CHAPTER - 8

FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

Introduction

The Constitution of India obliges the state to ensure effective social security measures for the working people of the country. The term working people include both organised and unorganised workers. India as well as the state of Assam has initiated both protective and promotional social security measures through legislations which primarily cover the workers of the organised sector enterprises due to various limitations as embodied in the Acts.

The concept of unorganised sector as given by CSO, NCL, ILO, ICLS, UNSNA and NAS are not in agreement, for which the corresponding concept of unorganised workers still remains to be ambiguous and still suffers from lack of precision.

The social security programmes for the unorganised workers, as envisaged by the Government are basically in the nature of social assistance.

Findings

The different aspects of social security for the unorganised sector workers in Assam with special reference to the agricultural labourers of Kamrup district and its underlying principles, policies, problems and approaches as revealed during the course of our investigation have been summarised as follows:
The Unorganised Sector Workforce: A Structural Analysis

During the period 1971-1999, the growth rate of unorganised workforce in Assam was quite impressive. The total unorganised workers which stood at 35.97 lakhs in 1971, gradually increased to 82.97 lakhs in 1999, recording 43.55 per cent decadal growth rate. The decadal growth rate of organised workforce during the relevant period was less than 9 per cent.

The proportion of unorganised labour far sway the proportion of organised labour. Unorganised workforce constituted 87.04 per cent of the total working population of the state in 1991 as compared to 12.96 per cent of the organised sector. The ratio of unorganised labour to organised labour for the country as a whole stood at 9:1 as on 1991. However, the labour absorption rate in the unorganised segment of the economy declined by 1.70 per cent in 1991 over 1971.

In both rural and urban Assam, male work participation rate is much higher than the female work participation rate. Rural male workers accounted for 79.54 percent and urban male workers 89.93 percent of the respective total rural and urban employments in 1991. The corresponding female participation rates were 20.46 per cent and 10.07 per cent.

During the two decades 1971-1991, employment growth rate was higher than population growth rate. This is partly because of the fact that female employment growth rate increased from 4.66 per cent in 1971 to 21.66 per cent in 1991. Notwithstanding, male participation rate almost remained close to 49 per cent during the period.
There has been acute problem of unemployment in the state. Despite, there has been steady improvement in the level of employment over the years due to faster expansion of unorganised segment. The crude work participation rate which was 27.96 per cent of the total population in the state in 1971, increased to 36.08 per cent in 1991 and the remaining proportion is represented by non-workers. The level of improvement is, however, upset by the marginalisation of unorganised workers.

The occupational structure of the male workforce is more diversified than that of female workers. 86.40 per cent of the female workers are engaged in agricultural sector having less representation in manufacturing, trade & commerce sectors as compared to male counterpart as on 1991. Women have better representation (2.17 percent) in HHI sector than the male workers (0.57 per cent) during the above year.

The primary sector was the most important sector in the state economy that provided large-scale employments. It alone absorbed 79.09 per cent of the total unorganised workforce in 1971 which increased to 82.66 per cent in 1999. Tertiary sector which offered employment to 15.63 per cent of the total unorganised workforce in 1971 fell down to 12.88 per cent in 1999. The secondary sector which ranked third enjoyed the rest. Of the primary sector, cultivators gained more prominence, while the labour absorption rate in livestock farming, horticulture, pisciculture etc. was negligible. Infact, labour absorption rate in both the categories—cultivation and allied activities declined during the period 1971-1999. Of the tertiary sector, trade was the significant category to improve share of
employment within the sector. The share increased from 5.64 per cent in 1971 to 6.12 per cent in 1999.

The unorganised sector occupies an important place in the state’s economy not only in terms of providing large employment but in terms of contribution to GSDP also. Even though the contribution declined in 1996-97 over 1993-94, it still accounts for quite a large share (more than 50 per cent) in Assam as well as India.

There was no remarkable disparities in occupational structure between the unorganised workers of the district of Kamrup and Assam. However, in other aspects, reversible results have been found. Female work participation rate (10.43 per cent) was much lower than that of Assam (21.61 per cent). The primary sector provided employments to only 45.65 per cent of the total labour force of the district as against 73.99 per cent of Assam, while the tertiary sector offered 42.41 per cent as compared to state’s 20.45 per cent during 1991. The rest 11.94 per cent was engaged in the secondary sector. The workers from agricultural sector shifted to gainful employments in tertiary and secondary sectors.

The total agricultural labourers in Assam and Kamrup aggregated to 24.42 lakhs and 1.80 lakhs respectively as on 1999. There had been increase in the total strength of agricultural labourers in the state, but it showed a declining trend in the district during the period 1971-1991. The annual acceleration rate for the state was 5.43 per cent, while the annual deceleration rate for the district was 1.02 per cent during the period.
Food Security

To provide adequate food security to the vulnerable section of the society is a fundamental duty of the state, but the state failed miserably to effectively discharge this noble function in Assam including the district of Kamrup.

The incidence of poverty gives some idea about the necessity of targeting food security programmes in favour of the vulnerable sections of the unorganised workers particularly the agricultural labourers, marginal labourers, transport workers and construction workers. Based on consumption level of 1973-74, the Planning Commission of India estimated that 51.23 per cent of the total population of Assam was living below poverty line in 1993. Our survey reveals that 87.28 per cent of the households of agricultural labourers of Kamrup district were living below poverty line followed by construction workers (67.44 per cent), transport workers (56.36 per cent) and artisans (45.89 per cent) during the year 1999. These workers are the needy persons required to be assisted in any food security programme of the state.

The pattern of PDS purchases has shown that the poor unorganised workers were not benefiting much from PDS. The poor purchased 0.84 kg of foodgrain and the very poor purchased 0.93 kg per month from PDS in Assam during the year 1992.

The dependence of agricultural labourers of Kamrup district on the open market is much higher than on the PDS for most of the essential commodities. The monthly purchase of rice under PDS by the
agricultural labourers constituted only 11.86 per cent of the total monthly rice consumption of the family, which means that the household purchased 88.14 per cent of the total monthly rice requirement from the open market. The per capita monthly purchase of rice under PDS was 1.52 kgs.

The access to wheat under PDS by the agricultural labourers of the district was indeed disheartening. The monthly per capita purchase of wheat under PDS was only 0.645 kg. PDS wheat provided for only 5.63 per cent of the monthly consumption of it by an agricultural labourer’s family.

The per capita per month PDS purchase of sugar varied between 0.25 kg. and 0.41 kg. among the agricultural labourers living in the surveyed blocks of Kamrup district. The average per capita purchase of sugar was 32 grams taking all the blocks together as against the Government supply of 425 grams per head per family. PDS purchase of sugar accounted for only 9.70 per cent of the total monthly household sugar consumption. As such PDS has remained largely an untergated programme. Impressive coverage and/or additional state level spending on subsidy is not guarantee that the very poor are better served. Per capita PDS purchase in urban areas is much higher than in the rural areas, which means that PDS system is urban biased.

The level of foodgrain production in Assam, in fact, adversely effected in ensuring state food security programme and easy availability of
food-grains to the weaker section of the unorganised sector workers even though the FCI had surplus disposable stocks.

The yearly growth rate of food production in Assam, which was as much as 16.6 per cent in 1990-91 declined to 2.16 per cent in 1998-99. The production of foodgrain in the district of Kamrup was almost static during the period 1991-2000. The gross production of foodgrain in the district, which was 127 thousand tonnes in 1991-92 swung down to 119 thousand tonnes in 1999-2000. The production of foodgrain in Assam as well as in Kamrup district was not at all satisfactory in view of rising population.

The per capita per day availability of foodgrain in Assam stood at only 356 grams in the year 2000, which was far below the minimum level of nutritional requirement of 500 grams of foodgrain per person per day as recommended by the National Institute of Nutrition. The per capita per day availability of foodgrain in the district of Kamrup was even worse than that of Assam as a whole. The per capita per day availability of foodgrain in the district varied between 129-168 grams during the year 1991 throughout 2000. This means there had been acute shortage of foodgrain in the district. The shortage of foodgrain in Assam accounted for 2.36 lakhs MT in the year 1998-99. The shortage of foodgrain requirement which was 162.64 thousand MT in 1990-91 in Kamrup district rose to 220.00 thousand MT in 1999-2000.

The poor agricultural labourers of the district suffer from social deprivation in terms of access to adequate food.
Due to mismanagement, 27 GPSSs in Kamrup district were in defunct and many GPSSs could not lift the allotted PDS commodities timely, which interrupted the smooth supply of PDS items.

FCI had excess food stock as against the actual food stock during the period 1994-2000 except 1997. The average excess food stock accounted for about 51.05 per cent during the above period. The Corporation did not procure paddy in the state of Assam since 1997 which adversely affected the farmers' income, as the farmers of the state had been selling paddy at Rs. 500 per quintal in 1999-2000, whereas the farmers of West Bengal and Uttar Pradesh sold at Rs. 875 per quintal.

The off-take of PDS commodities during the period 1991-2000 was quite disheartening at all India level. The wheat off-take declined from a peak of 85.23 per cent of allocation in 1991-92 to 34.06 per cent in 1999-2000. Likewise, rice off-take in the country fell down to 53.14 per cent in 1999-2000 from a peak of 89.52 per cent in 1991-92. The average off-take of rice during the period 1991-2000 was 73.08 per cent. The ratio of lifting to allotment in the State of Assam was far more satisfactory than those of all India ratios. The off-take of BPL rice in the state registered 117.33 per cent (i.e. more than what was allocated) in March, 2000. However, the off-take of levy sugar which registered 111.84 per cent in April, 1999 slashed down to 68.49 per cent in March, 2000 due to narrowing down of the difference between issue price and market price. Despite the fact the yearly growth rate of distribution of PDS items during the period 1991-2000 was not impressive, as for example, the yearly growth rate in distribution of rice
through PDS in the state which shot up to 45.72 per cent in 1996-97 shrunk to 31.14 per cent the following year and 4.09 per cent in 1999-2000.

Due to rising economic cost and the profit margins reserved for the distributors such as GPSSs and FPSs, the real issue price of PDS items have been rising since 1991-92. The difference between the PDS price and open market price of wheat, which was 48.04 per cent in 1997 came down to 28.43 per cent in 2000 making the PDS item costlier to the poor beneficiaries. In respect of sugar the gap between PDS price and open market price was negligible in 1994 (being 2.2 per cent) and the maximum gap worked out to 27.99 per cent in 1999.

However, the difference between PDS price and open market price of rice which narrowed down to 15.66 per cent in 1993, improved to 65.17 per cent in 2000.

The per capita income transfer to the agricultural labourers from all subsidies routed through PDS was Rs. 10.30 in 1999. The income gain to the poor in Assam was Rs. 2.2 as against the all India level of income gain to the poor of Rs. 3.4 per month.

The income transfer via food subsidy contributed insignificantly to the food budget of the poor agricultural labourers.

**Employment Security**

For increasing the purchasing power and achieving adequate food security, the poor unorganised workers have to be provided employment
security. In case of the unorganised sector workers who have no regular jobs or assured income, their primary need is employment security.

Wage employment programmes can play a helpful role in addressing the problem of employment security.

The most important feature of agricultural employment situation in the district of Kamrup as well as in Assam as a whole is casualisation of work. Our study reveals that among the agricultural labourers of the district of Kamrup the proportion of casual labourers (86.33 per cent) is much higher than the proportion of attached labourers (13.67 per cent). The magnitude of casualisation reflects the non-availability of adequate self-employment opportunities in the rural Kamrup. It also reflects the under-utilisation of human resource. The employment of rural labourers in agriculture as well as in non-agriculture is so uncertain and irregular that a casual labourer working in the field for a day or so can not be sure that he would get employment in the next day.

In view of the inadequate opportunities in the agricultural and non-agricultural activities, a large number of rural labourers crowd around the available opportunities, there by resulting in underemployment. Such a situation compels the labourers to work at a low wage rate.

The rural agricultural labourers of the district continue to suffer due to excessive seasonality of employment, lack of wage employment opportunities and low wage rates.
Efforts to provide wage-employment as a short run strategy for alleviation of rural poverty has been a major component of the developing planning in India. EAS and JRY are the major rural public work programme which are indirectly helping in improving the labour intensity of agricultural labourers during the off-season period.

It has been found that in Kamrup district 7.60 lakh mandays were generated under EAS in 1994-95, which increased to 10.19 lakh mandays in 1999-2000. On the other hand since 1991-92 to 1998-99 70.30 lakhs mandays of employment have been generated in the district as against the target of 82.31 lakhs mandays.

It is revealed by our study that only 30 per cent of the agricultural labourers of the district availed the opportunity of wage employment under EAS during the year 1999-2000, while only 24.66 percent of the total respondents enjoyed the facility of wage employment under JRY in the district in the relevant year. In case of EAS only 10.33 per cent secured employment of mandays between two and three months, while under JRY only 5.67 per cent enjoyed engagement between 60 and 90 mandays. Thus the benefits under wage employment programmes to the agricultural labourers of the district are far from expectation both in terms of entitlement of mandays and low wage rate paid to them. The coverage under the schemes is also narrower. Therefore, these wage employment programmes could not help uniformly the poor agricultural labourers of the district to cross over the poverty line.

Wage policy is an important component of employment security to the unorganised workers. The issue of minimum wages in agriculture is
relevant, because agriculture is the major source of employment for the rural workers. It is disheartening to note that the daily average wages required by the agricultural labourers of the district were lower than the minimum wages fixed under MW Act. The accepted wage policy applicable to the organised sector is overlooked by the planners of the country and employers of the unorganised sector.

The study exhibits that there has been widespread disparities in wages received by the different types of agricultural labourers, for example, in 1992, a field labourer received Rs. 28.12, while a herdsman Rs. 18.78 per day. The average daily wages received by male and female agricultural labourers also exhibited wide disparities during the period 1991-2000.

Out of a sample of 228 casual male workers of Kamrup district, 55.70 per cent received average daily wage between Rs. 40 and Rs. 45 in the semi-urban areas. Another 26.32 per cent casual agricultural workers received wages between Rs. 35 and Rs. 40 in the interior areas. It is significant to note that only 16.13 per cent of the female workers (as against 55.70 per cent of male casual workers) received daily average wage between Rs. 40 and Rs. 45. The female casual agricultural labourers who received actual average daily wage between Rs. 30 and Rs. 35 constituted 54.84 per cent as compared to 17.98 per cent of the male counterparts.

There had been inter state variations in fixation of statutory minimum wages in agriculture. There is no homogeneity in the fixation of statutory
minimum wages in agriculture. Although the Act has empowered the states to frame their own legislation to fix, revise and enforce the minimum wages, states show little interest in enforcement and revision of the rates. The variable D.A. was never paid to the agricultural labourers of Kamrup district. Nor the agricultural wage was revised timely.

**Health Security**

Since there is no special health care schemes and centres for the unorganised sector workers, these workers generally look up to the public health care facilities in the state to protect and maintain their industrial health.

At the end of the year 1999-2000, there were 16 community hospitals, 51 PHCs, 42 dispensaries and 500 sub-centres in the district of Kamrup. Though the growth rate of PHCs (being 35.89 per cent) was impressive enough, but in absolute terms it can not be said to be at all satisfactory in view of rising rural population. Assam still needs 5133 sub-centres, 855 PHCs and 214 CHCs with properly oriented and trained health workers.

The choice for PHCs is the highest among the agricultural labourers of Kamrup district. As much as 61.67 per cent registered for health care in PHCs and public civil hospitals, while only 4.17 per cent registered in public health care units. Public health care units are very costly. Privatisation of health services as advocated by the Government and some NGOs is likely to adversely effect the maintenance cost of health for the poor agricultural labourers and other poor unorganised workers.
The study reveals that only 28-33 per cent of the agricultural labourers who were taking medical treatment in the concerned PHCs got cured of their diseases. The main reasons for it are — non-availability of basic amenities and absence of specialists in the health centres. Thus the poor health remains to be the most dominant human deprivation in the district.

The quality of medical services rendered by the public hospitals are beyond expectation. 82.5 per cent of the respondents viewed that doctors were not timely available in the hospitals. Another 89.17 per cent did not get substantial portion of the prescribed medicines from the hospitals.

The housing conditions of the agricultural labourers are miserable. The majority of the agricultural labourers, being 90.55 per cent posses ‘Kutcha’ houses, while the remaining 9.45 per cent own ‘Pucca’ houses in the district. Only 53.33 per cent of the agricultural labourers’ houses have only one window and one entrance, and the rest do not have window but one entrance only. A large number of agricultural labourers live in a one room house. It was found that 22 per cent enjoyed the facility of separate kitchen from their dwelling houses and 10 per cent have electricity in their houses.

The number of beneficiaries under IAY in Assam increased from 4475 in 1993-94 to 37,743 in 1999-2000, while in Kamrup district the number of beneficiaries increased from 333 in 1993-94 to 2315 in 1999-2000. During the course of field investigation, we found that out of 300 agricultural labourers only 4.67 per cent received dwelling housing facilities under IAY. Even though the ceiling on construction assistance
under IAY was fixed at Rs. 20,000 per unit for plain areas and Rs. 22,000 for hilly areas, the beneficiaries had received maximum of Rs. 10,000 per unit for conversion of unserviceable ‘Kutcha’ houses into ‘Pucca’ houses.

Drinking water facilities available to the agricultural labourers’ families of Kamrup district is not encouraging. The percentage of such families with drinking water from pump/tubewell in Kamrup is only 51.33. The percentage of families with drinking water from tap/pipe accounts for only 3.33. Rural water supply programme of the Government of Assam is covered by MNP which is assisted by ARWSP. These schemes are yet to make any headway not only for the benefit of the rural labourers, farmers, artisans etc.; but for the masses of Kamrup and Assam as a whole. This is evident from the fact that the proportion of households with drinking water from pump/pipe in Assam was 45.27 per cent, as against country’s average of 68.2 per cent and Punjab’s 98.6 per cent. While providing safe drinking water to the rural people, the Government of Assam is yet to take up some policy initiative as to eradication of guineaworm, control of brackishness, removal of excess iron, control of fluorosis and arsenic. The coverage of habitation under MNP and ARWSP was 34.38 per cent in Kamrup as compared to Assam’s 43.01 per cent as on March 31, 1998.

As per census Report, 1991, there were 498 toilets per 1000 households in Kamrup district as against Assam’s figure of 374 per 1000 households. The toilets facility in the urban areas of Kamrup (895 per thousand household) was much more encouraging than its counterpart in
the rural areas being 264. Of course these data include both 'Kutcha' and 'Pucca' latrines.

Our study reveals that 8.33 per cent of the families of agricultural labourers of the district have the facilities of 'Pucca' latrines and 29.16 per cent have 'Kutcha' latrines, while 62.51 per cent of the agricultural labourers' families have no latrines. Only 2 per cent received financial assistance under CRSP and MNP for construction of latrines.

**Old Age Security**

The employees' Provident Fund Scheme, 1952, Employees' Pension Scheme, 1995, Payment of Gratuity Act, 1972 and Employees' Deposit Linked Insurance Scheme, 1976 which are primarily applicable to the organised sector could also be applied for the benefit of the unorganised workers.

NOAPS and NFBS were launched by the Central Government under National Social Assistance Programme on 15th August, 1995 to provide public pension benefit to the agricultural labourers and other vulnerable groups of the society. The benefits payable under the schemes are not attractive.

The total number of beneficiaries in Assam under Old Age Pension Scheme was 3.17 lakhs as on 31st March, 2001. Out of 1.13 lakhs age old persons belonging to unorganised sector of Kamrup district only 14.37 per cent received benefits under NOAPS as on year ending 31st March, 2000.
The coverage of total age old persons of the agricultural labourers under old age pension scheme was 32.69 per cent as on year ending 31st March, 2000. The remaining 6785 eligible agricultural labourers are still waiting to be benefited by the scheme. Moreover, the instalments under the scheme were not paid regularly. The biggest recipient of benefits under NOAPS in 1999-2000 was Tamil Nadu (32.49 lakhs) followed by Uttar Pradesh (8.58 lakhs) and Bihar 6.92 lakhs.

The achievement under NFBS in the district of Kamrup fairly exceeded the yearly target of 560 households during the period 1996-2000. However, the yearly target was far below the expected deaths that might have occurred of poor household families of unorganised workers. The yearly target should have been fixed between 2500 and 3262. A large number of families below poverty line had been deprived of family benefits under NFBS.

The achievement under NFBS in Assam was unexpectedly disheartening. The highest recipient of family benefits was Madhya Pradesh (34846 nos.) followed by Andhra Pradesh (30415 nos.) and Maharashtra (26664 nos.) in 1998-99 as compared to Assam’s 2251 only.

**Financing of Social Security**

While providing social security to indigent workers of the unorganised sector is of prime importance of time, the implementation of the schemes suffers a serious setback due to paucity of funds of the State Government.
Unlike organised sector, the social security schemes for the unorganised sectors are usually financed by the Centre and the States in a predetermined cost sharing ratio.

The Central Plan Outlay (BE) which was Rs. 6575 crores in 1991-92 moved upto Rs. 21563 crores in 1999-2000 which constituted 1.12 per cent of GDP. The Assam Government’s annual expenditure on social sector which was 1039.75 crores in 1991-92 rose to 2876.14 crores in 1998-99 constituting 11.33 per cent of GSDP. While investment on social sectors at the state level was increasing at a rate of 2.86 per cent, the same was declining at the all India level at a rate of .01 per cent per annum during the period 1991-2000.

The Total revised expenses on social sector in India which constituted 18.3 per cent of the total plan expenses in 1991-92 rose to 28.1 per cent in 1998-99. The total expenses on social services and rural development of the State of Assam expressed in terms of percentage to total state annual budget expenses fluctuated between a minimum of 26.23 per cent and a maximum of 37.10 per cent during the period 1991-2000.

There had been widespread variation in expenses of social sector across the states during the period 1991-2000. In 1997-98, the highest expenses of Rs. 9187.40 crores was made by Uttar Pradesh while Orissa incurred the lowest expenses of Rs. 2579.97 crores as compared to Assam’s Rs. 1837.08 crores.

The Central allocation of funds under the schemes such as JRY, EAS, IAY, NOAPS, NFBS, ARWSP and CRSP to Assam fluctuated during
the period 1991-2000. The fund allocated to Uttar Pradesh under JRY was 7 times greater than Assam in 1999-2000. The share of Assam in total central fund of EAS which constituted 4.71 per cent in 1993-94 declined to 3.20 per cent in 1999-2000. As against it, the share of Bihar which was 9.53 per cent in 1996-97, improved to 18.66 per cent in 1999-2000. Assam accounted for 1.30 per cent of the central allocation of fund under NOAPS in 1996-97 and its share marginally improved by 4.40 per cent in 1999-2000.

The rate of utilisation of fund in Assam under EAS was only 60.62 per cent in 1998-99, even though the rate of utilisation of fund at all India level exceeded the allocation by 113.46 per cent in the relevant year. The rate of utilisation of fund under NOAPS and NFBS were also not encouraging though the schemes are fully subscribed by the Central Government. The fund allocated under CRSP to the state was never used by the Government during the period 1991-99.

While the AFPPP was the highest in Bihar (Rs. 258.50) in 1999-2000, Assam accounted for AFPPP of Rs. 192.02 in the same year.

Recommendations

In the light of the above findings, the following recommendations are put forward, whereby it is expected, will go a long way in helping the Government to adopt suitable policy with regard to social security for the unorganised workers of the state including the agricultural labourers of the district of Kamrup. No doubt, the recommendations will also make
the social security programmes for the poor unorganised workers
effective and equitable.

To Develop the Standard and Status of Unorganised Workers

(1) An implication which emerges from the present study is that women’s skill upgradation is an area which requires utmost attention. Vocational training can play an important role in this direction. Acquisition of such training will become an instrument for not only availing occupational diversification over wide areas of economic activities, but also can act as an agent to modify existing attitude and behaviour pattern among the women. The state should accelerate the pace of vocational training for the development of women’s participation in various field of economic activities.

(2) Non-farm sector strengthens the base of rural livelihood and helps in diversification of occupations in the rural areas. While the shift of the workforce to the non-farm sector is welcome, but the discontinuation of employment due to closure of establishment consequent to the demand for higher real wages and market is unwholesome. The policy makers should think of protecting these small enterprises and expand tertiary and secondary sectors by providing adequate finance facilities and regulating the employment.

(3) The definition of worker as provided in the Trade Union Act, 1926, should be changed so as to include home-based workers,
construction workers, transport workers and other workers of the unorganised sector. Such a change can certainly help in getting the union of unorganised workers registered as trade unions.

(4) The agricultural labourers and marginal workers do not have full time employment because of seasonal character of agricultural system and dearth of manual work in the district concerned. Both intensive cultivation and extension of irrigation are very much needed to increase agricultural work. By these methods there will be double cropping and employment will be available for the whole year around.

(5) The waste land and the unutilised forest land should be allotted to the agricultural labourers on selective basis so that they can start orchards, floriculture and fisheries as the case may be.

(6) The District Industry Centre (DIC) should act as a nucleus for disseminating information about the prospective job in the district so that the unemployed persons can take up self-employment gainfully.

To Restructure the Food Security System

(1) A major drawback of PDS is its character of universal entitlement. It should be targeted to the poor by using various criteria. Primarily it ought to base on equity in distribution with respect to income inequality and regional inequalities. The present PDS structure needs to be dismantled and the target groups be
identified anew by an impartial commission instituted in this behalf. Then the food security system should cover the entire food requirements of the poor agricultural labourers and the other depressed sections of the unorganised workforce.

(2) To help the poor unorganised workers, PDS should be implemented through wage employment programmes.

(3) The FCI should restrict the volume handled through PDS by means of effective targeting and reduced leakages. This will result in economic operation of the Corporation. It can be effected in two ways - first by matching the volume both in terms of commodity consumption and volume with distribution targets so that storage level can be controlled. In this light, more allotment may be made to Assam, in general, and Kamrup in particular. Second, to increase in PDS off-take, the excess foodgrain may be used for massive public works programmes. The jobless poor agricultural labourers of the district will be benefited by the way. This policy will also create infrastructure for the state like Assam and reduce buffer stock besides generating employment for the weaker section of the society.

(4) The business of GPSSs is profitable one. It can not run at a loss provided the existing management is replaced by management scientists. The profit budgeting and accounting standards of the GPSSs, need to be improved upon immediately to prevent frauds.
(5) The delivery system of PDS should be improved upon. The vigilance committee can play a decisive role in this aspect.

(6) The gap between the issue price and the open market price should be widened to give foodgrain at prices which the poor can afford and benefit from the PDS. Unless this gap is improved upon all the talks about food security to vulnerable section of the society do not have any meaning.

(7) The Government of Assam should evolve a strategy of its own to provide food security to the different classes of poor unorganised workers. The STATEFED may be revitalised and it may be assigned a given responsibility of ensuring food security to those workers.

(8) The State Government should establish appropriate state level decision-making centres for proper functioning of food security programmes and develop food security information system.

To Provide Employment Security to the Agricultural Labourers and other Unorganised Workers:

(1) The Village Panchayat or Block Development Officers in co-ordination with the Ministry of Rural Development and DRDAs should draw out Action plan considering the magnitude and nature of unemployment of the agricultural labourers within their jurisdiction.
(2) Transparency is also a major area of concern in implementing JRY and EAS. The implementing agencies at all levels should display funds available, works sanctioned and estimates of costs involved. The measure of social audit should be stepped up.

(3) Works under JRY and EAS should be labour intensive which result in durable productive assets. No contractor should be permitted under wage employment programmes.

(4) The Village Panchayat or Block Development Officer should initiate registration of wage employment seekers through advertisement in the local area.

(5) The implementing agencies of wage-employment schemes should utilise one person from among the beneficiaries group as animator/leader/facilitator in maintenance of master roll, payment of wages, monitoring of quality of work etc.

(6) The Central and the State Governments should amend the existing labour legislations to regulate the wage and employment conditions of the unorganised sector workers.

(7) Statutory minimum wages for the agricultural labourers should be revised every three years and an enforcement machinery should be constituted to administer its implementation.

(8) Since the wages for the unorganised workers in general are determined by the respective employers at their own volition, a
Wage Board for Unorganised Sector (WBUS) is very much essential to guide and supervise wage structure.

(9) A national level employment guarantee scheme can also provide some sort of security for the rural labourers. Therefore, the Central Government should give more emphasis on the development of such programme. When natural disaster like drought and food occur, there is a need for strengthening wage employment programme and public distribution system.

**To Improve Health Security**

(1) Ensuring community involvement is crucial for the success of the PHC. The Government should support the decentralised management structure by better information and incentive systems by involving the community in management of health services.

(2) The Government should set up advisory committees involving the community to monitor the performance of the sub-divisional hospitals and district hospitals.

(3) Adequate supply of trained and qualified personnel clubbed with proper attention to the basic requirements of health centres through strong administration should be stepped up.

(4) The Government should improve the efficiency of drug procurement and distribution system to ensure that essential medicines are available at all health centres.
(5) ESI scheme should be extended to unorganised workers with modified modalities and on selective basis.

(6) The State Government in co-operation with the commercial banks and other financing institutes like HUDCO should prepare an action plan for rural housing to provide shelter to the indigent families.

(7) Credit-cum-subsidy scheme for rural housing should be modified in favour of the indigent class of the unorganised sector workers.

(8) Rural Building Centres (RBC) should be established in which the agricultural labour class should be involved. RBC should encourage innovative, cost effective and environmental friendly techniques in the housing sectors in rural areas including technology transfer and information dissemination.

(9) Not less than 60 per cent of the funds of HUDCO should be utilised for financing the construction of houses for the rural households. It should proactively intervene to ensure adequate geographical distribution of the benefits under its Rural Housing Scheme and start up specific Rural Housing Scheme for the agricultural labourers. The Agricultural Labourers should form Housing Co-operative Societies for the purpose.

(10) The Government should guarantee commercial banks for the loans given to the agricultural labourers.
A State Mission for Rural Housing and Habitat (SMRHH) should be set up in Assam. The duty of the SMRHH will be to identify the most needy class for housing in the rural and urban areas and facilitate induction of science and technology inputs on a continuous basis into the sector and providing convergence to technology, habitat and energy related issues with a goal to provide an affordable shelter to all in the rural areas within a specified time frame and through community participation.

The implementation of Samagra Awaas Yojana, a comprehensive housing scheme launched recently with a view to ensuring integrated provision of shelter, sanitation and drinking water should be expedited. The scheme should be piloted on the basis of blocks.

The State Government should adopt an allocation based programme with the provision for progressive phasing out with a view to achieving at 50 per cent coverage of the rural poor by the end of next five years. It requires that the Government should avoid demand driven approach and adopt poverty oriented approach.

The Government should emphasise more on community based sanitation rather than individual household. As such there will be greater involvement of households. The beneficiaries should form Village Sanitation Committee for the maintenance of the sanitation system at their own expenses.
(15) Development of back-up services—trained missions, building materials through rural sanitary marts/production centre and restructuring of programme guidelines, especially increasing choice of technology which is location specific.

(16) A Total Sanitation Campaign (TSC) should be designed to suit beneficiary group-specific requirement. TSC envisages a synergistic interaction between the Government machinery, active NGO participation and intensive IEC.

(17) The Government should take active steps to inculcate IEC awareness among the agricultural labourers and other sections of the rural society, and the people in turn, should actively participate in the programme.

(18) The Government should step up implementation of MNP, ARWSP and PMGY by covering more habitations and gear up the machinery for maintaining the completed projects of safe drinking water supply.

(19) The Government with the help of NGOs should also take up some policy initiatives to control water borne diseases and make drinking water sustainable.

To Tone up Old Age Security System

(1) The age of applicant under OAPS should be reduced to 60 years.

(2) The amount of old age pension should be increased to atleast 50 per cent of the BPL income per month.
(3) The procedural aspects for sanction of OAPS and NFBS should be simplified. The performance of the schemes should be monitored by a public committee to prevent misappropriation of funds.

(4) Chilean Pension System may be introduced in this country on the basis of defined contribution (or partially funded basis) and defined benefit.

To Enhance Funds for Financing Social Security Programmes in the State

(1) In view of the economic backwardness of Assam clubbed with scarce job opportunities in the rural areas of the state, the Central Government should increase the allocation of fund under various social security programmes to at least 25 per cent of the State Gross Domestic Product.

(2) The State Government should also envisage employment guarantee scheme and old age security scheme at its own like that in Maharashtra. The resources required for the purpose may be collected by having professional tax on business occupations, additional tax on sales tax and a surcharge on land revenue. The Central Government should also impose a moderate surcharge on the incomes of the top 12 per cent households of India for the purpose. The Government may also charge additional tax on income of persons keeping assets disproportionately higher than honest incomes.
(3) NGOs should take up certain social security programmes for the benefit of the weaker section of the society in the state like that of SEWA in Gujarat.

(4) More allocation of funds to the state under various social security programmes for the unorganised workers is only a necessary condition but not sufficient for effective utilisation. Management or administrative aspects are equally important for efficient utilisation of the programmes in reaching the poor working class. Therefore, the Government should give equal weightage to both organisational aspects and allocation of funds in the process of implementation of the social security programmes.

Conclusion

High labour intensive pattern economic growth is important for creation of productive employment. The immediate task before the Government intervention should be to accelerate wage and self-employment programmes till economic growth takes care of the employment security. While wage employment programmes are more effective because of self targeting nature, the self-employment programmes upgrade the skills of the rural labour in order to compete in the market. Public actions should be more on females and other vulnerable groups in the area of health security. Public distribution system requires to be strengthened with various targeting procedure (linking with poverty alleviation programme) in order to reach the agricultural labourers and the poor unorganised workers. There is strong case for a nation-wide and comprehensive
protective type of social security. There is a growing recognition now about the importance of these schemes to reduce the contingent poverty of the poor who cannot afford loss of earning. The protective schemes may be more effective than promotional schemes because targeting will be easier in the former compared to the later scheme. Apart from that political commitment may be necessary for the success of any social security programme for the unorganised sector workers.