

# DECENTRALISE MGNREGS FOR BETTER IMPLEMENTATION, SAYS GOVT. STUDY

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**Need of the hour:** The study also noted that the MGNREGS wages were far below the market rate in many States, defeating the purpose of acting as a safety net. PTI-

An internal study commissioned by the Ministry of Rural Development has argued for decentralisation of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS), allowing for more “flexibility” at the ground level.

The Ministry recently made public the report of the sixth Common Review Mission, which surveyed seven States — Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Karnataka, Nagaland, Gujarat, Jharkhand, Himachal Pradesh — and the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir in February to assess the implementation of all rural development schemes, including the MGNREGS.

“There should be a greater diversification of permissible works instead of listing the types of permissible works, broad categories of works may be listed out and flexibility should be given at ground level to select the type of works as per broad categories,” the study noted.

This is a problem also highlighted by activists and academics working in the field. “In the past few years, the fund management has been centralised instead of paying the gram sabhas an advance enabling them to decide the work they want to undertake. The gram sabhas can take into account the local conditions and the community’s requirement instead of chasing a target set for them,” said Professor Rajendra Narayanan of Azim Premji University, who co-authored a study on the role of the MGNREGA during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The internal study also flagged the frequent delay in fund disbursement, and to deal with it suggested a “revolving fund that can be utilised whenever there is a delay in the Central funds”.

The survey quoted various instances to underline this chronic problem. In Lower Subansiri district of Arunachal Pradesh, for example, the surveyors found that because of the delay in the material component, the beneficiaries ended up buying the construction material themselves to complete the projects. In Himachal Pradesh and Gujarat, the delay in wages was by three or four months and the material component by six months.

The study also noted that the MGNREGS wages were far below the market rate in many States, defeating the purpose of acting as a safety net.

At present, the minimum wage of a farm labourer in Gujarat is Rs. 324.20, but the MGNREGS wage is Rs. 229. The private contractors pay far more. In Nagaland, the wage is Rs. 212 per day, which does not take into account the difficult terrain.

In Jammu and Kashmir, the rate is Rs. 214 per day. This, the study noted, “is lower than what is offered by private contractors which can go up to Rs. 600-Rs. 700 per day”.

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