

Monitoring Report of Dhar (17 November 2009 to 21 Nov2009)

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Preface: The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005 (NREGA) guarantees 100 days of employment in a financial year to any rural household whose adult members are willing to do unskilled manual work. The Act has come into force with effect from February, 2006 in 200 districts initially and later on extended to all the rural districts of India from the financial year 2008-09. NREGA is the most significant act in the history of contemporary India as it not only secures Livelihood security but also facilitates through people's planning and social audit participation of poor (who are either 'invisible" or "insurgent") in the sustainable and equitable development in rural India. The Monitoring of Dhar district by Member(Central Council) has been undertaken within the general provisions of Section 11 of the Act.

Descriptive-ethnographic part of Monitoring Report

17 November 2009 Sagwal Panchayat in Sardarpur Block

Sagwal Panchayat Visit; Though the visit was supposed to be unannounced but the NREGA officials/Staff made sure that some information about the visit was leaked to the troika of Sarpanch, Secretary and JE in Sagwal Panchayat. Panchayat Bhawan of Sagwal was small office without much support systems and had no idea about "Janata Information system"; no information was available on the walls of GP building about any RD programmes. After the intervention of Member(CEGC) Sarpanch sent a word out for an impromptu assembly of NREGA workers.

General Observations obtained after interaction with NREGA workers:

Many job cards were without photo; local MGNREGA officials including Mr. Gupta (Additional CEO) promised that photos would be ensured by initiating a special drive. Many job cards were found blank without entry though workers complained that they had worked. Since there was no instant mechanism to verify this, an investigation requires to be done if any ghost work' had been done in the GP. Job Cards were kept in the Panchayat Bhawan raising the fear that job cards were kept with Panchayat Secretary/Mukhiya. Most women and men were enthusiastic about NREGA but complained about lack of work and their participation in the selection of shelf of work. Many vital norms of social audit were absent. It appeared that officials from Rural Engineering Services in the district were in command of the execution of NREGA leading to complaints of corruption and violation of rights of workers as envisaged in the Act. The issue of widows facing serious problems of

poverty, hunger and destitution was very disturbing. About 9 widows turned up in the meeting with Member(CEGC); most of them were young and very poor. They complained about being vulnerable at home and outside; at home old widows are facing problems of neglect by their sons and daughter in-laws leaving them with nothing to support. With misty eyes, a 60 years old widow complained that neither NREGA nor her own son had so far been of any help, however she still looked at NREGA as a possible escape from poverty. She wanted a separate job card and a job in NREGA that can take care of her old age and give job with dignity. In consultation with Mr. Gupta, (Additional CEO) Member (CEGC) advised that NREGA district officials needed urgently to look into possibility of providing help to widows in the village; a base-line survey could be done and all identify RD programmes for their help. Member, (CEGC) suggested to Mr. Gupta to seek the help of reputed voluntary organizations in this regard. Women in particular complained about gender bias in allocating work; many of them complained about work being refused by Panchayat Officials. Geetabai, for instance, complained about no work being allocated to her despite repeated requests to Panchayat officials and also NREGA staff. The district had made no arrangements for setting up HelpLine; the awareness of MGNREGA workers about the facility of HelpLine was non-existent. In the Sagwal Village of Sardarpur block, many job cards had recorded names of Children; this needed to be reversed as it was patently illegal and could result in the promotion of child labour under the pretext of advance "Job Card" for teenagers who would need job card in near future. (This was the explanation of district officials). As regards lack of work in the village, that officials from Line Department offered a bizarre logic of "three months continuous rains" in the district. It was hard to believe that when the country faced drought conditions, Rain God was particularly happy on the district of Dhar leading to frequent disruption of NREGA works to the extent that district officials simply refused to entertain the requests for work from NREGA workers! This clearly showed that role of people in the planning and preparation of shelf of work was at best a sham; the NREGA was dictated by the whims and fancies of officials of Line departments particularly PWD, RES etc. People in the meeting also alleged that machines had been used in NREGA works; this complaint needed to be verified from independent sources. In the meeting with workers, there was a repeated reference to some fictitious work that had probably been done under the name of NREGA but workers alleged that they had never been paid for the same. Their job cards had no record of work undertaken referred to by the workers in the village. This was a serious allegation and needed to be probed.

None of the workers in the Sagwal Village was aware of the provision of “unemployment allowances”; this is state of awareness in the district about an Act that is built around rights-model. District officials are perhaps in denial mode or consider “unemployment allowances’ a liability that may dent their prospects in the service. Based on NREGA workers’ demand that work needed to be started in the village, the Member (Central Council) told district officials about the provisions in Schedule II in the Act(Para 7,10,18,19) and urged them to start taking applications for the work. The district officials immediately started the process of accepting application for the work and also promised to look into the complaints of workers especially against the role of Program Officer, JE and Secretary of the Panchayat in the denial of rights of NREGA workers.

Following specific information obtained from workers:

1. Job Card number 18—Kamala Devi worked from 27/3/06 for 14 days then no work has ever been allocated to her.
2. Suguna, job card number 64 complained that her work has not been properly recorded. On physical verification of her Job card, it was found true.
3. Bhalla Somani job card number missing has alleged that he had worked in 2009 but his work was not recorded. this requires proper investigation.
4. Shaitan bai job card number 21 alleged that no work has even been recorded in her job card; no entries existed in her job card.
5. Tejubai and Vishu Gangaram, job card number 57; No work ever recorded in the job card.
6. Ramkanya and Mangilal job card number 84, photo is in there, and names of children recorded in the job card. Since 22/4/06 no work entry in the job card.
7. Mangu Bai, job card number 86, a widow but has not worked more than 4 days as per the entries in the job card.
8. Radhabai job card number 12; children name included in the job card.
9. Dhanna Lal job card number 126; since 5/1/07 no work done, he alleged that he was paid for 15 days of work but job card entries show no such detail.
10. Mayaram, Job Card number 20; no work after 5/1/07; he alleged that he worked for 8 days in 2009 but no such entries in the job card.

11. Gopilal, Job card number; 73, physically handicapped and alleged discrimination in the allocation of work to handicapped persons.
12. Ganesh, Job Card no; 35—Not a single day work recorded in the job card though he alleged that some money was paid to him for MGNREGA related work.
13. Shamu Kailash, Job Card number 145K; no record of any work.
14. Soma Dalla job Card number 50; no record of job after 3/6/07

18 November 2009 Visit of Tirla-GP(Village Mafipura)

In the village Mafipura (Tirla panchayat) Kalu Lal, Son of Mangi Lal, (ST) met and narrated his experience about the benefits of getting Kapil Dhara well on his individual land. The well was constructed on his land (under individual land development category). The beneficiary was very satisfied by the construction of well as it contributed to the productivity of crops. Some job card holders also interacted with the Member(CEGC) .They were by and large satisfied with the NREGA work in the village; they seemed to be doctored by the duo of Sarpanch (Sarpanch's son was officiating in the absence of her mother) and Secretary. However, there were serious concerns about lack of work and also fraud in the identification of BPL households as some genuine households were excluded from BPL. Smt Sapna Bai, w/o Rajesh claimed that she had only worked twelve days under NREGA. Bikram, S/O Mangi Lal, Job card number 151, in the year 2006-7 narrated his outstanding work in NREGA as he had completed 100 days work. In the village Mafipura, there are about 289 job card holders. Govind, S/O Deva, job card number 174 also met the Member (CEGC). Govind and his wife worked in a local brick Klin. His wife was not able to enrol for NREGA work and said that if she were given continuous work under NREGA, she would prefer to work on the NREGA site. In 2007-08, about 250 households secured 100 days of work as told by Secretary. Member (CEGC) inspected registration register, approval of work registers and also saw a couple of muster rolls. The practice of recording muster roll in English was a matter of concern as most job card holders were illiterate. Many job cards were without photographs. Samaria-(ST) complained about non-availability of work. The matter was discussed with secretary of GP, who promised to ensure continuous work to job card holders. As regards payments from banks, beneficiaries recorded that the payment was made within 15 days, this needed to verified. The account was maintained with Bank of Maharashtra (BOM). However, BOM delayed

issuing passbooks to beneficiaries. Necessary administrative action needed to be taken in this regard. Member (CEGC) also inspected the construction of a culvert under NREGA in this village. The quality of the work was found to be good, but there was no board of NREGA. Natives of the village expressed satisfaction over the construction of the culvert. The local NGO, CARD seemed to be performing below par as was evident in the discussion with representative of CARD as he did not even know basic things about NREGA. In discussion with GP secretary, it was found that the roaster of Mate was not available in the village. There was only one Mate, namely Magan Singh (disabled) who claimed to have received some training. Awareness about social audit was dismal as most beneficiaries of NREGA and village had no idea about social audit process. Member urged GP-Secretary to organize a special drive for social audit in the Gram Sabha. Mr. Gupta, ACEO, directed GP secretary and member, CARD to conduct social audit within seven days. The Member (CEGC) also inspected LavaJhiri pond constructed in the village. The pond was constructed with the expense of Rs. 46.89 lakh. The construction under NREGA was done by irrigation department, Tirla. The pond had been transferred to GP and initiatives were afoot for initiating fishery work, an issue of convergence with NREGA. The walls of Gram Panchayat bhavan were blank as no government scheme was painted on the GP walls. Nishtari Talaab, Nawadipur was also inspected. The pond was constructed at an expense of 50 lakh. There were 8 to 10 diesel motor-pumps in operation to lift the water, though the construction of the pond was still incomplete. Member (CEGC) expressed concern about pilferage of water from public pond constructed under NREGA as some villagers reported to him that the pond water was being sold to small and marginal farmers. It was also stated that motor pumps were brought from Dha to sell water. Member asked Mr. Gupta to conduct an enquiry into the alleged sale of pond water as this clearly constituted an example of capture of NREGA assets by dominant interests in the village. After inspection of GP, Maphipura, member inspected block office of Tirla. DPC/Collector also joined his visit to the block office. In the block office, he interacted with president Block Samiti, Smt Bhori Bai, w/o Ram Singh and member Janpad, Dariyav Singh. They alleged that NREGA workers were not paid statutory wages as they were getting only Rs. 50 per day. DPC clarified the system of piece rated measurement and Member (CEGC) urged DPC to make sure that worker's wage was not pilferage and also urged PRI representatives to ensure support to the works of NREGA. After the inspection of Block Office of Tirla, Member (CEGC) with DPC/Collector-Dhar proceeded towards Janapad Panchayat, Gandhwani. I visited Gram panchayat Pantha in Gandhwani Block. The construction of Gandhwani pond

was indeed a great success story for NREGA in the hill parts of the district. The work was still incomplete but offers great scope for convergence with other development programs especially fisheries and social forestry. In interaction with some NREGA workers at site (Neru, son of Kalu, Job card no. 10) it was found that entries were not proper and photograph was not available. The villagers appreciated the construction of ponds as it helped them grow wheat in place of maize.(Is this really good practice?) Sarpanch, GP was available at the site. Reacting to the complaints of workers that job cards were kept with the sarpanch, Member urged DPC to look into the matter. Further, Nishtari pond (Reharda) was also inspected. The work had not yet been not completed. The Mate, who was available at the site, had not received any training. There were concerns about payment for material. This matter was also discussed with DPC that recording of wages in the job card must be done on the basis of muster roll and material for work needed to be procured under approved rates and genuine vendors.

19 November 2009 Visit in GP Nalachha

The gravel road construction site from" Bayadpura to Kujada Kodra Road" in GP Nalachha was inspected by Member (Central Council). Mr. Deepak Singh, newly appointed CEO of the district Samiti accompanied Member (CEGC). The work was incomplete. To the dismay of everyone, the Muster rolls were filled at the time of the visit; the number of NREGA workers on the Muster Roll was only 11 but there were more workers at the site. Mate informed that the attendance was generally taken after 12 in the day. Secretary GP and JE informed that the work was closed from June 2009 and only after hearing about the visit of Member (CEGC) the work was urgently today started. Ramsingh's name (job card number 294) was not recorded on the Muster roll though he was found working at the site. This practice needs to be properly investigated. The work site facility was almost non-existent and the medicine box was full of expiry drugs, this is really a serious breach that needed to be investigated. The discussion wrt NREGA was held with Shobha Ram (Job Card number 118) and Kodar Mangilal (job card number 87). Smt. Gajaribai, NREGA worker complained about less payment as she had worked for more than 3 months. This needed to be investigated as the practice of not-recording bona-fide workers could lead recording of less work days. She expressed her enthusiasm for NREGA provided there was continuous work for poor people. Women workers generally complained about hardship in the work and demanded less strenuous work keeping their health and other issues into account. Photos were missing from various job cards and workers also complained about making a payment for photos; this seemed

to be general practice in Dhar. And various columns in the job cards were not filled at all. Babu, Job card number 258 mentioned how the date of registration for work was not recorded in his case. (State government had all kinds of innovations to avoid the payment of unemployment allowances).

A random check of Nalacha panchayat office in the presence of Mr. Deepak Singh, (CEO), exposed several flaws in the maintenance of records relating to wage slips, check books, muster rolls, etc. Proper entries were missing at several places. Let us not forget that the report of National Level Monitors of Dhar(from 29 sept to 04 October 2009) had pointed out that issue of 'fake entries in respect of dead individuals and government servants in Nalachha block'. However, it seemed that the district had not done any corrective actions for keeping records in order. In the presence of Program Officer of Nalacha block, who was quite clueless about implementation of NREGA, Mr. Singh promised to take effective steps to correct these distortions after having carried out a thorough review of existing processes of audit and records relating to NREGA. Since there was shortage of time, Member (CEGC) could not make out that these were routine 'human error' or 'deliberate neglect', however, it was obvious that there were several basic faults in the record keeping processes in Dhar. When pointed out, most local officials blamed it on poor training and lack of infrastructure at the level of panchayats. Therefore, as promised by DPC, Dhar and reiterated by Mr. Deepak Singh, it was necessary to develop a system of "continuous and comprehensive training of Sarpanch, Secretary, Employment Assistant (Rozgar Sahayak), Sub-engineers (JE) in the task of handling proper execution of NREGA. Though a cursory look at the MIS data on the routine training of personnel involved in implementation of NREGA in Dhar painted a perfect picture, but the ground realities cast serious doubts on the efficacy of the district administration to implement the Act in its letter and spirit.

In the evening, DPC/Collector Dhar took Member (CEGC) to the District Coordination Meeting with banks and post-offices. DPC and Member (CEGC) shared the grievances of NREGA workers with bankers. For instance, the issue of bank passbook of NREGA workers was raised. It was also discussed that bank official's insistence on the presence of Secretary for payment was very disturbing as it led to delay of payment and harassment of NREGA workers. Member (CEGC) criticized the practice of deducting the wage of NREGA workers from their account for settlement of old loans as this would lead to dilution of livelihood support by NREGA. The issue of mass payment of NREGA workers on the local market day was also discussed because banks were not able to make the payment on a single

day and this often led harassment of NREGA workers. Member suggested a system of staggered payment and also using banking correspondent for timely payment. He also urged Banks to treat NREGA as one of core banking activities. The specific complaints from Sardarpur GP and Salwa GP were discussed. Bankers agreed that this was a bad practice and won't be repeated in the future. Member (CEGC) also recalled section 25 and urged all bankers and officials from post-offices to treat themselves as 'implementing agencies' as envisaged in the Act. It was also emphasized in the meeting that monthly coordination meeting between district and Banks and post-offices needed to be institutionalized. DPC/Collector informed the house that a one-day work of all bank-managers would be soon organized to discuss wage payment related issues AP model of payment was also referred to. Member (CEGC) closed the meeting by making plea that banks and post-offices needed to be more sensitive towards NREGA workers and also help the government in the 'financial inclusion' of poor!

20 November 2009 Visit report Dhar

(a) Meeting with key officials from Line department

At the instance of Member (CEGC), a review meeting with officials of Line department was organized at the circuit house at 9AM. Mr. Deepak Singh (CEO) introduced Member, (CEGC) to the officials and also explained the rationale of the meeting. Following members were present in the meeting:

1. Shri Verma, Forest Department, Dhar,
2. Shri Gupta, Executive Engineer, PWD Dhar
3. Shri Badkul, Executive engineer, RES, Dhar
4. Shri Solanki, Executive Engineer, RES, Manwar
5. Shri Gupta, Executive Engineer, Water Resources, Dhar
6. Shri Bghel, Executive Engineer, Water Resources, Manwar
7. Shri Sharma, Executive Engineer,
8. Shri Srivastava, Chief Accounts Officer, Zila Panchyat, Dhar
9. Shri Solanki, Chief Data Manager, Zila Panchayat, Dhar
10. Mr. Jain(who took notes of the meeting for Member, CEGC)

Member, (CEGC) explained the role of Central Council in monitoring the implementation of NREGA and also reflected on the pending issue of “unemployment allowances” in the district. According to MIS, 3526 days of Unemployment Allowances were pending. This was a matter of grave concern. And 10488 muster roll were also reported delay payment of wages at various stages. Member (CEGC) explained the position of the Act on delay payment and urged Line department officials to take corrective actions as per the Act. Since the general awareness level of officials/staff of Line department about various provisions in the Act and Operational guidelines was found quite low among implementing staff and personnel, it was urged to procure the latest copy of the Operational Guidelines of MoRD. The lack of continuous work in the district also came up for criticism in the meeting. Given the status of training in the district, Member (CEGC) urged DPC to send NREGA officials and staff for training to places like Rajasthan and AP. The dismal awareness about good practices in other states in the implementation of NREGA was noted. The lack of worksite facility, absence of NREGA logo with unique work code etc were also discussed in the meeting. The poor participation of people in the Gram Sabha was also discussed; the Vigilance and Monitoring issues were also put into focus. The example of Baslai in Sardarpur Panchayat was also discussed where NREGA workers had not been paid for the 90 days; this was a grave violation of the Act. The issue of Social Audit and the transfer of NREGA assets to PRIs also came up for discussion. Member (CEGCC) expressed his concerns of lack of genuine social audit and non-participation of civil society organization in strengthening the implementation of NREGA. He criticised the manner in which social audit had been manipulated in the district. He particularly referred to the need to institute processes they would enable rural workers who were crippled by obvious limitations of awareness, literacy, destitution etc. to register their demand for work. This was noted as one of the biggest failures in the implementation of NREGA in the district. He also emphasised the need for filling up all the vacant posts for NREGA. In the end, he appreciates the good works of the district especially in water conservation and building assets for raising productivity in the agriculture. The meeting concluded with a vote of thanks by Mr. Deepak Singh. After the meeting at the circuit house, Member (CEGC) proceeded for a follow up visit of Gram Sagwal Block Sardarpur. He was accompanied with Mr. Ashis and Joshi, local media persons along with other officials of the district.

The Construction of Gravel Road from Makdi to Khakedi was inspected. The work was being carried out by GP, Sagwal and work order was started from 10/5/2009. When asked about why the work was stopped for three months, NREGA workers at the site informed that Mate Shri Antar Singh S/o Mangilal showed up at the site for the first time on 17/11/09 and asked workers to come for work. The role of Sarpanch, Secretary and Mate, the trio needed to be investigated. Following workers interacted in the meeting with Member (CEGC)

1. Nandibai w/o Soma, Job Card number 50; she reported for the work for the first time.
2. Ramkanyabai, job card number 16; she reported for the work for the last 2days. She also mentioned that a road work was started with MLA fund in the village and she worked there. She complained about delay payment. Secretary, Sagwal said that he deposited check at bank on 18/11/2009 and showed the letter from bank. He blamed Block office for delay.
3. Nanibai w/o Sitaram job card number 48; started NREGA work only 2 days ago.
4. Devisingh S/o Punaji, job card number 122, again only 2 days ago got NREGA work.
5. Shardabi w/o Santosh, job card number, 104; 2 days ago got NREGA work.
6. Ramesh S/o Sukhram. Job card number 63; got job 2 days ago.
7. Janibai W/O Abhaysingh job card number 29
8. Nathibai W/O Manohar

It appeared that the work was started only after the visit of Member (CEGC). There was hardly any worksite facility at the site; the box of medicine was available. It clearly indicated the shoddy and adhoc manner NREGA was being implemented in the block. After this, Member (CEGC) proceeded for the visit of Village Baslai (Panchyat Baslai) Block Sardarpur.

Visit of Village Baslai, Block Sardarpur

The Member(CEGC) interacted with NREGA workers at the site of construction of Gravel Road from Village Baslai to Sandla Road. The GP

Baslai was executing the project and the project was approved on 15/12/2007; the work was still incomplete. The JE Mr. Srivastava reported that the work was actually started on 19/11/2009 after hearing the visit of Member (CEGC), otherwise the work had stopped. It was noted that no senior NREGA official including PO had ever bothered the visit or inspect the worksite; this raised a serious administrative lapse. Not surprisingly, there were no worksite facilities available in complete contravention of provisions in the Act. In fact, Mr. Gupta, Additional CEO justified the non-availability of worksite facilities by saying that workers used local resources. This is the state of affairs in the district of Dhar! In interaction with NREGA workers, it was found that the practice of giving receipts for registration of work was at best occasional. Many workers received receipts only after the news of Member (CEGC)'s visit reached the GP. Following NREGA workers shared their experiences;

1. Tejabai W/o Gopal
2. Javariaya, Job card number 182; worked only 25 days but no entries in the job card; this seemed a common practice in Dhar.
3. Nanalal, Job Card number; 137; worked in a Kapil Dhar Scheme.
4. Badibai, job card 155; she was found working at the site but her job card was empty, no work record at all!
5. LeelaBai W/O Mayaram, job card number 68; entries of work found and payment also made.
6. Hariram , Job Card number 50
7. HiraRama, Job Card number 44
8. KankuBai W/O Sukhram, Job Card number 163.

Women workers particularly Sugnabai, Tulasibai, Munnibai, Gangabai complained about gender bias and also non-availability of NREGA work; they also spoke of their exclusion from decision making process at Gram Sabha. Many workers spoke about the instance of machines being used in the block/village. Member (CEGC) urged Sarpanch and Secretary to ensure timely and genuine payment of wages and also ensure 100 days of works in this remote and backward village. NREGA officials agreed to hold a special Gram Sabha at the earliest and prepare a new shelf of

works, ensure new vigilance and Monitoring Committee and also do social audit a fresh. It was also discussed in the assembly of workers at the site that officials and PRI representatives would ensure a better and effective monitoring of NREGA with the help of local media and civil society organizations. Shri Gupta, Additional CEO, instructed Sarpanch to organize a special Gram Sabha for NREGA.

On the way back to Dhar, Member (CEGC) also inspected the office of GP of Godikheda. The GP was in a bad shape due to lack of proper infrastructure support. The Secretary came to the Office and showed records of NREGA. The material and labour ratio in the construction of culvert was found satisfactory. However, Member (CEGC) expressed concerns about lack of 'Janata information System'- no wall writings- in the GP. Around 8PM, the team left for Dhar. A through investigation of the GP was required.

21 November 2009 Visit in GP Khairod (Dhar Block)

The monitoring of NREGA works in Khairod GP was quite interesting and also shocking. The Member(CEGC) was accompanied with local journalist Mr. Joshi and Ashis(who worked with IBN channel). The GP building was almost on the National Highway but the office was closed at the time of visit. After making inquires with local villagers, Member (CEGC) made inquires with Mr. Srivastva (Executive Engineer) about the status of work in Khairod. He claimed that work was on and at least 20 labourers had reported for the work. Local Villagers contested his version. After some drama over the issue of who keeps the "key" of the GP building, (Sarpanch feigned ignorance about the key), the secretary of the GP was called and office of the GP office was opened. When sarpanch was asked about the work, he denied that people demanded work. (Surprisingly, the Mate, Mukesh Kumar of the GP was MCom and he was not aware of basic provisions of the Act). The people including vice-Sarpanch present near the GP office rejected the contention of duo of Sarpanch and Secretary. Again it appeared that NREGA was in the hands of duo of Sarpanch and Secretary and availability for work was dependent on them. People including some workers raised serious doubts on the integrity of the implementation of NREGA in the GP. A couple of workers who did not wish to be quoted referred

to the practice of 'machine' in the works. Vice-Sarpanch (Up-Sarpanch) Mr. Rameshwar Kachwya raised serious allegations against the trio of Sarpanch, Secretary and Mate. This needs to be investigated. The role of JE (Shri Gangway) was also not found satisfactory as he could not answer queries relating to his work; it seemed as if he had sub-contracted out his work. Proper action needed to be taken against both Mate and JE who seemed hand-in-glove. The rate of completion was quite poor. It was surprising to note that despite so much expenditure on training and skill development of NREGA staff, there was a general apathy towards various provisions of the Act.

It seemed that GP office was in the hands of outside elements who were not elected members of the GP; this needs to be investigated. Mr. Gupta, Additional CEO who had been handling implementation of NREGA in the district for quite some time agreed that he had never visited this GP though the GP was located on the National highway. On the inspection of records especially works related, it was found that vouchers pertaining to purchase were not in order and also the ratio between labour and wages was seen higher than allowed in the Act. This was evident in the construction work of Road from Khairod to Kalsara in the GP. When GP Secretary and Sarpanch with support from some unnamed outside elements who were quite aggressive, resisted Member's efforts to probe further, Member (CEGC) called DPC and apprised him of the ground situation. DPC immediately rushed his Sub divisional magistrate (SDM) Shri Ravindra Chaudhary to seal the office and do a thorough investigation into the records of NREGA and find out if any misdeeds had been done. The SDM immediately came to the GP office, started the process of search of the office records and ensured Member (CEGC) that proper legal case would be made if anything was found wrong. The Member (CEGC) would like to place on record DPC's timely and effective intervention. Later, Member(CEGC) visited the village and personally went to the fields to meet some of the agricultural workers to take a view on the implementation of NREGA; NREGA seemed to be driving the imagination of poor agricultural workers yet it was not being implemented in the letter and spirit of Act. On the issue of fake-job cards, Member(CEGC) went to a couple of houses but got no response as men members were not found in those houses. The house of Kailash s/o Bagdiram was also visited as he was said to have possessed a fake job card. He lived in a pucca two -storied house. If the complaint about his involvement in NREGA was found true, action needed to be taken and his job card cancelled. Santosh S/O Mohan said that he worked for a day or two on the gravel road but was not paid. In fact, he was presently involved in the dairy work and did not work in NREGA. HinduSingh S/O

Kanaji Job card 85 complained about being excluded from NREGA work. His wife Shayrabai told that she was never informed about the opening of NREGA work. HinduSingh's job card was blank though he claimed to have worked for 7 days. Member interacted with Ramesh Singh (Job card number 258) who complained about delay payment (almost a month). This led him to rely on unofficial loan from the rich people in the village for running his household kitchen. Most district officials passed the blame to banks and post offices for the delay in payment. Many villagers in Khairod also complained about the use of machines in NREGA works. If it was found true, necessary action must be taken against the guilty officials/ staff and proxy contractors. After the visit of Khairod GP, Member (CEGC) returned to Dhar Rural Engineering Department and inquired about the construction of gravel road in Khairod with Mr. Chauhan in the department. In the records of payment, a voucher for payment of Rs. 3.08 lakh in April was found missing. The matter had been orally brought to the notice of DPC/ Collector and he promised to investigate the entire issue.

At the Circuit House of Dhar, Member (CEGC) had a good exit discussion with DPC/Collector and shared with him his initial observations. And he also handed over to him a petition from Mr.Riyaz Khan (Dhar) to look into the complaints of irregularities in the implementation of NREGA in the district. The DPC promised to ensure an effective action on any grievance of NREGA workers in the district. He also mentioned his plan to initiate a campaign mode of implementation in the district. The Member (CEGC) thanked DPC for his courteous and efficient support to the work of CEGC and promised to revisit in a span of 6 -months the district to assess the follow-up actions after his visit. At 5PM, he left for Indore for his return journey to Mumbai.

Analytical parts of the Report

Following are some of the salient policy and implementation related observations in the report;

Proactive role of Gram Sabha a non-starter; In most villages and Panchayats visited and interaction with NREGA stakeholders revealed that Gram Sabha performed merely symbolic functions in ensuring the implementation of basic entitlements of the Act. Most NREGA workers in the district of Dhar informed that their participation in Gram Sabha was merely a ritual and in most cases 'proxy' participation. In contrast, the duo of Sarpanch and Secretary blamed the inefficiency of Gram Sabha on to the indifferent behaviour of NREGA workers towards Sabha. In

this blame game, “Mate” was often found on the side of Sarpanch and Secretary for obvious reasons as “Mate” (informed by workers & villagers) was often handpicked by Sarpanch and Secretary ((Mantri) to assist their acts of commission and omission. So the neutrality and professionalism of key PRI officials in the implementation of NREGA are under considerable doubt and suspicion! It is indeed urgent Sarpanch, and Secretary should not become “agents of loot and plunder” in NREGA as alleged by many NREGA workers. The success of Panchayati Raj in India seems to depend on successful implementation of NREGA!

Policy Recommendation: As this is a typical issue of institutionalized failure of participatory and deliberative role of Gram Sabha, we need to reenergize Gram Sabha by social mobilization of NREGA workers through voluntary organizations (Lok Sevak scheme could be tried out) and also mobilizing SHG of women. As a policy measure, one could also try forming labour unions of NREGA workers. These new institutional incentives need to be made part of Operation Guidelines of NREGA. Secondly, the institutionalization of “Mate” needs to be done by MGNREGA workers through a participatory process. And Mate should be on rotational basis. Also, highly qualified persons should be barred from holding the job of Mate; Mate is one among equals as far as NREGA workers are concerned! Third, Sarpanchas and Secretaries should also follow the normal rules of ‘disclosure’ of their assets and those found guilty of subversion of NREGA must be debarred from contesting elections!

- Unholy nexus among Sarpanch, Secretary, JE, Mates and their collusion with Line Departments ; Implementation failures

The opening of timely and continuous work is a major complaint in the district Dhar district; It is in this sense; the implementation of MGNREGA seems to have collapsed in the district though there is tremendous enthusiasm for the program and also demand for NREG among the poor households. Applying for work, getting work in time or receiving unemployment allowance; all these statutory ‘entitlements are being violated without fear and in most circumstances with the collusion of local Rural Engineering Services officials who often hobnob with Sarpanch and Secretary (Mantri). It has become a stark reality in Dhar that the success of NREGA depends not on poor, illiterate workers but on the ‘pleasure of officials of RES’ in the district. NREGA guidelines clearly stipulates that the registration for work has to be an open-ended process to facilitate registration of eligible Households throughout the year but this is rarely observed in the district of Dhar; individual beneficiaries at most work sites complained that the work was rarely available. And opening of new work was often dependent on the whims and fancies of the duo of Sarpanch and Secretary. Participatory people’s planning at GP as envisaged by the Act (existed on paper) Sadly, JE (on whom a very important responsibility of measurement rests) is member of a dangerous triangle that could easily destroy the potential of NREGA in the district. At most places, Mates were found lacking in fulfilling their basic duties

as prescribed in the guidelines; Mates in most places failed to explain queries about muster roll, consolidation sheet, stock register, measurement book, technical estimate & work sanction, vigilance committee inspection report. It seems that Secretary or Mantri doubles up as Mate leaving a vast scope for manipulation and fraud! PO(Dhar does not have dedicated Pos) whose role is clearly indicated in the Act is either a silent spectator or contributing factor in the increasing mess is a subject of investigation. Mr. Gupta ((Additional CEO) and other implementing officials in the district need to own up the reasonability for their laxities (deliberate or unintended) in this. At the intervention of Member((CEGC), officials including Mr. Gupta readily agreed to open the work in the GP of Sagwal; this shows that a proactive administration is need of the hour in the district of Dhar. If works in NREGA await the visit of member of Central Council then it is not an ordinary failure but symptomatic of a larger governance crisis in the district administration. The old bureaucratic ways of implementing programmes such as food for work continues to guide the implementation of NREGA in Dhar; this explains people's rising anger against officials of Line departments particularly Rural Engineering Services. It seems the 'old raj' of contractor and engineers continues and also flourishes with connivance of Sarpanch and Secretaries. This explains as to why the whole set of executive engineers are interested in constructing large water tanks (worth Rs 50 lakh) where proxy contractors and machines could easily be employed. Though water reservoirs are vital but people's priorities should guide NREGA. The DPC/Collector of Dhar needs to do a thorough cleaning of his district administration and bring new officials for implanting NREGA. In the exit meeting with Member (CEGC), DPC agreed to take adequate and appropriate administrative measures within a time-frame. As DPC was recently posted in the district, he needed time to do a thorough assessment to identify gaps in the implantation of the Act. He promised that Mr. Deepak Singh, newly posted CEO of the district Council would do a systemic analysis in this regard and take necessary action against erring officials from engineering departments.

- Administrative and Management Failures in Dhar: The Role of POs must be highlighted as the weakest links in the administrative and management failures in Dhar. It is a tragedy that despite their statutory role, PO treats NREGA as additional and wasteful work. Though it was assumed that the POs would assist the process of plan preparation, monitor the projects, ensure prompt and fair payment of wages, ensure payment of unemployment allowance, ensure regular social audits as well as disposal of disputes or complaints within seven days or forward it to any other relevant authority for resolution but this all has not happened on the ground. There is urgent need for taking administrative. Under section 25 of NREGA, proceedings can be initiated against those officials who are accused of frequent and serious dereliction of duty with regard to implementation of NREGA. This will have created collateral benefits for wage payment as part of

the problem lies at the level of administration. Let us not forget that penalty alone does not work; we need to motivate NREGA officials-Staff to develop long term stakes in NREGA; Reforms of district level administration has become urgent in view of growing significance of NREGA and other rural development programs. Not only quality training and interaction with civil society organizations but a new incentive structures with proper HR policies needs to be put in place for district/block level officials. So the failure of administrative and management system is writ large in Dhar. For instance, take the case of District planning; Not much proactive action on this by the district officials; a tokenism defines the preparation of NREGA's shelf of works. The district administration does not have necessary technical support for assessing the viability of the work programmes identified at the village-level as no impact assessment has even been done in the district. At no site of inspection, there was any reference to a monthly day for disbursing NREGA information or what we call 'Rozgar Divas'; neither the local line department officials nor NREGA workers were aware of this practice; Member(CEGC) tried to impart as much information as possible about entitlements in his limited interaction with workers at the site. In the district meeting, the Member (CEGC) observed that key ground level officials/staff were not well versed in the Operational guidelines of MoRD. As discussed with DPC/Collector, it would be better if key officials are sent for rigorous training programmes at either SIRD or NIRD and also exposure trips to Rajasthan and AP for learning from good practices. The Implementation of MGNREGA cannot endlessly depend on indifferent bureaucratic intervention. So we need to design a policy mechanism to involve PRIs more proactively with reputed and credible voluntary organization without diluting the oversight functions of district administration.

Policy Recommendation: If we judge the successful implementation of NREGA against the goals of Social Audit then NREGA is a huge disaster in Dhar. However, if we judge the success of NREGA against the goals of creating physical assets (ponds, tanks and roads) then NREGA is a modest success in Dhar. As witnessed in the inspection of Gandhamati tank, NREGA has succeeded in water-related projects but at the cost of various norms of accountability and transparency. And also lack of people's participation. This raises the fears of NREGA being captured by 'dominant interests' in the Line Departments and PRI system. For instance, at most work sites, the old contractor driven model of project implementation was evident; the tank was made with NREGA labour, handed over to Panchayat but collateral benefits of tanks or ponds are reaped by powerful dominant elements in the village population who could rent or buy expensive generator set based pumps to irrigate their land and also offer water

from a public pond on sale. This indicates the hidden layers of “loot and plunder” of public resources in the implementation of NREGA in Dhar.

- The fate of Social Audit and Local Vigilance & Monitoring Committees; Social Audit and LV&M committees are in most cases notional and exist only on paper in the district of Dhar; this is a serious lacuna and also violation of NREGA and its guidelines. Most workers were ignorant about the most basic thing about social audit that they have got inalienable right to participate in a social audit; they informed that ‘social audit depends on the arbitrary will of the sarpanch or mantri (panchayat secretary)’. Most NREGA workers Dhar seemed to have never attended any meeting of social audit form as prescribed in the section 12 of Act; this raises a genuine doubt about the ‘credibility of the social audit’ in the district. Most importantly everything seems to depend on the combined will or inefficient of mates, panchayat secretaries, Sub-engineers and bank. Post office officials. At no stage, worker is involved; this raises a crucial issue of ‘fixing the full responsibility for misdeeds’. The NREGA workers have no idea of what social audit means as in most cases the troika of Sarpanch, Secretary and Mate manipulate the LVMs. In this Program Officers (POs) and officials from Line department are also complicit as they take no interest in compliance with guidelines of NREGA especially provisions relating to vigilance, monitoring and social audit. A special drive needs to be undertaken for making the process of LVMs transparent. Secondly, the capacity of LVMs to undertake vigilance and monitoring work is dismal in the absence of any institutionalized framework of capacity building by the district administration. The legacy of “food for work” continues! Not only social audit even the regular ‘government audit’ of NREGA is a casualty in Dhar; several distortions, flaws in maintenance of records and poor book keeping practices have been noted that require a follow up investigation . In the absence of ‘clear, manifest and incontrovertible ‘ evidence of wrong doing by particular individuals at the time of visit, Member(CEGC) would suggest that the line departments and implementing government agencies must comply with standard procedures and processes of physical, financial and assets auditing. Exaggerated/ inaccurate technical estimates, unnecessary expenditure, excessive rates and material etc often escape the scrutiny of the government audit otherwise cases of fraud/leakage would not have taken

place as alleged by workers . It is better if Rural Engineering Services are given very minimal role in implementing NREGA in the region. Before big systemic steps are being taken, some simple solutions could be implemented. For wider dissemination of the information pertaining to NREGA the printout of muster-roll and active works need to be pasted on the wall of Gram Panchayat office in local language and same need to be updated on weekly, /monthly basis

Conclusion: The Role of Civil Society and cultivation of “habits of hearts” The role of Civil Society Organisations as stipulated under section 2(g) of the Act is neither encouraging nor encouraged by the Line departments in Dhar. Given the dismal level of awareness about NREGA among workers and also NREGA officials in the district, the role of civil society becomes obligatory and urgent. Reputed civil society organizations and teams from leading social science institutes such as IRMA, MKKS, and SPS could be invited to get involved in the implementation and social audit of NREGA. As the monitoring report of Dhar clearly suggests that NREGA in Dhar is plagued by both systemic crisis ((both in terms of delivery and capacity building) and also deliberate human error, it is necessary that we must take not only corrective-remedial administrative actions but also support a popular campaign for social mobilization of NREGA workers to cultivate what Alex Tocqueville (Democracy in America; 1834) called “habits of hearts” for enhancing the implementation of NREGA in the district.

PS: NREGA has been renamed as Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Gurantee Act.