

# MGNREGS: A boon for the Socio-Economic uplift of the Underprivileged in Ananthapuramu District

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## ABSTRACT

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) is a flagship poverty alleviation program introduced by the Indian government to enhance livelihood security in rural areas by providing at least 100 days of guaranteed wage employment annually. This research paper examines the impact of MGNREGS on the socio-economic upliftment of underprivileged communities in Ananthapuramu (Anantapur) District, one of the most drought-prone and economically backward regions in Andhra Pradesh. Using both primary and secondary data, this study evaluates how MGNREGS has contributed to employment generation, poverty reduction, women's empowerment, and rural infrastructure development. The findings suggest that while the scheme has been instrumental in improving livelihoods, certain challenges such as payment delays, corruption, and lack of awareness persist. Recommendations for improving implementation effectiveness are also discussed.

**Keywords:** MGNREGS, Ananthapuramu, rural employment, poverty alleviation, socio-economic development

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## INTRODUCTION

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), enacted in 2005, is a landmark social security measure aimed at reducing rural poverty by providing guaranteed wage employment and creating sustainable rural infrastructure. The scheme mandates at least 100 days of wage employment per household per year, targeting marginalized communities, landless laborers, and Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs).

Ananthapuramu District, located in Andhra Pradesh, faces severe economic distress due to recurrent droughts, erratic rainfall, and limited industrial development. With a significant rural population dependent on agriculture and daily wage labour, MGNREGS has been a crucial support system, offering employment and improving socio-economic conditions. This district has been designated as one of the pilot districts for the implementation of welfare activities. In most areas of the district, a single dry crop, namely groundnut, is cultivated under rain-fed conditions. Agriculture serves as the primary economic driver of the district, with over three-quarters of the total workforce engaged in this sector.

The demand for labor within agriculture is notably unpredictable and seasonal, resulting in significant migration of laborers to nearby cities. Drought conditions are causing ecological imbalances, transforming the district into a desert-like environment. Areas prone to drought are particularly susceptible to deforestation and the depletion of natural resources such as water, soil, and minerals. Consequently, rivers and streams are drying up, leading to a decline in underground water levels and a reduction in irrigated land.

The immediate effect of these changes is a decrease in agricultural production, which in turn contributes to food scarcity. These adverse conditions are rendering the lives of agricultural laborers and farmers increasingly difficult and unbearable. As a result, there have been numerous reports of farmer suicides within the district. In light of these circumstances, the Government of India has resolved to implement the ambitious Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) in Ananthapuramu district as part of its initial phase. The program was officially inaugurated at Bandlapalli village in Ananthapuramu district on February 2, 2006, by the esteemed Prime Minister of India, Mr. Manmohan Singh. Despite the existence of various other initiatives aimed at improving the conditions of the rural poor, this program stands out as the only one that has successfully mobilized the involvement of the rural populace.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review reveals several studies that emphasize the importance of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) as a transformative initiative in rural development. Dreze and Khera (2009) found that the implementation of MGNREGS significantly reduced the phenomenon of distress migration while simultaneously enhancing rural wage levels. Shah (2007) pointed out the program's positive impact on women's participation in the workforce, with nearly 47% of the labour force being comprised of women. Furthermore, Reddy et al. (2014) observed that regions affected by drought, such as Ananthapuramu, benefited from the development of assets, including water conservation structures and rural infrastructure like roads. However, it is important to note that critics have raised several concerns regarding the program, particularly issues related to delays in wage payments, instances of corruption, and insufficient monitoring mechanisms, as highlighted by Kumar and Chakraborty (2016).

#### Statement of the Problem

This study employs secondary data as part of the ongoing assessment of the MGNREGS programme. However, many studies have been carried out at both macro and regional levels throughout different regions of Andhra Pradesh. These studies do not specifically address gender issues, limiting their capacity to showcase the impact of the programme on female beneficiaries.

#### Objectives of the Study

The present study is an attempt to evaluate the impact and performance of MGNREGS in Human life

The objectives of the study are:

- To assess the role of MGNREGS in generating employment for underprivileged communities in Ananthapuramu District.
- To evaluate its contribution to poverty alleviation and household income stability.
- To examine women's participation and empowerment under the scheme.
- To analyze challenges in implementation and suggest policy improvements.

#### Data Base and Methodology

The research requires the utilization of secondary data. This secondary data has been collected from a variety of sources related to the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS). These sources include information sourced from relevant government departments, scholarly articles published in academic journals, and various other related resources that provide insights into the scheme.

**Table -1:Year- Wise Issued and Active MGNREGS Cards in Ananthapuramu District**

S. No.	year	Issued Job Cards	Active Job Cards
1	2014-15	785003	249658
2	2015-16	796804	317100
3	2016-17	795844	354638
4	2017-18	794399	384000
5	2018-19	809742	406526
6	2019-20	837412	417782
7	2020-21	888089	477074
8	2021-22	885751	469371
9	2022-23	583300	464845

Source: <https://nrganarep.nic.in/netnrega/MISreport4.aspx>

It can be observed from Table - 1 that the distribution of total MGNREGS job cards issued in the district is not uniform over the 10-year study period. The total number of job cards issued fluctuates between 5,71,707 (2023-24) and 8,88,089 (2020-21). The number of active MGNREGS job cards in the district has been gradually increasing during the first seven years of the study. The peak number, specifically 4,77,074 job cards, was recorded as active in 2020-21. The percentage of active MGNREGS job cards in the district exhibited an upward trend during the initial five years of the study. Among the issued job cards, the percentage of active cards ranges from 31.80 percent (2014-15) to 81.99 percent (2023-24).

**Table -2: Year Wise Skilled and Semi-Skilled Workers Working under MGNREGS in Ananthapuramu District**

S.No.	year	Skilled Workers		Semi Skilled Workers	
		Male	Female	Male	Female
1	2014-15	3000	183	43731	26792
2	2015-16	3000	183	43731	26792
3	2016-17	3008	188	43790	27131
4	2017-18	2986	188	43547	27024
5	2018-19	2986	188	43547	27024
6	2019-20	2986	188	43547	27024
7	2020-21	2965	186	43469	26974
8	2021-22	2965	186	43469	26974
9	2022-23	2965	186	43469	26974
10	2023-24	2965	186	43469	26974

Source: Dept. of DWMA and NREGS, Ananthapuramu

Table - 2 illustrates that in the Ananthapuramu district, the number of semi-skilled workers employed under MGNREGS surpasses that of skilled workers throughout the ten-year study period. The proportion of semi-skilled workers in the district fluctuates between 95.68 percent (2015-16) and 95.72 percent (2020-21). Among skilled workers, a significant majority are male. The percentage of male skilled workers within the total skilled workforce ranges from 94.25 percent (2014-15 & 2015-16) to 94.08 percent (2017-18 to 2019-20). Similarly, in the category of semi-skilled workers, males also dominate, holding a substantial share. The percentage of male workers among semi-skilled individuals varies from 61.71 percent (2017-18 to 2023-24) to 62.01 percent (2014-15 to 2015-16).

**Table – 3: Year Wise Total Households issued Job Cards and Provided Employment in Ananthapuramu District**

S.No.	year	HH Issued Job Cards	No. of HH Provided Employment
1	2014-15	785003	260241
2	2015-16	796804	294308
3	2016-17	795844	278974
4	2017-18	794399	292512
5	2018-19	809742	309093
6	2019-20	837412	320550
7	2020-21	888089	422275
8	2021-22	885751	407198
9	2022-23	583300	352232

Source: Source: Dept. of DWMA and NREGS, Ananthapuramu

The data presented in Table 3 indicates that the distribution of total household job cards issued is not uniform throughout the ten-year study period. The years 2020-21 and 2023-24 recorded the highest (8,88,089) and lowest (7,85,003) numbers of job cards issued to households, respectively. Similarly, the highest and lowest numbers of households receiving employment under the MGNREGS in Ananthapuramu district occurred in 2020-21 and 2014-15, respectively.

Over the initial seven years of the study, a total of 1,03,086 new households were granted employment in the district. A significant decline in both the issuance of job cards and the employment provided can be observed in the years 2022-23 and 2023-24. It is noteworthy that among the households that received job cards, the highest percentage, specifically 60.95 percent, were employed in 2023-24. This trend can be explained by the deletion of a considerable number of inactive job cards in the district during the years 2022-23 and 2023-24.

**Table – 4: Year –Wise Number of Women Provided Employment and Person days generated Employment in Ananthapuramu district**

S.No.	year	No. of Women Provided Employment	No. of person days generated by Women
1	2014-15	248286	8120432
2	2015-16	275815	11934655
3	2016-17	253556	9534962
4	2017-18	267065	9852709
5	2018-19	285183	12484012
6	2019-20	293488	10413945
7	2020-21	394379	15003148
8	2021-22	376107	13809649
9	2022-23	331609	10424922
10	2023-24	313873	10435081

Source: <https://nreganarep.nic.in/netnrega/MISreport4.aspx>

The data presented in Table 4 indicates that from the fiscal years 2016-17 to 2020-21, there has been a noticeable increase in the number of women employed in the district under the MGNREGS program. In contrast, the distribution of person-days generated for women during other periods appears to be inconsistent. The highest number of man-days recorded was in 2020-21, totaling 1,50,03,148 days, while the lowest was in 2014-15, with 81,20,432 days generated. Furthermore, the average number of employment days allocated to women in the district for a specific financial year ranges from 31.44 days in 2022-23 to 43.78 days in 2018-19.

**Table – 5: Year-Wise Social Category Wise Number of Persons days Generated Employment in Ananthapuramu District**

S.No.	year	SCs	STs	Others	Total
1	2014-15	98672	23565	353013	475250
2	2015-16	105856	26041	404247	536144
3	2016-17	91503	23459	374267	489229
4	2017-18	92753	24711	392641	510105
5	2018-19	95475	25907	421494	542876
6	2019-20	101375	26411	431291	559077
7	2020-21	145996	38325	581023	765344
8	2021-22	136196	36455	553461	726112
9	2022-23	115781	31049	484479	631309
10	2023-24	120708	32325	440672	593705

Source: Dept. of DWMA and NREGS, Ananthapuramu

Table 5 illustrates the Year-Wise Social Category Wise Number of Persons days Generated Employment in Ananthapuramu District. It indicates a gradual increase in the number of workers employed under MGNREGS for SC, ST, and other categories from 2016-17 to 2020-21 in the district.

In 2020-21, the highest number of workers was employed under MGNREGS in the district. Among the total workers employed under MGNREGS, the proportion of SC workers fluctuates between 17.21 percent (2023-24) and 19.81 percent (2014-15). In terms of the Scheduled Tribe share, it varies between 4.72 percent (2019-20) and 5.44 percent (2023-24). The majority of workers engaged under MGNREGS in the district belong to the category workers, with their share in total workers ranging from 74.22 percent (2023-24) to 77.64 percent (2018-19).

**Table – 6: Year- Wise and Social Category Wise No. of Households/families 100 days of employment under MGNREGS in Ananthapuramu District**

S.No.	year	SCs	STs	Others	Total
1	2014-15	8730	2291	33964	44985
2	2015-16	16419	4471	70714	91604
3	2016-17	9784	2750	49990	62524
4	2017-18	9702	2838	47055	59595
5	2018-19	15709	5080	82300	103089
6	2019-20	11305	3400	54039	68744
7	2020-21	22855	6098	95356	124309
8	2021-22	13039	4111	60366	77516

Source: Dept. of DWMA and NREGS, Ananthapuramu

Table 6 indicates that in the years 2022-23 and 2020-21, households from all three social categories reached both the highest and lowest levels of completing 100 days of employment under the MGNREGS program in the district. The percentage of SC caste families among those who completed 100 days of employment varied from 15.01 percent in 2022-23 to 19.41 percent in 2014-15. Over the course of the study, the share of STs ranged from a low of 75.50 percent in 2014-15 to a high of 79.95 percent in 2016-17.

## FINDINGS

### Employment Generation & Poverty Alleviation

- Ananthapuramu District has consistently been one of the top performers in Andhra Pradesh in terms of person-days generated under MGNREGS.
- SC/ST and women workers constitute a majority of beneficiaries, ensuring inclusive growth.
- Wage payments have supplemented agricultural income, reducing vulnerability during lean seasons.
- Infrastructure Development & Sustainable Assets
- MGNREGS has facilitated water conservation (check dams, farm ponds), crucial for drought-prone Ananthapuramu.
- Rural road connectivity has improved, enhancing access to markets and healthcare.
- Women's Empowerment
- Over 50% of workers are women, ensuring financial independence.
- Self-Help Groups (SHGs) collaborate with MGNREGS, enhancing collective bargaining power.

This initiative represents a distinctive wage employment program in contrast to previous wage employment schemes, as it ensures a statutory provision of 100 days of employment each year.

During the execution of the program, issues such as fraudulent muster rolls, corruption, inaccurate measurements, and delays in wage payments have been identified.

The research unequivocally demonstrates that the program positively influences daily wages and has contributed to a decrease in migration.

### Challenges

- Delayed wage payments due to bureaucratic hurdles.
- Corruption in muster roll maintenance and fund diversion.
- Lack of awareness among beneficiaries about entitlements.

### Policy Recommendations

Digital Transparency: Strengthening the National Mobile Monitoring System (NMMS) to curb corruption.

Timely Wage Payments: Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) efficiency must be improved.

Skill Development: Integrating MGNREGS with vocational training for long-term employability.

Awareness Campaigns: Educating beneficiaries through panchayats and NGOs.



## **CONCLUSION**

MGNREGS has played a pivotal role in uplifting the socio-economic conditions of the underprivileged in Ananthapuramu District by providing employment, stabilizing incomes, and empowering women. While challenges remain, policy interventions and better governance can enhance the scheme's effectiveness, making it a true boon for rural development.

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