

# **IMPLEMENTATION OF NATIONAL RURAL EMPLOYMENT GUARANTEE ACT: A CASE STUDY OF TAMENGLONG DISTRICT OF MANIPUR**

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**MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY**

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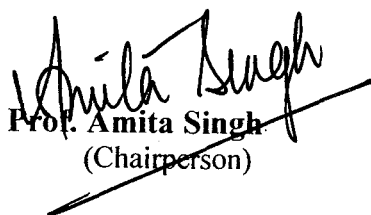
**Declaration**

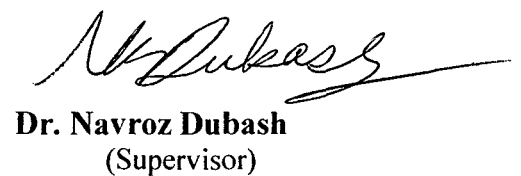
I declare that the dissertation entitled “Implementation of National Rural Employment Guarantee Act: A Case Study of Tamenglong District of Manipur” submitted by me in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of **Master of Philosophy** of this University is my original work. This dissertation has not been previously submitted for any other degree of this or any other University

  
N.G. Yirmaya

**Certificate**

We recommend that this dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation

  
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(Chairperson)

  
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## CONTENTS

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

1. INTRODUCTION	1-5
2. DISTRICT PROFILE	6-12
3. REVIEW OF THE EXPERIENCE OF THE PAST ANTI-POVERTY PROGRAMMES IN INDIA	13-35
4. THE ROLE OF THE ADMINISTRATION IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NATIONAL RURAL EMPLOYMENT GUARANTEE ACT	35-49
5. IMPLEMENTATION OF NATIONAL RURAL EMPLOYMENT GUARANTEE ACT IN TAMENGLONG	50-69
6. CONCLUSION	70-73
BIBLIOGRAPHY	74-76

**CHAPTER ONE**

**INTRODUCTION**

## **INTRODUCTION**

The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act is an act which guarantees minimum 100 days of work per rural household in the financial year. It has a legal sanction and it compels the government to provide employment. The Act received the approval of the President of India on September 5, 2005. The Act covered 200 districts in its first phase, implemented on February 2, 2006, and was extended to 330 additional districts in 2007-2008. Tamenglong district in Manipur was covered in the first phase of NREGA. All the remaining rural areas have been notified with effect from April 1, 2008.

It is a demand driven scheme. The word “demand driven” has special meaning in NREGA. It implies that the demand for employment is not limited by the budget constraints rather it is determined by the demand for employment. Of course, subject to minimum 100 days per household in the rural areas. The other implication of the word demand-driven is that the operation of the scheme has to be driven by the people. It is the priority of the people to decide what kinds of assets to be created and also decide the location of the projects. This is unprecedented in the history of India. The Act empowers rural people to take part in the process of decision making while at the same time enables them to have a say in the process of economic development.

One of the distinguishing features of the NREGA is that it is funded outside the normal budgetary process. It is purely based on the assessed needs of employment. The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act is not supposed to be affected by normal bureaucratic and political processes of spending public money. In principles, atleast funds are always available for projects that are approved on technical grounds and meet employment needs. There would never be an excuse of lack of funds for National rural employment guarantee Act.

This is also the first time in the history of India where Panchayati Raj Institutions have been given so much of power to participate in the process of development. It is expected that the involvements of local people in deciding the nature of works would

result into greater alignment with the immediate local needs. Therefore the history of deciding the implementation of scheme from distance land has done away with the coming of the NREGA atleast in principle.

That is why it is said that NREGA has the potential to transform rural economy and also empower the rural people. The unique character of the NREGA lies in the remarkable opportunities it opens up to transform the development scenario in India (Lalit Mathur, 2008). The choice of work suggested in the Act addresses causes of chronic poverty like drought, deforestation and soil erosion, so that the process of employment is maintained on a sustainable basis (Raghuvansh Prasad Singh, 2008). Therefore if the act is implemented in letter and spirit, it has the potential to transform the rural economy.

Tamenglong is one of the most backward districts of Manipur. Though several development programmes had been launched in this district, it seems that very few studies have been carried out. Therefore I decided to take up this topic. I feel that NREGA is very much relevant for backward district like Tamenglong. It has the potential to transform the phase of the Tamenglong economy provided that it is implemented effectively. Therefore it would be interested to look at how the process of implementation is going on there.

I have divided my dissertation into two parts. One part looks at the experience of past anti-poverty programmes. The second part looks at how the process of implementation of NREGA is going on in Manipur based on the experience of past anti-poverty programmes in India. My research questions are given below

### **RESEARCH QUESTIONS:**

1. How is the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act different from the past anti-poverty programmes?

Sub-questions:

1. What is the experienced of the past anti-poverty programme in India?

2. How is the design and implementation of the NREGA different from old anti-poverty programmes?
3. What have people found in fact it is different?
4. What is the effect of the RTI in the implementation of the scheme?

2. Based on the past experience of anti-poverty programmes in India, how is the implementation of the NREGA proceeding in Manipur?

Sub-questions:

1. Does the Administration ensure timely delivery of exact amount of wages to the workers?
2. What implementing agencies doing to implement the scheme efficiently and effectively?
3. To what extent the scheme actually benefited the intended beneficiaries?
4. What is the role of the civil society in the implementation of the scheme?
5. What kinds of works are being undertaken under this scheme?
6. Are the funds being utilized for productive purposes?

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

To answer the first question, I relied on secondary sources. Secondary sources include existing literature, literature review, government publications among other.

To answer the second question, I visited Tamenglong district in the month of January-February 2008. I had a detailed discussion with the district administration officials who are involved in the implementation of the NREGA. To further understand the ground realities, I visited two villages Duigailong and Old Tamenglong which fall under the jurisdiction of Tamenglong sub-division. In the village I had a discussion with the village headman and the village authority members. I had also an interaction with the workers. Besides this, I visited almost all the worksites undertaken under the scheme.

## **OUTLINE OF THE DISSERTATION**

I have divided this thesis into three main chapters. In the third chapter, I have narrated the experience of past anti-poverty programmes in India. Due important has been given to IRDP, NREP, RLEGP, and Maharashtra's Employment Guarantee Scheme. I have examined the Maharashtra's EGS from the beginning to the end. NREGA has lot of similarities with the EGS. In fact, EGS is the precursor of the NREGA.

In Fourth chapter, I have described the role of the officials in the implementation of the Act. The role of the officials is limited to district officials of Tamenglong district. I have begun with the actual role envisaged in the guidelines and then narrow down to actual role performed by then on the ground. I have examined some of the important issues based on my field work.

In Fifth chapter, I have look at the implementation of the act on the ground. This chapter is prepared after interacting with the workers who had participated in the scheme. This chapter has been divided into four sub-sections- Participation, Project related implementation, and Wage related implementation issues and Working conditions.



**CHAPTER TWO**  
**DISTRICT PROFILE**

## District Profile<sup>1</sup>

The northeastern block of India comprises of seven states, popularly known as seven sisters. Manipur is one of the states, lying in the eastern most parts of India having a border with Assam, Nagaland, Mizoram and Myanmar (Burma). Out of the state's nine districts, Tamenglong is located along the western boundary of the state. It is bounded by Senapati District to the East, North Cachar Hills District of Assam to the West, Kohima District of Nagaland to the North and Churachandpur District of Manipur to the South. Tamenglong the District H.Q is the farthest District H.Q in the state from the capital city, Imphal with a distance of 147 kms.

Tamenglong district is lacking in all fronts. Government's commitment cannot make much headway. The district is lacking in basic infrastructure, the health facilities are very poor. There are no opportunities for availing loans for those village entrepreneurs. There is lack of technical know how among the population of the district. There are no marketing facilities for the local products. The roads are the only link there is no railway connection.

However there are opportunities which can be explored. The distance to both Imphal and Silchar offer feasibilities to market their products in the two urban centre. There are possibilities to access the market in neighbouring Nagaland State if the link road between Tamei and Tenning opens up. There is huge market available in Assam if the road between Tamenglong and Halflong becomes a reality. The most important road was the New Cachar road known as the National Highway 53 linking Imphal and Silchar, passing through the district of Tamenglong. The State highways are Imphal-Tamenglong road via Kangpokpi, the old cachar road etc. It has only 380km of all weather roads.

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<sup>1</sup> All the below informations are taken from Website of the Tamenglong district, Census commissioner of India website, Statistical Abstract Manipur, 2005

Tamenglong is entirely composed of hills, ranges and narrow valleys. Tamenglong is inhabited by majority Zeliangrong Naga tribe (comprising of Rongmei, Liangmei, Zemei and Pumei) and Kukis, besides minority Hmars, Chirus and Khasis.

Geographical Area	4,391 sq. Kms.
Population	111,499
Literacy	59.25%
Sub-divisions	Tamenglong
	Tamei
	Tousem
	Nungba
Main Tribes (inhabitants)	Zeliangrong Nagas
	Kuki
	Chiru
	Hmar
	Khasi
Total Workers	50,863

There 46 villages under Tamenglong block with a total household of 6788, and total population of 45284, out which 22635 are male and 22649 are female. Nungba sub-division has 75 villages with 4743 households and total population of 31492 with 15804 male and 15688 female. The Tamei sub-division has 40 villages with households 3572 and a total population of 26099 with 13657 male and 12442 female. Tousem sub-division has a total of 62 villlages with 4014 households and a total population of 25953 with 13034 male and 12919 female. .

The steep mountain, deep gorges and the river valleys made the region physically isolated from outside world. The need to increase the productivity of the soil has led the people of Tamenglong to take to terrace cultivation in the hills slope and river basins. People practice agriculture and shifting cultivation. The staple crops are rice, cotton, ginger, chilly, taro, pumpkins, and turmeric.

There is no industry in the true sense of the term. There are some handicrafts only a few were engaged in cottage industries for domestic and village level consumption and some engaged in loom weaving. They also produce basketry made of cane and bamboo. Other means of livelihood are rearing of livestock, pig, cow, and poultry mostly for domestic consumption.

### **Agriculture:**

Even today, most of the people are engaged in agriculture. Jhum cultivation is widely practiced to meet the domestic requirements. Horticulture has grown; fruits like orange, pineapple, banana, have been developed and the products marketed.

### **Flora and Fauna**

Tamenglong District is blessed with virgin forests, exotic orchids, rare and endangered plants, and wildlife. The forests can be grouped as Tropical-Ever-green forest, Sub-tropical forest and Bamboo brakes. The dense tropical Evergreen Forests are located along both the sides of rivers flowing in the district, varieties of ground flora, creepers, herbs and grasses are found here. These forests are the main source of timbers. Cane brakes are found in and around water bodies. The Sub-tropical forests are found on the highest altitudes. Varieties of orchids are found in this zone of forests. In the degraded forest areas the bamboo brakes are found in plenty.

A number of exquisite orchids are found. They are epiphytic, lithophytic and terrestrial in nature.

The Dendrobium, Vanda, Cymbidium, Cattleya and Lycaste are found in abundance. The Phius tunkervels, a rare terrestrial orchid is found in the Barak valley. Thunia alba which is known as bamboo orchid is found around Taobam village. Paphiopedilum is found in Leimatak area.

## **TOURISM**

Tamenglong has potential for tourism; there are good number places of tourist interest. The district administration can explore and promote tourism which can benefit the local people. The concept of 'eco-tourism' can be implemented with local participation. Below are the brief of tourist spots in the district.

Tamenglong district of Manipur is blessed with topography of irregular undulation. It has in its small area most of the awesome features that nature mould to a hilly terrain. Turbulent waters, roaring waterfall, pitch dark caves, enchanting lakes of the wilderness, rocks chiseled to wondrous form and yet the thick blanket of dense tropical forest most part of which are still virgin.

The famous Tharon cave is located at about 27 kms from the district HQ. The map of the entire cave is engraved and painted on a stone at the main entrance. Archeological excavation of the cave shows affinities with Hobinian culture of North Vietnam.

The legendary Zeilad lake at Makoi (Atengba) is associated with a number of pythons, fishes and water birds. There are six other lakes nearby Guiphop Zei, Nrou Zei, Nap-sam Zei etc.

The Buning (N-piulong) meadow is located on the western side of the picturesque Tamei town. A number of well-groomed uneven small mounts, numerous glittering brooks studded the stretch. Come June the meadow is coloured with enchanting ground orchids and various wild lilies. Cry of Hoolock gibbon howling of foxes melodious chirping of birds altogether form Buning a big family of the wildlife evoking wonder and admiration of many who have witnessed the meadow.

## **OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY COMMISSIONER, TAMENGLONG**

The office of the Deputy Commissioner is in-charge of the district administration, law and order, revenue matter, over-all supervision of the working of all the govt. offices in the district. It coordinates functioning of all departments of the State Government and the Centre, operating in the district. This office acts as the focal point of land revenue, development, district planning, food and civil supplies, calamities relief, election, census and other critical areas of governmental interventions. As the principal agent of government in the district, the office of the DC has to take the lead in providing to the citizens governance that is the peoples' due. It is also the chief grievance redress machinery in the district.

### **District Rural Development Agency (DRDA), Tamenglong**

The District Rural Development Agency (DRDA), Tamenglong is the agency for implementation of Central and State funded development schemes. The Deputy Commissioner is the Chairman of this Agency, with a Project Officer as the principal executive officer.

### **THE TAMENGLONG AUTONOMOUS DISTRICT COUNCIL**

The Tamenglong Autonomous District Council came into existence in 1973. At present, the district council has no elected members. However, election to the District Council is planned shortly. Deputy Commissioner, Tamenglong is the ex-officio chairman of the TADC. This agency has been taking up various developmental initiatives in the fields of education, agriculture, veterinary and animal husbandry, health and PWD. New initiatives are being taken up by the TADC, especially in areas of primary education, health care and provision of civic services in Tamenglong HQ. Attempt is being made to insure all schools function properly and that children in the remotest village in the district get the minimum standards of education that is their right. Health camps are being organized at regular intervals especially in areas not covered by the existing medical network of the district. Some initiatives on sanitation, water supply and proper upkeep of other civic services in Tamenglong town are also being attempted.

## **DISTRICT INDUSTRIES CENTRE, TAMENGLONG**

The District Industries Centre, Tamenglong was opened in 1979 with the objective of removing the industrial backwardness of the district. It was meant to solve employment problems by setting up village cottage industries, medium ancillary industries, demand-based and skill-based industries with training and infrastructure facilities in the district. The DIC gives loan to educated unemployed youth. It also extends financial assistance to registered industrial units, artisans and ex-trainees etc. It also gives registration to newly established industrial units.

## **HORTICULTURE AND SOIL CONSERVATION, TAMENGLONG**

The District Office of Horticulture and Soil Conservation, Tamenglong takes up various horticultural and soil conservation programme in the district. It also makes an attempt to replace jhum cultivation by wet terrace cultivation. Other development programmes for soil conservation, construction of dams, plantation of fruit bearing trees etc are also taken up.

## **THE TRIBAL DEVELOPMENT OFFICE, TAMENGLONG**

The District Office, Tribal Development, deals with various tribal development programmes such as distribution of loin-loom, village & small industries, piggery, poultry, distribution of Sewing machines, blacksmith tools, vegetables, kitchen garden, carpentry, financial assistance to small shops, artisans, tribal women society production centres, financial assistance for medical treatment etc. The main thrust of this office is to eliminate poverty and to uplift the living standards of tribals and scheduled caste persons.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **Review of the experience of the past anti-poverty programmes in India**



## **INTRODUCTION**

In this chapter, I have described the experience of past anti-poverty programmes in India starting from Community Development Programmes which is often considered as the founding father of all development programmes. I have also mentioned some of the important features and policies behind the programmes.

## **EARLY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES IN INDIA**

The development programmes in India started with the setting up of the Community Development Programme (CDS) in 1952. It was often described as the founding father of all the development programmes in India. The main philosophy behind this programme is that rural poverty would be taken care of with the growth in all aspects of life. Thus the programme covered many aspects including irrigation, agriculture, housing, education, rural industries etc. But given resources constraint and wide varieties of activities to be covered, the programme failed to make an impact on any aspects (Theses, 2000)<sup>2</sup>. Moreover, the programme forgot to consider the diversity of the country; CDS was launched as a universal programme in India.

The Development programmes in India took a new turn in 60s with the scarcity of food looming in the country. The country was forced to import food. This led to the attention from community development programme to growth in agriculture; it resulted into the formation of Intensive Agricultural District Programme (IADP) in 1960-61. This programme was implemented only in selected areas. In 1964, the programme was extended to other districts under the name Intensive Agriculture and Area Programme (IAAP). The scarcity of food was further exacerbated by the severe drought that took place in between 1964 and 1967. Thus, the need to increase the food production becomes imminent. In order to achieve this, the government came up with an innovative measure known as High Yielding Varieties Programme (HYVP) in 1966. Introduction of this

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<sup>2</sup> Anti poverty programme and a search for an institutional framework for rural development/Pallavi Sinha [Theses], 2000

programme raised the level of self-sufficiency in certain crops. This is famously known as the *green revolution* in India.

The main drawback of this programme is that it created inequality among the farmers. This technology is suitable only in those regions where there is perennial supply of water, assured irrigation etc. and therefore only some parts of India – western Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, and Punjab benefited from this scheme. Moreover, only those well-to-do farmers could afford the technology.

Taking the above mentioned shortcomings into account, the government of India decided to change its strategy to tackle poverty and promote development. This led to the formation of the Small Farmers Development Agency (SFDA) and Marginal Farmers and Agricultural Laborer Agency (MFAL) in the Fourth five year plan. Small Farmers Development Agency (SFDA) and Marginal Farmers and Agricultural Labourers Agency (MFAL) arose in the context of the green revolution in which it was widely felt that the small and marginal farmers and also agricultural laborers were not benefited, thereby leading to widening of the gulf between them and others in the society.<sup>3</sup> The SFDA was, therefore, designed to facilitate extension of new technology including inputs, like seeds and fertilizers, and additional productive assets like tube wells, pumpsets, farm implements etc. to farmers who would be in a position to use these successfully to increase the income above the poverty line and repay back the loans. The government thought that these programmes would make a major dent on poverty. But these programmes had been criticized for its shortsightedness and stand alone programme in nature. There was lack of co-ordination with these programmes and other programmes. By and large, these programmes were ad hoc in nature with its own line of administration without much of co-ordination and without any conceptual frame of complementarity in which they were to operate. They had the character of temporary programmes created to respond to certain ad hoc problems that came up.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Nilakantha Rath, 'Garibi Hatao: Can IRDP Do IT?', Economic and Political weekly, February 9, 1985

<sup>4</sup>D Bandyopadhyay, 'Direct Intervention Programmes for Poverty Alleviation: An Appraisal', Economic and political weekly, June 25, 1988

The Food for Work (FFW) Programme was launched in 1977-1978. There are two main purpose of this programme. Firstly, it aims to generate gainful employment to a large number of unemployed and under-employed persons, both men and women in the rural areas which will improve their incomes and consequently nutritional levels. Secondly, it aims to create durable community assets and strengthen the rural infrastructure which will result in high production and better living standard in rural areas; and utilize surplus food grains for development of human resources. However, the success of this programme was moderate (Kaushik Basu, 1983).

### **NATIONAL RURAL EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMME (NREP)**

The Food for Work Programme was restructured and renamed as National Rural Employment Programme (NREP) from October 1980. The main purpose of this programme is to create an additional employment during slack agricultural seasons and at the same time creating durable community assets and raise nutritional standard of the poor. The National Rural Employment Programme (NREP) was implemented as a joint collaboration between the state and centre government on a 50:50 basis. With a view of ensuring the durability of assets created a provision had been made allowing for expenditure on the materials to the extent of 40 per cent of the total project cost which was revised in 1983-84 to 50 per cent.

The International Labour Organization carried out a survey of the implementation of the NREP in two states, namely Gujarat and Karnataka. The ILO survey found that the number of employment provided under the scheme was 51 days and 55 days in Gujarat and Karnataka respectively.<sup>5</sup> Hirway (1984) also studied the implementation of the NREP in Gujarat. The main conclusion emerged out of these studies is, that the NREP while it provides short-term employment, it has not been effective in so far as provision of long-term and continuous employment was concerned. Based on her studies, she also pointed out that NREP programme has not led to any significant increase in the employment of

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<sup>5</sup> This is quoted from D Bandyopadhyay article in EPW, June 25, 1988

the individual worker or in his level of living, which is the primary objective of the programme.

The reduce impact of the NREP was also attributed to the absence of the systematic efforts to asses the nature and extent of unemployment and plan the work on this basis so that continuous employment is available to the poor. The long term goal of the NREP is to integrate the poor in the main stream economy by increasing its labour absorption capacity through the creation of durable and productive assets. But the NREP could not achieve this objective. The basic causes of this as pointed out by Hirway are the poor design of the programme and the administrative constraints and weaknesses.

Most of the analysis attributed the failures of the programme to administrative failures and weakness. Sandeep Bagchee (1987) pointed out that the failures are basically the result of not properly analyzing the environment, including the available organization, in order to formulate an operational strategy and generate a realistic design of the programme.

### **RURAL LANDLESS EMPLOYMENT GUARANTEE PROGRAMME (RLEGP)**

It was introduced from 15 August 1983 with the objective of improving and expanding employment opportunities for the rural landless households up to 100 days to atleast one member of every landless household in the country in a year and, creating durable assets for strengthening the infrastructure so as to meet the growing requirements of the rural economy. The concept of the guarantee employment is enshrined in the constitution of India though it is not justifiable. It assumed the status of directive principle. The concept of guarantee was first explicitly recognized for the first time at the national level with the introduction of the Rural Landless Employment Guarantee Programme. The guarantee was given in the form of ceiling rather than a floor of minimum; the maximum employment to be provided is 100 days in a year to every rural landless households.

There are positive as well as negative aspects of this scheme. We can say that for the first time, Panchayats were given important role in the implementation of the scheme though they have to function under the supervision of District Rural Development Agency (DRDA). But to what extent the panchayats were successful in the implementation of the scheme was a moot question. There were wide spread criticism against the scheme. It was said that employment provided was for a very short duration and there was inadequate co-ordination among various departments in planning and execution of works. Moreover, the scheme did not provide funds for the maintenance of the assets created. This led to the disappearance of the newly constructed roads during the monsoon. There were also complaints that the assets created under the scheme went to benefits the better-off section of the society. The opinions of the poor were ignored. According to D. Bandyopadhyay (1988), "The felt needs are not necessarily the real needs of the masses but are often the articulated needs of the people in power of the local self governing institutions. Thus, the participation of the poor in the creation of the durable assets gets limited to direct wage payments and the assets created do not have any enduring impact of further employment".

Under this programme, the project approval is given by the central government on the basis of the undertaking that technical aspects are according to the state norms. The guidelines clearly stipulated that every effort should be made to take up those works which would benefit the weaker section of the society. One of the main criticisms of this programme is that while employment generation has been given importance, this has been viewed as an end in itself rather than in the correct perspective of providing income on a reasonably assured basis for the rural poor and thus neglecting the long-term employment aspects. The kind of assets created under this scheme strengthens the assets base of the stronger section of the society (Subbarao, 1985). There was an excessive underutilization of funds under this scheme because of the rigidly specified high labour content of the scheme and the shortage of the critical inputs like skilled labour and construction materials. The low wage rate along with payments modalities and irregularities in disbursement failed to attract workers for the projects.

## JAWAHAR ROZGAR YOJANA

From April 1989, the two employment programmes viz. NREP and RLEGP were merged into a single programme known as Jawahar Rozgar Yojana (JRY). This programme was meant to generate meaningful employment opportunities for the unemployed and underemployed in rural areas through the creation of economic infrastructure and social assets. A major portion of JRY funds was spent on roads and buildings. However, against 40 percent of population in a rural village panchayat who sought work, only 15 percent were actually employed (Planning Commission, 2002-2007). There was a massive failure in targeting and creation of good quality assets. Raghav Gaiha (1998) attributed this failure to ineffective functioning of Panchayats and high wage rate and excessive delay in the payment of wages. The delay in the wage payment in the rural areas distracted the poor from the public wage employment programmes because what the poor need is immediate income as they are living from hand to mouth. In the absence of regular payment of wages, the poor people started looking for other options. The higher the wage rate, the greater the incentives for the non-poor to compete with the poor people in the employment programme. The point is that these non-poor people due to its better economic position have the patience to wait for the payment of wages and therefore crowded out the poor people from the scheme. Therefore, the periodicity of payment matters to a great extent for the poor people. According to the studies done by Raghav Gaiha and his team, only three states in India managed to pay its workers (half of the workers) in time.<sup>6</sup> Bureaucratic and other procedures caused excessive delays even though it is stipulated that the payment of wages would not exceed more than a week under the Jawahar Rozgar Yojana. Though the guidelines strictly prohibited the involvement of contractors, it was not uncommon to find the involvement of contractors in the implementation of the projects. In Orissa, 16 per cent of the projects use private contractors; in Karnataka it was 19 per cent. The main reason for this is the inadequate staff coupled with the corrupt behaviour of the local panchayats representatives who were involved in the implementation of the scheme. By

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<sup>6</sup> For more details one may have a look at Raghav Gaiha, P.D Kaushik, Vani Kulkarni, "Jawahar Rozgar Yojana, Panchayats, and the rural poor in India," Asian Survey, vol. xxxviii, No. 10, October 1998

and large, the JRY was an utter failure. According to Gaiha (1998) “The benefits of the JRY and other development programmes to the poor were minimal. With a local power structure in which the upper castes are dominant and lack of awareness and organization among the poor, rent seeking behaviour remained unchecked”.

The JRY was revamped from 1 April 1999 as the Jawahar Gram Samridhi Yojana (JGSY). It now becomes a programme for the creation of rural economic infrastructure with the employment generation as the secondary objective. The programme is implemented by the village Panchayats and provides the specific benefits to SC/STs, the disabled and the maintenance of the assets created in the past. The main drawback of this scheme as pointed out by the Planning commission is that the amount of fund allocated for each Panchayats is too meagre to take meaningful infrastructure.

With reference to the above mentioned wage employment programmes i.e. National Rural Employment Programme (NREP), Rural Landless Employment Guarantee Programme (RLEGP), and Jawahar Rozgar Yojana (JRY) Hirway (2004) points out the following weakness

- The programme had a limited impact in terms of generation of mandays of employment per worker
- They have had limited impact in terms of production of durable, good quality assets
- There frequently has been poor maintenance of the assets
- the planning components of the programmes has been weak in terms of selection and sequencing of assets and in terms of ensuring productive use of the assets for generating sustainable employment in the mainstream.

Therefore the overall scene of the wage-employment has not been very encouraging. In other words, these programmes have neither reduced poverty levels in a sustainable manner, nor have they expanded the labour absorption capacity of the mainstream economy on any significant scale. Consequently, these programmes have remained a long-term financial drain on the economy (Hirway 2004).

Some of the important drawbacks of wage-employment programme in India as pointed out by the second administrative reform committee are worth mentioning in this context.

- Lack of planning; untimely release of funds both from the centre to the District and from district to the blocks; and other factors such as inability of the states to generate matching resources were important factors that contributes to low utilization of funds.
- A large part of the funds was used less in labour intensive activities and more in capital-intensive activities. The normative capital ratio was not adhered to.
- These programmes created income for the poor but left very few durable assets.
- Majorities of the beneficiaries received less than 30 days of wage employment
- Fudging of muster rolls and measurement books was common and resulted in loss of funds that could have otherwise invested in creation of rural infrastructure
- In most cases, contractors were involved and the use of machinery was also reported, though the scheme forbade it. Some of the important lessons learnt from the past wage employment programmes as pointed out by the Second Administrative reform committee report<sup>7</sup> are given below
- Serious flaws in project selection had adverse impact on the productivity and quality of the physical capital created.
- In the absence of people's participation, the bureaucracy dominated the process of planning and implementation, with the result that the approach was technocratic and top-down
- Involvements of Panchayats strengthen the planning and implementation of the employment schemes wherever they are associated.
- Lack of capability among Panchayat chiefs and other functionaries. Therefore, appropriate training and require skills should be imparted
- Leakages were common feature in the implementation of employment programmes. In most cases, contractors were involved.

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<sup>7</sup> Second report: Unlocking human capital: Entitlements and governance a case study/India. Second Administrative Reforms Commission





## **INTEGRATED RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME (IRDP)**

There was a wide spread poverty in the 70s and the growth of national income had not reached the poorest of the poor section. Therefore, there was a growing opinion that poor people should be provided with an assets so that they can employ themselves and earn income to cross the poverty line. This school of thought believed that the rural poor were poor because they posses neither productive assets nor any special skill and therefore any strategy to improve their condition must aim at providing productive assets. The philosophy of the IRDP says that the main attack on poverty has to be by endowing the poor with productive assets and/or skills so that they are assured of a stream of income that raises them above the poverty line. The thrust of the programme is on making the rural poor households economically viable by giving them self-employment oriented schemes.

In 1970, the World Bank articulated a view that investment limited to the modern sector increases disparities of income; therefore development policy should be designed in such a way that increase investment should be made in rural sector. Capital formation among poorer farmers was necessary for using their available resources and labour to generate higher income. At the same time in 1970 at Geneva in ILO conference, there was emphasized on satisfaction of an absolute level of basic needs. These two approaches of World Bank and ILO of redirecting investments towards the poor and the satisfaction of their basic needs had a strong impact on the strategies adopted to alleviate poverty in rural areas in India from 1970. In brief, we can sum up that World Bank and ILO approaches advocated the concept of Integrated Rural Development. In order to qualify for the loans from these agencies, India also re-evaluated its rural development programmes and moved towards Integrated Rural Development. This led to the birth of The Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP). The IRDP was initially started in 1978-79 in 2300 blocks and extend to the entire country from October 1980.

The most distinguishing feature of the IRDP is that it provides subsidized-credit to the poor. But there is an inherent danger associated with the subsidized loans. Pranab Bardhan (1996) explains this concern succinctly:

Over the last three decades there have been many cases in poor countries of the government trying to provide subsidized credit to the poor. The results have been mixed (as, for example, in case of the largest credit programmes for asset-building by the rural poor in the world, the Integrated Rural Development Programme in India). Wealthier borrowers have often appropriate the credit subsidies meant for the poor. In general the under pricing of the credit had led to inefficient use of capital. Credit administered through government or semi-government agencies weakens incentives to invest wisely or to repay promptly: building political connections to get debt relief and rent seeking sometimes become more important than responsible investment. Political patronage in the matter of loan disbursement or moratorium has rendered the whole financial system shaky in some countries. Even ignoring the political clientelism, the fundamental dilemma of the credit market is that outside agencies (including government banks) do not have enough local information about the borrower and monitoring is costly, and so they insist on collaterals which ration out many of the poor; on the other hand, the local lenders who have more personalized information about the borrower often use this information entry barrier to the credit market to charge high interest rate (Pranab Bardhan 1996)

*Poverty line* concept was employed to identify the beneficiaries under the Integrated Rural Development Programme. Under the IRDP all households with a total annual income of less than Rs. 3,500 or an annual per capita income of less than Rs. 700 are treated as poor and were eligible for loans. In the Seventh plan, the poverty line was based at Rs. 6,400, but those eligible for assistance under the IRDP had to have an average annual income of Rs. 4,800 or less. It was assumed that those households income between Rs. 4,800 and Rs. 6,400 would be able to rise above the poverty line in the process of growth. It was targeted that 20 million families would be assisted under the IRDP during the Seventh plan of which 10 million were new households and 10 million

old beneficiaries who had been unable to cross the poverty line and required second dose. Under IRDP, beneficiaries are selected on the basis of level of income. All households with a total annual income of less than Rs. 3,500 or an annual per capita income of less than Rs. 700 are treated as poor and were eligible for loans. There were wide spread criticism against the method of selection of beneficiaries under IRDP. Selection of beneficiaries based on income criteria is quite ambiguous. In rural areas, it is very difficult to know the exact level of income of the households. As Jean Dreze (1990) has aptly put it in this way, "It is very difficult to arrive at reliable estimates of households' income in rural India and one cannot under any illusion that government officials devote much effort to this daunting task. Therefore, the eligibility condition for the scheme was wide opened to nepotism and corruption". Some households may be below the income level stipulated and eligible for loans under the scheme due to some short decline in the income. But the crux of the point is that selection of beneficiaries based on income criteria failed to distinguish between temporary poor and chronic poor. The point is that those temporary poor have more influence, are better educated and can easily afford to pay bribe to the officials concerned.

According to Rath (1985), "On the whole it would not be improper to suggest that atleast 15 percent of those identified as poor and helped under the IRDP did not really belong to the category of the poor. It would not be far wrong to estimate that at the end of 7 years of operation of IRDP about 3 percent of the poor households in rural India would have been helped to live above poverty, even if for a while only". Therefore, there is a widespread misidentification of the beneficiaries and even those who got loans under the scheme, very few were able to cross the poverty line but by and large it won't be wrong to say that IRDP failed to create any lasting impact on beneficiaries. The IRDP was a dismal failure (Gaiha, 1998). Beneficiaries were selected by the chairpersons after extracting hefty fees and the village assemblies were largely ignored in identifying the beneficiaries. Wrong identification at an all India level was around 16-20 percent (Subbarao, 1985). It was found that wrong identification was not so much related to the administrative efficiency but it was more to do with the method adopted in the identification of the beneficiaries. The degree of wrong identification was considerably

less in those areas where the selection of the beneficiaries was done in the meeting of the gram sabhas. This reflects to some extent that those people for whom the scheme is intended for should be allowed to involve in the implementation to make the scheme successful.

The debate of whether wage-employment or self-employment should be pursued started basically with the implementation of the IRDP. The proponents of wage-employment argued that most of the people in rural India lack required skills to take up self-employment and the poor cannot withstand the vagaries of the market. Therefore, self-employment is too risky and the government should stick to wage-employment. Very few people could be helped under self-employment. Poor people may be less interested in taking up self-employment because they are afraid that they may not be able to repay back the loans. And also chances of corruption are more in self-employment than wage employment. Therefore the proponents of wage-employment suggested that as far as possible there should be concerted efforts to move away from individual beneficiaries to a group approach. This would reduce the extent of leakages and also improve the viability of projects and provide sustained employment to the poor. Also, a cluster approach should be preferred wherein a few specified activities are identified for assistance in an area. This will help in building up relevant infrastructure in the area.

On the other hand, the proponents of self-employment argued that wage-employment leads to total dependence of the poor on the employers'. Wage-employment tends to accentuate the gap between the rich and the poor by strengthening the assets base of those who are relatively better-off. It is far better for the poor people to get employment during the lean agricultural season and do some productive works for the entire community.

### **SAMPOORNA GRAMIN ROZGAR YOJANA (SGRY)**

Sampoorna Gramin Rozgar Yojana (SGRY) was formed by merging Jawahar Gram Samridhi Yojana (JGSY) with the Employment Assurance Scheme (EAS) in 2001.

The basic aim of the scheme continues to be generation of wage employment in rural areas and provision of food and nutrition security to the poor. The works taken up under the programmes are labor-intensive and workers are paid the minimum wages notified by the states. The SGRY is a central government rural employment guarantee scheme initiated in 2001, and is funded by a combination of central (75 percent) and state (25 percent) funds. In SGRY, projects are initiated and implemented by the locally elected bodies. SGRY allegedly embodies all the claimed advantages of contemporary localism—the democratically elected bodies are expected to be more efficient than remote bureaucracies in identifying and using public resources to respond to locally specific needs. In SGRY the selection of workers are done by the locally elected bodies who are suppose to identify those who are really in need of the employment (those who are in need of employment). The local autonomy embodied in the organization of SGRY has its limitations. Funding comes through government agencies and is subjected to the amount allotted in the financial years. Further, the government agencies are to a varying degree responsible for the design and construction of SGRY works. Some of the important features of the SGRY are mentioned below:

- The village councils need not seek the approval of the higher authority for projects costing up to Rs. 100,000 but are required to seek the approval of the general village assembly (gram Sabha)
- All works should be executed under the direct guidance of the public employees. The use of contractors and other middlemen is strictly forbidden.
- Wage payments are partly to be made in cash and in kind.
- Thirty percent of the employment opportunities are to be reserved for women and men and women are to be paid equal wages without any discrimination.

## **MAHARASHTRA EMPLOYMENT GUARANTEE ACT**

Maharashtra Employment Guarantee scheme is the earliest guarantee programme launched in India, though it was operational at the state level. It had been in operation since the 1960s though it was formally declared as an act in January 1979. The main

philosophy behind the Act is that rural public works generate additional income during slack periods and help build rural infrastructure. The EGS guarantees employment on demand, preferably within a radius of 8 Km (originally 5 Km) from a participant's home. The distance requirements ensure that poor people and specially women are not excluded from the scheme. Initially, the Maharashtra Employment Guarantee scheme relied on self-selection mechanism for the selection of the beneficiaries. Self-selection mechanism is induced by restricting the choice of works- head load carrying, rock breaking, digging etc. and low wage rate on a piece-work basis. A low wage rate helps avoid competition with agricultural demand for labour while a piece-work method, by linking remuneration to both the quantity and quality of work, may inculcate the work ethic among participants (Gaiha 1996). This may also discouraged the poor from becoming over dependent on the scheme over time. The wage rate is kept below the ongoing agricultural wage; the piece rate is fixed in such a way that with average effort the daily wage would equal the minimum of all statutory minimum wage rates obtaining in different parts of the state. Self-selection mechanism was employed in order to ensure that only the deserving get the benefits. Some of the mechanisms are worth mentioning here. First, no choice of work is given- only unskilled manual work is made available. Secondly, the wage rate is kept below the ongoing agricultural wage; the price rate is fixed in such a way that with average effort the daily wage would equal the minimum of all statutory minimum wage rates obtaining in different parts of the state. On the whole self-selection mechanism has reasonable work-well (Osamani 1990).

Thus, the EGS was conceived as a programme to provide wage-employment during the lean season and at the same time create an infrastructural support for the whole rural economy of Maharashtra. This was what the scheme was basically aimed to achieve. But various studies have convincingly shown that Maharashtra Employment Guarantee Scheme was a total failure in many aspects.

The scheme was initially started as a social movement for the upliftment of the poor but with the sustained mobilization of the poor together with the widespread support given by the opposition and certain section within the congress party led the Government

of Maharashtra to convert it into act. In the course of the movement, landed Maratha and Politicians also started taking interest as they saw a big opportunity for them. The act incorporated most of the demand made by the workers such as providing employment on demand, payment of wages within a stipulated time etc. But one of the provisions that were added was that work was permitted on the private lands. This provision was added on the insistence of the landed Maratha who were having a strong link with the politicians. The administrative structure remained insensitive to the demands of the poor. It tilted in favour of the landed Maratha caste. The latter was able to use the existing administrative provisions proactively to benefit its interest. The Maratha ruling groups were also aggressively demanding that its interest be protected whenever it recommended further changes in the act, such as the introduction of contractors to implement the scheme and the use of EGS for new agricultural activities such as horticulture and floriculture.

In the later section, I will show that the scheme went to benefit better-off section of the society. The act became a tool in the hand of the landed Maratha and strong politicians who use this act as a tool to exploit the poor.

Of course, it is true that workers benefited during the course of specific projects as they were paid wages but the lasting benefits went to rich farmers in the form of assets that were created under the EGS. There was an excessive concentration on the creation of minor irrigation works. As the official evaluation of EGS showed, these irrigation works and other agricultural related land development works yielded remarkable benefits to the farmers, specially the middle and large farmers (PEO 1980). Sujata Patel (2006) has shown that most of the works done under the scheme were located in the western part of the Maharashtra where strong politicians and landed Maratha are residing. Dev and Vatsa (2005) through their extensive research works showed that most of the EGS expenditure went into small irrigation works, such as nullahs bunding and tanks. Most of the works done under the EGS was located in the western part of the Maharashtra where big politicians and landed Maratha are concentrated. The western part of Maharashtra is a rain-fed region and the creation of minor irrigation would supply water for sugarcane

industries owned by landed Maratha. In EGS, Politicians were given some role in deciding the nature and location of works. The available data suggest that in the western part of the Maharashtra, EGS is mainly used to create nullahs, bunds and tanks to link it to the irrigation canals in private lands [Sujata Patel 2006]. Government data points to the fact that most of the expenditure had gone into developing private lands rather than using funds for development of public utilities.

It has now become obvious that the state politics of Maharashtra was dominated by rich landlords. Another interesting finding of EGS which could be a guide for the future employment programme is that the State politics of Maharashtra is dominated by rich landowners. The politically powerful rural elite of Maharashtra has succeeded in extracting surplus wealth from the urban sector, combined it with the raw labour of a marginalized rural population, and created assets for the benefit of their land. EGS was financed by collecting professional tax from the urban elite groups. The secret of Maharashtra's EGS lies in forming a triangle between dominant rural elite, a materially prosperous urban sector which for some reason was willing to foot the bill, and a poor but abundantly available rural labour force. The surplus rural labor forces were exploited both by the rural elite and materially prosperous urban sector as well. This is what set the limits to the possibility of emulating Maharashtra in the rest of the region (Osamani 1990).

In brief, we can sum up the following points regarding the Maharashtra employment guaranteed scheme:

- EGS failed to achieved its basic objective i.e. creation of sustainable and productive assets.
- Uneven spatial distribution of EGS assets i.e. assets were concentrated in those areas where there is concentration of landed Maratha.
- Decline in its outreach to the poor i.e. with the passage of time it failed to cater to the needs of the poor.



- The nature of employment offered is of menial kind and therefore skills development of workers is absent.
- EGS wages were kept below the minimum wages. The administration tried to justify this on the ground that it acts as a self selection mechanism; this would attract only those who are in need of works

Evaluation studies of EGS by the Second Administrative Reform Committee shows the following results

- The programme continues after 30 years without any decrease in demand for unskilled wage work
- Modest impact on poverty reduction and on unemployment reduction
- Quality of assets created and their maintenance is not satisfactory
- Failure to adopt a local development policy to promote overall area development

## **NREGA: AN IMPROVED VERSION OF THE PAST ANTI-POVERTY PROGRAMMES**

The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005 received the approval of the president on India on September 5, 2005. The Act guarantees a minimum 100 days of employment for one person in each rural household every year whose adults are willing to do unskilled manual work. Every person working under the Act shall be entitled to wages at the minimum wage fixed by the state government for agricultural labourers under the minimum wage Act, 1948 subject to a minimum of Rs. 60. Payment of wages should be made preferably within a week for the convenience of the workers but in no case later than a fortnight. Any adult who applies for work under the act is entitled to being employed on the public works within 15 days. If the administration failed to provide an employment within 15 days from the date of application, an unemployment

allowance has to be provided. The employment allowance shall not be less than one-fourth of the wage for the first thirty days during the financial year and not less than one half of the wage for the remaining period of the year. The Act also says that every payment of unemployment allowance shall be made or offered not later than 15 days from the date on which it became due for payment. And it is the obligation of the state government to contribute the funds for payment of unemployment allowances. According to the act, work will be provided within 5 km of applicants' residence. This is done to ensure that the assets created are around the participants' residence. A worker is entitled to get 10 percent additional wages towards transport if employment is provided beyond 5 km of the applicants' residence. Another silent feature of the act is that one-third of the proposed jobs would be reserved for women. Other distinguishing feature of the Act is that for the first time in the history of India Panchayati Raj Institutions are directly involved in the process of planning and implementation of the Act. Gram Panchayats and Gram Sabha will identify what kinds of works are to be undertaken from the list of works permissible under the Act.

The major departure that NREGA made from the past anti-poverty programmes is that it gives rise to programme that spring not from its willful benevolence, but as a legally binding response by the state to the right to work (Mihir shah 2006). This also implies that the constraints of resources cannot be cited as the reason for not providing employment and the workers have the right to take the government to the court if the government failed to provide an employment. This is also the first time that so many agencies are involving in the implementation of the project. The Act empowers the ordinary people to play an active role in the implementation of the scheme through Gram Sabha (village general meeting), Social audits, participatory planning and other means.

The ministry of rural development has issued detailed guidelines for the implementation of the projects. The basic aim of the scheme is to lay the foundation of the rural economy by creating relevant and quality assets. The emphasis on water conservation, rural connectivity, land developments etc. reinforces this aim. Another unique feature of the NREGA is that it puts a complete ban on the contractors. Earlier

programmes have been characterized by the excessive involvement of the contractors in the implementation of the scheme who were responsible for the exploitation of the laborers. The NREGA strictly stipulated that workers should be paid according to the statutory minimum wages. It has also a detailed provision to make the worksites workers friendly. It states that worksites facilities such as drinking water, first aid, crèche should be made available at the worksites. Great emphasis has been placed on transparency and accountability at every stage of the programme implementation. For the first time, civil society has been given a major role in the implementation of the scheme. They are allowed to participate in the implementation process as well as allowed to check corruption and promote transparency and accountability.

There is also unprecedented emphasis on the use of information technology. This is meant to facilitate the right to information and more intensive monitoring of the programme. All stages of NREGA work, from registration of workers to issue of job cards, preparation of works estimates to muster rolls have to be very effectively computerized. This not only makes for greater efficiency, it also opens up NREGA for public scrutiny, thus engendering greater transparency.

Unlike other anti-poverty programmes, the NREGA has a legal sanction. It is an Act and therefore it is justifiable in the court of law. For the first time, the government of India took the initiative to operationalise the concept of right to work enshrined in the constitution under the Directives Principle of State Policy. The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act had made a departure from the past anti-poverty programmes to ensure the participation of people and panchayati raj institutions (Indira Hirway 2004). Therefore, it is not only a state led programme, but other forces like civil society, local community, self-help groups are involved in it. The provision also ensures more public disclosure of information muster roll of workers, list of worksites, amount expenditure etc. The system of job cards, social audits, payment of wages through banks, the use of web-based application etc. are some of the salient feature introduce in the NREGA for its effective and transparent implementation. The Right to Information would enable the Public to check the corruption. Of course, corruption is a universal phenomenon in India.

But with the coming of The RTI, corruption can be minimized. According to Jean Dreaze, “Corruption is a major danger. This is why the demand for an Employment Guarantee Act is inseparable from the demand for a strong Right to Information Act. Of course, a Right to Information Act on its own cannot be expected to eradicate corruption. But it will give people a powerful tool to fight corruption and claim their due.”

The Act provides for people’s participation at the grass root level. The Gram Sabha is the statutorily institutional mechanism for community participation. In addition, other method of local participation can be evolved: workers’ association, local beneficiary committees, self-help groups etc. Active community participation is important for transparency and public accountability.

Whether the act is really different from other previous programme would depend on the performance of the scheme at the ground level. Though the act has certain elements of uniqueness, I could not see much difference from other previous scheme. According to the Second administrative committee report<sup>8</sup>, the average number of employment provided under the previous employment programmes was 30 days. Based on the interaction I had with the workers in the field, workers are being provided only 30-40 days employment in the financial year. Then what is the difference between the NREGA and the other previous years programme? The act has a provision which says that if the state failed to provide an employment then the workers can sue the government as the act (NREGA) is justifiable. But how can the government expect the workers to sue the government when they are busy running up and down for their immediate survival. Though the act has so many entitlements for the workers, they may not have the capacity to claim those rights. Another problem is that there is no proper institutional mechanism to monitor the act.

The cost of the NREGA is anticipated to rise from 0.5 percent of GDP in 2005-2006 to 1 per cent of GDP in 2008-2009. In order to finance this scheme, the government

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<sup>8</sup> Unlocking human capital: Entitlements and governance a case study/India. Second Administrative reforms commission.

has to raise the tax rate substantially by imposing extra cess on certain group of people. Jean Dreze has argued that India's tax-GDP is very low in internal perspective: about 15 per cent (for the centre and state combined) compared with, say, 37 per cent of OECD countries.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, he foresees no financial problem in financing NREGA. But common sense would suggest that people have a natural tendency to oppose any hike in tax rate. But one exception is that rich people may not oppose to it if the scheme could create "*forward and backward linkages*". This happened in case of Maharashtra Employment Guarantee Scheme. Here, the brunt of the burden of the hike in tax-rate is borne by the urban dwellers-more specially, those living in Bombay. This is justified on the ground that the EGS restricts migration into urban areas and thus prevents further congestion (Raghav Gaiha, 1996). If NREGA failed to generate any kind of "forward and backward linkages" then people who bear the burden of the increasing tax-rate may protest and refused to finance the scheme, though, not directly, but say, through lobby group. Another danger is that of massive leakages associated with any type of poverty-alleviation programme. Corruption is pervasive in India. In this context, we may quote Rajiv Gandhi's statement that only 15 paise out of every rupee of public expenditure on anti-poverty programme actually reach the poor. The NREGA requires huge amount of funds. Jean Dreze has estimated the cost of funds at Rs. 40,000 crores. Prabhat Patnaik (2005) estimated that an open-ended unrestricted guarantee would cost Rs. 23,400 crores. T.S Papola (2005) estimated that on the basis of the cost of unrestricted rural employment guarantee could be place at Rs. 20,000 crores. National Advisory committee put the cost at Rs. 40,000 crores. Other things being equal, if only 15 paise out of one rupee reaches the poor, then out of 40,000 crores only 6000 crores would reach the indented beneficiaries. This means that a substantial amount of funds would be misallocated or siphoned-off en route. The ultimate result would be that there would be no palpable achievements. This may leads to massive public outcry leading to termination of the scheme. As Pranab Bardhan (1996) says, "A society may very consider the objective of redistribution in favor of the poor as a sufficiently worthwhile goal to warrant sacrifice in terms of efficiency. But if such redistribution comes at a substantial amount of cost in

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<sup>9</sup> For more detail one can looks at Jean Dreze, "Employment Guarantee: Promise and Demise", Yojana, vol. 49, April 2005.

terms of misallocated resources and aggregate income losses, it may not be politically or economically sustainable". Therefore the fate of NREGA would be decided by its performance. As I have mentioned earlier, if the benefits failed to reach the intended beneficiaries; there would be no palpable achievements; and this would lead to huge public outcry forcing the policy makers to change the strategy.

## **CONCLUSION**

Thus the past anti-poverty programmes seem to have ignored the interest and aspirations of the poor people. Though poor people benefited during the scheme, it was largely in the form of wages. The enduring benefits went to the better-off section of the society. Some of the wage-employment programmes had been used by the local elite to pursue their own interest. It was also revealed that the implementation of the programmes were more effective in those cases where poor people were given a chance to participate in the process of implementation. This reflects that for successful implementation of anti-poverty programmes, poor people should be given a major role to play.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **THE ROLE OF THE ADMINISTRATION IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NATIONAL RURAL EMPLOYMENT GUARANTEE ACT (NREGA)**

## **INTRODUCTION**

In this chapter I have narrated the role of the various agencies involve in the implementation of the scheme. Those are actual roles envisaged in the NREGA guidelines. I have also discussed some of the important issues of NREGA based on the interaction I had with district officials of Tamenglong district. Besides this, I have also look at the kinds of assets created under the scheme in Tamenglong district.

## **ROLE OF THE VARIOUS AGENCIES**

The National rural employment guarantee act provides for multi-tier structure of authority for implementation and monitoring of the scheme with specific functions and duties for each authority. There are various agencies involved in the implementation of the scheme. At the Central level there are Central Employment Guarantee Council (CEGC) and the Ministry of Rural Development (MORD). At the state level we have State Employment Guarantee Council (SEGC), the state government and the Employment Guarantee Commissioner. There are District Panchayats, District Programme Coordinator and Implementing agencies involved in the implementation at the district level. Intermediate Panchayat (IP) and Programme Officer (PO) are identified as the implementing agencies at the Block level. One of the unique features of NREGA is that it has carved out a special role at the village level: Gram Sabha (GS) and Gram Panchayat (GO) have a pivotal role to play in the implementation of the scheme.

As specified in the act, the central government would set up Central Employment Guarantee Council (CEGC) and this body would advise the state government on matter related to NREGA. Apart from advisory role, this body has been entrusted with the tasks of monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the Act. The CEGC would also prepare Annual Reports and submit it to the parliament to keep the members of parliament who represent people informed about the progress of the scheme. The Ministry of Rural Development (MORD) is the nodal Ministry for the implementation of the Act. The main role of this Ministry is to ensure timely and adequate resource support



to the states and to the Central Council so that the act could be implemented in letter and spirit. To make the process of implementation more transparent and to capture and track data on every critical aspect of implementation, the ministry has set up an MIS (Management Information System). The information technology has been incorporated in the implementation of the act to increase the transparency and efficiency of the process of implementation as well as improve interface with the public. Most of the information on NREGA-related matters is now available for the public at the website of the Ministry of Rural Development (MORD). This is a big achievement on the part of the ministry. Thus, the role of the Central Employment Guarantee Council (CEGC) and the Ministry of Rural Development (MORD) is indispensable for the success of the act.

The Act authorized every state government to set up State Employment Guarantee Council (SEGC). The role of this body is to advise the state on NREGA-related matter and also evaluate and monitor the implementation of the scheme at the state level. The SEGC is also entrusted the task of deciding “preferred works” to be implemented and recommending the proposals of works to be submitted to the Central Government by the State Government. In order to ensure timely availability of fund for the scheme, the state government has to set up State Employment Guarantee Fund. The state government has to contribute a certain portion of the fund. According to the guidelines, the state government will bear one-fourth of the cost of materials and wages for skilled and semi-skilled workers and unemployment allowance in case the state fail to provide the employment within 15 days from the date of application. Besides, the state government will bear the expenses of the State Employment Guarantee Council.<sup>10</sup> It is the obligation of the state to ensure all administrative, financial and technical support to the District Programme Coordinator, Programme Officer, Panchayati Raj Institutions and all agencies involved in the implementation of the Act. Another indispensable duty for the state government is to provide “Technical Support” to the implementing agencies. The State government will also designate State Rural Employment Guarantee Commissioner who will be responsible for ensuring that all activities required to fulfill the objectives of the act are carried out.

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<sup>10</sup> For more details one may have a look at NREGA guidelines Chapter 7

The NREGA guidelines has clearly stipulated that if an applicant under this act is not provided such employment within 15 days, he/she shall be entitled to daily unemployment allowance, which will be paid by the state government. This implies an inbuilt structure of incentives for performance and non-performance state, as the inability to provide employment in time would require the state to pay unemployment allowance for which there is no contribution form the Central government. This would also require the state government to undertake a proper co-ordinated approach while making a plan for the number of days of employments to be generated during a given year. It would further require the state government to have an in-depth understanding of region specific labour demand and supply: as the act is a demand driven scheme the supply of labour should be equated with the demand of labour. Failure to fulfill these requirements may result in an imprudent use of funds, as the inability to provide employment would require payment of unemployment allowance, which does not get translated into tangible assets. As it is a demand-driven scheme, the flow of funds from higher authority to the lower level should be assured according to the demand. Otherwise, the whole concept of demand-driven scheme would become meaningless.

At the district level, there is a District Programme Coordinator (DPC) who is responsible for the overall coordination and implementation of the scheme in the district. Apart from District Panchayats, Line Departments, NGOs, Self-Help Groups (SHGs) can also be identified as implementing agencies. The authority entrusted with the implementation of the Act indicates that a coordinated approach of different tiers of government or vertical coordination is critical for the success of the scheme. In addition, the horizontal coordination across line departments, NGOs, Self-Help Groups etc. for programme identification and execution of works through Panchayat assumes critical importance.

At the Block level, there is a Programme Officer (PO) who acts as a coordinator at the block level. He/she should be equipped with necessary require staff for facilitating implementation. The important functions of the Programme Officer are: scrutinizing

village plans; supervising the implementing Agencies; matching employment opportunities with the demands and safeguarding the entitlements of the workers. The chief responsibility of the Programme Coordinator is to ensure that anyone who applies for work gets employment within 15 days. For this, he has to make an elaborate plan taking into account each and every factor that would affect the demand and supply of labour. He has to make a plan in advance how much of funds would be required to meet the demand for labour. The Programme Officer is the main officer who is dealing with the act at the ground level and his role is indispensable for the success of the implementation of the scheme.

One of the unique features of the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act is that it endows a special role for the gram panchayat. The Act authorized the gram Sabha to recommend works to be taken up under the act. For accountability and transparency purposes, the gram sabhas are given power to conduct social audit. Apart from those mentioned crucial roles, the gram panchayats are also entrusted with the tasks of registering families, issuing job cards, receiving applications and allocating employment. The Act authorized that these tasks may be entrusted to the 'employment guarantee assistant'.

### **IMPORTANT ISSUES OF NREGA BASED ON THE FIELD WORK**

The state has not appointed programme officer, and SDO (Sub-Divisional Officer) is designated as the programme officer. The SDO is overburdened with huge responsibilities.<sup>11</sup> The Act envisages that the state should appoint programme officer to look after the scheme and the programme officer should be equipped with adequate manpower and enough technical support. The non-appointment of programme officer implies that the district administration is not adequately equipped to carry out the scheme successfully. The act also envisages that adequate technical staff should be made available for taking up feasible projects. The SDO of Tamenglong said that lack of proper

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<sup>11</sup> Interview with the SDO, Tamenglong sub-division

technical guidance has been hampering the process of implementation. There is also shortage in manpower of government staff employed to supervise the scheme.<sup>12</sup>

There are also couples of other states where the states have not appointed programme officer. The Programme officer is an integral part of the scheme. The guideline says that he should be a person who has a technical knowledge and who has an experienced in rural development. Non-appointment of the programme officer has been hampering the process of implementation. The Comptroller and Auditor General of India report on NREGA showed that more than half of the states have not appointed programme officer.<sup>13</sup> In those states where programme officers have been appointed, there is a confusion regarding the role of the Block Development officer and the programme officer. In state like Jharkhand, the role of the programme officers has become subservient to the Block Development Officer. The Programme officers have been appointed just for the namesake. Besides, the BDO wants to retain the power that he used to enjoy. Thus, there is an inclination towards maintaining the earlier power equations.

Another issue relates to the wage and material component combination. The Act makes it mandatory that of the total cost incurred, 60 per cent should be toward wage payment and 40 per cent toward materials costs.<sup>14</sup> This is the permissible combination. The district administration is strictly advice to stick to this permissible combination. The District Project Officer<sup>15</sup> and other involving in the implementation of the scheme find it very difficult to work out the exact proportion. The worst thing is that it puts a limitation on the choice of projects to be taken up. Thus, the district administration has to make some compromise while choosing the nature of works to be taken up. This similar kind of problem is also there in Kerala. Due to strict emphasize on the requirement ratio, most of the works undertaken were devoted to drainage renovation, water channel creation and similar sort of works where materials requirement were minimal. It is very difficult to

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<sup>12</sup> Informal discussion with the Sub-Divisional Officer (SDO), Tamenglong

<sup>13</sup> Quoted from the Mainstream

<sup>14</sup> NREGA guidelines

<sup>15</sup> Tamenglong District Project Officer

make estimates with just 40 per cent materials. Therefore, a greater allocation towards materials costs is required to initiate proper asset creating works.<sup>16</sup> The Maharashtra experienced showed that the requirement should be changed to 50:50.<sup>17</sup> This would enable to take up technically feasible projects. This kind of limitations reflects the planner's concept of what needs to be done without taking into consideration the ground reality of the rural India.

Another problem is that the Project officer is asked to stick to the NABARD (National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development) guideline, whenever he has to take up new project. Sometime it is difficult to stick to the guideline and the amount of cost stipulated in the guideline could not meet the exact cost involve in the project. Tamenglong as a hilly region requires more fund than what is stipulated in the NABARD guideline.<sup>18</sup> This kind of limitation/constraint reflects the planner's concept of what needs to be done for the rural population and there is very little room for accommodating the local needs. While evaluating the performance of IRDP, K. Subbarao<sup>19</sup> has suggested in brief, the need for decentralization, flexibility, and drive away from uniformity towards a careful study of local conditions and potentials. Poverty alleviation programme should have enough space for accommodating local needs and aspiration. Though the plan emphasizes the need of participation from the lower level, it seems that for all intents and purpose it is largely a Planner's programme.

The various layer of administrative set-up to monitor the scheme have many negative effects. Those officials that I met are complaining of too much of interference from the higher authority.<sup>20</sup> Sometime they even raised silly question as if to show-off their superiority. One of the official told me, "if we perform too well, there will be a query, if we perform too bad there will be a query again, and therefore we have to be on

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<sup>16</sup> Arun Jacob and Richard Varghese, "NREGA implementation-I, Reasonable beginning in Palakkad, Kerala." *Economic and Political Weekly*, December 2, 2006

<sup>17</sup> Chhaya Datar, "Failure of National rural employment guarantee scheme in Maharashtra" *Economic and political weekly* August 25, 2007

<sup>18</sup> Informal discussion with the Project officer, Tamenglong

<sup>19</sup> Regional variations in impact of anti-poverty programmes: A review Evidence, *Economic and political weekly* vol xx, No.43, October 26, 1985

<sup>20</sup> Officials involve in the implementation of the scheme at Tamenglong district

the average". This sort of excessive interference from the top has stifled initiative where it is possible, and given rise to the tendency to do the minimum.<sup>21</sup> The kind of administrative set-up to deal with the implementation of the scheme is highly inclined toward the higher authority. While the implementation of the scheme is to be done mainly at the district and Block level, it seems that they do not have adequate authority in terms of financial and administrative power. The administrative power of the district officials has been curtailed largely because they are to depend on higher authority to fulfill their responsibilities. Thus, simply assigning responsibility without adequate resource and capacity will not lead to any serious improvement in the implementation.

Non-receipt of fund in time has hampered the process of implementation. One of the reasons attributed by the district administration is the indifferent attitude of the state government.<sup>22</sup> As a result, the district administration could not pay the wages in time. The payment of wage has been delayed for the last two to three months.<sup>23</sup> If the fund could be routed straight to the intended beneficiaries or if not at least to the administration, which is closer to the people, the implementation would be much smoother and efficient. Thus, the National rural employment guarantee scheme is not free from excessive bureaucratization of the scheme. Fund passes through various stages before finally reaching the intended beneficiaries. Therefore, if the system of delivery of funds could be shortened, the implementation process could be much faster.

One of the intrinsic problems of NREGA is that it is some sort of joint collaboration between the state government and the central government. The state government has a certain share in the scheme; state government has to bear 25 per cent of the cost for hiring semi-skilled labour and also it is the duty of the state to pay unemployment allowance to those workers who applied for works and who could not be provided a job within 15 days.<sup>24</sup> It should be kept in mind that the state government and the centre government are separate entity and it is not necessary that the interest of the

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<sup>21</sup> The studies conducted by the Indian School of Women's studies and Development have also given a similar finding.

<sup>22</sup> Manipur State government

<sup>23</sup> As told by the workers

<sup>24</sup> NREGA guidelines

centre be in congruence with the state. In Tamenglong district, not a single worker has been paid an unemployment allowances.<sup>25</sup> None of the worker is aware of unemployment allowance. Though it is the duty of the district administration to spread the awareness, they have not done it deliberately. They may be afraid of workers claiming unemployment allowance when the state is not providing the fund. Therefore, if the central government takes the initiative of the scheme by itself, the success of the scheme would be higher. At this junction, we may cite the example of Indira Awas Yojana. This is a centrally sponsored scheme funded on a cost-sharing basis between the centre and the states in the ratio of 75:25. This scheme has almost become defunct in Manipur due to non-release of fund by the state government.<sup>26</sup>

#### **ASSETS CREATED BY THE DISTRICT ADMINISTRATION OF TAMENGLONG UNDER NREGA**

The basic objective of the Act is to enhance livelihood security in rural areas by providing atleast 100 days of guarantee wage employment in a financial year. The wage goes to create an assets like tanks, ponds, irrigations, land development, plantations, horticulture, rural connectivity etc. as can be seen from the below table. The assets created by the district administration under NREGS during the year 2006-2007 upto March 2007 is shown below.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Not a single worker that I met has been paid unemployment allowance

<sup>26</sup> Satyam Bharat Singh, "Poverty in Manipur" Economic and Political Weekly, January 20, 2007

<sup>27</sup> This table is prepared in accordance with "The Annual Plan and Budget Proposal , NREGS" prepared by the District administration of Tamenglong

Works/activities	Completed works	
	Nos	Expenditure (RS in lakhs)

1. Water conservation and harvesting

a. Tanks	110	101.05
b. Ponds	76	65.5
c. Percolation tanks	30	21
d. Small check dams	58	59.8

2. Drought proofing

a. Afforestation	90	102.42
b. Tree plantation	81	65.64
c. Minor irrigation canals	87	166.92

3. Renovation of traditional water bodies

a. Desilting of tanks/bonds	7	4.72
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4. Land Development

a. Plantation	158	261.03
b. Land leveling	70	73.61

5. Flood control and protection

a. Drainage in water logged areas	1	22.64
b. construction of embankment	4	24.39

6. Rural connectivity

	129	210.5
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The National rural employment guarantee scheme is a unique scheme directing capital in the rural areas. As it is visible from the table above, wages go to create assets like water conservation and water harvesting, drought proofing, provision of irrigation facility, renovation of traditional water facilities, land development, flood control and protection and rural connectivity. Rural connectivity, plantation, minor irrigation canals, Tanks attract more than 50 per cent of the scheme. Rural connectivity is a big problem in Tamenglong as dense forest and rugged terrains surround it. Therefore there is so much of emphasize on rural connectivity. Tamenglong is suitable for cultivation of Turmeric,



ginger, chilly, passion fruit, pineapple, coconut, and betal nut etc. The scheme is also being utilized for the cultivation of those crops. Those crops have a great potential for exports and earn income for the villagers. The Government of India has assured to help in marketing organically naturally cultivated spices from Manipur. This would give a big push to the local economy. Thus the assets created under the scheme as shown in the table will have a visible impact on the landscape Tamenglong.

Rural connectivity has been given a special importance. The only means of transport for the district is the road link in the accessible terrains. As such rural connectivity has a special importance as vital infrastructure for economic development of the district. Tamenglong is the most inaccessible district in Manipur.<sup>28</sup> It is covered by dense forest and rugged terrains. Therefore we can assume that the construction of rural connectivity has brought villages closer to each other. This would help in exploring untapped resources of the district and give incentive for more production and general development.

Construction of minor irrigation and small check dams would have a beneficial effect on agriculture as it brings more land under cultivation. Most of the people in the district are engaged in agriculture sector. Therefore, construction of irrigation means generation of additional employment opportunities for the rural people. The scope of irrigation is very high due to the existence of numerous small valleys and slope all over the district where permanent terraced field are to be constructed for cultivation. Minor irrigation has a special place in the functioning of the local economy. It smoothen the functioning of the local economy. The schemes are inexpensive, easy to build, maintain and operate within the short gestation period.<sup>29</sup>

Since Tamenglong is located at high altitude, there is also a problem of water scarcity and people have to spend time for fetching water. We can assume that with the construction of water tanks, people could do something else. It saves their time and

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<sup>28</sup> Economic Survey, Manipur 2007-2008

<sup>29</sup> As told by the Assistant Engineer

energy. Therefore the scheme makes possible for the poor to participate in the developmental process by earning daily wages and at the same time creates assets in their areas of surrounding.

The durability and employment generating capacity of the assets would judge the quality of the assets. A unique feature of the scheme is that the maintenance of the assets is provided for in the programmes. Therefore, there is no dependence on additional funds each year to ensure their continuing productivity. Therefore, if the government can ensure the continuous flow of the funds to the district administration, the quality of the assets would enhance. The exact impact of the scheme on local economy is not possible to assess as the scheme has been implemented just two years back. However, the impact of the scheme on the local economy would largely depend on the longevity and durability of the assets created and durability and longevity of the assets would depend largely on how the assets created are maintained. Though the scheme has a provision of fund for maintenance of assets, the district has not been provided funds for maintaining the assets. This is an alarming situation. Moreover, the erratic flows of funds have worsened the situation. The result would be that that newly constructed road would be washed away in the monsoon and the whole impact of the scheme would get disappear within a short period. The success of the programme would largely depend upon the capacity of the assets in generating Net employment. Here Net Employment refers to the amount of mandays generated because of the NREGS. Thus, it includes the indirect consequences of the project as well. Therefore, the quality of the assets should be maintained in such a way that it is capable of generating net employment.

The administration should not only concern with the creation of employment but at the same time with the quality of the assets. As Kaushik Basu (1981) says, "If employment generation is our sole objective, then its satisfaction is no problem. We could get people to build roads which would get washed away with the first rains". Therefore, the quality of the assets and the maintenance of the assets to enhance its quality are very important.

Nevertheless, what is lacking is that there is no proper technical guidance while selecting the worksites and therefore proper technical guidance is required for taking up feasible projects. In case of Maharashtra's employment guarantee scheme, the selection of the projects is the prerogative of technical departments, and consultations with the local beneficiaries are rare.<sup>30</sup> The crux of the point is that selection of projects is very important and the selection of the projects should be worked out properly among the villagers in consultation with the technical department. In Tamenglong district, there are inadequate technical staff dealing with the selection of the projects and therefore this may lead to inappropriate selection of the projects. Though the act has a provision which says that there should be adequate technical staff, this has not been fulfilled so.

## **TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY**

The act is justifiable and therefore it is important to maintain accurate records of all aspects of implementation of the scheme. The Programme officer is supposed to maintain all the important documents on NREGA in computerized form. This document has to be sent to the District programme coordinator and the district programme coordinator will forward it to the Ministry of Rural Development. For efficient implementation of the scheme, every critical aspects of the implementation should be made available for public scrutiny. As we know, NREGA is a scheme, which is something unique and made a departure from the previous developmental programmes. It gives a scope for the public to involve in the implementation of the scheme. Therefore, the act says that all accounts and records relating to the programme will be available in convenient form for public scrutiny. For the first time in the history of India, right to information is used to promote the efficiency of the implementation of the programme. The Right to information requires that all relevant documents should be made accessible to the public.

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<sup>30</sup> The Employment Guarantee Scheme in India: Is It Mismatched? ,Raghav Gaiha, Asian Survey, Vol.36, No.12

When it comes to maintaining relevant information on NREGA, very few documents are available at the office and not much information can get on Tamenglong district on the NREGA website. The district administration of Tamenglong is blaming on poor technological infrastructure and it is very arduous task for them to maintain all the relevant information. To make the matter worse, the district is out of touch most of the time due to frequent failure in the power supply. Internet connection is down due to failure in power supply.

The district does not have a proper grievance redressal mechanism, Vigilance and monitoring committee. Some of the officials involve in the implementation are also not aware of those mechanism. The Programme officer told me that they do not have as such as Grievance redressal mechanism but if any complaints is brought to his office, then they look into it and prompt and swift action is taken. Effective monitoring, grievance redressal and social audit mechanism could enhance transparency and accountability in the implementation of the scheme. There is no proper informal-organization to check the implementation of the scheme. Therefore, participation from the public in the implementation of the scheme is very low. Awareness of the scheme among the people also seems to be very low; workers cannot think of beyond their daily wages. They are not at all aware of the basic rights, which they are entitled to. For effective implementation of them scheme, awareness among the people is indispensable.

## **CONCLUSION**

I have examined the role of the officials of the district administration of Tamenglong. They are facing certain problems when it comes to implementation. Some of the problems have to do with the Act itself which limits their power to exercise. This is in one way hampering the effective implementation of the scheme. I feel that the district administration is not equipped adequately to implement the scheme. For instance, there is lack of adequate technical staff to supervise the works under NREGA. Therefore adequate technical support should be made available for implementing the scheme efficiently.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **IMPLEMENTATION OF NATIONAL RURAL EMPLOYMENT GUARANTEE ACT IN TAMENGLONG**

## INTRODUCTION

This chapter is based on the survey conducted in two villages Duigailong and Old Tamenglong in the month of Jan-Feb 2008 in Tamenglong district of Manipur which is the first district in that state to implement the scheme.

Duigailong is a small village consisting of 140 households falling under the jurisdiction of Tamenglong sub-division. The village is headed by the village headman who is hereditary king. There are nine village authority members who are legitimately elected by the villagers. The headman along with the village authority members takes all the important decisions of the village. All the important decisions are taken at the village general assembly (gram sabha). This is a brief description of how the village is functioning.

Based on my observation and the interaction I had with the villagers, it is a very backward village. Majority of the people are engaged in agriculture; agriculture is the backbone of that village economy. Therefore agriculture should be given the foremost important under the scheme. Rural connectivity is a big problem in the village. Most of the people in the village of Duigailong are aspired to have good road connectivity with the main town and other important areas. This would facilitate the flow of goods from the village to the market thereby enabling the villagers to get better return for their products. This would help in exploiting the local resources for the betterment of the villagers. This village also has a big problem in getting drinking water and people have to spend time in fetching water.

To look at the set of issues of implementation of the NREGA, I went to this village and had a discussion with the headman and some members of the village authority. And then I had an interaction with some of the workers who had participated in the scheme. After the discussion, I filled up the structured questionnaire containing set of questions related to implementation of the Act.

In Duigailong village, Gram Sabha is convened once in every month. This Gram Sabha decides what works to be done and where. The headman along with the nine village authority members participates in the gram sabha. Labourers did not participate in the gram sabha. Therefore I assume that labourers have no voice in deciding the nature and location of the projects. However the headman told me that decision-making become cumbersome whenever there are too many people and moreover the village authority members are legitimately elected by the villagers and therefore they represent the aspiration of the people. He told me that utmost care is being taken while deciding the nature and location of the works; which would be acceptable to all. So far, they have not faced any pressure from higher authority while deciding the nature of projects. They choose the nature of projects among the list of permissible projects under the NREGA. Once they have decided the nature of works, they forwarded it to the programme officer for approval.<sup>31</sup>

Duigailong village has appointed two members for conducting Social Audit. Their duty is to see how funds are being utilized; how it can be used more productively. They look at the amount of funds being sanctioned in the village. They look into the matter of wage payments; whether workers are being paid according to the norm. To my surprise, the village has also appointed Nigrani committee (Vigilance committee). As narrated by the headman, the Nigrani committee has to certify that the scheme is doing well in the village and funds are being utilized properly. But Nigrani committee has not submitted any report so far. Therefore, I assume that Nigrani committee is still at the ritualistic stage and is not active.

And then I went to another village called Old Tamenglong which falls under the jurisdiction of Tamenglong sub-division. There are 600 households and 590 job cards holders.<sup>32</sup> This village is also headed by the headman who is a hereditary king. He is supported by the village authority members who are legitimately elected by the villagers.

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<sup>31</sup> Discussion with the headman of Duigailong village.

<sup>32</sup> This is micro-data collected from the village itself.

All the important decisions related to the village are taken by the king along with his village authority members during the village assembly meeting. They convinced gram sabha once in three months. If there is any urgent decision is to be made, than the king may convened the gram sabha at any time.

The gram sabha decides the nature and location of works. In this village, labourers are allowed to participate in deciding the nature and location of the projects. The decision is based usually on consensus. The village has also instituted Social Audits committee to check the income and expenditure involve in the project. But they have not instituted Nigrani committee (Vigilance committee).

As usual, agriculture is the main occupation of this village. Many people are engaged in commercial farming in this village. This place is suitable for cultivation of orange, banana. turmeric etc. They have constructed an excellent farm lane under the scheme. This would facilitate the faster flow of goods from the farm to the markets. Based on my personal observation, most of the big farms are owned by the better-off section of the village.

This chapter would be divided into four sub-sections. They are shown below

- **PARTICIPATION**
- **PROJECTS IMPLEMENTATION**
- **WAGE RELATED IMPLEMENTATION ISSUES**
- **WORKING CONDITIONS**

### **PARTICIPATION**

Aware of NREGA		Got a job card	
Yes	No	Yes	No
26(54)	28(54)	54(54)	0(54)



Out of 54 workers interviewed, 26 workers said that they are aware of the scheme and 28 workers reported that they are not aware of the scheme. Therefore, the level of awareness is little more than 40 per cent, which is quite low. Thus, majority of the workers are not aware of the scheme under which they are being provided a job. To make the matter worse even those workers who said they are aware of the scheme are not at all aware of the details provisions and the entitlements. One of the workers told me, "I just heard of the scheme and the amount of wages paid under the scheme in our village and I do not know beyond this". Some are not aware at all about the scheme under which they are employed. They go to work because they have to earn for their living and do not know that they are an integral part of the scheme. The level of awareness is mainly confined to the wage rate as it is their immediate needs; workers have no time to think beyond this.

The level of awareness among the workers would go a long way in effective implementation of the scheme. The responsibility of the implementation lies not only in the hand of implementing authorities but also in the hand of the workers. The scheme is a demand driven scheme and therefore it is the responsibility of the workers to demand employment. They are entitled to minimum 100 days employment during a financial year. The workers have also a right to say how the scheme should be implemented. They have the right to participate in the Gram Sabha and share their view regarding the nature of the projects and location of the projects.

Since the act depends a great deal on public participation, right from deciding on what projects to be undertaken to actually demanding work and finally undertaking social audit, lack of awareness about NREGA and its various provisions is the first stumbling block to effective implementation of the act. . The NREGS guideline as well as the information provided by the Ministry of Rural Development emphasizes the significant of spreading the awareness of NREGS for its effective implementation. The district administration has to disseminate the information. However, the ground reality reflects that little information on NREGA has been trickled down to the workers.

I can sense it that the district administration does not have an adequate resource to spread the awareness. The low level of awareness could also be partly attributed to lack of initiative on the part of the district administration. Some of the crucial informations on NREGA are kept out of public domain. For instance, none of the worker is aware about the unemployment allowances. The guidelines say that if the administration is unable to provide employment within 15 days from the date of application, then the administration should provide an unemployment allowance and this unemployment allowance has to be borne by the state government. I feel that the district administration has not disseminated the unemployment allowances information in order to avoid administrative inconveniences; the state government has not contributed unemployment allowances. It is clearly mentioned in the guideline it is the duty of the state to contribute funds for unemployment allowances. From the past experience, we have seen that the state often failed to contribute its share due to this or that reasons. None of the worker is aware of the grievance redressal mechanism. Even the Sub-Divisional officer who is acting as the Programme officer does not know properly the concept of grievance redressal mechanism.

The Headman and the village authority know very little about the NREGA. They do not know that the scheme is demand-driven and they are at the receiving ends. These all developments belied the demand-driven principle of the scheme.

People's awareness of their entitlements under the act is quite low. For instance, many people do not understand that a job card entitles them to a 100 days employment as a matter of right, or that employment is demand-driven. Most people are treating NREGA as yet another top-down scheme. Therefore major initiatives to spread the awareness of the scheme should be launched in the District. Workers would be able to put continual pressure on the administration only when they come to know their entitlements under the act and would be in a position to put pressure on the administration. I think a certain kind of process, in which workers play a major role, is integral to the effective implementation of the scheme.

## PROJECTS IMPLEMENTATION

Require days to get work		Distance of the worksites from participant's home		Machines used at the worksites		
Min(average)	Max(average)	Min(average)	Max(average)	Yes	No	Missing data
11.6	27.9	1.1	3.2	8(54)	42(54)	4(54)

The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act is a time-bound employment guarantee Act. The guidelines say that the Programme Officer shall be responsible for providing wage employment to the applicants within 15 days of the date of receipt of application. In case of advance applications, employment will be provided from the date that employment has been sought, or within 15 days from the date of applications, whichever is later.<sup>33</sup>

The guidelines also stipulated that those who are allocated works outside 5-Km radius should be given a transport and living allowance equal to 10 per cent of the minimum wage. This guideline has several implications. The first implication is that it would result into localization of the scheme. This is done with the intention that job should be provided around the participants' residence so that the assets created go to benefit the participants. This would also encourage women and old person to participate in the scheme. In case an employment is to be provided at all beyond 5-km, traveling allowance has to be provided so that job seekers would not give up the work. It implies that job should be provided preferably within 5 kilometers from the participants' residence. The distance requirement is in itself an indication of the genuineness of the guarantee as longer distance tends to exclude some section of the people.

Contractors are strictly prohibited under the scheme. Contractors cannot be engaged in any manner in the execution of works (NREGA guidelines, Chapter 5). All works under the scheme have to be done by employing labourers. The purpose of the act

<sup>33</sup> For more details one may have a look at NREGA guidelines, Chapter 4.

is to generate employment for creating durable assets for the community as well as daily wages for the workers to supplement their daily needs. The NREGA emphasize heavily on labour-intensive technology; it is not necessary that all productive works are capital-intensive. Labour intensive works could be very productive in rural areas and therefore involvement of contractors and the use of machines would unnecessary replace the workers.

Based on my survey, it takes around minimum 11 days and maximum 27 days to get an employment under the scheme. Though the administration has able to provide employment within the stipulated in some cases, in most of the cases workers have to wait for more than 15 days to get an employment under the scheme. During the survey, I did not find even a single worker who said that he/she is paid unemployment allowance. Neither they are aware of the unemployment allowance if the administration failed to provide within 15 days from the date of the application. The guidelines clearly mentioned that if a worker who has applied for work under NREGA is not provided employment within 15 days from the date on which work is requested, an unemployment allowance shall be payable by the government (NREGA Guidelines, Chapter 6, 6.4.1). When I tried to find out the reason for not paying the unemployment allowance, the district administration told me that the State government has not contributed the funds for paying unemployment allowance. Therefore, the district administration seems to be helpless.

Based on the experience during my field work, I feel that the administration is not properly equipped to provide the employment in time. I would like to mention that labour intensive-programmes need extensive planning and logistics which consists of the following criteria.<sup>34</sup>

- Projects site have to be investigated and design drawn up and approved.
- Expenditure plans have to be prepared and co-ordinated with those designs

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<sup>34</sup> Mick Moore and Vishal Jadhav, 'The Politics and Bureaucrats of Rural Public Works: Maharashtra's Employment Guaranteed Scheme,' *Journal Of Development Studies*, Vol. 42, No. 48, 1271-1300, November 2006

- A range of complementary inputs need to be assembled and deployed as required. These might include engineering staff to check progress, supervisor to organize the works etc.

If the administration failed to come up with the above mentioned criteria while planning works for NREGA, it would fail to provide employment in the right volumes and location to meet unpredictable local needs. Therefore the administration has to be well prepared to provide employment in time to the workers.

Regarding the distance of the worksites I found that on average workers traveled minimum 1.1 Km and maximum 3.2 Km to go for works. At only one instance, I came across a worker who said that he traveled more than 5 Km. On further investigations whether he is paid unemployment allowance, he said, "I don't know what is unemployment allowance and I did not get any allowance". The distance of the worksites reflect that assets are created around the participants' residence. But this in no way reflects which section of the society benefited the most from the assets created under the scheme.

Even though the guidelines strictly forbid the use of the machines, at some places machines (Bulldozer) have been used by the contractors. The involvement of contractors is a grave violation of the Act. During my field work, I heard that those contractors have a connection with the political parties and those officials involve in the implementation of the scheme. The involvement of contractors violates the basic principle of the demand driven nature of the scheme.

I have also learnt that the Village Panchayat is not capable enough to execute the works and they are not used to supervising workers. Whereas contractors are use to executing works under different schemes and they are more efficient. But this could not be an excuse for involvement of contractors. The involvement of contractors is strictly prohibited under the Act. The spread of awareness among the workers would help to eliminate the role of the contractors in the future.

Usefulness of the projects as rated by the workers				
Very useful	Somewhat useful	Useless	Destructive	No clear answer
31(54)	23(54)	0(54)	0(54)	0(54)

One important purpose of the NREGA is to create durable assets while at the same time providing daily livelihood of the participants. It intends to lay the foundation of the rural economy in the long-run. The success of the scheme would largely depend on the kind of assets created and its usefulness to the local participants. The guidelines emphasized on labour-intensive technologies for water conservation, water harvesting, drought proofing, flood control, all-weather rural connectivity and other works appropriate for the state and various climatic regions of the state.<sup>35</sup> But some of the prominent economists like Suresh Tendulkar have argued that excessive emphasis on labour-intensive works would reduce the effectiveness of the public works programmes in building the productive capacity of the rural economy. The logic behind this argument is that all productivity increases must necessarily be labour displacing, requiring a hike in the materials and expertise content in works. Mihir shah (2007) contend that such a view ignores the immense vista pf possibilities of labour-intensive, productivity raising earthen technologies opened up by approaches such as watershed development. An employment guarantee focused on asset-creating works that are labour intensive at the same time could tackle problems of unemployment, environment regeneration and agricultural growth at one stroke. And this is precisely how NREGA has been conceived.

In the long-run, the scheme should aim to integrate local economy with the mainstream economy. Therefore stand-alone works need to be discouraged. The scheme should be properly integrated with the larger plan of the economy. This would produce a conducive environment which could smoothen the functioning of the local economy.

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<sup>35</sup> NREGA guidelines, Chapter 12, 12.1.3 (a)

The selection of the project is the priority of the village subject to the verification by the technical departments of the district administration. To a great extent, the villagers know which projects would be useful for them and therefore they should be allowed to identify the kind of works to be taken up in the village. In the course of this, they should be provided proper technical guidance. The higher degree of involvement of local people in planning and executing projects would result in a greater alignment of works with genuine local infrastructural needs; and a greater use of local labour resources.<sup>36</sup> The guidelines contain list of projects allowed to be taken up under the scheme. These are technically feasible projects and villagers have to choose their choice of projects from that list unless the state government adds new projects keeping in mind the specificity of the local needs. The NGRES guideline clearly mentioned that Gram Sabha should be convened regularly and workers should be given a chance to participate. The Gram Sabha decides the kind of works to be taken up in the village. There should be a proper channel for communication so that each and every worker can communicate their priorities/demands/needs. Those officials involve in the implementation of the scheme must be able to interpret the need of the participants and to suitably adapt the projects. Last but not least, adequate technical support and proper technical guidance while deciding the nature of the projects is imperative for the success of the programme. In the light of this, it would be appropriate to suggest that Panchayats chiefs and other functionaries involve in the implementation of the scheme should be given appropriate training and required skills. The serious flaw in project selection could have an adverse impact on the productivity and quality of assets created. The productivity would depend among other things on how well projects are prepared, selected and executed. A poorly prepared project will increase its ultimate costs. A badly executed work will unduly reduce the working life of the assets created.<sup>37</sup>

Based on the field visit, I found that the selection of the projects is done mostly by the village headmen along with the village authority members. But I should mention that

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<sup>36</sup> Is locally really better? Comparing EGS and locally-managed rural works programmes in Nasik district, Sanjay Savale, Economic and Political Weekly, December 16, 2006

<sup>37</sup> Rural works programs in India: Costs and Benefits, N.S.S Narayana, Kirit S. Parikh, T.N Srinivasan. Journal of Development Economics 29 (1988) 131-156. North-Holland

none of them have the required technical skills to decide the right kinds of works. This led to the random selection of the projects. To make the matter worse, even the district administration who verified the projects does not have adequate technical support. Therefore it would be appropriate to suggest that village headmen and his members should be given some technical training so that they could identify the actual needs of the village. As reported by the headmen and village authority members, there is no interference in selection of project from the higher authority.<sup>38</sup> In Duigailong village, the selection of the project lies in the hand of village headmen and his members; none of the worker is invited. In Old Tamenglong, some of the workers were invited in deciding the nature of the project. The reason for not inviting the workers as said by the headmen is that decision –taking would become cumbersome if all the workers are invited. Besides, all the members of the village authority are legitimately elected by the villagers and therefore they represent the aspirations of the people. Now, what is important is to what extends this sort of project selection fulfilled the wishes of the people. There is a complaint among the workers that the kind of works taken up under the scheme goes to benefit the better-off section of the society. For instance, better-off section of the society rather prefers rural connectivity whereas poor people prefer kind of works that would promote agriculture as they depend mainly on agriculture. In Old Tamenglong village, rural connectivity dominated the assets portfolio created under NREGA.

Judging by my experience on the field, I feel that there is too much of emphasis on the rural connectivity because of their employment intensity. One crucial factor in deciding the nature of projects is employment generation; rural people still perceived public works programme as employment generation programme rather than a development programme. This led to creation of assets which has high employment intensity overriding productive assets. The result is an overabundance of roads in comparison to other more needed community assets. The excessive concentration on rural connectivity also reflects the pressure from local politicians for projects with large employment potentials and the perception of the people who look at NREGS as

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<sup>38</sup> Both the village headmen told me that higher authority do not interferes in the selection of the project. But the interference of the politicians in choosing the nature of works cannot be rule out



employment generation programme rather than a development programme. The immediate need of the rural people is employment and wages and this factor precede any other factor in deciding the nature of works. Thus, there is a misperception among the villagers regarding the public works programme.

During the field visit, one of the problems that I observed is that population is not concentrated and wide scattered. This pose a major problem-the point is that people living at the periphery within the village are left untouched by the development programme. Most of the worksites are located in those areas where there is maximum concentration of population. This resulted into uneven distribution of benefits of the scheme. This led to the cumulative expansion in the favour region at the expense of the other regions. Based on the field visit, this is happening in both the villages. Therefore, the administration should take an utmost care so that the benefits of the programme reach those people.

For an effective implementation of NREGA, there has to be genuine democracy at the local level. I feel that these are not very democratic. They largely involved local headmen and village authority members to take the decision. This obviously resulted into creation of assets that favour the better-off section of the society.

It has been pointed out repeatedly that selection of works should be done in such a way that it harmonizes with the district development plan. Stand-alone works need to be discouraged. The main tasks of the NREGA should be-

- To build good quality local infrastructure that will last
- Converting an abundant resource- underemployed labour into useful infrastructure such as irrigation, roads etc.

None of the worker reported that the works done under NREGA is useless or destructive. All of them agree that it is useful. One of the workers told me during the survey, "Now I don't have to walk a long distance to fetch water. With the construction of the water tank near my house I am able to devote my time for some other purpose". I

feel that the labourers feel the usefulness of the works done under the NREGA. Of course, there are some workers who complained that the assets created under the NREGA go to benefit better-off section of the society. One of the labourers said, “Local elite are using the funds to pursue their interest”. For instance in Duigailong village, funds had been utilized to improve the road that connects with the main road with the village. Some workers said that this would largely benefit the richer section of the society. But those who are interested in improving the road said, “Rural connectivity would give a big push to the rural economy. It would generate an additional employment”. Poor people are more interested in works related to agriculture. One of the workers who had participated in the construction of canal said,<sup>39</sup> “It improves our agriculture and increase productivity”.

Due to erratic flow of funds, some of the works undertaking under the scheme have left incomplete. If funds are not being allotted again for those incomplete works, then the assets would be washed off in the monsoon.

The guidelines mentioned that due care should be taken to benefit the weaker section of the society while formulating the works under the scheme. Land development works should begin with the land of small and marginal farmers. Based on my field work, I feel that the reverse is taking place. Until and unless poor people are given proper voice, this would continue to exist.

### WAGE RELATED IMPLEMENTATION ISSUES

Aware of the wage rate			Wages paid lower than the official norm			Complain of cheating in the payment of wages		
Yes	No	Missing data	Yes	No	Missing data	Yes	No	Missing data
27(54)	16(54)	11(54)	1(54)	38(54)	15(54)	2(54)	42(54)	10(54)

<sup>39</sup> Interview with the worker

Every person working under the scheme shall be entitled to wages at the minimum wage rate fixed by the state government for agricultural labourers under the Minimum Wages Act, 1948, unless the wages have been notified by the Central Government. Labourers shall not be paid less than the above-mentioned wage rate under any circumstances (NREGA guidelines, Chapter). The wage rate in India differs from state to state. However, in no case it should be less than Rs. 60. In some states of India, the minimum wage rate is less than Rs. 60. In Manipur, it is RS. 71.40. However the district administration told me that they have recently increased the wage rate to Rs. 81.80 for NREGA workers.<sup>40</sup>

Out of 54 workers, 38 workers said that they are being paid according to the official wage rate. Some of them do not have a clear answer, as some payment had paid long time back. In some cases, somebody collected the wages for the workers. Out of 54 workers, only one of them said that he is paid lower than the official norms. Based on my field works, I could say that there is no corruption regarding the payment of wages. If there is any, then it is negligible. The total amount of wages for the workers is deposited into the account of the headman and the village authority members. There is a mutual consensus among the workers in the village that two rupees each will be deducted from each and every workers wage and this amount is given to a person who go to the district headquarter to collect the wages as an expenditure. The workers in the village mutually agree to this.

Monitoring and vigilance committee has been constituted both at the district and village level to increase the transparency and make corruption free in the implementation of the scheme. At the district level, member of the parliament from that district is the chairman and Deputy Commissioner is the secretary. There is no evidence of report submitted at the district level which implies that the committee is not that active. The village has formed a vigilance committee consisting of two members and two audit members. They conduct social audit; how the fund has been utilized and how it can be

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<sup>40</sup> For detail regarding wage rate one may have a look at the NREGA website

utilized more productively. They look into the amount of funds sanctioned in the village. They look into the wage payment; whether the workers are paid according to the official norm. The Nigrani (Vigilance) committee consists of two members. This committee has to certify that the scheme is doing well and funds are utilized for the purpose. So far, the Nigrani committee has not submitted any report. The Nigrani committee is not active.

Delays in wage payment			Unhappy with the frequency of payment of wages			Notice any kind of corruption in the implementation of the project		
Yes	No	Missing data	Yes	No	Missing data	Yes	No	Missing data
51(54)	0(54)	3(54)	52(54)	0(54)	2(54)	1(54)	40(54)	1(54)

It is essential to ensure that wages are paid on time. Workers are entitled to being paid on a weekly basis, and in any case within a fortnight of the date on which work was done (NREGA, Section 3(3)). In the event of any delay in wage payments, workers are entitled to compensation as per the provision of the Payment of wages Act, 1936 (NREGA, Schedule II, Section 30). Compensation shall be borne by the State government.

The main problem is the delay in the payment of wages. All the workers that I interviewed expressed unhappiness with the frequency of wage payment. The delay in the payment of wages in time has led to lost of interest among the workers in the scheme. During my survey, I found that workers have not been paid for the last two to three month. This is a great injustice to the workers. "Had I known that payments would be delayed so much, I would have not participated in the scheme and rather invested my

time in some other activities”.<sup>41</sup> Most of the people in the village are living from hand to mouth. They have no other source of income rather than depending on their daily work to get their food. Delay in payments of wages therefore caused lot of inconveniences for the workers. Delay in the payment of wages also led to the lost of interest in the scheme among some of the workers. One of the laborers told me, “I don’t know whether I will ever get the due amount.” They are helpless and there is no one to turn for help. In one way they are being cheated by the administration who has been saying that getting employment is a legal right under the act and payment will be made on time. Therefore timely payments of wages should be ensured by the administration. Otherwise, it causes lot of inconveniences to the workers and this would lead to the lukewarm attitude among the workers regarding the scheme.

The district administration expressed its helplessness as the fund is routed from the Union to the State and not directly to the district administration. This tedious flow of funds adds to immense delay in reaching the fund to the nodal point of utilization. Moreover, there is no guarantee that the State would stick to the central guidelines and may utilize the funds for other purpose. Therefore, costs and time both increased when funds flow through unnecessary intermediate level. The Second Administrative reforms committee<sup>42</sup> has pointed out that there is a substantial delay in receipt of funds at utilization level when centrally sponsored schemes are routed thorough state governments. In a demand driven scheme like NREGS, timely availability of funds is indispensable for the smooth implementation of the scheme. Instead of routing funds to the state, the funds should be directly routed to the district administration which is closer to the point of utilization and is also charged with the implementation of the scheme. Assigning responsibility without adequate funds is meaningless and the whole point of demand-driven concept will get disappeared.

During my field work I heard that though the bank has released the money to pay the workers, the released money was lying in the account of someone to earn interest.

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<sup>41</sup> Interview with worker

<sup>42</sup> Second Administrative commission Report: Unlocking human capital. Entitlements and Governance- a case study

This could be a case where contractors are involved in the implementation of the scheme. This has become a common practice in Manipur and this has hampered the timely implementation of the scheme.

Another reason for delay in the payment of wages was the delay in getting the works measured by the engineering department of the district administration. There is severe shortage of technical staff and due to shortage of funds the district administration is not able to recruit enough technical personnel. The engineering department is overburdened with the responsibilities. Funds are being sanctioned only after the projects are being examined by the technical department. Even within the engineering department there is a hierarchical system. It is the duty of those engineers who are at the lower level to go the field and do the estimations of works. Once the estimation is done, it is submitted for approval by the higher level engineers. Sometime the senior engineer may not be around in the office due to some simple reason which led to the additional delay in the execution of works and payment of wages. It is also said that the engineering department is overburdened with responsibilities.

Apart from the above reasons, wage payments were also delayed due to some specific reason pertaining to that place. The administration has to make an elaborative arrangement for bringing the money from the state capital to the district headquarter due to security reason. This also adds to the delay in the payment of wages. Another big problem is that there is only one bank (United Bank of India) for the whole district. There is always dearth of cash in the bank and it takes more than the normal time to clear cheque. The remote nature of the place also adds to the additional delay in the disbursement of wages. Tamenglong has a very poor transport and communication infrastructure. It is said that it takes around 4-5 days for those villages lying at the periphery to come over to the district headquarter for collecting the fund and distribute it to the workers.

## WORKING CONDITIONS

Harassment at worksites		Drinking water at the worksites		Crèche at the worksites		First aid		Shade for children	
Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
0(53)	53(53)	54(54)	0(54)	0(54)	54(54)	24(54)	30(54)	21(54)	33(54)

The above table depicts the working culture at the NREGA worksites. The NREGA guideline has a details provision for creating conducive atmosphere at the worksites. The guideline clearly stipulated that the above mentioned facilities should be made available at the worksites and the centre government will bear the expenses for providing the above facilities at the worksites. Facilities like crèche, shade for children at the worksites is to ensure women participation in the scheme.

In none of the cases, I came across any kinds of harassment at the worksites. However, some of the important facilities like crèche, shade for children are not there at the worksites. This is a failure on the part of the administration. Though some women workers brought their children at the work place, children were left in the open as there was no crèche. The NREGA clearly states that in the event where there are atleast five children under the age of six years at the worksite, one of the female workers should be deputed to look after them and she should be paid the same wage as other NREGA workers.<sup>43</sup> Yet at none of the worksite there is crèche constructed. This would dissuade the women workers from participating in the scheme. Women with older children might have no problem but women with young children would have a great problem.

Some women were unable to join the NREGA worksites as they have to take care of their children. In Duigailong village one of the young women told me, "I was not able to participate because there is no one to take care of children at home and my husband is busy with some other works". Another woman said, "I am used to working without crèche and this is not a big problem". But I am pretty sure that if facilities like crèche are

<sup>43</sup> NREGA 2005, schedule II, section 28

provided at the worksites more women would turn up for work and this would enable them to claim their entitlements under the scheme.

At some places, the workers arranged a shade by themselves for taking rest during the break. Fortunately, the weather is not that harsh in Tamenglong. In Tamenglong district, workers are used to working without the above mentioned facilities at the worksites before the act came into being. All the workers reported that water for drinking was available at the worksites and this was arranged by the workers themselves. The village headmen and the village authority members said that they did not receive funds for providing above-mentioned facilities at the worksites. The NREGA guideline has a provision for providing those facilities at the worksites. Based on my field work, I can say with certainty that if facilities like drinking water, first aid are made available at the worksites, the productivity of the workers would certainly go up.

## **CONCLUSION**

The implementation of the scheme has suffered from several aspects. One of the aspects is the excessive delay in the payment of wages. The excessive delayed in the payment of wages are creating lot of inconveniences among the workers. Most of the worksites facilities provided under the scheme are not there at the worksites. If those facilities are made available, I am pretty sure that the productivity of the workers would certainly go up. There is an urgent need to provide adequate technical support to identify the right kinds of projects. This would enhance the durability and productivity of the projects. Workers should be allowed to present their view. This might result into greater alignment of the projects with the genuine local needs. The level of awareness regarding NREGA seems to be low and confine to wage rate. The spread of awareness regarding NREGA would go a long way in effective implementation of the Act.



**CHAPTER SIX**

**CONCLUSION**

## CONCLUSION

The experiences of the past anti-poverty programmes have not been satisfactory. They have failed on many aspects. Some of the earliest programmes like Community Development programmes failed to make a major impact. Though it was a very ambitious plan, due to resource constraints and wide varieties of activities to be covered, it failed to make a major impact.

The past anti-poverty programmes showed that it tends to exclude those people who need the most. One factor is the delay in the payment of wages. In the absence of regular payment of wages, poor people started looking for some other options instead of participating in the programmes. Even among the poor, who have more economic power would tend to participate in the scheme as they can wait for the payment of wages.

The past anti-poverty programmes have failed to provide employment in the long-term. Most of the wage-employment programmes viewed employment generation as an end in itself rather than creating an employment on sustainable basis. This resulted into creation of inferior quality assets.

Some of the programmes failed to consider the diversity of the country. They were formulated without taking into account the diversity of the country. It happened that some programmes were successful at one place but it simply failed to perform in some other places. The doctrine of "one-size-fits-all" could not be applied in a big country like India. Therefore there should be enough flexibility to accommodate local needs and diversity.

The experienced of past anti-poverty programmes have also reflected that voices of the poor were largely ignored and suppressed. In some cases, richer group of the society were using the programmes to promote their own interest. Bureaucratic and other procedure caused excessive delays in the implementation of the scheme. The implementation of the scheme from distant land failed to identify the immediate local needs.

under the scheme), the Act implicitly implies that the benefits of the scheme should favour weaker section of the society.

The kinds of works undertaken are mostly related to rural connectivity and agriculture. I feel that with proper technical guidance the productivity of the assets could be increased.

Thus turning back to past anti-poverty programmes and looking at the most recent wage employment programmes i.e. NREGA I feel that the government of India has long way to go to fulfill the aspiration of the rural poor. The Second Administrative report mentioned that on an average 30 days employment were provided under the scheme. During my field work, I found that on an average 30-40 days employment are being provided under NREGA. The involvements of Contractors were common in the past programmes. So also contractors are involved in NREGA. But at the end I should not underestimate the potential of NREGA. And I should say that NREGA has so many inbuilt mechanisms which can cure the sickness of the past anti-poverty programmes.

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