



ELSEVIER

www.elsevier.com/locate/worlddev

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2014.01.006>

The Politics of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act in Andhra Pradesh

DIEGO MAIORANO*
University of Liège, Belgium

Summary. — The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act is India's (and the world's) largest employment scheme. While many analyses exist on the impact and implementation faults of this program, scant attention has been dedicated to how political dynamics have influenced implementation. This paper will try to fill this gap with evidence from the southern state of Andhra Pradesh. It will argue that the implementation performance of the scheme has been fairly good, despite the abysmal performance of the state government with previous employment schemes; the key factor in determining such a shift was the political commitment of the state's chief minister.

© 2014 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Key words — Asia, India, MGNREGA, politics, Rural Development, poverty

1. INTRODUCTION

The call for bringing politics back in development studies regularly resurfaces in both academic and donors circles (Hickey, 2008; Leftwich, 1994, 2005; UNDP, 2002; Whitehead & Gray-Molina, 2003) and today there is wide acceptance that development is “an inescapably political process” (Leftwich, 2005, p. 575) and that it “cannot be understood, analyzed, or managed without explicit recognition of the roles of politics and institutions in shaping what happens” (Reich & Balarajan, 2012, p. 5). In fact, in recent years a growing number of works appeared, linking politics and development (e.g., Harris, Stokke, & Tornquist, 2004; Manor, Ng'ethe, & Melo, 2012; Mosley, Chiripanhura, Grugel, & Thirkell-White, 2012).

A great deal of attention has been given to the role of the state (e.g., Corbridge, Williams, Srivastava, & Véron, 2005) and, more generally, to how institutions shape development processes (Houtzager & Moore, 2003). Far less attention has been given to the influence that powerful political actors exercise on such processes. This paper will seek to offer a contribution in these two domains, showing how the actions and interactions of the state's institutions (both formal and informal) on the one hand, and the interplay of political dynamics and political leaders' agency on the other, influence the implementation of India's Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), the largest anti-poverty scheme in the world. In doing so, I will argue that political agency was the key element in determining a radical shift, from a path in which development policies were conceived as rent seeking devices by powerful elites, to one in which welfare schemes are widely recognized as election winning devices and should therefore be implemented the way they are supposed to. Such a shift will make the departure from the newly established path very costly politically.

The paper is structured as follows. In the first section, a brief description of the most salient features of the MGNREGA is provided. In the second and following sections, the analysis focuses on one state of India's federal system, Andhra Pradesh (AP). Not only is this one of the best performers among India's largest states, but the local administration has also set up a series of implementation measures that, on the one hand, claim to have depoliticized the scheme and, on the other hand, are being replicated at the national level. Section 2 deals with

the political commitment of the state government and in particular of its former chief minister, Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy (popularly known as YSR). Section 3 deals with the relationship between the state's administrative apparatus and the state's political class. Finally, Section 4 offers a brief account of how the political dynamics described in the previous sections impact the implementation of the MGNREGA at the local level.

2. THE MGNREGA

The Indian Parliament passed the MGNREGA unanimously in August 2005, after a complex and somewhat peculiar policy process (Chopra, 2011; Dreze, 2010). It was the Congress party-led United Progressive Alliance's flagship scheme. The program was launched in February 2006 in the 200 most backward districts and by 2008 progressively extended to the whole country.

As the name suggests, the MGNREGA is a legal guarantee of employment. Every adult residing in rural areas has the right to demand and obtain employment in local public works within 15 days of the request and to be paid a (relatively) decent minimum wage. Every household is entitled to up to 100 days of employment per year. According to virtually every analysis, the scheme, although marked by some important ambiguities, has had a profound impact on rural India, significantly ameliorating the living conditions of the rural poor (Ministry of Rural Development, 2012).

The MGNREGA contains what are perhaps the toughest transparency and accountability measures a poverty scheme has ever seen; it bans contractors. By not putting an upper limit on expenditure, it makes employment a non-excludable good, thus significantly reducing the role of political brokers

* I would like to thank the Research Council at the University of Liège for funding the research on which this paper is based. Conversations with James Manor and K.C. Suri also were of great assistance. Indrajit Roy made some very useful comments on a previous draft. I would also like to thank four anonymous reviewers for their valuable suggestions and constructive criticism. Of course, any shortcomings are my responsibility only. Final revision accepted: January 8, 2014.

in guaranteeing the poor's access to the scheme. In other words, the MGNREGA is an example of "post-clientelistic" policy (Manor, 2010); namely, a government scheme that is insulated to a significant extent from intrusions by politicians seeking to deviate public resources and distribute them through their patronage networks. As such, it contrasts greatly with anti-poverty policies of the past, whose aim was often the opposite; i.e., oiling patronage networks down to the local level in the absence of effective party organizations.¹ Obviously, as this paper will show, the fact that the MGNREGA is a "post-clientelistic" policy does not mean that the program is completely isolated from politics.

Not surprisingly, the MGNREGA had few supporters within the Congress party itself (Jelani, 2010). As Congress's Vice-President, Rahul Gandhi, put it in a private conversation, "why should my MPs from Uttar Pradesh support the MGNREGA when they are all contractors?"² To win the "battle for employment guarantee" (Khera, 2012), a huge amount of political energy was spent by the supporters of the act including a few politicians, many civil society activists, and some bureaucrats. However, a few politicians did understand the political dividends that could be derived by "investing" in the MGNREGA. The chief minister of Andhra Pradesh, YSR, was one of them.

3. THE ROLE OF POLITICAL COMMITMENT

This paper will provide an analysis of how politics influence the implementation of the MGNREGA in the southern state of Andhra Pradesh. This state is the top spender and among the top performers in terms of employment generation.³ Andhra Pradesh has also adopted quite a few administrative innovations that are now being replicated in other states of the Indian Union.

Our attention will focus on two main points. First, the political commitment of the state government and in particular, of its Congress chief minister will be explored. Second, the relationship between the political class and the state administration, in particular the Rural Development (RD) department, which is in charge of the implementation of the scheme in the state will be discussed. These two dynamics are, of course, interrelated and intertwining.

The Congress party had based its electoral campaign for the 2004 state elections on a very progressive agenda, promising to respond to the severe crisis in which the rural sector had precipitated in the previous years (Ghosh, 2005). The political backing of the MGNREGA must be understood within this broader political context.⁴ In fact, that the MGNREGA would be a priority of the state government was clear since the very beginning, when YSR asked and obtained the national scheme to be inaugurated in Andhra Pradesh by the Prime Minister.

YSR came from a powerful family from the Kadapa district in Rayalaseema region. YSR's family was one of the families that formed the backbone of the Congress party's organization during the anti-colonial struggle and maintained significant power after 1947. As was the case in many states, much of the political activity took place within the Congress party itself, mainly in the form of factional strife, which in Rayalaseema region assumed a particularly violent form. YSR's family was able to build his political turf mainly through "violence and intimidation" (Jangam, 2013, p. 12) against factional rivals.

YSR became an important figure in Andhra Pradesh's politics in 1980, since that time he never lost an election. His

repeated electoral victories made him important in the eyes of the central leadership of the party in New Delhi, whose backing was crucial for his appointment as the state's party leader in the 1990s. The Congress party unexpectedly won the general elections in 2004 and a crucial contribution for this victory came from Andhra Pradesh where YSR had led the party to a sweeping victory both for the central Parliament (the party conquered 29 seats, more than in any other state) and the state Legislative Assembly, where the Congress obtained 185 seats in a 294-member assembly. This further increased YSR's importance in the eyes of the central leadership, especially Sonia Gandhi.

In fact, Mrs. Gandhi's strong backing became the single most important factor in explaining YSR's rise as Andhra Pradesh's absolute monarch. Two other factors explain this. First, during his chief ministership, YSR supplied the central Congress party with abundant funds mainly coming from kick-backs on government contracts in his state (more on this below). Second, YSR used his powers to eliminate factional enemies (hitherto a structural feature of Andhra Pradesh's politics) and to win followers, mainly through the provision of economic benefits or ministerial berths to political non-entities (who, therefore, knew that they owed their positions exclusively to the chief minister). The enactment by his government of a series of very popular welfare schemes made him extremely popular, which obviously further reinforced his position within the party. In other words, welfare schemes made him popular, the backing of the central leadership made him irremovable and the generous funding provided to followers and enemies made him stronger.

YSR used his position of prominence inside the party to realize a crucial precondition for the successful implementation of the MGNREGA in the state. The chief minister made it clear to his partymen and cabinet colleagues that the MGNREGA and other welfare schemes could not be considered as a way to amass wealth and to finance political activities.⁵ The chief minister also made it clear that those who did not abide to this rule would not be protected. In other words, the experience of the Food for Work scheme—often called "Loot for Work"—which had led to "exceptionally high misappropriation" (Deshingkar, Johnson, & Farrington, 2005, p. 576) had to be reversed. On the other hand, he explicitly facilitated and promoted the generation of illicit money from other sources, such as land concessions, government contracts, and mining.⁶ Indeed, he was extremely "liberal" when it came to distributing or facilitating the accumulation of black money (Congress MLA, interview, Hyderabad, December 17, 2012). Thanks also to the extreme centralization of power in the chief minister's hands—who was able to control government funds to a significant extent and to squeeze "wet" ministries at will (Congress former cabinet member, interview, Hyderabad, December 17, 2012)—the operation was quite successful and welfare schemes were not systematically conceived as a source of income by most politicians in the state. The shift from the old path to a new one was remarkable.

Second, the executive spared no effort in giving the RD department the necessary autonomy and authority to successfully run the scheme. In particular, a good number of transfers brought the most efficient and honest officials to the department, beginning with the principal secretary and the MGNREGS Director.⁷ The latter two made a list of five "non-negotiable" issues (translated in a list of 55 recommendations) that had to be incorporated in the state's MGNREGA guidelines. The chief minister backed the guidelines and used all his political leverage to make the Cabinet sub-Committee accept all 55 recommendations, including those

having far-reaching consequences in terms of transparency and accountability⁸ (senior government official, interview, Hyderabad, December 20, 2012). According to a senior official involved in the process, it may be that most members of the sub-Committee did not fully understand the consequences in terms of enhanced transparency and simply obliged to the chief minister's will (interview, Hyderabad, December 19, 2012). Furthermore, and very importantly, the department was left free to design innovative solutions and was given the authority to tackle implementation issues; as a result very few transfers have occurred since 2006.

Third, the chief minister gave full political backing to the institutionalization of social audits. This is an auditing procedure conducted by the citizens themselves (or, more often, by NGOs on their behalf) of both financial and non-financial details of the MGNREGA (Akella & Kidambi, 2007).⁹ The results of the audit are read out in public, thus generating awareness among villagers about who was responsible for the misappropriation of funds or for their exclusion from benefits to which they were entitled. Crucially, villagers also come to know how their rights had not been respected, thus increasing their awareness and vigilance. Needless to say, politicians at all levels—virtually all of whom have a strong “allergy” for transparency and downward accountability (Manor & Jenkins, *in press*)—strongly opposed the institutionalization of such a procedure. The chief minister, however, after having enquired if the social audits could enhance *his* popularity (interview with a senior official in the AP government, Hyderabad, December 06, 2012) wholeheartedly backed the proposal, despite stiff resistance from Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs), Cabinet Ministers, and local-level politicians. Moreover, the chief minister understood that effective social audits could weaken the nexus between local politicians, contractors, and bureaucrats. This perfectly fit his centralizing agenda, which, by the time of his death in a helicopter crash in September 2009, had made Andhra Pradesh's government one of the most centralized in the country.

The state government constituted a Strategy and Performance Innovation Unit under the RD department, to conduct social audits in a systematic way.¹⁰ Shortly before the 2009 state elections, fearing that a change of government could lead to the abandonment of social audits, the RD department created an independent organism (the Society for Social Audit Accountability and Transparency, SSAAT) to perform the task. Very importantly, this was done through an Act of the Legislative Assembly, which provides a strong legal backing to the Society. To date, three rounds of social audits have been conducted in each of the 22,000 Gram Panchayats (GP)¹¹ of the state. The SSAAT employs more than 1,000 staff and coordinates more than 100,000 Village Social Auditors.¹²

The backing of the state government is crucial for the functioning of the Society in at least three respects. First, to ensure that auditors get access to the necessary documentation. This is in fact a provision of the MGNREGA Act, which is widely disregarded in many Indian states, where it can take more than a week to get access to (often incomplete) documentation by low-level state officials. In AP, it barely takes half a day (interview with an official of the SSAAT, Medak district, December 11, 2012), even though the percentage of local administrations not providing full documentation¹³ to the Social Audit teams has worryingly increased in recent years, from 27% to 47% of the cases (interview with a government consultant, Hyderabad, December 10, 2012). This, on the one hand, shows that local officials are quite scared of the social audits as they fear that malpractices will be uncovered; on the other hand, reluctance to provide documentation might have something to do

with the political instability of the state government after YSR's death in 2009 and with the weakness of the chief ministers that succeeded him, who spent most of their time trying to remain in office rather than monitoring policy implementation.

Second, the state's backing is crucial to ensure the safety of the auditors—cases of violence are virtually non-existent in AP, unlike in other states—and, third, to minimize pressures on the Director of the SSAAT (currently a former civil society activists), to give her the authority to ignore such pressures and to run the Society independently.¹⁴ Furthermore, the simple fact that the government backs the social audit system is often sufficient to act as a deterrent for tempted government officials willing to supplement their salaries.¹⁵ According to the social audit reports, misappropriated funds constitute about 3% of the total spending (INPUTO, 2012).

4. ADMINISTRATIVE AND POLITICAL INTERACTIONS

Let us now turn to the relationship between the RD department and the political class. This is marked by convergences, compromises, and clashes. Convergence regards two areas: employment generation and the exclusion of the lower levels of India's federal system—the Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRI)¹⁶—from playing a significant role in the implementation of the scheme.

Most MLAs pressure the administration, at all levels, to provide work in their constituencies (interview with a senior official in the state administration, Hyderabad, December 15, 2012). In theory the MGNREGA is a demand-driven scheme: work should be provided on the basis of the demand for work by the wage seekers. However, in most states it is in fact a supply-driven scheme. This is particularly true in Andhra Pradesh, where, as we shall see below, the implementation of the scheme follows a rigid top-down approach. Pressures come from politicians across party lines, even though it is obviously more so for Congress politicians. In this sense MLAs exercise a positive influence, pushing for the removal of obstacles in their constituencies and for the timely payment of the wages (which is the single most important grievance reported by the wage seekers) (interview with a government consultant, Hyderabad, December 06, 2012).

It is not clear (although it is very plausible) whether belonging to the Congress party makes the administration more ready to resolve issues. In any case, according to the official data, in 2011–12 the average number of person-days generated per household was 67.07 in Congress constituencies as against 54.95 in non-Congress ones. Among the top ten performers, seven are Congress constituencies, which include those of the present chief minister and two cabinet ministers. Conversely, among the worst ten constituencies, only two belong to the Congress.¹⁷ In a *limited* number of cases, the political affiliation of the MLA seems to be the single most important factor in determining implementation outcomes. For example, in Kadapa district—i.e., YSR's district and one of Congress's bastions in the state—the only non-Congress constituency (Proddatur) in 2011/12 generated 25.25 person-days per household, whereas the average in all other constituencies in the district was 65.55 person-days.¹⁸ This evidence seems to suggest that the political affiliation of the MLAs has an influence on the implementation of the program. According to many civil society activists I spoke to, the administration tends to appoint honest and/or competent officials in certain *mandals* and not in others; or to act swiftly to solve administrative

bottlenecks in certain cases and not in others. This is what could explain the (rather significant) variation in terms of employment generation between Congress and non-Congress constituencies.¹⁹

The second point of convergence between politicians and the administration is the shared belief that elected local bodies should not be in charge of the implementation of the scheme. This is particularly true for village level institutions, the GPs. According to the Act, at least 50%²⁰ of the funds should be spent by the GPs. Moreover, GPs are supposed to be in charge of the overall management of the scheme, from the allocation of work to the wage seekers, to the planning of the works to be taken up in the village. In fact, the MGNREGA represents one of the most audacious experiments of devolution of powers and funds (Ambasta, 2012) to local elected bodies perhaps in the whole world. However, GPs in Andhra Pradesh are involved only on paper.²¹ On the one hand, a sizable part of the RD department believes that GPs are not to be trusted, as there is a widespread feeling that they would misuse the money and that they lack the administrative capacity to run any scheme—"it can't work" (interview with a senior official in the RD department, Hyderabad, December 15, 2012). Moreover, bureaucrats at all levels are unwilling to devolve powers to elected local bodies, which would be exercised outside of their control. It is important to note that the mistrust for the GPs is something not confined to the RD or the state administration. I interviewed many scholars, NGOs activists, and journalists in the state that share such mistrust, although for different reasons²² (interviews, Hyderabad, December 01–23, 2012).

On the other hand, MLAs are forcefully opposed to the creation of alternative power centers at the local level. Opposition to local bodies is so widespread that the elections, due to be held in 2011, were postponed several times and eventually held in mid-2013.²³ Therefore, given the virtual non-existence of PRIs in AP, it is not surprising that GPs are hardly involved in the implementation of the scheme. In fact, in some cases, the elected heads of the GP (the *sarpanch*) do not even know that the MGNREGA "is their thing" (interview with a social activist working in Mahbunagar district, Hyderabad, December 06, 2012).

Rather than the *sarpanch*, the person making all key decisions in the village is the Field Assistant (FA), who is hired on a contract basis (thus he/she is *not* elected) by the Society for Rural Development (a government-controlled NGO). In particular, given the supply-driven nature of the scheme in the state,²⁴ it is him/her who offers MGNREGA employment, often on a discretionary basis. As we shall see below, political considerations often influence the FA's decisions. To put it in the words of a senior official in the RD department "if a FA doesn't want to give jobs, he doesn't" (interview, Hyderabad, December 19, 2012).

Many FAs used their preeminent position to amass considerable wealth and social status. Some of them are now powerful and intimidating figures in village life.²⁵ These figures can afford to be defended by the most expensive lawyers when accused of malpractices by the social audit team (interview with an employee of the SSAAT, Hyderabad, December 06, 2012). This acquired social status is entirely due to their nearly absolute power as far as the implementation of the MGNREGA is concerned. Their crucial role, especially in terms of selecting the beneficiaries, made them important in the eyes of the village elites, like the *sarpanches* and the landowners, and even to the MLAs who, as we shall see below, can exercise an influence on the scheme mainly through the FAs. Their authority over virtually any aspect of the scheme also made them impor-

tant because, in order to steal from the scheme, it is necessary to involve the FAs, who find themselves at the center of the corruption network at the local level (Aiyar, 2012). In other words, the FAs are now at the heart of the political dynamics of the village.

Both the state administration and the MLAs prefer to have an appointed rather than an elected official in charge of the scheme, but for different reasons; the former want to exercise a degree of control that they would not have over an elected *sarpanch*. It is important, in the eyes of the state administration, to retain the power to remove FAs who are accused of malpractices by the social audit team, and to have the legal authority necessary to recover deviated funds.²⁶ The MLAs on the other hand, spare no effort to have their men appointed as FAs, exercising a great deal of pressures on the officials at the block and district levels.²⁷ It is through their link with the FAs that MLAs exercise an influence on the scheme—and indeed on the village. FAs not only provide MGNREGA jobs, but also collect information and distribute money before the elections (a widespread phenomenon in India) on behalf of their political protectors (interview with a former employee of the RD department, Hyderabad, December 19, 2012). Also, farmers who want MGNREGA to be stopped during the agricultural season (see below) exercise pressures on the FAs to do so and if the pressure is not sufficient, they approach the local MLA (interview with the Minister for Rural Development, Hyderabad, August 05, 2013). However, as we shall see below, recent measures taken by the RD department threatened to undermine the links between FAs and MLAs, and this constituted a serious issue of contrast between the state administration and the political apparatus.

Thus, the implementation of the MGNREGA is rigidly top-down. For example, the prioritization of works to be taken up is decided upon by the government—even though GPs are asked if they agree (interview with a District Director, December 11, 2012)—and follows both technical and political considerations. For example, the government decided to prioritize the development of private lands of the Scheduled Classes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs)²⁸ because such a land was, in most cases, barely cultivable²⁹ and because these are among the most deprived sections of Indian society,³⁰ and also because—and perhaps more importantly—the SCs and STs form part of the social base of support of the Congress party in the state (The Hindu, 2004). Even the planning of single works comes from the top, resulting in 27% of the work being done on private land either to be not required or not meeting the owners' needs (interview with a government consultant, Hyderabad, December 06, 2012). Similarly, as a consequence of an explicit decision of the state government to reach them (interview with a government's consultant, personal communication, December 10, 2012), the STs' participation in the scheme since 2010 has surged. ST's participation in the scheme increased from 12.95% in 2008–09 to 18.35% in 2011–12. The decision to build road connections to all SC/ST habitations followed similar considerations (more on this below).

In other cases, the relationship between the RD department and the legislators is marked by compromise. This was mostly evident in two situations. The first one is the adaptation of the MGNREGA calendar to the agricultural calendar of the state. In fact, this is something occurring in a majority of Indian states (Figure 1).

Of course, the decline of the demand of MGNREGA employment during the agricultural peak season is a somewhat "natural" phenomenon, given the higher employment opportunities in rural areas during this part of the year

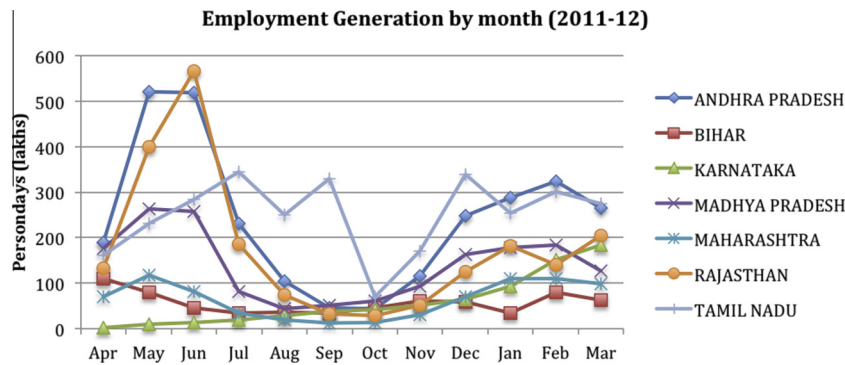


Figure 1. *Employment generation by month (2011–12)*. Source: Author's calculation based on official MGNREGA data (FY 2011–12).

(Karat, 2011). However, this is also due to a compromise between the administration on one side, and the political class and the farmers on the other. The latter have been arguing forcefully that the MGNREGA caused a steep increase of rural wages, as the guarantee of employment at the minimum wage significantly increased the laborers' bargaining power.³¹ Moreover, the farmers' argument continues, the surge in employment opportunities in rural India caused a serious shortage of manpower for agricultural work.

The farmers lobbied along two lines. First, they wanted to be included in the list of permissible works under the MGNREGA the agricultural activity, or, in other words, to subsidize agricultural wages. The second request was to suspend the provision of MGNREGA employment during the agricultural season. The first of these requests, despite strong lobbying by farmers' representatives (both in the unions and in the Cabinet) was not successful, also because of strong opposition from New Delhi's Ministry of Rural Development (which was in turn being lobbied by farmers' representatives at the national level like the Minister of Agriculture, Sharad Pawar). The second request was substantially met. MGNREGA work does not stop completely, but in most villages FAs do not offer employment. The RD department, although objecting in principle, accepted the compromise,³² especially as there is a broad consensus across party lines that the interests of the farmers, in this respect, should be protected. Recently, the administration started negotiations with farmers in one district (Srikakulam) to adapt the farmers' demand for work during the agricultural season to the offer of MGNREGA jobs³³ (interview with a senior government official, Hyderabad, December 19, 2012).

Furthermore, there is a more subtle (and more localized) lobbying activity to boycott or dilute the MGNREGA altogether, as most landowners resented the increased bargaining power of the laborers and their consequent increased social status in the village's political economy—that high caste landowners have, in some cases, to “beg” Dalit laborers to work in their fields—is certainly something that the village elites find hard to stomach (interview with a senior journalist, Hyderabad, December 05, 2012). In the summer 2011, farmers in East and West Godavari districts even declared a “crop holiday” (Times of India, 2011) protesting against low profitability mainly due—according to them—to the increase in wages witnessed in recent years.³⁴

A second example of compromise between the political class and the administration was the expenditure pattern of the MGNREGA funds. According to the Act, not more than 40% of the funds can be spent on procurement of material. This is a key interest of MLAs and local politicians, who seek

to promote “their” contractors (often owned by themselves, their relatives, or their clients) (interview, AP Minister for Rural Development, Hyderabad, August 05, 2013). Therefore, politicians push for the highest possible material–labor ratio.

Until recently, the system in place facilitated the work of politicians seeking to promote their clients. First, material was procured through Self-Help Groups (SHG) federations³⁵ at the sub-district (*mandal*) level. It is at this level that local politicians and MLAs could exercise pressure to influence the allocation of procurement contracts. Second, the unit to calculate the labor–material ratio was the district, so that it was common to find, within the same district, *mandals* or GPs with an extremely high or extremely low material component, thus, the overall (district) ratio complied with the law's requirements. According to the Comptroller and Auditor General's Report (CAG, 2013) this was a widespread practice in most parts of India. Of course, the choice to have higher or lower material components reflected the local political equilibria and power dynamics. The system represented a sort of compromise between the administration that chose not to see this bizarre interpretation of the 60:40 norm, and the political class that exploited the fallacy in the system, but did not put the labor component of the scheme in jeopardy.

However, starting in 2012, things changed. On the one hand, the procurement of material was centralized. Apparently, the Minister in charge was eager to bring the procurement of material under his direct control (interview with a senior official in the RD department, Hyderabad, December 20, 2012). The policy change brought about a shift in the procurement policy, from facilitating petty corruption at the local level, to (potentially) facilitating big corruption at the central and district levels. However, the shift to e-tendering (IT-based) also brought more transparency into the procurement system. According to a top government official, “politicians were furious” when the shift was announced (interview, Hyderabad, December 19, 2012)—the fact that it took a year to procure crowbars probably has something to do with the political furor generated by the policy change. On the other hand, under pressure from New Delhi, in early 2012 the state government decided to change the unit used to calculate the labor–material ratio to the GP,³⁶ thus, severely cutting the local politicians' room for maneuvering.

However, after intense lobbying activity by a number of MLAs who asked more “visible” works to be taken up, the administration decided to connect every SC/ST habitation by roads (a very visible and material-intensive kind of work). According to a senior official involved in the negotiations, this was a way to placate MLAs who were threatening to “kill the scheme” (interview, Hyderabad, December 20, 2012). In fact,

the labor component declined from almost 90% in 2009–10 to 66% the following year. This shift also coincided with the change of the chief minister following YSR's death in September 2009 and the subsequent political instability that marked the ruling Congress party ever since. It is plausible that MLAs could make their voice heard precisely because of the weakness of the chief ministers and their precarious political situation.

Finally, the relationship between the administration and politicians is marked by clashes. In general terms, the administration has been *trying* to isolate the MGNREGA from the influence of politics. In fact, the “oversystemization” of the scheme (interview with a senior official, Hyderabad, December 19, 2012) and the heavy reliance on a fairly complicated IT system has seriously limited the politicians' room for maneuvering. Also, the agitation for the creation of a separate Telangana state captured much of the politicians' attention and energy, so that not much time was left for monitoring policy. However, clashes repeatedly occur. For example, in recent years, the clash has been particularly intense over the appointment and removal of FAs. We have mentioned above how the FA is the most important actor at the local level, as he/she is able to control virtually every aspect of the scheme. Thus, this is a key figure for local power dynamics and constitutes an important link to the village not only for local politicians, but also for MLAs.

The FA is appointed by a sub-district official, namely the Mandal Parishad Development Officer (MPDO), who is in charge of the MGNREGA at that level. The Scheme Director (PD) at the district level must then confirm the choice. Therefore, it is on these two officials that politicians exercised their pressure in an effort to have their men appointed. Also, it is at this level that MLAs and local politicians (along with the Field Assistants' unions) try to protect FAs accused by the social audit team. Sometimes it is the local administration that proactively seeks the politicians' approval before appointing FAs. A consultant to the government of Andhra Pradesh working in Mahbubnagar district told me that MPDOs send the list of prospective FAs directly to the MLA (who is also a Minister in this case) with notes describing their political affiliation (interview, Hyderabad, August 07, 2013).

However, in the last 3 years, the administration has tried to break the nexus linking FAs to politicians. First, rules for their recruitment have changed. Now only the top three MGNREGA workers (as per number of days worked in the preceding financial year) can be appointed as FAs in any given GP. This obviously does not preclude the possibility that the new FA will be co-opted in the local political system (which, in fact, happens), but it surely constitutes a serious blow to the politicians' capacity to penetrate the scheme at the local level. Second, in Spring 2012 the RD department decided to remove all FAs who had not generated at least 7,500 person-days in the preceding fiscal year (Memo No. 5540/TD II/a1/12 dated April 03, 2012). This decision sparked vehement protests from politicians and FAs, who went on strike. Eventually, the RD department increased the FAs' salary, and the agitation was called off. However, due to strong political pressure on the PDs in the districts (those in charge of implementing this decision), as of December 2012, no FA had been removed yet (interview with a senior official, Hyderabad, December 19, 2012).

A second example of the clash between the administration and the political apparatus concerns the findings of the social audits. We have seen how the establishment of an institutionalized procedure for conducting social audits was met with stiff resistance from MLAs, but the then chief minister, YSR, used

all his political leverage to back the provision and to ensure its proper implementation.

However, by all accounts the social audit system falls short when it comes to taking action against those accused of malpractices. In fact, most of the action taken is directed against FAs and other officials hired on a contract basis. This is not only due to the fact that sacking or punishing a contract employee is much easier than taking action against a permanent employee of the state; but it is also due to the design of the social audit themselves. These focus mainly on very local issues, therefore concentrating on the role of the FAs.

However, the situation is radically different when it comes to permanent employees of the state. In these cases, the combined protection of the unions, politicians, and constitutional provisions makes the punishment of guilty officials extremely difficult and time-consuming. Also, the extremely energy-consuming procedure for removing a permanent employee of the state must be started by the Panchayat Raj department, which, by all accounts, does not share the same kind of commitment to the functioning of the MGNREGA that the RD department does. However, even the RD department finds it difficult to implement decisions that are under its purview. As of March 31, 2011, out of 19,488 officials implicated during the social audits in all 13 phase-1 districts, only 9,809 were sanctioned (Aiyar, Metha, Kapoor, & Samji, 2013, p. 265). Protection from politicians, including MLAs, is quite difficult to overcome. In some cases, guilty officials find their way back into the system. For example, in Kurnool district, an official was first suspended for having stolen from the scheme, but was later reinstated in the same role in another *mandal* where he was later found guilty of the very same misconduct and removed once again. The second time the official was not reinstated because he was not affiliated with the local MLA, who, accordingly, did not exercise his power to protect him. The guilty official, according to one source, is now lobbying in Hyderabad, by approaching other MLAs, to have his job back (interview with a former government employee Hyderabad, December 19, 2012).

The RD department is fully aware of this situation and has recently taken steps to increase its powers vis-à-vis MGNREGA personnel. In April 2013 the MPDOs went on strike, essentially demanding to be removed from the scrutiny of the social audits. The RD department then decided to remove MGNREGA from the responsibilities of the MPDOs and transfer them to the Additional Project Officers, who is hired on a contract basis and can therefore be sanctioned relatively easily if accused of malpractices (interview with a government consultant, Hyderabad, August 07, 2013).

5. POLITICS AT THE GRASSROOTS

Finally, it is worth saying a brief word on the political dynamics that influence the implementation of the MGNREGA at the local level, namely at the sub-district level and in the GPs. From what we have said above, it should be clear that a major difference from most other Indian states is the marginal role played by elected representatives in the village (especially the *sarpanches*). However, the FA, although not elected, is fully inserted into local political dynamics. Generally speaking, *sarpanches* have the incentive to run the scheme well because they need to get re-elected; FAs have the incentive to generate employment not only because of the recent decision of the government to remove FAs who are not able

to provide at least 15,000 person-days a year, but also because their political protectors expect them to generate employment in their constituencies.

However, a number of other factors can come into play and affect the generation of employment. Let me offer a few examples.³⁷ First, a specific GP can face heavy delays in the approval of the shelf of works by the MPDO. Of course, there could be technical reasons; but this is often due to the political affiliation of that specific GP, which contrasts with that of the local strongman or MLA. Often this has, paradoxically, positive outcomes. If one locality is discriminated against on political grounds, politicians from that locality usually protest vocally (interview with a social activist working in Guntur district, Hyderabad, December 18, 2012). This in turn, on the one hand, facilitates the work of the social audit teams, as malpractices are more likely to emerge; on the other hand, if protests become too vocal, the local administration will take steps to redress grievances in order to avoid sanctions from above (interview with a SSAAT employee, Hyderabad, August 05, 2013). Indeed, the social audit teams find their work more difficult when a single party completely dominates a certain area (a similar point is made by Khosla, 2011).

Second, at the village level the FAs enjoy great discretionary power, especially as far as who gets employment (and where and how much).³⁸ Their choices could be influenced by a plethora of interrelated factors. For example, political convenience or social prejudice can result in a certain caste group obtaining significantly less (or significantly more) employment; similarly, FAs may be biased toward people residing in their own habitation; or they could assign certain kinds of works in certain locations to certain groups—e.g., opponents would invariably be assigned harder works (and consequently lower wages),³⁹ located at a greater distance from the village and so on and so forth. Opponents and friends could, of course, be determined by a number of different reasons, like their political affiliation,⁴⁰ their tendency to complain or raise issues during the social audits, their belonging to one of the factions that shape socio-political dynamics in the village, or simple antipathy. Some FAs even started having political ambitions and some of them contested the recent PRIs elections (interview with a SSAAT employee, Hyderabad, August 05, 2013).

An apparently paradoxical dynamic is that the exclusion of the GPs, from the implementation of the MGNREGA, has not led to significant clashes between the FAs and the local political elite. This is largely due, on the one hand, to the historical powerlessness of the GPs in the state, and on the other hand, as we have seen above, to the fact that the FAs are in most cases co-opted into the local power dynamics and are strongly influenced by demands coming from the *sarpanches*, the farmers and other powerful actors. Strong *sarpanches* can have a significant influence on the implementation of the scheme through an alliance with the FAs.

Third, the government of Andhra Pradesh, in collaboration with NGOs,⁴¹ promotes the formation of *Shrama Shakti Sanghas* (SSS) (or Fixed Labor Groups) at the village level. The SSS are small groups of MGNREGA wage seekers (10–20 members, usually from the same habitation within the GP) who work together for a certain period of time (not less than a year). Participating NGOs provide training to SSS's representatives (*mates*), who will then be in charge of dealing with the local administration on behalf of the group. According to most observers I spoke with, wherever there are SSS groups, the MGNREGA works better. This is largely due

to the fact that this sort of “unionization” of the MGNREGA workers can significantly bolster poor people’s “political capacity” (their political confidence, skill, awareness, and connections) (Manor & Jenkins, *in press*), a shortage of which is one important dimension of their poverty. Enhanced political capacity is also translated into a better capacity to deal with the administration and to express grievances as a unified voice.

The RD department recently decided to create federations of SSS groups at the village and *mandal* levels. Federations were piloted in 13 *mandals*. A recent government order extended the experiment to the whole state. The idea is to replicate the state’s experience with the federations of SHGs. Federations of SSS workers at the village level will be given the power to decide the labor budget of the village (i.e., the amount of employment to be provided) and to propose the list of works to be taken up.⁴² They will also be empowered to decide whether the FA should keep his/her position, thus inserting a much-needed mechanism of downward accountability into the system (interview with a senior official in the RD department, Hyderabad, August 06, 2013). It is too early to evaluate the functioning of SSS federations at this stage, but this represents an interesting development that future research should not ignore.

However, one thing is clear. The creation of SSS groups and federations is a way to, or at least an initial step toward, putting into question power relations at the local level. Expressing grievances or demanding the respect of their own rights *as a group*, can force local politicians and administrators to listen to their requests; this in turn can contribute to increase poor people’s confidence and ability to interact with the public sphere. It can also contribute to forging alliances with other poor people and possibly lead to the creation of quite strong MGNREGA “lobbies” in the villages. In short, it can enhance poor people’s political capacity (Manor & Jenkins, *in press*). This could potentially transform poor people’s ability to interact with actors outside the MGNREGA too. It could, for example, have a profound impact on laborers–farmers relations. We have seen how the mere existence of the MGNREGA has given substantial bargaining power to the rural poor. Their “unionization” will further increase this power. Indeed, this was one of the main objectives that the architects of the MGNREGA had in mind.

6. CONCLUSION

Andhra Pradesh has performed fairly well as far as the generation of MGNREGA employment is concerned. In fact, among India’s largest states, it is among the top performers in terms of both person-days per household generated (56.49 as against an all-India average of 42.43 in 2011–12) and number of households provided with 100 days of employment (17.76% as against 7.81% on average in 2011–12). Andhra Pradesh also has an above-average participation rate of women (57.79% as against 48.17% in 2011–12). The performance, in terms of guaranteeing the *right* to work and the *right* to obtain the unemployment allowance in case the former is denied, is less positive. In fact, while there is widespread awareness about the scheme, especially after the first round of social audits were conducted (Aiyar & Samji, 2009), there is far less awareness among rural dwellers that it is their *right* to get employment on demand. This seems to be the case in many parts of India.

Since demands were not registered until very recently, it is not clear the extent to which demand has been rationed. A World Bank study (Dutta, Murgai, Ravallion, & van de Walle, 2012, Table 3) estimates that the percentage of those demanding and not getting employment is around 25%. Until the end of 2012 there had been a single case of unemployment allowance paid (Times of India, 2012), which was the result of a four-year struggle by a number of civil society organizations (interview with one of the activists involved, Hyderabad, December 09, 2012). However, recent steps taken by the RD department should improve the situation on this account, which, in any case, is not much better in other Indian states.

On the other hand, it is undeniable that the Andhra Pradesh government is going against the spirit of the law in terms of the empowerment of the Panchayat Raj Institutions, which are by and large excluded from playing any significant role in implementing the MGNREGA. The main argument in favor of the approach adopted by the government, is that the PRIs lack the administrative capacity to run the scheme and that, in most cases, these institutions are controlled by powerful elites who are not interested in the welfare of the poor. There is indeed some truth in these arguments. There is also some evidence that shows how simply devolving more funds to the PRIs does not automatically improve their functioning as democratic institutions (Manor, 2011) or necessarily result in better implementation outcomes (Corbridge & Srivastava, 2013, p. 464). Given the historical weakness of the PRIs in the state, bypassing them represents what is probably a good solution to run the scheme effectively in a *short-term* perspective.

However, in a longer-term perspective, not empowering the PRIs represents a missed opportunity. Providing employment to the poor is just one of the objectives of the MGNREGA, and probably not the most important one. Bolstering poor people's political capacity and capabilities can potentially bring about profound changes in rural India's social structure and the PRIs represent an institutional set up where such increased political capacity could be channeled and used to promote downward accountability. If development is about expanding people's freedom (Sen, 1999), the democratization of the MGNREGA is surely a way to promote development. Further, an administration-led scheme is more fragile than a people-led one. A few transfers in the RD could potentially kill the scheme, although it would be very costly politically, given the popularity of the scheme in the state.

The recent initiative taken by the RD government to federalize SSS groups and empower them to play a significant planning and implementing role is a sign that the government has understood that, in the words of a senior official of the RD department "it does not matter how much we improve the supply side; we need to strengthen the demand side" (interview, Hyderabad, August 06, 2013). In the view of the same official, the federations' assemblies will be the "real Gram Sabhas," where MGNREGA workers will be more free to express their grievances. There is ample evidence that shows how poor people—and even more so, women—do not participate much in the Gram Sabhas, as these assemblies replicate the condition of striking inequalities that shape the village's political economy. Institutionalize assemblies of MGNREGA workers should therefore lead to higher rates of participation in the village's public life. However, the democratic credentials of these federations are at best dubious, not to speak of the fact that they could be scrapped by a government order, unlike the PRIs that are constitutionally recognized. It remains to be seen if and how these federations will work.

In short, the case of the Andhra Pradesh presents us with a dilemma: a top-down approach has resulted in a substantial success (if compared with most other Indian states) and to a significant reduction of corruption, but it has failed, on the other hand, to go beyond the mere provision of employment to the poor, which is just one of the objectives of the act. We face the same dilemma when we think about the social audits.⁴³ Should we prefer Andhra Pradesh's highly bureaucratized and aggressively top-down system or, say, Rajasthan's PRI-led one? In the former case, social audits are conducted regularly and there is now ample evidence that they have been an effective instrument for tackling corruption and promoting awareness about the basic features of the act, even though the system does not encourage people's participation and proactivity. In Rajasthan on the other hand, *sarpanches* have used the political and financial capital acquired through the MGNREGA to effectively boycott the social audits (The Hindu, 2010); very successful cases (e.g., the one conducted by the *Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangatam* in Bhilwara district) remain isolated examples. Most villages do not conduct social audits; furthermore, it is unrealistic to hope that villagers will conduct them on their own. In fact, Andhra Pradesh seems to be the only state where social audits are regularly occurring.

Two further conclusions can be drawn from this study. The first one pertains to the crucial importance of the commitment of the political leadership for development schemes to have a chance of success. More particularly, in the case of Andhra Pradesh—as well as in other developing countries (Manor *et al.*, 2012)—it is the commitment of the political leaders at the apex of the system (the chief minister in our case) that is absolutely critical. His backing was crucial for the administrative apparatus to have the necessary autonomy, authority, and resources to implement the scheme, sometimes against the wishes of the state's political class. Further, the chief minister's actions were crucial to change the very perception of the state's welfare schemes, from a way to amass wealth by powerful actors, to a device to re-win elections. If one compares the MGNREGA's performance with that of the Food for Work scheme (also known as the "Loot for Work" scheme) it is difficult not to conclude that the shift was indeed radical. The path dependency literature has highlighted how such shifts from a path to a new one often occur in times of crisis (Houtzager & Moore, 2003, p. 17). Here the crucial element seems to be the election result and the subsequent establishment of a chief minister who used his position of prominence within the party and in the government to bring about significant change in the way development policies are implemented. Or, in other words, to abandon a path and to undertake a new one, which will be politically very costly to abandon, as the two chief ministers that succeeded YSR clearly understood.

Second, it is important to stress that YSR was re-elected in 2009; this is a remarkable political achievement (Elliot, 2011). Between 1980 and 2008 more than 75% of the incumbent governments in India faced defeat at the elections. YSR put in place a very simple and yet, very smart political strategy. On the one hand, he invested massively on Rural Development schemes—both in terms of financial resources and political energy—and made sure that these remained clean and reached the intended beneficiaries. On the other hand, he did not renounce to loot the public exchequer and to share the profits with his accolades. As a result, his popularity among the rural poor increased, while he was able to amass huge wealth, for himself and his party—a clear win-win situation.

NOTES

1. For some comments on the poverty policies of the 1980s see [Maiorano \(2012\)](#).
2. Interview with a person present during that conversation, New Delhi, March 2013.
3. In 2012–13 only Rajasthan and Maharashtra generated a higher average number of person-days per household among India's largest states. Andhra Pradesh is also the second best state in terms of number of households who completed the 100 100 days target. In the same year, AP spent about 793 million US\$ of MGNREGA funds, out of a national total of 7.2 billion US\$ (i.e., 11% of the total). AP accounts for about 7% of India's population. Official data taken from the MGNREGA's website: nrega.nic.in.
4. Other rural-friendly policies promoted by the Congress party included a universal pension scheme, a housing scheme, universal health care coverage scheme, massive public investments in irrigation projects and the provision of free electricity to the farmers. Most of these policies were implemented within a "post-clientelistic" framework, meaning that they were based on universal coverage.
5. India lacks a legislative framework for the financing of political activity, making the recourse to black money somewhat inevitable ([Gowda & Sridharan, 2012](#); [Jha, 2011](#)).
6. The opposition parties published a series of short books (e.g., *Raja of Corruption*, collectively published by all opposition parties in AP) showing the pervasiveness of the systemic corruption in the state masterminded by the chief minister. While the claims of the opposition parties are probably exaggerated, they do grasp the general picture (interview with a senior journalist, Hyderabad, December 14, 2012). YSR's son, after spending a considerable amount of time in jail, is now free on bail.
7. This is something that even NGOs that are otherwise very critical of the government, would concede (interviews with numerous civil society activists, Hyderabad, December 01–23, 2012).
8. For example, the introduction of post office accounts for paying the workers' wages or the extensive use of IT systems to run the scheme. [Manor and Jenkins \(in press\)](#) identified 24 ways in which it was possible to steal from the scheme, 22 of which are impossible or extremely difficult after the introduction of postal/bank accounts for paying the workers' wages.
9. The AP government has recently extended the social audit system to other welfare schemes, like the pension scheme.
10. To date, AP is the only state that has institutionalized social audits. The AP model is being replicated in other states, at the insistence of the central government. However, most states did not show much enthusiasm (interview with a senior official, Ministry of Rural Development, New Delhi, November 27, 2012).
11. The GPs are self-governing institutions at the village level. Technically, the social audit is conducted at the sub-district (*mandal*) level. However, every single village in AP is scrutinized.
12. Village Social Auditors are those who conduct the social audit at the village level. They belong to MGNREGA wage-seekers families from a different village.
13. The report from which this percentage is taken does not differentiate between different kinds of documents not provided to the Social Audit team. Therefore, if a single (and possibly irrelevant) page from one register was missing or if no documentation was provided at all, both cases were classified as "missing documentation".
14. Most people this writer spoke to in Andhra Pradesh and Delhi would agree that the SSAAT is rather independent from the government. Others think that a government-run NGO such as the SSAAT cannot be truly independent (e.g., When Government Doubles as NGO, *Business Standard*, May 7, 2013).
15. This is not the place to discuss the effectiveness of the AP's social audit model. See [Aiyar and Samji \(2009\)](#) and [Aiyar et al. \(2013\)](#). For an internal view see [Akella and Kidambi \(2007\)](#). For a critical account see [Shankar \(2009\)](#).
16. These are elected local bodies at the district, sub-district, and village level.
17. Author's calculations based on the data available on the MGNREGA's website. The data refer to the 13 phase-1 districts only.
18. Author's calculations based on the data available on the MGNREGA's website.
19. Andhra Pradesh administers MGNREGA funds through the electronic Fund Management System (e-FMS), which is about to be adopted by the entire country. Funds are kept in a state-level account, from which implementing agencies at *mandal* and district levels can withdraw according to their requirement. There is little the state government can do to block/release funds to specific *mandals*. MLAs can influence the allocation of funds *within* their constituencies, though.
20. Some states devolve even more funds, like Madhya Pradesh or Rajasthan, where 90% of the MGNREGA spending is made through the GPs.
21. See also the findings of the Comptroller and Auditor General ([CAG, 2013](#)), in particular Annexes 6F and 7B.
22. Some NGO activists, for example, say that these institutions are invariably dominated by dominant landowning castes, thus, systematically excluding poor people's voice in the village affairs.
23. The state government agreed to hold elections in the wake of a Supreme Court order mandating the state government hold PRI elections as soon as possible ("Congress in a dilemma over PR elections," *The Hindu*, February 19, 2013. Retrieved from www.thehindu.com).
24. This is not a peculiarity of AP. Some (timid) measurers to make the scheme more demand-driven have recently been taken (e.g., there is now (7 years after the launch of the scheme) a procedure for registering demands for employment).
25. A SSAAT employee told me that some of them even travel accompanied by armed bodyguards (interview, Hyderabad, December 06, 2012). However, I could not find anyone else who confirmed this. In fact, a senior official of the RD department categorically excluded that this is the case even in a single village (personal communication, November 13, 2013).

26. In fact, about 10,000 people have been removed since 2006 (interview with a senior official of the RD department, Hyderabad December 15, 2012).
27. More on this below.
28. SCs and STs are two groups of historically disadvantaged people that benefit from a series of policies of positive discrimination at the national and state levels.
29. In many cases, these small plots of land have been redistributed during one of the rounds of land reform in the state. Often surplus land was not cultivable.
30. Most of this land had been redistributed during the various phases of the land reform process in the state in the previous decades.
31. Although it is not “scientifically” certain that this happened, it is clearly perceived to be true by most stakeholders I spoke to in Hyderabad, Delhi and Jaipur between November 2012 and April 2013. See also Mahajan (2012).
32. This is not an official guideline, but bureaucrats at all levels know that not offering jobs during the agricultural season will not result in disciplinary actions, quite the contrary.
33. This is another indication of the supply-driven (as opposed to the prescribed demand-driven) nature of the scheme.
34. The steep increase of the price of fertilizers probably affected farmers’ costs of production more significantly.
35. SHGs in AP are federated at the GP, sub-district and district levels.
36. Each and every GP must now respect the 60:40 ratio.
37. For other examples of how politics influences the implementation of the MGNREGA below the district level see Khosla (2011).
38. It should be noted that most of the wage seekers do get employment, although maybe not as much as they want.
39. Salaries are paid with a piece rate system. Digging a hole in hard soil takes more time than in soft soil, but the wages would be based on the amount of soil uncovered in a day in both cases.
40. This is particularly important when the FAs are controlled by a powerful *sarpanch* or by a local political boss. I listened to many stories affirming this in many parts of Rayalaseema region.
41. Within the so-called Andhra Pradesh Non-Governmental Organization Alliance (APNA).
42. This of course will further marginalize the GP’s role.
43. Yamini Aiyar made this argument at the 2nd Azim Premji University International Conference on Law, Governance and Development, Bangalore, July 2–3, 2013.

REFERENCES

- Aiyar, Yamini. (March 01, 2012). *MGNREGS faces critical questions*. Livemint. Retrieved from <www.livemint.com>.
- Aiyar, Yamini, & Samji, Salimah. (2009). *Transparency and accountability in NREGA: A case study of Andhra Pradesh*. AI Working Paper. Retrieved from <<http://www.accountabilityindia.in>>.
- Aiyar, Yamini, Metha, Pratap Bhanu, Kapoor, Soumya, & Samji, Salimah (2013). India: Implementing social audits. In Kalanidhi Subbarao, Carlo del Ninno, Colin Andrews, & Claudia Rodriguez-Alas (Eds.), *Public works as safety net – Design, evidence, and implementation* (pp. 249–268). Washington: The World Bank.
- Akella, Karuna Vakati, & Kidambi, Sowmya (2007). Social audit in Andhra Pradesh: A process in evolution. *Economic and Political Weekly*, XLII, 47, 18–19.
- Ambasta, Pramatesh (2012). MGNREGA and rural governance reform: Growth with inclusion through panchayats. In Ashok K. Pankaj (Ed.), *Right to work and rural India: Working of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee scheme* (pp. 335–368). New Delhi: Sage.
- CAG. (2013). *Report of Comptroller and Auditor General of India on Performance audit of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee scheme*. New Delhi.
- Chopra, Deepta (2011). Policy making India: A dynamic process of statecraft. *Pacific Affairs*, 84(1), 89–107.
- Corbridge, S., & Srivastava, M. (2013). Mapping the social order by fund flows: The political geography of employment assurance schemes in India. *Economy and Society*, 42(3), 455–479.
- Corbridge, S., Williams, G., Srivastava, M., & Véron, R. (2005). *Seeing the state: Governance and governmentality in India*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Deshingkar, Priya, Johnson, C., & Farrington, J. (2005). State transfers to the poor and back: The case of the Food-for-Work program in India. *World Development*, 33(4), 575–591.
- Dreze, Jean (2010). Democracy and the right to work: India’s employment guarantee act. In Niraja Gopal Jayal, & Pratap Bhanu Metha (Eds.), *The Oxford companion to politics in India* (pp. 510–519). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Dutta, P., Murgai, R., Ravallion, M., & van de Walle, D. (2012). *Does India’s guarantee scheme guarantee employment?* Policy Research Working Paper. Washington: The World Bank.
- Elliot, Carolyn (2011). Moving from clientelistic politics towards a welfare regime: Evidence from the 2009 assembly elections in Andhra Pradesh. *Commonwealth and Comparative Politics*, 49(1), 48–79.
- Ghosh, Jayati. (2005). *The political economy of farmers’ suicides in India. “Freedom from Hunger” lecture series*. New Delhi. Retrieved from: www.macroscan.org.
- Gowda, M. R., & Sridharan, E. (2012). Reforming India’s party financing and election expenditure laws. *Election Law Journal*, 11(2), 226–240.
- Harris, J., Stokke, K., & Tornquist, O. (Eds.) (2004). *Politicising democracy: The new local politics of democratisation in developing countries*. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Hickey, S. (2008). The return of politics in development studies I: Getting lost within the poverty agenda?. *Progress in Development Studies*, 8(4), 349–358.
- Houtzager, P., & Moore, M. (Eds.) (2003). *Changing paths: International development and the politics of inclusion*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- INPUTO. (2012). *Crucial findings in the analysis of SSAAT data*. Unpublished.
- Jangam, Chinnaiiah (2013). The story of a jailed prince: Feudal roots of democratic politics in Andhra Pradesh. *Economic and Political Weekly*.
- Jelani, Mehboob (2010). NREGA’s reality check. *The Caravan*. Retrieved from <www.caravanmagazine.in>.
- Jha, Prem Shankar (2011). Time to rock the vote. *Tehelka*. Retrieved from <www.tehelka.com>.
- Karat, Brinda (2011). Another excuse to cut government spending. *The Hindu*. Retrieved from <www.thehindu.com>.
- Khera, Rethika (Ed.) (2012). *The battle for employment guarantee*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Khosla, Rishabh (2011). Caste, politics and public distribution in India: Evidence from NREGS in Andhra Pradesh. *Economic and Political Weekly*, XLVIII, 25, 14–15.
- Leftwich, A. (1994). Governance, the state and the politics of development. *Development and Change*, 25(2), 363–386.

- Leftwich, A. (2005). Development studies and the rediscovery of social science. *New Political Economy*, 10(4), 573–607.
- Mahajan, Kanika (2012). Agricultural wage and the NREGA: Exploring the myth. *Livemint*, Retrieved from <www.livemint.com>.
- Maiorano, D. (2012). Mrs. Gandhi's final term and the remaking of the Congress (I)'s social base. *India Review*, 11(1), 23–45.
- Manor, J. (2010). What do they know of India who only India know? The uses of comparative politics. *Commonwealth and Comparative Politics*, 48(4), 505–516.
- Manor, J., (2011). When local governments strikes it rich, ICLD Research Reports Series.
- Manor, J., & Jenkins, R. (in press). *Politics and the Right to Work: India's National Rural Employment Guarantee Act*.
- Manor, J., Ng'ethe, N., & Melo, M. (2012). Against the odds: Politicians, institutions and the struggle against poverty. London and New York: Hurst&Co./Columbia University Press.
- Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India (2012). *Mahatma Gandhi NREGA Sameeksha*. New Delhi: Orient Blackswan.
- Mosley, P., Chiripanhura, B., Grugel, J., & Thirkell-White, B. (2012). *The politics of poverty reduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Reich, M., & Balarajan, Y. (2012). *Political economy analysis for food and nutrition security*. Washington: World Bank.
- Sen, Amartya (1999). *Development as freedom*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Shankar, Shylashri. (2009). *Can social audit count?* ASARC Working Paper. Retrieved from <www.asian-studies.com>.
- The Hindu (2004). Pro-rich image, pessimism about reform did Naidu. *The Hindu*, Retrieved from <www.thehindu.com>.
- The Hindu (2010). No guarantees anymore. *The Hindu*.
- Times of India (2011). Farmers declare 'crop holiday'. *Times of India*.
- Times of India (2012). 101 NREGA workers win compensation. *The Times of India*.
- UNDP (2002). *Human Development Report*. New York: UNDP.
- Whitehead, L., & Gray-Molina, G. (2003). Political capabilities over the long run. In P. Houtzager, & M. Moore (Eds.), *Changing paths: International development and the politics of inclusion* (pp. 32–57). Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Available online at www.sciencedirect.com

ScienceDirect