

Planning and Implementation of National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme in Sikkim

A Process Study



Bhumika Pradhan

K Hanumantha Rao

Selected districts in Sikkim



Agency: IRRD

Legend

Selected Districts

National Institute of Rural Development
Hyderabad
&
State Institute of Rural Development
Sikkim

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Monograph Series - 10



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&
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Preface

The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA), presently known as Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, is an unprecedented intervention by the Government in reforming and reenergising the (rural) labour market both by way of correcting the prevailing anomalies and in providing livelihood security to millions of rural poor. Most of the rural poor are largely dependent on the prospects of agriculture sector which is facing the problems of productivity in absolute and relative terms. The promised 100 days of guaranteed wage employment per household per annum at the stipulated minimum wages would not only reduce the rampant under and unemployment in rural areas, but also impact the stagnant wage structure for the rural unskilled workers.

The rights based NREGS emphasises on community participation in planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation (Social Audit) of the programme. It also aims at enabling the local bodies to move towards good governance through the transparency and accountability mechanisms. Elaborate institutional arrangements have to be made to realise not only the objectives of the NREGA but also to make the formal (PRIs) and informal institutions vibrant. Thus, the efficacy of the institutional performance and active participation of the community determine the overall effectiveness of NREGS.

The Centre for Wage Employment and Poverty Alleviation (CWEPA), created in the context of the NREGS in January 2008 has taken up a process study of NREGS to document the Planning and Implementation arrangements in 11 States (Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Gujarat, Haryana, J&K, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Orissa, Sikkim and Uttarakhand) to understand the problems and factors influencing the differential performance across and within the regions. The CWEPA has involved the willing State Institutes of Rural Development and reputed Research Institutions to participate in this 11-State study with a view to building a network of institutional alliance to examine various thematic issues relating to NREGS on a regular basis.

NIRD has designed the study, data collection instruments, sampling design and data analysis plan. Besides the field study initiatives of CWEPA, the partner institutions have also taken the responsibility of conducting the field study in collaboration with NIRD and are associated with report writing. Pre and post-study workshops were conducted to validate the study design and instruments. A post-study working was also done to consolidate learning and agree upon the key areas of reporting and suggested action for improved implementation of the NREGS. We hope that the findings of the State-specific studies and suggested action points would benefit the delivery system to enhance the overall effectiveness of NREGS in the respective States.

K. Hanumantha Rao
Prof. & Head (CWEPA)

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We are thankful to our partner institution, i.e. 'State Institute of Rural Development, Sikkim' for associating with the study.

Dr. P.Durgaprasad, Prof. & Head (CPGS) has provided us valuable comments and we would like to express our thanks for encouragement and his support.

Special thanks are due to District Programme Coordinator of North Sikkim for the support in organising the fieldwork. We take this opportunity to thank the Programme Officers, the Elected Representatives and the workers in the study blocks for their cooperation in providing data and sharing their views and experiences.

Ms. K. Jayasree has provided able technical support in data processing. Ms. K. Rajya Lakshmi has taken the burden of typing the manuscripts and also the final report. We thank them profusely.

Study Team

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Executive Summary

Sikkim can be classified as a moderately developed State in terms of per capita GDP, literacy rate, IMR, etc. But the rural-urban migration (17.3 per cent) and rural poverty ratios (22.3 per cent) are relatively high. The State launched the Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (REGS) in North Sikkim district in 2006. As per the MoRD, Gol data, the performance of Sikkim is rated as average (rank being 12th among the 27 States). The utilisation of funds was moderate (33.02 per cent) and 59 days of employment per household on average was generated under the SREGS during 2006-07. Hardly 5.4 per cent of the participating worker households were provided with 100 days of employment.

This process study focuses on some selected aspects, viz., institutional arrangements for planning and execution of State Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (SREGS), awareness and capacity building, community participation, planning, implementation, monitoring, social audit, and (tangible and intangible) outcomes of SREGS, such as wage employment and people's empowerment during 2006-07.

The State Employment Guarantee Council (SEGC) was not constituted during 2006-07. Consequently, firstly, the burden on the nodal department, namely, Rural Management and Development Department (RM &DD) was high and secondly, the department missed an opportunity to seek guidance and advice from SEGC. Hardly 33 per cent of the State Employment Guarantee Fund was utilised during 2006-07.

The District Development Officer acts as District Programme Coordinator for SREGS. Similarly, the BDO, a newly created post, is entrusted with the task of REGS and acts as the Programme Officer (PO). The ZP involvement in REGS was found to be moderate partly due to the ensuing ZP elections. Gram Panchayat Sabhapati is the key person for planning and implementation of REGS and is assisted by Rural Development Assistant (RDA) and Panchayat Secretary. Though GPs are equipped with computers,

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use of IT for REGS was rather insignificant. The State has not yet established any 'MIS' for SREGS with 'online facility'.

It was not very clear as to what extent the monitoring schedules prescribed by the State / District were adhered to and how effective the visits / inspections in improvising the programme implementation were, though the officials claim that the field visits / inspections were effective. Social Audits were not conducted in the reference period and guidelines were issued in Sep. 2007 by the State for organising them before Nov. 2007.

The minimum wages for agricultural (casual) workers are adopted for SREGS and it was Rs. 85 per day during 2006-07. Wage payments were made on 'time' basis.

The State Institute of Rural Development (SIRD) Sikkim and the National Institute of Rural Development (NIRD) and its North-Eastern Regional Centre at Guwahati have organised training programmes for the development functionaries associated with SREGS in the district. Our field interactions suggest that members at GP level should be provided with 'checklists' or manuals to guide them during implementation. The development plans at GP level have not been developed professionally. They appear at best as lists of works to be taken up during the five-year period. The 'Natural Resource Management (NRM) based planning' and 'participatory planning' are some of the areas in which officials and elected representatives need further inputs (with focus on 'Hands on' experience).

Despite the optimistic claims of the State, the level of awareness about provisions under SREGS among the workers was low (28-32 per cent). Knowledge about RTI and Social Audit was almost negligible. Almost all the (sample) workers were not aware of the officials / agencies to be contacted for redressal of grievances. The community participation in Gram Sabhas relating to SREGS was also discouraging due to lack of / ineffective social mobilisation strategies. The State has not involved NGOs or CBOs in SREGS. It could not fully make use of the funds available due to delays in obtaining technical and administrative sanctions of works, and

the consequent delays in Scheme implementation. Actual works were initiated in August 06. The funds can be put to full use only if planning is effective, delivery system is more responsive and people's awareness and participation in SREGS are high. The district administration pleads for a change in the wage-material cost ratio. However, the State has to build a case for the change of wage-material ratio from the present 60:40 in favour of material cost with suitable statistical analysis.

Inter-block and intra-block (across GPs) performance of SREGS both in terms of fund use and employment generated per household varied substantially. These are attributable to the relatively low capabilities (Sabhapati, Sachiv and RDA) and concerns of GP and not (mainly) due to delays in release and shortfall of funds. Most of the works taken up included rural connectivity, flood control and protection work and micro-irrigation. Over 60 per cent of the works undertaken were completed.

Most of the households which were issued job cards had sought employment (93 per cent) and the demand was almost met. Though applications for employment were given by the households, it was GP which helped fill the forms, submitted them for work and got the same sanctioned.

As per the survey data, all the workers are tribals and of the sample workers almost 80 per cent are poor. Most of the job cards (88 per cent) were issued in the name of males and nearly two-thirds of workers are males. These figures raise doubts about the gender bias in the labour market of the study area. It is reported that RDA / GP secretary periodically makes entries in the job card. In fact, it was during NIRD's fieldwork that the card entries have been updated. Delays in provision of work were reported (25 per cent) and most of the complaints received at the district level include delays in getting employment and payment of wages. Wages were paid equally for men and women in cash at the rate of Rs.85 per day per worker. Except delays in payment (more than 15 days), workers did not experience problems in receiving wages. None was required to be paid unemployment allowance.

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It is disquieting that most of the mandatory facilities (except drinking water) were not provided at the worksites. Neither payment was made for sharpening tools nor workers were provided with improvised tools (to reduce drudgery).

Vigilance and Monitoring Committees (VMCs) were functioning and 37 per cent of the workers informed that VMCs were also visiting worksites and participating in Gram Sabhas. No Social Audit was done during 2006-07.

As per the official statistics, the average number of employment days was 59 and wage earnings amounted to Rs. 5015 per household through SREGS. About 5 per cent of the worker households were provided with 100 days of employment. The sample data suggest that about 51.5 days of work was given, on an average in North Sikkim during 2006-07, which implies a wage income of Rs.4378 per household. But most of the workers got less than 60 days of employment. It is interesting to note that of the sample worker households, only 9.2 per cent got more than 100 days of employment.

About 32 per cent of workers reported that they could demand services from GP; the responses corresponding to 'officials' were very insignificant. None has mentioned that SREGS facilitated emergence of partnerships among local institutions. It is encouraging that 50 per cent of the workers realised their right to work. As far as quality of assets created under SREGS is concerned, they were rated as good (62-67 per cent). Impact on (push) migration was high (35 per cent) in Kabi GP where wage rates were lower than in Tung Naga GP. As per the perception of workers, the overall performance of SREGS was average (47-48 per cent); the GP performance was (55-58 per cent) followed by officials (40 per cent). Though 40 per cent of workers mentioned that information on SREGS was displayed at GP, their opinions indicate a low value about their (improved) knowledge about decision-making at GP level, which was 25 per cent.

Our focus group discussions with people point out that the provision of additional wage beyond 5 kms from GP should be modified to beyond 1 km in hilly regions. For effective supervision of SREGS, additional manpower is needed and manpower requirements should be made terrain specific. Issue of wage slips (once in a week or once in a fortnight) to workers should be made mandatory for release of funds to GP.

Some Caveats and Cautions

The claims of the officials and GPs are not consistent with the field observations. So, the official data need to be interpreted with caution. The overall index of effectiveness of SREGS, constructed by NIRD, has clearly brought out the deficiencies (43.52 per cent) in the planning and implementation process in the North Sikkim district. Follow-up action to correct these anomalies would certainly help the State in effectively planning and executing the Scheme in all the four districts of Sikkim during 2008-09.

CHAPTER I

Introduction

Backdrop to the Study

Crowned with Himalayas and studded with snow clad mountains, glaciers, rivulets, and rich biodiversity, Sikkim is the 22nd jewel in the Indian Union. Coming of a unique political history, natural resources, diverse ethnic groups and social traits, Sikkim has made tremendous efforts to keep pace with the needs of time and achieve greater heights.

The State has a total geographical area of just 7076 sq.km. with about five and half lakh population (2001 census) with an annual growth rate of 2.0 per cent per annum during 1991-2001. It has four Districts –North District, South District, East District and West District. A large proportion of people (89 per cent) reside in the rural areas. The State has made rapid strides in areas of health, education, literacy and local governance and was ranked as the third best performing State in Panchayati Raj. The estimates of HDI for the State show that HDI has increased from 0.454 in 1991 to 0.532 in 1998 (Lama 2001).

The Gross Domestic Product increased from Rs. 403 crore in 1993-94 to Rs. 1717 crore in 2005-06 (Economic Survey, Govt. of Sikkim). According to the Tenth Plan of the State, the Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) growth rate was over 5 per cent with per capita income growth of 3.5 per cent per annum during 1993-94 to 1999-2000, which is relatively higher than the national average (Papola: 2005).

The GDP growth rate in the last four years of the 10th Five Year Plan (2002-2006) of Sikkim was a double digit figure. But despite such high growth rate, the decline in the incidence of (rural) poverty has been slow. In 2004-05, the poverty ratio for rural Sikkim was 22.3 per cent. This has been mainly due to unequal distribution of the benefits of development, concentration of income among the urban rich and slow growth of income

and employment opportunities in rural areas. The economic growth has not been able to generate employment so much so that observers have commented that Sikkim was able to attain 'jobless' growth (HDRC: 2001)¹.

Some selected socio-economic indicators of Sikkim are presented in Table 1 to justify the relevance and utility of NREGS.

There is also a large disparity in the income levels of the rural and urban dwellers and the rural-urban divide has been widening. Unemployment is also on the rise. The NSSO estimation reveals that unemployment was 2-3 per cent during 2004-05. The average number of days of employment was very low for female workers, i.e., 93 days in 2004-05. People consider the government as the only development agency. The government jobs provided high income in Sikkim. Agriculture is still a major source of livelihood to majority of people (more so for female workers) in rural areas though some non-farm activities also coexist. But agriculture in the recent years has not been remunerative because of the small operational holdings, lack of irrigation facility, steep topography and resultant constraint in application of modern technology. The quality of the soil is also low resulting in low yields. These factors have pushed the rural youth to the towns in search of jobs in the government sector. The rural-urban migration has been high, i.e., 17 per cent in 2001.

In the light of the above, there is a necessity to secure a sustainable livelihood opportunity for the rural poor and strengthen the infrastructure base in rural areas. (For instance, the infrastructure index for Sikkim was 83 with all-India as base in 2000). In this backdrop, one can easily visualise the usefulness of the NREGA in addressing some of the major development issues mentioned above.

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Table 1 : Information sheet on Sikkim

S.No. Indicators		
1	2	3
1.	GDP per capita (Constant Prices) (Rs.) 2004-05	12637
2.	GDP growth rate (1999-00 to 2004-05) % p a	5.08
3.	Population growth (1991-2001) % p a	2.00
4.	Workforce (Per thousand persons) (2004-05)	
	- Males	554
	- Females	318
	- Persons	443
5.	Workforce growth (1993-94 to 2004-05)% p a	1.13
6.	Distribution of workforce (2004-05)%	
a)	Agriculture	
	- Males	54.7
	- Females	71.9
b)	Mining & Quarrying	
	- Males	0.50
	- Females	1.00
c)	Manufacturing	
	- Males	3.60
	- Females	0.70
d)	Electricity, Water etc.	
	- Males	1.80
	- Females	0.20
e)	Construction	
	- Males	10.6
	- Females	2.90
f)	Trade, Hotel & Restaurant	
	- Males	7.70
	- Females	10.50
g)	Transport, Storage & Communications	
	- Males	5.80
	- Females	0.00
h)	Other Services	
	- Males	15.3
	- Females	12.80
7.	Wage rate (Rs/day) – Males – Public works - 2004-05	89.29
	Other works - 2004-05	89.16
8.	Wage rate (Rs/day) – Females – Public works- 2004-05	89.29
	– Other works - 2004-05	74.22

(Contd..)

Table 1 : (Contd...)

1	2	3
9.	Casual Labour (%)	16.0
		1993-94
		2004-05
10.	Unemployment rate (CDS) 2004-05	7.0
	- Males %	2.9
	- Females %	2.1
11.	Average No. of days of employment per worker 2004-05	
	- Males	201
	- Females	93
12.	Rural Poverty (%)	45.0
		1993-94
		2004-05
13.	Infrastructure index (2000) (CMIE) (All-India = 100) Sikkim	83.01
14.	Migration from rural to urban areas (2001) (%)	17.3

Issues:

Following are some of the issues examined in the study:

- i)* **Awareness about NREGA:** What strategies have been adopted to build awareness about NREGA, 'Right to Information' Act and 'Social Audit' among people, elected representatives, officials? How effective are these strategies?
- ii)* **Registration, Issue of Job Cards and Applications for Wage Employment:** What roles the Gram Panchayats (GP), Officials and Civil Society Organisations have played in these activities? Irregularities, if any, noticed in the process?
- iii)* **Planning:** Whether the Sarpanch and Secretary of GPs have received training for preparing action plans / shelf of works / projects? Could GPs prepare the development plans in a participatory manner? To what extent these works address the causal factors of poverty? Whether gender concerns and problems of the disabled are adequately taken care of in identification of works and provision of facilities? Whether Gram Sabhas are held to finalise the activities / works? Whether the officials could workout the cost and technical

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estimates in time? Is Programme Officer (PO) well equipped in performing the assigned tasks without delays? Whether a shelf of works / projects (technically approved and administratively sanctioned) is kept in pipeline for each GP?

iv) Implementation: What arrangements are contemplated at various levels of administration to ensure smooth functioning of SREGS? What mechanisms are in use to give publicity to the works including associated cost estimates and whether the administration could ensure transparency? Are works planned match the magnitude of registration? Are all the applicants provided with work? Are there private contractors engaged in execution of works? Whether there is any (undue) delay in execution / inspection / measurement of works? Whether the applicants were provided with employment within 15 days? Have the implementing agencies provided the recommended facilities at worksites? What is the extent of participation of women and the physically challenged in the works? Whether 'piece-rate contract' of certain works is disadvantageous to (women) workers in realising the minimum wages stipulated? Whether job cards are duly filled in with all the particulars correctly and getting updated regularly? How fool proof is the institutional arrangement for payment of wages? Are the wage payment methods and amounts accurate and as prescribed?

v) Monitoring and Social Audit: Whether Gram Panchayat / Gram Sabha is monitoring the works? Are the officials adhering to the monitoring schedules prescribed? How effective are the Vigilance and Monitoring Committees (VMCs)? Whether the reports of VMCs are presented to Gram Sabha?

What are the practices followed for Social Audit? Whether Gram Panchayat is aware of the 'mandatory agenda' for the social audit to be conducted by the Gram Sabha? What are the problems in adhering to the same? How responsive are these agencies / authorities in making the proceedings / documents accessible to

the public? Whether there is i) public display of information on works including current status, sanction and utilisation of funds, list of applications; ii) Proper maintenance of records, registers and measurement books; and iii) arrangements for disbursement of wages in the presence of GP members and VMC? Whether any physical audit of the works undertaken? What role the local institutions and community have been playing?

- vi) Transparency and Accountability**—Whether the State Employment Guarantee Council (SEGC) has prepared the key documents* and displayed the same in public domain? Whether the audit reports of GPs were processed and acted upon? What type of irregularities were reported and corrective actions initiated? How effective is the ‘grievance redressal system’? Whether the implementing agency should also be made responsible for grievance redressal? What is the public perception about the (performed) role and responsibilities of elected representatives and government functionaries in different stages of the programme implementation?

Objectives

- Study the effectiveness of the processes adopted for generating awareness about NREGA, RTI Act and Social Audit among stakeholders;
- Assess the usefulness of the institutions and mechanisms chosen for sensitising people in regard to registration, issue of job cards and employment ;
- Ascertain the extent to which the mechanisms have facilitated participatory planning and selection of works ;
- Review the procedures for implementation of works including provision of employment, works measurement and payment of wages;

* Data relating to registration, job cards issued, list of people sought employment and provided, receipt and utilisation of funds, sanctioning and progress of works, cost estimates and expenditure on different works, employment generated, copies of muster rolls and reports of local committees.

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- Examine the nature and quality of community participation and inter- institutional coordination in planning, implementation, monitoring and social audit of the works / projects;
- Analyse the problems in utilisation of Central and State funds – administrative and programme expenditure;
- Study the quality of assets created and their utility to the poor / weaker sections / others;
- Assess the tangible benefits of REGS to the people in terms of employment and (minimum) wages, 'right to work', 'right to minimum wages', 'right to information' and accountability of development functionaries to people; and
- Identify the major factors influencing the performance of NREGS with special focus on geographic, socio-economic and politico-cultural aspects that explain differential performance in the study areas.
- Outline the broad direction in which the NREGS is moving with specific reference to the national guidelines, state action plans, institutional arrangements, delivery systems / people's views, current achievements and future course of action.

Approach

Since the NREGA was introduced only in North district of Sikkim during 2006, the same was chosen for our study. Among the four Development Blocks, Mangan and Kabi Tingda were selected keeping in view their performance of NREGS (e.g. Mangan's performance was the least and Kabi Tingda was the best in regard to funds utilisation during 2006-07). From each of these two blocks one Gram Panchayat was randomly selected, viz., Tunga Naga from Mangan and Kabi from Kabi Tingda. From each of these GPs, 30 workers were randomly selected from the Attendance Registers and structured schedules were canvassed to seek their views on various aspects of REGS. Further, two focus group discussions (FGD) one in each Gram Panchayat unit were held with the workers including the female

workers to elicit information regarding the entire process of planning and implementation of NREGS at the GP level. A set of schedules was prepared and administered to officials at the State level, and also to officials and elected representatives at the district, block and Gram Panchayat level, who are associated with the planning, implementation and monitoring of NREGS in North Sikkim district. Based on the data collected from these schedules and also discussions with officials and other stakeholders, the issues chosen for the study were examined.

Sampling Design

State	District	Blocks	Gram Panchayats (GPs)
Sikkim	North Sikkim	Kabi Tingda Mangan	Kabi Tung Naga

Salient Features of NREGS

The Government of Sikkim has formulated the Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme called the Sikkim Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (SREGS), in 2006 in conformity with the National Act to provide not less than 100 days of wage employment on demand in a financial year to every rural household, when adult members by application volunteer to do unskilled manual work subject to works specified in the Scheme. Another objective of the scheme is to create durable assets and strengthen the livelihood resource base of the rural (poor) people. The Scheme is implemented as a Centrally Sponsored Scheme on cost sharing basis between the Centre and the State in the ratio of 90:10.

In concurrence with the Central Act, the SREGS has defined the following non-negotiable parameters:

- (i) Every registered rural household shall be provided not less than 100 days of wage employment in a financial year.
- (ii) Payment of wages shall be made at least once in a fortnight.
- (iii) Equal wages shall be paid to both men and women.
- (iv) Contractors and labour displacing machinery shall not be engaged.

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- (v) Only works approved by the Gram Panchayat (as identified in the Gram Sabha) at village level and by the Zilla Panchayat at the district level shall be taken up.

Profile of the Study Area

Of the four districts, North Sikkim district was covered under the programme in 2006 while East and West Sikkim districts were included during the current year, i.e. 2007-08. Our investigations were thus confined to the North Sikkim district only for this study. The district comprises 60 per cent of the total geographical area of Sikkim but constitutes only 7.68 per cent of the total population as much of the area is uninhabitable. A brief profile of the district is shown in Table 2.

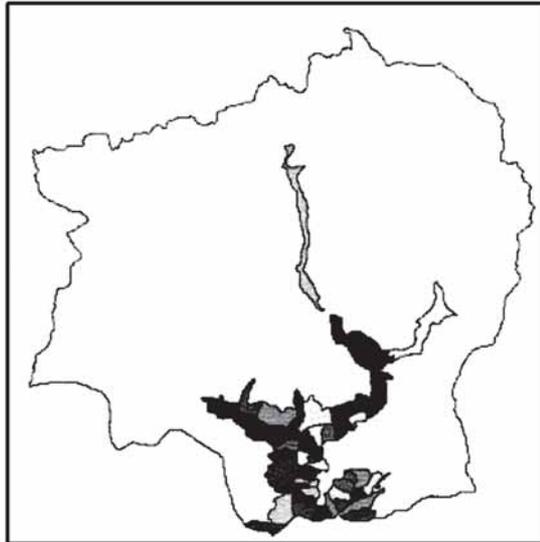
Table 2 : Fact sheet on north Sikkim district

Geographical Area	4226sq.km.
Population(Census 2001)(Millions)	0.54 (Male 0.29; Female 0.25)
Rural (Total population in millions)	0.48 (89 per cent)
Estimated households	6489
No. of Gram Panchayat Units	20
No. of Gram Panchayat Wards	102
Sex Ratio	1000 : 836
Literacy	54 per cent
Human development index 1998 (Lama: 2001)	0.468
Workers	15575
Govt. salaried workers (lowest in the State)	5.01 per cent
Agriculture workers	551
Non-agriculture workers	1294
Farmers	9134

Source: Government of India, Population Census 2001.

Government of Sikkim, Directorate of Economics, Statistics,
Monitoring & Evaluation.

North Sikkim



It shares its border with China and consists of four blocks, namely, Mangan, Chungthang, Passingdong and Kabi Tingda. Except Mangan, the district headquarters, all other areas are identified as rural. Despite the rugged terrain, extreme climatic conditions and small landholdings, agriculture is still the main occupation of the people, which is mainly concentrated in growing cash crops like cardamom (55.2 per cent), ginger (1 per cent), potatoes (2.92 per cent) orange (0.21 per cent) and cereal crops like maize (18 per cent), paddy (5 per cent) and barley (0.45 per cent)². The North district has the second highest proportion of people engaged in agriculture sector (25.25 per cent) in the State, but the analysis of the district-wise production of foodgrains shows that North district's production is the lowest (10 per cent of the total food production in the State).³ It is thus apparent that agriculture has not been remunerative. Based on the social, infrastructural and developmental parameters, the district was identified as backward. Majority of the workers under REGS are marginal farmers, non-agricultural labourers and agriculture labourers. Their average landholding is one acre and the yield levels are low. Agriculture is mainly concentrated in growing food crops, though North

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district is known as the large Cardamom Capital. However, during the recent years, exploitative marketing system, crop diseases and many such factors have limited the production of cash crops (cardamom, potatoes, ginger and orange in particular). Livelihood dependence on non-farm sectors like small scale industries, handicrafts and allied activities in the area is high but is yet to be explored fully. The SREGS intends to bring about positive changes in livelihoods of the rural poor.

Two blocks, Mangan and Kabi Tingda were selected for the survey based on their performance levels.

Table 3 provides data on the socio-economic profiles of the selected Gram Panchayats for the study. Tung Naga appears to be developed compared to Kabi in terms of percentage of households with PDS cards meant for the poor, percentage of cropped area irrigated per capita availability of land. However, both the GPs have primary school and access to basic amenities like electricity, drinking water etc.

Table 3 : Profiles of the sample GPs in north district of Sikkim State

S.No.	Indicators	North Sikkim District	
		Kabi	Toong Naga
1	2	3	4
1	Population size	1902	1797
2	No. of households	375	434
	- % of SC & ST	92.8	100
	- % of landless	1.9	-
	- % of marginal & small farmers	98.1	83.18
	- % with PDS card (meant for poor)	84.0	18.2
3	Net Sown Area (NSA) (acres)	3218	5161.4
	- Irrigated area as % NSA	NA	72.5
4	Major crops grown : List 3 crops	Maize,	Cardamom,

(Contd...)

Table 3 : (Contd...)

1	2	3	4
		Paddy, Millet	Paddy, Potato
5	No. of migrant workers	-	-
6	Lean months for work	Nov. – April	Nov. Feb.
7	Number of children in labour market	-	-
8	Wage rate (Rs./day) / person	NA	
	Adult males - Agriculture	1	
	Peak season - Min.	50 with 3 meals/Rs90	100
	- Max.	100	120
	Lean season	85	85-100
	Adult females- Agriculture	Same as male	
	Peak season - Min.		85
	- Max.	NA	120
	Lean season	30 with 3 meals	85-100
	Adult males – Non-Ag.		
	- Min.	85	150
	- Max.	90	200
	Adult females- Non-Ag. (construct)		
	- Min.	85	100
	- Max.	90	125
9	Basic amenities (number)		
	- Primary school	7 within GPU	4 within GPU
	- High school	1 within GPU	1 within GPU
	- Health sub-centre	-	-
	- Primary health centre	1 within GPU	1 within GPU

(Contd...)

Table 3 : (Contd...)

1	2	3	4
	- Anganwadi	4 within wards	6 within GPU
	- Bank	SBI within GPU	17km away
	- Cooperatives	3 within GPU	1 within GPU
	- Krishi Vignan Kendra	-	-
	- Nearest town	20Km away	17km away
	- Bus / rail facility	Small vehicle available	Small vehicle available
	- Post Office	Within GPU	Within GPU
	- Electricity	Total coverage	Total coverage
	- Drinking water	All households	All households

Source: Records of the GPs.

CHAPTER II

Institutional Arrangements for NREGS in Sikkim

State Employment Guarantee Council (SEGC) in Sikkim is yet to be formed. The Rural Management and Development Department (RM&DD) is presently coordinating all the activities of NREG Scheme. The *State Employment Guarantee Fund* has been created during the year 2006-07 and Rs. 858.30 lakh had been allocated out of which 283.44 lakh (33.02 per cent) had been utilised (RM&DD, Govt. of Sikkim).

Capacity Building of Functionaries: The State Training Action Plan was prepared by the State Institute of Rural Development (SIRD) in consultation with RM & DD to impart training to all the development functionaries associated with NREGA in the State. Separate budget for the training activities was made by SIRD and MoRD and State have provided the financial support.

Awareness Building: The mechanism adopted for building awareness about REGS among the people was through display of hoardings in public places and publication in local papers. Given the high literacy levels of people, use of print media was preferred by the State (RM & DD) for information dissemination.

Planning: At the district level, the District Development Officer (DDO) acts as the District Programme Coordinator (DPC). The Assistant Project Officer, Sikkim Rural Development Agency (SRDA), assists the DPC in mobilisation and planning. The Block Development Officer* (BDO) is entrusted with the additional task of (SREGS) Programme Officer (PO). At the Gram Panchayat level, the GPs are responsible for planning and execution of SREGS. At present there is no involvement of Voluntary Organisations in SREGS. As required of the scheme, each district should prepare a five-year perspective plan that attempts to estimate the need

* Newly created post.

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for employment through a participatory process of planning starting from the Gram Sabha.

The Annual Plan is the actual action plan which flows from the perspective plan. Gram Sabhas are expected to be conducted for identification and prioritisation of works by December and duly approved by the GPs. The Employment plan shall be forwarded to the PO for scrutiny. The PO shall scrutinise the plan and ensure that the plan meets the likely demand for employment based on the number of households registered and send a consolidated proposal to the Zilla Panchayat (ZP). The ZP shall approve and may propose works that may involve more than one block within its jurisdiction. Sikkim has no Intermediate Panchayat (IP) though it has development blocks. The ZP is the principal authority for planning and implementation of the Scheme. It is expected that the District Perspective Plan and the Annual Plan are prepared with the involvement and approval of the ZP. The administrative sanction is accorded by the DPC. The list of works administratively sanctioned is sent for technical sanction. The technically sanctioned projects are sent to the Programme Officer, who shall maintain this as a shelf of works. Thus, these shelf of works are allotted to the implementing agencies.

Implementation

At the village level, the GP is the principal authority for planning and implementation. The Gram Panchayat is responsible for identification of works, receiving application for works, issue of job cards and execution of works. The Rural Development Assistant (RDA) provides administrative support and maintains the records and accounts as well. He also assists the Junior Engineer provided in the GPU. The Gram Panchayat units are equipped with computers and the government is also thinking of providing an accountant and a computer assistant for maintenance of records. Based on the demand for employment, the Panchayat Secretary has to submit a request to the PO to issue work commencement letter, and on receipt of the same, the works are expected to be immediately taken up by the GP. The PO is required to play a critical role in coordinating the implementation

process in the block. His important functions include ensuring Social Audit by Gram Sabha, disposal of complaints and grievance redressal, ensuring timely payment of wages, monitor the quality of implementation and progress of the works. He functions under the overall guidance of the DPC in the implementation of the Scheme.

Monitoring Arrangements: For monitoring, the State Government has prescribed a schedule of visits / inspections for officials at different levels. For instance, at least 10 per cent of the works under SREGS shall be inspected by the District Level Officers and at least two per cent by the State Level Officers. The State Government shall designate 'Area Officers' for effective monitoring. However, these initiatives have yet to be operationalised.

The Programme Officer (PO) at the block level is expected to make physical verification of all the works while at least 10 per cent of the works need to be audited by DPC. As per the guidelines, the release of funds has to be linked to the verification by PO and submission of the report by Vigilance and Monitoring Committees (VMCs.) Regular Financial Auditing is to be carried out by the Chartered Accountants and the Accountant General's Team. The Internal Auditing process is expected to be introduced soon so that the auditing would become a concurrent process. However, the State Government has yet to establish any MIS for SREGS with 'online' facility.

Social Audit: Social cum vigilance monitoring committees have been formed for conducting Social Audit. Payments of wages and other bills pertaining to the Scheme are passed only with due recommendations and verification. The State has also issued detailed guidelines. The nodal department had also issued in Sept. 07 a statutory obligation for GPs to conduct regular Social Audit of works in the SREG districts and aims at organisation of Social Audits of all SREGS works by Nov. 2007 under the overall guidance of DPC. A Social Audit calendar is to be prepared and published to ensure people's participation and transparency*. Follow-up is to be initiated by Block and District Administration based on the Social

* See for details DO No. 112 / RM&RD dated 7/9/07.

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Audit reports and the consolidated reports have to be prepared and submitted by DPC to the State and MoRD, Gol.

Wages under SREGS

While provision for payment of wages under 'piece-rate' mode is existing in NREGA, the State Government has opted for wage payment on time-rate basis. However, it intends to introduce the former system after undertaking the Time –Work- Motion studies for different categories of works in different terrains and seasons. The District Schedule of Rates or Rural Schedule of Rates has not been evolved specifically for SREGS. The Rural Standard Schedule of Rates is notified by the Labour department of the State and is being followed by the State Public Works Department. The minimum wages for agriculture (casual) workers was fixed by the State in 2005 and the present rate adopted is Rs.85 per day, and the same rate is adopted for SREGS for both men and women.

CHAPTER III

Capacity Building, Awareness and Community Participation

Capacity Building: Under the State Training Action Plan (STAP) of the MoRD, Gol, the officials and elected representatives associated with RD programmes are being imparted training on NREGA, RTI Act and Social Audit. The State Institute of Rural Development (SIRD) has already organised training programmes during 2006-07 to build the awareness levels and also capability upgradation for the functionaries to plan and implement the schemes. However, field observations and discussions with development functionaries at GP level suggest that they need to be provided with 'check lists' during the training programmes or CDs on various steps in the preparation of village development plans. The latter should not be equated with list of works identified in Gram Sabha. Since water and land resources are crucial to rural economic prosperity, a National Resource Management (NRM) - based participatory planning would be more appropriate for the State of Sikkim. The efforts of Andhra Pradesh Academy of Rural Development (APARD), Hyderabad in the preparation of such NRM - based plans could prove useful here in this context. The need for providing *periodic training* to these personnel at GP level can hardly be over emphasised.

Awareness Building: The approach of the State to display information on SREGS through hoardings has not been found to be very effective despite the State's high literacy levels. Tables 4 to 8 confirm this view. Some of the workers were aware of the maximum number of days of employment and payment of minimum wages in the NREGS. The awareness scores about provisions of SREGA are 32 and 28 per cent, respectively, in Mangan and Kabi Tingda blocks. The awareness levels of workers about RTI Act and Social Audit are insignificant. Neither officials nor GP have provided key information. This is a disturbing fact. Therefore, one cannot expect high performance of SREGS as a 'Rights Based' scheme given the meagre levels

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of awareness. Whether officials / PR representatives have played a 'proactive role' to enable people to demand for work, ensure timely payment of wages, bring about transparency in their decision making and implementation etc., remains a question mark. It would certainly be a time taking process. It is in this context, a definite role for NGOs should be carved out for social mobilisation and awareness building on SREGS and other RD programmes after building the capacities of (selected) NGOs. The State machinery and local government bodies need to monitor and evaluate these activities.



Focus Group Discussion with SREGS workers in Tung Naga

Table 4 : Distribution of workers: awareness level - wise

Block	Awareness Indicators							Unemploy- -ment allowance
	Aware of entitle- ments	Max. No. of days of Employ- ment	Wages to be paid, if work is given beyond 5 kms. from GP	Minimum wages to be paid	Time limit for providing employ- ment	Time limit for pay- ment of wages		
Mangan	18# 62.1%	17 56.7%		28 96.6%	3 10.0%	7 23.3%	3 10.0%	
Kabi	21 70.0%	18 60.0%	2 6.7%	27 90.0%	1 3.3%	3 10.0%		
Total	39 66.1%	35 58.3%	2 3.3%	55 93.2%	4 6.7%	10 16.7%	3 5.0%	

No. of respondents who are aware of the indicators.

Table 5 : Correct responses against six questions on levels of awareness about SREG

Block	Nil	Only 1	Only 2	Only 3	Only 4	Only 5	Average Awareness level score (%)
Mangan	0	12	12	3	2	1	32.2
		40.0	40.0	10.0	6.7	3.3	
Kabi	1	10	17	1	1		
	3.3	33.3	56.7	3.3	3.3	-	28.3
Total	1	22	29	4	3	1	
	1.7	36.7	48.3	6.7	5.0	1.7	

Table 6 : Distribution of workers: awareness about RTI Act and Social Audit

Block	RTI Act	Social Audit
Mangan	2 6.7 %	3 10.0 %
Kabi	-	-
Total	2 3.3 %	3 5.0 %

Table 7 : Distribution of workers reporting GP as source of information for REGS, RTI and Social Audit

Block	REGS and RTI	Social Audit
Mangan		
Kabi	No Response	
Total		

Table 8 : Distribution of workers: awareness about officials for contact for information on key components of employment

Block	Job cards are not given	Work is not given within 15 days	Wages are not paid within 15 days
Mangan	2 6.7%	-	-
Kabi			No Response
Total	2 3.3%	-	-

Community Participation: It is disheartening to note that the local communities have not evinced much interest in the different stages of the SREGS. People still perceive that if the Panchayats give them work they are ready to work. To make the delivery system responsive and responsible, the community should take active interest in the planning and implementation and more specifically, in making the (illiterate) workers aware of the provisions of NREGA, facilitate the smooth conduct of the process of employment seeking and payment of wages. For this to happen, social mobilisation has to be taken up on a large scale, preferably with the support of NGOs. The people's organisations such as SHGs, *Vana Samrakshna Samitis* (VSS) and Water Users Association (WUAs) need to be sensitised with a view to ensuring their guidance and support to REGS.

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Focus Group Discussion near Block Office, Kabi Tingda.

CHAPTER IV

Planning, Implementation and Performance

Performance of NREGS in North Sikkim

Planning: A five-year draft plan (for the Eleventh Plan) had been prepared by all the Gram Panchayat Units (GPUs) in 2006-07. The development plan, based on the discussions in Gram Sabha, contains the list of schemes and projects to be implemented in the villages over a period of five years. Certain projects were short-listed from the draft report on priority basis and implemented under SREGS during the initial year. The District Planning Committees (DPCs) were constituted in all the four districts in accordance with the 73th Amendment and district plans have been prepared on the basis of the village level plans. The plans were prepared by the 'Gram Planning Forum', the members of which included all the GP members and the ZP members concerned, all the village level line department functionaries and five experts nominated by the Gram Sabha. The plans were approved in Gram Sabhas and consolidated District Plans were prepared in Dec. 2006 (Annual Report of Panchayati Raj in Sikkim).

Attempts were made to prepare the District Perspective Plan specifically for SREGS and the Annual Plan in the financial year 2007-08. Gram Sabhas were conducted in all the GPUs for identification and prioritisation of the works to be undertaken. However, the Gram Sabhas could be conducted only in April and May, 2007 in most of the GPUs and the Zilla Sabhas could not be conducted because of the election process to the local bodies and reorganisation of Panchayats and introduction of new urban local bodies. Thus, the required involvement of the Zilla Panchayat could not be ensured in the Planning procedure of SREGS in the district. The PO scrutinises the projects as and when received and forwards the same to the DPC. The estimates are worked out by the Junior Engineers (JEs) according to the defined rates of the PWD. The Plans are administratively sanctioned by the nodal department. From August 2007, the works to be undertaken by the

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nodal departments have been informed to the DPC and further sanctions will be accorded by the DPC. Due to the fragmented approach to the planning and scrutiny of the Schemes, the performance of the Scheme is hampered. The works selected are in the nature of building concrete assets like box drain, micro irrigation canals (42.72 + 14.5 km), flood control protection wall (95+ 40 km) and rural connectivity (44 + 9 km) etc. The {figures in () are completed and ongoing activities, respectively}.



NREGS worksite at Kabi

Due to lack of awareness and inadequate social mobilisation efforts, participation of workers and people in Gram Sabha relating to SREGS was poor, as revealed in the Focus Group Discussions. About 42 per cent of the sample respondents (SREG workers), however, had indicated that they were aware of the works selected in the Gram Sabha (Table 9). Forty per cent of the workers informed that information relating to REGS was displayed at the Gram Panchayat, an indication of the extent of transparency in the implementation.

The involvement of ZP in planning is not very encouraging. All the scheduled works were executed at GP level during 2006-07. As mentioned earlier, training of SREG functionaries on 'plan preparation' needs

improvement and innovation (including 'Hands on' experience). SIRD has developed a cadre of Para-Professionals (field facilitators) who may be used to facilitate in the preparation of Perspective and Annual Action Plan for each GP in a participatory manner. The plans should address the causes of poverty in rural areas in particular. Due to non-availability of technical personnel (e.g. Junior Engineers) at GP level, preparation of cost and technical estimates for the proposed works has been delayed. The Rural Development Assistant who is functioning as *Gram Rojgar Sewak* should be trained in preparation of estimates and measurement of work. The software packages developed by States like AP (TCS) and Maharashtra (SIRD, Pune) can be adapted to local conditions and made use of to reduce the delays in preparation of cost and technical estimates. In fact, the actual process of employment generation is more supply - driven contrary to the anticipated demand - driven wage employment under this Scheme.

Table 9 : Distribution of workers by awareness about type of works and participation in Social Audit

Block	Participation of self in selection of works	Works selected under NREGS	No. of workers aware of			Display of information on NREGS works at GP
			Who participated in Social Audit / GS			
			Officials	Sabha-pati	People in general	
Mangan	12	15 (17) 51.7%	-	NA	-	9
Kabi	11	10 (15) 33.3%				15
Total	23	25(32) 42.4%				24

Figures in () are number of workers reporting that the Gram Sabha was conducted for selection of works.

NA: Not applicable since no Social Audit was conducted in the sample GPs.

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Funds Utilisation: As per the official data (MoRD website), an amount of Rs. 451.5 lakh had been earmarked for 2006-07, of which the State release was Rs. 5 lakh. The implementation of works under REGS started in July/ August 06. About Rs. 211 lakh was spent towards wage bill for unskilled workers.

The performance of the Sikkim State / North district during 2006-07 was assessed using the data available from the MoRD website (taken on 9/11/ 07). Most of the households who have obtained job cards sought employment (4179 out of 4498) under NREGS and the demand was almost met (4107) (as per official data)*. Over 5 per cent of participating households (222) could get more than 100 days of employment. Work was provided during the lean seasons during 2006-07 and about 2.42 lakh persondays of employment was provided.

The delays in commencing (actual) work is the main reason for low utilisation of available funds (57 per cent). It is heartening to note that, on an average, the participating households got 59 days of employment and earned Rs. 5015 of wage income. However, States like Rajasthan could generate over 70 days of employment per household. Compared to the national average of women's share in NREGA (40 per cent), Sikkim's coverage was only about 25 per cent. One would expect a higher degree of participation of women in REGS of Sikkim since they were getting fewer employment opportunities (see Table 1). And unemployment allowance was not paid so far to any worker. No serious efforts were made until now to ensure convergence of REGS with other programmes (e.g. Infrastructure development programmes) or pooling of funds with PRIs and other development agencies. BDOs being new and SREGS work being additional charge, the required attention for the Scheme might not have been bestowed (Table 10).

* In fact 4665 persons from 4107 households took part in the work.

Table 10 : Performance of NREGA in north Sikkim (2006-07)

Indicators	State
1. % of households (hhs) demanding work to hhs issued with job cards	92.9
2. % of hhs provided employment to hhs demanding employment	98.3
3. % hhs provided with 100 days of employment	5.4
4. Utilisation of funds (%)	57.4
5. Employment days (Million)	0.24
6. Employment per household (days)	59
7. Share of SCs in employment (%)	0.80
8. Share of STs in employment (%)	98.3
9. Share of women in employment (%)	24.8
10. Cost of generating one day of employment (Rs.)	108
11. Wage paid (Rs. / day)	85

hhs: Households

Source: <http://nrega.nic.in>, as on 9.11.2007.

Indicators are constructed using the data on the website.

District Level Performance: In the planning and implementation of REGS in the district, the overall participation of the elected members of the ZP was found to be very moderate. About Rs. 780.87 lakh was released to the district under SREGS during 2006-07 and Rs. 264.55 lakh was utilised by the district (33.87 per cent of the available funds were made use of in the district).

District: North Sikkim

Nearly Rs. 50.07 lakh was spent on material cost*. The administrative expenditure accounted for Rs. 3.48 lakh. Thus, the wage : material ratio

* The explanation given for this atypical situation was that i) material costs were very high; ii) the materials had to be downloaded on the road sides distant from worksites and iii) additional wages and transport charges had to be given for further movement of materials.

Table 11 : Financial allocation and funds utilisation (2006-07) under REGS
(Rs. in lakh)

Blocks	GP	Allocation		Releases		Funds		Expenditure on				
		Blocks	GP	Blocks	GP	Availa- -ble	Utili- -sed	Unski- lled	Semi- skilled	Mate- rial	Contin- gencies	Total
		3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
MANGAN	Ramthang	65.50	10.00	65.50	10.00	65.50	7.95	79.5				
	Tanek											
	Namok		10.00		10.00		7.0	70.0				
	Tingchim		10.00		10.00		5.23	52.3				
	Mangshilla											
	Ringhim		15.50		15.50		11.0	71.0				
	Nampatam											
	Sentam		10.00		10.00		9.2	92.1				
	Tung Naga		10.00		10.00		8.07	80.7				
	Sub-total	65.5	65.5	65.5	65.5	65.5	48.45	74.0				

(Contd..)

Table 11 : (Contd...)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
KABI	Kabi	61.50	15.00	61.50	15.00	61.50	12.35	82.0				
TINGDA	Phensang		10.00		10.00		9.53	95.3				
	Rongong		19.50		19.50		13.6	69.8				
	Tumlong											
	Men		17.00		17.00		15.7	92.2				
	Rongong											
Sub-total		61.50	61.50	61.50	61.50	61.50	51.2	83.2				
PASSING-	Lingthem	65.52	20.00	67.52	20.00		17.17	85.9				
DONG	linggdem											
	Sakyong		2.52		2.52		1.77	49.4				
	Pentong											
	Tingbong		10.00		10.00		7.96	79.6				
	Lingden		10.00		10.00		8.48	84.8				
	Barfok											
	Hee		10.00		10.00		7.51	75.1				
	Gyathang											
	Lumgaur		15.00		15.00		14.32	95.5				
	sanjitok											
Sub-total		69.52	67.52	69.52	67.52	67.52	56.68	83.9				

(Contd...)

Table 11 : (Contd...)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
CHUNG- THANG	Chungthang		71.00	10.00	71.00	10.00	71.00	10.00	71.00	7.10	71.0	
	Shipgyer		10.00		10.00		7.22	72.2				
	Lachen		15.00		15.00		14.94	99.6				
	Lachung		36.00		36.00		29.53	82.0				
	Sub-total		71.00	71.00	71.00	71.00	71.0	58.80	82.8			
North District	Total		265.52	265.52	265.52	265.52	215.13	78.9	50.6	3.47		

Note: Opening balance as on 1st April 2006 was nil.

Source: Records obtained from the DPC office and cross-checked with the RDAs.

The district data are constructed by adding all the figures.

was almost 80 : 20 which was drastically different from the contemplated ratio of 60 : 40. Most of the works undertaken included rural connectivity (53 km), flood control and protection (135 km), micro-irrigation works (57 km), construction of check dams etc. It is to be noted that the material cost of Rs. 50.7 lakh did not include expenditure towards payment of wages to skilled labour.

The State had incurred Rs. 3.48 lakh in respect of administrative expenses (source: DDO, North district, Mangan). However, the district administration thinks that it should focus more on creating more durable quality assets and the present 60 : 40 wage material ratio should be changed to 50 : 50 more so in hilly areas. However, it was informed by the DPC that the entire amount of Rs. 211 lakh was spent towards the wage bill of unskilled workers. The exact expenditure on the wages paid to skilled workers was not provided. Nearly Rs. 51 lakh was spent on materials which also included the wages paid for shifting the material from the road side to the worksite.

The contingencies which include administrative expenses accounted for Rs. 3.5 lakh (i.e., less than 1.3 per cent of available funds). The funds utilisation was the least in Mangan block while the rest of the blocks spent almost 82-84 per cent of funds provided. Thus, Mangan and Kabi Tingda were chosen for further investigation. The relatively low level of fund, low fund utilisation in Mangan may be because a higher percentage of worker population in the area are employed in the Government service sector as the district headquarter is located in Mangan. A significant proportion are also engaged in business and tourism sector so the participation in the REGS is less. The high rate of fund utilisation in Kabi may be because the livelihood options in the area are less, people are dependent on agriculture and livestock and they are more willing to participate in REGS which provides them work and income also during the lean period.

The financial and physical performance of north Sikkim district during 2006-07 can be gleaned from Tables 12 to 14. All the job card holders have not applied for work while all those who have applied for work were given

Table 12 : Physical performance of north Sikkim district (2006-07) under SREGS

Blocks	No. of HHs	Employment		No. of days of employment				Physically challenged (Others)	
		Job cards issued	Applications received	Emp. provided	Total	SC	ST		Women
Chungthang	875	875	818	818	69498	-	69498	15485	-
Kabi tingda	961	961	909	913 *	49255	-	48989	13691	266
Mangan	1570	1570	1371	1371	57111	1676	52383	30627	3052
Passingdong	1092	1092	1014	1014	66315	-	66315	17091	-
District	4498	4498	4112	4116	242179	1676	237185	76894	3318

* : A few were provided employment even without submission of applications formally.

employment. Even some applications from individuals (without cards) were also considered for employment, when applied. About 59 days of employment was shown under REGS to the sample workers at the district level. But intra-district variations were also found to be significant. For instance, on average, 42 days of employment was provided in Mangan block and on the other extreme, about 85 days of employment per household was generated in Chungthang block. Most of the SREGS workers are tribals. Women's participation was hardly 32 per cent; varying between 22 per cent (Chung Thang) and 54 per cent (Mangan).

Table 13 : Physical performance indicators - SREGS

Blocks	I ₁	I ₂	I ₃	I ₄	I ₅	I ₆	I ₇
Chungthang	93.5	100	85.0	-	100	22.3	-
Kabi tingda	94.6	100.4	53.95	-	99.46	27.8	0.54
Mangan	87.3	100	41.66	2.9	91.72	53.6	5.34
Passingdong	92.86	100	65.40	-	100	25.8	-
District	91.42	100	58.84	0.69	97.94	31.75	1.37

I₁ : Ratio of applications received to job cards issued;

I₂ : Ratio of employment provided to applications received;

I₃ : Average No. of days of employment provided;

I₄ : Share of SCs in employment; I₅ : Share of STs in employment;

I₆ : Share of women in employment; I₇ : Share of physically challenged in employment.

Table 14 : Financial performance indicators - SREGS

Blocks	I ₁	I ₂	
		Minimum	Maximum
Mangan	74.0	52.3 (Tingchim Mangshilla)	92.1 (Sentam)
Kabi Tingda	83.2	69.8 (Rongong Tumlong)	95.3 (Phensang)
Passingdong	81.5	49.4 (Sakyong Pentong)	95.5 (Lumrgaur Sanjtok)
Chungthang	82.83	71.0 (chungthang)	99.6 (Lachen)

I₁ : % of funds utilised.

I₂ : Minimum and maximum utilisation of funds across GPs (%).

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Bulk of the works undertaken in north Sikkim district during 2006-07 under REGS are 'Flood control and protection work,' 'Micro Irrigation' and 'Rural connectivity' (Table 15).

Table 15 : Asset creation (2006-07)

S.No.	Activity/work	Unit	No. of works completed	In progress
1	Flood control and protection work	95	55	40
2	Rural connectivity	23	13	10
3	Water conservation	8	7	1
4	Micro-irrigation	29	22	7
5	Renovation of traditional water bodies	2	2	-
6	Land development	1	1	-

Note: C= Completed; O= Ongoing

Source: Office Records, Office of DPC, North District Mangan, 2007



Jeepable road constructed under NREGS in Lachung, North District

All these works are appropriate to the rural context of Sikkim. Instead of selecting works on an ad hoc basis, it would be better to dovetail the works with the GP development plan with the natural resources management perspective.

Monitoring and Social Audit

At the district level, the DPC had received some complaints regarding:

- Incomplete job cards
- Non-payment of wages within 15 days
- Not-provision of employment
- Non-conduct of Social Audit for ensuring greater transparency and accountability

The DPC had issued directives in this regard to comply with and is also contemplating to fix two days in a month as Employment Guarantee Days and empanelment of an NGO for effective monitoring / implementation. The DPC monitored the implementation through field visits, review meetings with the RDAs and scrutiny of the monthly progress reports. However, systematic and regular monitoring by the State officials and other district officials is yet to take place. A need was also felt for involving some non-governmental organisations which could be associated as partners in the planning and implementation. Social Audit exercises were conducted in two GPUs in coordination with NIRD Guwahati and SIRD Karfector.

Performance at the Block Level: At the block level, the BDO, a newly created post in Sikkim is designated as the PO of REGS. Until 2006 there were no development blocks. The district had two sub-divisions, namely, Mangan and Chungthang, headed by two Sub-Divisional Development Officers (SDDOs). When the REGS came into force on 2 Feb. 2006, the SDDOs have functioned as the sub-divisional programme coordinators of REGS. The REGS works started w.e.f. 4/08/06 in Chungthang sub-division and from 26/07/07 in Mangan sub-division.

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The SDDOs received training at NIRD, Hyderabad, NIRD NERC-Guwahati and SIRD, Sikkim. In addition to the administration and development work of their blocks, they performed the REGS tasks like issue of muster rolls, scrutiny of plans, preparation of work estimates, payment of wages and monitoring. Of course, monitoring is a weak link as stated elsewhere. In Nov. 2006 the district was divided into four development blocks- Passingdong, Kabi Tingda, Mangan and Chungthang headed by the BDOs. The BDOs were then designated as the Programme Officer (PO) of REGS. The earlier SDDOs were re-designated as BDOs. The (new) BDOs received training on REGS at SIRD, Karfector. In the light of this, the quality of the programme implementation seems to have suffered in 2006-07. The financial performance of the two blocks is presented in the following Tables (Tables 16 to 22).

Table 16 : Financial allocation and utilisation (2006-07) under REGS – Kabi Tingda block

(Rs. lakh)

GP	Allocation	Releases	Funds Available	Funds Utilised
Kabi	15.00	15.00	15.00	12.36 (82.4)
Phensang	10.00	10.00	10.00	9.53 (95.3)
Rongong Tumlong	19.50	19.50	19.50	13.61 (69.8)
Men Rongong	17.00	17.00	17.00	15.67 (92.18)
Block	61.50	61.50	61.50	51.17 (83.2)

Figures in () are percentages of funds utilised out of available funds.

Note: Unspent balance of 2005-06 is nil.

It is very clear from Table 16 that 83 per cent of available funds were put to use in Kabi Tingda block in 2006-07. Across GPs, the utilisation of available funds varied widely from 70 per cent (Rongong Tumlong) to 95 per cent (Phensang). All the households with job cards had applied for work and were also provided employment in the four GPs (Table 17). However, the number of days of employment per household (among the work seekers)

Table 17 : Physical performance (2006-07) under REGS- Kabi Tingda block

Blocks	No. of HHs	Employment (Households)		No. of days of employment				Physically challenged (Others)		
		Regis- tered	Job cards issued	Applications received	Emp. provided*	Total	SC		ST	Women
Kabi	340	340	297	297	297	14539	-	14273	2371	266
Phensang	182	182	178	178	182	11218	-	11218	1837	-
Rongong	227	227	222	222	222	16011	-	4790	2462	-
Tumlong										
Men	212	212	212	212	212	18442	-	18442	7021	-
Rongong										
Block	956	956	909	909	913	60210	-	48723	13691	266

*: A few individuals without application were provided employment.

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varied considerably from 48 days (Kabi) to 87 days (Men Rongong). Such variations could be because the works selected were less in number and the Gram Panchayat had to adjust all the workers in the given number of Projects. In Kabi Gram Panchayat, only seven were undertaken though 297 people had to be provided with employment therefore, each household was given 48 number of employment days on an average. It also implies that the Gram Panchayat had given the number of employment days rather than based on the demand of the people. The share of women in total employment was as low as 16 per cent (Kabi and Phensang) and as high as 51 per cent (Rongong Tumlong) (Table 18). Thus, the inter-Gram Panchayat differences in SREGS performance are very evident.

Table 18 : Physical performance indicators - Kabi Tingda block

GP	I ₁	I ₂	I ₃	I ₄	I ₅	I ₆	I ₇
Kabi	100	100	48.9	-	100	16.3	1.8
Phensang	100	100	61.6	-	100	16.4	-
Rongong Tumlong	100	100	21.6	-	100	51.4	-
Men Rongong	100	100	87.0	-	100	38.1	-

I₁ : Ratio of applications received to job cards issued;

I₂ : Ratio of employment provided to applications received;

I₃ : Average No. of days of employment provided per household;

I₄ : Share of SCs in employment; I₅ : Share of STs in employment;

I₆ : Share of women in employment ; I₇ : Share of physically challenged in employment.

Table 19 : Asset creation (2006-07) - Kabi Tingda block

S. No.	Activity/work	Unit	No. of works		Employment (mandays)	Cost incurred (Rs.T)	
			Compl-eted	In progress		Total	Unskilled wage
1	Micro-irrigation work	11	8	3	19743© 4086(o)	-	©1678155/- (o)347310/-
2	Flood control protection	9	5	4	©10409 (o)5145		©884745/- (o)437325/-
3	Rural connectivity	8	5	3	9767© 5036(0)		©830195/- (o)428060/-
4	Land development	1	1	-	335©		©28475/-
5	Water conservation	2	1	1	2788© 1609(o)		©236980/- (o)136765/-

Source:Data constructed by the investigator by tabulating GP activity-wise data and cost incurred,respectively.

The performance of SREGS in Mangan block can be seen from Tables 20 to 22. The utilisation of funds was impressive in Sentam (93 per cent) and it was very disappointing in Tingchem – Mangshila. In respect of ‘average number of days of employment per household’, the observed variations are substantial: 18.3 days in Tingchem – Mangshilla to 67.2 days in Sentam. (It was learnt from the RDA Tingchem-Mangshilla that seven works had been sanctioned in the year 2006-07 and more people had come for work therefore, one household could be provided an employment of only 18.3 days on an average.) However, in Sentam GPU which is close to the District Administrative Office and the Block Office seems to have received significant guidance and assistance from the officers. This was the first Gram Panchayat Unit in the north district where REGS work was

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started. Social Audit was also conducted by NIRD and SIRD in the same village. Thus, such factors worked in raising the capacity and commitment of the stakeholders and subsequently the performance of REGS. There is a direct relationship between the extent of use of available funds and generation of employment per participating household. 'Flood control and protection' works are the major activities undertaken in this block (Table 22).

**Table 20 : Financial allocation and utilisation (2006-07)
under REGS – Mangan block**

GP	Unspent balance of 2005-06	Allocation	Releases	Funds Available	Funds Utilised
Ramthang- Tanek	Nil	10.00	10.00	10.00	7.95 (79.5%)
Namok- Swoyem	Nil	10.00	10.00	10.00	7.00 (70.0%)
Tingchem- Mangshilla	Nil	10.00	10.00	10.00	5.23 (52.3%)
Ringhim- Nampatam	Nil	15.00	15.00	15.00	11.00 (73.3%)
Sentam	Nil	10.00	10.00	10.00	9.32 (93.2%)
Toong-Naga	Nil	10.00	10.00	10.00	7.59 (75.9%)
Block Total	Nil	65.00	65.00	65.00	48.09 (73.8%)

Note: Figures in () are % utilisation of funds as percentage of funds available.

Table 21 : Physical performance (2006-07) under REGS - Mangan block

GP	No. of Households (hhs)	Employment (hhs)	No. of days of employment ('000)			Ave. No. of days of employment	
			Total	SC	ST		Women employment
Ramthang-Tanak	242	152	9350	-	9309 (99.6)	2947 (31.5)	61.5
Namok-Swoyem	234	204	8231	102 (1.24)	8043 (97.7)	-	40.3
Tingchem-Mangshilla	406	336	6155	504 (8.19)	5588 (90.79)	1531 (24.9)	18.3
Ringhim-Nampatam	365	365	12938	1000 (7.73)	9340 (72.2)	-	35.4
Sentam	172	163	10947	70 (0.64)	10837 (99.0)	3409 (31.1)	67.2
Toong Naga	151	151	9490	-	9266 (97.6)	1571 (16.5)	62.8
Block Total	1570	1371	57111	1676 (2.9)	52383 (91.7)	9458 (16.6)	41.7

Note : The figures in this Table acquire greater meaning, when read in the context of the indicators as shown below (I₁ to I₇)

I ₁ : Ratio of applications received to job cards issued	87.3	I ₄ : Share of SCs in employment	2.9
I ₂ : Ratio of employment provided to applications received	100.0	I ₅ : Share of STs in employment	91.7
I ₃ : Average No. of days of employment provided	41.7	I ₆ : Share of women in employment	16.6
I ₇ : Share of physically challenged in employment	0		

Table 22 : Asset creation (2006-07) - Mangan block

S. No.	Activity/work	Unit	No. of works		Employment (mandays)	Cost incurred (Rs. T)	
			Completed	In progress		Total	Unskilled wage
1	Flood control and protection	20	16	4	25920 (C) -	(C) 2203241 (O) 356665	
2	Water conservation	7	6	1	46140 (C)	(C) 392190 (O) 106250	
3	Rural connectivity	8	6	2	10581 (C)	(C) 899436 (O) 287300	
4	Micro-irrigation	5	5	-	7244	(C) 615745	

C : Completed works

O: On-going works

Source: Data constructed by Investigator by tabulating GP activity-wise data and cost, respectively.



Female workers under NREGS at Mangan Block

Performance at the GP Level: The performance of REGS was judged by analysing data obtained from the workers who have participated in the REGS in the selected works. The profiles of the selected workers are presented in Tables 23 to 27. The source of data for all the Tables is primary data collected from the sample workers in the field through the worker's schedule.

Table 23 : Distribution of workers: sex-wise

GP	Male	Female	Total
Toong Naga	20 66.7%	10 33.3%	30 100.0%
Kabi	18 60.0%	12 40.0%	30 100.0%
Total	38 63.3%	22 36.7%	60 100.0%

Table 24 : Distribution of workers: age group-wise

GP	Years < 20	21-35	36-60	Total
Toong Naga	2 6.7%	19 63.3%	9 30.0%	30 100.0%
Kabi	5 16.7%	18 60.0%	7 23.3%	30 100.0%
Total	7 11.7%	37 61.7%	16 26.7%	60 100.0%

Table 25 : Distribution of workers: occupation-wise

GP	Cultivator	Ag. Labour	Non-Ag. Labour	Artisan	Total
Toong Naga	24 80.0%	1 3.3%	4 13.3%	1 3.3%	30 100.0%
Kabi	14 46.7%	11 36.7%	5 16.7%		30 100.0%
Total	38 63.3%	12 20.0%	9 15.0%	1 1.7%	60 100.0%

Household size: Mangan: 2.87 Kabi: 2.63

Table 26 : Distribution of workers by landholding status

GP	Landless	Less than one acre	1.01-2.5 acres	2.51 - 5.00 acres	5.01 - 10.0 acres	Total
Toong Naga	1 3.4%	9 31.0%	9 31.0%	7 24.1%	3 10.3%	29 100.0%
Kabi		16 53.3%	7 23.3%	7 23.3%		30 100.0%
Total	1 1.7%	25 42.4%	16 27.1%	14 23.7%	3 5.1%	59 100.0%

Table 27 : Distribution of workers: economic status-wise

(Income per annum per household)

GP	<Rs. 5000	Rs. 5001 -10,000	Rs. 10,001-15,000	Rs. 15,001-20,000	Rs. 20,001-25,000	Rs. 25,001 +	Total
Toong Naga	4 13.3%	5 16.7%		4 13.3%	5 16.7%	11 36.6%	30
Kabi	-	7 23.3	11 36.7	6 20.0	5 16.7%	1 3.3	30
Total		11 18.3	16 26.7	10 16.7	10 16.7%	12 20.0%	60

Poverty line for Sikkim was Rs. 4656 per capita per annum during 2004-05. If we take household size of five for rural Sikkim, the household poverty line would be Rs.23280.

All the workers in the sample are tribals. Women's participation was about 33-40 per cent in the two selected GPs. Participation of youth was very high (above 70 per cent). Over 80 per cent of the workers earned their (household) incomes largely from agriculture. Interestingly, sub-marginal (less than one acre) and marginal (less than 2.5 acres) farmers together constituted about 70 per cent of the total workers. If we adjust the poverty line of 2004-05 for inflation, it would be above Rs. 25,000 during 2006-07. Thus, 80 per cent of the participating workers were poor and the rest were lower non-poor. Evidently, REGS in Sikkim has been catering mostly to the employment needs of the economically and socially disadvantaged though the Scheme is open to all.

Registration, Job Cards Issue and Work Application: Job cards were issued to all the households in the village. During the focus group discussion (FGD), it was informed that many workers are not aware of the various provisions of the Scheme. For instance, many workers (52 per cent) were ignorant that they should apply for the work and can actually demand not only the number of days but also the timing (specific period) for employment.

The approaches followed by the GPs in creating awareness among the people were not effective as is evident from Tables 28 to 31. At the time of this survey, the job cards were with the Panchayat Secretary and it was reported that the cards were taken to update the information. Almost 90 per cent of the job cards are in the name of males and no one has incurred any expenditure for obtaining job cards.

About 48 per cent of the sample respondents knew that they have to give applications for getting work. It is very clear that without job card and application, people do not get employment, of course with rare exceptions. During the field visits, we were informed that application for work was prepared by the Panchayat Secretary, on behalf of the workers. And when the sanction was made, applicants were then asked to participate in work (oral communication). Thus, it is a supply-driven Scheme and least of all a demand-driven one in practice.

Table 28 : Distribution of workers: job card registration and possession

GP	Who has registered for the job card		Possession of job card by self#	Expenditure incurred, if any, for getting job card	Keeping job card while going for work*	Making entries of employment and wages paid in the job card#
	Male	Female				
Toong Naga	28 93.3%	2 6.6%	No	Nil	1 3.3%	15 50.0%
Kabi	25 83.3%	5 16.7%	No	Nil	3 10.0%	24 80.0%
Total	53 88.3%	7 11.7%	No	Nil	4 6.7%	39 65.0%

#: It was with Panchayat Secretary.

* For others, the job card is left behind at home or it is with the Panchayat Secretary.

: Entries by RDA or other designated official (Panchayat Secretary).

Table 29 : Distribution of workers: awareness level of requirements for getting work

GP	Application to be given
Toong Naga	17 58.6%
Kabi	11 37.9%
Total	28

Table 30 : Distribution of workers: knowledge of methods of seeking work

GP	Can get work without job card		Can get work without application	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
Toong Naga	-	29 100.0%	-	17 100.0%
Kabi	3 10.3%	26 89.7%	1 8.3%	11 91.7%
Total	3 5.2%	55 94.8%	1 3.4%	28 96.6%

Note: Others could not answer the question.

Table 31 : Distribution of workers by extent of time taken for giving employment

GP	Given application for work	Time taken for giving employment		
		Immediately	11-15 days	> 15 days
Toong Naga	15 100.0%	1 6.7%	12 80.0%	2 13.3%
Kabi	5 100.0%	2 40.0%		3 60.0%
Total	20 100.0%	3 15.0%	12 60.0%	5 25.0%

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All the works in the village are being executed by the GPs. The registration, issue of job cards and execution of works and payment of wages are done by the GP assisted by the RDA. The workers are informed about the commencement of works by way of an oral message from the GP. works are usually executed under the supervision of members of GP or the RDA. In areas like Lachung and Lachen, where the traditional Dzumsa system (Village Council comprising the head of each household) prevails, the development works are initiated by the Dzumsa headed by the Pipen* and junior Pipen. The Dzumsa decides about the kind of work or place of implementation and the mode of execution. The Pipen calls for an open tender of development works. The highest bidder gets the work and has to give the tender amount immediately, which is distributed to the people. During the implementation of the work, each household has to send one adult member to work and payment is made thereafter. Thus, institutions like Dzumsas can be used successfully not only to mobilise people for (100 days of) employment, but also for planning and implementation of works and for bringing about women's empowerment and natural resource management systems.

Thus, a large awareness campaign will be necessary to create an environment where people can appreciate the significance of REGS and also be able to differentiate the REGS from other wage employment practices in the State.

The cost estimates of the works are displayed at the worksite and also at the *Gram Prasasan Kendra* (Table 32).

* The Pipen is a powerful person who exercises judicial functions as well. Whenever the Pipen calls for a meeting everybody has to comply with and anybody who fails would be boycotted.

Table 32 : Distribution of workers by awareness about type of works and participation in Social Audit

GP	Participation of self in selection of works	Works selected under REGS	Who participated in Social Audit / GS			Display of information on REGS works at GP
			Officials	Sarpanch	People in general	
Toong Naga	12	15 (17) 51.7%			- NA-	9
Kabi	11	10 (15) 33.3%			- No Response -	15
Total	23	25(32) 42.4%				24

Figures in () are number of workers reporting that Gram Sabha was conducted for selection of works.

NA: Not applicable since no Social Audit was conducted in the sample GPs.

The display mechanism has been a useful one to ensure transparency; details of the works started in each ward of the GPU such as the date of sanction, amount sanctioned etc., are proving useful while the works selected are major ones requiring involvement of a large number of workers, systematic planning and execution is required with no room for the current sporadic sanctioning process. The workers are paid in cash as there are no banking facilities or post offices near the Wards (Table 33). Workers were paid wages on 'time basis' and not on 'piece-rate' (Table 34). About 50 per cent of workers reported problems in getting full wage (i.e. minimum wage of Rs. 85 day). There was undue delay in payment of wages (beyond 30 days). It is disheartening to note that the mandatory facilities at the worksites, except drinking water, were not provided (Table 35). Attendance Registers were kept instead of Muster Rolls as per the information of workers.

Table 33 : Distribution of workers by type of wages and receipts of wages

GP	Time based	Wages paid – equally for men and women	Issue of wage slips	Mode of payment – cash	Problems in getting full wage		Receipt of Min. wage
					Yes	No#	
Toong Naga	27	30 100.0%	No	RDA & Ward Member	10	20 66.7%	30 100.0%
Kabi	26	30 100.0%		RDA & Panchayat	6	24 80.0%	30 100.0%
Total	53	60 100.0%			16	44 73.3%	60 100.0%

* Piece-rate or time-based; #: (delays were made in giving full wages).

Banking facilities in all the blocks are yet to be introduced. To ensure greater awareness and transparency, issue of wage slips needs to be introduced whereby all the relevant information like work code, number of workers, number of days worked and wages received can be recorded and made available both to workers and supervisors. This will be useful information for Social Audit. An employment register is maintained by the RDA where the household job card number and payments received are entered.

Table 34 : Distribution of workers by perceptions on type of wage and their preference

GP	Piece-rate work disadvantageous to females	Preference for time-based work
Toong Naga	15 57.7%	12 41.4%
Kabi	12 42.9%	20 66.7%
Total	27 50.0%	32 54.2%

Table 35 : Distribution of workers reporting availability of muster roll and mandatory facilities at worksite

GP	Muster roll	First Aid	Drinking water	Creche	Shade
Toong Naga	8 27.6%	-	16 55.2%	-	-
Kabi	8 26.7%	-	30 100.0%	-	-
Total	16 27.1%	-	46 78.0%	-	-

An attendance register is kept at worksite instead of the muster roll sheet, as it has chances of getting torn / spoiled. During the (2006-07), wages were paid once in a month but after having realised that it is mandatory for payment of wages within a fortnight, wages are now paid on fortnightly basis. There has been no discrimination against women in giving minimum wages as equal wages are received by men and women. The present mode of work under REGS is the time-rate basis but during the interactions with the people, it was understood that preference is more for piece-rate basis. However, people also felt that piece-rate basis may not be beneficial to physically challenged and women as their stamina cannot be compared with that of men (Table 34). The measurement of work is done by the Technical Assistant and recorded in the measurement book provided. Muster rolls are closed every 15 days. (The chances of not completing the work on time in 'time-basis approach' are high).

The financial and physical performance of REGS in the selected GPs, viz., Kabi (Tables 36 to 39) and Toong Naga are shown in Tables 40 to 43.

**Table 36 : Financial allocation and utilisation (2006-07) under REGS
– Kabi GP**

(Rs. in lakh)				
Unspent balance of 2005-06	Allocation	Releases	Funds Available	Funds Utilised
Nil	15.00	15.00	15.00	12.36 (82.4)

Performance of Kabi Gram Panchayat was good with 82 per cent of funds utilisation. Almost, 98 per cent of the employment has gone to STs but the share of women in the REGS employment during 2006-07 was hardly 16.3 per cent (Table 37). However, it is a happy augury for the progress of the Scheme that all the registered households were given job cards and that all the applicants were given employment. Some people have applied for job cards with a hope that it would be useful for some other purposes

Table 37 : Physical performance (2006-07) under REGS - Kabi

No. of HHs	Employment (Households)			No. of days of employment				
	Registered	Job cards issued	Applications received	Total	SC	ST	Women	Physical challenged (others)
375	340	340	297	14539	-	14273	2371	266
						(98.2)	(16.3)	

Table 38 : Physical performance indicators - Kabi

GP	I ₁	I ₂	I ₃	I ₄	I ₅	I ₆	I ₇
Kabi Tingda	87.3	100	48.9	-	98.2	16.3	1.83

I₁ : Ratio of applications received to job cards issued;
 I₂ : Ratio of employment provided to applications received;
 I₃ : Average No. of days of employment provided per household;
 I₄ : Share of SCs in employment; I₅ : Share of STs in employment;
 I₆ : Share of women in employment; I₇ : Share of physically challenged in employment.

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at a later date. Officials informed that workers were given employment on submission of application only. About 49 days of employment was provided, on an average, to all the participating households which means an (additional) income of Rs. 4156 per household. It was informed in the FGDs that work was given in the lean seasons only. However, in Toong Naga, more number of days of employment was provided (63 days) and so workers realised higher wage income per household (Rs. 5338) (Tables 39 to 43).

Table 39: Asset creation (2006-07) in Kabi

Activity/work	Unit	No. of works completed	Mandays generated	Cost incurred (Rs. '000) Unskilled wage
Micro-irrigation works	2	2	3617	307.4
Flood control and Protection	4	4	8853	752.5
Rural connectivity	1	1	2069	175.9

Table 40 : Financial allocation and utilisation (2006-07) under REGS (GP: Toong Naga)

(Rs. In lakh)					
GP	Unspent balance of 2005-06	Allocation	Releases	Funds Available	Funds Utilised
Tung Naga	Nil	10.00	10.00	10.00	8.06 (80.66)

Table 41 : Physical performance (2006-07) under REGS - Toong Naga

No. of HHs	Employment (Households)		No. of days of employment						
	Registered	Job cards issued	Applications received	Emp. provided	Total	SC	ST	Women	Physically challenged
151	151	151	151	151	9490	-	9490	1571	-
							(100)	(16.5)	

Table 42 : Physical performance indicators – Toong Naga

GP	I ₁	I ₂	I ₃	I ₄	I ₅	I ₆	I ₇
Tung Naga	100	100	62.8	-	100	16.6	-

I₁ : Ratio of applications received to job cards issued;

I₂ : Ratio of employment provided to applications received;

I₃ : Average No. of days of employment provided;

I₄ : Share of SCs in employment; I₅ : Share of STs in employment;

I₆ : Share of women in employment;

I₇ : Share of physically challenged in employment.



Box Drain built under NREGS in Kabi

Table 43 : Asset creation (2006-07) - Toong Naga

S. No.	Activity/work	Unit	No. of works completed	Employment (No. of mandays)	Cost incurred (Rs. '000) on unskilled workers
1	Micro-irrigation canal	1	1	1584	134.6
2	Drainage	1	1	1496	127.2
3	Micro-irrigation canal	1	1	1520	129.2
4	Drainage	1	1	1548	131.6
5	Drainage	1	1	1566	133.1
6	Drainage	1	1	1776	151.0
				Total	806.6



Box Drain built under NREGS in Kabi

Participation and Perception of Workers: In the sample villages, all the workers under REGS are tribals. The annual income of the households in 2006-07 ranged from Rs.10,000 to Rs.40,000 and their household size ranged from 5 to 10 members. Majority of the workers are males (83 per cent).

Most of the workers under SREGS are not aware of the Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, or their entitlements under it. They were not aware of the clause of 'unemployment allowance', provision of compensation if work is given beyond 5 km (additional wage), and the time limit for providing employment or for payment of wages. Since the REGS works were executed as per the Schedule of rate fixed by the PWD, the same was applied. All the workers are aware of the minimum wage of Rs.85 day. The awareness on the 'Right to Information' and 'Social Audit' was nil.

Information on REGS from other sources like newspapers, radios, TV, NGOs or NREGS Campaign was also nil. They were unaware of the *Right to Work* and their *Right to Livelihood Security concepts*. Disheartening to note they were not even aware that they could demand work and they could redress

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their grievances, if it was not given within 15 days. The job cards were mostly registered in the name of the male members of the household. However, it was also found that the job cards of majority of the workers were with the Panchayat Secretary. We were informed that these were taken to make entries. Only a few took them while going for REGS work, while the rest did not bother to take it. Nor they bothered to look at the entries in the job card.

Workers did not know that they have to apply for work and actually could demand the number of days and the period as well. The Panchayats and RDAs filled up the forms for people who needed employment and provided them work. In the GPs selected, employment was provided in the months of July-September. In a particular ward in Toong Naga all the workers got employment for 63 days; in one ward in Kabi, it was 49 days with an average wage income of Rs.4156 per household. However, in certain wards falling under Toong Naga, all the workers worked for as many as 111 days - the reason being the ward has had very less population and owing to the distance and remoteness of the area, people of other wards are not willing to come and work in these wards. The work was given on time basis and equal wages were paid to both the male and female workers by cash.

The (average) time taken to make the wage payment in Kabi was one month and in Toong Naga it was 18 days. Most of the workers reported that though the payment was delayed, they experienced no problem in getting full wages.

The market wages in Kabi varied between Rs.85 and Rs.50 day with three meals a day for similar work as in REGS and whereas workers in Toong Naga could get as much as Rs.100 per day owing to scarcity of workers. Evidently, some measures of impact of REGS on market wages in other works can be seen. There was no tangible impact on wages of unskilled workers in other activities in Kabi since the same rate as that of REGS has been prevailing for other activities, except in Toong Naga where it is different.

The works were shown within the GPs for all the workers. The Muster-rolls were not kept at worksites as there was risk of being spoilt and therefore, worksite specific Attendance Register was kept. The mandatory facilities such as First Aid, Creche and Shade were not provided. However, drinking water was always available from a nearby spring. People mostly brought tools on their own though some tools like Spade, Shovel and Hammer were provided at the worksite. No additional amount was paid for sharpening of tools (Table 44). Majority of the workers reported that no effort was made to reduce the drudgery of workers by providing improvised tools.

Table 44 : Distribution of workers by working conditions and facilities

Block	Work within the GP *	No provision of improvised tools for reducing drudgery #		Payment of money for sharpening tools
		Males	Females	
Mangan	28 96.6%	24 82.8%	24 82.8%	No
Kabi	30 100.0%	21 70.0%	21 70.0%	No
Total	58 98.3%	45 76.3%	45 76.3%	

*: All works were executed by GP.

#: The remaining workers reported that improvised tools were provided. The tools include hammer, shovel, spade spear etc.

One person was given work outside GP and was paid additional wages

Though Gram Sabhas (GSs) were conducted for the selection of the works, majority of the people did not participate in the GS. However, they were aware of the works selected through neighbourhood interaction. The GS

was attended by the Gram Panchayat President, Members and Ward Members. No GS was conducted specifically for organising Social Audit (for discussing progress of works, employment provided and wage paid). Since Social Audits were not organised, their utility was not known. However, a very small proportion reported rise in wages of unskilled workers in other works due to REGS (Table 44). Though the Vigilance and Monitoring Committees (VMCs) were formed, the people felt that they should participate actively (Table 45).

Table 45 : Distribution of workers by views on performance of Vigilance and Monitoring Committees (VMCs)

GP	Knowledge about formation of VMC	VMCs visiting worksites	VMCs participating in GS
Mangan	12 63.2%	7 38.9%	7 36.8%
Kabi	17 73.9%	8 34.8%	8 34.8%
Total	29 69.0%	15 36.6%	15 35.7%

Assets like micro-irrigation, canal and box drain were constructed under REGS work. Nearly two-thirds of the workers opined that the quality of assets created was good (Table 46). People were not really so much concerned about the long-term benefits of the assets created but were happy that they were being provided employment within their wards (Source: Focus Group Discussion). To some extent, the people are informed about the decisions of the GP on development programmes but much remains to be done in empowering the people in demanding services from the officials and GP (Table 47).

Table 46 : Distribution of workers by opinions on quality of assets created

GP(weight)	Very good (3)	Good (2)	Average (1)	Not Good (0)	Don't know (-)	Ave. Score (%)
Mangan	-	28	-	-	-	62.2
		100				
Kabi	-	30	-	-	-	66.7
		100				

Table 47 : Distribution of workers by perceptions on REGS benefits to the Community and Development Agencies

GP	Demanding services from Officials GP		Bringing together GP / CBOs, NGOs, Officials as partners	Realisation by workers about Right to work	Creation of useful assets in GP	Right to information
Toong Naga	3	8	-	14	1	No response
	10.3	27.6	-	48.3	3.4	
Kabi	1	11	-	16	-	
	3.3	36.7	-	53.3		
Total	4	19	-	30	1	
	6.8	32.2	-	50.0	1.7	

People could not decisively say whether REGS has helped in bringing GP, CBOs, NGOs and Officials together as partners in development process. There was also no tangible effect on migration of unskilled adults since the (push) migration is a rare phenomenon in Mangan block (average score was 9 per cent). In Kabi, the effect on migration was perceived to be

good (27 per cent). The GREF (General Reserve Engineering Force) of the Indian Army which maintains the National Highway, employs the local people in construction of roads and bridges and its maintenance for a daily wage rate of Rs.90 but had to commute away from their villages to the worksite. And now that they are getting work within their GP through REGS, temporary migration has stopped (Table 48).

Benefits: The tangible outcomes of REGS include the number of days of employment for the participating households and the (additional) incomes accrued. On an average, the workers have got 51.5 days of employment and wage income of Rs. 4378 per household. However, most of them obtained employment for less than 60 days in 2006-07 (Table 49). Therefore, if the GPs plan their works well in advance, the demand for employment can be fully met.

The major benefit of the programme is wage employment to the households during the lean period in the villages; while there is no bar to take up works at any time. There was also improvement in the infrastructure access to the participating households, as durable assets/ services like jhora training, box drains, rural connectivity (roads) proved useful to the community in the wake of uneven topography and inaccessibility of the area. Participation in the Gram Sabha to a certain extent had brought about awareness about government schemes and their role (say) in the choice of works to be taken up in the village (Tables 49 to 51).

Table 48 : Distribution of workers by perceptions on REGS and reduction of migration of unskilled adults

GP (weights)	At household level				At village level			
	Considerably (2)	Mode-rately (1)	No effect (0)	Cannot say (-) (%)	Considerably (2)	Mode-rately (1)	No effect (0)	Cannot say (-) (%)
Toong Naga	1	3	7	18	1	3	7	18
	3.4	10.3	24.1	62.1	3.4	10.3	24.1	62.1
Kabi	4	13	2	11	1	14	3	12
	13.3	43.3	6.7	36.7	3.3	46.7	10.0	40.0

Note: No score was given to the 'cannot say' responses. The average weighted score was calculated excluding the responses of the former type.

Table 49 : Number of days of employment generated under SREGS

No. of hhs. (sample)	Total (REGS) participating workers	Average no. of workers per household *	Average No. of days of employment
60	60	1	51.5

*:Most of the workers who took part in REGS are STs.

Table 50 : Distribution of workers by number of employment days in the sample GPs

No. of days of employment			
41-60	61-80	81-100	Total
52	4	4	60

Table 51 : Distribution of workers by employment opportunities sought / provided under SREGS

GP	Employment provided per household	Average wage income per household * (Rs.)
Toong Naga	55.14**	4687.00
Kabi	48.00	4080.00
Total	51.51	4378.00

* : from NREGS.

** : Less than the estimate derived (69 days) from the GP data.

The workers were asked to share their views on the effectiveness of SREGS implementation in the study GPs and the contribution of GP, officials, community and local institutions to the observed effectiveness. Also opinions were sought as to whether SREGS helped the people in knowing

about the decision making at GP (Transparency). The responses in this regard are presented in Tables 52 to 57.

The inferences from these Tables are summarised here:

- * In the study GPs, the workers rated the effectiveness of SREGS implementation as average (scores between 47- 48 per cent)
- * For this average performance, Sarpanch and GPs contribution was rated high (55-58 per cent) followed by officials (40 per cent). The effect of community awareness levels and local institutions on the performance of SREGS was insignificant.
- * The decisions at GP level were more transparent (32 per cent) in Kabi compared to Toong Naga (17 per cent). On the whole, transparency in decision-making in the local bodies was found to be moderate (25 per cent).

Table 52 : Distribution of workers by views on effectiveness of REGS implementation

GP (weights)	Very effective (3)	Effective (2)	Less effective (1)	Not effective (0)	Cannot say (-)	Total	Score (%)
Toong Naga	1	17	5	-	5	28	46.6
	3.6	60.7	17.9		17.9		
Kabi		21	1		8	30	47.8
		70.0	3.3		26.7		
Total	1	38	6		13	58	
	1.7	65.5	10.3		22.4		

Table 53 : Distribution of workers by opinions on contribution of Sabhapati and GP members to effective implementation of SREGS

GP (weights)	Large extent (2)	To some extent (1)	Not at all (0)	Cannot say (-)	Total	Score (%)
Toong Naga	12	11		6	29	58.3
	14.4	37.9		20.6		
Kabi	9	15		6	30	55.0
	30.0	50.0		20.0		
Total	21	26		12		
	35.6	44.1		20.3		

Table 54 : Distribution of workers by opinions on contribution of officials to effective implementation of SREGS

GP (weights)	Large extent (2)	To some extent (1)	Not at all (0)	Cannot say (-)	Total	Score (%)
Toong Naga	1	22		6	29	40.0
	3.4	75.9		20.7		
Kabi	0	24		6	30	40.0
Total	0	80.0		20.7		
	1	46		12	59	

Table 55 : Distribution of workers by opinions on contribution of awareness levels of community to effective implementation of SREGS

GP (weights)	Large extent (2)	To some extent (1)	Not at all (0)	Cannot say (-)	Total	Score (%)
Toong Naga				29	29	-
Kabi				30	30	-
Total				59		

Table 56 : Distribution of workers by opinions on contribution of local institutions to effective implementation of SREGS

GP (weights)	Large extent (2)	To some extent (1)	Not at all (0)	Cannot say (-)	Total	Score (%)
Toong Naga		1		28	29	1.6
		3.4		96.6		
Kabi				30	30	-
				100.0		
Total		1		58		0.83
		1.7		98.3		

Table 57 : Distribution of workers by opinions on perceptions on improved knowledge of GP in decision-making

GP (weights)	Large extent (2)	To some extent (1)	Not at all (0)	Cannot say (-)	Total	Score (%)
Toong Naga	1	8		20	29	16.6
	3.4	27.6		69.0		
Kabi		19	1	10	30	31.6
	-	63.3	3.3	33.3		
Total	1	27	1	30		24.6
	1.7	45.8	3.3	50.8		

CHAPTER V

Views of the Stakeholders

(Officials, elected representatives, NGOs, workers)

- * 'The decision-making process needs to be decentralised from the nodal department down the line.'
- * 'The Junior Engineers appointed for the REGS should be stationed at the Block Office rather than district office.'
- * 'Tasks like technical guidance, providing materials, provision of worksite facilities etc., should be entrusted to the PO and his technical officers/staff.'
- * The pace of monitoring of works from the district and blocks should be increased and grassroots monitoring and concurrent evaluation should be undertaken by the reputed Institutes / NGOs.
- * After the selection of works, finalisation of estimates and sanction of projects, Panchayats are forced to chase the project like a contractor. This should be avoided and improved systems created.
- * All the required materials should be made available at worksites, because even when provision is made by the panchayats, it takes about 7 to 8 months and many visits to the district headquarters for procurement.
- * Funding of tools and implements should be sanctioned simultaneously with the sanction of works.
- * National Food For Work (FFW) programme is better than NREGS.
- * The arrangements for sand, gravel and timber are done by the Panchayats. The private transportation cost differs from the Govt. rates and the difference of which the Panchayat has to bear. Therefore, it would be convenient if the materials are made available at the site and on time by the officials.

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- * Process study like the one being carried out should be conducted every year by SIRD as it makes the delivery system more alert and facilitates effective stakeholders' participation.
- * Works like land development, watersheds, works on lands of STs/SCs should be taken on priority basis under SREGS.
- * Compensation for additional distance travelled should be reduced to one km and instead of 5 kms in hilly and difficult areas.
- * Higher minimum wages should be provided for physically challenged persons working in SREGS.
- * Planning and implementation of a 'Rights Based' Programme can lead to a responsive delivery system in future. But with current levels of ignorance and dependency it is likely to take a long time before the people are enabled to actually exercise their 'right to work and information' for their socio-economic upliftment.
- * There is a need to enable people to demand services from the panchayats and officials and also to motivate the stakeholders to bring greater commitment to eradicate poverty and deprivation.

CHAPTER VI

Field Observations

- * During the Focus Group Discussion it was observed that people have not been fully able to realise the difference between NREGS and the earlier wage employment programmes and other schemes implemented by Panchayat. They are not aware of their entitlements and the provision of unemployment allowance, if work is not provided within fifteen days. Most people said that they should be "Given Employment when the Panchayat Starts the Project" which certainly points to the state of affairs and the need for massive awareness campaign. This is a phenomenon that is not only prevalent in the North District but also the rest of the other districts which have been covered in NREGS in the recent phase. Therefore, the percentage of households who got employment within fifteen days of demand, which is relatively high, may not be reliable as it was the RDAs who initiated the application as the people are unaware of the need to file application for demand-based employment.
- * It was also observed that in a Gram Panchayat ward all the participating households have worked for the same number of days. In one of the wards in Kabi all the workers have worked for 48 days, similarly in one ward in Tung Naga all the workers have been given 111 days of employment whereas in another ward all the workers have been provided 70 days of employment. It points to the fact that the people have been allotted employment according to the need of the project rather than the need of the people.
- * The Perspective Plan and Shelf of Projects have not been prepared. Works are being put up for sanction as and when demanded by the villagers. Different wards in the Gram Panchayat unit demand works at different time and are sanctioned randomly without long-term perspective. This creates a chance where works cannot be given within 15 days of demand, and the selected works cater only to the

influential few in the village. Initially in 2006-07, all the GPUs were allotted Rs. 10 lakh or more under REGS and according to the demands of the GPU release of funds was demand - based.

- * It was noted that most of the Panchayats themselves were not clear about the provisions of the Scheme ,though they reported that they had received training from SIRD, more intensive training on Planning, Social Audit and RTI was seen as essential .Such intensive training was also felt imperative for the BDOs and RDAs. It was rather very frustrating for the researcher when most of the queries from the schedules canvassed elicited responses like 'does not know', cannot say' or an apathy attitude from the stakeholders.
- * It was also noted that more than one job card was issued to a single household (even if the son was not married and still lived with his parents he was issued another job card).
- * Except for the two Social Audit exercises carried out by NIRD and SIRD, virtually no Social Audits were carried out and NREGS was just confined to providing employment to the people. The other aspects of the Scheme like bringing about greater efficiency in the delivery system and accountability was ignored. This was probably because of lack of a strong civil society and the empowerment of the people. Though there are a few NGOs in the North District, they were not in any way associated with the Scheme. The Social Audit was confined to verification of signatures for completion certificate from the vigilance and monitoring committee etc. It was felt necessary that the VMCs should be trained to carry out the assigned function of Social Audit and technical support. It was also considered necessary that the tenure of VMC members should not be terminated every year but at least one-third of them are retained in office every year to maintain continuity.
- * Lack of effective monitoring was also a weak part in the Scheme. Though the State Government has prescribed specific Schedules of Visits by district level and block level officials, yet such officials

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have not visited the worksites. There was no role for NGOs and CBOs in monitoring yet and the MIS was not effective. Certain indicators need to be developed at each level (for MIS) and independent agencies be developed for validation and revalidation.

- * Record keeping and documentation is weak. A proper system of data entry needs to be devised, only rudimentary data project-wise were available. The investigator had to compile project-wise data at the GP level and construct the block level and district level data.
- * Some of the works selected were non-productive without any impact on the socio-economic growth of the village. More productive schemes like horticulture and rejuvenation of cardamom, ginger plantation, which has direct benefits to the people should be taken up. People were very enthusiastic about works to be taken on private lands of SC/ST which has not been so far explored. However, it is suggested that such works should be taken on the basis of economic backwardness criteria rather than on the ST/SC status.
- * Since the distance travelled in the hilly terrain could not be equated with the distance travelled in the plains, it is necessary to amend the provision of allowance for extra distance travelled from 'more than 5 km' to 'more than 2 km'.
- * The quality of work has also suffered because of the reluctance of the skilled labourers to work in the Scheme. The skilled labourers were unwilling to work with daily wage rate of Rs. 85. If their payment was made from the material component, which is provided from the district office, the bills are cleared only at the completion of the project. This would entail delay in their wage payment and thus their exclusion in the Scheme caused a major setback to the quality of the project.
- * There was some confusion regarding the 4 per cent Administrative Cost meant for the District Programme Coordinators and this was discussed during the Consultative Workshop held on 3 July 07 at

SIRD. It was unclear as to what per cent of fund could be utilised for IEC and whether they could hire staff at the Gram level.

- * The share of employment (ref: performance Indicator) which is as low as 24 per cent may not be true because the Muster Roll which essentially is made in the name of the job card, mostly happens to be the male members. As such during the field interaction, it was observed that in the worksite though more women had come to work, the same was not reflected in the official report.
- * The worksite mandatory facilities like shade, creche and First Aid were negligible. Effective participation of CBOs and trained VMCs would ensure provision of mandatory facilities and ensure improved decision-making of the Gram Panchayat.
- * The lack of banking facility was another setback. Since the wages were paid in cash unlike in other States where the payments are directly remitted to the workers' bank accounts, the RDAs are overburdened and timely payments were hampered.
- * People still feel that all of them have to go to work only when Panchayat gets the work sanctioned and thus, there still is a long road to be walked where people realise that it is a rights-based scheme wherein they can go to work and get it on demand.

However, it was observed that the Scheme is well received by the workers who have participated and they are enthusiastic to work within their village. Though there have been some initial delays in payment of wages, all the workers are getting full wages and the prescribed minimum wage rate. The gender bias in payment of wages unlike in other States is non-existent. There is no discrimination in wage payment between men and women and all could receive full wages. Hence the lapses are just initial teething problems in Sikkim. Given its low population base, less redtapism in bureaucracy and Good Governance features, it has every potential to become one of the best performing States in the REGS.

CHAPTER VII

Major Findings and Suggestions

The performance of NREGA in Sikkim during 2006-07 was said to be satisfactory / moderate, if we consider its funds utilisation, average number of days of employment generated per (participating) household, coverage of women workers etc. But the field level data do not lend much support to this view. The low levels of fund utilisation and employment provision per household are attributable to the moderate levels of awareness among the NREGS workers, little participation of the rural communities in the entire planning and implementation, inadequate programme management and delivery and to some extent official apathy (For example, the 'Programme Officer' task is an additional charge to the BDOs. Hence full-time involvement and associated management skills are wanting). These are some of the factors responsible for inter-block and inter-GP variations in the performance of the SREGS.

No systematic approach seems to have been followed in the preparation of perspective development plans. The officials and GP level functionaries need to be supported through manuals and training for improved management of the SREGS. In States like Sikkim which experience floods, land slides, soil erosion frequently, SREGS can support ecological balance and livelihood security to the agriculture-dependent population, if planned well. A natural resources-centric Plan would be more appropriate.

About 80 per cent of workers who participated in SREGS are poor. The workers from the study GPs reported obtaining about 51 days of employment and about Rs. 4378 of wage earnings per household from SREGS.

The workers perceived that SREGS implementation was just effective (48 per cent) and members of GP and officials contributed to this degree of success. The opinion about the quality of assets created was good (62-67 per cent). It is disheartening that most of the workers reported that their

participation in REGS has not helped in demanding work from officials and GP. Only 50 per cent of the workers informed that they have realised the 'Right to work'. Impact of SREGS on reduction of migration was evident in Kabi GP only. Since participation of people in Gram Sabhas for identification of works was insignificant and that the Social Audits were not conducted, the transparency and accountability dimensions of REGS received a setback.

A few suggestions for making the planning and implementation process effective are outlined below:

Gram Sabha: Steps should be taken to ensure that more people participate in the Gram Sabha by establishing the credibility of the decisions taken in the Gram Sabha and in making aware that people have to plan for their own development and village development. Preparatory steps to ensure participation of the people in the Gram Sabha through wide publicity (e.g. mobile announcement using mikes, drum beatings, door to door messages) need to be doubled up to mobilise the people for participation in Gram Sabha. Reputed NGOs/SHGs, Cooperatives, Youth Clubs etc., should be entrusted with the task of social mobilisation and in particular for educating the community about its role in Gram Sabhas and Social Audit. All adult members of the GP (including women) should actively involve in the preparation of GP Development Plan and Annual Action Plans. It should not be construed as a mechanical exercise to be carried out by the officials. If perspective plans with natural resources management focus are prepared, then the causal factors of poverty can be better addressed. The lapses like irregular conduct of Gram Sabhas, specifically Social Audit of the works under REGS (a practice noticed elsewhere in the country), should be acted upon to bring greater transparency and accountability. Given the delays in providing employment, it is suggested that Gram Sabhas for selection of works should be conducted before the commencement of the financial year and sanctions be accorded to a shelf of projects, at the earliest.

Awareness and IEC: During the consultative workshop of the Programme Officers (POs) and DDOs at SIRD, Karfectar during 3 July 07 and also through our field interactions, it was understood that the IEC activities need to be fortified. Intensive use of audio-visual aids is necessary to bring about awareness. Given the uncertainty in regard to the reach of newspapers on time due to the remoteness and recurrent road blockages in the area, use of mobile vans and posters in pictorial formats is advisable. Films based on the SREGS elaborating the concept, objective and steps to be followed at each stage are necessary to generate greater participation and confidence building, and for effective performance. The job cards can be used as one important tool for creating awareness by changing the design and layout in a way that it gives information about the procedure to be followed for getting the job and entitlements in a pictorial format on the cover and back pages (as is done in Andhra Pradesh).

Selection of Works: It was observed during the focus group discussions that there is need to adequately address the question of gender justice and the problems of the physically challenged. The permissible works should be broad enough to include such works which are women-friendly and not physically taxing so that women and the physically challenged can also participate effectively and gainfully.

The causes of poverty in the region are mainly attributed to low productivity of small land landholdings and more so due to drastic reduction in the area and production of principal cash crops (largely cardamom, orange and ginger) in the recent years. The incomes of the small farmers have significantly reduced due to falling productivity / output of these cash crops. Deforestation, massive soil erosion and landslides over the years have degraded the quality of the soil and its productivity. The orchard yields have also significantly reduced as the plants are aged and are outliving their economic life span. The works undertaken in SREGS have to be directed towards addressing these causes of poverty but there is a need to take up some specific activities like land development (e.g., terracing and contour bunding), afforestation, regeneration and rejuvenation of

cardamom plantations in private land of the tribals and the poor farmers. Water harvesting structures would also benefit the people as just about 11 per cent of the gross cropped area in Sikkim is irrigated.

Convergence with other Programmes: There was no systematic effort to bring convergence of REGS with other development programmes nor any attempt is made to pool the resources. The District Programme Coordinator (DPC) should take the initiative in this regard by converging the development programmes of different departments (more so, watershed, afforestation, soil conservation) in the district with SREGS.

Manpower: The Rural Development Assistants (RDAs) at the GP perform multi-faceted tasks like maintenance of records and employment registers, entry in job cards, payment of wages, maintenance of accounts of the REGS in addition to their mandatory tasks as RDAs. Thus, it is necessary that more manpower—junior engineers and accountants should be deputed to the Panchayat unit to carry out administrative and supervisory functions since the RDAs are entrusted with other functions as well. The induction of larger numbers of Gram Rogar Sewaks would increase the efficiency. Since, GPs are provided with computers, use of IT for Planning, Implementation and Monitoring should receive top priority. The software development on lines similar to that Andhra Pradesh and NIC with some more improvements would certainly benefit the DPC and PO in effectively monitoring the SREGS.

Wage-Material Ratio: The cost of materials is relatively higher in the hilly region since they have to be procured from long distances. The delivery agents include the cost of transportation of materials from the unloaded road site to the worksite. It was reported that it is difficult to adjust the wages of the skilled labourers in the material component and maintain the 60 : 40 ratio. Thus, problems were faced in completing the works on time with the remaining mandays. The district administration argues that the wage-material ratio could be increased in favour of the material cost to create better quality of works. The State Government can build a case after analysing the expenditure data in this regard.

Induction of Non-governmental Agencies: The SREGS being a people-centric programme emphasising grassroots planning and implementation, there is a need for non-government agencies (NGOs) and community based organisations (CBOs) to play a vital role in enhancing the performance of SREGS. So far the involvement of NGOs and CBOs / SHGs in the scheme is far from encouraging though there is ample scope for these agencies to play a critical role in the REGS. The NGO movement is yet to gain momentum in Sikkim. Therefore, there is need to strengthen the NGOs and CBOs and to involve them in the development process. Certain aspects of the programme like awareness campaigns, social audits, improving the accountability procedures etc., require greater involvement of NGOs and CBOs in REGS. These agencies should be provided with necessary wherewithal (e.g. capacity enhancement) to act as catalysts. Their services can bring greater transparency in the implementation of RD and other programmes. They can also be involved in the (community based) monitoring of the programmes. Though the State has not conducted any Social Audit during 2006-07, it has issued guidelines in 2007 for organising the same. It would be worthwhile if Social Audits are conducted throughout the year.

Natural Resource Management under SREGS: The livelihood security of the people is intrinsically dependent upon the sustainability of natural resources and the people in Sikkim have been living in harmony with nature. Given the fragility and sensitivity of the eco-system in the State and its location on a high seismic zone, it is essential that development goes hand in hand with management and conservation of natural resources. Every year, during the monsoon, Sikkim faces a herculean task of maintaining its roads due to land slides, floods and flow of debris disconnecting the roads for months together. The landslides and debris erode the fertile top soil and as a result the quality of the soil degrades every passing monsoon. The receding glaciers is another alarming phenomenon occurring in the North Sikkim due to indiscriminate deforestation and climate change. All these disasters have to be mitigated / eliminated before it spells a greater disaster for Sikkim. Natural resource

management works like slope and toe treatment and massive afforestation should be carried on simultaneously while creating employment opportunities under SREGS. The NREGS is an apt programme for Sikkim which can strike a right balance between socio-economic development and environmental balance by preparing a NRM based development plan for each GP in the State.

Conclusion

Perceiving REGS as a programme for giving just 100 days of employment to rural households is unjust since NREGS addresses several inter-related development issues. Nowhere in the paradigm of development has such a historical programme been formulated and implemented. It has several elements to bring development in its truest sense – raising the capacities of the people and enabling them to participate in the decisions affecting their lives, environmental protection and promotion, emergence of good governance with sustainable outcomes, greater accountability and responsive delivery systems.

CHAPTER VIII

Towards Effective Implementation of SREGS

The experiences of Sikkim in planning and implementation of NREGA during 2006-07 are mixed even while leaving a lot of hope. Due to lack of clarity on some aspects of the SREGS and its preparatory arrangements, the REGS could not be grounded before August 2006. The non-formation of the State Employment Guarantee Council (SEGC) may be construed as an opportunity lost to the State in receiving good advisory support. The creation of blocks and BDO post in this year and making the latter as Programme Officer (as additional charge) has probably caused a setback to effective implementation in this initial period.

Inadequate training of the GP level officials and elected representatives in participatory plan preparation is also a disturbing feature. In fact, given the topographical conditions and problems of agriculture including plantation crops, NRM-based GP Perspective Plan, would be most appropriate. Developing a cadre of para-professionals by SIRDs in the field of local level planning, would enable the GP, CBOs, local youth in the preparation of development plans in participatory mode.

The awareness levels were expected to be high given the high literacy levels but the strategy followed for information dissemination on NREGA, RTI and Social Audit (i.e. hoardings and coverage in print media) was not found to be effective. Involvement of NGOs and CBOs, after equipping them with necessary information and skills, would be more effective in social mobilisation and community participation. In fact, these agencies can facilitate conduct of Social Audits more effectively.

The VMCs were constituted recently and greater representation of women and ST members of GP and CBOs in VMCs would strengthen the monitoring function. Social Audits should be made mandatory and release of funds to GP should be linked to conduct of Social Audits and follow-up action on the irregularities noticed. MIS needs to be established at the earliest and

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all officials should be asked to make available and accessible details of their field visits and inspection reports for public scrutiny and to ensure transparency.

Rural development assistants are attending to several tasks including SREGS. Deploying more staff (Accountants and IT personnel) at GP level would enhance the quality of implementation. State should use the computer softwares (developed by TCS, NIC,...) to plan and monitor the various works in different GPs periodically.

The moderate tangible benefits of REGS (in terms of employment) could be justified due to delays in execution in 2006-07. Our field observations reveal that it is not a demand-driven Scheme and the realization of 'right to work' and 'right to information' would certainly be a time-taking process. The recent improvements in the planning and implementation of REGS suggest that Sikkim would also be able to make use of this Scheme to maintain ecological balance, improve productivity of agriculture (including plantation) and ensure employment and livelihood security in the years to come.

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Centre for Wage Employment and Poverty Alleviation

Vision

To become a nodal research and training centre with special focus on Rural Wage Employment Programmes and Poverty Alleviation.

Thrust Areas

Training activities relating to Planning and Management of Wage Employment Programmes, Assessment of Impact of Rural Development Programmes on Rural Poverty Reduction and Livelihood Security.

Instruments

- Conducting research on poverty and sustainable livelihoods
- Assess periodically the effectiveness of wage employment programmes
- Documentation of successful cases / best practices
- Develop training modules and course material in a partnership mode
- Organize training programmes for RD functionaries of wage employment programmes
- Conduct workshops on the major development issues of poverty, labour markets and wage employment programmes to sensitise policy makers.

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