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Impact of MGNREGA on the Livelihoods of Scheduled Tribes in Kokrajhar District: A Data-Driven Analysis

Abstract

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) is a comprehensive program in India designed to provide job opportunities and enhance public infrastructure in rural areas. This research investigates MGNREGA's effects on the livelihoods of Scheduled Tribe (ST) communities in Kokrajhar District of Assam. By meticulously analyzing secondary data, the study aims to assess the program's success in creating employment for ST populations. The investigation covers various aspects, including the number of person-days generated, the percentage of households receiving 100 days of work. Additionally, the research seeks to identify challenges in implementing MGNREGA. The findings of this study have the potential to guide policymakers, government officials, and other relevant parties in improving the program's design and implementation.

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1. Introduction

Enacted in 2005, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) is a cornerstone of India's rural development policy. This comprehensive program guarantees a minimum of 100 days of yearly paid work to rural families willing to perform unskilled manual labor. MGNREGA serves as a vital support system for countless rural Indians, tackling unemployment issues while fostering asset development

in rural regions. MGNREGA aims not only to create jobs but also to bolster rural household security, establish lasting infrastructure for rural economic growth, and uplift disadvantaged groups. The program's structure incorporates principles of social inclusivity, gender parity, and ecological preservation, offering a comprehensive strategy for rural advancement. This research examines MGNREGA's effects on Scheduled Tribes (ST) livelihoods in Kokrajhar District, concentrating on job creation and resource allocation. Kokrajhar District's selection is crucial due to its significant ST population, enabling a thorough evaluation of the program's reach to marginalized communities. Examination of secondary data indicates a notable rise in workdays generated for ST households since MGNREGA's inception. This trend showcases the program's vital role in expanding job prospects for one of India's most vulnerable groups. The increase in workdays suggests not only improved work access but also potential growth in household earnings and overall economic stability within ST communities. Nevertheless, the study also uncovers inconsistencies in fund distribution and spending patterns. These discrepancies may arise from various factors, including bureaucratic holdups, administrative inefficiencies, and difficulties in implementing a large-scale program across diverse geographical and socio-economic landscapes. Such inconsistencies could impede the program's efficacy and restrict its potential impact on ST communities. The research findings highlight both successes and hurdles in MGNREGA implementation. While the program has effectively generated employment and contributed to rural asset creation, issues related to fund management and utilization point to areas needing improvement in program administration and execution. These insights provide valuable guidance for policymakers and program administrators, emphasizing the need for refined strategies to ensure more equitable and efficient distribution of job opportunities among ST communities in rural areas. Potential improvements may include streamlining administrative processes, enhancing transparency in fund allocation and use, and implementing more robust monitoring and evaluation systems. Moreover, the study underlines the importance of customizing development programs to meet the specific needs and circumstances of marginalized communities like the Scheduled Tribes. It suggests that while MGNREGA has made significant progress in addressing rural unemployment, there is room for further adaptation to maximize its impact on ST livelihoods. In summary, the objective of this study offers a nuanced understanding of MGNREGA's role in fostering employment and economic stability among ST communities in Kokrajhar District. By highlighting both achievements and areas for

improvement, it contributes to the ongoing discourse on rural development strategies in India and provides a foundation for evidence-based policy refinement.

1.1 Objectives of the Study

To achieve the main objective of the study, the present paper selects the following specific objectives.

1. To estimate the employment generation through Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act in Kokrajhar District of Assam
2. To examine the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act on employment generation of ST households in Kokrajhar District of Assam.

1.2 Methodology

This research primarily utilizes secondary data to pursue its objectives. The relevant secondary data were collected from various published sources, including the official website of MGNREGA, the official websites of the government of Assam, the Ministry of Rural Development, block development offices and Gram Panchayat, the Statistical Hand Book of Assam, journals, periodicals, and other related sources.

2. Literature Review

2.1 National Context

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act is widely regarded as one of India's most significant social welfare programs. It aims to provide at least 100 days of wage employment annually to rural households. Its impacts have been extensively documented across the country, focusing on poverty reduction, employment generation, and rural development. **1. Poverty Alleviation:** Research indicates that MGNREGA has contributed significantly to reducing rural poverty. According to Dutta et al. (2012), the program reduced poverty levels by 7–8% among participating households by offering a stable income source. This aligns with findings from Narayanan (2016), which highlighted the scheme's role in enhancing household consumption and reducing distress migration. **2. Rural Wage Increases:** MGNREGA has led to substantial increases in rural wage rates. Drèze and Khara (2017) reported that guaranteed employment under the scheme has established a

benchmark for minimum wages in rural areas, indirectly benefitting non-participants by improving local wage dynamics. **3. Employment and Gender Equity:** The program has successfully engaged marginalized groups, including Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), and women. Women's participation in MGNREGA often exceeds 50%, fostering financial inclusion and empowerment (Khera & Nayak, 2009). This gendered dimension is particularly noteworthy in states such as Rajasthan and Tamil Nadu, where women constitute the majority of the workforce in MGNREGA projects. **4. Infrastructure Development:** By emphasizing asset creation, MGNREGA has improved rural infrastructure, such as irrigation facilities, rural roads, and water conservation structures. According to Chopra (2014), these assets not only address immediate employment needs but also contribute to long-term agricultural productivity and resilience. **5. Climate Resilience:** Recent research has underscored MGNREGA's role in promoting climate resilience. Projects involving afforestation, watershed management, and soil conservation have had dual benefits of environmental protection and livelihood generation (Barrett et al., 2020). **6. Challenges and Criticisms:** Despite its achievements, MGNREGA faces challenges, including delays in wage payments, inadequate monitoring, and unequal implementation across states. For instance, Rajshekhar (2021) highlighted systemic issues such as low fund allocation and bureaucratic inefficiencies, particularly in low-performing states.

2.2 State-Level Insights

In Assam, the implementation of MGNREGA has been characterized by significant regional variability. Districts where the scheme was introduced during its initial phase, such as Barpeta, Dhemaji, and Dibrugarh, have consistently demonstrated higher employment days compared to districts where the rollout was delayed. This trend aligns with findings from Baruah et al. (2015), who observed that early implementation allows for better capacity-building, infrastructure setup, and community awareness, resulting in more effective program outcomes. However, the state has also faced challenges in ensuring equitable access to MGNREGA benefits. Studies by Sarma et al. (2018) indicate that geographical remoteness and administrative inefficiencies often limit the scheme's reach in hilly and tribal areas, particularly in districts like Kokrajhar and Karbi Anglong. Furthermore, delayed wage payments, insufficient awareness campaigns, and inadequate staffing have been identified as key impediments to achieving the scheme's full potential. Despite these challenges, MGNREGA has made notable contributions to rural development in Assam, particularly in creating irrigation infrastructure and promoting afforestation, which align with the state's

agricultural and environmental needs. Research highlights several challenges specific to ST populations: **1. Limited Awareness:** Awareness about the rights and entitlements under MGNREGA remains low among ST communities. A study by Banerjee and Saha (2016) in the northeastern states revealed that only 40% of ST households were aware of the program's provision for 100 days of guaranteed employment. **2. Bureaucratic Delays:** Administrative inefficiencies, such as delays in job card issuance and the approval of work applications, disproportionately affect ST populations. Tripathi and Biswas (2017) found that such delays were more pronounced in remote tribal areas, where connectivity and administrative presence are weaker. **3. Unequal Access to Benefits:** Inequitable access to MGNREGA benefits is a recurring issue. Studies by Xaxa (2014) and Jha et al. (2019) highlight that ST households often receive fewer person-days of employment than other groups due to discrimination and inadequate monitoring mechanisms. **4. Role of Customary Practices:** Cultural practices and traditional livelihoods in tribal areas may also impact participation in MGNREGA. For example, shifting cultivation or seasonal migration for labor often conflicts with the rigid timelines of MGNREGA work schedules, limiting ST involvement (Kumar et al., 2020). These challenges underscore the need for targeted interventions, such as awareness campaigns in tribal languages, grievance redressal mechanisms, and flexible work schedules tailored to local contexts.

3. Discussion

Table 1.1 represents the total person days generation as well as households achieved 100 days employment in Kokrajhar district from 2019 to 2024. This data provides insights into the implementation of the rural employment guarantee scheme in Kokrajhar district over a five-year period. The information on person days generated and households achieving 100 days of employment can be used to assess the effectiveness of the program in providing livelihood opportunities to rural residents. Analyzing these trends can help policymakers and administrators evaluate the scheme's impact and identify areas for improvement in employment generation and household participation.

Table 1: Person Days Generated in Kokrajhar District (2019-2024)¹

Year	Total Person Days	Achieved 100 Days
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¹Source: www.nrega.nic.in

		(Households)
2019-2020	2387555	719
2020-2021	2394313	897
2021-2022	2238196	223
2022-2023	3628385	828
2023-2024	4454074	615

Figure 1 depicts total person days generated over the Years. A bar chart illustrating the annual trends in person-days generated from 2019-2024. The chart demonstrates significant increases in 2022-2023 and 2023-2024. Figure 1.b presents Households Achieving 100 Days of Employment: A line chart representing the number of households attaining 100 days of work for each year. The chart exhibits fluctuations in the number of households achieving 100 days of employment across the years.

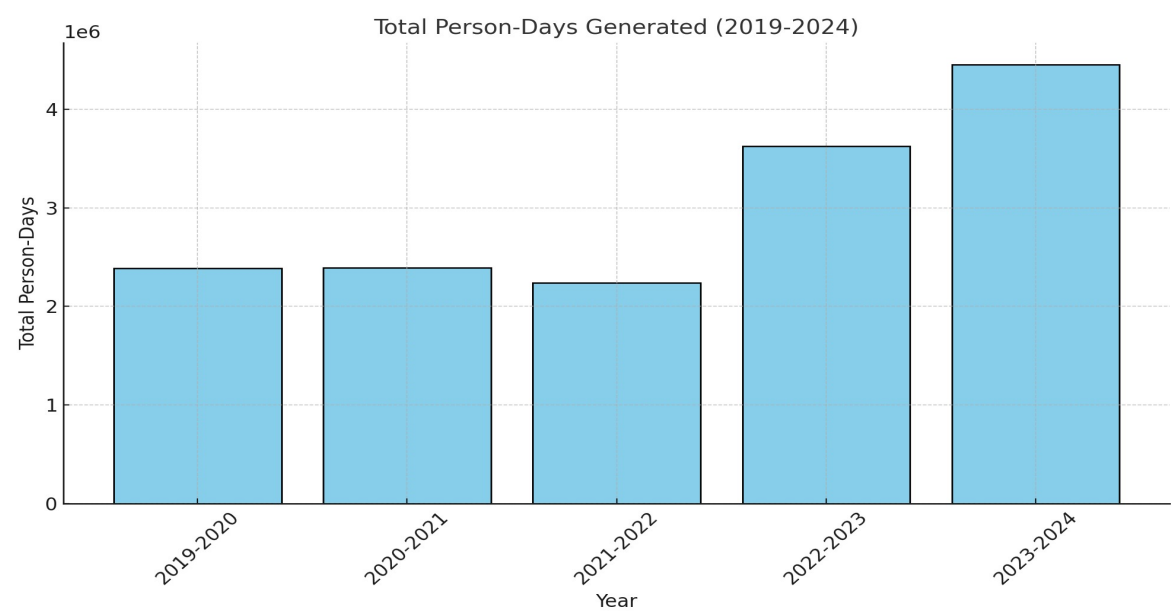


Figure 1: Total Person-Days Generated (2019-2024) (Computed by author)

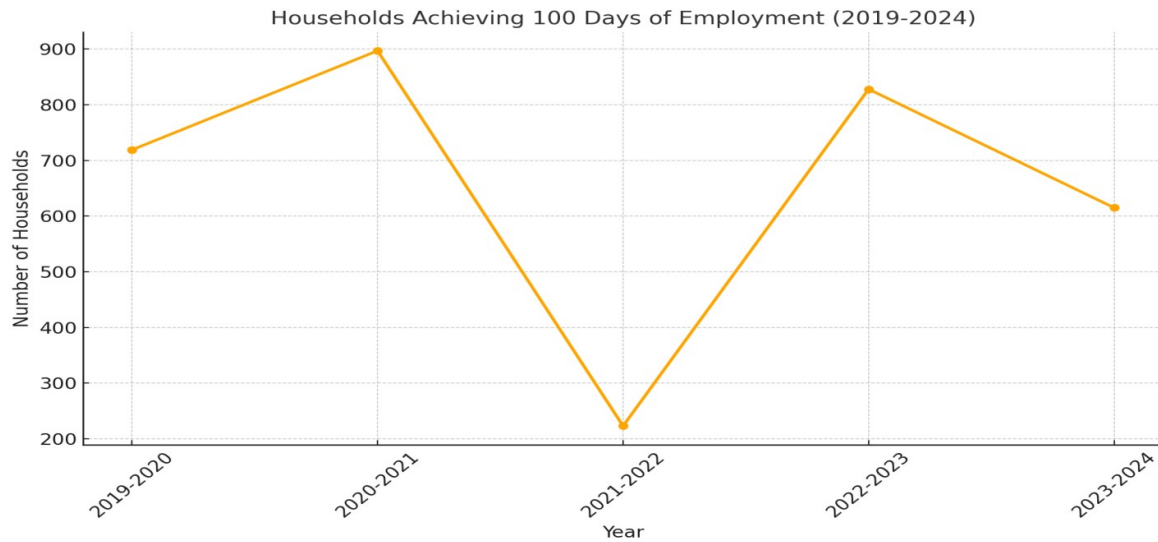


Figure 2: Households Achieving 100 Days of Employment (2019-2024) (Computed by author)

Table 1.2 illustrates the total person days generation and achieved 100 days employment in Kokrajhar district from 2019 to 2024. The data provides insights into the participation and performance of Scheduled Tribe (ST) households in MGNREGA from 2019–2024. Two key indicators are analyzed: Total Person-Days Generated for ST Households and ST Households Achieving 100 Days of Employment. The percentages in parentheses represent the proportion of total person-days and the share of ST households achieving 100 days of work compared to all households, respectively. The total person-days for ST households have consistently increased over the years, with the highest figure of 2,080,250 (46.70%) in 2023–2024. The percentage of person-days attributable to ST households has also risen, from 34.67% in 2019–2020 to 46.70% in 2023–2024, indicating enhanced inclusion and participation of ST populations in MGNREGA activities. The number of ST households achieving 100 days of work has fluctuated. Following a significant decrease in 2021–2022 (111 households, 49.78%), the figures recovered to 414 households in 2023–2024, with a notable share of 67.32%. This recovery suggests improved access to consistent employment for ST households in recent years.

Table 2: Person Days Generated for ST People in Kokrajhar District (2019-2024)²

Year	Total Person Days (ST)	Achieved 100 Days (ST Households)
2019-2020	827777 (34.67)	406 (56.46)
2020-2021	898460 (37.53)	476 (53.07)
2021-2022	906193 (40.49)	111 (49.78)
2022-2023	1413708 (38.96)	402 (48.55)
2023-2024	2080250 (46.70)	414 (67.32)

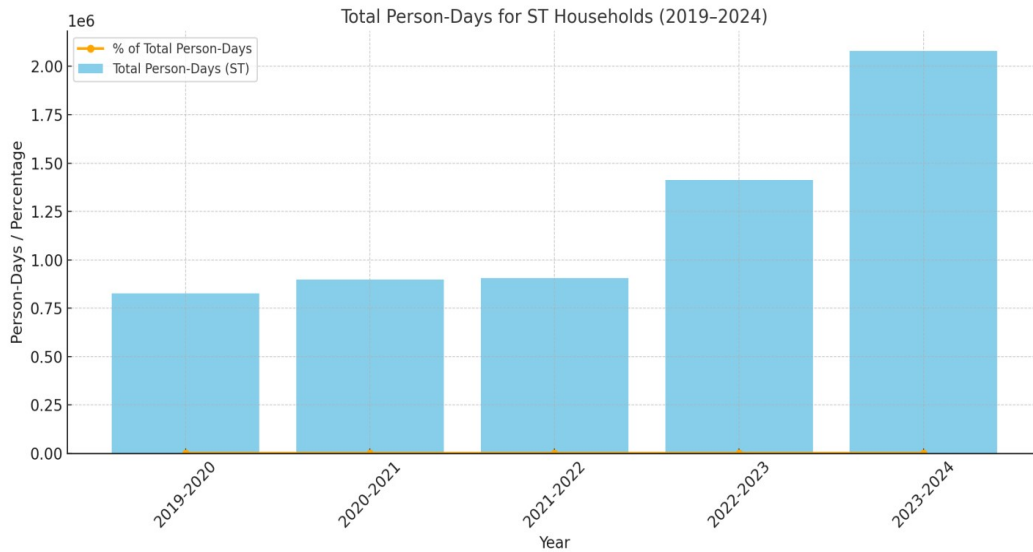


Figure 3: Person-Days for ST Households (2019-2024) (Computed by author)

²Sources: www.nrega.nic.in

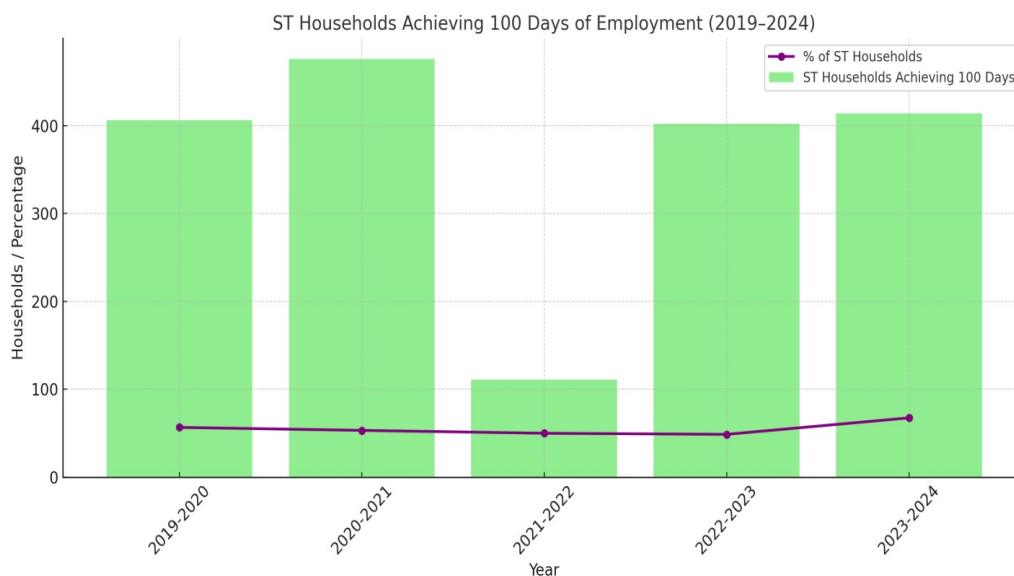


Figure 4: ST Households Achieving 100 Days of Employment (2019-2024) (Computed by Author)

Figure 1.c depicts Total Person-Days for ST Households (2019–2024). The blue bars represent the total person-days generated for ST households, demonstrating a consistent increase from 827,777 in 2019–2020 to 2,080,250 in 2023–2024. The orange line illustrates the percentage of total person-days attributed to ST households, which increased from 34.67% to 46.70%, indicating enhanced inclusion over time. Figure 1.d illustrates ST Households Achieving 100 Days of Employment (2019–2024). The green bars represent the number of ST households achieving 100 days of employment annually. Despite a decrease in 2021–2022 to 111 households, the figures recovered to 414 households in 2023–2024. The purple line depicts the percentage of ST households among all households achieving 100 days, increasing from 56.46% in 2019–2020 to 67.32% in 2023–2024, reflecting improved performance relative to other groups. These trends suggest that MGNREGA's reach and impact on ST populations in the region have strengthened in recent years, evidenced by increased participation and employment stability.

4. Conclusion

This research examines the impact of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) on the livelihoods of Scheduled Tribes (ST) in Kokrajhar District, Assam, India. By analyzing secondary data from 2019 to 2024, the study assesses

the program's success in creating employment for ST populations. The findings show a consistent increase in total person-days generated for ST households, from 827,777 in 2019-2020 to 2,080,250 in 2023-2024. The percentage of person-days attributable to ST households also rose from 34.67% to 46.70%, indicating enhanced inclusion and participation. However, the number of ST households achieving 100 days of employment fluctuated, with a notable recovery in recent years. The study highlights challenges such as limited awareness, bureaucratic delays, unequal access to benefits, and the impact of customary practices on ST participation in MGNREGA. The research emphasizes the need for targeted interventions and policy refinements to maximize the program's impact on ST livelihoods in Kokrajhar District.

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