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PRI

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Sharing of National Study (Phase I) on Role of PRIs in Implementation of NREGA

As part of the project “Enabling Panchayats to Deliver Rural Employment”, PRIA conducted a study on role of PRIs in implementation of NREGA in 16 states. To share major findings and trends of this study a national workshop was organized at India International Centre Annexe, New Delhi on December 18th, 2006. 61 participants from 14 states and Delhi representing Civil Society Organisations, Media and Government Departments attended this workshop.

Dr. Rajesh Tandon, President of PRIA welcomed participants and introduced panelists Shri Raghuvansh Prasad Singh (Union Minister for Rural Development), Smt. Amita Sharma (Joint Secretary, Ministry of Rural Development, GOI), Shri M.K. Khanna (Additional Secretary, Ministry of Panchayati Raj, GOI), Shri L.C. Jain (Gandhian and former member Planning Commission) and Shri Manoj Rai (National Coordinator, PRIA).

Mr. Manoj Rai informed participants that this study was conducted in 16 states and 563 GPs, 74 Blocks and 24 districts were selected on random sampling method. Primary data was collected from 5630 households. Data collection was done with the help of 7 schedules from September to November 2006. He shared following major findings of the study with participants:

- On all parameters of the NREGA, there are wide variations among states and districts within a state. Significant variations have also been noticed among different blocks within each of districts.
- Rate of issuance of Job Cards has improved since PRIA’s last survey in June 2006 from 10% to around 60- 70% now.
- People are not demanding jobs and main reason is lack of awareness. About 80% respondents are not aware of the need to apply to get job.
- Lack of awareness is prevalent among officials and elected representatives too.
- 70 to 80% respondents have responded that Gram Sabha have been held for registration. But when they were asked whether Gram Sabha for planning are being held or not, this percentage came down to 30 to 40%.
- More than 50% of works undertaken are of rural connectivity.
- Expert led planning and contractual planning are seen in almost all states except few states where positive exemplars have emerged.
- Except Andhra Pradesh and Kerala, it cannot be said that exclusive officials are available for NREGS at all levels. Unavailability of Assistant Engineers and Junior Engineers are not only affecting planning of works but also wage payments due to delay in measurement of works done.
- Employment Guarantee Assistants are available only with Gram Panchayats of Andhra Pradesh, Kerala and Tamil Nadu and nowhere else.
- District and block level Panchayats have proactively come forward and supported Gram Panchayats.
- About 50% of elected representatives have been oriented about NREGS. It’s a national average with state variations ranging from 10 to 80%.
- 80% Gram Panchayats do not display information. 10% of households know about the existence of grievance redressal mechanism at block level.
- Only 25% Gram Panchayats have formed Monitoring and Vigilance Committees.
- Only in 25% to 30% Gram Panchayats say that social audit is being done (read, social audit in their own ways).

- If we look at the trend, presently NREGS is the most visible programme in rural areas. Spread of this programme is apparently achieved through piggybacking Panchayats. But sad part is that institutional role of Panchayats has been limited. It seems that individual role of Sarpanch (Chairperson) of GP has undermined the role of GP, as institution. Other members of Panchayats are getting alienated which will not be useful either for Panchayats or for NREGA in the long run.
- People's pressure on Panchayats is increasing. But Panchayats are not able to fully respond due to lack of support mechanism at Panchayat level. Bureaucracy is offloading everything to Panchayat without being supportive to them, the way NREGA envisages. So, for Panchayats it is a perplexing situation.

Arun Jindal (Karauli, Rajasthan) said that though Government of Rajasthan has taken positive initiatives for planning, there was confusion in Rajasthan as two plans were being made: one for 11th Five-year plan and other for NREGS. Separate Gram Sabhas are being organized for both plans. In Sapotara block of Karauli district, Chairperson of Panchayat Samiti has taken initiative in forming monitoring committee comprising of Panchayat Samiti level elected representatives, officials and representatives of voluntary organizations. Gram Panchayats are Sarpanch and Panchayat Secretary centric and ward members are playing no role.

Srinivas Rao (Raipur, Chhattisgarh) informed that in Chhattisgarh, NREGS is fast becoming state government directed programme. Plans are not being prepared by Gram Panchayats as envisaged by the Act but by the line departments. This trend has left Gram Panchayats, Janpad Panchayats and Zila Parishads with a feeling that their role is limited to monitoring only and has no role in decision-making. In some districts such as Rajnandgaon, line departments have started works and invited people to work without any demand for such job and then entries were made in their job cards. These practices are creating resentment among people. Although employment is being given under NREGS in Chhattisgarh but role of Panchayats need to be strengthened.

Yogesh Kumar (Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh) shared that Madhya Pradesh is quite ahead in terms of registration and works undertaken under NREGS. People do not understand these 100 days of guarantee because what they get in one day is lower than the minimum wage. They should have an idea of how much amount in a year they can get as wages. In the job cards days of employment is being written and hence there is discrepancy. People are confused whether they are getting 100 days of employment or not. This has to be resolved at some level. Another difficulty, which Sarpanches are facing, is every work cannot be done manually and they need to use machines for earthmoving etc. and that requires technical sanction. How can the required flexibility be introduced should be given a thought. Many Sarpanch believe that NREGS has been able to stop immigration, and many people have got employment but immigration of Sarpanches is very fast. It is because they do not have funds to pay, because lack of technical sanctions. Number of people who have been recruited in Madhya Pradesh is phenomenally high now but they have not been trained. This has resulted into delay in payments leading to people's apathy towards this programme. Jalabhishek Abhiyan was launched during summer and Hariyali Abhiyan during monsoon. During Haryali Abhiyan lakhs of trees were planted. Target given to each panchayat was so big that cost of procurement of plant and fencing went up. More than half of the total plants may not even survive as of now. So the whole spirit of keeping this programme as a programme of strengthening local institutions has been lost. It is becoming a top- down model where absorption of money is becoming very important. Somehow this discrepancy has to be taken care of as the programme moves forward. And for training new staff deployed for NREGS,

various organizations and experts need to be involved for timely completion. Training only by SIRD is not sufficient.

Mr. S.K. Gupta (Kolkata, West Bengal) highlighted that same figure keeps on changing at all level. For example if we see estimated percentage of registration, figure from the sample survey is different from the figure from Gram Panchayat level and so on. It keeps on increasing. This trend indicates towards some discrepancy. We have to find out where is the problem, in the recording system or somewhere else. In West Bengal job cards were not issued to households during monsoon purposefully because they could not have been provided employment. Earthwork could not have undertaken during monsoon. For this a letter has been written by State Government to Central Government that they should be permitted to take up some allied works. But when we met state government officials, they told they were still waiting for reply.

Pawan Kumar (Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh) shared that planning in AP is not NREGS specific but for NRM in which 80% of prioritised works will be allotted for NREGS and 20% for other activities under NRM. Although Act has made Panchayats the principal authority but only applications are taken at Gram Sabha and Gram Panchayat level and allocation of works in NREGS or NRM is decided at the Mandal level. Role of PRIs in implementation is only nominal and implementation process has been completely taken over by implementing agencies. Payments of wages are being delayed because problems of accounts in post offices and workers are getting disinterested as they are not sure whether they will get payments when needed or not.

Kamleshwar Singh (Shimla, Himachal Pradesh) told that in Himachal Pradesh applications for registration under NREGS are being rejected of all those interested persons who are employed part time or on contract. Physically challenged persons are also denied registration. One Panchayat Secretary looks after 8 to 9 Gram Panchayats. Even where Panchayat Assistants are there, they do not have financial powers. And hence, panchayats are finding it very difficult to implement big programmes like NREGS.

Omkar Singh (Patna, Bihar) informed that awareness among people is very low. They even do not know whether they have to keep the job cards or Panchayat Secretary will keep it. In Muzaffarpur workers are getting Rs. 100 to 150 elsewhere and finding the wage rate of Rs. 68 under NREGS too low.

Ranjan Rout (Bhubneswar, Orissa) told that perspective plans were prepared by external agencies hired by district administration in Orissa. . Priorities have been fixed by the district administration for the implementation of the NREGS. In Gram Sabha meetings Chairperson just discussed for 1-2 minutes only and got approval of the Gram Sabha. There is a demand from workers that minimum wage rate should be increased.

Rajpal (Ranchi, Jharkhand) pointed out that in 20 out of 22 districts of Jharkhand NREGS is in force. Neither State Employment Guarantee Council has been constituted nor any guidelines have been formulated so far. There is no Panchayat and hence Panchayat Sevaks are spending the mandatory 50% funds for Gram Panchayats and also rest of the 50%. Because one Panchayat Sevak looks after 5-6 Gram Panchayat, they have identified one middleman in each Gram Panchayat. These middlemen are playing important role in the implementation of NREGS. They are not only facilitating but are also working as contractors.

Amita Sharma (Joint Secretary in charge of NREGA, Ministry of Rural Development, and Government of India) said that problems are there, but most important thing is how do we deal with it. There is a paradigm shift in wage employment programme from allocation based to demand based. Under NREGS Panchayats have to respond to demands of works from people. There will be demand for registration and job cards. After receiving job cards people should be able to decide when in the lean season they should demand job under NREGS. So all these problems are of transition phase. This is first year of the implementation of NREGS and to convert all these concepts and theories into practice take time. This conversion will be based on real experiences. Capacities provided to Panchayats under NREGS are same as under other developmental programmes such as on health, education etc. I shall share with you what is being done to deal with these issues. First of all, for capacity building of Panchayati Raj Institutions to implement NREGA, provision for seed money as advance funds to all panchayats has been made. Secondly, there is provision for revolving fund. Under NREGS, by submitting utilization certificate of 60% funds Gram Panchayats can get reimbursement from Block. Thus arrangement has been made so that funds are available at district level to meet the demand for jobs at Gram Panchayat level. Let us first see what is the framework and then evaluate whether this framework is implemented or not and what are the causes of non-implementation. So problem lies in transferring of resources from district to block and GP level and not from the Centre to district. And as for as training for NREGS is concerned, we along with hon. Minister monitor twice in a month as to how many rounds of trainings have been given, modules have been prepared or not and what are the contents. We are giving special emphasis to the training of Panchayati Raj Institutions. We are providing training to Monitoring Committees. And unless such training is provided, these committees even if formed will only be on paper. Recently a new module too has been prepared by NIRD and we want to expand the coverage of training of Village Monitoring Committees. We have issued guidelines to give top priority to recruitment of Employment Guarantee Assistant by using 2% of the fund earmarked for administrative expenses. We are also working on increasing the upper limit for administrative expenses from 2% to 5%. Recent data available with us show that in most of the states Employment Guarantee Assistants have been recruited. But technical staffs are still inadequate and we have to fulfil the existing gap. We are giving lot of emphasis on providing adequate staff to Panchayats, even by allocating additional budget so that at least one EGA in each Gram Panchayat and One technical assistant for every 10 GPs are available. Later on we want one technical assistant for every 5 GPs. So there is a clear strategy to provide money, staff and training for implementation of NREGA. We believe, theoretical training of Panchayats is not enough for their capacity building and implementation of NREGA is an opportunity where their struggle for the effective implementation of NREGA will enhance their capacities to a great extent. For awareness generation too, we have a strategy to involve NGOs and civil society organizations where they will not only educate people but also facilitate enforcement of their awareness. We want to develop a model in each state for social audit with the help of some good organizations as to what will be the process and objectives of social audit.

As far as change in data at different levels in West Bengal is concerned, we are giving emphasis on Gram Panchayat based MIS. Once that is operational, there will be neither any problem of report nor inconsistency in data. We want that all data gets digitised and all muster rolls are available on the website. This way problem of data interpolation will be tackled. About allowing other works in West Bengal, we have received similar demands from some other states too. We would like to make it clear

that first state should exhaust permissible works after preparing perspective plan. Only when we make a perspective plan we can identify those periods of the year when there is demand for job, which cannot be supplied by undertaking, works permissible and planned under NREGA and what can be those additional works.

M.K. Khanna (Additional Secretary, Ministry of Panchayati Raj, Government of India) told that Panchayati Raj Ministry is only 2 years old, and it is not possible to instantly make PRIs, which are 2.5 lakh in numbers, model institutions. Let me share with you our efforts in this regard. We have taken up “Gram Swaraj” a new scheme this year to enhance the capacities of PRIs. Under Gram Swaraj, we will take up training and awareness generation, construction of panchayat ghar for Gram Panchayat wherever not available and also for Panchayat Samiti if they do not have building of their own. We have also taken up a mini mission under which we are making available one computer, necessary software and training to operate that computer to each Gram Panchayat. Computer provides strength to monitoring and planning at the Gram Panchayat level. The most important problem is inadequacy of staff at Gram Panchayat level and we are trying to provide additional staff to Panchayats. Under NREGA some additional funds have been made available and Panchayati Raj Ministry is also providing Rs. 1 Crore each to all 250 districts from Backward Region Grant Fund. We want that with the help of this fund capacity of Panchayats is enhanced and they play their role effectively. Regarding social audit, our ministry has issued some guidelines and I think MoPR and MoRD should sit together and develop joint guidelines about how to do social audit for NREGS. For planning, we will have to strengthen training institutions. As suggested other organizations should also be involved in ensuring social audit, transparency etc. If done so we will be able to implement the model of planning from the village itself, as the Planning Commission of India desires.

L.C. Jain (Gandhian and Ex Member, Planning Commission of India) in his address said that only six months have passed since this Act came into force. Although you have pointed out different bottlenecks, but I am happy that you all have come forward to facilitate it's effective implementation. I would suggest making one district each in all the states as model district in next 3 months. There should be a local team with a mandate to remove bottlenecks and make the district as model district in implementation of NREGA. And then in next 3 months same process should be spread to other districts of the state. Local experiences are easier to multiply. This is an act to provide employment to the needy. And if people apply and do not get employment within stipulated time, they will stir the entire system. Tremor of youth anger has already been felt in Bihar, but this time it will not remain limited to Bihar but will spread to entire nation. Technical staff is being recruited but increasing number of officials will further aggravate problems of bureaucracy. My suggestion is provide 5% of the funds to Panchayats to get technical advices. So many retired technical persons are there in villages. Kerala has set up technical support groups inducting local technical persons.

It is very important to raise awareness of the scheme first. In Jharkhand fee is being asked for even forms. Youth will no longer tolerate this. In Nepal, we have seen democracy getting established. Maoists have surrendered their weapons and have come into mainstream. We should get inspiration from this development in the neighborhood. Panchayati Raj Ministry is new but this does not mean we start from zero. Once it has been written in the Act that Panchayats will be principal authority for the implementation of NREGA you should use the Panchayat system effectively. There are 30 lakh elected representatives. We have not prepared Panchayats before

assigning them responsibilities. We need to act upon the provisions of the Acts. They are not mere pieces of paper but hope and aspirations of people of India.

Raghuvansh Prasad. Singh (Hon. Minister of Rural Development, Government of India) claimed that NREGA is first of its kind and many developing countries want to start similar programmes. Unemployment is a global phenomenon. This Act was prepared after unprecedented wider consultation. And hence no drawback of the Act has yet been pointed out. Lack of implementation and misinterpretation of the Act has been reported. We can make illiterate or less educated aware, but what about unawareness of educated and intelligentsia. One economist has remarked that all funds for NREGA will go down the drains. Another economist said that Rs. 2,00,000 Crore would be needed for implementing NREGA and country would go bankrupt. These kinds of knowledgeable persons get disturbed whenever some programme for rural development is undertaken. You have highlighted inter district and interstate variations. How do we expect uniformity? There are 87,000 Gram Panchayats implementing NREGA currently. If chairperson of one Gram Panchayat is an upright person, NREGA will be effectively implemented but if neighboring Gram Panchayat has corrupt chairperson everything will be wrong. And hence there is difference in results. Characters of local BDOs, Collectors, MLAs and MPs also influence implementation of NREGA.

This Act is not only for poor people but also for the transformation of entire country. In next 2 years, the result of this Act would be visible. There is strong anti-rural, anti poor lobby in the country. After all Metro has been constructed in Delhi with loan of Rs. 30,000 Crore. Argument was that construction of Metro would reduce the number of vehicles on roads. Has this number come down? But nobody is questioning. Some people are questioning budgetary allocation for rural employment guarantee programme. Wage employment programme is not new. Intelligentsia is advocating for a uniform wage rate across the country. I strongly objected to it. This minimum wage rate ranges from Rs.25 in Nagaland (now it is higher) to Rs.125 in Kerala. When I ask, people suggest fixing it somewhere in between. But state governments will object to it. NREGA has enabling provisions and states have to play very important role. Government of UP is distributing unemployment allowance to educated unemployed whereas Mulayam Singh makes statement against NREGA. Wisdom says we should not give money to any person without work. I made special effort to correct this attitude in UP.

As per my learning National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme is heading towards complete success. In MP all have been issued Job Cards whereas in Bihar only 50 Job Cards per Gram Panchayats have been issued. Panchayat Secretaries are keeping Job Cards with themselves and have also issued Job Cards to their relatives first. In Punjab, many highly educated persons too have got themselves registered. But when they came to know that they would have to do manual labour, they backed out. BDOs are not in adequate numbers. For example in Bihar there are at least 50 Blocks where neither a BDO nor a CO is available. One Gram Sevak serves 2-3 Gram Panchayats. Implementation of NREGA is to be done through PRIs and district administration of the state and we are always ready to support them to overcome these bottlenecks. Budgetary support for recruitment of Programme Officers, Employment Guarantee Assistant and Technical Assistants is being provided. In 120 districts out of 200 districts, beginning of this programme has been very good. Rest 80 districts are still weak.

We have calculated performance of districts. Assam, West Bengal, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Meghalaya had assembly elections. Most of state officials were involved in

election work and hence implementation of NREGA slowed down. In Bihar many Mukhiyas have not distributed Job Cards fearing they will have to pay unemployment allowance from their pocket if employment is not given on demand. Bihar Government too has written that unemployment allowance will be paid from the salary of officials. Our country is so big; there are different kind of governments and people. 1 Crore 23 lakh households have demanded employment so far and this is increasing. Even if number of households demanding employment becomes equal to the number of BPL households, we will consider that awareness has been created. We are concerned about awareness and making every effort in this direction. Secondly, we do not want any bogus muster roll. This is key to success. And third, we are preparing to expand this programme to all districts of the country. We are working on these three fronts now.

The Minister called upon Civil Society organization, and sought PRIA's support in this regard, to build models in Panchayats across all states. "You create model in one-two Panchayats only. Even if you are able to make 5 persons demand job and get receipts, thing will change. If state governments are made to pay unemployment allowance, they will be forced to respond to demands. Secondly you get photocopies of muster roll with the help of Right to Information Act. Take up one GP at least. If you do these two things this act will become revolutionary in real sense. I have told CAPART to stop NGOs working as contractors and involve them in awareness. Water Conservation will be top priority now. This is a big programme and only 8 months have passed. Implementation related problems that you are witnessing now are birth pangs. Among all wage employment programmes this is most successful and has been able to stop migration". He also suggested that for the next round of surveys, which PRIA is planning, collaborations with Ministry of Rural Development would be very helpful for the effective implementations of NREGA by Panchayats.

At the end of the workshop, Dr. Rajesh Tandon thanked all panelists and participants and informed them that PRIA would conduct this study every six months and would share findings with all stakeholders. As advised by the honorable minister, PRIA would be very happy to work closely with Ministry of Rural Development and Ministry of Panchayats to facilitate effective delivery of NREGA by Panchayats.

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