

This volume examines the evolving dynamics of rural India through twenty-seven interdisciplinary chapters. Organised into five thematic sections, the volume addresses governance, livelihoods, gender, technology, environment and indigenous knowledge. The contributors include scholars and practitioners from reputable institutions across India, as well as international contributors, reflecting diverse regional and disciplinary perspectives. Drawing on empirical case studies and policy analysis, the book highlights inclusive growth, decentralised institutions and ecological sustainability. It offers valuable insights for researchers, students, planners and development practitioners.



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RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Changing Contexts, Issues and Policy Pathways



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Role of MGNREGA in Rural Development: A Study of Selected CD Blocks of Kanchipuram District, Tamil Nadu

R. Vimala*

Abstract: *The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) is a key rural development programme that aims to enhance livelihood security through guaranteed wage employment. This study examines the role of MGNREGA in supporting rural livelihoods in selected villages of Kundrathur and Sriperumbudur Blocks of Kanchipuram District, Tamil Nadu. The analysis is based on primary data collected from 200 respondents during a field survey conducted in January - March 2025, supplemented by secondary sources. The study focuses on the socio-economic characteristics of beneficiaries, awareness and participation levels, the nature of employment, wage utilisation, and the perceived benefits of the programme. The findings reveal high awareness of MGNREGA and substantial participation, particularly among women and economically weaker households. Employment under the scheme is mainly concentrated in manual and asset-creation activities, with most beneficiaries receiving fewer than the guaranteed 100 days of work. MGNREGA income is primarily used to meet basic household expenses, underscoring its role as a financial safety net rather than a source of long-term economic advancement. While the programme contributes to employment access and short-term income support, its broader developmental impact is constrained by limited work availability and a lack of diversification of activities. The study concludes that strengthening planning, ensuring adequate workdays and expanding the range of works are essential for enhancing the contribution of MGNREGA to sustainable rural development.*

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Keywords: MGNREGA; Rural Development; Employment; Livelihood Security; Kanchipuram

11.1 Introduction

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) is one of the most important rights-based social protection programmes in India, designed to enhance livelihood security by providing guaranteed wage employment to rural households. Enacted in 2005, the programme aims to address chronic rural unemployment, reduce poverty and promote inclusive rural development through income support and creation of durable community assets (Government of India, 2013). Beyond employment generation, MGNREGA is expected to strengthen rural infrastructure, improve natural resource management and enhance social inclusion, particularly for women and marginalised groups (Dreze & Oldiges, 2007).

Tamil Nadu has been recognised for its relatively effective implementation of MGNREGA, with higher participation rates and greater administrative outreach than in several other states (Khera & Nayak, 2009). However, the programme's performance varies across districts and blocks due to differences in socio-economic conditions, awareness levels, local governance, and the availability of work (Shah, 2016). Regions undergoing rapid urbanisation alongside persistent rural livelihood dependence provide a critical context to assess the actual contribution of MGNREGA at the grassroots level. Kanchipuram District, located in north-eastern Tamil Nadu, is a transitional region where agriculture, wage labour, and non-farm activities coexist.

The existing literature on MGNREGA highlights its positive role in providing income security, increasing rural wage levels, and enhancing women's participation in the workforce (Dreze & Khera, 2010; Narayanan et al., 2016). At the same time, several studies point to limitations, including irregular wage payments, insufficient employment duration, administrative delays, and uneven quality of

assets created under the programme (Ambasta et al., 2008; Shah, 2016). Much of this research relies on state- or district-level secondary data, offering limited insight into village-level experiences and beneficiaries' perceptions.

Against this background, the present study examines the role of MGNREGA in rural development through a micro-level analysis of selected villages in Kundrathur and Sriperumbudur Blocks of Kanchipuram District. By combining primary survey data with secondary sources, the study seeks to assess beneficiaries' awareness, participation and perceptions of MGNREGA, and to evaluate its contribution to employment generation and rural livelihood support. The findings aim to provide locally grounded evidence to inform policy discussions on strengthening MGNREGA's effectiveness in semi-rural regions.

11.2 The Study Area

The present study was conducted in Kanchipuram District, located in the north-eastern part of Tamil Nadu. The district occupies an important transitional zone between the rapidly expanding Chennai metropolitan region and predominantly rural hinterlands. Although parts of the district have experienced industrial growth and urban expansion, a significant proportion of the population continues to depend on agriculture, wage labour and public employment programmes for livelihood security. This socio-economic setting makes Kanchipuram District a suitable area for examining the functioning and impact of MGNREGA.

The field investigation covered the Kundrathur and Sriperumbudur CD Blocks, which represent semi-rural areas with mixed livelihoods. These blocks exhibit varying levels of agricultural activity, non-farm employment and participation in government welfare programmes. Four villages, Kundrathur, Mangadu, Thirumudivakkam and Padappai, were selected for detailed study. The selection

was based on the prevalence of wage-labour households and on residents' active participation in MGNREGA works.

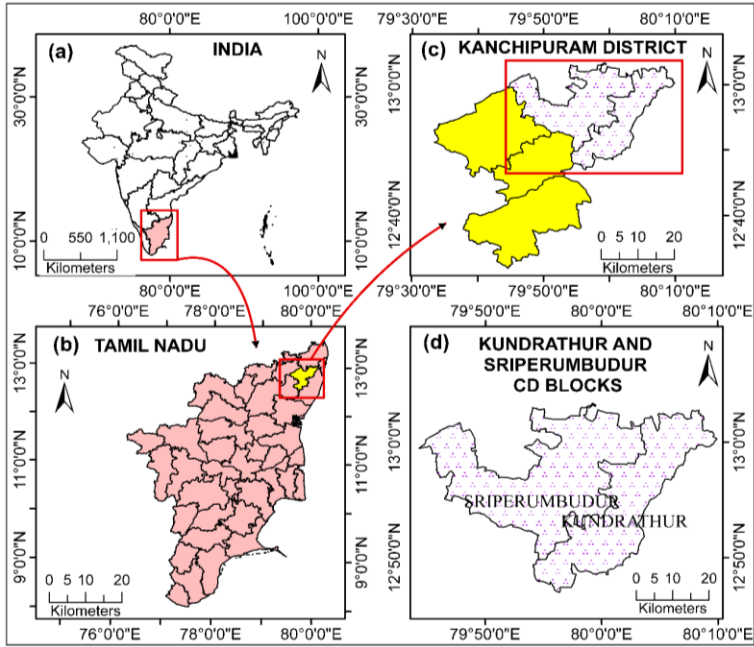


Fig. 11.1: Location Map of the Study Area

11.3 Data Sources and Methodology

The study is empirical and descriptive, based on both primary and secondary data. Primary data were collected through a household survey conducted in selected villages of Kundrathur and Sriperumbudur CD Blocks of Kanchipuram District during January to March 2025. A structured questionnaire was used to obtain information on socio-economic characteristics, awareness of MGNREGA, level of participation, nature of employment and perceived benefits of the programme.

A total of 200 respondents were selected through convenience sampling, with the focus on households registered under MGNREGA. The study emphasises beneficiaries' perceptions and experiences rather than statistical generalisation. Primary data are mainly used to

analyse employment generation, income support and the role of MGNREGA in strengthening rural livelihoods.

Secondary data were collected from Census reports, MGNREGA operational guidelines, government publications, district statistical handbooks and relevant research studies. These sources were used to contextualise primary findings and to understand broader trends in rural employment and development.

The collected data were analysed using simple statistical techniques, mainly percentages and tabular presentation. Tables and limited diagrams were used to ensure clarity of interpretation. By integrating primary and secondary sources, the methodology provides a balanced assessment of MGNREGA's contribution to rural development in the study area.

11.4 Main Findings

This section presents the empirical findings from a primary survey conducted with 200 respondents across selected villages in the Kundrathur and Sriperumbudur CD Blocks. The analysis focuses on socio-economic characteristics, awareness and participation in MGNREGA, nature of employment and perceived benefits, without entering into interpretative discussion.

11.4.1 Socio-Economic Profile of Respondents

The surveyed households largely belong to economically weaker sections, with high dependence on wage labour and agriculture-related activities. Female participation is notably high, reflecting MGNREGA's inclusive nature.

Table 11.1: Socio-Economic Profile of Respondents (N = 200)

Category	Percentage (%)
Agricultural labourers	38
Casual wage workers (non-farm)	31
Small and marginal farmers	19
Others (petty trade, services)	12

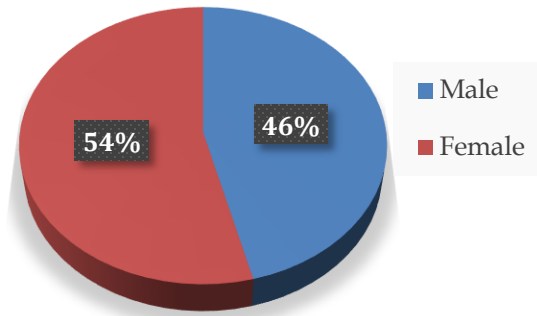
Source: Primary Data

11.4.2 Gender-wise Participation under MGNREGA

Gender-wise analysis of the primary survey data reveals a relatively high participation of women in MGNREGA works in the study area. Among the 200 respondents, women accounted for a substantial share of beneficiaries, reflecting the programme's inclusive design and its relevance to women from economically weaker households. The availability of wage employment near their homes and equal wages have encouraged women's participation, particularly among those who had previously engaged in unpaid domestic work.

The figure 11.2 shows that women account for 54 per cent of total respondents, slightly exceeding male participation. This pattern is consistent with state-level trends in Tamil Nadu, where women's involvement in MGNREGA has remained comparatively high.

Despite higher participation, qualitative responses indicate that women are mainly engaged in labour-intensive activities and receive fewer days of employment compared to their male counterparts. Seasonal household responsibilities and limited availability of continuous work also affect women's sustained participation.



Source: Primary Data

Fig. 11.2: Gender-wise Distribution of Respondents under MGNREGA (N = 200)

Thus, while MGNREGA has enhanced women’s access to paid employment, gender-based differences persist in the intensity and continuity of work engagement within the programme.

11.4.3 Awareness and Participation in MGNREGA

The level of awareness regarding MGNREGA among the respondents is notably high in the study area. Information about the programme is mainly disseminated through Gram Panchayat offices, local officials and social networks, indicating the effectiveness of grassroots communication mechanisms. High awareness reflects the institutional presence of MGNREGA and its recognition as an important employment support scheme among rural households.

Table 11.2: Awareness and Participation in MGNREGA

Indicator	Yes (%)	No (%)
Awareness of MGNREGA	92	8
Participation in the last year	78	22

Source: Primary Data

The difference between awareness and participation highlights implementation-related constraints rather than a lack of knowledge about the programme.

11.4.4 Nature of Employment and Work Availability

Primary survey data show that employment under MGNREGA in the study area is largely concentrated in manual and asset-creation activities. The type of work undertaken reflects Panchayat-level planning priorities and the nature of projects sanctioned under the scheme. Most respondents reported engagement in physically intensive tasks, with limited diversification of work categories.

The table indicates a clear dominance of earthwork and road-related activities, together accounting for more than two-thirds of total employment. While water conservation works form an important component, plantation and other diversified activities remain limited, suggesting scope for

expanding the range of works to enhance employment continuity and asset quality.

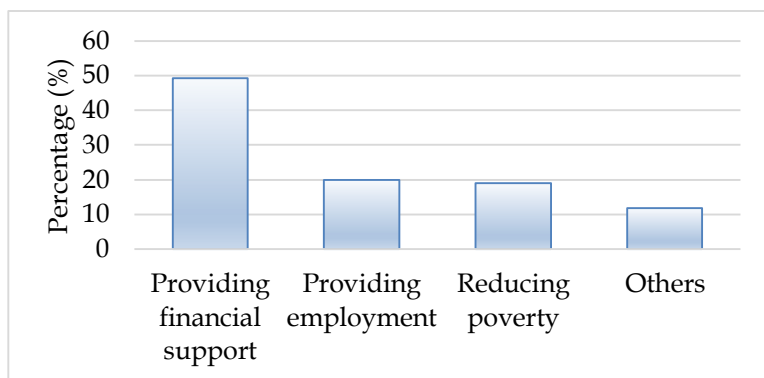
Table 11.3: Nature of MGNREGA Works Undertaken by Respondents (N = 200)

Type of Work	Percentage (%)
Earthwork (land levelling, digging)	41
Road construction and maintenance	27
Water conservation works	22
Plantation and other works	10

Source: Primary Data

11.4.5 Perceived Benefits of MGNREGA for Rural Households

Primary survey responses highlight the perceived usefulness of MGNREGA among rural beneficiaries. Respondents were asked to identify the main ways in which the programme has been helpful to them. The responses reflect both economic and social dimensions of rural livelihood support.



Source: Primary Data

Fig. 11.3: Perceived Benefits of MGNREGA

The figure shows that nearly half of the respondents (49.3%) identified *financial support* as the most significant benefit of MGNREGA. This indicates the programme's importance in meeting immediate household expenses and reducing income insecurity. About 19.9% of respondents

viewed MGNREGA primarily as a source of employment, while 19.0% perceived it as contributing directly to poverty reduction. A smaller proportion (11.8%) reported other benefits, including support during agricultural lean seasons and reduced dependence on informal borrowing.

These findings demonstrate that MGNREGA is largely perceived as a financial safety mechanism, reinforcing its role in providing short-term economic stability to rural households.

11.4.6 Wage Payment and Income Utilisation

Wages were largely credited through bank or post-office accounts. While most respondents reported regular payments, some beneficiaries reported delays. MGNREGA income was mainly used for subsistence needs.

Overall, the findings indicate that MGNREGA provides crucial employment and income support to rural households in the study area, though coverage and work availability remain below the statutory guarantee.

Table 11.4: Utilisation of MGNREGA Income

Purpose	Percentage (%)
Food and daily household expenses	52
Health and education	21
Debt repayment	17
Savings	10

Source: Primary Data

11.5 Discussion

The findings indicate that MGNREGA plays an important supportive role in the rural livelihood system of the study area, particularly for economically weaker households dependent on wage labour and small-scale agriculture. High participation by women reflects the programme's inclusive design and its relevance to enhancing women's access to paid employment. However, women's engagement remains largely confined to labour-intensive and short-duration work, suggesting that

increased participation has not fully translated into stable livelihood security.

The high level of awareness about MGNREGA demonstrates the effectiveness of local governance mechanisms in disseminating information. At the same time, the gap between awareness and actual participation points to operational constraints such as limited work availability and irregular scheduling. Employment under the scheme is concentrated in a narrow range of manual activities, with limited diversification. This restricts both employment continuity and the long-term developmental value of assets created.

The programme is primarily perceived as a source of financial support that helps households meet immediate consumption needs and cope with income insecurity. Its contribution to poverty reduction and employment generation is recognised, but remains largely short-term. Income utilisation patterns further suggest that earnings are used mainly for subsistence, leaving limited scope for savings or asset formation.

Overall, the discussion highlights that while MGNREGA enhances employment access and provides short-term economic stability, its broader developmental impact is constrained by insufficient workdays, limited diversification of activities and reliance on informal labour structures.

11.6 Suggestions

Based on the findings and discussion, the following suggestions are proposed to enhance the effectiveness of MGNREGA in the study area:

11.6.1 Ensuring Adequate Workdays

Efforts should be made to ensure eligible households receive the full 100 days of guaranteed employment. Advance planning of works at the Panchayat level can help meet employment demand more effectively.

11.6.2 Diversification of MGNREGA Works

The range of works undertaken should be expanded beyond routine earthwork and road construction. Greater emphasis on water conservation, plantation, soil management and community infrastructure can improve asset quality and long-term developmental outcomes.

11.6.3 Strengthening Women's Participation

Although women's participation is notable, targeted measures such as crèche facilities at worksites and flexible work timings can further enhance their sustained engagement and productivity.

11.6.4 Timely Wage Payments

Mechanisms should be strengthened to minimise delays in wage payments. Efficient monitoring of electronic payment systems and grievance redressal mechanisms can improve beneficiary confidence in the programme.

11.6.5 Skill Development and Convergence

Linking MGNREGA with skill development initiatives and other rural development programmes can enhance workers' employability beyond MGNREGA and support livelihood diversification.

11.6.6 Community Awareness and Monitoring

Regular awareness programmes and social audits should be strengthened to ensure transparency, accountability and active community participation in planning and implementation.

These measures can improve both the short-term employment benefits and the long-term rural development impact of MGNREGA in the study area.

Conclusion

The study examined the role of MGNREGA in supporting rural livelihoods in selected villages in the Kundrathur and Sriperumbudur CD Blocks of Kanchipuram District, using primary and secondary data. The findings show that the programme plays an important role in providing supplementary employment and income

support to economically vulnerable households, particularly those dependent on agricultural and casual wage labour. High awareness and participation levels indicate that MGNREGA has become an accessible and relevant livelihood option at the local level.

However, the study also reveals several constraints that limit the programme's developmental impact. Most households receive fewer than the guaranteed 100 days of employment, and the nature of work remains largely confined to short-term manual activities. Income earned through MGNREGA is primarily used to meet basic consumption needs, with limited scope for savings or long-term economic improvement. These patterns suggest that while the programme reduces immediate livelihood insecurity, it falls short of ensuring sustained rural economic resilience.

Within the study area, variations in participation and work availability reflect differences in local planning and implementation capacity. The findings highlight the need for improved planning, timely wage payments and better-quality asset creation to enhance programme effectiveness. While the analysis is limited to selected villages and is based on beneficiary perceptions, it provides valuable micro-level insights into the functioning of MGNREGA in a semi-rural context. Strengthening convergence with other rural development initiatives and ensuring consistent availability of work can significantly enhance MGNREGA's contribution to inclusive and sustainable rural development.

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