



Role of MGNREGA Stakeholders in Rural Development of South West Khasi Hills District, Meghalaya

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Abstract: The challenging task of every Government is to eradicate poverty and unemployment problems. As a result, Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) is considered as “Silver Bullet” to eradicate these twin chronic problems (Faroog, 2014). It is one of the largest wage employment schemes in human history which provide employment of 11.56 crores people only in 2018-19 (mgneraweb4.nic.in). The successful of the Scheme depends on the active role of stakeholders from grass-root level to the National Level. This paper will examine the role of stakeholders in implementation of MGNREGA in South West Khasi Hills District, Meghalaya. The District comprises of 1, 10,152 population residing in 315 villages.

Key words: *MGNREGA, Rural Development, Sustainable Assets, Stakeholders, Village Employment Council, Village Dorbar.*

I. Introduction

Since time immemorial, India is a land of village communities and a rural Country. Of about 70 percent of its population reside in villages whose main activity is agriculture and its allied activities. The development of the country depends on the development of the village communities. Mahatma Gandhi once said (Harijan, 1936), “India lives in Her Villages”¹. The development of the Country depends on the development of village communities. He further said, “I would say that if the village perishes, India will perish too, it will be no more India. Her own vision in the world will get lost. The revival of the village life is possible only when there is no more exploited”². Out of 1.21 billion people, 833 millions live in rural areas which account 72.22 percent of total population³. The success of any Government Schemes depends on the closed coordination between beneficiaries and the policy makers. The achievement made by the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) for more than a decade shows a congenial link between various stakeholders where responsibilities are vested upon. The basic objective of the Act is to ensure livelihood and food security by providing unskilled work to rural households through creation of sustainable assets. The mandate of the Government is to implement the Scheme in the most transparent and effective way by active participation of the people right from the grass root level up to the national level. To ensure transparency and accountability, the Government has adopted measures like social audit and direct transfer of wages to personal account of labourers. Wage earners and the Village Employment Council (VEC) and Village Administrative Council (Durbar Shnong) are the primary stakeholders where responsibility is empowered to identify and register households, plan, survey, execute, implement and monitoring the work as per the demand of people at the village level. Being, the primary

¹ Singh, Katar,(2009, ‘Rural Development: Principles, Policies and Management’ 3rd Edition, New Delhi, Chaman Enterprises.;1:5

² Singh, Katar,(2009, ‘Rural Development: Principles, Policies and Management’ 3rd Edition, New Delhi, Chaman Enterprises.;1:5

³ <http://censusindia.gov.in/2011>

stakeholders they played a vital role in planning, surveying, executing and monitoring. Valuable suggestions from the primary stakeholders will be an instrument to strengthen rural livelihood and rural development in the future. This paper will examine the role of stakeholders in rural development through the implementation of MGNREGA in South West Khasi Hills District, Meghalaya.

MGNREGA:

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) is the Central Sponsored Scheme which was notified on September 7, 2005 with the objective to provide 100 days of guaranteed wage employment in a financial year to every household whose adult members are willing to do unskilled manual work during the agricultural off season. The Act aims at providing wage employment to the villagers by creating rural assets based on their demand which can enhance the livelihood of the rural people.

Rural Development:

A long term strategy designed to uplift the socio-economic life of the rural people in a sustainable manner. Rural development is a process which leads to sustainable improvement in the quality of life of rural people especially the poor. (Chambers, 1983;147), "Rural Development is a strategy to enable a specific group of people, poor women and men, to gain for themselves and their children more of what they want and need..."⁴

Sustainable Assets:

Sustainable assets are quality physical infrastructures created through MGNREGA with the prior objective to strengthen rural livelihood in a long run. The Assets included public works related to natural resources, community and individual assets, common infrastructure which promotes agriculture and rural infrastructures.

MGNREGA Stakeholders:

MGNREGA Stakeholders are people bestowed with a common role and responsibilities to deliver in an effective manner for the successful implementations of the Act. The Stakeholders in MGNREGA are categories as Wage seekers, Gram Sabha, Panchayat Raj Institution or Gram Panchayat, Programme Officer at Block level, District programme Co-ordinator, State Government Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India Civil Society and other stakeholders such as line departments, Convergent departments and Self-help groups.

Village Employment Council (VEC):

The VEC is a conglomeration of all adult members or wage seekers including both male and female which represent each household in the decision making, planning, surveying and implementing of MGNREGA at the village level. It is considered as the primary stakeholders who can exercise their rights and demand for works as per the needs of the village.

Dorbar Shnong:

In Meghalaya where Panchayat Raj Institutions are not available, the *Dorbar Shnong* (Village Administrative Council) is looking after the administrative affairs and it is considered as the highest policy making body at the Village level. Each *Dorbar Shnong* has its own set of laws and policies disseminate at the village level for the welfare of the villagers. Only adult males are members to the general meeting of the *Dorbar*. Women are debarred to take part in the *Dorbar*.

2. Literature review:

Sudha *et al.*, (2014) has analyzed that the assets creation in Maharashtra were very useful and supportive of agriculture and people feel that it is their role to decide on the type of work. Due to MGNREGA, women participation in decision making has improved Bhargava (2013), Dandekar *et.al.*, (2010), found that in Sikkim 70 percent admitted that planning was done as per the community's demand and had taken part at village level. CAG Report (2018), revealed irregularities in payment of wages to people, unemployment allowances were not paid fully, labour amenities and other entitlement guaranteed to workers were not provided, workers were not given receipt for their work demanded and the work provided to disabled persons was only 29 to 36 days. Mishra (2011), study in three district of Madhya Pradesh, the study concluded that there is a need to explore the ways to enhance ownership of assets created among the

⁴Singh, Katar,(2009, '*Rural Development: Principles, Policies and Management*' 3rd Edition, New Delhi, Chaman Enterprises.:1:3

villagers and provision for maintenance of these assets. Seth (2015) in the study on the overview of MGNREGA in India, found that MGNREGA is proving a significant employment providing scheme, raising the level of income of the people in rural areas, increase in standard of living, power to buy good quality seeds and fertilizers and built productive assets to a great extent. Sharma and Didwania (2013), found that in the District of Jind, Rajasthan 98.44 percent of people aware about MGNREGA. The study suggest that delivery system need to streamline to make stakeholders more responsive to the people, Panchyat Raj Institute need to be more intimately involved in planning, implementation and monitoring of development programme.

3. Statement of the problem:

The study is focused only on the role of the MGNREGA's Primary Stakeholders which comprises of Wage Seekers, Village Employment Council (VEC) and the *Dorbar Shnong* (Village Administrative Council) in Rural Development at the village level of South West Khasi Hills District of Meghalaya for financial years 2015-16 to 2018-19.

4.1: Objective of the Study:

1. To examine the social responsibility of primary stakeholders in planning, surveying and executing the Scheme for community development.
2. To examine the role of *Dorbar Shnong* (Village administrative Council) in implementation of the Act.

4.2. Study Design, Methodology and Tools:

1. **Population of the study:** The population of the study consists of all households registered under MGNREGA in Mawkyrwat C&RD Block and Ranikor C&RD Block of South West Khasi Hills District.
2. **Sample Size:** Randomly 398 households from 40 (forty) villages were selected from both the C&RD Blocks.
3. **Methodology:** Both Primary and Secondary data were taken as sources of information. Quantitative and qualitative data have been collected as per the requirement of the study. For primary sources, the tools used in the study comprise of Observation, Interview Schedule and Focus Group Discussion. Secondary Sources are taken from C&RD Blocks, Official Websites of MGNREGA, Journal and Research papers. The statistical tools and testing used in the study include Simple Statistical Analysis.

5.1: Study area: MGNREGA in South West Khasi Hills District:

South West Khasi Hills district is a rural and agrarian District with none of it village falls under Township. The District was carved out of the West Khasi Hills District on 3rd August 2012. It occupies an area of 1,341 Sq.Kms and located at 25.3106° N, 91.2059° E. It is bounded on the North by West Khasi Hills District, Bangladesh on the South, East Khasi Hills District on the East and West Khasi Hills and South Garo Hills District on the West. The District Headquarters is located at Mawkyrwat. The total population of the District was 1,10,152 and residing in 16,809 Households of 216 Villages (Census, 2011).

The District comprises of two Community & Rural Development Blocks viz. Ranikor and Mawkyrwat. Recently, with the re-organisation and division of Villages, the District comprises of 315 villages, Mawkyrwat C&RD Block consist of 158 Villages with population of 54,462 and Ranikor C&RD Block with 157 villages and population of 41,218. Villages are characterized by limited amenities; deprived of skill development, poor infrastructure base, rugged terrain, and scattered nature of settlements which posted serious problems for necessary interventions in terms of infrastructural development. The District is inhabited by the Khasi people predominantly known to be one of the earliest ethnic groups of settlers in the Indian sub-continent, belonging to the Proto Austroloid Monkhmer race.

Agriculture and allied activities is the main sources of livelihood for the people in South West Khasi Hills District. The major crops grown in the district are: Rice, Maize, Potato, Soya-bean, Mustard, Betel Nuts & Betel Vine, Kharif & Rabi Vegetables, Spices, Mandarin Oranges, Plum, Peach, Papaya, Jackfruit, Litchi, Pineapple, Mangos, and Tamarind & Banana.

5.2: Achievement of MGNREGA in South West Khasi Hills District: The Present Study

MGNREGA has provided employment of about 6.54 lakhs persondays in 2015-16 which has been increased every financial year to about 13.14 lakhs per-persondays in 2018-19 with a percentage growth of 100.91 percent over the last five years. Schedule tribes are mainly involved in the Scheme as villages comprise only indigenous Khasi and Garo people. The scheme could provide on an average of only 60 days per year to registered households which remain a challenging task to achieve 100 days employment as per its mandate.

Table 1: Progress of MGNREGA in South West Khasi Hills District.

Progress	2018-19	2017-18	2016-17	2015-16
Persondays Generated so far[In Lakhs]	13.14	10.68	10.37	6.54
Average days of employment provided per Household	64.31	57.5	56.82	39.99
Average Wage rate per day per person(Rs.)	181	175	169	162.94
Total No of HHs completed 100 Days of Wage Employment	2,944	1,698	2,406	370
Total Households Worked[In Lakhs]	0.2	0.19	0.18	0.16
Total Individuals Worked[In Lakhs]	0.28	0.23	0.23	0.18

Source: <http://mgnrega.nic.in>

6. Findings and Discussions:

Every Stakeholder played a vital role in the successful implementation of the Scheme. The study found the following roles of primary stakeholders in rural development through implementation of MGNREGA at the village level.

6.1: Role of Wage seekers and Village Employment Council:

Wage seekers: Wage seekers or job card holders are the primary stakeholders of the Act. They have the right to apply for registration, obtaining job cards, apply for work and expected to get unemployment allowance if job not provided within 15 days of their demanded, they have the right to enquire about the implementation of the work and they are suppose to get worksite facilities like first aids and timely payment of wages which should not exceed 15 days after the work completed. They have the right to propose the types and categories of community assets as well as individual assets to be implemented in the village.

Wage seekers play a vital role in successful implementation of the scheme because the scheme is a demand driven and all works or assets to be constructed is based on the requirement of the villagers considering that the assets are sustainable and have a positive impact on the livelihood of the farmers. The table 2 below shows the active participation of the wage seeker or villagers in the implementation of MGNREGA work at the village level.

Table 2: Active participation of wage seekers at the village level				
Engaged with responsibilities	frequency	percent	valid percent	cumulative percent
Member VEC	106	26.6	26.6	26.6
Member Vigilance Committee	17	4.3	4.3	30.9
Labour	275	69.1	69.1	100
Total	398	100	100	

Source: Survey data

Data shows that 26.6 percent of job card holders were the active members of the executive committee of VECs, only 4.3 percent were members of Village Monitoring Committee as only few villages constitute this committee. Majority of the wage seekers are labourers but they were also members of the general meeting of the VECs.

Gram Sabha and Gram Panchayat or VECs: These are the pivotal body for implementation of the Scheme at the village level. According to the Guidelines of the Scheme where Part Nine of the Constitution does not apply, Local Councils/ Authorities as mandated by the State concerned will be invested with corresponding responsibilities. Therefore, the Meghalaya State Government made a provision to constitute Village Employment Council (VEC) at the village level to monitor and implement the Scheme as per the guideline. The role and responsibilities of VECs is to plan the type of works, verify

registration application, registration households, issuing job cards, receiving application for employment, allotting employment, executing work, maintaining report, convening social audit and monitoring the scheme at the village level.

About 74.77 percent of the people are engaged in agriculture and allied activities (Census of India & Statistical Abstract, Meghalaya 2016). The climatic condition and the topography of the region support a good scope for livestock and this activity remained a supplementary occupation to rural households with substantiate productivity. Individual assets under MGNREGA like cowshed, piggery shed, poultry shed and Goatery shed were included in the admissible works. All households are eligible and have the right to apply these assets. It is a challenge for the VECs to sanction and provide the works to all households at one go. Therefore, some strategy has been adopted by the respective VECs in consultation with wage seekers to finalise the list of beneficiaries' households. Table 3 indicated different parameters set by respective VECs as a strategy to select construction of individual assets under MGNREGA at the village level.

Table 3: Role of VECs in selecting construction work of Community and Individual Assets

Methods of selecting individual assets	Number of respondents	Percentage	Method of selecting Community assets	Number of respondents	%
Socio-economic poor	81	22.68	Proposed orally in the meeting	387	97.2
availability of land	40	11.32			
Experience	20	5.6	Proposed in written by group or individual	11	2.8
Interest	126	35.2			
Lucky draw	20	5.6			
First come first serve	70	19.6			
Total respondents	357	100	Total respondents	398	100

Source: Survey data

Out of 357 respondents, 22.68 percent considered Socio-economic back ground as criteria to select beneficiaries of individual assets, 11.32 percent based on availability of land, 5.6 percent based on experience of the households, 35.2 percent was based on the interest of the households, 19.6 percent was based on first come first serve basis and 5.6 percent was based on lucky draw. Lucky draw was taken into consideration when all characteristics of applicants are relevant, therefore it remain a herculean task for the VECs to decide, therefore with unanimous decision by all members such strategy was adopted to satisfy everyone. But, through discussion with villagers and members of VECs, almost all VECs had adopted a resolution that other applicants who have not yet received of individual assets will be getting in the coming years.

The data in Table 3 shows that out of 398 respondents, 97.2 percent admitted that the method of selecting work of community assets was taken on account of oral proposal during general meetings. Only 2.8 percent of the works selected were based on written proposal submitted by the group of individual, but the final decision was taken during the general meeting of the VEC. The role and responsibilities of VECs is shown in table 4.

Table 4: Role and responsibility of VECs

Role and Responsibility played by VECs	responses (number and %)					
	yes	%	no	%	can't say	%
Provide employment within 15 days of application	0	0	398	100	0	0
Get employment allowance	20	5	378	95	0	0
Appointment of mate at work	100	100	0	0	0	0
Special work to special category of workers	2	.5	83	20.9	288	72.4
Availability of worksite facilities	40	10.1	340	85.4	18	4.5
Smooth implementation of work at village level	380	95.5	18	4.5	0	0
Better cooperation with the administrator	398	100	0	0	0	0
Used machine in MGNREGA works	18	4.5	380	95.5	0	0

Source: Survey data

The table indicated that the VECs have not been able to provide works to job seekers within 15 days of demanding work. This has remain a challenging task to all stakeholders because of many practical problems arises not only at the village level but even at the Block level. Village Employment Councils are not the ultimate authority to provide work to wage seekers, some of these VECs located far from Block Offices which is time consuming for members to reach and submit application to the Offices. Accordingly, only 5 percent of wage seekers got unemployment allowance on demand from VECs. The amount of unemployment allowance was one-fourth of the minimum wages for the first 30 days, and one half thereafter. Others job seekers were not serious about unemployment allowances, may be they simply accept and satisfied to the work at any time of the year as MGNREGA work was just a supplementary work for them. All VECs appointed a mate to supervise the work and recording attendance at their work place. The ratio of mate to the labourers as per guidelines is 1:50. The wage of mate is similar to those of semi-skilled workers and the numeration of mate includes in the material component of MGNREGA work.

Through discussion, even if the data shows that there was no special work provided to special categories like senior citizens; physically challenge people and families of single woman as bread earners, but the VECs provide works without hesitation to them at their conveniences. About 72.4 percent of the respondents cannot comment on special work assigned to special categories people like physical challenge, senior citizens, HIV Positives persons, etc. because there was no such cases in their families.

Majority of villagers fully agreed, that in the past worksite facilities like medical aids, drinking water and shade were provided to the labourers but recently these were not provided. Through discussion, villagers did not feel much important about having such facilities which may be one of the possible reasons of not having worksite facilities as shown in the table by 85.4 percent of respondents. The success of MGNREGA works can be seen through the smooth implementation of the scheme at the village level. Data shows that 95.5 percent respondents says that MGNREGA works were implemented smoothly and only 4.5 percent disagree which may be due to some discrepancies that arises at the VECs level or non-cooperative attitudes of the villagers. However, villagers agreed that MGNREGA work bring closeness with the administration at the village level and people can air their grievances to the village administration without any hesitation.

The Scheme does not give any provision for contract work through contractor nor permit any usage of machinery in MGNREGA works. But, table 4 shows that 4.5 percent of respondents revealed that machine has been used in certain works which are not feasible by manual works. All documents related to payment of services in using machinery were adjusted with wages of labourers after a unanimous decision at the VEC level. As a result in paper works, no cases of machinery work appeared.

6.2: Role of Dorbar Shnong (Village Administrative Council):

In the District of South West Khasi Hills, Meghalaya, almost all villages have the Durbar Shnong or Village Administrative Council as the highest policy making body to look into the administrative affair of the village. Traditionally only adult male villagers are members of the Durbar. These village councils (Durbar Shnong) plays an important role in the overall development and affairs of the village. The achievement of every scheme at the village level depends on the active role and gigantic responsibility of the Village Durbar. The table 5 shows the role and responsibility of Village durbar in implementing MGNREGA in the District.

Response of village durbar	frequency	percent	valid percent	cumulative percent
Fully cooperate with VEC	60	15.1	15.1	15.1
Seeking report and approved proposal	257	64.6	64.6	79.6
Fully entrusted to VEC	81	20.4	20.4	100
Total	398	100	100	

Source: Survey data

Out of 398 respondents, 15.1 percent revealed that the village Durbar had fully cooperates with VECs. Whereas, 64.6 percent admitted that the Village Durbar has played an important role in seeking report of the previous works and approved future action plan of the VECs so as to minimize any discrepancy that may

arises. About 20.4 percent revealed that the Village Durbar fully entrusted the VEC to implement the scheme because every member of the Village Durbar are also member of VECs.

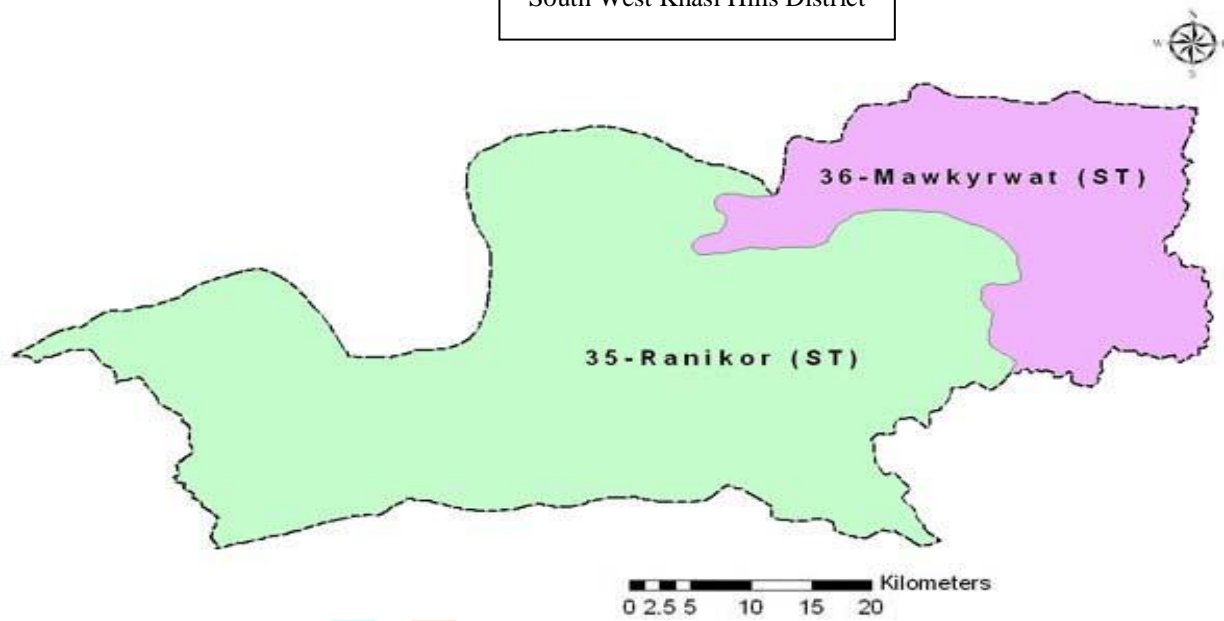
7: Suggestions and Policy implications: Assets that have been created were supportive to rural livelihood. Assets have its own durability but sometimes due to inclement weather and other calamities, these assets get damaged and become non-functional. Maintenance of assets is highly needed to keep all assets operational for the welfare of villagers as well as to minimize the wastage of public exchequer. Therefore, strategy should be adopted by primary stakeholders to create 'Maintenance Fund' or set-up User's Committee looking after maintenance of assets. For minor repair and maintenance, the Village Durbar or VECs should arrange at least once or twice social work or voluntary work in a year to be participated by all adult members of rural households. For major repair, the VEC should include such works in the new shelf of projects.

8. Conclusion: The operational guideline of the Act empowered villagers at the grass root level in matters related to planning, surveying and executing of the works. Active participation of villagers plays a vital role in community development. Rural villages were blessed by numerous infrastructures which really strengthen livelihood and improve rural economy to a great extent. People perception has changed with the implementation of the Act, socio-economic life has improved, and involvement with the scheme has created awareness about the role of people in terms of implementation, accountability and transparency of other schemes available in the village.

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