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MGNREGA in Nagaland: An Evaluation of Employment Outcomes and Inclusion Gaps

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Abstract

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) is a flagship program aimed at enhancing livelihood security through guaranteed wage employment for rural households. This study evaluates the effectiveness of MGNREGA implementation in Nagaland with a particular focus on employment outcomes and inclusion gaps during the period 2022–2024. Drawing on official performance data, the research highlights key discrepancies between job card issuance, employment demand, and actual work provided across districts in the state. Notably, despite high job card coverage, Nagaland recorded one of the lowest proportions of households completing 100 days of employment (0.1%) in FY 2023–24. The analysis further reveals significant gaps in the inclusion of vulnerable segments, with Scheduled Tribes constituting the majority of beneficiaries, minimal participation from Scheduled Castes, and less than 50% representation of women. These findings point to underlying structural and administrative challenges affecting the scheme's outreach and efficacy. The study concludes with recommendations for enhancing demand generation, equitable participation, and program transparency to strengthen the impact of MGNREGA in Nagaland.

Keywords: Rural Employment, Social Inclusion, Women Participation, 100 Days Work, Employment Gaps and Rural Development

INTRODUCTION

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), enacted in 2005, is a landmark social security initiative aimed at providing at least 100 days of guaranteed wage employment in a financial year to every rural household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work (Ministry of Rural Development [MoRD], 2023). Designed to enhance livelihood security, the Act emphasises not only employment generation but also social inclusion

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by ensuring participation of marginalised groups such as Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), women, and persons with disabilities.

Nagaland, a predominantly tribal and hilly state in North East India, presents a unique socio-economic and administrative context for evaluating the implementation of MGNREGA. Despite high rates of job card issuance across its districts, recent data from the Directorate of Rural Development (2023) indicates a significant mismatch between the number of households demanding work and those provided employment. For instance, in FY 2022–2023, only 5,892 households demanded employment out of over 451,000 job card holders, raising concerns over awareness, accessibility, and administrative bottlenecks.

Moreover, Nagaland reported one of the lowest proportions of households completing 100 days of work in FY 2023–24 (0.1%) compared to national and regional averages (MoRD, 2024). This gap is further compounded by disparities in the inclusion of vulnerable groups. While Scheduled Tribes accounted for 99% of the workdays generated, reflecting the state's demographic profile, the participation of women remained under 45%, and Scheduled Castes reported virtually no representation (MoRD, 2024). These trends highlight the need for a focused assessment of how effectively the scheme is reaching its intended beneficiaries in Nagaland.

This study aims to critically evaluate the employment outcomes under MGNREGA in Nagaland and to identify key inclusion gaps that hinder equitable access to the program. By analysing district-wise performance data and the representation of vulnerable segments, the research seeks to provide actionable recommendations to strengthen the delivery and inclusiveness of MGNREGA in the state.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) has been the subject of extensive academic and policy research due to its potential to alleviate rural poverty, empower marginalised communities, and stimulate rural development. Several studies have examined the scheme's implementation across Indian states, with varying outcomes depending on the local socio-economic and administrative contexts.

Effectiveness of MGNREGA in Employment Generation Research by Drèze and Khera (2009) highlights that MGNREGA significantly reduced rural distress by providing supplementary employment and wage income, particularly during agricultural lean seasons. Similarly, Azam (2012) demonstrated that MGNREGA positively influenced rural wages and reduced the wage gap between casual labourers in rural India. However, the implementation remains uneven across states, often influenced by governance capacity and local participation. In Nagaland, implementation challenges are prominent. According to the Directorate of Rural Development (2023), despite the issuance of over 4.5 lakh job cards, the number of households demanding employment is disproportionately low, indicating gaps in awareness, access, or program delivery. Studies in North East India also point to the logistical and administrative difficulties in hilly and remote areas (Bora & Das, 2018), which hinder consistent demand generation and work allocation.

Inclusivity and Participation of Vulnerable Groups MGNREGA was envisioned as an inclusive program that empowers marginalised communities, including SCs, STs, and women (MoRD, 2023). While Scheduled Tribes constitute the majority of beneficiaries in Nagaland, consistent with the state's demographic composition, there is negligible participation from

Scheduled Castes, and women's participation falls below the national average of 58.9% (MoRD, 2024). Goel and Kaushik (2021) emphasise that meaningful inclusion in MGNREGA requires not only program access but also agency, transparency, and gender-sensitive implementation.

Women's participation, in particular, has been found to be positively associated with social empowerment and household-level benefits in states like Kerala and Tamil Nadu (Pankaj & Tankha, 2010). The underrepresentation of women in Nagaland may be linked to gender norms, lack of supportive facilities (such as crèche services), or uneven distribution of work sites, which merit deeper investigation.

Regional Disparities and Performance Gaps A comparative study by Mukherjee and Ghosh (2016) suggests that performance under MGNREGA varies significantly even within regions due to differences in administrative efficiency, civil society engagement, and political will. In the case of North East India, Bora and Das (2018) argue that despite the potential of MGNREGA to strengthen tribal livelihoods, implementation suffers due to weak monitoring, limited convergence with other rural schemes, and frequent delays in wage payments.

The low proportion of households completing 100 days of work in Nagaland (0.1%) during FY 2023–24, compared to states like Mizoram (58.9%) and Meghalaya (15.9%), raises concerns about program delivery, accountability, and effective mobilisation of beneficiaries.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To evaluate the overall performance of MGNREGA in Nagaland.
2. To examine the level of participation of vulnerable groups in MGNREGA work in Nagaland.
3. To recommend policies to increase demand, employment, and marginalised group participation under MGNREGA in Nagaland.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study is based entirely on secondary data collected from credible and official sources. The primary datasets include the MGNREGA Management Information System (MIS) portal maintained by the Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India, and annual performance reports from the Directorate of Rural Development, Nagaland. Additionally, state-wise data on employment outcomes and inclusion indicators have been sourced from the Economic Survey of Nagaland (2022–2023) and the MGNREGA State Performance Report (2023–2024). These sources provide comprehensive statistics on job card issuance, employment demand and supply, 100 days of work completion, and the participation of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and women. The study uses descriptive and comparative analysis to evaluate district-level variations and identify trends in inclusion and performance within Nagaland and the broader North East region.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The study highlights key gaps in the implementation of MGNREGA in Nagaland. Despite widespread job card coverage, actual employment demand and completion of 100 days of work remain very low. Participation of vulnerable groups such as women and Scheduled Castes is limited, indicating issues related to awareness, access, and administrative efficiency in ensuring inclusive and effective rural employment.

Table – 1 MGNREGA Performance Report for the year 2022-2023

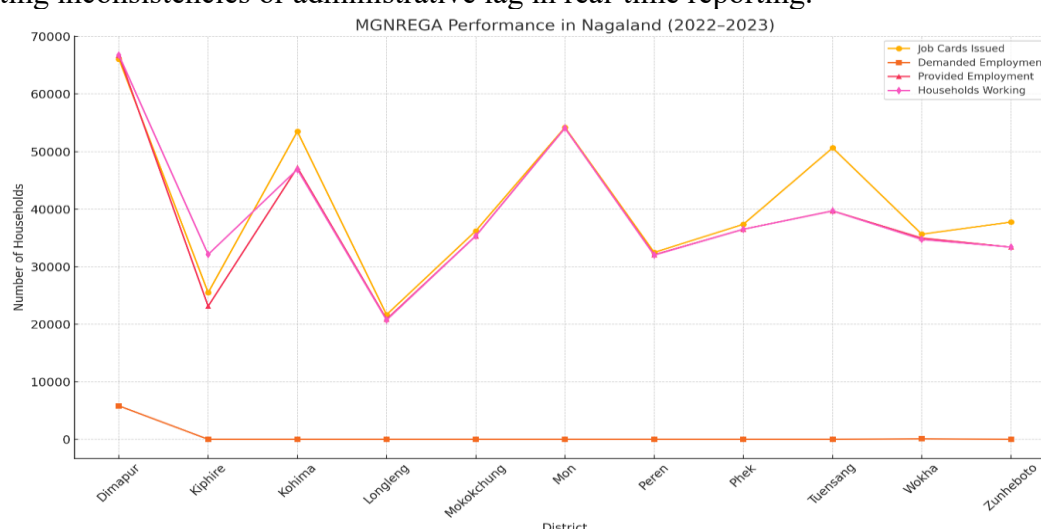
Sl. No	District	Job Cards Issued (Cumulative)	Households Demanded Employment	Households Provided Employment	Households Working	Disabled Beneficiaries (Individuals)
1	Dimapur	66091	5809	66760	66759	147
2	Kiphire	25484	1	23123	32122	11
3	Kohima	53501	0	47230	46919	14
4	Longleng	21654	0	20866	20732	5
5	Mokokchung	36219	0	35350	35334	15
6	Mon	54207	0	54089	54089	12
7	Peren	32476	0	32073	32010	32
8	Phék	37370	0	36510	36499	120
9	Tuensang	50649	0	39701	39680	17
10	Wokha	35649	82	34966	34728	5
11	Zunheboto	37748	0	33400	33398	6
	Nagaland	451048	5892	424068	432270	384

Source: Directorate of Rural Development

Table 1 data reveal a significant disparity between the number of job cards issued and actual employment demand across Nagaland. While 451,048 job cards were issued statewide, only 5,892 households demanded employment, reflecting poor utilisation of the scheme. Surprisingly, employment was provided to 424,068 households, indicating either backlogged demand or administrative adjustments.

Districts like Dimapur show relatively better performance, with over 5,800 households demanding work, while most other districts such as Kiphire, Kohima, Longleng, and Mon, record zero or near-zero demand. This points to serious gaps in awareness, outreach, or accessibility.

Interestingly, the number of households that provided employment often exceeds those that demanded it, raising questions about data recording and implementation processes. Moreover, the number of households working (432,270) surpasses both employment demand and provision, suggesting inconsistencies or administrative lag in real-time reporting.



In terms of inclusivity, only 384 disabled individuals benefitted from the scheme across the state, which is disproportionately low considering the overall scale, reflecting a need for better targeting and accessibility for persons with disabilities.

Overall, the table reflects underutilization of the scheme, limited outreach in remote districts, and potential administrative anomalies that warrant deeper investigation and policy correction.

Table – 2 North East Indian States – Proportion of Households Completed 100 Days of Work in FY 2023–24

State	Proportion of Households Completed 100 Days (%)
Arunachal Pradesh	1.9
Assam	0.9
Manipur	0.1
Meghalaya	15.9
Mizoram	58.9
Nagaland	0.1
Sikkim	6.6
Tripura	11.8

Source: Ministry of Rural Development, Performance Report 2023-24

Table 2 highlights stark disparities in the proportion of households completing 100 days of work under MGNREGA across North East Indian states. Mizoram stands out with a remarkable 58.9%, followed by Meghalaya (15.9%) and Tripura (11.8%), indicating strong implementation and beneficiary engagement in these states.

In contrast, states like Nagaland and Manipur report an alarmingly low completion rate of just 0.1%, suggesting poor demand generation, administrative hurdles, or lack of awareness. Assam (0.9%) and Arunachal Pradesh (1.9%) also reflect underperformance.

The low completion rates in most states, particularly in Nagaland, point to structural and operational challenges in achieving the core MGNREGA objective of providing 100 days of wage employment. These variations underscore the need for localised policy interventions, improved monitoring, and enhanced community mobilisation to ensure effective and inclusive implementation of the scheme.

Table - 3 North East Indian States – Share of Vulnerable Segments Benefited by MGNREGA Work Generated in FY 2023–24

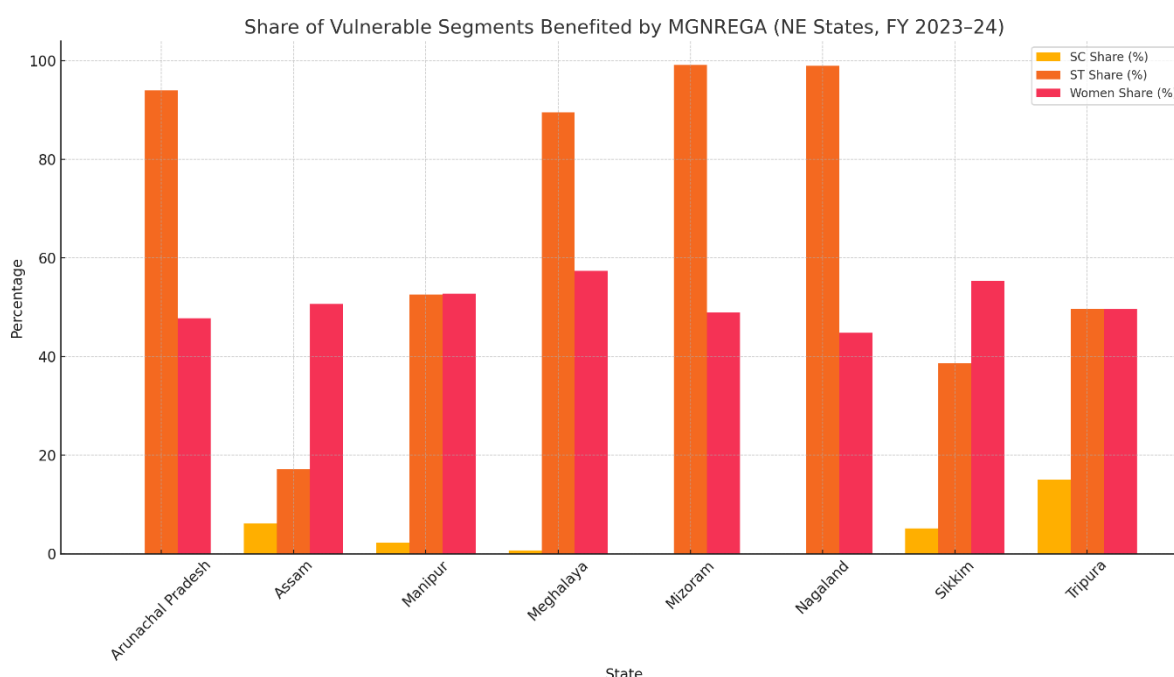
State	SC Share (%)	ST Share (%)	Women Share (%)
Arunachal Pradesh	0	94	47.8
Assam	6.2	17.2	50.6
Manipur	2.2	52.6	52.7
Meghalaya	0.7	89.5	57.4
Mizoram	0	99.1	48.9
Nagaland	0	99	44.8
Sikkim	5.1	38.7	55.4
Tripura	15	49.7	49.6

Source: Ministry of Rural Development, Performance Report 2023-24

Table 3 data reveal important insights into the inclusivity of MGNREGA in the North East region. Scheduled Tribes (STs) dominate the workforce in most states, particularly in Mizoram

(99.1%), Nagaland (99%), and Arunachal Pradesh (94%), reflecting their demographic dominance and active participation in rural programs. In contrast, Scheduled Castes (SCs) have very low representation, with 0% in Nagaland and Mizoram, and only 15% in Tripura, highlighting potential exclusion or low SC population in these areas.

Women's participation varies significantly across states. Meghalaya (57.4%), Sikkim (55.4%), and Manipur (52.7%) perform relatively well, exceeding or nearing the national average (58.9%), whereas Nagaland (44.8%) and Mizoram (48.9%) fall short. This suggests gender-based constraints in work participation in certain areas.



Overall, the table shows that while ST inclusion is strong across most North Eastern states, SC and women's participation remains uneven, indicating a need for targeted policy measures to enhance the inclusivity and equity of MGNREGA benefits, particularly in Nagaland and Mizoram.

Policy Recommendations to Strengthen MGNREGA Implementation in Nagaland: Enhancing Demand, Inclusion, and Transparency:

Enhance MGNREGA in Nagaland through awareness drives, inclusive access for marginalised groups, gender-sensitive worksites, real-time monitoring, timely fund release, and strengthened grievance redressal for transparent and effective implementation.

1. Strengthening Demand Generation

- **Awareness Campaigns:** Launch grassroots-level awareness drives through local media, village councils, and self-help groups to educate rural households about their entitlements under MGNREGA.
- **Digital Job Demand Registration:** Facilitate online and offline systems in all villages to ease job application and reduce dependency on intermediaries.
- **Community Mobilisation:** Involve NGOs, youth groups, and village development boards to identify job seekers and actively register work demand.

2. Ensuring Equitable Access

- Geographic Prioritisation: Identify underperforming districts and remote villages and provide special logistical and administrative support to improve access.
- Inclusion of Marginalised Groups: Proactively issue job cards and prioritise employment for Scheduled Castes, persons with disabilities, and elderly rural poor through focused outreach.
- Worksite Allocation: Ensure that worksites are created within accessible distances for rural households, especially in hilly and isolated regions.

3. Promoting Gender Inclusion

- Women-Centric Work Opportunities: Create gender-sensitive worksites such as water harvesting, plantation, and food processing tasks suitable for women.
- Supportive Infrastructure: Ensure provision of crèches, drinking water, toilets, and shaded rest areas at worksites to encourage women's participation.
- Women's Representation in Planning: Involve women in Gram Sabha planning processes to reflect their needs in the choice of works.

4. Enhancing Transparency and Accountability

- Social Audits and Public Disclosure: Conduct regular social audits at the village level and publicly display MGNREGA work data, beneficiary lists, and fund flows.
- Real-Time Monitoring Systems: Strengthen MIS reporting and use geo-tagged photos, biometric attendance, and mobile apps for real-time tracking of work progress and payments.
- Grievance Redressal Mechanism: Set up accessible grievance cells at block and district levels and ensure timely redressal of complaints with escalation protocols.

5. Capacity Building and Administrative Reforms

- Training of Officials and Gram Rozgar Sevaks (GRS): Regular capacity-building sessions to improve understanding of the Act and streamline implementation.
- Timely Fund Release: Ensure efficient fund flow from state to district and block levels to prevent wage delays.
- Convergence with Other Schemes: Integrate MGNREGA with schemes like PMGSY, NRLM, and watershed programs for sustainable asset creation and improved community impact.

CONCLUSION

The evaluation of MGNREGA implementation in Nagaland reveals critical gaps between policy intent and ground realities. Despite high job card issuance, employment demand and completion of 100 days of work remain exceptionally low. The participation of women and the Scheduled Castes is also limited, highlighting shortcomings in inclusivity. While Scheduled Tribes dominate the workforce due to demographic factors, the scheme's potential to ensure equitable and guaranteed rural employment is yet to be fully realised in the state. Strengthening awareness, accessibility, and administrative efficiency, along with promoting gender and social inclusion, is essential to bridge these gaps and make MGNREGA a more impactful tool for rural development in Nagaland.

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