

SWOC analysis of MGNREGA convergence implemented with Department of Agriculture and Horticulture in North Karnataka

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Abstract: The diagnostic research was conducted to diagnose the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOC) of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) convergence mechanism from implementers in North Karnataka during 2022-23. The findings of the study revealed that, 'enhanced livelihood security for workers' was the first ranked strength among PDOs and Technical Officers (RBQ= 96.50 and 93.50 respectively), followed by 'no funds constraints in implementing the set goals' and 'better quality and longer shelf life of project activities' were II and III ranked strengths among PDOs (RBQ = 95.50 and 94.75, respectively) and III and II ranked strengths among Technical Officers (RBQ = 93.00 and 85.36, respectively). 'Inadequate field-level staff to implement convergence' and 'preference of autonomy from the PRIs by the converged line departments and vice versa' were I and II ranked weakness among PDO (RBQ= 91.50 and 91.00, respectively) and II and I ranked weakness among Technical Officers (RBQ= 88.75 and 89.25, respectively). 'Scope for pooling the available human resources, skills and competencies' and 'scope for creating more employment days and works' were perceived similarly and were positioned respectively in first and second ranked opportunity among PDOs (RBQ=96.75 and 96.00 respectively) and Technical Officers (RBQ=93.50 and 91.00, respectively). 'Establishing the required institutional structures and mechanisms at village, taluka, district, and state levels' and 'converging line departments have to align and accommodate itself with the political and social dynamics of PRIs' were first and second ranked challenge among PDOs (RBQ=92.25 and 90.75, respectively) and second and first ranked among Technical Officers (RBQ= 85.50 and 83.00, respectively).

Key words: Challenges, Convergence, MGNREGA, Opportunity, Strength, Weakness

Introduction

Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) is considered as a "silver bullet" and "breakthrough legislation" in the history of India's development initiatives, and one of the largest employment generation programs of the world (Mishra and Mishra, 2018). This scheme is based on Indian labour law and social security, which is based on the line 'right to work' and supplies assures 100 days employment to every rural household in a year with special focus on women employment sector.

Since inception of MGNREGA the country has achieved several milestones including massiveness of coverage, targeting benefits for the marginalized sections of the people (Jha *et al.*, 2008), sensitizing people regarding employment as their rightful entitlement (Dreze, 2007), arresting distress migration and causing increase in lean season rural wages (Mehrotra, 2008). In Karnataka National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) was implemented during the year 2006. The first phase of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) was launched in February 2006 in Bidar, Gulbarga, Raichur, Davangere and Chitradurga. Similarly the second phase of MGNREGS was commenced in April 2007 in six districts namely Belgaum, Chikmagalur, Hassan, Kodagu, Shivamogga and Bellary. Since 2008 it covers all the 30 districts of the state. Dharwad and Gadag were also covered under III phase of MGNREGS implementation (Nimbaragi and Honnappa, 2017).

Convergence planning introduced in 2009 by the Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India (MoRD-GoI) was anticipated that the efforts towards inter-sectoral convergence of development programmes would lead to not only optimum utilisation of public funds but also maximum returns on the public investments along with rise in employment opportunities, wages and earnings by all the developmental programmes in one single implementation package. Ever since the introduction of convergence under MGNREGA, different states have undertaken a host of measures to dovetail funds under other schemes with that of MGNREGA to meet the cost of an identifiable part of a project resulting in enhanced durability of assets created under MGNREGA for improved livelihood opportunities. Further it was reported that some line departments have provided technical expertise to improve the quality of assets created under MGNREGA and efforts were made to provide capacity building to the beneficiaries. In all, there have been concerted efforts to create durable community assets and improved employment opportunities in rural areas. While the measure seems to be a welcome effort, there are reported cases of difficulties in implementation, lack of co-operation among the line departments, confusions and apprehensions among the beneficiaries and other stakeholders. Hence, the present study attempts to critically examine the Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities and Challenges (SWOC) of MGNREGA convergence in North Karnataka.

Material and methods

The study was conducted in Gadag and Dharwad districts of North Karnataka during the year 2022-23. Based on effective functioning of MGNREGA in the study area five talukas from each district were selected. Further from each taluka two blocks and from each block two Gram Panchayats were selected for the study. From each selected Gram Panchayat (GP) one Panchayat Development Officer (PDO) and from each selected Hobli/Block two Technical Officers {one Agriculture Officer (AO) and one Assistant Horticulture Officer (AHO)} were selected as implementers for the study. Thus the population for study includes 80 implementers {40 PDOs (from GPs) and 40 Technical Officers (20 AOs—from Department of Agriculture and 20 AHOs- from Department of Horticulture)}.

The diagnostic research was employed to diagnose the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOC) of MGNREGA convergence mechanism from implementers. The schedule was designed for the study. The items indicating Strength, Weakness, Opportunity and Challenges were collected by examining relevant publication, reviews (Anon, 2009; Suryanarayan *et al.*, 2013; Maske, 2015; Singh *et al.*, 2018) and discussing with the experts involved in implementation of MGNREGA convergence works. Further members of the advisory committee were asked for any modifications, addition or deletion of the statements and then items were finalized. Rank Based Quotient (RBQ) method as suggested by Thiruman Kannan and Raj Pravin (2020) and Balasubramaniam *et al.* (2022) was used for conducting SWOC analysis. The implementers {PDOs and Technical Officials (AOs and AHOs)} were asked to rank the SWOC statements from 1 to 10 based on their experience in implementing the works. Further based on response of the implementers RBQ value is calculated for each statement and ranks were assigned based on highest RBQ value.

The formula for RBQ calculation is as follows.

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

Where,

RBQ = Rank Based Quotient

F_i = Frequency of respondents for the i^{th} rank

n = Number of ranks

N = Total number of respondents

\sum_i^n = Sum of multiple factors

i.e. $\sum_i^n F_i (n+1-i) = \sum F_1 \times (n+1-1) + F_2 \times (n+1-2) + F_3 \times (n+1-3) + \dots + F_n \times (n+1-n)$

Results and discussion

A. Strengths of MGNREGA convergence mechanism as perceived by the implementers

The portrayal of major strengths of MGNREGA convergence mechanism as perceived by implementers presented in Table 1 revealed that 'enhanced livelihood security for workers' was the first ranked strength among PDOs and Technical Officers with RBQ value of 96.50 and 93.50, respectively. The strength 'no funds constraints in implementing the set goals' was perceived in II rank position with PDOs (RBQ= 95.50) and III rank with Technical Officers (RBQ= 85.36). The 'better quality and longer shelf life of project activities' was perceived in III rank position with PDOs (RBQ= 94.75) and II rank with Technical Officers (RBQ= 93.00). Further, 'synergy between converging departments and agencies helps in effective achievement of objectives' was noticed in IV rank among both PDOs (RBQ= 94.50) and Technical Officers (RBQ= 92.25). 'Strengthening local institutions and democratic processes' was placed in V rank among PDOs (RBQ=92.25) and VI rank among Technical Officers (RBQ=88.25). On the contrary 'wider coverage of activities' was positioned in VI rank among PDOs (RBQ=91.50) and V rank among Technical Officers (RBQ=91.50).

However, the strength of 'rights-based implementation and legal safeguards through act', 'transparent, participatory, and accountable processes' and 'conducive policy environment' were perceived similarly in the position of VII, VIII and IX rank among PDOs (RBQ=91.25, 89.74 and 87.75, respectively) and

Table 1. Strengths of MGNREGA convergence mechanism as perceived by implementers

Strengths	PDOs ($n_1=40$)	Technical Officers ($n_2=40$)	Total ($n=80$)
Enhanced livelihood security for workers	I (96.50)	I (93.50)	I (95.00)
No funds constraints in implementing the set goals	II (95.50)	III (85.36)	V (90.43)
Better quality and longer shelf life of project activities	III (94.75)	II (93.00)	II (93.87)
Synergy between converging departments and agencies helps in effective achievement of objectives	IV (94.50)	IV (92.25)	III (93.37)
Strengthening local institutions and democratic processes	V (92.25)	VI (88.25)	VI (90.25)
Wider coverage of activities	VI (91.50)	V (91.50)	IV (91.50)
Rights-based implementation and legal safeguards through act	VII (91.25)	VII (85.75)	VII (88.50)
Transparent, participatory and accountable processes	VIII (89.74)	VIII (84.50)	III (87.12)
Conducive policy environment	IX (87.75)	IX (83.75)	IX (85.75)
Political support that cuts across party lines	X (87.50)	XI (81.25)	X (84.37)
Excellent track record in implementation	XI (87.00)	X (81.50)	XI (84.25)

Note: Figures in parentheses indicates Rank Based Quotient (RBQ) values & statement were rearranged as per highest rank orders

also Technical Officers (RBQ=85.75, 84.50 and 83.75, respectively). The provision of 'legal safeguards through act' is the important feature of MGNREGA which was not seen in other programmes.

However the strength of 'political support that cuts across party lines' was positioned in X rank among PDOs (RBQ=87.50) and rank XI among Technical Officers (RBQ=81.25). On the contrary 'excellent track record in implementation' was positioned in XI rank among PDOs (RBQ=87.00) and X rank among Technical Officers (RBQ=81.50), respectively.

These strengths revealed the fact that convergence of MGNREGA was favourable for promoting sustainable livelihood opportunities by pooling the resources from different sectors/departments, planning at the grass root level lead to greater ownership of projects. Regarding the strength *viz.*, 'transparent, participatory and accountable processes', 'conducive policy environment', 'political support that cuts across party lines', and 'excellent track record in implementation' the provision of 'legal safeguards through act' is the important feature of MGNREGA which was not seen in other programmes.

B. Weakness of MGNREGA convergence mechanism as perceived by the implementers

The perceived weakness of MGNREGA convergence mechanism by implementers as presented in Table 2 indicate that 'inadequate field-level staff to implement convergence' was the first ranked weakness among PDOs (RBQ=91.50) and second ranked among Technical Officers (RBQ=88.75). On the contrary 'preference of autonomy from the PRIs by the converged line departments and vice versa' was positioned in II rank among PDOs (RBQ=91.00) and rank I among Technical Officers (RBQ=89.25). Further, 'non finalisation of operational details of convergence' ranked III among PDOs (RBQ=90.00) and IV among Technical Officers (RBQ=85.50). On the contrary 'lack of support from converged line departments in different stages of convergence mechanism' was ranked IV among PDOs (RBQ=89.50) and III among Technical Officers (RBQ=88.50). Further, 'insufficient knowledge of ICT technologies among GP officials and supporting staff' ranked V among PDOs (RBQ=87.25) and VI among Technical Officers (RBQ=79.75).

On the contrary 'inadequate infrastructure and equipment in effective operationalizing convergence' ranked VI among PDOs (RBQ=85.50) and V among Technical Officers (RBQ=83.75). However, 'lack of technical competency among the line department and GP level supporting staff', 'constraints with the implementing agencies in utilizing the available funds' and 'staff have reservations about 100-days guarantee work' were perceived similarly and were positioned in VII, VIII and IX ranks among PDOs (RBQ=85.25, 78.75 and 76.50, respectively) and Technical Officers (RBQ=77.50, 77.00 and 71.00, respectively).

Probable reasons for above weakness could be 'not getting required co-operation among the departments, overburden of work implementation process, fast updating of the operational guidelines of MGNREGA convergence without allowing the existing guidelines to get operational, lack of higher education, trainings and workshops among supporting staff, non-existence of the convergence resource group at village and taluk level (*viz.*, Village Level Resource Group -VLRG, Taluk Level Resource Group-TLRG) in reality, non-involvement of line or converged departmental staff in gram sabha, rozgardiwas, planning and monitoring and evaluation on regular basis, less or no training for both converged departments supporting staffs, lengthy process in fund release, non-completion of works in stipulated time period, continuous involvement of converged line department implementers irrespective of their department work as MGNREGA provides 100 days of guaranteed work.

C. Opportunities of MGNREGA convergence mechanism as perceived by the implementers

The results on perceived opportunities of MGNREGA convergence mechanism as presented in Table 3 highlighted that the opportunities of 'scope for pooling the available human resources, skills and competencies' and 'scope for creating more employment days and works' were perceived similarly and were positioned respectively in first and second rank among PDOs (RBQ=96.75 and 96.00, respectively) and Technical Officers (RBQ=93.50 and 91.00, respectively). While the opportunity of 'scope for increasing the capacity-building through technological and science-based approach' noticed in

Table 2. Weakness of MGNREGA convergence mechanism as perceived by implementers

Weakness	PDOs (n ₁ =40)	Technical Officers (n ₂ =40)	Total (n=80)
Inadequate field-level staff to implement convergence	I(91.50)	II(88.75)	I(90.12)
Preference of autonomy from the PRIs by the converged line departments and vice versa	II(91.00)	I(89.25)	I(90.12)
Non finalisation of operational details of convergence	III(90.00)	IV(85.50)	III(87.75)
Lack of support from converged line departments in different stages of convergence mechanism	IV(89.50)	III(88.50)	II(89.00)
Insufficient knowledge of ICT technologies among GP officials and supporting staff	V(87.25)	VI(79.75)	V(83.50)
Inadequate infrastructure and equipment in effective operationalizing convergence	VI(85.50)	V(83.75)	IV(84.62)
Lack of technical competency among the line department and GP level supporting staff	VII(85.25)	VII(77.50)	VI(81.37)
Constraints with the implementing agencies in utilizing the available funds	VIII(78.75)	VIII(77.00)	VIII(77.87)
Staff have reservations about 100-days guarantee work	IX(76.50)	IX(71.00)	VII(73.75)

Note: Figures in parentheses indicates Rank Based Quotient (RBQ) values & statements were rearranged as per highest rank orders

Table 3. Opportunities of MGNREGA convergence mechanism as perceived by implementers

Opportunities	PDOs (n ₁ =40)	Technical Officers (n ₂ =40)	Total (n=80)
Scope for pooling the available human resources, skills and competencies	I(96.75)	I(93.50)	I(95.12)
Scope for creating more employment days and works	II(96.00)	II(91.00)	II(93.50)
Scope for increasing the capacity-building through technological and science-based approach	III(94.50)	IV(86.50)	III(90.50)
Scope for utilizing and verifying target work at planned locations through ICT technologies in better mode (GIS, GPS, Remote sensing etc.)	IV(91.25)	III(86.75)	IV(89.00)
Availability of technical expertise from line departments	V(90.25)	V(85.75)	V(88.00)
Scope for combining labour intensive works and material-intensive works	VI(89.75)	VI(85.25)	VI(87.50)
The common administrative and operational arrangements facilitate higher officers in effective monitoring of coordination, dovetailing of resources, partners and activities	VII(87.75)	VII(85.00)	VII(86.37)
Positive disposition of PRIs in implementing convergence	VIII(85.75)	IX(79.75)	IX(82.75)
Convergence mechanism provides the opportunities for converged line departments to adopt bottom-up approaches	IX(85.50)	VIII(82.75)	VIII(84.12)
Scope for executing the approved works within the financial year	X(75.00)	X(77.00)	X(76.00)

Note: Figures in parentheses indicates Rank Based Quotient (RBQ) values and statements were rearranged as per highest rank orders

III rank among PDOs (RBQ= 94.50) and IV among Technical Officers (RBQ= 86.75). On the contrary 'scope for utilizing and verifying target work at planned locations through ICT technologies in better mode' noticed in rank IV among PDOs (RBQ= 91.25) and III among Technical Officers (RBQ= 86.75) and the opportunity of 'availability of technical expertise from line departments' was noticed in same rank among both PDOs (RBQ= 90.25) and Technical Officers (RBQ=85.75). The situation of sharing of available resources (human, technical and financial) among both the converged departments and joint working mechanism of MGNREGA convergence might be the reasons for these perceived opportunities.

The opportunity of 'scope for combining labour intensive works and material-intensive works' was perceived in VI rank among both PDOs (RBQ=89.75) and Technical Officers (RBQ=85.25). The possession of job cards and dependency on MGNREGA works by most of the rural people might have helped implementing departments to overcome the human resources problem in implementation of the works.

Further the opportunity of 'the common administrative and operational arrangements facilitate higher officers in effective monitoring of coordination, dovetailing of resources, partners and activities' was also perceived similarly and noticed in VII rank among both PDOs (RBQ= 87.75) and Technical Officers (RBQ=85.00). It could be due to District Planning Committee has the sole responsibility of approving GP, TP ZP and line department's shelf of the MGNREGA works and all the implementers has to abide by the rules and regulation of MGNREGA convergence guidelines.

The opportunity of 'positive disposition of PRIs in implementing convergence' was found to rank VIII among PDOs (RBQ=85.75) and IX among Technical Officers (RBQ=79.75). On the contrary 'convergence mechanism provides the opportunities for converged line departments to adopt bottom-up approaches' ranked IX among PDOs (RBQ=85.50) and VIII among Technical Officers (RBQ=82.75). The probable reason

might be that some of the social sector schemes have top-down approach but convergence with MGNREGA creates the opportunity to follow bottom-up approach as NREGA is fully bottom-up and democratic process.

Lastly it was noticed that the opportunity of 'scope for executing the approved works within the financial year' was positioned in X rank among both PDOs (RBQ=75.00) and Technical Officers (RBQ=77.00), respectively. The fund sharing, human resource sharing and joint working mechanism in convergence might have helped to complete the works within a stipulated time period.

D. Challenges of MGNREGA convergence mechanism as perceived by the implementers

The data on challenges of MGNREGA convergence mechanism as perceived by implementers shown in Table 4 point out that 'establishing the required institutional structures and mechanisms at village, taluka, district and state level' was the first ranked challenge among PDOs (RBQ=92.25) but second rank among Technical Officers (RBQ= 83.00). On the contrary the challenge 'converging line departments must align and accommodate itself with the political and social dynamics of PRIs' ranked II among PDOs (RBQ= 90.75) and ranked I among Technical Officers (RBQ= 85.50). It could be due to PRI takes the whole responsibility of MGNREGA works right from works sanctioning to evaluation of the works and line departments has to abide by the rules and regulations of MGNREGA.

However, the challenges 'decreased participation of job card holder in implementing convergence activities', 'retaining confidence among cardholders in the situation of delayed wage payment', 'implementing annual action plans during the difficult situation of holistic life cycle' were perceived similarly and were positioned in III, IV and V rank among PDOs (RBQ=88.75, 86.50 and 84.25, respectively) and Technical Officers (RBQ=82.70, 82.05 and 81.75, respectively).

Table 4. Challenges of MGNREGA convergence mechanism as perceived by implementers

Challenges	PDOs (n ₁ =40)	Technical Officers (n ₂ =40)	Total (n=80)
Establishing the required institutional structures and mechanisms at village, taluka, district, and state levels	I(92.25)	II(83.00)	II(87.62)
Converging line departments have to align and accommodate itself with the political and social dynamics of PRIs	II(90.75)	I(85.50)	I(88.12)
Decreased participation of job card holder in implementing convergence activities	III(88.75)	III(82.70)	III(85.72)
Retaining confidence among cardholders in the situation of delayed wage payment	IV(86.50)	IV(82.05)	IV(84.27)
Implementing annual action plans during the difficult situation of holistic life cycle	V(84.25)	V(81.75)	V(83.00)
Coming together converged line departments under public scrutiny through social audits and person helping in settling complaints	VI(81.00)	VII(67.50)	VI(74.25)
Emergence of conflicts in the works identified by converged line departments and the priorities of GPs	VII(66.75)	VI(79.50)	VII(73.12)

Note: Figures in parentheses indicates Rank Based Quotient (RBQ) values and statements were rearranged as per highest rank orders

The small land holding, insufficient awareness/knowledge about convergence works, pending payment of the works, and prioritization/influence of officials/political leaders might be the reason for decreased participation of job card holders. While the probable reason for the challenge of retaining confidence among cardholders in the situation of delayed wage payment might be most of the job card holders of MGNREGA were functionally illiterate and they depended on the GP supporting staff for every payment and also incompleteness of targeted works in stipulated time period by the implementers holds the payments of wages till the works get complete so these might have hindering the confidence of the job card holders.

Regarding the challenge of 'implementing annual action plans during the difficult situation of holistic life cycle' the probable reason might be works of line department schemes were planned on macro level yet the implementation is focused on the micro level in phased and project cycle spans of particular time period/years and plans prepared are holistic and science based. Whereas in MGNREGA, works are selected from Five Year Development Plan and implemented through annual plans within a financial year.

Further it was noticed that the challenge of 'coming together converged line departments under public scrutiny through social audits and person helping in settling complaints' positioned in VI rank among PDOs (RBQ=81.00) and VII among Technical Officers (RBQ=67.50). It could be due to the fact that social audit of MGNREGA convergence works is mandatory where each and every work is discussed and scrutinized by the social audit team in presence of villagers/job card holders at GP

level and villagers were also asked for complaints and the team resolves the complaints in presence of all.

The challenge of 'emergence of conflicts in the works identified by converged line departments and the priorities of GPs' ranked VII among PDOs (RBQ=66.75) and VI among Technical Officers (RBQ=79.50), respectively. The works identification method in both converged department/schemes differs from one another even though ultimate aim is to improve the livelihood of villagers. But in MGNREGA convergence the priority is given to need based works of villages which may be difficult for other line department to reach their target within the stipulated time.

The portrayal of SWOC analysis of convergence mechanism of MGNREGA got support from the past studies of Anon (2009), Sharma (2013), Suryanarayan *et al.* (2013), Nayak *et al.* (2018), Bairagi (2020), Thiruman Kannan and Raj Pravin (2020) and Balasubramaniam *et al.* (2022) and also the SWOT analysis of convergence linkage of KVK and ATMA in Chhattisgarh state reported by Chaturvedani (2017) found to support the present findings.

It could be concluded from the study that majority of the implementers in the study area identified the major Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities and Challenges of MGNREGA convergence mechanism. So the need of hour is that the policy makers, district administrators and extensional personnel of line departments and Panchayat Raj nodal officials of MGNREGA need to work together in strengthening MGNREGA convergence mechanism by optimistically considering the suggestions of programmes implementers for smooth functioning and implementation of MGNREGA works in convergence mode

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