

Caste-based Inequities in MGNREGA Implementation: Precision Policy Advisory for Participatory Planning Processes

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Abstract

Abstract: We use data-driven methods applied on publicly available Management Information Systems (MIS) data of the MGNREGA scheme in India to understand the underlying processes through which inequities might be perpetuating and the extent to which they might be emerging from historical caste-based disparity. In this report, we provide a summary from field-visits to multiple different panchayats in the states of Bihar and Jharkhand in India, to validate our methods and build confidence on the ability of such data-driven analysis to provide precise policy recommendations to guide participatory planning processes in MGNREGA.

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1 Introduction

Government-supported welfare schemes are designed to improve livelihood for the poor [3] and also counter the effects of historical discrimination through resource redistribution. These schemes typically prioritize the allocation of resources to the most disadvantaged groups. MGNREGA 2005 depends on participatory planning and involves beneficiaries to enhance the effectiveness and equity in resource allocation. However, the success of participatory planning depends on the active participation of the marginalized. Active participation of disadvantaged groups in welfare planning can lead to greater equity in welfare allocation whereas nominal participation may lead to the perpetuation of historical and existing inequities [1]. We visited several panchayats in Bihar and Jharkhand to understand the relationship between participatory processes and inequities in welfare allocations. In this report, we discuss the socio-economic setup, power dynamics, technical challenges surrounding welfare allocation, and gaps in the participation of various social groups in the planning and implementation of MGNREGA.

We ask the following research questions:

- **RQ1:** What are some challenges in participatory processes in MGNREGA?

- **RQ2:** How do these challenges vary between different types of panchayats categorized in terms of their caste composition?
- **RQ3:** What are the different mechanisms through which inequities can occur in implementation processes and are these differences significant across different types of panchayats?

This brief report contributes to identifying gaps in awareness about different aspects of the welfare scheme, explores some complexities in its implementation, and highlights underlying processes through which inequities could be perpetuating. It also examines how benefits are distributed differently based on contextual variables like communal harmony, awareness, caste, and the political influence of the Mukhiya.

2 Background

India’s long history of caste-based discrimination is being actively addressed through social welfare schemes such as the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) of 2005, which prioritizes benefits for marginalized castes. However, disparities still persist in implementation. In our prior work published in ICTD 2024, we quantitatively analyzed inequity in MGNREGS allocations. Assuming that structurally different types of panchayats would have different processes operating that would lead to inequities in MGNREGA implementation, we categorized panchayats based on the proportion of marginalized castes, identifying those with significant populations of Scheduled Castes (SC) — above 18.1% — or Scheduled Tribes (ST) — above 16.3%. Further, we sub-categorized all panchayats based on the population distribution of various castes across the villages in these panchayats. These sub-categories spanned panchayats in which all villages had a high SC/ST population, or some villages had a high SC/ST population and some villages were dominated by other castes, or the SC/ST population was distributed across all villages in the panchayat [6].

Additionally, since MGNREGA is demand driven but the demand itself could be influenced by awareness or past experience of the communities with MGNREGA, we developed a demand model using a multi-layer perceptron (MLP) network to predict unrecorded work demand. This model is trained on features such as the age, gender, land holdings, literacy, and caste, by focusing on “good” panchayats that have effectively met work demand. The demand data itself is obtained from the MGNREGA MIS [6].

We then use the output of the demand model to build several outcome indicators presented in Table 1 such as how much of the predicted demand was actually demanded, how much of the demand was met, etc [6].

Finally, to determine the difference between outcomes in different types of panchayats, we build matched pairs of panchayats with significant SC/ST population and those with low SC/ST population. We use a Propensity Score Matching (PSM) approach for this purpose [6].

Equity is thus measured in terms of the average of differences in outcome indicators between these matched pairs of panchayats. Outcome indicators for extensive and intensive management of the scheme involve comparing the number of households provided employment and the total person-days of employment provided, respectively. Similarly, an outcome indicator for awareness is built by comparing the work demanded with the work predicted to be demanded under ideal conditions. We then calculate equity scores at the state, district, and panchayat levels [6].

We believe that these scores can help reveal the extent of disparity if this disparity is operating along historical caste-based discrimination against Scheduled Castes and Tribes. However, the quantitative analysis which draws heavily on MGNREGA MIS data, the caste census, and several

Indicator	Definition
Extensive Management	Extensive management refers to broader coverage of the scheme, which is measured as the number of households employed under the scheme normalized by the predicted number of households demanding employment.
Intensive Management	Intensive management refers to the depth of the scheme coverage, which is measured as the person-days of the employment provided under the scheme normalized by the predicted person days of employment demanded.
Utilization	Utilization refers to demand for work through the scheme, which is measured as the number of households demanding work under the scheme normalized by the predicted number of households demanding employment.

Table 1: Outcome Indicators

other datasets, should be validated with field studies. These field studies and their validation against assessment made from the MIS data are the primary subject of this report.

3 Related Work

We kept several perspectives in mind while designing our field study.

3.1 Impact of participatory processes on exclusion

While welfare projects may follow a top-down or bottom-up approach, the success of these projects depends on design as well as implementation. It is widely acknowledged that the bottom-up approach is especially useful to be able to draw upon contextual and local environmental knowledge and community engagement. This approach is also important to bring fair and equitable outcomes since it helps in building consensus, exchanging information, and empowering the community. Community involvement thus results in better and more acceptable decisions due to the alignment of community priorities and project goals [4, 5], whereas the exclusion of a specific group from planning activities can lead to a disregard of the group’s concerns, resulting in inequity in benefit distribution [1]. We carefully tried to uncover participation dynamics in the MGNREGA implementation process across our different field sites.

3.2 Impact of Digitization on equity in welfare distribution

Digitization involves inherent complexity and is known to sometimes become a deterrent in achieving equity. For example, the ability of beneficiaries to use digital tools, or the efficacy to which they can operate in remote rural areas where network connectivity can be a challenge, can become more of a cause for exclusion than to improve efficiencies. Similarly, the digitization of welfare data, often aimed for tighter control, may also be used to increase transparency; however, the beneficiaries may be limited by their capabilities to benefit from such advantages of digitization [2]. We therefore keenly observe the experiences of different stakeholders with digitization in MGNREGA.

4 Methods

4.1 Data Collection

We analyzed demand and allocation of MGNREGA works for various panchayats across India to assess the extent of inequity at the panchayat, district, and state levels. Based on our access to field partners, and also the existence of higher inequity in Bihar and Jharkhand, we selected a few areas from these states for our field study. In several panchayats in the districts of Dumka in Jharkhand and Jamui in Bihar, we conducted more than 30 hours of observations, 4 focus group discussions, and 15 semi-structured interviews with beneficiaries, mukhiyas, MGNREGA program officers, and CSO partners to understand the extent to which the scheme is meeting its objective and the challenges faced in different areas. All interactions were carried out in Hindi and focused predominately to assess the differences in community awareness and benefit allocation in different Panchayats. Most participants in Bihar were men, while more women participated in FGDs in Jharkhand.

Participant (Gender)	Role	Village, Pan-chayat	Panchayat Type
B1(F)	Beneficiary	Barmasia, Dhobna Harinbahal	Segregated significant ST population
G1(F)	NREGA mate	Thadi, Sanpchala	Segregated significant ST population
B2(F)	Beneficiary	Thadi, Sanpchala	Segregated significant ST population
B3(M)	Beneficiary	Thadi, Sanpchala	Segregated significant ST population
B4(M)	Beneficiary	Thadi, Sanpchala	Segregated significant ST population
P1(M)	Mukhiya	Sanpchala, Sanpchala	Segregated significant ST population
G2(M)	NREGA PO	Masalia	-

Table 2: Interview participants' demographics (Masalia, Dumka, Jharkhand)

Participant (Gender)	Role	Village, Panchayat	Panchayat Type
P2(M)	Mukhiya	Sabal-Bigha, Sikan-dra	Segregated significant SC population
P3(M)	Ward Member	Sabal-Bigha, Sikan-dra	Segregated significant SC population
B5(F)	Beneficiary	Sabal-Bigha, Sikan-dra	Segregated significant SC population
B6(M)	Beneficiary	Sabal-Bigha, Sikan-dra	Segregated significant SC population
P4(M)	Mukhiya	Mahadeo-Simaria, Sikandra	Mixed SC population
P5(M)	Mukhiya	Bisanpur, Khaira	Segregated significant SC population
P6(M)	Ward Member	Gadhi Bisanpur, Khaira	Segregated significant SC population
G3(M)	NREGA PO	Gidhaur	-

Table 3: Interview participants' demographics (Jamui, Bihar)

Focus Group	Participants	Village, Block, District	Panchayat, Panchayat Type	Gender
FG-1	11 beneficiaries, 4 NGO volunteers	Barmasia, Dhobna Harin-bahal, Masalia, Dumka	Segregated significant ST population	7M, 8W
FG-2	3 beneficiaries, 3 NREGA workers, 4 NGO volunteers	Thadi, Sanpchala, Masalia, Dumka	Segregated significant ST population	7M, 3W
FG-3	6 NGO volunteers	Masalia, Dumka	-	5M, 1W
FG-4	6 beneficiaries, 1 Mukhiya, 1 NGO volunteers	Bisanpur\ Khaira, Jamui, Jamui	Segregated significant SC population	8M

Table 4: Focus group participants' demographics

4.2 Observations and Findings

4.2.1 Active participation

We observed better bottom-up planning and community involvement in Jharkhand. There was also more active participation of women in FGDs, who specifically shared that MGNREGS works are allocated such that they can comfortably complete a person-days' worth of work without impacting their daily routine. *"we can manage NREGA work with our regular household chores (FG-1)."*

Despite more visible community engagement in Jharkhand, we observed a lack of community assets. Most of the MGNREGA assets were assets for individual households, although these had been planned in consultation with the community. The effectiveness of bottom-up planning was further enhanced by the expertise of CSO workers who guided in asset planning and sustainability practices (FG-3). *"The community did not find mixed plantations beneficial, therefore the proposed mixed plantations were replaced with mango plantations (P1)."*

We observed contrasting participatory processes in Bihar. While active community participation in Jharkhand had led to effective interventions, we observed quite less community participation in Bihar, and which seemed to be leading to continued inequity. Moreover, the influence of upper caste groups seemed prominent. For example, we observed the limited power of a lower-caste mukhiya in a focus group discussion where the voices were dominated by upper caste members, and who insisted that more funds should be allocated to non-NRM assets rather than NRM assets required by lower-caste members.

4.2.2 Digital technologies

MGNREGA utilizes digital technologies to track each transaction and makes the information available for public access. Despite the ability of digital tools to improve and bring transparency in MGNREGA processes, in this case they seem to increase inequity. Several participants (B1, G1) shared the delays in fund distribution arising from technology related failures. *"I built my kitchenbadi using my personal funds and labor. I received NREGA funds in about 6 months to a year (B1)."* The participant shared that once the individual asset was approved for her, she continued with building it. However, there was a delay of 6 months to a year in getting the payments. Similar issues with delays in fund allocation were shared by FG-2. While the budgeting is completed in consultation with the community, the fund disbursement depends on claiming the funds as and when they become available. Participants shared that Internet problems in remote areas led to delays in claiming the funds (G2).

Complex technology and a lack of awareness on how to use it also contributed to inequity. *"There is an upper limit on the number of assets that can be created. If we enter an asset incorrectly, we are not allowed to delete the asset. As a result, we cannot utilize the allocation completely" (P4).*

4.2.3 Complex guidelines

MGNREGA 2005 is jointly funded by the Central and State Governments and has very detailed guidelines on fund utilization. These guidelines support decentralization and empower the Mukhiyas to approve MGNREGA works. The irony of the guidelines however is that *"while individual assets are intended for marginalized castes, their approval requires the beneficiary to own certain assets such as a specific amount of land and also a capacity to make partial payments for asset construction. This is impossible for the poor though."* A Mukhiya shared that his decisions depend on the financial capabilities of a beneficiary to get individual MGNREGA assets built, which however excludes the poor. This was supported by B2 who shared the inability of their household to get any benefits

from welfare schemes, while B3 and B4 had had multiple individual MGNREGA assets approved for different members of the same family.

4.2.4 Awareness

Awareness of the beneficiaries also plays an important role in their ability to utilize the scheme. P2 was able to identify the requirements of his Panchayat and was aware of the different guidelines related to individual and community assets allowed under the scheme, leading to better utilization of the funds in his Panchayat. At the same time, P4's lack of awareness, coupled with complex technology and poor coordination with the PO resulted in poor fund allocation to the Panchayat. While P2 shared different ways of utilizing NREGA funds within his Panchayat, such as unskilled labor for PM Awaas for beneficiaries like B5, the complexity associated with fund allocation for different assets left room for corrupt practices, and resulted in depriving the marginalized of the benefits of the scheme. For example, B6 could not draw the intended benefit from the individual asset approved for him as he shared, "*I received only 100 of the 200 plants approved for my plantation. I bought the rest but was not reimbursed for those. I received only one payment of sustenance amount and nothing after that.*" His statement reveals several issues with the scheme, such as the complex structure of technical reports, lack of awareness and gaps in knowledge, and an inability of the beneficiaries to understand such reports.

These interactions revealed several processes through which inequities, including caste-based inequities, continue to perpetuate despite good intentions in the design of welfare schemes.

4.3 Data Analysis

We first present results from the desk-side inequity analysis for the selected panchayats. The average treatment effects (ATE) for the panchayats are shown in Table 6. ATE1 represents the average treatment effect in extensive management across panchayats, ATE3 represents the average treatment effect in intensive management across panchayats, ATE4 represents the average treatment effect in extensive management within panchayat, and ATE5 represents the average treatment effect in intensive management within panchayat. ATE2 represents the average treatment effect in utilization across panchayats. However, ATE2 could not be evaluated due to gaps in the MIS data.

The relative patterns followed by these indexes can help reveal potential processes that could be leading to inequity. Biases in fund allocation at the district or subdistrict administration level could be a possible cause for disparity across panchayats, while local power dynamics are likely to have more influence within panchayats. Therefore, higher across-panchayat inequity in management is likely to stem from administrative apathy or lack of funds while higher within-panchayat inequity in management is more likely to be due to local elite capture. Since consolidated significant SC/ST panchayats can be identified easily, higher across-panchayat inequity combined with higher inequity in consolidated significant SC/ST panchayats would more strongly signal administrative apathy. On the other hand, lower across-panchayat inequity combined with higher inequity in consolidated SC/ST population panchayats is likely to be a sign of a lack of funds. Higher inequity in utilization and management indicates lower demand and lower employment provided, which is more likely to be due to discouraged workers unwilling to demand MGNREGA work as a result of prior unfavorable experiences with the scheme. Prevalent patterns and possible underlying processes therein, and suggested policy actions at the panchayat level are shown in Figure 1. The description of various patterns presented in these figures are available in Table 5.

Pattern	Description
Overall	refers to all metrics (extensive management across, intensive management across, utilization across, extensive management within, intensive management within)
Across	refers to extensive management across and intensive management across
Within	refers to extensive management within and intensive management within
Insignificant or Not significant	refers to small positive equity scores

Table 5: Description of patterns

Panchayat	Panchayat Category	ATE1	ATE3	ATE4	ATE5	Inequity index	Pattern Interpretation
Dhobna Harinbahal, Masalia, Dumka	Segregated significant ST population villages			-0.46558	-0.93357	2.199573	Outlier panchayat & Lack of funds
Sanpchala, Masalia, Dumka	Segregated significant ST population villages			-0.59012	-0.08529	1.837708	Outlier panchayat & Local elite capture
Sabal-bigha, Sikandra, Jamui	Segregated significant SC population villages	0.110661	0.047606	-0.03105	-0.00319	2.155627	Local elite capture
Mahadeo-Simaria, Sikandra, Jamui	Mixed SC population villages	-0.05831	-0.02096	0.083726	0.008853	2.238179	Administrative apathy
Bisanpur, Khaira, Jamui	Segregated significant SC population villages	0.092192	0.068577	-0.39827	-0.03597	2.437649	Local elite capture

Table 6: Equity and Inequity Scores obtained by quantitative analysis

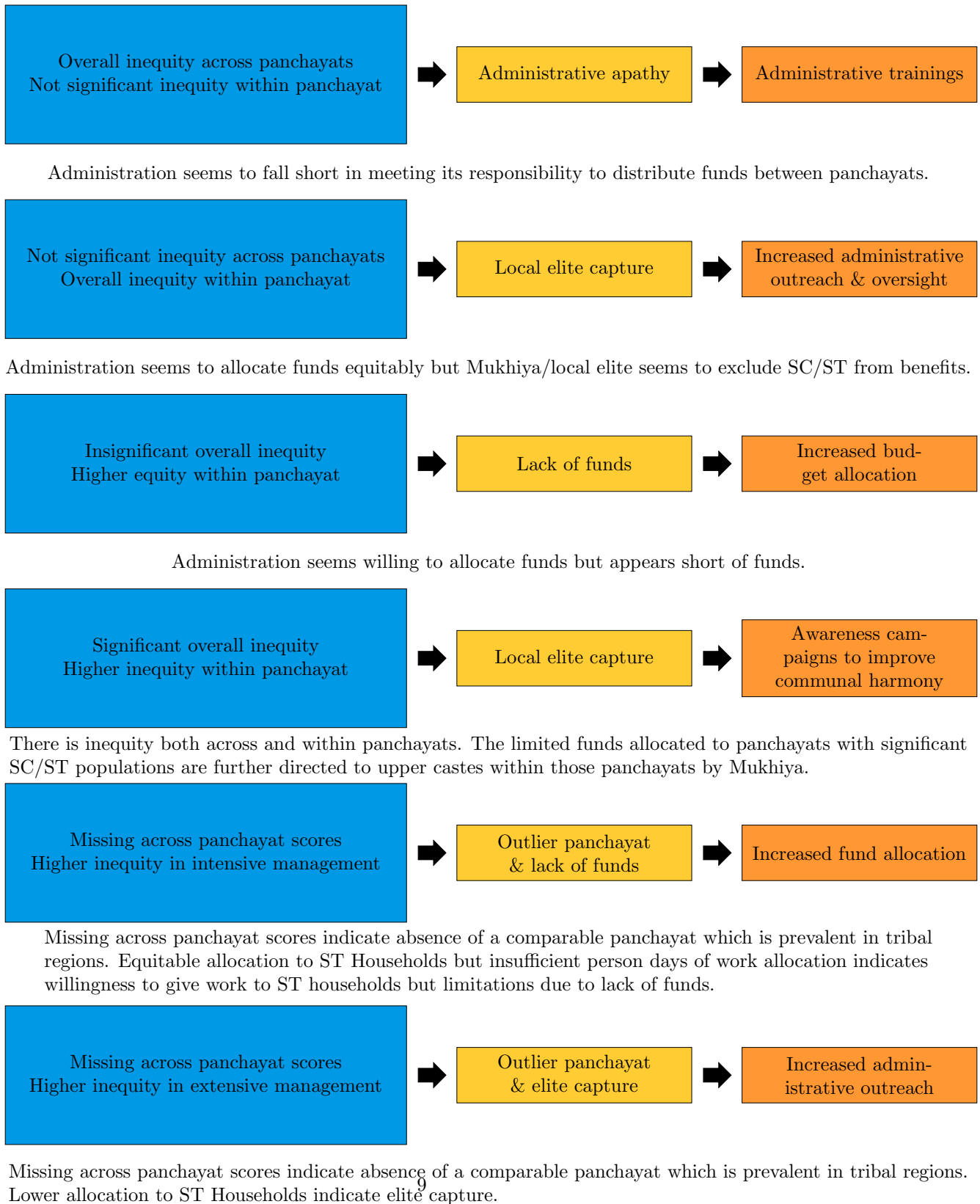


Figure 1: Precise Policy Action at panchayat level

5 Discussion based on the observations from the field visit

We next outline if we actually saw hints of such patterns operating on the ground, at the study sites.

- **Dhobna Harinbahal, Dumka:** As shown in Table 6, across-panchayat equity scores could not be assessed, suggesting that no comparable panchayat was found within Jharkhand for meaningful comparison. This itself is indicative of a possible outlier status which can make systemic disparities difficult to benchmark. Within the panchayat, both extensive and intensive management scores are negative, signaling a significant shortfall in meeting the ideal demand, both in terms of the number of households reached and the person-days allocated. Particularly, the higher inequity in person-day allocations within the panchayat points to a deeper issue of inadequate fund allocation and administrative responsiveness.

Field observations from Dhobna Harinbahal reinforced this analysis. Although we could not meet the Mukhiya, our focus group discussion with residents and interaction with a beneficiary provided key insights. We noted that the panchayat prioritizes individual assets over community-based ones, despite community members expressing a clear need for Natural Resource Management (NRM) assets like rainwater harvesting systems to address groundwater depletion. It was encouraging that the community showed strong internal coordination, higher awareness of schemes, and a willingness to engage with government programs. However, the lack of adequate administrative support limits their ability to fully benefit from these schemes. The field-level identification of unmet demand and underutilization of MGNREGS support directly aligns with the negative equity scores, illustrating how structural inequities and lack of funds continue to hinder effective service delivery in the Panchayat.

- **Sanpchala, Dumka:** The data analysis for Sanpchala, Dumka closely mirrors those of Dhobna Harinbahal. Both panchayats are situated in remote tribal regions and have a significant Scheduled Tribe population. In Sanpchala, we observed a marginal improvement in the within-panchayat equity score for person-days allocation, suggesting a slight positive shift in equitable access to employment under MGNREGS. However, the highly negative ATE4 score indicates that the ideal demand is still far from being met. The higher inequity in number of households employed within the panchayat suggests the presence of local elite capture, where influential actors may be skewing the distribution of work and benefits towards themselves and their social groups. This discrepancy, despite visible community awareness and coordination, points to a deeper issue of local elite capture.

Field interactions in Sanpchala supported these desk-side findings based on data analysis. We conducted interviews with beneficiaries, the Mukhiya, MGNREGA mates, and held a focus group discussion. MGNREGA mates highlighted delays in wage payments as a persistent issue which often discouraged participation in the scheme. Nonetheless, the enthusiasm for MGNREGA remained evident in the community. The Mukhiya appeared informed and influential but was seen to use his discretion in a way that favored beneficiaries who could contribute their own resources to complete individual assets. This practice inadvertently excluded more vulnerable households who lacked the means to co-finance or execute asset development. This disparity was evident during our visit: some beneficiaries had multiple assets approved, while others had none, despite being in greater need of support.

Furthermore, the challenges of remoteness and limited technological access in these tribal areas emerged as critical constraints. This was particularly relevant in the context of digital processes required for approvals, monitoring, and payments under MGNREGS. These constraints were confirmed in our meeting with the NREGA Program Officer, who acknowledged the block's

difficulties in ensuring effective digital integration and service delivery in such geographically isolated regions.

- **Sabal-Bigha, Sikandra, Jamui:** As presented in Table 6, both extensive and intensive management equity scores are higher across panchayats than within them. Moreover, the within-panchayat equity scores are negative. This indicates that while the district administration may be allocating more funds for Scheduled Castes at a broader level, these funds are not reaching the marginalized castes at the local level. Such a pattern suggests possible local elite capture, wherein the local elite influence or control the distribution of benefits, thereby restricting access for marginalized households. Additionally, the lower across-panchayat equity score for intensive management compared with extensive management implies that although more Scheduled Caste households might be included in the scheme, fewer person-days are being allocated per household. This points to a dilution of impact, where the quantity of coverage comes at the cost of depth of benefit. Together, these findings highlight a pattern of systematic perpetuation of inequity that appears to be exacerbated by local elite interference.

Field observations further validate this pattern. During the visit, the Mukhiya demonstrated strong awareness and understanding of various government schemes and showed the capacity to navigate administrative complexities to access benefits. However, individual beneficiaries, particularly from marginalized communities, lacked similar awareness and access. A detailed examination of the files related to a specific asset revealed a convoluted system of fund distribution, vulnerable to manipulation. We found assets that had been approved for marginalized households, but the benefits were not reaching them. For example, material costs were being paid directly to vendors without the beneficiary’s knowledge or the verification of delivery of the material. Labor costs, intended to support the beneficiary through wages for work on their own land, were unpaid. Moreover, no guidance was being provided to help beneficiaries make effective use of their land. As a result, beneficiaries remained in the same or worse socioeconomic state despite asset approvals. Thus, while the MIS data may reflect allocation to marginalized individuals, the actual gains were being captured by vendors or local elites. These on-ground findings align with the quantitative analysis and provide concrete evidence of systematic inequities being perpetuated and intensified by local elite capture.

- **Mahadeo Simaria, Sikandra, Jamui:** As presented in Table 6, the across-panchayat equity scores for both extensive and intensive management are lower than the within-panchayat equity scores. Moreover, the across-panchayat equity scores are negative, indicating potential systemic disparity in allocation that could be driven by bureaucratic inefficiencies of structural barriers. Although the within-panchayat equity scores are positive, their small magnitudes suggest a limited degree of equity even within panchayats. These patterns point toward administrative shortcomings and inconsistent implementation of MGNREGS, which hinder equitable distribution of resources, especially for marginalized communities.

Field-level observations from Mahadeo Simaria substantiated these quantitative findings. The Mukhiya expressed frustration with the overly complex administrative processes, technological hurdles, and a lack of coordination with the MGNREGA Program Officer (PO). He was also unaware of key aspects of the scheme, such as the different provisions for community and individual assets, highlighting serious information and capacity gaps at the local level. These limitations restrict the Panchayat’s ability to effectively leverage MGNREGA. Additionally, the visit revealed that the PO had made minimal effort to build awareness and that political positions reserved for marginalized groups often existed only on paper, further weakening their access to benefits. A comparison between two panchayats in the same block—Mahadeo

Simaria and Sabal Bigha—clearly illustrates this disparity: Sabal Bigha, with a more informed Mukhiya and better relations with the PO, receives more consistent funding. This contrast underscores the role of administrative functioning and local relationships in driving inequity. The lack of institutional initiative to address these gaps, simplify guidelines, and support capacity-building reflects a broader trend of administrative apathy.

- **Bisanpur, Khaira, Jamui:** As presented in Table 6, the within-panchayat equity scores for this location are negative, with a particularly high magnitude observed in the ATE4 score. These figures reflect significant inequity against Scheduled Castes within the panchayat. Even the across-panchayat scores, though positive, are too small to indicate meaningful equity at the administrative level. Taken together, the equity analysis for this location highlights a troubling influence of the local elite lacking required administrative support, which undermines the effective delivery of benefits to marginalized communities.

Field observations in Khaira Panchayat further substantiate these findings. The Mukhiya, a Scheduled Caste woman, appeared to have limited authority and was reportedly subjected to manipulation and discrimination, suggesting that the position may be symbolic rather than empowering. Her representative, the husband, seemed visibly anxious during our visit and expressed helplessness in even identifying active MGNREGS worksites. He candidly pointed out a key contradiction in the asset approval process: while guidelines prioritize Scheduled Castes for individual asset allocations, eligibility often requires land ownership, something many poor SC households do not possess. As a result, the very people the schemes are designed to support are systematically excluded. This disconnect between policy intent and ground-level implementation reflects both administrative neglect and structural discrimination manipulated by local elite for their own benefit, reinforcing the patterns of inequity revealed through the inequity scores.

6 Conclusion

These field visits identified persistent caste-based inequities in the implementation of MGNREGA across different panchayats in Bihar and Jharkhand. The interviews, observations and focus group discussions confirmed the findings of quantitative analysis at a high level while helping us find more nuanced reasons resulting in inequity in different locations.

Despite built-in prioritization of benefits to the marginalized in the design of MGNREGA 2005, its complex guidelines often lead to increased inequity due to difficulty in interpretation of the guidelines. With room for discretion, more proactive and highly aware Mukhiyas are able to lead in gaining access to funds than others. Block and district level officials may also not pay attention, or if they do and increase fund provisioning, the actual allocation across different social groups may still remain disparate due to local elite capture. Structural constraints such as land ownership requirements, not having adequate working capital to upfront pay for the assets and await reimbursement, and discouragement arising from long delays in wage disbursements, further perpetuate inequities. Moreover, a reliance on digitization without adequate infrastructural and capacity support can further widen the gap in welfare access, especially in remote tribal regions. The net consequence is that countering historical discrimination against the lower castes through schemes like MGNREGA remains difficult. Disparity, whether intended or unintended, continues.

The convergence of evidence from inequity scores and field insights highlights the urgent need for more accountable, transparent, and inclusive planning processes. Strengthening participatory mechanisms, especially those involving women and the most marginalized, along with simplifying

administrative procedures, ensuring timely fund allocation, and improving digital access and literacy, are essential steps towards realizing the true potential of MGNREGA. Without deliberate and structural interventions to address such gaps, welfare delivery will continue to fall short of its equity goals, and perpetuate rather than alleviate caste-based and geographic disparities.

Desk-side analysis of MIS data can reveal specific patterns of underlying processes that might be operating in different locations and offers a possible precision policy instrument to correct for these issues. As we have seen though, the crux will remain on effective implementation of even these policy measures.

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