

#TheCEGISCircle

Prachi Agarwal

Current Institution:
Masters in Economics, SciencesPo

Role at CEGIS:
**Program Associate with
the Outcome Measurement
(in Bodoland, Assam) and
the MEL team**

Duration of time at CEGIS:
2 years





What **inspired** you to **join** CEGIS?

What **drew** you to its **mission**?

Initially, driven by my curiosity, I was inspired to join CEGIS for two reasons. The first was to uncover the black-box of the 'Executive'. We read about new laws and court judgements in the news but we don't have a lot of avenues to understand how the Executive branch functions. The second was a chance to work with the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC). As a student of economics and public policy, I understood the quasi-federal structure and the role state governments play, but I had little understanding of how Councils functioned.

Moreover, during the hiring process, I got a chance to interact with my future colleagues. I left the interview with a lot of food for thought and excited to learn from them and the team. Finally, however, it was the CEGIS vision of working within state governments that really sealed the deal for me. I wanted to be a part of the movement that brings attention to and tries to solve the unique problems faced at the state-level.



How did your **experience** at CEGIS **contribute** to your professional and personal **journey**?

My time at CEGIS has left me with a lot of lessons. From learning to identify the essence of a problem to understanding how engagements with different stakeholders are built, my time at CEGIS has been foundational. The Outcomes Measurement team held learning sessions which was an opportunity to deep-dive into other projects in other states. This was helpful in learning how colleagues approached challenges that I, too, may have been facing. With the BTC team, I learnt how to connect with frontline workers, their supervisors and other officials to really listen to their feedback and insights for our interventions.

I am grateful to my mentors in CEGIS (Krishna, Javed, Sravan, and Ganesh) who helped me identify areas of growth and encouraged that growth. I am also grateful to have worked with Suramya, Bhanita, Madhurima, and Krishan. Since this was my second job, my time at CEGIS helped me fill relevant gaps and build new skills.

Personally, at CEGIS, I saw first hand the utility for data in decision-making and how theory informs practice. This motivated me to pursue a Masters in Economics. Finally, it was during my stay in Kokrajhar that I learnt to cycle and even speak a bit of Assamese!

Was there an experience at CEGIS that made a **lasting impression** on you?

During my initial days at CEGIS, Madhurima and I conducted a focus group discussion with Anganwadi workers (AWWs) who candidly shared their experiences and challenges. In my undergraduate studies, I read about the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) system but it was interesting to contrast what I had read against the challenges on the field. More importantly, the AWWs' generosity with time and the willingness to share showed that they, too, should be partners in the interventions' design. This encouraged us to actively seek inputs for our interventions which further enriched our engagement.



The Honorable Executive Member, Shri Gautum Das launched two of our pilot interventions in November, 2023

What are you most **proud** of regarding your **time** at CEGIS?

I am most proud of being an early member of two teams, the Bodoland and the MEL teams, because we faced unique challenges and adapted as per partner needs. The initial days provided room for exploration—to test our hypotheses and rethink our assumptions. Besides being an important chance to learn from colleagues in the department and other teams, it was a chance to create frameworks and knowledge products that can shape the team's trajectory.



The BTC team

How has your **experience** at CEGIS shaped your professional **goals** and **aspirations** moving forward?

As part of the Outcome Measurement and the MEL teams, I was exposed to the different aspects of data collection (eg: sampling or survey design) and data analysis. During the learning sessions and in conversations, I saw how a strong understanding of theory informed the way we handled administrative data or uncovered important insights and patterns. Across teams, there was a habit of consulting the literature. The silent role of theory in bringing rigour to thought was quite evident. This inspired me to pursue my Masters in Economics at SciencesPo.



*The Outcome Measurement
and the MEL teams*



If there was one piece of **advice** you could give to **new team members** just joining CEGIS, what would it be?

I would strongly encourage new team members to keep an open mind and to make the most of the opportunity. The time at CEGIS is a chance to learn with and from colleagues and folks in the government. The lessons will come from not only the learning sessions but also from the way the team members think about problems and their solutions. Most people I met were highly curious and action-oriented, so there will be lessons in getting things done, too. CEGIS believes in 'autonomy in action and accountability in outcomes' which means that even at junior levels, colleagues have the opportunity to shape interventions and programs. Initiative and effort is highly encouraged, and there will always be guidance and support.