

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF SAMPOORNA GRAMIN ROZGAR YOJANA AND MGNREGA IN BIHAR

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Abstract

Through documentary and descriptive research designs, this paper attempts to compare the Sampoorna Grameen Rozgar Yojana (SGRY) and the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act/Scheme (MGNREGA/MGNREGS) in Bihar. It assesses the design of institutions, security of wages and food, access to employment, gender and social inclusion, local governance, asset creation, flows of the public purse, and accountability for implementation. Legislation, Ministry of Rural Development documentation, parliamentary responses, programme analyses, and scholarly articles are drawn upon in the study. That means the SGRY was launched in 2001 to provide a supply of employment through schemes that were allocated administratively, Besides which the wage support was food grain-based. MGNREGA, a legislation enacted in 2005 and implemented from 2006, revised the policy framework by giving a statutory entitlement to employment on demand, an unemployment allowance, transparency and social audit. From the official data in Bihar, there were 2,364.32 lakh person-days in 2022-23, 2,205.06 lakh in 2023-24 and 2,497.87 lakh in 2024-25. It also reported 50.14 lakh households worked in 2022-23, 48.18 lakh in 2023-24 and 51.09 lakh in 2024-25. The study finds that legal entitlements and digital administration may have improved the architecture of rural employment policy but these two cannot, in themselves, guarantee timely work allocation, payment or equitable participation. When comparing programme performance, the unique historical periods, definitions and coverage of data must be considered. Research suggests greater work-demand registration, local planning, payment grievance mechanism; asset maintenance, social audits and district-level reporting.

Keywords: Bihar; rural employment; SGRY; MGNREGA; poverty; social protection; Panchayati Raj; public works

1. Introduction

Comparative analysis is also a history of how Indian rural welfare policy defines a citizen's relationship to the state. Under a given allocation-led programme, administrative capacity only determines when works are opened and how far labour demand can be absorbed. A citizen is entitled under a statutory guarantee to raise a claim for an employment and receive a dated acknowledgment, although actual fulfilment continues to depend on the conduct of officials. Joshi (2010) believes that law and citizen action should interact if formal rights are to be converted into services. Vij (2011) believes in accountability from below. It is crucial to evaluate Bihar by distinguishing between the existence of a procedure in law and the capacity of households to invoke it.

The Government, in its official statements, provides for a cash component along with the foodgrains. Resources will flow through the Panchayati Raj (Prime Minister's Office, 2005). As such, the pre-guarantee model dealt with a real problem of seasonal employment, but its legal architecture did not make each additional day of requested work an obligation. This is a design distinction, not evidence that all SGRY projects were unproductive or that every work demand under MGNREGA has been met.

The rural region of Bihar poses a challenging setting for public-employment policy since most households rely on seasonal agriculture, informal labour and migration as an income risk management strategy. Jobs related to agriculture change with rainfall, irrigation, cropping patterns and local demand for labour. A programme that provides work in between agricultural seasons can thus serve as an income supplement as well as an insurance. It is only when eligible households know how to demand work, there are enough works in place, and workers receive their wages without unreasonable delay, that an employment scheme is effective (Dutta et al., 2012; Dutta et al., 2014).

India's programme progression shifted from administratively paid relief-oriented job opportunities towards a legally enforceable job guarantee. Sampoorna Grameen Rozgar Yojana initiated in September 2001 was a try to put cash resources along with foodgrains and was implemented through the Panchayati Raj institutions. The twin objectives were the generation of additional wage employment while ensuring food security through the creation of useful community assets (MoRD, 2004). The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act of 2005 established an entitlement of a hundred days of wage employment in a financial year for every rural household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work; the programme subsequently became widely known as MGNREGA (Govt of India 2005).

The allocations and implementation capacity were the key constraints which constrained SGRY. MGNREGA provides legally guaranteed processes for job cards, demand registration, work provision, unemployment allowance and public accountability. Entitlements on paper can coexist with rationed employment or incomplete administrative records, difficulty in wage payment. A key point of comparison is whether stronger laws leads to stronger outcomes (Dutta et al., 2012; Banerjee et al., 2020).

The Bihar perspective is substantive and methodological in nature. The World Bank assessment focused on Bihar which highlighted the gap between stated demand and actual access. Meanwhile, newer official parliamentary data enables an examination of employment volume at both state and district levels. This study thus differentiates normative scheme provisions, documented outcomes and plausible interpretations, rather than attributing changes in Bihar's poverty or migration solely to either scheme (Dutta et al., 2014; MoRD, 2026a).

2. Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the present study are as follows:

1. To evaluate the origin and delivery architecture of the Sampoorna Gramin Rozgar Yojana (SGRY) and Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA).
2. To assess how both frameworks tackle rural employment, food security, women's participation, disadvantaged groups, and the generation of durable rural assets.
3. To analyze MGNREGA trends for person days, coverage of households and wage-component releases in Bihar.
4. To find out the common administrative constraints affecting the implementation and effectiveness of the rural employment programmes in Bihar.
5. The goal is to create recommendations that can be implemented to increase transparency, accountability and efficiency of employment schemes.

3. Review of Literature

The general literature on other institutions offers alternative lenses, not directly comparable Bihar effect sizes. According to Ansell and Gash (2008), collaborative governance is conditioned by trust and deliberative institutional design; Mansuri and Rao (2013) question the assumptions that participatory decentralization reliably cures local inequalities. Kassim-Lakha (2011) delves into grassroots

accountability in Rajasthan, while Drèze and Khera (2009) illustrate the political competition concerning the implementation of the employment guarantee. Kabeer and Cook (2010) positions social protection in unequal structures of access. The Government of India's National policy texts (2008), Ministry of Rural Development (2012, 2013, 2014) and Planning Commission (2011) provide a series of statements of programme procedures and anticipated outcomes. The National Sample Survey Office (2011) provides a labour-market context and The World Bank (2011), International Labour Office (2017), United Nations Development Programme (2024), and Government of Bihar (2024) provide a broader context of protection, deprivation and state economic conditions. While these sources can broaden the conceptual and policy context, they are not substitutes for impact estimates at the Bihar field level.

Throughout the literature, there are two impactful propositions that must be analytically distinct. The first is that public works may provide self-targeted assistance as households self-select into participation at prevailing programme wages, and the second is that employment guarantees may unduly influence market wages and the terms under which landless workers bargain with employers. Imbert and Papp (2015) provide labour-market evidence for this later channel, Murgai et al. (2013) question whether work requirements are a necessarily more cost-effective poverty intervention once forgone earnings are included. The relevant policy standard is not the gross wage disbursement but the net gain in welfare after allowing for time, travel, delay and lost jobs.

The scholarship geared towards Bihar sharply differentiates demand from supply. According to Dutta et al. (2012), unmet demand is widespread, measured in poorer states. Dutta et al. (2014) argue in their subsequent Bihar monograph that one reason for the gap between legal design and actual poverty reduction is supply constraints and administrative weaknesses. Ravallion et al. (2013) examine an information intervention, and demonstrate how a positive change in awareness cannot lead to identical improvements in actual employment, if only supplies and administrative responses are critical. The assumption that merely issuing job cards or publicizing entitlements is sufficient can no longer be taken for granted.

Similar findings for gender and migration are contingent not uniform. Khera and Nayak (2009) trace significant gains but persistent barriers for women workers. Dasgupta and Sudarshan (2011) outline the institutional conditions that affect gender inclusion; while Prasanna et al. (2014) present evidence from Tamil Nadu on financial inclusion and bargaining power; one shouldn't mechanically transplant these to Bihar. Migration analysis should differentiate between distress-driven and aspirational or better-remunerated departures. Thus a positive or negative pattern of migration by itself is not a measure of programme success.

A variety of document types have been used.. they include programme design documents, audit and evaluation reports, worker surveys, quasi-experimental studies and field experiments. The contributions of descriptive reports, observational studies and causal evaluations are not interchangeable, but complementary. Each type of report aims to provide certain information, but they also contain limitations. Table 1 gives a summary of the most relevant studies and discusses limitations to guide the present synthesis (Dutta et al., 2012; Imbert & Papp, 2015; Banerjee et al., 2020).

Table 1. Detailed review of selected literature

Study / source	Focus	Method / scope	Main contribution	Important limitation
MoRD (2004)	SGRY policy backgrounder	Programme design	Established foodgrain/cash financing, PRI implementation and wage-employment objectives.	Normative provisions, not outcome measurement.
Singh et al. (2005)	NIRD-sponsored SGRY field evaluation	Multi-state district-level survey, including Bihar	Provides field-based evidence on early implementation and local institutions.	Sampling covers selected locations; unpublished study summarized in a digest.
Government of India (2005)	NREGA legislation	Statutory text	Specifies employment entitlement, work application and unemployment allowance.	Legal rights do not establish compliance rates.
Khera & Nayak (2009)	Women workers under NREGA	Fieldwork in six states	Highlights gains from local paid employment and constraints on women's participation.	Findings are not Bihar-specific causal estimates.
Dutta et al. (2012)	Demand and access to work	NSS 2009–10 analysis	Finds substantial unmet employment demand, especially in poorer states.	Survey-based demand differs from administrative registration.
Dutta et al. (2014)	Right to Work? Bihar assessment	Bihar-focused mixed evidence	Examines rights realization, poverty relevance and capacity gaps.	Reflects early programme implementation.
Imbert & Papp (2015)	Labour-market effects	Phased-rollout quasi-experiment	Reports effects on private wages and labour allocation beyond direct jobs.	National estimates cannot be assumed uniform in Bihar.
Banerjee et al. (2020)	Electronic fund-flow reform	Large field experiment linked to Bihar	Finds reduced leakage but longer payment delays in evaluated reform.	Specific reform mechanism, not all MGNREGA functions.
MoRD (2024)	State performance report	Administrative monitoring	Shows national aggregate participation and wage-employment indicators.	Aggregate statistics mask interstate inequality.
MoRD (2025)	Parliamentary person-days and wage releases	Government administrative series	Enables Bihar time-series analysis for 2019–20 through 2023–24.	Later revisions mean snapshots must not be mixed silently.
MoRD (2026a)	Lok Sabha reply: Bihar	Bihar district and household figures	Provides revised 2022–25 employment and household counts.	Does not establish programme causality or work demand.
MoRD (2026b)	Rajya Sabha statewide series	Administrative series	Updates person-days through 2025–26 and verifies interannual variation.	Fiscal-year status and revision dates must be stated.
Joshi (2010)	Rights and civic action; India	India; secondary study	Legal rights need organized public action and responsive institutions.	Design-to-delivery gap in Bihar
Murgai et al. (2013)	Bihar; survey-based welfare analysis	survey-based welfare analysis; secondary study	Foregone income affects workfare cost-effectiveness.	Avoid equating gross wages with net gains
Ravallion et al. (2013)	Bihar; randomized information campaign	randomized information campaign; secondary study	Awareness improved, but supply constraints remained important.	Demand and employment provision
Dasgupta & Sudarshan (2011)	India; gender/labour review	gender/labour review; secondary study	Gender participation depends on labour institutions and access.	Women's employment barriers
Vij (2011)	India; governance analysis	governance analysis; secondary study	Social auditing provides voice but cannot alone ensure redress.	Accountability and monitoring

Comptroller and Auditor General (2013)	India; performance audit	performance audit; secondary study	Audited implementation, job-days and utilisation weaknesses.	Administrative-quality interpretation
Imbert & Papp (2015)	India; quantitative labour-market study	quantitative labour-market study; secondary study	Employment guarantee affects market wages and labour allocation.	Indirect economic effects
Banerjee et al. (2020)	India; experimental evaluation	experimental evaluation; secondary study	Financial reforms can improve accountability and leakage outcomes.	Digital payment governance
Aakella & Kidambi (2007)	Andhra Pradesh; social-audit analysis	social-audit analysis; secondary study	Community monitoring may uncover corruption when backed by action.	Institutional audit design
Prasanna et al. (2014)	Tamil Nadu; socioeconomic field study	socioeconomic field study; secondary study	Documents inclusion, migration and bargaining-related outcomes.	External comparison, not Bihar proof

One line of thinking sees public works as a social-protection instrument that can smooth consumption and improve households' bargaining power. Imbert and Papp (2015) made an empirical contribution that is particularly salient: access to the programme can affect wages in the wider rural labour market and not just participant wages. In the meantime, higher wages on the market do not prove that all household with a demand for employment received it. Dutta et al. (2012) do indeed document unmet demand, but this is why demand-side must go along with person-day counts.

The second strand prioritises implementation and institutional accountability. Dutta et al. (2014) discuss Bihar and observes that the actual translation of right into effective functioning should be possible only when local administration provides services. According to Banerjee et al. (2020), a large evaluation of financial-management reforms associated with Bihar shows that tighter electronic controls can reduce leakage, while introducing payment frictions. The findings warn that digitization should not be regarded as something that always has a good effect to the extent that its good effects are dependent on their processing being reliable, verification and complaint resolution.

The social inclusion is studied in a third strand. According to Khera and Nayak (2009) local public employment can offer women access to income in safer working conditions but at the same time there are barriers to participation. The study links the evidence to programme architecture. Legal commitments do help, but worksite facilities, accessible works, transparent selection and household care responsibilities also determine whether formal inclusiveness turns real. Through amalgamation with fresh evidence on Bihar's administration, paper fills a gap between legal comparison and measured delivery.

4. Research Methodology

The policy regime as implemented in Bihar is the unit of comparison, not a matched sample of individual SGRY and MGNREGA beneficiaries. This assessment of the most recent historical appraisal draws on legislation, programme guidelines, official statements audits and peer reviewed research. Bihar MGNREGA administrative outcomes report explicitly identified years and reporting vintages in the quantitative assessment. The literature table notes the geographic setting, research method or document type, principal contribution, and relevance to the comparative argument. Three representations guide reading. An administrative person-day records an employee's paid status but does not prove or disprove payment of the full legally due amount in a timely fashion. To further understand the issue, one must note the fact that the number of participating households is not the denominator for unmet employment demand. For instance, households discouraged from filing an application may drop out of the official demand series, which is not fundamental to understanding the unemployment rate. In addition, a simple before-after estimate of replacing SGRY by MGNREGA is not feasible on account of differences in rural population, prices, statutory provisions and reporting systems. To carry out a causal evaluation. Geographically and temporally credible counterfactuals are required, microdata and controls for contemporaneous economic changes are needed. This is a qualitative- comparative study with descriptive statistics. No primary

fieldwork was conducted, and no original evidence of any respondent survey, regression coefficient or impact estimate is presented. The central policy backgrounder on SGRY, 2004; NREGA legislative provisions; digest of an early evaluation of SGRY; peer-reviewed research, published parliamentary replies and dashboards of the Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD, 2004, 2025, 2026a; Government of India, 2005). The units of comparison are programme design and recorded implementation at the level of Bihar, with studies at the national-level brought in only where they help to explain mechanisms.

Legal status, eligibility, resources, wage modality, demand procedures, decentralization, inclusion, asset creation and transparency are the comparative dimensions. For deriving descriptive analysis, person-days are in lakh units and fund release figures are in crore (wherein one lakh=100,000, while one crore=10 million). The values for the time series for 2019–20 to 2023–24 use a parliamentary snapshot from April 2025 and the 2024–25 value uses the revised reply from March 2026. This mixed-vintage choice is made clear since older figures can be modified after administrative re-coordination. For lack of an adjustment for inflation or a common counterfactual, this chart must not be interpreted as a causal trend due to MGNREGA alone (MoRD, 2025, 2026a).

There is an issue of comparability between historical and official administrative datasets on SGRY for Bihar and recent MGNREGA data. This is because of differences in coverage of the schemes, the standards of entitlements, accounting conventions, process of digitization, and reference years. As a result, the research outcome makes a structured but not fabricated institutional comparison that does not create a matched longitudinal SGRY-versus-MGNREGA impact series. The evidence related to the rights framework, programme governance nature and objectively documented MGNREGA activity; outcome and poverty assertions are apposite qualified.

5. Comparative Institutional Framework

One way to understand the institutional change is to distinguish four administrative events which follow one another in time: identification of local works; registration of potential workers; documented demand for employment; paid work. A supply-driven allocation model can create useful local assets while rationing jobs via financial ceilings. The formal obligation of a demand-based law arises only on application. However, delays in demand acknowledgement make it unclear in that case whether the guarantee gets breached or not. Transparent and reliable grievance redressal must necessarily be there to ensure non-visibility of this gap in routine programme reporting (Joshi, 2010; Gopal, 2009; Vij, 2011).

The cash-and-foodgrain component of SGRY presents additional complications in analysis. The foodgrain that are given for wages are not equal to present cash wages, even after an inflation adjustment. Further, its welfare value will depend upon its quantity, quality, local market prices, household food access and delivery costs. The Prime Minister's Office (2005) documents continuing cash-component support in the mid-2000s. This paper assesses the provisioning logic of SGRY, but it does not construct a consolidated Bihar-specific time series which converts SGRY's grain distributions into MGNREGA earnings in purchasing-power-equivalent.

The aim of SGRY was to provide income and food security by way of cash and foodgrain employment generation and rural infrastructure. The Centre provided foodgrains to the states, while the cash element was shared in 75:25 Centre-state ratio. Panchayati Raj bodies played an active role of implementation. As per a parliamentary statement (2003), payment of wages partly in kind and partly in cash, minimum foodgrain component of five kilograms and minimum cash component of one-quarter of wages (MoRD 2004; government of India 2003). These features were a response to food access concerns but created challenging commodity logistics, monitoring and valuation questions.

The defining characteristic of MGNREGA is the right to demand employment. Rural households can apply for unskilled work, and there are legally mandated deadlines for administration to reply. Unemployment allowance is in law for when work is not supplied in time. The law set standards for conditions, documentation, participatory surveillance and payment at worksites. The guarantee is measured at a household level rather than at the individual worker level – an important distinction for understanding 100-day claims.

Table 2. Policy design comparison

Dimension	SGRY	MGNREGA
Programme form	Centrally sponsored wage-employment scheme	Statutory demand-driven employment guarantee
Start	September 2001	Act 2005; phased operational rollout from 2006
Central purpose	Additional work, food security, assets	Livelihood security via up to 100 household days and assets
Work entitlement	Dependent on planned allocations	Household can formally demand work
Payment form	Cash plus foodgrain component	Wage payments primarily through accounts
Non-provision of work	No comparable nationwide statutory allowance	Statutory unemployment allowance provisions
Local delivery	Panchayati Raj institutions	Gram Panchayat planning with multi-tier implementation
Accountability	Programme guidelines and audit	Social audit, public records, complaint processes
Data systems	Predominantly paper-based historical reporting	MIS, electronic muster/payment infrastructure

A theory of change is also required for programme comparison. The budget allocation and foodgrain availability to selected works, wages and food consumption formed SGRY's pathway. The initiation of an MGNREGA scheme begins with the declaration of demand for unskilled work for the eligible beneficiaries. Failures that final expenditure totals cannot identify affect the intermediate steps. Consequently, the relationship between work demand and payment represents a more proper monitoring unit than disbursement by itself (Dutta et al., 2012; Banerjee et al., 2020)

6. Bihar: Documentary Results and Data Analysis

- 1) *Data quality should get just as much attention as data volume. Scheme dashboards along with parliamentary replies are considered administrative products that can be updated in hindsight, as muster rolls along with wage transactions and work records get reconciled. Thus, a comparison using 2025 snapshots for some vintages and 2026 replies for others must directly identify those vintages, as tables and figures that follow do. Readers shouldn't see the small changes as labour market changes. According to the Comptroller and Auditor General (2013), the implementation and fund-utilisation constraints faced by a broader base were reported. There is, however, a need to match the output series with independent evidence of audit and payment.*

2) 6.1 Employment generated and households covered

According to an official report prepared in March 2026, the Lok Sabha stated that Bihar will generate employment of 2,364.32 lakh person-days in 202223, 2,205.06 lakh in 202324 and 2,497.87 lakh in 202425. The number of households that worked over the years is as follows. When person-days divided by households worked out, it gave descriptive averages of about 47.2, 45.8 and 48.9 days per working household. The figures that are being presented are estimated ratios, they are not the proportion of households that received 100 days, nor are they measures of satisfaction of demand (MoRD, 2026a).

Table 3. Bihar MGNREGA output and household coverage, revised government reply

Financial year	Person-days (lakh)	Households worked (lakh)	Calculated days / HH
2022–23	2,364.32	50.14	47.2
2023–24	2,205.06	48.18	45.8
2024–25	2,497.87	51.09	48.9

Source: Ministry of Rural Development (2026a), Lok Sabha Unstarred Question 4074, March 17. Calculations by author. The series should not be combined with older vintage values without noting revisions.

Figure 1's coverage in 2019–20 reveals wider trends. Bihar's person-days saw an increase in the year 2020–21, likely consistent with exceptional rural labour-market pressures due to the pandemic. It then declined in 2021–22, went up again in 2022–23 and varied again thereafter. Don't characterise these associations as causative since labour demand, public funding, local capacities and reporting can change together (MoRD, 2025, 2026a).

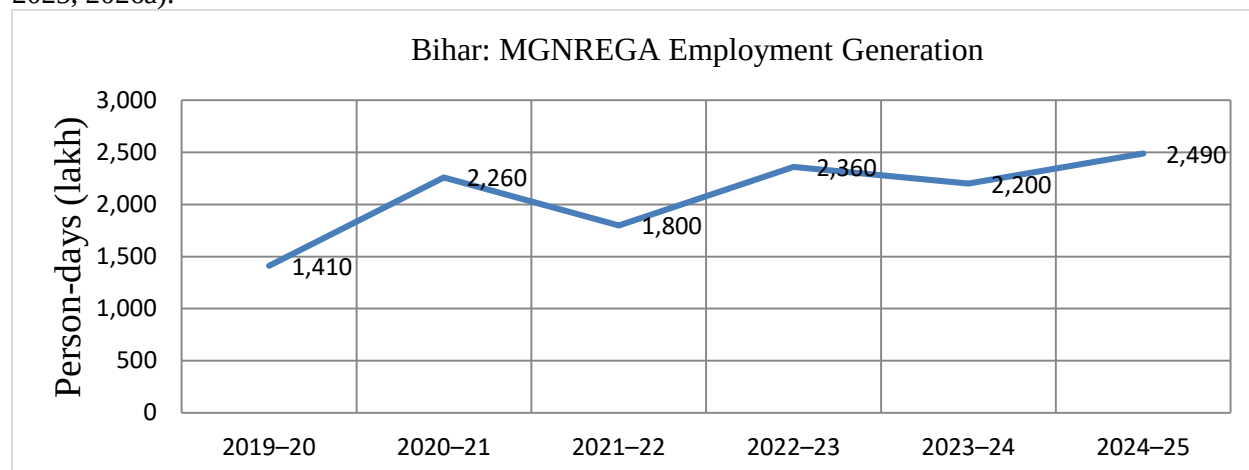


Figure 1. Bihar MGNREGA person-days. 2019–20 to 2023–24: April 2025 parliamentary snapshot; 2024–25: March 2026 revised reply. Sources: MoRD (2025, 2026a).

Table 4. Longer-run Bihar employment series with source vintage explicitly distinguished

Year	Person-days (lakh)	Source snapshot
2019–20	1,406.81	April 2025
2020–21	2,261.26	April 2025
2021–22	1,802.75	April 2025
2022–23	2,364.55	April 2025
2023–24	2,205.25	April 2025
2024–25	2,497.87	March 2026 (revised)

3) 6.2 Wage-component releases and fiscal interpretation

Wage-component release data quantify transfers from the Union government for financing of wages; they are not total programme expenditure, not wages actually credited to each worker, and not a substitute for audited accounts. The annual variation for Bihar of the parliamentary series is significant with ₹2,305.56 crore in 2019–20, ₹4,756.87 crore in 2020–21 and ₹5,024.83 crore in 2022–23 (MoRD, 2025). The variations may mirror the size of the programme, liabilities yet to be settled, timing and administrative balancing process; they should not, however, be mechanically divided by person-days - as if they were a wage rate.

Table 5. Union wage-component releases to Bihar under MGNREGA

Financial year	Wage-component release (₹ crore)
2019–20	2,305.56
2020–21	4,756.87
2021–22	3,539.93
2022–23	5,024.83
2023–24	4,284.17
2024–25	4,811.34

Source: MoRD (2025), parliamentary reply on working of MGNREGS. Figures reflect the official April 2025 reporting snapshot; 2024–25 releases as of March 30, 2025.

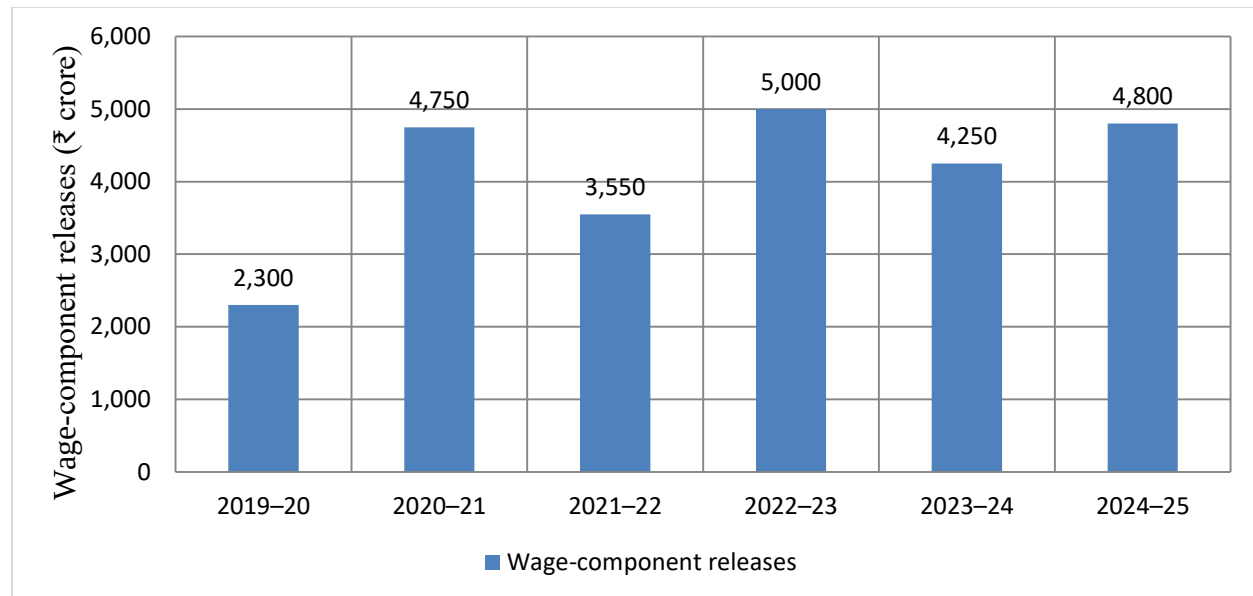


Figure 2. Wage-component releases to Bihar (₹ crore), as reported by MoRD (2025)

4) 6.3 Selected district disparities

District variations are obscured by state totals. According to the official district annexure for 2022–23, 87.32 lakh person-days were reported in Araria, 91.99 lakh in Aurangabad, 38.47 lakh in Banka and 30.58 lakh in Arwal. The respective observations for 2023–24 were 55.40, 65.63, 38.61 and 20.27 Lakh. The quality of implementation cannot solely be determined by district disparity since differences in population, work demand, project preparedness, rural employment opportunities, etc. are also significant factors. Before ranking performance, district comparisons must be normalized with respect to relevant households, demand registered and worker characteristics (MoRD, 2026a).

Table 6. Selected Bihar districts: person-days (lakh)

District	2022–23	2023–24	2024–25
Araria	87.32	55.40	71.04
Arwal	30.58	20.27	20.46
Aurangabad	91.99	65.63	68.21
Banka	38.47	38.61	42.59

Source: MoRD (2026a), district annexure. Selected districts illustrate heterogeneity and are not a representative sample.

7. Discussion and Impact

5) *7.1 Livelihood and food security*

6) *The two plans noted the income instability faced by rural households but used different instruments to manage the risk. The SGRY was a paid public employment program that linked in-kind foodgrain contributions that may have protected basic consumption when household liquidity was weak. Protection was effective only when procured, lifted, transported, fairly distributed and clearly accounted. Evaluation material sponsored by NIRD covering Bihar and other states gives an indication that the merits of implementation needs to be investigated at the local level and not inferred from allocations (Singh et al., 2005; MoRD, 2004).*

7) *MGNREGA's earnings-based mechanism offers workers the flexibility to allocate money based on their household priorities. The benefit of this option is that eligible claimants can be enforced in terms of application including accounting for standardized applications. Further, the limitation is that delayed payment may undermine protection precisely at the moment most poor households need cash. An insurance cover for statutory right will only give a meaningful cover for work done and wages received on time. Evaluations of unmet need and fund-transfer reform bolster this distinction between programme design and actual protection (Dutta et al., 2012; Banerjee et al., 2020).*

8) *7.2 Women, marginalized communities and migration*

9) *Access to local work is often especially important to women who may be limited by travel constraints and other employment options. According to Khera and Nayak (2009), NREGA can increase income opportunities for women despite institutional hurdles. In the case of Bihar, the question ought to be whether work is available close to homes, whether worksites have suitable facilities, whether women can access job cards and payments in practice, whether care burdens limit the number of days they work. Disaggregated evidence at the district and block levels is required rather than claims based on national participation shares.*

10) *For Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe (SC/ST) households or other groups facing discrimination in the labour market, clear rules of entitlement may decrease discretion around barriers, but they cannot remove exclusion from job registration, project selection or payment channels. The impact of migration should also be stated with caution. Having a job near home can prevent some households from migrating during the lean season, however, other households opt to migrate because of better daily pay, job regularity or occupational opportunities. There is not enough information put together here to estimate the reduction in migration across Bihar that can be attributed to MGNREGA (Dutta et al. 2014; Imbert and Papp 2015).*

11) *7.3 Local infrastructure and environmental resilience*

12) An essential by-product is community assets. SGRY permitted public works according to local needs; MGNREGA now includes works for water conservation, watershed works, farm ponds, irrigation and drainage and rural infrastructure. In March 2026, the Parliament's reply specifies 267 allowable categories, of which 70 relate to individuals. An assessment is deemed credible if it establishes functionality, sustainability, accessibility and environmental suitability rather than merely counting construction. Technical appraisal and long term drainage maintenance are important in flood prone districts. Water harvesting and soil works may be more useful in water scarce areas.

13) 7.4 Institutional accountability and governance trade-offs

The administrative complexity under SGRY was to trace foodgrain and cash across government levels. The record trail is much more extensive in MGNREGA – demand applications, job cards, work allocation, muster rolls, measurement books, fund-transfer orders, worker accounts. Having more transparent records allows for more scrutiny. However, it may also lead to the exclusion of workers if not accurate. Further, if the record's digital transaction fails, workers are excluded. The experimental evidence of Banerjee et al. (2020) linked to Bihar suggests that preventing leakage and ensuring timely payment are distinct performance objectives that warrant simultaneous monitoring.

There is a similar tension between local discretion and central controls. Panchayats are able to determine the infrastructure priorities for particular sites but resource constraints and the lack of technical staffing may delay the preparation of the work. Though central dashboards can help visibility, they may privilege easily counted outputs over workers. We should not allow social audit become just a matter of formality. The audit will have meaning if records are accessible to all, public participation and rectification is possible and follow up action is enforceable. An effective design integrates works selected by communities with verifiable finance, and responsive grievance redressal (Government of India 2005; Dutta et al. 2014).

14) 7.5 Why observed programme volumes are not impact estimates

The information about Bihar indicates a high level of reported employment activity. However, the data do not indicate how much a worker would earn without the scheme. Further, we do not know how incomes, nutrition, debt and migration changed in a counterfactual world. Increase in person-days may not be a good sign of the economic condition of rural India. A fall may also mean less demand, less supply or different accounting. Rigorous impact evaluation needs reference groups, household-level outcomes and attention to programme placement and spillovers. The causal literature shows there is a possibility of wage effects but it does not imply that these estimates can be applied to all districts of Bihar (Imbert & Papp, 2015; Dutta et al., 2012).

8. Key Findings and Policy Recommendations

A monitoring framework that is anchored in practical Bihar must bring together the employment cycle into one intelligible sequence that is understandable to all. It must be read as dated application, employment offered within the statutory window, attendance, measurement, wage order, actual account credit and complaints resolved. Each stage's rates and median waiting time should be published by the district dashboards. A high payment-order completion rate should not mask long delays in bank credit. Social-audit findings should be classified by the type of failure and monitored until restitution takes place. This guarantees the metrics are more reflective of the guarantee than spending-utilization alone (Vij, 2011; Banerjee et al., 2020). An assessment sensitive to equity must

disaggregate demand, participation, days worked and delay in payment by gender, caste category, disability and district and must protect identity. Simply noting that some women worked does not show whether childcare, worksite facilities, transport, delays in payment or social barriers, inhibited participation. Khera and Nayak (2009) and Dasgupta and Sudarshan (2011) discuss the necessity of evaluating access through formal rules and experiential constraints of workers.

A credible reform agenda would allow independent beneficiary surveys to identify unregistered and discouraged demand. The initial finding is structural in nature: SGRY linked relief employment with foodgrain distribution while MGNREGA set up a statutory work-demand structure. According to official Bihar figures, there is substantial employment delivery but with a considerable year-on-year variation. Third, average days of benefit per participating household in 2022-25 were well below the 100-day ceiling; and this alone does not indicate rights compliance without data on work requested. District-level differences call for localised analysis at the level. Fifth, it was argued that electronic accountability may limit leakage, but payment timeliness should be measured independently. (MoRD, 2004, 2026a; Banerjee et al., 2020) These findings lead to a policy priority. It is required that every Gram Panchayat display the simple procedures for dated work-demand acknowledgment in a prominent place. Along with that offline support must also be provided to the applicants. District administrations must maintain a work shelf with technical approval before peak lean seasons.

MIS reviews ought to specify the requests received, jobs offered within the legal limit, work supplied, payment timing, rejects and unemployment-allowance verdicts. In case a household receives water for less than 100 days, officials should distinguish between limited demand and unmet demand instead of inferring failure or success of a programme from averages (Government of India, 2005; Dutta et al., 2012). The payment monitoring should take place for the entire chain from muster closure to actual credit in the account and should not be just another timestamp for approval in the system. Workers should have easy to access correction support for their bank account, a clear explanation of the pay rules, – and for reporting grievances which also refers to the cut-off date for resolution.

For social inclusion, all project sites must be assessed for amenities at the worksite and barriers to participation of women and disadvantaged groups. Public dashboards must disclose comparable district-level indicators with stable historical snapshots, ensuring independent verification and assessment of unusual declines (Khera & Nayak, 2009; Banerjee et al., 2020).

The asset policy must alter from construction counts to a lifecycle model which must encompass locally justified selection, geo-referenced design, independent technical inspection, user access and maintenance provision. Only when the programme's completed assets can be used in the future can they generate durable public value. A matched, multi-district Bihar study involving worker interviews, seasonal work demand, scheme records, and household consumption and migration histories needs to be undertaken as the differences descriptive figures cannot settle (MoRD, 2026a; Dutta et al., 2014).

9. Conclusion

The most robust conclusion for comparison is one that relates to institutions rather than numbers. SGRY linked allocated public goods, cash-and-food payments and village works; MGNREGA reframed public work as a household entitlement with procedural duties and accountability mechanisms. Bihar's experience shows that formal entitlements need to be evaluated together with actual work provision, wage receipt and quality of community assets. In the future, scholars should enhance a unified historical data set for the pre-guarantee period and combine MGNREGA transaction records with representative field evidence. It is only then that we can estimate, with reasonable confidence, the distributional and causal effects of the transition. The transition from the Sampoorna Grameen Rozgar Yojana to MGNREGA represents a significant shift in rural development policy in India: from a planned provision of wage employment and foodgrain relief to a legally articulated and demand-driven right to work. In Bihar, this shift gave the subjects a stronger institutional basis for claiming employment and inspecting the bureaucracy. However, the right to work is meaningful only when the local work pipeline, records, wage-payment systems and accountability arrangements work together. New government data shows large scale jobs growth and

significant variation across years and districts. However, they nevertheless do not, by themselves, show rural poverty or distress migration is becoming a thing of the past. With this is the implication of institutional progress and enduring implementation risk. The future performance of Bihar should be assessed through the dual lenses of fulfilment of work-demand and benefit of assets created in a timely manner and equitable access to them.

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