

National Rural Employment Guarantee Act:

From Rights to Livelihoods

Present Status Special

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The rapid economic growth of the Indian economic and the massive bull-run on the stock market has made India a very attractive economy on the world stage. On the other hand however the poor are groaning under the burden of the basic questions of their daily needs. From Government records we find that 74% children under 3 years suffer from anemia and 50% children are seriously malnourished. 87% pregnant women are anemic nation wide; hundreds have died due to malnutrition. Every year over 25 lakh children die in India, which is about one fifth of the world total. Child deaths are higher than even Bangladesh. The NSS data shows that about 359 lakhs village person consume less calories than Sahara Africa (Patnaik 2005). The enormity of the situation facing us can be seen from the 10,000 suicide deaths last year (Ghosh 2005) and child deaths in thousands in a prosperous state like Maharashtra.

In this way the unemployment problem is also causing a lot of concern. The 55th National sample survey shows that the employment rate has fallen considerably. The current daily rate in the period 1983-1994 was 20.7%, in the period 1994-2000 this fell to 1.07%. In both rural and urban areas, unemployment increased considerably. In rural areas, unemployment rate in 1993-94 was 5.6 % which increased to 7.2% in 1999-2000. The main reason for the lack of employment opportunities was that employment did not rise with the development of agriculture. In 1993-1994 with a 1% rise in production, employment rose by 0.7% between 1994-2000 the rate was only 0.01% (Ghosh 2005) in other words there is a need to provide employment to those who are worse off.

The recently passed National Rural Employment Guarantee Act 2005 (NREGA) is an attempt to address these questions. NREGA is the culmination of a long struggle by mass organisations on the issue of providing a minimum right to work.

NREGA is clear on the fact that this right is available to all rural communities. To operationalise this Act, the State of poverty in different parts of the country was studied and to start with the worst affected districts were taken up. The objective is to provide a stipulated payment for stipulated work. Workers have always been unhappy about the rate of payment received. The stated strength of this programme is that if employment is not provided, un-unemployment allowance will be provided.

During the last two years Jaisamand consortium is working in eleven villages of 3 Gram Panchayats. The data from these villages show that employment is being provided primarily to the economically weaker castes. The higher castes are participating in NREGA only to a limited extent. Other data shows that 80% women are being employed. Some sections had forecast that NREGA would affect migration but the data does not reflect this trend. However since the women of the house have been employed, this has resulted in additional income.

To get the work and ensure proper payment, women have used their collective strength. In Bhalo Ka Guda, the women accosted the secretary and mate on the road and ensured work was started and that the women were employed.

Table: 1

| Panchayat | Village | No. of HH | Total Population | SC | | ST | | OBC | | Others | |
|---------------|---------------|-----------|------------------|-------|----|-------|-----|-------|-----|--------|----|
| | | | | Popu. | HH | Popu. | H H | Popu. | H H | Popu. | HH |
| Vali | Vali | 107 | 573 | 72 | 15 | 22 | 3 | 439 | 82 | 40 | 7 |
| | Vela | 159 | 955 | - | - | 941 | 156 | - | - | 14 | 3 |
| | Khedi | 132 | 679 | 85 | 16 | 336 | 63 | 241 | 129 | 17 | 6 |
| Phila | Phila | 135 | 706 | - | - | 605 | 116 | 101 | 19 | - | - |
| | Ratanpura | 26 | 129 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| | Hathida | 75 | 312 | - | - | 312 | 75 | - | - | - | - |
| | Jamun | 65 | 308 | - | - | 307 | 63 | - | - | - | - |
| Bhalo Ka Guda | Bhekda | 82 | 416 | - | - | 410 | 81 | 6 | 1 | - | - |
| | Karget | 151 | 806 | 13 | 3 | 781 | 146 | 12 | 2 | - | - |
| | Bhalo Ka Guda | 90 | 404 | 14 | 3 | 215 | 51 | 175 | 36 | - | - |
| | Chota Guda | 31 | 132 | 27 | 7 | 92 | 22 | 13 | 2 | - | - |
| | | 1053 | 5420 | 211 | 44 | 4021 | 776 | 987 | 271 | 71 | 16 |

Prior to the implementation of NREGS, one of the main issues has been the selection of labour. This selection process has entirely been in the hands of the Sarpanch, Secretary and mate. Which work will be done where and who will be employed for labour was entirely left to the Sarpanch and secretary. The selection of mate was also a politically charged question which was settled at the whims of the Sarpanch and Secretary. What qualities were looked for in the mate with respect to implementing construction work etc. is no secret. In the case of NREGA however due to the fact of the mandatory condition for employment of all these seeking employment, this issue acquires some different dimensions now.

Due to the expansion of the number of mates required and the legal requirements, the government is providing mates with special training. Such trainings were non-existent earlier. Some NGO's have become nodal agencies for such training and are organising mate trainings. Most of the mates are now trained. They are also trained in

how to take measurements and make payments according to this. How to take measurement for a group of five people as a unit have also been done so that effort based payment can be made for the work done by each unit. The struggle for the rights of the workers is like getting water in the desert of Rajasthan. Even if the rural community has been slow to respond but steady as a tortoise. It is inching towards achieving just compensation for an honest days work. The relationship between corruption, exploitation and the lies being told, can be clearly seen.

In terms of payment, Government is now making attempts to make payment from bank or post office. This may reduce the problem to some extent. However it will take some time for this arrangement to be operational. Opening accounts of illiterate persons is quite a tall task. The number of employees in rural banks is very limited. It is very trying to open accounts as also answer the numerous queries.

Rajasthan Bank has a branch in Bambora Village. This bank is to open accounts for all people from the six Panchayats of Gudli, Fila, Bori, Sulawas, Kot and Somakheda. However the bank has opened a/c for only two Panchayat namely Phila & Bambora, the other Panchayats have their bank a/c in other banks. Therefore, the bank has given the argument that other Panchayats should open their NREGA a/c in those banks. It has now been resolved to open a/c's in the post office.

Table: 2

| Gram Panchayat | a/c opened at | Present status |
|-----------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Phila | The bank of Rajasthan Ltd.; Bambora | a/c's Opening is in process |
| Vali | Post Office; Vali | a/c's Opening is in process |
| Bhalo ka Guda | Post Office; Bhalo ka Guda | a/c's Opening is in process |

Payments have not been made from 1st April to 10th July 2008. Will the government include interest on the payment to make up the loss? How will people ensure that similar payment is being made for similar kind of work or whether they have got full payment or not?

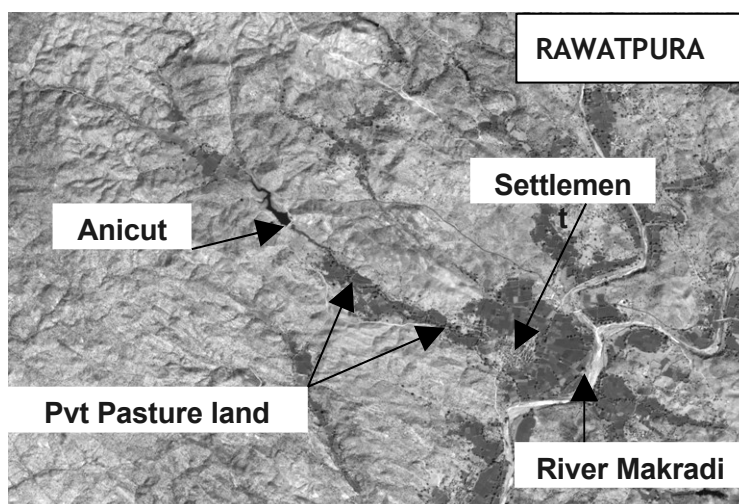
NREGS has listed working on natural resources and its management as a priority. If this is actually to take place, it will not take long to transform the situation in the village through the development of the natural resources. The experience of the first two years shows that even now road building is a priority. In tribal dominated areas, this is necessary as it facilities transport and communication. In Jaisamand catchment area, there is very limited area in which two crops can easily be taken. If this area is leveled, irrigation facilities provided and development and improvement of enclosures taken up, the livelihood conditions in the village will improve.

In the project areas, drinking water availability is also a major problem. This has become a discussion point in the village in connection with the preparation of micro plans and the solution to this vexed problem is sought to be found.

In the year 2008-09 major activity proposed is land leveling. However except for a few places, this activity is noted by its absence. If this activity is taken up before the monsoon it would have helped to improve the productive potential of the land. Now the crops have been sown. In this context who will participate?

Jaisamand catchment area comes under the warm sub-humid region where the rainfall regime is between 600 mm to 750 mm. Due to the prolonged dry periods there is always fear of the crops drying up. The Aravali hills make their present felt, but in the degraded state, with these hills are being further exploited small holdings, uneven terrain, falling ground water levels even availability of sustainable water sources and scattered human settlements provides a challenge. If micro plan can facilitate the development of individual and common lands then there can be a transformation of the livelihood profile. During the feudal era, animal husbandry was a major source of livelihood. The level of dependence of animal husbandry today can be gauged by the fact that SARAS Milk plant in Udaipur, sources 40% of its milk from the region. Milk production has some relationship with the caste composition. Tribals and scheduled castes keep small ruminants in the main. The involvement of castes having milch animals is almost nil.

Rawatpura village is located on Makradi River. The settlement in this village is based on caste. Dangis have their agricultural fields next to the river bed. Tribals are settled in the upper regions. While Dangis have big ruminants. This type of settlement did not take place accidentally; it has a historical perspective to it. The



tribals live separately or near the Jungle. The requirement of water and fodder compel Dangis to live near water sources and improve the productivity of the land they depend upon for agriculture. Next to the anicut as well, we can see that the Dangis have occupied land, the tribals are in the main doing without access to water resources which would have helped them to go for a double crop.

Here two important issues emerge. Firstly drought is a permanent feature of the region. Secondly, the availability of fodder is a major issue. If one analyses the programme, one notices that not even 5% is being spent on drought proofing; In addition to this, not a single programme has been taken in the region to support pastureland development, none of the programmes will benefit the small ruminants as well.

One of the aspects of NREGA is legal rights to women in this region. 85-95% women are participating in NREGS.

TABLE:

| State | Share of women in NREGA Employment (%) | State | Share of women in NREGA Employment (%) | State | Share of women in NREGA Employment (%) |
|----------------|--|--------------------------|--|----------------|--|
| Rajasthan | 67 | Orissa | 36 | Andhra Pradesh | 55 |
| Assam | 32 | HP | 12 | Haryana | 31 |
| Madhya Pradesh | 43 | Uttrakahnd | 30 | Tamil Nadu | 81 |
| North East | 49 | Karnataka | 51 | Bihar | 17 |
| Chattisgarh | 40 | Jharkahnd | 28 | Gujarat | 50 |
| Uttar Pradesh | 17 | Jammu & Kashmir | 4 | Panjab | 38 |
| West Bangal | 18 | Maharashtra ^a | 37 | Keral | 66 |
| India | 40 | | | | |

Source: Ministry of Rural Development

During the last two years, in some places women having been receiving less than men. In some cases, it has also been noticed that mostly women or older people are participating in the programme. After training a group of four women and one man is formed. All receive same wages. It is not clear whether the men and women belong to the same family and hence accept the low average wage or whether productivity of both men and women average is less. This aspect is being studied.

Horticulture is being taken up in the lands of scheduled casts, scheduled tribes and other backward castes under Keshavbadi Programme. Families in Bhalo Ka Guda benefited from this programme as well. Lime, Aonla and mango plants were distributed. Late distribution of plants can still be tolerated but the beneficiaries were given green branches in the name of plants. As a result of this, survival is very low. Apart from the poor quality saplings, the land on which the saplings were planted was very poor. If one examines the payment schedule, it becomes clear that in Panchayat the average rate was up to Rs. 53/-

Table:

| Sl No | Job Card # | Name of Household | Units | Families | | | Work Days | Payments Received | Name of Work | Average Payment |
|-------|------------|------------------------|-------|----------|----|------|-----------|-------------------|----------------|-----------------|
| | | | | S C | ST | O BC | | | | |
| 1 | 11 | Shankar/Bhaga Meena | 2 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 88 | 4854 | Ratanpura Road | 55.16 |
| 2 | 88 | Loger/Kalu Meena | 2 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 70 | 3358 | WHS | 47.97 |
| 3 | 95 | Veera/Nara Meena | 2 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 13 | 603 | Ratanpura Road | 46.38 |
| 4 | 96 | Kalu/Pura Meena | 2 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 50 | 2339 | Ratanpura Road | 46.78 |
| 5 | 97 | Ramlal/Pura Meena | 4 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 100 | 4696 | WHS | 46.96 |
| 6 | 98 | VAlchand/Kalu Meena | 2 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 99 | 5502 | Ratanpura Road | 55.58 |
| 7 | 100 | Kalu/Bhaga Meena | 2 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 89 | 4214 | WHS | 47.35 |
| 8 | 102 | Catara/Kana Meena | 3 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 99 | 4880 | Ratanpura Road | 49.29 |
| 9 | 103 | Parta/Kalu Meena | 2 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 97 | 4831 | WHS | 49.80 |
| 10 | 104 | Premshankar/Kesa Meena | 4 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 99 | 4925 | WHS | 49.75 |
| 11 | 105 | Bhanwar/Chatra Meena | 2 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 100 | 4971 | Ratanpura Road | 49.71 |

| | | | | | | | | | | |
|--------------|-----|-------------------------|---|---|---|---|-------------|--------------|-----|--------------|
| 12 | 109 | Lalu/Moda Meena | 3 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 100 | 5581 | WHS | 55.81 |
| 13 | 111 | Amar Singh/Laxman Singh | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 99 | 4521 | WHS | 45.67 |
| 14 | 113 | Jai Singh/Laxman Singh | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 100 | 4723 | WHS | 47.23 |
| 15 | 114 | Bhim Singh/Amar Singh | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 50 | 2782 | WHS | 55.64 |
| Total | | | | | | | 1253 | 62780 | | 50.10 |

The total job cards are less than the total number of families. Compounded by the fact of less payment for labour, the amount dispersed is considerably less than that sanctioned.

Tables

| Sl No. | Job Card # | Name of Household | Units | Families | | | Work Days | Payments Received | Name of Work | Average Payment |
|--------------|------------|------------------------|-------|----------|-----|------|-------------|-------------------|--------------|-----------------|
| | | | | S C | S T | O BC | | | | |
| 1 | 25 | HAna/Parta Meena | 3 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 98 | 4475 | Road | 45.66 |
| 2 | 32 | KAnna/Dola Meena | 2 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 99 | 5171 | Anicut | 52.23 |
| 3 | 36 | Vardi Sigh/Madho Singh | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 55 | 2726 | Anicut | 49.56 |
| 4 | 43 | KAnna/Roda Meena | 3 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 85 | 6205 | Forest | 73.00 |
| 5 | 45 | Nathu/Kalu Meena | 3 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 60 | 3197 | Road | 53.28 |
| 6 | 46 | Logri/Pema Meena | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 100 | 6474 | Forest | 64.74 |
| 7 | 53 | KAnna/Deva Meena | 2 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 100 | 4995 | Road | 49.95 |
| 8 | 55 | Vela/Mana Meena | 2 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 60 | 3243 | Road | 54.05 |
| 9 | 60 | Ram Singh/Mod Singh | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 100 | 4910 | Road | 49.10 |
| 10 | 61 | Kheta/Mana Meena | 2 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 98 | 5169 | Road | 52.74 |
| 11 | 62 | Noja/Keeka Meena | 4 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 97 | 4754 | Anicut | 49.01 |
| 12 | 68 | Shankar/Deva Meena | 3 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 98 | 4804 | Anicut | 49.02 |
| 13 | 70 | Jaswant/Roop Singh | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 49 | 2436 | Anicut | 49.71 |
| 14 | 73 | Bhaga / Manna Meena | 3 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 102 | 5037 | Road | 49.38 |
| 15 | 75 | Megha / Noji DAngi | 2 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 60 | 3228 | Road | 53.80 |
| Total | | | | | | | 1261 | 66824 | | 52.99 |

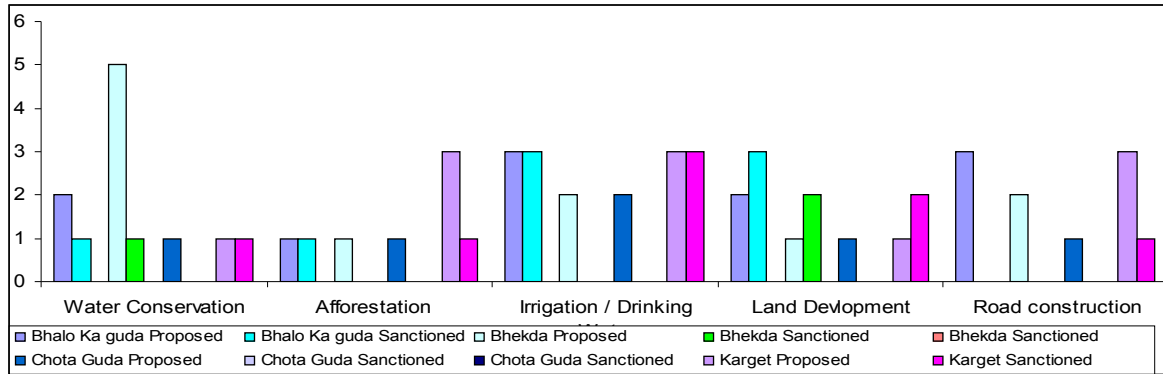
Proposed Works for 2008 - 09 in Bhalo Ka Guda Gram Panchayat

| Particulars | Bhalo Ka Guda | | Bhekhda | | Chota Guda | | Karget | | Total | |
|------------------------------------|---------------|-----------------|--------------|-----------------|--------------|-----------------|--------------|-----------------|--------------|-----------------|
| | No. of works | Proposed Budget | No. of works | Proposed Budget | No. of works | Proposed Budget | No. of works | Proposed Budget | No. of works | Proposed Budget |
| Water Harvesting works | 2 | 9.5 | 5 | 15.5 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 3 | 9 | 31 |
| Afforestation & Keshav Badi Scheme | 1 | 1.56 | 1 | 0.78 | 1 | 0.78 | 3 | 3.68 | 6 | 6.8 |
| Irrigation/Drinking water scheme | 3 | 15 | 2 | 4.5 | 2 | 4.5 | 3 | 7 | 10 | 31 |
| Land Deelopment | 2 | 8 | 1 | 2.5 | 1 | 2.5 | 1 | 2.5 | 5 | 15.5 |
| Road works | 3 | 8.75 | 2 | 6.25 | 1 | 3.75 | 3 | 8.75 | 9 | 27.5 |
| Total | 11 | 42.81 | 11 | 29.53 | 6 | 14.53 | 11 | 24.93 | 39 | 111.8 |

Sanctioned Works for 2008 - 09 in Bhalo Ka Guda Gram Panchayat

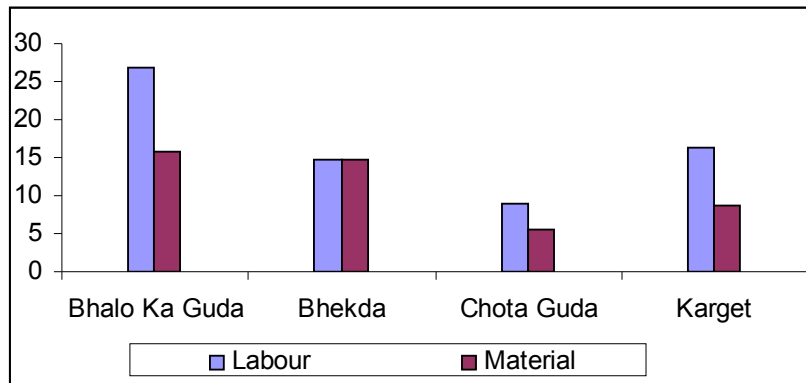
| Particulars | Bhalo Ka Guda | | Bhekhda | | Chota Guda | | Karget | | Total | |
|-------------|---------------|----------|---------|----------|--------------|-----------------|--------|-----------------|--------|----------|
| | No. of works | Proposed | No. of | Proposed | No. of works | Proposed Budget | No. of | Proposed Budget | No. of | Proposed |

| | | Budget | works | Budget | | | works | | works | Budget |
|-------------------------------------|----------|-------------|----------|-------------|----------|----------|----------|-------------|-----------|-------------|
| Water Harvesting works | 1 | 2 | 1 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 9 |
| Forestation & Keshav Badi Scheme | 1 | 2.4 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 2.4 | 2 | 4.8 |
| Irrigation / Drinking water scheme` | 3 | 20 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 11 | 6 | 31 |
| Land Deelopment | 3 | 12 | 2 | 4.5 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 9 | 7 | 25.5 |
| Road works | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 6 |
| Total | 8 | 36.4 | 3 | 12.5 | 0 | 0 | 8 | 27.4 | 19 | 76.3 |



Proposed Works for 2008 - 09 in Bhalo Ka Guda Gram Panchayat

| Village | Labour | | Material | | Total (Rs in Lakhs) | Person Days |
|--------------------|----------------|------------|----------------|------------|---------------------|-------------|
| | Rs. (in Lakhs) | % to total | Rs. (in Lakhs) | % to total | | |
| Bhlo Ka Guda | 26.96 | 62.96 | 15.86 | 37.04 | 42.82 | 35932 |
| Bhekda | 14.77 | 50.00 | 14.77 | 50.00 | 29.54 | 18001 |
| Chota Guda | 9.02 | 62.04 | 5.52 | 37.96 | 14.54 | 11836 |
| Karget | 16.25 | 65.16 | 8.69 | 34.84 | 24.94 | 21741 |
| At Panchayat Level | 67 | 62.96 | 44.84 | 37.04 | 111.84 | 87510 |



Obituary

Jaisamand Consortium extends its condolence to the family, friend, supporters and well wishes of Shri Lalit Mehta who was killed by antisocial elements on 14th May 2008. Shri Lalit Mehta was working to make NREGA more effective and transparent in Jharkhand.

Reference

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