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SWOC Analysis of MGNREGA: Exploratory Study of District Rudraprayag, Uttarakhand, India

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ABSTRACT

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) is an important rural development programme aimed at providing wage employment, strengthening livelihood security, creating durable community assets, and promoting inclusive participation. The present study assessed the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges (SWOC) associated with MGNREGA implementation in Agastyamuni Block of Rudraprayag district, Uttarakhand. The study was conducted in 15 selected Gram Panchayats, and primary data were collected from 198 registered MGNREGA beneficiaries using a semi-structured interview schedule. Twenty-four variables six each under strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges were identified by the respondents. The Rank-Based Quotient (RBQ) method was used to determine the relative importance of each variables. The finding revealed that the creation of rural infrastructure and community assets was the major strength of MGNREGA, with an RBQ of 98.28, followed by enhanced livelihood security of beneficiaries (97.06) and women's participation and empowerment (96.06). Delay in wage payment emerged as the most important weakness, recording an RBQ of 99.29, followed by lack of transparency in work allocation (98.89) and corruption by elected representatives and officials (98.85). The development of public infrastructure and community assets for improved rural connectivity was identified as the leading opportunity, with an RBQ of 95.35. Adverse climatic conditions and geographical constraints constituted the most serious challenge, recording an RBQ of 99.29, followed by the continued preference for migration in search of better employment opportunities (94.95). The study concludes that MGNREGA has considerable potential to strengthen rural livelihoods and promote inclusive development in the hill region; however, timely wage payment, transparent implementation, improved technical planning, effective social audits, and climate-responsive execution are necessary for improving its performance.

Keywords: MGNREGA, SWOC analysis, rural employment, livelihood security, Rank-Based Quotient, Uttarakhand, Agastyamuni.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) was introduced to strengthen rural employment and encourage community participation through the Panchayati Raj system (1, 2). It aims to guarantee wage employment in rural areas, create national assets, and protect the “right to work” by providing livelihood security to rural households (3, 4). By creating job opportunities, this program has empowered women, promoted gender equality, and supported the long-term development of rural infrastructure (5). Social justice and balanced development cannot be achieved just through economic growth unless it is linked to the reduction of poverty and the creation of jobs for the underprivileged and marginalized segments of society. By revitalizing the natural resource base that is, increasing productivity and fostering the development of long-lasting assets and bolstering rural governance through decentralization and procedures of accountability and transparency, it seeks to establish a sustainable rural way of life (6, 7).

In order to satisfy the statutory right to food security, the Indian Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) was passed on 7 September 2005. The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), the related Public Employment Program, is a central government initiative under the Ministry of Rural Development that is implemented jointly by the federal and state governments (8, 9). On October 2, 2009, the Indian government renamed the NREGA to MGNREGA. It was introduced in 200 districts on February 2, 2006, and then, in 2007-2008, it was expanded to 130 more districts. One of the primary and significant factors that determines a situation in which a person feels dissatisfied with basic necessities of everyday existence, such as food, clothing, housing, etc. (10).

MGNREGA has been replaced by the Viksit Bharat-GRAM G Bill, 2025, which establishes a new legal framework aligned with the Viksit Bharat-2047 vision. The work guarantee has been increased 100 days to 125 days for each rural household to enhance financial security. This bill connects wage employment to long-term rural infrastructure development across four key sectors household where adults volunteer to perform manual labor that requires little ability (11).

2. OBJECTIVE

To assess the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges (SWOC) of MGNREGA implementation in enhancing rural employment.

3. MATERIAL AND METHODS

3.1. Selection of Villages and Sample

The research was Rudraprayag District and Agastyamuni Block of Uttarakhand. This block was intentionally selected because it has a large number of MGNREGA beneficiaries and is relatively easy to access. Within this block, 15 Gram Panchayats were also deliberately chosen based on the allocation pattern of the MGNREGA budget. From these Gram Panchayats, a total of 198 registered MGNREGA beneficiary. Gram Panchayats were purposefully chosen, were randomly selected allowing for a balance between accessibility and randomness to enhance the reliability of the findings.

3.2. Data Collection

The primary data were gathered using the semi-structured interview methods through questionnaire, which covered key aspects including respondent's socio-demographic characteristics, and understanding of the scheme, spending transferred patterns, and the challenges faced by beneficiaries.

3.3. Measurement of Variables

For the formulation of the research methodology for SWOC analysis, a total of 24 items were identified, comprising 6 in each parameters. These identified SWOC items were presented to the respondents for assessment and ranking. The respondents were asked to indicate the perceived importance of each item and assign ranks to the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Challenges based on their experiences and perceptions. The responses obtained for each SWOC parameter were systematically tabulated and analyzed using the Rank Based Quotient (RBQ) method as suggested by (12). The RBQ was used to determine the relative importance and priority of each SWOC parameter based on the ranks assigned by the respondents. A higher RBQ value indicates a higher level of perceived importance of the respective SWOC factor. The formula used for calculating the Rank-Based Quotient is given below:

$$RBQ (\%) = \frac{\sum F_i(n+1-i)}{(N \times n)} \times 100$$

Where:

f_i : Number of respondents for the i^{th} rank to a given SWOC variable

n : Number of ranks assigned

N : Total number of respondents

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

4.1. SWOC Analysis of MGNREGA

To comprehensively assess the performance and effectiveness of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) in the study area, a SWOC analysis was conducted. The analysis was used to identify the major positive and negative aspects associated with the implementation of MGNREGA, as perceived by the respondents. A set of 24 SWOC parameters, comprising six each strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges. RBQ method was subsequently employed to quantify and prioritize the identified parameters. Higher RBQ values indicate greater perceived importance of a particular parameter. The results of the SWOC analysis are presented (Table 1 and Figure 1) in the following section.

4.1.1. Strengths of MGNREGA

The SWOC analysis indicates that rural infrastructure and community assets in village level as the strongest aspect of MGNREGA, securing high percentage with RBQ of 98.28, indicating that the tangible outcomes of MGNREGA works, such as rural roads, plantation, water conservation structures, ponds, land development and other community assets directly benefit the wider rural population and can be observed at the village level, respondents placed the greatest importance (13, 14, 15, 16). This was followed by Enhanced livelihood security for beneficiaries with RBQ of 97.06 by providing wage employment to rural households, particularly during periods of limited agricultural employment, the programme helps beneficiaries earn supplementary income (13, 14, 17, 18, 19).

Women's participation leading to empowerment RBQ of 96.06 indicating that participation in wage employment provides women with independent earnings, greater control over income, and increased involvement in household economic decisions. Moreover, employment opportunities within or near the village make participation more feasible for rural women who may otherwise face mobility and household-related constraints (14, 20, 21, 22).

Ensures participation of all segments of the society with RBQ 95.86, shows very strong perception that MGNREGA promotes inclusive participation among different social and cast groups in rural society. The programme's demand-driven nature and provision of wage employment create opportunities for households across these social groups to participate in MGNREGA works and access employment benefits. The participation of SC and ST households is particularly important in promoting livelihood opportunities among socially and economically vulnerable communities, while cast category households also benefit from the employment opportunities provided under the programme (2, 23, 24). Prevents rural out migration to search for employment with an RBQ of 86.77, by providing employment opportunities within the village or nearby areas, the programme can reduce the immediate need for rural workers to migrate elsewhere in search of wage employment. However, the comparatively lower RBQ may be explained by the fact that MGNREGA employment is generally seasonal and limited in duration, while migrants may seek higher and more continuous earnings outside the village (13, 14, 25, 26, 27).

Wider coverage of activities related to environment protection with an RBQ of 85.56, MGNREGA supports activities such as water conservation, watershed development, afforestation, land development, and drought-proofing, which contribute to environmental sustainability and natural-resource management. The comparatively lower score may be because the environmental benefits of these activities are often indirect, gradual and less immediately visible to beneficiaries than wage employment or physical infrastructure (13, 14, 28).

4.1.2. Weakness of MGNREGA

The SWOC analysis reveals that delay in payment of wage as the most significant weakness of MGNREGA, with the highest RBQ score of 99.29. Timely wage payment is critical for rural households that depend on employment under the programme to meet their immediate consumption and livelihood needs. Delays can create financial difficulties, force households to borrow money, and reduce beneficiaries' confidence in the programme. Therefore, respondents assigned the highest priority to this issue (13, 14, 29). This was followed by the Lack of transparency in work allocation to Village under the Gram Panchayat, with an RBQ of 98.89, indicating that prioritization and allocation of works is not adequately communicated, beneficiaries may perceive the process as unequal or preferential. This can affect public trust and may limit equitable access to employment opportunities across villages (13, 30).

Corruption by elected representatives and other officials, with an RBQ of 98.85, respondents may associate corruption with irregularities in beneficiary selection, work allocation, attendance records, wage payments and implementation of works. Such practices can reduce the actual benefits reaching intended beneficiaries and undermine the transparency and accountability of the programme (13, 14, 31). Lack of Planning and expertise in village panchayats related to assets creation with an RBQ of 97.17, reflects a strong perception that inadequate planning and technical expertise at the Gram Panchayat level affects the quality, usefulness, and sustainability of assets create under the MGNREGA. Effective asset creation requires proper identification of local needs, technical planning, appropriate site selection, resource assessment, and supervision.

Limited technical capacity and planning expertise may therefore result in poorly designed or less durable assets (13, 14, 32, 33). Lack of awareness about the social audit, with an RBQ of 93.94 indicating that mechanisms for promoting transparency, accountability, and community participation in MGNREGA implementation. If beneficiaries are not sufficiently aware of the purpose, procedures and opportunities for participation in social audits, their ability to monitor works, verify expenditure, and raise grievances is reduced and Low awareness about E-muster rolls lowest RBQ of 84.95, indicating comparatively weaker awareness among beneficiaries about their entitlements and digital employment-record mechanisms (14).

4.1.3. Opportunities of MGNREGA

The SWOC analysis shows that development of public infrastructure and community assets for improved rural connectivity as the most prominent opportunity under MGNREGA, securing an RBQ score of 95.35, indicating that considerable potential to improve rural connectivity through the construction and maintenance of rural roads, drainage systems, bridges, water-conservation structures, and other community assets. Such infrastructure can improve access to markets, schools, healthcare facilities, and employment opportunities, thereby contributing to overall rural development (13, 14, 15, 34).

This was followed by Ensures social equity in rural areas with an RBQ of 93.94, the programme suggested that employment opportunities to both men and women, thereby supporting greater participation of women in wage employment and contributing to their economic independence and empowerment. In terms of social groups, MGNREGA facilitates access to employment opportunities among SC, ST, OBC, and General Category households, thereby promoting more equitable participation across different caste groups. The participation of women belonging to SC, ST and OBC communities is particularly important for reducing multiple forms of social and economic disadvantage. Similarly, ensuring employment opportunities for men and women across different caste categories can help reduce disparities in access to wage employment and livelihood opportunities (35, 36). Creates employment opportunities for rural households with an RBQ of 93.33, indicating programme provides wage employment within rural areas, it can offer an important source of livelihood during periods of agricultural off-season and limited local employment. Expansion and effective implementation of MGNREGA works can therefore strengthen household income security and reduce dependence on irregular employment opportunities (14, 37, 38).

Supportive approach of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) towards convergence with an RBQ of 92.53, suggesting opportunities for effective convergence with other rural development programmes, can facilitate better utilization of resources, technical expertise, and institutional capacity. A supportive approach by PRIs can also strengthen decentralized planning, improve implementation at the grassroots level, and increase community participation in identifying and executing locally relevant development (39). Opportunities for employment creation and capacity building with an RBQ of 92.29, suggested that proper planning works can provide opportunities for workers to acquire practical skills and experience while strengthening local institutions and community-level capacities. This can improve the ability of rural households to participate in livelihood activities and enhance their longer-term economic opportunities (13, 14, 40).

Finally, ensuring food and nutrient security with an RBQ of 87.58 demonstrating the age income generated through MGNREGA can enhance households' purchasing power and thereby improve their ability to access food and meet basic nutritional requirements. The comparatively lower RBQ may be attributed to the fact that the programme contributes to food security indirectly through income and employment, while factors such as agricultural production, food prices, household food preferences, and access to government food-security programmes also influence nutritional outcomes (13, 14, 41).

4.1.4. Challenges of MGNREGA

The SWOC analysis reveals that adverse climatic conditions and geographical constraints the most significant challenge associated with MGNREGA, securing an RBQ score of 99.29. In hilly and mountainous rural areas, steep slopes, difficult terrain, landslides, heavy rainfall, snowfall, and limited accessibility can make the planning and execution of labor-intensive works difficult. Such conditions may increase transportation and implementation costs, restrict the working season, and cause delays in completing MGNREGA works. Therefore, respondents assigned the highest priority to this challenge (13, 14). This was followed by reduces rural out-migration in search of better employment opportunities. With an RBQ of 94.95, while the scheme provides local wage employment, the number of available workdays and wage levels may not always be sufficient to meet household income requirements. Consequently, rural workers, particularly younger workers, may continue to migrate to urban areas in search of better-paying and more regular employment opportunities (42). Reduce rural out migration in search of better employment opportunities with an RBQ of 93.64. Poor fund allocation and delays in fund release, implementation, and monitoring with an RBQ of 92.73, indicates that financial and administrative constraints constitute a major challenge to effective MGNREGA implementation. Inadequate allocation of funds or delays in releasing funds can disrupt the timely initiation and completion of works and may also affect wage payments. Weaknesses in implementation and monitoring can further reduce efficiency, accountability and the quality of assets created under the programme (13, 14). Corruption and misappropriation of allocated funds with an RBQ of 88.79, indicates that corruption and misappropriation of funds remain an important governance related challenge. Irregularities in work allocation, measurement of works, attendance records, expenditure reporting or utilization of funds can reduce the resources actually reaching intended beneficiaries. Such practices can adversely affect transparency, accountability and public confidence in the programme. The comparatively lower score than the preceding challenges suggests that, although important, respondents perceived it as relatively less dominant than climatic, geographical and financial constraints (13, 14). Finally, Rural Youth Participation in the Wage Scheme recorded the lowest RBQ score of 74.55, indicates that comparatively lower participation of rural youth was perceived as a challenge under MGNREGA. Young rural workers may prefer private-sector, urban or skilled employment because these opportunities can provide higher wages, greater continuity of employment and better prospects for career advancement (14) MGNREGA's predominantly manual and temporary nature may therefore be less attractive to educated and skilled rural youth.



Plate 1: Interaction with an MGNREGA respondent during field survey

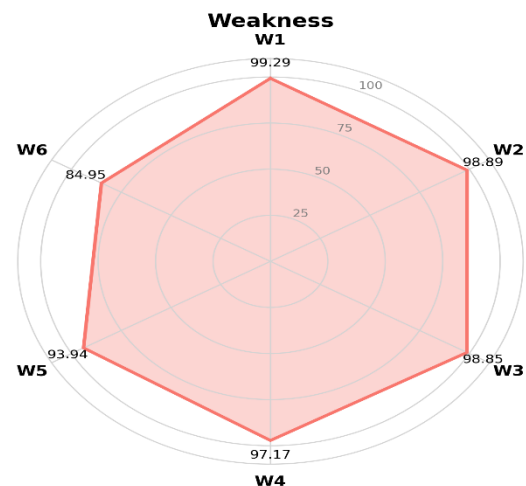
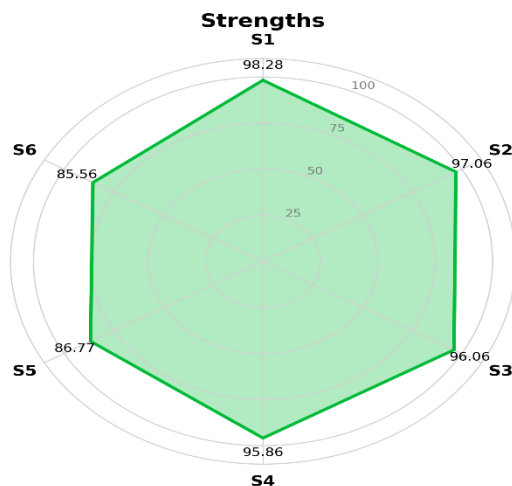


Plate 2. Livestock shed and Community asset created under MGNREGA in the study area

Table 1. SWOC analysis of MGNREGA

Notations	Strengths Parameters	RBQ
S ₁	Rural Infrastructure and Community Assets in Village Level	98.28
S ₂	Enhanced livelihood security for beneficiaries	97.06
S ₃	Women's participation leading to empowerment	96.06
S ₄	Ensures participation of all segments of the society	95.86
S ₅	Prevents rural out migration to search for employment	86.77
S ₆	Wider coverage of activities related to environment protection	85.56
Weakness of MGNREGA		
W ₁	Delay in payment of wage	99.29
W ₂	Lack of transparency in work allocation to Village under the Gram Panchayat	98.89
W ₃	Corruption by elected representatives and other officials	98.85
W ₄	Lack of Planning and expertise in village panchayats related to assets creation	97.17
W ₅	Lack of awareness about the social audit	93.94
W ₆	Low awareness about E-muster rolls	84.95

Opportunity for MGNREGA		
O ₁	Development of public infrastructure and community assets for improved rural connectivity	95.35
O ₂	Ensures social equity in rural areas	93.94
O ₃	Creates employment opportunities for rural households	93.33
O ₄	Supportive approach of PRIs towards convergence	92.53
O ₅	Opportunities for employment creation and capacity building	92.29
O ₆	Contributes to improved food and nutritional security	87.58
Challenges of MGNREGA		
C ₁	Adverse Climatic Conditions and Geographical Constraints	99.29
C ₂	Reduces Rural Out-Migration in Search of Better Employment Opportunities	94.95
C ₃	Political Influence in the Selection of Allocation of Works	93.64
C ₄	Poor Fund Allocation and Delays in Fund Release, Implementation, and Monitoring	92.73
C ₅	Corruption and Misappropriation of Allocated Funds	88.79
C ₆	Rural Youth Participation in the Wage Scheme	74.55



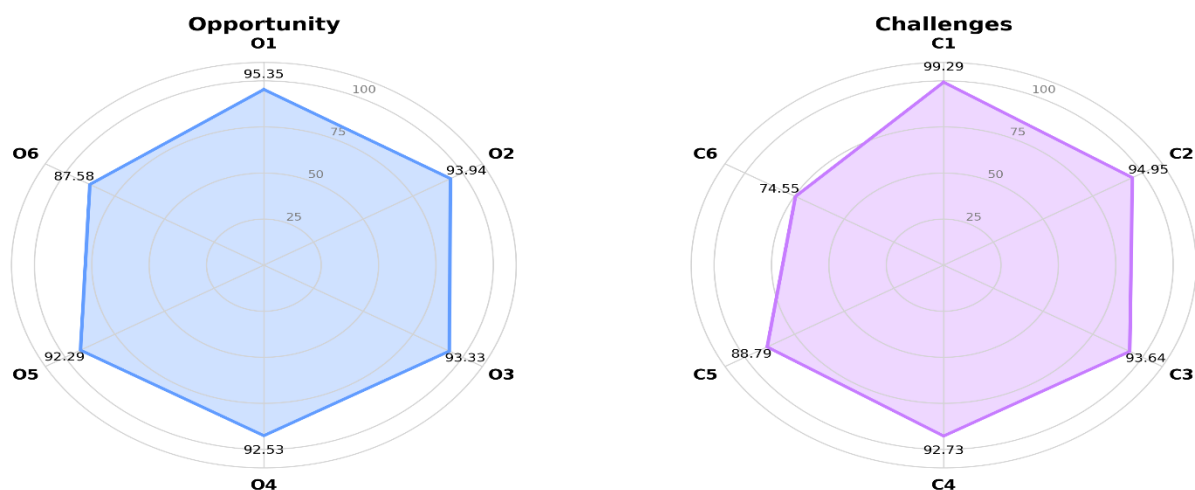


Figure 1. SWOC Analysis of MGNREGA based on Rank Based Quotient (RBQ)

5. CONCLUSION

The study demonstrates that MGNREGA is not only an employment programme but also an instrument for strengthening local infrastructure, supporting vulnerable households, and promoting participatory rural development. At the same time, the effectiveness of the programme is restricted by several implementation-related weaknesses. Delay in wage payment was identified as the most important weakness, indicating that administrative and fund-transfer delays directly affect the economic security of beneficiaries. Lack of transparency in the allocation of works, perceived corruption, inadequate planning, and limited technical expertise at the Gram Panchayat level further reduce public confidence and affect the quality and sustainability of assets. Low awareness regarding social audits and e-muster rolls also limits the ability of beneficiaries to monitor the programme and claim their rights. The programme offers important opportunities for improving rural connectivity, strengthening social equity, creating employment during the agricultural off-season, building local capacities, and promoting convergence among development departments. However, the hill geography of Uttarakhand presents special challenges. Steep terrain, landslides, heavy rainfall, snowfall, difficult accessibility, and a restricted working season can delay the execution of works and increase implementation costs. In addition, the temporary and predominantly manual nature of MGNREGA employment may not be sufficiently attractive to rural youth or workers seeking regular and better paid employment.

Policy Implications

To improve the effectiveness of MGNREGA in hilly and rural areas, timely wage payments should be ensured through time-bound fund release, prompt work measurement, and quick resolution of technical or banking issues, while beneficiaries should be informed about payment status and delays. Transparency in work allocation should be strengthened by publicly disclosing proposed works, beneficiary demand, priorities, sanctioned funds, and completion schedules through Gram Sabha meetings, notice boards, and digital platforms.

Regular and independent social audits, along with effective grievance-redressal mechanisms, should be institutionalized to enhance accountability. The capacity of PRIs and field functionaries should be strengthened through training in participatory planning, financial management, record keeping, and climate-resilient construction. MGNREGA planning should adopt hill-specific standards that consider terrain, rainfall, landslides, transportation constraints, and the short working season, with greater emphasis on durable and productive assets such as water harvesting, spring rejuvenation, watershed development, soil conservation, rural connectivity, and livelihood-supporting activities. Effective convergence with agriculture, horticulture, livestock, watershed development, and skill-development programmes should be promoted, while beneficiary awareness regarding employment entitlements, wage rates, worksite facilities, and social audits should be enhanced. Greater participation of rural youth and integrated monitoring through field inspections, geo-tagging, photographic evidence, muster-roll verification, and community monitoring can further improve programme implementation, asset quality, and accountability. Policymakers should take these aspects into consideration while formulating and implementing VB-G-RAM-G, as addressing these issues can help minimize implementation-level difficulties, strengthen transparency and accountability, and ensure more effective and efficient delivery of the programme to rural beneficiaries.

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