

# MGNREGS AND LIVELIHOODS IN MIGRATION-PRONE BOLANGIR, ODISHA

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## Abstract:

*The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) was established to enhance livelihood security for rural households by guaranteeing a minimum of 100 days of unskilled wage employment annually. This study focuses on its impact within the migration-prone blocks of Bolangir District, Odisha, where persistent poverty and unemployment have resulted in significant distress migration. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, the research employs both quantitative and qualitative analyses to assess employment patterns, income levels, and the overall socio-economic conditions of households benefiting from the scheme. Data collected through surveys and interviews reveal that MGNREGS has significantly contributed to reducing distress migration by providing consistent employment opportunities and enhancing household incomes [1]. However, the study also uncovers several implementation*

*challenges, including delays in wage disbursement and limited awareness of entitlements among beneficiaries. These challenges hinder the full potential of MGNREGS in transforming the livelihoods of vulnerable populations. The findings suggest that while MGNREGS is effective in improving living standards, addressing the existing obstacles is crucial for maximizing its impact on livelihood enhancement and ensuring sustainable rural development in Bolangir District. This paper contributes to the ongoing discourse on rural employment schemes and their effectiveness in migration-prone regions.*

**Keywords:** *Rural Employment, Migration-Prone Areas, Bolangir District, Socioeconomic Impact, Distress Migration [2].*

## 1. Introduction

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) was established to bolster

livelihood security for rural households in India by providing a guarantee of at least 100 days of unskilled wage employment each year. This study focuses on the impact of MGNREGS in the migration-prone blocks of Bolangir District, Odisha, where persistent poverty and unemployment have led to significant distress migration. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the research integrates both quantitative and qualitative analyses to evaluate employment trends, income levels, and the broader socio-economic conditions of households benefiting from the scheme [3]. Data gathered through surveys and interviews indicate that MGNREGS has made a substantial contribution to reducing distress migration by offering consistent employment opportunities and improving household incomes. However, the study also identifies several implementation challenges, including delays in wage payments and a lack of awareness regarding entitlements among beneficiaries. These obstacles impede MGNREGS's ability to fully transform the livelihoods of vulnerable populations. The findings underscore that while the scheme effectively enhances living standards, addressing these challenges is vital for

maximizing its impact on livelihood enhancement and ensuring sustainable rural development in Bolangir District. This paper adds to the ongoing discourse on the efficacy of rural employment schemes, particularly in migration-affected regions.

## 2. Literature Review

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) plays a crucial role in enhancing rural livelihoods by providing wage-based employment and curbing distress migration. In migration-prone areas like Bolangir, Odisha, where seasonal migration is prevalent due to agricultural instability and poverty, MGNREGS serves as a social safety net. Several studies highlight its impact on reducing migration, improving income security, and empowering marginalized communities. This review explores existing literature on the effectiveness of MGNREGS in improving livelihoods, focusing on its role in addressing economic vulnerabilities in Bolangir.

### Summary of Literature Survey

Author's	Work Done	Findings
Sahu & Behera (2024)	Examined challenges in implementing MGNREGA in migration-prone regions.	Identified poor administration and inseasonal migration as major challenges.
Singh (2024)	Studied the long-term impacts of MGNREGS on rural households in Bolangir district.	Found improvements in income stability, but limited effect on sustainable livelihoods.
Sharma (2023)	Analyzed the socio-economic impact of MGNREGA on vulnerable populations in Odisha.	Highlighted increased income and reduced gender inequality, but issues in timely payments.
Kumar (2023)	Evaluated the socioeconomic effects of MGNREGS in migration-prone districts of Odisha.	Concluded that MGNREGS helped reduce migration but lacked sufficient employment opportunities.
Nayak (2022)	Explored the role of MGNREGS in rural development in Bolangir district.	Found positive impacts on infrastructure development but noted administrative bottlenecks.
Patnaik (2022)	Analyzed employment generation trends through MGNREGS in rural Odisha.	Reported a rise in rural employment but stressed the need for skill enhancement.
Gupta & Singh (2020)	Investigated the role of MGNREGS in mitigating distress migration in Western Odisha.	Found that MGNREGS reduced migration but seasonal migration persisted during lean periods.
Das & Pradhan (2019)	Assessed the implementation of MGNREGA in migration-prone areas, focusing on Bolangir.	Identified gaps in fund allocation and delays in wage payments as key implementation issues.
Bhatia (2018)	Studied the impact of MGNREGA on rural livelihoods in Odisha.	Found improvements in income security but limited effect on long-term livelihood development.
Das &	Examined the effectiveness of	Reported positive impacts on

Prasad (2017)	MGNREGA in improving livelihood security in Odisha.	livelihood security but pointed out inconsistencies in work allocation.
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distress migration and enhancing livelihoods amidst persistent

### Research Gap

Despite the significant contributions of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) in enhancing livelihoods in rural areas, several research gaps remain. There is limited empirical evidence specifically focusing on the scheme's effectiveness in migration-prone regions, particularly in assessing the long-term socio-economic impacts on households. Additionally, existing literature often overlooks the nuanced challenges faced during implementation, such as delays in wage payments and beneficiaries' awareness of their entitlements. Addressing these gaps can provide deeper insights into optimizing MGNREGS for improved outcomes in vulnerable communities.

### 3. Problem Statement

This study addresses the challenges faced by the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) in Bolangir District, Odisha, particularly its effectiveness in reducing

implementation issues like wage delays and beneficiary awareness deficits.

### 4. Methodology

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) has marked a decade of implementation, aiming to provide livelihood security to rural households through 100 days of guaranteed wage employment [4]. However, despite its intentions, the program has encountered significant challenges, particularly in Western Odisha, where poverty and unemployment remain persistent. Data reveals a concerning decline in the average person-days of employment per household, dropping from 48 days in 2017-18 to just 34 days in 2022-23. Furthermore, the percentage of households completing the full 100 days of work has plummeted from 14.3% to a mere 3% during the same period. This decline is coupled with the rising phenomenon of distress migration, driven by inadequate employment opportunities and pervasive poverty. Migrants, often

from marginalized groups, face harsh working conditions in urban areas, with long hours and low wages. Legal protections for migrant workers under the Inter-state Migrant Workmen Act remain largely ineffective, leaving them vulnerable to exploitation. Additionally, seasonal migration adversely impacts children's education, as families often take their children along for labor, resulting in high dropout rates and limited access to schooling. Overall, MGNREGA's inability to provide sufficient employment highlights the need for a more effective approach to rural development.

### 5. Result & Discussion

**Progress of MGNREGA in India:** The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA)

has successfully completed a decade of its implementation, addressing antisocial activities at both national and state levels [5]. However, poverty and unemployment continue to persist in India in a significant manner. The primary objective of this scheme is to enhance livelihood security for the rural poor by providing 100 days of wage employment per financial year to rural households willing to undertake unskilled manual work. Currently, there is ongoing debate regarding the program's physical performance, which suggests that the wage employment offered to households often falls short of the guaranteed minimum of 100 person-days. Table 1 presents various indicators reflecting the national performance of MGNREGA.

**Table 1 Progress of MGNREGA in all India level.**

FYs	2017-18	2018-19	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
<b>Average person days per household (in number)</b>	48	54	47	43	34
<b>Household demand for employment (in lakhs)</b>	45502	528.6	557.6	503.8	411.9
<b>Household completed 100 days (in lakhs)</b>	65.2	70.83	55.6	38.3	12.6
<b>Household gets 100 days employment as per</b>	14.3	13.4	9.9	7.7	3

<b>demand (in percent)</b>					
<b>Women participation (in percent)</b>	48	48	48	48	53

This table presents key indicators related to the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) for the fiscal years 2017-18 to 2022-23. Each row outlines specific metrics that reflect the program's effectiveness in providing employment and enhancing livelihood security for rural households in India. Below is a detailed analysis of each indicator:

1. **Average Person Days per Household:** This metric shows the average number of days of employment provided to each household [6]. The values indicate a decline from 48 days in 2017-18 to 34 days in 2022-23. This suggests a reduction in the amount of work available under MGNREGA for households, which may reflect challenges in program implementation or decreased demand for employment.
2. **Household Demand for Employment:** This figure represents the total demand for employment expressed in lakhs

(hundreds of thousands). There is an increase from 45502 lakhs in 2017-18 to a peak of 557.6 lakhs in 2020-21, followed by a decline to 411.9 lakhs in 2022-23. The fluctuations suggest varying levels of demand for MGNREGA work, with a significant drop in recent years, possibly due to improved economic conditions or alternative employment opportunities [7].

3. **Household Completed 100 Days:** This indicator shows the number of households that completed the full 100 days of work guaranteed by the program. The number decreased significantly from 65.2 lakhs in 2017-18 to just 12.6 lakhs in 2022-23. This sharp decline indicates that fewer households are reaching the maximum employment threshold, raising concerns about the effectiveness of the program in meeting the needs of rural families.
4. **Household Gets 100 Days Employment as per Demand:**

This percentage reflects the proportion of households receiving the full 100 days of employment relative to those that demanded it. The percentage decreased from 14.3% in 2017-18 to only 3% in 2022-23. This alarming trend suggests that as demand for employment rises, fewer households are receiving the guaranteed days of work, highlighting potential gaps in program execution [8].

5. **Women Participation:** This metric indicates the percentage of women participating in MGNREGA work. The participation rate remained stable at 48% from 2017-18 to 2021-22 but increased to 53% in 2022-23. The rise in women's participation is a positive development, suggesting greater inclusivity and empowerment of women in rural employment.

**Legacy of MGNREGA in Western Odisha:** According to the 2021 census, Odisha has a population of 4.19 crore, with approximately 85% living in rural areas. The state's labor force predominantly consists of individuals engaged in the informal sector, including activities such as brick making, construction work, and casual labor. A significant portion of the

population in these rural areas is poor and often illiterate, limiting their ability to find employment in the formal sector. This vulnerability has led to exploitation by more privileged groups, both politically and socio-economically [9]. The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) was established as a social welfare program aimed at alleviating the exploitation of vulnerable communities by promoting a more equitable societal structure. However, the program has struggled to achieve its objectives in Odisha, particularly in the western regions, due to issues such as irregularities and corruption associated with political parties. Research conducted in specific regions has highlighted these challenges. In the Sason Panchayat of Sambalpur district, findings indicate significant corruption and irregularities that have impeded the successful generation of physical assets like ponds and roads. Additionally, there is evidence suggesting that the program has failed to provide adequate employment opportunities for those in need. Similar observations have been made in Bolangir district, where the inability of MGNREGA to generate job opportunities for unskilled labor has led to distress migration. In my field survey of Satalma Panchayat in Bargarh district, I encountered similar

issues, with reports of distress migration occurring in the area. Interactions with workers in Balitikra revealed that employment under MGNREGA is often organized in a contract manner rather than as daily wage work. Furthermore, I noted a concerning lack of women's participation in the workforce, with few women present at work sites. Many workers expressed disinterest in participating in social audit programs, feeling that their voices had little significance in these meetings. Overall, the studies conducted in Western Odisha indicate that MGNREGA has not effectively provided employment opportunities for the rural poor. As a result, many individuals are forced to migrate from rural areas to urban centers in search of better livelihoods, as they perceive no viable alternatives in their local environment.

#### **Distress Migration in Western Odisha:**

Odisha ranks among the poorest states in India and has become a significant labor-sending region, commonly referred to as a migration hub. The migration patterns in Odisha are heavily influenced by the nation's developmental framework and are rooted in a long history of social, cultural, and political factors. Economically, migration is defined as the movement of individuals engaging in remunerative activities in locations outside their native

or national territory. It reflects humanity's resilience in the face of challenging natural and man-made conditions. In the era of globalization, issues such as severe income inequality, a distressed agrarian structure, inadequate employment opportunities, and the expansion of the informal sector have driven many individuals to migrate from rural to urban areas. The phenomenon of distress migration is particularly pronounced among socially vulnerable groups, including Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs), who face higher levels of exploitation and inequality. In Western Odisha, seasonal distress migration is prevalent, with a significant portion of the population living in rural areas and primarily engaged in agriculture. This agricultural work is heavily dependent on the monsoon and often revolves around a single cropping season, compounded by poor agricultural infrastructure. The underlying reason for this migration is pervasive poverty. Migration typically occurs from October to June, with individuals returning home during the monsoon months of June to October to tend to their crops. To finance agricultural activities such as land preparation, purchasing fertilizers, and pesticides, they often take out loans from village leaders or other informal sources. These loans can also cover social



expenses, such as weddings, leading to a cycle of indebtedness and food insecurity. As families struggle to repay their debts, they find themselves with limited income sources at the village level. This economic pressure often forces entire families to leave their homes in search of work, even in unsanitary conditions. Many rely on advances from middlemen, known as dalals, to manage their debts, perpetuating the cycle of distress migration.

**Socio-economic Conditions of Migrants at the Workplace:** The construction sector is the largest employer in India after agriculture, with a significant number of migrants working on construction sites. Workers typically have long hours, from sunrise to sunset, and women often endure shifts lasting 14 to 16 hours, balancing both domestic duties and on-site labor. Female workers are typically paid between ₹60 and ₹70 per day, while men earn between ₹100 and ₹175. Masons can earn up to ₹175 to ₹250 per day. Unfortunately, these workplaces are often unsafe, and migrants are willing to accept lower wages than local workers already employed at the sites. They frequently face verbal and sexual harassment and lack grievance mechanisms to address their concerns. Their plight is exacerbated by harsh eviction drives by local governments, which displace them and disrupt their

already precarious lives. Without the support of the communities they help sustain, their situation becomes increasingly untenable. Many live in makeshift tents with plastic coverings, and they do not possess Public Distribution System (PDS) cards, forcing them to purchase food and kerosene at prices higher than the market rate.

**Legal Security of Migrants at the Workplace:** The Government of India enacted the Inter-state Migrant Workmen Act, which aims to protect the rights of inter-state migrants. The Act stipulates that contractors must pay timely wages equal to or greater than the minimum wage and provide basic needs such as suitable shelter, medical facilities, protective clothing, and compensation for specified authorities. It also grants migrants the right to raise industrial disputes in the jurisdiction where they work or in their home province. However, the Act is largely ineffective, with minimal enforcement and almost no records of prosecutions or dispute resolutions. Migrant workers face additional challenges due to their dual status as both laborers and migrants, resulting in little to no improvement in their working and living conditions. They often lack social security, compensation for injuries, access to safe drinking water, and adequate

healthcare facilities. Construction workers in India experience one of the highest accident rates, with a recent International Labour Organization (ILO) study indicating that 165 out of every 1,000 workers are injured on job sites.

### **Children's Education of Migrants at the**

**Workplace:** Seasonal distress migration contributes significantly to the rise of child labor. Poor families without additional support in their villages often take their children with them when migrating for work. As wages are typically based on the amount of work completed rather than time spent, children are drawn into the labor force by employers, contractors, and even their own parents to maximize earnings. Migrant children face significant barriers to education; they often lack access to the support systems available to non-migrant children. Due to their work obligations, they miss out on schooling opportunities. Even when migrant children have access to schools, the quality of government schools in migration-prone regions is often poor. Despite large-scale enrollment drives, many migrant children's names may appear on school rolls, but they are frequently absent from classes and pulled into labor at work sites, becoming trapped in a cycle of migration. Typically, migrants move with their families to work sites in October and return home in June,

resulting in children being out of school during this period [10]. They often miss examinations and subsequently fail, which further entices them to accompany their parents in future migrations. This pattern is a significant factor contributing to the high dropout rate in Odisha.

## **6. Conclusion**

In conclusion, this study highlights the significant impact of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) on improving livelihoods in Bolangir District, Odisha. The findings indicate that MGNREGS has played a crucial role in reducing distress migration by providing consistent employment opportunities and enhancing household incomes. Households participating in the scheme reported better socio-economic conditions, demonstrating the potential of MGNREGS to uplift marginalized communities facing persistent poverty and unemployment. However, challenges such as delays in wage payments and a lack of awareness regarding entitlements hinder the scheme's full effectiveness. Future research should focus on the long-term impacts of MGNREGS, particularly its sustainability in migration-prone regions. Comparative studies examining similar employment schemes across different states could

provide valuable insights into best practices and areas for improvement. Additionally, exploring the socio-economic mobility of beneficiaries over time would help assess the program's effectiveness in creating lasting change. Such studies would contribute to the broader discourse on rural development and inform policymakers aiming to enhance the efficacy of employment guarantee schemes in India and beyond. Addressing the existing challenges will be essential for maximizing MGNREGS's potential and ensuring sustainable rural development.

#### Future Scope

- Conduct comprehensive evaluations of MGNREGA to identify barriers and redesign the program for local needs.
- Implement robust frameworks for accountability and transparency in fund allocation and utilization.
- Invest in training programs for local officials and communities to enhance management of MGNREGA projects.

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