

Participation, information, governance challenges and ICT-enabled solutions to rights-based workfare programme

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Abstract

The Governance Mechanism plays an influential role in deciding the scheme's fate. The present study is an attempt to report the governance mechanism of MGNREGS at the grassroots in Haryana. The study found that poor implementation has transformed demand-driven scheme into supply-based scheme. Execution lacunas have restrained people

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from enjoying the rights provided by the act. Local stakeholders should be encouraged to participate in strengthening the scheme. The study strongly recommends the three-tier governance mechanism to investigate the matters of implementation meticulously, revitalize the governance strategy, and use the latest information and communication technology to enhance the operational efficiency of the mega employment scheme.

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Introduction

Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) is India's most acclaimed Public Works Programme to address the chronic socio-economic problems of poverty and unemployment through a multi-faceted demand-driven and entitlement-based social security mechanism. The scheme was enacted in phases, initiated in 2006, and encompassed rural India in 2008. The scheme is considered radical for its provisions of providing a hundred days of employment on a guaranteed basis, time-bound wage payment, implementation through local government with community participation, mandatory social audits at regular intervals envisaged for transparency and accountability, along with several other prominent features. It is one of the world's most extensive public works programmes [1]. Researchers admire the scheme's flexible structure. On the one hand, the scheme provides the 'Right to Work' to deprived section of rural India, and on the other hand, it focuses on environment protection and asset creation through works such as land development, afforestation, water resource management, community and individual assets, and modifiable permissible work list for infrastructure development. The scheme is anticipated to be a public welfare scheme accelerating the development process, improving the quality of life of rural masses in the short run, and being helpful in sustainable development in the long run. The programme greatly supported labour in rural areas during COVID-19 [2]. To be more effective and robust, the implementation of any scheme matters, and the analysis of this aspect further assists policymakers in making desired changes in the scheme for the welfare of beneficiaries and society at large.

In India, studies have unfolded various aspects of implementing the scheme with bright and grey shades. Khera and Nayak [3] described NREGA as an excellent platform to provide income and employment to people experiencing poverty but also raised important issues related to

women: safety, health access, and other worksite facilities. Reddy, Roy, and Pradeep [4] showed that the vulnerable group has achieved some support, but the implementation gap was found in the scheme. Mukherjee and Ghosh [5] found Gram Panchayat's lack of efficiency in designing and implementing projects was the major limiting factor in the efficient implementation of the scheme. Gaur [6] analyzed that many provisions under the scheme were not followed effectively, improper monitoring of works, corruption, and provision of less than minimum wages were the reasons for the attraction of workers towards open markets. Narang [7] analyzed that in Nuh/Mewat, an increasing trend in employment generation under the scheme was found, but implementing agencies still needed to employ the beneficiaries on the requisite scale. Sharma [8] examined that the presence of corruption, lack of awareness, absence of civil society organizations, and low level of education of Sarpanches and their political subordinates were the main reasons for the poor performance of the scheme. Swain and Sharma [9] found in Rajasthan that the scheme successfully targeted the poor, enhanced food security, protected against extreme poverty, gave women greater economic independence, and reduced distress migration. Carswell and Neve [10] examined the workings and impacts of NREGA and found that women and vulnerable groups benefitted from the scheme. Kumar and Shah [11] reported that the indifference of local government and officials to perform the social audit, negligible involvement in gram sabhas, and non-transparency in showing the documents by the village secretary were prominent issues. Sridhar and Reddy [12], in their field analysis, found that women beneficiaries received more benefits than men and claimed that participation positively impacted poverty reduction. Hussain [13] explored that the number of male members in the household positively impacted the workdays provided to a household under the scheme. Breitkreuz et al. [14] reported that MGNREGS wages were less than the market wage rate in Kerala and Tamil Nadu. However, these two states were better than Odisha regarding employment days creation. Baruah and Radkar [15] verified efficiency in MGNREGA's targeting. The study found that people with no banking facility and persons belonging to SCs and STs positively impacted MGNREGS participation. Saha [16] found major local problems that affected the working of the scheme. Caste-based inequalities, differential occupational interests, and apathy of local Panchayat to take initiative were hindrances to effective functioning. Kumar, Madheswaran, and Vani [17] concluded that self-selection provision was found insufficient in budget-constraint situations, and specific earmarking for SC/STs is

required in the scheme to achieve social justice and inclusion. Natesan and Marathe [18] provided insights into the implementation aspect and supported 'technology-enabled monitoring systems.' Choudhary and Karan [19] highlighted the positive impact of the scheme on reducing migration, increasing wage rates, and achieving sustainable development goals. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is quickly changing shape and scope. Advanced bio-metric systems, cloud computing, big-data technologies, and human-computer interaction technologies can be leveraged for rural transformation [20]. It is essential to examine to what extent this programme has succeeded in governance.

3. Data, methodology, and objectives

The study attempts to gauge the scheme's impact on the grassroots level in Haryana. In the chosen state, the dichotomy prevails regarding economic progress and the unemployment rate. It is worthwhile to assess the implementation of the Employment Guarantee Act in a state with the highest unemployment rate in India. To analyze the governance mechanism of MGNREGS comprehensively, an interview schedule was designed carefully, incorporating all relevant questions related to various aspects of the MGNREGS and the study's objectives. A multistage sampling technique was adopted for the field survey. In the first stage, four districts of Haryana were selected randomly, considering their geographical location so that an accurate state picture could be represented. One district from the North, one from the West, one from the South, and the last from central Haryana was selected. On this basis, districts Karnal, Hisar, Nuh/ Mewat, and Jhajjar were selected, respectively. In the second stage, purposively, two blocks were selected from each district where comparatively more work days were generated to analyse the scheme implementation regarding the study's objectives. Data related to employment generation and asset creation available at the MGNREGS website worked as a backdrop for the selection of blocks. A carefully structured interview schedule was canvassed from April to September 2021 in twenty-four-gram panchayats, choosing three-gram panchayats from each block and sixteen beneficiaries from each village, thus making the sample size three-hundred and eighty-four.

The specific objectives of the study are:

1. To assess the governance mechanism of the MGNREGS
2. To examine the problems in the process of the implementation of the scheme

3. To provide policy inputs for the better implementation of the scheme

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 *Socio-economic profile of the respondents and their participation*

Understanding the socio-economic profile through surveys is of utmost importance. In the survey conducted across four districts, ninety-six households were surveyed, making up twenty-five percent of the total respondents.

4.1.1 Gender, Religion, Social Group, and Marital Status

The gender distribution within the surveyed population of 384 respondents indicates that 57.29 percent were male, while 42.71 percent were female. Notably, the female participation displays variation across the four districts, progressively decreasing from 14.3 percent in Karnal to 13 percent in Hisar, further to 9.6 percent in Jhajjar, and reaching its lowest at Nuh/Mewat, with only 5.7 percent female representation compared to the total male representation of 19.3 percent. The situation is most concerning in Nuh/Mewat, where female participation is notably low, accounting for only 22.9 percent of the selected worker's households in the district.

Within the respondent group, the predominant religious affiliation was Hindu, comprising 70.83 percent of the dataset. In contrast, 29.17 percent of the respondents identified as Muslim. Nuh/Mewat district demonstrates the highest concentration of Muslim respondents. Interestingly, in Karnal, every respondent identified as Hindu, while in Nuh/Mewat, every respondent identified as Muslim. Nuh/Mewat stands out with a significantly different demographic composition, with an 80 percent Muslim population (Census of India, 2011). This is also reflected in the survey, where most respondents were Muslim in Nuh/Mewat. The presence of Muslim respondents was relatively limited in Hisar and Jhajjar, with only 1 and 15 respondents belonging to the Muslim religion, respectively. Public Works Programmes such as MGNREGS were designed to economically upgrade socially disadvantaged social groups. So, it becomes crucial to examine the social group among MGNREGS workers. Participation in MGNREGS remained limited among households belonging to the General caste and other backward castes, despite these caste categories collectively constituting over 50 percent of the population, according to the Census of India 2011. Specifically, in Karnal, Hisar, and

Jhajjar, the percentage of households from the General caste stands at 1.8 percent, 3.6 percent, and 4.9 percent, respectively. Similarly, households from other backward caste categories accounted for just 0.3 percent and 0.5 percent in Karnal and Hisar, underscoring the relatively low representation of these castes in the MGNREGS. Karnal saw a substantial 8.1 percent participation from backward castes, Hisar recorded 5.2 percent, and Jhajjar registered 1.3 percent. Notably, Nuh/Mewat stood out with a high participation rate of 25 percent, primarily due to its predominantly backward caste population. Additionally, Karnal, Hisar, and Jhajjar had significant percentages of scheduled caste (SC) households, with 14.6 percent, 15.6 percent, and 18.8 percent, respectively, falling under this category.

In the marital status category, three respondents were classified as unmarried, 84 respondents were married, nine were widows, and no respondents were in the divorced or separated categories in district Karnal. In Hisar district, four respondents were categorised as Unmarried, 80 as Married, 12 as Widows, and no respondents in the Divorced or Separated categories. In the Jhajjar district, five respondents were classified as Unmarried, 78 as Married, 12 as Widows, and one as Separated/Divorced category. In Nuh/Mewat district, four respondents were categorised as Unmarried, 87 as Married, five as Widows, and none in the Divorced or Separated categories. The total count across all districts reveals 16 respondents in the Unmarried category, 329 in the Married category, 38 in the Widow category, and 1 in the Separated category.

4.1.2 Age, Education, Occupation, and Family Size

Knowing the age group of MGNREGS workers in selected regions is imperative. Only one respondent from the Nuh/Mewat district was less than 20 years old. Respondents in the 21-30 age group were 13 percent, in the 31-40 age group were 31.7 percent, in the 41-50 age group were 30 percent, and in the 51-60 age group were 21.1 percent. Surprisingly, 4 percent of respondents were more than 60 years of age and working under the scheme.

Additionally, all four districts have distinct variations in literacy rates among their respondents. Recognising the education levels of MGNREGS participants is paramount as it enables the development of targeted skill-building programmes to enhance their employability. Table 1. presents a breakdown of respondents in each district based on their education levels. Despite slight variations, the overall trend indicated that many respondents across all districts were illiterate, followed by those with Primary and Secondary education levels. However, the proportion of respondents with

Middle and Senior Secondary education was relatively minor, and only a limited number possessed higher qualifications. Hisar had the highest count, 53 illiterate individuals, followed by Nuh/Mewat 45, Karnal 42, and Jhajjar 34. One hundred nine workers had primary education, 35 were literate to the middle class, 40 had secondary education, 15 were literate up to senior secondary, and four were diploma/certificate holders. Notably, Karnal had three graduates among its MGNREGS workers, while each of the remaining districts had one graduate in their respective districts. Jhajjar has one postgraduate MGNREGS worker as well.

Understanding the occupation of households has great significance in assessing the impact of MGNREGS in providing employment. In Karnal, the primary occupation of many beneficiary households was casual labour/others (10.7 percent). This category comprises various informal and unskilled occupations. Additionally, a substantial number of households depended on MGNREGS employment (6.8 percent), 2.9 percent of beneficiaries were engaged in agriculture labour, and 2.6 percent were self-employed, indicating a mix of agricultural and non-agricultural activities. Some households were doing farming (1.3 percent). One respondent depended upon salary, and two were pensioners. In Hisar, the primary occupation trend shows that many MGNREGS beneficiaries were engaged in casual labour/others (13.8 percent), like Karnal. However, a significant group relied on their farming (3.9 percent) and obtaining wage income through MGNREGS (5.2 percent). Some households were involved in livestock farming (0.3 percent), Agriculture labour (0.8 percent), self-employment (0.8 percent), and salaried/contractual jobs (0.3). In Jhajjar, casual labour/others were the primary occupations for the majority of MGNREGS beneficiary households (61 percent), while a smaller percentage is engaged in MGNREGS (2.6 percent), own farming (0.8 percent) and self-employment (1.6 percent). A few households were involved in livestock farming (1.8 percent), small shops (0.3 percent), and agriculture labour (0.8 percent). In Nuh/Mewat, casual labour/others remained the main occupation for many MGNREGS workers' households (12 percent). The households also relied on their farming (5.2 percent), livestock farming (3.4 percent), and self-employment (2.6 percent). Some households also received wage income from MGNREGS (0.3 percent). The data indicates that casual labour/others were the prevalent main occupation category among MGNREGS workers' households across all districts. However, MGNREGS work was the prominent additional livelihood source of 72.4 percent of households. Own farming (10.7 percent) and livestock farming (8.2 percent) were other famous additional sources of livelihood undertaken by these households.

Additionally, the presence of other sources such as casual labour, agriculture labour, pension, and house-makers further highlighted the diverse additional economic activities of these households.

Family size substantially influences participation in the scheme primarily because larger families generally possess a more significant labour force. Therefore, examining family size and the number of earning members within a family becomes pivotal for an analysis. The average family sizes across the districts were determined by calculating the mean. Karnal exhibited the smallest family size, with an average of 4.4 members, closely followed by Jhajjar with 4.6 members and Hisar with 4.8 members. In contrast, Nuh/Mewat reported the highest family size. Notably, in Karnal, Hisar, and Jhajjar, nearly 50 percent of family members earned income, whereas Nuh/Mewat registered only one-third of family members as earners. Additionally, the districts reported 1.8, 2.1, 1.7, and 1.5 individuals participating in MGNREGS. Intriguingly, the gender dynamics within MGNREGS participation revealed exciting trends. In Karnal, female participation surpassed male participation; the ratio was nearly 1:1, followed by Hisar's 0.94. However, the female participation ratio drops to 0.74 and 0.64 in Jhajjar and Nuh/Mewat, respectively. These variations highlighted the diverse participation patterns of different districts within the MGNREGS.

Table 1

Socio-Economic profile and participation as beneficiaries in NREGA

Title	Description	Karnal	Hisar	Jhajjar	Nuh/ Mewat
Gender	Male	41 (10.7)	46(12)	59(15.4)	74(19.3)
	Female	55(14.3)	50(13)	37(9.6)	22(5.7)
Religion	Hindu	96(25)	95(24.7)	81(21.1)	0
	Muslim	0	1(0.3)	15(3.9)	96(25)
Social Group	General	7(1.8)	14(3.6)	19(4.9)	0
	Other Backward Castes (OBC)	1(0.3)	2(0.5)	0	0
	Backward Caste (BC)	31(8.1)	20(5.2)	5(1.3)	96(25)
	Schedule Caste (SC)	56(14.6)	60(15.6)	72(18.8)	0
Marital Status	Unmarried	3(0.8)	4(1)	5(1.3)	4(1)
	Married	84(21.9)	80(20.8)	78(20.3)	87(22.7)
	Widow	9(2.3)	12(3.1)	12(3.1)	5(1.3)
	Separated	0	0	1(0.3)	0

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Age Group	20 years or less	0	0	0	1(0.3)
	21-30 years	12(3.1)	7 (1.8)	10(2.6)	21(5.5)
	31-40 years	38(9.9)	27(7)	27(7)	30(7.8)
	41-50 years	21(5.5)	30(7.8)	36(9.4)	28(7.3)
	51-60 years	22(5.7)	24(6.3)	20(5.2)	15(3.9)
	61 years and above	3(0.8)	8(2.1)	3(0.8)	1(0.3)
Education	Illiterate	42(10.9)	53(13.8)	34(8.9)	45(11.7)
	Primary	24(6.3)	25(6.5)	29(7.6)	31(8.1)
	Middle	10(2.6)	6(1.6)	12(3.1)	7(1.8)
	Secondary	13(3.4)	7(1.8)	13(3.4)	7(1.8)
	Senior Secondary	3(0.8)	4(1)	3(0.8)	5(1.3)
	Diploma/Certificate course	1(0.3)	0	3(0.8)	0
	Graduate	3(0.8)	1(0.3)	1(0.3)	1(0.3)
	Post Graduate	0	0	1(0.3)	0
Main Occupation	Own farming	5(1.3)	15(3.9)	3(0.8)	20(5.2)
	Livestock farming	0	1(0.3)	7(1.8)	13(3.4)
	Agriculture Labour	11(2.9)	3(0.8)	3(0.8)	0
	Self-employed	10(2.6)	3(0.8)	6(1.6)	10(2.6)
	Shop	0	0	1(0.3)	4(1)
	Salaried/Contracted	1(0.3)	1(0.3)	0	2(0.5)
	MGNREGS wage income	26(6.8)	20(5.2)	10(2.6)	1(0.3)
	Pension	2(0.5)	0	5(1.3)	0
	Casual Labour/ Others	41(10.7)	53(13.8)	61(15.9)	46(12)
Additional Occupation	Own farming	26(6.8)	0	1(0.3)	14(3.6)
	Livestock farming	6(1.6)	1(0.3)	13(3.4)	11(2.9)
	Agriculture Labour	3(0.8)	0	0	0
	Self-employed	2(0.5)	0	0	0
	Salaried/Contracted	0	0	1(0.3)	0
	MGNREGS wage income	68(17.7)	76(19.8)	70(18.2)	64(16.7)
	House-maker	10(2.6)	11(2.9)	7(1.8)	5(1.3)
	Pension	4(1)	6(1.6)	1(0.3)	2(0.5)
	Unemployed	0	1(0.3)	1(0.3)	0
	Casual Labour/ Others	3(0.8)	1(0.3)	1(0.3)	0
Family Information	Total members of the family	4.4	4.8	4.6	6.7
	Total earning members in the family	2.3	2.7	2.3	2.1
	MGNREGS Workers	1.8	2.1	1.7	1.5
	Female/male MGNREGS	1.11	0.94	0.74	0.64

Source: Field Survey

4.2 *Right-Based Framework and Related Issues*

MGNREGS provides a solid legal framework and various entitlements to ordinary people, which helps make a hundred days of employment possible for every poor rural household. The act has provided ten entitlements and must be ensured while implementing the scheme. Entitlements, along with ground reality status, are as follows:

4.2.1 Right to Job Card

The study found that except for one respondent, all respondents applied for MGNREGS job cards verbally, and surprisingly, some were informed after they were issued job cards. Table 2 reveals that thirty respondents in Nuh/Mewat, twenty-four in Jhajjar, eleven in Hisar, and four in Karnal were unaware of their job card issuance procedure. Most of them were informed after the issuance of the job card and, in some cases, at the time of work under the scheme. Some beneficiaries were unaware of their enrollment under the scheme even during the survey. The study found that around sixty-seven percent of respondents reported delays in issuing the job cards. Thirty percent of job cards were provided without photographs of adult volunteer members of the household. Only forty-three percent of job cards have photographs pasted on them, and these, too, were submitted by the Beneficiaries themselves to the implementing agency. Around twenty-seven percent of job cards do not have updated photographs. In Hisar, most job cards were with photographs, and Karnal majority needs updation. In Nuh/Mewat, fifty-two job cards needed pictures/updated pictures, and the count for the Jhajjar district was sixty-one. The most important document, the job card, worked as identity proof for most people. Many needed to be made aware of their job card or what to say about their job card number. Serious violence of the law occurred when most households in Nuh/Mewat did not possess their job cards. The same trend was followed in other districts, too, with different degrees. These practices indirectly indicated the malpractices prevalent in the districts. One household is entitled to one job card, whereas in real, each adult member was provided with a separate job card in some places. Complete ignorance was witnessed when employment, work, and income information was missing in almost all the job cards. In this regard, only a few entries were made in some job cards in sample areas.

Table 2
Grass root Level Information about Job-Card

Title	Description	Karnal	Hisar	Jhajjar	Nuh/ Mewat
The time gap between registration and job-card issuance	unaware	4	11	24	30
	Less than 15 days	22	14	8	12
	15-30 days	43	45	35	29
	More than a month	27	26	29	25
Family photograph of willing and adult members	Without Photograph	20	16	36	44
	With Photograph	23	64	35	44
	Photograph without updation	53	16	25	8
Custody of the job card	With household	74	62	65	11
	Gram Panchayat	0	0	0	54
	Mate	14	34	22	29
	Unaware	8	0	9	2

Source:-Field Survey

4.2.2 Right to demand work in a timebound manner and other related entitlements

Table 3 reflects that even after nearly two decades, the rural poor need to be aware of Gram Sabha Meetings and entitlements beneath the Employment Guarantee Act. Beneficiaries got information about the scheme from gram panchayat members, mates (gram rojgar sahayak), friends, and neighbours. It is discernible from the table that in Karnal and Hisar, mates were the main source of information; in Jhajjar, information was spread through friends and neighbours, and in Nuh/Mewat scheme was known to only affiliated families to Sarpanch and gram panchayat members. There was an alarming situation regarding awareness of the scheme's provisions. Respondents were aware of minimal provisions only. They were not aware of all the facilities at work sites. The provisions of worksites within a radius of five kilometers otherwise compulsory travel allowance, wage payments within fifteen days otherwise delayed compensation, the procedure of preparing shelves of projects, social

audits, grievance redressal, unemployment allowance in case of non-provision of minimum hundred days employment after demand, were not known to beneficiary respondents.

Many beneficiary respondents verbally demanded MGNREGS work from a sarpanch or mate. Only one respondent in Karnal requested work in a written application. Surprisingly, eleven respondents replied that they had not demanded work. Respondents reported that they were provided work under the scheme as per work availability, not on their demand for work. The provision of employment days was not time-bound and demand-driven. Only around fifteen percent of respondents could avail work under the scheme within fifteen days. The remaining eighty-five percent got work as per the availability.

Beneficiaries were neither aware nor provided unemployment allowance. Due to the procedural lapses in the work demand pattern, beneficiaries were automatically restrained from providing unemployment allowance. Respondents were not appropriately informed about the selection of works under the scheme. They reported that works were launched at the discretion of Sarpanch and mate. Community participation was said to be almost non-existent in this procedure. Only four respondents replied that work selection was done in gram sabha, and sixteen percent of respondents were completely unaware of the selection of works procedure. Nearly twenty-four percent of beneficiaries were unhappy with the scheme implementation and work selection, and thirty-five percent reported being indifferent regarding the scheme. Forty percent were satisfied with the scheme, which provided them with some employment days. People were more concerned about employment days and timely wage payments than work selection and asset creation.

Most beneficiaries reported the availability of drinking water at work sites, but people were concerned about the quality of drinking water. Only about twelve percent of respondents admitted the availability of first-aid facilities at worksites, and many of the respondents revealed their health and skin problems due to improper work selection under the scheme. Thirty-nine percent of respondents admitted that works were provided within a five k.m. radius. In Karnal and Hisar, the problem of distant worksites was mostly reported. Female respondents said that the distance of work sites makes the work under the scheme more tiring. This problem was aggravated when the workers were not paid travel allowances for

distant work sites. Nearly forty-six percent of beneficiaries admitted that muster roll was available at work sites; nonetheless, most of them could not verify the records due to illiteracy or lack of endeavour. No one among the respondents was aware of record registers. On the issues of worksite facilities, acceptance of other worksite facilities was nearly negligible. Only one respondent reported shades were available to rest at the work site. Only five respondents, slightly greater than one percent, accepted creche facilities at the workplace. Unfortunately, nearly two percent of respondents admitted to the availability of information boards and recorded registers at worksites.

Twelve percent of respondents reported about the role of contractors, and twenty-three percent admitted using machines for the works under the scheme. On the question of malpractice, thirty-nine percent admitted the case, whereas nearly thirty-four percent did not respond to this question. Their silence indirectly indicated that their answer was yes. There was no symmetry in working hours and base of work measurement, which induced their dissatisfaction. Those who got a commission or worked for fewer hours without work measurement were happy with the scheme. In contrast, those who worked for more than seven hours received wages based on work measurement on an arbitrary basis and did not receive timely and complete wage payments were highly disappointed with the scheme.

The grievance redressal system needed to be included in all the selected districts. Table 3 showcases the average employment days in selected districts in four consecutive years from 2017-18. The value is far from the minimum provision of a hundred days in all the districts. The highest employment days were 65 in Karnal, 56 in Hisar, 45 in Jhajjar, and around 47 in Nuh/Mewat during the four-year study period. Goyal, Kumar, and Goyal [21] showed that participation of scheduled caste beneficiaries in Haryana was less than expected during 2017-18 and 2020-21. Beneficiaries were unable to receive unemployment allowance due to procedural lapses. The situation is more problematic in Jhajjar and Nuh/Mewat districts. All the respondents admitted that they needed more employment opportunities. It was quite pathetic that even after an employment guarantee scheme, the rural poor were unable to avail their entitlements.

Table 3
Provision of Information and Employment Days

Title	Description	Karnal	Hisar	Jhajjar	Nuh/ Mewat
Information source	Gram Sabha Meeting	1	0	0	1
	Announcement	1	0	8	2
	Sarpanch/ Panchayat Members	2	3	23	51
	Mate	58	55	12	23
	Friends & Neighbours	34	38	53	19
Way of demand of Work	Verbally Demanded from Sarpanch	4	13	25	61
	Verbally Demanded from Mate	90	82	71	26
	Applied in Written for Work	1	0	0	0
	Never Applied	1	1	0	9
The time gap between application and provisioning of work	Less than 15 days	22	14	8	12
	Between 15-30 days	43	45	35	29
	More than 30 days	27	26	29	25
	Do not know	4	11	24	30
Work Selection	Gram Sabha	2	1	0	1
	Sarpanch	49	49	65	71
	Mate	27	17	21	18
	Do not know	18	29	10	6
Satisfaction from the scheme	Satisfied	63	42	16	35
	Dissatisfied	8	14	42	28
	Indifferent	25	40	38	33
Water facility	Available	96	95	80	76
	Not Available	0	01	16	20
First-Aid at Worksites	Available	09	07	16	13
	Not Available	87	89	80	83
Worksites' Distance	Within 5 K.M	13	04	48	85
	At more than 5 K.M distance	36	60	0	10
	Sometimes, in distant places	47	32	48	01
Role of contractor	Admitted	1	0	16	28
Use of Machine	Admitted	5	2	34	47

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malpractices	Admitted	15	35	59	41
	Indifferent/did not reply	34	39	26	31
The base of work measurement	Individually	50	59	8	19
	Collectively	16	02	43	44
	Each family	03	17	0	04
	The group is made of people/ mate	27	18	29	12
	Not applicable (people who got the commission)	0	0	16	17
Working hours	Less than five hours	1	0	16	04
	5 to 6 hours	7	21	0	30
	6 to 7 hours	54	39	39	44
	7 to 8 hours	34	29	25	1
	More than 8 hours	0	7	0	0
	Not applicable	0	0	16	17
Average Number of days of employment	2020-21	61.4	55.9	44.7	46.5
	2019-20	65.4	48.4	22.1	28.7
	2018-19	50.7	29.4	19.4	26.1
	2017-18	44.9	47.9	7.8	22.6

Source: Field Survey

4.2.3 Entitlement of timely wage payments

Only twenty-eight percent of respondents nodded on the question of timely wage payments; fifty percent reported that sometimes there were delays, and they received timely wage payments for some projects (Table 4). Around twenty-two beneficiaries were quite disappointed with wage payment delays. Nearly fifty-four percent of respondents faced problems regarding wage payments for fewer working days and non-payment of travel compensation during the four years of the study. It was disheartening to note that around twelve percent of respondents have paid or received a commission for being MGNREGS beneficiaries. However, only thirty-four percent of beneficiaries have not faced any problem with receiving wages. Most respondents have no difficulty withdrawing wages in the digital payment system. Twenty-eight percent of beneficiaries reported problems with wage withdrawal as they received wage payments in different bank accounts at other times. Practices like actual work done by one member and payment made in another person's account were observed locally. The

people working were different from the names in the muster roll. Some others reported that illiteracy and the absence of bank branches in their village were the reasons for problems in wage withdrawals. Fewer employment days, biases in employment days provision, lack of awareness, uses of machines, the role of contractors, and lack of grievance redressal facilities were the reasons that only one-fifth of beneficiaries realised the financial help and admitted the increase in quality of their lives. Goyal, Kumar, and Goyal [22] also described in their filed analysis in Haryana that people were not satisfied with the fewer employment days. Forty-two percent of beneficiaries felt that the scheme has sometimes proven helpful in receiving additional employment days. While thirty-six percent, most of them from Jhajjar, felt that they had not received envisaged help at the time of requirement for employment opportunities.

Table 4
Wage Payment-Related Issues

Title	Description	Karnal	Hisar	Jhajjar	Nuh/ Mewat
Wage payment	Timely wage payment	25	29	14	39
	Sometimes delayed	56	53	39	45
	Delayed Wage Payments	15	14	43	12
Problems in getting wages	Payment for less person-days	18	21	50	18
	Non-payment of travel compensation	41	53	3	2
	Commission	0	0	16	32
	No problem faced	37	22	27	44
Problem with wage withdrawal	Problem faced	11	17	50	29
	No- problem faced	85	79	46	67
The scheme provides financial help.	Helped	33	14	9	26
	Sometimes helped	47	51	32	33
	Did not get help at the time of need	16	31	55	37

Source: Field Survey

Information provided by the respondents indicated poor performance regarding scheme implementation. Rural poor were in acute need of employment opportunities on the one hand, and on the other, they were dissatisfied with the scheme due to bias and inefficiency in scheme implementation. The fundamental element of awareness and empowerment

still needed to be included in most cases. While discussing the field-based results, Breitzkreuz et al. [14] also showed the power relations and gender-related issues related to entitlements and empowerment. Efficient reduction in duplication of works can be made possible through a mobile-based SMS reporting system for tracking MGNREGS work progress. Gujarat's Geo-ICT initiatives were useful to supervisors and administrators in making decisions in near-real-time [23]. Biometric technologies, along with certain latest technologies such as Iris recognition, signature recognition, voice recognition, facial recognition, etc. may be used to enhance transparency and accountability and also to reduce delays. A local language-enabled audio-visual ICT kiosk model may be developed that provides workers details such as work allotment, attendance, muster report, wages calculation as on date, etc., [24].

5. Conclusion and Policy Alternatives

The study shows that there are various structural issues in the implementation of NREGA at the grassroots level. The analysis of the findings of this field-level study indicates that challenges are present in implementing the scheme in the state of Haryana. There is an urgent need to revamp the scheme's implementation and make it more transparent and effective. Government departments should work more to create awareness about the scheme primarily. The local governance system has the potential to assist in achieving the target of inclusive growth, and this needs to be strengthened with the sincere participation of all local stakeholders to implement the scheme effectively. People need to be empowered with information and knowledge to understand the importance of their participation in planning and monitoring. Capacity building of local institutions is significantly required. The ICT ecosystem may prove an empowering tool in rural transformation. Biometric attendance, GPS coordinates, user-friendly devices, and apps are significant in ensuring operational efficiency. There is an urgent need for a better channelized mechanism of feedback, queries, and complaints from beneficiaries through local language-enabled audio-visual online portals. More exposure to technology will help in ensuring transparency.

Accountability of implementers needs to be functional. Labour organizations, NGOs, strong opposition parties at the local level, and skilled volunteers can prove the catalysts in ensuring transparency and accountability at the village level. It is observed that work site facilities are almost non-existent, and these facilities can be helpful mainly for female

beneficiaries. The inclusion of women in such schemes should be taken as a specific agenda to achieve the targets of inclusive and Sustainable Development. There is an urgent need to address issues such as work availability and transparency in the distribution of work. Although the wage rate in Haryana, under the scheme, has remained first and second highest in the country, it is still considerably low compared to the open market wage rate. The enhanced wage rate must be ensured by using proper and standardised work measurement criteria. Delays in wage payments need to be reduced immediately. Social audits and grievance redressal need to be implemented with stringent penalty provisions. Based on the survey findings and analysis of employment generated and funds allocated, one can not anticipate the success or failure of a programme. It should be supported by field-level realities so that the same can be realised with broader perspectives. Effective social audits can help to highlight the implementation gap and provide pathways. Asset creation and maintenance, effective targeting, planning, and utilization of allotted funds with convergence to other schemes at the local level are necessary to make the scheme more effective.

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