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# Pathway to Progress: Evaluating the Impact of Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY) in South-West Garo Hills of Meghalaya

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**Abstract:**

Access to roads is the key component that significantly improves the quality of life. The road facilities for the rural residents, such as transportation services, easy access to marketplaces, and better employment opportunities, promote economic growth and boost access to education, healthcare, and other resources. Such improvement leads to enhanced living standards and poverty reduction. Rural roads in India have been constructed under a number of government development projects, including the National Rural Employment Programme, the Rural Landless Employment Guarantee Programme, the Employment Assurance Scheme, etc. Though these developmental projects extend the length of rural roads, a lack of sufficient maintenance has resulted in rapid deterioration of the roads, rendering them inaccessible during rainy seasons. Addressing these massive rural road connectivity gaps, the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY) was launched on December 25, 2000, to provide all-weather road access to previously inaccessible communities. It also facilitates upgrading existing roads where all eligible habitations meet the population size requirement for the scheme for all-weather road connectivity. This study is an attempt to evaluate the various outcomes of PMGSY on rural development in Meghalaya's South-West Garo Hills. The paper assesses the current status of the scheme and offers recommendations for future research and policymakers.

**Keywords:** Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY), rural development, road connectivity, transportation and communication in Meghalaya.

## 1. Introduction:

Roads are a key component that improves the quality of living. The road serves as a path for progress in rural areas, elevating living standards and reducing poverty by connecting rural people to essential services, markets, and employment opportunities, thereby promoting economic growth and enhancing access to

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education, healthcare, and other vital resources. Roads function like veins, creating a complex network that enables access to various essential activities. Rural roads, specifically, ensure connectivity to the most remote parts of the country, providing last-mile access. When rural road construction and improvements are combined with other infrastructure developments and targeted interventions, they have proven to be effective tools in alleviating poverty in rural areas (Tiwari & Verma, 2022, p.131).

Rural roads are also an integral part in improving socio-economic conditions by increasing agricultural productivity, generating employment, and promoting access to essential public services, which serve as lifelines for the majority of rural inhabitants (Parida, 2014, p.63). Historically, rural roads in India had been constructed under several government developmental projects, including the National Rural Employment Programme, the Rural Landless Employment Guarantee Programme, and the Employment Assurance Scheme. There were several schemes for the construction of roads implemented; However, these constructions were insufficient, especially in rural remote areas. The roads constructed were suitable only for animal-drawn carts and pedestrians. The arrival of fast and heavy vehicles has led to quick deterioration and a lack of adequate maintenance, rendering them inaccessible during the monsoon season. In order to address this massive rural road connection gap, India's president announced a new program in October 1999 to develop all-weather roads connecting all villages and habitations across the country. In January 2000, the government formed the National Rural Road Development Committee to give precise suggestions for the way forward. The Prime Minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, then introduced the Prime Minister's Rural Roads Program (Pradhan Mantri Gramme Sadak Yojana [PMGSY]), which was launched on 25 December 2000 (Herrera Dappe et al. 2021, p.19). The objective of this program is to provide all-weather road connectivity, including culverts and cross-drainage structures, to rural areas with populations of at least 500 in the plains and 250 in hill states, tribal districts, and desert areas. It also facilitates upgrading existing roads where all eligible habitations meet the population size requirement for all-weather road connectivity (Biswas et al. 2018, p.31). Therefore, this study evaluates the various effects of PMGSY on rural development in Meghalaya's South-West Garo Hills.

The paper assesses the current status of the scheme and offers recommendations for future research and policymaking. The paper is divided into five parts: introduction, road connectivity in South-West Garo Hills, economic and social impact, implementation challenges, recommendations and conclusion. The first part introduces the PMGSY scheme and its aim to boost road connectivity in rural areas, focusing on the South-West Garo Hills District of Meghalaya. It explains why roads are crucial for development and outlines the study's purpose: to assess how PMGSY impacts rural regions in the state. The second part examines road connectivity in the South-West Garo Hills before PMGSY and how the scheme was

implemented. It also provides details on the number of roads built, villages connected, and the progress made so far. The third part discusses how improved roads have positively impacted both the economy and society in rural areas. The fourth part of the article identified challenges faced while implementing PMGSY in Meghalaya such as Geographic obstacles, delays in projects, and financial limits. It also considers how local communities play a key role in this process. The last part of the article provides recommendations for enhancing the PMGSY scheme by improving road maintenance, strengthening governance practices, and promoting greater community involvement. These strategies are crucial for sustaining the long-term benefits of the scheme. It also summarizes the study's findings, highlighting PMGSY's positive impact on rural development in Meghalaya. It underscores the vital role that road connectivity plays in driving future growth and development in the region.

**The South-West Garo Hills:**

South West Garo Hills is Meghalaya's smallest district, carved out of West Garo Hills district on August 7, 2012 (History | South West Garo Hills District | India, n.d.). The district has an area of 822 sq km, of which nearly one-third is covered with hills and the rest is a plain zone interspersed with small hillocks (South West Garo Hills District | Government of Meghalaya | Administration | India, n.d.). The district has 177556 population as per the 2011 Census. The district has four Community and Rural Development (C&RD) Blocks, where 542 villages are spread out (Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Government of Meghalaya, 2022). This shows that the district is predominantly rural and most of the families were under the Below Poverty Line (BPL). Economically, the majority of the residents rely on agricultural sources for their daily livelihood. Weekly markets also play an important role in the regional economy because they serve as trading hubs for agricultural commodities. Therefore, rural road connections play a significant role in the regional economy and overall development of the people in this region.

**2. Road connectivity in the South-West Garo Hills before PMGSY:**

Villagers in South-West Garo, before the implementation of PMGSY, had road infrastructure that in poor condition, with many abandoned roads, and therefore, residents faced a lot of challenges. Many roads connecting villages are not all-weather, leaving many rural settlements isolated and with limited or no access. Due to a lack of good roadways, people struggle to reach main marketplaces, healthcare facilities, and educational institutions, and maintain law and order, making these challenges particularly detrimental to socio-economic development. Poor road conditions or unsealed (kutcha) roads become impassable during the monsoon season, limiting transportation and access to necessities.

The PMGSY was implemented in the South-West Garo Hills to address these problems and to build durable all-weather road connectivity that would allow year-round access to isolated settlements. To provide a lifeline for the neighbouring communities, the execution of PMGSY began with the identification of important rural roads. Special emphasis was placed on connecting habitations with populations greater than 250 in the South-West Garo Hills. To facilitate better and timely implementation of the project, the local authority collaborated closely with the national and state government authorities, and contractors were hired to build roads using standardised criteria that assure durability and sustainability.

As per the data provided by the Public Works Department office in South-West Garo Hills, Meghalaya, 37 roads have been constructed 87.761 kilometres in length. These roads brought much-needed connectivity to many remote villages, transforming the region's accessibility landscape. The following is a list of the roads constructed under the Pradhan Mantri Gramme Sadak Yojana (PMGSY) in South-West Garo Hills, Meghalaya, along with their respective lengths.

1. 5th Km of OMB Road (Dengnakpara) to Rongchadenggre – 4.00 km
2. Garobadha to Balapara – 2.00 km
3. Betasing Bazaar to Banduraja – 2.00 km
4. Damalgre Mellim to Dombagre – 4.71 km
5. 8th Km of GR Road to Bangre – 3.53 km
6. Garobadha to Rangsakhona to Jaluagre – 2.30 km (partially open)
7. 10th Km GA Road to Chondonpara – 2.861 km
8. Jamanggre to Wakantagre – 6.75 km
9. 114th Km of AMPT Road to Jewligre – 1.513 km
10. Rongchadenggre to Wakantagre – 1.087 km
11. 4th Km GM Road to Tangabart – 1.616 km
12. Garobadha Rangshakona Road to Watregre – 2.688 km
13. AMPT Road to Rongbakgre – 2.375 km

14. Joyfar to Kashra Sec-II – 0.989 km

15. Joyfar to Kashra Sec-I upto Belbari – 1.700 km

16. Ampati Civil Sub-Division to Bangkapara – 1.729 km

17. Murchapani Koch to Dalbotpara – 1.190 km

18. Chigitchakgre to Jelbongpara – 2.996 km

19. Ampati-Botdamgre Road to Kambakpara – 3.927 km

20. 4th Km KG Road to Dinangpara – 4.779 km

21. 5th Km Ampati Mellim Road to Bangdapara – 2.998 km

22. 13th Km AP Road to Nachilpara – 1.793 km

23. Ampati Purakhasia Road to Anangpara Songsarek – 1.339 km

24. 8th Km AP Road to Dinapara – 1.185 km

25. Hatisil to Muji Agalgre – 1.710 km

26. 16th Km PM Road to Bakdagre – 1.891 km

27. 21st Km KG Road to Durapara – 1.635 km

28. 9th Km MM Road to Wanangre – 2.024 km

29. Mankachar to Mahendraganj Road to Marhalipara – 1.840 km

30. MM Road to Mekdual Adenggre – 1.929 km

31. PM Road to Gujangpara – 2.431 km

32. Ampati-Mahendraganj Road to Simsang – 2.916 km

33. 3rd Km of AP Road to Wakantagre – 3.210 km

34. Mellim Road to Chondonpara – 1.800 km

35. Botdamgre to Ampati Bazaar – 4.120 km

36. Kashra to Belbari Road – 2.500 km

37. Purakhasia to Asananggre – 3.500 km (partially constructed)

Before the roads constructed under the Pradhan Mantri Gramme Sadak Yojana (PMGSY), all of these villages had no all-weather road; however, after the implementation of PMGSY in the South-West Garo Hills, a newly constructed road connected various rural habitations. At present, these villages are connected to the district headquarters in Ampati. These roads also lead to the headquarter of West Garo Hills District for the entire Garo Hills. Roads constructed in villages such as Jamanggre, Wakantagre, Jewligre, and Kambakpara have significantly improved mobility and accessibility. This increased economic opportunities for communities by providing all-weather roads that connect to the agricultural market and other commercial activity.

So far, more than 87 km of road have been constructed in South-West Garo Hills under the Pradhan Mantri Gramin Sadak Yojana (PMGSY). These roads have significantly improved transportation and upgrade the socio-economic conditions of rural people within the district. The improved road infrastructure has enhanced transportation within the region, linking previously isolated villages to nearest market, hospitals, and educational institutions. Economic activities improve transportation by allowing for smoother transportation of goods, access to healthcare and education by shortening travel times to facilities in more developed areas, emergency services such as ambulance that can now reach remote areas more efficiently and agricultural productivity by connecting farmers to larger markets and reducing spoilage caused by transportation delays. Despite substantial progress, a few roads in South-West Garo under PMGSY remain under construction or have yet to be opened for traffic. If this road is completed, the region's development is likely to be accelerated. However, the PMGSY made a successful transformation force in bridging the infrastructural gap within the district and improving the quality of life for rural residents of South-West Garo Hills.

### 3. Impact of PMGSY Road Constructed:

The Pradhan Mantri Gramme Sadak Yojana (PMGSY) has had an immense impact on rural areas in the South-West Garo Hills region. Road construction under PMGSY has produced significant positive outcomes, supporting physical improvements and the region's overall development. The construction under PMGSY brought socio-economic benefits and better maintenance of law and order within the district.

### 3.1 Economic Benefits:

The better road network connection creates many opportunities for the business hub, which generates substantial economic benefits for the rural areas of the South-West Garo Hills leading to a significant improvement in the livelihoods of local populations. The primary economic advantages include:

**3.1.1 Easier Access to Markets:** During the monsoon season, many villages in the South-West Garo Hills became isolated and had restricted road access to connecting marketplaces. Farmers who manage cottage industries struggle to transport their produce to larger markets such as Ampati; they frequently have to rely on labour-intensive methods, which consume a significant amount of time and money. After the completion of an all-weather road under PMGSY, farmers now have direct and reliable access to agricultural markets. The constructed road by PMGSY has led to various improvements: Reduced transportation costs help farmers enhance their income. Faster delivery of perishable items, lowering spoilage and guaranteeing fresher produce reaches markets. Increased market reach allows rural farmers to connect with larger regional and state markets, improving their economic prospects.

**3.1.2. Better Job Opportunities:** PMGSYs provide road connections to unconnected villages and renovate abandoned existing roads for rural communities in South-West Garo Hills providing access to employment prospects. The road reconstructed under the PMGSY provides more reliable transportation for rural residents. People can now easily commute to nearby markets and sell their agriculture items. Road construction not only creates temporary jobs for many people who live in neighbouring villages, but also enhances connections resulting in long-term economic advantages by allowing rural residents to migrate to nearby towns for employment on a daily or weekly basis. This has also increased employment for the local people in the small-scale industries and passenger transportation businesses.

**3.1.3. Growth of Local Businesses:** The construction of All-weather Road in this district of rural area offer access throughout the year and it has benefits on local enterprises, which have experienced significant growth in their business. Villages connected by new road infrastructure have experienced an upswing in small-scale businesses, such as shops, small vendors, and cafes, which profit from greater customers and access. Farmers are now better access agricultural supplies such as farming equipment, fertilisers, and seeds. Such facilities allowing them to produce more output.

**3.2 Social Benefits:** The all-season road constructed by PMGSY has brought social improvements in the South-West Garo Hills District. The all-weather roads have transformed access to essential services, such

as healthcare, education, and social services, bringing about visible improvements in the overall well-being of the rural population.

**3.2.1. Enhanced Access to Education:** After road construction under PMGYS, remote areas that were previously unconnected from educational institutions now have better access. Before road construction, many children living in the distant remote areas encountered problems in reaching the school, particularly due to unsafe road connections during the rainy season. However, the after new road construction under PMGSY, the travel time to school has been greatly reduces, making it easier for the students to attend on a regular basis. Children's school attendance rate has also grown, notably among girls, who were previously facing higher hurdles in accessing educational institutions.

**3.2.2. Improved Healthcare Access:** Prior PMGSY residents of the South-West Garo Hills had to deal with a lot of challenges, especially when people get sick and had to travel far to the hospital. However, after PMGSY improved road connections, people's health improved in the South-West Garo Hills. People who require medical assistance to reach hospitals on time have a lesser risk. Better road connections render transportable health services, enabling medical teams to travel to villages to provide prenatal care, health check-ups, and vaccinations. These improve maternal and child health outcomes in remote areas by providing access to hospitals for safe deliveries and regular treatment for children.

**3.2.3. Access to Essential Services:** Aside from education and healthcare, road connectivity has improved access to government services such as social welfare programs, pensions, and agricultural subsidies, which can now be supplied more effectively to remote communities. Additionally, emergency services, such as ambulances, police, and disaster relief teams, are now responding faster to rural disasters with the new roads provided by PMGSY.

**4. Challenges of implementation of the PMGSY scheme:**

Although the PMGSY has significant improvements made in enhancing rural connectivity in the South-West Garo Hills, several difficulties continue to hinder the process's implementation, including geographical barriers, logistical challenges, and budgetary limitations.

**4.1 Geographical barriers:** In South-West Garo Hills district, many of the villages are situated in isolated areas that are difficult to reach with large construction equipment and construction materials. Furthermore, landslides caused by excessive rainfall during the monsoon season bring harm to road infrastructure, resulting in rural isolation similar to the previous condition. Therefore, road development requires

innovative and inventive methods to construct roads in these regions. These challenges slow down road construction and create additional expenses, necessitating additional planning and funding to ensure that roads are strong and resilient to weather.

**4.2 Logistical Challenges:** The South-West Garo Hills district has rugged terrain, which makes it more difficult for the construction of all-weather roads. Road construction in this region has taken longer than the expected timeframe, which lead to incomplete the certain projects unfinished and limiting the program's maximum benefits in this region.

**4.3 Financial Constraints:** The PMGSY scheme faces financial constraints which have impacted the project's scope and reduced the speed of execution. The state funds allotted for this program are limited and must be divided among several districts, limiting the amount of financing available for both new construction and continuing maintenance, affecting the pace at which new roads are developed and existing roads are maintained.

Another issue that executors encounter while working on this project is the rapid fluctuation in construction expenses. This type of obstacle is common in steep terrains such as South-West Garo Hills. The cost per kilometre of road in hilly terrain is higher due to the need for specialised construction techniques and materials. The rising expense of road construction frequently forces compromises on road quality. Poor road quality and harsh environmental conditions can cause wear and tear on newly built roads in this region, leading to increased maintenance costs and a delay in project completion. As a result, remote areas may not receive the intended infrastructure improvements on time. These are the main challenges that prevent the project from fulfilling its objective fully.

## 5. Recommendations for Enhancing PMGSY:

To ensure effective implementation in the South-West Garo Hills of Meghalaya, the Pradhan Mantri Gramme Sadak Yojana (PMGSY), there are three main areas to look into: improving road maintenance after road construction, strengthening governance procedures for monitoring, and encouraging more active community participation in the PMGSY implementation process.

### 5.1. Improving Road Maintenance:

Community-based Road maintenance groups are the best way to maintain roads because they are the ones who have always used them. When local villagers take responsibility for minor maintenance and repairs of roads in their area, they establish a sense of ownership of the roads and prolong the life of the roads.

### 6.2. Strengthening Governance Practices:

To achieve high-quality road construction under PMGSY, the government should strengthen and strictly follow the guidelines, such as better planning, execution, and monitoring, to avoid delays in road construction.

### 6.3. Promoting Greater Community Involvement:

Active participation of local community play an important role the effective implementation of PMGSY. Engaging the residents at the beginning of the planning phase allows them to select routes that connect important services such as markets, schools and healthcare facilities. Furthermore, integrating local governing bodies including village councils or traditional leaders will boost the project by increasing responsibility and efficient administration of road infrastructure.

## 7. Conclusion:

In conclusion, the Pradhan Mantri Gramme Sadak Yojana (PMGSY) has connected previously unconnected villages and reconstructed deteriorated existing roads into all-weather roads in the South-West Garo Hills of Meghalaya. More than 87 kilometres of all-weather roads have been constructed in the district under the PMGSY project, which has improved residents' quality of life and livelihoods by providing access to basic facilities such as markets, schools, and medical services. The new road infrastructure has improved financial conditions by improving transportation and employment opportunities while supporting regional economic growth. Consequently, people have gained greater access to government services, health care services, and education. This also benefits socially marginalised individuals, particularly those living in remote areas.

Despite such achievements in terms of road connection, efforts from the government and the community are required to ensure regular road repair when roads deteriorate. There is a requirement of a stronger government monitoring system to reinforce PMGSY guidelines, and more community participation in the process of implementation. Active participation of the community creates sense of ownership among the residents and it also ensures that the road is maintained, preventing it from deteriorating. In the process of implementing the PMGSY project more effectively, delays should reduce and high-quality construction assured. More local people participate to help with the maintenance and supervision of these projects to improve the durability and develop unity and a sense of ownership among the residents. PMGSY established a solid foundation for future growth in the region. Thus, current and future investments in this

project are necessary to guarantee that road connectivity continues to drive long-term social and economic development in South-West Garo Hills

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