

## **CASE STUDY OF ONGOING SCHEMES UNDER MGNREGAAT BOKO (KAMRUP DISTRICT), ASSAM**

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### **Abstract**

*One of the most ambitious programs of the government to alleviate poverty through employment generation was started in 2005. In August 2005, landmark legislation was passed by the Indian government, the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act. It gives a justiciable 'right to work' in all the states of the country. MGNREGA is designated as a safety net to reduce migration by rural poor households in the lean period through guaranteeing hundred days of unskilled manual labor in a financial year, provided when demanded at minimum wage. The erstwhile employment schemes were formulated and implemented by bureaucrats and there was little or no participation of public. This study was conducted in Boko town of Kamrup District in Assam. Two ongoing schemes were studied in detail namely Land development scheme at Tepesia Village and Plantation and fencing at Jawaharlal Nehru College, Jarapara Village. Observations were drawn by physical verification of the works, interviews were conducted with the local community members who were working at the sites and Focussed Group Discussion was also conducted with women labours. Secondary data was collected from Block Development Office and from the MGNREGA website. It was seen that the scheme has helped the marginalised section of the society and the oppressed people to earn for two square meals a day and gives them financial independence. Women feel empowered as they have bank accounts and can operate them too.*

**Keywords:** MGNREGA, empowerment, Right to Work, employment

### **Introduction and Background**

One of the most ambitious programs of the government to alleviate poverty through employment generation was started in 2005. In August 2005, a landmark legislation was passed by the Indian government, the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act. It gives a justiciable 'right to work' in all the states of the country. Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) is designated as a safety net to reduce migration by rural poor households in the lean period through guaranteeing hundred days of unskilled manual labor in a financial year, provided when demanded at minimum wage. The erstwhile employment schemes were formulated and implemented by bureaucrats and there was little or no participation of public. Studies reveal that NREGA is the successful scheme of the central Government of India to improve the condition of rural people (Puri, 2008 and Bhatia & Dreze, 2006). So, MGNREGA was conceptualised by the government with a mandate to provide at least hundred days of guaranteed wage employment in a financial year to every rural household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work. The other objectives of MGNREGA include generating productive assets, protecting the environment, empowering rural women, reducing rural-urban migration and fostering social equality among others (NREGA, 2005). It ascertains that both men and women are paid an equal wage which is the statutory minimum wage

ascertained by the state government (Khera and Nayak, 2009). To check the inconsistencies, financial records such as muster rolls, job cards, material vouchers, expense ledgers, bank statements are examined (Jenkins, 2012). For this, social audits are conducted in the process by which details of financial and non-financial resources used in public expenditure programme are shared with the primary stakeholders in order to enforce accountability and transparency in the execution of such programme (Vision Foundation, 2005).

Seven districts of Assam were covered in February, 2006 under MGNREGA, and in 2007 five more districts were included. By April, 2008, remaining 14 districts were also covered (Das, 2014).

### **Field Area**

This study was conducted in Boko town of Kamrup District in Assam. It is situated on the south bank of river Brahmaputra. There are 11 Gram Panchayats in Boko Development Block. The total number of villages in the block was 140. It was seen that the total number of job cards issued were 14817 and amongst them those issued to Scheduled Caste category were 887 while those issued to Scheduled Tribes numbered 9084. Table 1 shows this data. Two ongoing schemes were studied in detail namely Land development scheme at Tepesia Village and Plantation and Fencing at Jawaharlal Nehru College, Jarapara Village, Boko, Assam. (Table 1 here)

**Table 1: Details of Boko Development Block**

Geographical Area	252.94 sq. km.
Total No. of Gram Panchayats	11
Total No. of Job Card	14,817
Total No. of SC Job Card	887
Total No. of ST Job Card	9,084

**Status of MGNREGA in Dakhin Paschim Boko**

The study was conducted in DakhinPaschim Boko in Kamrup District in Assam. From Table 2 it can be inferred that the total households applied for job cards are 1390 and the same number of job cards were issued too. Since the area is mainly inhabited by people belonging to Scheduled Tribe, maximum number of job cards was issued to them. Though the job cards issued were 1390 in number, it is seen that only 447 people demanded work under MGNREGS. It can be inferred from the table that all those who demanded work were allotted some work too, but yet no household had reached 100 days limit of access to work. Total muster rolls filled were 120 in number and total bank accounts operating were 362. It can also be seen from the table that 2210 days were given to women for work, which indicates a high percentage of women participation in volunteering for MGNREGS. (Table 2 here)

**Table 2: Details of Panchayat (DakhinPachim Boko)**

Indicator	Total
Total households applied for job card	1390
Total job cards issued	1390
Total job cards (SC)	52
Total job cards (ST)	972
Total job card (non SC/ST)	366
Total households demanded work	436
Total persons demanded work	447
Total households allotted work	436
Total persons allotted work	447
Total muster rolls filled	120
Total households worked	425
Total person-days worked by women	2210
Amount sanctioned (Rs. In Lakhs)	33.74
Total muster rolls filled	120
Total bank accounts	362
Disabled persons worked	0

**Objectives**

The aim of this study was to explore the impact of the ongoing MGNREGA schemes in Boko town of Kamrup district, Assam. The authors present it in a form of case study

**Methodology**

Both qualitative and quantitative approaches were used to assess the impact of ongoing MGNREGA schemes in Boko, Assam. Observations were drawn by physical verification of the works, interviews were conducted with the local community members who were working at the sites and Focussed Group Discussion was also held with women labours. Secondary data was collected from Block Development Office and from the MGNREGA website.

**Data analysis**

Two ongoing schemes under MGNREGA were studied in depth by the authors. The details of these schemes are:

- (i) Land Development Scheme at TepesiaYubak Club
- (ii) Plantation and Fencing at Jawaharlal Nehru College

**Land Development Scheme:** The first scheme was being implemented at TepesiaYubak Club at Tepesia Village under MGNREGA, 2014-15. The name of the Gram Panchayat was 69 No. DakhinPachim Boko. The total number of job card holders was 1489. There were 36 labours working at the site. They were using spades to dig earth from about 200 metres away from the site where it had been filled (Figure 1 and 2). They were working in groups as the work required immense physical strength. The details are mentioned in Table 3. (Table 3 here).

**Table 3: Details of the Scheme**

Estimated Sanction Amount	Rs.3,28,859
Wage	Rs.2,89,578
Material	Rs.39,281
Man-days Generated	1,734
Wage Rate per day	Rs. 167

The authors found that 36 Job card holders were working at the site. Out of the, 30 were women (aged 20-70 years). Out of these 36 Job Card holders, 25 were from Scheduled Caste background and 5 were out of Scheduled Tribe background. The workers were asked whether they had benefitted from any other government schemes apart from MGNREGA. It was found that 10 of them had benefitted from Indira Awaas Yojana (IAY). Regarding the literacy level of the respondents, it was found that 95% of them were literate and could speak in Assamese and Bengali along with some words of Hindi. It was also observed that the Job Card holders had been working for the last 6 years under MGNREGA.



**Figure 1: Women Labourers Digging Land**

As far as the payment of wages is concerned, the authors found that payment to all Job Card holders was made after processing of Muster Rolls. After computation of Muster Rolls, a Wage List is processed. After electronic Fund management system (e-FMS) is used, wages are deposited in the respective bank accounts of the Job Card holders who are due for payment. After duly signing and verifications, the Job Card holders can withdraw money from the banks. Through physical verification and checking of Job Cards of those present at the work site, the authors observed that all the Job cards were updated regularly and payment had been done weekly according to all norms.

The work done at the work site was quite satisfactory and all workers were seen working with full stamina.

### Plantation and Fencing at Jawaharlal Nehru College

This scheme was being implemented at Jawaharlal Nehru, College, Boko at Jarapara Village. The name of the Gram Panchayat was No. 69, DakshinPaschim Boko. Through further exploration it was found that total number of Job Card holders was 51 which included 26 males and 25 females (aged 20 -60 years). This included 16 Indira Awaas Yojana (IAY) beneficiaries. All the members in the group belonged to the Schedule Tribe category. They had completed the task of fencing the landscape area of the college. The details are present in Table 4. (Table 4 here)

**Table 4: Details of the Scheme**

Estimated Sanction Amount	Rs.4,99,000
Wage	Rs.3,00,200
Material	Rs.1,98,734
Mandays Generated	1,789
Wage Rate per day	Rs.167



**Figure 2: Women labourers transporting the dug up land in 'thelas'**

Through further exploration, the authors found that most of the labours had worked since six years in MGNREGA schemes. Here also, the payments were made after computation of the Muster Rolls. The wage lists were processed and after e-FMS, wages are deposited directly in the bank accounts of the Job Card holders. The workers reported that the scheme was beneficial as it provided an employment opportunity to them. Apart from that, fencing and plantation would beautify the college campus too, hence the work was being done at a steady speed.



**Figure 3: Site for Plantation and Fencing at J N College**

### Role of Panchayat

The authors observed that the Gram Panchayat was the implementing agency of the schemes. It played a very strong role as it helped in disbursing of the wages in time. The Gram Panchayat also monitors the utilisation of the full fund received for the implementation of the scheme

### Discussion and Results

Regarding the benefits received from the scheme, the authors observed that women who worked as labours in the MGNREGA schemes, were happy with the scheme. Through the Focussed Group Discussion held with labours, it was found that they feel financially independent and empowered. They get employment for some days and a regular payment for the same. They get to work in sites close to their home.

An elderly female responded, *"I am all alone. There is no one to take of me. When I heard about this scheme, I got a job card made and volunteered for work. Now I earn my meals. I don't have to beg for food."* She was more than eighty years of age and pulling cart at the work-site.

Also, the development schemes create assets in their villages. The site where Land Development was taking place will be used as a community ground. It will be used for multiple public functions. As it is, the scheme where cutting of high land is required, it is beneficial to the community as unproductive high land will become productive and the low lying land will become feasible for public use.

The schemes provides for generating employment to the local people who volunteer to take unskilled labor works. The area was highly affected by recent flood the scheme provides villagers in providing public service too and being paid at the same time. Employment through the scheme strengthens livelihoods of people and can bring financial security to the Job Card holders. The Scheme is more beneficial to the Yubak Club as various cultural and educational programs are organized there. This strengthens the socio-cultural environment in the area.

A male respondent who lived nearby this work site responded, *"It is good that through MGNREGS this land is being filled. It will prevent water-logging because of which the club facilities cannot be used and the logged water leads to health hazards. Once the land is filled, community property can be optimally used."*

The authors also observed that the Job Card holders were fully aware about their rights and entitlements. They are aware about the role of Gram Sabhas and the process of Social Auditing. They make sure that the Gram Sabhas are organized and they are physically present there. At the same time, the authors observed that no work site facilities are provided to Job Card holders. There was no provision for drinking water and first aid in case of an emergency. There was no 'ayaa' or person to take care of small children at the worksite.

When asked about the work conditions, another female respondent said, *"There is no provision for drinking water or first aid at the work site. We are not aware about it also. We fetch our own water and refill our bottles from nearby houses or community taps."*

The authors also met a women labor who was above 75 years of age and had no other source of livelihood. She was a Job card holder and was earning wages to manage two square meals a day. There were other workers, especially women, who shared that through earning wages and operating bank accounts they feel empowered and financially independent. They can send their children to school and they hope for a better future of their children.

One middle-aged female respondent shared, *"I feel very confident now. I earn and manage a bank account. I know how to operate my account. Now, I can send my children to school."*

## Recommendations

After meeting the Job Card holders and physically visiting the sites of the two schemes mentioned above, the authors feel that the MGNREGA is being implemented in a fairly well manner. It was observed that there were no provisions for drinking water and first aid box at the work sites. Also, there was no person deployed at the work site to look after small children, neither there was any shed provided where labours could take rest. If all the facilities as per MGNREGA norms are provided, the schemes are surely to succeed. Proper auditing and monitoring mechanisms will definitely enhance the implementation of MGNREGA schemes.

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