

The Role of Government Schemes in Rural Development of Meghalaya: A Study



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ABSTRACT: Rural development plays a crucial role in the overall economic growth and social stability of Meghalaya, a predominantly rural state in northeastern India, government schemes are instrumental in addressing socioeconomic challenges such as poverty, unemployment, and inadequate infrastructure. This study explores the role of various government initiatives in fostering rural development in the state, focusing on sectors like agriculture, education, healthcare, and infrastructure. The research highlights the implementation of Government schemes to enhancing livelihood opportunities, improving access to basic amenities, and promoting sustainable development practices in rural areas, and empowering rural communities. Through qualitative and quantitative analysis, the study also identifies gaps in policy execution, such as delays in fund disbursement, inadequate monitoring, and lack of community participation. It emphasizes the need for inclusive governance, capacity building, and stronger collaboration between stakeholders to maximize the benefits of these schemes.

KEYWORDS: Meghalaya, Government Schemes, Rural and Urban Development, Poverty Eradication.

INTRODUCTION

Rural development is a critical aspect of ensuring inclusive growth and equitable progress in India. In states like Meghalaya, where a significant proportion of the population resides in rural areas, development efforts are vital for enhancing the quality of life, reducing poverty, and improving access to basic amenities. Meghalaya, a picturesque state in the northeastern region of India, is predominantly agrarian, with its economy relying on agriculture, forestry, and allied activities. However, the state faces challenges such as infrastructural gaps, unemployment, and limited access to healthcare and education in rural areas. Government schemes play a pivotal role in addressing these challenges by fostering social and economic development. These schemes are designed to provide financial support, skill development opportunities, and infrastructure improvements, enabling rural communities to overcome systemic disadvantages and achieve sustainable progress. The Government of India, along with the state government of Meghalaya, has implemented various initiatives tailored to the unique geographical and socio-cultural context of the region. Flagship programmes such as the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) have contributed significantly to improving livelihoods through guaranteed wage employment. Similarly, the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY) focuses on enhancing rural connectivity, thereby linking remote villages to markets and essential services. State-specific schemes, such as those aimed at promoting indigenous crafts, agriculture, and rural entrepreneurship, further complement central government efforts. This study explores the impact of these government schemes on rural development in Meghalaya, examining their effectiveness in addressing key issues such as poverty alleviation, infrastructure development, healthcare, and education. It also highlights challenges, including limited awareness, bureaucratic hurdles, and geographical constraints, which affect the implementation and success of these programs. By identifying gaps and assessing outcomes, the study aims to provide actionable insights to enhance the effectiveness of government interventions in fostering sustainable rural development in Meghalaya.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present investigation is assessed by employing an exploratory and investigative study method to seek and identify the role of Government Schemes in Rural Development of Meghalaya. The study is heavily based on the tools of historical analysis. For this purpose, the primary and the secondary data were confined. Primary data is based on the observation and experiences. Conduct

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interviews with beneficiaries of government schemes in rural Meghalaya to assess the tangible outcomes and challenges of these schemes and secondary data was collected from books, articles, journals, magazines, related works, and records. Limitation of the study. The present article is focused on the role of women in the politics of Meghalaya (1972-2023). All sources of information from books, diaries, magazines, records, articles, and journals

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To evaluate the effectiveness of government schemes aimed at rural development in Meghalaya.
2. To assess the reach and accessibility of these schemes to the rural population.
3. To analyze the impact of these schemes on socio-economic development, including income levels, education, health, and infrastructure in rural areas.
4. To examine the role of government initiatives in reducing poverty and unemployment in rural regions.

THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENT SCHEMES IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Rural development is a key focus area in Meghalaya, a predominantly agrarian state in Northeast India with unique socio-economic and cultural dynamics. Government schemes play a pivotal role in addressing rural poverty, enhancing infrastructure, and improving livelihoods in the state. This discussion explores the impact of these schemes on the rural economy, infrastructure, social equity, and overall quality of life. The role of government schemes in the rural development of Meghalaya is critical, as these programs aim to improve the standard of living, increase income, and enhance infrastructure in the state's rural areas. The rural economy of Meghalaya is primarily based on agriculture, with a large proportion of the population depending on farming and related activities. Government initiatives, through various schemes, have contributed to the socio-economic upliftment of rural areas in several ways. Government schemes have made significant contributions to rural development in Meghalaya, improving infrastructure, livelihoods, and social equity. However, their impact can be further amplified by addressing implementation challenges, leveraging community participation, and tailoring interventions to local needs (Government Scheme).¹ As Meghalaya continues to evolve, the synergy between government initiatives and grassroots efforts will be crucial in achieving sustainable rural development. To research the role of government schemes in the rural development of Meghalaya, you can focus on various government programs that aim to improve the socio-economic conditions of rural areas, addressing issues such as infrastructure, education, health, and agriculture. In our study, we may analyze the effectiveness of these schemes in transforming rural Meghalaya by addressing issues like infrastructure, poverty, agriculture, and social development. You can also assess whether these schemes have led to sustainable development or if there are gaps in implementation (Guidelines, Government Scheme).² Several national and state-level schemes are implemented in Meghalaya to drive rural development:

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), enacted in 2005, aims to enhance the livelihood security of rural households in India by providing at least 100 days of wage employment in a financial year to every household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work. It provides employment opportunities to rural households, enhances rural infrastructure, and empowers local communities through participatory planning. MGNREGA is one of the most prominent rural development programs in Meghalaya. It provides rural households with at least 100 days of wage employment in a financial year (Aims, MGNREGA).³ This scheme aims to enhance livelihood security by creating sustainable rural assets such as roads, ponds, and infrastructure, thus contributing to the overall development of rural areas. Firstly, it provide wage employment to 100 days of unskilled manual labor to rural households, ensuring livelihood security. Secondly, it improve rural development by focusing on durable infrastructure creation like water conservation, irrigation canals, rural roads, and flood control measures and promotes natural resource management through projects like afforestation, land development, and watershed development. Thirdly, it reduce poverty by providing supplementary income to rural families, helping reduce rural poverty and reduces dependency on migration to urban areas by offering local employment opportunities. Fourthly, it empower rural communities by empowering Gram Panchayats to plan, implement, and monitor projects under the act and mandates social audits and public accountability to prevent corruption and misuse of funds. Fifthly, it ensure the social and economic equity by ensuring equal pay for men and women, with women comprising at least one-third of the workforce and creates opportunities for socially disadvantaged groups, fostering inclusiveness. Sixthly, it encourages eco-friendly initiatives such as water harvesting, drought-proofing, and afforestation and improves environmental sustainability through soil and water conservation projects (Guidelines, MGNREGA).⁴ Lastly, While the act primarily provides unskilled employment, it indirectly enhances the skill sets of rural workers by involving them in projects like construction and land development.

The National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM), also known as Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana – NRLM (DAY-NRLM), is a flagship poverty alleviation program of the Government of India under the Ministry of Rural Development. It aims is to promote sustainable livelihoods for rural poor households by organizing them into self-managed institutions and enhancing their economic

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opportunities (NRLM, Meghalaya).⁵ The main functions of NRLM include the formation of Self-Help Groups by organizing rural poor households, particularly women, into SHGs and federations and strengthens SHGs by providing training, capacity building, and financial support. Secondly it facilitates access to affordable credit from banks through the linkage of SHGs with financial institutions. Provides interest subvention for loans to reduce borrowing costs and promotes savings habits among SHG members. Thirdly, supports rural poor in identifying and developing sustainable livelihoods. Enhances income-generating activities through skill development, entrepreneurship, and market linkages and focuses on farm-based, non-farm-based, and allied sector livelihoods (e.g., agriculture, animal husbandry, handicrafts). Lastly, it implements skill development programs to enhance employability under sub-schemes like the Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalya Yojana (DDU-GKY) and supports placement-linked skill training and self-employment initiatives. The NRLM focuses on building rural poor women's organizations, ensuring financial inclusion, and improving the socio-economic status of rural households. In Meghalaya, the scheme has empowered women and given them access to financial services, thereby promoting rural entrepreneurship and self-reliance (Guidelines, NRLM).⁶

The Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY) is a flagship program of the Government of India, launched in 2000, aimed at improving rural infrastructure by providing all-weather road connectivity to unconnected villages. Ensure reliable and sustainable road connectivity to unconnected habitations in rural areas. Focus on habitations with populations greater than 500 in plain areas and greater than 250 in hilly, desert, and tribal regions. Facilitate better access to markets, health centers, schools, and other essential services for rural populations. Enhance socio-economic development by reducing rural isolation. Establish strict quality standards during road construction. Mandate a five-year post-construction maintenance period, during which contractors are responsible for upkeep (Aims, PMGSY).⁷ Encourage the use of geospatial technology for planning, implementation, and monitoring. Leverage digital platforms like the Online Management, Monitoring, and Accounting System (OMMAS) for tracking progress and ensuring transparency. Focus on environmentally sustainable construction practices. Support upgradation of existing rural roads to enhance durability and meet growing traffic demands. Create rural jobs through road construction and maintenance, contributing to local economic development. Utilize labor-intensive methods in alignment with the objectives of other schemes like the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA). Prioritize connectivity in under served and remote regions, particularly benefiting marginalized communities, including Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and economically weaker sections. Conduct regular audits and third-party evaluations to ensure proper implementation and accountability. Collect performance feedback to improve the scheme's efficacy. By improving rural connectivity, PMGSY plays a critical role in bridging the urban-rural divide and accelerating the pace of rural development in India. It focuses on providing all-weather roads to unconnected habitations, which significantly boosts connectivity and accessibility in remote rural areas of Meghalaya (Guidelines, PMGSY).⁸

The Integrated Watershed Management Programme (IWMP) was a flagship initiative launched by the Government of India under the Department of Land Resources, Ministry of Rural Development, to address land degradation and improve rural livelihoods. It focused on the sustainable development of natural resources through community-based approaches in watershed areas. The IWMP has been subsumed under the Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana (PMKSY) since 2015-16, under its Watershed Development Component (WDC). Conservation, development, and management of soil, water, and vegetation resources in the watershed areas. Promoting soil fertility improvement, erosion control, and groundwater recharge (Aims, IWMP).⁹ The scheme will enhance agricultural productivity and improving livelihoods in rural areas by adopting sustainable land-use practices. Promoting alternative livelihoods like horticulture, agroforestry, and livestock management. Ensuring efficient utilization of rainwater and reducing dependency on groundwater. Development of water harvesting structures like check dams, percolation tanks, and farm ponds. Mobilizing and training local communities to participate actively in planning, implementing, and maintaining watershed activities. Formation of user groups, self-help groups, and watershed committees for decentralized management. Improving resilience to climate change by adopting practices that reduce vulnerability to droughts and floods. Promoting afforestation and agroforestry to enhance ecological balance. Promoting sustainable agriculture through better water and soil management practices. Supporting allied activities like livestock development, fisheries, and pasture management. Creating wage employment opportunities through the construction of watershed development infrastructure. Enhancing income through diversified farming systems and value addition to agricultural produce. Regular monitoring of watershed activities to assess their impact and ensure the sustainability of interventions (Guidelines, IWMP).¹⁰ Adoption of technological tools like GIS and remote sensing for effective project planning and monitoring. The IWMP worked on a participatory approach, ensuring that local communities were involved in the decision-making and management of watershed activities, which enhanced its sustainability and effectiveness.

The Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY) is a flagship housing initiative of the Government of India aimed at providing affordable housing for all. It has two primary components: PMAY-Urban (PMAY-U) for urban areas and PMAY-Gramin (PMAY-G) for rural areas in the state. The scheme Offers interest rate subsidies under the Credit Linked Subsidy Scheme (CLSS) to economically

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weaker sections (EWS), low-income groups (LIG), and middle-income groups (MIG). It also provides direct financial aid to beneficiaries for constructing or enhancing houses. Encourages construction of affordable houses through public-private partnerships (PPPs). Ensures housing solutions for urban poor, slum dwellers, and rural households without proper housing. Prioritizes economically weaker sections (EWS), low-income groups (LIG), and marginalized communities. Gives preference to women, differently-abled individuals, Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), and minorities (Aims, PMAY).¹¹ Provides in-situ slum redevelopment using land as a resource. Aims to integrate slum dwellers into the formal urban housing system. Encourages the use of environmentally friendly construction methods and materials. Implements disaster-resilient and sustainable technologies in housing projects. Ensures that houses constructed under the scheme have essential amenities like water supply, electricity, sanitation, and cooking fuel. These functions collectively aim to address India's housing shortage and improve the living conditions of economically weaker populations (Guidelines, PMAY).¹²

The Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana (RKVY) is a Government of India initiative launched in 2007 to incentivize states to invest in agriculture and allied sectors. Its primary goal is to ensure holistic agricultural development. Encourage states to allocate more funds for agricultural and allied sectors. Strengthen agricultural infrastructure and productivity. Achieve a 4% annual growth rate in the agriculture sector. Focus on increasing farm productivity through better planning and resource management. Provide flexibility to states to formulate and implement projects tailored to their specific agricultural priorities and challenges. Develop storage facilities, irrigation systems, soil and water conservation structures, and marketing facilities. Promote agricultural mechanization and modernization. Support activities related to horticulture, fisheries, livestock, poultry, and dairying to ensure comprehensive agricultural growth. Support innovative practices, new technology adoption, and research-driven agricultural projects (Aims, RKVY).¹³ Promote sustainable agricultural practices and climate-resilient technologies. Given that agriculture is the primary livelihood in rural Meghalaya, RKVY has played a significant role in enhancing agricultural productivity. This scheme supports the development of agriculture and allied sectors, including horticulture, animal husbandry, and fisheries. The scheme has been renamed RKVY-RAFTAAR (Remunerative Approaches for Agriculture and Allied Sector Rejuvenation) since 2017, with a renewed focus on increasing farmers' income and ensuring sustainable development. Through this initiative, many people in Meghalaya's rural areas have been able to access better living conditions. It aims to ensure "Housing for All" by 2022, which is vital for improving the quality of life in rural Meghalaya (Guidelines, RKVY).¹⁴

The Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) is a flagship program of the Government of India aimed at promoting holistic development and well-being for children and mothers. It provides a range of services, focusing on early childhood care and development. Provides supplementary nutrition to children aged 0–6 years, pregnant women, and lactating mothers to address malnutrition and improve nutritional standards. Facilitates immunization for children against preventable diseases (e.g., polio, measles) and tetanus toxoid injections for pregnant women. Conducts regular health check-ups for children, pregnant women, and lactating mothers to monitor growth and development and identify health issues early. Offers non-formal pre-school education to children aged 3–6 years to enhance early cognitive, social, and emotional development. Provides information and training to women of reproductive age (15–45 years) on nutrition, health, family planning, and childcare practices. Refers children and mothers to healthcare facilities for treatment of illnesses and conditions requiring specialized care. The services are delivered primarily through Anganwadi Centres (AWCs), which serve as the focal points for community-based activities. This comprehensive approach helps address the health, nutrition, and education needs of vulnerable populations (Aims, ICDS).¹⁵

The National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP) is a welfare program in India that provides financial assistance to economically weaker sections of society. It was launched on 15th August 1995 by the Government of India under the Ministry of Rural Development. The primary aim is to ensure a minimum standard of living for vulnerable groups through direct financial support. Provides social assistance to elderly, widows, and persons with disabilities who live below the poverty line. Focuses on reducing economic insecurity for the most disadvantaged. While centrally sponsored, the schemes are implemented by state governments and Union Territories, promoting collaboration between the Center and states (Guidelines, ICDS).¹⁶ Provide support to individuals unable to sustain themselves due to circumstances like old age, widowhood, or disability and ensuring a dignified life for marginalized citizens. This scheme targets senior citizens, widows, and disabled individuals in rural areas, providing them with social security and financial support. It helps in improving the living standards of the most vulnerable sections of the rural population. The scheme has benefited a lot to the rural population of the state (Aims, NSAP).¹⁷

State-specific schemes are programs or initiatives implemented by individual states in India to address local needs, promote welfare, and facilitate development within the state. These schemes vary by state based on the socioeconomic and demographic conditions. States provide financial support to various sectors such as agriculture, industry, and small businesses to promote economic growth. State governments often implement skill development programs to enhance employability and entrepreneurship, including vocational training centers. Programs aimed at improving access to health care and education, including free health services, scholarships, and grants (Guidelines, NSAP).¹⁸ States often have schemes targeting poverty

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reduction, like food distribution programs, employment generation, and income support. These schemes are designed based on the unique requirements of each state, and they evolve with changing socioeconomic and political contexts. Meghalaya also implements state-specific rural development schemes to cater to its unique challenges. These programs focus on sectors like tourism, teleprocessing, and small-scale industries, promoting local resources and cultural heritage. Meghalaya has specific state schemes aimed at rural development, including the Meghalaya Livelihood and Access to Markets (M-LAM) program, which helps rural farmers access markets for their produce (Guidelines, NSAP).¹⁹

The Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalya Yojana (DDU-GKY) is a flagship skill development initiative under the Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India. In Meghalaya, the program is implemented by the State Institute of Rural Development (SIRD) under the Community & Rural Development Department since 2016. The programme aims to equip rural youth from economically disadvantaged backgrounds with market-relevant skills to enhance their employability. It focuses on providing these trained individuals with jobs that offer regular monthly wages at or above the minimum wage, thereby promoting sustainable livelihoods (Aims, DDU-GKY).²⁰ The program emphasizes the involvement of state governments to identify deserving candidates, assess local skill gaps, propose suitable training programs, and monitor outcomes effectively. By focusing on skill development and employment, DDU-GKY in Meghalaya strives to transform the economic landscape of rural communities, enabling youth to achieve financial independence and contribute to the state's growth (Guidelines, DDU-GKY).²¹

The Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Abhiyan (RGSA) is a centrally sponsored scheme aimed at enhancing the capacities of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) to deliver on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The scheme focuses on building governance capabilities, promoting inclusive local governance, and strengthening Gram Sabhas to function effectively as forums for people's participation, transparency, and accountability. The implementation of RGSA is adapted to the state's unique administrative structure. The State Institute of Rural Development (SIRD) in Nongstder, Ri-Bhoi District, serves as the nodal agency for the scheme. Under RGSA, Village Development Plans (VDPs) are prepared to undertake various projects aimed at local development. The funding for these initiatives is shared between the Central and State Governments on a 90:10 basis. 2024-25, Meghalaya proposed an Annual Action Plan of Rs. 48.603 crores under the revamped RGSA, indicating the state's commitment to strengthening local governance and achieving sustainable development at the grassroots level (Aims, RGSA).²²

The Sansad Adarsh Gram Yojana (SAGY) is a rural development initiative launched by the Government of India in 2014, where Members of Parliament (MPs) adopt villages to transform them into model villages. The focus is on improving infrastructure, education, health, agriculture, and social welfare through convergence of various government schemes. In Meghalaya, the scheme faces unique challenges due to the state's hilly terrain, scattered settlements, and traditional governance systems. MPs from Meghalaya have adopted villages under the scheme, focusing on improving rural infrastructure and livelihoods. However, the progress varies due to local challenges and implementation hurdles (Guidelines, SAGY).²³

The Pradhan Mantri Adi Adarsh Gram Yojana (PMAAGY) is a government initiative aimed at the holistic development of villages with significant Scheduled Tribe (ST) populations. The scheme is designed to bridge gaps in infrastructure and provide better socioeconomic opportunities in these villages. The scheme will improve basic infrastructure (roads, housing, sanitation, etc.), enhance education and health facilities, promote economic development and livelihood opportunities, ensure digital inclusion and better access to government schemes. The scheme is being implemented in more than 36,000 villages across India, with a focus on improving the quality of life for tribal communities (Aims, PMAAGY).²⁴ The Special Rural Works Programme (SRWP) is an initiative by the Government of Meghalaya, introduced in the 1990-91 fiscal year, aimed at fostering active community involvement in rural development. The programme allocates funds to each Assembly Constituency, with the selection of schemes facilitated by the respective Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs). These schemes are then implemented through local village bodies, known as Dorbars. Projects under the SRWP encompass a wide range of activities, such as infrastructure development, public amenities, and community welfare initiatives. The SRWP is managed by the Community & Rural Development Department of Meghalaya, which oversees the formulation, approval, sanctioning, and implementation of the schemes. The Scheme empowered the local communities and their leaders to identify and address their unique developmental needs, the SRWP plays a crucial role in the state's strategy to uplift its rural population (Aims, SRWP).²⁵

IMPORTANCE OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN MEGHALAYA

Infrastructure development plays a crucial role in the rural development of Meghalaya, a predominantly hilly state in Northeastern India. The state's unique topography, cultural diversity, and dispersed rural population require targeted strategies to enhance infrastructure and boost socioeconomic development. Firstly, It construct roads and building and improving rural roads under schemes like Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY) to connect remote villages. Focus on eco-friendly road construction due to the state's fragile ecology. Construction of suspension and concrete bridges to connect rural communities separated by rivers and deep valleys. Promoting shared transport systems to improve mobility in remote areas. Secondly, it supply water and

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sanitation by implementation of Jal Jeevan Mission to provide tap water to rural households. Leveraging Meghalaya's abundant rainfall through water harvesting systems. Promoting open defecation-free (ODF) status through the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan. Installation of community and household toilets in rural areas. Thirdly, it provide Electricity and Renewable Energy. Expanding the reach of electricity under the Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Gram Jyoti Yojana (DDUGJY). Promoting the use of solar energy in off-grid areas. Harnessing Meghalaya's water resources for small-scale hydropower projects in rural areas. Fourthly, promotion digital infrastructure by enhancing broadband penetration under the Digital India initiative. Setting up Common Service Centers (CSCs) to provide digital services to rural communities. Using technology for public service delivery in education, healthcare, and governance. Fifthly, providing agricultural and irrigation infrastructure. Development of cold storage and warehouses to reduce post-harvest losses (Guidelines, PMGSY).²⁶ Expanding irrigation facilities through schemes like PM Krishi Sinchai Yojana (PMKSY). Promoting traditional water management practices. Improving rural markets (haats) and setting up agriprocessing units for better value addition. Sixthly, implementation of the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana – Gramin (PMAY-G) to provide pucca houses. Development of street lighting, drainage systems, and community centers. The government of Meghalaya, in collaboration with central initiatives, is making strides in improving rural infrastructure. Sustainable and inclusive development remains a priority to ensure that rural communities thrive while preserving the state's unique environment and cultural heritage (Guidelines, PMAY).

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Health and Education: The health and education sectors play a pivotal role in the rural development of Meghalaya, a state in Northeastern India. The Government of Meghalaya has taken initiatives to promote health facilities in the state by implementing Programs like Janani Suraksha Yojana (JSY) and Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHAs) aim to improve maternal and child health. Bringing medical services to remote areas. Leveraging technology to bridge the gap in healthcare access. Promoting vaccination, hygiene, and nutrition awareness. Supporting local healers while introducing modern medical practices. The impact of health facilities include improvement in vaccination coverage, increased institutional deliveries, enhanced community participation in health programs through ASHAs and local health workers. With regards to education, Meghalaya has implemented initiatives to implement Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) which focused on universal primary education, Mid-Day Meal Scheme to improve school attendance of the students and addressing malnutrition, Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) to enhance secondary education facilities, Digital and E-Learning Programs to provide smart classrooms and digital tools in some schools, Community Schools to encourage local participation in running schools (Guidelines, RMSA).²⁸

The programme has increased literacy rates over the years, improved gender parity in education and greater awareness about the importance of education among rural communities. It also strengthen infrastructure for both health and education, enhance the quality of services by training professionals, promote community engagement and local governance, address the digital divide through improved connectivity and affordable technology and integrate traditional knowledge systems with modern practices. Investing in health and education in rural Meghalaya is vital for holistic development, reducing disparities, and empowering its rural population.

Economic significance: Meghalaya, a Northeastern state of India, is predominantly rural, with around 80% of its population residing in villages. The economic significance of rural development in Meghalaya is profound, as it influences the overall well-being of its population and drives sustainable growth. Agriculture is the backbone of Meghalaya's rural economy, employing nearly two-thirds of the rural workforce. Jhum (shifting) cultivation is widely practiced, but rural development programs aim to modernize farming with sustainable techniques. Encouraging the cultivation of crops like turmeric, ginger, areca nut, and broom grass has improved household incomes. Enhanced agricultural productivity boosts food security and contributes to state GDP. Firstly, Promotion of eco-tourism and cultural tourism. Rural areas in Meghalaya are known for their scenic landscapes, living root bridges, caves, and rich cultural heritage and promoting rural tourism generates employment, fosters entrepreneurship, and supports local crafts and industries. Secondly, promotion of handicrafts and cottage industries (Rural Development, Meghalaya).²⁹ Meghalaya is known for its handloom, bamboo, cane products, and traditional jewelry and encouraging these industries creates alternative sources of income for rural households, especially women and marginalized communities. Thirdly, rural livelihoods in Meghalaya often rely on forest resources like timber, fuel wood, and non-timber products. Rural development in Meghalaya is vital for its economic transformation. With focused interventions in agriculture, infrastructure, tourism, and skill development, the state can unlock its full potential while preserving its rich cultural and ecological heritage. This not only improves the quality of life for its rural population but also contributes significantly to Meghalaya's economic growth and sustainability (Rural Development, Meghalaya).³⁰

IMPACT ON ECONOMIC GROWTH

Agriculture and Livelihood: Meghalaya, a state in Northeastern India, has a predominantly agrarian economy, with agriculture and allied activities forming the backbone of the livelihoods for a majority of its population. The interplay between agriculture,

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livelihood, and economic growth in Meghalaya is significant and complex. Over 80% of the population depends on agriculture and allied activities for their livelihood. Practices like jhum (shifting cultivation) are still prevalent in many parts, especially in rural and tribal areas. Meghalaya is known for its diverse horticultural produce, including oranges, pineapples, bananas, and spices like turmeric and ginger. The state has immense potential for organic farming due to its relatively unpolluted environment. Rice and maize are staple crops, ginger, turmeric, and betel nut are important for export, gaining prominence in regions like Khasi and Jaintia Hills, poultry, piggery, and dairy farming contribute to household incomes. With regard to Livelihoods, a majority of farmers engage in subsistence farming, with low productivity and limited market access, women play a significant role in agricultural activities, from planting to harvesting, traditional industries like weaving and cane products supplement agricultural incomes.

Agriculture plays a dominant role in the economic growth of Meghalaya. It contributes a significant share to the state's Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP). Agriculture is a major source of employment, especially in rural areas. The growth of agro-industries, food processing, and marketing chains has the potential to increase the sector's contribution to the economy. Agri-tourism is gaining traction as tourists explore rural Meghalaya and its farming practices. Agriculture and livelihoods are deeply interwoven with Meghalaya's economic growth. Addressing the sector's challenges and leveraging its unique strengths, such as organic farming potential and diverse agro-climatic conditions, can significantly enhance its contribution to the state's overall development. A balanced approach integrating modern practices with traditional knowledge will be key to sustainable growth.

Skill Development: Skill development plays a vital role in driving economic growth in Meghalaya, which have unique geographic, demographic, and socioeconomic characteristics. Skill training increases the employability of Meghalaya's youth, reducing unemployment rates and creating a skilled workforce for various sectors. Training programs aligned with the needs of local industries like agriculture, handicrafts, tourism, and IT can boost production, quality, and competitiveness. Skill training encourages entrepreneurship, allowing individuals to start small businesses, particularly in rural areas, contributing to the state's economy. By providing local employment opportunities, skill development curbs the need for migration to urban centers. Training in modern farming techniques, organic farming, and post-harvest management. Promotion of value-added processing for crops like turmeric, ginger, and oranges. Firstly, promotion handicrafts and Handlooms by focusing training in weaving, cane, and bamboo crafts and branding and marketing strategies to enhance market access. Secondly, Meghalaya benefits from central initiatives under NSDM for vocational training and skill development, has implemented its own policies tailored to local needs, such as the Meghalaya State Skill Development Society (MSSDS) and creation of training centers and vocational institutes in rural and urban areas. Skill development is a catalyst for economic growth in Meghalaya, addressing unemployment, enhancing productivity, and promoting sustainable development. By aligning training programs with local resources and industries, Meghalaya can harness its potential and contribute significantly to the overall growth of its economy.

Rural Entrepreneurship: The role of rural entrepreneurship in the economic growth of Meghalaya is significant, as it has the potential to transform the state's economy, reduce unemployment, and promote sustainable development. Firstly, Meghalaya is rich in natural resources, including forests, minerals, and agricultural products. Rural entrepreneurship encourages the utilization of these resources in a sustainable manner. Secondly, Rural entrepreneurship creates job opportunities, reducing unemployment and underemployment in rural areas. For example, Small-scale industries in Meghalaya, such as food processing units, provide jobs to local youth. Thirdly, entrepreneurship reduces dependency on government jobs, a prevalent issue in Meghalaya. With training and financial support, rural entrepreneurs can, establish small businesses, such as poultry farming, beekeeping, or piggery and diversify income sources for rural families. Rural entrepreneurship is a catalyst for the economic growth of Meghalaya. By leveraging its rich resources and cultural heritage, and addressing existing challenges, the state can create a sustainable and inclusive growth model. Government support, coupled with community participation, is crucial to unleashing the full potential of rural entrepreneurship in Meghalaya.

CHALLENGES IN IMPLEMENTATION

In Meghalaya, like in many other rural regions, the successful implementation of government schemes often encounters the challenge of lack of awareness among the target beneficiaries. This issue significantly hampers the intended impact of these initiatives. Rural areas in Meghalaya, especially those in remote and hilly regions, often face challenges in accessing timely and accurate information about government schemes. Poor infrastructure, such as inadequate road connectivity and erratic communication networks, further exacerbates the problem. While Meghalaya has a relatively high literacy rate compared to other Indian states, certain rural areas still lag behind. This results in many individuals being unable to comprehend the technicalities of schemes or even recognize their eligibility for benefits. Secondly, Administrative Hurdles as a Challenge in Implementing Schemes in Rural Meghalaya. Implementing government schemes in rural Meghalaya faces significant challenges due to administrative hurdles. These include: Lengthy procedural requirements and bureaucratic inefficiencies often delay the implementation of schemes. This includes delays in fund disbursement, approvals, and clearances, rural areas in Meghalaya often face a shortage of

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adequately trained staff to manage and implement schemes effectively. Limited capacity-building opportunities for local administrators further exacerbate this issue, Meghalaya's rugged terrain and scattered settlements make it difficult to establish an efficient administrative framework, causing delays in service delivery and monitoring, and poor infrastructure, including limited digital connectivity and insufficient office facilities in rural areas, hampers the proper documentation and tracking of scheme progress. Thirdly, The geographical infrastructure barriers in rural Meghalaya pose significant challenges to the implementation of various schemes and developmental programs. Meghalaya is characterized by steep hills, deep valleys, and rugged terrain, which make the construction and maintenance of infrastructure like roads, bridges, and buildings difficult and costly, frequent landslides during the monsoon season disrupt connectivity and damage existing infrastructure, many villages are located in remote, inaccessible regions, making the transportation of materials and workforce a logistical challenge, and rural areas lack proper roads or have roads that are poorly constructed, making transportation slow and unreliable. Fourthly, leakages and corruption pose significant challenges in the effective implementation of schemes in rural Meghalaya, as in many rural areas across India. These issues can undermine the intended benefits of government programme aimed at improving infrastructure, education, healthcare, and economic development, funds allocated for rural development schemes often do not reach the intended beneficiaries due to middlemen siphoning off a significant portion. This can be a result of poor monitoring systems, inadequate auditing, and lack of accountability mechanisms at local levels. Corruption can occur at multiple stages of scheme implementation, such as during fund allocation, tendering, and execution of projects. For instance, inflated bills, ghost beneficiaries, or substandard construction work are common tactics that reduce the overall quality of services. In some cases, the implementation of schemes in rural areas is done in an opaque manner. This includes hidden tenders, unreported changes in project scope, and failure to inform the community about how funds are spent. This lack of transparency increases the risk of corruption. Lastly, the implementation gap in the context of rural Meghalaya refers to the challenges in effectively translating policies or schemes designed at higher levels of government into successful outcomes at the grassroots level. This gap can significantly hinder the achievement of the intended benefits of various schemes, especially in rural areas like those in Meghalaya. Meghalaya's hilly terrain and remote villages make it difficult for authorities to reach and deliver services. This also leads to logistical challenges in transporting goods, materials, or personnel necessary for scheme implementation. Many rural areas in Meghalaya suffer from poor infrastructure, including inadequate roads, poor internet connectivity, lack of electricity, and insufficient health and education facilities. These deficiencies hinder the successful delivery of services and schemes, making it harder for beneficiaries to access the intended support. Limited administrative resources and capacity at the local level can slow down the effective execution of schemes. The lack of skilled personnel and the presence of poorly trained local officials often results in inefficiencies, delays, and mismanagement. To bridge this gap, the government needs to focus on improving infrastructure and connectivity, strengthening the capacity of local administration, increasing community participation and awareness, ensuring better coordination among various agencies, providing timely financial support and transparency and fostering trust between the government and rural communities.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Government schemes play a pivotal role in driving rural development in Meghalaya, addressing key challenges such as poverty, unemployment, and lack of infrastructure. Through initiatives like the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS), rural roads under the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY), and agricultural support programs, the state has witnessed improvements in livelihood opportunities, connectivity, health and education, agriculture, skill development, rural entrepreneurship, and socioeconomic conditions. However, the study highlights that while these schemes have positively impacted many areas, challenges such as uneven implementation, limited awareness, and bureaucratic hurdles persist. For sustainable development, a stronger focus on community participation, transparency, and efficient monitoring is essential. Additionally, integrating traditional practices with modern development strategies can help align government schemes with the unique socio-cultural fabric of Meghalaya. Government schemes have undeniably played a pivotal role in rural development in Meghalaya. They have contributed to improving infrastructure, livelihood, and socioeconomic conditions. However, there is a need for better implementation, awareness programs, and addressing regional challenges to make these schemes more effective and sustainable. Continued support for agriculture, infrastructure, and rural entrepreneurship will remain crucial for the overall development of rural areas of Meghalaya.

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