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MGNREGA: AN INTENSIFICATION OF RURAL LIVELIHOOD IN ASSAM

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Abstract:

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) is a monumental social security and employment generation scheme globally. Guaranteeing 100 days of wage employment in every financial year to every rural household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work. This study analyzes the impact and implementation of MGNREGA on the intensification of rural livelihood in the state of Assam. The study finds that MGNREGA has positively impacted the economic and social security of beneficiaries, particularly women, Scheduled Tribes (STs) and Scheduled Caste (SCs) as well as overall performance in Assam remains constrained. Slow work completion rates, low public awareness of entitlements and systematic issues like inadequate social audits, bureaucratic inefficiencies are some key challenges in implementation process. The conclusion suggests that strengthening governance, improve transparency and enhancing local-level coordination are essential for successful implementation of MGNREGA in Assam.

Keywords: MGNREGA, Intensification, Implementation, Rural livelihood.

1.0 Introduction:

India remains a predominantly rural dominated country, as of 2011 census, about 68.8% of the population lived in rural areas, with that number still above 65% in 2021. That why making rural development and poverty alleviation is the key national priorities. The state Assam characterized by a high dependence on agriculture, poor infrastructure and significant incidence of poverty presents a critical context for study of social welfare programs. The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act 2005 (NREGA), which later renamed as Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act or MGNREGA came into effect in response to the nationwide movements for right to a dignified life. This act aims at enhancing livelihood security of the households in rural areas of the country by providing at least one hundred days of guaranteed wage employment in every financial year to every household whose adult member volunteer to do unskilled manual work. MGNREGA is a paradigm shift transforming the nature of poverty alleviation from a 'relief-based' to 'right-based' approach (Hussain, 2022).

MGNREGA has emerged as a vital initiative, addressing persistent issues that have plagued India even six decades after independence. The country's struggles with poverty, illiteracy, malnutrition and social inequality continued unabated. This legally binding program aims to reverse the trend by rejuvenating the rural economy. By creating sustainable livelihoods, MGNREGA can empower the poor to better manage risks and seize opportunities. Keeping in mind the importance of MGNREGA an attempt has been made to study on 'MGNREGA: An Intensification of Rural Livelihood in Assam'.

1.1 Objective of the Study:

- To examine the implementation status of MGNREGA in Assam and extent of employment generation.
- To identify the key challenges and limitations hindering the successful implementation of MGNREGA in Assam.

2.0 Review of Literature:

- Bordoloi. J. (2011) carried out a widespread study on the impact of MGNREGA on wage differentials and migration in five districts of Assam including Nagaon, Cachar, Dibrugarh, Sonitpur & Bongaigaon as well as also tries to assess the proper processes and procedures of the Scheme. The study revealed that MGNREGA is unable to meet the demand from wage seekers hence failed to check migration. But the Scheme has been able to reduce gender disparity in wages.



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- Das, D. (2017), “State Intervention and Rural employment in India: A Case Study of MGNREGA Implementation in Barpeta district.” Das in her doctoral thesis mainly try to find out the impact of MGNREGA and extent of awareness regarding MGNREGA among the rural people of Barpeta districts and to find out whether it has led to reduction of rural urban migration or not. She also tries to know about the changing pattern of income in rural areas through the scheme. According to her research the scheme MGNREGA has not to fulfill their objectives about the 100 days work guarantee in this area.
- Upen Konch (2012) in his article; “Rural Employment Generation through National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme” attempted to examine the implementation of NREGS in context of generation of rural unemployment in Machkhowa Development block under Dhemaji district of Assam. He mentioned some problems regarding mplementation NREGA such as- unhealthy relationship between the bureaucrats and people’s elected eprementatives, lack of awareness among the people and lack of people’s participation in implementation and decision making process of the scheme.
- Amal Ch. Gogoi (2014) in his article “Implementation of MGNREGA in Morigaon District- An Analytical Study” discussed the impact of implementation of MGNREGA in Morigaon district. He analyzed area specific problems and use of appropriate technology to provide rational database for preparing a plan in order to immediately implement it. He also suggested that there is need of frequent supervision by government officers and engineers to ensure smooth execution of this program in all parts of the district.
- Shah, Mihir, (2009) analysis the scheme as “Multiplier accelerator synergy in NREGA”. The author borrowed the concept of multiplier and accelerator from macroeconomic theory illuminates the enormous potential of NREGA. According to Shah, NREGA has put money into the hands of the poorest of the poor on a scale that is unprecedented in the history of independent India. NREGA is a large- scale public works programme and it’s providing a stimulus to production, employment and demand, which is called the multiplier. First, investment generates demand and income through the multiplier. Than income stimulates investment via the accelerator. Shah not only focus the multiplier but a productivity enhancing accelerator in action that transform livelihoods for millions of poorest people of India, in a manner that is sustainable in both economic and ecological term.

The existing literature suggests that MGNREGA is the revolutionary scheme for rural development in India. But, in Assam MGNREGA’s growing in tortoise walk, with systematic flaws in implementation undermining the Act’s rights-based architecture.

3.0 Methodology:

The present study ‘MGNREGA: An Intensification of Rural Livelihood in Assam’ is based on the descriptive research design. The main aim for having used this research design is to analyze the phenomena precisely for using the secondary data. The secondary data has been collected from books, journals, theses, articles, concern websites, reports, newspapers etc.

4.0 Analysis:

The Mahatma Gandhi National Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) is a lifeline for rural households in Assam, offering them guaranteed wage employment. This isn’t just about jobs; it’s way to develop their livelihood security and also improved community assets such as infrastructure and conservational projects. MGNREGA operates on a bottom-up, demand driven approach, meaning local needs drive the work. It specifically targets vulnerable groups like Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST), ensuring the benefits reaches those who need them most. The scheme core goal is to empower local communities and strengthen the Panchayat raj institution by putting planning and execution of projects directly into the hand of the people. While large numbers for Assam’s participation aren’t readily available, the scheme’s national reputation as a massive workfare program and its clear focus on sustainable development highlight its significant and widespread impact on the state. It’s a powerful tool for social and economic change at the grassroots level.



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4.1 Status of MGNREGA in Assam:

Table: 1.0
Status of MGNREGA in Assam

State : ASSAM	As on 29-09-2025
Total No. of Districts	35
Total No. of Blocks	235
Total No. of GPs	2,753
Total No. of JobCards issued[In Lakhs]	69.02
Total No. of Workers[In Lakhs]	111.24
Total No. of Active Job Cards[In Lakhs]	36.02
Total No. of Active Workers[In Lakhs]	51.35
(i)SC worker against active workers[%]	5.12
(ii)ST worker against active workers[%]	17.06

Source: nregastrep.nic.in

The above table 1.0 shows the status of MGNREGA in the state of Assam. In Assam, the scheme covered total 35 numbers of district, 235 numbers of development block and 2753 numbers of Gaon Panchayats. 69.02 lakhs job card are issued by the scheme in Assam, but out of 69.02 lakhs Job cards, only 36.02 lakhs job cards are in active mode, which ensure that only 52.19% job cards are active from the total job card. Again, out of 111.24lakhs workers, only 51.35lakhs (46.16%) workers are active. The table also shows the percentage of active workers from ST and SC, only 5.12% from the total active workers are SC workers and 17.06% from the total active workers are ST workers.

A large number of rural households and individuals who are registered and possess an official job card under the scheme are not actually participating in the scheme by demanding or receiving work during a given period. The low percentage of active job cards and active workers suggests a major disconnect between potential eligibility and actual employment. This disparity can indicate several things:

1. **Low demand for work:** The most positive indication is that workers are finding better, higher-paying work elsewhere, such as in agriculture, local industries etc.
2. **Administrative and implementation gaps:** Irregular wage payment or delays in receiving wages make the scheme unreliable, causing workers to seek more consistent income sources.
3. **Out-Migration:** Registered workers have temporarily or permanently migrated to urban areas for better employment opportunities, thus the job card is in inactive mode.

4.2 Progress of MGNREGA in Assam:

Table: 1.1
Progress of Labour and Household of MGNREGA

Progress	FY 2024-2025	FY 2023-2024	FY 2022-2023	FY 2021-2022
Approved Labour Budget[In Lakhs]	600	900	792	730
Persondays of Central Liability so far[In Lakhs]	710.72	873.89	786.21	915.72
SC persondays % as of total persondays	5.51	6.16	4.24	4.25
ST persondays % as of total persondays	23.09	17.25	14.25	16.15
Women Persondays out of Total (%)	54.45	50.6	47.56	47.57



Average days of employment provided per Household	37.16	38.92	34.22	33.48
Average Wage rate per day per person(Rs.)	248.36	237.93	228.96	223.94
Total No of HHs completed 100 Days of Wage Employment	23,917	19,416	21,427	51,954
Total Households Worked[In Lakhs]	19.13	22.46	22.98	27.35
Total Individuals Worked[In Lakhs]	26.36	33.47	34.29	39.87
Differently abled persons worked	4213	5397	6880	6868

Source: nregastrep.nic.in

The above table 1.2 shows the progress of MGNREGA scheme in the state of Assam from last four years. The person days of central liability of the scheme is 71.072 crores during 2024-25 financial year, which is lower than 2021-22 (91.57crores), 2022-23(78.62crores) and 2023-24(87.38crores) financial years. The decrease of central liability typically signifies fewer funds allocated to the state, which can lead to the non-generation of work, unemployment benefits and potentially signal a reduction in government spending on the program. Thus, the lower central liabilities negatively affect employment, wages and overall effectiveness of the MGNREGA in providing guaranteed work in Assam.

The data (table 1.2) also shows the average wage rate per day per person in last four financial years. In 2021-22, the average wage rate was 223.94 rupees per day, in 2022-23 rate was 228.96 rupees per day, in 2023-24 rate was 237.93 rupees per day, in 2024-25 rate was 248.36 rupees per day, and in 2025-26 rate was 254.86 rupees per day. It was gradually increase, but it is not sufficient amount for an unskilled labour to operate a family. The Labour Commissioner of Assam published a notice on 25/03/2025, where clearly mention that the unskilled labour wage must be minimum 385 rupees per day and 11550 rupees per month. There are huge difference between MGNREGA unskilled labour minimum wage rate and government unskilled labour minimum wage rate. Thus wage rate is one of the reasons for non-generation of work and decrease the numbers of active workers.

The households worked and individual worked rate is also fall off in last four financial years. 27.35 lakhs household worked were done in 2021-22 financial year, which decrease to 19.13 lakhs in 2024-25 financial year. Similarly, individuals worked rate is decrease 39.87 lakhs to 26.36 lakhs in between 2021-22 to 2024-25 financial years. It could reflect improved economic conditions in rural areas of Assam, making MGNREGA less necessary.

Table: 1.3
Progress of Work of MGNREGA

	Financial Year 2022-2023and Earlier				Financial Year 2023-2024				Financial Year 2024-2025			
	No. of Works started	No. of Works Completed	Not Yet Completed	Work Completion Rate	No. of Works started	No. of Works Completed	Not Yet Completed	Work Completion Rate	No. of Works started	No. of Works Completed	Not Yet Completed	Work Completion Rate
Total	1862346	1787420	74926	95.98	596336	531074	65262	89.06	308193	184115	124078	59.74

Source: nregastrep.nic.in

The above table 1.3 indicates a decreasing trend the work completion rate of MGNREGA in Assam over the observed financial years. 95.98 was the work completion rate in 2022-23 financial year, which decrease into 59.74 in 2024-25 financial year. On the other hand, the 'not yet completed' works gradually growing in those financial years. It was growing



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in between 2022-23 to 2024-25 from 74926 to 124078. Thus, policy recommendation is necessary to reverse the declining completion rate and address the growing backlog of ‘not yet completed’ works.

5.0 Findings:

The major findings are:

- The active job cards and active workers rate is low than the issued/ registered job cards and workers. Out of 69.02 lakhs job cards, only 36.02 lakhs job cards are in active mode, which ensure that only 52.19% job cards are active from the total job card. Again, out of 111.24lakhs workers, only 51.35lakhs (46.16%) workers are active.
- The percentage of active workers from ST and SC unsatisfactory. Only 5.12% from the total active workers are SC workers and 17.06% from the total active workers are ST workers.
- The low percentage of active job cards and active workers suggests a major disconnect between potential eligibility and actual employment.
- The lower central liabilities negatively affect employment, wages and overall effectiveness of the MGNREGA in providing guaranteed work in Assam.
- There are huge difference between MGNREGA unskilled labour minimum wage rate and government unskilled labour minimum wage rate. Thus wage rate is one of the reasons for non-generation of work and decrease the numbers of active workers.
- The households worked and individual worked rate is also fall off in last four financial years. It could reflect improved economic conditions in rural areas of Assam, making MGNREGA less necessary.
- The work completion rates of MGNREGA in Assam significantly decrease. On the other hand, the ‘not yet completed’ works gradually growing. Thus, policy recommendation is necessary to reverse the declining completion rate and address the growing backlog of ‘not yet completed’ works.

6.0 Conclusion:

MGNREGA possesses the statutory framework and the potential to be a formidable intensifier of rural livelihood in Assam. It has succeeded as a social floor, providing a vital economic buffer. However, its actual performance is significantly under-par due to persistent administrative and governance failures that compromise its rights-based architecture. To move from the marginal supplement to a true intensifier of rural livelihood, the government of Assam must strictly enforce the 100 days work provision for those who demand it, prioritize the completion of quality, durable assets, mandate transparent and rigorous social audits and launch a massive awareness campaign. The rectification of these implementation flaws is paramount for MGNREGA to fulfill its promise of enhancing the livelihood security of the rural poor in Assam. The valuable gains should not be derailed for poor implementation. This study can't be generalized, so more studies in this aspect is needed to verify the findings.

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