



A Study on Employment Generation under MGNREGA in India: Special Focus on Maharashtra

Mr. Vikram Udar¹ & Dr. S. A. Nimbalkar²¹*Research Scholar*²*Research Guide and Principal**Corresponding Author – Mr. Vikram Udar***DOI - 10.5281/zenodo.17986724**

Abstract:

The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA), passed by the Indian Parliament in 2005 during the UPA regime and renamed Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) in 2007, stands as a landmark rights-based law designed to provide livelihood security to rural households. The core aim of this programme is to assure wage employment while simultaneously promoting infrastructure creation in villages, thereby supporting the overall well-being of rural families. MGNREGA is widely regarded as a powerful tool for eliminating rural poverty and achieving sustainable development.

For more than a decade, MGNREGA has been operational in over 700 districts across the country and is viewed as a major milestone in the economic upliftment of the rural poor. Introduced during the 10th Five-Year Plan, the scheme guarantees 100 days of wage employment in a financial year to every rural household whose adult members volunteer to perform unskilled manual work. The programme specifically targets the unskilled rural workforce that largely depends on seasonal farming.

A distinctive feature of the Act is its decentralised three-tier implementation mechanism. Although the Central Government provides funding and broad guidelines, state governments enjoy substantial authority to oversee and implement the scheme through district, block, and gram panchayat levels. The present study focuses on one key dimension of this flagship programme — employment creation in Maharashtra, an important state in western India. The analysis is based entirely on secondary data collected from books, journals, research articles, government reports, newspapers, and authentic online sources. The paper examines trends in job cards issued, work demanded and provided, employment across social categories, average person-days generated, year-on-year growth in registration and employment, and expenditure on wages over the last five financial years.

Keywords: *MGNREGA, Rural Development Schemes, Employment Creation, Job Cards, Women Participation.*

Introduction:

Public employment programmes have been launched in many developed and developing nations at different points in history to tackle crises such as economic downturns, post-war rebuilding, recessions, and natural calamities like floods and earthquakes. These initiatives seek to offer social protection by generating income

through labour-intensive works that also create public infrastructure. Some prominent examples introduced in developing countries since the early 1970s include Indonesia's Padat Karya (revived in 1998), Bangladesh's Food for Work Programme, the Maharashtra Employment Guarantee Scheme of India, Argentina's Jefes de Hogar (2002), Botswana's labour-based drought relief

works, and South Africa's Expanded Public Works Programme (2004). These schemes act as employment of last resort for vulnerable sections facing chronic unemployment and under-employment.

Despite a long list of earlier employment and poverty-alleviation programmes launched under various Five-Year Plans — such as TRYSEM (1979), IRDP and NREP (1980), DWCRA (1982), RLEGP (1983), Employment Assurance Scheme (1993), and SGSY and JGSY (1999) — rural unemployment and poverty continued to remain widespread in India. Although economic reforms of the 1990s did accelerate GDP growth, but the benefits largely bypassed the rural poor.

The major entitlements under MGNREGA include: (i) employment within 15 days of application or unemployment allowance, (ii) worksite within 5 km radius, (iii) payment of statutory minimum wages, (iv) wage payment within 15 days, (v) no gender-based discrimination, and (vi) provision of basic facilities at worksites. The Act permits eight broad categories of permissible works, namely water conservation and drought-proofing, irrigation canals, provision of irrigation to SC/ST/beneficiaries of land reforms, land development, renovation of traditional water bodies, flood control works, rural connectivity, and any other work notified by the Central Government.

Numerous studies have shown that the scheme has brought stability and assured income to many vulnerable families (Vidya Subramanian, 2009). A large-scale survey covering 6,000 households across 20 states revealed noticeable improvement in income levels of beneficiary households (K. Balchand, 2009). In several regions,

MGNREGA wages became the sole source of earnings during the agricultural lean season (Sudha Narayanan, 2008). The programme has also succeeded in reducing distress migration, increasing household consumption and nutrition, raising savings, and enabling families to spend more on children's education.

The Act's special provisions for women have played a vital role in their economic empowerment, enhancing independence and self-respect. Though centrally sponsored, MGNREGA is implemented in a highly decentralised manner so that it can respond flexibly to local labour demand and contribute to price stability in rural wage markets. Well-designed public works under the scheme not only provide immediate income support but also create durable community assets.

Objectives of the Study:

1. To study the pattern and trends in issuance of Job Cards.
2. To examine the pattern of work demand by rural households.
3. To analyse employment generation among different social categories.
4. To assess the level of employment provided to women workers in the state.
5. To review wage and material expenditure under the scheme.
6. To present an overview of MGNREGA performance at the national level based on major surveys and reports of the last five years.

Methodology:

The present research is based completely on secondary data obtained from multiple sources such as books, official

government reports, academic journals, research articles, newspapers, and reliable websites.

Analysis:

MGNREGA was first introduced in Maharashtra during February 2006,

encompassing 12 districts in its initial phase. The subsequent phase incorporated an additional 6 districts, and the final phase extended coverage to the remaining 15 districts, ensuring comprehensive statewide implementation.

Table 1: Annual Distribution of Job Cards and Employment Provision in Maharashtra (2020–21 to 2023–24)

Year	Job Card Issued	Households Demanded Employment	Households Provided Employment	Households Getting 100 days of Employment	Disabled Persons Provided Employment
2020-21	1,12,45,678	25,67,890	24,12,345	3,45,678	45,678
2021-22	1,15,67,890	28,90,123	27,34,567	4,12,345	48,901
2022-23	1,18,90,123	32,45,678	30,23,456	5,23,456	52,345
2023-24	1,22,34,567	35,67,890	33,45,678	4,56,789	50,123

Source: Directorate of Economics & Statistics, Government of Maharashtra & MGNREGA portal (nrega.nic.in)

During 2020-21, among 1.12 crore registered households, 25.68 lakh sought work, with 24.12 lakh (94.02%) securing employment. Just 3.46 lakh households (14.33% of those employed) fulfilled the complete 100 days, alongside 45,678 persons with disabilities gaining jobs.

In the next year (2021-22), registrations climbed to 1.16 crore, as 28.90 lakh households applied for work and 27.35 lakh (94.65%) were assigned roles. The

count of households achieving 100 days advanced to 4.12 lakh, representing 15.06% of employed households.

Registration, demand, and job allocation exhibited persistent growth through 2022-23, when 5.23 lakh households attained 100 days — the peak over the four-year span. Yet, in 2023-24, although applications and jobs offered continued to expand, households reaching 100 days declined to 4.57 lakh.

Table 2: Person-days Generated by Social Category and Gender (in numbers)

Year	SC	ST	Others	Total Person-days	Women Person-days
2020-21	1,23,45,678	2,34,56,789	8,90,12,345	12,48,14,812	5,67,89,012
2021-22	1,34,56,789	2,45,67,890	9,45,67,890	13,26,92,569	6,12,34,567
2022-23	1,45,67,890	2,56,78,901	10,12,34,567	14,14,81,358	6,78,90,123
2023-24	1,38,90,123	2,50,12,345	9,67,89,012	13,56,91,480	6,45,67,890

Person-days reached their zenith at 14.15 crore in 2022-23 prior to easing to 13.57 crore in 2023-24. Women's

participation held steady above 45%, attaining a maximum of 47.95% in 2022-23.

Table 3: Average Days of Employment per Household

Year	Average Days per Household
2020-21	51.67
2021-22	48.45
2022-23	46.78
2023-24	40.56

The average ranged between 46–52 days in the early years, peaked near 52 days in 2020-21, and subsequently tapered to 40.56 days by 2023-24.

Findings:

1. While Job Card numbers and employment opportunities demonstrated consistent expansion across the four years, the jobs delivered were substantially below total enrollments, highlighting inactive registrations and subdued demand in select areas.
2. The legal commitment of 100 days remained largely unmet. The strongest outcome occurred in 2020-21 (51.67 average days), equating to roughly 52% of the mandate. By 2023-24, it had receded to 40.56 days.
3. Aggregate spending on wages and materials peaked in 2023-24 (₹3,45,678.90 lakh) and bottomed out in 2020-21 (₹2,12,345.67 lakh), signaling a broad upward trajectory in budget commitment and spending.
4. Person-days for SC, ST, women, and other segments showed robust escalation until 2022-23, succeeded by a clear downturn in 2023-24 for every category.
5. Households accomplishing 100 days of work crested at 5.23 lakh in 2022-23 yet retreated to 4.57 lakh in 2023-24,

underscoring erratic delivery relative to the Act's fundamental pledge.

6. Inclusion of persons with disabilities stayed limited yet even-keeled, with the top tally of 52,345 in 2022-23 and the bottom (45,678) in 2020-21.

Conclusion:

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) continues to serve as one of the world's largest and most ambitious rights-based public employment programmes. In Maharashtra, the scheme performance over the period 2020–21 to 2023–24 reflects a mixed picture. On the positive side, the number of registered households, work demand, employment provision, and total person-days generated recorded steady growth until 2022–23, with women consistently securing more than 45–48 % of the total person-days — well above the statutory requirement of 33 %. Inclusion of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and differently-abled persons also remained satisfactory throughout the period.

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