

NREGA ROZGAAR MELA 25TH JUNE 09 VIJAYPURA ⁱ

Why this Mela?

The Employment Guarantee Act has for the first time brought huge numbers of rural workers together to work on one platform. But the employment guarantee is not just about work. It is an enormous exercise in development and change. It demands the coming together of varied agencies to work collectively to ensure delivery. In the process power relationships are being reordered, a starved rural economy is realising its dream of ample resources, bank accounts have and are being opened in unprecedented numbers. Above all women and others at the margins are becoming part of the economy, using systems and making them accountable.

There has been skewed implementation of the Act in different parts of the country. Even in the better administered areas there have been major shortcomings in implementation. Those seeking their rights have applied, petitioned, and even taken to the streets to seek redress of their grievances. Through the NREGA better systems of transparent and accountable governance are being introduced in rural India. IT and RTI are being used 'top down', and 'bottom up' to increase the access of the ordinary person.

As a result, the NREGA:

- has changed the sectoral involvement of most development efforts. In some way or the other it has affected everyone, and given a stake to the entire village and citizenry. For the first time, there is a law that has established both the economic and social rights of the poor, acknowledged their right and contribution to the National economy, and not left development and poverty eradication to a scheme or programme with lofty assurances not backed by legal entitlements.
- has empowered the rural poor with a guarantee of work, and with a series of entitlements made a noticeable difference in their relationship with governance and power structures . The chronic inability to impact the failures of the delivery system are being overcome by using the mandatory provisions of transparency under the Act, and gradually moving towards a more comprehensive demand for transparency and accountability in all programmes.
- has made it imperative that the system respond to these demands by making real changes. This has required a blend of intent, skills and the willingness to learn from the history of drought works in Rajasthan. It has also forced the Government and the group of people concerned with rural employment and work, to collectively work out practical systems of implementation of public works programmes.
- has hundreds (or more than a thousand) people, and their families working in every gram Panchayat in Rajasthan, with a huge supportive work force of supervisors, administrators, elected representatives, and interested citizens, who are integrally linked to the programme. The whole village is affected by the quality and type of assets being created, and recognises the development agenda being defined by the NREGA. In fact, the influx of money in the local markets has made it clear to many local market forces, that the NREGA has saved many hinterland areas from the ill effects of the economic downturn. Despite lurking danger due to corruption and inefficiency, the NREGA has created a vested interest in its proper implementation amongst the people of the area.

- has a wider context, (perhaps for the first time since independence) also attracted a large number of urban students activists, and researchers, who are attempting to make their contribution to its successful implementation. The NREGA is impacting a cross section of society. One of the creative challenges is to bring all these people together on open ended but interrelated platforms.
- The Rozgaar Guarantee Mela being held in Vijayapura will be an attempt in that direction.
- Given the wide participation expected from policy makers, administrators, and senior elected representatives, the Mela will offer an additional opportunity for people of rural India, experts from many fields and the government to take the debate amongst the people, and dialogue on wider development issues related to the NREGA.

The Platform of the Mela

The 'Mela' in rural India is a traditional coming together of people with a common purpose to exchange goods, and share an event. A Mela does not need a formal invitation; on the contrary, once the date and place is known, people come to it, motivated by their own needs. The idea of the Rozgaar Mela of the NREGA was born out of a search for an idiom of expression and a mode which would allow for a free exchange of information, ideas and grievances and seek solutions. It is an attempt to create an inclusive platform which is both familiar and accessible to rural people.

Like all Melas, the people will be offered space, in a non confrontational atmosphere. In this case, not to buy and sell goods, as in most traditional Melas, but to share and exchange information and concerns. Some of these issues will find an immediate resonance and response; others will have to be addressed later. In some cases, it will help establish the predicament of the workers; in others it will give the workers an opportunity to examine and analyse potential solutions. Governments have often used traditional Melas to take their message across through stalls and publicity material. This will be an attempt to invert the process, where the government will help create the space, but the people will set the agenda and invite others to take part in their discourse.

Rozgaar Guarantee Melas can be held at different levels- gram Panchayat, Block, District, and so on. The Vijayapura Block level Mela will follow a similar Rozgaar Guarantee Mela being held at a gram Panchayat level in Bhogadeeth Panchayat, Ajmer District a week earlier.

Process

- The Mela will be preceded by a ten day Padyatras by five MKSS teams who will walk from village to village, and work site to work site in the whole Block to publicise the Mela, raise issues in the village and on the work sites, and invite workers and others to the Mela. This will help in making the dialogues at the Mela more advanced than merely raising an issue.
- Different gram Panchayats, of the Block will be requested to update all their registers and MIS entries. They will be informed in advance that they will have stalls allotted to them where, they will be required to display the MIS and social audit information of the previous year, but will also be able to creatively display whatever they might feel is appropriate.
- The Padyatras teams will gather information related to different aspects of NREGA during their Padyatras. They will also present their report of the status of the works they visited, evaluated against the NREGA indicators.
- People who have developed 'best practices' in the Block, and from other parts of the state will be invited so they can showcase their effort.

- Local people especially literate youth, will be encouraged to communicate through songs, poems, writings, wallpapers, posters, street plays etc.

What will happen at the Mela

- There will be stalls as in a traditional Mela. One to each Panchayat. Each Panchayat will bring information about the NREGA in a specified pre-determined format. Other information will also be displayed regarding works that the Panchayats feel need to be highlighted in their specific areas. Information will as far as possible be visually displayed on 'flex' or as charts. The Gram Panchayat, members of the vigilance committees, and social audit forums of each Panchayat with the members will be invited to manage the Panchayat stalls. People will also be allowed free access in or around the stall, and be given an opportunity to express their point of view. It will give the workers a chance to meet other workers and build a larger solidarity, and the people of the area to contribute and be more directly involved in the effort to make the NREGA a more effective mode of rural transformation.
- There will be a number of simultaneous activities, large spaces for visual display, the opportunity to demonstrate best practices,
- An opportunity to communicate through local cultural modes,
- There will be a 'Grievance Redressal Tent', where applications will be received category wise and simultaneously entered into a collation sheet, so that at the end of the Mela there will be a ready reckoner about the issues which need to be addressed.
- Space will be created for workers and administrators to discuss issues of implementation on an equal basis.
- The Panchayat Samiti will put up a big stall, with all information and details which are pro actively required to be displayed as per the mandatory transparency provisions of the NREGA and Section 4 of the RTI Act 2005.
- There will be a main Pandal where a formal function will be held for a specific duration in which representatives of the Government, Panchayat and other organisations will give a brief analysis of the Block . There will be a plenary discussion on a) major shortcomings if any in implementation- particularly in meeting the ten basic entitlements of the people of the area; and b) since the Union and State ministers along with the senior bureaucracy for Rural Development and Panchayati Raj will be present, major policy issues and appropriate changes will also be discussed and debated. Senior activists, officials, and The Miniser RD GOI and Minister RD GOR, will address the gathering.

Why Panchayat Vijayapura

- The Mela could have been held in any Panchayat, and if it is to become an annual affair, it could easily rotate each year. Vijayapura has been a model Panchayat for NREGA work including norms of transparency, accountability, and efficiency, and the Sarpanch who is a member of the MKSS has expressed a desire to host the Mela.
- The Sarpanch of Vijayapura, Shri Kaluram Salvi is a Dalit candidate who won on a general seat. He ran a transparent campaign spending just 550 rupees.
- The Manifesto of his Campaign became the commitment of the Panchayat to the people.

- The National Knowledge Commission has given support for the setting up of a pilot 'Panchayat Gyan Kendra' in Vijayapura, which could serve as working model for such knowledge centres/ Panchayat resource centres in every Block in the country.
- Vijayapura has developed an elaborate Panchayat level template for transparency provisions under NREGA and RTI

Organisers

The Mela will be organised by the Gram Panchayat and Block office, in collaboration with the State and Central Governments, the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS), the School for Democracy, and other local organisations.

Budget

Budgetary provisions should be fixed at a percentage of the total expenditure on works in the Area and should be drawn from the 6 % administrative costs sanctioned under the NREGA.

Financial allocation for all local activity will be provided by the Block office with a tentative budget of .01% of the expenditure in the Block under NREGA. The break up of expenditure will be used as a basis of determining the appropriate budget for other similar Melas in other Blocks in the state. Since this will be a particularly large event because of the participation of the ministries, an appropriate extra amount will be provided to the Block.

ⁱ RAJ राजसमन्द / देवगढ / विजयपुरा Rozgaar MELA, NREGA 09-- cross reference NREGA NATIONAL