

Participation and Decentralization of Development: A Case Study of Assam

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Abstract: Existing gap between urban and rural process of growth and change necessitates development decentralization as like the political decentralization in India. Factual development is related to all the people of rural and urban areas. Economists accepted the same and argued in favour of capability enhancement of rural people for balanced economic development.

MGNREGA (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act) is one of the flagship programmes of government of India implemented in the year 2005. By the very nature of the act, it has been active in each and every rural corners of the country. Rural unskilled people are entitled to minimum 100 days of work in a year. With different scheduled works and convergent approaches of MGNREGA, the process of rural development is now disseminated in the hands of participants. Taking 100 sample MGNREGA workers and same number of non MGNREGA workers (with same economic status) of Assam state (during June to September, 2018) we observed the situation- whether MGNREGA has promoted peoples' participation in development and actually decentralized the process of development. With these prime objectives of research we collected empirical information regarding MGNREGA workers (Experimental Group/EG) from 10 numbers of different MGNREGA work sites (located in different panchyats) of Assam. Similarly, information for non MGNREGA workers (Control Group/CG) is collected from the respective panchyats from where the MGNREGA work sights are chosen for data collection. Both MGNREGA and non MGNREGA workers are belonging to similar economic standard especially with respect basic economic necessities of living.

Taking four matching covariates (Age, educational qualification, marital status and family type) and variables (peoples' participation and decentralization of development) of study we applied PSM technique of research. Out of total 200 sample units of research 146 units are exactly matched and accordingly impacts on peoples' participation and decentralization of development through MGNREGA are analyzed in the paper. Matching propensity score lies between 0.38 to 0.63 ranges. 'Peoples' participation in development and decentralization of development has increased in the current period' is the single hypothesis created to verify during the course of our study. Using SPSS we analyzed the problem and found positive peoples' participation and development decentralization under MGNREGA in the state of Assam.

Keywords: Decentralization, Development, Impact, Peoples' Participation, MGNREGA etc.

1. INTRODUCTION

Looking into the long existing gap between urban and rural process of growth and change, it is now considered that development decentralization is necessary in India. Right development is accepted as related to all including the people of rural and urban areas. Prof. A.K. Sen (1980) accepted the same and argued in favour of capability enhancement of rural people for the unprejudiced development of the economy. All peoples' participation, specially the people of rural areas is a must for the balanced development of the economy in India. Without rural peoples' participation development is simply hollow.

To examine the present situation of rural peoples' participation in development planning and decision making and decentralization of development in the state of Assam we have undertaken MGNREGA (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural

Employment Guarantee Act). MGNREGA is one of the flagship rural development programmes of government of India implemented in the year 2005. By the very nature of the act, it has been effective in each and every rural corners of the country, even in each and every rural household. Rural unskilled people are entitled to minimum 100 days of work in a year. With different scheduled works and convergent approaches of MGNREGA, the process of rural development is now disseminated in the hands of participants. With the provision of right based guaranteed employment and works under the regime of MGNREGA, rural areas are supposed to get boost in terms of peoples' participation for development and fulfillment of rural economic demand. In this paper, we have quickly undertaken MGNREGA to simplify and generalize the observation related with rural peoples' participation in development decision making and decentralization of development.

Taking 100 sample MGNREGA workers and 100 sample non MGNREGA workers (with equal economic status) all over the state of Assam we observed the situation- whether rural peoples' participation in development planning and decision making has increased in the current period and whether the process of decentralization of development is exist in Assam. In order to derive an unbiased solution of the problem we have undertaken both MGNREGA workers and non MGNREGA workers and that too with respect to certain matching criterions (explained in methodology). We have collected empirical information regarding MGNREGA workers (Experimental Group/EG) and non MGNREGA workers (Control Group/CG) from 10 numbers of different MGNREGA work sites and respective panchyats of Assam.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In a developing country like India peoples' participation and development are necessarily linked a lot. Decentralization of developmental activities is considered important to merge the gap between urban and rural process of growth and development. Under the MGNREGA regime it is observed in several studies that peoples' participation in rural development is rightly enhanced. Altogether, in order to understand the situation of rural peoples' participation in developmental planning and decision making and decentralization of development we have gone through a few studies. Some of the related literatures are briefly reviewed in the following paragraphs.

Development is a participatory process. Stiglitz (2002) explained that voice, openness and transparency promote truly successful long term development. According to him the processes that guarantee success are also associated with inherent risk. Some societies that are highly participatory atleast in formal structure have failed to achieve development in many projects and in many times. But he mentioned that the understanding of centrality of participation, openness and transparency in sustainable development helps us to design policies, strategies and more processes that are more likely to lead long term economic growth and that reinforce the strengths of the processes themselves. Stiglitz clearly explained that participatory process refers not just to those processes by which decisions are made in national governments but also to processes used at local and provincial levels, at the workplace, and in capital markets. Participatory processes must entail open dialog and broadly active civic engagement, and it requires that individuals have a voice in the decisions that affect them.

PRIs (Panchayati Raj Institutions) are the designated agencies for the implementation of MGNREGA. Village Panchayats are supposed to implement at least 50 percent of total MGNREGA works at the national level. Explaining the 1st phase of MGNREGA implementation, Centre for Science and Environment (2008) stated that there are 61,763 village Panchayats in 200 selected rural districts as compared to 1894 block Panchayats. So the number of implementing agency is very high and they are very diverse in their political and socio-economic structures. It also stated the claim made by the ministry of rural development that currently village Panchayats are implementing close to 83 percent of total NREGA works while others including independent implementing agencies and block Panchayats are implementing around 17 percent of works.

Shariff (2009) explained the interrelation among rural investment, decentralization of governance and welfare achieved through MGNREGA. He explained that through a continuous systematic process of investment in rural areas, MGNREGA is pumping in the rural economy for sustainable boost. According to him, future of NREGA is strongly linked to the cherished national goal to strengthen the broad base decentralization of local governance. MGNREGA focus on irrigation, land and plantation which gives the necessary capacity to rescue rural India from it's deep crises. He also explained that NREGA has the potential to address both sustenance of income and enhance the welfare of households in rural areas.

Explaining the variation in impact and state wise success of MGNREGA implementation Mihir, Mann and Pande (Eds.) (2012) stated that legislation of this nature is bound to have repercussions at different levels, right from altering the socio-economic conditions more particularly for the disadvantaged and the poor. It also explained that experiences of MGNREGA implementation is vary from state to state with relatively more success in states like Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh and Assam to almost negligible success in states like Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar.

MGNREGA report to people (2015) explained the success rate of democratic governance throughout the process of MGNREGA implementation. The report explained that village panchayats are the nodal implementing bodies for MGNREGA. The village panchayat is responsible for planning of works, registering households, issuing job cards and monitoring implementation of the scheme at the village level. The intermediary panchayat is responsible for planning at the block level, and for monitoring and supervision. District panchayat is responsible for finalizing the district plans, which is comprehensive plan of action for the scheme for the district. Village panchayats are reportedly implementing 66% of total MGNREGA works at national level, others including independent implementing agencies and block Panchayats are implementing around 35% of the works.

From the above reviewed literature it is found that peoples' participation in development is necessary. Decentralization of development is necessary to merge the gap between rural and urban process of growth and development. In comparison to other programmes of rural development MGNREGA give more importance in decentralizing the developmental activities. Most of the MGNREGA scheduled works are implemented and completed by the panchayats but state level variation exists. State level variation is found to exist mostly due to the variation in peoples' participation in MGNREGA works at the grass roots. Entire northeastern region including Assam is comparatively underdeveloped and rural in nature. Peoples' participation and promotion of development decentralization through MGNREGA is an urgent issue of discussion and debate in the entire northeastern region of the country. The act has already crossed 11 years of it's implementation in the region along with the country as a whole.

3. OBJECTIVES AND HYPOTHESIS OF THE STUDY

Based on different explanation and stated problems of the study we determined the following specific objectives-

1. Whether rural peoples' participation in development planning and decision making has increased in the current period.
And
2. Whether the process of decentralization of development is exist in Assam.

'Peoples' participation in development and decentralization of development has increased in the current period' is the single hypothesis created to verify during the course of our study.

4. DATA COLLECTION AND METHODOLOGY

The study is purely based on Primary data that collected from the state of Assam. In order to fulfill the stated problems of the study, we have undertaken 100 sample MGNREGA workers and 100 sample non MGNREGA workers (with all equal economic status). Time period is June to September, 2018 in the entire state of Assam. In relation to MGNREGA workers (Experimental Group/EG), randomly three worksites are chosen from Nalbari district (geographically lower part of Assam), four are from Morigaon district (middle part of Assam) and another three are chosen from Lakhimpur district (upper part of Assam) of Assam. Meeting either at worksites or at home we collected first hand data from the EG. Similarly, information for non MGNREGA workers (Control Group/CG) is collected either from the respective panchyats or the concerned persons staying in the neighboring places of MGNREGA work sights. Here, MGNREGS workers (EG) - 'who have registered and worked under MGNREGA atleast one day during the current year' and non MGNREGA workers (CG) - 'who have registered but not worked under MGNREGA during the current year'. Both the sample units are belonging to same or almost similar economic strata.

Taking four matching covariates- Age, educational qualification, marital status and family type and two variables (peoples' participation and decentralization of development) of the study we applied here PSM (Propensity Score Matching) method of doing research. Covariates are general and common for both the EG and CG. PSM initiates from the identification of covariates. They provide the basis for deriving a matched sample. Dimension identities having the minimum variation between the groups are used as covariates. This increases the probability of a large matched sample.

Different types of matching namely Mahalanobis Metric Matching, pair matching, variable matching and so forth are present. Full matching considered to be the most appropriate and is applied here for our study.

Total collected data are organized in a systematic process and a database is created. Relationship between or among the dependent and independent variables are established by adopting a simple and selected econometric procedure. Binary regression is used here for the study. Computer-based statistical package- SPSS (16.0) is used as a tool of data analysis. Moreover to prove or disprove the hypothesis, we used statistical tables, ratios and percentages. Individuals from the EG and CG having the same PS formed the matched sample. They share identical features on the covariates. The outcomes of the matched sample are then compared to find the ultimate findings of the study. Out of all total 200 sample units (both in EG and CG) 146 are exactly matched and 54 are non-matched units in our study. Considering all the matched EG and CG sample units, we studied the views regarding peoples' participation in development planning and decision making and decentralization of development.

5. ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Taking into consideration of MGNREGA we are trying to bring out the scenario of rural peoples' participation in development decentralization of Assam. Forming two groups of people- EG and CG (looking into the similarity in economic back ground) our interest is to examine both the users and non users of MGNREGA and evaluate their views regarding the stated objectives of the study. Based on the objectives we prepared two sets of structured scheduled for first hand data collection. One set of schedule is prepared for the EG and the other is prepared for the CG. Before examining the collected data with the help of PSM, let us first see the basic observation. Whether the workers and non workers are allowed to take part in developmental decision making processes (through the participation in MGNREGA Gram Sabha meetings) and in comparison to past days (when other programmes of rural development like JRY, IAY, PMRY etc. were implemented) in the current days (when MGNREGA is in effect) whether decentralization of development is enhanced, we analyzed the outcome of the study. We examined all total 200 sample responses for the purpose. Different positive, negative and neutral responses (in number and percentage) are worked out separately in the following paragraphs. From the necessary observation regarding peoples' participation in MGNREGA works and other decision makings of MGNREGA in the state of Assam it is expected that the entire scenario of peoples' participation and development decentralization to become clear.

1. Peoples' Participation in Development Planning and Decision Making

About 55% sample units stated the positive response. People can take part in development decision making activities in their local areas through MGNREGA. As they mentioned, they can put forward (if they want) their decisions in Gram Sabha meetings for the development of their local areas. As they stated they can prepare their own development planning through Gram Sabhas on the basis of local needs and requirements. About 30% sample units also revealed the negative response that they can't take part in decision making activities under MGNREGA. About 16% sample unit also stated the neutral response.

Table-1: Participation in Development Planning and Decision Making

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Positive	109	54.5
Negative	59	29.5
Neutral	32	16.0
Total	200	100.0

Source: Scholar's data sheet

Responses under negative and neutral category explained the situation that the government may enhance the inclusiveness of peoples' participation.

2. Present Scenario of Decentralization of Development

From the long past, numbers of rural development programmes has implemented in the country as well as the state of Assam. Some of the programmes are already over and some others are still running for rural development in the state of

Assam. We tried to find the present situation of development decentralization through MGNREGA. We compared MGNREGA with other (active or inactive) programme/s of rural development. We found positive response (52.5%) in favour of MGNREGA. Some of the responses are ignorant and some others are neutral. The most positive sign of MGNREGA is that a very few number of sample units (12.5%) has stated the negative i.e. in against of MGNREGA. Thus there is no any other active implemented mass enthralled rural development programme like MGNREGA is available in the state of Assam. Therefore the present scenario of development decentralization is better than the past in the state of Assam.

Table-2: Present Scenario of Decentralization of Development

Response	Frequency	Percent
Positive	105	52.5
Negative	25	12.5
Somewhat	29	14.5
Neutral	41	20.5
Total	200	100.0

Source: Scholar's data sheet

Regarding MGNREGA implementation Panchayats are the nodal agencies. Besides the positives, ground level administrative lapses are observed in MGNREGA implementation. Inclusiveness in making advertisements about the provisions of MGNREGA, enhanced wage rate per day of work and increase in the number of right based days of employment from 100 to at least 183days i.e. 50% days of a year may improve the present scenario of decentralization of development.

▪ Observation through PSM

As it is stated, total sample units are divided into two categories- EG and CG. In each of the group total number of sample unit is 100. Covariates- age, educational qualification, marital status and family type are taken into consideration to find the matched sample units from both the sample groups (EG and CG). Here PSM is simplified through SPSS. Different numerical codes are used in the PSM work sheets. Codes and respective indications are mentioned below in the table-

Table-3: Code used in PSM and SPSS data sheet for different Covariates

1. Age	Code	2. Educational qlf.	Code	3. Marital status	Code	4. Family type	Code
30-40	1	Illiterate	1	Married	1	Joint family	1
40-50	2	Primary pass	2	Single	2	Nuclear family	2
50-60	3	Middle St.	3	-	-	-	-
-	-	More than middle st.	4	-	-	-	-

Source: Scholar's data sheet

Case processing summary of PSM is stated in the following table. Total number of selected case for the analysis is 200.

Table-4: SPSS Case Processing Summary

		N	Percent
Selected Cases	Included in Analysis	200	100.0
	Missing Cases	0	.0
	Total	200	100.0
Unselected Cases		0	.0
Total		200	100.0

Source: Scholar's SPSS work sheet

Covariates enabled the estimation of Logit (Z) values through the application of ‘qualitative response regression model’, in which the regressand is qualitative in nature. Here we adopted the Logit model, where, y (regressand) = 1/0, ‘1’ signifies the samples from the EG and ‘0’ samples from the CG and X (regressor) = covariates (Chemin 2006; Islam 2009), where X₁ is age, X₂ educational qualification, X₃ marital status and X₄ family type. These covariates form the profile of clients. It provides a base for a valid and reliable estimation of ‘Z’. Y = f (x) provides running a Logistic regression for n = 200 (1 = 100, 0 = 100) samples.

Table-5: Variable codes used in PSM and SPSS

Original Value	Internal Value
MGNREGA workers (EG)	1
Non MGNREGA workers (CG)	0
Peoples’ Participation	Increased/Not increased
Decentralization of Development	Positive/Negative

Source: Scholar’s PSM and SPSS work sheet

Values for the covariates along with the levels of significance are explained in the following table. It formed an integral part of the model.

Table-6: Beta values (B) derived through SPSS

	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.
Age	0.260	0.208	1.561	1	0.211
Eduqlftn	-0.086	0.140	0.381	1	0.537
Martlstst	-0.221	0.295	0.564	1	0.453
Fmlytype	-0.098	0.289	0.116	1	0.734
Constant	0.144	0.751	0.037	1	0.848

Variable(s) entered: Age, Educational qualification, Marital status and Family type. Source: Scholar’s SPSS work sheet

Subsequently, the ‘Z’ value is derived for all the ‘200’ samples-

$$Z = b_0 + b_1 X_1 + b_2 X_2 + b_3 X_3 + b_4 X_4$$

The estimated regression line is-

$$Z = 0.144 + 0.260 X_1 - 0.086 X_2 - 0.221 X_3 - 0.098 X_4$$

Total 200 ‘Z’ values are estimated for all the samples of EG and CG. Statistically, the ‘Z’ values may vary from (-) ∞ to (+) ∞. This signifies that if ‘Z’ is positive, with the increase in the value of the regressors, the odds that the regressand equals ‘1’ and vice versa. The range of ‘Z’ derived from the covariates under consideration varies from negative to positive. Subsequently, propensity scores (PS) are derived through the ‘Logistic function’ of ‘Z’ by the relation (inverse Logit) $e_z/1 + e_z$ where ‘e’ is the base of the natural Logarithm with the constant value 2.718. Hence, it’s value varies from ‘0 to 1’. Further, the Ln (Log natural) (PS/1-PS) equals ‘Z’ (Logit). The score range is 0.38 to 0.63 for the EG and the same 0.38 to 0.63 for the CG with numbers of middle values. Thus, PS are extracted for the 200 samples both from the EG and CG.

Here, samples from the EG and CG having the same PS are balanced on the covariates. They are identical on their profile or covariates and hence, are matched. Matching of two groups on such a basis guarantees a large matched sample. On matching, 146 matched samples are found which spread over 22 different scores. Total result of PSM exercise is explained with the help of the following table.

Table-7: Detailed EG and CG out result in PSM

	EG				CG			
	PP		DD		PP		DD	
	Increased	Decreased	Increased	Decreased	Increased	Decreased	Increased	Decreased
Number of Unit	58	15	53	20	45	28	46	27
%	79	21	73	27	62	38	63	37

Note: PP for Peoples’ Participation, DD for Decentralization of Development. Source: Scholar’s PSM work sheet

In EG we found more Peoples’ Participation than the CG. Decentralization of development is found better in EG. The ultimate combined outcome of PSM is explained bellow-

Table-8: Combined out result (EG and CG) in No. and Percentage (out of 146 matched units)

	PP		DD		Remark
	Increased	Decreased	Positive	Negative	
Number of Unit	103	43	99	47	Both PP and DD has increased
%	71%	29%	68%	32%	

Note: PP for Peoples’ Participation and DD for Decentralization of Development. Source: Scholar’s PSM work sheet

If we see the combined out result of EG and CG regarding Peoples’ Participation and Decentralization of Development then we find that the positive comment is greater than the negative. About 103 number of sample units (71%) mentioned that Peoples’ participation in development planning and decision making has increased. About 99 number of sample units (68%) explained positive for decentralization of development. In both the cases negative comments are less than the positive. Peoples’ participation in development planning and decision making and decentralization of development in recent timings has increased favorably in the state of Assam. Therefore, we may accept the hypothesis of our study that ‘Peoples’ participation in development and decentralization of development has increased in the current period’. Rural people now participate, think and work for economic development.

From the above detailed analysis and explanation we may put forward the following specific findings of the study-

1. With the inbuilt mechanism of guaranteed employment and unemployment allowances peoples’ participation demand for developmental activities has automatically got enhanced.
2. The traditional top down approach of development has systematically got reversed. Development now starts at grass roots and it follows the Gandhiji’s view- Development starts from villages. Thus, decentralization of development is in practice.
3. In comparison to the earlier process of village development the present process under MGNREGA has attained better success in fulfilling the local needs and aspirations of greater Assamese people because people now can prepare their own work schedules and developmental plan programmes.
4. The present process of peoples’ participation in developmental activities and income generation are positively attached. The developmental programme- MGNREGA has increased the magnitude of income of the poor and also provided them with increased employment opportunities. In the process of such income generation and employment creation, the act has improved the overall standard of living of the poor and achieved development in the rural areas of Assam.
5. The problem of rural unemployment and poverty has continuously been eradicating with the enhanced peoples’ participation and effective implementation of MGNREGA in the state of Assam.

As government’s policy response the present process of development (specially through MGNREGA) has been doing positive in enhancing peoples’ participation and development decentralization in the state of rural Assam. With the initiative of rural peoples’ participation and cooperation MGNREGA has practically embraced and improved several factors of rural development including transportation, asset creation; land development, environment restoration etc.

6. CONCLUSION

India already crossed across 72 years of independence. Several economic planning have adopted numbers of rural development and poverty alleviation programmes in India. Though political decentralization is achieved long back but economic decentralization is achieved only through MGNREGA implementation in the country. Rural people can now easily prepare their own annual developmental road map under the act. The present process of peoples' participation in development planning along with the systematic way of decentralization of development through MGNREGA has created sustainable development base all over the rural areas of the country. With different convergent approaches the present dynamic process has generated mass resources in the rural economy of Assam. The process under MGNREGA has been trying to restore the inborn natural resource base of the state. As it is seen from the past 11 years of implementation MGNREGA has been succeeded in bringing the Assam economy from the Libenstian's framework of low level equilibrium trap. To enhance the inclusiveness of peoples' participation and upgrade the process of development decentralization mass awareness under the government initiative is a must to do.

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