



MGNREGA, Tribal Livelihoods and Women's Empowerment in Wayanad, Kerala: Evidence on Employment, Consumption and Implementation Challenges

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ABSTRACT

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) is an important public employment programme intended to strengthen livelihood security in rural India. This article examines reported changes in livelihood patterns, household consumption expenditure, women's decision-making and access to programme benefits among tribal beneficiaries in Wayanad district, Kerala. It uses the descriptive tables available in the supplied research-article PDF. Employment-days observations reporting more than 100 days have been excluded from the employment-days analysis, as requested. However, the supplied PDF does not provide the underlying employment-days frequency table or the number of observations above 100 days; therefore, a revised employment-days total and adjusted sample size cannot be calculated from this document alone. The remaining reported tables indicate a shift in primary livelihood source from private agricultural casual labour (67% before MGNREGA) towards MGNREGA wage employment (47% after MGNREGA). Average monthly household consumption expenditure is reported to have increased from ₹3,950 to ₹7,200. Among the 64 women represented in the women-specific tables, respondents reported greater control over routine food and healthcare expenditure than over major asset purchases. Delayed wage payments

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and inadequate worksite facilities were also reported. These findings are descriptive and should not be interpreted as causal estimates.

1. Introduction

Rural employment insecurity remains a challenge for households that depend on seasonal agricultural labour and other informal sources of income. The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), enacted in 2005, provides a statutory framework for wage employment for rural households willing to undertake unskilled manual work. Its relevance extends beyond workdays generated: wages may help households manage consumption, reduce reliance on high-cost borrowing and strengthen workers' bargaining position in local labour markets.

These issues are relevant to tribal communities in Wayanad district, Kerala, where livelihoods may combine agricultural labour, forest-related activities and other informal work. Geographic isolation, administrative procedures, banking access and worksite facilities can influence whether the employment guarantee provides reliable livelihood support.

This article focuses on reported livelihood patterns, household consumption, women's economic and social participation, and operational difficulties. The analysis is based on the tables and interpretations in the supplied PDF; it does not independently verify the original fieldwork or establish causal effects.

2. Objectives

- To examine the role of MGNREGA in the economic and social empowerment of tribal women.
- To identify difficulties faced by tribal beneficiaries in accessing employment under MGNREGA.
- To examine reported changes in the consumption expenditure of tribal households.

3. Review of Literature and Research Gap

The source project discusses MGNREGA in relation to livelihood security, women's participation, wage-payment delays, financial inclusion, migration, asset creation and implementation quality. A recurring theme is that public employment can provide an income buffer when agricultural work is unavailable, while delayed payments and administrative gaps may weaken that protection. Women's access to wages may support household decision-making, although their influence may be greater over routine expenditure than major asset-related decisions.



The local research gap identified in the source is the need to consider women's empowerment, access barriers and household consumption together among tribal beneficiaries in Wayanad. Bibliographic entries in the source project were not independently verified and should be checked before journal submission.

4. Data and Methodology

The source document describes the study as descriptive and analytical, using primary data collected through a structured interview schedule and secondary information from government reports, MGNREGA records and published material. Percentages, averages, tabulations and graphical summaries are the principal techniques described. The demographic and livelihood tables appear to represent 100 respondents, while the women-specific tables refer to 64 women; these totals should be confirmed against the original questionnaire and field records.

Data-cleaning decision: employment-days observations reporting more than 100 days are to be excluded from the employment-days analysis. The supplied PDF does not contain the employment-days frequency table, respondent-level records, or the count of observations above 100 days. Consequently, the number excluded, the adjusted denominator and any recalculated employment-days percentages cannot be reported reliably here. No such figures have been invented. The other descriptive tables below are retained as reported in the supplied PDF; they have not been recalculated using a revised employment-days denominator.

The source does not specify the study villages, fieldwork period, sampling frame, sampling method, response rate or ethics/consent procedure. Before publication, these details should be added and all tables checked against the original records. Before–after comparisons are reported patterns, not proof that MGNREGA alone caused the changes.

5. Results and Discussion

5.1 Respondent profile

The demographic table reports that 48% of respondents were aged 30–45 years and 32% were aged 45–60 years. Women represented 64% of the overall sample. Paniya respondents accounted for 45%, Kuruma 18%, Kurichiya 15%, Kattunaikka 12% and Adiya 10%. Educational attainment was limited: 37% reported primary education and 29% were classified as illiterate, while 3% had higher-secondary education or above.

Indicator	Reported distribution
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Age 30–45 years	48%
Age 45–60 years	32%
Women in overall sample	64%
Paniya respondents	45%
Primary education	37%
No formal education	29%

5.2 Changes in reported livelihood patterns

The source compares respondents' primary livelihood source before and after MGNREGA. Dependence on private agricultural casual labour is reported to have fallen from 67% to 36%, while MGNREGA wage employment rose from 6% to 47%. Dependence on forest produce or traditional work declined from 19% to 12%, and unemployment or occasional work declined from 8% to 5%. This suggests that MGNREGA became a more prominent reported source of work among surveyed beneficiaries. The figures are retained as reported in the source; the employment-days exclusion cannot be applied to these livelihood-source percentages without respondent-level data and confirmation that the same records and denominator apply.

Primary livelihood source	Before MGNREGA	After MGNREGA
Private agricultural casual labour	67%	36%
Forest produce/traditional work	19%	12%
MGNREGA wage employment	6%	47%
Unemployed/occasional work	8%	5%

5.3 Women's decision-making and financial inclusion

The women-specific table records 64 respondents. High control was reported by 49 women for daily food expenditure, 36 for healthcare and medicines, and 31 for children's education and uniforms. By contrast, 11 reported high control over household assets or gold, while 25 reported having no say in that decision. The reported pattern indicates stronger influence over recurring household expenditure than over major financial decisions.

Decision-making area	High control	Moderate control	No say
Daily food expenditure	49	12	3

Children's education/uniforms	31	24	9
Healthcare/medicines	36	20	8
Household assets/gold	11	28	25

Regarding banking access, 39 women were reported to have an individual account, 17 a joint account and 8 no account. The source also reports improved interaction with banking or panchayat officials for 46 women and greater confidence speaking in Gram Sabhas for 41. These responses suggest a perceived relationship between paid work and engagement with formal institutions, but no validated empowerment scale or comparable baseline is supplied.

Women's bank-account status	Respondents
Own account	39
Joint account	17
No account	8

5.4 Access barriers and worksite conditions

The source reports that 44% found obtaining a job card moderately difficult and 28% found it highly difficult. Wage-payment timeliness was a concern: 11% reportedly received wages within 15 days, 39% within 16–30 days, 32% within 31–60 days and 18% after more than 60 days. Lack of a crèche or child shelter was rated highly severe by 67%; absence of first-aid or medical kits by 56%; and lack of drinking water by 42%. These conditions can affect workers' ability to participate safely and consistently, particularly women with care responsibilities.

Implementation issue	Reported result
Job-card process moderately difficult	44%
Job-card process highly difficult	28%
Wages received within 15 days	11%
Wages received after 60 days	18%
Crèche/child shelter absence rated highly severe	67%
First-aid/medical kit absence rated highly severe	56%
Lack of drinking water rated highly severe	42%

5.5 Household consumption and financial resilience

Average monthly household consumption expenditure is reported to have increased from ₹3,950 before MGNREGA to ₹7,200 after MGNREGA, an increase of 82.3% according to the source. The largest proportional increase was reported for education and school supplies (175%), followed by milk, meat and vegetables (133.3%) and healthcare and medicines (100%). Spending on cereals, pulses and groceries increased from ₹2,400 to ₹3,800.

Monthly expenditure category	Before (₹)	After (₹)	Reported increase
Cereals, pulses and groceries	2,400	3,800	58.3%
Milk, meat and vegetables	600	1,400	133.3%
Clothing and footwear	350	650	85.7%
Education and school supplies	200	550	175%
Healthcare and medicines	400	800	100%
Total average monthly expenditure	3,950	7,200	82.3%

The source also reports that 41% used surplus earnings to repay local debts or moneylenders, 27% to purchase mobile phones or consumer goods, 22% for house renovation and 10% for savings. Monthly savings reportedly increased for 41%, remained unchanged for 37% and were absent for 22%. For emergency expenditure, 28% said they were fully able to meet unexpected costs, 51% partially able and 21% unable. These patterns suggest that additional earnings may support consumption, education, healthcare and debt repayment. However, expenditure comparisons alone do not establish that MGNREGA was the sole cause; inflation, household composition, other income sources and recall error may also affect responses.

6. Policy Implications

- Improve wage-payment timeliness and provide accessible grievance support for workers experiencing delays.
- Ensure drinking water, first-aid kits and suitable crèche or child-care facilities at worksites.
- Strengthen assistance with job cards, attendance procedures, banking access and wage-status information, particularly in remote settlements.
- Include tribal beneficiaries, including women, meaningfully in planning and monitoring local works.



- Link employment works to useful community assets and livelihood support while preserving the programme's employment-guarantee purpose.
- Offer financial-literacy support accessible to beneficiaries with limited formal education.

7. Limitations

The findings are limited to the tribal beneficiaries represented in the source project and should not be generalised to all tribal households in Wayanad or Kerala. The sampling procedure, fieldwork dates and questionnaire are not reported in sufficient detail. Before–after comparisons appear to rely on respondents' recollections and are not supported by a comparison group or causal identification strategy. The supplied PDF does not include the employment-days frequency table or respondent-level data needed to identify and remove observations above 100 days and recalculate the employment-days distribution. Therefore, the revised employment-days sample size and percentages remain unreported. The bibliography also requires verification.

8. Conclusion

The descriptive evidence in the source project indicates that MGNREGA was an important reported source of wage employment among surveyed tribal households in Wayanad. The tables show a shift in reported primary livelihood patterns towards MGNREGA work, higher reported household consumption expenditure and women's participation in selected household and community decisions. Delayed wage payments, difficulties obtaining job cards and inadequate worksite facilities remain concerns. Reliable wage delivery, safe and inclusive worksites and locally accessible administrative support are important. A stronger follow-up study should document sampling and fieldwork clearly and use respondent-level data to estimate changes in employment, income, consumption and women's empowerment.

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