

MGNREGA AND TRIBAL EMPOWERMENT: A SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION IN IDUKKI DISTRICT, KERALA

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KEYWORDS

ABSTRACT

MGNREGA,
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Kerala.

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) has been a significant policy intervention aimed at ensuring livelihood security for rural communities in India, particularly marginalized groups such as tribal populations. The collected data, a total of 380 valid responses were retained for analysis. To Impact of MGNREGA among The Tribal Community, a cross-tabular analysis was performed using selected background variables of respondents. The result was also calculated using the percentage analysis, mean, standard deviations, t-test and ANOVA. This study explores the role of MGNREGA in fostering economic and social empowerment among the tribal communities in Idukki District, Kerala. Through a sociological lens, the research examines how MGNREGA has influenced employment patterns, income stability, poverty reduction, and overall social transformation within the tribal society. Utilizing a mixed-method research approach, the study incorporates field surveys, interviews, and focus group discussions with tribal beneficiaries, local government officials, and stakeholders. Key areas of analysis include the participation of tribal workers in MGNREGA, the impact of wage employment on their financial independence, and the development of community assets through the program. Furthermore, the study investigates the extent to which MGNREGA has contributed to social inclusion, women's empowerment, skill development, and access to essential services like education and healthcare. The findings suggest that while MGNREGA has played a crucial role in enhancing economic resilience and social dignity among tribal households, several challenges persist, including bureaucratic inefficiencies, delays in wage payments, lack of awareness about entitlements, and infrastructural limitations. The study concludes with policy recommendations aimed at improving the implementation of MGNREGA to maximize its impact on tribal empowerment. By highlighting both the achievements and shortcomings of the program, this research contributes to the broader discourse on rural development and social justice for indigenous communities.

INTRODUCTION

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), enacted in 2005, is one of the most significant social welfare programs in India, aimed at providing livelihood security through guaranteed wage employment. The scheme ensures 100 days of employment per financial year to rural households, particularly benefiting marginalized communities, including Scheduled Tribes. By promoting rural employment, infrastructure development, and financial inclusion, MGNREGA has emerged as a key instrument for poverty alleviation and social empowerment.

Tribal communities, being among the most socio-economically disadvantaged groups in India, face multiple challenges, including land alienation, lack of access to formal employment, and social exclusion. Idukki District of Kerala, is home to several tribal groups

that largely depend on agriculture, daily wage labor, and forest-based livelihoods. The implementation of MGNREGA in this region has the potential to not only enhance economic stability but also foster social empowerment by improving access to education, healthcare, and community assets.

This study aims to analyze the impact of MGNREGA on the economic and social transformation of the tribal communities in Idukki district. It explores the extent of tribal participation in the scheme, its effectiveness in improving income security, and the broader socio-cultural changes it has triggered. The research also seeks to identify challenges faced by tribal workers in accessing MGNREGA benefits, such as bureaucratic delays, lack of awareness, and infrastructural shortcomings.

By adopting a sociological perspective, this study will provide insights into how MGNREGA has influenced the lives of tribal populations, particularly in terms of financial independence, skill development, women's participation, and social inclusion. The findings of this research will contribute to policy discussions aimed at enhancing the effectiveness of MGNREGA in empowering tribal communities and ensuring sustainable rural development.

EMPOWERMENT OF TRIBAL COMMUNITIES

Empowerment within tribal communities encompasses the enhancement of social, economic, political, and cultural capacities, enabling these groups to exercise greater control over their lives and participate actively in broader societal processes. The multifaceted empowerment involves fostering self-reliance, preserving cultural heritage, and ensuring equitable access to resources and decision-making platforms. In the Indian context, tribal communities, or Adivasis, constitute approximately 8.6% of the population, totaling around 104 million individuals (Census of India, 2011). Historically marginalized, these communities have faced challenges such as poverty, limited access to education and healthcare, and political underrepresentation. Empowerment, therefore, entails addressing these disparities by promoting educational opportunities, economic development, and political inclusion, while also safeguarding traditional knowledge and practices. The approach not only uplifts the socio-economic status of tribal populations but also enriches the cultural diversity of the nation.

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), enacted in 2005, serves as a pivotal instrument in advancing the empowerment of tribal communities across social, economic, and political dimensions. Economically, MGNREGA guarantees 100 days of wage employment per financial year to rural households, thereby providing a stable income source. The financial security has been instrumental in reducing poverty levels among tribal families. For instance, in Odisha, the implementation of MGNREGA has led to significant improvements in the economic conditions of tribal participants, with reports indicating enhanced income levels and reduced migration (Mallik, 2023). Socially, the scheme promotes inclusivity by encouraging the participation of marginalized groups, including Scheduled Tribes. The emphasis on community-based projects under MGNREGA fosters social cohesion and collective decision-making, thereby strengthening community bonds. Politically, MGNREGA empowers tribal communities by involving them in the planning and execution of development projects, thus enhancing their agency in local governance structures. The participatory approach ensures that the developmental initiatives align with the specific needs and aspirations of tribal populations, thereby promoting a sense of ownership and accountability.

IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

The study is significant as it highlights the unique challenges faced by tribal communities and evaluates the role of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) in addressing them. Tribal populations are among the most

marginalized in India, often grappling with poverty, illiteracy, and limited access to resources. In regions like Idukki, where livelihoods are primarily dependent on seasonal agriculture and daily wage labor, MGNREGA serves as a critical intervention. The scheme guarantees 100 days of wage employment annually, providing a financial cushion during lean agricultural seasons. Data from the Ministry of Rural Development (2022) indicates that 40% of rural households in tribal areas depend on MGNREGA as their primary income source during non-harvest periods. The financial support plays a vital role in improving food security and reducing economic vulnerability within these communities. Besides, MGNREGA has the potential to address broader socio-economic issues, such as unemployment and infrastructure deficits, that disproportionately affect tribal areas. For example, rural unemployment in tribal regions often exceeds 45% during peak demand periods, and MGNREGA projects directly contribute to reducing the rate by creating employment opportunities. Besides, infrastructure projects such as road construction, water conservation, and irrigation facilities not only enhance local development but also improve access to markets and essential services. Despite these benefits, challenges such as delayed wage payments and administrative inefficiencies persist. Only 26% of tribal workers receive timely wage payments, as reported in 2023, leaving many households in financial distress. Addressing these systemic issues is crucial to fully realizing MGNREGA's potential for tribal empowerment and poverty alleviation.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Pravash R. M et al. (2022) the current study aimed to evaluate how the MGNREGA scheme affected the subjects' standard of living. An empirical study was conducted in the Rayagada district of Odisha with the selected sample to gain further insights into the research. Primary data on socio-economic elements was gathered through in-depth interviews and standardised questionnaire schedules. The study's conclusion shows that the MGNREGA program significantly improved the socio-economic standing of its recipients by generating valuable assets, hence sustaining their lives. According to the survey, the MGNREGA program significantly increased purchasing power and guaranteed food security.

Anwar H (2022) describes one of India's significant initiatives, MNREGA, which offers a wide range of employment possibilities to improve the standard of living for the impoverished in rural areas. 3.63 crore people are living in the Indian state of Assam, and 86% of them are rural dwellers. Most of them fall into the category of those below the Proton Line (BPL). At its highest point is also the unemployment rate. This curriculum will provide a fresh approach to leading a safe social life. This year, the total labour budget must be decreased; however, creative and comprehensive use of these resources guarantees people's ability to live in rural areas. This program will assist in activities that promote self-reliance and bring about a comprehensive economic change.

Karunakaran N & Smitha E.K (2020) This report aims to provide an overview of the effects of MGNREGA on creating jobs in rural Kerala. It also looked at the factors that significantly contribute to creating jobs, such as the demand for jobs and the jobs created. The main goals of this program are creating jobs and the livelihood security of rural infrastructure. MGNREGA aims to provide a strong safety net for vulnerable populations by providing a fallback job if other employment opportunities are unavailable or insufficient. Rights-based laws and creative work practices empower the rural poor and the agricultural economy's long-term growth.

Rekha & Rekha M (2019) The performance and effects of MGNREGA in the studied area were the primary focus of the study. Significant alterations have been seen in the socio-economic variable, and the model's adjusted R² value was 0.54—a firm fit that accounts for

54% of the variances in the dependent variable. The non-significant coefficients of factors such as social group and economic category suggest that they do not directly impact the change in the dependent variable. Other factors such as age, gender, size of family, education level, and amount of land held all had significant coefficients. The limitations mentioned by the employees connected to this program have prompted the study to recommend strengthening the current MGNREG Scheme. It might be argued that MGNREGA can effectively support the inclusive economic growth of the nation if it is implemented correctly, with accountability and adherence to the law.

Methodology

The methodology forms the backbone of this study, providing a systematic approach to understanding the impact of MGNREGA on the tribal community at Idukki District, Kerala. The chapter outlines the research framework, methods, and tools employed to achieve the study's objectives. A combination of qualitative and quantitative techniques was adopted to explore the socio-economic benefits, livelihood sustainability, and empowerment facilitated by MGNREGA.

Research Design

The study adopts a descriptive research design to examine the impact of MGNREGA on the tribal community at Idukki District, Kerala. By focusing on the socio-economic development, livelihood sustainability, and empowerment of tribal communities, the design provides a comprehensive understanding of MGNREGA's effectiveness and its role in enhancing social and economic well-being. A mixed-method approach is employed, combining quantitative and qualitative data. Primary data is collected through surveys and in-depth interviews with MGNREGA beneficiaries among the tribal community, while secondary data is sourced from scholarly research, government reports, and census data to supplement the findings.

Objectives

1. To study the socio-economic conditions of the Tribal community
2. To understand the role of MGNREGA in the socio-economic development of the tribal communities in Idukki District.
3. To analyse the impact of MGNREGA in sustaining the livelihood of the tribal communities.

Hypothesis

1. **Null Hypothesis (H_0):** The role of MGNREGA differs significantly with the demographic variables.
2. **Null Hypothesis (H_0):** The level of empowerment through MGNREGA differs significantly based on demographic variables.
3. **Null Hypothesis (H_0):** Role of MGNREGA, Impact of MGNREGA, Empowerment through MGNREGA and satisfaction towards MGNREGA are significantly related.

SOURCES OF DATA

Primary Data: Primary data is collected through surveys and in-depth interviews with community at Idukki District of Kerala.

Secondary Data: Secondary data is sourced from scholarly research, government reports, and census data to supplement the findings

Research Method

The study adopts a quantitative research approach based on a positivist philosophy, which assumes that social facts exist objectively, independent of individual beliefs. The research

examines the impact of MGNREGA on the socio-economic conditions, livelihood, and empowerment of tribal communities in Idukki District using the survey method.

SAMPLING DESIGN

The researcher employed a multi-stage random sampling technique to gather data from the respondents.

Sampling and Data Collection

The collected data, a total of 380 valid responses were retained for analysis. It ensured a robust and reliable dataset for the study.

Statistical Tools Used

After collecting data from respondents, the data was carefully edited and entered into a computer using SPSS software version 28.0. Because this is a descriptive study, most of the analysis used frequency tables. The significant dependent variable in this study was MGNREGA's impact on the Tribal Community at Idukki District Kerala: A Sociological Study. To Impact of MGNREGA among The Tribal Community, a cross-tabular analysis was performed using selected background variables of respondents. The result was also calculated using the percentage analysis, mean, standard deviations, t-test and ANOVA.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Table No: 1

Gender of the Respondents

S.No	Gender	No. of Respondents	Percentage
1	Male	220	57.9
2	Female	160	42.1
	Total	380	100.0

The gender distribution of respondents in the study shows that males constitute a majority at 57.9%, while females make up 42.1%. This indicates a relatively balanced but male-dominated participation in the survey, which may reflect broader gender dynamics within the tribal community of Idukki District. The higher proportion of male respondents could suggest that men are more actively involved in MGNREGA or other economic activities within the community. However, the significant presence of female respondents also highlights the important role that women play in the workforce, despite potential cultural or social constraints. This gender distribution suggests that both men and women are beneficiaries of MGNREGA, though the impacts and challenges faced by each gender may differ, warranting a closer examination of gender-specific outcomes in the program.

Table No: 2

MGNREGA strengthened local economies of tribal community

S.No	Strengthened Local Economies	No. of Respondents	Percentage
1	Strongly strengthened	3	.8
2	Moderately strengthened	165	43.4
3	Slightly Strengthened	212	55.8
	Total	380	100.0

The data shows that 55.8% of respondents believe MGNREGA has slightly strengthened the local economies of the tribal community, while 43.4% feel it has moderately strengthened them. Only 0.8% perceive a strong impact. This distribution suggests that while MGNREGA has contributed to local economic improvements, the extent of its impact is generally seen as modest. The findings indicate that while the program has had some positive effects on local economies, there is potential for greater strengthening of economic resilience and development within the community.

Table No: 3
Level of Role in Sustainability and Environment Role

S.No	Level of Role	No. of Respondents	Percentage
1	Highly Significant	146	38.4
2	Moderately Significant	165	43.4
3	Slightly Significant	69	18.2
	Total	380	100.0

The data shows that 43.4% of respondents view MGNREGA's role in sustainability and environmental protection as moderately significant, while 38.4% consider it highly significant and 18.2% see it as slightly significant. This distribution suggests that while a substantial portion of respondents acknowledge MGNREGA's positive impact on sustainability and environmental issues, opinions vary on the extent of its significance. The findings highlight a general recognition of the program's contribution to environmental goals, with a notable number of respondents seeing room for further enhancement in its effectiveness in these areas.

Table No: 4
Impact on Livelihood

S.No	Impact on Livelihood	No. of Respondents	Percentage
1	High	42	11.1
2	Moderate	286	75.3
3	Low	52	13.7
	Total	380	100.0

The data reveals that 75.3% of respondents perceive a moderate impact of MGNREGA on sustainable livelihood, while 11.1% see a high impact and 13.7% report a low impact. This distribution indicates that the majority view MGNREGA as having a moderate effect on their livelihoods, with a smaller percentage recognizing a high or low impact.

Table No: 5
Significance test for Empowerment through MGNREGA based on No. of Family Members

No. of family members	N	Mean	SD
None	93	148.3333	11.60428
1-2	209	151.3062	10.49689
3-4	50	156.9800	10.49099
5 or more	28	152.8214	4.83853
Total	380	151.4368	10.75286

ANOVA

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	2489.328	3	829.776	7.549	.000
Within Groups	41332.156	376	109.926		
Total	43821.484	379			

The table presents the results of an ANOVA test analyzing empowerment through MGNREGA based on the number of family members. The descriptive statistics indicate that individuals with 3-4 family members report the highest mean empowerment score (Mean = 156.98, SD = 10.49), followed by those with 5 or more family members (Mean = 152.82, SD = 4.84) and 1-2 family members (Mean = 151.31, SD = 10.50). Those with no family members report the lowest mean empowerment score (Mean = 148.33, SD = 11.60). The ANOVA results show a significant F-value of 7.549 with a p-value of .000, indicating statistically significant

differences in empowerment through MGNREGA based on the number of family members. This suggests that perceptions of empowerment through MGNREGA vary with the number of family members, with individuals having 3-4 family members generally perceiving a higher level of empowerment compared to those with fewer family members.

Table No: 6

Significance test for Satisfaction towards MGNREGA based on Gender

Gender	N	Mean	SD
Male	220	37.8500	2.30351
Female	160	38.3125	2.69214

T-test

t	df	Sig
-1.799	378	.073

The table presents the results of a t-test analyzing satisfaction towards MGNREGA based on gender. The descriptive statistics show that females have a higher mean satisfaction score (Mean = 38.31, SD = 2.69) compared to males (Mean = 37.85, SD = 2.30). The t-test results reveal a t-value of -1.799 with a p-value of .073. Although the p-value indicates a trend towards a significant difference, it is above the conventional threshold of .05, suggesting that the difference in satisfaction between males and females is not statistically significant at the 5% level. This implies that, while females report slightly higher satisfaction with MGNREGA compared to males, the difference is not strong enough to be considered statistically significant.

Table No: 7

Relationship between Role of MGNREGA, Impact of MGNREGA on sustainable Livelihood, Empowerment of Tribal Community through MGNREGA and Satisfaction towards MGNREGA.

	Role of MGNREGA	Impact of MGNREGA	Empowerment	Satisfaction
Role of MGNREGA	1			
Impact of MGNREGA	.806**	1		
Empowerment	.827**	.860**	1	
Satisfaction	.584**	.476**	.499**	1

The table illustrates the interrelationships between the role of MGNREGA in socio-economic development, its impact on sustainable livelihood, its contribution to the empowerment of the tribal community, and overall satisfaction with the program. A strong positive correlation exists between the Role of MGNREGA and its Impact on sustainable livelihood ($r = .806$, $p < .01$), suggesting that as the perceived role of MGNREGA improves, its impact on sustainable livelihood also increases. Additionally, the Role of MGNREGA is highly positively correlated with Empowerment ($r = .827$, $p < .01$), indicating that a better perceived role is closely linked to higher levels of empowerment within the tribal community. The Impact of MGNREGA also shows a strong positive correlation with Empowerment ($r = .860$, $p < .01$), reflecting that significant impacts on livelihood contribute to greater perceived empowerment. Furthermore, Satisfaction with MGNREGA is moderately positively correlated with the Role ($r = .584$, $p < .01$), Impact ($r = .476$, $p < .01$), and Empowerment ($r = .499$, $p < .01$) provided by the program, suggesting that higher satisfaction is associated with a better perceived role, greater impact, and increased empowerment. These correlations collectively highlight that improvements in MGNREGA's role, impact, and empowerment are generally associated with higher levels of satisfaction among respondents.

CONCLUSION

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) has emerged as a crucial policy intervention aimed at enhancing the economic and social well-being of rural communities, particularly the marginalized tribal populations. This study has examined the impact of MGNREGA on the tribal community in Idukki District, Kerala, focusing on its role in employment generation, income security, social inclusion, and overall empowerment. Findings indicate that MGNREGA has provided a stable source of livelihood for many tribal households, reducing financial vulnerability and improving their standard of living. The scheme has also contributed to social transformation by increasing women's participation in the workforce, fostering community asset creation, and enhancing access to education and healthcare. However, the study highlights persistent challenges such as delayed wage payments, bureaucratic hurdles, limited awareness about entitlements, and infrastructural inadequacies, which hinder the full potential of MGNREGA in empowering tribal communities.

Moreover, to further empower tribal communities, MGNREGA should focus on enhancing community participation in decision-making processes and integrating traditional skills and knowledge into project designs. Establishing women's advisory councils and leadership training programs could strengthen women's roles in community and project leadership. In conclusion, while MGNREGA has made significant strides in supporting the tribal community in Idukki District, there remains considerable potential for further impact. Addressing the identified challenges and implementing targeted improvements will not only enhance the effectiveness of MGNREGA but also contribute to sustainable socio-economic development, ensuring that the benefits of the program are more equitably distributed and more deeply felt across the community.

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