



Implementation issues with the MGNREGA

This editorial is based on [“In NREGA reforms, prioritise the worker and her dues”](#) which was published in The Hindu Business Line on 30/01/2023. It discusses the reforms that need to be undertaken in order to implement the MGNREGA in its true sense.

For Prelims: MGNREGA, Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribes, Amrit Sarovar, Jaldoot App, Ombudsperson for MGNREGS

For Mains: Implementation issues with the MGNREGA, Government Policies & Interventions, Issues Relating to Development

The [Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act](#) was passed in 2005, and the **demand-driven scheme guarantees 100 days of unskilled work per year for every rural household** that wants it. There are **currently 15.51 crore active workers enrolled under the scheme.**

Recently, the **Central government has constituted a committee to review the implementation of the MGNREGA scheme**, especially to assess the programme’s efficacy as a poverty alleviation tool. The committee, headed by former Rural Development secretary Amarjeet Sinha, had its first meeting in November 2022, and **has been given three months to submit its suggestions.**

What are the Challenges with the Implementation of the Scheme?

- **Delay and Insufficiency in Funds Dispersal:**
 - Most states have **failed to disburse wages within 15 days as mandated by MGNREGA**. In addition, workers are not compensated for a delay in payment of wages.
 - This **has turned the scheme into a supply-based programme** and subsequently, workers had begun to lose interest in working under it.
 - There is ample evidence by now, including an admission by the Ministry of Finance, that delays in wage payments are a consequence of insufficient funds.
- **Caste Based Segregation:**
 - There were **significant variations in delays by caste. While 46% of payments to SC (Scheduled Caste) workers** and 37% for **ST (Scheduled Tribes) workers** were completed in the mandated seven-day period, it was a dismal 26% for non-SC/ST workers.
 - The negative impact of caste-based segregation was felt acutely in poorer States such as Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, Odisha and West Bengal.
- **Ineffective Role of PRI:**
 - With very little autonomy, [Panchayati Raj Institution \(PRI\)](#) are not able to implement this act in an effective and efficient manner.
- **Large Number of Incomplete works:**

- There has been a delay in the completion of works under MGNREGA and inspection of projects has been irregular. Also, **there is an issue of quality of work and asset creation under MGNREGA.**
- **Fabrication of Job cards:**
 - There are several issues related to the existence of fake job cards, the inclusion of fictitious names, missing entries and delays in making entries in job cards.

What are the Key Achievements of MGNREGA Scheme?

- **Achievements of 2022-23:**
 - 11.37 crore households availed employment.
 - 289.24 crore person-days employment has been generated out of which:
 - 56.19% were for women
 - 19.75% were for [Scheduled Castes \(SCs\)](#)
 - 17.47% were for [Scheduled Tribes \(STs\)](#).
- **New Initiatives under MGNREGS:**
 - **Amrit Sarovar:** Construction/renovation of at least 75 Amrit Sarovars (ponds) in each district of the country; they will help in increasing the availability of water, both on surface and under-ground.
 - **Jaldoot App:** It was launched in Sept 2022 for measuring the water level in a Gram Panchayat through 2-3 selected open wells twice a year.
 - **Ombudsperson for MGNREGS:** Ombudsperson App was launched in Feb 2022 for **smooth reporting and categorization of grievances received from various sources** related to the implementation of the MGNREGS.

What should be the Way Forward?

- **Address Delays in Wage Payments:**
 - Improving the **financial management system, including regular transfer of funds to the states and timely release of funds** to the implementing agencies.
 - **Strengthening the administrative capacity and accountability** of the implementing agencies.
 - **Improving the transparency and efficiency of the wage payment process,** including the use of digital tools and platforms to track payments and prevent delays.
- **Strengthen Implementation Capacities:**
 - For a universal, **demand-based social security programme such as MGNREGA,** reforms cannot be based on 'targeting' better. There has to be a **focus on exclusion and not inclusion "errors"**.
 - Instead of using expenditure and income poverty as the only markers, **exclusion must be identified at the household level.**
 - There is **enough evidence to show that MGNREGA is fairly well targeted, benefiting the poorest,** especially [Scheduled Caste \(SC\)](#) and [Scheduled Tribe \(ST\)](#) families. However, there is scope for improvement.
 - For instance, **panchayats, blocks and districts where employment of SCs and ST families is lower than their proportion in the population must be identified.**
 - This would indicate pockets where the most marginalised are being nudged out of the programme.
- **Building the Spirit of Public Participation:**
 - There is a **need to build the scheme on the spirit of public participation.**
 - **Government must leverage consultative processes and forums,** such as the State and Central Employment Guarantee Councils which can be beneficial for the government in making informed decisions and addressing the needs and concerns of the people.
 - Any proposed reforms must be **tabled in State assemblies in addition to Parliament** along with bringing [civil society organisations](#), worker unions and representatives of [self-help groups](#) into the discussion.
- **Mapping the Impact of Reforms:**

- It is time the **Governments makes an earnest attempt to map the impact of each of its “reforms”** on access to and the expenditure of MGNREGA, particularly in poorer States.
- The government agencies **must be held accountable for the denial of entitlements to MGNREGA workers as a result of top down “reforms”** that workers had no say in designing.

Drishti Mains Question

What are the challenges faced in the implementation of MGNREGA and how can they be addressed?

UPSC Civil Services Examination Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Prelims

Q. Among the following who are eligible to benefit from the “Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act”? (2011)

- (a)** Adult members of only the scheduled caste and scheduled tribe households
- (b)** Adult members of below poverty line (BPL) households
- (c)** Adult members of households of all backward communities
- (d)** Adult members of any household

Ans: (d)

Exp:

- Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee (MGNREGA), which is the largest work guarantee programme in the world, was enacted in 2005 with the primary objective of guaranteeing 100 days of wage employment per year to every household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work.
- It aims at addressing the causes of chronic poverty through the ‘works’ (projects) that are undertaken, and thus ensuring sustainable development. There is also an emphasis on strengthening the process of decentralisation by giving a significant role to Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) in planning and implementing these works.
- **Therefore, option D is the correct answer.**