



# **MGNREGS - A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES PARTICIPATION IN TELANGANA**

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## **ABSTRACT**

After the introduction of this scheme in 2006, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) has become the largest social security scheme in the globe, providing 100 days of unskilled manual work for all rural people in India. The structure of the rural labour market has been modified with it. One of the key aims of this system is to build jobs, raise purchasing power and reduce poverty among the rural poor. The most disadvantaged and oppressed parts of society, reaching through caste, religion and culture, are Person with Disabilities (PwDs). It is also important to ensure that the PwDs who are deemed vulnerable, as well as the poorest of the poor, enjoy their benefits. This paper discusses the review of the role of PwDs in MGNREGS and the problems encountered. The study concluded that they are potentially de-motivated from taking up MGNREGS jobs by the shortage of disabled-friendly implements and the absence of travel services to access the work site. There is a need to have a conducive working climate by discounting job requirements to draw them into MGNREGS work and strict enforcement of the Act, taking into account their vulnerability, physical and mental status.

**Key Words:** Persons with Disabilities, Participation, MGNREGS, Telangana.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Job Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) is the world's biggest social security scheme, promising all rural households in India 100 days of unskilled manual work. In fact, the MGNREG Act grants rural households the right to work, making it compulsory for the state to supply them with work on demand. In rural India, one in four individuals lives below the poverty line. Since the introduction of this scheme in 2006, the structure of the rural labour market has shifted. This provided rural households an ability to gain minimum income by receiving job cards under this scheme. A measure to supplement their earnings by working through lean farming times, while the poor have used it to climb out of poverty.

In addition, with greater inclusion of women, SC and ST people, the scheme is inclusive. It is both a first-time earning experience and a potential at empowerment for many women. One of the key goals of this scheme is to create jobs among the rural poor and raise purchasing power. Therefore, if the overall aim of MGNREGS is to reduce poverty, it is important to ensure that the PwDs who are regarded vulnerable, and even the poorest of the poor, will benefit from it.

The most disadvantaged and oppressed parts of society are PwDs, breaking through caste, religion and culture. Many PwDs have faced many challenges that hinder their presence in mainstream social events, leading to more or less secluded lives. In addition, the challenges include, inadequate recognition by government authorities of their skills and expectations and insufficient steps and programmes to rehabilitate them.

They suffer not only from the shame of oppression, but from separation as well. These challenges restrict their involvement in conventional development programmes, thus forcing them to suffer from different facets of poverty. Though MGNREGA is known for improving the welfare of poor rural households' livelihoods, the scheme also involves holistic fulfilment as particular emphasis was concentrated on disadvantaged sectors, including PwDs. As this group of persons has different capacities, it is important to develop specific criteria to encourage their inclusion in MGNREGA.

While the PwDs have not been provided directly with regard to the distribution of works, the Act expressly specifies that the PwDs should be provided with sufficient work that fits their capability and qualifications. Owing to the insensitivity of the PwDs' problems and the compliance officer's dismissive mindset, when allocating the jobs, the PwDs do not have any choice. This would become obvious as we look at the details related to the amount of members of PwDs provided by this scheme within the first few years. The coverage of PwDs under the programme was very poor in the following years as well. Just a total of 4.62 lakh PwD beneficiaries were protected at national level under the scheme during the financial year 2019-20. Their coverage under the scheme is very low given the overall population of PwDs in the country. The research was then conducted to clarify the different issues linked to the participation of PwDs in MGNREGS.

The present study focuses on the role of PwDs in MGNREGS over the last three financial years in the State of Telangana, the kind of employment undertaken by PwDs and the nature of the difficulties encountered.

### **Inclusion of PwDs in MGNREGS**

The MGNREGA guidance describes the type of work to be carried out under the scheme which is generally known as a project shelf which includes the following tasks such as water storage, water harvesting, drought control, irrigation channels, planting and horticulture irrigation facilities, rehabilitation of existing bodies of water, land development, flood control work and rural connectivity to include all-weather roads.

The Act specifies that if a rural disabled person requests employment, it would be necessary to provide appropriate work for his/her capability and qualifications. However, it was found that no care was given to classify the work that the PwDs might take up in that area as the project shelves were made. At the Gram Panchayat level, it was the discretion of the implementation body to determine what form of work would be provided to the PwDs. In general, it was observed that light tasks such as the provision of drinking water to the staff, child care, are delegated to the disabled, given their physical and mental disabilities.

In 2010, special incentives and arrangements were provided by the State Government to draw PwDs, which included an extra number of days of employment, increased travel rates, additional payment of wages and a concession on the number of working hours. The orders concerned were given to assign independent job cards to PwDs at or above the age of 18 and agreed to raise the number of days of job from the present 100 days to 150 days a year. Provision is also made to extend additional benefits to the disabled who have been members of disabled work groups and also members of groups created by Shram Shakti to do MGNREGS work in groups. Apart from the stipulated payment of salaries, members of the Shram Shakti groups and individual PwDs are further liable for an extra salary of 30 per cent. The 30 per cent less work but equal wages are given to all the PwDs and is mentioned in the job cards issued to them. In the allocation of light works, preference is also given to the employees of Shram Shakti groups. Special facilities such as transport costs of Rs. 10/- are also entitled to members of the Shram Shakti group and an individual PwD if they have to go up to 5 kms and Rs. 20/- if it crosses 5 km along with wages.

In addition to the aforementioned, PwDs must be referred to only by their names. His name and surname should be explicitly listed on the job card. They should not be blamed for their condition or looked down on. It is important to build a conducive environment for PwDs at the job site and to handle them appropriately.

### **Works to be allotted for PwDs:**

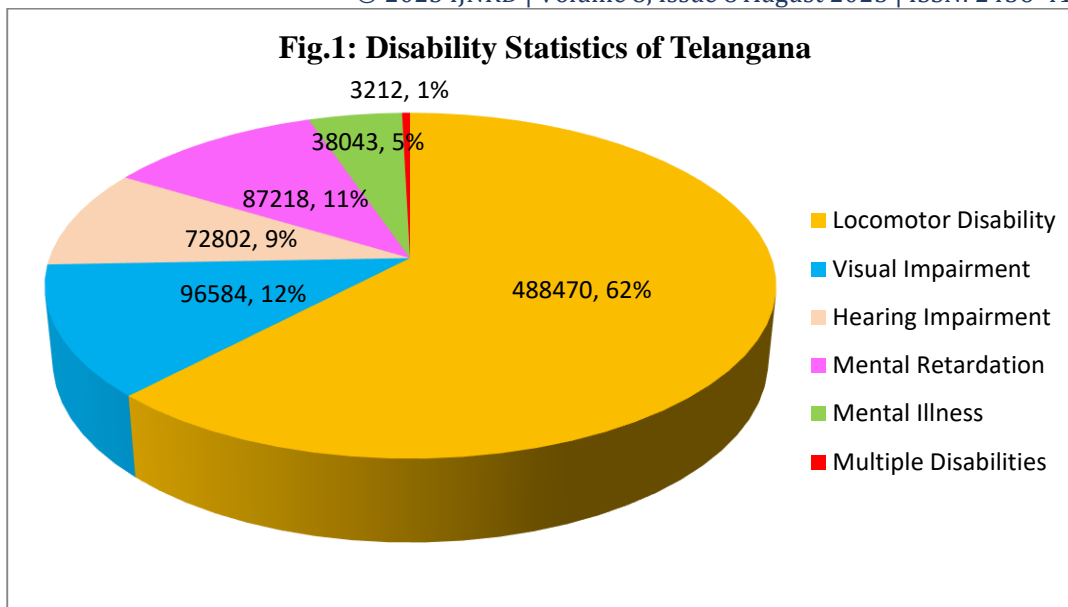
The chosen works from already established works are to be offered to PwDs in Shram Shakti groups. Jobs in nursing centres under MGNREGS are to be given exclusively to PwDs in the Shram Shakti groups. Priority should be provided to PwDs in Shram Shakti groups for work at Vermi Compost Centres under MGNREGS. In the respective regions, the Shram Shakti groups and PwDs are to be educated. In order to do meaningful work under MGNREGS, adequate resources need to be provided to disabled people. In the event that the tools are taken by a PwD, the amount must be paid to him for the tools carried by him.

### **OBJECTIVES**

- To assess the participation of PwDs in MGNREGS during the last three financial years in Telangana State
- To understand the kind of jobs done by PwDs and the nature of the difficulties experienced

### **METHODOLOGY**

The intended research is focused on primary PwD data and secondary data sources obtained from different books, journals, census accounts, annual reports, newspapers and official websites of the Ministry of Rural Development, the Government of India and the Government of Telangana. According to the website of the Society for the Elimination of Rural Poverty, Government of Telangana, the state has a total population of around 7, 86,329 PwDs.



The district-wise data on PwDs who employed in Telangana under NREGS was obtained. Three districts with large and medium numbers of PwDs enrolled for work under MGNREGS were identified and randomly chosen for the analysis. Karimnagar, Nizamabad and Suryapet districts were selected from Telangana state on the basis of the above exercise. In order to determine the efforts made by the MGNREGS officials of the three districts over the last three financial years, a comparative analysis among the districts was conducted. The research focused mainly on secondary data obtained with respect to MGNREGS from government websites, including primary sources. This was also validated by data obtained as a primary source from a few chosen PwDs and their associations.

#### Participation of PwDs in MGNREGS

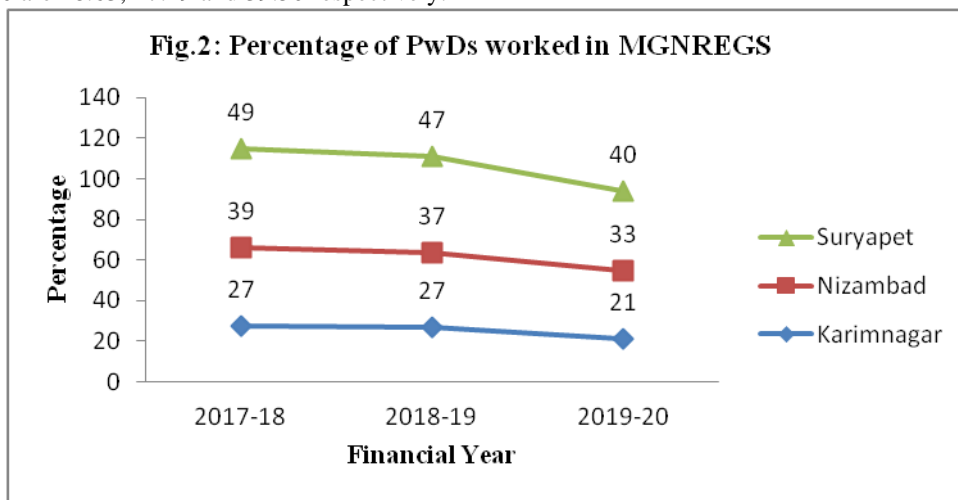
Bearing in mind the objectives of the research, data on the three districts of Karimnagar, Nizamabad and Suryapet of the state of Telangana are gathered from different sources. As seen in Table 1, this data provides the employment details given to PwDs in the MGNREGS over the last three financial years.

**Table 1: Showing the details of employment provided for PwDs in MGNREGS during the financial years 2017-18, 2018-19 and 2019-20**

Year	Details	Karimnagar	Nizambad	Suryapet
2017-18	No. of PwDs Registered	7019	9838	11030
	No. of PwDs worked	1915	3818	5364
	% of PwDs worked	27.28	38.81	48.63
	No. of Person-days of PwD	63260	145167	160780
	Avg. Person-days per PwD	33	38	30
2018-19	No. of PwDs Registered	7036	9940	11203
	No. of PwDs worked	1881	3677	5287
	% of PwDs worked	26.73	36.99	47.19
	No. of Person-days of PwD	71589	136961	157047
	Avg. Person-days per PwD	38	37	30
2019-20	No. of PwDs Registered	7056	10043	11254
	No. of PwDs worked	1494	3345	4445
	% of PwDs worked	21.17	33.31	39.50
	No. of Person-days of PwD	52838	126781	110814
	Avg. Person-days per PwD	35	38	25

The values against the number of PwDs recorded in Table 1 revealed the number of PwDs who were unemployed in rural areas and applied for jobs under MGNREGS. Table 1 above shows that the number of applicants for employment by PwDs, i.e. the number of PwDs registered under MGNREGS, has risen over the last three financial years. In all three districts, the same criteria is found.

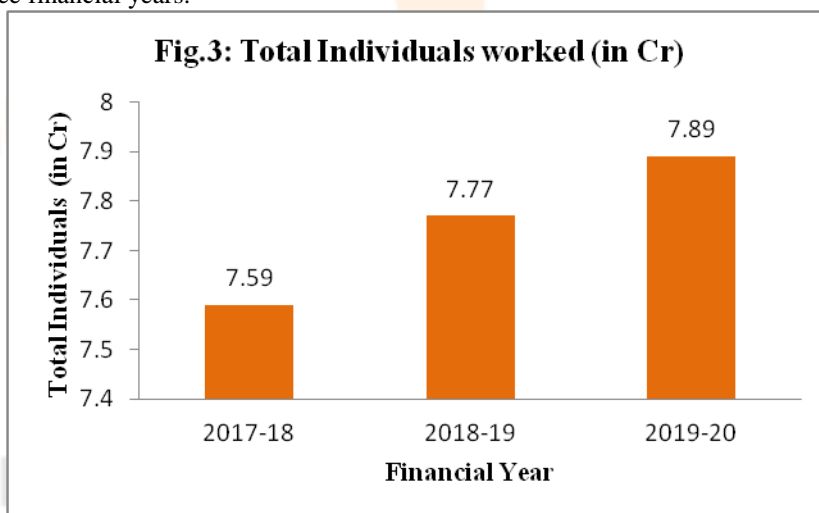
The values against the No. of PwDs worked in the Table 1 is shown the number of PwDs who were attended for the work followed by the registration under MGNREGS. The percentage of PwDs worked has calculated from the number of PwDs worked with respect to the number of PwDs registered under the scheme. It is observed from the table that the percentage of PwDs worked in Karimngar district during financial year 2017-18, 2018-19 and 2019-20 are 27.28, 26.73 and 21.17 respectively. The percentage of PwDs worked in Nizamabad district during financial year 2017-18, 2018-19 and 2019-20 are 38.81, 36.99 and 33.31 respectively. Further, it is also observed from the table that the percentage of PwDs worked in Suryapet district during financial year 2017-18, 2018-19 and 2019-20 are 48.63, 47.19 and 39.50 respectively.



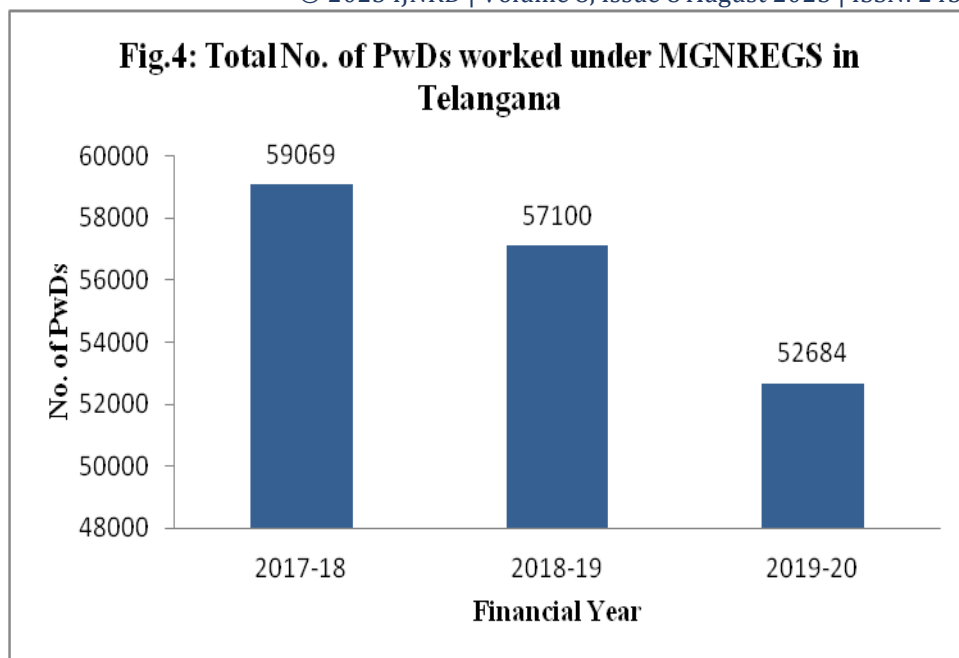
From the Fig.2, it is noticed that the participation of PwDs in MGNREGS works has been decreasing from last three financial years. The same trend is noticed in all the three districts. Particularly, from the year 2018-19 to 2019-20, the fall of percentage in all the three districts is more compared to the previous years.

In the Table 1, the values against the No. of person-days of PwDs showed the total number of days worked by PwDs during a year. The average person-days per PwD is calculated and it is in the range of about 33 days only. It depicts that the PwDs are provided with 33 days (approximately) of work only instead of 150 days.

In this connection, if we observe the trend of participation of rural non-PwDs in MGNREGS in India is as shown in the Fig.3. It is increasing over the last three financial years.



But, dissimilar to the normal people in MGNREGS, the participation of PwDs during the last three financial years is decreasing in the state of Telangana as shown in the Fig.4.



It can be concluded during the review of the results and the gathering of information from the PwDs of certain districts that the decline in the participation of PwDs is due to the works given to them that are not appropriate for their physical condition.

The nature of the work carried out by PwDs is usually divided into land-based and non-land-based operations. Land-based operations include work related to land development, irrigation, including feeder channel desiltation, afforestation, tree planting, and roads. Non-land-based operations include the provision of drinking water to staff in the workplace, child care and semi-skilled jobs, such as MGNREGS work monitoring.

#### Challenges faced by the undertaking of work

- When examining the concerns faced by the PwDs, it was discovered that the PwDs were disappointed with the quality of the work they were offered. They believed that the works given to them were not suited to their physical state, and because of their poor health status, the work given to them was very difficult to do, since many of the PwDs refused land-based works.
- Another significant issue faced by the PwDs was that the equipments issued to them to do the job were not disabled-friendly. Furthermore, Gram Panchayat's officials lacked sufficient disabled-friendly equipment.
- PwDs find it impossible to access the employment site and there is no plan to carry the participants to the work site for any vehicle arrangements. In certain cases, it was noticed that the worksite was not 5 km from their place of residence. In certain cases, members of the family gave the requisite support to meet them at the job place.
- PwDs found it was extremely difficult for them to work 8 hours a day due to their physical limitations, with a one-hour rest in between, because they are physically frail.

The data also shows that they are potentially de-motivated from taking up MGNREGS jobs by the absence of disabled-friendly implements and the absence of travel services to access the work site.

#### SUGGESTIONS

It is a fact that PwDs are capable of varying and should not be equated with the majority of the population with their physical and mental circumstances. Therefore, based on the types of disabilities encountered by the individuals, it is important to define different shelves of work. In particular, a lack of knowledge of the scheme and the nature of the work proposed under the scheme distances the PwDs from participating in MGNREGS. There is a need to delineate particular tasks specifically for PwDs in order to attract the PwDs under the scheme, taking into account their physical and emotional capacity to function. Few of them were fortunate enough to do lighter jobs, such as taking care of infants, supplying the staff with drinking water, and semi-skilled work. Others had to perform land based activities which some of them found difficult to execute as it was strenuous one. To maximise the involvement of PwDs in MGNREGS, the following measurements should be performed.

- Monitoring the PwDs and conduct monthly meetings to discuss progress should be undertaken on a regular basis at Gram Panchayath level.
- Works can be opened strictly only at the housing level for the PwDs.
- The Gram Panchayath authorities should foster and educate the PwDs regarding MGNREGS.
- 150 days of specified work should be given, at least for the working PwDs.
- The PwDs should be provided with free transport services to the work site or else provide travelling allowance.
- The job time could be shortened by 1 to 1½ hours.

**CONCLUSION**

The PwDs were also keen and involved, like others, in pursuing jobs suitable to their physical and mental conditions. Despite the protective measure provided by the RPWD Act 2016, the current level of work participation of the population of PwDs in either the professional or unskilled jobs sector is very low. The social and environmental barriers erected around them are one of the reasons for low participation. Also, most of the PwDs handled land-based activities in the MGNREGS instead of specified non-land-based hard activities. As such, in the state of Telangana, the presence of PwDs has declined over the last three financial years. Much of the PwDs is denied or deprived in the unskilled industry. There is a need to have a favourable working environment by discounting job requirements to draw them into MGNREGS work, given their insecurity, physical and mental condition. Such an intervention would assist the PwDs in recognising their potential and adding their strength to the construction of the country.

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