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Role of MGNREGA in fostering its contributions in Green Structure: A Study of the East Khasi Hills District of Meghalaya

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ABSTRACT

The terms "green structure" and "sustainability" are frequently used interchangeably because of the vital role that green structures play in structural development, industry innovation, resilient infrastructure development, sustainable urban design, and climate change adaptation measures. To develop and preserve these ecological assets, local communities, businesses, and government organizations frequently work together. In rural India, green infrastructure is being promoted via the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA). In addition to promoting ecological conservation and environmental sustainability, MGNREGA is a social security program designed to guarantee livelihood security through employment. Green infrastructure development is supported by MGNREGA, which incorporates activities like afforestation, water conservation, and building sustainable rural assets. These initiatives support rural livelihoods by creating jobs, but they also aid in the preservation and repair of natural ecosystems. The main objective of this paper is to highlight the activities for green infrastructure under MGNREGA and the problems faced for the implementation of green infrastructure initiatives under MGNREGA.

Keywords: Sustainable Development, MGNREGA, Green Infrastructure, Rural India, Sustainable Livelihood.

I. INTRODUCTION

No policy or programme undertaken in a developing or a developed nation can afford to ignore the question of environment. Environment, defined in the large sense that includes both natural environment and large sense that includes both natural environment and built environment- 'buildings and works, and the other modifications which the human race makes to the natural environment' is at the centre of the global discussion on sustainability for a long time now. Development must not merely sustain itself and establish a perpetual network of productive

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institutions. It must ensure that the environment and all its components are in mutual harmony and in a position to retain that balance for the long foreseeable future of humanity.

(A) Review of Literature

In a study on the environment sustainability and vulnerability reduction, Tiwari et. el. (2011) observed that the NREGA has provided multiple environmental services and reduced vulnerability, apart from providing employment and income to rural communities. The environmental services include groundwater recharge, water percolation, more water storage in tanks, increased soil fertility, reclamation of degraded lands and carbon sequestration. These services contributed to, and had positive implications for, increased crop and livestock production.

Das (2019) in his study on the impact of MNREGS in West Bengal stated that the scheme helps maintain the natural ecosystem, control the soil erosion and land slide in hilly region, fulfils the forest base demand in local region, protect the drought, flood and desertification, sustain the local forest-based tradition and culture and maintain the local weather condition for the physical and mental wellbeing for the living species within the natural habitats. The findings also noted the scheme also helped afforestation in the waste land, plantation through agroforestry, plantation on the both side of the road, railway, plantation in drought and desert affected area and plantation on the bund of river and costal area.

Pandey (2017) in this paper “MGNREGA and Its Role in Rural Development” mentioned the role of MGNREGA on economic development, asset creation and infrastructural development of rural India. He showed that four states (Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh) accounted for 50% of the total expenditure made under the scheme. It was also seen that three states, namely Bihar, Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh accounted for 46% of the rural poor but utilized about 20% of the funds and consequently only 20% of total households were provided employment under the scheme. This indicates that there was little correlation between poverty level in a state and the implementation of MGNREGA.

Pamecha & Sharma (2015) studies in 20 villages of Rajasthan’s Dungarpur district reveals that MGNREGA increased the income of families by providing employment with as estimate of 51% increase per households, contributing from Rs 5000 to 10000 in the yearly income of their family. The study examined that MGNREGA is an important factor to reduce the migration from rural to urban.

Sinha, Basu, and Katiyar (2011) in “Adapting to Climate Change: Opportunities under MGNREGA”, showed the relationship between MGNREGA and ecology. They identified the

contribution of MGNREGA on food security, water scarcity management, ecological sustainability, health hazard management and extreme weather events through different schemes.

(B) Objectives of the Study

1. To highlight the activities for green infrastructure under MGNREGA.
2. To study the problems faced for the implementation of green infrastructure initiatives under MGNREGA.

(C) Research Methodology

The study will be based on secondary sources of data. For the completion of study necessary information will be collected from relevant books, journals, articles, and various government reports etc.

II. MGNREGA

The MGNREGA is chiefly an employment scheme aimed at rural India, yet it has helped in augmenting ecological conservation. The Act aims at enhancing the livelihood security of the people in rural areas by guaranteeing hundred days of wage employment in a financial year, to a rural household whose member volunteer to do unskilled manual work. The objective of the Act is to create durable assets and strengthen the livelihood resource base of the rural poor. The Act further aims to create sustainable livelihoods through regeneration of the natural resources base of rural India, furthering the cause of resilience and adaptation to climate change.

(A) Impact of MGNREGA in Strengthening Environmental Services and taking up Green Infrastructure Initiatives

The impact of MGNREGA works can be clearly seen in the rise in groundwater, improvement in soil quality and reduction in vulnerability of production systems to climate variability. Naturally, the extend and kind of impact the MGNREGA works have on the environment depends on the scale of activities being undertaken, their technical design, quality of assets created and ownership and use of the physical structures constructed.

Several studies suggests that the MGNREGA has had a positive impact on the environment, but there is need to quantify it, so as to know extensively. Evidence of suitability of the MGNREGA works in terms of their usefulness for environment and ecology is emerging. In the short run, the works under the scheme provide environmental services aimed at natural resources at the local level, such as water availability, recharging groundwater, conserving water, increasing the area under irrigation, reducing soil erosion, increasing soil fertility, conserving biodiversity,

reclaiming de-graded crop and grazing lands and carbon sequestration. When all these benefits are combined, they produce at a large scale, regional implications for climate change mitigation and carbon sequestration.

We can enumerate the impact of the MGNREGA works in the following table:

- Renovation of traditional Water Bodies: Improved storage capacity, irrigation availability, water conservation recharge, soil quality (nutrient cycling), biomass production and crop production.
- Water Conservation and Harvesting: Groundwater recharge, soil moisture retention and protection, water conservation, flood control, providing irrigation and drinking water and improving soil quality.
- Irrigation Provisioning and Improvement: Providing irrigation, improved-agriculture and livelihoods, reducing the need for methane increased crop production producing large dams.
- Land Development: Land reclaimed for agriculture, improved-irrigation availability, hence agriculture and livelihood improvement.
- Flood Control: Better drainage, higher land productivity and water conservation flood control.
- Drought Proofing: Soil Moisture retention, protection of soil, water conservation, carbon quality, flood control, biomass sequestration, biodiversity production and local climate regulation conservation.

The above impacts can be exhaustive or on a limited scale, but their impact cannot be ignored in terms of ecological advantages.

(B) MGNREGA in Meghalaya:

The year 2006 saw the Districts of West Garo Hills and South Garo Hills implement the Mahatma Gandhi NREGA for the first time. 2007 saw the Districts of East Khasi Hills, Jaintia Hills, and Ri-Bhoi covered by the second phase. Finally, the third phase in 2008 covered the districts of East Garo Hills and West Khasi Hills. The Meghalaya government has developed some procedures over time that are regarded as best practices for implementing the MGNREGS. MNREGA Statistics of East Khasi Hills District, Meghalaya (NREGA, 2024), the following provides the employment details of household in the district:

Employment provided to households:	0.54457 Lakh
Persondays [in Lakh]:	
Total:	22.25
SCs:	0.06 [0.27%]
STs:	21.94 [98.6%]
Women:	13.33 [59.93%]
Others:	0.25 [1.13%]
Total works taken up:	1705
Works completed:	288
Works in progress:	1417

Works Under MGNREGA during the Financial Year 2024-2025 in East Khasi Hills District:

1. Drought Proofing
2. Fisheries
3. Flood Control and Protection
4. Food Grain
5. Land Development
6. Micro Irrigation Works
7. Renovation of traditional Water bodies.
8. Rural Connectivity.
9. Rural Drinking Water.
10. Rural Sanitation.
11. Water Conservation and Water Harvesting.
12. Works on Individual Land.
13. Play Ground.
14. Coastal Areas.
15. Bharat Nirman Rajeev Gandhi Sewa Kendra.

16. Anganwadi/other Rural Infrastructure.

17. Other works.

III. DISCUSSION

The goal of the current study is to comprehend how MGNREGA has influenced and contributed to the development of green structures in Meghalaya's East Khasi Hills District. During the financial year 2020-21, the Labour Budget approved by the Ministry of Rural Development (MORD) was 393 lakh person days which is 12.29% more than the previous year's approved budget (350 Person days). The achievement stood at 383.70 lakh person days which touched 97.63% of the projections, providing 71.53 % of average person days per household. The COVID-19 pandemic although it had an impact on the programme implementation during the year, yet it continued to be a lifeline for the rural households which is visible in the demands made by them during the period of lockdown. The person days achieved stood as the highest when compared to previous financial year. During the fiscal year 2020–21, the State was granted ₹ 166024.36 lakh, of which ₹ 161882.64 lakh was utilized. Of this, ₹ 97496.76 lakh was actually spent on wages during the year, ₹ 3909.57 lakh on materials, and ₹ 3619.48 lakh on administrative costs (CHAPTER 1). The entire cost also included the repayment of ₹ 3800 lakh that the State Corpus Fund had borrowed in FY 2018–19 and the ₹ 29.23 lakh transfer of the accumulated interest under the NeFMS. The fund's sanctioned amount grew to ₹ 22924.46 lakh from the previous fiscal year.

Work Categories: Rural Infrastructure and Anganwadi Drought Proofing 1.94 %, Fisheries 6.96 % 1.79 percent; Protection & Control of Floods; 3.60 percent; Land Development; 4.92 percent; Micro Irrigation Works; 0.83 percent; Other Works Playground 0.02 percent; Works on Private Property (Category IV) 39.69% Water Harvesting and Conservation 14.70% Rural Drinking Water 0.02% Traditional Water Body Renovation 1.66 percent Connectivity in Rural Areas: 22.33%

The percentage of the total number of works for each work category in the 2020–21 fiscal year. There have been a number of changes to the VEC's planning process following several years of emphasizing rural connectivity. There was a rise in works under on Individual Land The VECs are still concerned about rural connectivity, and they have identified water conservation as a top issue.

IV. CONCLUSION

In conclusion it can be said that the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee

Act (MGNREGA) has played a prominent role in advancing green structure in East Khasi Hills District of Meghalaya. In addition to giving rural residents options for a living, MGNREGA's employment generating programs that prioritize environmental conservation and sustainable development have also helped to preserve natural resources and advance environmentally friendly practices. In addition to increasing the local residents' ability to adapt to climate change, the construction of green infrastructure—such as afforestation initiatives, water conservation structures, and soil conservation measures—has also aided in the region's sustainable development.

(A) Suggestions

Moving forward, it is critical to increase the implementation of MGNREGA by incorporating innovative technology and best practices to maximize its impact on green infrastructure. In addition, encouraging community participation and raising knowledge about environmental conservation might help MGNREGA initiatives last longer. Furthermore, forming alliances with local NGOs, academic institutions, and government agencies might help to broaden the scope and effectiveness of MGNREGA programs in promoting green infrastructure throughout the East Khasi Hills district and beyond. MGNREGA, with continuous commitment and collaboration, has the potential to be an important tool for fostering both economic development and environmental sustainability in rural areas.

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