Sustainable Development through Government Policies: A case study of Nalbari District of Assam

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Abstract

Purpose: Sustainable development distinguished that growth must be both inclusive and environmentally sound to reduce poverty and build shared prosperity for today’s population and to continue to meet the needs of future generations. Economic growth, environmental management and social exclusion are the three major pillars of sustainable development. This paper seeks to examine the extent to which government policies have in fact sustainable development through a case study of MGNREGA in Nalbari district of Assam.

Methodology: The study will be based on both primary data and secondary sources. Besides for the primary data collection, the information gathered through the questionnaires and interview method and structured questionnaires will be administrated to the respondents. It is proposed to the study 7 blocks, taking one village from each 7 blocks in the district. A sample of 105 respondents will be drawn for the purpose of the study. Secondary data will include books, published articles, newspapers, magazines and journals. The data collected from both the source will from the basic of analysis of the study.

Findings: The data will be quantified and analyzed in qualitative terms.

Research Limitations: The study is primary limited by only one government policy in one district from the state of Assam.

Practical Implications: The study would help in analysis the contribution of the policy towards sustainable development and also would hopefully provide a guideline to the agencies involved in future implementation of the scheme.

Originality: This study of sustainable development through government policies (MGNREGA) is first to undertaken in Nalbari district of Assam. Although there are several studies had been undertaken with the regards to various government policies in the different parts of the north-eastern region but almost negligible for Nalbari district.
Keywords: Sustainable development, government policy and MGNREGA.

Paper type: Case study, Empirical

Introduction

The sustainable development defined by the Brundtland Commission Report entitled “Our Common Future” as “development, which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generation to meet their own needs”. It contains two concept i.e., needs and limitations. The concept of needs means, the essential necessities of the rural poor. Further, the idea of limitations imposed by the state of technology and social organization on the environments that ability to meet present and future needs. The concept of sustainable development is not about choice between environmental protection and social progress but rather more about striving for economic and social development that would be compatible with environmental protection. The Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro (1992) put the concept of sustainable development on national and international policy. It is interpreted primarily in terms of environmental protection as well as management. In India, the movement in support of environmental protection and sustainable development started in the early 1980s, due to the devastating effects of the Bhopal gas tragedy as well as international development. Sustainable development has been embedded in the planning process during the 1990s. The Ninth Five-Year Plan (1997–2002) explicitly recognized the synergy between environment, health and development and identified as one of its core objectives the need for ensuring environmental sustainability of the development process through social mobilization and participation of people at all levels.

The Government of India has initiated many policies for the alleviation of poverty as well as sustainable development. Some of the programmes for achieving this goal were Community Development Programme (CDP), National Extension Service (NES) Integrated Agricultural

District Programme (IADP), High Yielding Varieties Programme etc. Further, Government of India also has been adopted some policies related to sustainable development which has given emphasized on economic and social development, for particular people with low standard of living as well as protecting the natural resource based on environment. Such as policies are Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (2005), National Urban Transport Policy (2006), National Environmental Policy (2006), National Urban Housing and Habitat Policy (2007), National Action Plan on Climate Change (2008), National Disaster Management Policy (2009), National Rural Livelihood Mission (2009) etc. This paper seeks to examine the extent to which government policies have infact sustainable development through a case study of MGNREGA in Nalbari district of Assam.

Methodology

The present study was conducted in the Nalbari district, Assam. It was based on both primary and secondary sources. Besides for the primary data collection, the information gathered through the questionnaires and interview method and structured questionnaires is administrated to the respondents. It was included all 7 blocks, taking one village from each 7 blocks in the district. Samples of 105 respondents were drawn for the purpose of the study. Secondary data was collected from books, published articles, newspapers, magazines and journals. The data collected from both source formed the basis of analysis of the study.

Nalbari district was a sub-division of undivided Kamrup district, declared as a district on 14 August 1985. It was further divided in 2003 for creation of Baska district in B.T.A.D areas. The population of Nalbari district is 769,919 of which 395,804 male and 374,115 female respectively. Further, the rural population of the district is 687368 and Urban population 82551. Nalbari is one of the educationally advanced districts in Assam. The literacy rate of Nalbari district is 79.89 per cent as per 2011 census. The male literacy rate is 84.36 per cent and female literacy rate is 72.57 per cent. Agriculture is the largest source of livelihood of the majority of the rural masses. The infrastructure facilities of the district such as electricity, connectivity, education and health are inadequate.

Several districts in Assam like Goalpara, Dhubri, Dhemaji, Morigaon, Nalbari, Kokrajhar, Darrang etc. have poverty level much higher than that of the state of Assam. The level of poverty in Nalbari district is one of the highest among these districts, and nearly

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5 Accessed from planningcommission.nic.in/plans/stateplan/assam/sp_sdrassam.htm, on 12/08/2012.
97.59 per cent of the total population of the district live in villages. Their poverty is reflected in several forms—illiteracy, ill-health, unemployment, failure of development. Various employment generation programmes have been implemented for the development of rural areas like TRYSEM, NREP, RLEGP, JRY, etc. since the early 1980s, although the performances of these schemes were very poor in the district of Nalbari. Given this socio-economic context, Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment guarantee Act seen as transformational mission for the upliftment of the rural poor.

MGNREGA have been implemented in different district of Assam between three phases. It was implemented in Nalbari district in the second phase (2007-08). Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment guarantee Act offered a paradigm shift from all precedent of wage employment programmes providing a statutory guarantee of wage employment. The significance of the Act lies in the fact that it creates a right based framework for wage employment programmes and makes the government legally bound to provide employment to those who seek it. It is also largest wage employment programme ever launched in the country, open to all rural people who are willing to do unskilled manual work. It is providing a legal guarantee of hundred days of employment in every financial year to an adult of any rural household. An innovative feature of the scheme is social audit which allow for participation of the primary stakeholders in monitoring the implementation of the scheme to ensure transparency and accountability. The mandatory feature of social audit by the primary stakeholders is being introduced for the first time in any public expenditure programmes in the country. The gram sabha has to conduct regular social audits of projects undertaken within the gram panchayats under section 17 of the scheme. Further, the crucial aim of the act is to create durable assets as well as strengthen the livelihood of the rural poor. The works undertaken through the Act addresses causes of chronic poverty like drought, deforestation, soil erosion, etc., so that the process of employment generation can be carried out on a sustainable livelihood and eco-restoration. It focuses on increase land productivity, recharging ground water and increasing water availability. According to 2013-14 as many as 105435 job cards were issued to households in 7 blocks in the district. On the other hand, the total number of person days generated is 533069, out of which 71253 women, 20158 SCs, 17255 STs and 495656 others.

Accessed from http://nalbari.nic.in on 24/02/2012.

Training of Rural Youth for Self Employment (TRYSEM), National Rural Employment Programme (NREP), Rural Landless Employment Guarantee Programme (RLEGP), Jawahar Rozgar Yojna,

1. **Assets Created under MGNREGA**

MGNREGA created assets have contributed towards improving the quality of rural people life. Through the employment generation, MGNREGA creating durable assets for strengthen the livelihood of the rural poor. According to Mihir Shah that the MGNREGA as a good way to investments which are both productive and labour-intensive. The aim has to be long term drought- and flood-proofing, not merely short-term relief. According to him, if MGNREGA is implemented properly, the programme has the potential to liberate India of the nuisance of regular drought and flood. Further, it also is providing employment opportunities to the rural poor which are helping for regenerating the local economy. The Centre for Science and Environment conducted study on MGNREGA in 9 states and 12 districts found that it is not just about drought relief but relief against drought.

**Table 1. Employment Generated Days-Wise during the Financial Year 2013-14**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Block</th>
<th>between (1 - 10) days</th>
<th>between (11 - 20) days</th>
<th>between (21 - 30) days</th>
<th>between (31 - 40) days</th>
<th>between (41 - 50) days</th>
<th>between (51 - 60) days</th>
<th>between (61 - 70) days</th>
<th>between (71 - 80) days</th>
<th>between (81 - 99) days</th>
<th>between (101 - 150) days</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BARIGO</td>
<td>725</td>
<td>1332</td>
<td>934</td>
<td>350</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>G BANBHA</td>
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<tr>
<td>BARKHE</td>
<td>366</td>
<td>912</td>
<td>883</td>
<td>514</td>
<td>337</td>
<td>289</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>14</td>
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<tr>
<td>BORBHA</td>
<td>1046</td>
<td>1512</td>
<td>383</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>MADHUP</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>630</td>
<td>523</td>
<td>252</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>PASCHI</td>
<td>588</td>
<td>1198</td>
<td>1010</td>
<td>461</td>
<td>361</td>
<td>179</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>8</td>
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</table>
From the table it is found that the average number of household get job only between 1-30 days. It is observed that the large number of household issued job card, but only few household get work. Similarly, 1408 household get work between 41-50 days, and 797 household get work between 51-60 days.

**Figure 1. Households Completed 100 Days in Financial Year -2013-2014**

The main objective of the Act is to enhancing livelihood security to the rural household by providing at least 100 day of guaranteed wage employment in every financial year. Above this figure it has been observed that a very few households could complete the norms of 100 days. According to the financial year 2013-14 that only 82 household from Nalbari district get job of 100 days. In the district only 26 household from Tihu block could completed the norms of 100 day and lowest only 1 household got 100 days job from the Borogog Barghag block.

Source: DRDA, Nalbari, 2014
Form this it has been observed that 105454 household issued job card during the financial year 2013-14, out of which 23245 household provided employment. On the other hand the percentage of employment provided between SCs, STs and women is lower in Nalbari district. Further, 978 household SCs out of 4955, 689 household STs out of 3462 and 3198 women provided employment. The most significant feature of MGNREGA is given priority to socially disadvantage groups; however it seems that the percentage of SCs, STs and women under this Act are not much satisfactory in the district of Nalbari.

**Table 2. Completed Work under MGNREGA during the financial year 2013-14**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Work Type</th>
<th>Borigog</th>
<th>Barkhetri</th>
<th>Borbhaag</th>
<th>Madhupur</th>
<th>Pashim. Nalbari</th>
<th>Pub-Nalbari</th>
<th>Tihu</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rural connectivity</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>541</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flood control</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water conservation and Harvesting</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: DRDA, Nalbari 2014
| Renovation of traditional Water bodies | 1  | 0  | 4  | 2  | 14 | 13 | 1  | 35 |
| Drought proofing                     | 14 | 0  | 0  | 5  | 0  | 16 | 0  | 35 |
| Micro-Irrigation                     | 2  | 2  | 1  | 9  | 9  | 14 | 4  | 41 |
| Irrigation Facilities to SC/ST/IAY/LR| 0  | 0  | 3  | 0  | 0  | 3  | 0  | 6  |
| Land Development                     | 31 | 74 | 36 | 34 | 72 | 85 | 22 | 354|
| Rural Drinking                       | 0  | 0  | 0  | 0  | 0  | 0  | 0  | 0  |
| Rural Sanitation                     | 0  | 0  | 0  | 0  | 0  | 0  | 0  | 0  |
| Total                                | 183| 90 | 82 | 117| 211| 258| 58 | 1026|

Source: nrega.nic.in

Through MGNREGA assets creation like rural connectivity, water conservation, land and watershed development, flood control, drought proofing and agri-related activities promise to contribute greatly to the economic and ecological development of rural areas. Majority of work done under this act in Nalbari district is rural connectivity and land development. Further, the completed work under MGNREGA in Nalbari district rural connectivity obtained top position with 541, land development with 354, Micro-irrigation with 41, water harvesting with 38, drought proofing with 35 and renovation of traditional water bodies with 35.

Figure 2. Impact of MGNREGS on Rural Connectivity
Since most of the activities carried out under the scheme are related to rural connectivity like connecting a village by paved road and construction of culvert etc. Nalbari district is one of the mostly flood affected district of Assam. In the rainy season the villages is unapproachable and water accumulate in many places. People were not able to reach market and mostly the school going children were not able to reach school. So, villager’s priority was rural connectivity, which is approved in gram panchayats. From the field it has been observed that after the implementation of MGNREGA rural people able to connect the remote villages as well as children able to go school. In Nalbari district 71 percent respondent agreed that MGNREGA has a positive effect on rural connectivity, whereas 34 percent respondent were not agreed. The construction of new road is changing the lives of villagers in Nalbari district of Assam. Moreover, the rural people achieve double benefit through this scheme, like creating rural infrastructure and livelihood security through employment.
Source: Field Survey, 2013-14

The data indicates about 50 percent of the respondent both male and female reported that MGNREGA is helpful to overcoming financial problems. Further, rural people achieved the alternative source of employment which is created livelihood opportunity in an agriculture dominated areas through wage employment. However, about 29 percent male and 28 percent female did not agree.

2. MGNREGA: Its Impact and Possibilities

2.1 Impact on Local Economy: The major impact of MGNREGA is providing employment opportunities to the rural poor as well as helping to receive the local economy. Especially, majority of women previously not entered in labour market because of patriarchal values. However through the Act women get right to employment which is directly effect to raising the total size of the labour force in the villages and livelihood security. Further, improved economic condition will encourage parents to send their children to school.

2.2 Improved Quality of Life: The level of development is very low in rural areas due to the absence of adequate infrastructure. Development of rural infrastructure facilities under MGNREGA is a good way to improve the quality of rural people life. The
construction of roads improved the connectivity for villagers such as access to market and other facilities which are increases the people access to livelihood option. Due to the rural connectivity MGNREGA might improve the access to health service centre.

2.3 Impact on Agriculture: Agriculture is the main occupation of the people in the district engaging about 68% of the working population. Paddy is the major agricultural crop. Further, more or less 85 percent respondent reported to have their own land. Through the enhancement of MGNREGA project related to water conservation, flood control and watershed development contributed to growth of agriculture production. Especially in Borigog Bonbhag, Barkhetri, Pub-Nalbari and Pashim Nalbari Blocks.

2.4 Improvement in Rural Environment: MGNREGA assets have made potential impact on reduced environmental degradation through natural resources management such as afforestation, drought proofing, flood control, water conservation, renovation of traditional water bodies, micro-irrigation, land development, etc.

2.5 Change the Cropping Patterns: Provision of water is vital for ensuring food and water security in rural India. Water-related assets created under MGNREGA have increased the quantity of water available for irrigation. The increased availability of water has also led to changes in cropping patterns and increased area under cultivation. However, the majority of micro-irrigation project have been created in Madhupur, Pub-Nalbari and Pashim Nalbari blocks.

2.6 Reducing Migration: During the non-agricultural season most of the farmers who used to migrate towards the nearby cities. However, after implementation of MGNREGA there are very few rural people who migrate from the village. If MGNREGA implemented properly, the programme has potential to reduction in distress migration and an improvement in the livelihood of the poor.

Concluding Remarks

MGNREGA aims at providing sustainable livelihood through employment to the rural poor. However, from the above analysis it seems that the overall performance of MGNREGA in Nalbari district is not satisfactory. It has been observed that regarding work the performance of Pub-Nalbari and Pashim Nalbari block under Nalbari district is much better than other

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9 Potential Linked Credit Plan (2005-06), Nalbari District, National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development, Guwahati.
blocks. Further, the act could not able to ensure 100 day of guarantee to the rural people in the district. As we know MGNREGA is demand driven programme, creation of jobs under this programme indirectly depend on rural household demand. However the rural people are less awareness regarding the act such as demand of works, unemployment allowance, types of work, payments etc. Even the level of awareness regarding the role of gram panchayats also is very poor. Although the performance of MGNREGA is low in Nalbari district even there some positive impact also. MGNREGS has shown the way for sustainable livelihood by taking up horticulture plantation, digging fisheries etc. for the villagers. The enhancement of employment and income opportunities would be help to create a long-term of activities for their livelihoods security.

Reference


