

# A Critical Appraisal of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005

**Dr. K. L. Chandrashekhara**

Asst. Professor of Law

Vidyavardhaka Law College, Mysuru, Karnataka, India

(Affiliated to Karnataka State Law University)

aijoor1980@gmail.com

**Abstract:** The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act or MGNREGA is an Indian job guarantee scheme, enacted by legislation on August 25, 2005. The scheme provides a legal guarantee for one hundred days of employment in every financial year to adult members of any rural household willing to do public work related unskilled manual work at the statutory minimum wage.

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005 was a part of the commitments made by the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) Government of its Common Minimum Programme and came into effect in February 2006 primarily in 200 districts. It was a commendable effort and has attracted national and international attention. It has manifold objectives. On the one hand it is a social protection measure and implemented on the experience of previous public schemes, especially the Employment Guarantee Scheme (EGS) in Maharashtra. On the other hand, through providing guarantee employment in rural areas, it also seeks to improve labour market outcomes. This Act has dual purpose, it creates employment as well as sustainable assets in rural areas.

This act was introduced with an aim of improving the purchasing power of the rural people, primarily semi or un-skilled work to people living in rural India. MGNREGA is designed as a safety net to reduce migration by rural poor households in the lean period through. It is an important step towards realisation of the right to work. It is expected to enhance people's livelihood security on a sustained basis, by developing economic and social infrastructure in rural areas.

India's Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, which began in 2006 is the largest public workfare scheme in the world. In the 2010-11 fiscal year, the MGNREGS employed 55 million households who put in 2.5 billion work days on 5.1 million projects, financed by a budget of Rs. 394 billion. The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005 that created the MGNREGS grants each rural household a legal right to employment of up to 100 days per year in public works projects at a minimum wage rate fixed by the concerned state. This employment guarantee programme is primarily intended to enhance the livelihood securities of the people in rural areas by supplementing wage employment opportunities to the unskilled labour force.

MGNREGA is the flagship programme of the UPA Government that directly touches lives of the poor and promotes inclusive growth. The Act aims at enhancing livelihood security of households in rural areas of the country. MGNREGA is the first ever law internationally, that guarantees wage employment at an unprecedented scale.

Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act has a five-tier structure of implementation starting from Gram Panchayat at the bottom to the Central Government at the top. Gram Panchayat is the nodal agency at the bottom level that has the authority to select, design and implement the works. Selection of works, execution, monitoring and supervision are done by the Gram Sabha (Village Council). Gram Panchayat has the responsibility to register households, issue job cards, receive applications for employment, provide employment and monitor the works under this scheme.

**Keywords:** MGNREGA, Job Guarantee, Panchayat Raj, Rural development, Wage & Employment.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act or MGNREGA is an Indian job guarantee scheme, enacted by legislation on August 25, 2005. The scheme provides a legal guarantee for one hundred days of employment in every financial year to adult members of any rural household willing to do public work related unskilled manual work at the statutory minimum wage.

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### **Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005: At a Glance**

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act was passed in 2005 under the UPA Government which ensured the legal right of basic livelihood security to whoever is willing to work at a stipulated minimum wage rate in the rural areas for a period of hundred days in a financial year. This economic safety step for the rural poor by the UPA Government under Dr. Manmohan Singh was a paradigm shift from all other programmes enacted for uplifting the economic condition of the rural poor since this employment guaranteed scheme was backed up by a legal framework in order to give effect to the fundamental right of "right to work" and "right to earn a livelihood" recognized as a part and parcel of Article 21 of the Constitution of India. In *Olga Tellis Vs. Bombay Municipal Corporation*<sup>3</sup> which is considered to be one of the pioneering cases, the Supreme Court brought socio-economic rights

<sup>1</sup><https://www.legalserviceindia.com/legal/article-5445-legal-analysis-of-rural-development-schemes-in-india.html>, date of visit 10.02.2023, at 9.45pm.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup>AIR 1986 SC 180.

within the sweep of PART-III of the Constitution.<sup>4</sup> Further emphasizing on this case to understand the critical matter of topic in our hand, we find that the Supreme Court went on to the extent of stating that-

***"If the right to livelihood is not treated as a part of the constitutional right to life, the easiest way of depriving a person of his right to life would be to deprive one of their means of livelihood to the point of abrogation."***<sup>5</sup>

Backed up by legislation itself, this social security programme of ensuring hundred days of wage employment had the primary objective of ensuring that if there is surplus labour in the economy, this act works as a means to absorb that surplus labour of the rural poor an option to participate even at a low rate with the wage serving as an additional household income to increase the basic amenities of rural poor household members so that they can earn additional livelihood to sustain themselves and their family during uncertain agricultural phenomenon period. Following are a few of the objectives of the Act that has been highlighted in the document of the Act –

To provide an alternative source of income employment to the rural vulnerable people so that their social security can be secured both socially and economically.

To enhance the right to livelihood as a security of the rural poor households of India by providing hundred days of guaranteed wage employment.

To empower and encourage the socially disadvantaged more particularly the womenfolk, the Scheduled Tribes, and Scheduled Castes through the process of upholding the basic fundamental rights of them which are backed up by the formulation of legislation.

To create additional employment on productive works which would be of sustained benefit to the poor which shall further contribute to the creation of rural infrastructure.

To deepen democracy at the grassroots level by strengthening the Panchayati Raj Institutions which shall be responsible for the effective implementation of this programme.

### **Salient Features of the MGNREG Act**

**The Right to Work:** The Act strengthens the right to work and livelihood of rural poor by providing adult members of the rural household willing to voluntarily undertake casual, or unskilled manual work. This shall provide a minimum of hundred days guaranteed days of employment which shall cease labour exploitation. This primary objective of the Act was formulated keeping in mind Article 21<sup>6</sup> which is a Fundamental Right of Right to life sweeping within its ambit right to work and earn livelihood and further upholding the directive principle of Article 41 of the Constitution<sup>7</sup> which directs the state to secure to all citizens 'right to work'. Through the enactment of this legislation, the government is trying to balance both fundamental rights and directive principles of state policy since both are complementary and supplementary to each other.<sup>8</sup> The Act provides for certain conditions that are to be considered while allocating work such as works are to be provided within 5km radius of the village and if it is beyond that, an extra 10% are to be paid.

**The effective target of encouraging disadvantaged Groups:** This Act is designed in a way that it reaches almost all socially disadvantaged groups which also includes the equity of participation of women in both access to work and payment of wages which further ensures equal wages between men and women. This Act has witnessed the active participation of women working in many small-scale industries in their respective villages which further has reduced the trouble of migration. The increase in access to paid work with the effective implementation of this Act has a positive mark on women's socio-economic status and wellbeing. There are stances wherein now women have a

<sup>4</sup>Durga Das Basu, Introduction to the Constitution of India, Wadhwa & Nagpur, 2005, p.86.

<sup>5</sup>Olga Tellis Vs. Bombay Municipal Corporation, AIR 1986 SC 180.

<sup>6</sup>Durga Das Basu, Introduction to the Constitution of India, Wadhwa & Nagpur, 2005, p.56.

<sup>7</sup>Durga Das Basu, Introduction to the Constitution of India, Wadhwa & Nagpur, 2005, p.123.

<sup>8</sup>Chandra Bhawan Boarding & Lodging v. State of Mysore, AIR 1970 SC 2042; Minerva Mills v. Union of India, AIR 1980 SC 1789; State of Kerala v. NM Thomas, AIR 1976 SC 490; Patthumma v. State of Kerala, (1973) 4 SCC 225; Kesavananda Bharati v. State of Kerala, (1973) 4 SCC 225; State of Karnataka v. Rangantha Reddy, AIR 1978 SC 215; Sanjeev Coke Mfg.Co. v. Bharat Coal Ltd., AIR 1983 SC 239; State of Madras v. ChampakamDorairajan, AIR 1951 SC 226; Mohd. Hanif Qurareshi v. State of Bihar, AIR 1958 SC 731.

substantial say in the way the money they earned is to be spent. Priority is given to the women so that one-third of the beneficiaries under the scheme are women.

**Effective Wage and Less Labour Exploitation:** The wages that are promised under this scheme shall meet the basic wage scale. MGNREGA mandates that wage payment should be made available to the beneficiary within 15 days of completion of work. Delay in wage dilutes the very crux of this Act which works as an instrument for social security for the poor.

**Transparency and Accountability:** This feature of this Act is ensured by providing the means of establishing social audits and grievance redressal mechanisms. The act provides, more specifically mandates every information to be actively made available in the public domain, and any information if sought should be provided. The wage payments are made through Mahatma Gandhi NREGA worker's institution accounts mandatory. There is also an establishment of a Central Employment Council which monitors the effective implementation of the law and reviews processes such as social audits and grievance redressal.

**Legal Authority Backing:** Given that this programme has legal backing makes it more effective compared to all other wage employment programmes since there is a law that shall work as a protective shield in case there is a violation of any mandatory responsibility of any respective department or member in case they don't comply with the same.

#### **Specific goals of the Scheme**

Creation of durable assets and strengthening the livelihood resource base of the rural poor.

Creation of social safety net for the vulnerable groups by providing a fall-back employment source, when other employment alternatives are inadequate.

Playing the key role for sustainable development of an agricultural economy.

Empowering rural poor through the processes of a rights-based law.

#### **Type of Work**

Creation of durable assets and strengthening the livelihood resource based of the rural poor people shall be an important objective of the scheme. Following are the permissible kinds of works:<sup>9</sup>

1. Water conservation and water harvesting.
2. Drought proofing (including forestation and tree plantation)
3. Irrigation of canals: Provision of irrigation facility to land owned by households belonging to the SC and ST land beneficiaries land reforms or that of the beneficiaries under the Indira Awas Yojana.
4. Renovation of traditional water bodies including desilting of tanks.
5. Flood control and protection works including drainage in water logged areas.
6. Rural connectivity to provide all weather access.
7. Any other work which may be notified by the Ventral government in consultation with the State Government.
8. Land development.

New works have been added to the existing list of permissible works under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005 with a focus to strengthen co-operation between Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005 and rural livelihoods, particularly in agriculture and land related activities. Besides ensuring durable quality assets, the expansion of NREGS works is likely to improve the socio-economic conditions of marginalized sections of the society, for example, SC/ST, small and marginal farmers, Indira Awas Yojana beneficiaries, indigenous community etc. as many of the new works are now permitted on the land or homestead of specified individual beneficiaries.<sup>10</sup>

In this context, it is worth mentioning here that, the Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD), Ministry of Water Resources (MoWR), Ministry of Agriculture (MoAg) and Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) have taken

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<sup>9</sup>Schedule I of the MGNREG Act, 2005.

<sup>10</sup>Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005, Report to the People, available at: [http://ncst.nic.in/sites/default/files/documents/nrega\\_reports/NREGA\\_Report\\_to\\_the\\_people9307529454.pdf](http://ncst.nic.in/sites/default/files/documents/nrega_reports/NREGA_Report_to_the_people9307529454.pdf) (last visited on 05.2.2023 at 7.40 pm).

initiative and evolved guidelines for convergence of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) with the programmes of the other partner Ministries. Creation of durable and quality assets for community as well as for the individual and livelihood security to the rural people are critical issues in rural development. Involvement of community and other stakeholders including officials and members of Panchayats who implement the programme in planning process should be the focus of initiatives of the government.<sup>11</sup>

### Critical Analysis of MGNREG Act

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act is considered as welfare legislation that seeks to meet three distinct objectives – Promotive, Protective, and Preventive. It protects the vulnerable rural poor by providing them with demand-driven jobs. It reduces the risk of agricultural investment and rural impoverished people being compelled to migrate. It indirectly fosters and boosts the development of rural economies by raising employment opportunities which further improves living standards and infrastructure availability in rural areas. As a result of its influence on livelihood security, social protection, and democratic empowerment, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act is a powerful tool for fostering equitable growth in rural India.

A rights-based law, such as the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, advocates for a shift in the way government systems work by minimizing demand-supply dualities, indicating the maturation of democracy in which the term ‘state’ refers to both people and government. MGNREGA workers’ rights include, among others, on-demand employment, minimum wages, wage equality between men and women, and payment of wages within 15 days, as well as providing essential worksite facilities. A registered household is legally guaranteed 100 days of employment every fiscal year. Under the Act, each state must develop a State Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (SREGS), which must meet the Act’s minimal requirements.<sup>12</sup>

The policy concept of MGNREGA’s may be classified into two categories: socio-economic background and political context. As far as the socio-economic background is concerned, the years leading up to the inception of MGNREGA were characterized by high rates of economic growth with little impact from poverty and unemployment, implying that growth was not accompanied by the distribution of resources in the economy. Poverty and inequality were addressed through policies that emphasized inclusive growth. The MGNREGA was designed as a means for distributing resources to the rural poor while also providing them with a minimal level of livelihood security. By maintaining a minimal degree of dignity for the rural poor, this policy was seen as a step towards a rights-based policy. Second, the political environment aided the Act’s passage, with inclusive growth being a top priority for the Congress-led UPA government. Because of the focus on rural areas, the Act guaranteeing a right to work to all rural households was enacted.

In the case of *Swaraj Abhiyan Vs. Union of India*,<sup>13</sup> the Supreme Court issued directions while dealing with the implementation of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005 and the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme framed under the provisions of Section 4 of the said Act -

State governments should propose a realistic budget, which the Empowered Committee should assess pragmatically in order to avoid any disagreements between state governments and the Indian government over the allocation of funds under the Scheme.

The Government of India has been directed to release sufficient funds under the Scheme to the State Governments in a timely manner so that the ‘workforce’ gets paid on time.

The Government of India has been asked to ensure that workers who have had their pay checks delayed for more than 15 days receive compensation.

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<sup>11</sup>M.V. Rao, K.Hanumantha Rao, C.Dheraja and Saurabh Kumar, “Status Report on Convergence Initiatives of MGNREGA in India”, Centre for Wage Employment and Poverty Reduction, National institute of Rural Development, April 2010. Available at: [http://www.nird.org.in/mgnregs/con\\_nregs](http://www.nird.org.in/mgnregs/con_nregs) (last visited on 05.02.2023 at 7.50 pm)

<sup>12</sup><https://www.legalservicesindia.com/article/2322/Poverty-alleviation-and-the-significance-of-MGNREGA.html> (last visited on 09.02.2023 at 7.30 pm)

<sup>13</sup>AIR 2016 SC 549.

Both state governments and the central government have indeed been ordered to make every effort to encourage poor people to apply for the scheme.

Within 60 days of the date of the ruling, the Central Employment Guarantee Council will be established under Section 10 of the NREG Act.

Within 45 days after the date of the order, the State Employment Guarantee Council must act under Section 12 of the Act.<sup>14</sup>

The Court further laid emphasis on the fact that the Government of India must guarantee that the NREG Act's requirements are faithfully executed by all parties involved because it is social welfare and social justice legislation.

The Covid-19 pandemic disturbed almost every facet of human existence. It appeared to have galvanized the Central government to reconsider necessary alterations to meet the very core objective of this enacted legislation securing livelihoods of infinite rural lives during such an uncertain time where the workers were forced to confine themselves in order to curb the spread of the virus. In 2020, Union finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman increased the total budgetary support for Mahatma Gandhi Rural Employment Guarantee Act to more than one lakh thousand crores, making it the highest budgetary support since the launch of the historic right to work actively in 2006. Workers covered by the Mahatma Gandhi Employment Guarantee Act 2005 were left in the lurch by the nationwide lockdown imposed by the Central Government to combat the spread of the novel coronavirus disease. Faced with such an uncertain economic crisis, the Mahatma Gandhi Employment Guarantee Act Sangharsh Morcha during Covid-19 demanded at least two hundred days of employment guarantee per person from hundred days and increase wages up to Rs.600 a day.<sup>15</sup>

Nobel Laureate Abhijit Banerjee highlighted the need of increasing the number of workdays under the government's flagship job scheme as one of the most effective ways to help poor migrant workers to recover from the clutches imposed by the nationwide lockdown. This welfare policy protected some of the unfavourable effects of the pandemic thereby providing employment opportunities and incomes to migrant workers and other vulnerable sections of the rural region. Recently in January 2021, the Uttarakhand government stated that the MGNREGA's working days would be raised from 100 to 150 days.<sup>16</sup>

Further in April 2020, Activists Aruna Roy and Nikhil Dey filed a petition before the Supreme Court of India to issue consistent instructions to all States/Union Territories to guarantee that all active and registered job cardholders under the MGNREGA Act are regarded to be at work and are given full salaries as soon as possible. Advocate Prashant Bhushan filed the petition on behalf of the activists, requesting that the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005, protect the fundamental rights to health and livelihood guaranteed under Article 14<sup>17</sup> and Article 21<sup>18</sup> of the Indian Constitution for over 7.6 crore active job cardholders (MGNREGA Act).<sup>19</sup>

### **Aggravated form of Criticism of MGNREGA**

Despite its progress in improved implementation and governance, the MGNREGA still has to deal with the corruption and other improprieties that have come to be associated with any Govt. program in India. The CAG review said in as many as 70% of the villages checked, there were no proper records available on number of households who demanded jobs and the actual number of people who benefited from the job guarantee scheme.

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<sup>14</sup>Swaraj Abhiyan Vs. Union of India, AIR 2016 SC 549.

<sup>15</sup><https://www.legalserviceindia.com/legal/article-5445-legal-analysis-of-rural-development-schemes-in-india.html> (last visited on 10.02.2023 at 9.30 pm)

<sup>16</sup>COVID-19 impact | Increasing work days under MGNREGA to 150 best ways to help poor: Abhijit Banerjee, (<https://www.moneycontrol.com/news/business/economy/covid-19-impact-increasing-work-days-under-mgnrega-to-150-best-way-to-help-poor-abhijit-banerjee-7017811.html>, 8:05 AM, June 21, 2021).

<sup>17</sup>Durga Das Basu, Introduction to the Constitution of India, Wadhwa & Nagpur, 2005, p.26.

<sup>18</sup>Durga Das Basu, Introduction to the Constitution of India, Wadhwa & Nagpur, 2005, p.43.

<sup>19</sup>Aruna Roy And Nikhil Dey Move SC For Payment of Wages to MNREGA Workers, Temporary Job Cards To Migrants, (<https://www.livelaw.in/top-stories/aruna-roy-and-nikhil-day-move-sc-for-payment-of-wages-to-mnrega-workers-temporary-job-cards-to-migrants-154776?infinitescroll=1>, 02:04 PM, APRIL 4, 2020)

### **MGNREGA is just a way of redistribution of Income**

There is some truth to the criticism that this act is just a way of redistributing the income rather than making any lasting improvements in the rural infrastructure. Even its main proponents are silent on the details of the infrastructure projects successfully completed through the program and the benefits of such projects to the local communities. A majority of the supporters only show its effectiveness in improving governance procedures and making people aware of their rights. This is, however, more an offshoot of the successful implementation of the Right to Information act in the MGNREGA program than the MGNREGA itself.<sup>20</sup>

### **Long term dependency of the poor on the Government**

It would just create a long-term dependency among the poor on the largesse of the Govt. If the works are only of marginal importance, and involve mainly the equivalent of digging and filling the ground, it would be such a huge waste of human potential and resources.

### **A Vote Bank called MGNREGS**

With the new changes in store, chances are the rural jobs scheme will become a vehicle for gigantic expenditures in the name of the poor with very little money actually going to the poor.

### **Misuse of public Funds**

The apparent misuse of much larger amounts of public funds rarely gets much mention in the press, especially when it pertains to expenditure that is likely to benefit the urban elite, such as major new highways or new airports. But on the relatively small amount of money spent on MGNREGA there have been shrill and adverse allegations in the media from the very start.

### **Lack of Administrative Capacity Accountability**

The lack of the administrative accountability to run this scheme in the desired decentralised manner and the need to build this capacity quickly and effectively. The main deficiency was the lack of adequate administrative and technical manpower at the Block and GP levels, especially the Programme Officer, Technical Assistants, and Employment Guarantee Assistants. The programme so far has not done what it was supposed to do to the full extent, mainly because of the shortage of administrative and technical staff. Therefore, is the urgent need to ensure more administrative assistance for the programme at all levels, which really means both resources and personnel devoted to the actual implementation, monitoring and financial management of the programme.<sup>21</sup>

### **Absence of Effective Grievance Redressal System**

The major problem with MGNREGA is that there is absolute absence of an effective grievance redressal system. The common labourers are not aware to whom to submit their grievances and what will happen to that. Although the government of India recently passed an ombudsman order, but there are also many loopholes.

### **Evaluation of the MGNREGA<sup>22</sup>**

The Parliamentary Standing Committee Report of the Ministry of rural development and Panchayati Raj has highlighted major challenges and recommended following changes:

Enhancement of budget for MGNREGA: A Parliamentary Standing Committee Report of the Ministry of rural development and Panchayati Raj has recommended enhancing the budget for implementation of work under the MGNREGA, 2005

The committee has observed that the revised estimates for the last 4 to 5 years had been going up in keeping with the increased demand for work.

The government has itself acknowledged the surge in demand for work in 2020-21 because of reverse migration and the consequent dependence on MGNREGA work as a last resort of solace.

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<sup>20</sup> Aruna Roy and Nikhil Dey (activists with Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangthan), NREGA: Breaking New Ground, The Hindu: Magazine, June 21, 2009

<sup>21</sup> Comptroller and Auditor General's report, MGNREGA Performance Report 2012.

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.legalservicesindia.com/article/2322/Poverty-alleviation-and-the-significance-of-MGNREGA.html>, (last visited on 08.02.2023 at 8.30 pm)

Higher wages and increased number of days: The committee has also recommended higher wage rates and an increase in the number of person days to 150 from present 100 days.

Blame game between Centre and states: The committee has said that the blame game is completely unacceptable and the need of hour in a federal form of government is not finger-pointing since it is detrimental for a public welfare scheme but working in unison with the common goal of upliftment of lives of the rural masses.

Huge pendency of wage liabilities: The committee has highlighted the pending wage liabilities and noted that the beneficiaries of the scheme were people whose hopes for a decent upliftment of their economic status hinged upon the success from the scheme and has asked the ministry to address the issue of pendency of wage liabilities.

Average number of days of employment: The average number of days of employment per household was 31.68 in 2021-22(till August 2021), 51.52 in 2020-21, 48.4 in 2019-20 and 50.88 in 2018-19.

Among the BIMARU states, the average was below the national average in Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Bihar and Jharkhand.

Lack of internet facilities at gram Panchayat level: The problem in muster roll updation resulting in delayed payment of wages has been attributed to lack of internet facilities at the gram Panchayat level.

About 1.25 lakh gram Panchayat had Bharat Net but as internet networks are not available, muster rolls could not be filled out or updated.

Wide gap between job cards issued and actual employment: The large number of job cards issued each year since 2018-19 was also a reflection of the crisis.

There was a wide gap between the job cards issued and actual employment provided to households.

For instance, in 2018-19, 1334.63 lakh job cards were issued but only 526.6 lakh households were provided employment.

Disparity in wage rates: there is a wide variation in wage rates, it ranges from as low as Rs.193 in Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh and Rs.198 in Bihar and Jharkhand to Rs.318 in three Gram panchayats in Sikkim.

The majority of states were found to be paying less than Rs.250.

The committee has expressed concern at high cost of living, inflation and price rise of essential commodities and that the scheme beneficiaries, all belonging to marginalised sections, were surviving on such amounts.

The committee has highlighted that the low wages were one of the major reasons for people opting out of the scheme.

A proposal to have a Consumer Price Index (Rural) instead of the present Consumer Price Index (Agricultural Labour) had not been considered.

## **II. CONCLUSION**

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act was the first attempt to legally codify development rights. It is an opportunity for the rural poor who live on the fringes to make a tiny claim in the development process, even if it is not the key to the regeneration of rural regions or the elimination of poverty in India. The Covid-19 pandemic has increased the importance/value of how necessary it is for the Government to strengthen the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act in today's times. Given the plights of migratory workers and the long-term repercussions of the covid pandemic on the rural economy, it's time to rethink MGNREGA as a universal basic income guarantee system. This combination of workfare benefits and direct cash transfers has the potential to alleviate the economic hardships of landless workers, small-scale farmers, and other low-income people. There is strong evidence that even a small amount of universal basic income helps poor women and children in rural India (targeted groups) secure their livelihoods and health. MGNREGA will eliminate the need for numerous conflicting income support systems for farmers in rural India by providing a monthly basic income support combination with 100 days of constitutionally guaranteed rural work.

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005, this law provides the government an opportunity reverse the prolonged neglect of productive rural infrastructure. The focus on poverty has been sharpened and strengthened by our government by restricting and revamping income and the levels of living of the poorest of the poor by introducing MGNREG Act. The reduction of poverty is been given priority in this Act and its, main goal is to remove poverty and create fuller employment. The most important factor which influences the status of a poor is employment. Rural unemployment as a condition under which the worker would be willing to work longer hours or

more intensively for a higher income but could have no opportunity of doing so due to the absence of opportunities for working.

The basic economic notion of self-targeting employment guarantee programmes is that the households that are most likely to seek MGNREGS employment are those otherwise unemployed or whose self-employment or any other livelihood options would earn less than the programme's minimum wage, they are considered as poor. The demand-oriented nature of the MGNREGS is one of its many features as this self-selection is expected to generate a progressive poor participation profile.

The negative findings of the implementation of NREGA have been broadly reported in recent times in the mainstream media. Lack of transparency, leakage of funds, use of obsolete technologies, lack of coordination among agencies, non-participation of the target groups in planning and execution, delay in making payment of wages, lack of qualified personnel in adequate numbers and top-down approaches have been identified as some of the major drawback in the proper implementation of the scheme.

The strategy which can be adopted for rural development as well as poverty alleviation in India the developmental works should be undertaken in the areas of irrigation, road making, rural housing, rural water supply, rural electrification and rural telecommunication connectivity. Specific targets need to be achieved within a certain time frame so that there is accountability in the progress of these initiatives. It is worth mentioning here that Ministry of Rural Development is also promised to fulfil the three goals of Bharat Nirman by achieving the targets of rural connectivity, rural housing and rural water supply within the prescribed time frame.