Examining Rural Development through the Lens of MGNREGA: Evidence from Longleng District of Nagaland

Dr. Dhiraj Borkotoky[1*], Liong M Phom[2]

[1*]Associate Professor, Department of Political Science, Royal Global University, Email ID: dhirajborkotoky@gmail.com

Orcid ID: 0009-0000-4956-8551

[2]Research Scholar, Department of Political Science, Royal Global University, Email ID: phomleong@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT:

Rural development has increasingly assumed a central position in the development discourse of many countries, particularly in the Global South, where structural inequalities and livelihood vulnerabilities remain pronounced. In India, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) has emerged as a significant rights-based intervention aimed at enhancing livelihood security and promoting inclusive rural development. This article critically examines the functioning and impact of MGNREGA in the Longleng district of Nagaland, a predominantly tribal and geographically remote region. Drawing on field-based data, the study evaluates the extent to which the programme has contributed to employment generation, asset creation, and socio-economic upliftment of rural households. It further analyses the institutional and implementation challenges that shape programme outcomes, including issues of accessibility, administrative capacity, and local governance. The findings suggest that while MGNREGA has played a meaningful role in improving income security and rural infrastructure, its transformative potential remains constrained by structural and contextual.

The paper argues for a more localized and participatory approach to strengthen the effectiveness of rural employment schemes in tribal regions.

Keywords: Rural Development, MGNREGA, Employment Generation, Nagaland, Longleng District, Livelihood Security, Inclusive Development, Rural Governance.

Introduction

Rural development continues to be a major challenge across many regions of the Global South where the benefits of modernization and technological advancement have not been evenly distributed. Rural development is now perceived as a complex process (Naumov 2023). While certain sections of society have been able to take advantage of economic growth and industrial expansion, large segments of rural populations remain trapped in poverty, unemployment, and limited access to basic infrastructure. This imbalance in development is especially evident in rural regions, where economic opportunities are limited and access to social services remains insufficient. Poverty has still overwhelmingly a rural face and the rural economy and society still perform a vital part in the

development process and in people's well-being (Kay 2009).

India has a large population of people who live in rural areas (Verma et.al 2024). In India despite significant progress in sectors such as industry, services, and infrastructure, rural regions continue to experience persistent socio-economic challenges. A large proportion of the population still resides in rural areas where livelihoods are heavily dependent on agriculture and allied activities (Namjudheen 2016). Limited employment opportunities, small landholdings, and seasonal agricultural cycles contribute to widespread underemployment and livelihood insecurity among rural households.

The concept of rural development is therefore central to the broader discourse on development. Scholars such as Chambers (1983) define rural development as a strategy aimed at improving the livelihoods and well-being of rural populations, particularly the poor and marginalized. Rural development initiatives typically focus on improving employment opportunities, enhancing agricultural productivity, strengthening infrastructure, and promoting social inclusion.

The debate surrounding development has also been shaped by different theoretical perspectives. Early modernization theorists such as Rostow (1960) conceptualized development as a linear process characterized by industrialization, capital accumulation, and economic growth. However, these perspectives have been criticized for their Eurocentric assumptions and limited attention to historical inequalities. Dependency theorists such as Frank (1967) and Amin (1976), along with world-systems theorists like Wallerstein (1974), argue that underdevelopment in many parts of the Global South is a structural outcome of unequal global economic relationships.

More recent development frameworks emphasize human well-being, participation, and social justice. Sen's capability approach, for instance, conceptualizes development as the expansion of human freedoms and opportunities rather than merely economic growth (Sen 1999). Similarly, scholars such as Escobar (1995) and Sachs (1992) critique mainstream development discourse and advocate alternative models of development that are more locally grounded and socially inclusive.

Within this broader debate, rural employment programmes have emerged as important policy instruments for addressing poverty and livelihood insecurity. One of the most significant initiatives in this regard is the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA). Enacted in 2005, the programme guarantees at least one hundred days of wage employment annually to rural households willing to undertake unskilled manual labour (Government of India 2013). The programme aims not only to provide income security but also to promote decentralized development, strengthen rural infrastructure, and create durable community assets.

MGNREGA has been widely recognized as one of the largest public employment programmes in the world and represents a rights-based approach to rural development (Ranjan 2016). By ensuring employment opportunities at the local level, the programme seeks to reduce distress migration, enhance livelihood security, and promote inclusive development in rural areas.

In the northeastern state of Nagaland, rural development remains a significant concern due to geographical isolation, infrastructural limitations, and uneven socio-economic development. Studies highlight that rural areas in Nagaland face multiple developmental constraints including poor connectivity, limited employment opportunities, and inadequate access to basic services (Ao 1993). MGNREGA was introduced in the state in phases beginning in 2006 and was gradually expanded to cover all districts, including Longleng.

Despite the nationwide implementation of MGNREGA, relatively little research has examined its functioning in remote districts such as Longleng. These regions present unique challenges related to geographic remoteness, administrative capacity, and socio-economic conditions. Understanding the impact of MGNREGA in such contexts is therefore important for evaluating the effectiveness of rural development policies.

This article examines the role of MGNREGA in promoting rural development in Longleng district of Nagaland. It specifically explores the programme's contribution to employment generation, sustainable livelihoods, and women's empowerment while also analysing the challenges faced in its implementation. The study argues that although MGNREGA has created opportunities for livelihood security and rural asset creation in Longleng district, its overall impact remains constrained by administrative inefficiencies, limited awareness among beneficiaries, and infrastructural limitations.

Conceptualizing Rural Development

Rural development represents a specific dimension of the broader concept of development and has been interpreted differently by scholars depending on regional contexts and stages of economic transformation. In general terms, rural development refers to a process that seeks to improve the economic, social, and institutional conditions of rural societies through the expansion of productive opportunities and the provision of essential services (Prasad 2004). Traditionally, rural development has been associated with agricultural growth, modernization of rural economies, and increased productivity. However, contemporary scholarship recognizes that rural development extends beyond agricultural advancement and includes improvements in education, healthcare, infrastructure, water supply, and employment opportunities (Namjudheen 2016).

At its core, rural development aims to enhance the quality of life of people living in rural areas by ensuring equitable access to resources and opportunities. According to the World Bank, rural development can be understood as a strategy aimed at improving the economic and social conditions of the rural poor, including small farmers, tenants, and landless labourers (Mathur 2006). In this sense, rural development is not merely an economic process but also a social transformation that seeks to reduce inequalities and strengthen community participation in development initiatives.

Over time, the understanding of rural development has expanded significantly. Earlier approaches largely equated rural development with agricultural productivity and technological modernization. However, more recent perspectives emphasize a multi-dimensional framework that includes livelihood diversification, rural industrialization, environmental sustainability, and social empowerment. As scholars increasingly acknowledge, rural development involves the overall progress of rural regions by strengthening local industries, improving socio-economic infrastructure, and enhancing human capabilities (Ao 1993).

The objectives of rural development are therefore multidimensional. These include increasing production and productivity in rural areas, promoting socio-economic equity, fostering balanced economic and social development, improving ecological sustainability, and encouraging participatory community engagement in development processes (Mathur 2006). Rural development thus reflects a comprehensive and integrated approach aimed at improving living standards while ensuring sustainable management of natural resources.

Importantly, rural development should be viewed as a continuous and evolving process rather than a fixed policy outcome. It functions not only as a development strategy but also as a broader normative framework that seeks to transform rural societies through sustained institutional support and community participation. In this sense, rural development represents both a policy agenda and a long-term commitment to addressing structural inequalities affecting rural populations (Ao 1993).

Rural Development in India: Historical Context

The significance of rural development has been widely recognized in developing countries where a large proportion of the population resides in rural areas. In many regions of Asia, Africa, and Latin America, colonial economic structures prioritized urban and export-oriented sectors while neglecting rural development. As a result, rural communities

often experienced economic stagnation, infrastructural deficits, and limited access to public services (Prasad 2004).

India's rural development trajectory reflects similar historical challenges. During the colonial period, rural areas were largely neglected in terms of infrastructure, institutional support, and economic investment. The colonial economy primarily focused on revenue extraction and commercial agriculture, which contributed to persistent rural poverty and economic disparities (Prasad 2004). Consequently, at the time of independence in 1947, rural India faced severe socio-economic challenges including low agricultural productivity, limited industrial development, and widespread poverty. Government initiatives like MGNREGA are crucial for the welfare of rural India, where casual and unskilled workers often face low job security (Patwardhan and Tasciotti 2023).

Efforts to address these issues can be traced back to the rural regeneration movements that emerged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These movements sought to revitalize rural communities through social reform, agricultural improvement, and local self-governance. Early initiatives were undertaken by social reformers, voluntary organizations, and nationalist leaders who recognized the centrality of rural development for India's broader socio-economic transformation.

The pre-independence phase (1860–1920) witnessed the decline of traditional feudal structures and the emergence of new ideas influenced by Western education and social reform movements. Although rural reconstruction was widely discussed during this period, practical efforts remained limited due to structural constraints and colonial priorities (Ao 1993).

The second phase (1920–1947) coincided with the rise of Indian nationalism and the growing recognition of rural regeneration as an essential component of nation-building. Several prominent initiatives emerged during this period, including experiments in rural reconstruction led by Rabindranath Tagore at Sriniketan, Mahatma Gandhi at Sevagram, and Spencer Hatch at Martandam. These initiatives emphasized community participation, self-reliance, and local empowerment as key principles of rural development.

Following independence, rural development became a central priority for the Indian state. Successive governments introduced a wide range of programmes aimed at addressing rural poverty, unemployment, and infrastructural deficits. Over time, these initiatives evolved into large-scale national programmes focusing on employment generation, poverty alleviation, and inclusive growth, among which the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) represents one of the most significant interventions in contemporary rural development policy.

Rural Development in Nagaland: Institutional and Socio-Economic Context

Nagaland, located in the northeastern region of India, became the sixteenth state of the Indian Union on 1 December 1963. Geographically, the state lies between 25°12' and 27°02' north latitude and 93°20' and 95°15' east longitude, covering an area of approximately 16,479 square kilometres. It shares its borders with Assam to the north and west, Arunachal Pradesh and Myanmar to the east, and Manipur to the south (Imnayongdang 1990). The state's socio-economic structure is predominantly rural in character, with nearly seventy percent of the population residing in rural areas. Agriculture and allied activities continue to be the primary source of livelihood for a large proportion of the population, engaging more than seventy percent of the workforce (Imnayongdang 1990).

Despite India's broader developmental initiatives following independence, Nagaland faced significant challenges in achieving balanced rural development. Political instability and administrative constraints during the early decades after independence limited the effective implementation of development programmes in the region. Consequently, the state lagged behind many other parts of the country during the initial phases of India's Five-Year Plans (Samanta 2001).

One of the earliest attempts to promote rural development in the region was the Community Development Programme (CDP) introduced in 1952 when Nagaland was still part of the undivided state of Assam. The programme represented one of the first major policy initiatives undertaken by the Indian government after independence to address rural poverty and underdevelopment through integrated development planning. The CDP aimed to promote rural transformation by improving agricultural productivity, strengthening rural infrastructure, expanding basic services such as education and health, and encouraging community participation in local development initiatives. The programme was designed to function through a block-level administrative structure that sought to mobilise local resources and encourage participatory planning among rural communities (Mathur 2006). However, despite its ambitious objectives, the programme faced several structural and administrative challenges, including inadequate institutional capacity, limited local participation, and weak coordination between government agencies and rural communities. Consequently, the programme achieved only limited success in promoting sustainable rural development in many regions of India, including the hill areas of the Northeast (Prasad 2004). In the case of Nagaland, meaningful progress in decentralized rural planning emerged much later, particularly during the late 1970s and early 1980s, when institutional mechanisms for grassroots participation began to take shape.

A major institutional innovation in Nagaland's rural development framework was the creation of Village Development Boards (VDBs) under the *Village and Area Council Act of 1978*. The establishment of VDBs represented a significant step toward decentralised governance and participatory development in the state. The first VDB was established experimentally in Ketsapomi village in Phek district in December 1976 as part of an effort to strengthen village-level institutions and promote community-driven development initiatives. Following its initial success, the model was gradually expanded across the state through a coordinated policy initiative during the early 1980s. The adoption of the VDB Model Rules in 1980 further institutionalized decentralized planning and community participation in rural development programmes. These institutions function in close coordination with Village Councils and play a crucial role in identifying local development priorities, implementing government programmes, and ensuring community participation in decision-making processes (Ao 1993). Unlike the Panchayati Raj institutions prevalent in many other Indian states, the VDB system in Nagaland reflects the integration of traditional tribal governance structures with modern development administration. As a result, VDBs have emerged as key implementing agencies for various state and centrally sponsored development programmes, including rural employment schemes, infrastructure development projects, and livelihood initiatives aimed at improving the socio-economic conditions of rural communities (Samanta 2001).

Unlike most other Indian states, Nagaland follows a distinctive system of local governance rooted in traditional institutions. The state is exempted from the provisions of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment, which introduced the Panchayati Raj system in other parts of India. Instead, local governance operates through traditional institutions such as Village Councils and Village Development Boards. These institutions are responsible for planning, implementing, and monitoring developmental programmes at the village level, thereby promoting community participation in development initiatives (Samanta 2001).

To strengthen rural administration and programme delivery, the state government has also established a network of rural development blocks across Nagaland. At present, there are seventy-four rural development blocks covering more than 1,200 recognized villages and approximately 250,000 rural households. These administrative units play an important role in coordinating development schemes, implementing poverty alleviation programmes, and ensuring the effective delivery of public services in rural areas.

The presence of traditional local institutions combined with modern development programmes creates a unique governance framework in Nagaland's rural development landscape. Understanding this institutional context is crucial for analysing the implementation and impact of national development programmes such as the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) in the state. In districts such as Longleng, where geographical remoteness and infrastructural constraints persist, the effectiveness of rural development programmes largely depends on the interaction between state policies and local governance structures.

Theoretical Framework

Understanding rural development and employment guarantee programmes requires a theoretical framework that links economic welfare, social participation, and human capability expansion. This study draws upon three complementary perspectives: the Capability Approach, Participatory Rural Development, and the Sustainable Livelihood Framework. These perspectives provide an analytical foundation for examining how employment programmes such as the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) contribute to livelihood security, empowerment, and rural transformation.

Capability Approach

The Capability Approach, developed by Amartya Sen, conceptualizes development as the expansion of people's freedoms and capabilities rather than merely economic growth (Sen 1999). According to Sen, development should be evaluated in terms of individuals' ability to achieve valuable "functionings," such as being adequately nourished, educated, and able to participate in social and economic life. In this framework, income and employment are important not as ends in themselves but as means that enable individuals to expand their capabilities. The Capability approach must be used to find out the methodological and empirical challenges that the MGNREGA has (Dang 2014).

The capability approach is particularly relevant for analysing rural development policies because it highlights the importance of social opportunities and institutional arrangements in improving human well-being. In rural contexts where poverty, unemployment, and lack of access to basic services restrict people's choices, programmes that provide guaranteed employment can significantly enhance individual capabilities. By providing wage employment, income security, and community assets, MGNREGA contributes to expanding the capabilities of rural households, allowing them to improve their living standards and access essential services such as education, nutrition, and healthcare.

Moreover, the capability perspective emphasizes the role of agency and participation in development processes. Individuals are not merely passive beneficiaries of development programmes but active participants capable of shaping their own socio-economic conditions. In the context of MGNREGA, the involvement of rural communities in planning and implementing development works reflects this participatory dimension of development.

Participatory Rural Development

Another important perspective informing this study is the concept of participatory rural development advanced by Robert Chambers. Chambers argues that development strategies should prioritize the needs, knowledge, and experiences of rural communities, particularly those who are poor and marginalized (Chambers 1983). According to this approach, sustainable development can only be achieved when local communities actively participate in identifying their own needs, designing development interventions, and monitoring programme implementation.

Participatory development challenges earlier top-down development models that often failed to address the realities of rural societies. Instead, it advocates decentralised decision-making and community empowerment as key components of rural transformation. In India, programmes such as MGNREGA incorporate these principles through decentralized planning mechanisms at the village

level. Local institutions, including village councils and community bodies, play an important role in identifying development works, monitoring programme implementation, and ensuring transparency through social audits.

In regions like Nagaland, where traditional village institutions have historically played a central role in governance, participatory approaches become even more significant. The interaction between state-led development programmes and traditional community institutions shapes the effectiveness of rural development initiatives.

Sustainable Livelihood Framework

The third theoretical perspective used in this study is the Sustainable Livelihood Framework, which emerged from development research in the 1990s and has been widely used to analyse poverty and rural livelihoods. Scholars such as Scoones (1998) define a livelihood as the capabilities, assets, and activities required for a means of living. A livelihood is considered sustainable when it can cope with and recover from shocks while maintaining or enhancing its assets without undermining the natural resource base.

The framework identifies several types of assets that influence livelihood outcomes, including human capital (skills and knowledge), physical capital (infrastructure), financial capital (income and savings), social capital (networks and institutions), and natural capital (land and environmental resources). Rural employment programmes can strengthen these assets by providing wage income, improving infrastructure, and creating community resources such as irrigation facilities, roads, and water conservation structures.

MGNREGA aligns closely with the principles of the sustainable livelihood framework. The programme not only generates employment but also creates durable assets that contribute to long-term livelihood security. Works related to water conservation, land development, and rural connectivity improve agricultural productivity and reduce vulnerability to environmental shocks. At the same time, wage employment provides immediate financial support to rural households during periods of economic distress.

Integrating the Framework

Taken together, these three perspectives provide a comprehensive analytical framework for examining rural development through employment guarantee programmes. The capability approach highlights the expansion of human well-being and freedoms; participatory rural development emphasizes community involvement and decentralized governance; and the sustainable livelihood framework focuses on strengthening the economic and social assets necessary for long-term livelihood security.

By combining these theoretical perspectives, the present study examines how MGNREGA contributes to rural development in Longleng district of Nagaland. Specifically, the analysis evaluates whether the programme enhances livelihood security, promotes women's empowerment, and strengthens rural infrastructure while also identifying institutional and administrative constraints that limit its effectiveness.

Methodology

This study adopts a mixed-method research design combining both qualitative and quantitative approaches in order to analyse the role of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) in promoting rural development in Longleng district of Nagaland. Mixed-method approaches are widely used in development research because they allow researchers to combine statistical analysis with field-based insights in order to better understand complex socio-economic processes (Creswell 2014).The empirical focus of this study is Longleng district in Nagaland, a predominantly rural region characterized by limited infrastructure, geographical remoteness, and heavy dependence on agriculture and allied activities for livelihoods. The district presents an important case for examining the functioning of rural development programmes because of its socio-economic vulnerabilities and developmental challenges. The study, is based on

both primary and secondary sources of data. Primary data were collected through fieldwork conducted in selected villages of Longleng district. Structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews were used to gather information from beneficiaries of MGNREGA regarding employment generation, livelihood security, women's participation, and challenges faced in programme implementation.

Secondary data were obtained from a variety of sources including government reports, census publications, official documents of the Ministry of Rural Development, academic journals, and statistical handbooks related to rural development and MGNREGA. These sources were used to contextualize the findings of the study and to analyse broader policy trends related to rural employment programmes. This study employed random sampling technique to select respondents from the study area. Out of the total forty-six villages in Longleng district, eight villages were selected based on population distribution and accessibility. From each selected village, fifty respondents were interviewed, resulting in a total sample size of four hundred respondents. The respondents consisted of individuals who had participated in MGNREGA works during the study period.

This sampling approach was adopted to ensure representation of different villages and socio-economic backgrounds within the district. The inclusion of multiple villages also helped capture variations in programme implementation and beneficiary experiences.

Primary data were collected through field surveys using structured questionnaires designed to capture information on several key aspects of MGNREGA implementation. These included employment generation, income patterns, participation of women, asset creation, and awareness of programme entitlements. In addition to questionnaires, interviews with beneficiaries and local stakeholders provided qualitative insights into the functioning of the programme and the challenges faced during its implementation.

Secondary data were analysed to examine trends in employment generation, work participation, and programme performance in the district. Official reports and statistical records were particularly useful in understanding the broader institutional and policy context of MGNREGA implementation. The data collected from the field survey were analysed using both quantitative and qualitative techniques. Quantitative data were tabulated and analysed using descriptive statistics to examine patterns of employment, income generation, and participation among beneficiaries. Qualitative responses obtained through interviews were analysed thematically to identify key issues related to programme implementation, institutional constraints, and beneficiary experiences. The empirical analysis of this study focuses on the period from 2020–21 to 2023–24. This time frame was selected to examine the recent performance of MGNREGA in Longleng district and to assess its contribution to rural livelihoods during a period marked by significant economic and social challenges.

Findings and Discussions

Implementation of MGNREGA in Nagaland

Rural development initiatives in Nagaland have evolved through a combination of centrally sponsored programmes and state-specific institutional mechanisms. Early efforts included the Community Development Programme introduced in the 1950s, which aimed to promote integrated rural development through community participation. Over time, decentralised governance structures became central to the state's development strategy, particularly with the creation of Village Development Boards (VDBs) during the late 1970s and early 1980s. These institutions function as key implementing agencies for both state and centrally sponsored development programmes and have played an important role in facilitating grassroots planning and community participation in rural development initiatives (Government of Nagaland 2022).

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) was introduced in

India in 2005 and gradually expanded across the country in phases beginning in 2006 (Government of India 2013). In Nagaland, the programme was first implemented in Mon district during the financial year 2006–07. Subsequently, additional districts including Kohima, Mokokchung, Wokha, and Tuensang were incorporated during the second phase in 2007–08. The programme was eventually extended to all districts of the state, including Longleng, by 2009. This expansion reflects the broader national effort to strengthen rural livelihoods and employment opportunities through rights-based welfare programmes.

MGNREGA Performance in Nagaland

An analysis of MGNREGA performance in Nagaland between 2020–21 and 2023–24 indicates a generally increasing level of participation among rural households. The number of households provided employment increased from 392,310 in 2020–21 to 420,743 in 2022–23 before declining slightly to 407,066 in 2023–24. Similarly, women's participation in the programme showed a significant increase over the study period, rising from 156,516 women beneficiaries in 2020–21 to more than 213,000 in 2023–24.[i]

In terms of employment generation, the programme produced over 18 million person-days of employment in 2020–21, which further increased to nearly 19.7 million person-days in 2022–23 before declining slightly in 2023–24. A significant feature of the programme in Nagaland is the dominance of Scheduled Tribe participation, reflecting the demographic composition of the state. More than 17 million person-days were generated for Scheduled Tribe households in 2020–21, increasing to approximately 19.5 million in 2022–23. By contrast, the participation of Scheduled Castes remains extremely limited.

Despite these achievements, the average number of workdays per household remains significantly below the guaranteed 100 days stipulated under MGNREGA. During the study period, the average employment generated ranged between 43 and 47 days per household. Similarly, the average number of workdays per woman beneficiary declined slightly to approximately 37 days in 2023–24. This gap between the guaranteed and actual employment generated suggests persistent implementation constraints within the programme.

The number of development works undertaken under MGNREGA also fluctuated during the study period. While 4,219 works were initiated in 2020–21, the number declined to 3,672 in the following year before increasing to 4,356 in 2022–23. Interestingly, the number of completed works increased sharply to 4,899 in 2023–24, indicating improvements in project execution and monitoring mechanisms.[ii]

Performance of MGNREGA in Longleng District

The performance of MGNREGA in Longleng district provides an interesting reflection of both the opportunities and limitations of rural employment programmes in geographically remote regions of the North-Eastern part of India. The number of completed works in the district increased substantially during the study period, rising from 95 completed works in 2020–21 to 205 works in 2023–24. These projects included activities such as rural connectivity, water conservation and harvesting, fisheries development, drought proofing, micro-irrigation, renovation of traditional water bodies, and land development.

Interestingly, the data also reveal a large number of projects that remained in progress or have been suspended across different blocks in the district for various reasons. For instance, 212 works remained incomplete in 2020–21 and increased to 345 projects in 2022–23 before declining to 204 in 2023–24. The presence of such incomplete projects indicates administrative and logistical challenges affecting programme implementation and the overall development issues of the district.

Employment Generation in Longleng District

Table 1 Employment generation in Longleng district from financial years 2020-21 to 2023-24.

District	Indicators	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Longleng	Cumulative Person days generated (in lakhs)	937854	958467	720828	839518
	Cumulative person days for SC households	59	46	0	0
	Cumulative person days provided to ST households	933644	955341	720828	839518
	Cumulative person days provided to women	267230	219829	289485	335624
	Total No of HHs completed 100 Days of Wage Employment	0	0	0	0

Source: Statistical Handbook of Nagaland 2021, 2022, 2023,2024

Employment generation under MGNREGA in Longleng district demonstrates mixed trends. The total person-days generated increased from 937,854 in 2020–21 to 958,467 in 2021–22 before declining to 720,828 in 2022–23. However, employment generation recovered slightly in 2023–24, reaching 839,518 person-days.

The data also reveal a striking pattern in terms of social group participation. While employment generation for Scheduled Tribes accounts for the overwhelming majority of person-days generated in the district, the participation of Scheduled Castes is almost negligible. In fact, the number of person-days generated for Scheduled Castes declined from 59 in 2020–21 to zero in subsequent years.

Women's participation under MGNREGA shows a gradual increase in the district. The number of person-days generated by women increased from 267,230 in 2020–21 to 335,624 in 2023–24. This trend reflects the important role played by the programme in providing wage employment opportunities to rural women, particularly in regions where alternative employment options remain limited.

Nevertheless, a significant limitation of the programme is evident in the fact that no household in the district completed the guaranteed 100 days of employment during the study period. This suggests that while MGNREGA provides supplementary employment opportunities, it falls short of fulfilling its statutory guarantee in practice.

Asset Creation under MGNREGA

Asset creation represents another important dimension of the developmental impact of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) in rural areas. Unlike earlier wage employment programmes that primarily focused on providing temporary employment, MGNREGA places significant emphasis on the creation of durable community assets that contribute to long-term rural development. These assets are intended to strengthen local infrastructure, improve natural resource management, and enhance livelihood opportunities for rural populations. In this context, asset creation serves not only as a mechanism for generating employment but also as a means of building productive rural infrastructure that can sustain economic activities in the long run

(Government of India 2013). States that successfully aligned MGNREGA activities with local planning processes achieved significant gains in employment generation and asset creation, thereby enhancing agricultural potential. (Reddy et.al 2014)

In the case of Longleng district, the data indicate that between the financial years 2020–21 and 2023–24, a total of 126 works related to rural connectivity were completed under the programme, making it the most prominent category of asset created during the study period. These projects primarily include the construction and improvement of rural roads, village pathways, and link roads connecting remote settlements to nearby markets and service centres. The emphasis on rural connectivity is particularly significant in geographically remote districts such as Longleng, where difficult terrain, limited transportation networks, and inadequate infrastructure often restrict mobility and access to essential services. Improved road connectivity not only facilitates easier movement of people and goods but also enhances access to markets, healthcare facilities, educational institutions, and administrative centres. Consequently, such infrastructure plays a crucial role in integrating rural communities with broader economic and social networks.

Furthermore, enhanced connectivity can contribute to agricultural development by enabling farmers to transport their produce to local markets more efficiently and at lower cost. It also encourages the expansion of small-scale economic activities and improves the delivery of public services in rural areas. From a developmental perspective, the prioritisation of rural connectivity projects under MGNREGA reflects the recognition that infrastructure development is a key driver of rural transformation. By creating such assets, the programme not only provides immediate wage employment but also strengthens the physical foundations necessary for sustained rural economic growth and social development. Agricultural underdevelopment and a lack of employment opportunities in rural areas are fundamental factors contributing to poverty-induced migration and thus proper implementation of the Act has the possibility of stopping migration to urban areas due to lack of employment opportunities (Bellampalli & Yadava 2024).

Other notable categories of assets created include drought proofing (81 works), fisheries development (57 works), water conservation and harvesting (45 works), and flood control measures (20 works). These activities contribute to strengthening rural livelihoods by improving natural resource management and agricultural productivity.

However, the analysis also reveals that several categories of development works remain largely absent from the district's project portfolio under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA). During the study period, no projects were undertaken in important sectors such as rural drinking water supply, playground development, or works on individual landholdings. The absence of these categories is noteworthy, as MGNREGA is designed to support a broad spectrum of livelihood-oriented and community-based infrastructure projects aimed at strengthening rural economies and improving the quality of life in rural areas (Government of India 2013). The lack of such interventions suggests that the implementation of the programme in the district has been concentrated primarily on a limited set of activities, particularly those related to rural connectivity and certain natural resource management works.

From a broader development perspective, the absence of diversified projects may indicate limitations in local-level planning, technical capacity, or awareness regarding the full range of permissible works under the programme. Effective implementation of rural development schemes requires a balanced distribution of projects that address both economic and social infrastructure needs, including water supply, sanitation, recreational facilities, and land development activities that directly benefit rural households. The concentration of projects in a narrow set of sectors may therefore restrict the potential developmental impact of the programme and limit its ability to generate sustainable livelihood opportunities.

Consequently, there is a clear need for more diversified and participatory planning mechanisms that encourage local institutions to identify a wider range of development priorities and fully utilise the programme's potential for comprehensive rural development.

Overall, the findings suggest that MGNREGA has played an important role in generating employment and creating rural infrastructure in Longleng district. At the same time, gaps between policy objectives and actual outcomes remain evident in areas such as employment duration, project completion rates, and diversification of development works. These findings highlight the importance of strengthening administrative capacity, improving awareness among beneficiaries, and ensuring more effective monitoring mechanisms to enhance the programme's developmental impact.[iii]

Conclusion and Policy Implications

This study examined the role of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) in promoting rural development in Longleng district of Nagaland. By analysing employment generation, asset creation, and participation patterns, the study highlighted both the potential and the limitations of the programme in addressing rural livelihood challenges in geographically remote regions.

The findings suggest that MGNREGA has contributed to employment generation and the creation of rural infrastructure in Longleng district. The programme has generated a significant number of person-days of employment and has supported various development activities such as rural connectivity, water conservation, fisheries development, and drought-proofing measures. These interventions have helped strengthen rural infrastructure and provided supplementary income to rural households, particularly during periods of limited agricultural employment. The programme has also created opportunities for women's participation in wage employment, reflecting its potential to enhance economic inclusion in rural areas.

However, the study also reveals several structural and administrative challenges that limit the programme's effectiveness. One of the most significant findings is that the average number of workdays generated per household remains far below the statutory guarantee of one hundred days of employment. Similarly, no household in the district completed the full quota of guaranteed employment during the study period. These findings indicate a persistent gap between the programme's legislative promise and its actual implementation at the local level.

From a theoretical perspective, the findings can be interpreted through the Capability Approach proposed by Amartya Sen, which emphasized on the expansion of human freedoms and opportunities through the idea of maximum utilisation of skills as the central objective of development. MGNREGA contributes to this process by providing wage employment and strengthening rural infrastructure, thereby enhancing the economic capabilities of rural households. At the same time, the limited duration of employment and administrative bottlenecks restrict the programme's ability to fully expand the capabilities of beneficiaries. In this sense, the programme functions more as a supplementary livelihood support mechanism rather than a comprehensive solution to rural poverty.

The findings also highlight the importance of local institutional structures in shaping the outcomes of rural development programmes. In Nagaland, traditional governance institutions such as Village Councils and Village Development Boards play a central role in the implementation of development initiatives. While these institutions facilitate decentralized planning and community participation, the effectiveness of development programmes ultimately depends on administrative coordination, resource availability, and institutional capacity at the local level.

Another important dimension of the study relates to asset creation under MGNREGA. The programme has contributed to the development of infrastructure such as rural roads, water conservation structures, and fisheries projects,

which can potentially enhance long-term livelihood security of the indigenous community in the Longleng district of Nagaland. However, the concentration of works in a limited number of categories suggests the need for greater diversification of development activities to address broader rural development needs.

Based on these findings, several policy implications emerge. First, improving awareness among rural beneficiaries regarding their rights and entitlements under MGNREGA is essential for strengthening demand-driven employment generation. There should be counselling sessions regarding the opportunities that can be derived put of such welfare mechanisms for the rural masses. Second, administrative mechanisms must be strengthened to ensure that the programme delivers the full quota of guaranteed employment days. Third, greater emphasis should be placed on the quality and sustainability of assets created under the programme so that they contribute to long-term rural economic development.

Finally, future rural development strategies should adopt a more integrated approach that combines employment programmes with investments in rural infrastructure, skill development, and livelihood diversification. Such an approach would enhance the developmental impact of MGNREGA and contribute to more sustainable and inclusive rural transformation in regions such as Longleng district.

In conclusion, while MGNREGA has played an important role in supporting rural livelihoods and infrastructure development in Longleng district, its full potential remains constrained by implementation challenges and structural limitations. There is a requirement of having an agrarian-centric approach aligning with the MGNREGA (Patel 2024). Addressing these challenges is essential for ensuring that employment guarantee programmes contribute more effectively to rural development and socio-economic transformation in marginalized regions.

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Notes

[i] Data collected from MGNREGA Management Information System.
[ii] Ibid.
[iii] Data was also collected from field-based studies from Longleng district of Nagaland.