

Chapter 3

THE ORGANIZATIONAL SETUP AND THE PLANNING OF NREGA

In the present chapter, an attempt has been made to explore the organizational setup and the planning of NREGA. It also tries to focus the views of GP members, Sarpanches, Gram Rajger Sevek regarding awareness of organizational set up and planning of NREGA in No. 7 Pachim Teok Gaon Panchayat in Jorhat district of Assam.

The Organizational set up of NREGA

National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) is one of the important tools of rural development. Rural Development is viewed as a strategy to bring about improvement in the economic and social life of rural poor. In the present study, rural development means improvement in socio-economic conditions of the rural people by providing them guarantee of minimum wage employment through National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA). Other way, Rural Development is one of the major part of a particular nation. The majority people of India as well as Assam live in rural areas of which considerable sections belong to the Below Poverty Line (BPL). The betterment of economic conditions of the people helps to upliftment of social status among the rural people. The socio-economic conditions of the states of India have been gradually changed since after Independence due to the implementation of various rural development programmes. The State as well as Central Government of India has introduced various self and wage employment programmes for socio-economic upliftment of rural people. Important wage as well as self employment programmes like the Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP), National Rural Employment Programme (NREP), Jawahar Rojzar Yojana (JRY) and National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) etc aim to redistribute the rural income and accomplish a massive uplift of the rural poor. But all these well intentioned

programmes have yet to have a meaningful impact on the common people in North East India.

The NREGA, 2005 is a wage employment programme whereby anyone who is willing to do unskilled manual labour at the statutory minimum wage is entitled to being employed on public works within 15 days. If employment is not provided within the 15 days of application, an unemployment allowance has to be paid according to the guidelines of the Act. However, the work guarantee in NREGA 2005 is subject to an initial limit of “100 days per household per year”.

The NREGA is implemented in a different phases in all over the India. In first phases, NREGA came into force in 2006 by covering 200 most backward districts at the country. Subsequently, an additional 130 districts were added in phase II during 2007-08 and the remaining 285 rural districts were notified under NREGA in phase III on 26.9.2007. The NREGA scheme came into force in the state of Assam in the year of 2008.

The salient objective of the scheme is to provide for the enhancement of livelihood security of the households in rural areas of the State by providing 100 days of guaranteed wage employment in every financial year to every household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work.

Salient Features of the Act

According to the 1.4 sections of the Act, the main features of the Act are as follows-

1. Adult members of a rural household, willing to do unskilled manual work, may apply for registration in writing or orally to the local Gram Panchayat.
2. The Gram Panchayat after due verification issue a job card under NREGA and Job card is free of cost.
3. The card issues within 15 days of application. The GP/PO should be responsible for providing wage employment to the applicant within 15 days of the date of receipt of the application in case of advance

applications, employment should be provided from the date that employment has been sought, or within 15 days of the date of application, whichever is later.

4. A job card holder may submit a written application for employment to the Gram Panchayat, stating the time and duration for work which is sought.
5. The GP are the responsible for issue a dated receipt of the written application for employment.
6. Employment must provide within 15 days of application for work, if delay of giving the work, an unemployment allowance must be provided by the State Government at the rate prescribed of the Act.
7. Work should be provided within 5 km radius of the village. In case of work more than 5 km. radius then extra 10 % are payable according to Act.
8. Wages are to be paid according to the Minimum Wage Act 1948 for agricultural laboures of in the state. Both men and women get the equal wage.
9. At least one third is women who have registered and requested work under the scheme.
10. Worksite facilities are to be ensured by the implementing agency. Work site facilities such as drinking water, shade and crèche if there are more than five children below the age of six years have to be provided under the Act (NREGA, Schedule II, and Sections 27 & 28). If more than five children below the age of six years are present in the worksite, a person (preferably a woman) should be engaged under NREGS to look after them.
11. The shelf of projects for a village recommends by the Gram Sabha and approved by Zilla Panchayat.
12. At least 50 % of works allots to Gram Panchayats for executions.

13. A 60:40 wage and material ratio has to maintain. Unskilled cost may be more than 60 % but material cost cannot exceed 40 %.
14. Social Audit has to be done by the Gram Sabha. According 12.4.1 provision of the Act, there should be mandatory review of all aspects of the social audit at the Gram Sabha meetings to be held at least once every six months for this purpose. The 'Social Audit Forums' information would be read out publicly, and people would be given an opportunity to question officials, seek and obtain information, verify financial expenditure, expenditure, examine the provision of entitlements, discuss the priorities reflected in choices made, and critically evaluate the quality of work as well as the services of the programme staff.
15. All accounts and records relating to the scheme are being available for public scrutiny.

Eligibility

The National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme is opened to all rural households in the areas notified by the Government of India. The entitlement of 100 days of guaranteed employment in a financial year is in terms of a household. This entitlement of 100 days per year can be shared within the household. All adult members of the household who are registered can apply for work. To register, they have to:-

- a. Be local residents "local "implies residing within the Gram Panchayat.
- b. Be willing to do un-skilled manual work.
- c. Apply as a household at the local Gram Panchayat.

Application for Registration and Issuance of Job Cards

The application for registration can be given on plain paper or on the prescribed application format available at Gram Panchayat level or an oral request for registration can be made. The application should contain the names of those adult members of the household who are willing to do un-skilled manual work, and

particulars such as age, sex and SC/ST status etc. After verification all particulars are entered in the registration, registered by the concerned Gram Panchayat. Every household is assigned by a registration number. Job cards to every registered household are issued by the Gram Panchayat. The job cards are issued within a fortnight of the application for registration. Photographs of adult members, who are applicants, are attached to the job cards. The cost of job cards and photographs are borne as part of the programme funds. The job card is valid for a period of 5 years.

Application for Work and Allocation of Employment

Applications for work can be submitted to the Gram Panchayat as well as to the Programme Officer. Applications should be given in writing and a dated receipt for the application for work must be issued to the applicant. The applications for work must be for at least 14 days of continuous of work. Applicants, who are provided work, to be intimated by means of letter sent to them at the address given in the job card and also by a public notice displayed at the offices of the Gram Panchayat. The wage employment to the applicant is to be provided within 15 days of the date of receipt of application.

Agencies involved in implementing NREGA and their responsibilities

1. Gram Sabha

- a. Selection of the beneficiaries (family registration)
- b. Suggestion of developmental works for developmental plan schedule (give suggestions while preparing estimates)
- c. To implements and monitor the work.
- d. Gram Sabha be used extensively as a forum for sharing information about the scheme.

2. Three tier Panchayat (Gram Panchayat/ Panchayat Samiti/ Zila Parishad)

- i. Planning and implementation of the scheme under the Act.
- ii. 50 % of the work planned work can be taken through Gram Panchayat.

- iii. The responsibility of planned schedule work is given to Gram Panchayat which is recommended by Gram Sabha.
- iv. GP are the responsibilities for receiving and verifying the application and issuing the Job Card for the beneficiaries
- v. GP prepares planning schedule and even possible work shelf.
- vi. The Panchayat Samiti gives permission to all types of activities of Gram Panchayat and send to Zila Parisad for further approval.
- vii. Zila Parisad gives approval to the plan at the block level, further they decide about the various agencies/ NGO for implementation of the work.
- viii. Gram Sabha are the responsibilities for convening the Gram Sabha for social audit and monitoring as well as implementation of the scheme at the village level.

3. Other Implementing Agencies (Line Departments)

- i. To prepare possible labour estimate.
- ii. To decide works of the development plan.
- iii. After technical approval of competent officers for the annual planning (other agencies) of works and to present agenda to Zila Programme Co-ordinator for approval.
- iv. To distribute the wages
- v. To present paid muster rolls to Gram Panchayat and necessary information to Gram Panchayat regularly.
- vi. Provide necessary detailed of work by presence during social audit.

4. Local Vigilance Committee

- i. To monitor the execution of the work in the Gram Panchayat area.
- ii. To visit working sites and list out labour complaints and follow up with solutions.
- iii. To check whether necessary facilities and concessions, time to time wages and unemployment allowance etc are given to labours.

- iv. To present criterion of work, its execution etc and mention social audit report at the time of audit.

5. Gram Sevek/ Gram Rojgar Sevek

- i. Registration of families/distribution of employment notice/distribution of works.
- ii. Planning schedule-inclusion of work/priority/preparation of shelf.
- iii. Execution of work
- iv. Distribution of wages.
- v. Distribution of unemployment wages.
- vi. To organize employment guarantee day.

These are the important implementing agencies of NREGA. The agencies help to implements the Act in successful way.

Financing of NREGA and Labour Budget

Financing Pattern

The Central Government bears the following cost of the Act

- i. The entire cost of wages for unskilled manual work.
- ii. 75 % of the cost of material and wages for skilled and semi-skilled workers.
- iii. Administrative expenses as may be determined by the Central Government. These include inter alia, the salary and allowances of Programme Officers and their support staff and worksites facilities.
- iv. Administrative expenses of the Central Employment Guarantee Council.

The State Government bears the following Cost

- i. 25 % of the cost of material and wages for skilled and semi-skilled workers.
- ii. Unemployment Allowance payable in case of the State Government can not provide employment within 15 days of employment.

- iii. Administrative expenses of the State employment Guarantee Council.

Labour Budget

According to the provision of the Act that the District Programme Coordinator prepares the month of December every year a labour budget for the next financial year containing the details of anticipated demand for unskilled manual work in the district and the plan for engagement of labourers in the works covered under the scheme. The steps of the labour budget from the district to Panchayat level are mentioned below through systematic way.

- i. Gram Sabha held on 2nd October of each year for identification and recommendations of works.
- ii. GP has to forward the development plan with its priorities to the Programme Officer by October 15 of each year.
- iii. The PO ensures the GP approves and consolidates all Gram Sabha recommendations into the village shelf of projects. The process of scrutiny, re-reference to Gram Panchayat, if necessary, and consolidation and submission to Intermediate Panchayat are completed by Programme Officer by November 15.
- iv. The Intermediate Panchayat approves the Block Plans within 15 days of the submission by PO and PO submits the Block plan to the District Programme Coordinator (DPC) by November 30.
- v. The DPC submits the Block wise shelf of projects and labour budget based on it to the District Panchayat by December 15.
- vi. The District Panchayat approves the Block wise shelf of projects and the Labour Budget by December 31.
- vii. The DPC forwards the Labour Budget to the State Government which forwards it with its recommendation to the Ministry of Rural Development by January 31.

Planning of NREGA

Planning is critical to the successful implementation of National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS). A key indicator of success is the timely generation of employment within 15 days while ensuring that the design and selection of the works are such that good quality assets are developed. The basic aim of the planning process is to ensure that the District is prepared well in advance to offer productive employment for demand.

Development Plan

The section 16 (3) (4) of the Act states that every Gram Panchayat prepares a development plan and maintain a shelf of works and forward it to Programme Officer for security and preliminary approval prior to the commencement of the year in which it is proposed. The Development plan is like a rolling plan, since the approved shelf of projects may carry over from one financial year to the next. The development plan includes the following components.

- i. Assessment of labour demand.
- ii. Identification of works to meet the estimated labour demand.
- iii. Estimated cost and the wages
- iv. Benefits expected in terms of employment generated and physical improvements (water conservation, land productivity)

PRI Planning Process

- i. Section 13 of NREGA makes the Panchayats at district; intermediate and village level the principle authorities for planning. After the comprising the shelf of projects on the basis of recommendations of the Gram Sabha to Gram Panchayat, Gram Panchayat has to forward the development plan with its priorities to the Programme Officer (PO) for preliminary scrutiny. The PO has to consolidate the Gram Panchayat proposals and the proposals to the Intermediate Panchayat into a block plan and after the approval of the Intermediate Panchayat, forward it to the District Programme Coordinator. The

DPC consolidates the Block Plans and proposal from other implementing agencies and district Panchayat should approved the block wise shelf of projects.

- ii. It is necessary to ensure timely scrutiny and approval of each level, so that an adequate number of works with administrative and technical approvals are available to meet the demand for employment. It is also necessary to ensure that each level of approval maintains the order of priority between different works that is indicated in the development projects forwarded by the GP under section 16 (4).
- iii. The DPC have the responsibility for ensuring that the process of identification of works, their consolidation, and final approval of the shelf of projects is completed by December.
- iv. At the Block Level, PO is the responsible for ensuring that the Gram Sabhas are held on 2nd October of each year for identification and recommendations of works. All the GP development plans must reach the PO by October 15.
- v. The Gram Panchayat Plans have been received; the PO scrutinizes the GP's Development for its technical feasibility. The PO are not rejected a work proposed by the GP.
- vi. The DPC scrutinizes the Block plans, examining the appropriateness and adequacy of works in terms of likely demand as well as their technical and financial feasibility.

The DPC are the responsible for consolidating the Blocks plan within a month of receiving the entire blocks plan. The DPC formulates the labour budget on the basis of the district plan to indicate the amount of funds required to implements the scheme in the next financial year. The DPC also submits the Block wise shelf of projects and the labour budget based on the District Panchayat by 15

December. The District Panchayat approves the Block wise shelf of Projects and the Labour Budget by December 31.

The District Plan comprises a Block-wise shelf of projects. The Block-wise shelf of projects arrange through Gram Panchayat wise. The implementing agencies for each work has to be identified keeping in view the mandatory minimum 50 % of the works to be executed by the GP, GP may be given more than the minimum stipulated 50 %.

- vii. The DPC forwards the Labour Budget to the State Government and forwards it for recommendation to the Ministry of Rural Development by 31st January to enable it to release the Central Share of funds for implementing the NREGA.
- viii. The entire exercise has to be undertaken and completed by 31st December of the year proceeding the year for which the shelf of Projects and the Labour Budget are being formulated.

District Perspective Plan

The District Perspective Plan is intended to facilitate advance planning and to provide a development perspective for the district. The aim is to identify the types of NREGS works that should be encouraged in the District, and potential linkages between these works and long term employment generation and sustained development.

A District perspectives plan has the following features:

- i. Village-based: with the village as the unit of planning.
- ii. Holistic attempt to cover all aspects of natural resource management along with socio-economic infrastructure requirements so as to identify all critical aspects of development in the local area.
- iii. Finalize the works that can be included under the NREGA.
- iv. Delineate baseline,

- v. Indicate outcome-based strategies,
- vi. Indicate methods for measurement of outcomes,
- vii. Identify the existing programmes and financial resources and assess the additional resources required.

The DPC enables the adoption of a project approach to works rather than just an activity approach. These are the organizational setup as well planning of NREGA.

The views of GP members, Sarpanches, Gram Rajzer Sevek regarding awareness of organizational set up and planning of NREGA are summarized below.

Views of the Gram Panchayat Office, Sarpanches, Gram Rajzer Sevek

The findings from the views of Members of Gram Panchayat, Programme Officer, Gram Rajzer Sevek are discussed within the framework of objectives of Awareness generation, registration of job card, application for employment, works progress, wage payment, record maintenance, staff and training etc are as mentioned below.

Communication of NREGA

As awareness Generation through Information, Education and Communication (IEC), people know their rights under the Act, effective communication of information about the Act is essential. For awareness generation every state government should take Information Education and Communication exercise to publicize the key provision of the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) and procedures to be followed like the process of registration, demand for employment, unemployment allowance etc.

Awareness Generation

Most of the Gram Sabha/ Gram Rajger Sevek are aware to key provisions and procedures of the Act and attended block orientation conventions. They also mentioned that the Gram Sabha was held for discussing about the NREGA plan. It is also found form the discussion with the GS and Sarpanchas that the Gram Sabha

informed the provisions and procedures of the Act and also mentioned that the Gram Sabha was conducted the social audit of the scheme.

There were no needy households who did not know about NREGA as reported. But in the context of village no. 3, it is revealed that there were some of the Household who did not know about NREGA. Through the interviewing with the secretary/ president/ ward members of the Panchayat that the majority beneficiaries of the Panchayat are able to registrar freely and easily for job cards and knows the key provision of the Act. But it is found during the study that the wage seekers are not aware about the key provision of the Act in spite of discussing the key provision of the Act in the Gram Sabha.

Registration and Job Card

It is informed by the GS/ Sarpanches that the wage seekers are able to registrar freely and easily for job card. All the job cards are obtained on free of cost as reports by the GS/ Sarpanchas. The time gap between registration and issue of job cards was usually within 15 days as reported. There are no fees charged for job cards and photos by the beneficiaries. It was observed during the study of village no. 3 that majority of the beneficiaries are not obtained their job card. In this regard, the members of GP mentioned that the job card are made but have not been distributed. The reasons as reported by the SPs/ GSs are that there are some discrepancies regarding photographs and names. They are also mentioned that the Household are received their registration numbers. But it is found that majority of the beneficiaries in village No. 3 have not received their registration numbers. On the other hand, the other two villages' household of Pachim Teok Gaon Panchayat had obtained their job card & registration numbers.

Works Process

In these sections some of the important issues have been discussed like District Perspective Plan (DPP), Annual Plan, Shelf of Projects, Execution etc.

Planning

The annual plan is a working plan that identifies the activities to be taken up on priority in a year. As in every year, GPs should convene a meeting of the Gram Sabhas (GS) to estimate the demand for labour, and to propose the number and priority of works to be taken up in the next financial year. The annual plan also indicates the existing demand of work, demand in previous year, works taken up in the previous year, proposed cost etc. Regarding this, as majority of the GSs/SPs reported, Gram Sabhas were convened to select works in the planning of NREGA. They also reported that the local people as well as all the beneficiaries of the Act are so happy regarding the choice of work in the Act. But with the discussion of the beneficiaries it is found that Gram Sabhas were not convened to select the works.

Shelf of Projects

NREGA operational guidelines envisaged the preparation of shelf of projects after the assessment of local needs and infrastructural needs and infrastructural gaps in the area. The major responsibility of preparing this shelf of projects was entrusted to the District Rural Development Agency (DRDA). But, no such plan was prepared in the context of GP, Block as well as district level. The whole process of the implementation of Act is going on annual plan. In this regard Singh. V. P. Singh (1995) in the study mentioned that the concept of shelf of projects was not clearly understood throughout the State. The practice was of preparing annual actions plan every year and the whole process of planning was repeated year by year. It caused not only delays in the preparation of annual actions plans every year but also affected the quality of assets created under the programme as most of the works could be started at the fag end of the financial year and under pressure. As a result quality could not be maintained in a number of NREP works. The whole process is still running in the planning process of NREGA in the context of Jorhat district

Execution

It is found from the view of the GS/SPs that GP have at least 50 % of works selected for execution. They also reported that muster rolls are properly maintained but in all the three study villages beneficiaries reported that the muster rolls are not properly maintained. All the workers have done the work under the Act through the uses of job card. Regarding the evidence of contractor and machinery at the work sites, it is reported by the GS/SPs that there are no evidence of contractor in the context of the planning of NREGA. It is also reported by the members of GP that measurement of the work is done regularly. The measurements of the work are done by the members of GP which are appointed by Jr. Engineer.

It is also reported by the GSs that works in progress are technically supervised. It is found that in the context of village no. 1 & 2 that the work is regularly supervised. But in village no. 3, the work is not supervised due to not providing the work. GSs reported that adequate work sites facility is available in the area. But it is found from the discussion with the beneficiaries that only drinking facility are available in their working area. The drinking facilities are also not pure as reported by the beneficiaries.

Wage Payment

This section contains to employment and wages (District Schedules of Rates) and payment of wages. According to the NREGA operational guidelines that District Scheduled Rates (DSR) should be prepared for each district, and should be posted at worksites in the local language. As reported by the members of GP that the wages of beneficiaries are Rs. 77 per day.

Payment of Wages

The beneficiaries who are working under the Act are entitled to wages at the minimum wage rate, fixed by the State Government of agricultural labourers. According to the operational guideline of the Act that wages should be paid in time. In case of delayed the wage payment within the 15 days, workers are entitled to compensation as per the provision of the payment of wages Act, 1936. Every

beneficiaries working under the Act is entitled to wages at the minimum wage rate fixed by the state government for agricultural labours. As reported by the SPs/ GSs that separate wage rate are not applicable to NREGA works.

The task of the rates of wages about men and women NREGA beneficiaries are equal as reported by the members of GP. As it is found from the study, none of the female beneficiaries have obtained the work in the three villages of Pachim Teok Gaon Panchayat. Regarding the provision of wages payment within 15 days, wages are paid in time as the guidelines of the NREGA and as reported by the beneficiaries this is found to be correct. In some cases it was paid after 15 days as reported some of the beneficiaries in two villages. The village No. 3 is unable to get the work under the Act.

It is reported by most of the GSs that the muster rolls are read out when wages are paid and it is found false in some cases as reported by the beneficiaries.

Records

Maintenance of Records under the Act is an important step for the implementation of the Act. The guidelines of the Act have specified details of records and registered to be maintained at different levels i.e. records of the application registration number, job card register, employment register, asset register (register of all works sanctioned, executed and complemented), muster rolls, complaint register etc. Job card register provides the details of job card issued of households. As reported by the GSs/ SPs that muster rolls entry match with the job card. Some of the GSs / SPs mentioned that work completed recorded in Asset Register.

Staff and Training

According to the provision of the Act, every State Government required to appoint full time dedicated Programme Officer (PO), not below the Block Development Officer (BDO) with necessary supporting staff for facilitating implementation of the scheme at Block Level. The operational guideline of the Act provided that it would be advisable to appoint a 'Gram Rojzer Sevek (GRS)' in

each GP, and plays a significant role for implementation of the programme. As reports by the GSs that GRS is available in their GP. The members of GP also indicates that there is no technical assistant (Junior Engineer) for a group of GP to supervise and measure. It is also reported that training has been provided to GRS, Panchayat Secretary, Sarpanches/ Ward Members, Vigilance Monitoring Committee Members.

Monitoring

According to the guidelines of the Act regarding the monitoring and reporting that Block Level officials inspects 100 % of works every year, district level officials 10 % and state level officials 2 % of works. The Vigilance Monitoring Committee (VMC) which is consisted through the members of elected by the Gram Sabha should monitor the progress and quality of the work. Regarding monitoring of the scheme, the members of GP mentioned that Block level officials had inspected all the works which were undertaken under the Act.

Social Audit

According to 12.4.1 provision of the Act, there should be mandatory review of all aspects of the social audit at the Gram Sabha meetings to be held at least once every six months for this purpose. The 'Social Audit Forums' information would be read out publicly, and people would be given an opportunity to question officials, seek and obtain information, verify financial expenditure, expenditure, examine the provision of entitlements, discuss the priorities reflected in choices made, and critically evaluate the quality of work as well as the services of the programme staff. Regarding social audit of the scheme, social audit of the works has been done as reported by the members of GP. They also mentioned that the Gram Sabha did the social audit of the scheme with the active participation of workers of the Act.

Grievance Redressal

It was reported by the GS/SPs that complaints registrar were available at GP level. They also reported that the complaints are not disposed.

Views regarding Gram Sabhas Meetings

As reported by the GS/ SPs that 5 to 7 Gram Sabhas meetings were held from 1st April 2008. Majority of the members of GP have attended all the meetings of the Gram Sabhas. Regarding the discussing about the NREGA plan in GS, it is found from the GSs views that NREGA has been discussed in Gram Sabhas meetings. In the meetings of the GS had discussed how to properly implement the scheme in rural areas. It also reported that GP has taken some of the active steps for providing the work under the act (resolution of the Act). The GRSs/SPs also reported that the GS meetings has discussed about the selection of the works in the planning of NREGA.

Major Findings

NREGA operational guidelines envisaged the preparation of shelf of projects after the assessment of local needs, infrastructural needs and infrastructural gaps in the area. The major responsibility of preparing this shelf of projects was entrusted to the District Rural Development Agency (DRDA). The preparations was assumed as continuous process and included adequate number of projects which could be executed during the course of plan period or at least three years on the basis of the average allocations available to the district. The works in the shelf of projects were expected to cover all blocks and areas within the block to the extent possible so that a balance growth could take place in the entire district and employment could be available to employment seekers as near to the village as possible. During the preparation of shelf of project of the act, a conscious effort had to be made particularly to include those areas which benefited to the weaker sections of the society with priority to the areas predominately inhabited by Scheduled Caste, Schedule Tribes and landless labourers. The workers meant for the direct benefit to the SCs/STs had invariably to be earmarked in the shelf of projects. The projects had to be arranged in an order of priority and no work outside could be taken up for execution under the programme. An annual action plan for the district had to be prepared on the basis of the shelf of projects by the

District Rural Development Agency (DRDA) before the start of the financial year. Thus, as per the norms of the programme planning the major task was the preparation of shelf of projects by DRDA.

In the context of Assam however the notion of shelf of projects was not understood in its original meaning and an adhoc arrangement of preparing an annual action plan on a year to year basis was adopted which led to a number of dilemmas. It is therefore felt that it would be more appropriate to first explore the actual planning activities in the field level.

Throughout the state schemes were initially suggested by the people individually or jointly by indicating their preferences for specific schemes in the area. After the comprising the self of projects on the basis of recommendations of the Gram Sabha to Gram Panchayat, the Gram Panchayat has to forward the development plan with its prorities to the Programme Officer (PO) for preliminary scrutiny. The PO has to consolidate the Gram Panchayat proposals and the proposals to the Intermediate Panchayat into a block plan and after the approval of the Intermediate Panchayat, forward it to the District Programme Cooridinator. The DPC consolidates the Block Plans and proposal from other implementing agencies and district Panchayt should approved the block wise shelf of projects. The whole procedure is time consuming and caused long delays in approval of the schemes at the district level. As a result the delays in the approval of the schemes could be minimized to some extent in comparison to the earlier stage phases but because of ad-hocism in the planning process, particularly in preparation of annual action plan on a year to year basis in place of shelf of projects remained a major weakness of NREGA planning in Assam. It also reflects the lacks of planning skills are found among the implementing agencies in the context of Block and District level. It was found during the study that the GP and Block Levels officials were quite unaware about the know-how the schemes are planned. This is more evident from the fact that annual action plan could not be prepared anywhere before the commencement of the financial year in which NREGA works had to be

taken up. The shelf of project is not prepared from the GP to District level. In Jorhat district, the Project Director of DRDA (PD) argued that the shelf of projects was nothing but an annual action plan which had to be prepared every year by DRDA. From the view of PD, there are no differences between shelf of projects and the annual action plan. This shows the level of confusion among the officials of the implementing agency about the programme. In this regard *Singh. V. P. (1995)* in this study mentioned that the concept of shelf of projects was not clearly understood throughout the State. The practice of preparing annual action plans every year and the whole process of planning was repeated year by year. It caused not only delays in the preparation of annual action plans every year but also affected the quality of assets created under the programme as most of the works could be started at the fag end of the financial year and under pressure. As a result quality could not be maintained in a number of NREP works. The whole process is still running in the planning process of NREGA in the context of Jorhat district of Assam.

Another weakness of the planning of NREGA in Assam was observed in the preparation of estimates of the schemes. Apart from technical dimensions of the scheme, it was imperative to prepare the estimates in terms of wage and non wage components of the cost and estimated employment in person days to be generated by the work. In the studying of schematic plan under NREGA in Jorhat, the estimates of the schemes were prepared by Block Level Steering Committee (BLSC) after the recommendation of GP, which had not much interest and prepared estimates of the schemes in their own style without following NREGA norms in this regard.

Thus, the planning of NREGA in Assam was ad-hoc in nature and suffered with a number of shortcomings such as lack of planning skills at district and block levels, trained in capacity as lack of proper orientation among the officials who were entrusted to draw the blue print of the programme at the field level. The lack of people participation in the planning of NREGA is also one of the barriers for

implementation of the scheme. Although rural link roads were selected on top priority in the context of national to block level, but no effort was made to prepare a shelf of projects as well as inventories of the existing roads. The whole process is found the entire schematic plan (other permissible work) under NREGA.