

Role of MGNREGA in Generating Employment Opportunity in India – A Study of During Covid-19

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Abstract

The foundation of Indian economy is agriculture. To remove unemployment and remove poverty from rural areas government launched various scheme. Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) was established in 2006, as the first step toward employment generation in rural India and provides 100 days' work guarantee to Individuals and households under 'right to work' involved in agriculture and seasonal employment in a financial year within the radius of 5 km. It helps in reducing poverty in rural India and raises the economic status of workers. MGNREGA provides employment opportunities to women workers and decreases migration from urban areas to rural areas. The study tries to focus on pre covid and post covid era in employment generation through MGNREGA. The secondary data of last five years is used to perform the study. The finding of the study show decline in employment opportunity in pre-covid and post-covid era but shows increase in during pandemic and also increasing women employment percentage. MGNREGA through its various categories of projects provides autonomy to unskilled workers to choose their preference of work. MGNREGA was reflected as the world's greatest and striving programme of social security and public works. The data collected through the secondary source by various newspaper articles, mgnrega website and research papers. Maximum numerical data has been collected through MGNREGA website. The analysis shows that there is an increase in employment generation under MGNREGA scheme during covid 19 in rural areas and the reason is migration of rural people from urban areas. The statistics also portrays that there is a continuous increase in the wage rate system under MGNREGA. The main idea of MGNREGA is to scrutinize the reliability and success of the employment policy. It is really difficult to reflect that any other programme worked well with potential in employment generation for rural people in earning their livelihood.

Keywords: Employment generation, rural development, MGNREGA, pre-covid, during covid, post-covid

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Introduction:

A major part of India is covered under rural communities. People in rural areas have a poor life which leads to a lack of housing, education, nutrition, and health. It can be said that one of the reasons of poverty in India is joblessness. It is said that around 70 percent of the population belongs to rural India and their earnings solely depend on agriculture. Agriculture is a seasonal employment that creates a huge gap between productivity and income. To reduce this gap government introduced various Anti-Poverty programs to lessen poverty and to generate skill-based employment opportunities for rural India. In India, major rural livelihood depends on seasonal variation in Agriculture and linked activities.

Lack of formal education and weak economic background draws the attention of central and state governments. Indian labor market force is the most unorganized and informal. After understanding the labor market, the Indian government introduced many programs to reduce poverty and came up with Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act under the flagship of the Rural Guarantee Act. The central objective of this act is to provide guaranteed employment opportunities to poor people of rural India. Government always focuses on employment generation for the rural population for earning their livelihood. MGNREGA scheme provides 100 days wage employment every financial year to every family member (above 18 years of age) to enhance the socio-economic status of rural communities. The period of employment shall be a minimum of 14 days continuously but it should not be more than 6 days in a week. Various policies come under government on right basis like right to information Act, Right to education and many more out of which MGNREGA takes second position.

In the beginning, it was National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA), and after

that, it was retitled as Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA). The aim of passing MGNREGA is to provide social security and welfare to the rural community, trim down unemployment and poverty, and exterminate hunger. It is said that under MGNREGA rural people seek employment as their right. MGNREGA is seen as a demand-driven initiative that was carried out in response to demand from the villagers and labour. MGNREGA was implemented in phase wise style; the first phase covered 200 districts of extreme backward rural areas. In next phase 130 districts were covered and rest of district comes in final phase.

MGNREGA emerged as a social welfare tool for economic development. The central government provides livelihood as well as security to the millions of rural people in India during covid 19. MGNREGA proves a boon for the rural Indian people during covid 19 when millions of people moved back to their villages and hometown after losing their job in urban areas. MGNREGA plays an important role in reducing redundancy as the rural population is interested in working during covid and post covid but they could not find single-day work to earn their livelihood. During the pandemic MGNREGA protects the migrated workers from loss of income and increased their earning from 20% to 80% subject to the block the worker belongs.

Key Features of MGNREGA

MGNREGA was the first-ever program developed under the flagship of Prime Minister Dr. Man Mohan Singh in September 2005 that guarantee wage employment to rural India. The MGNREGA program is successfully implemented in 736 districts in India. As per the preface it is considered the largest social welfare scheme for providing employment opportunities for the rural population. MGNREGA is considered

the prominent paradigm of rural development published by the World Bank in World Development Report in 2014. During covid 19 pandemic, MGNREGA was considered an invaluable employer to provide employment opportunities in rural India. It can be said that because of the pandemic 19 – 20, suddenly, the demand for employment was raised by the rural people as they moved to their hometowns to earn the livelihood they need. MGNREGA focuses on both unskilled and skilled labor, it consists of at least 60% unskilled labor and the remaining 40% for skilled and semi-skilled labor. The accepted projects under MGNREGA are majorly divided into four different categories public works relating to natural resources management, individual assets for vulnerable sections, common infrastructure for DeendayalAntyodayaYojana–National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM) compliant self-help groups, and rural infrastructure. Through MGNREGA government initiated numerous poverty reducing scheme with different projects work few programmes comprise the Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP), Employment Assurance Scheme (EAS), PradhanMantriRojgarYojana (PMRY), Swarnajayanti Gram SwarajgarYojana (SGSY) and PradhanMantriGramodayaYojana (PMGY).

The focus of MGNREGA is to encourage convergence. Basically, MGNREGA works divides into four different classes namely, A, B, C & D. In accordance with Category A, public works involving the management of natural resources, including water conservation, watershed management, micro- and minor irrigation, restoration of historic waterbodies, land development on common land, and afforestation, are covered. The most vulnerable households are supported by Category B using collective or private resources. The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006 lists these groups as Scheduled

Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), nomadic tribes, denitrified tribes, families below the poverty line (BPL), households headed by women, households headed by physically disabled people, beneficiaries of land reforms and the PradhanMantriAwasYojana (PMAY), and traditional forest dwellers. Small and marginal farmers, as defined under the Agricultural Debt Waiver and Debt Relief Scheme of 2008, are also qualified to receive the benefits of category B assets. Self-help groups (SHGs) that are in compliance with the National Rural Livelihood Mission are covered by Category C, which provides for shared infrastructure. SHGs that fall under this category increase agricultural productivity by building sturdy bio-fertilizer infrastructure, warehouses for post-harvest storage, and shared work sheds for SHG livelihood activities. For example, Category D covers the construction of gram panchayat buildings, compound walls for government schools, playfields, all-weather roads, rural sanitation-related projects such individual household latrines, school toilets, anganwadicentre toilets, etc.

Literature Review:

In the era of Globalization, Privatization, and liberalization social security and social welfare plays an important role in generating employment opportunities.

A report foresees that around 130 million people were unemployed in India during covid 19. Around 40% mainly consist of blue-collar people. It left a lasting impact on the morale of the rural people. Pre Covid period of MGNREGA was blissful for rural people. Studies showed a positive impact on employment generation through MGNREGA (Roy & Singh, 2010)

Xavier, G. and Mari, G. (2014) disclosed in their study that MGNREGA provides economic and

social, and monetary freedom through employment generation and improves the decision-making power of rural women as well as increases their income and purchasing power of the household.

Dutta. S (2015) in his studies put an argument that in some states MGNREGA worked very well while in other states it failed due to its ineffectiveness, absenteeism, incompetence, and dishonesties. He focused on the accountability of the program. He further stated that in order to make MGNREGA effective for rural population, it is very important to remove an incapability of the program.

Sami & Khan (2016) concluded in their research that MGNREGA generated various employment opportunities that lead to an increase in the income level of the rural population and poverty eradication in various districts of India. The People Action for Employment Guarantee (PAEG) clearly showed the increased demand for work in 2021 and 2022.

Researchers say that during covid 2020-21 rural people did not get a single day job under MGNREGA. Majorly livelihoods were affected due to covid 19 in urban areas which leads to huge unemployment and relocation of the rural population. (Vasudevan, et.al 2020).

MGNREGA proves a very powerful tool in economic development of our country. The various features of MGNREGA are very helpful in removing poverty from different phases and generating livelihood for people through assets creation. Its beneficial for rural people in many aspects, especially for women in in different region. (Hirway. et.al 2008)

Mit & Mahapatra (2020) in his article mention that there should be an increase in the number of work

projects so that uninterrupted work should be provided to the needed individuals and households under MGNREGA schemes. He further mentioned that, there should be an immediate pay method to the workers to avoid delay in their wages, which lift up their motivation to work more and with sincerity.

Kareemulla, Ramasundaram, et.al (2013) through his research finding mention that after MGNREGA there was strong reduction in the migration of seasonal workers and through various schemes rural workers can earn to meet their normal expenses of food, clothing, education and medical care, which reduces down poverty.

Bhat & Mariyappan (2015), finding in his studies that 76% believes that MGNREGA works for the improvement of the rural people by generating employment opportunities on equality basis and fairness in wage distribution among men and women. whereas Srinivas (2016) found in his research that there is difference in the wage rate policy for men and women. 56% rural people do believe that MGNREGA helps in improving living standard and relishes a life of self-respect. 68% people working under various schemes of MGNREGA supposes that it really helps in creating employment opportunities for rural populations. Whereas Mukherjee & Sinha (2011) in his studies found that MGNREGA did not bring any change in the living standard of rural people.

Various researcher supported MGNREGA from their views like Reddy et.al (2014) stated a positive outcome of MGNREGA on rural wages whereas Kumar (2013) in his studies shows a negative effect upon migration of people from different village.

Research Gap:

Many studies have been done by different groups to cover various aspects of MGNREGA Programme

but none of the studies shows the analysis of during covid 19 eras, where numbers of migrants were returning back to their villages from different part of the country. To earn their livelihood during the tough time of pandemic 19. So this study is majorly focusing on the various aspects of employment generation for Individual, women and household during covid 19 and its impacts on their livelihood and assets creation.

Objective of the study:

- To study the role of MGNREGA in generating employment opportunities for rural areas.
- To analyze the changes in employment generation through MGNREGA pre and post covid 19.
- To evaluate the performance of MGNERGA in employment generation.

- To examine the satisfaction level of rural people through MGNERGA Scheme.
- To give suggestions on the improvement of MGNREGA practices.

The Hypothesis of the Study:

H₀ -There is no increase in employment opportunities during covid 19.

H₁ - There is an increase in employment opportunities during covid 19.

Research Methodology:

This research paper is based on secondary data, collected from various newspapers, reports on employment and MGNERGA in rural India, and an online database and website of MGNERGA. This paper is descriptive research in which qualitative data on MGNERGA activities in rural India is used.

Table No.1 Status of MGNREGA

S.No.	Details	2022-2023
1	Total No. of Districts	736
2	Total No. of Blocks	7156
3	Total No. of GPs	2,70,090
4	Total No. of Job card issues (Cr)	16.89
5	Total No. of workers (Cr)	31.49
6	Total No. of Active Job Card (Cr)	10.18
7	Total No. of Active Workers (Cr)	15.52

Source – <http://nrega.nic.in>

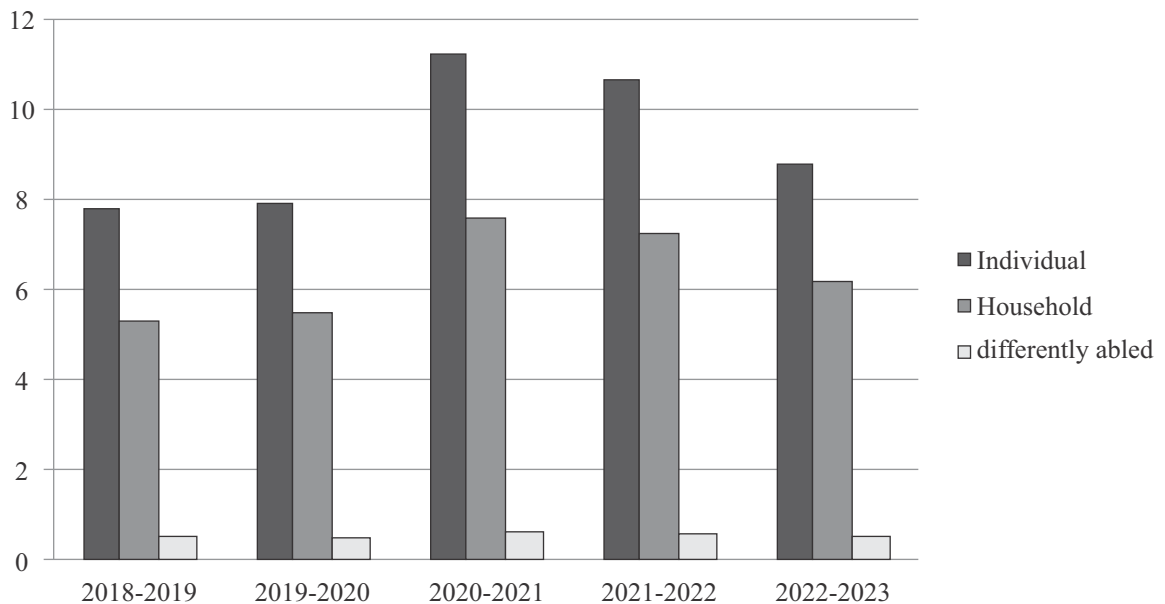
There are currently 31.49 crore total number of workers in 736 district which covers 7156 blocks and around 2,70,090 Gram panchayat under MGNREGA scheme. The active workers are 15.52 cr. Total number of Job card issued in 2022-2023 is

16.89 cr. and total number of active job card are 10.18cr. Which is almost 60.27% lesser than it should actually be. Similarly active number of workers is also less than total number of number of workers.

Table- 2 Employment Generated in India (2019-2020 to 2021-2022)

S.No	Detail	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023
1	Total No. of Individuals worked (in Cr)	7.77	7.88	11.19	10.62	8.76
2	Total No. of Households Worked (in Cr)	5.27	5.48	7.55	7.26	6.19
3	Differently abled persons worked	4,90,668	4,62,917	6,06,149	5,73,811	4,90,668

Source – <http://mrega.nic.in>



We have taken data on the overall employment status of India by comparing the pre covid, during covid and post covid worker participation rate of men and women and household. In the year 2018-2019 during the pre covid period total number of individuals work was 7.77 crore and increased to 11.19 crore which is almost 44.01% increase in the year 2020-2021 during covid. The data of post covid (2021-2022) drop down to 5.09% and 17.51% in the year 2022-2023. Total household

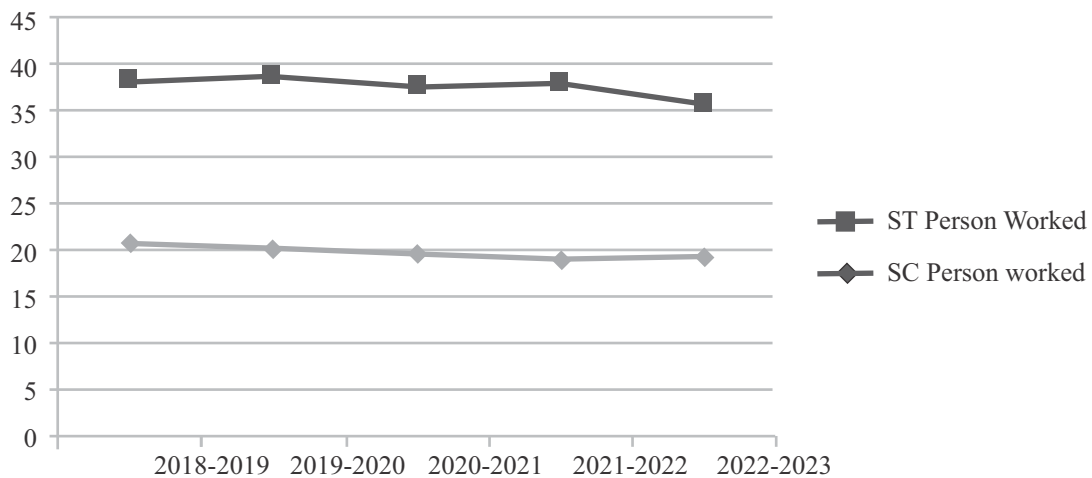
work shows a comparative increase of 43.26% from 2018-2019 to 2020-2021 during covid and a slight decrease of 3.84% 2021-2022 and 14.74% in 2022-2023 post covid era. The data shows decrease in 2018-2019 by 27,751 and a great increase in during covid lockdown (2020-2021) by 1, 43,232 and again decrease in post covid period. This is reflected in the studies that demand for the work during covid is very high and breaks the record of these five years.

Table – 3 Employment generations and its distribution from FY

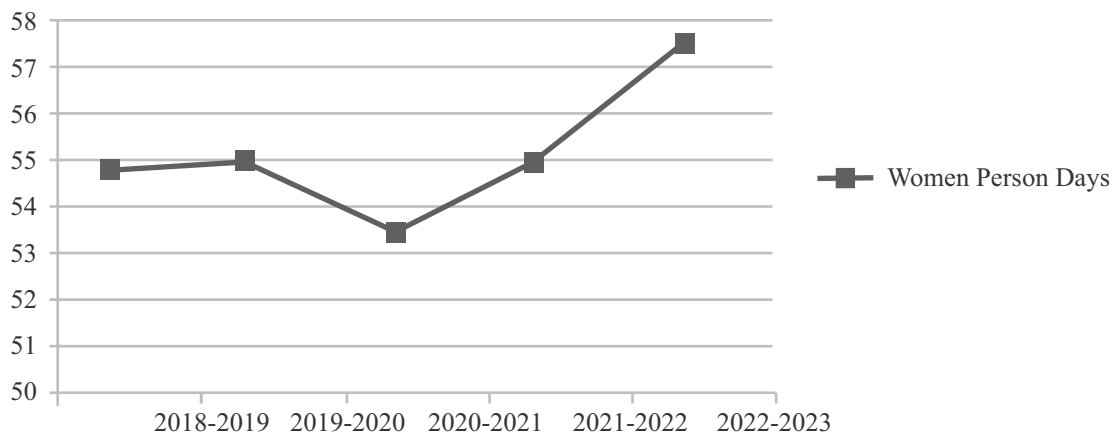
S.No	Detail	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023
1	SC person days % as of total	20.77	20.28	19.74	19.17	19.2
2	ST person days % as of total	17.42	18.46	17.87	18.82	16.58
3	Women person days out of total	54.59	54.78	53.09	54.7	57.4
4	Average days of household provided per household	50.88	48.4	50.46	50.07	47.84
5	Total number of household completed 100 days of wage employment	52,59,502	40,60,463	71,97,090	59,17,728	7,30,203

Source – <http://nrega.nic.in>

ST & SC Person Days worked



Women Employment



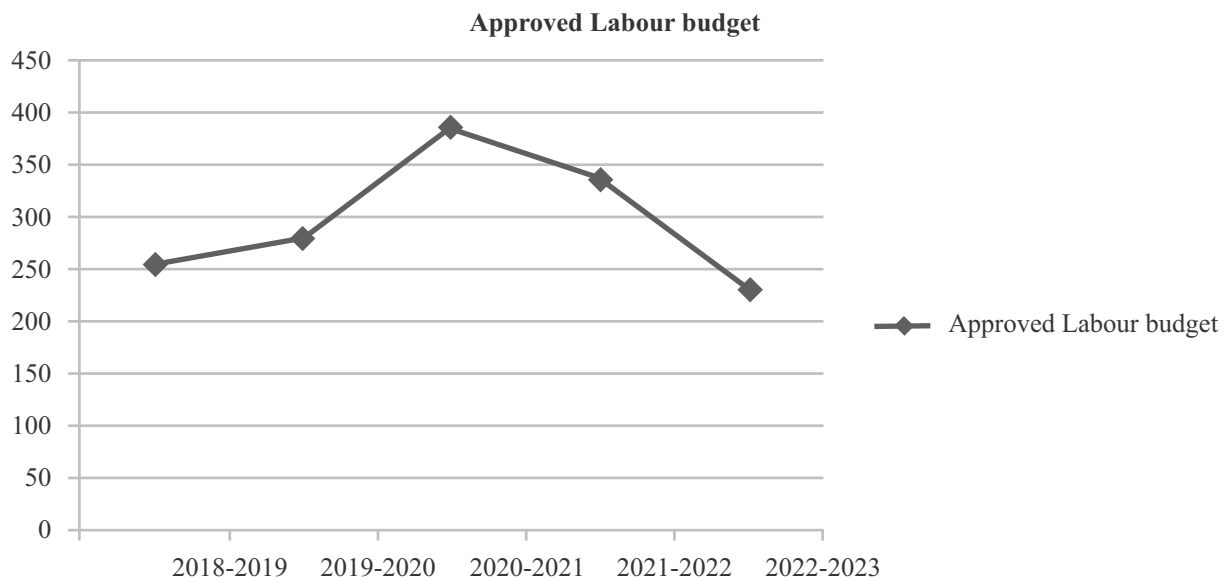
The data shows the involvement rate of SC person day's employment generation continuous declining from pre pandemic period to lockdown period to post pandemic period. There is a drop down of 7.55% in these years. But in ST person days' work there is a rise of 5.97% in pre covid 2019-2020 and again a down fall of 3.19% during pandemic and in post pandemic period (2021-2022) there is a rise of 5.04% and again a down fall of 11.90% in 2022-2023. This does not portray a very good image of MGNREGA with respect to ST & SC person days

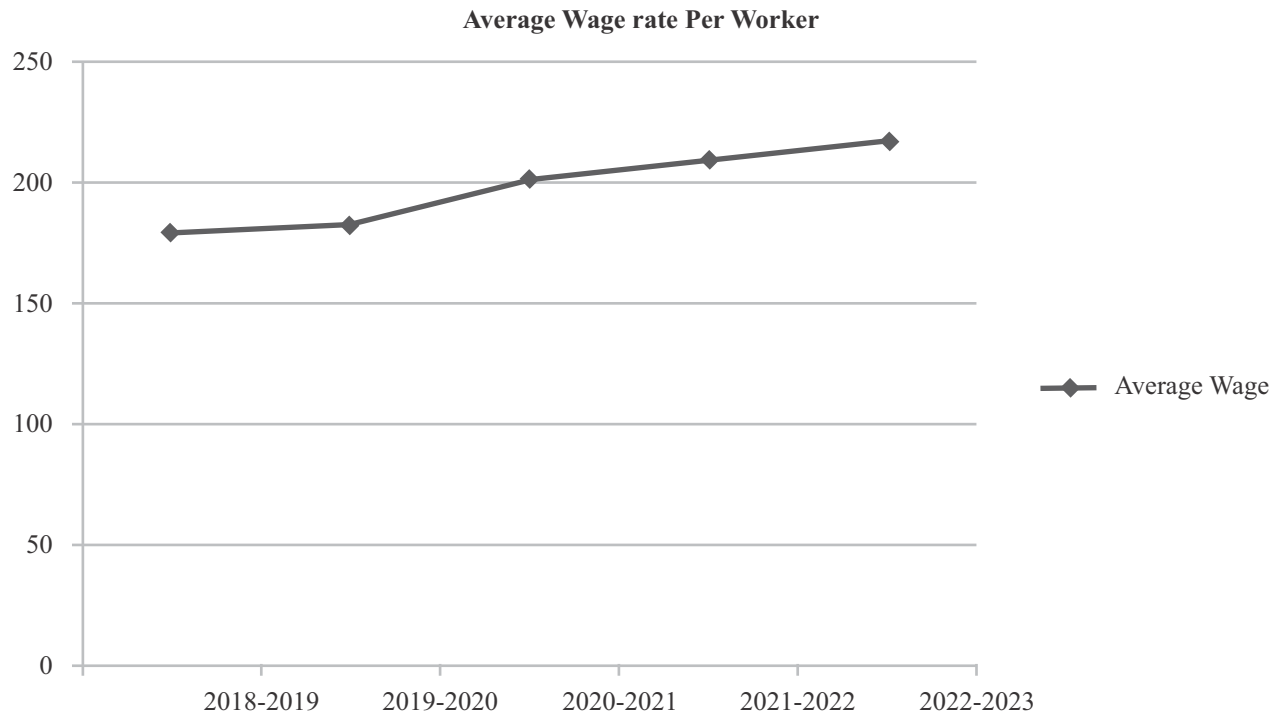
worked. In terms of employment generation only 2020-2021 during covid period shows the attainment of plan. There is remarkable success in women employment under MGNREGA as its continuously increasing across India, but shows a non-attainment of plan in women employment in 2020-2021 during pandemic. With the help of following data it can say that demand of employment increase during pandemic. This is a positive sign toward employment generation among women.

Table No. 4 Total Labour Budget Approved

S.No.	DETAIL	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023
1	Approved labour budget (Cr)	256.56	277.63	385.67	337.76	230.18
2	Average wage rate per worker per day	179.13	182.09	200.71	208.84	216.43

Source: <http://mrega.nic.in>





Data shows a significant increase in approved labour budget from 256.56 crore in 2018-2019 pre covid era to 385.67 crore in 2020-2021 during pandemic but again shows a decrease from 385.67 crore to 230.18 in 2022-2023 in post covid era. And again with time and in post covid era it started reducing and falls down in 2022-2023.

A research recommended that MGNREGA has continuously shows a growth of daily wage rates per worker since pre covid era. The usual rise in the wage rate under MGNREGA was 4.25%, whereas there is no concept of dearness allowance for MGNREGA workers.

Findings:

- There is a slow growth rate of individual worked in pre covid era and a shows a decline in post covid era.
- There is trend shows slightly increase in household worked pre pandemic period and again shows a decline trend post pandemic.

- Research and data shows that there is a lot of flexibility in employment generation from MGNREGA pre and post covid era.
- Research shows that MGNREGA tries to improve the status of the rural people and continuously increasing the average wage rate per worker.
- The budget approved by MGNREGA also shows continuous rise in pre pandemics era and but a down fall in post pandemic era.
- Data shows that women employment is increasing in pre pandemic era but decline during covid era and again showing growth rate post covid era.
- As per the scheme of MGNREGA of 100 days wage employment opportunity to rural people data shows increase only during covid period and rest of the period shows declining rate.

Conclusion:

MGNREGA is considered as the key rural employment generation scheme in India. To support poor population in rural economy, government took initiative and develop MGNREGA scheme. MGNREGA promotes gender equality in providing equal employment opportunities for rural females. The main aim of MGNREGA is to provide employment to unemployed individuals and households so that economic growth can be achieved. MGNREGA is considered as the powerful mechanism in reducing employment in rural areas especially among women and shows a noticeable amount of rural development and empowering the various societies by income generation. With continuous increase in wage pay MGNREGA attracts many rural individuals and households to work on different projects of government. The trends show that Employment generation of MGNREGA is not the successful for ST & SC persons whereas it proves successful in generating employment for women. The budget allocation for MGNREGA for covid period (2020-2021) is not sufficient as the number of migration increases, so rural people seek employment in their area which increase employment and subsequently demand for increasing budget allocation from central government.

During Pandemic MGNREGA was the only source of income for rural people because migration from urban areas. MGNREGA reduces migration by providing employment opportunities in nearby areas. From the data, it can be concluded that during covid the various person days is reduced. Minimum 100 days of work opportunity is very helpful for agricultural and seasonal workers as during spare time they get some work to earn their livelihood. It is the responsibility of the gram panchayat to play an active role in graceful functioning of the MGNREGA in particular rural

areas and should provide job on immediate basis to those who possess job cards and help them in earning their livelihood. H0 Null Hypothesis is rejected and hence the H1 is accepted as there are changes in employment opportunities during covid.

Suggestions:

- Though the wage rate under MGNREGA is continuous increasing but at a very substantial rate, so government should focus on the increase in wage rate per worker as per inflation rate.
- As the employment opportunities are continuously increasing under MGNREGA, so government should on employment generation for differently abled workers.
- MGNREGA in participation with central government should launch some projects which provides throughout the year employment programme, so that continuous flow of income is there for rural people.

Scope for Future Research:

MGNREGA provides a lot for future studies in various segments. This study provides scope for future research in the areas of women empowerment through MGNREGA in rural areas and to study about the decreasing demand of employment in SC & ST sections in various years in India. To understand the reason behind the decline in the approved budget in post covid era, various financial adjustment and benefits of MGNREGA for different blocks and its challenges. There should be the provision for single women employment opportunities under MGNREGA.

Limitation of the study:

The main limitation of this study is that, it is purely

based on secondary data. The various data that used in the study for analysis purpose is majorly from newspaper articles and MGNREGA website and other research paper published in National and International Journal. The interpretation of various segments cannot be used for vital managerial decisions. The study cannot be done in generalize way.

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