CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION
The present chapter notes the findings to which this research has led. It deals with the important findings of the study arrived at on the basis of analysis of data collected from both primary as well as secondary sources. Besides, this chapter also identifies the major obstacles which arise in the successful implementation of National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS) and offers certain suggestions to rectify the drawbacks if any, involved in the implementation of NREGS in the study area.

Since time immemorial, India is a land of villages which constitute the very heart of the country. More than 72 per cent of India's population live in 7,00,000 villages. The rural population largely comprises of small and marginal farmers, agricultural labourers, artisans, SC and ST. The living condition of the vast numbers of rural population is miserable. Even after more than sixty years of independence, the rural areas have been associated with poverty, unemployment, under-unemployment and economic inequality. Many rural poor suffer from want of basic amenities, such as food, clothing, shelter, health, education, clean water etc. Nearly one-third of the global poor (3.75 crore) still reside in India and 300 million of the rural people live below poverty line. Rural poverty is visible, by and large, in the form of poor dietary conditions, with malnutrition, primitive type of shelter, poor health, illiteracy, high propensity to consume with very low level of savings etc. Therefore, the improvement of socio-economic conditions of the vast number of rural people through gainful employment is one of the major priorities drawing the attention of the governments and policy planners of the country.

Under this backdrop, the Government of India (GoI) continued its chain of efforts and accordingly in the beginning of new millennium, the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) Government at the centre launched the ambitious job guarantee scheme, namely the NREGS in the year 2006 for struggling rural poverty and unemployment, which extended to the entire country with effect from 1st April, 2008 (except Jammu & Kashmir).

In fact, it may rightly be mentioned that the NREGS is essentially a wage earning scheme which can fulfil the aspiration of the rural people. The primary objective of NREGS is to enhance the livelihood security of the rural people by providing at least one hundred days of guaranteed wage employment in a financial year to every rural
household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work. Besides, the work guarantee can also serve other objectives such as generating productive assets, protecting the environment, empowering rural women, reducing rural-urban migration and fostering social equality. This places a judicially enforceable obligation on the part of the state, and gives bargaining power to the workers.

The major thrust of this research work was to evaluate the implementation of NREGS in Assam. Keeping the high magnitude of poverty and unemployment in view, the scheme has been implemented in the state of Assam from 2nd February, 2006 with a lot of enthusiasm and initiatives. Therefore, in this study, an attempt has been made to examine how far the state is successful in implementation of the scheme or how far the objectives of NREGS have been fulfilled in the state.

The present empirical study examines the socio-economic profile of the state of Assam, Dhemaji district along with two sampled blocks and eight selected villages under study. The study reveals that Assam is one of the most socio-economically backward states of the country due to lack of basic infrastructural facilities viz., power, transport and communication, education, health etc. After more than sixty years of independence, 75 per cent of the total population is getting their means of livelihood from agricultural sector and about 69 per cent of the total working force in the state is engaged either directly or indirectly in this sector. Agriculture continues to be the major occupation of the people which provides not only food items but also employment opportunities to a large extent. Despite being rich in natural resources, such as abundant rainfall, alluvial soil, rich and diverse plant and animal genetic base, the development of agriculture in Assam has been slow over the decades and the agricultural productivity in the state still remains stagnant and in deplorable condition due to application of traditional farming techniques, widespread prevalence of subsistence cultivation, inadequate agricultural infrastructure, and so on. Further, the state is one of the industrially backward states of India in spite of being blessed with a high potential for development of resource-based and demand-based industries in the state, the pace of industrialization in Assam is not at all satisfactory. In Assam, the workers of manufacturing and other household industries constitute only 2.8 per cent of the workers of the state and the contribution of this sector to the state income is very negligible (only 15.30 per cent) in comparison to primary and service sectors.
An examination of the socio-economic background of Dhemaji district reveals that the district is most exceptionally backward in comparison to other parts of Assam. The district is situated in the remote North Eastern corner of Assam at a distance of 480 km. from the State Capital Guwahati. Despite having ample resources of development, the district is very backward socio-economically.

The study also found that the eight selected villages under study are situated at the remote corner of the district Head Quarter (HQ). The total household of the villages were 744 out of which 92 per cent households have katcha houses and 4.1 per cent have semi pucca houses while the remaining 3.9 per cent have pucca houses. The total populations of the villages were 4319 comprising 53 per cent male and 47 per cent female. Out of total 744 families in selected villages, BPL families constituted 86.42 per cent (643 families) while the number of BPL population was 3603 i.e. 83.42 per cent of the total population of the villages. The villages were pre-dominantly rural and the main source of income was agriculture. Educationally, the villages were very backward where 37 per cent of the total population was educated up to Lower Primary School and 41.9 per cent up to Middle English School. So far the communication facilities of the villages are concerned, the study reveals that in absence of pucca roads, the communication of the villages was cut-off almost half of the year due to heavy damages caused by frequent flood during the rainy season. In case of electrification, 64 per cent of the total houses were yet to be electrified.

The study examines the various Rural Employment Generation Programmes (REGPs) in India since independence up to the implementation of NREGS. An examination of various REGPs in India reveals that it has been the constant endeavour of the Central as well as the State Governments to eradicate rural poverty and unemployment. In the light of the above objective, a wide gamut of self-employment as well as wage-employment programmes has been implemented to tackle the problem of poverty and unemployment. Under self-employment programmes, SFDA, MFAL, IRDP, TRYSEM, DWCRA, PMRY and SGSY have been implemented. Besides, DPAP, FWP, NERP, RLEG, JRY, EAS, JGSY, SGRY and NFFWP have been implemented under wage-employment programmes.

However, none of these programmes has succeeded in achieving the desired goals. The achievements of these programmes in the field of employment generation were not satisfactory and the result was not up to the mark. Thus, the study reveals that
various anti-poverty and employment generation programmes have failed to eradicate rural poverty and unemployment. The result was not up to the mark and failed to change the face of villages. The benefits of the programmes could not reach the deserving and the needy persons. The GoI continued its chain of efforts and accordingly launched a new ambitious strategy of rural employment, namely NREGS in the year 2006. It is worthy to note that the NREGS is most relevant to the wage earners and poor peasants living in rural areas. Besides, the NREGS recognizes the people’s participation in the process of planning, decision-making and implementation of various schemes under NREGA-2005.

The NREGS is a centrally sponsored scheme implemented in the State of Assam on 2nd February, 2006. All the districts of Assam were brought under NREGS during 2008-09. Based on the detailed study of the implementation of NREGS, the study found that during 2007-08 to 2010-11, there were total 1,25,17,572 Job Cards issued in Assam and generated 2342.52 lakhs persondays of employment by spending Rs. 315113.62 lakhs (72.17 per cent) against Rs. 470484.11 lakh sanctioned amount. It is observed that the variation of participation of caste component in NREGS works occurred in Assam during the reference period. It was perhaps due to dominant demographic structure of a particular group of population of the district or it might be due to special attention of the implementing agencies for weaker sections of the population. The study shows that ST community is relatively more benefited in case of seeking employment opportunities. On an average, 31.89 per cent of employment is generated for this community during the reference period.

The right to participate in works for women was made compulsory as per NREGA – 2005 which states that there must be at least 33 per cent participation for women. But this aspect is missing in NREGS where women’s participation rate in the work force was abysmal. The study shows that although emphasis has been given on the engagement of women in NREGS during the reference period the achievement in this respect is not satisfactory. The women’s participation in NREGS has accounted 27.37 per cent of the total persondays generated, far below the mandatory provision of 33 per cent fixed by the Act.

Besides, it is also found that during 2007-08 to 2010-11, the total households demanding employment under NREGS was 75,50,491 of which 68,46,211 households were provided employment. Out of 68,46,211 households, only 6.80 per cent (4,65,796
households) could complete the target of 100 days of employment in a financial year. Thus, in this regard one of the major findings of the study is that the implementing authorities of NREGS in Assam were not successful in fulfilling the basic objective of providing 100 days of wage employment to the rural poor in a financial year.

The study further reveals that the schemes under NREGS selected for implementation in Assam were Rural Connectivity; Flood Control and Protection; Water Conservation and Water Harvesting; Drought Proofing; Micro Irrigation Works; Irrigation Facilities to Land owned by SC’s and ST’s Beneficiaries of Land Reform, IAY, Small and Marginal Farmer and others; Renovation of Traditional Water Bodies; Land Development; Any other Activities approved by MoRD and Bharat Nirman Rajeev Gandhi Sewa Kendra. Out of ongoing 10 schemes under NREGS in Assam, the Rural Connectivity in the villages has got top priority which occupied the highest position with 50.01 per cent completed works and 53.66 per cent ongoing works and the expenditure incurred was 51.15 per cent and 42.62 per cent of the State total respectively during the reference period.

The number of bank and postal accounts was 7402167 comprising 7249810 individual accounts and 152357 joint accounts. Out of 7249810 individual accounts, 3892010 were individual bank accounts while 3357800 were individual postal accounts. Similarly, out of 152357 joint accounts, the numbers of bank and postal joint accounts were 118636 and 33721 respectively. So far as the amount of disbursement of wages is concerned, it stood at Rs. 110884 lakh comprising Rs. 69171.95 lakh through banks and Rs. 41711.54 lakh through post offices.

For proper assessment and implementation of NREGS works, the Act provides very extensive provisions of hundred per cent social audit and inspection of works under NGEGS. So far as the inspection of NREGS works is concerned, the study reveals that 100 per cent works (28.13 per cent inspected at the district level and 71.87 per cent at the block level) were inspected in Assam. However, in respect of verification of Muster Roll, the study shows that out of 19,80,392 numbers, 74.15 per cent (14,68,484 numbers) was verified during the reference period. In case of social audit, it is observed that the social audit was conducted in 6,963 numbers (82.83 per cent) of GP of the State. Besides, the study also found that the State received total 1687 numbers of complains during 2007-08 to 2010-11 of which 87.96 per cent (1,484 numbers) cases had been disposed so far.
In fact, this micro level research was conducted with the purpose of gaining an understanding of implementation of NREGS in Dhemaji district of Assam. Therefore, the findings of the study are based on empirical information obtained from the field on the basis of beneficiary perception and opinion of the implementing authorities as to what they perceive about the implementation of NREGS in their respective areas under study and how they conceive the usefulness of the scheme. Though the findings are confined to the micro situation of Dhemaji district of Assam yet it is felt that these findings may be taken care of by the other parts of Assam. With this in mind, at the very beginning, the researcher sought the opinions, attitudes and perception of the NREGS beneficiaries in implementation of the scheme. Based on the detailed study of the implementation of NREGS, empirical information obtained from the field and personal observation, the study draws the following important observations.

- The most encouraging feature of implementation of NREGS in selected villages under study is that 100 per cent of the respondents were aware of NREGS operating in their villages. However, it was equally disheartening to observe that an absolute majority (97 per cent) of the beneficiaries were not aware of the year of implementation of NREGS in Assam. It might be either due to lack of awareness campaign or the negligence of officials who did not take any step to encourage the people to come forward to know and get the benefits of the scheme.

- The study reveals that no household survey was carried out in the areas under study. The beneficiaries expressed a deep sense of dissatisfaction regarding household survey. It is observed that 61 per cent of the respondents very clearly stated that no household survey was carried out in their respective area which, in fact, is not only a serious violation of the provision of the Act but also an important irregularity in implementation of the scheme.

- As per NREGA – 2005, any adult above 18 years can apply for work under NREGS. However, during field study it was found that majority (57 per cent) of the beneficiaries did not know in detail about it. The reason for unawareness may be assumed that the concerning authorities have not taken any initiative to disseminate the information to the rural poor who were willing to work under NREGS. The unawareness of such important provision as the researcher perceives is an obstacle of proper and effective implementation of the scheme.
In regard to the officials responsible for providing employment under NREGS, it was encouraging to observe that majority (52.25 per cent) of the beneficiaries were aware of it and drew the information that the concerning GP and PO were responsible for providing employment under NREGS.

It was equally encouraging to note that the provision of entitlement of employment under NREGS within 15 days from the date of application was known to respondents (76.25 per cent). However, the most disappointing fact was that 69.50 per cent of the respondents had not been entitled employment within the stipulated time of 15 days from the date of application.

As regards the payment of unemployment allowance, the most disheartening feature is that no unemployment allowance was paid to the applicants in spite of failure to provide employment within 15 days from the date of application.

By and large, the idea of Job Card was known to all the beneficiaries. The study reveals that respondents were well familiar about Job Card which was one of the positive aspects of implementation of the scheme. Further, it was also an encouraging fact that the implementing authorities issued Job Cards to the NREGS employees free of cost.

It is pertinent to note that the cardholders were not the custodian of their Job Cards. A majority (46.50 per cent) of respondents informed that the concerning GPs were the custodian of their Job Cards. Besides, the contractors or some middle men (12.25 per cent) were involved in keeping Job Cards. In this regard, the researcher would like to conclude that this is, in fact, not only a serious irregularity of implementation of NREGS but it also stimulates the implementing authorities in involvement of corruption and mis-appropriation of NREGSFs.

In regard to awareness of the respondents about the wage rate under NREGS, the study reveals that an overwhelming majority (79.75 per cent) of the beneficiaries was aware of it. However, a disappointing observation is made that, by and large, there was a general dissatisfaction among the beneficiaries with the existing wage rate under NREGS which was sizeably lower than the prevailing market rate which, as the researcher perceives, stood as one of the significant obstacles for proper implementation of the scheme.

So far the wage rate of men and women is concerned; an encouraging conclusion derived from the study is that equal wages were paid to both men and women. In this
regard, it is heartening to note that the scheme was successful in execution of the provision of equal pay for men and women (for equal work) as envisages in NREGA – 2005 which is one of the important positive aspects towards fulfilling the objectives of NRGES.

- The study also observed that the beneficiaries were employed outside the Panchayat or radius of 5 km. However, they were not paid extra 10 per cent of the wage rate as transport and living allowances.
- The provisions relating to payment of wages to the NREGS workers “in every week or in case, not later than a fortnight after the date on which such work was done and if the wages are not paid in time, the implementing authorities are liable to entitled compensation as per the provisions of the Payment of Wage Act, 1936 was not carried out in the study areas. The study reveals that no compensation was paid to the workers for delayed payment of wages.
- By and large, the most encouraging feature of implementation of NREGS is the payment of wages through bank or postal accounts. It was observed that the bank or postal accounts were opened and wages were paid through it.
- Regarding worksite facilities, an interesting observation is that 69.50 per cent of the beneficiaries were of the view that the worksite facilities as mentioned in the NREGS guidelines were not provided by the implementing authorities at the worksite. It indicates that the implementing authorities were not sincere in proper implementation of the scheme.
- The Act strictly prohibited the engagement of contractors in any form in implementation of NRGES. However, this regulation of the Act is also violated by the implementing authorities in implementation of the scheme. The field visits revealed that 79.75 per cent of the respondents openly acknowledged that the contractors particularly Nayaks (middle men or group leaders) were engaged in implementation of the scheme in a large scale. They were playing a very significant role in implementation of the scheme. They were, in fact, the custodian of JCs of the workers. Even sometimes the payment of wages to the workers was also made through the Nayaks. Moreover, it is very interesting to note that the elected peoples’ representatives of PRIIs were also playing as the role of contractors in the implementation of the scheme. The study indicates that though the NREGA – 2005 has prohibited strictly the engagement of contractors in implementation of the
NREGS, however, in due course of time the contractor have played a decisive role in implementation of the scheme. Thus, such a finding in implementation of the scheme helped not only in miss-appropriation of funds but also hampered an effective and proper implementation of the scheme.

• The study observed that NREGS could not provide 100 days of employment to every rural household in a financial year. An absolute majority of the respondents (88.25 per cent) were not entitled 100 days of employment per year under NREGS. In this respect, it can be inferred that the NREGS could not keep its commitment of providing 100 days of wage employment to the rural poor and therefore, it can be said that the NREGS failed to fulfil its basic objective. Besides, there was a general dissatisfaction (95.50 per cent) among the respondents on the issue of 100 days of employment. They very clearly stated that one hundred days of employment round the year was not enough for the rural unemployed. In this regard, the study found that instead of 100 days of wage employment, it should be increased to 250 days in a financial year.

• In regard to improvement of socio-economic conditions of beneficiaries, an important observation is that majority (65.50 per cent) of the respondents very clearly stated that the scheme could not enhance the purchasing power and socio-economic conditions of the rural people by generating additional income. The respondents strongly asserted that no perceivable socio-economic changes have taken place in the lives of the rural people after implementation of the scheme. In fact, the socio-economic conditions of the rural poor adversely affected especially when NREGA failed to maintain parity with the outside rate. Therefore, it is a matter of great concern for workers of NREGS as a whole. Thus, in regard to above, an important conclusion can be derived from the study that the NREGS failed to increase the socio-economic conditions of the rural people.

• Another most discouraging feature of implementation of NREGS is that the scheme failed to stop migration of rural workers from the rural to the urban areas in search of employment.

• As far as creation of community assets under NREGS is concerned, there was a general dissatisfaction among the beneficiaries on this issue. An overwhelming majority (80 per cent) of the beneficiaries very clearly stated that the assets created under NREGS were of very low and of inferior quality. In the above regard, the study
indicates that more attention is to be needed at the time of their construction of community assets for their longer durability.

- So far the evaluation mechanism of NREGS by the implementing authorities is concerned; an interesting finding of the study is that there was no strict monitoring-cum-concurrent evaluation in implementation of the scheme. The study reveals that majority (75.75 per cent) of the respondents stated that the implementing authorities did never visit the worksite. Sometimes they made visit to the houses of the people belonging to the upper strata in the locality and made discussion with them about the matter relating to execution of schemes in their locality which stood as an important obstacle in successful implementation of the scheme.

- An encouraging trend was observed that the implementing authorities constituted Vigilance and Monitoring Committees (VMCs), in which the rural people could exercise an enormous scope of participation in implementation of NREGS and monitor the progress of quality of work while it is in progress. The majority (56.75 per cent) of the respondents stated that the VMCs were formed as per the guidelines. However, it was equally disheartening to note that the VMCs, by and large, did not make regular visits to the worksite to monitor the various aspects of the works under NREGS. Therefore, it can be inferred that the VMCs are yet to be activated for the successful implementation of the scheme.

- There is a provision of holding of regular GS meetings at the village level in order to maintain accountability, transparency and continuous social audit. In this regard, an important observation is that 59.75 per cent of the beneficiaries stated that the GS meetings were not organized regularly in sampled villages till date. Thus, the non-organization of GS meetings is not only an irregularity of implementation of the scheme but also, it undermined the implementing, monitoring and evaluation process of NREGS.

- In fact, the NREGA- 2005 focuses on extensive participation of rural people in planning and implementation process through GS meetings. In this regard, the study found that an overwhelming majority (72.75 per cent) of the respondents were of the view that they were not invited to participate in the GS meeting. Further, it was equally disheartening to observe that majority (52.75 per cent) of the respondents viewed that they were not interested to participate in GS meetings. It may due to illiteracy, the rural people were afraid to come forward to participate rightly in
implementation and decision making process of the scheme. In fact, the full and active participation of rural people is must for making rural development programmes successful. However, the study reveals that there was lack of participation of rural people in the working of NREGS which stood as an important obstacle in successful implementation of the scheme.

- In regards to involvement of implementing authorities in corruption, an absolute majority (83 per cent) of the beneficiaries openly admitted that the implementing authorities were not free from corruption. Further, 97 per cent of the respondents felt that the existing system of Government control over the utilization of NREGFs was not satisfactory. The Government was not devising any financial management approach in execution of NREGSFs for which the lion's share of the funds was appropriated by the implementing authorities having understanding with the political leaders of the party in power. Thus, one of the main conclusions derived from the study is that due to lack of consciousness of the people to whom the funds are executed and the indifferent attitude of the State Government towards the utilization of NREGSFs leads to corruption or misappropriation of funds.

- Moreover, an interesting finding derived from the study is that the implementing authorities of NREGS were not successful in implementation of the scheme. Majority (65.75 per cent) of the respondents very clearly stated that the scheme was not successful in fulfilling its basic objectives. The scheme could provide neither sufficient job opportunities nor enhance the socio-economic conditions of the rural people.

Moreover, the perception and opinion of the implementing authorities who are really working at the field levels as to what they perceive on the implementation of NREGS and how they conceive the usefulness of the scheme in Dhemaji district of Assam have been analysed. During the course of observation, based on empirical information obtained from the field, the following findings have come to light in the field of implementation of NREGS:

- One disappointing feature of implementation of NREGS is that an absolute majority (74 per cent) of the implementing authorities were not aware about the year of enactment of NREGA - 2005 in India. The level of unawareness was higher among the respondents belonging to panchayat members (91.67 per cent) than the government officials (28.58 per cent). Further, it was equally disheartening to observe
that 74 per cent (comprising 94.44 per cent Panchayat Members and 21.42 per cent
government officials) of the implementing authorities expressed their opinion that
they were not aware about the year of implementation of NREGS in India. Same in
case of Assam, 64 per cent (comprising 80.56 per cent panchayat members and 21.42
per cent government officials) implementing authorities were not aware of the year of
implementation of NREGS.

- As far as familiarity of the implementing authorities with the basic ideas of NREGS
is concerned, an encouraging observation is that 54 per cent of the respondents were
familiar with the basic ideas of NREGS. Significantly, hundred per cent government
officials were familiar with it which was one of the positive aspects of
implementation of the scheme. However, majority of the Panchayat Members were
not acquainted with the basic ideas of NREGS. Hence, it is to be noted that until
proper knowledge of implementing authorities, the NREGS will never be successful.

- In regard to “Principal Authorities” of planning and implementation of NREGS, an
interesting finding derived from the study is that the implementing authorities of
NREGS were not well versed about it. The study reveals that majority (62 per cent)
of the respondents acknowledged that they had no ideas about the “Principal
Authorities” for the planning and implementation of the scheme which was one of the
most negative aspects of implementation of the scheme. In fact, the implementing
authorities had failed to sensitise the operational aspects of the scheme.

- The NREGA allowed the implementing authorities to undertake a door-to-door
survey for identification of NREGS beneficiaries. However, the study is very clear
that a majority (68 per cent) of the respondents viewed that there was no door-to-door
survey to identify NREGS beneficiaries. Interestingly, all the government officials
reported positively while 94.44 per cent of the Panchayat Members responded
negatively. Thus, there was a contradiction of opinion among the functionaries and
this difference of opinion created a major lapse of sincerity.

- In order to maintain transparency of registration process, the NREGA – 2005 ensures
that the first registration for work is to be done in a special GS meeting conducted for
the purpose which is the mandatory agenda of social audit. The study reveals that
there was no special GS meeting for the first registration of workers under NREGS.
An absolute majority (74 per cent) of the implementing authorities admitted that
special GS meetings were not conducted for the purpose. In the above regard, an
important conclusion is that some irregularities and violation of the mandatory provision of the Act had taken place in implementation of NREGS in the villages under study.

- A most disappointing observation is that the implementing authorities failed to provide employment to the job seekers within 15 days from the date of application. It is observed that 80 per cent of the respondents hold this view. In this regard, an important conclusion derived from the study is that the NREGS functionaries were violating not only the guidelines but also the legal obligations of the NREGA – 2005.

- The most distinctive feature of the NREGA-2005 is the payment of unemployment allowance if the implementing authorities cannot provide employment within 15 days from the date of application. In the above regard, an important observation is that though it was a mandatory provision under NREGA – 2005, the job seekers were not entitled the unemployment allowance which was, by and large, the gross violation of the provision of the Act.

- Regarding organization of Project Initiation Meeting (PIM), the study found that 64 per cent of the total respondents stated that there was no PIM. The negative replies mostly came from elected representatives of PRIs (83.33 per cent). The fact may be that the government officials conducted PIM on the worksite, but, they never invited the PRIs members, instead, meetings were conducted by them with a few influential persons of the locality. Thus, the study indicates that the interface between the government officials and PRIs members was not adequate which affected adversely in successful implementation of NREGS in the areas under study.

- Regarding the issue of updating the Job Cards on the Gram Panchayat (GP) notice board, the study shows that 42 per cent of the respondents were of the view that they updated Job Cards regularly and put up on the GP notice board. However, 38 per cent of the respondents responded negatively while 20 per cent fall in ‘Do not know’ category. Thus, it is pertinent to note that the ‘No’ and ‘Don’t know’ responses taken together constitute 58 per cent of the total respondents. In this regard, it may be concluded that the Job Cards were not updated regularly on the GP notice board which indicates that the implementing authorities of NREGS were not serious and sincere in implementation of the scheme.

- An encouraging trend was observed that the key documents related to implementation of NREGS were proactively disclosed to the public without waiting for anyone to
apply for them. It was observed that 54 per cent of the respondents held the view that they disclosed all important documents to the public on the notice board which was one of the positive aspects of implementation of the scheme.

- The study reveals that priority was given to women while providing employment under NREGS. Hundred per cent respondents were of the opinion that priority was given to women while providing employment under the scheme. The extensive participation of women in NREGS has widened the scope of women empowerment which is an important positive aspect towards the fulfilling the objectives of NRGES. Further, the study also observed that 62 per cent of the total respondents stated that the reservation of seats for women under NREGS was 33 per cent to 50 per cent. Thus, in the above regard, an important finding is that the reservation of seats for women under NREGS was significant and encouraging which was well above the limit of 33 per cent as per gender norms of the Act.

- The NREGA – 2005 states that the implementing authorities must make all efforts to publicize the wage rates in simple vernacular language so as to make it easily accessible to the local community or the workers. However, it was disappointing to observe that 62 per cent of the respondents acknowledged that the wage rate was not displayed prominently at the worksite which was a serious violation of the provision of the Act.

- As per NREGS guidelines, on 2nd October of each year the PO is responsible to organize Gram Sabhas for the recommendation of works to be taken up under NREGS. In this regard, it is startling to note that an absolute majority (84 per cent) of the respondents very clearly stated that the date for Gram Sabha meeting was not intimated to them.

- So far the involvement of implementing authorities in planning process is concerned, it is pertinent to note that 75 per cent of the PRI members were not involved in planning process of NREGS. In this regard, it can be concluded that the participation of implementing authorities especially the Panchayat members in the planning process of NREGS was limited which was not only against the spirit of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act but also NREGA – 2005.

- It may be mentioned that it has become a rule rather than an exception that the politicians always try to exercise their influence in implementation of any development scheme. However, in case of NREGS, the study reveals that there was
limited interference of politicians in the implementation of the scheme so as to jeopardize every motive of the scheme. Majority (62 per cent) of respondents responded that there was limited political obligation and interference in implementation of the scheme. Besides, the study also reveals that 58 per cent of the implementing authorities viewed that they were not facing any unwanted situation due to non-acceptance of political pressure.

- It was also disappointing to observe that the implementing authorities of NREGS were not independent administratively and technically to implement NREGS. An absolute majority (70 per cent) of the implementing authorities hold the view that they always depended on district administration for their administrative and technical support.

- The study found that the present office staffs of implementing authorities were not sufficient for effective implementation of NREGS. The BDO does not only look after the NREGS; he is entrusted to look after the other programmes too. As a result, the work of NREGS gets hampered. Thus, the shortage of office staff stood as an important obstacle in successful implementation of the scheme.

- In regard to corruption, the study found that the implementation of NREGS was not free from corruption. 38 per cent of the respondents acknowledged that the implementing authorities were involved in corruption. They pointed out that they knew the misuse of NREGS funds. Thus, in regard to above analysis, an important observation is that there was corruption or misappropriation of funds in implementation of NREGS.

- The study reveals that 58 per cent of the respondents were fully dissatisfied with the existing system of government control over NREGSFs. They were of the opinion that the Government was more concerned with expenditure rather than the attainment of the objectives. Large parts of the funds were released in the last month of the financial year, which could not be expected to be spent by the respective implementing authorities during that financial year.

- Regarding training of implementing authorities, a disappointing observation is that majority (54 per cent) of the respondents did not attend the training programme organized for the purpose of implementation of NREGS. Interestingly, 75 per cent of the PRI members did not attend any training programme for implementation of the
scheme which stood as an important obstacle in proper implementation of the scheme.

- Another most disappointing observation is that the study shows a confrontationist tendency between bureaucracy and elected members of PRIs. It was observed that majority (62 per cent) of the respondents were of the opinion that the relationship between the two types of functionaries was not stipulated and cordial which often created immense problems in successful implementation of NREGS.

**Obstacles**

In this section an attempt has been made to identify the major obstacles which arise in the successful implementation of NREGS in selected areas under observation. The study brought the following major constraints in implementation of NREGS:

- Firstly, the major difficulty faced by the implementing authorities in implementation of NREGS was mainly administrative in nature. The finding suggests that the Block level administration is always dependent upon the District Level Agencies (DLAs) in taking any RDPs for their implementation. The Block had to carry out the suggestions and directions given by the district authority.

- The study indicates that the elected members of PRIs were neither experienced nor aware of operational aspects of the NREGS. Therefore, it may be said that lack of experience and awareness of PRI members as an implementing authority stood as one of the major obstacles in successful implementation of NREGS.

- The lack of cordial relationship between the bureaucrats (officials) and PRIs has become a disturbing factor in smooth implementation of NREGS. The study found a confrontationist relationship between the two types of functionaries. The officials were not ready to accept the PRIs on equal terms. The general attitudes of the officials towards the PRIs were that of contempt and resentment.

- The study also reveals that the implementing authorities have been facing some technical difficulties. Technically, the implementing authorities had to depend on the district administration. The technical staffs working in the various functioning departments at the district level were always not available to the Block level administration to provide technical assistance.

- The study found a gap between the rural people and the rural development authorities. While visiting the field, it was observed that there was hardly any
interaction between the officials and the rural people. In fact, the rural development is a two way process. Unless it is achieved there cannot be any development in true sense.

- The study reveals that the rural development officials did never visit the areas where the schemes were implemented. Of course, sometimes the officials visited the houses of the people belonging to upper strata and discussed with them about the matters relating to the execution of schemes. In fact, the image of rural development authorities in public mind was that of inefficiency, maladministration, red-tapism, delay and corruption.

- Illiteracy is one of the main obstacles in healthy implementation of the NREGS in selected areas under study. The study reveals that the beneficiaries of NREGS were illiterate. Due to illiteracy the rural people were not only unable to participate rightly in implementation and decision making process of the scheme but also had no control over the funds which are supposed to be spent for them.

- The NREGA – 2005 strictly prohibited the engagement of contractors in any form and use of machines in execution of works. But in practice, the study found that all works under NREGS were executed by the implementing authorities through dummy contractors with the help of machines.

- Constant monitoring and evaluation of the ongoing schemes is very essential not only for successful implementation of NREGS but also to plug leakages of money and resources. However, the study found that proper monitoring was almost absent. The implementing authorities made no regular visit to the worksite and monitor the various aspects of the work under the scheme. Besides, to maintain proper monitoring and vigilance in the working of the implementing authorities, there should be a VMC. Though formed, the VMCs were inactive in the study areas.

- The NREGA – 2005 focuses on an innovative feature of social audit, an ongoing process through which the potential beneficiaries and other stakeholders can get involve at every stage – from planning to implementation, monitoring and evaluation through regular GS meeting. The organization of GS meeting at least once in every six months for social audit is a mandatory provision of the Act. But in practice, the study found that the meetings of the GS were not held regularly which hampered immensely in smooth implementation of NREGS.
• Corruption will not be out of place to point out another serious lacuna of successful implementation of NREGS. The study reveals that both the implementing authorities (38 per cent) and beneficiaries (83 per cent) openly admitted that the implementation of NREGS was not free from corruption. Besides, the existing system of Government control over the utilization of NREGFs was not satisfactory. The Government was not devising any financial management approach in the execution of the NREGSFs for which the lion's share of the funds was appropriated by the implementing authorities in co-operation with the political leaders of the party in power.

• Training occupies an important place in the efficient management and implementation of any development programme. Besides providing skills, training programmes bring about desired changes in the outlook and attitudes of implementing authorities. However, the study points out that no serious efforts were made either by the State Government or district administration to provide special skill acquisition training programmes for the implementing authorities especially for the elected representatives of PRIs. Thus, the lack of appropriate training of implementing authorities stood as an important bottleneck in successful implementation of NREGS.

• The climatic condition of the district was considered as an important factor in successful implementation of NREGS. The monsoon actually starts in the district from the month of March and lasts up to the month of September-October. Therefore, the implementing machineries had got hardly four months i.e. from November to February to fulfil their targets. Consequently, the implementing authorities failed to fulfil their targets.

• The wage rate under NREGS was sizeably lower than the prevailing market rate. Besides one free meal, the market rate for a daily wage earner was Rs. 200 or more than that per day and hence, the labourers showed reluctance to work under the scheme. Thus, the low rate of wage under NREGS created problems in smooth implementation of the scheme.

• The study reveals that the majority of the implementing authorities were not aware about some of the basic implementing aspects of NREGS i.e. the year of enactment of NREGA, the year of implementation of NREGS, the principal authorities of planning and implementing the scheme etc. In fact, the level of unawareness was higher among the respondents belonging to panchayat members than the government
officials. Thus, such a finding had not only underrated the implementing authorities but also stood as a significant obstacle in successful implementation of NREGS.

- Planning is critical to the successful implementation to NREGS. After enactment of 73rd Constitutional Amendment Process, the involvement of PRIs members in the planning and implementation of any RDPs have been legalized. Despite the fact, the study shows that the involvement of non-officials i.e. elected members of PRIs was neglected in implementation of NREGS which was an important drawback in implementation of the scheme.

- The study reveals that the wages to the workers were not paid in time and even they were not entitled compensation for delayed payment which is an important provision of the NREGA - 2005. Since most of the workers under NREGS were daily wage earners and needy people, therefore, they were not interested to work under the scheme because they could not wait for wages for a longer period of time. Thus, such a finding adversely affected in smooth implementation of NREGS.

- The study shows that the funds under NREGS were not released in due time to the Block level implementing authorities. It was due to the fact that the sanctioning authorities of NREGSFs followed a cumbersome procedure in releasing funds. The unnecessary delay of disbursement of NREGSFs to the implementing authorities often created hindrance in proper implementation of the scheme.

Suggestions

Based on the findings of the present study and exhaustive field experience, in the present context the following measures are suggested which may be considered by the implementing authorities and policy planners for securing improvements and successful implementation of NREGS in the study area in particular and in Assam in general. Though the suggestions are confined to the micro situation of Dhemaji district of Assam however, it is felt that these recommendations have their relevance for the state as a whole.

- One of the findings of the study is that at the present moment there is a confrontationist tendency between the Government officials and people's representatives of PRIs. In this connection, it may be recommended that in order to avoid such tendencies the powers and functions of both the types of functionaries...
should be clearly demarcated by the Government for desired results and effective execution of RDPs.

- At the time of field survey, it was observed that the implementing authorities of NREGS were not independent administratively to implement the scheme. It is recommended that maximum autonomy should be given to the Block level implementing authorities in implementation of NREGS.

- At the block level, the BDO does not look after the NREGS only; he is entrusted to look after the other programmes too. Consequently, the work of NREGS gets hampered. Therefore, there is need to relieve the BDO from NREGS functions. Another officer equivalent in rank to BDO may be appointed to hold exclusive charge of these functions. It may therefore, be suggested that a separate post of additional BDO as a full time officer is to be created for speedy and effective implementation of NREGS.

- For proper implementation of NREGS, much emphasis should be given on training for PRI members at the different levels and bureaucracy at the Block level.

- In fact, the Government’s effort alone will not be able to eradicate unemployment problem from the rural India. For, the success of any national programme like NREGS, peoples’ active and full participation is a must. Without their participation, NREGS cannot achieve its long-term perspective targets reducing the percentage of the people below poverty line. For this purpose, it may be recommended that special attention must be given by the Government to increase peoples’ participation in NREGS.

- The study reveals that the peoples’ consciousness about the basic features of NREGS is yet to be realized. There is need for a special drive on the part of implementing authorities to educate the rural people about the various provisions of NREGS.

- Misappropriation and skimming of the NREGSFs by unscrupulous elements may be checked by appointing a vigilance committee and the persons responsible for such offences may be dealt effectively.

- Constant monitoring and evaluation of the ongoing schemes are very essential to plug leakages of money, resources and proper implementation of the scheme. For this purpose, it is essential that a strict monitoring mechanism should be developed for successful implementation of the scheme.

- The meeting of the Gram Sabha needs to be held regularly.
• The wage rate under NERGS was Rs. 152.00 per day which was sizeably lower than the existing market rate of Rs. 200 or more than that. Therefore, it can be suggested that for extensive participation of wage earners in NREGS, the wage rate should be enhanced keeping parity with the existing market rate.

• The contractors should be banned strictly from engaging in implementation of the scheme. For this purpose, it may be recommended that the law breakers should be seriously dealt with even with punishment up to imprisonment.

• Auditing may be done through extra government agencies in addition to GP to check mishandling of funds.

The review of the literature has shown that the literature available on the present work is limited in number and there is very little research on the implementation of NREGS. In fact, the introduction of NREGS is a recent phenomenon. It may be logical to state that the scheme is still in experimental stage. No systematic major works have so far been done in depth and detail in the context of Assam. The present study could be a pioneering work in this regard and it will help to identify the existing research gaps in the field and will provide a base for further extensive research work in the field. Besides, the literature survey suggests that there are so many issues relating to implementation of NREGS have not been well covered and there are still considerable gaps in many other areas of our understanding. Therefore, specific research is needed on each of the issues of implementation of the scheme in order to fully understand the contribution of NREGS in eradication of rural poverty in particular and rural development in general.

Further, during the course of study, the investigator has perceived a potential avenue of research for the future. The present study is delimited to Dhemaji district of Assam. It will be a worthwhile effort if some scholars were to study the implementation of NREGS in several districts of Assam and compare the same with the implementation of the scheme in the neighbouring states of Assam or other parts of the country to understand the implementing pattern of NREGS.