

Role Of Panchayati Raj Institution In Eradication Of Poverty: A Case Study From Kamrup District, Assam (India)

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Abstract

In order to build a more flourishing, identical and secure world by 2030 Seventeen Global Goals has been put forwarded by the United Nations in the year 2015. Among these 17 goals one of the goals is focused on poverty eradication from global society. This is very crucial for society as various socio-economic problems are directly or indirectly linked up with this social phenomenon. In the particular case of India, during the last two decades, the national authorities have implemented several poverty alleviation programs among the poor. The objective of these programs is to improve their standard of living. For this purpose, constitutionally sanctioned local govt. system i.e. Panchayati Raj Institution (PRI) is a crucial driving force for visioning, planning, developing implementation and monitoring the various govt. welfare schemes at the grassroots level. The current study is focused on the roles that play by PRI in achieving the first goal of SDGs in a village from the influence zone of Assam's capital city Guwahati through case study. For that both primary and secondary data base are used to draw the conclusion. Along with the govt.'s efforts it's the duty of local people also to cooperate in implementing and proper maintenance of the various poverty alleviation schemes in the study area.



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Introduction


Environment refers to the surrounding conditions including both living and non-living things. The rapid anthropogenic activities increasingly degrade the quality of environment in the recent times. The environmental experts, governmental authorities, NGO's and educational institutions involved in the matter of conservation of environment has already come forward to think over the

issue relating to environmental degradation and introduced various policies. However, this is not sufficient enough, proper summarization, monitoring, reporting, developing and implementation are necessary to ensure the healthy state of the planet earth for future generation. For this purpose, 'environmental degradation calls for a sound management system which in turn is indispensable for sustainable development'.⁶ As a dynamic

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concept, the environmental management can be defined as a purposeful activity with the goal to maintain and protect the various resources of environment for equitable use by future generations. It is much cleared that environmental management is related with the careful handling of available natural resources because careless handling of the resources through various anthropogenic activities will abuse the environment by leading hunger, poverty, pollution, deforestation etc.

Although the notion of *sustainable development* emerged in the late 1960's in Western world with an aim of raising awareness of environmental issues but it became familiar from Brundtland's 'Our Common Future', 1987, in which sustainable development can be defined as a eco-friendly development. MDGs (Millennium Development Goals) were introduced to eradicate indigence, starvation, ailment, illiteracy, environmental deterioration and discrimination against women from the global society through the United Nations Millennium Declaration in 2000, that MDG goals were replaced by SDGs which are also called as Global goals in 2016.⁹ Among these 17 sustainable development goals that were set, end of poverty or poverty eradication is also a prime concern like the others throughout the world.

Poverty is wide spread across the globe. According to the World Bank (2015), globally 85% of the people fight for earns \$30 /day in which approximately 56.6% live by earning below \$10 /day and every person per ten lives on \$1.90 or below / day. Though different countries have their different monetary value but the World Bank measures the global poverty based on bread-and-butter of a person's consumption. As a result of which in the year 2015 the definition of breadline was edited. A person is regarded as indigence if they survive on \$1.90 or below- /- day (World Bank, 2015). In the past, mass of the world population experienced the stage of deprivation from 80% in 1800 to 20% by 2015. According to United Nation's estimates, roughly 734 million people remained in indigence or roughly 1 in 10 people worldwide in 2016, out of which half of them from South-East Asia mainly from India and China. Recently, World Bank estimates that an additional 88 – 150 million people will fall into indigence by 2021 due to the full impact of ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

India ranked 62 out of 107 developing countries in Global MPI (Multidimensional Poverty Index) in 2020 (Global MPI 2020). Though most of India's poor live in rural areas but an estimated 86 million people daily fight to fulfill their basic necessities of life in the urban areas also. In order to tackle this specific problem, several rural development programs are being implemented by the Indian authorities with the aim of maintaining a balance and healthy development in the rural areas. Lack of proper implementation of these various national policies and the exploitation of the financially weaker section by the richer one are the root causes behind the stagnant development of the rural societies of India.¹⁷ For this purpose, the local govt. plays a vital role towards execution of these various developmental schemes at the grassroots level. The Panchayati Raj Institution (PRI) is the constitutionally accredited local govt. system of India which always ready to provide support for planning, coordinating, monitoring and regulating the proper execution of diverse national developmental strategies in the rural areas.

G.M.Mwabu and Erik Thorbecke (2004) highlighted poverty as a rural phenomenon and argued the potentiality of some rural-based policies in Sub-Saharan African region for stimulating overall growth and poverty eradication. Nicola Banks *et al* (2011) explored the negligence of the urban poor of Bangladesh in research, policy and action on poverty eradication. Gilvan R. Guedes *et al* (2012) analyzed the relation between rural poverty and inequality among the Brazilians of Transamazon. They stated the key role played by public policies in fostering sustainable development and poverty eradication among rural poor. Khalid Saeed (2002) made an attempt to explain the failures of the public policies of Pakistan towards alleviating rural poverty. The author found transfer of land ownership from its cultivators to capitalists led poor economic conditions of the working rural households. Yasin Abdalla Eltayab Elhadary and Narimah Samat (2012) highlighted the situation of urban poverty and political economy by emphasizing on its pattern, causes and the public policies adopted by Sudan and Malaysia to eradicate poverty. They stated that food insecurity, socio-economic imbalances and regional disparities were highly responsible for the prevailing of this poverty among the people of both the countries.

According to World Bank, (2017), 'Assam is the home of 3.1 crore people, a third of which are needy one'. Assam Development Report (World Bank 2017) reveals that incidence of rural poverty of Assam is similar to that at the all India level compared to urban ones which is much lower than that observed for urban areas at the all India level. Thus, poverty in Assam is predominantly a rural phenomenon but in terms of its eradication Assam's performance is not so good, as a result of which poverty levels being very high in some parts of the state mainly in rural areas. In Bargaon, a medium size village of Kamrup district, out of 405 households 197 comes from Below Poverty Line (BPL) category. In this context, an attempt is made to focus on the role of PRIs in achieving the first goal of SDGs in the area of Bargaon village by implementing various

national schemes during the period of last five years (2015-2020).

Study Area

The study is confined to the Bargaon village that situated in Kamrup district, Assam. It is located at Kamalpur Tehsil, surrounded by its nearby villages as shown in the fig. 1. Along these villages the mighty river Brahmaputra flows in the south, river Suklai in the north and Puthimari river in the west. The village covers a region of 2.9326 sq km in the Assam area in India. The climate is sub-tropical monsoonal. Both deciduous and semi-deciduous forests are found here. As per Census of India (2011) the village counts with 1912 dwellers (997 males and 915 females). With a population density equals to 700 persons / sq km.

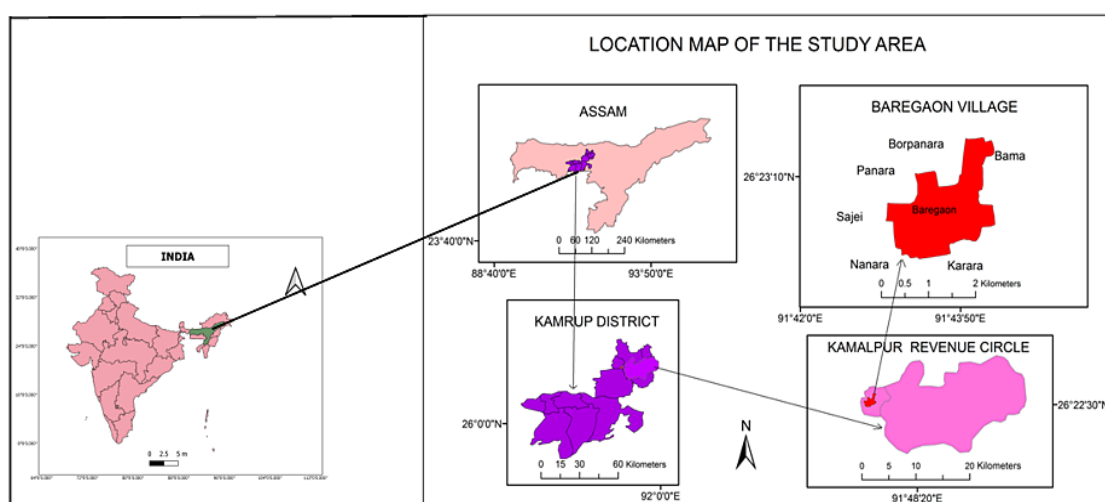


Fig. 1: Location Map

Source: Circle Office, Kamalpur, Kamrup district

Objectives

This paper consists of the following objectives:

1. To determine the glimpse of penury in the study area.
2. To check the benefits of the most significant national schemes in the local population.
3. To analyze the role of PRI's in achieving the first goal of SDGs in the study area.

Methodology

Two databases were considered. In the first one, 150 households surveyed (total households 405) through relevant interview schedule using so-called

Simple Random Sampling technique. We map the collected data. The necessary information related with the organization of various training program, awareness program in the study area during the last five years (2015-2020) are collected from the Office of the ETC (Extension Training Centres), Saraighat and SIPRD (State Institute of Panchayat and Rural Development), Bezera, Assam. Along with Population collected from the national Census data (2011) and The World Bank (2017), we collect also a secondary group of data extracted from research papers, newspapers' reports, journals and books.

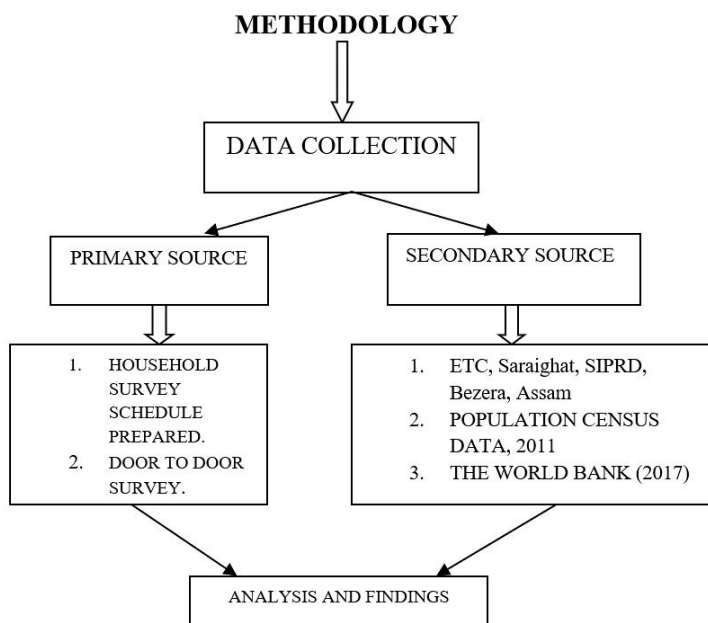


Fig. 2: Flow Chart of Methodology and Database.

Results and Discussion

The constitutional right of human being related to achieve a healthy life is not fully granted to many people of the village of Baregaon as 48.64 % households fall under the category of Below Poverty Line, i.e., do not have adequate income to

meet minimum basic necessities of life. With 755 working population only 39.48% villagers of the total population are engaged in different sectors as main and marginal workers as per 2011 Census. The following table gives a detailed view regarding the working status of the people of Baregaon.

Table 1: Working Status of Baregaon Village, Assam

Category		Workers	
TOTAL WORKERS	755	Cultivators	157
MAIN WORKERS	415	Agriculture Labourer	07
MARGINAL WORKERS	340	Household Industries	17
		Other Workers	234
NON WORKERS	1157	Total Main Workers	415

Source: Census of India, 2011

From the above table, it is clearly proved that poverty is just the reflection of unemployment or low adequate income in which lack of good education and awareness programs also give extra fuel as around 60.5% people are non-workers in the study area. And the remaining 39.48% people are engaged as main and marginal workers in different sectors out of which most are in primary economic sectors.

Besides, the incidence of poverty is a little bit higher among those working as laborers and daily wage earner. In this context, proper implementation of various govt.'s schemes and their maintenance are the means of poverty eradication so that each and every corner of the village of Baregaon gets benefitted.

Various govt. Schemes of Assam

An estimated 86% people of Assam inhabit in rural areas where agriculture is the prime source of livelihood (Census, 2011). Being a biodiversity hotspot this beautiful greenery state of India is richly endowed in natural resources. As a traditional agricultural state here emphasis has been put on this aspect for a means of livelihood either by consuming them or by selling the surplus in the nearby market. But this has not affected much the economy of the state and hence there is no upgradation

of the society to the limit it should for which use of old-school farming machinery, poor implementation of BGREI (Bringing Green Revolution to Eastern India) Program, fragmentation of cropland etc are mainly responsible. 'As a result of which the level of well-being of the rural people of Assam is getting deteriorates by increasing penury'.²⁷

Both the Central and State govt. has introduced several centrally and state sponsored poverty alleviation programs as follows:

Table 2: Various Poverty Alleviation Programmes In India And Assam

Sponsors	Name of The Schemes	Year	Remark
	Accelerated Rural Water Supply Programme which was retitled as National Rural Drinking Water Programme. (NRDWP)	1972	NRDWP was restructured as JJM in 2019.
	Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM)	2019	
	Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP)	1978	IRDP was restructured in 1999, 2011 and 2015.
	Swarnajayanti Grameen Swarojgar Yojana (SGSY)	1999	
	Aajevika – National Rural Livelihood Mission	2011	
	Deendayal Antayodaya Yojana (DAY – NRLM)	2015	
	Pradhan Mantri Gramin Awaas Yojana or Pradhan Mantri Awaas Yojana (PMAY-G)	2015	PMAY-G was previously known as Indira Awaas Yojana.
	Jawahar Rozgar Yojana (JRY) (National Rural Employment Programme + Rural Landless Employment Guarantee Programme)	1989	JRY is the merging of two schemes.
	National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP)		
	· Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme (NOAPS)		NSAP comprises of five schemes
	· Indira Gandhi National Widow Pension Scheme (IGNWPS)		
	· Indira Gandhi National Disability Pension Scheme (IGNDPS)		
Centrally Sponsored	· National Family Benefit Scheme (NFBS) and · Annapurna	1995	
	Mid-Day Meals Scheme (MDMS)	1995	
	Public Distribution System	1997	
	Jawahar Gram Samridhi Yojana (JGSY)	1999	
	Food for Work Programme	2000	
	Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY)	2000	
	Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY)	2000	
	Pradhan Mantri Gramodaya Yojana (PMGY)	2000-01	

	Sampoorna Gramin Rozgar Yojana (SGRY)	2003	
	National Food for Work Programme	2004	
	Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA)	2005	
	Rajiv Gandhi Grameen Vidyutikaran Yojana (RGGVY)	2005	DDUGJY replaced the existing RGGVY in 2015.
	Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Gram Jyoti Yojana (DDUGJY)	2015	
	National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS)	2006	
	National Food Security Mission	2007	
	Prime Minister Employment Generation Programme (PMEGP)		PMEGP is the merging of PMRY and REGP.
	(Prime Minister's Rozgar Yojana, PMRY + Rural Employment Generation Programme, REGP)	2008	
	National Rural Livelihood Mission	2011	
	Saansad Aadarsh Gram Yojana (SAGY)	2014	
	Swachh Bharat Mission- Gramin (SBM)	2014	
	Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana	2015	
	Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana	2015	
	Atal Pension Yojana (APY)	2015	
	National Maternity Benefit Scheme	2016	
	Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY)	2016	
	Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana (PMGKY)	2016	
	Solar Charkha Mission	2018	
	National Nutrition Mission (NNM), Poshan Abhiyan	2018	
	Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Maan – Dhan (PM-SYM)	2019	
	Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana	2020	
	Prime Minister Street Vendor's Atma Nirbhar Nidhi	2020	
State Sponsored Programmes in Assam	Chief Minister's Swa – Niyojan Yojana (CMSY)	2001	
	Mukhyamantrir Karma Jyoti Achari (MKJA)	2005-2006	
	Govt. Of Assam's Interest Subvention Scheme (GAISS)	2006-2007	
	Chief Minister Self – Employment Scheme (CMSS) and Vocational Training	2008-2009	
	Assam State Rural Livelihoods Mission Society (ASRLMS)	2011	

Source: The above mentioned information is collected from various secondary sources that are enlisted in the list of reference.

Among these various schemes (table 2) only a few portions are fully implemented in the villages of this agrarian state, but now a marked change has been

observed as the social and economic conditions of some rural poor a little bit better by getting the benefits of these schemes with the help of PRIs

but it's not like some other developed states of India. Both the govt. (center and state) is trying their best to overcome the problem of poverty but yet to be able to achieve their goal due to the lack of implementation of these schemes along with their proper maintenance in some remote areas where the entire system of implementation of govt. schemes have been plagued by various problems.

Implementation of Various Govt. Schemes in the Study Area

Among several social protection programs in India poverty alleviation plays a crucial role towards ameliorating the living standards of the poor people. Though Assam's performance in very recently

declared Sustainable Development Goals India Index 2020-2021 by NITI Aayog is not so good (ranked as 3rd worst-performing state) but it does not mean that all of the schemes and programs are not fully implemented here, there are some such rural areas where the journey of villagers towards meeting the first goal of SDG is clearly seen and Baregaon is a kind of village in Kamrup (Rural) district of Assam where some sorts of Govt. schemes (table 3) are able to touch the aspirations of the villagers during the last five years (2015-2020). In this context, PRIs has a dominant role without which it's not possible to get the benefits of various govt. schemes at the grassroots level.

Table 3: STATISTICS OF IMPLEMENTATION OF GOVT. SCHEMES ALONG WITH THE BENEFICIARIES IN THE STUDY AREA (2015-2020)

Name of the Schemes	No. of Beneficiaries (Total no. of household out of 197 Below Poverty Line)
Pradhan Mantri Awaas Yojana - Gramin Mission (PMAY-G)	100
Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA)	85
Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY)	75
National Rural Drinking Water Programme (NRDWP)	30
Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Gram Jyoti Yojana (DDUGJY)	80
Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY)	156
Swachh Bharat Mission- Gramin (SBM)	130

Source: Field Survey

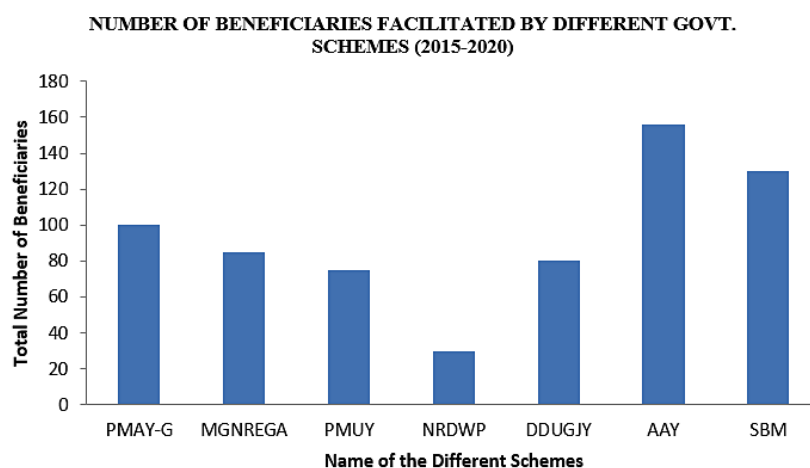


Fig. 2: Implementation of govt. schemes along with the total number of Beneficiaries of Baregaon village during 2015-2020

The proper implementation of the schemes is like a boon for the rural poor but in the above diagram, it is clearly seen that though all of the poverty alleviation schemes are in functional mode, but the local govt. has so far not been able to provide the benefits (take advantage of the scheme) of all of the schemes equally to the poor; if some of them has been able to avail few of the schemes, in the mean time deprived of the other. Poor information facilitation

and support infrastructure facilities at Panchayat level, information and digital illiteracy, weak processes in identification, selection and enrollment of beneficiaries, lack of basic identity documents of the beneficiaries and most importantly proper maintenance by the people after implementation have restricted many from having equal access to the avail of the schemes.



Fig. 3: Implementation of PMAY-G and NRDWP schemes in the Study Area (2015-2020)

Role of PRI in the Study Area

In order to smoothly functioning of the rural development schemes an active organization is needed which was fulfilled by the formation of Panchayati Raj Institution (PRI) at the village level and it got a new dimension through the Constitution 73rd (Amendment) Act, 1992. The PRI is a statutorily elected body at the grassroots level with powers of local government.³⁹

The members of the ETC, Saraighat, and SIPRD, Bezera, Assam are actively involved in organizing various awareness programs in the area of Baregaon village in which they provide the information of various welfare schemes with advantages / benefits. They also responsible for carrying out some kind of training programs for the representatives of gram panchayat in order to smoothly functioning of the govt. welfare schemes. Sometimes the members of self-help group are also trained up under various schemes. As a result, the people mainly under BPL category of study village are able to taste the benefits of various poverty alleviation schemes but not in equal mode. Moreover, after implementing also some sorts of schemes become almost failure or non-functional mode because of poor maintenance by dwellers. Though all of the schemes are not equally adequate to beneficiaries

but it is important to observe the change in their socio-economic conditions. For a long time most of the rural poor were excluded from having adequate access to schemes but now at least they are able to access their basic necessities due to the formulate and implementation of the major welfare schemes. In this context the credit for creating a healthy environment for the rural poor to improve their living conditions predominantly goes to the PRI and their functioning system.

Conclusion

The Panchayati Raj Institution is considered as the only effective instrument towards smoothly running of the decentralized development planning at grassroots level. Though it is actively involved in achieving the first goal of SDGs in the study area but still this three-tier representative structure of the Govt. fails to bring equality in reaching out of the benefits of all the Govt. schemes to the poor. Some major socio-economic factors are highly responsible for creating such barriers and challenges in having timely as well as equally access to these public schemes' information and benefits, though the majority of the respondents are not happy with that but in the meantime they also agree with the fact that the implementation of the various poverty alleviation schemes is able to bring a radical change in their

socio-economic life to some extent in the last few years. Proper implementation of the Govt. welfare schemes and monitoring of their developmental activities by the members of Panchayat are the correct way to attain their goals at the grassroots level. Thus, by implementing all of the poverty alleviation schemes properly and introducing key solutions to overcome the socio-economic barriers it would be possible for the villagers of Baregaon to achieve the first goal of SDG in the coming years. But, it is important to note here that in very recently declared rankings of SDG India Index by NITI Aayog Assam paint a dismal picture as a worst performing state after Bihar and Jharkhand with a score of 57 out of 100. As poverty is the nodal point in which various socio-economic problems are directly or indirectly linked up, so, along with the Govt. its people should

also cooperate to make the study area as a poverty-free village; if it continues for other remote areas also then it will not so far to achieve the first goal of SDG for Assam by the given deadline.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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