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NREGA

Fuelling Inclusive Growth

From the Editor's Desk

The World Bank estimates that 456 million Indians now live under the global poverty line which is one third of the total global poor. Among them 75% live in rural areas and most of them are daily wagers, and landless labourers. In this context, Indian government enacted the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, (NREGA) in 2005. National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS) was launched in February 2006 and it provides guarantee for one hundred days of employment in every year to adult members of any rural household to do public work-related unskilled manual work at the statutory minimum wage. This scheme was introduced with an aim of improving the livelihood security of unemployed rural poor, primarily semi or un-skilled workers living below poverty line. It attempts to bridge the gap between the rich and poor in the country. Also it ensures that one-third of the beneficiaries must be women who have registered and requested work under the scheme.

NREGS is in implementation for the past three years. The scheme is not merely a wage employment programme. But it is focused on the regeneration of village economy in the long term. The Act's success or failure will have an impact on the entire rural development scenario in India.

There is excitement as well as disappointment over its state of implementation. The scheme has huge potential for regenerating village economy in India, but only if it ensures to avoid the loopholes for corruption. The NREGA can never meet its objectives without the active participation of people in its implementation. Since NGOs are emphasizing people's participation in all levels of government schemes' implementation, we feel NGOs have a crucial role to play. In this context, we are bringing this issue with some of the pioneering endeavors and perspectives of NGOs who have hands on experience in the area of NREGS and its implementation.

Fr. Joy Vattoly
Secretary, CEVA

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Forerunning Schemes and Background of National Rural Employment Guarantee Act 2005

* Dr. Jalindar Adsule

Introduction

India is an agricultural country where, 72.2% of the population lives in rural areas (2001 census). Though India has completed more than 60 years of independence poverty in rural India continues to increase day by day and people are increasingly migrating to the urban areas to earn their living. In other words, even after completing 60 years of independence we have more than 40 per cent people living below poverty line. Almost every Five Year Plan and many other poverty alleviation programmes for the rural poor have come up with different income generation or employment Guarantee Schemes. Their result seems to be unsatisfactory.

National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) 2005 seems to be a more advanced and radical scheme which directly gives a right to employment. This scheme has been implemented all over the country in selected districts. A family, which is listed under BPL, is entitled to get work for 100 days in a year. This article tries to discuss the background, purpose and implementation of NREG scheme.

Poverty Alleviation programmes in Rural India

After the independence of India in 1947, the government adopted a mixed economy and the planned development approach. Till date, the government of India has implemented 10 Five Year Plans while the 11th Plan is being implemented at present. In each plan, the government has come up with different schemes to eradicate poverty.

Raising the standard of living of the masses is one of the important objectives of planning in India. The first Five Year Plan did not emphasis much on poverty alleviation. The second plan talked about milieu for the small man. The fourth plan included

improvement in the condition of the common man and the weaker sections, especially through provision of employment and education. It also emphasized the attainment of the national minimum as an essential prerequisite to improve the condition of the lower income groups. It recognized that small farmers and landless labourers constitute the bulk of the potential that have no productive base and are dependent for their livelihood on wage employment. The fourth plan categorically stated: —If the implementation of the programmes, the weaker are looked after and the benefits of the development are made to flow by planned investment in the underdeveloped regions and among the more backward sections of the community.” (Fourth Five-Year Plan Document)

Despite all the pious sentiments for the weaker sections, the number of the poor continued to swell in the country. The Garibi Hatao slogan raised during the parliamentary elections of 1971 brought into sharp focus the problem of poverty. The sixth plan stated, —According to a recent estimate using the norm of calories consumption, the percentage of population below the poverty line in 1977-78 may be projected at 48 percent in the rural areas. The total number of poor so defined would be about 290 million”

The subsequent plans i.e., seventh, eighth, ninth and tenth have been saying much about poverty alleviation, improvement of the standard of living and generation of income. But, in reality little improvement has been felt in the condition of those living below the poverty line.

Reports show that the first poverty alleviation scheme or programme was initiated in the fifth Five Year Plan. The Government of Maharashtra too did this by initiating the Employment Guarantee

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Scheme (EGS), which was later introduced as the Maharashtra Employment Guarantee Act, 1972. According to this Act, any person who is unemployed, who is living in a rural area and is above 18 years of age, can register with the Village Development Officer. He/She would be provided with a job close to his/her place of residence and paid an employment allowance, which is according to the Minimum Wages Act.

In 1979, the Government of India came up with "Training of Rural Youth for Self Employment" (TRYSEM). Under this programme, youth below the age of 18 years were imparted training in various occupations. In case of SCs and STs, a stipend was also given during training. The Government has spent almost 100 crores all over India on this scheme which was implemented through the Chief Executive Officer at the district level.

The Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP) was initiated in 1980. The beneficiaries of this programme were people below the poverty line. At that time the Poverty Line was considered as a total annual family income below Rs. 3,500/-. Assistance was given mainly for agriculture, weaving, handicrafts and self-employment. Fifty percent of the amount was given by the Central Government and the remaining fifty per cent by the State Government.

During this period, another scheme known as the "National Rural Employment programme" (NREP) was launched in 1980. In it preference was given to SC/ST families and it was decided that at least one person from such a family should get employment. The main objectives of this scheme were: to improve the quality of life of the rural people, to improve their health and to improve the rural economy.

Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas (DWCRA) was introduced in September 1982. It was one of the schemes of IRDP. The main focus of this programme is to generate income for

women below the poverty line. The ultimate aim was to improve the economic condition through women's groups. This scheme also included children between the 0-6 age group. Women's groups were expected to take up economic activities through groups, i.e. *Balwadis*, tribal development, Drought programmes etc.

The Central Government's Rural Landless Labourer Employment Guarantee Scheme (RLEGP) was established in 1983. Its objective was to provide employment opportunities to landless labourers, both women and men for a minimum of 100 days in a year.

The Employment Assurance Scheme was introduced by the Government in the 9th Five Year Plan (1992-1993). This scheme aimed at providing 100 days of unskilled manual work to the rural poor.

During the 10th Five year Plan, the government of India introduced the "Barna Jayanti Gram Swarajgar Yojana" in April 1999. Its main purpose was to improve the standard of living of families through the promotion of micro enterprises and businesses.

During the 10th Five Year Plan in year 1999, the government also introduced the "Jawahar Samridhi Yojana". This scheme was along similar lines as the EGS of Maharashtra. Community activity was promoted. All the funds were channelized through the Village Panchayat, which was expected to initiate work for the needy.

During the 11th Five Year Plan UPA Government introduced a number of poverty alleviation programmes and also employment generation programmes. National Employment Guarantee Scheme of 2005 is such kind of a scheme.

National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme

NREGS - Specific characteristics

☛ NREGS is based on the assumption that

every adult has a right to basic employment opportunities at the statutory minimum wages.

- ☛ NREGS' aim is to end food insecurity, empower village communities, and create useful assets in rural areas.
- ☛ Complete participation of Gram Panchayat in choice and selection of employment work, its planning and implementation.
- ☛ Complete transparency and Social Audits.
- ☛ Registration of rural and Social Audits.
- ☛ Registration of rural household workers and giving of employment cards.

NREGS – Key Features:

- ☛ People get not only guarantee but also the right to employment'.
- ☛ Each family would get work for 100 days in a year.
- ☛ Daily Minimum wages recommended not less than Rs.60/-
- ☛ Extra wages if the worksite is more than 5 kms away from village.
- ☛ Unemployment allowance in case work is not provided.
- ☛ Compensation in case of accident or death of the labourers on site.
- ☛ Onsite facilities as drinking water, first aid, shelter etc.
- ☛ Creches for children of women labourers
- ☛ Village development is focused.
- ☛ Long-term assets are insisted.
- ☛ Appointment of Gram Rojgar Sevak is suggested.
- ☛ Powers to Gramsabha and people.

The main purpose of this scheme is to alleviate unemployment and poverty. This scheme provides 60 per cent opportunities to unskilled work and 40 percent for skilled. It is implemented through Jilla Parishad, Gram Panchayat and NGOs. This scheme is funded by government and the proportion of contribution is 90 percent Central Government and 10 percent State Government. For the purpose of the peoples participation scheme suggests councils on National and State level, Gram Panchayats, Gram Sabhas and NGOs. The scheme also has suggested social audit through Gram Sabha.

Various feedbacks and reports on this scheme reveal that even getting registration for job is also difficult. Sometimes wages are paid even after three months. Always more work is given for male and women are ignored at every stage. At Gram Panchayat level there is no transparency at all about work sanctioned and payment made. There is also high level of politicization of this scheme. There are also reports of inadequate staff and infrastructure to implement this scheme. There are cases of corruption while implementation of the scheme. But, besides all this 65.8 lacs people got employment under NREGA during 2006-2007. Therefore one needs to look at this scheme in a positive way. For the effective implementation of this scheme it is necessary to create awareness among the people about the procedure of the scheme and motivate more people to get benefit of it.

Conclusion

This is one of the revolutionary and advance schemes in today's time. First time it gives legal guarantee of 100 days work in rural area. Though there are many limitations, it is necessary that such schemes are introduced. In a vast country like India, it becomes difficult to make uniform policies. One needs to have political will to look at the problem of poverty and unemployment.

National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS) – Perspectives and Implementation Mechanism in Kerala

* Dr. G. Placid

Introduction

The NREGA represents a paradigm shift as it provides for guaranteed employment on demand. Generating employment through public investments got structured in Indian planning through a "wage employment model" under different schemes. There are three distinct phases in the development of India's rural public investment based employment generation. The first phase adopted until the early nineties sought to provide supplementary wage employment. The second phase emerged in the early nineties took the form of employment assurance. The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) is the third phase and is unique as it is based by legislation and the Act was enacted in 2005, got presidential assent on the 5th of September 2005, and was in effect from the 2nd of February 2006.

Provisions under NREGA

Under the Act the State Government shall make a Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, for providing not less than 100 days of guaranteed employment to at least one adult member of every household in rural areas on demand, at the minimum wage under Minimum Wage Act 1948 for agricultural labourers. The employment is for casual and manual work, provided within 15 days of receipt of his/her application seeking employment. If work is not provided within this period he/she shall be a daily unemployment allowance. The work area should be located within 5 kilometers from the habitat, in case it is more than that the worker is entitled for a travel allowance. The wages should pay directly through bank by opening zero balance account in their name in the nationalized or cooperative banks. The scheme shall not permit engaging any contractor for implementation of projects under it. The task under the scheme shall be performed manually and not by machines.

The state is obliged to ensure certain work place facilities. Social audit and transparency is built into the Act. The State Government shall determine appropriate grievance redressal mechanisms at the block and district levels for dealing with any complaint by any person in respect of implementation of the scheme and lay down the procedure for disposal of such complaints. Besides employment generation, the objective of the scheme is to create durable community assets also.

The Implementation Mechanism of NREGS in Kerala

The Kerala Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (KREGS) is drawn up more or less in tune with the NREGA and was published on the 23rd of June 2006, even though the scheme was formally inaugurated by the Chief Minister on the 2nd of February 2002 in Pattambi in Palakkad district and extended to all panchayats in 2008.

The State Government constituted a State Employment Guarantee Council with a chairperson to advise the State Government on all matters concerning the scheme and its implementation, determine preferred work, review the monitoring and redressal mechanisms, promote dissemination of information about this Act and Scheme and prepare annual report to be laid before the State Legislature. The Rural Development Department is the nodal agency for implementing the Act. The Rural Development Commissioner is the nodal officer for implementation of NREGA at the state level. At the district level, the District Collector is the nodal officer. A district Project Officer with necessary staff is appointed to assist the District Collector. At the Block Panchayat level, a Block Programme Officer in the rank of Block Panchayat Secretary has been appointed to coordinate the scheme at the three levels of Panchayats and its

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implementation. At the Gram Panchayat level, an overseer/Asst. Engineer and an Accountant-cum-Computer Operator are appointed to assist the Gram Panchayat and its Secretary.

The Gram Sabha is the statutorily mandated institutional mechanism for community participation. The Act authorizes the Gram Sabha to recommend works to be taken up under the scheme, to monitor and supervise these works and to conduct social audits of the implementation. The Gram Panchayat is responsible for all other works related to planning and implementation. The Block Panchayat is responsible for planning at the block level, and for monitoring and supervision. District Panchayat is responsible for finalizing the district plans for NREGS, which is comprehensive plan of action for the scheme for the district, and its monitoring and supervision.

As per the NREGS, a perspective plan has to be made and should be discussed and approved with modifications suggested by Gram Sabha at the Gram, Block and District Panchayat level. The annual plan is worked out from this perspective plan. The demand for work, the nature and time of work and preference is decided by those who are likely to seek employment. The Community Development Societies (CDS) and Area Development Societies (ADS), the women organizations at the Panchayat and ward level promoted by Kudumbasree Mission, are entrusted with the role of supervision, distribution of implements, marking of attendance in NMR, etc.

Some basic issues and scope for the Scheme in Kerala

Considering the overall performance of the NREGS in the state, it is argued that the scheme is yet to be picked up in its full swing. Even though the scale of registration and employment are low, a few Gram Panchayats have gained some capacity to implement the scheme in a ring 2008-09. But there are several constraints which hinder the effective implementation like difficulty in

identification of sufficient number of projects, lack of staff at Gram Panchayat level, lack of participation of male members, lack of provisions for undertaking schemes require material and skilled labour cost, lack of awareness among various stakeholders, lack of capacity among the supervisors and monitors, reluctance in collaborating with the NGO sector in the state, lack of cooperation and collaboration between the project staff and Panchayat functionaries at various levels, lack of interest among the elected representatives, etc.

Moreover, the topography, climatic conditions, rural employment market, literacy level, infrastructure development, high wage rate of unskilled men labourers, work culture etc, in Kerala do not make the scheme so attractive as in other states. There are many essential areas outside the priority areas prescribed in schedule I of the Act. The State Government should take up the matter with the Central Government and get the schedule I modified to suit Kerala situation.

If implemented properly, the NREGA will make considerable impacts on the social, economic and political arena of the rural community. It would protect rural households from poverty and hunger. The availability of employment at the local area would also lead to a reduction of migration. It ensures gender equality and social justice by offering job to all adult irrespective of their caste and creed, age, economic status /position and equal wage to all for the same work. Every rupee paid under wages are reached directly to the hands of the workers. The availability of money and its circulation at the local level will boost up the local economy. The inbuilt mechanism of monitoring and social audit will help reduce corruption and malpractices and ensure transparency and accountability. The scheme will also help create social assets. After all the NREGS should view

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NREGA – Orissa Experience Struggle for Wages & Survival of the Fittest

***Ms. Vidhya Das**

Introduction

An Act like the NREGA had indeed raised our hopes. There were really good and wonderful people behind this Act, monitoring its implementation, setting examples for others to follow. Surely much can come out of such a beginning. With grim determination, we start following up things as the NREGA year started with fanfare and announcements. We started talking about it, spreading the messages, reading out and explaining the Act, and the notices in the villages. The cards are slow in coming; however, several positive and constructive steps have been taken by the Orissa Government for the better implementation of the Employment Guarantee Act. In the first financial year, the material to wages ratio was shockingly 54 to 46, with some of the districts showing ratios such as 57 to 43, etc. However, things have improved, even though the major works still carried out under NREGA are connectivity and communication infrastructure. Circulars of the PR Department detail how the works should be taken up, and payments should be made, and also strictly lay down that contractors are not to be engaged in the execution of the work, emphasising that the works are to be taken up departmentally by the Gram Panchayats / Panchayat Samitis or Line Departments according to prescribed guidelines. These instructions also provide for payment of wages through the banks and post offices provided the wage earners are willing. The state has also been the first in adapting IT to monitor the NREGA in all its 3,672 Gram Panchayats, being way ahead of Andhra, Karnataka, the supposedly IT pioneers in India, as also other states implementing NREGA. Thus according to several press reports, Orissa is the first state to place the name, age, job card numbers, and other details of each job card holder

on the net, and enable access to online records of muster rolls, works undertaken, with costs and bill numbers, etc.

NREGS – Performance in Orissa

Indeed, Orissa has been projected as the first state in implementation of the NREGS, showing a total expenditure of more than Rs.700 crores, a fund utilisation of 82.39%, surpassing all the major states in percentage of expenditure against available funds. Out of the 19 districts, taken up in the 2006-07 financial year, Mayurbhanj has come out on top with Koraput and Nuapada coming second and third respectively. The state claims to have issued job cards to 23.30 lakh households, and provided employment to 11.19 lakh households. On an average, reports say, each household has been provided with 31 days of employment, while no household has completed 100 days of employment.

Impressive achievements indeed. However, there is a shocking invisibility of these achievements on the ground. Even as the reports of 700 crores plus utilisation started coming out, many of us were puzzled to see the near non-existence, and non-impact of these achievements in the rural areas. In two letters to the Chief Minister, we had pointed out the major discrepancies in the NREGA work in several villages in Koraput, Rayagada, and Nawrangpur Districts. In villages like Podabandh and Pudugusil in Rayagada district, people had worked and not received wages. Then, asked to sign on blank muster rolls before they could receive payment. In Kanheimunda in Nawrangpur, there were several discrepancies in the records in the job cards, and in the payment received.

In a village like Tikarapada, in Koraput district, people had received more money than the number

**Activist and Coordinator in AGRAGAMEE, Orissa*

of days worked, but the much talked about e-records indicated that the muster roles showed 28 days, as against the 12 days of payment made! In actual fact, people had worked only 5 days. Since these letters, there has been little follow-up in the villages.

However there are a few success stories worth mentioning. In Khandiaguda village of Tentulikhunti block, Nawarangpur 63 job card holders have got the unemployment allowance of Rs. 4,410.00 for the first time in Orissa to showcase that constant demand for employment can yield good result. In Keshkeri village of Kashipur Block, Rayagada District, people have demanded and got the concretisation of a canal work of Rs. 9 Lakh under NREGS.

Even as three years of the NREGA have been completed, there is little impact on the ground, and the problems seem to have multiplied for the poor wage labourers, rather than diminished. Major lacunae deter even the more courageous and gritty card holders from making a bid for getting just payment.

The NREGA is a guarantee for employment not for wages

There is very little in the Act to ensure that the labourer gets due payment after completion of the work. Junior Engineers, Panchayat Executive Officers, VLWs, BDOs, and I dare say the concerned politicians and Secretaries all join together to make hay, while the poor Job Card Holders in the villages, apply once or twice for work, slog it out in the sun, and not getting any returns, quietly give up, and continue with their meager lives, the more able migrating, the less able just continuing as before.

No Regulations on Wages to be paid

Even when the people do get paid, they rarely get the minimum wages. The provision for payment as per the work output based on measurement by the noble Junior Engineers ensures that an opaque,

impenetrable wall of complex mathematical calculations deny due wages to the poor uneducated job card holder. Why can't the Act just say minimum wages will be paid regardless of the volume of work? Why should it mistrust the poor job card holder, and place such touching faith on its own functionaries, when it should be the other way round?

District & Panchayat Level Plans

Despite the fact that the NREGA is to prioritise the people's needs, district plans are totally top down, and it is impossible for a villager to get hold of the plans and outlays for his village or Panchayat for the coming year. On the other hand, village applications for specific works are never honoured, on the grounds that the annual plan has already been formulated, and so the present demand cannot be accommodated. How can a villager, living 15 to 30 kms from the block headquarters successfully file under RTI to even know what development plans the government has for her own village? RTI Applications to the Orissa Govt. are notorious for getting little or no response.

There is too much red tape

A labourer has to apply for work, get the work application accepted on record, and then wait for 15 days. This is the same procedure for applying for cards. There is no remedy if the Panchayat Office is always closed, and the Panchayat Secretary, and the Sarpanch missing or absent most of the time. Even if they are present, there is no way the card holder can get them to sign on the receipt tag. On the other hand, every application has to be made on a form. Forms are of course willfully not made available to the card holders. On the other hand, if the card holder brings a petition on paper it is rejected, as it is not in due format!

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Proper planning and people's participation did wonders in NREGS

* Abani Mohan Panigrahi

Introduction

There is a lot of hue and cry on the failure of the much expected NREGS in many western Orissa districts including Nuapada. Delay in disbursement of funds, misappropriation of money, use of machineries, and non-investment on asset creation have been sited as reasons for making this harsh assessment. In Nuapada district this programme was expected to be an effective answer to check out-bound migration. But unfortunately the scheme couldn't deliver and migration remained an unsolved issue. Lokadrusti wanted to experiment the idea of putting some intervention in terms of awareness generation and activation of the programme to make it more effective. Lokadrusti, the lead partner of a consortium comprising of 8 member organizations - Lokadrusti in Nuapada and seven other NGOs in the neighbouring Bolangir district – has been facing the problem of migration in its operational villages.

Our Success Story

This Ford Foundation sponsored programme –Sustainable Livelihood and NREGA” was launched by Lokadrusti in the most migration prone Gram Panchayat Sunapur of Boden block, the most backward block out of the five blocks of Nuapada district in the year 2007 - 08. The primary objective of the project was to make the NREGA more effective so that migration could be reduced. In order to make the project realize its objective we made a detailed baseline and microplanning to address the issue within a period of five years. As the baseline data showed, the migration rate was quite alarming when this programme was

launched. Out of the total population of 4,204 from 1,020 households as many as 487 persons had migrated from 97 households. This is essentially a tribal dominated Gram Panchayat who constitutes 60% followed by OBC with 31%. In the migration figure also it was seen that the ST and the OBC were the maximum with 35% and 39% respectively.

Our mobilizers began the intervention and convinced the Panchayat Samity authorities to shift the focus from cement work to earth work and create assets like farm pond, renovation of pond etc.

When the migrant population returned from their workplace they were thoroughly oriented and when they agreed the BDO of Boden block was negotiated to undertake plantation work on wasteland earmarked by the self help groups with the help of the Revenue Inspector. Lokadrusti offered to supply 'Jatropha' saplings. As per the prevailing practice under NREGS all works stop during rainy season which happens to be the lean season for the rural community, mostly the landless and the marginal farmers. There is no provision of any employment for them from any sectors. So they are compelled to take loans and thus mortgaging themselves for migration for the next year. This vicious debt cycle continued every year and our planning designed the idea of beginning plantation work during rainy season to break this cycle. In the first year, 200 acres of waste land in Bagbahal, Sardhapur, Ainlabahali villages was covered under plantation which created 8,500

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NEWS FROM CEVA

Board of Directors Meeting at CEVA Kochi



Board of Directors meeting was held on March 3rd 2009. Rev. Fr. Jose Panthaplamthottiyil CMI, the Prior General of CMI congregation and patron of CEVA and all the board of directors were present in the meeting. The birthday celebration of the patron during the meeting added more colours and joy to the occasion. He enlightened the participants with a message on the significance of thinking differently in order to bring difference and change in the society. He also elucidated the Gandhian principle and its worth in leading simple life to assist the deprived to flourish.

Annual Meeting 2009

Annual meeting of KKS, KKF, and KKID & CEVA was held at KKID from 5th to 7th March 2009. Mr. Ralf Tepel, the executive director represented KKS team for the 13th Annual Meeting of the family. Mr. Ignatius the president, Fr. Joy Vattoly CMI the secretary, Fr. Varghese Kokkadan the moderator, Fr. Dominic Kunnupurath the regional secretary of NRO along with all the coordination staff attended the meeting. News and views from KKS, KKID and CEVA were shared during the meeting. Discussions were held based on KKS project coordination aspects as well as the current social issues.



Visit of European Commission Staff from Delhi

Ms. Carrie Stevens and Ms. Arja Kilpelainen from Finance and Audit Section of the Delegation of the European Commission made a spot visit to Dalit Development programme, Mannanam, Kerala implemented by Samagravikas on 28th and 29th of April 2009. The project coordinator Mr. Mathew P. Thomas joined along with them in the spot checking of financial documents of the project.

Project Evaluations

During the first half of 2009, mid-term evaluation of Renewable Energy projects implemented by Gram Vikas and Agragamee was completed. Another two evaluations namely, 'Sustainable Development through Resource Management' – implemented by Jeet Prakash Trust, Gujarat – and 'Mangrove Conservation and Livelihood Support' – implemented by Tagore Society for Rural Development, Kolkata – are ongoing. Besides that, process has been just initiated for the mid-term evaluations of the projects implemented by CEROWC – Bhopal and Badlao Foundation – Jharkhand.

International Conference on MDGs and Child Protection

Fr. Joy Vattoly, Fr. Dominic Thomas, Mr. Subodh Tandon and Dr. Shobha Mohapatra attended an International Conference on **–Child Protection & Millennium Development Goals**” on 6th and 7th January 2009 at Rajagiri College of Social Sciences, Kochi. The programme was sponsored by UNICEF and UGC. Fr. Joy presented a paper on **–Children and AIDS**” and Dr. Shobha presented another paper on **–Status of National Child Labor Schools in U.P**” in this programme. The conference was enriching from the point of view of updating the information pertaining to child protection and related policies. On the other hand, there were limited references and sharing of experiences from the northern India.

Workshop of potential partners of a combined project

A workshop was organized at DRCSC office (Kolkata) on 5th May 2009, in which 5 potential partners participated (DRCSC, KJKS, Catholic Charities, VOSARD and Vikasana) besides Dr. Michael Hollaender, Fr. Dominic Thomas, Mr. Mathew P. Thomas, Mr. Anoop Jacob, Mr. Subodh Tandon and Mr. Soumyendra Roy. The main objective of the meeting was to plan for the combined project **–Food Security and Sustainable Agriculture Programme**”, which will be submitted by KKS to BMZ. Dr. Michael Hollaender clarified the concept of the proposed programme and answered all queries of the participants.



New coordination responsibility for NRO in A.P

On 15th and 16th April Fr. Joy Vattoly, Secretary – CEVA, officially introduced Mr. James and Mr. Subodh to the project team of JKS – Parvathipuram and Chaithanya Bharathi – Vizianagaram respectively. Both the project teams have promised continued cooperation and support to CEVA in implementing the current projects supported by BMZ/KKS. Hitherto these project were under the coordination of CEVA - Kochi. It was a nice opportunity to meet the project teams directly, especially in the presence of the Secretary – CEVA.

‘KAVACH’ PROJECT

The Project **‘Kavach’** is being implemented by CEVA northern regional office since 2005 with the support of Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation through Transport Corporation of India. It focuses on both preventive and curative aspects of HIV/AIDS. The preventive aspect includes mid – media which consists of exhibition, health games, street play, film shows, interactions of trained drivers, ex-drivers, helpers in the form of group sessions with target community and mega events like truckers’ **‘utsav’**. Curative aspects include clinical treatment for STI/STD in the form of static clinic, and satellite clinic as well as health camps focusing on particular specialisations. Apart from it, community mobilisation is also a component of the project.



National Child Labor Programme - NCLP

The National Child Labourer Project (NCLP) is being implemented by our northern regional office (Ghaziabad) since 2005 from the support of Ministry of Labour through District Labour Department. For the same project CRS has been providing partial support for the past three years. Now that CRS has withdrawn support, CEVA is managing the programme with local support besides District Labour Department.

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man-days especially for the landless people. This helped them to get employment during the lean period and in the process earned some money. This was helpful to break the debt cycle. This also encouraged the block authorities and they agreed to shift the attention to creation of assets such as Farm Pond, renovation of pond and other traditional water bodies. This created permanent assets in the villages and offered tremendous opportunities for irrigation and pisciculture activities.

During the project intervention the focus was also placed on the promotion of SHGs and Farmers' Clubs. Thus 26 SHGs and 5 Farmers' Clubs have been promoted. The SHG members are engaged in onion and garlic cultivation by utilizing the farm pond water. In addition to this they are also growing groundnuts in their fields by shifting the traditional pattern to cash crop. Keeping this in mind we provided 3 oil processing units to the SHG members to process different oil seeds. The SHG members also began to collect Minor Forest Produces and instead of selling it at distressed price, as happened earlier, processed it themselves. This earned them more profit. In the field of agriculture also new SRI system of cultivation was implemented which increased productivity. The farmers' club members were trained on sustainable agriculture through organic farming. The waste products of the oil processing units are used as fertilizer by the people. Thus within a span of just two years wind of change is visible. The mindset of the people has been fast changing. They have acknowledged the fact that migration has a number of adverse effects on their lives and they can do away with it. Moreover, job opportunities have been created under NREGS.

Now in all the five villages of the Gram Panchayat Sunapur migration has come down substantially. In 2008-09 the migration figure has come down to 56

Households covering 127 people. We were much pleased to note that after the project intervention the Residential Care Centres (RCC) had to be closed in this Gram Panchayat. RCC is a residential hostel for the children of migrant parents during the period of their migration. So after this project intervention the number of children in this hostel reduced which is a clear success indicator of the success of the project.

A few Issues

Like any other Governmental schemes, NREGS is also not without a few bottlenecks. During this year the NREGA fund was delayed as the district administration did not make it online in time. Delay in fund flow is a great hurdle and this creates a lot of problems. Timely provision of employment and timely payment of wage are crucial in dealing with the migrant population as they are most vulnerable and any delay can cause frustration and result in a huge swing. This is purely an administrative gimmick and we have no hold over this. So what we can suggest to any NGO going to facilitate NREGS is that a permanent corpus fund may be created to bridge this short term gap. This can make the project far more effective in realizing the project objectives.

Conclusion

Although there are a number of criticisms about NREGS, our experience is really positive. If NGOs are willing they can do a great job in facilitating the scheme more successfully in their target villages. Since NGOs generally have a good rapport with the village community and know the real need and pulse of the people, they are better placed to guide the community in identifying need-based programmes in their villages and effectively executing them.

Inclusion of Women in NREGA: The Challenges Ahead

*Anita Panot

Introduction

National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) implemented by the ministry of Rural Development is the flagship programme of the government that directly touches lives of the poor and promotes inclusive growth. The act aims at enhancing livelihood security of households in rural areas of the country, by providing at least one hundred days of guaranteed wage employment to every household, whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled work.

Though reports indicate initial positive trends and increased women workforce participation as compared to earlier wage employment programmes, it is necessary to critically evaluate and suggest measures to overcome some of the shortcomings of this programme with special reference to women's participation in NREGA. NREGA provides that 30 percent of the employment provided, should be given to women. However the various studies conducted by NGOs and government bodies to evaluate the success of NREGA shows that to some extent the programme has failed to meet its objective. The inclusion of women irrespective of their status (single, widow, divorced and deserted), caste, health status and region has remained on paper.

Participation of Women

According to SEWA, an NGO working with women in Gujarat, women are the main sufferers from poverty. They have the responsibility of running the house, procurement of water, rearing children, maintaining social relations and attending to health related and other unusual situations in families. Therefore, it is necessary to build women's

capacity. In many households, women also take up income generating programmes, activities at home or in external work place. Such women are engaged in making garments, agarbatis, bidis, paper cups, kites, fire crackers etc. It is to be noted that they are skilled and semi skilled activities and all of them need support of NREGA. It is important to note that providing higher levels of female labour participation, especially in rural areas, is closely associated with lower infant mortality rates and higher primary school enrollment.

Therefore, the definition of work as physical, manual work in the act, would eliminate women from being employed, as many women in rural areas are also employed in soft skills jobs such as nursery, forestry and social service schemes. If we look at the nature of employment provided under the scheme, it appears meaningless to offer hard physical labour employment to those women/men who are anaemic and sick. Such women and men should be trained to do some light physical work, which they can do in group sitting at home.

Facilities at work sites for Women

The NREGA passed in 2005, mandates that provisions should be made to depute workers to look after children below the age of six years who accompany women to work sites. A survey of NREGA participants conducted by NREGA watch in Villupuram district, Chennai, reveals that seventy percent of women respondents stated that, ~~there~~ "there were no child care facilities at the work site", and eighty percent of mothers who left their children at home they can do in group sitting at home said that, ~~they~~ "they would certainly bring their children to the worksite if a crèche was provided to them". The survey also reveals that while the

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anganwadi caters to the older children, it creates problems for women with infants, only five percent of surveyed women said that they left infants in anganwadis.

Though NREGA plays an important role in providing employment to women, low level of awareness and absence of worksite facilities especially toilets and crèches can adversely affect women's participation.

Women with Disability

The person with Disability Act 1995, states that, —the appropriate governments and local authorities shall reserve not less than three percent in all poverty alleviation schemes for the benefits of person with disabilities. In case of proper implementation of NREGA in the country it is necessary that this vulnerable group is not undermined and is included to fulfill the objectives of this programme.

Inclusion of Dalits with special reference to women

According to the report of ministry of rural development, nearly one fourth of the 701 million employment days generated by NREGS in India up to March 16, 2007 were availed by Scheduled Castes (SC). States like Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu accounted for the highest coverage of SC under NREGA, delivering between 55.70 percent of all job to them. On the other hand, the coverage of SC in states like Gujarat, Rajasthan, and Tripura did not even match up in proportion to the existing numbers of SC in the population of these states. During the National Tribunal on NREGA organized at the Indian Social Forum in November 2006, hundreds of dalit participants including women recounted numerous instances of denial of their entitlements under NREGA. For instance, Anita Devi, a landless Musaha labour from East Champaran district of

Bihar mentioned how job cards were issued in her village only after people organized a dharna in September 2006. Common grievances expressed at the Indian Social Forum were, (1) issue of limited number of job cards, (2) unreasonable delay in issue of cards, (3) job card lacking necessary information, (4) demand for bribe for issuing cards, (5) delay in employment and unemployment wages, and in some cases non payment of the same. In view of the fact the scheme does not differentiate between the poor and the non-poor, or between dalits and non dalits in terms of eligibility of employment, the relative exclusion of dalits in delivery of employment cannot be taken as a good indicator of government's commitment to equitable development.

Inclusion of single women

Mr Venugopal, who was a special reporter to the National Human Rights Commission, has recently done a study in one of the districts of Andhra Pradesh to study the implementation of NREGA. According to him the single woman does indeed lose out for the reason that she is often isolated. It is not easy to find a male partner for work - something worksite officials demand.

Inclusion of women at Panchayat level

The all India Democratic Association (AIDWA) has recently setup a commission related to women's participation in the NREGA. The conference expressed concern over the high productivity norms under NREGA, which failed to provide women even with minimum wages. The commission also took note of the fact that unlike in West Bengal, Tripura and Kerala, where there is 40 percent presence of women in local bodies, in many other parts of the country the role of the women functionaries in panchayats was greatly undermined.

Importance and need of women's participation

The ultimate benefits of rural welfare as a result of an employment guarantee scheme are huge. On the one hand it would provide employment that would result in better health and education for their children and on the other hand it would improve infrastructure facilities in rural India. The benefits would be greater if women are also given due primacy to work. The success of NREGA depends on the inclusion of all, especially women in rural India. The situation is thus; firstly the registration process is difficult as many Indian women are restricted by social taboos like, going out in public alone, e.g., visiting the gram panchayat or talking to strangers. Secondly, even when they register, they should get proper job cards and employment on time. Women who get the employment should get their wages on time, which is often delayed.

Suggestion for inclusion of women in NREGA

1. To begin with women should be kept in forefront for planning, implementing, and evaluation of the programme.
2. Besides manual work, NREGA should also include soft skilled and semi skilled jobs. By such inclusion, the services of women could be utilized in social service and rural health schemes.
3. SEWA's experience of working with women has shown that women who are employed in various skilled and semi skilled ventures possess good technical skills but they require financial help to support their activities. For success of the programme, it is important that local resources are utilized to the fullest and capacity of local communities and institutions are built. Government should conduct a National survey to identify the entrepreneurs, tiny and micro enterprises, to provide financial assistance through NREGA. This will call for involvement of various other

ministries like HRD, Commerce and Industry.

4. Besides one person from one family, a special provision should be made for individual entitlements in case of widows, persons with disabilities, single and deserted women in each household, so that it becomes compulsory for the implementers to include them in the list of employment. Measures ought to be taken to ensure women's participation so they are not pushed disproportionately out of the scheme. The Gram Panchayat can regularly update the list of beneficiaries in the villages by conducting routine surveys in their area.
5. Grass roots organizations of the poor should be involved in the process of implementation. This will include anganwadi workers, health workers, village development committees; self help groups, cooperatives and mandals etc. Capacity of such individuals, groups and institutions should be built by providing training so that they learn the administrative procedures to avail various schemes including NREGA.
6. Empowerment of workers and their holistic development depends, in terms of their strategies to a great extent on the linkages of NREGA and other development programmes. Linkages with social welfare programmes such as rural health mission, literacy programme and anganwadi scheme is needed to ensure basic human entitlements to the worker that, in turn will enhance their capacity to negotiate their right under the act.
7. It is essential to provide mobile health care facilities and Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan classes to the workers so that the educational and health needs of the children, women and others can be met on

the worksites. Mobile crèches for infants and growing children should be provided. Since the anganwadi services are available in every village their working time can be extended for the period of time till the work is in progress on NREG'S worksite. In such situation additional salary or stipend to anganwadi workers and helpers can be adjusted from the budget provided for NREGS. Since women and particularly poor women are malnourished and weak, it is necessary to allow them to work on less strenuous activities. Food for work scheme or anganwadi services can be introduced in such situations at the worksite.

8. Special facilities for disabled women and men such as, accessible toilets and barrier free environment should be ensured. Based on the various provisions made by The Disability Act 1995, work to the disabled person should be provided near their residence. Appropriate transport facilities should be provided to them. Each person with disability should be considered as a separate household regardless of whether he/she has family or not. Their wages should be time based and not work based. Social audit, vigilance committee, State and central data should include the information about the person with disability.
9. It is important to seek women's participation in the social audit of NREGS to make it more effective. Monitoring should be an integral part of the scheme. Mahila mandal, self help groups, and anganwadi workers could play an important role in making it successful by reaching out to women in the community. Safety of women workers on worksite is must. The gram pachayat can arrange a place for their night stay in near by villages.

10. NREGA in its current form has no provision for extending reservations to dalit. Given that the scheme needs to be extended to

the dalit community with special provision for dalit women. Dalit representation at the panchayat level and in administrative work of NREGS should be assured. Capacity building of district level administration and sensitization to the issue of gender, poverty, and rural employment should be done on regular basis before and during implementation of the programme. NGOs can be appointed as an implementing agency. Some of the shortcoming at the state and district level such as lack of adequate professional and technical manpower for planning and implementation and employing manpower for social mobilization at village level is also required to be addressed for successful implementation of the programme.

Conclusion

The NREGA can never meet its objectives without the active participation of people in its implementation. And it is here, that the Right to Information Act 2005 is an indispensable tool in the hands of the poor - to fight leakages, claim entitlements and make the NREGA meaningful for themselves. The gap between progressive laws and their implementation lays some possibilities of containing the fear, genuine or otherwise, of the NREGA becoming a victim of systematic corruption, thereby defeating the very purpose for which it was implemented.

The NREGA can become a major instrument for galvanising panchyati raj institution in India. But how far this actually happens will depend a great deal on the mobilization of disadvantage group like women, dalits, adivasis, and the poor. Without their mobilization and empowerment, the full socio-political potential of the act will not be realized.

NREGA: Breaking new ground

* ARUNA ROY AND NIKHIL DEY

The NREGA, the flagship programme of the UPA government, was revolutionary in its promise of inclusive growth, the right to work and the dignity of labour and a rational, participatory relationship with the State. And it has mostly delivered...

An opportunity for rural renewal: An NREGA project site in Rajasthan

Suddenly the NREGA has become a buzz word. It stands vindicated by the mandate of the people in its most basic evaluation in a democracy — the general elections. Basking in the glory and security of post-electoral analysis, it is actually the best time for those who support the basic philosophy of the NREGA to focus on what it has done and what it has not, by its own parameters.

The first and the primary focus should be to examine its impact on the human resource base of rural India. Has it energized, mobilized, empowered, and delivered to India's poorest and most marginalized rural people? Secondly, has it provided those who were —“not shining” a measure of dignity, tangible economic benefit, and a motivation to participate in local action? This is the crux, for, something as vast and ambitious as the NREGA can only succeed in bringing about change if millions of workers become its true advocates and monitors.

Let us begin with the most persistent charges of endemic corruption. Notwithstanding negative propaganda and the prominent reportage of corruption, NREGA stands apart from employment and poverty alleviation programmes in significant ways. It is the first national programme of consequence which has woven transparency and accountability into the mundane fabric of daily interaction of people with government. The cases of reported corruption have shocked the

intelligentsia. The rural worker might often be the victim but will still offer critical support, not only because it has provided wage income, but also for facilitating disclosure, which helps identify and fight pilferage. In fact, in many cases, scams have been exposed by the workers themselves. NREGA gives an opportunity to break the feudally enforced silence of its victims.

Total Transparency

The Act has a number of “trigger mechanisms” designed to activate and establish people's entitlements. One such trigger is the right to have a Job Card. The Act mandates that anyone who applies at their Panchayat for a Job Card must be given one within 15 days. Without a Job Card, people cannot even apply for work, nor corroborate the records. It is a “dense” and “pan card” of the wage worker's family, with a record of days of work and wages received during the year. There are many States where large numbers of people have demanded, but not received, Job Cards. In many Panchayats, the Job Cards are in the control of implementing agencies. Publicising the Job Card as a record of individual entitlements, to be updated by the authorities, and kept in possession of the workers, would ensure the NREGA is monitored by its workers.

Crucial accountability

The application for work and the dated receipt are crucial to trigger the demand for work. The receipt is also the basic record for claiming unemployment allowance if the work is not provided within 15 days. States like Rajasthan have fared well in providing Job Cards, and providing work within 15 days, but resistance to giving dated receipts has become a massive problem. No State has effectively activated this important mechanism.

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Nevertheless, it has worked when workers groups have got organized.

In the 30 years of existence of its precursor, the Maharashtra Employment Guarantee Act, there is no recorded instance of payment of unemployment allowance. The NREGA has already recorded payment of unemployment allowance to large numbers of workers in chronically poorly-administered areas. The payment of unemployment allowance emanates from an administrative lapse, and is eventually deducted from the pocket of erring officials. It is not a freebie doled out of the government exchequer. Like the Right to Information Act, this has created an important mechanism for enforcing the right while holding the bureaucracy accountable.

The wage under NREGA has been another trigger and indicator of its success. The wage rate, the measurement system, and the timely payment of wages have all become part of the entitlement package. Thanks to NREGA, minimum wages have, for the first time, become a real factor in determining the lower limit for market wages.

Bottlenecks

Wage payments through NREGA have initiated the biggest “financial inclusion” drive, with the requirement that all wage payments be made through banks and post offices. The engineers, the accountants, and the post offices have been unable to cope, and late payments have begun to cripple the Act. Students and Academics, working together with workers’ organisations in Khunti District in Jharkhand, have operationalised the entitlement in the NREGA to get Rs. 2,000/- per worker paid to over 300 workers as compensation for delayed payment under the provisions of the Payment of Wages Act. The Khunti payment, made last month, has once again demonstrated that the solution to the vexatious issue of late payments lies in the entitlement framework.

The uneven implementation in different States has

shown that where people’s struggles have gained political and administrative respect, the NREGA has shown tangible results on a massive scale. It is that battleground of struggle that could well determine the future of the political discourse in this country.

The NREGA also assures an adequate, realistic provision for administrative expenses. At the current six per cent of total costs which has been allowed for administrative costs, there is no legitimacy in citing a shortage of staff or resources for bureaucratic delay. In Rajasthan, for instance, the over 7,000 crores spent on NREGA last year amounts to a massive Rs. 450 crores available for administrative expenses per year. This kind of money and resources can, in fact, help gram Panchayats become properly resourced to better carry out their overall responsibilities.

Biggest contribution

Transparency and accountability to the poorest and the weakest is in fact the biggest potential contribution of the NREGA to the entire governance system. The NREGA is an outstanding example of how the RTI Act can be woven into the fabric of the delivery system and the whole legal and governance paradigm. The entire expenditure on works and workers — 94 per cent of the total amount — is required to be put on the website of the NREGA, with every transaction revealed in detail. This can easily be increased to 100 per cent. Using this Management Information System (MIS), Vijayapura Gram Panchayat in Rajsamand District has begun to build a Janata Information System (JIS) painted on the walls of government buildings in the Gram Panchayat. The boards reveal the details of the number of days of work provided and payments made in the year to every Job Card holder in the Panchayat. Also painted on the walls are the list of works sanctioned, the expenditure on labour and material, and item-wise expenditure on material in each work in the Panchayat, including exactly how many bags of cement, sand and

trolleys of stone were procured, and at what rate in the Gram Panchayat. This is like a web wall which reveals to every interested visitor all that they want to examine.

Larger impact

If the millions of financial transactions of the NREGA can go on their web site, there can be no justification for not following the example and putting almost every financial transaction of government — receipt or expenditure — on the web sites of the relevant department or agency. Proactive disclosure is a requirement of the RTI Act, and is a good example of the larger potential impact of the NREGA on governance.

The NREGA is India's first law to codify development rights in a legal framework, and like the RTI, it has begun to set an example in a global context. Apart from the law, and a set of guidelines, there is a strong and immediate need to formulate rules to operationalise provisions in the Act; which includes guaranteeing grievance redressal in seven days, social audit twice a year, and mandatory transparency and proactive disclosure. Properly incorporated and enforced, a comprehensive set of operational rules could strengthen the entitlement framework, fixing responsibility at every level. Once again, it would enable bottom-up pressure for implementation, which should be matched by a strong political mandate. Today, the NREGA has millions of workers' unresolved and un-addressed grievances and problems to be dealt with. A response system could not only radically improve the NREGA, but can impact and transform the whole face of rural governance.

Interacting with government officials in Rajasthan

Is the NREGA an administrator's nightmare or a redistribution of income and power? A social safety net or a step towards the right to work, to prevent migration, and even boost local market

economies? For those who cannot think beyond the pale of the free market economy and the business model manager, it is indeed a nightmare. For years, simplistic management solutions to poverty, with the poor as an input to be managed, have failed. We cannot see ordinary people as active participants and empowered citizens. That is why there is difficulty in understanding the practice and logic of democracy and difficult, therefore, to understand the realistic detailing and complexity of an Employment Guarantee initiative.

Inclusive growth

Independent India has to acknowledge the critical role the NREGA has played in providing a measure of inclusive growth. It has given people a right to work, to re-establish the dignity of labour, to ensure people's economic and democratic rights and entitlements, to create labour intensive infrastructure and assets, and to build the human resource base of our country. For the first time, the power elite recognises the people's right to fight endemic hunger and poverty with dignity, accepting that their labour will be the foundation for infrastructure and economic growth. The entitlements paradigm is still to be established in many States in the country. Second generation issues like the expansion of the categories of permissible works needs to be taken up with labour and the deprived continuing to be the central focus. The improvements must be to strengthen, not divert from these basic tenets. In the midst of the current economic slowdown, there is enough evidence that this kind of commitment can work to help reduce the slowdown.

The political class would do well to understand that the most important solution is an assertion of its will to respond to people's voices. The many wise, creative, and innovative initiatives emerging from theory and practice have a future only if they are owned by the people and implemented with justice. The NREGA can give people an opportunity to make the entire system truly transparent and accountable. Properly supported, people's struggles for basic entitlements can, in turn, become the strongest political initiative to strengthen our democratic fabric.

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not only as a scheme for employment guarantee but also an effective process of promoting citizen's active engagement and commitment in creating social assets in improving their living condition at the local level.

Conclusion

Despite all its current limitations, the NREGA, as a measure to address immediate distress and supplement incomes has the potential to tackle key issues facing the impoverished people. Dr. Manmohan Singh, the Prime Minister of India said –we look upon the programme to create durable assets and strengthen Panchayati Raj Institutions since at least 50% of work will be routed through Panchayats. Three watchwords should be followed: outlays must be matched by outcomes, productive assets must be created and guarantee must be implemented in true spirit. The Act is a blessing and a challenge. Let us hope it brings smiles on the faces of our poor”. We can also share his hopes and fulfill our commitment to make such a realistic change in future.

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of course, for petitioning against non payment of due wages there is no form, and by far the majority of cases, labourers have worked, and not been paid. With an attitude of cynical callousness, the governments at the state and the centre do not care at all what happens to the poorest in the country, and society. The NREGA is just another means of pocket money for functionaries, officials and politicians.

Conclusion

The NREG Act ‘per se’ is really good and it could create wonderful impact in the rural areas, provided it is properly implemented with maximum participation of the local people. The top-down approach, first of all, has to be abandoned. Mechanisms have to be developed to ensure that the spirit of the Act is executed and the poor people are respected. Any complaints of willful negligence of the concerned officials should be seriously dealt with and severe punishments should be imposed on the errant.

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