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Examining the Effectiveness of MGNREGA in Supporting the Livelihoods of People in Remote Areas of Rambrai C&RD Block, Meghalaya

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ABSTRACT: This study specifically investigates the impact of MGNREGA as a safety net in supporting the Livelihoods of People in Remote Areas Rambrai Community and Rural Development Block, West Khasi Hills District, Meghalaya. The study is based on quantitative research method and draws primary data from MGNREGA job cardholders across 10 villages using stratified random sampling, to make sure that people from different villages were fairly represented. The data were collected through structured questionnaires and analyzed using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) software through descriptive and inferential statistics such as percentages, mean, standard deviation, and factor analysis. The findings indicate that MGNREGA plays a significant role in supporting rural livelihoods by employing during non-farming seasons, reducing financial stress, and improving access to essential services like food, education, and healthcare. The scheme also contributed to reducing seasonal migration and dependency on informal credit. Nevertheless, challenges like wage delays, limited awareness, and inadequate infrastructure persist. The study concludes that while MGNREGA has had a meaningful effect on rural development in the Rambrai Block, its long-term success depends on improved implementation, transparency, and enhanced community engagement. Overall, MGNREGA has helped people in rural areas, with most of the respondents expressing strong approval and acknowledging that it has helped many individuals in the village.

KEYWORDS: MGNREGA, financial supports, livelihood opportunities, socio-economic security, women employment and standard of living.

INTRODUCTION

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) was passed on 23`nd August 2005 and launched on 2nd February 2006, not merely as a scheme, but as legislation enacted by parliament, with the main goal of eliminating extreme poverty and hunger, along with promoting gender equality and empowering women in rural areas. The scheme operates on a demand-driven basis; labour budgets are formulated according to the demand for work, which subsequently determines the allocation of funds. This feature of being demand-driven differentiates MGNREGA from previous rural development programs. MGNREGA is considered a gender-sensitive initiative, aiming for one-third of participants to be women, providing day care facilities at work sites, and ensuring equal wages for men and women (Farooqi & Saleem, 2015). This Act is a key initiative introduced by the Indian Government in 2005, ensuring a legal entitlement to 100 days of work for rural households in the country. The objective of the scheme is to foster inclusive growth and alleviate poverty by offering employment options to individuals residing in rural regions. MGNREGA is recognized as one of the world's largest employment generation programs, emphasizing asset creation, sustainable development, and social safety nets. The initiative has successfully provided job opportunities to millions of rural families and has played a significant role in enhancing the quality of life for countless individuals. MGNREGA serves as a vital instrument for poverty alleviation and rural advancement in India, possessing the capacity to make a considerable impact on the nation's agenda for inclusive growth and development (Sharma et al., 2023).

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MNREGA), enacted on August 25, 2005, is a key Indian legislation that guarantees one hundred days of employment annually to adult members of rural households willing to perform unskilled manual work for the statutory minimum wage. The Ministry of Rural Development (MRD) oversees the implementation of this scheme with state governments. Designed to enhance the purchasing power of those below the poverty line in rural areas, it aims to reduce economic disparity. A minimum of one-third of the employees should be women. Rural households submit their details along with photos to the Gram Panchayat for registration, receiving a job card that documents the enrolled member's information. This act provides a social safety net for vulnerable groups and promotes the sustainable development of the agricultural economy by addressing chronic poverty issues like drought and soil erosion. Effective execution of MNREGA can significantly change poverty dynamics and promote inclusive growth by enhancing transparency and supporting grassroots democracy (Badodiya et al., 2011).

BACKGROUND OF THE RESEARCH AREA

Rambrai is a settlement situated in the Nongstoin subdivision of the West Khasi Hills district in Meghalaya, India. It is located approximately 23 kilometres from the district headquarters in Nongstoin, with a population of 36,148 according to the 2011 Census. The nearest town for significant economic transactions is Nongstoin, and the main means of transport is by road. While detailed historical documentation on the founding of Rambrai village is lacking, it has been home to indigenous Khasi communities for many generations. The town operates under the traditional Khasi administrative structure known as the Rambrai Syiemship, which has long overseen local matters (*Rambrai Village in Nongstoin Taluka, West Khasi Hills, Meghalaya*, n.d.). The majority of residents in Rambrai rely on agriculture and livestock for their income. Farming serves as the primary occupation, largely due to the limited availability of alternative employment options. A notable issue in the region is the high dropout rate, with around 40% of the population having halted their education at some point in school or college. Due to restricted access to jobs, vocational training, and infrastructure, many locals depend on agriculture and activities related to the forest for their sustenance (*Rambrai Village*, n.d.). The Rambrai Community & Rural Development (C&RD) Block was recently established by the Government of Meghalaya. Chief Minister Conrad K. Sangma officially inaugurated it on November 9, 2022.

Rambrai Block, was splitting from the Nongstoin C&RD Block, covers an area of 584.628 square kilometres and includes 109 villages, with a total population of 36,148. The main communities living in this region are the Khasi and Garo. The formation of this new block aims to enhance governance and public service accessibility for the residents. It facilitates easier access to rural development initiatives such as MGNREGA, which can aid in generating livelihoods, improving infrastructure, and alleviating poverty. Despite ongoing issues such as inadequate road conditions and limited job prospects, the establishment of the Rambrai Block represents a significant advancement toward improved governance, rural empowerment, and sustainable development in the area (*Meghalaya C&RD Block in Rambrai, Highland Post*, 2022).

Objectives

1. To assess the impact of MGNREGA in supporting the livelihoods of people in remote areas.
2. To analyze the pros and cons of MGNREGA in terms of socio-economic services.

Relevance of the study

This study holds significant relevance as it focuses on evaluating the implementation and impact of MGNREGA in Supporting the Livelihoods of People in remote tribal region, Rambrai C&RD Block, West Khasi Hills District, Meghalaya, where rural poverty, unemployment, and lack of livelihood opportunities are still major concerns. While numerous studies have been conducted across India to assess MGNREGA, very few have focused on North-East India, and even fewer have addressed the lived experiences of people in newly formed administrative blocks like Rambrai. In this region, many households depend on seasonal farming, daily wage labor, or forest-based activities for survival. Job opportunities are scarce, and access to formal employment is extremely limited. By analyzing how MGNREGA is functioning in such a context, this study helps uncover whether the scheme is meeting its core objectives of generating employment, reducing poverty, and supporting rural development. The research provides valuable insights based on primary data collected directly from job cardholders. It sheds light on the extent to which MGNREGA is supporting families, particularly women and marginalized groups, and whether it is being implemented fairly and effectively. The findings are not only useful for policymakers and local authorities but also contribute to academic research by filling a knowledge gap in an under-researched geographical area. Ultimately, this study is relevant because it offers evidence-based understanding of MGNREGA’s strengths and weaknesses in a tribal and rural setting, and suggests ways to improve its delivery and sustained effects on reducing poverty and ensuring livelihood security in Meghalaya and its surrounding areas.

Origin of MGNREGA

Narayanan, (2020) noted that MGNREGA was not entirely new but evolved from earlier schemes like Maharashtra’s Employment Guarantee Scheme (EGS) launched in 1972, which itself was built on ideas expressed in the Third Five-Year Plan (1961–66) to provide 100 days of employment. The Act, notified in 2005 and implemented in phases from February 2006 to April 2008, merged existing schemes such as the Jawahar Gram Samridhi Yojana (JGSY), Employment Assurance Scheme (EAS), and Sampoorna Grameen Rojgar Yojana (SGRY), which lacked a statutory guarantee. Narayanan highlighted that MGNREGA was distinct for its legal guarantee of employment, decentralised planning, and demand-driven structure. It was also influenced by international models like Argentina’s “Trabajar II” program, which employed economic downturns. The Act aimed not only to offer employment but also to create durable assets and empower rural communities. It strengthened grassroots institutions like the Gram Sabha and Panchayati Raj Institutions, and introduced accountability mechanisms such as social audits and real-time data monitoring. Narayanan emphasized that MGNREGA's design was shaped by past administrative experiences, global best practices, and political mobilisation demanding greater social protection in rural India.

Mukherjee & Sinha (2011) explain that the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) was introduced in 2005 to address poverty and unemployment in rural India. They trace its roots to earlier employment schemes like the 1978 Maharashtra Employment Guarantee Scheme and international examples such as the 1817 Poor Law in Britain and the New Deal in the United States. According to them, the Indian rural labour market suffers from low wages and underemployment. MGNREGA was designed to provide at least 100 days of guaranteed wage employment each year to rural households, giving workers income security and more bargaining power.

Impact of MGNREGA in Various Parts of India

The researcher explores the effects of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), a wage employment initiative launched by the Indian Government, on rural poverty and its underlying mechanisms. The study aims to show that MGNREGA can reduce poverty by improving living standards and income. The information is derived from primary data gathered from 120 participants across five villages in the Jahrikhal Block of Pauri Garhwal district, Uttarakhand, employing purposeful random sampling. The findings suggest that MGNREGA plays a vital role in alleviating poverty among the rural poor while enhancing community and economic resources through job creation and asset development. Consequently, MGNREGA has greatly enhanced rural livelihoods by offering consistent wage payments and job opportunities (Santosh et al., 2017). However, it is noted that in the affluent District of Haryana, MGNREGA has not been successful in preventing migration from more developed areas, as the wage rates offered elsewhere are more attractive. The findings also suggested that farmers with larger landholdings and those engaged in animal husbandry typically lack interest in taking part in MGNREGA projects (Ahuja et al., 2011).

Present an in-depth evaluation of MGNREGA's role as a transformative tool in rural India, emphasizing its impact on employment generation and household welfare. They highlight that although only a fraction of rural households obtains the full 100 days of guaranteed work, participation in the program significantly reduces reliance on moneylenders and promotes financial inclusion through increased access to formal banking. The authors also note that MGNREGA has empowered women by providing them with their first opportunity to earn a cash income, thereby enhancing their autonomy and decision-making power within households. Furthermore, the program has contributed to improved educational outcomes for children in participant households, indicating its multifaceted role in poverty alleviation beyond income support (Desai et al., 2015).

According to Kant (2021) the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) represents a transformative shift in India's rural development strategy from traditional welfare schemes to a legally enforceable right to employment. He emphasizes that the Act guarantees 100 days of wage employment annually to rural households and is grounded in the principles of transparency, accountability, and inclusivity. Drawing from the historical evolution of rural employment programs, Kant traces how earlier schemes such as the Rural Manpower Programme, Employment Assurance Scheme (EAS), and Sampoorna Grameen Rozgar Yojana (SGRY) served as precursors, but lacked the legal strength and decentralized structure that MGNREGA introduced. He highlights the Act's significant role in promoting gender equity by mandating that at least one-third of all beneficiaries be women, which has led to increased female participation and socio-economic empowerment in states like Kerala and Himachal Pradesh. Kant further underscores the importance of durable asset creation under the scheme, noting its contribution to water conservation, land development, and rural infrastructure. The introduction of technological tools such as Aadhaar-linked wage payments and the Geo MGNREGA platform has been praised for enhancing transparency, reducing corruption, and improving the monitoring of public assets. Despite these achievements, Kant acknowledges persistent challenges in implementation, including wage payment delays, low levels of awareness, misuse of contractors and machinery, and limited institutional capacity at the panchayat level. He concludes that while MGNREGA has made measurable contributions to livelihood security, sustainable development, and grassroots empowerment, continuous evaluation, local adaptation, and policy reform are essential for the scheme to reach its full potential.

Utilizing secondary data, the analysis emphasizes the program's achievements in offering rural employment, especially in states such as Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal, and enhancing livelihood security through guaranteed legal work and wage payments. The initiative is commended as a transformative measure dubbed the "foundation of new rural India," while also acknowledging issues such as delays in wage payments, unequal access to opportunities, insufficient awareness among marginalized communities, and inadequate facilities at work sites. The report advocates for reforms, including a standardized national wage, longer workdays, and improved digital implementation to promote inclusive rural development (Taufique et al., 2023).

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed quantitative research method to understand the impact of MGNREGA in promoting rural employment and reduced poverty in the village. This method helped in collecting and analyzing numerical data to find out the overall effectiveness of the scheme.

Research Design

This study used a descriptive research design, it focused only on job cardholders under MGNREGA, and the data was collected using a structured questionnaires, which helped to gather information in a proper and organized way. The responses were later analyzed using SPSS to find out common patterns or trends in how the scheme is being used.

Sampling Technique

In this study, the researchers used probability sampling method, specifically stratified random sampling, to make sure that people from different villages were fairly represented. The villages were grouped (stratified) based on their population size, so that the number of people selected from each village matched the size of its population.

Sample Size

The researcher selected 10 villages from the block, determining the number of respondents from each village based on its population, with a target of 100 respondents in total.

Tools of data collection

The questionnaire was designed using a 5-point Likert scale, where the response options were coded as: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, and 5 = Strongly Agree. In this study, the questionnaire consisted of closed-ended questions, where participants had to choose from given options.

Technique of data analysis

For data analysis, the study utilized the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software. The statistical methods applied included basic statistical techniques and descriptive statistics, such as percentage, mean, median, standard deviation, factor analysis.

Ethical consideration

In this study, the researchers make sure to do everything in a fair and respectful way. During the data collection, the researcher explained clearly to each respondents about the purpose of study before asking any questions. Informed consent was taken, and participants were told that joining the study was their choice. There was also information that they could skip any question or stop the interaction at any time.

Data Analysis

The researcher involved 100 respondents in total. Descriptive statistics were employed to analyzed their demographic attributes. The factors examined include age, marital status and household size. Frequency distributions and percentages were utilized to illustrate the data. The findings are displayed in the subsequent tables and charts.

Table 1 - Age Group of Respondents

Age group (Years)	Frequency (n)	Percent (%)
18-29	48	48.0
30-39	25	25.0
40-49	22	22.0
50-59	2	2.0
60+	3	3.0
Total	100	100.0

Table 1 displays the information regarding the age groups of the respondents. The study found that most individuals are either young or middle-aged, with very few older adults who have participated in the scheme. The largest group is those aged 18 to 29, making up 48% of the total. People in their 30sto 40s are also well represented, with 25% aged 30 to 39 and 22% aged 40 to 49. However, older individuals are underrepresented, with only 2% aged 50 to 59 and just 3% aged 60 or above.

Table 2 - Marital Status

Marital Status	Frequency (n)	Percent (%)
Married	65	65.0
Unmarried	30	30.0
Widow	5	5.0
Total	100	100.0

Table 2 illustrates the data provided in the table concerning the marital status of the surveyed. The study showed that most of the people in the sample are married, making up 65% of the total. This means that the majority of participants are in a married relationship. About 30% of the people are unmarried, and the smallest group is widows, comprising just 5.0% of the sample.

Table 3 - Household size

Household size	Frequency (n)	Percent (%)
1-4	21	21.0
4-8	48	48.0
9-12	31	31.0
Total	100	100.0

Table 3 illustrates the data concerning the household size of the surveyed. The study shows that most of the participants in the study live in homes where at least four people live together. The most common household size is between 4 to 8 people, making up 48% of the group. This means almost half of the participants live in medium to large families. Households with 9 to 12 people are also common, making up 31% of the group, which suggests many live in large or extended families. Smaller households with 1 to 4 people are the least common, with only 21% of the participants.

Impact of MGNREGA on Livelihoods

For this objective, a total of twenty items under the impact of MGNREGA were analysed through Principal Component Analysis (PCA) and Varimax rotation method to extract the factors. The test extracted four components. For the inclusion of the items for consideration, factor loading benchmark was set at 0.50. The loadings above the threshold value were considered for further analysis. The result of the rotated component matrix is presented in the Table 4.

Table 4 - KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		0.859
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	1323.741
	Df	190
	Sig.	0.001

Table 4 shows that the KMO value is 0.859, which indicates that the sample size is adequate for conducting factor analysis, and the p-value is 0.001 from Bartlett's Test of Sphericity suggests that there is sufficient common variance among the speed-related variables. Both the high KMO value (0.859) and the statistically significant result of Bartlett's Test ($p < 0.001$) strongly confirm that the data is suitable for factor extraction. KMO is a test that checks whether the sample size is good enough for factor analysis. According to Pallant (2011) KMO, Bartlett's Test of Sphericity, and Rotated Component Matrix tables between .8 to .9 are considered meritorious.

Table 5 - Total Variance Explained

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	9.298	46.491	46.491	9.298	46.491	46.491	4.154	20.771	20.771
2	1.497	7.484	53.974	1.497	7.484	53.974	3.688	18.439	39.210
3	1.203	6.014	59.988	1.203	6.014	59.988	3.218	16.090	55.300
4	1.163	5.814	65.802	1.163	5.814	65.802	2.100	10.501	65.802
5	.958	4.791	70.593						
6	.869	4.345	74.938						

7	.814	4.069	79.007						
8	.685	3.426	82.433						
9	.581	2.905	85.338						
10	.470	2.352	87.690						
11	.460	2.300	89.990						
12	.431	2.155	92.145						
13	.329	1.646	93.791						
14	.273	1.365	95.156						
15	.262	1.311	96.467						
16	.223	1.115	97.582						
17	.140	.699	98.281						
18	.129	.646	98.926						
19	.125	.624	99.550						
20	.090	.450	100.000						

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Table 5 demonstrates the eigenvalues and total variance explained, before extracting, there were 20 linear components placed for analysis, after the extraction and rotation, four major components were extracted within the data set for eigenvalue>1. The four components extracted accounted for a combined of 65.80% of the total variance. As per the guidelines the total variance extracted should be at least 50%. The results shows 65.80% common variance shared by 20 variables accounted for four components. The first component explained 20.77% of total variance with eigenvalue of 9.298. The second component explained 18.43% of total variance with eigenvalue of 1.497. The third component explained 16.09% of total variance with eigenvalue of 1.203 and the final component with 10.50% of total variance with eighenvalue of 1.163.

Table 6 – Summary for Factors Related to Impact of MGNREGA on Livelihoods

Variables	**Communalites Extraction**	**Mean**	**SD**	**Factor loading**
Livelihood Improvement				
MGNREGA is helping to access basic needs	0.828	3.25	1.05	0.827
The wages earned through MGNREGA is reducing my financial crisis.	0.769	3.44	0.902	0.822
Participation in MGNREGA has enhanced the accessibility to buy essential goods.	0.619	3.46	0.914	0.65
MGNREGA wages support us to pay the school fees of our children.	0.642	3.59	1.064	0.63
My household's economic condition has improved after joining MGNREGA.	0.68	3.56	0.913	0.579
Enhancing Financial Stability				
MGNREGA helps us to depend less on agriculture as our only source of income.	0.738	3.34	1.156	0.817
MGNREGA helps us to stay in our place instead of migrating to search for a job	0.735	3.35	1.14	0.696
MGNREGA has made my family's finances more stable.	0.675	3.07	1.094	0.694
MGNREGA pays for what we need when times are tough.	0.612	3.34	0.986	0.637

The scheme has helped in reducing our dependence on money lenders.	0.647	3.18	1.15	0.613
MGNREGA wages are paid on time and help manage household finances well.	0.709	3.42	0.955	0.554
Due to MGNREGA, we can save some money regularly.	0.677	2.97	1.15	0.543
Social Security				
MGNREGA has reduced income inequality in the village.	0.746	3.19	0.8	0.784
MGNREGA has helped improve my household income.	0.746	3.36	0.904	0.739
MGNREGA has helped improve the financial situation for women.	0.662	3.56	0.891	0.668
MGNREGA has improved our housing conditions (e.g., roof, floor, walls).	0.581	3.66	0.945	0.648
Building Resilience and improving living standards				
We can afford better healthcare because of the MGNREGA income.	0.459	3.52	3.163	0.671
Our standard of living has improved due to MGNREGA.	0.494	3.75	0.88	0.629
The income from MGNREGA is a dependable source during emergencies.	0.636	3.48	0.989	0.551
MGNREGA income supports us during natural calamities or crop failure.	0.547	3.57	0.934	0.548

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.
a. Rotation converged in 7 iterations.

The component 1 is labelled as ‘livelihood improvement’ contains 5 items with good loading factor such as MGNREGA helps to access basic needs (.827), reducing financial crisis (0.822), accessibility to buy essential goods (.650), it helps to pay the school fees (.630) and household economic condition has improved (.579). The component 2 is labelled as ‘enhancing financial stability’ there are 7 items loaded, those are; MGNREGA helps us to dependent less on agriculture as our only source of income (.817), it helps to reduce migration (.696), it made the family’s finance more stable (.694), source of support during the tough times (.637), reduce dependence on money lenders (.613), wages paid on time (.554) and MGNREGA helps to save money regularly (.543). The component 3 is labelled as ‘social security’ there are 4 items loaded properly in this component, those are; MGNREGA reduced income inequality in the village (.784), it improves household income (.739), improve financial situation of women (.668) and improve the housing conditions (.648). Additionally, the 4 component is labelled as ‘building resilience and improving living standards’ with 4 items loaded, MGNREGA helps people to afford better healthcare (.671), standard of living is improving (.629), it is a dependable source during emergencies (.551) and MGNREGA income supports during natural calamities or crop failure (.548).

Pros and Cons of MGNREGA

The researchers collected data from 100 MGNREGA job card holders using five-point Likert scale structured questionnaires. The data were analyzed using SPSS descriptive frequencies and are presented in Table 7 below.

Table 7: Pros and Cons of MGNREGA	SD	D	N	A	SA
Pros					
MGNREGA helps in women empowerment	2	8	20	60	10
It enhances the livelihoods of people	0	0	15	55	30

It reduces poverty	5	5	30	50	10
MGNREGA helps provide access to drinking water in the village.	5	10	4	36	45
MGNREGA is eliminating open defecation and promoting sanitation	0	3	2	49	46
MGNREGA is improving road connectivity in rural areas.	0	1	6	47	46
MGNREGA is enhancing farming practices	4	22	9	54	11
It promotes financial security for people	0	4	30	57	9
MGNREGA is contributing to environmental protection	2	9	15	56	18
MGNREGA is enhancing the rural infrastructure in the village.	1	8	10	48	33
It improves the power supply	10	28	39	15	8
It uplifts marginalized sections					
It improves in Community engagement and inclusivity	0	0	21	59	20
Cons					
Wages under MGNREGA are minimal compared to other labor wages	0	4	27	33	36
The quality of work executed under MGNREGA is often unsatisfactory.	5	48	21	14	12
Late payment of wages under MGNREGA	2	28	12	47	11
There is a lack of proper monitoring and follow-up to ensure the effectiveness of MGNREGA activities.	5	47	13	28	7
Corruption and misuse of funds are common in the MGNREGA scheme.	7	39	13	22	19
The convergence of MGNREGA with other schemes creates significant confusion and misunderstanding.	4	38	20	27	11
MGNREGA-related expenditure and work progress is not shared properly in the village.	6	37	19	20	18
MGNREGA fails to ensure long-term livelihood sustainability.	5	14	42	27	12
The implementation of MGNREGA is complicated by the inefficiency of village officials (Chairman, Secretary, etc.).	3	16	9	55	17
The program often creates social divisions and misunderstandings among community members.	9	40	17	24	10
There is a lack of safety measures during the construction of MGNREGA infrastructure (roads, footpaths, ponds, check dams, etc.).	2	33	20	32	13

From the table above we observed the data related to pros and cons of MGNREGA in terms of socio-economic of people in rural areas. The Positive Perceptions of MGNREGA's are *Roads connectivity*, a significant majority of respondents agree or strongly agree that MGNREGA is improving road connectivity (93% combined) and eliminating open defecation/improving sanitation (95% combined). *Enhances the livelihood of people 85%* of the people agreed and strongly agreed that MGNREGA helps to improve their livelihood which includes the illiterate people. *Access to drinking Water*, 81% of respondents believe MGNREGA helps in accessing drinking water, related to *rural infrastructure*, the scheme is widely seen as enhancing infrastructure (81% combined). Related to *Community Engagement and Environmental Protection*, there is strong agreement that MGNREGA improves community engagement (79% combined), MGNREGA also contributes to *Environmental protection* 74% agreed and strongly agreed in protection and preservation of environment, on the other hand MGNREGA also helps in *Women empowerment* with 70% agreed and strongly agreed, Related to *Farming Practices*, there is a mixed perception regarding MGNREGA's impact on farming practices 65% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that it enhances farming, MGNREGA also contributed in *promoting financial security* (66% combined) and *poverty reduction* 60%.

The data also highlights several critical issues and mixed opinions regarding the scheme's implementation. The Areas of Concern and Mixed Perceptions are *Wages*, the statement Wages under MGNREGA is minimal compare to other labour wages received a high level of agreement, with 69% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing. This suggests that while the scheme provides work, the compensation is perceived as insufficient compared to the open market. Related to *Power Supply***,** the data shows a largely negative perception of MGNREGA's role in improving power supply, total of 77% of respondents disagree or are neutral on this point, suggesting that power supply is either not a focus of the scheme's activities or has not seen significant improvement through its implementation. Related to *Livelihood Sustainability***,** there is a significant concern about the long-term impact of the scheme, 42% of respondents are neutral or disagree that MGNREGA is ensuring livelihood sustainability. Related to *Unsatisfactory Work***,** 53% of respondents disagree or strongly disagree that the work done is satisfactory, while 26% agree or strongly agree, and 21% are neutral. This indicates a mixed but significant negative view of the quality of work. Related to *Late Payments,* 40% of respondents disagree or strongly disagree with late payments, while 58% agree or strongly agree. This suggests that late payment of wages is a very common issue. Related to *Lack of Proper Checking and Corruption,* there is strong disagreement with the idea that there are proper checks and follow-ups (52% disagree/strongly disagree) and that there is no corruption (46% disagree/strongly disagree), this point to significant concerns about a lack of oversight and the presence of corruption. Related to *Lack of Information Sharing***,** a large majority (63%) disagree or strongly disagree that MGNREGA-related expenditure and work progress is shared properly, suggesting a lack of transparency. Related to *Complicated Scheme*, a 72% of respondents agree or strongly agree that the scheme is complicated due to the inefficiency of village in-charge personnel. Related to *Social Division*, the data is mixed on whether MGNREGA creates division. 49% disagree or strongly disagree that it creates division, while 34% agree or strongly agree. Related to *Lack of Safety Measures*, while 45% agree or strongly agree that there is a lack of safety measures, 35% disagree or strongly disagree, and 20% are neutral. This indicates that safety is a concern for a significant portion of the population, but not all.

Based on this data, the MGNREGA scheme is widely perceived as effective in its stated goals of providing infrastructure and improving community life in rural areas, particularly in sanitation, road connectivity, and access to water. It is also seen as a positive force for financial security and environmental protection.

DISCUSSION

The information gathered for the study was examined concerning the established objectives, and the findings based on both descriptive and inferential statistics (factor analysis) are explained and discussed.To gain a clearer insight, the findings are organized under the subsequent headings and as per the objectives below:

Socio-demographic context of beneficiaries

MGNREGA is effectively targeting and engaging some of the most vulnerable and underserved groups in rural areas. The high participation of youth between 18 to 29 years which has 48% are involve in the scheme, showing that it is helping youth find employment and there are also strong participants from women with 79%, which means that the scheme is not only accessible to them but it also supporting women's empowerment by giving them a chance to earn money and become more independent. Most of the participants are married, with 65% and the most common household size is between 4 to 8members, making up to 48%. This means that mostly they live in large families, followed by 9 to 12 people, with This suggests that income from MGNREGA is helping not just individuals but also their entire families by supporting food needs, education, and access to basic services. In terms of education, 68% of the respondents had not completed their 10^{th} standard. This shows that the scheme is especially important for people who may not qualify for formal jobs due to a low education level, but MGNREGA gives them unskilled job opportunities and acts as a safety net for those who might otherwise remain unemployed.

Impact of MGNREGA in Supporting the Livelihoods of People

The researchers found that the analysis of data collected from the selected villages under the objective to assess the impact of MGNREGA on livelihood and living standards in remote areas, it shows positive but varied results, based on the factor analysis and Rotated Component Matrix. There were four items loaded properly under the component of livelihood improvement. People positively agreed that MGNREGA is helping to access basic needs, it helps to reduce financial crisis, it enhanced the accessibility to buy essential goods, to pay children's education fee and improving the overall household economic. On the other hand the researchers also identified the items related to enhancement of financial stability. There were 7 items loaded properly under this component, the respondents agreed that MGNREGA is reducing the dependency on agricultural outcomes, it reduces migration is search of job, it is promoting income stability, it is a financial back up in times of emergency, it reduces dependency on money lenders, they received their wages as per their work and could save some money. The respondents also believe that MGNREGA promotes social security. There were 4 items loaded appropriately under this component, the beneficiaries agreed that MGNREGA is reducing income inequality to certain extends, it improves household income, it enhance financial situation of women and it improves the housing conditions. Additionally there were 4 items loaded appropriately under the component of building resilience and improving living standards of people in remote areas. The respondents agreed that the wages they earned from MGNREGA is supporting them in terms of healthcare expenditure, it improves their living standard, it becomes a dependable source in times of emergency and supporting when natural calamities occurred.

Overall analyzing the pros and cons of MGNREGA

We observed that many factors have both advantages and disadvantages, as it's nearly impossible for anything to be perfect. Similarly, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), despite its numerous benefits, also has drawbacks that need to be addressed during its implementation. The advantages we observed from table 7 are in terms of *women empowerment, enhances livelihood, poverty reduction, improving roads and sanitation, access to drinking water, promoting household and financial security, community engagement and environmental protection*. On the other hand the critical issues and mixed opinions regarding the scheme's implementation are in the areas of *wages* as it is minimal compare to other labour wages. Related to *power supply*, the data shows a largely negative perception of MGNREGA's role in improving power supply. Related to *livelihood sustainability*, there is a significant concern about the long-term impact of the scheme. Related to *unsatisfactory work*, there is a mixed but significant negative view of the quality of work. Related to *late payments*, it suggests that late payment of wages is a very common issue. Related to *lack of proper checking* and *corruption*, there is strong disagreement with the idea that there are proper checks and follow-ups (52% disagree/strongly disagree). Related to *lack of information sharing*, a large majority (63%) disagree or strongly disagree that MGNREGA - related expenditure and work progress is shared properly. Related to *social division*, the data is mixed on whether MGNREGA creates division. Related to *lack of safety measures*, 45% agree or strongly agree that there is a lack of safety measures and 20% are neutral. In spite of those disadvantages we also found that MGNREGA helped many families meet their basic needs, reduced their dependence on irregular and seasonal jobs, and provided some financial stability, especially during non-farming periods. It also helped reduce migration, improved food security, and empowered women by giving them access to paid work.

In conclusion, the findings suggested that while MGNREGA had strong support from the community, especially in creating employment and boosting income, there were some concerns about its ability to provide financial security, improve infrastructure, and ensure sustainable livelihoods. Still, the overall perception remained highly positive, as seen in the high percentages of agreement and very low negative responses.

SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The researchers would like to share some suggestions and recommendations based on the finding of the study:-

1. **Ensure Consistent Availability of Work Opportunities:** The study suggests that local authorities should plan and generate enough projects apart from MGNREGA to ensure continuous work availability throughout the year, especially during non-farming seasons when income is most needed.
2. **Speed up Wage Disbursement and Improve Transparency:** Delays in wage payments can discourage participation and create financial stress. The study recommends those government officials and other stake holders to streamline the wage disbursement process by improving coordination to ensure payments are made on time, and using real-time tracking systems.
3. **Enhance Communication and Awareness Among Beneficiaries:** The study found that some participants were unaware of their entitlements or did not clearly understand how to apply for work. It is recommended that officials adopt more consistent and clear communication strategies, including regular awareness campaigns, community meetings, and the use of posters or audio messages in the local language.
4. **Strengthen the Role of Women in Planning and Monitoring:** With women making up 79% of the respondents, their role should not be limited to labor participation. The study suggests encouraging women to take leadership roles in monitoring committees, and social audit teams to promote gender-inclusive decision-making.
5. **Improve the Quality and Maintenance of Created Assets:** Beneficiaries appreciated the infrastructure built under MGNREGA, but regular upkeep is necessary. The study suggests setting up village-level monitoring groups to ensure that created assets like roads, check dams, and irrigation channels are maintained and used effectively.
6. **Promote Regular Impact Assessments in Tribal and Remote Areas:** Since regions like Rambrai are underrepresented in national evaluations, the study recommends that regular field-based impact assessments be conducted. This will help ensure that the scheme is truly benefiting marginalized communities and that policy adjustments can be made based on real local needs.

CONCLUSION

Previous studies across India found that MGNREGA played a key role in improving rural livelihoods by offering employment, enhancing women's participation, and supporting income generation. However, many of these studies also identified research gaps, particularly the lack of primary data and field-based studies in remote tribal areas like Rambrai, Meghalaya. There was a clear need for localized research to understand how MGNREGA operates in such contexts, and whether its benefits are reaching the most vulnerable households. This study addressed that gap by collecting primary data from 100 job cardholders across ten villages in Rambrai C&RD Block. The findings provide strong evidence of the positive impact of MGNREGA on rural employment and poverty alleviation as a safety net and source of livelihoods for people. The scheme helped households meet their basic needs, reduced their reliance on irregular jobs, and provided financial support during non-farming seasons. It also contributed to reducing migration, improving food security, and empowering women, who formed the majority of participants. At the same time, the study recommends strengthening the scheme's implementation. Many respondents reported challenges such as limited access to the full 100 days of work and delays in wage payments. To improve its effectiveness, there is a need for better awareness, timely wage distribution, regular monitoring, and stronger support at the grassroots level. The findings of this research demonstrate the importance of MGNREGA as a livelihood support system in rural and tribal areas. It has proven to be a valuable safety net for the poor and continues to play a vital role in promoting inclusive development in India.

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