



MGNREGA AND EMPLOYMENT GENERATION: A STUDY IN THE STATE OF ASSAM, INDIA

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ABSTRACT

MGNREGA has been a breakthrough in the history of independent India particularly in terms of economic empowerment of rural poor. It is one of the major legislative measures taken by the government during its 10th Five Year Plan with a view to ameliorating poverty in rural India by generating 100days guaranteed employment to each member of rural households who demand for it. This Act has been calculatingly designed for poor unskilled labour force of the rural areas of the country who are basically dependent on agriculture which is mostly seasonal in most of the parts of the country. The decentralized three-tier implementation process of the Act is its most remarkable aspect. Apart from the key role played by the Central Government, the state governments have also been empowered a lot to monitor and implement the Act through various levels of administrative structures from district to panchayat levels via development blocks. The paper basically focuses on one aspect of this epoch-making legislation, i. e, employment generation in the state of Assam, a major component of North Eastern Region of India. Particularly the analyses comprise the details of job cards issued and employment provided, employment generation to various social groups, average mandays of employment provided, increase in job card issued and job provided as well as the fund expended on wage and the data furnished against all these aspects cover the period from financial years 2007-08 to 2014-15.

Key Words: MGNREGA, Rural Development Programmes, Employment Generation, Households, Mandays, Job Card.

Introduction

Public employment programmes have been introduced in various developed and developing countries across the globe from time to time with a view to tackling certain crises arising out of depression, postwar reconstruction, economic crisis, recession as well as floods and earthquakes having the objective of providing a kind of social security through income generation via labour intensive employment which in turn contributes to public assets. Mention may be made of certain such welfare programmes introduced in a number of developing countries since early 1970s in Asia, Africa and Latin America- i) Indonesia's Padat Karya, relaunched in 1998 after the economic crisis, ii) Bangladesh's Food for Work Programme, iii) India's Maharashtra Employment Guarantee Scheme, iv) Argentina's Jefes De Hogar in 2002, v) Botswana's labour-based relief programmes, vi) South Africa's expanded public works programme from 2004 etc. These are 'last resort wage employment' opportunity for vulnerable groups who are unemployed and underemployed over the year; if properly planned, labour intensive public works programme can not only alleviate poverty but can bring about economic growth and social equity. According to Sukti Dasgupta and Ratna M. Sudarshan (2011), these programmes are based on a Keynesian aggregate demand strategy of direct job creation for ensuring a full employment economy. Minsky (1986) speaks in favour of these programmes and opines that these are usually targeted job programmes, paying minimum wages, with an aim to create a social floor and have the potential to reduce poverty 'in a politically digestible manner'(1971, 20) as quoted in Papadimitriou, 2008, 4). Antonopoulos (2009) while describing the rationale of such programmes states that government has an active role to play in promoting full employment in developing economies by assuming the role of the market-maker for labour. The maximum benefit can be derived if factors like planning of the programmes, the wage rate, the nature of works, the types of jobs generated and the access and availability of work for women and men are well-planned and taken up in a systematic manner. But the programmes are not above criticism as often the charge of expensiveness and corruption are leveled against these. The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) of India came into being mostly with a noble mission by the government of India to be delivered finally to the respective state governments to be implemented from the very grassroot level

making the panchayat a primary implementing agency. For the first time ever, it makes an effort to ensure 'right to employment' for the rural poor unskilled labourers through some legislation.

In keeping with the ideology of Mahatma Gandhi regarding the human resources of a nation particularly the poor ones that the National Rural Employment Guarantee ACT (NREGA) has been renamed as Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) which is a landmark legislation in the history of independent India in government's continuous effort to eradicate poverty by generating employment to the rural population (both BPL and APL) who are basically dependent on agriculture, mostly a seasonal occupation for them. Moreover, a developing country like India with the experience of years of colonization and population explosion has huge upsurge of unskilled labour and for them, this particular Act is a boon whatsoever. Moreover, it is a demand-driven scheme and all willing members of rural households are to be provided with some work within a stipulated period of time. Despite all the major employment generating programmes introduced in various five year plans like Training of Rural Youth for Self Employment (TRYSEM) in 1979, Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP) and National Rural Employment Programme (NREP) in 1980, Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas (DWCRA) in 1982, Rural Landless Labour Employment Guarantee Scheme (RLEGP) in 1983, the Employment Assurance Scheme (EAS) in the period 1992-93, Swarna Jayanti Gram Swarajgar Yojana (SJGSRY) and Jawahar Gram Samridhi Yojana (JGSY) in 1999, the eradication of unemployment problem has been a far cry for a vast country like India where poverty is a chronic disease, difficult to be tackled with. With the introduction of economic reforms in the early 1990s, though an impressive growth rate of GDP has been perceptible, statistical evidences show that the benefits of the growth have not affected the overwhelming majority of India's poor in a remarkable manner. Thus unlike the previous programmes of employment generation and poverty alleviation, it aims at mitigating rural poverty along with some other factors like inclusive growth, transparency, decentralized development and participation of civil society in rural and national development etc. Apart from that the Act intends to empower the most disadvantaged and deprived sections of the society including women without intermediaries and to create demand-based local level community assets in order to bridge the infrastructural gaps in rural area. It has turned out to be a tool of gender equity and socio-economic empowerment. It cannot be forgotten that the least advantaged in a democracy are the ones, most in need of democratic support as has been the crux of the

ideology of the great political philosopher John Rawls and MGNREGA seems to be a positive response to the ethical task set by him.

The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) was enacted on August 23, 2005 and got presidential assent on September 5, 2005, came into force in 200 districts of India on February 2, 2006 out of a total 593 in the country, 130 districts in the financial year 2007, and in the third and final phase it was expanded to cover the entire nation including the study area. As has already been said, it is considered an “employer of last resort”, initially called the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) which is rechristened on October 2, 2009 as Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) having the twin objectives of rural development and employment. Basic entitlements of MGNREGA include i) employment within 15 days of application, ii) unemployment allowance, iii) work within a 5 km distance from home, iv) minimum wages, v) payment within 15 days, vi) no gender discrimination, vii) basic worksite facilities whereas eight categories of work permitted under MGNREGA include i) water conservation and water harvesting, drought proofing, ii) irrigation canals, iii) provision of irrigation facility on the lands of the disadvantaged sections-SCs and STs and others, iv) land development, v) renovation of traditional water bodies (tanks etc), vi) flood control and protection works, vii) rural connectivity to provide all-weather access and viii) forestry preservation for bio-diversity.

Among the salient features of this epoch-making Act, mention may be made of the provisions like

- i) Payment of wages every week or at least within a fortnight
- ii) Compensation to be paid in case of delay as per the Payment of Wages Act
- iii) Gender bias to be discarded
- iv) Compensation and treatment in case of injury
- v) On-site safe drinking water, care of small children, periods of rest, and a first-aid box
- vi) Banning contractors and labour displacing machines
- vii) At least 60 percent of expenditure should be on wages
- viii) At least 50 percent of the projects should be implemented through gram panchayats which must prepare a development plan
- ix) The Programme Officer to be responsible for the implementation of the employment guarantee programme in the block.

The main impetus behind the Act might be the social movements for ending hunger by guaranteeing right to food to the poor supported by various civil society movements such as the right to information etc. and also the influence three-decade-long track record of the Employment Guarantee Scheme (EGS) has in Maharashtra. MGNREGA thus marks a paradigm shift from all the precedent wage employment programmes as it i) provides a statutory guarantee of wage-employment right-based framework for wage employment, ii) employment provided on workers' demand unlike the earlier programmes which were based on budget allocation, iii) inbuilds transparency safeguard documents-job card entitlements which are in the custody of the workers, iv) written application for employment, muster rolls, measurement books and asset register processes, acceptance of employment application, issue of dated receipts, time-bound work allocation and wage payment, Citizen Information Boards at worksites, Vigilance Monitoring Committees, regular block, district and state-level inspections, and social audits, v) public delivery system made more accountable as both the Central Government and the State Governments are obliged to present annual reports on the outcomes of MGNREGA to the Parliament and the State Legislatures respectively.

It has a three-tier planning and implementation system. The Gram Panchayat is the pivotal body for implementation at the village level which is responsible for planning work, registration of applicants, issuing job cards, executing works, and monitoring the implementation of the scheme. The Programme Officer who is answerable to the DPC is responsible for the implementation of the Act at the block level. At the district level, the District Panchayat will be responsible for finalizing the district plans and for monitoring and supervising the EGS in the district, DPC, who can be the Chief Executive Officer of the District Panchayat, or the District Collector, or any other district-level officer of appropriate rank would be responsible for the proper implementation of the various provisions of the Act. At the state level, the responsibility is with State Employment Guarantee Council (SEGC) which shall advise the State Government on the implementation of the Scheme, evaluate and monitor it. Finally at the central level, the Central Employment Guarantee Council (CEGC), set up under the chairmanship of the Minister of Rural Development is the major stakeholder, its function being advising the government on MGNREGA-related matters, monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the Act as a whole and preparing annual reports to be submitted to the parliament. The state governments are mandated to provide sufficient staff and technical support to the DPC and Programme Officer for the effective implementation of the Act. The Ministry of Rural Development has suggested

certain administrative pattern which can be followed or adapted by the state governments according to their needs and contexts. The funding agency for the maintenance and management of the implementation of the Act at different levels and stages lies with the government of India. From Government reports, it is found that in last few years after the implementation of the Act, more than 3.12 crore households have been provided with employment throughout the country, around 122.45 crore person days have been created and 7.32 lakh assets have been built out of 26.14 lakhs taken up under this programme whereas national bulletin of MGNREGA discloses that out of the total person days created, 50 percent of the person days have been occupied by women labourers. In terms of the inclusion issues, the data generated under MGNREGA gives a bright side of the picture but the state-wise performance analysis brings out the other side of the whole affair and persistent malpractices seem to be working against the proper implementation of the Act. The state of Andhra Pradesh seems to be the topper with the reports of providing 100 percent employment continuously under the Act, followed by Tamil Nadu, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh etc. with a very low performance on the part of Himachal Pradesh. Moreover, more or less 99 percent of demanded work has been fulfilled by the government with minor variations in various financial years.

Despite the government effort to spread the benefits of the Act to every nook and corner of the country, much remains to be done yet for which governance system has to be strengthened and awareness drives must be given for the better planning and implementation of the programme. But then universalizing and homogenizing the whole affair will be wrong as inter-state variations in executing the Act are perceived. Certain states have performed well in terms of employment provided as against employment demanded. Kannan (2005) stresses that the potential of MGNREGA could be more fully realized if human development had been more fully prioritized, for instance, improved health care facilities would help mothers to work better under the Act. Taking the fact into consideration that a well-designed employment guarantee programme can promote job creation, gender equality and pro-poor development, MGNREGA has been introduced to the end of developing personal competencies and skills, challenging the existing power relations, household decision-making, gaining access, control over resources like credit, income, land knowledge, and subjective variables like sense of personal power and self-efficacy among the rural population of the country. When it was observed that performances in Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, and Rajasthan were rather encouraging, factors like strong political will, presence of civil society agencies and NGOs, higher levels of awareness among the

communities, prior experience and capacities of civil servants and officials regarding the implementation of similar programmes like drought relief schemes were identified to be responsible. The Scheme has improved the lives of the people and has brought stability and assured incomes to the families that were until recently desperately poor (Vidya Subramanian, 2009). In a study conducted by the Institute of Applied Manpower Research covering a sample of 6,000 households across 20 states in the country (300 samples per state), it is derived that the low earning level of a number of beneficiaries declined and the number of households reporting marginally higher income has increased (K.Balchand, 2009). In certain places, especially during the lean season, MGNREGA has been the only source of income (Sudha Narayan, 2008). It positively checked migration which was more perceptible before the implementation of MGNREGA among rural population. With the increase in additional income, total consumption and nutritional intake are also found to be increasing following which savings and investments have also risen to a remarkable extent helping the poor to be involved in diverse productive activities. Most of the benefitted households can utilize their income for accessing children's education or improving the quality of education by providing additional facilities. Again special provisions made for women under the various schedules of the Act can play a substantial role in economically empowering women and laying the basis for greater independence and self-esteem. This programme, though centrally funded is a locally decentralized job generating, rural public work one aiming at securing an elastic demand for labour along with ensuring full employment and price stability. The public works are supposed to play a positive role as income insurance due to the presence of seasonality in agrarian labour market (Basu, 2011), for building long-term capital assets (Basu, 1981), preventing dislocation of families in search of jobs and food (Dreze and Sen, 1991), and arresting rural-urban migration (Ravallion, 1999).

Employment Scenario in India under MGNREGA:

Table-1

Employment Generation under MGNREGA in India

Year	No. of HHs Registered	Employment Demanded by HHs	Employment Provided to HHs	Employment Provided (Percent)
2006-07	37850390	21188894	21016099	99.18
2007-08	64740595	34326563	33909132	98.78
2008-09	100145950	45518907	45115358	99.12
2009-10	112548976	52920154	52585999	99.37
2010-11	120095282	54008043	53384234	98.84
2011-12	118595083	31724531	31105136	98.04
2012-13	135478282	50101754	48251564	96.30
2013-14	136578935	51765569	47684864	92.11
2014-15	127209600	46485800	41337900	88.92

Source: www.nrega.nic.in

The table shows year-wise employment scenerio in India from 2006-07 to 2014-15.

In India, no of households (HHs) registered from 2006-07 onwards till 2014-15 have been 37850390, 64740595, 100145950, 112548976, 120095282, 118595083, 135478282, 136578935 and 127209600 respectively.

Total no of HHs demanding job during the period from 2006-07 to 2014-15 are respectively 21188894, 34326563, 45518907, 52920154, 54008043, 31724531, 50101754, 51765569 and 46485800.

Employment provided to HHs during the period is 21016099, 33909132, 45115358, 52585999, 53384234, 31105136, 48251564 , 47684864 and 41337900 respectively.

Thus total employment provided during the period (in percent) is 99.18, 98.78, 99.12, 99.37, 98.84, 96.30 92.11 and 82.92 respectively.

Now when a discussion is to be ensued on the study area, it seems to be necessary to introduce the area to the readers at large. According to 2011 census, the geographical area (in Sq km) of Assam (our study area) has been measured to be 78438. The number of districts is 27,

circles 184, towns 214, statutory towns 88, census towns 126, villages (total) 26395, villages inhabited 25425, no of households (total) 6406471 out of these number of rural households is 5420877, urban 985594, population (total in persons) is 31205576, male 15939443, female 15266133, rural 26807034, urban 4398542. Now the decadal growth rate of population is estimated to be 17.07, annual exponential growth rate is 1.58, percentage of urban population 14.10, sex ratio (per '000 male) 958, density of population per sq km. 398, child (0-6 year) population (in persons) 4638130, male 2363485, female 2274645, child (0-6 yr) sex ratio (per '000 male) 962. Total literacy rate in the state (in persons) is 72.19; male 77.85, female 66.27, rural 69.34 and urban 88.47.

Among the total population of Assam, the Hindus are 19180759, i.e 61.47%, Muslims 10679345, i.e 34.22%, Christians have total population of around 1165867, i.e. 3.74%, Sikh are 20672, i.e. 0.07%, Buddhist 54993, i.e. 0.18%, Jain having 25949 population, i.e 0.08%, Others are 27118, i.e. 0.09% and religion not declared 50873 (0.16%). Out of total number of 119696 workers, main workers are 8687123 out of which cultivators are 3138554 and agricultural labour 903294. Total number of marginal workers is 3282567, agricultural labours 942052 and household industry 249250 and others 1168192. While considering total households and amenities (in %), as per 2011 census, total households constitute 6406471, drinking water facilities 54.8, drinking water near premises 26.7, electricity as source of lightening 37.0, latrine facilities with premises 64.9, SC total population 2231321, out of which male 1145314, female 1086007; ST population is 3884371, out of which male is 1957005, female 1927365; total slum households is 42533 and total slum population 197266 out of which males are 101424 and female is 95842, total disabled population amounts to 480065 out of which male is 257385 and female 222680, population below poverty line (BPL) in 2011-12 is 31.98 out of that BPL population in rural areas is 33.89 and urban is 20.49. Total SC population is 2231321 out of which male is 1145314, female 1086007; total ST population amounts to be 3884371, male is 1957005 and female is estimated to be 1927366.

Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) at current prices is Rs. 195145 crore in 2014-15 (Quick Estimated) and at constant 2011-12 price is Rs. 156895 crore. Net State Domestic Product (NSDP) at current prices is Rs. 1752 crore in 2014-15 (Quick Estimate) and NSDP at constant (2011-12) prices is estimated at Rs. 138387 crore.

Review of Literature

Shekhawat (2002) in his study on “Impact of Employment Generation Programmes (Egps) in Jaipur district of Rajasthan”, reported that disbursal of assistance to beneficiaries was delayed and assistance given under Egps was insufficient, and these were the major problems faced by the respondents in taking advantages of Egps.

Borgohain (2005) finds MGNREGA as a bold step towards the problem of acute unemployment in the rural areas.

Sood (2006) studied the challenges involved in implementation of NREGP and reported that in Jashpur block, Chattisgarh, lack of staff is having a negative impact on the working of the NREGA. Moreover, sub-engineers were being burdened with the task of maintaining job cards for which their primary tasks suffered. Such additional appointments are a rare opportunity to provide employment to the youth in villages and should not be allowed to be squandered due to administrative hurdles.

Mathur (2007) argues in favour of NREGA and says that it has marked the beginning of momentous changes in the lives of the rural poor. He shows that migration has reduced in several villages in Andhra Pradesh, Chattisgarh, Orissa and Rajasthan. Minimum wages were raised in many states; the participation of women increased significantly even in the districts of Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh.

Chakraborty (2007) observes that employment guarantee is abysmally low in Maharastra, Karnataka, Bihar, and Jharkhand. It is noted that while for Andhra Pradesh and Gujarat the supply of employment has met the demand, for most other states enrolment falls far short of demand. He further presents a budgetary appraisal of MGNREGA and as the utilization of funds is not satisfactory, it suggests that devolution of responsibilities and strict accountability criteria which may accelerate the effective implementation of it at the panchayat level and can function as a demand-driven programme more suitably if attention is paid on capacity building at the village level, social audits on a regular basis, accountability of functionaries and an effective redressal mechanism etc and better co-ordination among various stakeholders of the governments.

Central Guarantee Council (2007) reviewed the implementation of MGNREGA in Burdibeda village of Jharkhand district and revealed that Job Cards were handed over to the

workers only 2 days prior to the visit of the social audit team in the same village. Two community development works have been sanctioned on the same land owned by the Pradhan of the village, construction of well and a farm pond are both being carried out on the Pradhan's land.

Datt (2008) revealed that out of 20.1 million households employed in the MGNREGA, only 2.2 million (10.5%) received the full 100days' employment and wages. The average employment per household was 43 days in 2006-07 and 35 days in 2007-08 respectively. He further reported that main constraints under MGNREGA were lack of professional staff, lack of proper project planning, bureaucratic resistance to MGNREGA, inappropriate rates of payment, lack of worksite facilities and lack of transparency and social audit.

Jandu (2008) carried out a research in four states namely Chattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa and Tamilnadu. Survey data showed that women workers were more confident about their roles as contributors to family expenditure and their work decisions and it gave them speech in public sphere. Most of the respondents felt that the Act is very important for them. The study found positive impact of the NGNREGA in migration patterns.

Jacob (2008) observes that the MGNREGA Programme has immense potential to improve the gap between urban and rural India and lead to rural development in the form of building infrastructure like roads, in terms of agricultural productivity from irrigation works etc. It is said to provide a stable income for workers.

Goswami (2008) describes the positive impact of NREGA on the lives of the people in Sikkim and Meghalaya in the form of raising their confidence level and guaranteeing some degree of financial independence.

Hazarika (2009) examined the impact of NGREGA on gender empowerment in Morigaon and Bongaigaon districts of Assam. This study showed that almost 70 to 80 of sample workers had meaningful income other than unpaid family work during the Pre- NREGA. Majority of the workers felt that they were now in better position to fulfill their own requirements without looking at others.... In Bongaigaon district, a large number of job card holders were found who had become Panchayat representatives.

Basu et al (2009) argue that the success of an employment guarantee scheme (EGS) in safeguarding the welfare of poor is related to wage given and the ease with which any worker can gain access and power enjoyed by local bureaucracy and political elements and proper implementation of socially productive public works.

Ramesh & Kumar (2009) in their study also found that the scheme holds the powerful prospect of bringing major changes in the lives of women. NREGA is playing a substantial role in empowering women economically and laying the basis for greater independence and self esteem. It has become a beacon of light in the empowerment of rural women, and has contributed substantially for the increased living and economic conditions by creating equal wages for male and female workers and increasing the minimum wages. Their study was conducted in 2009-10 on selected 500 women beneficiaries. The beneficiaries expressed that this programme helped in eradicating the debt burden to some extent.

In a NCAER-PIF study conducted by Sharma et al (2009), MGNREGA has slightly improved share of ST households in employment and has outshined the earlier programme as far as participation of women is concerned. They find a number of anomalies related to the hike in wages, disbursing compensation to the labourers in cases of delayed payments and non-payment of unemployment allowances, selection of works, execution, estimates and measurements as well as delays in release of funds etc.

Kareemulla et al (2010) evaluated the scheme in four states, that is, Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Maharashtra with a specific focus on desirability, quality and durability of assets created and the effect of the programme on the livelihood generation of beneficiaries. They conclude that scheme was achieving its primary objective of employment generation but the assets created were generally seen as a by-product in the study areas. They further opine that NREGS has significantly brought down the migration levels in rural areas who are now available for local work.

Chhabra and Sharma (2010) consider the NREGS as a landmark in the economic history of independent India which provides legal rights on employment to the rural citizens.

Pankaj (2011) compares between Bihar and Jharkhand on the progress of NREGA and argues that implementation was tardy and the effort was driven by the supply side.

Shah, Ambustha and Shankar (2011) argue that NREGA had great promise but it could not be realized if it was implemented in the same framework of governance which has been serving the country since independence.

In the survey conducted in the four sample districts of Assam, Panda and Umdor (2011) find no significant changes in the status of women except Tinsukia. Bordoloi (2011) finds a more or less positive impact of MGNREGA on the life of the rural poor and by restructuring the social relationship contributing ultimately to the nation-building. It has also minimized the gender difference in some works commonly practised in rural areas. Ministry of Home Affairs in 2011 finds a hopeful situation for the remote states like Manipur and Nagaland as NREGA has been gradually transforming the 'Geography of Poverty'. The two-pronged function of tackling both hunger and poverty.

According to Encyclopaedia of NREGA and Panchayatiraj, B.R.Trivedi and B.S.Aswal (2011), argue that in states like Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Bihar, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh, out of total families in the sample villages, 47.69% families have been registered under the scheme whereas, the national average obtained from the secondary data suggests that more than 70% rural households have been registered under NREGA. Out of the total registered families, approximately 90% families have received the job cards. In Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh, about 96% BPL families have job cards. Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand have the lowest figures at 32.33% and 39.82% respectively. In Jharkhand and Madhya Pradesh, people reported that they were unaware of the fact that they had to apply for jobs. In Jharkhand, it was observed that people thought that having a job card automatically makes the workers entitled for 100 days employment. It has also been observed that the whole concept of demand for job is rather fictitious as people are turning up for work as in any other Government scheme and while they are at work, the secretaries fill up their applications to demand jobs as a mere formality. Thus, though it is conceived as a demand-driven scheme, lack of proper awareness and lack of motivation after all make it a supply-based scheme. Now, in most of the states, it is evident that most of the works sanctioned are on water conservation and water harvesting structures, followed by rural connectivity. Only 9.7% of the total works undertaken has been on the provision of irrigation facilities to the land owned by SC/ST. In Jharkhand and Madhya Pradesh, it was observed that works were undertaken as per the priorities stated by the block officials. Works on SC/ST farms do not figure as a priority of the Panchayats in any of the six states. In

Madhya Pradesh, more than 90% works have been undertaken by panchayat in the state. From the analysis of the primary data, it is found that only in Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh, more than 50% respondents have received jobs in less than 15 days. In the case of Maharashtra, it was found that none of the respondents had got jobs within 15 days.

Dutta et al (2012) uses National Sample Survey (NSS) data for 2009-10 to verify the guarantee of employment at the stipulated wage rates to the households seeking employment under the Act. They observe considerable un-met demand for work in all states under MGNREGA. Interestingly, the extent of the un-met demand is greater in the poorest states where the scheme is needed the most. Though the men are more in demand according to the local level rationing processes, the scheme is virtually attracting poor women into the workforce.

In the paper entitled “MGNREGA scheme implementation in Assam disappointing” published in the Assam Times dated 18/06/2012, Daya Nath Singh terms MGNREGA as a revolutionary Act of the Government of India with tremendous potentiality of eradicating unemployment situation in the country. In the first phase of the implementation of the Act in 2006, along with 200 districts across the country, 7 districts of Assam were also incorporated. In the year 2007, the second phase of NREGA had started where 5 districts of Assam were included and in the third phase starting from April 1, 2008, remaining 14 districts of Assam came under the purview of the Act. On March 31, 2012, Assam completed 6th year of MGNREGA implementation. But as stated by the author, in a survey conducted by the North East Social Trust (NEST) and a few other voluntary organizations of Assam monitoring the impact of this Act and its implementation during last couple of years, the result found out was not very encouraging.

Bhowmik (2013) talks about the impact of the scheme in the state of Tripura. The state has been doing quite well in ensuring equity and efficiency. The stakeholders feel that the scheme suffers from the lack of sufficient monitoring and implementing staff.

National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO) in a survey conducted in 3 states, observes that the scheme provides work at a time when no other work or alternate employment opportunities are available (MGNREGA Sameeksha, 2013).

In a paper entitled “Is the MGNREGA being set up for failure?” published in the Hindu dated May 31, 2015, G. Sampath and Rukmini.S find that MGNREGA has generated more rural

employment than any other government scheme on private initiative in the history of independent India. If the critics call it wasteful, ineffective, leaky and argue that it is fuelling inflation and the assets created by MGNREGA are of poor quality, the researchers agree to its manifold successes as an anti-poverty, pro-growth intervention in the rural economy. The Hindu brings the field reports from four different states- Uttar Pradesh, Telengana, Chattishgarh and Bihar that document the experiences of those who have actually used the scheme. The reports of various field studies have been endorsed and published by the Union Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD) in a volume entitled MGNREGA Sameeksha where it is revealed that far from being a wasteful expenditure, the works under the MGNREGA have helped create rural assets and infrastructure, ranging from anganwadis, toilets for individual households, crematoria, cyclone shelters, and playgrounds for children, to drought proofing, flood protection and control, water conservation and harvesting and rural road connectivity. Contrary to the claim that it distorts the rural economy, the MoRD's 'Report to the people on MGNREGA, 2014' acknowledges that the scheme has actually boosted agricultural productivity through development of wasteful/fallow land, and construction of post-harvest storage facilities and worksheds. The MoRD report further says that the number of households that received the legally guaranteed 100 days of work fell from 51.73 lakhs in 2012-13 to 46.73 lakh in 2013-14 (under the UPA) and then dipped sharply to 23.24 lakh in 2014-15 (under the NDA). One explanation for this could be that funds are not being released by the Centre. A look at the data on amount sanctioned, it shows a similar steep decline under the NDA government, from Rs.27, 484 crore in 2013-14 to Rs. 17, 074 crores in 2014-15. It is observed that basically delay in payments is disappointing the people.

Significance of the Study

Assam, being an important state, dominated by rural population facing a large-scale unemployment followed by acute poverty in the rural sector in the North Eastern Region of the country has been purposively selected to examine the extent to which employment generation has been made to the unskilled labour of rural Assam under the Act.

Objectives of the Study

- i) To find the trend in Job Cards issued.
- ii) To find the trend in demand for work among the rural HHs.

- iii) To find out the trend in employment in various social groups.
- iv) To find the range of employment generation for women labourers in the study area.
- v) To find out the expenditure specifically on wages of the Job Card holders as well as the materials used.
- vi) To give an overview of the status of MGNREGA at the national level referring to the analyses of a few selected surveys and projects undertaken on the Act over the years.

Methodology

Only secondary data have been used in the present study. The sources for these data are various types of books, government publications, journals, research articles, articles in papers and different websites etc.

Analysis

MGNREGA has been implemented since February 2006 in 7 districts of Assam as the first phase districts. But during the year 2008-09, all the 27 districts of Assam were covered under the programme. During the period from 2006 -07 to 2009-10, the total Job Card holders in the State were 3611717 (approximately 36.12 lakh). The table 2 reveals the amount of Job Cards issued, Households demanded employment, Households provided employment, HHs provided 100 days of employment, disabled persons provided employment from the financial year 2006-07 to 2014-15.

Table 2

Year-Wise Job Cards Issued and Employment Provided in Assam(In Nos)

Year	Job Card Issued	Households Demanded Employment	Households Provided Employment	Households Getting 100 days of Employment	Disabled Persons Provided Employment
1	2	3	4	5	6
2007-08	1599659	1354665	1301078	239543	2949
2008-09	2969266	2151579	1873629	176757	2934
2009-10	3611717	2139111	2137270	130457	1989

2010-11	3769550	1443689	1432424	22497	2152
2011-12	3913176	1352700	1347201	17056	2250
2012-13	3985156	1247507	1234827	9807	2239
2013-14	4148981	1321148	1261778	15505	2372
2014-15	4183913	1083612	959562	10241	1441

Source: Directorate of Panchayat and Rural Development, Assam in Statistical Abstract, Assam 2014, Government of Assam, Directorate of Economics and Statistics, and Statistical Hand Book of Assam 2014 and 2015.

1354665 Job Card holders out of cumulative total of 1599659 Job Card holders demanded for job in MGNREGA in Assam in the financial year 2007-08 of which 1301078 (96.04 percent) were provided with employment , 239543 (18.41 percent out of HHs provided employment) Job Card holders were provided 100 days of employment and 2949 disabled persons were provided job. Though the employment of Job Card holders increased to 1873629 out of 2151579 HHs who demanded it where cumulative total of job card holders were 2969266 but HHs providing 100 days of employment decreased to 176757(09.43 percent of total HHs provided employment) during the financial year 2008-2009. During the year 2010-11 number of Job Cards issued and the number of HHs provided employment under MGNREGA, were 3769550 and 1432424 respectively and HHs provided 100 days of employment were 22497.

During the year 2012-13 , total Job Card holders increased to 3985156 (cumulative from 2006-07) of which 1247507 Job Card holders demanded works and and 1234827 Job Card holders were provided with employment out of which 9807 Job Card holders were provided 100 days of employment.

During the financial year 2014-15 the total amount of Job Card holders became 4183913 and 959562 got employment out of demanded 1083612 Job Card holders. 10241 Job Card holders got 100 days of employment

Table 3**Year-Wise Physical Achievement Under MGNREGA in Assam**

Year	Employment Generated (Lakhs Mandays)				
	SC	ST	Others	Total	Women
1	2	3	4	5	6
2007-08	40.69	191.37	268.19	500.25	151.11
2008-09	78.08	258.32	412.40	748.80	203.03
2009-10	89.03	227.36	418.78	735.17	203.03
2010-11	19.78	69.94	268.58	358.30	83.48
2011-12	19.62	80.41	253.26	353.52	88.05
2012-13	18.80	64.96	229.66	313.42	81.48
2013-14	19.23	48.17	231.06	298.47	73.87
2014-15	12.61	31.76	163.79	208.17	58.73

Source: Directorate of Panchayat and Rural Development, Assam in Statistical Abstract, Assam 2014, Government of Assam, Directorate of Economics and Statistics, and Statistical Hand Book of Assam, 2014 and 2015.

The table reveals the year-wise total mandays of employment generation under MGNREGS, to the women, SC, ST categories of beneficiaries as well as beneficiaries belonging to other social groups.

The total mandays are 500.25 lakhs in the financial year 2007-08 out of which 151.11 lakhs are women, 40.69 SC, 191.37 ST, 268.19 lakhs belonged to others respectively.

In 2008-09, out of the total mandays of 748.80 lakhs, employment generated for women, SC, ST and Others are 203.03, 78.08, 258.32 and 412.40 lakhs respectively.

Total mandays of 735.17 lakhs employment distributed among SC, ST, Others and Women are 89.03, 227.36, 418.78, 203.03 lakhs respectively in the year 2009-10.

In 2010-11, total mandays created have been 358.30 lakhs, out of which SC have got 19.78, ST 69.94, Others have got 253.26 whereas Women are provided with 83.48 lakhs of jobs respectively.

The data of 2011-12 shows that out of total mandays of 353.52 lakhs generated, SC has got 19.62, ST 80.41, Others 253.26 and Women 88.05 respectively.

In 2012-13, 13-14 and 14-15, total mandays have been 313.42, 298.47, 208.17 lakhs out of which SC has got 18.80, 19.23 and 12.61, ST 64.96, 48.17, 31.76, Others have got 229.66, 231.06 and 163.79 whereas women have been provided with 81.48, 73.87 and 58.73 lakhs respectively.

Table 4

Average man days of employment provided

Year	Average Mandays
1	2
2007-08	38.46
2008-09	39.98
2009-10	34.40
2010-11	25.02
2011-12	26.24
2012-13	25.39
2013-14	23.67
2014-15	21.70

In the year 2007-08, average mandays of employment provided in Assam under MGNREGA is 38.46, in 2008-09, 39.98, in 2009-10, 34.40, in 2010-11, 25.02, in 2011-12, 26.24, in 2012-13, 25.39, in 2013-14, 23.67 and finally in 2014-15, the average mandays provided is 21.70.

Table 5**Increase in Job Card issued and Provided Job (in percent)**

Financial Year	Job Card issued	Job provided
2007-08 to 2008-09	85.62	44.00
2008-09 to 2009-10	21.64	14.07
2009-10 to 2010-11	04.37	-32.98
2010-11 to 2011-12	03.81	-05.95
2011-12 to 2012-13	01.83	-08.34
2012-13 to 2013-14	04.11	02.18
2013-14 to 2014-15	0.84	-23.95

From the financial year 2007-08 to 2008-09, the percentage increase in Job Card issued was 85.62. On the contrary, the percentage increase in job provided was 44.00 during the same year. The increase in Job Card issued was 21.64 percent from the financial year 2008-09 to 2009-10. On the contrary, the increase in job provided was 14.07 percent. From the financial year 2009-10 to 2010-11, the increased percentage of Job Card issued was 04.37 but percentage of job provided decreased to 32.98 during the same period. The table reveals that both the percentage of Job Card issued and provided employment decreased upto the financial year 2012-13. Though from the financial year 2012-13 to 2013-14, both the percentage of J/C issued and provided employment increased upto 04.11 and 02.18 respectively, again it declined to 0.84 percent and 23.95 percent from the financial year 2013-14 to 2014-15.

Expenditure on Wages and Materials

In the financial year 2007-08, Rs. 549.14 crore is spent for both wage and materials whereas in 2008-09, the amount is 572.28 crore which is spent on wage and 381.52 on materials only. In the financial year 2009-10, an amount of Rs. 637.35 crore is spent on wage and 334.19 crore on materials. The expenditure on both wage and materials decreased upto 382.21 crore and 294.40 crore respectively in the financial year 2010-11, which is rather low in comparison with other financial years and the causes seem to be:

- i) Unprecedented heavy rainfall with extended monsoon.

- ii) Engagement of block officials in beneficiary-oriented schemes of other departments.
 - iii) Imposition of model code of conduct due to Assembly Election.
- (Economic Survey of Assam 2011-12)

During the financial year 2011-12, an amount of Rs. 461.08 crore is spent on wage and 225.52 on materials, in 2012-13, 400.17 crore on wage and 197.92 on materials, in 2013-14, 454.54 crore on wage and 207.45 on materials whereas in the financial year 2014-15, 336.20 crore and 136.81 crore is spent on wage and materials respectively under MGNREGA in Assam.

That is, upto the financial year 2009-10, total expenditure (both on wage and materials) increased, it has been extremely low in the financial year 2010-11, and though there has been a little bit of increase in 2011-12, a decreasing trend has been observed in the following financial years with a distinct fall in 2014-15, supposed to be the lowest during the studied period.

Findings

- i) Both the percentage of Job Card issued and employment provided had the decreasing trend up to the financial year 2012-13. But the percentage increased in the financial year 2013-14 more than the financial year 2012-13. Again in 2014-15, percentage in both areas started to decline.
- ii) The employment provided under the Act was far below in comparison with Job Card issued.
- iii) Though 100 days of employment is to be guaranteed according to the provision of the Act, but in Assam, it is seen that since its inception till 2014-15, the highest average mandays provided is approximately 40 percent which has been availed in 2008-09. After that a decreasing trend has been marked which has culminated at 21.70 in the year 2014-15.
- iv) Total amount of fund spent on the disbursement of wage and materials under the Act has been found highest in the financial year 2009-10 and the lowest in 2014-15 having 637.36 crore and 336.20 crore respectively. That is, there has been a decreasing trend in the whole affair in the studied period which could be expected to be rather increasing.
- v) With respect to the total number of person days created for the various social groups like SC, ST, Others and Women, a sudden increase in it has been observed upto the financial year 2008-09 and though a meager amount of increase for all the groups has

been observed in 2009-10, gradually there has been a steady decline from 2010-11 onwards till 2014-15.

- vi) Keeping in mind that 100 days' guaranteed employment has been the main feature of MGNREGA, the present paper reveals not a very satisfactory picture in the study area. In the financial year 2007-08, 239543 HHs were provided employment, after which fluctuations can be observed. A sudden decrease was there in 2008-09 and 2009-10 to be followed by even more steep decline in the years 2010-11 and 2011-12 but the figure is alarmingly low in 2012-13 to be followed by a bit of increase in 15505 in 2013-14 with a further decrease in 2014-15.
- vii) Among the disabled persons getting employment during the studied period, the highest number of employment generation to this group can be marked in 2007-08 with 2949 beneficiaries getting jobs with the lowest number being in 2014-15 with 1441 disabled beneficiaries getting employment under the Act.

Conclusion

Though MGNREGA guarantees 100 days' employment to each rural household demanding job in each financial year, the analyses of the present paper reflect that not more than 40 average mandays (in 2008-09) could be provided to the beneficiaries of the state during the whole studied period, and moreover, it shows rather a declining trend over the years to reach upto 21.70 in the financial year 2014-15. Thus it can be concluded that the MGNREGA in Assam has been partially successful.

Suggestions

- i) The provisions of MGNREGA need to be publicized in simple and easy-to-understand local dialects.
- ii) Dissemination of core message of the Act through print, electronic media and innovative street plays would help in generating awareness and building capabilities among the rural employable poor households on the Act.
- iii) To have a complete impact of MGNREGA initiative, an active involvement of national and state level experts like engineers, architects and planners is a must in identifying land masses requiring proper management, arriving at topographic specificities, effective flood/drought proofing methods and disaster management measures.

- iv) It is necessary to further strengthen service delivery, improve access and governance structures.
- v) A review of the criteria for determination of wage rates is essential.
- vi) A consistent positive political support is needed.
- vii) Though the states have introduced payment through bank accounts but this system may not be convenient for women if they have no control over family bank account. Thus it may be better if provisions can be made of different job cards for each adult member of the households and different bank accounts for both men and women in their respective households.
- viii) As there is the possibility of exhaustion of the village-level works, an urgent need is there to invent new and innovative works for retaining the labour and providing productive employment minimizing the need for such programmes in the long run.
- ix) Innovations in work opportunities, organization of the labour force and community planning and execution with greater involvement of the farmers at all stages are necessary for sustaining the momentum brought about by MGNREGA in rural economy.
- x) The Panchayati Raj system must be strengthened. Administration must be further decentralized to deliver the best to the remote villages situated far away from Development Block.
- xi) Intervention from other departments and agencies associated with panchayats must be curtailed.
- xii) To minimize the migration, minimum wage rates must be maintained which is at par with other rates in the market.
- xiii) More transparency in handling of the programme is required.
- xiv) Auditing can be done by some outside agencies.
- xv) Political intervention must be checked.
- xvi) An effective and prompt grievance redressal mechanism is a must.
- xvii) Right to Information Act must be made more effective and widely popular.
- xviii) IT sector must be more and more integrated with the Act.
- xix) A good and healthy co-ordination among Academia, Mass Media, Law, Administration, NGOs and Financial Institutions will pave the way for better implementation of MGNREGA.

- xx) MGNREGA has the potentiality to be proved as a truly welfare scheme on the part of the government.
- xxi) Proper and frequent training of panchayat officials, people's representatives and local level bureaucrats is needed for better outcome of the monitoring and implementation of the Act.
- xxii) Appropriate financial management approach must be made for the accurate utilization of the sanctioned amount and avoiding misappropriation of MGNREGAFs.
- xxiii) Much more initiative must be taken on the part of the government to increase people's participation for the better performance of the Act.
- xxiv) As the Act has more or less failed to provide 100 days employment to the rural demanding poor beneficiaries, much more intensive scrutiny and effort must be made to get the desired goal.
- xxv) The schedule of payments should be such to provide job on demand. Jobs must be provided for longer days and the time rate of payment needs to be fair.
- xxvi) There should be active participation of the Job Card holders in Gram Sabha for the better participation in and implementation of the Act.
- xxvii) The role of Civil Society must be realized and applied in letter and spirit for getting the desired result out of the Act.

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