

From Global Standards to Local Fields: Redefining Labour Through MGNREGS in Kerala's Tribal Heartlands – An Interrogation of ILO Norms

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Abstract: This study explores the transformative intersection between global labour norms and local governance innovations by interrogating the application of the International Labour Organization's (ILO) Decent Work framework within India's Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS). Focusing on the tribal districts of Wayanad, Idukki, and Palakkad in Kerala—regions marked by both ecological distinctiveness and socio-economic vulnerability—the research critically examines how labour is redefined as a right, a resource, and a site of empowerment. Drawing on a mixed-methods approach that integrates decade-long secondary data (2014–2025), policy documents, visual analytics, and field-based narratives, the paper analyzes the systemic underrepresentation of Scheduled Tribes (STs) in MGNREGS despite constitutional entitlements. In response, Kerala's "Tribal Plus" strategy is foregrounded as a model of localised governance—featuring tribal resource facilitation, culturally contextual asset creation, and decentralized grievance redressal—which reanimates the ILO's abstract norms into meaningful rural realities. By bridging theoretical constructs with empirical insight, the study not only critiques the performative inadequacies of labour-centric policies but also offers a replicable blueprint for rights-based rural employment. It advances the discourse on labour justice, especially in postcolonial and pluralistic societies, and contributes a timely intervention in the global conversation on inclusive development, indigenous agency, and institutional accountability.

Keywords: ILO, MGNREGS, Kerala, Tribal Plus, Labour Rights, Economic Empowerment, Scheduled Tribes, Rural Employment, Social Inclusion.

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I. INTRODUCTION

In the evolving discourse of global development, labour has re-emerged not merely as a factor of production, but as a site of dignity, entitlement, and political agency. The International Labour Organization (ILO), through its Decent Work Agenda, has championed a rights-based approach to employment—one that encompasses access to productive work, equality, security, and voice in the workplace^[1]. Yet, as these universal principles travel across borders into the variegated terrains of the Global South, they are often filtered through layers of structural inequality, bureaucratic inertia, and social exclusion. Nowhere is this paradox more visible than in rural India, where employment guarantee programmes like the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) attempt to deliver

constitutional promises of economic and social justice in deeply stratified societies. This paper enters this complex terrain by interrogating how globally defined labour standards are translated, negotiated, and sometimes reimaged in one of India's most progressive states—Kerala—and its most vulnerable geographies—its tribal heartlands.

MGNREGS, hailed globally for being the world's largest public employment programme^[2,3] aims to provide at least 100 days of guaranteed wage employment to every rural household. However, critical scholarship has highlighted how structural inequalities related to caste, gender, and indigeneity often undermine the egalitarian promise of this scheme^[4,5]. In Kerala—often lauded for its social development indicators¹^{6,7]}—the case of Scheduled Tribes (STs) under MGNREGS

remains both under-researched and under-theorized. Preliminary evidence suggests that despite constitutional protections and active decentralisation, STs in districts like Wayanad, Idukki, and Palakkad face disproportionately low access to employment, wage delays, inadequate grievance mechanisms, and cultural exclusion from participatory governance^[7,8]. This research identifies and interrogates this gap by situating Kerala's local innovation—'Tribal Plus'—within the broader framework of ILO's global standards.

The core research problem this study addresses is the disconnect between global labour norms and their implementation within marginalized communities under MGNREGS, specifically among ST populations in Kerala. The key research questions are: (1) How are ILO's Decent Work principles manifested, distorted, or resisted in the tribal districts of Kerala under MGNREGS? (2) What role does the Tribal Plus strategy play in localizing these global norms into field-level governance mechanisms? (3) How does the intersection of caste, gender, and indigeneity shape access to employment rights under MGNREGS in tribal Kerala? These questions aim to expose the limits of policy transfer and emphasize the need for contextual adaptation and ethical localisation of global standards.

The study focuses on three tribal-dominated districts—Wayanad, Idukki, and Palakkad—over a longitudinal period from 2014 to 2025. Using a mixed-methods approach, it draws on quantitative data from national and state MGNREGS portals, supplemented by qualitative insights from field-based case studies, focus group discussions, and policy documents. This research holds significance not only for Kerala's governance ecosystem but also for global debates on labour rights, decentralisation, and indigenous empowerment. By critically examining how labour is redefined through policy instruments in tribal settings, the study contributes to a growing body of scholarship that seeks to reframe welfare not as state benevolence but as a space for rights-based negotiation and inclusion. It offers a model for the ethical localisation of global frameworks, demonstrating that the real power of standards like the ILO's lies not in their universality alone, but in their capacity to be transformed by and through the lives of those they intend to serve.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

➤ *Global Labour Norms, Local Governance, and the Tribal Question under MGNREGS*

The intersection of global labour standards and local development policies has emerged as a pivotal site for interrogating justice, dignity, and inclusivity in the Global South. In India, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) stands as a landmark rights-based social protection initiative that promises rural households a legal guarantee to work. The theoretical ambition behind MGNREGS aligns with global frameworks such as the International Labour Organization's (ILO) Decent Work Agenda^[1] yet empirical research reveals persistent discrepancies between these ideals and the realities experienced by marginalised communities—particularly Scheduled Tribes (STs). This literature review synthesizes

major academic contributions across four dimensions: theoretical paradigms of labour and work, empirical evaluations of MGNREGS, caste and tribal marginalisation within labour markets, and the emerging role of decentralised governance in reconciling global-local policy disjunctures.

➤ *Theoretical Frameworks: Labour, Rights, and Global Standards*

Scholarly perspectives on labour have evolved from classical economic interpretations to critical frameworks that emphasise work as a site of human rights and dignity. The ILO's Decent Work Agenda^[1] redefines labour to include fair income, job security, and social dialogue—linking work to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 8). Scholars like Amartya Sen^[6] advocate for a capability approach, where employment is viewed not only as economic participation but as agency and freedom. Nancy Fraser's^[10] tripartite model of redistribution, recognition, and representation adds a feminist-structural lens, especially relevant in contexts where identity politics intersect with economic marginalisation.

While these theories offer a universalist vocabulary, scholars like Escobar^[11] and Ferguson^[12] caution against the uncritical application of global policy scripts in diverse local contexts. In labour studies, this critique leads to questions about how universal principles like 'decent work' are interpreted, translated, or resisted in rural and indigenous settings. Kerala's adaptation of MGNREGS under its decentralised planning system presents a compelling case of ethical localisation, demanding a re-evaluation of normative frameworks through grounded empirical inquiry.

➤ *Empirical Studies on MGNREGS: Scope, Achievements, and Critiques*

MGNREGS has spurred a substantial body of literature, both celebratory and critical. On the positive side, studies have documented improvements in rural wages^[13] reduced distress migration^[14], and greater bargaining power for rural labourers^[15]. In Kerala, its integration with panchayati raj institutions and gender-sensitive implementation mechanisms has been particularly noted^[16]. Kerala consistently leads in transparency, proactive disclosure, and participatory planning under MGNREGS^[17].

Yet, critical evaluations point to serious inconsistencies. Subham Roy et al.^[18] highlight spatial disparities in implementation across Indian states. Studies by Dutta et al.^[19] and Carswell & De Neve^[4] identify issues such as delayed wage payments, demand suppression, and elite capture. Gender-focused critiques highlight that women's high participation does not always translate to empowerment due to social constraints^[20]. Significantly, ST communities remain the least documented demographic in mainstream MGNREGS literature—suggesting a systematic blind spot in both data and policy design.

➤ *Labour Marginalisation and the Tribal Question*

Tribal communities in India face overlapping layers of dispossession, both economic and cultural. Xaxa^[21] and Baviskar^[22] describe how mainstream development projects often fail to engage tribal ontologies of land, work, and

community. In Kerala, Scheduled Tribes comprise around 1.5% of the population but face structural challenges in accessing state services^[8]. Studies by Kattakayam^[23] and the Tribal Development Report^[9] note that most tribal settlements are geographically isolated, lacking digital connectivity, literacy, and official recognition of demand registration.

Under MGNREGS, tribal workers frequently experience demand suppression, exclusion from wage record systems, and worksite discrimination. While affirmative policies exist—including wage differentials, individual asset creation, and flexibility in work norms—they are unevenly implemented^[24]. These exclusions are further complicated by language barriers, seasonal migration, and weak grievance redressal systems. The few studies focusing specifically on STs and MGNREGS are either dated or regionally scattered, underlining a significant empirical and theoretical void.

➤ *Decentralisation and Local Governance Innovations: The 'Tribal Plus' Approach*

Kerala's long-standing tradition of participatory governance, stemming from the People's Plan Campaign of the 1990s^[25] provides an institutional foundation for inclusive development. Within MGNREGS, innovations such as social audits, muster roll verification, and local grievance committees have been pioneered. The "Tribal Plus" strategy—formally introduced in 2018—represents Kerala's unique effort to integrate ST-specific concerns into the MGNREGS framework. It includes tribal resource persons, block-level tribal cells, and culturally contextual planning tools. However, academic literature on Tribal Plus remains minimal, and its evaluation is mostly limited to grey literature and government reports.

This study positions Tribal Plus as a potential case of ethical localisation, where global frameworks are transformed—not merely implemented—through local participation, recognition of difference, and structural adaptation. Drawing upon the idea of vernacular governance^[26], the present research attempts to fill the analytical gap by systematically evaluating this model using multi-year data (2014–2025), field narratives, and causal analytics.

➤ *Evaluation and Synthesis*

The reviewed literature demonstrates both the promise and paradox of rights-based employment programs like MGNREGS. While Kerala emerges as a national leader in several performance metrics, the persistent underrepresentation of ST communities in employment access, wage equity, and participatory planning remains underexplored. Theoretical frameworks provide tools to interrogate these inequities, but few studies integrate macro-level policy analysis with micro-level empirical data from tribal geographies. Methodologically, most studies rely on aggregate data or state-level averages, thereby missing intra-state and intra-district diversities.

This study builds upon and critically synthesizes these gaps by combining global labour frameworks with a district-wise, tribal-focused analysis. Its use of causal diagrams,

gender-disaggregated charts, and local governance flowcharts makes a methodological contribution to development studies and labour research. The integration of grounded field evidence with global theory responds to Fraser's^[27] call for participatory parity, enabling marginalised communities not only to benefit from development but to shape its grammar.

In summary, the existing literature underscores the complexity of translating global labour rights into local policy frameworks. While MGNREGS has transformed India's welfare landscape, it remains unevenly experienced, especially by tribal populations. Kerala's "Tribal Plus" strategy offers an important intervention point but requires rigorous academic scrutiny. This study thus contributes to filling a critical void in the scholarly landscape by combining macro-policy critique with local, data-driven insights. Its findings are expected to resonate with scholars, practitioners, and policymakers interested in labour governance, indigenous rights, and inclusive development in the Global South.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a convergent parallel mixed-methods design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative research techniques to provide a comprehensive understanding of how global labour standards—particularly the ILO's "Decent Work" framework—are operationalized through MGNREGS in the tribal heartlands of Kerala. The methodological foundation is observational, exploratory, and rooted in a rights-based lens of labour justice. The design allows simultaneous collection and analysis of both numeric and narrative data, thereby enabling triangulation and deeper causal insights. The framework also aligns with the grounded realities of the tribal populations, institutional frameworks, and adaptive innovations such as Kerala's "Tribal Plus" strategy. This methodological approach supports the core aim of interrogating the disjuncture between global labour norms and local delivery mechanisms through the lens of Scheduled Tribe (ST) experiences in Wayanad, Idukki, and Palakkad.

The study area comprises three of Kerala's most tribal-dense districts—Wayanad, Idukki, and Palakkad—selected based on their proportion of ST population, MGNREGS dependency, and geographic diversity. Together, they represent a microcosm of tribal rurality in the state. Using the Census 2011 data and updated administrative records from the State Rural Development Department and MGNREGS portals, the tribal populations were mapped, and the universe of participants was identified. The target population includes multiple stakeholders: registered ST MGNREGS workers, implementing officials at the panchayat and block levels, elected PRI members, tribal resource persons, and representatives of NGOs engaged in tribal empowerment. This inclusion ensures that both the delivery side and the recipient side of MGNREGS are critically examined, allowing the research to explore not only labour participation outcomes but also institutional responsiveness and adaptability.

A stratified proportionate random sampling technique was adopted to ensure that each district's tribal worker population was equitably represented in the sample. Based on the estimated number of ST MGNREGS workers—Wayanad (28,000), Idukki (18,000), and Palakkad (15,000)—the sample size was calculated using the Yamane^[28] formula: $n = N / (1 + N(e)^2)$ With a 95% confidence level ($e = 0.05$), this yielded approximate sample sizes of 390 (Wayanad), 305 (Idukki), and 285 (Palakkad), resulting in a total of 980 respondents. This proportionate distribution ensures statistical validity and district-level granularity. The mixed-sampling strategy enhances the representativeness of diverse tribal voices while addressing logistical and geographic challenges in field access.

For data collection, both primary and secondary sources were used. Quantitative tools included a structured questionnaire—framed around the ILO's Decent Work pillars—administered at the household level to assess participation, number of workdays, wage delays, grievance redressal mechanisms, and asset creation. Qualitative tools encompassed Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with ST male and female workers, key informant interviews with local MGNREGS officers and PRI representatives, and field case studies showcasing implementation innovations and challenges. Observational protocols were applied at MGNREGS worksites to assess physical conditions, labour treatment, and compliance with employment norms. These tools were developed in both English and Malayalam, pilot-tested for cultural validity, and administered with the assistance of trained tribal facilitators.

Data analysis followed rigorous quantitative and qualitative protocols. Descriptive statistics (frequency, mean, standard deviation) were applied to survey data, while inferential statistics—including Chi-square tests, t-tests, and ANOVA—were used to test significance in group differences. Multivariate regression models were deployed to identify predictors of labour participation and wage outcomes, while logistic regression analyzed binary variables such as timely payment and grievance satisfaction. Longitudinal data from 2014–2025 were subjected to time series analysis to understand tribal labour trends. Additionally, cluster analysis identified performance typologies across geographies. Software platforms included SPSS, STATA, R, and Python-based tools such as matplotlib and seaborn, alongside Tableau for visualization.

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➤ *Integrated Analysis of Labour Realities under MGNREGS in Kerala's Tribal Heart Lands*

The descriptive statistical analysis from 2014 to 2025 reveals significant disparities in total person-days generated under MGNREGS among Kerala's tribal districts. Wayanad recorded the highest person-days, followed by Idukki and Palakkad. These differences are not merely numerical but are indicative of underlying structural, administrative, and socio-cultural dynamics influencing labour provisioning and uptake. The bar chart visualization supports these findings by illustrating the district-wise variation in labour absorption. This pattern aligns with the ILO's first pillar of Decent Work—full and productive employment—highlighting the extent to which MGNREGS meets the employment needs of tribal populations in the region.

An inferential regression analysis, though limited by the number of observations, further accentuates these regional patterns. With Idukki emerging as a statistically stronger district in terms of person-days, the regression coefficients mirror the descriptive trends. However, the statistical insignificance due to sample size limitations is addressed by augmenting this analysis with qualitative insights. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) conducted with tribal workers across the three districts shed light on contextual and ground-level realities. For example, Idukki's better performance is

validated through FGD inputs citing active tribal facilitation, timely wage disbursement, and consistent job card renewals—reflecting ILO principles such as social protection, voice, and rights at work.

Structured questionnaires were administered among a proportionately stratified random sample of 980 tribal MGNREGS workers. Responses indicated that over 68% of participants in Wayanad reported irregularity in work availability, while in Idukki, more than 72% reported satisfaction with worksite conditions and wage payments. In Palakkad, about 60% of respondents expressed concern over delayed payments and low transparency in muster rolls. These figures correspond with the ILO's dimensions of security in the workplace and equal treatment, offering a robust quantitative scaffold to support the field-based narratives. Questionnaire-based data triangulate statistical observations, thereby lending further credibility to the research findings.

District-level case studies provide further granularity to the analysis. In Wayanad's Mananthavady block, tribal workers noted that asset creation projects under MGNREGS often excluded tribal hamlets due to poor planning and inaccessible locations. In contrast, Idukki's Devikulam block showcased effective convergence between MGNREGS and Tribal Development Schemes, especially in land development and water conservation works that directly benefited ST communities. Palakkad's Attappady block, despite being a nationally recognized tribal region, suffered from low implementation fidelity due to limited staff, digital illiteracy among ST workers, and inadequate grievance redressal. These case studies not only reinforce empirical trends but also embody ILO's call for context-sensitive and inclusive labour governance.

Integrating all these dimensions—statistical, narrative, and participatory—demonstrates the efficacy of using a convergent mixed-methods framework. The quantitative rigour of descriptive and inferential statistics is complemented by the depth of qualitative inquiry, ensuring a holistic analysis that goes beyond numerical reporting. Each layer of evidence strengthens the other, creating a scientifically valid, policy-relevant, and locally grounded assessment of MGNREGS implementation in tribal Kerala. Moreover, the use of internationally recognized frameworks like the ILO's Decent Work Agenda bridges global development standards with grassroots realities.

In conclusion, this multi-layered analysis validates the core hypothesis that labour governance through MGNREGS is uneven but holds transformative potential when tailored through interventions like Kerala's "Tribal Plus" strategy. The combined use of descriptive metrics, regression logic, stakeholder voices, and district-focused case evidence establishes a clear research logic that is methodologically transparent and epistemologically rich. It provides both a diagnostic and prescriptive insight into improving tribal livelihoods through rights-based rural employment, fulfilling the mandates of both national policy and global labour justice.

IV. FINDINGS

The empirical findings from both descriptive and inferential analyses underscore the uneven distribution and accessibility of labour provisions under MGNREGS across Kerala's tribal-dominated districts. Wayanad recorded the highest number of person-days generated, followed by Idukki and Palakkad. These trends reflect varying administrative capacities, local governance responsiveness, and community engagement levels. The Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and questionnaire data provide qualitative depth to these statistics, revealing that while some districts have institutionalized inclusive practices aligned with the ILO's Decent Work principles, others suffer from implementation deficits and infrastructural neglect.

These findings resonate with prior studies on tribal livelihoods and labour governance. For instance, Dreze and Khara ^[3] emphasize the role of proactive bureaucracies and local institutions in improving MGNREGS delivery. The better performance of Idukki, as revealed in this study, aligns with this assertion. However, the contrasting experience in Palakkad reflects gaps also highlighted by Economic Review ^[29], cautioning against assuming uniform implementation across decentralized structures. Unlike previous literature that often focuses on average outcomes at the state level, this study reveals intra-state tribal disparities that remain under-explored in national MGNREGS assessments.

The findings challenge conventional narratives of MGNREGS as a monolithic, egalitarian employment scheme by exposing localized inequalities within tribal belts. This substantiates theories of situated governance and labour marginalization within development studies. The role of "Tribal Plus" mechanisms in improving institutional reach confirms the significance of context-specific policy adaptation—a concept endorsed by Amartya Sen's capabilities approach and Nancy Fraser's justice theory. The data supports a refinement of the ILO's Decent Work framework by illustrating how it must be operationalized differently across subnational contexts marked by indigenous vulnerabilities.

The implications of this study extend beyond academic theorizing. Policymakers should prioritize decentralizing MGNREGS operations through culturally sensitive delivery models like Kerala's Tribal Plus strategy. Creating locally recruited tribal facilitators, deploying mobile worksite apps in tribal languages, and streamlining grievance redress mechanisms could ensure better access and transparency. Moreover, convergence between tribal sub-plans and employment guarantee schemes must be institutionalized, rather than project-based. This study thus offers actionable insights for bureaucrats, NGOs, and international development agencies seeking to make employment rights more inclusive.

Despite its depth, the study has limitations. The small sample size in inferential statistics restricts the generalizability of regression findings. A lack of year-wise panel data prevented more advanced time series analysis.

FGDs and interviews, while rich in narrative, were constrained by logistical challenges and language barriers in some tribal hamlets. Moreover, the overreliance on secondary data from government portals may have overlooked informal community initiatives not officially recorded. Future studies could deploy mobile-based real-time monitoring tools for richer micro-level data.

This research opens multiple avenues for future inquiry. Comparative studies across other tribal-dense Indian states like Jharkhand, Odisha, and Chhattisgarh could help contextualize Kerala's relatively advanced model. Internationally, the findings provide a framework for assessing the translatability of Decent Work norms into local realities. For example, UNDP-ILO collaborations on employment rights in Sub-Saharan Africa or Latin America could benefit from Kerala's Tribal Plus innovations. By documenting how global standards interact with regional complexities, this research bridges a critical gap in international labour studies and offers a replicable model for inclusive rural employment.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

➤ Institutionalize "Tribal Plus" Across States

Kerala's Tribal Plus model—featuring community facilitators, dedicated tribal budgets, and localized implementation frameworks—should be scaled up nationally through policy circulars from the Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD). States with high ST populations like Odisha, Chhattisgarh, and Jharkhand can contextualize this model for their own tribal belts.

➤ Enhance Digital and Administrative Inclusion

Mobile MGNREGS apps must incorporate tribal languages and voice-based interfaces to counteract digital illiteracy. Districts should hire local tribal youths as digital assistants at Gram Panchayat offices to bridge information gaps and assist in e-muster rolls and wage tracking.

➤ Ensure Timely Wage Payments and Transparency

MoRD and state Rural Development Departments must strengthen monitoring and enforce penalties for wage delays. A publicly available weekly dashboard at the Panchayat level should be mandated to report person-days generated, pending wages, and grievance redress status.

➤ Strengthen Panchayat-Level Convergence with Tribal Development Plans

Tribal Sub-Plan (TSP) funds must be co-utilized with MGNREGS to ensure asset creation and livelihood sustainability in ST areas. Every Panchayat should maintain a "MGNREGS-TSP Convergence Calendar," enabling planned and participatory work execution.

➤ Revise Work Allocation Norms for ST Hamlets

Recognize the geographical and climatic isolation of many tribal hamlets and revise the minimum number of workers required to initiate a project. Special provisions must be made for low-density ST settlements to ensure equitable access to work.

➤ Introduce Decent Work Evaluation Metrics at the Local Level

Gram Panchayats should annually audit their MGNREGS implementation against the ILO's four Decent Work pillars. Social audits must incorporate not just financial scrutiny but also dignity, inclusion, and safety metrics.

➤ Support Further Research on Tribal Labour Governance

Future studies should use disaggregated Panchayat-level data and participatory ethnographic methods to understand deeper socio-political dynamics. International comparative studies could also explore how India's tribal labour provisions compare with indigenous labour rights programs in Latin America or Africa.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study set out to interrogate how the ILO's global labour standards—particularly its Decent Work framework—are interpreted, adapted, and operationalized through MGNREGS in the tribal districts of Kerala. Anchored in a convergent mixed-methods design and informed by both statistical and ethnographic evidence from Wayanad, Idukki, and Palakkad, the research critically examines whether the promises of equitable and inclusive employment under MGNREGS have been realized for Scheduled Tribe (ST) populations. The findings decisively demonstrate that while Kerala's implementation of MGNREGS is comparatively more robust than many Indian states, significant intra-state disparities persist in tribal areas. Wayanad and Idukki showed higher person-day generation and better qualitative indicators—such as worksite conditions, grievance redressal mechanisms, and institutional responsiveness—when compared to Palakkad. These patterns were affirmed by descriptive and inferential analyses, structured questionnaires, focus group discussions, and district-specific case studies. The research also highlighted the role of local innovations like the "Tribal Plus" strategy in enabling more context-sensitive delivery of labour entitlements. Critically, the study advances the understanding that global labour frameworks, such as those promoted by the ILO, cannot be passively transplanted into localized rural contexts. Instead, they require translation, negotiation, and adaptation through participatory governance mechanisms. In this sense, Kerala's tribal districts become not just recipients of global norms but active sites of reinterpretation, where rights-based employment is shaped by geography, culture, caste, and state capacity. Theoretically, the study contributes to debates on labour citizenship, situated governance, and postcolonial interpretations of Decent Work. Methodologically, it demonstrates the power of integrated statistical and field-based inquiry in exposing hidden inequities in policy implementation. Practically, it underscores the urgency of recalibrating employment schemes through tribal-led planning, linguistic inclusion, and convergence with other development sectors. In sum, this research reframes MGNREGS not as a static welfare scheme, but as a dynamic arena where global aspirations meet local struggles, and where labour rights are continuously constructed, contested, and reclaimed. It offers both a critique and a blueprint—an

evidence-based call to strengthen tribal labour governance by grounding international standards in lived realities

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