

Efficacy of MGNREGS among Scheduled Caste Households in Fatehabad District, Haryana

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DOI: 10.46609/IJSSER.2025.v10i12.023 URL: <https://doi.org/10.46609/IJSSER.2025.v10i12.023>

Received: 18 October 2025 / Accepted: 28 November 2025 / Published: 25 December 2025

ABSTRACT

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) is a rights-based employment programme intended to enhance livelihood security in rural India, particularly for socially marginalised groups. This study examines the efficacy of MGNREGS among Scheduled Caste (SC) households in Fatehabad district by analysing temporal trends in employment intensity (households completing 100 days of guaranteed employment) and asset creation from 2014–15 to 2024–25. Using secondary data from the official MGNREGS portal, the analysis focuses on SC job card holders, completion of 100 days of guaranteed employment by SC households, and Category-B asset creation. The results reveal a steady increase in Scheduled Caste job card registrations, indicating expanding access to the scheme. However, completion of 100 days of employment shows significant fluctuation, with both absolute numbers and percentage share peaking during the COVID-19 period and declining thereafter. Category-B asset creation similarly intensifies during the pandemic but contracts sharply in the post pandemic years. The findings suggest that while the MGNREGS really supported the SC households in providing them livelihoods, but its declining performance puts the SC households at risk for their economic sustainability. The study suggests to strengthen the scheme and its outreach to all the vulnerable households by announcing more financial funding in the state.

Keywords: MGNREGS, Schedule Caste, COVID-19, Category-B asset, Employment

Introduction

Employment insecurity remains a major challenge in rural India, particularly for socially disadvantaged groups such as Scheduled Castes (SCs). Limited land ownership, dependence on casual wage labour, and restricted access to non-farm employment make SC households highly vulnerable to seasonal unemployment and economic shocks. In such a context, public employment programmes play an important role in providing livelihood support and reducing income instability among marginalised rural populations. The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS), launched in 2005, is one of the largest right based employment programmes in the world. The scheme guarantees at least 100 days of unskilled wage employment to rural households willing to work, with the objective of enhancing livelihood security and reducing distress migration. Unlike earlier wage employment programmes, MGNREGS is legally enforceable and demand driven, placing responsibility on the state to provide employment when demanded (Pankaj, 2012). Along with wage employment, the scheme also focuses on the creation of durable assets, particularly through Category-B works, which aim to support long term rural development.

For Scheduled Castes, MGNREGS holds particular significance due to their over-representation in low-paid and insecure forms of rural employment. Several studies have shown that SC households participate actively in the scheme and often depend on it during periods of economic stress (Kar, 2013; Manjula & Rajasekhar, 2015). At the same time, research has highlighted persistent challenges related to uneven work availability, delays in employment provision, and limited access to full employment entitlements among marginalised groups (Chaarlas & Velmurugan, 2012; Chopra, 2014). These issues raise important questions about the extent to which the scheme delivers sustained benefits beyond short-term income support.

The COVID-19 pandemic further highlighted the importance of MGNREGS as a safety net for rural households. The sudden loss of employment in both rural and urban areas led to increased reliance on public employment programmes, particularly among Scheduled Castes, who were disproportionately affected by job losses and return migration (Narayanan & Das, 2014). While several studies have examined the impact of MGNREGS during the pandemic, there is limited district level evidence that traces changes in programme performance before, during, and after the crisis.

District-level analysis is crucial because the implementation of MGNREGS varies significantly across regions due to differences in administrative capacity, local labour markets, and socio-economic conditions. Fatehabad district of Haryana, with its predominantly agrarian economy and a substantial Scheduled Caste population dependent on wage labour, provides an appropriate setting for such an analysis. Understanding how the scheme has functioned for Scheduled Castes

over time in this district can offer insights into both the strengths and limitations of MGNREGS at the local level.

Against this background, the present study examines the efficacy of MGNREGS among Scheduled Caste households in Fatehabad district from 2014–15 to 2024–25. By analysing trends in job card coverage, completion of 100 days of employment, relative participation, and asset creation, the study seeks to assess whether the scheme has been effective in providing sustained employment support and developmental benefits to Scheduled Caste households.

Objective, Study Area, Methodology

The objective of the present study is to examine the temporal performance of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) among Scheduled Caste households in Fatehabad district of Haryana from 2014–15 to 2024–25. The assessment focuses on programme access, employment intensity, relative participation, and developmental outcomes as reflected through job card coverage, completion of 100 days of employment, percentage share of Scheduled Caste households among total households completing 100 days, and Category-B asset creation.

Fatehabad district, located in the western part of Haryana, has a predominantly agrarian economy with high dependence on seasonal agricultural labour and allied activities. Scheduled Castes constitute a significant proportion of the rural population and are largely engaged in casual wage labour, making them particularly vulnerable to employment insecurity. These characteristics make the district an appropriate spatial unit for analysing the functioning of MGNREGS among marginalised groups.

The study is based on secondary data collected from the official MGNREGS portal (www.nrega.nic.in) for the period 2014–15 to 2024–25. Both absolute numbers and percentage share are used to capture programme outreach and relative participation. In this study, efficacy is understood as the extent to which MGNREGS achieves its intended objectives of employment access, sustained work provision, and asset creation for Scheduled Caste households, assessed through temporal analysis of secondary data.

Result and Discussion

Table 1 presents the year-wise performance of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) among Scheduled Caste households in Fatehabad district from 2014–15 to 2024–25. The table includes Scheduled Caste job card coverage, the number of Scheduled Caste households completing 100 days of employment (both in absolute terms and as a percentage of total households), and Category-B asset creation. These indicators together help

in understanding access to the scheme, intensity of employment, relative participation of Scheduled Castes, and the developmental outcomes of the programme. The discussion explains the observed temporal trends and the factors responsible for these patterns.

Table 1: Efficacy of MGNREGS among SC households on Fatehabad district, Haryana

Year	SC Job cards (Total Job Cards)	SC households completing 100 days (Total households)	% of SC households Completing 100 days (Overall)	Category B Assets for SC household
2014-15	29726 (44817)	20 (27)	0.07	0
2015-16	29653 (44831)	245 (297)	0.83	0
2016-17	31020 (48362)	255 (319)	0.82	16
2017-18	32331 (50879)	450 (551)	1.39	608
2018-19	33965 (54746)	895 (1237)	2.64	228
2019-20	35381 (57500)	422 (618)	1.19	702
2020-21	38182 (63154)	942 (1488)	2.47	1994
2021-22	39718 (66172)	1500 (2474)	3.78	523
2022-23	40601 (68700)	410 (706)	1.01	172
2023-24	42478 (73796)	445 (738)	1.05	100
2024-25	44743 (78498)	258 (422)	0.58	0

Source: www.nrega.nic.in (2014 to 2025)

Scheduled Caste Job Card Coverage

As shown in Table 1, the number of Scheduled Caste job card holders in Fatehabad district increased steadily from 29,726 in 2014–15 to 44,743 in 2024–25. This increase occurred alongside a rise in total job cards in the district, suggesting an overall expansion of MGNREGS coverage rather than a shift between social groups.

The continuous growth in job card registrations indicates improved awareness and accessibility of the scheme among Scheduled Caste households. Due to limited land ownership and high dependence on casual wage labour, SC households often seek MGNREGS as a form of employment security (Pankaj, 2012; Manjula & Rajasekhar, 2015). The sharper increase observed during the COVID-19 period reflects widespread livelihood distress caused by job losses, disruption of informal employment, and return migration. During this phase, MGNREGS emerged as a crucial fallback option for marginalised households, a trend also observed in other parts of the country (Narayanan & Das, 2014).

The sustained rise in job card coverage even after the pandemic suggests that dependence on MGNREGS among Scheduled Castes has not declined significantly. However, possession of a job card does not necessarily ensure employment, making it important to examine actual work provision under the scheme.

Completion of 100 Days of Employment

The number of Scheduled Caste households completing the full 100 days of guaranteed employment shows wide variation across the study period. During the initial years (2014–15 to 2016–17), completion levels remain very low despite increasing job card registrations. A significant increase is observed during 2020–21 and 2021–22, followed by a decline in the post-pandemic years. This uneven pattern highlights a persistent gap between programme entitlement and actual delivery. Low completion rates in the pre-pandemic period point towards administrative constraints such as inadequate availability of sanctioned works, delays in work allocation, and weak planning at the Gram Panchayat level. Similar implementation challenges have been reported in earlier studies, which note that demand for work often exceeds supply under MGNREGS (Chaarlas & Velmurugan, 2012; Chopra, 2014). The sharp increase during the pandemic period reflects the scheme's counter-cyclical role in providing employment during economic crises. With the collapse of alternative employment opportunities, Scheduled Caste households increasingly depended on MGNREGS to meet basic livelihood needs, resulting in higher completion of 100 days (Klonner & Oldiges, 2012). The decline after 2021–22 suggests a reduction in employment provisioning once emergency conditions eased, despite continued

demand indicated by rising job card registrations. This pattern indicates limitations in sustaining employment intensity beyond crisis situations, a concern also highlighted by (Reddy et al. 2014).

Percentage Share of Scheduled Caste Households Completing 100 Days

The percentage share of Scheduled Caste households among total households completing 100 days provides insight into relative participation. As shown in Table 1, this share remains below one per cent in the early years, increases significantly during the pandemic period, reaching a peak of 3.78 per cent in 2021–22, and declines sharply thereafter.

The low percentage share in the pre-pandemic period suggests that Scheduled Castes were underrepresented among households receiving full employment benefits, despite growing enrolment. This reflects underlying social and economic inequalities that affect access to continuous work, even within a rights-based programme (Kar, 2013; Chatterjee, 2014). The sharp rise in percentage share during the pandemic indicates that Scheduled Castes were more severely affected by employment disruptions and therefore relied more heavily on MGNREGS compared to other social groups. The post-pandemic decline in percentage share is particularly important. It suggests that Scheduled Caste households experienced a sharper reduction in employment opportunities as programme intensity declined. This raises concerns about equity in postcrisis programme implementation and suggests that marginalised groups may face greater difficulties in accessing sustained employment once emergency conditions subside (Negi et al., 2015).

Category-B Asset Creation for Scheduled Caste Households

Category-B asset creation for Scheduled Caste households shows strong temporal variation. Asset creation remains negligible during the initial years, increases after 2017–18, peaks at 1,994 assets in 2020–21, and declines sharply in subsequent years, reaching zero by 2024–25. The limited asset creation in the early years suggests that initial implementation of MGNREGS focused more on wage employment than on long term developmental planning. The significant increase during the pandemic period reflects an administrative shift towards combining employment generation with livelihood-supporting infrastructure. Category-B assets, such as land development and irrigation works, are particularly important for Scheduled Castes, as they enhance productive capacity and support long-term income security (Kareemulla et al., 2009; Keerthi et al., 2015). However, the sharp decline in asset creation after the pandemic indicates that such planning was not sustained. Treating asset creation primarily as a crisis response strategy limits the longterm developmental potential of MGNREGS. Earlier studies have similarly noted that the durability and usefulness of assets depend on consistent planning and

maintenance, which often weakens once immediate employment pressures decline (Ganeriwala, 2010).

Overall Efficacy

Taken together, the trends presented in Table 1 reveal three distinct phases in the functioning of MGNREGS among Scheduled Caste households in Fatehabad district. The pre-pandemic phase is marked by expanding access but limited employment intensity and asset creation. The pandemic phase represents a period of heightened labour absorption and asset-based activity, demonstrating the scheme's effectiveness as a safety net during economic shocks. The post pandemic phase shows contraction in employment completion and asset creation despite continued growth in job card registrations. This overall pattern suggests that while MGNREGS plays a crucial role in protecting Scheduled Caste households during periods of crisis, its effectiveness as a sustained developmental intervention remains limited. Strengthening continuity in employment provisioning and institutionalising asset-based planning are essential for enhancing the long-term impact of the scheme on marginalised communities.

Conclusion

The present study examined the efficacy of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) among Scheduled Caste households in Fatehabad district from 2014–15 to 2024–25 using indicators related to job card coverage, completion of 100 days of employment, relative participation, and Category-B asset creation. The analysis highlights important patterns in programme access, employment intensity, and developmental outcomes over time.

The findings show that access to MGNREGS among Scheduled Caste households has improved steadily, as reflected in the continuous increase in job card registrations throughout the study period. This indicates growing awareness of the scheme and increasing dependence of SC households on state-guaranteed employment due to limited and insecure livelihood options in the rural labour market. However, increased registration has not consistently translated into sustained employment benefits. Completion of the full 100 days of guaranteed employment remains uneven and largely concentrated during the COVID-19 period. While the pandemic years demonstrate the scheme's effectiveness as a safety net during periods of acute livelihood distress, the subsequent decline in employment completion suggests weaknesses in maintaining employment intensity during normal periods. The fluctuating percentage share of Scheduled Caste households among total households completing 100 days further indicates that marginalised groups are more vulnerable to contraction in work provisioning once emergency conditions subside. Category-B asset creation also follows a similar temporal pattern, with

significant expansion during the pandemic period and a sharp decline thereafter. Although such assets have the potential to support long-term livelihood security for Scheduled Caste households, the lack of continuity in asset-based planning limits the developmental impact of the scheme. Treating asset creation primarily as a crisis-response measure reduces its effectiveness in promoting sustained rural development. Overall, the findings suggest that the efficacy of MGNREGS in Fatehabad district is strongest during periods of economic distress, while its sustained developmental effectiveness for Scheduled Caste households remains limited due to irregular employment provisioning and weak continuity in asset creation. Strengthening continuity in work allocation and integrating asset-based planning into routine implementation with more financial funding, are essential for enhancing the sustained benefits and MGNREGS outreach to marginalised communities.

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