

Editors

Dr. T. Sudarsana Reddy
Mr.K.Saketh Reddy



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SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE IN INDIA

First Edition - 2020

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ISBN: 978-81-941934-0-1

Price: Rs. 1100.00

Winger Publications

A-531, H.No. 4-32-521, Phase-1, Allwyn Colony, Kukatpally, Hyderabad - 500 072.

Ph. : 7799000082

Sales Offices :

Hyderabad

A-531, H.No. 4-32-521, Phase-1, Allwyn Colony, Kukatpally, Hyderabad - 500 072.

Ph. :7799000082

New Delhi

C/14, SDIDC Work Centre Jhilmil Colony, New Delhi-100095. Phone: 011-2162365.

paramountpublishers@gmail.com | alluriasr2005@yahoo.com

Published by Manu Alluri for Winger Publications and printed by him at Sai Thirumala Printers.

Sl.No.	Title of the Paper	Page No.
28.	The Present Organic Agricultural Performs in Andhra Pradesh <i>- Dr. G Prathap, Dr. V. Ramesh Babu, T. Indumathi</i>	243
29.	Crop Productivity and Training Needs of Beneficiary Farmers in Watershed Development Programme in Rayalaseema Region of Andhra Pradesh <i>- Dr.D.Sreenivasa Rao</i>	253
30.	Response of Groundnut Varieties to Varying Conditions of Drought Areas: A Study of Ananthapuramu District in Andhra Pradesh <i>- Dr.G Ramalingappa, G. Chandrashekar, Prof.G. Venkata Naidu</i>	260
31.	Impact of Regional Rural Banks on Economic Conditions of Small and Marginal Farmers in Andhra Pradesh: An Empirical Study <i>- Dr. Seelam Ravi</i>	265
32.	Prospects of Agriculture Insurance in India <i>- Prof.N.R.Venkataramana Reddy, B. Sadhana</i>	276
33.	Sources of Agricultural Finance in India: An Outline <i>- Dr.Shaik Mahaboob Basha</i>	288
34.	Social Inclusion through Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act in Andhra Pradesh <i>- Dr.S.Nageswara Rao</i>	302
35.	Climate Changes and its Impact on Agriculture in Rayalaseema Region of Andhra Pradesh <i>-Dr. S.S.Mahalakshmi</i>	307
36.	Role of Crop Insurance in Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation A Case of Kadapa YSR District of Andhra Pradesh <i>-Dr. Anitha Manne, B. Nagendra Prasad</i>	313

Social Inclusion through Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act in Andhra Pradesh

Dr.S.Nageswara Rao

Assistant Professor, Department of Economics, Maharaja Agrasen College, Delhi University, Delhi.

Abstract

Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) is a flagship programme of the Government of India to provide assured employment for rural poor. Conceived as a holistic approach, the thrust of this scheme is social inclusion coupled with provision of improved livelihood opportunities. It encompasses inclusive growth strategy to reduce chronic poverty and regional imbalances in the country. This paper tries to analyze the impact of MGNREGS on rural employment and labour welfare. The main focus of the study is to examine the overall impact of MGNREGS on rural livelihood by comparing the functioning of this scheme in three distinct regions of Andhra Pradesh (AP). In order to assess the performance of the MGNREGA across different regions of AP, the study has employed both quantitative and qualitative techniques. Findings based on both the quantitative and qualitative data indicate that the programme has emerged as a very significant public programme in the rural areas. The provision of equal wages for both men and women under this programme has reduced the wage disparity in the labour market. It has to a large extent, a positive impact on rural livelihoods, eliminated distress migrations from backward areas and also promoted women empowerment. However, the study observed variation in the performance of MGNREGS across different regions of AP; its functioning is found to be better in Rayalaseema and Telangana regions than Coastal Andhra.

I. Introduction

Agricultural growth is very low compared to other sectors in recent decades in India. Many farmers especially large farmers are shifting to non-agricultural activities and are leasing out their lands due to higher labour cost or risk and uncertainties involved in agricultural activities. It has resulted in reduction of employment for rural poor and forced them to seek employment outside agricultural sector for their survival. Over the years, several wage employment programmes were designed in India by the policy makers to overcome employment uncertainty in rural labour market. These programmes encompass the component of social protection and social inclusion to generate employment elasticity in rural areas. However, these programmes failed to achieve their desired objectives compelling the state to introduce better schemes for rural areas. In this context, the Government of India (GoI) on 7th September 2005, notified an Act, called 'National

Rural Employment Guarantee Act' (NREGA) and subsequently it came into force on 2nd February 2006 and is being implemented in a phased manner. It was renamed and amended as 'Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme' (MGNREGS) on 2nd October, 2009, on the occasion of 140th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi. The Act aims at enhancing livelihood security of households in rural areas of the country by providing at least one hundred days of guaranteed wage employment in a financial year to every household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work. GoI provides funding and oversees the Act's implementation under the MGNREGS through the Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD). State governments provide an additional contribution, primarily for unemployment benefits.

This paper tries to analyze the impact of MGNREGS on the rural employment and labourers'