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That MGNREGS has led to an increase in children being made to work seems implausible

A report published by the World Bank suggests that the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) may have had the unintended effect of forcing children out of school. According to the report, India's rural jobs scheme, which promises an annual 100 days of low-skill work to at least one adult member of every rural household, might have increased the incidence of child labour as well as school absenteeism.

That MGNREGS has led to an increase in children being made to work seems implausible. The scheme is meant only for adults, and it's unlikely that age data could have been faked on a vast scale. Nor does it look likely that adults took on jobs and left their children to work at home or in the fields. As the scheme works as a dole in disguise, the tasks assigned are not terribly demanding. As for children missing school, this could be traced to other factors, the most salient being the tendency of the poor to overlook the eventual benefits of education. While we need to pay attention to second-order effects, it is evident that the scheme serves a worthy purpose. It assures the rural poor a living. That, in itself, is quite a big deal.

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