

“Mgnregp As A Flagship Programme For The Sustainable Development Of Kerala: An Overview”

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Abstract

Background: Rural development usually relates to the method of enhancing the quality of life, financial well-being, development of rural areas to improve the living standards of people in the village economy. As a developing nation with the second-largest population in the world, India has grappled with the significant challenge of generating ample employment opportunities for both individual and national progress.

Aim: The present study has been undertaken to evaluate the specific schemes undertaken by MGNREP in the state of Kerala. The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Programme (MGNREGP), launched in 2005 to improve the livelihood security of individuals in rural areas, legally ensuring a minimum of 100 days of paid employment each financial year for adult members of any household willing to engage in unskilled manual work related to public projects.

Keywords: MGNREGP, LSGD, Sustainable development, Bio-Diversity, Subhiksha Keralan, Sanitation Campaign, Kerala Tribal Plus, Advance Payment of Wages to ST families, Coir geotextiles. Jala subhiksha – Well Recharging and One crore saplings.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

India, being a developing country with the second-largest population globally, has faced the crucial task of creating sufficient employment opportunities for individual and national development. Since gaining independence, various programs and policies have been introduced with the goal of fostering employment opportunities. These initiatives include the Community Development Programme (1952), Rural Manpower Programme (1960-61), Crash Scheme for Rural Employment (1971-72), Integrated Rural Development Programme (1980), Jawahar Rozgar Yojana (1989), and Swarna Jayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (2001), among others.

Despite the implementation of these programs, the primary objectives of poverty eradication and comprehensive empowerment of marginalized segments of society remain unrealized. Many of these initiatives were primarily focused on contributing to the nation's economic growth rather than prioritizing comprehensive rural development. Unfortunately, the growth in unemployment rates has disproportionately affected underprivileged communities. It is clear that previous programs have fallen short of their intended impact in addressing poverty and empowering marginalized sections of society. There is a recognized need for future policies to reassess their strategies, ensuring a more inclusive and effective approach that directly uplifts the underprivileged and contributes to their holistic development. The challenge remains to design and implement programs that not only drive national growth but also prioritize the well-being and empowerment of the most disadvantaged sections of the population.

Sustainable development stands as a pervasive paradigm in the 21st century. Overcoming challenges such as poverty, biodiversity loss, and climate change is crucial for realizing the goals of sustainable development. The Act was passed on 23 August 2005 to improve the livelihood security of individuals in rural areas, legally ensuring a minimum of 100 days of paid employment each financial year for adult members of any household willing to engage in unskilled manual work related to public projects. MGNREGA as a programme was rolled out in three phases. Introduced in 200 rural districts in its first phase (2 February 2006), in its second phase, 2007-08, it was extended to an additional 130 rural districts. The remaining districts were notified under MGNREGA with effect from 1 April 2008. Effectively, this is the 15th year of its operation, and currently the programme operates in 691 districts in the country. In Kerala, the programme started in 2006 in two districts (Wayanad and Palakkad, two backward districts in the state) was extended to all the districts by 2008.

The initiation of the MGNREGS in Kerala (2006) marked a potential boon for the state. Commencing in the rural areas of Palakkad and Wayanad districts, the program expanded to Kasaragod and Idukki in the second phase by February 2007 and reached the remaining 10 districts in the third phase by January 2009. Kerala's Panchayati raj institutions has the pivotal role in planning and implementation of MGNREGS. As of now, the entire implementation is in the hands of village panchayats, and an important role is played by women's self-help groups such as Kudumbasree. The scheme aims to generate lasting impacts by creating durable infrastructure. MGNREGS works have the potential to generate environmental benefits such as groundwater recharge, soil, water and biodiversity conservation, sustaining food

production, halting land degradation and building resilience to current climate risks such as moisture stress, delayed rainfall, droughts, floods.

1.2 BIODIVERSITY AND MGNREGP

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee (MGNREG) workers play a crucial role in maintaining biodiversity through their involvement in various conservation and environmental projects. Participation in various projects of afforestation and reforestation, planting trees and restoring degraded ecosystems. They engage in habitat restoration activities, helping to recreate and maintain natural environments. Projects related to the conservation of wetlands, marshes, and other water bodies are often undertaken by MGNREG workers. These areas are critical for numerous aquatic species and contribute to overall biodiversity. MGNREG workers may engage in projects promoting sustainable agricultural practices. These practices can contribute to maintaining soil fertility, reducing chemical usage, and preserving the biodiversity of insects and microorganisms in the soil.

1.3 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Juliet Angom (2022)¹ found out that MGNREGP contributed immensely to reforestation and afforestation through its land development objectives. It would help to reduce vulnerability of local agrarian communities of recurrent droughts and floods. Thus they could conserve soil moisture and fertility. The study also revealed that MGNREGP in convergence with other government forest development programs had the potential to promote afforestation and reforestation in Indian states.

Dheeraj (2017)² revealed that MGNREG programme could contribute significantly for maintaining the Human Development Index (HDI) of India and created a positive impact on the four major indicators of the HDI namely – Income Generation, Economic self-reliance, empowerment of women (inclusive of gender mainstreaming) and the quality of life. The study also suggested that sustainable development of the nation could happen when the central and state governments introduce policies and initiatives for the growth and development of the rural household.

Sudhir Maske (2015)³ analysed the need to create mass level awareness about the MGNREG programme, recruitment of competent staff for the proper implementation of the programme to ensure the realization of desired goals of MGNREG policy. The study also revealed that for achieving the universal goal of inclusive growth and sustainable development, the authorities must draft policies to enrich the backward regions this would help to regenerate the village resources to achieve the prime goals of sustainable development.

Jahangir (2015)⁴ found out that various activities under MGNREG programme would help to ensure the economic growth through the protection of environmental quality and social shield. The study also revealed that the MGNREG programme, not only an initiative of poverty reduction but also a means to achieve the survival needs of the poor. Participation in this programme would help them to develop an attitude for stopping those activities that degrade the environment, one of the greatest threats to global climate change.

Sebastian (2014)⁵ analysed various activities promoted under Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme such as water harvesting and soil conservations. They could have high positive results on biodiversity and environment conservation. The study also suggested that biodiversity register of panchayats would be prepared as a part of the panchayat resource mapping at the earliest to identify the biodiversity hotspots in each panchayat. Awareness programmes among all the stakeholders would help to develop a positive attitude for conserving those precious biodiversity hotspots.

1.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Sustainable development encompasses three fundamental pillars: economic growth, environmental management, and addressing social exclusion. This study is an effort to analyze the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Programme (MGNREGP) of Kerala. This programme is initiated in the state of Kerala with the objective of enhancing livelihood security in rural areas by providing at least 100 days of guaranteed wage employment in the financial year, to every household and the aim was to create durable assets like road, canals, ponds and wells. The critical review of literature indicates that there is still a gap in existing literature as regards the MGNREG Scheme in the state of Kerala. It is hoped that the study would help to get an overview about the programme in the state of Kerala.

1.5 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

According to Mahatma Gandhi, our father of nation, “The soul of India is vested in villages” in his famous quoting which clearly specifies the need and importance of social empowerment. MGNREGP occupies a significant role in rural development. The present study has been

undertaken to get an overview of MGNREGP in the State of Kerala . Kerala is the southern state of India formed on 11 November 1956 and it is the 21st largest Indian State by area. It is bordered by Karnataka to the north, Tamil Nadu to the east and Lakshadweep sea to the west. Evaluation has been made by assessing the initiatives of the government of Kerala for the successful implementation of MGNREGP in the state of Kerala. The details were collected from the official website of Government of Kerala and also from various press releases.

1.6 OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

To get an overview about the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee programme for the Sustainable Development of the state of Kerala.

1.7 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Secondary data were used to get an overview about the specific schemes of MGNREGP. The secondary data were collected from books, journal and various websites.

1.8 ORGANISATION STRUCTURE

MGNREGA is implemented in the State under the valuable guidance and supervision of Hon'ble Chief Minister, Minister for Local Self Government Department and the overall supervision of Additional Chief Secretary to LSGD. State Employment Guarantee Council (SEGC) set up by the State Government under Section 12 of MNREG Act advises the State Government on the implementation of the Scheme, reviews the monitoring and redressal mechanisms and suggest improvements, evaluate and monitor the Scheme within the State and recommends the proposals of works to be submitted to the Central Government. The District Collectors as District Programme Officers hold the responsibility for overseeing the implementation of the Scheme at district level. They are assisted by Joint Programme Coordinators.

At Block level, Block Development Officers, who hold the charge of Block Programme Officers, monitor the Scheme. The field level implementation of the Scheme is entrusted with Grama Panchayaths. Grama Panchayath Secretary acts as the registration officer who is responsible for issuing job cards under the Scheme. Contract staff are posted at Block and Grama Panchayath level exclusively for the implementation of the Scheme.

The Gram Panchayat Secretary is the registration officer under Mahatma Gandhi NREGS. The GP Secretary is assisted by an Assistant Secretary in the implementation of MNREGS. In addition, an accountant and a section clerk in the Gram Panchayat fully deals with the day-to-day affairs of the Scheme at the GP level. Further, each Gram Panchayat is having two Village Extension Officers who also support the GP Secretary in the implementation of the scheme. To support the Gram Panchayat Secretary, data entry operator cum accountants and Engineers/Overseers are provided on contract for a period of one year which can be extended by the GP. The selection of the contract staff vests upon the concerned GP. Each ward is having a Vigilance and Monitoring Committee (V & MC) to oversee the implementation of the Scheme.

Table 1 MGNREGP in the state of Kerala at a Glance

Total No. of Districts	14
Total No. of Blocks	152
Total No. of GPs	941
Total No. of Active Job Cards [In Lakhs]	21.37
Approved Labour Budget [In Lakhs]	800
Average days of employment provided per Household	56.05
Total No. of Districts	14

Source : nregs.kerala.gov.in

1.9 STATE SPECIFIC SCHEMES FOR ENSURING THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF KERALA

1. SUBHIKSHA KERALAM

'Subhiksha Keralam' is a scheme launched by the State Government to save the State from the financial loss following the lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic and to focus more on agriculture and allied sectors and food production. The project aims to increase production and generate income, enterprises and employment by utilizing the food market. The project is being implemented under the leadership of the Departments of Agriculture, Local Government, Animal Husbandry, Dairy Development, Fisheries, Water Resources, Co-operation and Industry and local governments on a campaign mode, to ensure public participation. Joint efforts of Mahatma Gandhi NREGA, Haritha Kerala and Kudumbasree Missions and Agricultural, Veterinary and Fisheries Universities, Educational Institutions, Public Sector Undertakings, Co-operative Societies, Youth Clubs, Public Organizations, Residents Associations and other agencies are ensured for the success of the project.

2. SANITATION CAMPAIGN

The project is taken up under Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) in convergence with Suchitwa Mission to popularize and install bio-inorganic waste collection / treatment facilities such as, compost pits and soak pits as part of sanitation and waste management activities in the State. The mission is to make Kerala exemplary in its commitment to the country by ensuring mass participation under the leadership of Local Self Government Institutions, treating the source of bio-waste, collecting non-organic waste, transferring it to the recycling sector and building public friendly assets that support it. The aim is to start a campaign and achieve 'complete sanitation status' by setting specific goals for each local body and completing waste management systems.

3. KERALA TRIBAL PLUS

In addition to the 100 days guaranteed by the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, Government of Kerala started 'Kerala Tribal Plus' Scheme to provide additional 100 person days for all ST families in Kerala. The socio-economic development of ST families is aimed at, by allocating additional 100 person days. The cost for this scheme is borne by the Kerala State Tribal Development Department. All ST families in Kerala who complete 100 days of employment under the Mahatma Gandhi NREGS are eligible for the additional benefit. Awareness is imparted in all tribal villages through Tribal Extension Officers, Project Officers, Village Extension Officers, Social Workers and Tribal Promoters to ensure maximum participation.

4. ADVANCE PAYMENT OF WAGES TO ST FAMILIES

Although the working days for the Scheduled Tribe families were increased under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, the delay in disbursement of wages due to non-receipt of central funds on time, contributed to the reduction in the number of Scheduled Tribes participation in the scheme.

Hence, the State Government decided to set up a corpus fund to provide ST families with weekly advance payments without having to wait for central funds. The project has been implemented in Wayanad district and Aralam Farm in Kannur district through Kudumbasree Mission, and Attappadi block in Palakkad district through a special panchayat committee / oorukoottam. After checking the details of employment completed on a weekly basis, 90% of the wages that each worker is entitled to receive during that week is deposited through NEFT in the bank account that credits the employee's Mahatma Gandhi NREGS wages. Kudumbasree ADS / Oorukoottam account is credited with a refund of the amount paid by the banks at the time of release of funds by the Central Government, for disbursement of unskilled wages

5. COIR GEOTEXTILES

Measures are being taken to protect water resources in the state, including ponds and streams, under Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme.

The widespread use of rare natural resources such as rock, sand and cement for the conservation of water resources is not environmentally friendly. Hence, eco-friendly coir geotextiles are being used instead of such materials. Ponds, streams and canals are protected with coir geotextile and strengthened using grass / plant species suitable for the respective areas. Survival of the biologically active plant cover is ensured by their maintenance for a period of three to five years.

6. JALA SUBHIKSHA – WELL RECHARGING

This is a well recharging project undertaken by the State Government as part of ensuring water security by enriching the water resources of the State.

The objectives of the project are to make the wells in the State more water rich, to convert all the wells into sustainable - water rich - sanitary wells in different phases and to increase the ground water table of the State, by alleviating summer water shortages in open wells in rural areas and to prevent water quality degradation due to iron, ore, salt and other chemical elements. To this end, rainwater collected on the roofs of houses and rural buildings is collected, purified and recharged to wells. For this purpose, a temporary tank / recharge pit is prepared near the well, filled with sand and charcoal. The rainwater collected from roof top is conveyed through pipes / paths to the temporary tank/recharge pit, purified and recharged to wells.

7. ONE CRORE SAPLINGS

The scheme is aimed at setting up nurseries on Government owned lands and farms under the Department of Agriculture under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme and to produce and distribute one crore plant saplings. Decentralized nurseries are set up in each gram panchayat to produce seedlings. The technical assistance required for this is provided by the Department of Agriculture. The officials of the Department of Agriculture give advice on what seeds are available locally in each area and how to collect them. Seedlings grown in such nurseries are planted on the side of public lands, paths and canals and on the lands of vulnerable families. Maintenance activities are undertaken for a period of 3 to 5 years depending on the variety of seedlings.

CONCLUSION

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) emerges as a pivotal force in steering Kerala towards sustainable development. Through its multifaceted schemes, MGNREGA has played a transformative role in bolstering the state's economy, enhancing livelihoods, and fostering environmental resilience. The emphasis on labor-intensive projects, coupled with a focus on natural resource management, has not only generated employment opportunities but also contributed significantly to the overall well-being of rural communities. The success stories emerging from the implementation of MGNREGA underscore its potential as a model for sustainable development, not only in Kerala but also for regions facing similar socio-economic challenges. Moving forward, continued support, innovation, and policy refinement will be essential to harness the full potential of MGNREGA in shaping a sustainable and inclusive future for Kerala.

List of abbreviations

1. ADS : Area Development Societies
2. GP : Grama panchayat
3. LSGD : Local Self Government Department
4. MGNREGP : The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee programme
5. SEGC : State Employment Guarantee Council (SEGC)
6. ST : Scheduled Tribes
7. V & MC : Vigilance and Monitoring Committee

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