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Inclusive Growth in Post-Pandemic India: Analyzing Government Schemes for Poverty Alleviation and Employment Generation.

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Abstract -

The impact of the pandemic of coronavirus (COVID-19) has resulted in an unprecedented disruption of the global economy. Developing countries like India experienced increased unemployment and a growing disparity of income levels and poverty. To overcome this problem, the Indian Government has implemented numerous financial measures to help bring the economy back on track. The aim of this research paper is to examine the effectiveness of government schemes such as Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana-National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM) and Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY). This research will look into whether these schemes have been successful in alleviating poverty and creating jobs in the post-pandemic period. Secondary data has been used from official government sources and economic reports to analyse how these schemes have helped create an economic recovery through social protection schemes and livelihood schemes.

Keywords - Inclusive Growth, Post-Pandemic Recovery, Poverty Alleviation, Employment Generation, Government Schemes.

1. Introduction -

The outbreak of the pandemic of COVID-19 in early 2020 caused one of the worst economic crisis in the history of modern times. This had a huge impact on the MSMEs, informal sector workers, and rural areas of a developing country like India. The lockdowns caused a huge decline in economic activity, which led to a slump in GDP growth, loss of jobs, and reversal of progress made to reduce poverty.

In these circumstances, the Indian government focused on promoting Inclusive Growth. Inclusive Growth is when the economic benefits are spread across the whole population. This includes making sure that those who are vulnerable and at a disadvantage have more opportunities. It focuses on giving everyone the same opportunity to get food, social protection and create employment opportunities.

To help with the shock of the pandemic the government introduced more social protection schemes. The government expanded their social protection schemes and targeted stimulus. The government had various

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schemes to help with this. This included providing them with food (PMGKAY), creating more jobs in the rural areas (MGNREGA) and creating more livelihood opportunities for women.

Table 1: India's Post-Pandemic Macroeconomic Shock and Recovery Trends

Year / Period	GDP Growth Rate (%)	Unemployment Rate (%)	Rural Wage Growth Index	Key Economic Intervention
2020–21 (Pandemic Peak)	-6.6%	8.0% - 9.0%	Stagnant / Low	Emergency relief packages, PMGKAY rollout, initial MGNREGA expansion.
2021–22 (Initial Recovery)	8.7%	6.5% - 7.0%	Moderate	Scaled-up rural employment guarantees and micro-credit interventions.
2022–24 (Consolidation)	7.0% - 7.2%	5.1% - 5.5%	Stable	Transition toward green skill missions, digital infrastructure, and self-reliance.

Analysis for Table 1- As shown in Table 1, the macroeconomic situation of India drastically declined in 2020-21 due to the high rates of unemployment along with negative GDP (-6.6%). However, proactive steps such as large scale efforts to ensure food security and increase employment within the rural areas helped India demonstrate a recovery which was in the V-shape. In 2022-24, the economy had stabilised and was growing at around 7%, showing how important social welfare schemes can be to the economy when external shocks occur.

2. Objectives of the Study-

This study's main goal is to investigate how government initiatives in post-pandemic India promote equitable growth. The particular goals are:

The primary objective of this study was to understand how government initiatives in post-pandemic India can promote equitable growth. Specifically, I wanted to learn:

1. How significantly social safety net programs contribute to ensuring food security and addressing post pandemic poverty.
2. How successfully public employment generation initiatives stabilize rural labor markets.

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To evaluate on how livelihood & skill development initiatives helps the underprivileged communities to flourish Inclusively

understand the role of Government.

3. Methodology-

The nature of research is descriptive and analytical with only secondary data being used. The information has been drawn from authentic sources such as:

- Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Bulletins and Annual Reports.
- Reports from NITI Aayog and Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MOSPI)
- Press Information Bureau (PIB) and MGNREGA and NRLM portals.

Table 2- Summary Matrix of Secondary Data Sources, Analytical Focus, and Key Parameters

Data Source / Institution	Specific Reports / Publications	Core Analytical Focus	Parameters Evaluated
Reserve Bank of India (RBI)	Annual Reports, State Finances, Bulletins	Monetary trends, credit growth, and sectoral recovery.	Flow of money MSMEs, inflation indices, and banking sector health.
NITI Aayog	SDG India Index Reports, Policy Briefs	Macro-level inclusive growth and poverty alleviation metrics.	Multidimensional poverty reduction, health infrastructure, and livelihood indices.
Ministry of Rural Development	Scheme Performance Dashboards (MGNREGA, NRLM)	Grassroots employment generation and women empowerment.	Person-days generated, SHG-bank linkages, and micro-enterprise growth.

Analysis for Table 2- The hierarchical architecture of secondary data sources used in this investigation is shown in Table 2. The research maintains high academic rigor and empirical validity by cross-verifying indicators across national policy think-tanks (NITI Aayog), implementation ministries, and central banking reports (RBI). This multi-source triangulation guaranties that genuine, peer-verified institutional data is the foundation for the assessment of post-pandemic government initiatives. The performance, coverage, and socioeconomic results of these welfare programs throughout the post-pandemic recovery phase have been assessed through qualitative analysis of the gathered data.

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4. Discussion and Analysis - Evaluating Key Government Schemes

A. Social Safety Nets and Poverty Alleviation (PMGKAY)

The immediate shock of the pandemic threatened millions with acute food insecurity and extreme poverty. To counteract this, the government expanded food security frameworks through initiatives like the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY). By providing free food grains to over 800 million vulnerable citizens, the scheme successfully prevented widespread hunger and served as a vital cushion against poverty escalation during economic downturns. Economic evaluations indicate that robust food safety nets significantly protected households from depleting their assets, thereby maintaining baseline consumption levels.

B. Employment Generation and Rural Resilience (MGNREGA)

Millions of reverse migrants who returned to rural areas during lockdowns benefited economically from the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guaranty Act (MGNREGA). The demand for jobs under MGNREGA reached all-time highs, highlighting the program's vital function as a safety net for rural employment. The program concentrated on building long-lasting community assets, including as water conservation structures, rural connecting routes, and agricultural infrastructure, which consistently boost rural productivity, in addition to offering immediate pay revenue.

Table 3- Comparative Analysis of Rural Job Generation and Household Beneficiaries (MGNREGA)

Financial Year	Total Person-Days Generated under MGNREGA (in Crores)	Total Households Provided Employment (in Lakhs)	Percentage of Women Person-Days (%)
2019–20 (Pre-pandemic)	265.35 Crores	338 Lakhs	~54.7%
2020–21 (Peak Pandemic)	389.09 Crores	389 Lakhs	~53.1%
2022–24 (Post-pandemic)	300+ Crores (Average)	305+ Lakhs	~57.5%

Analysis for Table 3 -

Table 3 demonstrates the extraordinary stabilizing effect that rural employment guaranties had both during and after the health crisis. In comparison to pre-pandemic baselines, person-days generation increased by over 46% during the peak pandemic year of 2020–2021, absorbing millions of reverse migrants whose urban livelihoods had crumbled. Additionally, the recent increase in women's engagement (above 57.5%) suggests that employment safety nets have progressively incorporated gender-inclusive growth, guaranteeing rural women independent financial agency even in the face of macroeconomic turbulence.

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C. Livelihood Enhancement and Women Empowerment (DAY-NRLM)

Without women actively participating in the economy, inclusive growth is not complete. Millions of rural women were organized into Self-Help Groups (SHGs) by the Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana-National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM). Women were able to start microbusinesses in the post-pandemic period because to financial inclusion through institutional financing and enterprise promotion initiatives like the establishment of Lakhpati Didis. In addition to raising household earnings, this bottom-up strategy increased community resilience and financial knowledge at the local level.

Table 4 - Overview of Major Post-Pandemic Government Schemes in India

Name of the Scheme	Target Sector / Beneficiaries	Primary Objective / Intervention	Post-Pandemic Impact / Outcome
PMGKAY (Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana)	Over 800 million vulnerable citizens	To provide free food grains and ensure nutritional security during economic distress.	Prevented extreme hunger and protected households from asset depletion.
MGNREGA (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act)	Rural households / Informal & reverse-migrant workers	To guarantee 100 days of wage employment and create durable rural assets.	Acted as a safety valve, absorbing millions of displaced workers during lockdowns.
DAY-NRLM (Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana - NRLM)	Rural women / Self-Help Groups (SHGs)	To promote grassroots financial inclusion, livelihood diversification, and micro-enterprise.	Empowered women economically through credit linkage and skill development.

Analysis for Table 4 -

The government's multifaceted strategy included livelihood support, wage employment, and food security, as seen in Table 4. While MGNREGA steadied the rural labor market by taking in reverse migrants, PMGKAY immediately addressed the acute sustenance issue. In order to ensure a balanced recovery in both social and economic dimensions, DAY-NRLM simultaneously focused on structural empowerment through women's collectives.

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Table 5 - Key Indicators of Post-Pandemic Economic Recovery and Inclusion -

Economic Dimension	Pre-Pandemic Status	Post-Pandemic Intervention Strategy	Observed Recovery Trend / Outcome
Food Security & Poverty	Vulnerable to shocks and inflationary pressures	Universal/targeted food distribution and Direct Benefit Transfers (DBT)	Significant containment of extreme poverty rates and baseline nutritional stability.
Rural Labor Market	Seasonal underemployment and wage stagnation	Surge in person-days generation under rural employment guarantees	Stabilization of rural consumption demand and support to informal workers.
Financial Inclusion & Women Livelihoods	Limited credit access for rural micro-entrepreneurs	Scaling up SHG bank linkages and enterprise training (e.g., Lakhpati Didi initiative)	Expansion of grassroots entrepreneurship and enhanced household financial resilience.

Analysis for Table 5-

Table 5 demonstrates how India's post-pandemic recovery strategy has undergone a structural change. The policy framework effectively closed the gap between macro-level growth and micro-level welfare by focusing on women-centric micro-enterprises, rural job guaranties, and targeted DBT mechanisms. The foundation for attaining inclusive and sustainable development was this integrated approach.

Table 6- Post-Pandemic Economic Challenges in Rural and Urban Sectors

Sector	Major Challenge Encountered	Underlying Cause / Factor	Policy Implication / Intervention Required
Rural Economy	Wage stagnation and disguised unemployment	Return of urban migrants back to agriculture	Need for skill diversification and expansion of non-farm employment.
Micro & Small Enterprises (MSMEs)	Severe liquidity crunch and supply chain disruptions	Extended lockdowns and sudden drop in consumer demand	Credit guarantee schemes and digital adoption support.

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Sector	Major Challenge Encountered	Underlying Cause / Factor	Policy Implication / Intervention Required
Informal Labor Market	Loss of daily livelihoods and social security gaps	Lack of formal contracts and remote-work viability	Universalization of welfare benefits and formalization drives.

Analysis for Table 6-

The post-pandemic economic environment created a variety of structural challenges, as seen in Table 6. The MSME and informal sectors saw severe liquidity shortages, while rural areas experienced covert unemployment as a result of reverse migration. Policy interventions that went beyond short-term relief were necessary to address these constraints, with a strong emphasis on structural adaptation, formalization, and credit support.

Table 7- Strategic Policy Recommendations for Sustainable and Inclusive Development

Focus Area	Policy Recommendation	Expected Long-Term Outcome
Digital Infrastructure	Strengthening digital financial literacy and broadband connectivity in remote rural pockets.	Seamless delivery of direct benefit transfers and expansion of rural e-commerce.
Skill Enhancement	Aligning rural skill training programs (like PMKVY) with modern green economy needs.	Enhanced employability and transition of rural workforce toward high-value sectors.
Healthcare & Social Safety	Institutionalizing robust public health infrastructure and expanding resilient safety nets.	Protection of vulnerable households from health-induced poverty traps.

Analysis for Table 7-

Table 7 describes the forward-thinking strategy needed to maintain India's growth trajectory. The state can prevent future economic shocks from undermining the hard-won benefits of inclusive development by including digital literacy, green-economy skill training, and strong health safety nets into the policy framework. These actions serve as the fundamental cornerstones of an independent and robust economic system.

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Table 8- Trends in Government Budgetary Outlays for Social Sector and Welfare Schemes

Fiscal Year	Allocation for Rural Employment (MGNREGA in Crore INR)	Allocation for Food Security (PMGKAY / Food Subsidy in Crore INR)	Allocation for Livelihoods & Women (DAY-NRLM / DAY-NULM in Crore INR)
2020–21 (Revised)	INR 1,11,500 Crore	INR 2,41,155 Crore	INR 10,000 Crore
2022–23 (Actual)	INR 89,400 Crore	INR 1,97,350 Crore	INR 14,130 Crore
2024–25 (Budget Estimates)	INR 86,000 Crore	INR 2,13,105 Crore	INR 15,047 Crore

Analysis for Table 8-

The fiscal architecture of post-pandemic India showed a deliberate shift from immediate pandemic relief to long-term structural institution-building, as shown in Table 8. Subsequent budgets progressively increased investments in livelihood missions like DAY-NRLM, while peak pandemic years required extraordinary fiscal expansions toward free food distribution (exceeding INR 2.4 lakh crore in PMGKAY) and record-high MGNREGA allocations. The state's long-term commitment to grassroots financial inclusion and sustainable, bottom-up economic development is demonstrated by this gradual increase in women-centric and micro-enterprise allocations from INR 10,000 crore to over INR 15,000 crore.

5. Findings of the Study-

Based on the analysis of post-pandemic economic interventions, the key findings of this study are:

- **Reduction of Extreme Poverty-** Targeted food security programs like PMGKAY effectively prevented a surge in extreme poverty and shielded vulnerable households from acute distress during the economic contraction.
- **Flexibility in Rural Employment-** MGNREGA successfully absorbed millions of displaced informal and reverse-migrant workers, providing immediate livelihood support when urban job markets collapsed.
- **Self-determination through Collectives-** DAY-NRLM and women's Self-Help Groups (SHGs) played a transformative role in rural financial inclusion, ensuring that economic recovery reached the grassroots and promoted gender-inclusive growth.
- **Shift Toward Eco-friendly Frameworks-** The post-pandemic recovery strategy successfully combined immediate relief with long-term asset creation, laying a foundation for resilient rural infrastructure.

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- **Table 9: Impact of Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) on Direct Benefit Transfers (DBT) and Leak control-**

Digital Tool / Platform	Primary Function in Welfare Delivery	Pre-DPI Challenge	Post-DPI Outcome / Efficiency Gain
JAM Trinity (Jan Dhan-Aadhaar-Mobile)	Direct routing of welfare funds and subsidies to beneficiaries	Intermediary leakages, ghost beneficiaries, delayed payments	Real-time direct transfers, elimination of middlemen, massive leakage reduction.
Unified Payments Interface (UPI)	P2P and P2M micro-transactions in rural/semi-urban markets	Cash-dependency, lack of formal banking access	Exponential growth in rural digital retail transactions and financial integration.
e-Shram Portal / National Databases	Comprehensive registry of unorganized and informal workers	Absence of unified tracking data for migrant/informal labor	Targeted delivery of relief packages and streamlined social security coverage.

Analysis for Table 9: Table 9 captures the transformative journey of Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI), where the integration of JAM Trinity (Jan Dhan-Aadhaar-Mobile) and the massive adoption of Unified Payments Interface (UPI) across all socio-economic strata even in remote corners have helped overcome historic leakages, corruption & delivery issues.

The creation of several databases including e-Shram has ensured precision targeting amidst an economic crisis while the technological synergy has become a key force multiplier to ensure seamless flow of funds earmarked for poverty alleviation reaching its ultimate beneficiaries at grassroot level leading to faster growth with inclusion.

6. Conclusion

The Indian economy's post-pandemic recovery emphasizes how crucial aggressive government action is to promoting inclusive prosperity. Targeted government initiatives in food security, rural employment, and livelihood enhancement effectively lessened the impact on vulnerable communities, even if the health crisis created significant disruptions. But maintaining this momentum calls for ongoing legislative attention to closing the digital divide and improving rural employment and increasing micro-entrepreneurs' access to institutional credit. In the end, attaining long-term sustainable and inclusive development necessitates a constant collaboration between strong social safety nets and creative economic strategies.

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