INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLANNING REVIEW
ISSN:1474-6743 | E-ISSN:1478-3401

# ROLE OF *MGNREGA* IN REDUCING RURAL UNEMPLOYMENT IN JORHAT AND GOLAGHAT DISTRICTS

**[1]Md. Muktarul Hoque**
Research Scholar, Department of Political Science, Assam Down Town University, Guwahati, *Email-muktarulhaque970@gmail.com*

**[2]Dr. Bijoy Das**
Assistant Professor, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Assam Down Town University, Guwahati, *Email-dasbijoy@adtu.in*

## Abstract

This paper intends to investigate the role of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) in reducing rural unemployment in the Jorhat and Golaghat districts of Assam. MGNREGA, a flagship rural development program in India, aims to enhance livelihood security by providing at least 100 days of wage employment annually to every rural household. Assessing the effectiveness of MGNREGA in creating employment opportunities, improving wage distribution, and its overall socio-economic impact in these two districts is being focused in this paper.

For this paper a mixed-methods approach is adopted, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative data. Primary data were collected through structured surveys and in-depth interviews with beneficiaries and local officials. Secondary data were sourced from government reports, MGNREGA records, and other relevant documents. An in-depth analysis to compare employment trends, wage patterns, and the socio-economic outcomes of MGNREGA implementation in Jorhat and Golaghat is being employed in this paper.

The findings reveal significant improvements in rural employment and income levels due to MGNREGA. Both districts experienced a notable increase in employment days, with Golaghat showing slightly higher engagement levels. Wage distribution analysis indicates timely payments, although minor delays were noted in some cases. The socio-economic impact assessment highlights enhanced financial stability, reduced migration, and improved living standards among beneficiaries. However, challenges such as administrative bottlenecks, inadequate awareness, and variability in the quality of assets created were identified.

The paper concludes that MGNREGA has substantially contributed to reducing rural unemployment in Jorhat and Golaghat, although continuous monitoring and policy adjustments are necessary to address existing challenges. Recommendations include strengthening administrative capacity, enhancing awareness programs, and ensuring the quality and sustainability of assets created under MGNREGA.

**Keywords: MGNREGA, Rural Unemployment, Jorhat, Golaghat, Employment Trends, Wage Distribution, Socio-Economic Impact.**

## Introduction:

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), launched in 2005, represents a landmark in India's legislative framework for rural development. It seeks to enhance the livelihood security of rural households by guaranteeing at least 100 days of wage employment annually to every household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work (Ministry of Rural Development, 2021). As one of the world's largest social welfare programs, MGNREGA aims to address chronic rural unemployment, alleviate poverty, and promote inclusive growth by focusing on the creation of durable assets and infrastructure in rural areas (Dreze & Khera, 2017). MGNREGA's implementation spans diverse geographic and socio-economic contexts across India, including the northeastern state of Assam. Assam, characterized by its varied topography, ethnic diversity, and socio-economic challenges, presents a unique context for examining the impact of MGNREGA. Within Assam, the districts of Jorhat and Golaghat offer a pertinent comparative case study due to their distinctive demographic profiles, economic activities, and development trajectories. Jorhat known for its educational and cultural significance, contrasts with Golaghat's agrarian landscape and tea plantation economy. These differences provide a valuable framework for analyzing how MGNREGA's role in reducing rural unemployment manifests in varied local conditions.

Despite MGNREGA's ambitious goals and its extensive implementation, questions remain about its efficacy in addressing rural unemployment uniformly across different regions. In the districts of Jorhat and Golaghat, anecdotal evidence and preliminary studies suggest varied outcomes in terms of employment generation, wage distribution, and the broader socio-economic impact of the program. The nuanced differences in these districts raise critical questions about the factors influencing the success and challenges of MGNREGA implementation. One of the primary concerns is the extent to which MGNREGA has been able to reduce rural unemployment in Jorhat and Golaghat. While the scheme promises 100 days of employment, reports of underemployment, delays in wage payments, and the quality of work provided often surface, highlighting potential gaps between policy intent and on-ground realities (Shah & Mohanty, 2010). Moreover, the socio-economic and infrastructural differences between Jorhat and Golaghat suggest that MGNREGA's impact might not be uniform, necessitating a closer examination of district-specific outcomes.

In Jorhat, the relatively higher literacy rates and better access to infrastructure might facilitate more effective implementation of MGNREGA projects. However, challenges such as administrative inefficiencies and inadequate awareness among potential beneficiaries could still hinder the program's effectiveness. Conversely, in Golaghat, where agriculture and tea plantations dominate the economy, MGNREGA might play a crucial role in supplementing incomes during off-season periods. Yet, the dependency on plantation work and the seasonal nature of agricultural labor could pose unique challenges to achieving consistent employment under MGNREGA. The quality and sustainability of assets created under MGNREGA in these districts remains a subject

of scrutiny. The scheme emphasizes the creation of durable assets that can generate long-term employment opportunities and enhance rural infrastructure. However, variations in the types of projects undertaken, their execution, and subsequent maintenance can significantly affect the program's overall impact on rural employment and development. Furthermore, the socio-economic impact of MGNREGA extends beyond mere employment generation. It includes aspects such as improved financial stability, reduced migration, enhanced food security, and greater empowerment of marginalized groups, particularly women and scheduled castes/tribes (Pankaj & Tankha, 2010). Evaluating these broader impacts requires a comprehensive approach that considers both quantitative metrics and qualitative insights from the beneficiaries and other stakeholders.

Thus, the problem at hand is twofold: firstly, to assess the extent and nature of MGNREGA's impact on rural unemployment in Jorhat and Golaghat, and secondly, to identify the factors that contribute to the differential outcomes observed in these districts. This investigation aims to provide a nuanced understanding of how local contexts influence the implementation and effectiveness of MGNREGA, offering insights that can inform policy adjustments and improve the program's overall efficacy in reducing rural unemployment.

By comparing the experiences and outcomes in Jorhat and Golaghat, this paper seeks to contribute to the broader discourse on rural employment schemes and their role in fostering sustainable rural development in diverse contexts.

**Objectives of the study:**

a. To assess the impact of MGNREGA on reducing rural unemployment in the Jorhat and Golaghat districts of Assam.
b. To compare and analyze the factors influencing the effectiveness of MGNREGA implementation in Jorhat and Golaghat districts.

**Significance of the Study:**

This exercise is significant as it provides a detailed analysis of MGNREGA's role in reducing rural unemployment in the Jorhat and Golaghat districts of Assam. By identifying the specific factors that influence the effectiveness of MGNREGA implementation, the paper offers valuable insights for policymakers to enhance the program's efficiency and impact. Additionally, the comparative approach highlights regional variations, facilitating tailored strategies that can address local challenges. Ultimately, the findings can contribute to improving livelihood security, promoting sustainable development, and achieving inclusive growth in rural Assam and similar regions.

**Methodology:**

A mixed-methods approach is adopted for writing this paper, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative data. Primary data were collected through structured surveys and in-depth interviews with beneficiaries and local officials. Secondary data were sourced from government reports, MGNREGA records, and other relevant documents.

**Review of Literature:**

- ***Conceptual Framework of MGNREGA-***

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) is built on the principle of providing a legal guarantee for at least 100 days of wage employment to every rural household whose adult members volunteer for unskilled manual work. This framework aims to enhance livelihood security, create durable assets, and foster social inclusion by empowering marginalized communities. MGNREGA's design includes decentralized planning, social audits, and transparency measures to ensure effective implementation and accountability (Ministry of Rural Development, 2021).

- ***Global and National Perspectives on Rural Employment Programs***

Globally, rural employment programs have been pivotal in addressing poverty and unemployment. Programs such as the United States' New Deal during the Great Depression and South Africa's Expanded Public Works Programme highlight the importance of state intervention in providing employment and building infrastructure. In India, MGNREGA stands as a significant initiative, reflecting global best practices while addressing local socio-economic challenges (Dreze & Khera, 2017).

- ***Previous Studies on MGNREGA's Impact***

Numerous studies have examined MGNREGA's impact, revealing positive outcomes in terms of employment generation, wage increases, and poverty reduction. However, challenges such as administrative inefficiencies, delayed payments, and the variable quality of assets created have also been highlighted. Studies by Pankaj and Tankha (2010) emphasize MGNREGA's role in empowering women and marginalized communities.

- ***Regional Studies in Assam***

Regional studies in Assam indicate that MGNREGA has had mixed results, with significant improvements in rural employment and income levels but also facing implementation challenges. Research specific to Jorhat and Golaghat districts reveals variations in program effectiveness, influenced by local administrative capacity, socio-economic conditions, and community engagement. These studies underscore the need for a nuanced approach to understanding and enhancing MGNREGA's impact in diverse regional contexts.

**Socio-economic Profile of Jorhat and Golaghat Districts:**

Jorhat and Golaghat are two prominent districts in the state of Assam, India. Both districts share similar socio-economic characteristics but also exhibit unique attributes shaped by their geographical, cultural, and economic contexts. Understanding these characteristics is essential for evaluating the role and impact of MGNREGA in these regions. This part provides a comprehensive socio-economic profile of Jorhat and Golaghat, covering demographic details, economic activities, employment patterns, infrastructure, development indicators, and the specific role of MGNREGA in these districts.

Jorhat and Golaghat are predominantly rural districts with a significant portion of their populations engaged in agriculture and related activities. According to the 2011 Census of India, Jorhat has a population of approximately 1.09 million, while Golaghat's population stands at

around 1.06 million. Both districts have a similar demographic structure, with a relatively high population density and a substantial rural populace. In Jorhat, about 80% of the population resides in rural areas, while Golaghat has a slightly higher rural population percentage at 85%. The literacy rate is relatively high in both districts, with Jorhat at around 83% and Golaghat at 78%, reflecting the emphasis on education. The sex ratio in Jorhat is 956 females per 1000 males, and in Golaghat, it is 961 females per 1000 males, indicating a balanced gender demographic.

- ***Economic Activities and Employment Patterns***

The economy of both districts is primarily agrarian, with agriculture being the mainstay for the majority of the population. Rice, tea, and horticultural crops like vegetables and fruits are the primary agricultural products. Jorhat, known as the "Cultural Capital of Assam," also has a significant tea industry, with numerous tea gardens contributing to its economy. Golaghat similarly has a thriving tea sector, but with additional emphasis on fishery and sericulture. Employment patterns in both districts are heavily influenced by agricultural seasons. During peak agricultural periods, a majority of the rural workforce is engaged in farming activities. However, during lean seasons, the demand for alternative employment rises significantly. This seasonal fluctuation often leads to underemployment and migration in search of work. MGNREGA plays a crucial role in providing supplementary employment during these periods, helping to stabilize rural incomes.

- ***Infrastructure and Development Indicators***

Infrastructure development in Jorhat and Golaghat varies, reflecting their different stages of economic progression. Jorhat, being one of the more developed districts in Assam, boasts better infrastructure in terms of transportation, healthcare, and education. It is well-connected by road and rail, and the presence of Jorhat Airport enhances its connectivity. The district also has several reputed educational institutions, including Assam Agricultural University. Golaghat, while also reasonably developed, lags slightly behind Jorhat in infrastructure. It has adequate road and rail connectivity but lacks an airport. Healthcare facilities are more concentrated in urban areas, with rural regions facing challenges in accessing quality healthcare. Educational infrastructure is growing, with several schools and colleges catering to the local population. Development indicators such as the Human Development Index (HDI) and the Poverty Index reflect these infrastructural disparities. Jorhat generally scores higher on these indices compared to Golaghat, indicating better overall socio-economic conditions.

- ***Role of MGNREGA in the Districts***

MGNREGA has been instrumental in addressing rural unemployment and fostering socio-economic development in both Jorhat and Golaghat. The program provides a critical safety net for rural households by guaranteeing 100 days of wage employment annually. This employment is particularly crucial during the agricultural off-season, mitigating the effects of seasonal unemployment. In Jorhat, MGNREGA has facilitated the creation of numerous durable assets such as roads, irrigation canals, and community buildings. These assets not only provide immediate employment but also contribute to long-term rural development by improving infrastructure and

agricultural productivity. In Golaghat, MGNREGA's impact is similarly profound. The program has helped reduce rural poverty by providing steady income opportunities. It has also promoted the inclusion of marginalized groups, including women and Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes, enhancing their socio-economic status. Furthermore, the creation of sustainable assets like water conservation structures and soil erosion control measures has improved agricultural resilience.

Overall, MGNREGA's implementation in Jorhat and Golaghat has demonstrated significant benefits, although challenges remain in ensuring timely wage payments, effective monitoring, and addressing administrative bottlenecks. Continuous efforts to enhance the efficiency and reach of MGNREGA can further strengthen its role in promoting rural employment and socio-economic development in these districts.

**Analysis of MGNREGA Implementation:**

- ***Overview of MGNREGA Operations in Jorhat and Golaghat***

The implementation of MGNREGA in Jorhat and Golaghat districts has been marked by a systematic approach to enhancing rural employment and infrastructure development. Both districts have established MGNREGA offices at the district and block levels to oversee the planning and execution of various projects. In Jorhat, the district administration has focused on a wide range of projects, including road construction, water conservation, and land development. Similarly, Golaghat has emphasized projects that improve agricultural productivity and rural connectivity, such as irrigation infrastructure and rural roads. Despite these efforts, both districts face challenges such as administrative delays and logistical issues, which sometimes hinder the smooth execution of projects. Effective monitoring and regular audits have been instituted to address these challenges, ensuring transparency and accountability in the utilization of MGNREGA funds (Sarma, 2018).

- ***Employment Generation under MGNREGA***

MGNREGA's primary objective is to provide gainful employment to rural households, thereby reducing unemployment and underemployment in the agricultural off-season. In Jorhat, the scheme has successfully generated employment for thousands of rural workers, with a significant increase in person-days of work over the years. The district has consistently met its targets, providing crucial income support to rural families during periods when agricultural work is scarce. Golaghat has also seen substantial employment generation under MGNREGA, with a focus on involving marginalized communities such as Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. The employment opportunities created by MGNREGA have not only provided financial stability but have also empowered women by encouraging their participation in the workforce. The scheme's impact on reducing seasonal migration in search of work is notable, as many rural households can now rely on local employment (Borah, 2019).

- ***Wage Distribution and Payment Mechanisms***

Wage distribution under MGNREGA is a critical aspect of its implementation, aimed at ensuring timely and fair payment to the workers. In Jorhat, the district administration has

implemented electronic fund transfer systems to streamline wage payments, reducing delays and minimizing discrepancies (Hussain, 2016). Workers are issued job cards, and their attendance is meticulously recorded to ensure accurate wage calculations. Despite these measures, occasional delays in payments have been reported, primarily due to technical issues and administrative bottlenecks. In Golaghat, similar electronic payment systems are in place, but challenges such as banking infrastructure and accessibility in remote areas sometimes cause delays (Saikia, 2018). Efforts are ongoing to improve the efficiency of these systems, including the introduction of mobile banking units and increased financial literacy among beneficiaries. Ensuring timely payment is crucial for maintaining the credibility of the scheme and the livelihood security of the workers.

- ***Project Types and Their Implementation***

The types of projects undertaken under MGNREGA in Jorhat and Golaghat are diverse and tailored to the specific needs of each district. In Jorhat, projects have focused heavily on infrastructure development such as road construction, water conservation, and afforestation. These projects are selected through a participatory planning process involving local gram panchayats to ensure they meet community needs. In Golaghat, the emphasis has been on projects that enhance agricultural productivity, such as the construction of irrigation canals, check dams, and land leveling (Nath, 2018). These projects not only provide immediate employment but also contribute to long-term agricultural sustainability and rural development. The successful implementation of these projects requires meticulous planning, community involvement, and effective supervision. Both districts have reported varying degrees of success, with some projects facing delays due to logistical challenges and resource constraints.

- ***Beneficiary Perceptions and Satisfaction***

Beneficiary perceptions and satisfaction are crucial indicators of MGNREGA's effectiveness. In Jorhat, beneficiaries have generally expressed positive views about the scheme, particularly appreciating the employment opportunities and the improved infrastructure resulting from MGNREGA projects (Patowary, 2018). Surveys and interviews conducted with MGNREGA workers in the district reveal that most beneficiaries feel the scheme has significantly improved their financial stability and quality of life. However, concerns about occasional delays in wage payments and the need for more extensive awareness campaigns to inform potential beneficiaries about the scheme's benefits have been noted. In Golaghat, feedback from beneficiaries indicates high satisfaction with the employment provided and the assets created under MGNREGA. Beneficiaries particularly value the water conservation and irrigation projects, which have had a direct positive impact on agricultural productivity. Nevertheless, there are areas for improvement, such as ensuring the timely completion of projects and addressing administrative inefficiencies. Overall, the scheme is perceived as a vital tool for rural development and poverty alleviation in both districts (Borah, 2018).

**Comparative Analysis of MGNREGA's Impact:**

The comparative analysis of MGNREGA's impact in Jorhat and Golaghat districts reveals nuanced differences and similarities in the program's outcomes. Both districts have benefited significantly from MGNREGA in terms of rural employment generation and socio-economic development. However, specific variations exist based on factors such as implementation strategies, project types, and local socio-economic conditions. In Jorhat, MGNREGA has been instrumental in improving infrastructure through projects like road construction and water conservation, thereby enhancing rural connectivity and agricultural productivity. The district has also witnessed a reduction in seasonal unemployment as MGNREGA provides a reliable source of income during lean agricultural periods. Beneficiary perceptions in Jorhat indicate overall satisfaction with the scheme's impact on livelihoods and community development, although challenges such as occasional delays in wage payments persist (Patowary, 2018).

In contrast, Golaghat has focused on projects aimed at sustainable agriculture and natural resource management under MGNREGA (Das, 2016). The district's emphasis on irrigation infrastructure and soil conservation has bolstered agricultural resilience, benefiting local farmers and enhancing food security (Nath, 2018). Golaghat has also prioritized social inclusion through MGNREGA, with concerted efforts to involve marginalized groups in project implementation and decision-making processes (Gogoi, 2017). Beneficiaries in Golaghat express high satisfaction with MGNREGA, particularly appreciating the program's role in improving rural infrastructure and reducing poverty through sustained employment opportunities (Chutia, 2019).

Overall, while both districts have experienced positive outcomes from MGNREGA, differences in project focus and local priorities influence the program's impact. Jorhat's approach emphasizes infrastructure development and reducing seasonal unemployment, aligning closely with the district's economic needs and administrative capabilities. In contrast, Golaghat's strategy emphasizes sustainable agriculture and social inclusion, reflecting its priorities in enhancing agricultural productivity and empowering marginalized communities. These variations underscore the flexibility of MGNREGA in adapting to local contexts while achieving broader national objectives of rural development and poverty alleviation. Future improvements in MGNREGA implementation could benefit from cross-district learning and best practices exchange to optimize outcomes and address persistent challenges across different regions of India.

**Conclusion:**

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) stands as a cornerstone of India's rural development strategy, aiming to alleviate poverty and enhance livelihood security through guaranteed employment opportunities. This study has examined the implementation and impact of MGNREGA in Jorhat and Golaghat districts of Assam, shedding light on its role in reducing rural unemployment, improving infrastructure, and fostering socio-economic development. In both Jorhat and Golaghat, MGNREGA has significantly contributed to rural employment generation during agricultural lean seasons, thereby stabilizing incomes and reducing dependency on seasonal migration for livelihoods. The program's emphasis on creating durable assets such as roads, water conservation structures, and irrigation facilities has enhanced

rural infrastructure and improved agricultural productivity. These achievements are crucial in addressing local development priorities and promoting inclusive growth across diverse socio-economic landscapes (Baruah, 2015; Das, 2016). However, challenges persist in the effective implementation of MGNREGA, including administrative inefficiencies, delays in wage payments, and variations in project quality. Despite efforts to improve transparency and accountability through digital payment systems and regular audits, these issues continue to affect program efficiency and beneficiary satisfaction (Hussain, 2016; Sharma, 2017). Looking ahead, several recommendations emerge from this study to enhance the impact of MGNREGA in Jorhat and Golaghat districts. Strengthening administrative capacity at the grassroots level, enhancing monitoring mechanisms, and providing skill development opportunities to MGNREGA workers can improve program effectiveness. Moreover, increasing awareness among beneficiaries about their rights and entitlements under MGNREGA is essential for maximizing participation and ensuring equitable distribution of benefits.

MGNREGA has proven to be a vital social safety net and developmental tool in rural India, including in Jorhat and Golaghat districts. By addressing unemployment, enhancing infrastructure, and promoting sustainable livelihoods, MGNREGA continues to play a crucial role in the socio-economic empowerment of rural communities. As India progresses towards achieving its sustainable development goals, MGNREGA remains a pivotal policy instrument for inclusive growth and poverty reduction, necessitating continuous adaptation and improvement to meet evolving challenges and opportunities in rural development.

**References:**


1. Baruah, S. (2015). Implementation of MGNREGA in Assam: An overview. Journal of Rural Development, 34(1), 27-44.
2. Borah, A. (2019). Impact of MGNREGA on rural employment and migration in Assam. Economic and Political Weekly, 54(3), 24-30.
3. Bora, P. (2017). Challenges in the execution of MGNREGA projects: A case study of Jorhat district. Asian Journal of Development Studies, 5(2), 55-67.
4. Chakraborty, M. (2017). MGNREGA and rural employment: A study in Jorhat district. Assam Economic Review, 22(2), 89-103.
5. Chutia, B. (2019). Beneficiary perceptions of MGNREGA in Golaghat district. Indian Journal of Public Administration, 65(1), 122-135.
6. Dreze, J., & Khera, R. (2017). Recent social security initiatives in India. World Development, 98, 555-572. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2017.05.035
7. Das, K. (2016). MGNREGA and its role in rural development: Evidence from Golaghat district. Rural Development Review, 13(4), 15-28.
8. Gogoi, R. (2017). Social inclusion through MGNREGA: A study in Golaghat district. Journal of Social Welfare and Management, 9(3), 34-48.
9. Hussain, M. (2016). Electronic fund transfers and wage distribution under MGNREGA. Journal of Finance and Management, 11(1), 78-92.

10. Kalita, P. (2016). Infrastructure development through MGNREGA: Insights from Jorhat. Development Studies Journal, 20(3), 104-118.
11. Ministry of Rural Development. (2021). MGNREGA Annual Report 2020-21. Government of India. Retrieved from https://nrega.nic.in
12. Pankaj, A., & Tankha, R. (2010). Empowerment effects of the NREGS on women workers: A study in four states. Economic and Political Weekly, 45(30), 45-55. https://www.epw.in/journal/2010/30/special-articles/empowerment-effects-nregs-women-workers.html
13. Patowary, D. (2018). Evaluating beneficiary satisfaction under MGNREGA: A case study of Jorhat. Indian Journal of Rural Studies, 30(2), 211-228.
14. Nath, A. (2018). Agricultural productivity and MGNREGA: An analysis in Golaghat district. Journal of Agricultural Economics, 14(2), 67-81.
15. Shah, M., & Mohanty, M. S. (2010). Implementing employment guarantee: A case study of Gujarat. Indian Journal of Labour Economics, 53(1), 67-86. https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s41027-016-0007-8
16. Saikia, B. (2018). Banking infrastructure and wage distribution challenges in rural Assam. Financial Inclusion Journal, 7(4), 93-107.
17. Sarma, J. (2018). Monitoring and transparency in MGNREGA: Lessons from Assam. Public Administration Review, 12(2), 59-75.
18. Sharma, L. (2017). Ensuring timely payments under MGNREGA: A critical analysis. Journal of Policy Research, 9(1), 45-62.

*****