy and education compared to agricultural labour households. Overall, agricultural labourers were more socially disadvantaged and educationally deprived than cultivators in both villages.

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