



Poverty

**Work and Employment
Community**



Decentralization Community

**Solution Exchange for the Work and Employment
Community**

**Solution Exchange for Decentralization Community
Consolidated Reply**

Query: NREGA vigilance by local groups, from Lok Sabha Secretariat and from Social Watch, New Delhi (Advice).

Compiled by [Sumeeta Banerji](#) and [Alok Srivastava](#), Resource Persons; additional research by [Deepika Naruka](#), Research Associate and [Happy Pant](#), Research Officer
03 April 2006

Original Query: Amitabh Mukhopadhyay, Lok Sabha Secretariat and Ramit Basu, Social Watch, Delhi

Posted: 17 March 2006

The role of community groups through vigilance is very much essential to the implementation of schemes under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005, (NREGA) right from the beginning, to ensure that the provisions made under the Act are implemented in the right sense and equity and justice are ensured in every phase of its implementation.

For example, apart from the role of PRIs and government monitoring mechanisms, it would be useful if local vigilance groups involved in livelihoods/ employment (community organizations and NGOs) could survey wages, works done in their area etc. and build a compendium of sorts over a period of time. This could yield interesting information but ONLY if wages actually received are checked out by the groups and reported. This is because while everyone knows full wages are not always paid and they vary immensely through seasons and regions, there appears to be no systematic effort to document it and share the data.....we continue to rely on Labour Bureau statistics for our understanding and government interventions. Alternative reporting on these matters is essential and it is possible to build it up over time on portals of this kind.

Since many people would like to be a part of NREGA implementation and vigilance (especially the civil society), a discourse on these aspects would be worthwhile, especially for the larger people's campaign on governance accountability. We would like to get suitable directions on how to go

about reporting and vigilance of implementation of schemes under NREGA across the country. Specifically, could members give us advice on:

- What alternative vigilance and reporting mechanisms can be put in place? What systems could be designed to support record of data?
- What are the key aspects that local vigilance groups could collect data on? Given below is a check list of some aspects - please suggest any modifications/ additions. What would be some key indicators that could be recorded with regard to implementation of schemes under the Act?
 - a. Awareness of provisions of the Act
 - b. Processes (distribution of job cards etc.)
 - c. Accounting systems
 - d. Participatory processes in selection of works
 - e. Type of works: land development/water harvesting structure/roads/buildings
 - f. Block/ village-wise measurement of works, design of each and specifications
 - g. Asset creation: Use of assets created, Completion of assets (e.g. was it completed or left incomplete due to onset of agricultural season and operations OR due to paucity of funds OR local disputes ? and (iv) is it being used ?)
 - h. Payment of wages (recording wages received for different type of works)
 - i. Quality of jobs created
 - j. Quality of skills created
 - k. Grievance redressal
 - l. Safety standards at work
 - m. Gender issues: capturing actual payment of minimum wage equally to men and women, equal access to wages earned (joint bank accounts), creation of support structures enabling women to work (e.g. crèches).

We look forward to the views of this community and urge you to contribute to this important subject.

Responses were received, with thanks, from:

1. [Sarit Rout](#), CYSD, Bhubaneswar
2. [Kris Dev](#), Life Line to Business Ltd, Chennai
3. [K.S. Gopal](#), Centre for Environment Concerns, Hyderabad [Response 1](#)
[Response 2](#)
4. [Ujjwal Bhattacharya](#), Chief Conservator of Forests Wildlife, West Bengal
5. [Nikhil Dey](#), MKSS, Rajsamand, Rajasthan
6. [Trilochan Sastry](#), Indian Institute of Management, Bangalore
7. [Ramit Basu](#), National Social Watch Coalition, New Delhi - [Response 1](#),
[Response 2](#)
8. [Kris Dev](#), Life Line to Business Ltd., Chennai - [Response 1](#), [Response 2](#)
9. [Vinod Vyasulu](#), Centre for Budget and Policy Studies, Bangalore -
[Response 1](#), [Response 2](#)
10. [Ranjan Rout](#), PRIA, Bhubaneswar
11. [Ashok Kumar Paikaray](#), Mahabir Yubak Sangh, Bhubaneswar
12. [Kripa Anantpur](#), Madras Institute of Development Studies, Chennai
13. [Smita Premchander](#), Sampark, Bangalore
14. [Ashok Sircar](#), Lok Kalyan Parishad, Kolkata
15. [Venkatrao Ghorpade](#), SHRIDI Foundation, Bangalore
16. [Nidhi Prabha Tiwari](#), Resource Centre for Legislators, New Delhi

17. [Surendra N Tripathi](#), Panchayati Raj & Information Technology Dept., Govt of Orissa
18. [Geeta Malhotra](#), OneWorld South Asia, New Delhi
19. [Arvind Malik](#), Udyogini, Delhi
20. [Abha Mishra](#), UNDP, New Delhi
21. [Ashwini Kulkarni](#), Pragati Abhiyan, Nashik

Further Contributions are welcome!

[Summary of Responses](#)
[Comparative Experiences](#)
[Related Resources](#)
[Responses in Full](#)

Summary of Responses

NREGA is a landmark Act guaranteeing the right to livelihood security in rural areas by providing 100 days of wage employment to adults agreeing to do unskilled labour. While emphasizing the important role of community groups in vigilance, members highlighted that it would be critical to ensure the right to work, dignity and justice to the labourer. They mentioned useful lessons relating to monitoring and vigilance be drawn from the experience of the [Maharashtra Employment Guarantee Scheme](#), operational for several years now.

Role of alternate mechanisms: On alternative vigilance and reporting mechanisms, members felt that the vigilance of schemes by different agencies was essential and desirable as it would ensure transparent implementation of employment guarantee schemes. Members stressed on NGOs wholeheartedly engaging with the Act, learning about processes, organising workers, and finding ways to counter vested interests, and recommended their visiting job sites and monitoring works, and including other local groups include local youth forums, SHGs, people's federations and groups like Forest Protection/ Eco Development Committees, activists; local elite like lawyers, doctors, teachers/lecturers, and other civil society organisations. Members pointed out that wage workers too have a key role in ensuring good implementation of employment guarantee schemes. Members shared that organising wage workers would enhance their ability to hold the panchayats accountable. An example was shared from [Orissa](#), where the capacity of labour unions is being enhanced to ensure registration of beneficiaries and to monitor receipt of entitlements by beneficiaries.

Within Government framework: Members cautioned that, such systems need to be mainstreamed within government and implementing agencies. Strengthening local government and capacity-building of PRIs and NGOs, expanding scope of work of the vigilance commission officials (stipulated under the Act) and setting up of a new NREGA vigilance cell, were some suggestions put forward by members. In addition, similar to the formation of state-level employment guarantee councils, formation of such bodies at the district/sub-district level, could involve NGOs, CBOs, teachers, further in the vigilance process.

Tools and methods for vigilance: Respondents suggested several systems and tools to support data collection and reporting, including use of internet and software tools. Examples included the use in **Anantpur district, Andhra Pradesh**, of a biometric reader for tracking that payments are made appropriately and on time. Pilot testing of this tool demonstrated that

biometric based payment could reduce time taken for encashment of bank cheques and increase bank accessibility problems for remote areas. An example of an IT tool to [estimate 'works'](#) was also shared by a member. Another suggestion was to set up a district-wise NREGA website with data through IT tracking of all works at all its stages, which could be made available to the public in a read-only form, making it easier for monitoring by civil society and higher officials. Members argued that these tools could reduce scope for leakages and corruption, so they should be easy to handle, accurate and of good quality, so that data is read and verified with complete authenticity. In addition, provision of unique photographic identification of each citizen e.g. citizen/voter ID, etc.; would also help in transparency in implementation of schemes like the NREGA. For awareness generation as well as transparency, the setting-up of data collection kiosks/centers as well as maximum use of village community radios and computer centres, was also stressed in the responses by members.

Members suggested ways to facilitate alternative reporting and vigilance such as planning and budgeting in advance, publishing details of tenders/contracts, progress reports, etc. on the web-using Right to Information Act (RTI) as an effective tool for reporting and vigilance by local groups, SHGs and the community for transparent implementation.

Key aspects and indicators: Members shared the scope and role of alternate vigilance bodies and tools to support them, and recommended a checklist of key aspects and indicators that can be tracked to measure successful implementation, At the outset, members advised a base-line survey be conducted for identification of BPL families and this information be displayed in local language, at public spaces in villages (e.g. youth clubs). Principal aspects that needed tracking, according to members, were:

- **Awareness:** The level of awareness and information of the NREGA provisions particularly application and registration procedure, wage rates, and other rights among potential beneficiaries of the Act.
- **Application and Registration process:** Local vigilance groups can play an important role in ensuring that everyone gets the chance to apply; every legitimate family receives a job card; tracking whether job cards are being prepared/updated regularly and in a transparent manner, treatment of applications for work as per norms and registration of wage earners.
- **Payment:** Timely and fair payment can be ensured by recording name of the person, amount and date of payment. Correct data, not only on the issue of payment, but on the measurement of wages for different types of works separately for men and women, is crucial. Members underlined the gender-bias in calculating payment and the need to ensure equal wages to men & women. It is often assumed that women have assisted men to complete the task. This bias is further accentuated by the system of household head opening the bank account, to primarily men receiving all the wages. Members felt that this is an issue which needs to be urgently addressed.
- **Asset creation:** Transparency in sanction and implementation of works, tracking the quality of works, their proper measurement, and creation of productive assets of utility to community; application of participatory processes and open discussions (e.g. gram sabha meetings and through synergy with village-based micro plans) in identification and prioritization of works and auditing of completed works are some important aspects that can be reported on.
- **Estimation of cost of works:** Data collection for an updated Standard Schedule of Rates (SSR) is required to ensure payment of wages in accordance with an accurate estimation of cost of works. According to national guidelines, all states must undertake a Time and Work study but there is not much information of subsequent action by the states. Further it was suggested that estimate SSR should be calculated for at least two seasons since the degree of effort can vary. Members also pointed to making sure that in NREGA schemes there is no use of contractors or use of labour saving machinery.

Members touched upon Other aspects for local groups to pay attention to in their vigilance role - everyone be given intimation of the work she/he is provided with; timely payment of unemployment allowance; ensuring at least one-third women labour; responsibilities given to disabled persons, worksite facilities, process of handling work complaints, availability of muster rolls and similar documents for public scrutiny, transparent daily individual and final measurement of work, whether vigilance committee made regular visits, and so on. A member sent a comprehensive list of key indicators, accessible [here](#).

Finally, members advised on alternate mechanisms which need to be addressed in advance, e.g. their legitimacy; funding needs, etc. A local vigilance group for one panchayat, than for each village, with formal recognition from panchayat was suggested. Members emphasized on a new collaborative approach in effectively implementing the NREGA based on the principle of 'reciprocal relationship on deliverables' where different stakeholders voluntarily agree for specific tasks thereby ensuring clarity in expectations right from the start..

Comparative Experiences

Andhra Pradesh

From [K.S. Gopal](#), Centre for Environment Concerns, Hyderabad

Ensuring transparent payment of wages according to work performed

A pilot NREGA being implemented in ten panchayats in Anantapur is using an innovative device for making payments. The device, a hand held biometric reader, captures finger print data, prints the name and amount paid and records the date and time of payment. Priced at Rs 26,000, it makes payment to the wage worker at his habitation and with no additional costs to him. With staggered payments single equipment can cater to about ten villages.

Revision of Standard Schedule of Rates

A precondition for minimum wages is revising Standard Schedule of rates (SSR) for various tasks. The Andhra Government commissioned 'Time and Work' study in select villages in NREGA districts led to upwards modification of SSR for each type of work. As a result of this exercise, the state has a specific SSR for NREGA which has set in motion the fixation of minimum wages.

Multistakeholder Partnership

A multistakeholder MOU between state government, sarpanch, Mandal parishad officer, Mandal programme implementation officer and the NGO is in operation for certain villages. Under this, activities are broken into specific tasks defining responsibilities against timeline, and accordingly providing voluntary services of NGOs. This ensures clarity in roles and expectations from key partners during planning, implementation and monitoring of employment guarantee schemes.

Rajasthan

Mass Social Audit (from [Nikhil Dey](#), MKSS, Rajsamand, Rajasthan)

Drawing on experiences with peoples' audit process, a mass social audit is planned under the banner of '*Rozgar avum Suchna ka Adhikar Abhiyan*' in Dungarpur, one of the six NREGA districts in the state. In this exercise, 30 groups would spread over the district, visiting every village in a week's span, during which it would strengthen awareness about NREGA and carry out daily reporting from NREGA worksites about actual implementation of provisions as per guidelines.

Orissa

Labour Unions for awareness generation (from [Sarit Rout](#), CYSD, Bhubaneswar)

An NGO working in Nabarangpur district has trained labour union members for mobilising people in the district. The NGO has facilitated formation of Labour Unions, which would be involved in awareness generation as well as in helping people with issues like registration of families, monitoring the entitlements received, and so on.

Use of Software (from [Surendra N Tripathi](#), Panchayati Raj & Information Technology Dept., Govt of Orissa)

Orissa has used NREGA application software to issue job-cards and prepare database of project, and to systematize its implementation in 32,000 villages in 3,672 GPs. Step-wise instruction guide on handling of web-based monitoring system for OREGS has also been issued by the government for effective training of Program Officers in the various districts.

Maharashtra

Maharashtra EGS (from [Kripa Anantpur](#), Madras Institute of Development Studies, Chennai; [Ashok Sircar](#), Lok Kalyan Parishad, Kolkata; [Ashwini Kulkarni](#), Pragati Abhiyan, Nashik)

The EGS was set-up in the drought period of early 1970s. The data collected among those who participated in the scheme shows that employment through this scheme accounts for between 1/10th-1/3rd of the number of days of employment of rural workers. The participation of women in the EGS was between 30-40%. The scheme led to other positive impacts.

Karnataka

Social Mobilization (from [Smita Premchander](#), Sampark, Bangalore)

In Koppal district, Sampark is aiming to mobilize the NGOs, people's federations and local youth, to work in-tandem to learn and spread awareness on the various provisions of NREGA, especially among the rural people who will be the wage earners under the NREGS. To learn more see [below](#)

Related Resources

Recommended Documentation

Letter of Invitation: mass social audit of Rozgar avum Suchna ka Adhikar Abhiyan

(from [Nikhil Dey](#), MKSS, Rajsamand, Rajasthan)

<http://www.solutionexchange-un.net.in/emp/cr/res31030601.doc>

An information notice for participating in the social audit exercise being organized under the banner of 'rozgar avum suchna ka adhikar abhiyan'.

NREGA guidelines (from [Ramit Basu](#), Social Watch, New Delhi)

http://nrega.nic.in/Nrega_guidelines.pdf (565 KB)

Detail in relation to NREGA, the basic implementation principles, key agencies and their roles, planning process, execution of works and their payment.

Recommendations for Strengthening the PRIs (from [Venkatrao Ghorpade](#))

By Venkatrao Ghorpade, Sep 2005, Available at [link](#)

Proposed recommendations on strengthening of PRIs, presented at UNDP-Planning Commission workshop for assessing training needs of HD departments at state-level.

Check-list for NREGA (from [Nidhi Prabha Tiwari](#))

Prepared by Nidhi Prabha Tiwari and Mathew V., Available at [link](#)

Check-list of elements for monitoring of NREGA at the district, block & panchayat level, contains sections on transparency in works, wage payments, etc.

NREGA: SEWA's Perception and Implications: A Perspective Note, by Reena Nanawaty and Divya Pandya (*from Happy Pant, UNDP*)

<http://www.righttofoodindia.org/data/sewa05nregaperspective.doc> (267 KB)

SEWA has worked on a detailed analytical note, with recommendations on extending the scope of NREGA to include skilled and semi-skilled operations.

National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) 2005 (*from Deepika Naruka, Research Associate*)

<http://nrega.nic.in/rajaswa.pdf>

Act provides for livelihood security in rural areas by providing 100 days of wage employment to rural households whose adult members do unskilled manual work.

Recommended Organizations

From **[K.S. Gopal](#)**, Centre for Environment Concerns, Hyderabad

Centre for Environment Concerns, Hyderabad

Contact: 3-4,142/6, Barkatpura, Hyderabad-500 027; Email: cechyd@eth.net

Is doing a pilot under a multi-stakeholder MoU, in which the planning, implementation, monitoring work related to NREGA is divided among the different agencies.

Engineering Staff College of India - ESCI, Hyderabad

<http://www.escihyd.org/aboutus.htm>

Undertook a 'Time and Work' study in select villages of NREGA districts in AP, which led to the Standard Schedule of Rates (SSR) being revised.

National Institute of Rural Development, Hyderabad

<http://www.nird.org.in/>

Working with CEC, Hyderabad to hold a workshop involving NGOs and other organisations for discussion of experiences to develop a role for civil society in the NREGA.

Satyam Computers, Hyderabad

<http://www.satyam.com/>

Satyam Computers is working in conjunction with Centre for Environment Concerns to develop an IT tool for estimation of works.

Tata Consultancy Services

http://www.tcs.com/0_contact_us/india.htm

TCS focuses on delivering technology-led business solutions to its clients, and has been hired by the Govt. of AP to work on an IT tool for estimation of 'works' under NREGA.

Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan, Rajasthan (*from [Nikhil Dey](#), Rajsamand, Rajasthan*)

Address: Devdungri, Rajsamand, Rajasthan; Phone: 02951-250180

MKSS pioneered the cause of right to work and the legislation on employment guarantee through their campaigns.

Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India (*from Happy Pant, UNDP*)

<http://rural.nic.in/>

As a nodal ministry for NREGA, it acts as a catalyst for implementing wide spectrum of programmes aimed at poverty alleviation, employment generation and social security.

SEWA, Ahmedabad (from Happy Pant, UNDP)

<http://www.sewa.org/>

On the basis of its wide experience of working for sustainable livelihood creation among rural poor of India, SEWA has made some suggestions on the NREGA Act.

Institute of Social Studies Trust (ISST) (from Deepika Naruka, Research Associate)

Contact: Core 6A, India Habitat Centre, New Delhi -3, Ph: 011-24647873

Can be contacted for details and papers of a Jan 2006 workshop held jointly with India Habitat Centre, on the issue of 'Perspectives on Women and NREGA'.

Recommended Tool

Biometric Equipment (from [K.S. Gopal](#), Centre for Environment Concerns, Hyderabad)

Releasing payment to village wage workers through this device would make its investment & outsourcing the services a viable business for entrepreneur/NGO. See [more](#)

Recommended Websites

NREGA (from Happy Pant, UNDP)

<http://nrega.nic.in/>

A website of Ministry of Rural Development, Govt of India, provides comprehensive information, data and circulars related to NREGA.

The Right to Food Campaign - Employment Guarantee Act (from Deepika Naruka, Research Associate)

http://www.righttofoodindia.org/rtowork/ega_intro.html

Contains key documents of EGA, information on state EGS, articles and reports related to NREGA including on implementation of the act and gender-sensitivity of the components.

Right to Information Act 2005 (from Deepika Naruka, Research Associate)

<http://persmin.nic.in/RTI/WelcomerTI.htm>

Gives detailed information & documents related to the Act, including the full text, role of central/state governments, explanation of the Act, information requesting procedure, etc.

Maharashtra Employment Guarantee Scheme (from Deepika Naruka, Research Associate)

<http://mahaegs.nic.in/>

Maharashtra government website giving detailed information on the scheme including its history, beneficiary projects, downloadable forms, budgets, etc.

Recommended Past Consolidated Replies (CR)

Experiences with Employment Guarantees, from UNDP India, 18 Aug 2005

Available at: <http://www.solutionexchange-un.net.in/emp/cr/res18010605-public.pdf>

This global Poverty Network CR gives examples and GLOBAL experiences of rural wage employment/ self employment schemes run by governments.

Experiences with Employment Guarantee Legislation, from UNDP, India, 13 Oct 05

Available at: <http://www.solutionexchange-un.net.in/emp/cr/res18010604-public.pdf>

This global Poverty Reduction Network & Democratic Governance Network CR gives examples of food-for-work and employment Guarantee schemes in various countries.

NREGA Training for Different Stakeholders, from SIRD, Ahmedabad, 18 Jan 2006

Available at: <http://www.solutionexchange-un.net.in/emp/cr/cr-se-emp-18010601-public.pdf>

This Work and Employment Community CR gives advice on components for the design of training modules for the different stakeholders involved in the implementation of NREGA.

Panchayats implementing NREGA in backward districts, from NIPFP, New Delhi, 13 Dec 05

Available at: <http://www.solutionexchange-un.net.in/decn/cr/cr-se-decn-13120501-public.pdf>

This Decentralization Community CR offers valuable ideas regarding implementation of NREGA in different parts of the country, with special reference to the backward districts.

Capacity-building of PRIs, from Debate, Bhopal, 16 August 2005

Available at: <http://www.solutionexchange-un.net.in/decn/cr/cr-se-decn-16080502-public.pdf>

This Decentralization Community CR offers ideas on PRI capacity building training, and information organizations that could be contacted for detailed material and assistance.

Responses in Full

Sarit Rout, CYSD, Bhubaneswar

I am responding to the query made by Amitabh and Ramit about the role of local vigilance groups to ensure smooth functioning of the NREGA.

The local vigilance group should be formed for one panchayat rather for each village. They should have a formal recognition by the panchayat body. The first step in this direction is to have a base line survey identifying the BPL families. It should not be a rigorous survey rather it should involve minimum information about the number of individuals, income from various sources and the property under his / her possession. Such information should be available to the vigilance groups. If the basic information can be displayed in local language in some common places of the village such as youth club or any other common places that would produce tremendous result.

Again a list of beneficiary under different programmes of the village can be prepared and be available with the vigilance group. It can be also possible for the local vigilance group to take the help of school students to know the wage received by his father and mother and job cards received by them. Again frequent visit to job site and monitoring work may bring fruitful result.

Kris Dev, Life Line to Business Ltd, Chennai

Your questions are very relevant. But the answers are eluding us, for a long time.

With regard to vigilance of schemes implemented under NREGA, I would like to suggest that:

- All activities must be planned and budgeted in advance and put on the web.
- Every tender / contract must be published with full details on the web.
- Any citizen should be able to pursue the records of various projects, inspect them and report the progress or otherwise on the web. I think Govt. of NCT of Delhi is already doing this to some extent.
- There must be citizens watch dog committees that would monitor and report to the public.

More generally, what we need in India and many developing countries is the following:

1. Identify every citizen, from birth to death, with a unique identification.
2. All monetary transactions must be routed through a single genuine bank account for every individual and organization.
3. Ban currency circulation, and make all monetary transactions, transparent on the web, for all to see.
4. By the above, we can genuinely identify, those, below the poverty line and evolve methods of creating gainful employment and prevent siphoning of funds meant for such employment guarantee schemes.

We need totally transparent and accountable systems of self administration, rather than governance. This would alone help to transform India and the developing world. Corruption of mind, must be removed from our midst, if we need to progress. Free doles, must be stopped forthwith. Punishment for failures must be stringent and swift. A "Transparent Old Age and Infirm Pension and Life Guarantee Scheme" is a must, if the society has to progress. Every citizen must contribute their mite for the growth of the local community and society.

K.S. Gopal, Centre for Environment Concerns, Hyderabad

For the past few weeks we have been too engrossed in implementing the pilot NREGA in ten panchayats in Ananthapur (Andhra Pradesh) and by the next fortnight will have a document sharing our innovations, learnings and experiences. On the query asked by Ramit this is our response.

At the moment we are not placing priority to civil society monitoring as that is open to us and can wait. Our emphasis is more on making NREGA work in favour of the poor by improving the systems of governance and monitoring. My advice to civil society monitoring actors is not to seek every detail, but be selective on the critical areas which are vital and helpful to making this Act a right and ensuring the dignity and justice to the labourer. Having said that, let me share the following from our understanding and experience in the pilot:

a) Regarding ensuring payment going to the right person, in correct amount and on time we use a hand held biometric reader. In this the finger print data is captured of all the work persons and when the payment is made it is done after verification of the thumb impression by the biometric reader followed by a print out of the name and amount paid to the person. The biometric records the date and time of payment and in this way the amount is transparent, tells the date when the money was paid (as delay is one way of oppression practiced on the wage worker and gives scope for corruption). In our pilot three panchayats have one device and now we feel that about eight to ten villages can be served with one equipment with the payment dates being staggered, with each day two to three habitations being covered. The biometric costs Rs. 26,000 but its value will come down as the number purchased increases. The maintenance cost is for the paper roll, battery and later on we may need money for servicing/maintenance but for now our products is covered by warranty. The device is easy to carry. In choosing the software and buying the equipment we must be careful as there are many thumb readers that are cheaper and of poor quality but do not work in situations when the thumb of rough (as with a labourer) but needs to be read and verified with hundred percent authenticity.

b) The Government of Andhra Pradesh (AP) has a tie up with select nationalized banks for opening accounts and make NREGA wage payments. Our concern and choosing biometric is that

banks are fifteen to twenty kms away and the poor have to make many trips to find if the money has come and then draw it. Thus, if we calculate cost to the wage worker, paying through banks is not advisable while the biometric reader reaches the household at their habitation and making payment at no additional cost to the wage worker. Further it takes fifteen days for a cheque issued in the district headquarters, from where it must come, to reach the concerned bank. We feel that the entire payment be biometric based and outsourced to third parties, after taking collaterals and guarantees from them, by paying a service charge of 0.25% of the amount paid. In AP each panchayat has an average of about two hundred fifty registered worker households and at the eighty rupees wage fixed by the govt. and for one hundred days the likely payment comes to twenty lakh rupees annually making both the investment on biometric and outsourcing of payments a viable business for an entrepreneur or NGO. If two villages can be serviced it becomes viable to a service provider including same day updating of the data to a central data bank for storing the payment details. This will help in planning releases from the district headquarters without delay or holding large monies.

c) We are working with Satyam Computers for an IT tool to estimate "works". Tata Consultancy Services has been hired by the govt. and they have developed a product for this. The viability and use of this product in the field can be checked with the AP govt. We are working hard at further developing our software and testing on the ground but this will take time and needs pucca validation. But when this tool comes in and works the whole matter of "estimation of works" which is a black box today will come into public domain, eliminate negotiating the value of works and thus corruption. But we need to wait for it or someone like UNDP or the Ministry must invest resources for developing and customizing the software.

d) We are advocating NREGA district website with data through IT tracking of all works at all its stages. The TCS has this product also which needs to be field-tested. If this happens with the database being open as "read only" facility to the public then monitoring by civil society and higher officials would become easy and the implementing system be vigilant. While this task is simple it is gigantic as it needs cooperation of all officials in the NREGA decision-making and implementing systems and their willingness to take it forward. We have to hope it will happen over time. For the present we are pushing the state govt. to pilot it in some places where officials are willing through outsourcing or NGO involvement.

e) On the matter of vigilance, we advocate enlarging the task of the Vigilance Officials. Upto now the vigilance commission looks at only corruption. Our proposal is to expand its mandate or create a new NREGA vigilance cell with the task of looking at delays and denials of wages (which is the source of corruption and control over the poor) and look at relationship management including work site facilities (to deal with issues between engineers, officials and workers). So we are seeking a new approach in vigilance as that could be a way to ensure compliance on courtesy and timely services and strengthen the rights dimension. If this is not accepted, then we propose this being done as a pilot by civil society with some kind of endorsement to the process by senior supportive officials.

f) On the issue of equal wage for women we need to tackle the fundamental issue - measurement, which is the basis of calculating payment is itself gender biased and measures only the work of men and assumes that women have "assisted" men to complete the task. Women end up working more as shown in AP time and work studies while receiving lower wage. This injustice is further accentuated by the fact that under the proposed payment through banks only the household head will be opening the bank account and invariable all wages monies received will be received by men. I suggest we all get together and raise this fundamental injustice to women including their occupational health hazards and I look to others in taking a lead to correct this in the NREGA. I have brought this matter to the attention of the Planning

Commission and the Administrative Reforms Committee, which has been asked by the PMO to develop the implementation framework on the NREGA, and have also written to NGOs. To address this, we must not only raise the issue loud but find a way to correct or develop new tools and ways of measuring work. Currently like housework, the work of women in the NREGA is meeting the same fate of not being recognized and considered a valueless add on.

g) As regards minimum wages being ensured this can happen only when the standard schedule of rates for various tasks are changed. In AP we got the govt. to commission a 'Time and Work' study. This was done by the Engineering Staff College of India in select villages in the NREGA districts and led to the Standard Schedule of Rates (SSR) being revised upwards by a minimum of two and half times for each type of work leading to ensuring the minimum wages. Now in AP there is a specific SSR for NREGA. The national guidelines has said that all states must undertake a Time and Work study and revise the SSR but I have not heard further on such action by any state. The reason for this could be that it would require revisiting wages and would lead to escalation of the costs of all types of works now being done through contractors and this cannot be afforded by the state govt. All this despite my saying that in NREGA there should be no contractor or use of labour saving machinery and works on different principles and purpose. So let the civil society lobby with state govt. and get such a study done and quote the AP study and the GOI guidelines to ensure minimum wages. Even then there could be a problem as under NREGA a shelf of works is developed and implemented as demands for work come from wage seekers. The issue is that if all calculations is for the rainy and post rainy season what happens if work is done in summer when the soils get hard and the effort needed is much higher but the work out turn would be lower. We suggest that the estimates be provided for two seasons and based on when the work is actually done the appropriate cost estimate be applied.

h) Regarding Panchayat Raj, all I can say is that their role in implementation needs to be strengthened. Some state government such as Karnataka govt. is keen on the centrality of PRIs in NREGA and we have to see how it unfolds as they complete their state guidelines and get into action.

i) CEC is doing the pilot under a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the state govt. and in a voluntary capacity. So for the next forty five villages where four NGOs have volunteered in the district to assist the state govt. free of cost, we have developed a multistakeholder MoU. It involves the sarpanch, the Mandal Parishad officer/engineer, the Mandal programme implementation officer and the NGO with the MoU supervision being wrested with the district Collector. We are also now thinking if the MLA should also be included in such a compact. Under the agreement that is voluntarily agreed among these parties the activities are grouped in four categories - Planning, Implementation, Coordination and Decision Making and Monitoring, Review and Supervision. In each category the work is broken into specific tasks and defines who will do it and within what time and then we arrive what tasks different players will do and on that basis make available the NGO voluntary services. The advantage of such a multi-tier and mutually agreed MoU is that each states what services they want from NGO and what they will do in return. Thus there is pre-acceptance, commitment and clarity among the sarpanch, officials and the NGOs on the responsibilities of each and helps to prepare a detail of exactly who must do what and when. This institutional relationship and responsibility is fuzzy in the NREGA guidelines of some states. This approach we hope helps to mainstream the practices in the wider bureaucratic structure and that why the NGO has volunteered its services free in the first place.

j) I am in discussion with the National Institute of Rural Development on a workshop involving NGOs and select officials and this should be happening soon and our pilot and the experience of others could be discussed to develop a role for civil society in the NREGA.

Ujjwal Bhattacharya, Chief Conservator of Forests Wildlife, West Bengal

Under the provisions of National Rural Employment Guarantee Act '2005 Govt. of India has started the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS). They have instructed the State Government departments to ensure / create a minimum of 100 (hundred) days of employment for the rural poor per year.

I believe it is a very novel idea since lot of development schemes and works are undertaken by different govt. departments, where there is sizeable component of involvement of rural people for generation of man days. In so far as rural West Bengal is concerned, local people have always been involved in different development works in their area and these schemes have ensured certain amount of employment for them. However with this Novel Scheme NREGS of Govt. of India, this would be more organized, proper beneficiaries will be identified and the benefits are expected to percolate to the actual needy and poor. In the State Forest Department of West Bengal instructions have been issued to the field officers by the Principal Chief Conservator of Forests, West Bengal to draw up schemes under NREGS following the norms and guidelines issued by the Govt. of India.

There are two major issues with this scheme which require immediate attention of the members:

- 1) The works to be undertaken under NREGS should be development oriented, productive and useful to the community / environment and not merely a method of wage generation without a productive end use.
- 2) Governance and vigilance of the scheme by different agencies.

In this aspect the registered NGOs have a very important role to play in motivating the people, interact with the concerned departments in drawing up the schemes, identify proper beneficiaries depending on the works being generated and finally oversee proper implementation of the schemes.

The key indicators listed by Shri Amitabh Mukhopadhyay are very well thought out.

Alternative vigilance and reporting mechanism can be through the institution of:

- i) NGOs / Voluntary organizations.
- ii) Groups of people formed into Forest Protection Committees (FPCs) and Eco Development Committees (EDCs).
- iii) Forest Development Agency (FDA) - a body of local forest dwelling communities who have been empowered to receive grants and execute works.

Nikhil Dey, MKSS, Rajsamand, Rajasthan

In the context of this query, I would like to share with you details of a mass social audit exercise we are planning for April 15-26, 2006, in Dungarpur, Rajasthan.

With a resolve to draw on experiences with the social audit or peoples audit process, a number of groups have come together in Rajasthan under the banner of the "**ROZGAR EVUM SUCHNA KA ADHIKAR ABHIYAN**". As a first step, this platform has planned an activity of a mass social audit to cover the whole District of Dungarpur in the course of a ten day march (padyatra). Dungarpur, a tribal district in southern Rajasthan, is one of the 6 districts where NREGA is being implemented in the State.

The ROZGAR EVUM SUCHNA KA ADHIKAR ABHIYAN has proposed that upto a thousand people will divide into 30 groups with approximately 30 people in each group. After a two day preparatory meeting and orientation in Dungarpur town, they will go out across the district to visit every village in the district in a span of the next week. During this time, each group will visit villages (as mapped out in the two day workshop) with primarily two objectives in mind. One would be spreading awareness about the NREGA through various modes; and the second would be daily reporting from each of the groups from worksites of the NREGA and from the villages visited, about actual implementation of the provisions as per the requirements in the NREGA Guidelines.

We have been contacted by several groups and networks from across the country about receiving training for social audit processes based on our experiences in Rajasthan. One objective of this mass social audit is also to provide this kind of learning experience while being organically connected, and contributing to an ongoing process at a grass root level.

The [letter of invitation with a programme](#) and information note, which is self explanatory, is attached.

Trilochan Sastry, Indian Institute of Management, Bangalore

Alternate vigilance and reporting mechanisms are needed - this would include NGOs, civil society, activists, local elites (lawyers, doctors, teachers/lecturers) outside the government. The questions arise about what the legitimacy of these alternate mechanisms and what is funding if any they need. If action is not swift and prompt then all these mechanisms would be of no use. What happens when an alternate mechanism throws up problems? What swift remedial action is possible, and who will take it?

Also, if funding is needed for this, it should not come from the government or from the NREGA. That will compromise the independence of these alternatives.

Finally, in these alternatives, we should also look at physical works wherever possible. What prevents the poor and the officials from collaborating, showing works on paper, and sharing the payments?

Ramit Basu, National Social Watch Coalition, New Delhi

Thanks to the responses. I would like to point to the NREGA guidelines - Chapter 5 that on Works and Their Execution (page 21). In the list of permissible works point no. ix says that - "any other work that may be notified by the Central Government in consultation with the State Government." Now this creates confusion regarding the intention of the very scheme. Learning from the experience of past schemes and to ensure success of this scheme, it would be crucial to follow a bottom up approach of planning to implementation and to get the heart and soul of the beneficiaries and identify and address their actual needs.

Rather I believe that planning should be absolutely decentralized which should feed in to the district and state proposal. This will also build up the capacity of the panchayats in planning and implementation, imbibe a feeling of self reliance and they will feel responsible towards their role towards the development of the panchayats. I would also go to the extent of advocating that the list of works covered under in points i to viii should be kept opened and actual needs

assessment should be carried out which will bring out the true picture.

Hence this clause needs to be re-stated so that the actual benefits of the program can be reaped by the beneficiaries for whom it is meant as per their requirements.

Kris Dev, Life Line to Business Ltd., Chennai

Congratulations on your initiative. I wish you all success. Some observations on biometric cost as well as the methodology to track beneficiaries:

1. Biometric devices cost only Rs. 6,000 to 7,000 per piece. Even the software would cost only Rs 25,000.
 2. If the individuals are asked to open local cooperative bank accounts, thro' SHGs which can as Bank Extension Counters, then there is no need to pay them by cash. Instead the amount can be deposited in their account and a minimum saving can be insisted from them, like Grameen Bank savings.
 3. Every citizen covered under the scheme can be photographed and identity recorded. This would also ensure only genuine people get employed, with genuine bank accounts, linked to their Citizen ID / Voter ID.
 4. Generation of productive employment and audit of the outcome of such employment is a must for progress.
 5. The database can be thrown open to public to see and raise any doubts on the web, for response. This would bring in the desired level of transparency and accountability.
- I would like to have your reactions.

Vinod Vyasulu, Centre for Budget and Policy Studies, Bangalore

The NREGA is to be implemented through panchayats, which are democratically elected bodies. We also know they are weak in many respects. Should we not then focus attention on what needs to be done to strengthen them to undertake this work? I find concern in these debates about corruption etc--but little attention to the critical issue of strengthening the local governments--sometimes even the acknowledgement that these are local governments seems to be missing. Just as one MP does not a Parliament make, so does one member a not make a panchayat--the focus has to be on the general body of elected members sitting together. What exactly is the responsibility of elected members? What should it be? If there is a difference, how can we deal with it? In a democracy, it would appear wrong to bypass a democratic institution--which I am afraid is likely to happen--inadvertently perhaps.

K.S. Gopal, Centre for Environment Concerns, Hyderabad

I have read with interest what my friend Trilochan Sastry has written and this is my response.

While it is good for alternate vigilance led by civil society we must still mainstream such systems within the govt. and the implementing mechanism. A new approach underway in one district in AP is worth informing everyone. In our pilot NREGA, four NGOs have come together voluntarily to assist the govt. in effectively implementing the NREGA. But we placed one condition, the NGO will do its assigned role but expects others also in doing there tasks efficiently and therefore we can offer free service but wanted a reciprocal relationship on deliverables. Thus we now have a multi-party MoU - the sarpanch representing the panchayat raj, the MPDO who represents the

implementing agency in terms of works chosen, estimates preparation and making payments etc, the Mandal Project Implementation Officer who is incharge of NREGA being a right to the worker and the NGO. In the MOU each activity is identified and who will do what is specified and this is overseen by the District Collector. I guess we have to see how this works but we have expectations that the entire arrangement being signed by all parties with their articulating what they want to NGO to do and agreeing to reciprocity on the tasks to be done by them augurs possibility of effective partnership and reaching the NREGA to the people.

I agree that funding of NGO should not come from Govt. But some funds are needed and hence we must find ways to address this need including getting traditional donors to see the value of working on the NREGA and making it work. Works being on paper, I guess must be addressed but I have not seen that happening on Food For Work atleast in AP.

Ranjan Rout, PRIA, Bhubaneswar

Attached at this [link](#) please find the proceedings of a state level consultation of civil society groups, UNDP representatives, Government officials and others held on 17th March 2006 at Bhubaneswar and follow up action planned for strengthening NREGA in Orissa. This is just initiation of the collective process under the leadership of Right to Food Campaign.

Ashok Kumar Paikaray, Mahabir Yubak Sangh, Bhubaneswar

In Orissa about 47% of the population is below the poverty line, and the Government of Orissa has decided to reduce this to 40% within two years. NREGA is going to be implemented in 19 districts (some of the most backward districts in the state) of Orissa in the initial phase. The NREGA can indeed be a powerful tool for these marginalized people to fight against poverty. For the proper and transparent implementation of the program, the RTI can be used as a tool for reporting and vigilance by local groups, SHGs and the community

Kripa Anantpur, Madras Institute of Development Studies, Chennai

Thanks for some very interesting and thought provoking discussions. But I've felt that, at times, the focus of the discussion has not centred sufficiently on local governments. I'm glad that Vinod has been reminding us of the need to put local governments at the centre of the debate. I completely agree with Vinod's point. Local governments have legitimacy as democratically elected bodies and we should concentrate on strengthening them. NREGA is new programme and we have an opportunity to build adequate measures into the programme for monitoring and evaluation. We may look at the EGS programme in Maharashtra which does not have the Panchayat component to understand the ways in which their role could be strengthened.

Ramit Basu, National Social Watch Coalition, New Delhi

I fully agree with Mr. Vyasulu's views on strengthening of panchayats through NREGA and that is what should be aimed at doing exactly. Infact the entire planning exercise, amongst others, should be under the purview of the panchayats which will enable them to undertake a needs assessment of what needs to be done. Naturally a feeling of ownership and responsibility will develop once they start feeling a part of them.

Infact that should be the state of affairs which will strengthen the concept of 'local self governance' per se. Hope other members would also reflect on the same and suggest ways of strengthening the panchayats through the EGA.

Smita Premchander, Sampark, Bangalore

Thank you for raising this important question. NREGA will have unparalleled resources, very high expectations, and we all want to make sure it works, and not falls by the wayside, like so many other magical formulas we have had, including the most recent one of small credit to self help groups of women solving the poverty problem of the country.

The introduction of NREGA is politically motivated, and we need to make sure we are able to counter the politics involved in schemes with such heavy involvement of resources. Only technical solutions will not suffice. We need a tool, and we need the agents.

The tool: we have the right to information bill, which could strengthen our hands as citizens. We need the ability to use it, and should generate ideas and examples, very quickly, to be able to use the bill to our advantage. MKSS can share what facilitates and what hinders the use of this tool, in terms of processes.

In terms of agents, we need those who are a-political and those who have some resources. The form is not important: whether they are NGOs, youth forums, SHGs, or any other civil society organization, what is important is the ability to lead a collective movement, create awareness among those who are getting these jobs, creating locally powerful organizations, and find means of sustaining and empowering them. The resource we need are not financial alone, we need people who will join this movement.

I can imagine that in Koppal district, where Sampark works, we get all NGOs together and have a discussion with them. We can get some people's federations, there aren't many. Of the 15 NGOs, most work on small projects and have little financial and human resources. Perhaps we will also be able to involve local youth power. But, do we ourselves know the right to information bill well? No, Sampark did not ever use it in the field, we did not yet lead a movement. In fact, we have 120 women's SHGs, and year after year we link some to government schemes, and in many schemes the corruption on the ground continues, the field staff have been giving up challenging the 'system' to still keep up the energy to continue doing the ground work. If we see NREGA as important to the welfare of the poor people in our villages, we must first stop doing the small things we do, engage with the bill, find its true potential, learn what are the good processes to replicate, and which ones to rather avoid, and then organise those who will need the work and wages of NREGA, as well as find ways to counter the actors who have vested interests in the continued inefficiencies of official schemes. Purely from the perspective of a field based NGO, I think it is worth it to give the scheme this kind of attention, and try to make it work, but it will need a lot of effort on our part, and there are no real co-travelers - even with 15 NGOs here, only two are likely to accompany us, if at all.

As for dealing with panchayats, as a field based NGO, I will only say this: I would rather put in energies to organise the wage workers, rather than teach the panchayat what to do. If we organise the workers, they will then have the ability and strength to hold the panchayat accountable.

We have the tool, we need to know how to use it, and we need to organise ourselves to use it.

Ashok Sircar, Lok Kalyan Parishad, Kolkata

This is in connection with vigilance mechanism on NREGS. As I understand the vigilance is to ensure least corruption, better quality of work and horizontal equity. A closer look as it came out in a recent discussion among civil society players and the government brought out following works as part of vigilance mechanism -

1. Ensuring every one gets the chance to apply
2. Ensuring every legitimate family getting a job card
3. Ensuring Gram Sabha meetings (more than once if necessary) to identify and prioritize the work
4. Ensuring every one is given intimation of the work she/he is provided with
5. Ensuring proper measurements and quality of the assets being created
6. Ensuring timely payment and equal wages to men & women
7. Ensuring timely payment of unemployment allowance to the deserved
8. Ensuring the focus on creation of productive assets
9. Ensuring at least one third women labour
10. Ensuring minimum facilities at work sites (as provided in the act)
11. Ensuring upkeep of the various registers related to NREGS

I have the following comments to make -

1. The Act is silent on the capacity building aspects and there is very little clarity on how much resources are allocated in the programme for capacity building of all stakeholders (GP, Block, community, CSOs, etc). The Maharashtra lesson is very clear that massive CB exercise on a continuous basis is the key to success of the programme.
2. While the formation of state level employment guarantee council is envisaged it is not envisaged at the district and sub-district level. Formation of similar bodies at the GP and Block level with specific tasks could actually bring in NGOs, CSOs, CBOs, school teachers, college teachers-students (NSS students in particular) in to the realm of NREGS. This itself would enlarge the capacity of GPs on one hand and could act as a vigilance mechanism on the other. In this context the present clause no. 23 for transparency and accountability is quite weak and vague, and needs to be expanded.
3. The entire Act is written with a pre-73rd amendment perspective which is surprising. While the GP is given the responsibility to implement the programme, their freedom is severely restricted by the control of programme officer and programme coordinator implying almost that intermediate panchayats and zilla panchayats have very little role in it.

Venkatrao Ghorpade, (Ex-Zilla Panchayat President, Bellary), SHRIDI Foundation, Bangalore

Strengthening of Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs) along with capacity building should precede vigilance by local groups. Today, the three pillars of PRI, namely Electoral process, Capacity building, and Good Governance are out of step with each other, leading to huge leakage of resources - both human and financial. Therefore, concrete steps need to be taken in this direction.

In this connection I had participated in a three-day State level workshop in Mysore in Sep' 05, where I had suggested some concrete steps that need to be taken to strengthen PRIs. See recommendations [here](#)

Nidhi Prabha Tiwari, Resource Centre for Legislators, New Delhi

Just wish to bring in one more aspect in the monitoring of NREGA, which attempts to strengthen the role of elected representatives.

We have been approached by a few MPs who wish to conduct their own monitoring of the NREGA. They wish to cover the entire 200 district across the country for this exercise and have sought our help in putting together a check-list for doing the monitoring exercise. They also wish to build the capacity of their team in carrying out this exercise.

Attached is the same [check-list](#). Comments from the members on this initiative as well as the check list would be extremely useful

Surendra N Tripathi, Panchayati Raj & Information Technology Dept., Govt of Orissa

Orissa is the only state that has used NREGA application software to issue job-cards and prepare database of project, and to systematize its implementation in 32,000 villages in 3,672 GPs of 205 blocks. As on date, 24 lakh households have availed this opportunity.

Vinod Vyasulu, Centre for Budget and Policy Studies, Bangalore

I think the experience shared by Mr Gopal is quite useful. However, my question is that since the panchayats are to implement the NREGA, hence wouldn't it be better to give the supervisory role to the Zilla Panchayat President, as opposed to it being given to the civil servants?

Geeta Malhotra, OneWorld South Asia, New Delhi

I fully support the concern expressed by Mr Ashok Sircar. There is a need to make the communities aware, understand, learn and practice on what has been meant for them under the NREGA. The points list by Mr Sircar on the vigilance mechanism can only be fulfilled if the communities are prepared. Many Civil Society Organisations are doing capacity building on various subjects at gram, block, district and state level, with specific focus to roles and responsibilities of members of PRIs. This should be a part and parcel of each training programme. Now that a few panchayats are supposed to have computers, the information can be made available on the computers for access by the communities any time.

Kris Dev, Life Line to Business Ltd., Chennai

In my opinion, if Total Transparency and Accountability is introduced in local administration, including in projects planned and actual implementation, and all monetary transactions are made transparent through the web, radio, telephone, etc. in local language, - that would be true empowerment.

Automatically, the citizens, would start looking for what they want, and if not available, demand the info. We should encourage Governments to allow citizens to make the best use of the ICT tools, including local village community radios to empower them.

What do other members feel on this issue?

Arvind Malik, Udyogini, Delhi

This is an interesting debate and I too fully agree with you all that NREGA is not something that we can afford to let go as has happened with other government schemes. Udyogini is working in Mandla which is a tribal district of eastern Madhya Pradesh. We had a consultation in Mandla on "Practical Interventions tried out in Agriculture and NTFP sectors" in which various civil society organizations and government participated. CEO Mandla also participated in one session and NREGA surfaced. Participants raised their concern over the implementation of NREGA, which if not planned, networked and coordinated with CSOs already working in the same area, could severely affect the work on the ground, as the community will be attracted towards the higher labour for 100 days starting from April 1. In order to prepare the community for such high return labour scheme the preparation of village-based Micro Plans was discussed which may prove to be a useful tool to offset some core problems. CEO Mandla agreed that micro plans is a good practical way towards making the community aware about the possible interventions that can be taken up in a particular village and therefore synergize the NREGA activities with the plan.

Abha Mishra, UNDP, New Delhi

Panchayats would be implementing NREGA, the new scheme for ensuring 100 days employment. However, the Panchayat system is still weak and the need is to strengthen them not only in terms of the NREGA programme but also for the long-term, besides making them aware about their roles and responsibility. Besides panchayats, there is a need for capacity development of the community (as well as the officers) for whom the program is envisaged. If we want the common people to benefit there is a need for awareness creation as well as capacity development for them, so that they are able to demand their rights.

Another concern which I would like to raise here is about the selection of works. I am sure we are thinking that the Pradhans would propose projects after consultation in the Gram sabha. My experience has been that many a times these projects do provide the work but in terms of utility they are non starters. How do we ensure that the projects taken up contribute to the overall development of the villages? Many organisations as well as the government, are helping villagers/ PRIs across the country in preparing disaster management plans which identify the mitigation measures that are required to be undertaken to reduce the risks, maybe they can act as the baseline or the development plan for the village, instead of reinventing the wheel and asking them to again draw up new plans. Another issue which needs to be addressed is who is providing the technical guidance, e.g. say to make sure that water-harvesting structures store water, or that roads are not washed away after the first rains.

We may use the services of the SHG groups in the villages to do the monitoring but we need to develop specially designed participatory monitoring and evaluation tools

There is a need for greater involvement of the CSOs, who could be involved in capacity development, monitoring and reporting - many of them would also be able to provide the technical guidance that would be required for ensuring that the projects have a sustainability value.

It would also be useful to maintain a computerised database of the beneficiaries village wise. Giving them working ID cards with numbers which would help in monitoring.

Ashwini Kulkarni, Pragati Abhiyan, Nashik

I would like present some issues related to the Maharashtra EGS. The EGS has piece rate wages in Maharashtra, so the wage rate of various activities are based on the minimum wages, if a worker works diligently for 7 hours in a day, the piece rates are such that she/he can get as much as minimum wage for the day.

Yes, it is true and very hard to believe that no unemployment allowance has ever been paid in last three decades in our State. Initially it was only Re. 1 per day and it was said that this is more of 'penalty' to the Government rather than compensation to the labourer. Now this has been raised to Rs. 10 which will be changed because of the NREGS. However, it was not always possible to make work available to all the demanding labourers within 15 days as stipulated in the law. The process of claiming unemployment allowance is also quite cumbersome involving paperwork with numerous forms to be filled. There are 10 sample forms to be filled at the tehsil office by the labourer/ officials, 1 - for registration; 2 - register of labour registration; 3 - identity card; 4 - application demanding work; 5 - receipt of work demand application; 6 - consolidated register of demands; 7 – letter to labourer to intimate about work start; 8 – application for unemployment allowance; 9 – acceptance of the unemployment allowance application, 10- denial of application made for unemployment allowance. The worker demanding work under the EGS is the most vulnerable, needy, mostly illiterate and also politically very weak hence individual workers often did not have the skills to go through the extensive procedure. There has also been some problem of non-payment of wages on time.

After all these years of experience of studying the EGS of Maharashtra, I feel the weakest side has been the monitoring and redress and grievance mechanism. Presently, I am working on this.

Many thanks to all who contributed to this query!

If you have further information to share on this topic, please send it to Solution Exchange for the 'Work and Employment, Decentralization, Gender Communities' in India at se-emp_se-decn_se-gen@solutionexchange-un.net.in with the subject heading 'Re: [se-emp][se-decn][se-gen] Query: Database of resource support institutions for EGS from UNDP, New Delhi, (Referrals). Additional Response'

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