



Pratidhwani the Echo

A Peer-Reviewed International Journal of Humanities & Social Science

ISSN: 2278-5264 (Online) 2321-9319 (Print)

Impact Factor: 6.28 (Index Copernicus International)

UGC Approved, Journal No: 48666

Volume-VII, Issue-IV, April 2019, Page No. 282-306

Published by Dept. of Bengali, Karimganj College, Karimganj, Assam, India

Website: <http://www.thecho.in>

Role of Mgnrega in Poverty Alleviation: A Study of Karimganj District in Assam, India

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Abstract

Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) is one of the world's best and largest social security program adopted by the Indian Government which guarantees a minimum of 100 days wage employment per year to interested adults dwelling in the rural household's. This act adopts a dual approach of combining employment generation with the creation of durable rural assets. Through this guaranteed wage-for-employment policy, MGNREGA plays a key role in poverty alleviation, socio-economic development of the rural poor, migration reduction, rural development, women, SCs, STs and PWD empowerment, household food security, infant feeding and transformation of rural life in several districts of India. The present study aims to evaluate the current status, prospects and performance of MGNREGA in the Karimganj district of Assam, India. The study concludes that MGNREGA has created a significant impact on the women empowerment, rural assets creation and livelihood security of rural HHs in the district of Karimganj, Assam.

Keywords: *MGNREGA, socio-economic development, employment generation, women empowerment, livelihood security.*

Introduction: MGNREGA is one of the world's largest and best demand-driven, people-centered, right-based, wage-for-employment program run by the Indian Government to ensure social security and rural development (SIMDEGA, 2017). Proposed in 1991 by then Prime Minister, P.V Narasimha Rao, the Indian Parliament passed the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) on 23rd August 2005 (SOUTHTRIPURA DISTRICT, 2006). Four years later, on 2nd October, the act got rechristened as Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) by then United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government on the mark of golden jubilee celebrations of Panchayati Raj in India (TIMES OF INDIA, 2009; Press Information Bureau, 2009).

MGNREGA has a dual objective of rural job creation and development. It is a mandate to legally guarantee a minimum of 100 days wage-for-employment per fiscal year to every rural households (HHs) adult members who volunteers to do unskilled, labour intensive

manual works related to creation of durable public rural assets such as rural connectivity, water conservation and water harvesting, irrigation canals and facilities, flood protection and drought proofing, land development and reformation of private lands owned by small and marginal farmers, Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), Below Poverty Line (BPL), Indira Awas Yojana (IAY) (MINISTRY OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT GOVERNMENT OF INDIA, 2012).

The goals of MGNREGA is as follows (Government of India, 2013);

- MGNREGA aims to provide social protection to vulnerable groups through employment opportunities
- Ensure livelihood security through the creation of productive and durable rural assets such as roads, water and sanitation facilities, land development etc
- Environment protection through drought proofing, flood management and afforestation
- Empowerment of women
- Foster social equality among SCs, STs, PWDs
- Reduce rural-urban migration
- Participatory planning and implementation of schemes by involving people at the grass root level through 'Gram Sabah'
- Strengthening of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI)
- Ensure transparency and accountability by governance.

Employment Schemes implemented under this Act are controlled by the State Governments and Central Government pays wage for the unskilled labour and materials used in the creation of rural assets. While implementing various employment schemes, the State Government ensures all features and conditions specified under Schedule I and II of MGNREGA by Central Government is implemented under its schemes. Unlike previous allocation-based wage employment programs, MGNREGA is a demand driven wage employment program where, funds (100% of unskilled labour cost and 75% of material cost) are transferred from the Centre to the State based on its demand for employment. However, it is important to note that, As per Section 7(3) of MGNREGA, failure to provide work on time or delay in wage payment for the work done results in State Government's liability to pay 100% unemployment allowance and compensation (Government of India, 2013). An annual report on the current status, prospects and performance of MGNREGA should be presented by the Central Government to the Parliament. Similarly, State Governments through State Employment Guarantee Councils (SEGC) has to submit an annual report to the elected representatives of the State Legislatures

Gram Sabah (GS), plays bottom, yet key role in accepting, amending or rejecting works recommended to be implemented under MGNREGA schemes. In open assemblies, people plan and decide on the nature and choice of works to be carried out, the order in which it has to be done, site of work etc. Work schemes accepted by GS gets approved and

implemented through the Gram Panchayats (GPs). Adult members from rural HHs who volunteer to do unskilled manual works first sign up to the regional GPs. After verification of details, GP issues Job Cards at free of cost to each volunteer with their due picture. Once, job cards are issued, employment is provided within 15 days. Failure to provide job within this stipulated time, entitles the job seeker an unemployment allowance. Similarly, job allocated should be within 5 kms radius of the job seekers town. If the job is offered beyond 5km, then 10% additional income is paid towards transportation and residing expenses. Wage paid should comply with the Minimum Wages Act, 1948 and payment made on a weekly basis. Work schemes under MGNREGA should ensure one-third of its employees to be female participants and facilities like crèche, water, sanitation and shelter must be ensured on the workplace. GPs should ensure labour:material cost of 60:40 and all works implemented by the GP's should be socially reviewed and audited by the GS's and the information should be provided on request (MGNREGA, 2019).

Despite impressive achievements attained through implication of MGNREGA, issues relating to delays in unemployment allowance, wage compensation, wage payment, seasonal migration by rural workers, person's day generated, quality of assets created, fund allocation, corruption, pilferage of funds, grievance addressable has to be recognized and addressed accordingly (MINISTRY OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT GOVERNMENT OF INDIA, 2012; Lj.Charlas & J.M.Velmurugan, 2014). According to Seetha Lekshmi and Rathiha(2018), personal problems like lack of awareness, confidence and education among rural HHs limit effective use of MGNREGA by MGNREGA employees of Thiruvananthapuram District, Kerala. Similar study by Kumar(2012) which assessed the problems faced by male workers of MGNREGA in Kerala, reported that lack of responsible worksite captains affects organization and management of MGNREGA works such as task allocation, formation of work groups, maintenance of muster rolls, provision of worksite facilities, ensuring quality of work done etc. Another study by (vani et al.(2017), reported that, lack of crèche, water facilities and delay in job card issue affects women workers of MGNREGA in Jaipur District, Rajasthan. Highlighting the importance of timely wage payments for MGNREGA workers and to systemize fund flow, the Ministry of rural Development on 9th September 2016 up scaled the National Electronic Fund Management Systems (Ne-FMS) to streamline fund flow system and to ensure payment of wages into their respective bank accounts (Government of India, 2013). However, Aggarwal(2017) highlighted that errors in recording bank account details of wage workers and lack of funds allocation from Centre to State Government, results in the absence of wage guarantee which significantly affects the interest of new job seekers and existing workers to join and continue work with MGNREGA.

Introduced in 2006-07 in 7 districts as the first phase, the coverage was gradually increased to include all 32 districts of Assam by 2018-19 from 13 districts in 2007-2008 (GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM, 2019).

The following table 1 summarizes MGNREGA report of Assam as on 12th April 2019. In Assam there are 32 districts and 239 blocks. The total no. of job cards issued is 48.18 lakhs of which 26.64 are in active. There is about 81.27 lakhs no. of workers of which 39.94 are active workers, 4.99 lakhs are SC workers and 18.02 lakhs are ST workers. The total person days generated in 2018-19 are 534.27 lakhs of which 5.13lakhs are SCs persons and 20.07 lakhs are STs Persons. The average days of employment provided per household are 30.61lakhs. The Total No of HHs completed 100 Days of Wage Employment (2018-19) is 18,592.

Table 1: MGNREGA report of Assam - April 2019

Details	Numbers
Total no. of districts	32
Total no. of blocks	239
Total no. of job cards issued	48.18 lakhs
Total no. of active job cards	26.64 lakhs
Total no. of workers	81.27 lakhs
Total no. of active workers	39.94 lakhs
Percentage of SC workers against active workers	4.99 lakhs
Percentage of ST workers against active workers	18.02 lakhs
Total person day generated (2018-19)	534.27 lakhs
Total SCs persons day generated (2018-19)	5.13 lakhs
Total STs persons day generated (2018-19)	20.07 lakhs
Total women person day generated (2018-19)	41.1 lakhs
Average days of employment provided per Household (2018-19)	30.61 lakhs
Total No of HHs completed 100 Days of Wage Employment (2018-19)	18,592
Differently abled persons worked (2018-19)	5584

Source: Adopted From Ministry of Rural Development (2019)

Related Work: Several previous studies on MGNREGA has been conducted in different states of India to evaluate the impact of MGNREGA on rural poverty reduction(Bhat, 2015; Breitkreuz et al., 2017), improve socio-economic status of rural poor(Sarkar & Kumar, 2011), employment generation (Sharma et al., 2017), decrease seasonal migration, encourage women workforce participation(Santhosh, 2014), development of rural areas(Pandey, 2017), rural assets creation(Dhananjaya & Prathibha, 2011), transforming rural life(Bhat et al., 2016) etc. These studies help key stakeholders such as wage seekers, Gram Sabah, PRIs, Programme Officer, District Programme Coordinator (DPC), State Government and Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD) in analyzing the progress made through MGNREGA in their districts.

For example, study by Shivraj Meena(2018) assessing the effect of MGNREGA on socio-economic development of rural HH's in Sawai Madhopur district, Rajasthan during 2015-17 reported that MGNREGA helped to create jobs, enhanced quality of life, created rural asset, reduced rural-urban migration and encouraged participation of marginalized society in the development of rural assets.

Another study (Goyal, 2018) which assessed the role of MGNREGA in employment generation in 33 districts of Maharashtra during 2012-17 reported that, the number of employment provided was less than a number of job cards issued. The authors stated that, though the object of the scheme was to guarantee 100 days wage employment, the highest average days provided was approximately 60% from 2012-2016, which further reduced to 49% during 2016-17. Also, it was found that the total fund spends on material and wage increased since 2013. However, the total number of person days generated by women, SC's and ST's declined in 2016-17. Hence, the study concluded that MGNREGA failed to make a significant impact in empowering weaker sections through employment generation in the 33 districts of Maharashtra.

Research work by Vidya and Anagha(2018) which assessed the impact of MGNREGA on women empowerment in rural Kerala, concluded that MGNREGA played a significant role in creating employment opportunities for women in Anthikad Panchayat, Thrissur district, Kerala. In addition, it helped to increase the income and expenditure of rural HHs. Another study conducted in South India by (Vettriselvan et al., 2018) which assessed the role of MGNREGA in job creation and poverty alleviation in Tamil Nadu reported that during the study period 2006-2012, there was steady growth in total job cards issued among rural HHs. Evidence of flexibility in terms of employment and person day generated indicate MGNREGA helps job creation and poverty alleviation in Tamil Nadu. However, low growth in registration for wage employment was noted which was reported to be due to a rise in casual labour requirement and the rural job market.

Similar to above studies, several studies have been conducted assessing the role of MGNREGA in rural livelihood security(Bora, 2013; Deb, 2011) job creation (Baruah & Radkar, 2017) in Assam(Panda & Umdor, 2011; Das, 2013). For example, Das (2016) evaluated the role of MGNREGA in employment generation in Barpeta District of Assam. It was reported that during study period 2013-14, the participation of women under this scheme had increased however, there was a significant reduction in participation of SCs and STs. Major works carried out was related to water conservation and harvesting. Hence, the study concluded that MGNREGA played a significant role in the reduction of traditional gender wage discrimination, hence, encouraging women empowerment. Along with it, MGNREGA helped to conserve natural resources, created productive assets and limited the number of rural-urban migration in this district.

Another work by Dutta(2019) which assessed the impact of MGNREGA in terms of employment generation in Lakhimpur district of Assam. The study concluded that the implementation of MGNREGA helped increase employment generation however, it was not significant enough to provide moderate income to the rural HHs. Hence, it is important to enhance the employment level and income to alleviate poverty from this district. Also, the study suggested that moral and ethical values should reflect in the implementation of this program as more number of non-SC's and ST's HHs from Kamalabaria and Ujjalpur GP's were better off in a position to acquire more number of person days when compared to ST

HHs followed by SC HHs in this GP's. Also women person days generated during the study period was low when compared to previous fiscal years.

A case study by Borah and Bordoloi,(2014) assessing MGNREGA impact on women workers in Sonitpur District of Assam reported that although MGNREGA helps female workers in terms of income, social empowerment, HH decision making and creation of rural assets, few barriers such as non-availability of crèche, water/sanitation/first aid/rest room facilities followed by delay in wage payments showed reduced interest among female workers to participate in employment programs under MGNREGA. A similar study by De and Bhattacharyya(2013) reported that participation of women in physical activities and decision making was better than satisfactory levels when compared to women from backward communities who were involved mostly in physical work under MGNREGA. The study concluded that level of education, social status, age and distance from Panchayat centre played a significant role in women participation in decision making in the Morigaon district, Assam.

Though several studies have been conducted, there is a paucity of data available to assess the current status, prospectus and performance of MGNREGA in the Karimganj district in comparison to Assam. Hence, this study aims to conduct secondary data analysis to assess the impact of MGNREGA in in 7 blocks of Karimganj District with that of Assam.

Study Area: Karimganj town, the head quarter of the Karimganj District is the second largest town in the Barak Valley. The district covers an area of 1,809 sq.km and situated between longitude 91°15' and 93°15' east latitude 24°8' and 25°8' north. In the district, there are 7 towns. Karimganj is only town having Municipal Board and Badarpur town has Town Committee status. There are 5 Census towns in the district namely Batarashi, Kanisail Pt- I, Badarpur Rly Town, Mosli Pt- I and Chapra. According to the census report of 2011, the total population of this district was 1,228,686 of which 625,864 were males and 602,822 were females. But in 2001 census, the total population of this district was 1,007,976 of which 517,680 were males and 490,296 were females. The total area of the district is 1,809 sq. km. The density of population was 673 per sq.km in 2011 and 557 in 2001. According to the 2011 census 91.1 % live in a rural region in this district. In actual figure a total of 1118986 live in rural areas and 109700 are under urban areas of the district. In rural areas 570510 and 548476 are males and female respectively. Accordingly 55354 and 54346 are males and females respectively in urban of the district. The percentage of the urban population in the district is only 8.9. So it can be clearly seen that most of the population dwell in the rural areas of the district. The sex ratio is the number of females per 1000 males in the population. The district has a Sex Ratio of 963as against 958 in the State. The child proportion (0-6 ages) in 2011 was 17.60% while 17.25% in 2001. The literacy rate of Karimganj district is 78.2% of which 84.1% is for males and 72.1% is for females. The district literacy rate is above the state literacy rate (72.2%).

Methodology

The present study examines the current status, interior prospects and performance of MGNREGA in district Karimganj, Assam. Data were collected from various secondary sources like from District web site (<http://nrega.nic.in/netnrega/sthome.aspx>), different reports of government, published and unpublished sources like books, journals, reports, publications, unpublished doctoral dissertation and from www.nrega.nic.in. The study covers during the year 2018-2019.

Objective: The main objective of this study is to assess employment creation and income creation for beneficiaries at 8 blocks of Karimganj District, Assam. Secondly, the study aims to assess the rural assets created and usage of the budget allocated in the development of rural areas in this district.

Results:

Table 1 reveals that the number of new households joined MGNREGA in Karimganj district.

In Karimganj district of total 60314 households, 2213 newly joined household and 58101 households employed in 2017-18, while out of 74120, 930 new households and 73190 households were employed in 2018-19. When considering the block, in Patharkandi block there is 773 newly joined household in 2017-18, while in 2018-19 there is 523 newly joined household in Dullavcherra.

Table 1: New Household Joined MGNREGA in 2017-2018 and 2018-2019

Sl. No.	Block	2017-18			2018-19		
		Household Working in Earlier Also	Household New Joined in 2017-2018	Total Household's	Household Working in Earlier Also	Household New Joined in 2018-2019	Total Household's
1	BADARPUR	3895	280	4175	6270	97	6367
2	DULLAVCHERRA	10439	229	10668	14411	523	14934
3	LOWAIRPOA	10337	675	11012	12938	5	12943
4	NORTH KARIMGANJ	2689	1	2690	2589	36	2625
5	PATHARKANDI	16506	773	17279	20909	34	20943
6	RAMKRISHNA NAGAR	7349	158	7507	8395	206	8601
7	SOUTH KARIMGANJ	6886	97	6983	7671	29	7700
	Total (Karimganj)	58101	2213	60314	73183	930	74113
	Total (Assam)	1583585	101063	1684648	1656717	85261	1741978

Table 2: No. of Disabled Persons and Person days in 2017-18 and 2018-19

Sl. No.	Block	2017-18			2018-19		
		No. of Disabled persons registered in NREGA	No. of Disabled persons worked in NREGA in 2017-2018	Person days Generated in 2017-2018	No. of Disabled persons registered in NREGA	No. of Disabled persons worked in NREGA in 2018-2019	Person days Generated in 2018-2019
1	BADARPUR	21	2	45	21	5	138
2	DULLAVCHERRA	24	6	144	24	6	143
3	LOWAIRPOA	106	9	213	106	15	482
4	NORTH KARIMGJANJ	5	1	48	5	2	60
5	PATHARKANDI	42	19	141	42	22	767
6	RAMKRISHNA NAGAR	29	3	48	29	8	246
7	SOUTH KARIMGANJ	44	5	84	44	5	150
	Total (Karimganj)	271	45	723	271	63	1986
	Total (Assam)	25492	7844	126872	25525	5584	110082

Table 2 shows the number of disabled persons and person days in 2017 to 2019. In Karimganj district, of a total of 271 disabled persons registered in NREGA, 45 disabled persons were worked in 2017-18 and 63 persons in 2018-19. There is 723 number of person days generated in 2017-18, while 1986 in 2018-19. When considering the block there are 106 disabled persons in Lowairpoa registered in NREGA, in which 9 were working in 2017-18 and 15 were in 2018-19.

Table 3: Asset created for the year 2017-18 and 2018-19

Work Category	2017-18	2018-19
Flood Control	3	4
Rural Connectivity	150	213
Water Conservation And Water Harvesting	9	105
Renovation of Traditional Water Bodies	5	3
Drought Proofing	83	18
Irrigation Canals	106	216
Irrigation Facilities To SC/ST/IAY/LR	9	666
Land development	57	66
Other works	48	24
Rural Drinking Water	11	12
Fisheries	186	104
Rural Sanitation	50	1
Total (Karimganj)	719	1445
Total (Assam)	53035	136073

Among the total assets created in the year 2018-19, highest number of assets are created in the area of Irrigation Facilities To SC/ST/IAY/LR (46.1%) followed by Irrigation Canals

(14.9%), Rural Connectivity (14.7%), Water Conservation And Water Harvesting (7.3%), Fisheries (7.2%), Land development (4.6%), Other works (1.7%), Drought Proofing (1.2%), Rural Drinking Water (0.8%), Flood Control (0.3%), Renovation of Traditional Water Bodies (0.2%) and Rural Sanitation (0.1%) (Table 3).

Table 4: Gender wise wage analysis of employment provided on work

Work Category	2017-18								2018-19							
	Worker Employed		Person days [in Lakh]		Amount earned during the current financial year (In Lakhs)		Amount earned during previous financial year but paid in current year (In Lakhs)		Worker Employed		Person days [in Lakh]		Amount earned during current financial year (In Lakhs)		Amount earned during previous financial year but paid in current year (In Lakhs)	
	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
Rural Connectivity	4872.00	13880.00	0.69	1.91	126.04	349.83	25.47	65.12	1643.00	3131.00	0.25	0.46	47.69	87.75	0.00	0.00
Water Conservation And Water Harvesting	3122.00	5638.00	0.35	0.61	63.20	111.19	10.47	33.56	7114.00	13467.00	1.31	2.57	247.31	486.21	4.79	9.00
Renovation of Traditional Water Bodies	96.00	104.00	0.01	0.01	1.81	1.92	0.00	0.00	123.00	206.00	0.02	0.03	3.02	5.26	0.00	0.00
Flood Control	311.00	603.00	0.05	0.10	8.59	18.31	0.00	0.00	380.00	969.00	0.05	0.14	9.18	27.36	0.00	0.00
Drought Proofing	83.00	146.00	0.01	0.01	0.97	2.01	0.15	0.26	53.00	113.00	0.01	0.01	1.42	2.71	0.00	0.00
Irrigation Canals	11299.00	28997.00	2.04	5.42	372.65	991.83	24.12	77.22	19630.00	40980.00	4.18	8.66	790.10	1637.26	8.31	18.46
Irrigation Facilities To SC/ST/IA Y/LR	594.00	1029.00	0.16	0.20	29.13	37.16	0.00	0.00	1937.00	4399.00	0.79	1.62	149.42	306.18	0.41	0.74
Land development	2936.00	6295.00	0.40	0.85	73.32	155.43	5.72	16.61	5802.00	10050.00	0.89	1.63	167.67	307.82	0.59	0.70
Bharat Nirman Rajeev Gandhi Sewa Kendra	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Coastal Areas	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Rural Drinking Water	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Fisheries	1672.00	3570.00	0.22	0.46	39.99	84.17	21.02	51.11	763.00	1630.00	0.15	0.30	28.31	56.52	1.11	1.86

Rural Sanitation	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.01	0.13	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Other works	277.00	757.00	0.03	0.07	5.24	13.04	1.33	3.49	418.00	554.00	0.07	0.10	13.60	18.06	0.02	0.02
Grand Total (Karimganj)	25262.00	61019.00	3.94	9.65	720.93	1764.91	88.30	247.49	37863.00	75499.00	7.71	15.53	1457.71	2935.13	15.21	30.78
Grand Total (Assam)	1388268	2076481	178.08	285.0	32583.0	52146.6	3405.9	5883.55	1421036	1947965	214.56	307.14	40545.34	5803.57	1228.3	1862.2

Table 4 reveals the gender wise wage analysis of employment provided on work from 2017 to 2019. In 2017-18, 61019 employed were men and 25262 were women, 9.65 lakhs men person days while 3.94 lakhs were women. Amount earned during 2017-18 by men were 1764.91 lakhs and 720.93 lakhs by women. Amount earned during the previous financial year but paid in the current year by men were 247.49 lakhs and 88.30 lakhs by women. In 2018-19, 75499 employed were men and 37863 were women, 15.53 lakhs men person days while 7.71 lakhs were women. Amount earned during 2017-18 by men were 2935.13 lakhs and 1457.71 lakhs by women. Amount earned during the previous financial year but paid in the current year by men were 30.78 lakhs and 15.21 lakhs by women.

Table 5: Expenditure analysis of on-going works in 2017-18 and 2018-19

Sl. No.	Block Name	2017-18					2018-19				
		No. of works with	No. of works with				No. of works with	No. of works with			
			No Expenditure in	Expenditure Only on Material in	Expenditure Only on Labour in	Expenditure on Both (Material & Labour) in		No Expenditure in	Expenditure Only on Material in	Expenditure Only on Labour in	Expenditure on Both (Material & Labour) in
1	RAMKRISHNA NAGAR	1257	1001	0	249	7	1260	73	14	1154	19
2	PATHARKANDI	1901	1181	1	672	47	1911	230	1	1677	3
3	SOUTH KARIMGANJ	629	444	0	185	0	962	81	2	873	6
4	NORTH KARIMGANJ	364	228	0	135	1	364	38	3	298	25
5	BADARPUR	720	468	0	252	0	720	64	3	650	3
6	LOWAIRPOA	1859	1452	8	330	69	1859	336	2	1463	58
7	DULLAVCHERRA	1887	1446	15	267	159	1887	412	33	1364	78
Total (Karimganj)		8617	6220	24	2090	283	8963	1234	58	7479	192
Total (Assam)		128886	89209	1205	31812	6660	12886	23336	2338	95712	7500

Table 5 presents the expenditure analysis of on-going works from 2017 to 2019. In 2017-18 of total 8617 employed, 6220 employees with no expenditure, followed by 2090

employed only on labour, 283 employed in both material and labour and 24 employees with expenditure only on material, while in 2018-19 of total 8963 employed, 7479 employees with expenditure only on labour followed by 1234 with no expenditure, 192 employed only on both material and labour and 58 employees with expenditure only on material. When considered to blocks, of total 1901 total employed, 1181 with no expenditure, 672 employees with expenditure only on labour, 47 employees with both labour and material as expenditure, while 1677 employees with expenditure only on labour followed by 230 with no expenditure, 3 with both material and labour and 1 with material only.

Discussion: The present study examined the current status, interior prospects and performance of MGNREGA in the Karimganj District in the Barak Valley with respect to Assam between the study period 2018-2019. The study was conducted in 7 blocks of this district, namely, Badarpur, Dullavcherra, Lowairpoa, North Karimganj, South Karimganj, Patharkandi and Ramkrishna Nagar.

According to the data, though the total number of households (HH) employed under MGNREGA in these blocks during the fiscal year 2018-19 increased by 22.88% from 60314 in 2017-18, the number was not significant, as the number of newly joined HH's decreased by 57.97% from 2213 in 2017-18. Of different blocks, Patharkandi recorded a maximum number of HH's employed with MGNREGA (16506) between the year 2017-18 which later increased by 26.67% the year 2018-2019. Though this block showed a maximum number of newly joined HH's in 2017-18 i.e., 773, it reduced to 34 in 2018-2019. Similarly, Lowairpoa block which recorded the second largest newly joined HH (675) under MGNREGA in 2017-2018, the number significantly reduced to 5 newly joined HH in 2018-2019. As above two blocks, the number of newly joined HH's decreased significantly in Badarpur and South Karimganj blocks as well during 2018-2019. Despite above blocks, Dullavcherra, North Karimganj And Ramkrishna Nagar showed significant improvement in the number of newly joined HH's in 2018-2019, of which, Dullavcherra recorded maximum number of increase (523 from 229) in 2018-2019. On comparing the number of HHs joined in Karimganj district with that of Assam's overall newly joined HH's for the period of 2018-19, the number was insignificant (930 of total 85261). Similarly, when compared to previous year's figures (2213 of 101063) the number was low. This could be due to a low number of adults in the working age group (≥ 18 years) to join MGNREGA, or lack of interest to join MGNREGA or lack of motivation by MGNREGA staff to include more workers from these blocks.

It is important to look into the number of disabled persons working under MGNREGA to record equality in work allocation. According to the data, though the total number of disabled persons registered under MGNREGA is 271, the percentage of disabled persons worked under MGNREGA was 16.60% in 2017-18 which slightly increased to 23.24% by 2018-19, however, the percentage of person day generated by them increased almost trifold in 2018-19 from 723 in 2017-18. In all blocks, the number of disabled people worked with MGNREGA increased during 2018-19 and the person days generated by them increased

considerably from 2017-18. A maximum number of disabled persons registered with MGNREGA was recorded in Lowairpoa (106) however, the number of disabled persons worked with MGNREGA in 2018-19 was only 15, which was a 67% increase from 2017-18. In Patharkandi block, though the number of disabled persons worked with MGNREGA was 22, the person days generated by them was maximum, i.e, 767 in 2018-19. Followed by Patharkandi, Lowairpoa and Ramkrishna Nagar had maximum person days generated. When compared to Assam's overall PWD's person day generation for the fiscal year 2018-19, Karimganj district recorded low number (1986 of 110082) which was similar to previous fiscal year's record (723 of 126872).

In terms of assets creation through MGNREGA programme, there was a significant increase in total asset creation through MGNREGA in the year 2018-19 (100.97%) when compared to 2017-18. A maximum number of works (46.08%) was dedicated towards irrigation facilities for SC/ST/IAY and LR groups in 2018-19 which was 7300% (74 fold) increase from 2017-18. Followed by irrigation facilities to SCs and STs, next maximum number of works was dedicated towards the construction of irrigation canals (14.95) which was 103.77% increase from 2017-18 and construction of rural connectivity such as roads (14.7%). It is important to note that the number of works dedicated to the development of rural sanitation dropped significantly from 50 to 1 in 2018-19. Hence, the share of asset creation towards rural sanitation through MGNREGA was 0.069%. Though the number of assets created for drought proofing dropped by 78.3% in 2018-19, the percentage of assets created towards water conservation and harvesting increased by 1066.67% (11 fold increases). The number of assets created for land development increased considerably than fisheries through MGNREGA. Though, a total number of assets created in Assam tripled from 53035 to 136073 between fiscal years 2017-2019, the total assets created in Karimganj district only doubled from 719 to 1445.

According to the employment analysis, the total number of employed workers through MGNREGA during 2017-18 was 86281, of which the majority (70.72%) was male workers. During 2018-19, the total numbers of employed workers increased by 131.38% from 86281 in 2017-18 and similar to 2017-18, the percentage of male workers were significant (66.6%) when compared to female workers. Though the percentage of men participated in MGNREGA in overall Assam and Karimganj district reduced from 59.9% to 57.82% between the fiscal year 2017-18 and 2018-19 and 70.21% and 66.6% during the fiscal year 2017-18 and 2018-19. The percentage of men participation from Karimganj district was higher. One of the possible reasons is, according to the census report 2011; the total population of a male in rural areas of Karimganj was higher (50.98%) when compared to female population (49.01%). However, it is key to note that, the percentage of female workers in Karimganj district increased from 29.27% in 2017-18 to 33.40% in 2018-19 similar to Assam's overall female participation in MGNREGA i.e., 40.06% in 2017-18 to 42.17% between 2018-19 respectively.

There was no preference observed for the female gender in employment under certain projects of MGNREGA. Generally, the male was preferred over female in all works under MGNREGA programs. According to our findings, maximum numbers of men were employed in works like construction of irrigation canals 47.52% and 54.27% respectively during both 2017-18 and 2018-19. Followed by the construction of irrigation canals, rural connectivity 22.74%, land development (10.31%), water conservation and harvesting (9.24%) and fisheries (5.85%) was prioritized during 2017-18. During 2018-19, more men were employed in the construction of water construction and harvesting projects (17.83%) and land developments (13.31%) after employment in construction of irrigation canals projects. In terms of female population, maximum number were employed under irrigation canals projects 44.72% and 51.84% from 2017-19, however, between 2017-18, following irrigation canals, maximum women were employed for works like rural connectivity (19.28%), water conservation and harvesting (12.35%), land development (11.62%) and fisheries (6.6%). During 2018-19, maximum women were employed for water conservation and harvesting (18.78%), followed by land development (15.32%) and rural connectivity (4.3%) after irrigation canals. From the above findings, it is evident that total person days for constructing the irrigation canals were higher during 2017-18 of which it was maximum (55.24%) during 2018-19. When compared to Assam's overall current works (128886), the percentage of works carried out in Karimganj district was 14% during 2017-18 which increased to 15% by 2018-19.

On comparing the amount earned through employment under MGNREGA, it was found that the total amount earned during 2017-18 was 2821.63 lakhs of which 335.79 lakhs was the amount earned during the previous fiscal year but paid during 2017-18. Similarly, the total amount earned during 2018-19 was 4438.83 lakhs of which 45.99 lakhs was the amount earned during 2017-18 but paid during 2018-19. From above, it is evident that the total percentage of the amount earned during the fiscal year 2018-19 was 57.31% more than during the fiscal year 2017-18. This was significantly higher than Assam's total increase in the amount earned during 2018-19 (16.35%). The percentage of income earned by female population outnumbered (102.19%), the total income earned by male population 66.30% during the study period. This denotes, a significant number of women are showing interest to participate in employment with MGNREGA than the male population.

The expenditure analysis of on-going works under MGNREGA program for the year 2017-19 shows that, the maximum budget was allocated to Patharkandi block, followed by Dullavcherra, Lowairpoa, Ramkrishna Nagar. Of total budget allocated for works in 2017-18, expenditure towards labour was 2090 and towards materials were 24 and towards both material and labour were 283. Rest 6620 was not spent. However in 2018-19, maximum expenditure was done towards the labour (7479) of the total budget allocated 8963. Very less (58) was spent on material and towards both material and labour. Rest 1234 was not spent. This was comparable to the overall increase in Assam's expenditure on labour (200%) increase from 31812 during the fiscal year 2017-18.

Conclusion:

The key findings of the above study are:

- Significant decrease in the total number of households (HH) employed under MGNREGA during study period which could be due to the low number of adults in the working age group (≥ 18 years) to join MGNREGA, or lack of interest to join MGNREGA, lack of motivation by MGNREGA staff to include more workers from this block etc.
- The percentage of person days generated by disabled persons slightly increased during the study period.
- In terms of assets creation, there was a significant increase in total asset creation through MGNREGA in the year 2018-19 when compared to 2017-18.
- Maximum number of works was dedicated towards the construction of irrigation canals and generation of irrigation facilities mainly to SCs and STs followed by rural connectivity
- A number of works dedicated towards the development of rural sanitation and drought proofing dropped significantly, however, the percentage of assets created towards water conservation and harvesting increased considerably.
- There was no gender preference observed in works allocated under MGNREGA in this district during the study period
- The total percentage of the amount earned during the fiscal year 2018-19 was significantly more than during the fiscal year 2017-18.
- The percentage of income earned by female population outnumbered their counterparts denoting a significant rise in rural women showing interest to participate in employment under MGNREGA than their counterparts.
- The budget allocated for different works under MGNREGA increased during 2018-19 when compared to previous fiscal year and most importantly, maximum expenditure was done towards labour during 2018-19.

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