

Minutes of the proceedings of the Round Table on the Role of Media in strengthening NREGA held at NASC Complex, PUSA, New Delhi.

1. Union Minister of Rural Development, Dr. Raghuvansh Prasad Singh, inaugurated the Round Table on the Role of Media in strengthening NREGA.
2. The list of participants is at Annexure A.
3. Union Minister, Dr Singh, at the outset, welcomed the participants. He said that the Ministry is interacting with various groups to strengthen the implementation of NREGA. Information is being shared by the Ministry on NREGA so that proper perceptions on the programme may be formed. With the third year of the implementation of the Act, 3.11 crores rural households have been employed and it is expected that by the end of the year, 4.5 crore rural households will be provided employment. Distress migration has been averted from rural areas. The impact of the programme on the lives of the rural poor is demonstrated by the facts, like, significant participation of scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and women which is almost 50%.
4. He added that during all the three years, up to the end of October of the current year, Rs 26,489 crores have been spent on wages and altogether Rs 36,832 crores have been utilized. Minimum wages have gone up from Rs 65 in 2006 to Rs 85 per day in 2008. Panchayati Raj Institutions have been strengthened as they have been made the principal implementation authorities under the Act.
5. Payment of wages has been made mandatory through banks and post offices. Till date 4.92 crores bank and post office accounts have been opened in the country. Modern ICT tools are also being piloted to improve the management of the programme. Ministry is also promoting the life and medical insurance of the workers through the Jan Shree Bima Yojana and Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana. Toll free helpline has been set up in the Ministry and Lok Adalats are being organized to settle disputes under NREGA. Minister urged the media persons to play an active role so that the implementation of the programme can be streamlined.
6. Hailing National Rural Employment Guarantee Act as the magna carta of rural unemployment, Dr. Rita Sharma, Secretary, Department of Rural Development, Government of India said that rural unemployment is the major cause of rural poverty in India. Rural poverty stood at 28% in 2000-01 comprising 22 crores people and 4.5 crores rural households. Since its inception in 2005, NREGA has played a critical role in providing supplementary employment opportunities to the rural households mostly belonging to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Water conservation, irrigation and land development projects constitute the majority of the projects taken up under NREGA which has greatly contributed to the strengthening of the natural resources base of the country.
7. The Ministry has collaborated with professional institutions, academia, financial institutions, civil society organizations and now the media for strengthening the implementation of the Act. Media plays an important role. It can create awareness through free flow of information. It can extend the reach of the programme. It can uncover deviations from the Act. It can highlight success stories. Issues can be investigated in depth and a balanced picture can be made to ensure establishment of proper perception on issues. Knowledge network can be used by media to collect information on NREGA.

13. Secretary, Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India, shared the Press Book with the participants which contain both the positive and negative news published by newspapers. She highlighted the important issues as:

- i. Expansion of use of NREGA Knowledge Network by Media for sharing and using information on NREGA.
- ii. Media to build public opinion and facilitate dissemination of information relating to NREGA.
- iii. Proactive role of Media as an investigation agency on issues in the field.
- iv. Media to define its role as agency of awareness generation.
- v. Better use of Press briefs prepared by the Ministry for publication.
- vi. Adequate publication of success stories and dissemination.
- vii. Media persons to take field visits and interact with the people to have first hand information on the programme.
- viii. Media to ensure free flow of information across the country from the rural households to the government institutions and vice-versa.
- ix. Media to become medium of expression and voice of the poor and the obscure silent majority.
- x. Media to uncover the unseemly acts of omissions and commissions undermining the implementation of the Act.
- xi. Media to keep track of the news reports sent by the Ministry to the State Governments for taking up investigation and corrective measures.

15. The views of the participants are summarized below.

- i. **Mr. Arun Kumar Pandey, Bureau Chief of Rashtriya Sahara, Bihar:** The Press Book should also contain the news from Hindi newspapers. The Scheme should also be available during floods when the hardships are acute. Fair payment of wages should be made to the women and men workers. There is also delay in payment of wages. Payment through banks and post offices is adversely affected in blocks where there are no branches of banks. Contractors are involved in the execution of works.
- ii. **Mr. B.G.Vergheese:** Mr. Varghese reiterated that NREGA is the people's Act and suggested that the Doordarshan and All India Radio should be profusely used as they have vast network of transmission. A dialogue can be initiated with them to allocate an hour in a day or two days in a week for relay/telecast of programmes on Rural Development. Similarly, the Lok Sabha channel can be a good medium for delivery of information on NREGA. Persuading the commercial broadcasters for the urban base or taking them for conducted tour will be beneficial. The other suggestions included the use of "Wall Newspapers", Community Radio and blogging on the internet as mediums of dissemination of information. He also suggested inclusion of a media person in the Vigilance and Monitoring Committee, especially on the issues related to the maintenance of assets. Building a core of professionals, linking land-based assets with the land reforms and the marketing of rural products with the organizations like KVIC, were also suggested by Mr. Vergheese.
- iii. **Mr. Prabhat Kumar, Hindustan:** Mr. Prabhat opined that the local media persons at the Block or the District levels should also be involved during the planning process.
- iv. **Mr. Jitendra Kumar, Nai Duniya:** Mr. Kumar suggested the formation of group of 4-5 reporters who report on NREGA in each State to facilitate the dissemination of information and achievements.
- v. **Mr. Ritesh Anupam, PTI:** Mr. Anupam expressed that the performance report of a District or a Block should also be shared with the concerned officials and the Sarpanch/Mukhiya.

- vi. **Mr. Rajeev Kumar, Rashtriya Sahara:** Mr. Kumar suggested that the media conferences should also be organized regularly at the District and Block levels.
- vii. **Mr. Sanjeev Kumar, ETV News:** Mr. Sanjeev urged the need for convergence between the different programmes/ Schemes and NREGA.
- viii. **Mr. Bharti Vasant Kumar, Jagran:** Mr Kumar underlined the need for strengthening the information collection mechanism at the Ministry. He also suggested for organizing video conferences to brief the Media and promote “citizen journalists”. He opined for organizing the “photo competitions” covering the features of NREGA and creating a forum for collecting and evaluating the stories will be effective mediums. Another method for collection of news, as suggested by Mr. Kumar, on NREGA was introduction of “postcard” system. Summing up his suggestions he emphasized the importance of vernacular press in dissemination of information pertaining to NREGA.
- ix. **Mr. Sandip Das, Financial Express:** Mr. Das appealed the House to make NREGA news relevant to the mandate of their Newspapers so that it finds place. He suggested that Media conferences should be organized on Saturdays to maximise participation of media personals. He urged for an exposure visit of Media.
- x. **Mr. Manoj Kumar, Dainik Aaj:** Mr. Kumar put forth a suggestion of organizing the “NREGA Sabhas” for reporters at the State/District/Block levels.

Decisions taken

16. Summing up the suggestions received from the participants, Dr. Rita Sharma, Secretary, Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India, said that the suggestions may be divided into two categories. First, those that relate to the system and procedures of the programme. Second, those that relate to the content of the programme. Accordingly, she summed up the suggestions as follows:

- i. Organizing periodic District level NREGA Sabhas with Media for better coordination between the implementers and Media.
- ii. Initiate dialogue with Doordarshan and All India Radio for broadcasting programmes on NREGA.
- iii. Lok Sabha channel of Doordarshan to be used as medium for dissemination of information and discussions.
- iv. Promote conducted tours and field visits of Media for gathering first hand information.
- v. Encourage utilization of services of people as “citizen journalists” who would report on the status of implementation of NREGA.
- vi. Recognizing the efforts of the media persons who would make “significant contributions” in spreading awareness about NREGA and its programmes.
- vii. Introduce “wall newspapers”.
- viii. Encourage blogging.
- ix. Strengthen system for collection of information from vernacular press and gather information through Post Cards and Inland.
- x. Inclusion of Media personnel in the monitoring committees, especially at the Block and Gram Panchayat levels.

Secretary, Department of Rural Development said that the Ministry will consider the suggestions received in the Round Table for strengthening the implementation of NREGA. She thanked the media persons for their interest in the programme and hoped for a strong partnership with the media for the effective implementation of the Act.

