EFFECTIVENESS OF MAHATMA GANDHI NATIONAL RURAL EMPLOYMENT GUARANTEE ACT: A COMPARATIVE STUDY BETWEEN UTTAR PRADESH AND ANDHRA PRADESH

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Abstract

This paper aims to analyse the effectiveness of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act by undertaking a comparative study of its performance in the states of Uttar Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh, from 2007-2012. The paper evaluates the Act by looking at parameters such as structural capacity and mechanisms, financial planning, registration of households and issue of job cards, women participation, SC/ST representation, employment and wage conditions and work priority and execution.

Introduction

The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, was passed by the Government of India in the year 2005 and was later renamed as the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act. It came into effect on 2nd February 2006, in 200 backward districts of India, to provide at least 100 days of employment, every financial year, for any adult member of a rural household who is willing to do unskilled manual labour, at the statutory minimum wage. The Act guarantees that work will be made available to anyone who demands it within 15 days of submitting an application and the failure to do so would result in the state being accountable to pay an unemployment allowance.

Hailed by the Government as the world's largest public works programme, MGNREGA aims to ensure a basic minimum livelihood and alleviate poverty. It differs from other poverty-related schemes as it treats employment as a 'right' wherein it contains provisions for minimum wages, worksite facilities, mandatory participation of female workers (who comprise a third of the total participants) and equal wages for men and women. Emphasising the process of decentralisation, the programme is anchored on the principles of transparency and grass-root democracy and devolves significant power to Panchayati Raj Institutions in planning and implementing these works and tracks accountability through social auditing.

In the financial year 2007-08 scheme entered its second phase and was extended to 130 districts and by 1st April 2008, MGNREGA had expanded to the entire rural area of the country. Being applicable in all districts of the country, the effectiveness of the scheme however does vary enormously across states, with possible factors being the political commitment, lack of accountability, corruption and nepotism, and economic hardships currently being faced by the state.

To study the disparities in effectiveness and implementation of the programme across the country, the paper seeks to provide a comparative study of the performance of MGNREGA in the

states of Uttar Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh, based on the latest data available from 2007-12. By looking at various factors such as structural capacity and mechanisms, financial planning, registration of households and issue of job cards, women participation, SC/ST representation, employment and wage conditions, work priority and execution, it seeks to analyse the reasons which made the programme a success (or a failure) in the respective states.

Literature Review

Banik et al. (2021) analysed in their paper the reasons why the Act is successful in some states and not in others. According to their paper, the success of MGNREGA relies on the readiness of the government to implement it. In Tripura and Chhattisgarh, political will, efficient implementation, and proper supervision of the programme resulted in it being successful. On the other hand, the government of Rajasthan displayed a lack of commitment as it was unwilling to provide jobs under the programme and people were told they could request work only when it was available. In many villages in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar it was found that people could not find work despite demanding it. In some of the relatively richer states like Punjab and Haryana, with low demand for MGNREGA work, the government had not even formed the rules or issued job cards to implement the scheme seven years since the inception of MGNREGA.

Hashmi (2017) concluded from his survey conducted in five villages of Ballia district in Uttar Pradesh that immoderate political interference, nature of work and ignorance about the Act among workers are some of the reasons behind the dismal performance of MGNREGA in the area. According to his paper, while Uttar Pradesh had succeeded with respect to higher participation of SC's in MGNREGA, the same was not reflected in the survey district where only 14 percent of the SC population was part of MGNREGA employment during 2013-14. Given the economic distress of the SCs, there was a visible depressing trend in terms of participation of the disadvantaged sections of the population.

Ratan et al. (2016) in their comparative study of Bangarmau block, Unnao district of Uttar Pradesh, found huge disparities between the objectives and the actual outcomes of MGNREGA in the district. Though the programme succeeded in providing some monetary aid and short-term employment at some point at the same time it failed to prevent distress migration of the rural poor to cities and in empowering marginalised sections of the society. Along with the poor performance of the scheme they also discovered the malpractice of proxy employment in the villages.

Lakshmi et al. (2018) conducted a study in the Krishna District of Andhra Pradesh wherein most of the respondents stated that they were getting less than 100 days of employment during a year. While most of them were satisfied with the programme in reference to the wages paid, timings of work and behaviour of the officials, they were unhappy with the process of application, work allotment, and working conditions in the field.

Johnson et al. (2009) concluded in their paper that the Andhra Pradesh government set a high standard for transparency with the public dissemination of information on state-level NREGA participation and identified seven lessons from the data including the rapid growth of NREGA in AP despite its stagnant appearance, easy access to job cards contrary to what is stated in the mainstream press and similar wages existing across caste and gender but not across districts.

Methods

This paper conducts a comparative study of MGNREGA between Uttar Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh. The study is solely sourced from secondary data retrieved from academic and scholarly articles as well as government published journals. Audit reports of both the states have also been used to prove the effectiveness of MGNREGA.

Data

There is a lack of uniformity between the two state reports. In the reports of Uttar Pradesh many of the sections that were to be reported by the government were missing while on the other hand Andhra Pradesh's audit report was quite detailed.

The last reports that were available for the states of Uttar Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh were that of the years 2016 and 2012 respectively after which no auditing or investigation was done which creates a lacuna of the availability of data to compare with recent years. The Uttar Pradesh government has neither submitted a section on Completion work rate nor sufficient evidence regarding the execution of works along with its pictures, which under the MGNREGA act is an important requisite. Therefore researchers were unable to comment upon the progress of tasks undertaken in UP.

The data available on the official site of MGNREGA was quite different from the findings that we had achieved. Therefore, the data needs to be checked independently to confirm the findings as certain discrepancies were found between the data available on site and the audit report.

Results and Discussion

Despite the overall achievement of MGNREGA the impact of the program has not been uniform. A study by ESID (the Effective States and Inclusive Development) suggests that differences in states' capacity and commitment lead to variation in employment outcomes. States with higher capacity in terms of economic, and human resources can reach their potential beneficiaries (ESID, briefing no.1). The commitment of the states also plays an important role in the success of the implementation of such schemes, since it ensures initiative, transparency, preparation and efforts. These two factors are also interlinked, and these factors are highly dependent on the political and economic factors of the state, which varies across the country.

To understand the factors how the scheme can be implemented effectively, or why there is a stark difference between the performance of the poor and rich state. We have taken two states from each category Andhra Pradesh, with higher capacity and income and Uttar Pradesh, with lower capacity and income.

Overall the implementation of the MGNREGA act has been effective in AP but not in UP. All the factors have been stated based on the report of the Computer Auditor general of India and supported by arguments made by various scholars.

1) Structural Capacity and mechanisms

As per the requirement of the act, under section 12 both the states formulated the scheme in 2006, and set up the SEGC (State employment Guarantee Council) which is headed by the Chief

Minister, which takes care about the monitoring and implementation of the act. However, in the report provided by the auditor till 2012, SEGC of both the states have been practically non-functional (in UP the council only met once or twice, and in AP only eight times).

- **Mechanisms in both the states**

There was an acute shortage of the functionaries in UP ranging from 6% to 53%. The table given below reveals the shortfalls:

Levels	No. Of Units	Functionaries	Requirement	Sanctioned Posts	Persons in Position	Shortfalls in %
GP	51,980	Gram Rojgar Sevak	1	48,946	41,491	15
		Technical Assistant	Not Posted			
Block	820	Additional Programming Officer	1	783	704	10
		Account Assistant	1	792	660	17
		Technical Assistant	1	7931	5398	32
		Computer Assistant	1	745	554	26
Districts	72	Works Manager	1	72	49	32
		IT Manager with Computer Assistant	1	53	35	34
		Accounts Manager with accounts assistant	1	47	22	53
		Training Coordinator	1	49	36	27
		Coordinator Social Audit and Grievance redressal	1	273	256	6

(**Source**: Information provided by Additional Commissioner, MGNREGS Cell)

The state government of AP has developed an IT system AP MGNREGS MIS, which is a customised application software (RAGAS) in partnership with TCS. Use of technology is one of the major reasons that AP has achieved a greater level of transparency compared to the state of UP. This MIS system also has EGS transaction processing system. It helps in avoiding post payments of EGS transactions.

The state has also developed several mobile-based applications for muster rolls, verification, and work measurements etc.

- **Information and Educational initiatives**

One of the reasons that the implementation of the scheme has been so successful in AP is because they have undertaken measures to educate the beneficiaries and technical assistants by making films on a variety of topics— helping people understand their rights, training different levels of functionaries etc.

However, the training programme adopted by the UP Govt. wasn't up to the mark. Though the state government sanctioned Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Institute of Rural Development in Lucknow to conduct the training programmes for the chief functionaries, it was recorded that only 235 out of 771 sessions were held. These shortcomings were in spite of the fact that the government had allotted Rs 19.88 crore to be spent on the training. A huge amount of Rs 7 crore was unspent as of March 2012 which wasn't even refunded to MoRD.

The MGNREGA scheme was implemented in UP without any effective distribution of information to the illiterate masses. During the initial phase the government distributed a few pamphlets but that wasn't sufficient for vigorous circulation of information. The beneficiaries were not well aware about the scheme and hence were unable to avail the opportunities that could have been made available to them under this scheme.

2) Financial Planning

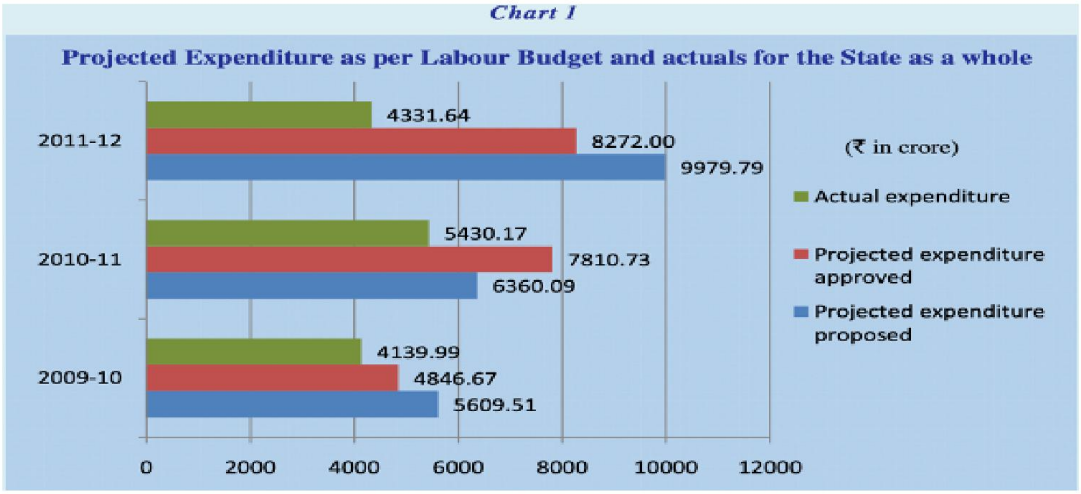
- **Utilisation of labour budget**

In AP from the year 2009-2012, the projections of the labour budget (proposed as well as approved) were found to be far higher than what was actually incurred. There was a discrepancy of 85%, 69% and 52% from the year 2009-10, 2010-11, and 2011-12 respectively (this has been indicated in the graph below). The projections of the labour budget have been inflammatory in both the states AP and UP.

An amount of Rs 22,174.35 Crore was spent under this scheme against the sanctioned amount of Rs 22,567 crore during 2007 -2012. The labour budget was not completely utilised. There was lack of maintenance of proper accounting records and instances of funds being released which were more than what the labour budget prescribed for the GPs personal interests.

The Labour budget was not based on realistic estimates. The GoI reduced the projected person days from 46793 crore person days to 42000 crore person-days.At the same time the budget of 26 districts was affirmed in excess of their labour budget. There were 8 districts whose projected person-days were increased by 8.38 lakh. Therefore,the district's projected person-days, their budget and the person days approved by the government of India did not really complement each other.

All the above mentioned factors point towards the lack of planning of fund transfer by the State Government and the corruption that prevails within the local institutions.



Source: Computer Auditor Report no. 5, 2009-12, Andhra Pradesh

Year	Approved Labour Budget	Releases of funds by		Total Releases	Expenditure	Releases excess (+) / short (-) over expenditure
		GoI	State			
2007-08	2,500.00	1,648.31	200	1,848.31	1,898.25	(-) 49.94
2008-09	4686.4	3,944.50	300	4,244.50	3,576.06	(+) 668.44
2009-10	7380.1	5,318.88	550	5,868.88	5,906.04	(-) 37.16
2010-11	8779	5,266.58	499.9	5,766.48	5,627.85	(+) 138.63
2011-12	8787.24	4,355.75	483.97	4,839.72	5,166.15	(-)326.43
Total	32,132.74	20,534.02	2,033.87	22,567.89	22,174.35	(+) 393.54

Source: MGNREGA cell, Lucknow

There have also been incidents where both state governments have diverted the money on other schemes. As per the MGNREGA act, diversion of funds to state-sponsored programmes is not allowed. For example, in 2013, Rs.66.95 lakhs from MGNREGA funds were diverted to Indira Jala Prabha project in AP, a state-sponsored programme. Data relating to UP's diversion of these funds has not been clearly stated.

3) Registration of households and issue of job cards

In AP, as of 2012, job cards have been issued to 124.24 lakh households which is about 35% of the total state population. As per the MoRD's Operational guidelines 2008, household means a nuclear family consisting of father, mother and children. However, the auditor report suggested that in four of the districts of AP some households were large (consisting of 20 or more members). The households have not been segregated into nuclear families which adds financial burden on such families with only one job cards to nuclear families by the end of 2012-13. Auditing is required to confirm this, however, it indicates that the government was prepared for immediate response, something that the UP state government lacks.

Table 6 – 'Large' Households

Household size	Ranga Reddy	Anantapur	Vizianagaram	Nalgonda
	(Number of households)			
20 or more members	40	6	8	10
10 or more, but less than 20 members	751	420	407	804
Maximum household size	65	30	39	28

Source: Computer Auditor Report No. 5, 2009-2012

Table 7 - Details of non-affixation of photographs on job cards

District	Percentage of photographs not available with job cards verified in audit
Nalgonda	33
Ranga Reddy	40
Kurnool	61
Anantapur	35
Visakhapatnam	38
Vizianagaram	25

Source: beneficiary survey, computer auditor report no.5, 2009-2012, AP

It was found that in both the states records of job registration were not maintained at Gram Panchayat level, only at Mandal and state level. This highlights the need to make the ground level institutions stronger and more accountable.

The beneficiary survey by the audit team suggests that in both the states the complete procedure of providing job cards was not followed. Though the act mandates affixing of

photographs on job cards; In both the states it was found that this was not carried out duly. In AP, an average of 38.7% of job cards from 6 districts did not have photographs affixed along with the update.

In UP, to reach out to more people no door to door surveys were conducted to identify the people willing to register for job cards. There were about 1298 households that did not receive the job card despite registration thereupon denying them the assured employment opportunity. Photos of 960 beneficiaries were not affixed in the job card register, leaving room for providing employment to someone else instead of the beneficiary who registered.

4) Women participation and SC/ST representation

This parameter was an important determinant of successful implementation of the act in AP as opposed to UP. One of the auxiliary objectives of the act is to empower women (33% reservation for women) and foster equity through SC/ST representation. In the gender-based analysis it was clear that women's participation in AP was far greater than in UP. In AP women were given employment as Technical Assistants, Assistant Programme Officer, Field assistant, etc and women's participation is almost half the total number of employeesThis showed that there was no discrimination in terms of employment opportunity for women labour in AP.

Table 21 – Gender-wise beneficiary profile for the State

Financial year	Total Number of beneficiaries provided employment	Number of male beneficiaries	Number of female beneficiaries	Percentage of female beneficiaries to the total beneficiaries
2009-10	1,15,14,361	52,90,557	62,23,804	54
2010-11	1,18,96,383	54,44,190	64,52,193	54
2011-12	91,24,569	41,14,368	50,10,201	55

Source: AP MGNREGS MIS Data

However, in UP, it was seen that the representation of women was very low ranging from 14% to 22% in the years 2007 to 2012. It was especially low in the year 2007-08 at about 14%.

Year	Total Employment days Generated (in lakh)	Women Employment Days generated (in lakh)	Representation of Women (in %)
2007-08	7.8	1.06	14
2008-09	12.53	2.68	21
2009-10	20.56	4.07	20
2010-11	26.79	7.35	27
211-12	27.17	5.7	21
Total	94.84	20.86	22

Source: Information collected during audit, UP

In Southern India, this trend has been noticed that women's participation exceeds 50%. In North India however, there have been several socio-cultural barriers that have led to males being more benefited from schemes like MGNREGA.

The reason behind this low participation of women (in UP) was that the female labourers were not allowed to work on lands of farmers who weren't from their caste or community. They were not encouraged by their male relatives and people from various castes equated allowing women to work outside their house with loss of dignity and honour to their family (Dutta. S, 2017). In Sitapur district, women who wanted to participate in MGNREGA faced hostility from both panchayats and male relatives. Their names were excluded from job cards, as they were considered "socially unacceptable" and "weak" to work (Dutta. S, 2017).

There is also clear evidence in terms of SC/ST representation. In AP, the government has been able to ensure a representation of 25% for SC workers and 15% for ST workers in the workforce. This is because AP provided strong backing to the poor; they have done this by promoting and forming Sharma Shakti Sanghas which unionizes poor and workers from lower caste. In 2010, in Anantapur district, a lower-caste worker filed a case against the technical assistant about the compensation of the work. The police took the case seriously under the Harijan Atrocities and the TA was dismissed (Dutta. S,2017).

In UP however, the representation from lower castes remains low. Reason for this is that for the longest time the state has been ruled by upper caste political parties. The interests of the lower castes were highlighted only upon the coming of the BSP (Bahujan Samaj Party) However, the party did not work actively to achieve its goal of fostering social equity. It did not change the bargaining power of the poor, any benefits from the presence of BSP were received by middle income Dalit groups. The poor Dalit families have been excluded from any benefit (Dutta. S, 2017). Lack of political competition, rampant corruption, and embedded hierarchy of caste and class are the major reasons for the hindrance of effective implementation of MGNREGA in UP.

5) Employment and wage conditions

In the AP audit report, the beneficiary survey states that 91% of people indicated that work was allotted to them within 15 days of registration. About 41% people said there was a delay in payments to about 1-2 months and only 33% beneficiaries received it in 15 days. Also, the act requires the state government to pay the households for working days exceeding 100 days. As per the report from 2009-2012, considering an average wage of Rs.60 per day, in four districts of AP the figure comes out to be Rs.259.72 crores. UP report does provide with any such data, however, presumably the numbers are quite high for it. The states have not taken active initiatives to disperse the wages on time (almost Rs 21.59 crores of wages are un-dispatched in the post office).

The audit analysis of AP also revealed that there were very low daily wages in some households. In four districts there were about 367 households in 2011-12 that received wages below Rs.20 per day. There is a strong possibility that these low daily wages are because of the improper measurement of work by the technical assistant.

Similarly, the scheme in UP began with a daily wage rate of Rs 58 in 2007 and was later enhanced to Rs 100. It was increased further to Rs 120 in the year 2011. Labourers in 17 GPs ,6 KPs and 2 ZPs were paid at a rate lower than the one prescribed, leading to a less payment of wages amounting to around Rs 4.50 Lakhs. There were a few districts where the wages to the labourers paid without measuring the work done which eventually resulted in an irregular payment of Rs 22.29 lakh. It is actually contrary to what the MGNREGA states to achieve.

- 100 days of household work

The number of households provided work for 100 days or less from 2009-12 has been summarised as below (as per the AP MGNREGS MIS web report).

Table 8 – Profile of employment provided for the State as a whole

Year	No of HHs working	No of HHs completed 100 days	No of HHs completed 75 - <100 days	No of HHs completed 50 - < 75 days	No of HHs completed < 50 days	% of HHs completed 100 days	% of HHs completed 75 - < 100 days	% of HHs completed 50 - < 75 days	% of HHs completed < 50 days
2009-10	60,78,121	13,21,149	5,77,644	8,44,335	33,34,993	22	9	14	55
2010-11	61,97,244	9,66,291	6,26,303	10,16,242	35,88,408	16	10	16	58
2011-12	49,98,709	9,74,256	4,81,539	7,33,844	28,09,070	19	10	15	56

Source: AP MGNREGS MIS web reports

The guaranteed 100 days of employment was provided only to 2 % to 8% of the workers during 2007-2012. Average number of days of employment provided to the worker by the districts in the years 2007 to 2012 was 18 to 29 days.

Year	Total registered households	Person days projected	Person days generated	Avg person days generated by households	Households provided 100 days of employment (in %)
2007-08	20,82,834	3,52,96,651	3,78,04,198	18	8.25
2008-09	32,47,837	8,52,11,377	7,31,53,726	23	6.72
2009-10	35,07,287	13,05,99,855	10,04,10,522	29	6.48
2010-11	37,05,112	14,04,82,827	9,20,86,159	25	6.08
2011-12	39,45,337	11,13,69,282	7,41,05,334	19	2.14
Total	1,64,88,407	50,29,59,992	37,75,59,939	23	5.62

Source: Computer Auditor Report No.4, 2013

The Act guarantees that work will be made available to anyone who demands it within 15 days of submitting an application and the failure to do so would result in the state being accountable to pay an unemployment allowance.

One of the major issues of execution that both the states lacked was unemployment allowance. As per August 2012 data in AP, out of 1,789 beneficiaries who applied for an allowance only 3 have received the payment. It was impossible to verify the details of who qualified for the allowance, due to lack of registration maintenance at Gram Panchayat level.

According to the information available at the official site of MGNREGA, UP did not provide employment to many workers within the stipulated time limit which would have resulted in a payment of an unemployment allowance, but an amount of Rs 5.12 crore remained unpaid by the state government. Furthermore, workers from over 25 villages were denied payment of an allowance when they demanded it.

Year	No. of Districts	Days for Unemployment Allowance	Days For the Allowances Paid	Amount Paid	Amount payable equal to wage rate Rs 100/120 per day
2009-10	71	13629	71	0.07	13.55
2010-11	72	367239	147	0.18	367.09
2011-12	72	109099	0	0	130.91
				Total	511.55

Source: www.nrega.nic.in

Aristocracy still prevails in UP. It's one of the main reasons that work against the interest of the backward people. The elites of the society still rule the government associations and deny access to public development funds to the state.

6) Work priority and Execution

Environmentally friendly works have been given priority in AP. Their highest proportion of work is in water harvesting and conserving. The table below clearly shows almost half of the manual work is still under progress.

Table 18 – Profile of works status

	Anantapur	Ranga Reddy	Vizianagaram	Nalgonda	Total
Completed	83,243	23,115	84,524	66,988	2,57,870
Closed	60,150	12,662	38,912	39,695	1,51,419
In progress	94,909	77,315	80,045	1,43,833	3,96,102
Others	126	294	43	161	624
Total	2,38,428	1,13,386	2,03,524	2,50,677	8,06,015

Source: Analysis of electronic data provided by the Department

The Audit of UP noticed that around 5.56 lack out of 15.55 lack i.e 35.75% of the work executed was of low priority and only 9.16% of the work that was given highest priority was executed. The percentage of the implementation of lowest priorities work in the year 2007-12 ranged from 12% to 79% .

Inadmissible works— such as construction of earthen roads, large bridges and beautification of ponds, distribution of plants— valued at Rs 25.60 crore approximately were also executed. Whereas 19 works were abandoned and 51 works were left incomplete after incurring a heavy amount of 18.19 lakh and 1.76 crores respectively. It was also noticed that the work the state government claimed to have completed according to the records, was not actually executed although a payment of 7.21 lakh was already made, in case of UP.

One of the objectives of the Act is to create durable assets for the villagers. The MGNREGA Act states that after the execution of the work, the data of working and closing projects must be substantiated with images (AP audit report provides images). UP on the other hand has not provided any images in their audit. This clearly points that the government is lacking in bringing more transparency to the auditing process.

The pictures below from the Audit report (of AP) show the quality of the work achieved under MGNREGA.

- Land development

It was noticed that in almost 60% of the work undertaken in AP lands remained unfit for cultivation, despite being declared as completed.



Source: Computer Auditor Report No.5, 2009-12, AP

- Water conservation and drought-proofing

In about 51 works construction of tanks, bunds etc., were not uniform. Top width was not maintained which could lead to slippage during rainy seasons.



Source: Computer Auditor Report No.5, 2009-12, AP

Conclusion

India's growth rate has been among the fastest in the world. With growing urbanisation and development, the disparity between the rich and the poor has been increasing. The rural population is mostly dependent upon agrarian and allied activities. The rural population presently suffers the most from poverty and deprivation, especially for households with unskilled labour. Rural development, therefore, becomes vital for sustainable growth. MGNREGA as a scheme plays an important role to address this issue, acting as a safety net.

AP has been awarded the first position in transparency, and the district of Anantapur has bagged the second position in the effectiveness of the programme. AP has its problems, but in comparison to UP, it has been more effective. It was clear that it was because UP lacked factors like— more transparency, use of technology, political competition, socio-economic barriers and accountability. There has been a clear difference in the way auditing of both states was done; UP lacked the data of certain parameters, which made it impossible to perform a comparison.

The auditor report of AP from 2012 states that more than 50% of the work were in progress. However, the official website of MGNREGA from 2017 onwards showed AP with a 98% completion of work rate. There are certain discrepancies in data available on the secondary sources. Hence, these findings need to be checked independently.

In the overall impact assessment of MGNREGA, the data clearly states that there has been an improvement in the consumption expenditure, better educational opportunity for children from the participation of women, and an overall increase in the standard of living.

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