

SOCIAL AUDIT IN MGNREGS

(A Synthesis Report on Learning, Processes & Way forward)



submitted to



Poorest Areas Civil Society Programme
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submitted by



Centre for Youth and Social Development

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Acronyms

CAG	Comptroller and Auditor General of India
CBO	Community Based Organization
CIG	Common Interest Group
CSO	Civil Society Organization
CRP	Community Resource Person
CYSD	Centre for Youth and Social Development
DFID	Department for International Development
GP	Gram Panchayat
GRS	Gram Rojgar Sevak
ICDS	Integrated Child Development Services
IPPE	Intensive Participatory Planning Exercise
IEC	Information Education Communication
MB	Measurement Book
MGNREGA	Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act
MGNREGS	Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme
MoRD	Ministry of Rural Development
NGO	Non-Government Organization
NIRD	National Institute of Rural Development
PACS	Poorest Area Civil Society
PO	Programme Officer
PRI	Panchayati Raj Institution
PIA	Project Implementing Agency
SAT	Social Audit Team
SC	Scheduled Caste
SIRD	State Institute of Rural Development
SSK	Sahabhagi Shikshan Kendra
ST	Scheduled Tribe
ToT	Training of Trainers
VDC	Village Development Committee

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- Members of Panchayati Raj Institutions
- Community Based Organizations at the District and Block level
- Samarthan and its district based partner organizations
- Sahbhagi Shikshan Kendra (SSK) and its district based partner organizations
- Centre for Youth and Social Development (CYSD) and its district based partner organizations

Executive Summary

Social audit refers to the steps that are taken to ensure that the work done by the government is actually benefiting the people whom it is intended to benefit. It is based on the principle that the local governance should be carried out, as much as possible, with the consent and in complete understanding of the requirements of the people concerned. It is certainly a process and not an event. It is about understanding, measuring, reporting, and most importantly improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the local governance.

Social Audit is a process in which the details of the resources, financial and non-financial, used by the public agencies for the development initiatives, are shared with the people, often through a public platform. It allows people to ensure transparency and accountability, thereby providing the ultimate users an opportunity to scrutinize the development initiatives.

The main reason for the push for social audit is the huge disconnect between what the people need, what the government thinks it needs, and what is actually done. Mindful of the inefficiency in implementation of the scheme, the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act included the provision for social audits to be carried out by the village assembly (Gram Sabha) to promote transparency and public accountability. Until the Act came into effect, the community members could only lodge a complaint to report issues or concerns. From this perspective, the right of an ordinary citizen to be part of a social audit on development work under the MGNREGA is a revolutionary step forward in Indian democracy. The Act empowers people to play an active role in promoting transparency through village meetings and participatory planning, and seeks to regulate the process of monitoring through the establishment of Social Accountability Committees and Vigilance and Monitoring Committees.

Planning and social audit are critical components of MGNREGS to ensure effective utilization of funds, particularly from the perspectives of the socially excluded groups. Although it is mandated in MGNREGS for the Gram Sabha to conduct social audit at least once in six months, it has never been practiced in letter and spirit. Even if it is undertaken, the focus is on exposing malpractice rather than using it as an instrument to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of implementation, and in particular for raising awareness and ensuring clarity of the roles of various stakeholders. The reason for poor implementation of social audit in MGNREGS is the poor interpretation of its key components and capacities of the concerned institutions/ stakeholders responsible to take it forward.

To advance the agenda of MGNREGS planning and social audit in six states, Poorest Areas Civil Society (PACS) partnered with Samarthan, Bhopal, Sahabagi Shikshan Kendra,

Lucknow and Centre for Youth and Social Development (CYSD), Bhubaneswar. These organizations acted as the technical resource agencies and led the campaign in the states of Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand, Odisha and West Bengal through civil society partner organizations and field functionaries. The technical resource agencies were entrusted with the responsibility of facilitating the social audit in 200 grampanchayats through CSO partners and use the experience to initiate dialogue with the district and state administration towards better implementation of MGNREGS.

In order to carry out the social audit for MGNREGS in the PACS supported states, a multipronged strategy was adopted. It included the identification and selection of local CSO partners to facilitate the process in their respective operational areas, selection of gram panchayats, development of knowledge products for a set of guidelines and to build an enabling environment for social audit, promotion and strengthening of the social audit teams and engage the government functionaries to implement the social audit in the select states.

The campaign also provided several learnings in each of the six states. The Social Audit Team (SAT) at the GP level has emerged as a successful model for replication and as a benchmark that could be effectively embedded in the social audit planning process. Mainstreaming social audit requires systematic and sustained training and capacity building support for stakeholders. While community mobilization forms the foundation for social audit, there is a need to build coalitions at the higher level to create a framework that is supportive to the objectives of social auditing. The success of social audits in MGNREGS largely depends on social mobilization and active involvement of stakeholders in planning, mobilizing demand, vigilance, monitoring and implementation. To raise awareness, intensive communication campaigns, tailored to local conditions, are needed.

This document tries to capture the purpose and scope of the initiative, strategies adopted for better implementation of social audit, process followed, issues identified during implementation, learnings from the experience and challenges faced by the PACS supported partner organizations while facilitating the social audit process in the six states.

The Poorest Areas Civil Society (PACS) Programme is a flagship program initiative of the UK Government's Department for International Development (DFID), in partnering with civil society in India to improve the uptake of rights and entitlements by socially excluded groups. It aims at addressing the issues of exclusion by advocating for a more socially inclusive environment. It is designed to strengthen demand for improved delivery of services; support service providers to be more responsive and accountable; and address the different forms of barriers and discrimination socially excluded groups face in claiming services and benefits. PACS aims to exercise the potential of civil society organizations to address social exclusion. PACS participate in the district and state level planning process of the MGNREGA project and build capacity of the NGOs that effectively raise the voices of the marginalised communities and monitor the project at the ground level.

Contents

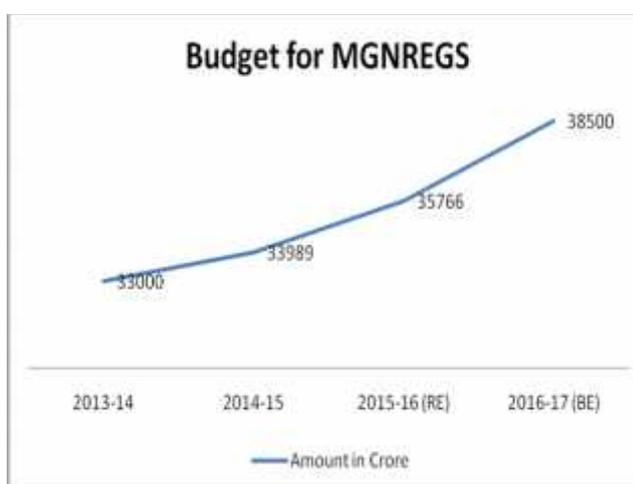
❖ Background	01-03
❖ Process Followed	04-13
Stage-I: Pre-Audit or Preparatory Phase	
Stage-II: Social Audit	
Stage-III: Post-Audit	
❖ Challenges	14
❖ Learnings	14
❖ Epilogue	15

Background

There are a number of poverty alleviation programmes which include wage employment programmes, rural housing, social security programmes, land reforms and devolution of powers and functions to institutions of local self-governance. Lack of people's participation in various stages of programme planning and implementation, lack of transparency in the operation of the schemes, inadequate monitoring and often weak anti-corruption mechanisms have resulted in slow progress towards poverty eradication.

Any programme, before it reaches the people undergoes two stages including planning and implementation. In a democratic country like India, the planning is supposed to be participatory and follow a bottom up approach and also there has to be people's participation during the implementation and monitoring phases. The idea is to improve the local self-governance for better implementation of programmes. However it is a known fact that there is a huge disconnect between what the people need, what the government accommodates, and what is actually done.

During last few years budgetary allocations for the development programmes, specifically for poverty alleviation program have substantially increased. However the outreach of these programme as well as timely utilization of the resources and quality of the expenditure continues to be a challenge. Lack of community participation and less priority to the community voice may be one of the possible reasons for this.



Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) is a flagship scheme of the Government of India with the largest coverage in terms of providing 100 days of employment guarantee in a year to the rural poor. Unlike other government schemes, "social audit" is a crucial component in MGNREGS. To ensure public participation and accountability "social audit" is inbuilt in the scheme. However the implementation of MGNREGS has gone through many stories of success as well as failure and hardship in its way to achieve the goal.

Poorest Area Civil Society (PACS) Programme is UK government's department for International Development supported programme to work with civil society in India on the issues of social exclusion and discrimination communities. PACS work in 90 poorest districts across seven states (Bihar, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Odisha and West Bengal) with 225 civil society partners on two broad thematic areas "Right to livelihood and Right to Basic Service".

During the year 2013 PACS carried out an inclusive MGNREGA planning process experiment with 200 Gram Panchayats in the six states of Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha and Uttar Pradesh. The exercise came out with a realization that "planning for work under MGNREGA is the biggest challenge in providing work to the work seekers".

In view of this situation, PACS intensified its 'Intensive Participatory Planning Exercise' (IPPE) and Social Audits to ensure greater accountability and transparency in MGNREGA in all its programme states through CSO partners.

Objective

- To facilitate inclusive planning and social audit in MGNREGA in select gram panchayats of six states including Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand, Odisha and West Bengal
- Document the learnings and experiences in these states with respect to IPPE and social audit
- Use the learnings to initiate dialogue with the district and state administration towards better implementation of MGNREGS

Purpose and scope of the report

While the report on National Campaign on Inclusive Planning of MGNREGS consolidates the experiences of the campaign in six states of Odisha, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Uttar Pradesh and Jharkhand, the present report outlines the process followed for social audit in MGNREGS and the learnings obtained therein that contributed towards better implementation of the programme in reaching out to the socially excluded groups.

Program Outreach

The Social Audit process was facilitated in different districts of Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Bihar, Odisha and West Bengal. The selected Civil Society

Organisations (CSOs) together with community resource persons were capacitated in these districts to take the process forward.

The detail programme outreach and CSO partners are provided in the table below:

State	Name of the CSO
Odisha	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DISHA, Sundergarh • THREAD, Mayurbhanj • Jana Sahajya & CWS, Kalahandi • AAINA & VICALP, Kandhamal • SPREAD, Koraput • SWAD, Rayagada
West Bengal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SMOKUS, North Dinajpur • Nari O' Sishu Kalyan Kendra, Mursidabad • Jalpaigudi Seba Sadan and CINI, Jalpaigudi
Bihar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pragati Gramin Vikas Samiti (PGVS), Jehanabad • Bhartiya Viklang Kalyan Parishad (BVKP), Muzaffarpur • CADAM - Arariya, Katihar, Madhubani and Gaya • DASHRA, Nalanda, Bhojpur • DEEP, West Champaran • MDA, Muzaffarpur, Madhubani Siwan • PRAYAS, Gaya • IZAD, Kishanganj • SSEVS, West Champaran and Siwan
Madhya Pradesh	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Madhya Pradesh Voluntary Health Association (MPVHA), Harda • Adivasi Chetna Shikshan Seva Samiti (ACSSS), Jhabua • Navrachna Samajsevi Sanstha (NSS), Seoni • Self-Reliant Initiatives through Joint Action (SRIJAN), Sagar
Jharkhand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CHETNA VIKAS, Deoghar • EFFICOR Jharkhand Vikas Parishad, PAKUR • FEMALE, ASRA, EFFICOR, West Singhbhum • EFFICOR, Sahibganj • Naya Savera Vikas Kendra (NSVK) – Giridih, Bokaro, Palamau, Chatra
Chhattisgarh	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Karmdaksh, Bilaspur • Disha Samaj sevi Sasthan, Kondagaon • Kalp Samaj Sevi Sanstha, Janjgir-Champa • Rachna manch Samaj Sevi Sansthan, Dhamtari • Chopal Samaj sevi Sansthan, Sarguja

Process Followed

In order to carry out the social audit for MGNREGS in the PACS supported states, a multipronged strategy was adopted. It included the identification and selection of local CSO partners to facilitate the process in their respective operational areas, selection of Gram Panchayats, development of knowledge products for a set of guidelines and to build an enabling environment for social audit, promotion and strengthening of the social audit teams and engage the government functionaries to plan and implement the social audit in the select states.

Selection of CSO partners

The CSO partners in each of the six states of Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand, Odisha and West Bengal were selected by the three partner organizations of PACS on the basis of the following criterion.



- Partnership experience between the respective CSO's and the PRI's, if any;
- Participatory leadership in Gram Panchayats;
- Specialized experiences of NGO/CSO in MGNREGA planning
- Budget of MGNREGS of the Panchayat (actual/expenditure) last financial year
- Strength of the CBOs functioning within the Panchayat area

A total of 33 CSOs were selected to participate in 200 panchayats in 40 districts with respect to the MGNREGS planning and social audit.

Selection of Gram Panchayats

Prior to the campaign, PACS held state level workshops with the technical resource agencies and CSOs to identify the districts for selection of Panchayats. Discussions on proposed panchayats for building models in each state were held in the workshop. However, finalization of the panchayats was done after further detailing with respective CSOs and PACS coupled with field visits to selected panchayats.

Strategy to implement Social Audit

The strategy adopted by the technical resource agencies to roll out the process of social audit in select panchayats included:



CSO Capacity Building

Development of knowledge products

A systematic capacity building needs assessment was taken up in consultation with different stakeholders involved in the planning and implementation of MGNREGS. Significantly planning and social audit had emerged as a critical capacity gap in CSOs and community resource persons.

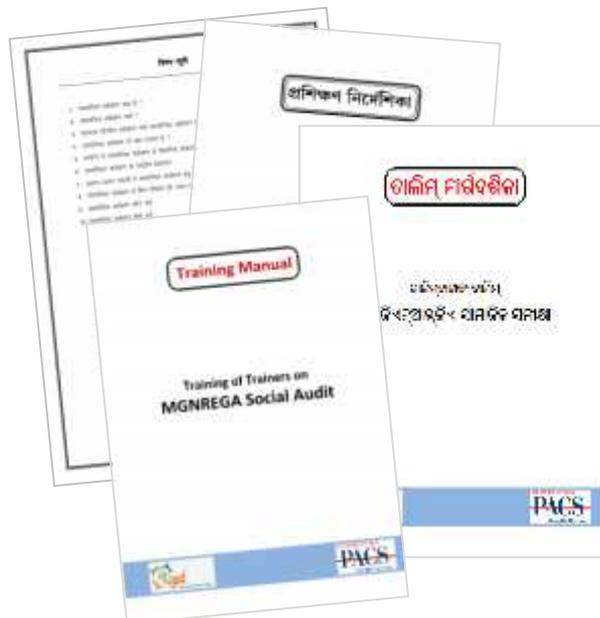
As an outcome of the capacity building needs assessment that was carried out for the CSOs and field functionaries, the following knowledge products were developed to build their capacities on social audit in MGNREGS.

- Training Manual on social audit in English, Hindi, Oriya and Bengali
- Field guide on MGNREGS social audit in English
- A film on the process of social audit (preparation phase, actual conduct and follow-up)

Broadly it covered the following topics:

1. What is a social audit?
2. Need of a social audit.
3. Process of social audit.
4. Participants of social audit
5. Indicators of social audit
6. Power of social audit team.
7. Role and responsibility of different stakeholders (Government officials, facilitating CSO, CBO's and community members)
8. Beneficiaries of social audit
9. Rules and regulations of social audit
10. Scope of the findings of social audit
11. Accountability of PRIs and social audit facilitators
12. Selection of social audit team/ eligibility of social audit team
13. Awareness of villagers
14. Legal aspects of social audit
15. Documentation tools (facilitators and PRI)
16. Coordination between panchayat and community
17. Time of social audit
18. Problems anticipated during social audit

Care was taken to make these knowledge products community friendly to be used for enhancing the capacity of the CSO staff and the community resource persons. Focus was given on making them context specific and use of pictorials to make it easy to understand and for reflection even by the most excluded groups. The knowledge products were translated in the local languages to facilitate better understanding (Hindi, Bengali and Odia).



Training of Trainers (ToT)

To address the capacity gaps of the CSOs and the field functionaries, the technical resource agencies used the knowledge products to conduct Training of Trainers (ToT) for the CSO representatives who in turn trained the community resource persons. The TOT was practice oriented. It combined classroom sessions with data collection and data verification in the field. Mock Gram Sabha was integral part of the training. Facilitation of the mock Gram Sabha's provided opportunities for practice session to

the participants. The content of the training comprised of provisions of the act, operational guidelines of the state, and a perspective building on transparency and accountability. Thus, a pool of facilitators was created to facilitate the process of social audit at the ground level.

Developing the plan for social audit

All the three PACS partners- namely Samarthan, SSK and CYSD tried to fix an annual calendar to conduct at least one social audit in the selected gram panchayat of their operational area through the partner CSOs. For this, they liaised with SIRD and other stakeholders. As a result a plan to conduct social audit in 115 grampanchayats could be developed in Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh as per the details below:

Sr. No	State	Districts	No. of Panchayats
1	Jharkhand	Sahibganj&Pakur	15
		West Singhbhum& Bokaro	9
		Giridih, Bokaro, Chatra, Palamau, Gumla	20
		Pakur	7
		Dumka, Deoghar	21
		Palamau	10
		Deoghar, Giridih, Jamtara	10
		West Singhbhum	4
		2	Madhya Pradesh
Jhabua	1		
Sieoni	2		
Baitool	All Panchayats of Ghodongri block		
3	Chhattisgarh	JanjgeerChanpa	6
		Kondagaon	2

Conduct of Social Audit

The social audit was conducted in three stages namely Pre-Audit, Social Audit and Post Audit in the course of the programme.

Stage-I: Pre Audit or the preparatory phase

Baseline Survey

A baseline survey was conducted to provide a detailed account of the prevailing MGNREGS scenario of the GPs. The survey examined awareness levels, flows of

benefits to the community, and the total number of eligible job cardholders in the sampled area. In addition, the baseline examined the target groups for the project by focusing on issues of vulnerability and the overall socio-economic environment that facilitated or prevented participation of the villagers in the scheme. The local baseline studies used both primary and secondary sources and participatory discussions with community groups.

The village committees were assisted in collecting information for the baseline, including information from the GP and government offices. This approach was revealing in that it underlined the types of barriers that villagers faced in accessing information. In some cases, local government functionaries had to be persuaded to provide records and certificates of engineering



works. Other documents such as sanction letters, resolutions, estimates, work orders, muster rolls, bills and vouchers were compiled. The data was classified and analyzed to develop a status report for the GP. For instance, muster rolls in weekly or fortnightly format were converted into worker-wise records to enable individual verification.

This information was shared at the GP level, which provided an opportunity for further physical verification of works and checking documents. This process of participatory verification was found to be important in instilling trust and developing confidence in the community to participate more actively in the process.

Stakeholder Analysis

The findings from the baseline survey provided a basis for a mapping of stakeholders to understand their role in implementation. The analysis helped identify people, groups and organizations that had a legitimate interest in the success of the scheme and to anticipate stakeholder concerns. This process acted as a tool to provide essential information about the interests, perspectives and expectations of stakeholders. This process-driven approach aided in strengthening the design processes, as well as deepening rapport and trust with key local stakeholders.

Environment Building

A capacity building program was organized to develop a set of social audit facilitators identified among the local leaders and village youth volunteers called community resource persons (CRPs). This followed a training of trainers (TOT) approach. Two or three CRPs for each selected GP were given training in social mobilization and understanding local causes and concerns relating to the MGNREGS. To enable a favorable environment for social audit implementation, the facilitators were provided with information on the detailed provisions of the MGNREGA, RTI Act, and an initial toolkit on the social audit process.

Following this first round of training, the local NGO facilitators served as resource persons, assisting and training the village social audit committees in gathering and analyzing information, physical verification and other associated activities. The facilitators mobilized communities to participate actively and exercise their rights in the social audit process.

Information Dissemination

During the pre-audit or the preparatory phase, information was made widely available to GP, block and district level officers and other key stakeholders, including the local Government representatives and the local non-governmental organizations (NGOs). All stakeholders were encouraged to participate in the social audit, and to play an active role in proposing improvements. This provided an important means to develop corrective action on issues arising out of the audits. Local programs were made more relevant and focused at raising awareness levels and educating the rural masses on MGNREGS, social audit and the right to information.

To deal with the challenge of social exclusion, awareness programs were first aimed at seeking their endorsement. Their agreement inspired trust, thus encouraging the socially excluded segment of the village to join the process.

Forming Social Audit Team (SAT) at the Gram Panchayat level

SATs consisting of ten to fifteen members were constituted with representatives from a wide range of stakeholder groups, including beneficiaries, self help groups, village level organizations, community leaders, youths, marginalized sections (especially scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, women and persons with disabilities) and existing Village Monitoring Committee (VMC) members. In forming these teams, emphasis was given to ensuring representation of the socially excluded groups. During the course of implementation, it was found that genuinely interested people were already playing some role in monitoring MGNREGS works.

Orienting the Social Audit Team

The SAT members were sensitized in terms of their roles and responsibilities and given training regarding the social audit process. The training sessions provided an understanding of the Right to Information Act, and the process for public access to key project-related records and information. They were also familiarized with key aspects of MGNREGS implementation, including preparation of technical estimates, project approval, job distribution, execution and monitoring, wage distribution, measurement of work, verification and the public hearing procedure.

Role of Social Audit Team in the Process

The SAT acts as a facilitator and helps in compilation. It does not take decisions or influence public opinion. It plays the following roles:

- Build an environment conducive for social audit
- Collect and ensures availability of information available to the public
- Facilitate collection of information from departments, offices or agencies using the RTI Act.
- Facilitate transparency in scheme implementation (display of information, maintenance of records for public inspection and collection of feedback)
- Transcribe information in a comprehensible medium for the public
- Share findings and seek feedback, individually or collectively.
- Compile findings from consultations
- Engage with implementing agencies to build rapport, discuss concerns and resolve conflicts
- Present findings (presentation to the implementing agency and other stakeholders.)



Stage-II: Social Audit

Relationship Building

Establishing relationships with all stakeholders was considered crucial in the facilitation process. When GP members, block functionaries and PRI representatives came in the way of access to project related documents, the SAT promoted dialogue and discussion to air concerns, to engage these key persons more actively in the

activities of the SAT and build rapport. In times of need for higher level intervention, the district functionaries were persuaded to put pressure on the local administration to concede and facilitate access to documents.

While public meetings were called to engage the village community at large, public relations and communication with government bodies and the *panchayat* were stressed upon equally. An enabling environment conducive to the audit process was fostered through regular meetings and discussions at the *panchayat* level that led to recognition for the SAT at higher levels of administration.

Community Sharing

The SAT members presented their findings in a multi-stakeholder community level meeting conducted at the village level. The findings included analysis of the status of registration of families, distribution of job cards, receipt of work applications, project preparation and selection of sites, development and approval of technical



estimates, work orders, individual allotment of work, implementation and supervision of works, payment of wages and unemployment allowance, and evaluation of work. Marginalized segments, especially women, were encouraged to voice their opinions. Officials were urged to respond and take disciplinary action to overcome delays in implementation, the most important of which were found to be the delayed payment of wages, and investigate allegations of corruption where they were found.

Issues emerging in Social Audit at the Panchayat level

Use of machines, attendance of fake labours in muster rolls, work provided on 'Job cards' of others.

Delay wage payments, use of machines in MGNREGA work, Less measurement of work completed and name of fake labours in muster rolls

Showing incomplete work of wells as complete work on documents, falsify muster roles and not accepting the application of workers

Mismatch of working days in Job card and muster roll, names of the dead persons

Issues emerging in Social Audit at the Panchayat level

and families who are not doing labour in MGNREGA are not eliminated so number of active job cards are high and it is affecting the estimate of total available man days
Incomplete entry in Job Cards, many MGNREGA workers do not have their passbooks with them either they have given it to Sarpanch or panchayat secretary
Poor work site facilities such as rest room, first aid, drinking water and childcare
Low level of participation of women
Non-compliance to statutory processes for employment application
Involvement of external contractors
Absence of postal accounts for workers
Fictitious applications for employment
Lack of grievance redressal system
Low levels of community participation in monitoring
Inadequate local communication of basic scheme provisions

Stage – III: Post Audit

District Consultations

To disseminate the findings and advocate the streamlining/actions, district consultations were undertaken in the last quarter of the assignments. The idea behind the consultations was to build a consensus on social audits in the district and generate a response on the social audit findings in the district. The district consultations were attended by CBOs, elected representatives, other CSOs of the district. However the presence of district officials was minimal in the consultations. This led to a situation that there was minimum response on the findings of social audits. However the consultations were useful as they not only build a positive environment for social audits in the district, but played a role in building capacities of various other CSOs and CBOs on social audits.

Issues raised in district level consultation in Madhya Pradesh

- Per day wages should be fixed district wise looking at the local market rates
- Social audit should be institutionalized to improve transparency and accountability
- Information about the MGNREGA act should be disseminated up to village level in a campaign mode
- Field functionaries are not skilled and ready to handle effective monitoring system
- Due to high migration and delayed payments in MGNREGA, people do not want to work

Issues raised in district level consultation in Madhya Pradesh

- Vigilance Monitoring Committees of Gram Sabha are not constituted.
- Job cards are not with labourers but are kept by secretary or gram Rojgar Sewak
- A large number of MGNREGA workers do not have an account in bank
- Lack of awareness about the MGNREGA among the community members
- Social audit committees are not formed and if formed, members do not know that they are in the committee
- Mismatch of labour days in muster roll and job card
- First time village social audit committee constituted in Panchyats
- Delayed payment of wages is a big issue
- Villagers were not satisfied with the engineer's evaluation of their work

Overall changes as a result of social audit

- Community mobilized and empowered to raise their voice relating to MGNREGS implementation
- Villagers especially the job seekers confidence level have been improved to raise their voice for work demand, delayed payments and proper worksite facilities which make accountable the local level administration
- Improving MGNREGA implementation and local level government representatives are more accountable.
- The job seekers are realized the process and benefits of social audit.
- CBO leaders knowledge and skill enhanced to further take forward the process
- Job seekers motivated to work more because of transparent and accountability.

Documentation

The experiences of the social audit were documented by the CSO facilitators and shared at the block and district level. Experience sharing events were organized at the GP, district and state level involving community leaders, local government representatives, MGNREGS implementing officials, policy makers, media and civil society organizations. The meetings were aimed at creating pressure to institutionalize social audit in implementation. In order to help others replicate and institutionalize the social audit process, a comprehensive report on the social audit process was developed and published.

Challenges

The broader goal of social inclusion of the PACS programme through MGNREGS planning and social audit was successful to some extent in the states of Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand. While the technical resource agency CYSD was successful in supporting the West Bengal Government in forming the Social Audit Directorate in the State, the social audits could not be taken up within the project period. However, CYSD together with the PACS team provided the necessary support and guidance in selecting officials to carry out the social audit process in the state followed by systems and processes. In Odisha, despite serious engagement by both the PACS and CYSD team, it was extremely difficult to get the senior leadership of the MGNREGA administration agrees to a participatory social audit process. The reluctance to engage with NGOs for even a constructive social audit was visible throughout in the operational districts of the state basing few districts. However, the dysfunctional Social Audit Directorate in Odisha did contribute substantially about lack of ownership.

Learnings

Formation of Social Audit Teams

The SAT at the GP level has emerged as a successful model for replication and as a benchmark that could be effectively embedded in the social audit planning process. Based on this emerging institutional design, a sustainable and effective approach to social audit could be developed.

Training and capacity building

Mainstreaming social audit requires systematic and sustained training and capacity building support for stakeholders. It is important that implementation mechanisms are strengthened to achieve its full potential. Local community, user groups, village-level organizations and local government bodies need to know their rights and understand their own roles and responsibilities in the implementation of MGNREGS and social audit. Training modules focusing on social audit for each category of stakeholders will strengthen the monitoring and social audit process.

Building coalitions at all levels

While community mobilization forms the foundation for social audit, there is a need to build coalitions at the higher level to create a framework that is supportive to the objectives of social auditing. There is a need to involve all stakeholders to create an enabling environment and for working together for robust results.

Public awareness and communication

The success of social audits in MGNREGS largely depends on social mobilization and active involvement of stakeholders. Public participation is vital in planning, mobilizing demand, vigilance, social audit, monitoring and implementation. To raise awareness, intensive communication campaigns, tailored to local conditions, are needed. This would help the communities understand their rights and entitlements, the role of the implementing agencies and government functionaries and monitoring and grievance redressal mechanisms.

Institutionalizing grievance redressal

There is consensus that community engagement can play a role in demanding greater responsiveness, accountability, and transparency through watchdog bodies like SATs, right to information and other mechanisms. An institutionalized and community-based grievance redressal system should be a permanent measure at the local government level.

Support of the Government

Support of the Government at various tiers (Panchayat Executive Officer, Gram Panchayat Extension Officer, Block Development Officer, District Project Coordinator, Project Director of District Rural Development Agency) are sine-qua-non for a productive Social Audit exercise. Participation of implementing agencies in social audit public hearing is critical. Without participation of officials from the supply side of the government, the Social Audit exercise remains incomplete.

Epilogue

Social Audit as a powerful social accountability tool, does connect the demand and supply side of governance. It enhances ownership of the programme by the beneficiaries and if successfully piloted in a constructive enabling environment, has the power to create informed citizenry and prevent leakage and corruption. The social audit experience of MGNREGS has huge replication potential in all other flagship programmes of the government.



Poorest Areas Civil Society (PACS) Programme is a flagship program initiative of the UK Government's Department for International Development (DFID), in partnering with civil society in India to improve the uptake of rights and entitlements by socially excluded groups. It aims at addressing the issues of exclusion by advocating for a more socially inclusive environment. PACS work in 90 poorest districts across seven states (Bihar, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Orissa and West Bengal) with 225 civil society partners on two broad thematic areas "Right to livelihood and Right to Basic Service".

www.pacsindia.org



Samarthan is a leading non-profit development organization with significant presence in the Indian states of Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. With a belief that a strong civil society is key to socio-economic development, Samarthan started out in the year 1995 as a support organization building capacities and networks of voluntary organizations working at the grassroots. It promotes and encourages involvement of local population in planning, execution and monitoring of development projects thereby challenging the mainstream "top-down" development model. The areas of its intervention have ranged from education, livelihood, water, sanitation and health with special focus on the SC/ST, women, minorities, the disabled and the destitute.

www.samarthan.info



Sahbhagi Shikshan Kendra (SSK), a support organization and a centre for Participatory Learning and Action, has been working since 1990 to promote and strengthen civil society organizations of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar and Jharkhand. SSK strives for building and strengthening capacities of CSOs through people centric approach placing people at the centre of all developmental initiatives. SSK works with grassroots organizations that strive for social change. It provides Capacity Building support to partners through organizing training programmes, workshops and providing intensive support in their programmes. To harmonize/supplement its efforts and enhance the knowledge base, the organization also undertakes studies and disseminates information on vibrant and imperative developmental issues. Its main thrust area of intervention is local self governance both rural and urban with a perspective on gender justice and increased space for marginalized communities in the democratic functioning of institutions of local self governance.

www.sahbhagi.org



Centre for Youth and Social Development (CYSD), a non-government development organisation, has been persistently working since last thirty-three years to bring visible changes in the quality of lives of tribal and rural poor in the state of Odisha. The centre's primary focus is to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, ensure social justice and inclusion, participatory governance and citizens' rights. Helping communities identify and initiate development measures; providing training and capacity-building support to their organisations and individuals; and carrying out research and advocacy on rural poverty, exclusion, public finance on social sector allocation and social integration, especially the tribal constitute the major initiatives of the centre. Strengthening Sustainable Rural Livelihoods, Promoting Participatory Governance and Budget Accountability and Building Disaster Resilient Communities are its key domains of work.

www.cysd.org



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