

Rural Development Through MGNREGS: A Mixed Method Approach

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Abstract

This was a comprehensive study of performance of one of the flagship government program of India, Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS). The study is supported by qualitative interviews of Odisha returnee migrant laborers during the onset of pandemic in India. The quantitative analysis included 10 states of India with varied geographic locations. An overall performance index (OPI) was designed combining other known indices to reflect the inclusive performance of the program during the period, wherein, the performance indicated an upward trend during April to July this year. A comprehensive comparison of the current period under study and same period of last five years also revealed the rise in the demand for the program in the present circumstance. Basing upon the empirical evidences, a 'policy performance based rural development facilitation model' was conceptualized. The study provides the path of rural development through effective policy implementation. This paper has significant practical implications for policy formulations. It also addressed the gap in the existing literature.

Keywords: Employment, MGNREGS, rural development, performance index, public policies

JEL: O21, O180, E24, H83, I31, I32, R11

1. INTRODUCTION

With a focus on acquisition and accumulation of capital in urban and semi-urban areas, the unipolar development of India through these decades lead to the disproportional distribution of wealth between the rich and the poor. The Agrarian-Indian-economy is predominantly labor-intensive; as well as the unemployed youths are dependent mostly on unskilled manual work. The multidimensional effect of the public policy has an incremental influence on production, income, and even on employment (Hirway et al., 2009). The social protection scheme, MGNREGS is demand-driven in nature (Singh, 2007), and is also targeted to provide unskilled manual work to the unemployed youths. The very purpose of the scheme is to act as a safety net (Dey, 2009) for these youths during the job crunch seasons. The scheme also has a significantly positive impact upon the aspirations and self-confidence of the unemployed youth (RoyandDey, 2011). Skewed impacts of the program could be reflected across different Indian states, while it provided better livelihood security in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh, had generated better employment in Andhra Pradesh (Ravallion, 2012). Further, it was opined that MGNREGS will be a big push for the growth of distress regions of India (Shah, 2007). However, there were many operational challenges was remained as hurdles in the effective implementation of the program (Reddy et al., 2010). Also, there was a lacuna in the institutional set-up of the program that resulted in a gap between the employment demanded and the employment provided by the program (Reddy et al., 2010; Dreze et al., 2011). The performance evaluation of the public policies should be conducted on an intermittent basis to measure the actual impact of the program on the livelihood, employment, income generation, and social security of the masses. On the one hand, it can provide desired feedback to address the loopholes in the existing policy; on the other help design the new policies in a better way. The pandemic is probably the most suitable period for us to evaluate the impact of these programs on issues like employment generation, livelihood security, and rural development. COVID-19 pandemic brought havoc to the small migrant laborers across the country (Bhosale, 2020) by not only snatching their jobs, but also putting a big question mark on their survival and livelihood. At this juncture, the role of MGNREGS became most vital in providing the basic livelihood support to these unemployed youths. Thus, a quantitative assessment of the program is attempted to know the impact of the scheme on employment generation across the country during the COVID period. The next chapter discussed the theoretical background of the study. The third section deals with the methodology that was adopted. The fourth and fifth sections vividly described the findings and the conceptual model developed.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The effects of the pandemic are unprecedented, huge, and varied; touching almost every sector. Other than the health issue, the global economic scenario is also not sound in the past few months, with a significant reduction in production as well as consumption. In the Indian context, it seems to be a balancing act during the formulation of the policy paradigm on a critical issue through a tradeoff between life and livelihood. The crisis affected all, but the worst sufferers were the migrant laborers, losing their employment and/or livelihood almost suddenly after the lockdown of the entire country. That was not the end but the beginning of a period even harder to thrive on, at their workplaces. Since circular migrants are not allowed to settle down and set up home where they have gone to, they are bound to return to their place of origin after shorter or longer bouts of casual employment without effective legal protection and social security (Bremen, 2020). It resulted in forceful homecoming of these laborers with their family and so called belongings even on bare foot and also in empty stomach. The reverse migration created a new challenge for the government in providing employability and livelihood support in rural

India (Dandekar and Ghai, 2020). India's internal migrants are vulnerable in terms of their mobility, gender, and mental health (Ranjan, Sivakumar, & Srinivasan, 2020). The central government is looking for a way to put the economy back on track. Thus, the prime focus of Atmanirbhar Bharat is to contain migration and to generate employability involving these people (Kapur, 2020). The effect of the pandemic, the losses due to stagnation of various sectors like agriculture, construction, and small-scale industries etc. had scaled to new heights (Seetharaman, 2020). Provisions in MGNREGS generated hopes in the rural poor by not only providing them job opportunities (Bhatia and Drèze, 2006), but also reducing their distress migration (Rao and Singh, 2013) and/or obligatory seasonal migration (Chakraborty, 2007) as in Odisha and Chhattisgarh, where it reduced the seasonal migration (Vaidya and Singh, 2011; Banerjee and Raju, 2009). Moreover, it had a significant role in reducing the rural to urban migration (Shah, 2007). With considerable variation in the average days of performance across the states of India (Raghuraman, 2009), the programme failed to achieve 100 days of employment in many instances (Mathur, 2007). In the absence of an unequivocal opinion regarding the performance of the programme on employment generation in rural areas, its systematic and periodic evaluation throughout the country becomes the need of the hour. Such quantitative evaluations will definitely be helpful in addressing the inherent question; whether MGNREGS was successful in providing wage employment to those vast unskilled labor forces? Simultaneously, it can also provide the status of the programme in terms of its performance during the pandemic.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Welfare programs like MGNREGS are critical for the states where geographical limitations and dependency of people on the state's initiatives are very high (Mukherjee et al., 2024). The basic purpose of this program reduction of livelihood vulnerability (Esteves et al., 2013; Das, 2016; Lengefeld et al., 2022) and poverty alleviation (Khan et al., 2007) through employment generation (Mohanty et al., 2025). Social protection is another important aspect of this program (Barrientos & Hulme, 2016). Women-empowerment is a crucial impact of MGNREGS in societal development (Carswell & Neve, 2013; Sarma, 2022; Gnyaneswar, 2016). It encouraged female participation in the household decision-making process (Tagat, 2020). This program has one of the pivotal tools of financial inclusion (Singh, 2021; Ghosh, 2017). Studies revealed that there was a positive impact of MGNREGS on reducing the migration of these manual laborers, and employment generation in rural areas (Parida, 2016; Rath & Kumari, 2024; Nandy et al., 2021). There was an increase in assets as well as the disposable income of the rural people (Pankaj & Bhattacharya, 2022). Moreover, there was an increase in the income of the rural poor through this scheme (Alexon & Manoj, 2013). It was also observed that there was sustainable asset creation through MGNREGS (Bose & Bhowmik, 2024). Another study depicted that this program has a positive impact on the restoration of community forests (Angom & Viswanathan, 2022). One of the significant contributions of this program was enabling the economically backward states to protect the livelihood of the poor people (Turangi, 2022). Research explored that there was an impact of MGNREGS on the labor wage rate and its fluctuation (Banik et al., 2021; Berg et al., 2012). The effective implementation of this program was reflected in the resilience shown to climatic catastrophes through MGNREGS works in Odisha (Steinbach et al., 2017). It was observed that the interaction of within the rural development bureaucracy with the political executive are crucial for proper implementation of the program (Mukherji & Jha, 2017). There was a positive impact of MGNREGS on the rural labor market and agricultural production (Reddy et al., 2014). Furthermore, there were seasonal variations in the employment demand for the program (Vaidya and Singh, 2011). The self-targeting design of the program not always self-targeting for rural-poor, rather, there was a middle-class bias in case of administrative rationing (Liu & Barrett, 2013). As depicted by previous studies that people

participation in the planning process of this scheme will decide the demand for work (Manjula, 2025). Furthermore, there is a direct correlation between MGNREGS as a social safety net and sustainable development goals (Giribabu et al., 2019). However, studies also reflected that there were differences in the performance level of this program across the states (Hajam et al., 2025). While few studies suggested that the performance of this scheme was very encouraging in a few states (Carswell & Neve, 2014; Jatav & Nair, 2023), whereas other studies were very critical about the scheme (Agarwal, 2019; Hussain, 2017; Bhatia & Dreze, 2006; Naidu, 2015). It was observed that the positive effects of the scheme were accompanied by some adverse effects also (Novotny et al., 2013). The policy-makers have to take meticulous care regarding the proper implementation of this program across different states (Chakraborty, 2014; Chopra, 2011; Anderson et al., 2015; Pani & Iyer, 2012).

4. METHODS

The study was substantiated through the qualitative interviews of 60 Odisha returnee migrant laborers from the beginning of the pandemic, wherein semi-structured interviews were conducted between April to June 2020. These interviews covered all the dimensions of AEI, IGI, MLI, and QWI. Prior to their interview, the participants were briefed about the purpose of the interview. Each recorded interview, in which questions were in vernacular language, had a running brief note followed by a quick draft. Each interviews last for around 45-50 minutes. Later, there was a thorough analysis, succeeded by elaborate drafting. The collected data were analyzed through an inductive method in an iterative process (Fendt and Sach, 2008). The findings and results were based on the subjective interpretation of qualitative data. (Taylor et al. 2015; Glacer 1978). Out of the total respondents 45 are male and 15 are female. The average age of the respondents is 32.5 years. Data (from April 2020 to September 2020) relating to different performance indicators viz. the monthly employment demanded by households, employment provided to households, average person-days works generated per households, number of households received 100 days of employment, total number of works completed and number of priorities works completed were obtained from the MGNREGS official site (MRD, 2020) and compared with respect to performance in overall indicator. The administrative effectiveness index (AEI), income generating index (IGI), minimum livelihood index (MLI), quality of works index (QWI) were prepared individually from these indicators; followed by the overall performance index prepared in combination. The sample population was from five zones of India involving 10 states wherein each zone contributed two states viz. northern zone (Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand), southern zone (Tamil Nadu and Kerala), eastern zone (Tripura and Sikkim), western (Rajasthan and Maharashtra), and central zone (Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh). The four indices were computed following the KSPB guideline (KSPB, 2020), which had a value between one and zero:

$$\text{Administrative Efficiency Index (AEI)} = \sum_{i=1}^6 Ri/6Di$$

Where, Ri is the nos. of households received employment in in “i” th month.

Di is the nos. of households demanded employment in “i” th month.

$$\text{Income Generation Index (IGI)} = \sum_{i=1}^6 (Pi - Li) / 6Ri$$

Where, Pi = Avg. days of employment provided in “i” th month.

Li = Lowest avg. days of employment provided in “i” th month.

Ri = Range of avg. days of employment provided in “i” th month.

$$\text{Minimum Livelihood Index (MLI)} = \sum_{i=1}^6 Hi/6Ri$$

Where, Hi = The nos. of households received hundred days of employment in “i” th month.

R_i = The total nos. of households received employment in “i” th month.

$$\text{Quality of Work Index (QWI)} = \sum_{i=1}^6 P_i / 6W_i$$

Where, P_i = Total priorities works completed in “i” th month.

W_i = Total nos. of works completed in “i” th month.

Finally, the Overall Performance Index was calculated as:

$$\text{Overall Performance Index (OPI)} = \frac{AEI + IGI + MLI + QWI}{4}$$

The Overall Performance Indices (PI) of various sample states were then compared to evaluate the status of the program across the states during the pandemic. The variables incorporated both quantitative and qualitative aspects of the program.

5. FINDINGS

5.1. Qualitative Study

Overview of Data Structure		
Statements (Initial Coding)	Theoretical Categories (Intermediate Coding)	Aggregate-Theoretical Dimensions (Advance Coding)
<i>I have to go many times to the office repeatedly</i>	Delay in process	Administrative Efficiency
<i>I have received my Job Card very late after running polls to pillars</i>		
<i>The treatment got worse as the virus spread in this reasons</i>	Service Issue	
<i>I have been asked to give money else they told that they will not handover my Job Card</i>		
<i>I know I will get less number of work compared to those who are close to the program in charge</i>		
<i>At least we are getting money in our own bank accounts.</i>	Direct benefit transfer	Income Generation
<i>My husband used to take all my money and consume alcohol, but now he is unable to do so.</i>		
<i>I used to work at different houses as maid. but as I am</i>		

<i>receiving more money from this I prefer it.</i>	Regular income	
<i>We have purchased a new television on installments as four members of our family are working in this scheme.</i>		
<i>We are at least getting food on daily basis earlier it was also difficult for us as there is no money for the bare minimum.</i>	Food Security	Minimum Livelihood
<i>Now our children are getting good food</i>		
<i>We are able to get non-vegetarian food also at times in a month.</i>		
<i>Most importantly now we can purchase the basic medicines during health issues</i>	Health Security	
<i>We save money for emergency and hospital expences.</i>		
<i>Good food making us healthy we are happy.</i>		
<i>We have to save money for Tihar-Bahar (festive-seasons), as all have expectations for new cloth, good food and visit places.</i>	Other Security	
<i>We used to purchase new clothes during festovals like Rath Yatra and Nuakhai which require a lot of money.</i>		
<i>I have shifted to Pakka Ghar from Kachha Ghar after working in this program.</i>		
<i>Our works are monitored on daily basis</i>	Monitoring	Quality of Work
<i>We are given prier instruction what to do and how to do</i>		
<i>We are happy that the pond constructed by us are used by the villagers, the check dams are used for irrigation and culverts are also in good condition</i>	Utility	

<i>All are works are of good quality and in working condition</i>		
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Table 1: Qualitative Response Segregation***Administrative Efficiency***

To understand the performance of MGNREGS we analyzed the administrative process involved in the whole scheme. It was observed that there are many loopholes in the administration procedures that impacted the performance. Time taken to issue the job cards is one of the major administrative gaps in the system. As stated by one of the respondents of Baidipali:

Describe your initial experience of working in this scheme, 'I have to go many times to the office repeatedly, but my job card was not issued, and always told to come in the next week. I am frustrated with the delayed work of the workers at the office'.

The job cards were made from pages of paper and many times mutilated, soaked in water, and not properly maintained. The fear of infection was also another reason, which lead to friction between the workers and the officials:

'The treatment got worse as the virus spread in these regions, in the name of virus, we are not allowed to enter into the office, even nobody was talking to us directly, just instructions came from the messenger, and we are doing the works' as reported by another respondent.

The lack of co-ordination and trust is visible from the response of the laborers. There were also allegations of corrupt practices in many places. One respondent narrated that:

'I have been asked to give money else they told that they will not handover my Job Card, in fact I have received my Job Card very late after running polls to pillars and asking for help from many members'.

It is also found that there is favoritism in assigning work to the laborers who are close to them:

'I know I will get less work compared to those who are close to the program in charge, what can I do for that, if it is disclosed to them, I might not get any more work in the future', another laborer added.

But most of the laborers are happy that they were at least getting the work:

'We are lucky that we are getting work during these tough times, when many people are not getting work and without employment. As a matter of fact we lost our jobs due to the pandemic come back to our home land'

Another worker expressed with a sense of satisfaction for getting the work during the pandemic. Some administrative bottlenecks, however, slowed down the pace of implementation of MGNREGS; therefore, studies did suggest that the programme needs improved political and administrative initiatives for its effective implementation (Kareemulla et al., 2009; Banerjee and Saha, 2010).

Income Generation

The basic purpose of the scheme is to generate income of the laborers during the lean phases. Villagers in India could recognize the relevance of income through MGNREG (Jha et al., 2009).

To evaluate the impact of income generation on the performance of the scheme, we asked income-related questions to the respondents. It was observed that income is the most significant factor impacting the performance of the scheme. As one respondent revealed that:

'I used to work at different houses as maid, but as I am receiving more money from this I prefer it'.

The daily wage and that to the guaranteed payment make it more attractive to the labor class. It is also more effective as the amounts are directly deposited in the accounts of the beneficiaries:

'My husband used to take all my money and consume alcohol, but now he is unable to do so' happily informed by another female respondent on direct benefit transfer.

Household expenditures, and consumption also increased significantly after working continuously in this scheme.

'We have purchased a new television on installments as four members of our family are working in this scheme' explained one member of the group.

Minimum Livelihood

It provided significant livelihood security in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh, as they had generated better employment in Andhra Pradesh (Ravallion, 2012). Minimum livelihood includes basic needs like food, cloth, shelter, medicine, and it should be accessed by all for making it sustainable (Manion, 2015). Getting the minimum necessities is the first and foremost priority of people:

'We are at least getting food on daily basis earlier it was also difficult for us as there is no money for the bare minimum. That is why we thank God for giving us this scheme' a grateful laborer stated.

The major expenditure occurred during the festive seasons when they have to purchase new clothes for all the family members and treat guests coming from different places to visit their houses:

'We have to save money for Tihar-Bahar (festive seasons), as all have expectations for new cloth, good food, and visit places, therefore, we are going for work daily'.

Quality of Work

One of the important indicators of the overall performance of the scheme is the quality of work conducted. MGNREGS is demand-driven in nature (Singh, 2007), and is also targeted to provide unskilled manual work to the unemployed youths.

'Our works are monitored on daily basis, we have specifically instructed beforehand what to do and how to do. We have also many experience laborers who used to guide us during the work about how to do it and what not to do' explained by one respondent.

In fact, the assets created by the laborer are regularly used by the villagers and which seems to be heartening to them:

'We are happy that the pond constructed by us are used by the villagers, the check dams are used for irrigation and culverts are also in good condition'.

It also reflected the quality of work is not inferior and durable after the public use also and at least to the satisfaction of the workers.

5.2. Quantitative Study

The maximum number of households getting employed by the scheme varied state wise also in different months as in Chhattisgarh 13.94L in April; in Rajasthan 34.81L and 46.70L in May and June respectively; and in Tamil Nadu 41.15L, 38.67L and 40.71L in July, August and September respectively. The number of employment is lowest for Sikkim in all the months which were under analysis. The lowest number of employment received was lowest in the month of April

in all the states; but, it was highest in May for Tripura, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh, in June for the states Sikkim, Rajasthan, and Kerala, and in July for the states like Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Tamil Nadu (Table.1). Employment demanded by households was lowest in Sikkim throughout the study period. Employment demanded by households was highest in Chhattisgarh in April (16.35L), in Rajasthan in May (41.28L) and June (53.71L) and in Tamil Nadu in July (43.43L), August (41.14L), and September (40.71L). Employment demand was highest in May as in case of Chhattisgarh and Tripura, which was highest in June for Sikkim, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Kerala and Himachal Pradesh and in July for the states like Tamil Nadu and Uttarakhand (Table.2). With AEI values .173 and .168 respectively, Himachal Pradesh and Tripura were at the top, while, with .146 AEI both Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan were at the bottom position (Table.3). The number of average person-days works generated was highest in Rajasthan (483.08L), it was however, lowest in Tripura and Sikkim (3.51L) (Table.4). IGI indices revealed, income generation touched maximum in Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh with values .816 and .633 respectively, which was however, lowest in states like Sikkim, Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh, wherein, the values were 0, .047 and .056 in that order. Highest IGI values could be reported in the month of April in Chhattisgarh, which however, topped in May, June and July in Rajasthan, whereas for Tamil Nadu the peak was achieved only during August and September (Table.5). Highest, 0.96 lakh households received 100 days of employment during the period in Chhattisgarh, which came down to only .01 lakh in Sikkim, thus, became the lowest among the states (Table.6). MLI for Tamil Nadu was .684, while for Kerala; it was .0003 reflecting the highest and lowest MLI correspondingly (Table.7). The highest number of works completed was in Rajasthan (2898.6L), which was lowest in Sikkim (21.38L). Further, the trend revealed that in Chhattisgarh it was highest in April, the peak value for Rajasthan was however, in May, June and July; but for Tamil Nadu it was in August and September (Table.8). Again, highest number of priorities works was completed in Madhya Pradesh (.84L), which was lowest in Sikkim (.0009L) (Table.9). While, in Tamil Nadu (1.654) and Chhattisgarh (1.370) QWI scores were the best among the states, of those Kerala (.000192) and Himachal Pradesh (.000197) were lowest (Table. 10). With a score of 0.764, the Overall Performance Index of Tamil Nadu was the highest followed by Chhattisgarh with the score of 0.538. On the other hand, lowest performance index could be seen in Himachal Pradesh and in Tripura with scores 0.0582 and 0.060 respectively (Table. 11). Both employment demand and provisions for employment touched all time low in the month of April 2020 across the states under evaluation, the COVID-19 factors and associated spontaneous migration to their native places might be the possible causes as the global slowdown can lead to decline in the wages of the casual workers (Sinha, 2010). However, the trend reversed in the months of May, June and July, wherein, the employment demand by households and provision for employment for them was elevated which then slowly declined in August-September period. The reverse migration by the labourers to their respective work places after a short stay at their native places could be the best possible explanation for such a trend in employment demand and/or provisions.

Additionally, a month wise (April to September) comparative analysis of last five years (2016-2019) data on employment demanded by and provided to household/persons revealed that there was an increase in employment demand in the current year from previous years from a minimum 0.15% in 2016 to a maximum 12.9% in 2019. Similar trend was also there in employment provided starting from 0.58% in 2016 to a maximum of 10.45% in 2019. The employment demand to provide was highest in 2016 and lowest in 2020 (Table.12). While, a significant increase in demand for employment during the pandemic was well understood taking into consideration the migration of the workers to their native places; the delay in employment provisions could be the possible cause behind the reverse migration to their respective work places in the subsequent phase of the pandemic i.e. during the months of August and September.

Himachal Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Kerala and Uttarakh and could provide jobs on demand in a time frame in better way than the others. Furthermore, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh and Tamil Nadu focused more on providing more number of days to existing work force. While, Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra emphasized on completion of minimum 100 days of work, Madhya Pradesh and Tripura streamlined the priority works. Furthermore, the Overall Performance Index assessment regarding Tamil Nadu and Chhattisgarh correlated with the findings of earlier studies (Banerjee and Saha, 2010; Chopra, 2018), also indicated the consistent performance of Chhattisgarh. The overall performance indicated that out of 10 states 7 states performed significantly in implementation of the program during this period which is in line with the earlier findings that MGNREGS offered basic employment to the marginalized section of the society (Breitkreuz, 2017).

6. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Based upon the empirical evidence, a ‘policy performance based rural development facilitation model’ was conceptualized. The proposed model makes available the path of rural development through policy implementation.

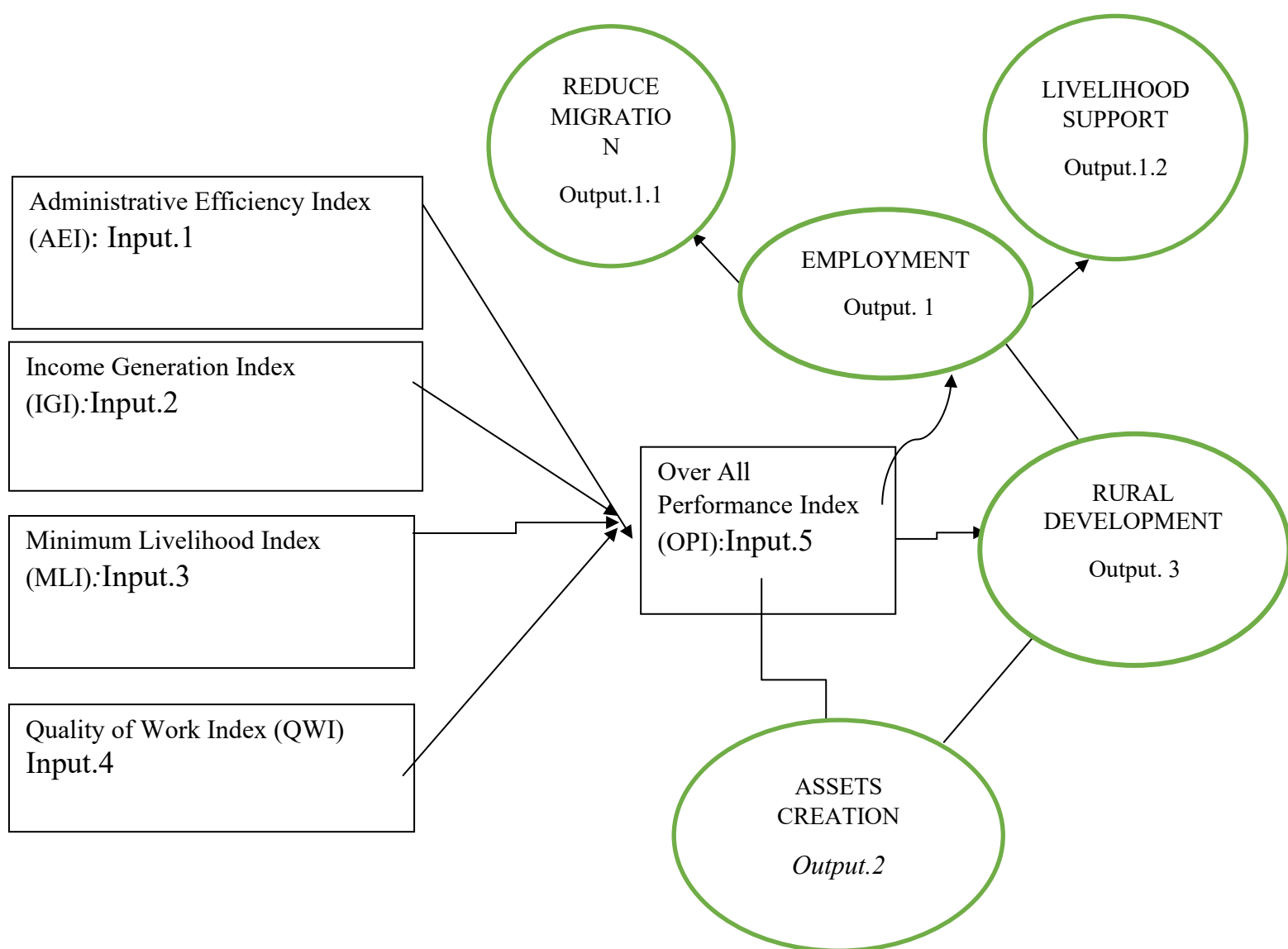


Fig. 1. Policy Performance Based Rural Development Facilitation Model

Administrative Efficiency Index (AEI): Input.1

Indicates the administrative capacity to provide jobs within a stipulated period according to the demands of unskilled laborers. Also, it reflects the efficiency of the administrative mechanism, the willingness of the administrative authority, and performance of the administrative team in providing demanded employment in time.

Income Generation Index (IGI): Input.2

Reflects the average number of days of employment provided with respect to the number of days of employment generated in a particular period. Simultaneously, it provides an idea about the amount of income generated in a particular geographic location within a specified period; which again shows the potential of the programme in generating income for a state or a country in a time frame.

Minimum Livelihood Index (MLI): Input.3

Demarcates the number of households has received 100 days of employment out of the total households getting employment in a particular area within a specified period of time. It also indicates how far the program is successful in providing a minimum livelihood to the unemployed rural youth?

Quality of Work Index (QWI): Input.4

Represents the percentage of priority works completed with reference to the total number of works completed within a stipulated time span. Further, indicating whether the works done were generating durable assets for the overall rural development or not? Additionally, it reflects the state's intention to accomplish the prioritized work.

The Over All Performance Index (OPI): Input.5

Points to the combined average performance of the indices in a specified period of time in all the provinces under the study. Thus, it throws light on the overall policy performance and the extent of accomplishment of the objectives of the policy.

Employment: Output.1

First and foremost, the output here is nothing but employment designated as Output 1 that automatically advocates the success of the policy in generating employment thereby directly supporting the livelihood (output.1.2) simultaneously reducing the number of possible distress migrations from their homes (output 1.1). The AEI, IGI and MLI signify this output.

Assets Creation: Output.2

The second desired outcome of the conditional cash transfer policy like MGNREGS is creation of durable assets for the development of rural infrastructure. This output indicates both durability as well as sustainability of the assets that come under the priorities of work list. QWI, which indicates the percentage of completion of the priority works out of the completed works, also reflects this output.

Rural Development: Output.3.

The final output of the public policy being addressed by OPI. It substantiates the overall performance of the programme that results in a sustainable rural development after successfully providing the desired employment also generating the durable assets for rural development (Deininger and Liu, 2013; Dreze and Khera, 2009; Dreze, 2010; Reddy et al., 2010; Azam, 2012; Imbert and Papp, 2015).

7. DISCUSSION

The present study offers a timely and critical evaluation of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and the unprecedented challenges faced by returnee migrant workers in India. By integrating both quantitative and qualitative methodologies, the research successfully captures the multidimensional performance of MGNREGS during a crisis period. The upward trajectory of the Overall Performance Index (OPI) across ten diverse states underscores the scheme's adaptability and responsiveness, suggesting that MGNREGS functioned as a vital economic safety net during the migratory distress of the pandemic. This observation is reinforced through focus group interviews with Odisha returnees, which highlighted the immediate relief that the program provided to households suddenly deprived of income sources. Equally significant is the comparative assessment with the preceding five years, which demonstrates not only an increase in demand but also a policy system resilient enough to absorb the shocks of labor displacement. The conceptualization of the 'Policy Performance Based Rural Development Facilitation Model' is a noteworthy contribution, as it moves beyond descriptive evaluation to propose a structured framework for assessing and guiding developmental policies in rural India. Nevertheless, the study also reveals notable limitations, particularly the scarcity of scholarly literature on programmatic performance during pandemic conditions, which restricts the generalizability of findings. This gap underscores the need for longitudinal and cross-regional studies that can validate and refine the proposed model. Despite such limitations, the findings carry substantial implications for policymakers, especially in designing welfare programs that are both responsive to crisis and sustainable in the long run. In this regard, MGNREGS emerges not only as an employment guarantee mechanism but also as a cornerstone of rural resilience and inclusive development in times of systemic disruption.

8. CONCLUDING REMARKS

It was of interest to assess the correct position of migrant workers during the pandemic imposed migratory phase and also to ascertain the role played by MGNREGS to facilitate those laborers and/or their families in that period of time in providing immediate source of revenue through programmed employment generation. It could here be known through the evaluation of overall performance of the program, focus group interviews and subsequent analysis of last five years pre-COVID-19 data that the programme has helped in neutralizing the effect of the pandemic to a great extent. The unique 'Policy Performance Based Rural Development Facilitation Model' which is based on the input performance indices and desired output indicators, provides an inclusive model of rural development through evaluating the performance of developmental policies. The limitation of the study is mainly the inadequate literatures on the pandemic-ridden performance evaluation of the programme. Therefore, more studies on performance evaluation of the programme are needed to make the assessment reliable. The study has profound policy implications related to the management of public welfare programs like MGNREGS, which became a ray of hope for the millions of poor migrant workers of India during this pandemic. While the present analysis highlights the critical role of MGNREGS during the pandemic, future research must extend its scope in both breadth and depth. Longitudinal investigations can provide insight into the sustained impact of the scheme on rural livelihoods beyond immediate crisis management. Comparative analyses across states with varying governance structures and socio-economic profiles may further reveal differential programmatic outcomes and best practices. Moreover, integrating advanced econometric modeling with household-level data can deepen understanding of causal linkages between employment generation and rural development indicators. An intersectional study with other welfare can also yield effective results. A pool of literature on welfare program performance, effectiveness, public need, and

rural development will enrich the domain of welfare and developmental economics and will be helpful in policy making.

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Consent for publication

Not applicable

Availability of data and materials

Not applicable

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Authors' contributions

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Table 1 Number of Households Received Employment during COVID-19 (In Lakhs) in 2020.

SL.NO	STATE	APRIL	MAY	JUNE	JULY	AUGUST	SEPTEMBER
1	TRIPURA	0.80	4.02	3.61	3.69	3.49	3.79
2	SIKKIM	0.05	0.13	0.41	0.31	0.23	0.23
3	RAJASTHAN	6.7	34.81	46.70	32.40	17.85	12.20
4	MAHARASTRA	1.99	6.89	5.53	3.02	2.04	2.19
5	MADHYA PRADESH	6.37	21.83	24.57	18.39	14.91	15.53
6	CHHATISHGARH	13.94	21.61	16.68	2.57	2.17	2.03
7	TAMILNADU	3.05	24.46	38.86	41.15	38.67	40.71
8	KERALA	0.44	5.23	8.72	8.27	6.95	8.22
9	HIMACHAL PRADESH	0.30	1.73	2.58	2.54	2.07	1.94
10	UTTARAKHAND	0.64	1.74	2.06	2.24	1.84	1.70

<http://mnregaweb4.nic.in/netnrega/MISreport4.aspx>

Table 2 Number of Households Demanded Employment during COVID-19 (In Lakhs) in 2020.

SL.NO	STATE	APRIL	MAY	JUNE	JULY	AUGUST	SEPTEMBER
1	TRIPURA	0.81	4.02	3.61	3.69	3.49	3.51
2	SIKKIM	0.06	0.15	0.42	0.32	0.24	0.21
3	RAJASTHAN	9.26	41.28	53.71	38.97	23.26	9.81
4	MAHARASTRA	2.3	8.13	6.65	3.41	2.37	1.91
5	MADHYA PRADESH	7.65	25.14	28.16	22.54	18.86	14.13
6	CHHATISHGARH	16.35	24.92	19.92	3.20	2.53	1.82
7	TAMILNADU	3.89	26.38	41.32	43.43	41.14	40.71
8	KERALA	0.53	5.81	9.29	8.53	7.58	7.36
9	HIMACHAL PRADESH	0.34	1.92	2.85	2.48	1.69	1.49
10	UTTARAKHAND	0.74	1.95	2.24	2.40	2.16	1.42

<http://mnregaweb4.nic.in/netnrega/MISreport4.aspx>

Table 3 Administrative Efficiency Index (AEI) during COVID-19 in 2020.

SL.NO.	STATE	APRIL	MAY	JUNE	JULY	AUGUST	SEPTEMBER	AEI
1	TRIPURA	0.16460905	0.166667	0.166667	0.166667	0.166667	0.179962	0.16853962
2	SIKKIM	0.13888889	0.144444	0.162698	0.161458	0.159722	0.18254	0.158292
3	RAJASTHAN	0.12059035	0.140544	0.144914	0.138568	0.127902	0.207271	0.14663171
4	MAHARASTRA	0.1442029	0.141246	0.138596	0.147605	0.14346	0.191099	0.15103505
5	MADHYA PRADESH	0.13877996	0.144723	0.145419	0.13598	0.13176	0.18318	0.14664045
6	CHHATISHGARH	0.1420999	0.144529	0.139558	0.133854	0.142951	0.185897	0.14814836
7	TAMILNADU	0.13067695	0.154536	0.156744	0.157917	0.15666	0.166667	0.15386686
8	KERALA	0.13836478	0.150029	0.156441	0.161587	0.152814	0.186141	0.15756273
9	HIMACHAL PRADESH	0.14705882	0.150174	0.150877	0.170699	0.204142	0.217002	0.17332547
10	UTTARAKHAND	0.14414414	0.148718	0.153274	0.155556	0.141975	0.199531	0.15719955

Table 4 Average Person-Days Works generated per Households during COVID-19(In Lakhs)
in 2020.

SL.NO	STATES	APRIL	MAY	JUNE	JULY	AUGUST	SEPT.	AVERAGE
1	TRIPURA	5.7	44.6	42.9	45.7	45.3	48.9	38.85
2	SIKKIM	.48	2.0	6.6	5.0	3.4	3.6	3.513
3	RAJASTHAN	93.0	686.1	1009.3	618.1	310.3	181.7	483.083
4	MAHARASTRA	26.8	120.6	844.9	47.2	29.5	32.3	183.55
5	MADHYA PRADESH	68.5	438.7	486.9	335.6	250.8	248.3	304.8
6	CHHATISHGARH	192.9	446.5	245.2	282.8	267.5	245.7	280.1
7	TAMILNADU	14.1	186.6	375.9	427.0	326.7	381.8	285.35
8	KERALA	2.6	48.0	103.3	92.1	63.1	86.4	65.916
9	HIMACHAL PRADESH	4.1	28.7	46.7	45.2	35.9	32.3	32.15
10	UTTARAKHAND	8.4	25.6	31.3	33.9	29.7	23.9	25.466

<http://mnregaweb4.nic.in/netnrega/MISreport4.aspx>

Table 5 Income Generating Index during COVID 19 in 2020.

SL. NO.	STATE	APRIL	MAY	JUNE	JULY	AUGUST	SEPT.	IGI
1	TRIPURA	0.027128157	0.0622716	0.036202	0.066384	0.129601	0.119936	0.07358723
2	SIKKIM	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
3	RAJASTHAN	0.480823199	1	1	1	0.949273	0.471538	0.8169391
4	MAHARASTRA	0.136784118	0.17336647	0.836043	0.068831	0.08073	0.075986	0.22862333
5	MADHYA PRADESH	0.353497557	0.63835697	0.479007	0.539227	0.765234	0.647869	0.57053172
6	CHHATISHGARH	1	0.64975881	0.237958	0.453107	0.816888	0.640985	0.63311612
7	TAMILNADU	0.070782663	0.26984359	0.368306	0.688305	1	1.001324	0.56642683
8	KERALA	0.011017566	0.06724163	0.09644	0.142065	0.184658	0.219222	0.12010726
9	HIMACHAL PRADESH	0.018813013	0.03902938	0.039992	0.065568	0.100526	0.075986	0.05665248
10	UTTARAKHAND	0.041159963	0.03449788	0.024633	0.047137	0.081349	0.053746	0.0470873

Table 6 Number of Households received 100 Day of Employment during COVID-19 (In Lakhs) in 2020.

SL.NO	STATE	100 DAYS COMPLETED TILL SEPTEMBER
1	TRIPURA	0.1
2	SIKKIM	0.01
3	RAJASTHAN	0.91
4	MAHARASTRA	0.49
5	MADHYA PRADESH	0.69
6	CHHATISHGARH	0.96
7	TAMILNADU	0.06
8	KERALA	0.06
9	HIMACHAL PRADESH	0.15
10	UTTARAKHAND	0.06

<http://mnregaweb4.nic.in/netnrega/MISreport4.aspx>

Table 7 Minimum Livelihood Index (MLI) during COVID-19 in 2020.

SL. NO.	STATE	MLI
1	TRIPURA	0.00106769
2	SIKKIM	0.00147493
3	RAJASTHAN	0.00109538
4	MAHARASTRA	0.00419449
5	MADHYA PRADESH	0.00133612
6	CHHATISHGARH	0.0028085
7	TAMILNADU	0.6840411
8	KERALA	0.00033772
9	HIMACHAL PRADESH	0.0027115
10	UTTARAKHAND	0.00117371

Table 8 Total numbers of works completed during COVID-19 (In Lakhs) in 2020.

SL.NO	STATE	APRIL	MAY	JUNE	JULY	AUGUST	SEPT	TOTAL
1	TRIPURA	5.7	44.6	42.9	45.7	45.3	50.7	234.9
2	SIKKIM	0.48	2	6.7	5	3.4	3.8	21.38
3	RAJASTHAN	93.1	686.1	1009.3	618.1	310.3	181.7	2898.6
4	MAHARASTRA	26.8	120.6	84.5	47.2	29.5	33.4	342
5	MADHYA PRADESH	68.5	438.7	486.9	335.6	250.9	257.1	1837.7
6	CHHATISHGARH	192.9	464.5	245.2	282.8	267.5	250	1702.9
7	TAMILNADU	14.1	186.6	375.9	427	326.7	381.9	1712.2
8	KERALA	2.6	48	103.3	92.1	63.1	88.4	397.5
9	HIMACHAL PRADESH	4.1	28.7	46.7	45.2	35.9	33.4	194
10	UTTARAKHAND	8.43	25.6	31.3	33.9	29.7	25.6	154.53

<http://mnregaweb4.nic.in/netnrega/MISreport4.aspx>

Table 9 Numbers of Prioritized works completed during COVID-19(In Lakhs) in 2020.

SL.NO	STATE	TILL SEPTEMBER
1	TRIPURA	0.83
2	SIKKIM	0.0009
3	RAJASTHAN	0.07
4	MAHARASTRA	0.09
5	MADHAY PRADESH	0.84
6	CHHATISHGARH	0.14
7	TAMILNADU	0.17
8	KERALA	0.46
9	HIMACHAL PRADESH	0.23
10	UTTARAKHAND	0.09

<http://mnregaweb4.nic.in/netnrega/MISreport4.aspx>

Table 10 Quality of Works Index during COVID-19 (QWI) in 2020.

SL.NO	STATE	QWI
1	TRIPURA	0.000588903
2	SIKKIM	0.70159026
3	RAJASTHAN	0.40234
4	MAHARASTRA	0.435595
5	MADHYA PRADESH	0.725544
6	CHHATISHGARH	1.37021
7	TAMILNADU	1.65479
8	KERALA	0.000192872
9	HIMACHAL PRADESH	0.000197595
10	UTTARAKHAND	0.970874

Table 11 Overall Performance Index during COVID-19 in 2020.

SL.NO	STATE	AEI	IGI	MLI	QWI	OPI
1	TRIPURA	0.16854	0.073587	0.001068	0.0005	0.06092364
2	SIKKIM	0.158292	0	0.001475	0.70159	0.21533923
3	RAJASTHAN	0.146632	0.816939	0.001095	0.40234	0.34175155
4	MAHARASTRA	0.151035	0.228623	0.004194	0.435595	0.20486197
5	MADHYA PRADESH	0.14664	0.570532	0.001336	0.725544	0.36101307
6	CHHATISHGARH	0.148148	0.633116	0.002809	1.37021	0.53857075
7	TAMILNADU	0.153867	0.566427	0.6840411	1.65479	0.7647812
8	KERALA	0.157563	0.120107	0.000338	0.00019	0.06954943
9	HIMACHAL PRADESH	0.173325	0.056652	0.002712	0.00019	0.05821986
10	UTTARAKHAND	0.1572	0.047087	0.001174	0.970874	0.29408364

Table 12 Performance of MGNREGS in last five years in India (Period from April to September).

MGNREGS WORKS	APR- SEPT 2020	APR- SEPT 2019	APR- SEPT 2018	APR- SEPT 2017	APR- SEPT 2016	% Rise/Fall From 2019 to 2020	% Rise/Fall From 2018 to 2020	% Rise/Fall From 2017 to 2020	% Rise/Fall From 2016 to 2020
DEMANDED BY HH and PERSONS	1776.7 5	1547.1 9	1499.5 8	1469.3	1467.09	12.921	3.077	2.019	0.150
PROVIDED TO HH and PERSONS	1492.9 6	1336.8 8	1303.9 7	1270.7	1278.07	10.4544	2.462	2.551	-0.58
% DEMANDED TO PROVIDED TO HH	84.027	86.407	86.956	86.483	87.116	-	-	-	-