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**Role of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) in Periyapalayam Village, Tiruvallur District, Tamil Nadu**

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**Abstract**

MGNREGA, a key Indian act, which was passed in 2005 and implemented in 2006 aims to secure rural livelihoods by guaranteeing 100 days of paid work for every financial year for rural households. The study aims to understand the impact of MGNREGA in Periyapalayam village in Tiruvallur district. The study also delves deep in understanding how the scheme has helped in alleviating poverty and the challenges faced by the workers. Furthermore, the research investigates the effects of MGNREGA on respondents' livelihood conditions, assesses their perceptions of asset creation under the program, and explores satisfaction of the workers with MGNREGA work. By analyzing these aspects, the study aims to understand the scheme's effectiveness in improving rural livelihoods and identify any challenges faced by beneficiaries in Periyapalayam. The study employed a mixed-method approach, data was collected through primary surveys with beneficiaries. The study is expected to provide insights about the impact of MGNREGA in the livelihood of the workers in Periyapalayam village.

**Keywords:** Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, MGNREGA, Periyapalayam village, Poverty alleviation, Tiruvallur district, Rural Development.

**Introduction**

Rural villages in India form the backbone of the country's economy, with agriculture as the primary source of livelihood. However, challenges such as seasonal unemployment, low wages, lack of alternative job opportunities, and rural-urban migration continue to hinder sustainable development (G. Vedanthadesikan, 2018). It is often said that the root of India lies in its rural communities, emphasizing the need for policies that strengthen rural livelihoods (G. Vedanthadesikan, 2018). Recognizing these challenges, the Government of India introduced the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) in 2005, a landmark social security measure aimed at enhancing rural livelihood security by guaranteeing 100 days of wage employment per financial year. Initially launched as the National Rural Employment

Guarantee Scheme (NREGS) in 2006, it was renamed MGNREGA in 2009 to honour Mahatma Gandhi's vision of rural self-reliance. MGNREGA is often considered a "magic bullet" for eradicating poverty and providing guaranteed work in rural areas, making it one of the largest and most ambitious social security programs in the world (Sami & Khan, 2016). The act is demand-driven, ensuring job provision within 15 days of request, with equal pay for men and women, and a strong emphasis on transparency through social audits and digital wage payments. Unlike previous employment schemes, MGNREGA also focuses on rural asset creation, including water conservation, afforestation, irrigation, and infrastructure development, while strengthening Gram Panchayats by giving them direct control over planning and implementation. Tamil Nadu has been at the forefront of MGNREGA implementation, with the scheme being introduced in six districts in 2006, expanded to four more districts in 2007, and fully implemented across the state by 2008. The program has played a crucial role in reducing rural-urban migration and providing economic stability, particularly during agricultural lean seasons. The COVID-19 pandemic further highlighted its significance, as widespread job losses in urban centres led to a surge in demand for MGNREGA work, benefiting 7.56 crore rural households in 2020–21.

This study focuses on Periyapalayam village in Tiruvallur district, a rural village where agriculture and non-farm employment coexist. Given its proximity to Chennai, the village presents a unique setting to analyse employment patterns, income stability, and rural economic resilience under MGNREGA. The research evaluates the scheme's effectiveness in generating employment, reducing wage disparities, and strengthening rural infrastructure, while also identifying challenges such as delayed wage payments, fluctuating demand for work, and bureaucratic inefficiencies.

By examining employment trends, wage distribution, and the role of Gram Panchayats in implementation, this study aims to provide insights into MGNREGA's impact on rural economic sustainability and its role in shaping India's rural labour market

### **Objectives**

1. To identify the effect of MGNREGA on livelihood conditions of the respondents.
2. To assess the perception of the respondents regarding the assets creation.
3. To examine satisfaction of the respondents for work in MGNREGA

### **Significance of the Study**

The present study aims to assess the effectiveness and satisfaction of MGNREGA among women workers in Periyapalayam village. As this program emphasizes the Grama Panchayat's responsibility to generate sufficient employment opportunities, every rural household is entitled to 100 days of paid employment per year under MGNREGA, with women being allocated one-third of the available jobs.

The Indian government's MGNREGA initiative plays a crucial role in job creation in rural areas, significantly improving rural labourers' earnings. The program is particularly beneficial to Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), women, and other socially marginalized groups, making it a key instrument in rural poverty alleviation.

This study seeks to analyse the financial performance, effectiveness, and satisfaction levels of MGNREGA among women workers. By identifying challenges within the scheme's implementation, the research aims to suggest necessary interventions to enhance its effectiveness and ensure it meets its intended objectives. The study's findings will contribute to a better understanding of the program's execution and areas for improvement.

### **Research Methodology**

The study was conducted through focus group discussions (FGDs) and to get further insights a structured questionnaire was employed in Periyapalayam village, Tiruvallur district, Tamil Nadu. A group of 50 women workers was selected using non-probability sample design by employing convenience sampling, ensuring accessibility and relevance to the study's objectives.

The study includes variables such as age, caste, number of household members participating in MGNREGA, educational qualification, and monthly household income, workdays attended, type of work done, level of work difficulty, and timeliness of wage payments. Furthermore the study also includes Financial and household variables like perceived job stability, impact on household income, access to essential services (food, healthcare, education), and financial independence. Perception-based variables assess satisfaction with MGNREGA work, the perceived quality of rural infrastructure developed, and challenges faced, such as insufficient workdays, low wages, delayed payments, and lack of basic facilities. These variables provide a comprehensive framework to evaluate MGNREGA's effectiveness in Periyapalayam village.

To analyze the data, thematic analysis was employed to identify recurring patterns and key insights regarding the effectiveness and satisfaction of MGNREGA among women workers. This qualitative approach allowed for an in-depth exploration of their experiences, challenges, and perceptions. Thematic coding was used to classify responses into key themes, such as financial stability, work convenience, challenges in payment disbursement, and impact on household well-being.

### **Limitations**

- The present study is conducted at a micro-level, focusing on a single village with a sample size of 50 MGNREGA beneficiaries. As a result, the findings cannot be generalized to a larger population or applied at a macro level.
- Primary data collection was restricted to available workers, which may limit the diversity of perspectives and potentially exclude the experiences of those who were unable to participate.

**Literature Review**

Sami & Khan (2016) has conducted a study to examine the impact of MGNREGA in selected districts (Rampur, Moradabad, Kanpur, and Etawah) using convenience sampling methods. The key findings of the study reveal that MGNREGA has played an important role in generating employment which has positively impacted the income and consumption level of the workers in the selected districts. The study finally emphasizes the importance of MGNREGA as a tool in eradicating poverty and improving the quality of life among the rural population.

G. Vedanthadesikan (2018) has analysed the role of MGNREGA in rural employment generation using secondary information. The findings of the study suggest that MGNREGA has contributed in increasing the agricultural wage rates and benefitting both male and female rural populations, especially unskilled labourers and the migration from rural to urban areas has also seen a significant reduction. The study identifies that there is a notable increase in the job card holders but the allocation of work is unsatisfactory. Additionally, the program also provides rural infrastructural development through the non-agricultural work provided to the workers.

Kulkarni et al., (2024) has conducted an analysis of the MGNREGA in mitigating the impact of COVID-19 where the study has identified that during COVID-19, the demand for the MGNREGA jobs have surged compensating from 20 percent to 100 percent of the lost income in some regions but still around 39% of the households could not secure work, which highlights a demand-supply gap and underfunding issues. Despite facilitating rural infrastructure development, such as roads, wells, and sanitation projects, concerns were raised about the quality of assets created. The study also identifies the challenges faced by the workers. The challenges include delayed wage payments, seasonal employment, and lower-than-notified wages led to dissatisfaction among workers. The study stresses that strengthening MGNREGA can enhance its role as a resilient social safety net and support long-term rural development.

Suraj et al., (2023) has conducted a study on MGNREGA and has found that MGNREGA has significantly improved the livelihoods of the rural household by increasing the household incomes, reducing poverty, and providing crucial employment, especially during crises like COVID-19, when funding nearly doubled to meet rising demand. The program has also enhanced the rural infrastructure by supporting infrastructure projects such as roads, wells, and sanitation. Furthermore, the scheme has also played a crucial role in women's empowerment by providing equal wages to both men and women. The challenges faced by the workers highlighted by the study are delayed wage payments, corruption, and seasonal work availability persist, limiting its overall impact.

N. Harish (2020) has investigated the performance of MGNREGA in Karnataka and has found that MGNREGA has significantly contributed to employment generation, poverty reduction, and rural infrastructure development across India, including Karnataka. The scheme has helped in reducing poverty as MGNREGA helps in increasing the household income. Furthermore, MGNREGA has reduced migration from rural to urban and has also provided crucial social security, particularly during crises like COVID-19, when employment demand surged. And the

study highlights how MGNREGA has supported women's empowerment as MGNREGA has increased women's participation in work and has also provided equal wages to both men and women.

C. Jeeva (2017) explained in his article that Tamil Nadu has the largest percentage of women in the NREGA workforce in the entire nation and has had it from the program's inception (approximately 80 percent). Additionally, a sizable proportion of women are hired as Makkal Nala Panniyalars (MNP), or work site supervisors, under the NREGA program at the gramme panchayat and block levels. Tamil Nadu has had success reducing corruption in NREGA projects. The only state that still pays wages in cash is Tamil Nadu, which helps to reduce delays. As an anti-corruption move in 2008, the federal government mandated that all wage payments be routed directly to employee's bank and post office accounts. Farm labourer's make up more than 90% of all female workers. Because they work in their farms, a substantial portion of their job is unpaid. Due to the MGNREGA, women are now rewarded for some of their formerly unpaid work, like levelling soil and creating ponds for their farms. This has drawn female participants to the programme. The history of women being mobilised for campaigns and programmes in Tamil Nadu appears to have led to their higher engagement.

### **Data Analysis**

The table below provides the detailed description of demographic information about 50 MGNREGA workers in Periyapalayam village, Tiruvallur district, Tamil Nadu.

Table 1: Demographic profile

Category	Value	Percentage
<b>Age Distribution</b>		
Above 55	25	50.00%
36-45	10	20.00%
46-55	8	16.00%
26-35	6	12.00%
18-25	1	2.00%
<b>Caste Distribution</b>		
SC	33	66.00%
ST	11	22.00%
OBC	6	12.00%
<b>Number of Household Members Participating in MGNREGA</b>		
0	4	8.00%
1	32	64.00%
2	9	18.00%
3	4	8.00%
4	1	2.00%
<b>Educational Qualification</b>		
No Basic Education	36	72.00%
Below 10th	10	20.00%
10th	2	4.00%
12th	2	4.00%
Diploma	3	6.00%
<b>Monthly Household Income</b>		
2001-5000	2	4.00%
5001-7000	3	6.00%
7001-9000	3	6.00%
Above 9000	44	88.00%

Source: Computed by the researcher using primary data

From the above table it is evident that a significant proportion of the respondents belongs to the above 55 age group, followed by 20 percent in the 36-45 and 16 percent in the 46-55 category, indicating a higher participation of older individuals in MGNREGA. On the other hand, younger age groups belonging to 26-35 and 18-25, have comparatively lower representation.

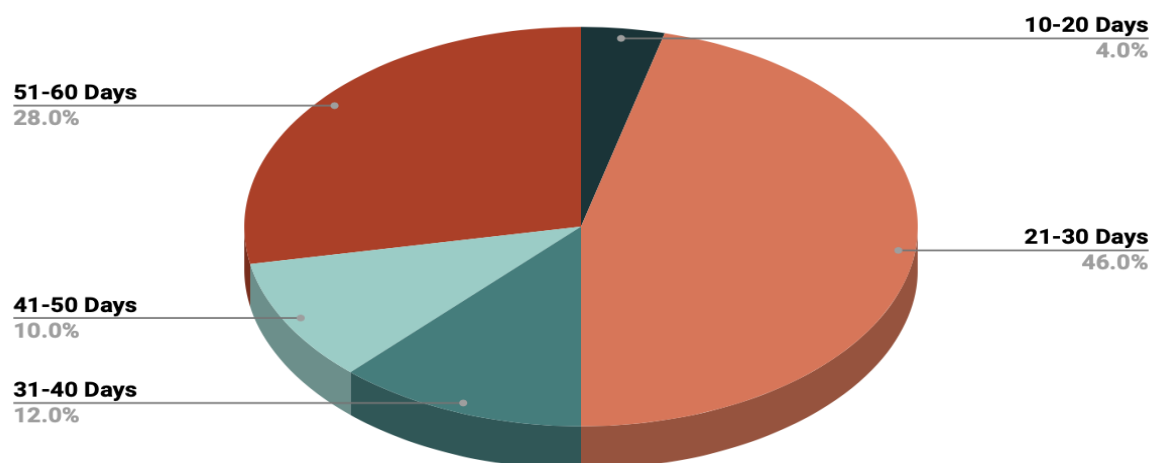
The caste distribution reveals that marginalized communities form the majority, with 66 percent belonging to Scheduled Castes (SC), 22 percent belonging to Scheduled Tribes (ST), and 12 percent are from Other Backward Classes (OBC). Furthermore, household engagement in MGNREGA is notable, as 64 percent of families have at least one member employed under the scheme, while 18 percent have two participants, reinforcing its role as a crucial livelihood source.

In terms of educational attainment, 72 percent of respondents have no formal education, while 20 percent have studied below the 10th grade. A smaller percentage has completed 10th, 12th, or obtained a diploma. Despite acquiring education up to these levels, many women continue to seek employment under MGNREGA due to the convenience it offers in managing both work and childcare responsibilities.

Income distribution further reflects the economic standing of the respondents, with 88 percent of households earning above ₹9000 per month, while 6 percent fall within the ₹7001-9000 range, 6 percent in the ₹5001-7000 bracket, and 4 percent earning between ₹2001-5000. These findings underscore a demographic largely composed of older individuals from marginalized communities, with limited formal education, a strong reliance on MGNREGA for employment, and a preference for work that aligns with their household responsibilities.

The following pie charts provide insights about the work days attended by the women workers in Periyapalayam village. In other words, whether the MGNREGA workers are getting a 100 day work under scheme. It is important to know this because the main aim of MGNREGA is to provide 100 day work to improve rural employment and reduce poverty.

Figure 1: Workdays Attended by Women Workers Under MGNREGA in Periyapalayam Village

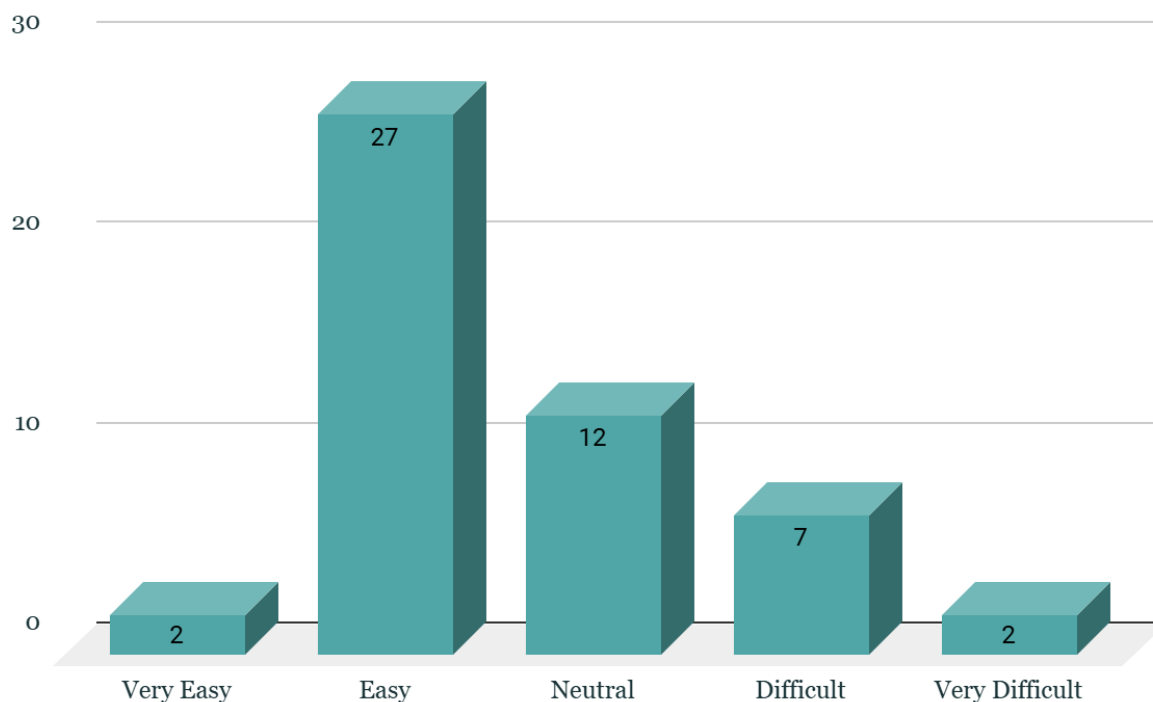


Source: Computed by the researcher using primary data

The pie chart represents the distribution of workdays attended by women workers under MGNREGA in Periyapalayam village. The majority of the women participated for 21-30 days, indicating that while they engaged in the program, they did not receive the full 100 days of employment. Around 28 percent attended 51-60 days, showing slightly better participation but still falling short of the guaranteed workdays. 12 percent of women worked for 31-40 days, while 10 percent attended 41-50 days. A small proportion worked for only 10-20 days, indicating possible barriers to participation such as household responsibilities, irregular work availability, or administrative delays. Notably, there were no workers in the 61-80 days range, and only 2 percent managed to work between 81-90 days. This highlights gaps in work allocation and suggests that women in the village struggle to secure consistent employment under MGNREGA. The following bar graph provides an insight about how the MGNREGA workers in Periyapalayam village feel about the difficulty of the work they do under MGNREGA. So the level of difficulty has five ranges starting from very easy to very difficult.



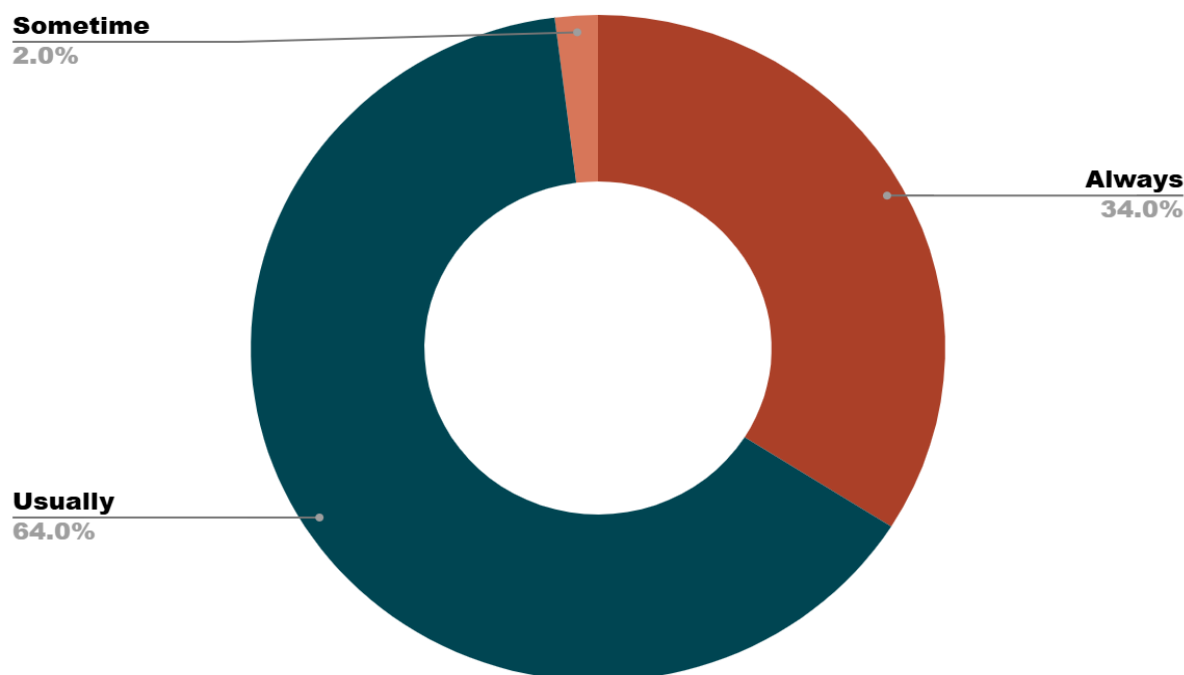
Figure 2: Level of Difficulty of work under MGNREGA



Source: Computed by the researcher using primary data

The responses regarding the level of difficulty of employment under MGNREGA in Periyapalayam village indicate varying levels of ease in securing work. A significant proportion of respondents rated the accessibility as moderate (3 - neither easy nor difficult) or somewhat easy (2 - manageable but with some challenges), suggesting that while work opportunities are available, certain obstacles persist in obtaining consistent employment. A smaller number of respondents rated it as very easy (1 - easily available with no difficulties) or very difficult (5 - extremely hard to secure work), indicating that individual experiences vary based on factors such as job availability, procedural barriers, and seasonal demand. The responses reflect a mixed perception of MGNREGA's effectiveness in ensuring regular employment for women workers. The following pie chart illustrates whether the MGNREGA workers in the Periyapalayam village get their wages in time or not. The respondents were asked whether they are paid their wages on time.

Figure 3: Wages Received on Time



Source: Computed by the researcher using primary data

The distribution of wage payments under MGNREGA in Periyapalayam village indicates that the majority of women workers received their wages on time. A significant portion of respondents reported receiving their wages "Usually" or "Always," highlighting a relatively efficient wage disbursement system. However, there are still instances where payments were delayed, as indicated by a small percentage of workers who received wages only "Sometimes." This suggests that while the system is largely effective, there may be occasional administrative or procedural delays affecting timely payments.

### **Employment and Financial Stability of MGNREGA on Rural Households**

MGNREGA plays an important role in improving the employment security and improving the financial well-being of the rural households. The responses indicate the majority of the workers feel a sense of stability in their employment, with nearly all respondents affirming that MGNREGA has improved their job security. This suggests that the program has successfully provided consistent work opportunities, reducing economic uncertainty for many families.

One of the most significant impacts of MGNREGA is on household income because the majority of the respondents reported an increase in their household income after their participation in the programs. The rise in income has directly contributed to improving financial stability which has enabled workers to meet essential expenses. In particular, the response highlights that

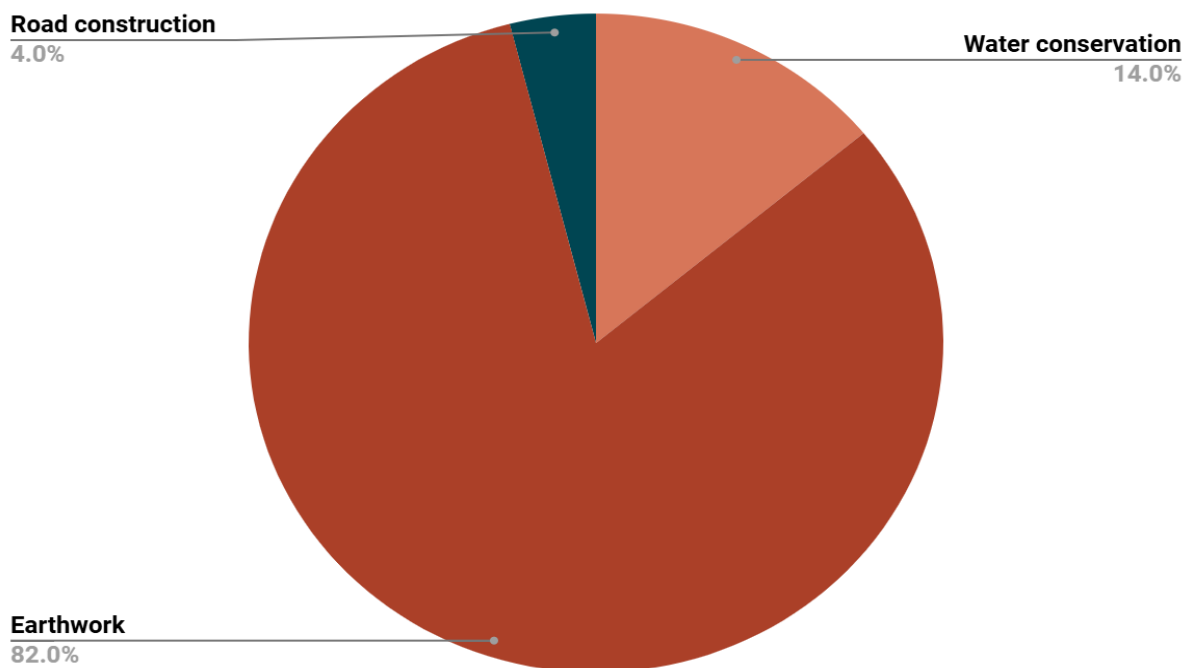
MGNREGA has positively influenced access to food, healthcare, and education, demonstrating its far-reaching socio-economic benefits.

Access to food security has notably improved, as many respondents confirmed that their earnings from MGNREGA have helped them afford better nutrition for their families. Similarly, access to healthcare services has seen an improvement, suggesting that higher household income allows for medical expenses to be met more effectively. Furthermore, MGNREGA has had a positive impact on children's education, as families are now in a better position to invest in their children's schooling, thereby fostering long-term human capital development in rural areas.

Another key finding is the role of MGNREGA in fostering financial independence among workers. A vast majority of respondents reported an increased sense of financial autonomy, likely due to the direct income they receive from MGNREGA-related employment. Although the majority of responses are positive, one outlier indicated that MGNREGA led to a decrease in household income, along with negative effects on employment security and access to essential services.

Then followed by another pie chart illustrating the type of work done under MGNREGA in Periyapalayam village. The three major type of work the workers do in the village lie broadly under road construction, water conservation and earthwork.

Figure 4: Types of Work Done under MGNREGA



Source: Computed by the researcher using primary data

The pie chart showcases the different types of work that women workers in Periyapalayam village were engaged in under MGNREGA. The majority of them were involved in earthwork, which constituted the largest share, followed by water conservation and road construction. This indicates that most MGNREGA activities in the village revolve around manual labor-intensive tasks such as land leveling and infrastructure development. The relatively smaller proportion of workers engaged in road construction and water conservation suggests that while these projects exist, they are not as widespread as earthwork-related assignments.

The following part of the analysis will follow an thematic analysis to understand better about the infrastructure developed in Periyapalayam village and the job satisfaction the MGNREGA workers feel about the work they do. Furthermore, the researchers have thematically analysed the challenges faced by the workers in the Periyapalayam village.

### **Infrastructure Development under MGNREGA**

One of the important aspects of MGNREGA is creating rural infrastructure which is essential to the villages. The respondents have stated that they have worked in developing and cleaning lakes, wells, ponds and check dams. These structures are vital for rural development as they provide water to the community over there for their day-to-day works and also for agriculture production. The majority of the respondents have stated that these assets that are created are of good quality and that they are also directly benefited from these assets.

### **Job Satisfaction Among MGNREGA workers**

100 percent of the respondents have reported satisfaction with the type of the job they are provided under MGNREGA. This positive response not only lies with employment and financial security but also due to a sense of fulfillment among the workers. This sense of fulfillment and commitment is because they see tangible improvement in the community they live in.

### **Insufficient Workdays**

One of the most frequently cited concerns is the limited number of workdays provided under MGNREGA. Several respondents mentioned that the 100-day work limit is inadequate and that the number of workdays has reduced over the past three years. This suggests that while MGNREGA provides employment, the irregularity and limitation of available workdays may hinder financial stability for many workers who rely on the scheme as a primary source of income.

### **Wage-Related Issues**

A significant number of respondents raised concerns about low wages under MGNREGA. Many workers believe that their earnings are insufficient to meet their daily needs and suggested that wages should be increased. This aligns with broader discussions on the adequacy of MGNREGA wages in relation to inflation and living costs.

**Delayed Payments**

Another major challenge highlighted is the delay in wage payments. Some workers reported that they had not received their wages for weeks, which can cause financial distress for families dependent on timely earnings. This issue underscores the importance of ensuring a smooth and transparent wage disbursement system to maintain trust in the program.

**Lack of Basic Facilities at Worksites**

Although some respondents mentioned that safety conditions were good, a few suggested improvements in workplace facilities. One worker recommended the provision of shaded areas ("panthal") at worksites to protect laborers from extreme heat. This indicates a need for better infrastructure and worker-friendly conditions at MGNREGA sites.

**Findings**

- The majority of the respondents are above 55 years, followed by 36-45 years and 46-55 years, indicating that older individuals participate more actively in MGNREGA while the age groups (18-35 years) have lower participation.
- Despite some of the respondents completing 10th, 12th, or diplomas, MGNREGA remains an attractive employment option due to its proximity, ease of work, and flexibility in managing household responsibilities.
- Most of the workers have only participated for 21-30 days in MGNREGA, indicating that full 100-day employment is not achieved while another 28 percent attended 51-60 days, but very few exceeded 80 days, pointing to gaps in job availability, i.e., irregular work availability.
- Wages are perceived as insufficient, and delayed payments remain a problem for some workers.
- Nearly all the respondents have affirmed that due to MGNREGA their economic standing has improved by reducing economic uncertainties for their families.
- Many respondents have stated that there is an income boost in their total household income when they are employed through MGNREGA, improving their ability to afford food, healthcare, and education.
- Furthermore, respondents confirmed that MGNREGA earnings help provide Three meals a day for their families.
- A majority of the respondents have felt an increase in financial autonomy due to their direct earnings from MGNREGA.
- Majority of the time, the workers have been involved in developing lakes, wells, ponds, and check dams, which directly benefit the community by providing essential water resources and building these infrastructure has created a sense of fulfillment on the workers as they felt they contributed to their village.
- The majority believe that the assets created are of good quality and contribute positively to their livelihoods and agriculture.
- All the respondents have felt satisfied with their job.

- Finally, the challenges faced by the workers in Periyapalayam village include insufficient workdays, low wages, delayed payment and lack of basic facilities at worksites.

**Suggestions**

- The current provision guarantees 100 days of work per household per year, which may not be sufficient for many rural families. Increasing this limit to 200 days would provide greater job security and income stability to the rural population.
- Many workers feel that the wages provided under MGNREGA are not sufficient to meet rising living costs. The wages should be revised periodically based on inflation and local economic conditions.
- One of the major issues faced by MGNREGA workers is the delay in wage payments. So, the payments should be processed within a week to ensure financial stability.
- Many workers suggested that skill development should be integrated into MGNREGA. This would help workers acquire skills that can enable them to secure better-paying jobs outside of the scheme.

**Conclusion**

The country has faced development challenges due to the steadily growing population and the threats that go along with it. The provision of jobs and other infrastructure facilities to our increasing population is still undermanaged, despite the demographic dividend that comes with it. The country's employment and poverty situations have gotten worse as a result of the bulk of the rural population's reliance on the agricultural industry, where growth is minimal. Therefore, poverty caused by unemployment continues to be a serious concern for policymakers. Despite the fact that several plans and initiatives for rural development and job creation have been carried out throughout the nation over the years, the situation has not improved as anticipated. However, the Mahatma Gandhi NREGA, which was implemented in the nation with the dual goals of creating rural assets and employment, has undoubtedly hit the rural areas in a high tempo of celebration and benefit. Overall, while MGNREGA has successfully enhanced employment security and rural development, expanding workdays, increasing wages, and improving worksite conditions would further strengthen its impact.

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