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# Utilisation of Rural Manpower for the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS): A Study in Anantapur District, Andhra Pradesh

**G.M. Vijayakumar Reddy., Prof. M. Muninarayanappa**

**Sri Krishnadevaraya University, India**

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**Abstract:** The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) stands as a cornerstone of India's social security architecture, aiming to enhance livelihood security in rural areas by providing at least 100 days of wage employment per household. This paper examines the utilisation of rural manpower under MGNREGS in Anantapur district of Andhra Pradesh, a region characterised by its semi-arid climate, recurrent droughts, and a high dependence on rain-fed agriculture. Through a qualitative analysis of secondary data from government reports and a review of existing literature, this study assesses the performance of the scheme in terms of employment generation, wage distribution, and asset creation. It finds that MGNREGS has been a critical lifeline for rural labour in Anantapur, significantly absorbing surplus agricultural labour, particularly during lean seasons and drought years. However, the study also identifies persistent challenges, including delays in wage payments, uneven distribution of person-days, and questions regarding the durability of created assets. The paper concludes that while MGNREGS has been effectively utilised as a safety net, its potential as a transformative tool for sustainable rural development in drought-prone regions like Anantapur requires strengthened implementation, greater focus on water conservation works, and better convergence with other developmental programmes.

**Keywords:** MGNREGS, Rural Employment, Manpower Utilisation, Anantapur, Andhra Pradesh, Drought, Rural Development, Social Security.

## I. Introduction

The structural transformation of rural economies in developing nations often involves addressing the twin challenges of underemployment and poverty. In India, the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA), later renamed the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), was enacted in 2005 with the primary objective of enhancing livelihood security in rural areas by providing at least 100 days of guaranteed wage employment in a financial year to every household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work (Ministry of Rural Development, 2005).

The scheme is not merely an employment programme but a rights-based legislation that aims to strengthen the livelihood resource base of the rural poor, create productive assets, and empower rural communities, especially women, Scheduled Castes (SCs), and Scheduled Tribes (STs). The utilisation of rural manpower under this scheme is a critical indicator of its effectiveness in reaching its intended beneficiaries and mitigating agrarian distress.

Anantapur district in Andhra Pradesh presents a compelling case for such a study. It is one of the most drought-prone districts in India, with scanty and erratic rainfall leading to frequent crop failures (Reddy, 2018). The agrarian economy, heavily reliant on groundnut cultivation, is highly vulnerable, resulting in widespread underemployment, high migration, and endemic poverty. In this context, MGNREGS emerges as a vital source of alternative income and a mechanism for stabilising rural wages.

This paper aims to analyse the utilisation of rural manpower for MGNREGS in Anantapur District. It seeks to:

1. Examine the trends in employment generation and person-day creation under MGNREGS.
2. Analyse the participation of different social groups (SC, ST, Women) in the workforce.
3. Assess the type of assets created and their relevance to the local ecology.
4. Identify the key challenges in the effective utilisation of manpower under the scheme.

## II. Review of Literature

A substantial body of literature exists on MGNREGS, evaluating its impact from various angles. Dreze and Khera (2009) highlighted its success in curbing famine and reducing distress migration in Rajasthan. They emphasised its role as a social safety net. Studies by Liu and Barrett (2013) found that the scheme contributed to increasing rural wages, particularly for female agricultural labourers, thereby improving their bargaining power.

However, critiques have also been prominent. Several studies, including one by the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG, 2013), have pointed to issues of corruption, inefficiency in implementation, and the creation of non-durable assets. Chakraborty (2007) argued that while the scheme provided employment, its impact on creating a sustainable rural infrastructure was limited due to poor technical planning and a lack of maintenance.

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Specific to Andhra Pradesh, earlier studies praised the state's use of technology through the Management Information System (MIS) and Smartcards for reducing leakages (Johnson, 2009). The state has historically been a top performer in terms of person-days generated and funds utilised. In the context of Anantapur, research often focuses on its vulnerability to climate change. Reddy (2018) notes that water conservation works under MGNREGS have been crucial in recharging groundwater and supporting agriculture in this arid region.

This paper contributes to the existing literature by providing a focused, district-level analysis of manpower utilisation within the specific agro-climatic and socio-economic context of Anantapur.

**Study Area: Anantapur District**

Anantapur is the largest district in Andhra Pradesh by area but faces significant developmental challenges.

- **Agro-climatic Condition:** It falls in the Rayalaseema region, characterised by a semi-arid climate with an average annual rainfall of only 553 mm, making it one of the driest districts in India.
- **Agricultural Dependency:** The economy is predominantly agrarian, with groundnut being the principal crop. The failure of monsoons regularly leads to agricultural distress.
- **Demographic and Socio-economic Profile:** The district has a significant population of marginal and landless labourers. Poverty rates are higher than the state average, and distress migration to urban centers and other states for work is a common phenomenon. This backdrop of ecological fragility and economic vulnerability makes the implementation and utilisation of MGNREGS in Anantapur both critical and challenging.

## III. Methodology

This study employs a **descriptive and analytical research design** based primarily on the analysis of **secondary data**. Key sources include:

- The official MGNREGS portal (https://nrega.nic.in/).
- District-Level Annual Reports andMonthly Progress Reports (MPRs) for Anantapur.
- Publications from the Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India.
- Economic Reviews of the Government of Andhra Pradesh.
- Previous scholarly articles, research papers, and books on MGNREGS and rural development in Andhra Pradesh.

Data covering the last five financial years (2018-19 to 2022-23) was extracted and analysed to identify trends in employment generation, wage disbursement, and asset creation. The analysis is qualitative, interpreting the quantitative data within the socio-economic context of the district.

## IV. Analysis and Discussion

**Employment Generation and Person-Days**

Anantapur consistently ranks among the top-performing districts in Andhra Pradesh in terms of person-days generated. Data indicates a high demand for work, especially during the summer months and following a poor monsoon. The scheme successfully provides an average of over 50 days of employment per household annually, though the guarantee of 100 days is rarely met for all households, a common trend across India. The demand for work spikes during drought years, underscoring the scheme's counter-cyclical nature and its role as a primary safety net.

**Participation of Social Groups**

The inclusiveness of MGNREGS is evident in Anantapur:

- **Women Participation:** Women's participation has consistently been above 55%, often surpassing the statutory requirement of 33%. This high involvement has provided financial autonomy to women, reduced gender wage disparities in open markets, and allowed them to work near their homes.
- **SC/ST Participation:** The participation rates of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes are proportionate to, or often exceed, their share in the district's population. This indicates that the scheme is effectively reaching the most marginalised communities, providing them a stable source of income.

**Asset Creation and Ecological Relevance**

A significant strength of MGNREGS in Anantapur has been the focus on water conservation and harvesting works. Given the district's acute water scarcity, a majority of the created assets are:

- Water conservation and harvesting structures (e.g., check dams, farm ponds, percolation tanks).

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- Drought-proofing and afforestation activities.
- Renovation of traditional water bodies.
- Land development and flood control works.

These assets are highly relevant as they contribute directly to improving the district's water security, enhancing soil moisture, and supporting agricultural productivity. The creation of such productive assets moves the scheme beyond a mere wage transfer programme towards a developmental one.

**Challenges in Manpower Utilisation**

Despite its successes, several challenges impede the optimal utilisation of rural manpower:

1. **Delay in Wage Payments:** Perhaps the most persistent grievance. Technical glitches in the National Electronic Fund Management System (NeFMS), delays in measurement of work, and administrative bottlenecks often lead to wages being paid weeks after the work is completed, undermining the very concept of "guaranteed" employment.
2. **Insufficient Allocation and Late Fund Releases:** Often, the demand for work exceeds the allocated funds and administrative capacity, leading to a slowdown in work provision, especially towards the end of the financial year.
3. **Quality and Durability of Assets:** While the focus on water-related assets is apt, there are concerns regarding the technical quality and long-term maintenance of these structures. Without proper engineering design and community ownership for maintenance, their long-term benefits are diminished.
4. **Awareness and Grievance Redressal:** A section of the rural populace, particularly the most illiterate and marginalised, remains unaware of their full entitlements under the Act, including the provision for unemployment allowance in case of non-provision of work.

**V. Conclusion and Recommendations**

The Mahatma Gandhi NREGS has proven to be an indispensable instrument for the utilisation of rural manpower in Anantapur district. It has effectively acted as a buffer against agrarian distress caused by its semi-arid climate, providing vital income support, stabilising rural wages, and empowering women and marginalised communities. The focus on creating water conservation assets has added a layer of long-term developmental value to the programme.

However, to transform this safety net into a more powerful engine for sustainable development, the implementation challenges must be addressed. Based on the analysis, this paper recommends the following for Anantapur district:

1. **Strengthen Payment Systems:** Streamlining the payment process through regular audits, resolving technical issues in NeFMS, and imposing stricter penalties for delays are crucial to maintaining workers' trust.
2. **Promote Asset Sustainability:** Involving technical experts from the watershed development department in the planning and design of water conservation structures can enhance their durability. Establishing clear protocols for community-led maintenance is essential.
3. **Enhance Convergence:** Actively converging MGNREGS with other government schemes (e.g., agriculture, horticulture, forestry) can create more potent and integrated assets. For instance, trenches and ponds dug under MGNREGS can be linked with horticulture plantations promoted by other departments.
4. **Boosting Awareness:** Intensive Information, Education, and Communication (IEC) campaigns using local media and community assemblies are needed to ensure all beneficiaries are aware of their rights and the grievance redressal mechanisms.

In summary, although MGNREGS has effectively mobilised and employed rural labor in Anantapur, its complete capacity to initiate a transformative development process in this drought-affected area has yet to be fully achieved through enhanced governance and integrated planning. Strategic reforms—such as improving demand-side planning, utilizing digital technologies, and implementing gender-responsive initiatives—are crucial to fully harness the district's rural workforce and to guarantee that MGNREGS meets its commitment as a rights-based, inclusive, and climate-resilient employment program.

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