

**NREGA Under the Scanner:
Social Audit in Ranchi District (Jharkhand), 14-21 May**

A massive “social audit” of the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) will be taking place in Ranchi District on 14-21 May. Hundreds of volunteers from Ranchi and elsewhere will be walking from village to village to visit NREGA worksites, verify muster rolls, and hold public meetings. The aim of this social audit is to empower people to fight corruption and defend their rights under the Act.

The schedule of this social audit is as follows:

14-15 May: Training for social audit at the State Institute of Rural Development (SIRD), Brambay, Mandar Block.

16-19 May: Social audit in four Blocks (Angarha, Khuti, Kanke, Mandar).

20 May: Gram Sabhas in the selected Blocks.

21 May: Public hearings at the Block headquarters in the selected Blocks.

This is an initiative of “NREGA Watch”, an informal coalition of organisations working for the effective implementation of NREGA in Jharkhand.

On 20-24 May, a delegation of the Central Employment Guarantee Council (CEGC) will be visiting Jharkhand to review the implementation of NREGA. The delegation will be taking part in the social audit on 20-21 May. This will be followed by field visits on 22 May, a public hearing in Ranchi on 23 May, and consultations with the state government on 24 May. Members of the delegation include Aruna Roy (Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan), Annie Raja (National Federation of Indian Women) and Jean Drèze (Allahabad University), among others.

The public hearing on 23 May will be taking place at the Administrative Training Institute (Ranchi) from 10 am onwards.

For further details, please contact Balram (09934320657), Gopi (09431760032) or Gurjeet (09431120534).

Press Note

Social Audit of NREGA Begins in Ranchi District

Ranchi (Jharkhand), 16 May 2007: A “social audit” of the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) began today in Ranchi District. About 275 volunteers from Ranchi and elsewhere have departed for 15 Gram Panchayats in four Blocks to visit NREGA worksites, verify muster rolls, and hold public meetings. The aim of this social audit is to empower people to fight corruption and defend their rights under the Act.

Social audit is a mandatory requirement under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act. This is the first time in the State of Jharkhand that the District Administration (Ranchi) and people’s organisations have come together to conduct a mass social audit of NREGA works.

A unique Social Audit Campaign

This social audit is being conducted mainly by local residents (after two days of intensive training), but other volunteers have come from far and wide – Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Delhi, Kerala, Orissa, Rajasthan and Tamil Nadu as well as other Districts in Jharkhand. The selected Blocks are Angarha, Khuti, Kanke and Mandar.

Rampant corruption has derailed many employment programmes in the past, and there is a fear that NREGA may follow the same fate. However, recent experience in several states (notably in Andhra Pradesh and Rajasthan) has shown that it is possible to eradicate corruption from NREGA. This requires rigorous enforcement of the transparency measures mandated by NREGA, effective exercise of the right to information, and building a culture of public vigilance. Social audits can go a long way in fostering this process. An insightful account of Andhra Pradesh’s experience in this regard was presented during the training programme by Ms. A. Karuna (Director, Social Audit Cell Andhra Pradesh Government). In Andhra Pradesh, social audits are now built into the system; to the extent at least one social audit of NREGA is conducted every day in some part of the State. The government has also started recovering embezzled funds (Rs. 5 lakhs in 26 gram panchayats in 12 districts in the last month alone).

To illustrate further, there is a long tradition of siphoning off funds from public works by fudging “muster rolls” (last year, a verification of muster rolls in Garhwa District found that 85% of them were fake). But NREGA requires muster rolls to be kept at the worksite, displayed in public, and examined by the Gram Sabha. Experience has shown that these measures can prevent fudging of muster rolls to a large extent. But this can happen only if muster rolls are actually disclosed, and if people learn to verify them. Muster rolls have been obtained for all NREGA works in the 15 Gram Panchayats covered by this social audit, and the participants will be verifying them one by one with the community.

Another noteworthy aspect of this exercise is the involvement of 25 student volunteers from Delhi University and Jawaharlal Nehru University who are not only participating in the social audit, but also conducting detailed muster roll verifications and work site surveys. This is part of a larger survey initiated by the Centre for development economics Delhi School of Economics in collaboration with the Institute of Human Development (Ranchi). Government officers from Chhattisgarh, Gujarat and Orissa are also accompanying some of the teams as a training exercise.

On 20 May, Gram Sabhas will be held in these Gram Panchayats to present and discuss the findings of the social audit in public. This will be followed by Block-level public hearings on 21 May, in each of the four selected Blocks. This will be an opportunity for concerned persons to bring their complaints to the attention of the concerned authorities and demand redressal.

This mass social audit campaign is an initiative of “NREGA Watch” (an informal coalition of organisations working for the effective implementation of NREGA in Jharkhand), in collaboration with the District Administration and the National Institute of Rural Development.

Central Employment Guarantee Council visit

On 20-24 May, a delegation of the Central Employment Guarantee Council (CEGC) will be visiting Jharkhand to review the implementation of NREGA. The delegation will be taking part in the social audit on 20-21 May. This will be followed by field visits on 22 May, a state level public hearing in Ranchi on 23 May, and consultations with the state government on 24 May. Members of the delegation include Aruna Roy (Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan), Annie Raja (National Federation of Indian Women) and Jean Drèze (Allahabad University), among others.

The public hearing on 23 May will be taking place at the Administrative Training Institute (Ranchi) from 10 am onwards.

For further details, please contact Balram (09934320657), Gopi (09431760032) or Gurjeet (09431120534).

Press Note

17 May, Ranchi (Jharkhand): On the second day of the mass social audit campaign, the team in Sataki panchayat of the Angada block, spoke to 25 labourers who worked in the *kunba toli talab nirman*, these labourers have yet to receive their payment one and half months since they carried out the work. Some of these labourers have dug 25 pits and no payments have been received to date for the work. The post master in Sataki is also charging Rs. 70-75 as account opening charges from workers. As a result of non-payment women informed the team that they have to make ends meet by traveling 8 kms into the city to sell wood gathered from the jungle. The women also said that they were considering migrating to the city to look for work.

Central Employment Guarantee Council member Annie Raja visited the *Chatra* and *Sataki* Panchayat and found that in *Burdi Beda* village, job cards were handed over to the workers only 2 days prior to the visit of the social audit teams. In the same village, there two works have been sanctioned on the same land, owned by the Pradhan of the village. Construction of a well and a farm pond are both being carried out on the Pradhan's land.

In *Kanta toil* village in *Sataki* Panchayat, she found that payments have not yet been made for work that began a month ago, as a result workers have stopped going for work. The team also spoke to a labourer who informed them that he had worked for only 6 days on a particular work but the entries on his job card indicated that he had worked for 48 days. When the team requested to see the muster rolls, the same were not available on the worksites in both panchayats. Awareness amongst workers regarding worksite facilities was also very low, the workers were also not aware of the rates for different pieces of work that they were carrying out.

In *Kakdoro* village of *kakdoro* panchayat, *Kanke* block, the beneficiary of a pond construction work, Chotak Munda told the social audit team that he had to pay 5 per cent of the sanctioned amount for the work, as commission to block agricultural officer, who has also been made the officer in charge for the implementation of the work.

According to the gram pradhan of *kakdoro*, Surya Narian Pahan, men and women are receiving different amounts as daily wage; in some places men are paid higher than the women (men receive Rs. 80 and women are paid Rs. 60 and sometimes even Rs. 40). This is direct violation of the NREGA, which mandates equal payment for work done by men and women. The social audit teams also observed that the total wages and payments were not being duly recorded in the job cards, there were no muster rolls or worksite boards or any facilities like first aid, shade, drinking water etc, available on the worksite even though work has been going on for the last three months. According to the labourers the shade on the worksite was constructed two days prior to the visit of the social audit team.

In *Toda Dhipo* village, in *Bogai Beda* panchayat in Angada block, a farm pond is being constructed on Chain lal Lohra fields, up on visiting the worksite the social audit teams learnt that names of labourers present on the worksite did not match those in the muster roll and those whose names are present on the MR are not present at the worksite. Those with names on the MR have also yet to receive payment.

In *Malti* village, in *Mandhar*, all the job cards were found with the gram sabha secretary. When the social audit team questioned the secretary he accepted his mistake and said that he was not aware of the rules and procedures and began handing out the job cards to the workers on the spot.

For more information contact: 9934320657 (Balram); 9234130264; 9934306722 (Rajpal)

Press Note

18 May, Ranchi (Jharkhand): In **Okhargada** village in **Kokdoro Panchayat**, Kake block, following media reports workers were removed from worksites in the village. Out of the 4 worksites only 1 or 2 workers were found on each site. In a land leveling work being carried out on Jagannath Pahan's land no worksite facilities are available, no medical kits or drinking water facilities and no shade was found. The villagers also do not have much information about NREGA.

Some villagers also said that they received Rs. 60 as wages for work, when the minimum wage in Jharkhand Rs. 76.68 paise. Workers said that no regular payments are made for work done, but beneficiaries like Jaganath Pahan, Utkar Pahan and Vishnu Pahan said, payments are being made weekly. Rs. 460 have been paid for a weeks work even though workers took a day or two off from work, they have received full payment. The Social audit team in the village also reported that the poor and those most in need of work are not being given work. The beneficiary's family members are being favoured in work allocation.

In **Anedi** village in **Murhi Panchayat** the team reported that no job cards have been issued to villagers. Many villagers have also not applied for job cards as they are not aware of the NREGA. Two days prior to the social audit campaign began; sample job cards were taken and shown to the villagers. A 14 year old child was also found on the worksite.

In **Chota Baru** village also in **Murhi Panchayat**, the teams found a muster roll entry, where a worker is shown to have worked for 15 days in the muster roll while he said he only worked for 2 days. In this village too job cards were distributed a few days before the social audit teams arrived. In the same village in a well construction work being carried out on Sarla devi's land the mate was paying the workers Rs. 54 as daily wages. However, the social audit team intervened and spoke to the Junior engineer (JE) and clarified the doubt over minimum wages. As a result the workers were paid Rs. 76.68 paise in front of the team. No muster rolls were available on the worksite, job cards and the muster roll were both found in the mate's house. 6 out of the 7 worksites visited by the social audit team in this village did not have any provision of medical kits.

In **Bandh Toli** village the teams spoke to Mohd. Khalil job card no. 4358 who has not gone on any worksite, yet the muster roll and the job card entries show that he has worked for 18 days on a farm pond construction work, carried out on Jaigarh Singh's land.

In another case in the same village, Hardev Mahto was also shown to have worked for 45 days as per the job card entry, but he informed the social audit team, when they met him, that he had only worked for two days and received Rs. 170 as payment.

In **Rameta** village in **Khuti Panchayat**, 10 women spoke to the social audit team. They had worked on a worksite providing worksite facilities like taking care of children and provided drinking water; each woman worked for one day. However, these women have not yet received payment for work and when they enquired about the payment, they were told by the beneficiary and the secretary that no payments can be made as no money has been sanctioned under the worksite facilities head and their names were struck off the muster roll.

For more information contact: 9934320657 (Balram); 9934306722 (Rajpal); 9234130264

Press Note

19 May Ranchi (Jharkhand): Today was the last day of the mass social audit campaign being carried out by 300 volunteers in 15 panchayats in 4 blocks of Ranchi district. The volunteers in each of the panchayats concluded their muster roll verification exercise and inspection of worksites under the NREGA. In *Kuchu* panchayat in Angada block, on a well construction taking place on Gulab Singh's land, the beneficiary deposited a cheque of Rs. 20,000 in the Zohna post office. This money was to be transferred as payments to the workers. However, the postmaster did not transfer the wages into the bank accounts of the workers and disbursed payments in cash. In the process he also pocketed Rs. 150-200 per worker. One of the workers Sona Singh Bodiya was to receive Rs. 622 for the number of days he worked, but the post master only gave him Rs. 400 as the total wages earned. Apart from the muster roll which should be available on each worksite, the beneficiary has also maintained an attendance register. The daily attendance, which should be recorded directly on the muster roll, is instead recorded in this register.

In *Chatvar* village of *Malti* Panchayat villagers have been warned and instructed by the beneficiary (of the scheme under the NREGA) not to attend the gram panchayat social audit forum to be organized tomorrow 20 May, to discuss the social audit campaign findings. In the same village a road construction work was undertaken which was completed within 20 days, however, in the muster rolls the number of days shown against each worker is 50-54 days. The villagers informed the social audit team that they had only worked for 3-10 days on that road.

In Siladon Panchyat, block *Khunti*, the job cards of the workers were with the panchayat *sewak* for the last 10 months, once the social audit team arrived in the panchayat the job cards were handed over to the workers. Villagers from *Chilgu* village informed the social audit team that although the work has been on-going in the village for the last 4 months, the junior engineer (JE) has not measured the work done over this period; as a result the workers have not received payments. The beneficiary (of the scheme under the NREGA) Narian Singh Munda informed the social audit team that he had to bribe the panchayat *sewak* Rs. 300 in order for him to measure the work done. In another village *Chukru* it's the same story, on going works have not been measured and therefore, no payments have been made to the workers. When the social audit team reached the village and asked the JE and the panchayat *sewak* to explain why the works had not been measured for months and no payments made, the two immediately acknowledged their mistakes and began measuring the works. By the end of the day a cheque for payment of wages had also been made.

Block level officers have been following the social audit team in Urugutu panchayat in Kake block. These officers have been interfering in the muster roll verification exercise and inspection of worksites that is being carried out by the social audit team.

A unique exercise was also undertaken today as a team also visited Tetri, Sehra and Kutiyatu panchayats in the *Namkum* block. These panchayats are not part of the 15 panchayats where the social audit campaign has been going on from May 16. In *Namkum* block workers expressed their dissatisfaction with the NREGA saying that what the use of such a programme when payments are not made in time. Another serious concern is system of measurement of work and the payment of wages based on the system. In particular the women expressed a great deal of concern and dissatisfaction as they are the worst affected by this system of measurement and wage payment.

The social audit teams will come together in their respective panchayats for a social audit forum to be organized tomorrow from 10 am onwards.

For more information contact: 9934320657 (Balram); 9934306722 (Rajpal); 9234130264