

An Assessment Report Brief

Rajasthan, India: A Citizen's Assessment of the Implementation of the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS)

BACKGROUND

For the first time in the history of independent India, an act was passed by the government, which guarantees employment to every rural household. In compliance with the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA), passed on August 23, 2005, National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS) was launched on February 02, 2006 in 200 districts of the country. After scaling up the scheme to another 120 districts in 2007, later, on April 1, 2008, NREGS was extended to all the 610 districts of the country.

NREGA is a people's act in several ways. Prepared through a wide range of consultation with people's organisations, the Act empowers ordinary people to play an active role in the implementation of the scheme through *Gram Sabhas*¹, social audits, participatory planning and monitoring, right to information and other means. The Act recognises employment as a universal legal right and thus it gets priority in the allocation of public funds over several other competing demands. The following are the entitlements as per the Act.

- Legal guarantee for 100 days of employment in every financial year to adult members of any rural household willing to do unskilled manual work at the statutory minimum wage within a 5 km radius.
- Minimum wage² of Rs 73 (US\$1.5) per day; this has been increased to Rs 100 (US\$2) from April 1, 2008, per day to one member of every rural unemployed family.
- A failure to provide work within 15 days or within 5 km radius gives the applicant the right to draw unemployment/ transport allowance.

Selection and prioritisation of the public works are to be done in the *Gram Sabha*. A final list of selected projects are displayed at the *Gram Panchayat* office for public information and also sent to the district programme coordinator through office of programme officer, where the technical estimation is finalised for sanctioning. The priority wise allocation of work takes place on demand from the workers. The implementation and supervision of work includes several steps³ to ensure transparency. Ultimately, the evaluation of work is done through the social audit process.



¹ *Gram Sabha* is a gathering of all the people at certain place to discuss about the issues related to village.

² Minimum wage differs from state to state, here the figures given is of Rajasthan

³ A board with details of work- estimates, funds and running cost must be put up at the work site. Muster roll, Sanction order of work, daily material register etc are made accessible to public. The provision of Daily/ individual measurement of work and formation of vigilance committee to check the work as per checklist prepared for them. Use of Right to Information is also encouraged to get any information, if not easily available.

Journey of a Job Seeker. Journey of a job seeker starts with the registration of his household by saying verbally or ‘in written’ on a form available free of cost at every *Gram Panchayat*. Without incurring any cost from the person, a job card will be prepared and delivered to him by *Gram Panchayat*. This job card will enable the family to get a job of 100 days (accumulative⁴) within 365 days of a financial year on demand. The job card and job must be delivered within the 15 days of demand and the wage must be paid to the worker within 15 days of work done and at a public place by reading aloud the details of work and payment.

The distribution of jobs must respect the gender quota of one-third female workers at the worksite. The worksite facilities⁵ must be provided at every worksite according to provision. The workers have to be given transport allowance also if s/he goes beyond the distance of 5 km

Box 1: NREGS Implementation in Rajasthan (2007-08)

- Number of Registered households: 2.73million
- Number of households demanded employment: 1.16 million
- Number of households provided employment: 1.14 million
- Number of person days completed: 49 million
- Number of households completed 100 days of employment: 46,593

from his/her village. The wage of the work done can be on a time-rate basis or on a piece-rate basis for which the norms must be clearly articulated before start of each work.

Service Delivery: NREGS Context. Under the NREGS scheme, the Central Government bears the cost of wages given to unskilled worker: 75 percent of the cost incurred on material and skilled/semi-skilled labour used and administrative expenses whereas rest of the cost like unemployment allowances⁶ and 25 percent of the cost of material and wages for skilled and semi-skilled workers is used. *Sarpanch*⁷ and *Gram Panchayat* Secretary are directly entrusted with the responsibility of registration, issuance of job cards, receiving application, providing job, monitoring work, ensuring facilities at the worksite, measurement of work done, and distribution of wages, etc. Apart from this, preparing village plan, setting up local institution to facilitate implementation, doing identification, designing and implementation of at least 50 percent of the work and ultimately doing social audit come under the ambit of the *Sarpanch* and *Gram Panchayat*.

*Pradhan*⁸ and Programme Officer at block level coordinate block level planning, identify possible works based on feasibility and technical assessment of village plans, and design and implement them. Monitoring and evaluation of work, execution of complaint redress process and ensuring transparency and accountability also come under their purview. *Pramukh*⁹ and District Programme Coordinator are involved in preparing district annual plan and perspective plan based on village plans, in coordination of district level activities and also in monitoring of implementation. The State Government sets up Employment Guarantee Council, evolves guidelines and regulations and facilitate timely resource flow for implementation. The Central Government, on the other hand, sets up National Employment Guarantee council, evolving guidelines, ensuring fund flow through channel, executing independent monitoring and evaluation.

⁴ Any single or all adult member of the family jointly can complete 100 days of work.

⁵ Medical aid, drinking water, shade and crèche if there are more than five children below the age of six years

⁶ The unemployment allowance has been fixed at 1/4th of the minimum wage for the first 30 days and then ½ for complete financial year and it must be paid to the person, if implementing machinery fails to provide job within 15 days of demand of work.

⁷ elected representative at *Gram Panchayat* (first tier of *Panchayati Raj* Institution) level

⁸ elected representative at *Panchayat Samiti* (Second tier of *Panchayati Raj* Institution) level

⁹ elected representative at *Zila Parishad* (third tier of *Panchayati Raj* Institution) level

PROCESS

During 2005-06, CUTS Centre for Consumer Action, Research & Training (CUTS CART), Jaipur undertook a pilot project to evaluate the implementation of the Mid Day Meal Scheme (MDMS) in Chittorgarh district of Rajasthan in partnership with the World Bank. The pilot was aimed at developing and testing a methodology that could provide regular user feedback to service providers which would be useful in better implementation of the MDMS in the states. A combination of two social accountability tools, namely, the Participatory Expenditure Tracking Survey (PETS) and the Citizen Report Card (CRC) were used in this study. The dissemination of the key findings of the study, followed by action by the service providers, has resulted in a number of policy as well as institutional changes in the implementation of the MDMS in the state.



The impact of the study in influencing the public expenditure outcomes and the demand from the State Government to do similar assessments created the background for doing a study on the implementation of NREGS. Based on the previous experience, a combination of three social accountability tools, i.e. CRC, Community Score Card

(CSC) and PETS was used for the assessment of NREGS implementation. The study to evaluate NREGS was implemented in Sirohi district of Rajasthan (see Box 2).

Box 2: Profile of Sirohi District

Sirohi district is situated in the south-west part of Rajasthan. With an area of 5,136 km², it is the third smallest district of Rajasthan, with a total population of 8,50,756 (Census 2001), and a population density of 166 persons per km². Out of the total population of the district, 82.3 percent lives in rural areas. There are mainly two types of tribes found in the Sirohi: Bhils and Grasiya. About 31.01 percent people come under the Below Poverty Line (BPL) category. Sirohi district has one *Zilla Parishad* and 5 *Panchayat Samities*, 151 *Gram Panchayats* and 5 Urban Local Bodies, the headquarters of the *Zilla Parishad* is situated at Sirohi town. The district is divided into five tehsils/blocks, which are Sirohi, Sheoganj, Aburoad, Pindwara and Reodar.

The whole study process consists of: (i) scoping visit; (ii) stakeholders meeting; (iii) developing, testing and finalising survey instruments, e.g. questionnaire; (iv) selection and orientation to surveyors; (v) primary and secondary data collection, i.e. compilation and analysis; (vi) CSC orientation and exercise in selected *Gram Panchayats*; (vii) conducting stakeholders workshop to discuss and finalise results; and (viii) finalising and disseminating study findings.

CRC: Sample Size and Methodology. A total of 825 NREGS beneficiaries from 165 villages, a total of 30 *Sarpanch* and 60 *Panchayat/Assistant Secretaries* and 75 mates (supervisors) from 125 *Gram Panchayat* of the Sirohi district were interviewed. Apart from these, several higher level government officials and PRI representatives were interviewed and several focused group discussions with beneficiaries were conducted. Sample size of 825 beneficiaries was kept at high confidence and low tolerance level. A criterion for survey sampling was developed and size of sample was validated with software for Random Sample Calculator. First of all, the monthly average of beneficiaries from April 2006 to March 2007 was calculated as 16,335

of which 815 beneficiaries were taken as sample at 99 percent confidence level with a tolerable level of 4.4 percent.



Four different sets of questionnaires, each for Registered Household, *Sarpanch*, *Mate* and *Panchayat*/Assistant Secretaries were prepared keeping the minutes of NREGS into consideration and field tested before finalisation. To gather the data, Sample of villages for data collection was done through random sampling method and decided that 5 questionnaires will be filled up in one village for logistical reasons. A *Mate* was interviewed from every alternate *Gram Panchayat*. *Sarpanch*, *Panchayat* Secretaries and Assistant Secretaries covered of the 20 percent *Gram Panchayat* two rounds of orientation of surveyors took place and 5 percent of the total filled up questionnaires was cross-checked by filling them again. Interpretation

of data was actualised through inclusion of the experiences from field level interactions, group discussions, consultations and observations from the worksites.

Visits to the worksites and observations, and assistance from local civil society organisations (CSOs) and several government officials helped in identifying the key issues faced by the beneficiaries and implementing agencies in the context of NREGS. Review of literature on NREGS was done in order to conceptualise the provisions made under the Act and Guidelines. These activities further helped in generation of questionnaires covering both quantitative and qualitative aspects of NREGS. Government officials (at various levels) and community stakeholders were actively engaged in different activities at different stages of the project to get their full cooperation. Partnership with a local NGO involved in the process of NREGS was made to remain acquainted with the situation through out.

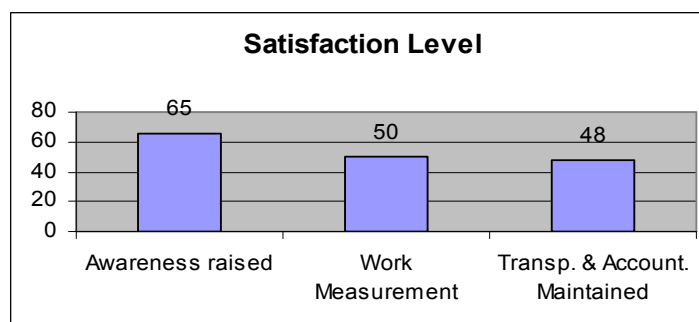
After data gathering and rechecking, data were analysed in order to get the findings. Brainstorming on key survey findings with the concerned stakeholders at intermediary level was performed and suggestions were incorporated for coming to final conclusion. Highlights of the implementation of the scheme, gaps in implementation and recommendations to address the gaps were documented and presented to the district administration, the State Government and other key stakeholders without any biasness. The recommendations were not only meant for filling the gaps but also to expand the scope of the highlights of the implementation.

IMPLEMENTATION OF NREGS: CITIZEN'S PERCEPTION

Level of Awareness Intense awareness generation on various provisions and entitlements is must to achieve the goal of the scheme especially due to low literacy among the workers. On investigation, 88 percent of people were found aware that employment of 100 days is a right and 76 percent of the people acknowledged that the scheme is running under an Act. However, only 28 percent people were aware about the provision of unemployment allowance. Since it is a scheme to provide unskilled employment, ban on use of machine and contractor and more than 40 percent use of material and skilled labour is also banned. The provision of ban on using labour displacing machine and contractor in the scheme was known to 59 percent of the beneficiaries

Wage Payment. It matters most that the employee under scheme be satisfied with wage paid which should be timely and adequately. About 87 percent people were found satisfied with the allotted work under the scheme whereas only 72 percent people were satisfied with the wage payment and 87 percent people acknowledge the increase in their income. Comprehensible method of measurement and applying them accurately for evaluating wage for the labourers is must for motivating the workers to join NREGS. Asking on satisfaction with the measurement, only 50 percent people were found satisfied (see Figure 1).

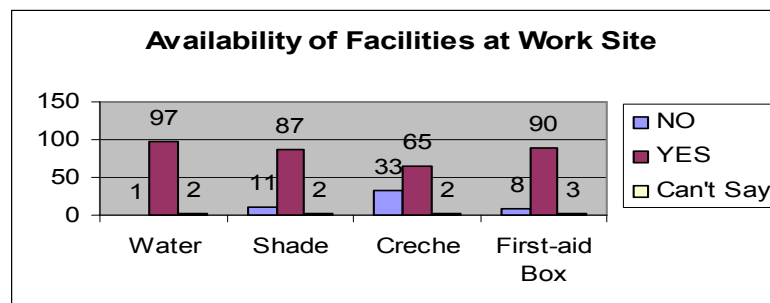
Figure 1: Satisfaction Level



Worksite Facilities.

Facilities of drinking water, shades, crèche and first aid box are made essential at every worksite. Almost 97 percent labourers reported presence of waters at the worksite, and 90 percent of them reported the presence of medicines whereas 13 percent reported absence of shades and 34 percent reported absence of crèche facilities at the worksite (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Availability of Facilities at the Worksite



Grievance Redressal Mechanism. Mechanism for early redress of grievances of any kind is one of the major provision for maintaining transparency and accountability under the Act. Almost 39 percent people deny that there is any grievances redress process and outcome (see Table 1).

Table 1: Grievance Redressal

Ranking for Various Services (values are in %)				
Services	Bad	Average	Good	Best
Timely payment of wage	7	28	48	18
Grievance redress	22	41	30	7
For allotting Job within 15 days	9	34	44	13
Helping & Creating awareness	21	32	37	10
Monitoring & Inspection	9	26	40	25

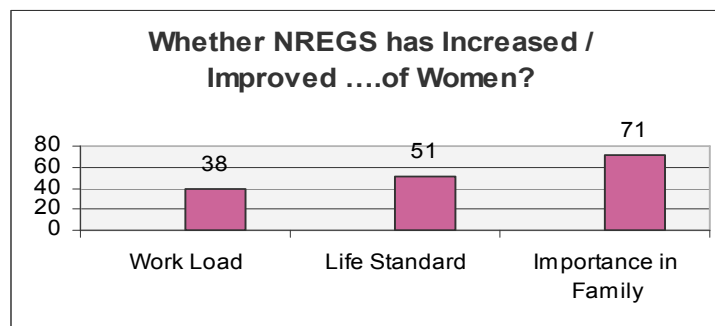
Monitoring and Vigilance. Continuous monitoring and vigilance makes any misappropriation away from the system. It was found in the study that 56 percent of the worksites are visited two times or less by upper level *Panchayat Raj Institution* (PRI) representatives and government authorities.

Creation of Assets for Livelihood. It was asked whether this motive is being fulfilled by creating durable assets to generate livelihood, 74 percent people endorsed durability of the asset created under NREGS and 85 percent accept that the asset created will generate means for livelihood. About 94 percent people accepted that the scheme has been able to improve the facilities in rural areas.



Gender Specific Benefits. Gender inequalities undermine the effectiveness of the developmental policies in fundamental ways. These gaps are widespread in access to and control of resources in economic opportunities, power, and political voice. So in Schedule II, Section 6 of NREGA, priority is given to women in such a way that at least 1/3 of the beneficiaries shall be women who have registered and requested for work under the scheme. There is a feeling of considerable positive change in their life style. About 71 percent women feel increase in importance in family due to increase in their earning capacity and that has resulted in their economic empowerment and decision making capacity as well. 51 percent women admit improvement in their living standard through increased income under NREGS.

Figure: Gender Specific Benefits of NREGS



PROCESS UNDER CSC

The CSC tool was used in Rohida and Watera *Gram Panchayats*, of Pindwada block under Sirohi district to assess the identified service deliveries under the NREGS. Service providers and beneficiaries, comprising of *Sarpanchs*, *Up-sarpanchs*, Ward Members, *Zila Parishad* Member, Mates (Supervisors) and the community members, who are working under the NREGS participated in the scorecard process, which includes orientation on the tool cum field exercise. Selection of *Gram Panchayats* was done on the basis of rapport built during the whole process of CRC and other activities held under the pilot. As an outcome, first time in their life, the users or the beneficiaries at the grassroots realised their power to evaluate/assess the actions of the service providers. This was a big eye-opener and has given the required confidence to the

beneficiaries to play the role of a watch-dog. The exercise brought the view of beneficiaries in open that they are not satisfied with several implementation process like measurement of work done by them under NREGS, mechanism available for quick redress of grievances, behaviour of service providers etc.



People in the villages are not informed about the meetings of the *Gram Sabha*. Hence, there is only minimal participation of the community in the decision making process, which result in lack of information about the details of new work sanctioned and availability of work as well. This has a severe negative impact and opposite to the provisions of the Act. This exercise helped to challenge the claim of the authorities that everybody in the village or the job card-holders are well aware of the rights and entitlements as per the provisions of the NREGS. Still, there is big gap between the presumed and the real/actual level of information. Even among the service providers only a

couple of people such as the *Sarpanch* or the Secretary were running the show. Even people like the *Up-sarpanch* or the ward members did not understand clearly that they are also part of the category of ‘service providers’ and they need to understand their role clearly in discharging their duties/responsibilities.

KEY FINDINGS & POLICY IMPLICATION

Most of the beneficiaries have developed positive towards the scheme and its implementations as evident from the data; however, there is lack of awareness on certain provisions and entitlements under the Act. People are happy as they are getting guaranteed employment of 100 days which was a dream for them.

Strengthening Gram Sabha. Mostly the *Gram Sabha* is weakly participated and decisions made are not participatory. Investigating the situation revealed two reasons for lesser attendance:

- Lack of information about the date on which *Gram Sabha* is planned as information is not given to the villagers; and
- Lack of involvement of people in decision making even if they are present.

For effective working of *Gram Sabha*, following needs to be taken into account:

- Any day (like 2nd Friday of the month) should be fixed for *Gram Sabha* meeting (as Sunday was fixed as polio day) and it should be made known to every villager through several means of communication suitable and available to the area.
- *Sarpanch* and *Panchayat* Secretaries should be trained for involving people and also monitored by authorities.

Awareness Generation. Lack of information about the provisions made under the Act, procedures of getting entitlements, details about ongoing work etc., have emerged out as a severe problem during Community Score Card (CSC) and in CRC findings:

- Intensive awareness generation on the provisions (entitlements) of the Act through appropriate means of communication must take place.
- Locally available literate villagers can be identified and trained by *Panchayat* on a script containing major entitlements and procedures of implementation developed by experts in government or hired from outside.

Availability of Application Forms. Still there is no trend found regarding demand in written and receiving the receipt which can force government to provide unemployment allowance in case job is not provided within 15 days. Hence, the following measures need to be taken:

- Ensure easy availability of application form for demanding job at various accessible public places like *Gram Panchayat Office*, Shops, Post Office etc., and motivate people to submit application form and get dated receipt.
- A window for collecting application form and providing dated receipt with stamp should be opened at the *Panchayat Office*. One literate adult of the *Panchayat* can be trained and appointed for the purpose.

Work Measurement. CRC findings reveal that half of the beneficiaries under the NREGS are not satisfied with the measurement of work, which becomes the basis of wage calculation. During visit to the worksites problem of measuring the task of low performing people *vis-à-vis* hard working people together and calculated the wage was tackled. A few people, due to their status in the village, get the wage only for their presence. Following measures are needed to overcome this problem:

- A mechanism to allocate and measure the work individually should be developed. The process of daily measurement should be made compulsory and it needs to be monitored by different authorities during their visit at the worksite.
- Clear articulation of norms (as norms differ from soil to soil and also depends on other conditions) fixed for measurement at that particular worksite should be conveyed to the beneficiaries at the beginning of each work and also should be displayed on the work site.

Worksite Facilities. Working women may face several difficulties if the facilities are absent at the worksite. If the crèche is absent, mothers have to keep infants in the open or leave them at home under the care of other children. In that case, she has to go home for breast feeding. There is no provision of funds for carrying the facilities to the worksite. In the stances, when the worksite is far from the locality, huge cost is incurred. This creates a space for corruption. Followings measures are recommended to enhance worksite facilities:

- Presence of all the facilities like water, shade (in sufficient number), first-aid box (with regular checks) and crèche (as per the provisions of the Act) should be ensured at all the worksites.
- The provision of additional financial allocation is needed for carrying facilities to the worksite and also to carry them out.

Empowerment of PRI. The principal authorities for planning, finalising, approving and implementing the scheme are entitled to the *Panchayat* of all levels and Government officials have to assist them. This is described in the Section 13 of the act. But the PRI functionaries are not empowered with the rights they are entitled for. Hence, below mentioned step is needed.

- Approval of the works under NREGS should be made jointly by *Zila Parmukh*, District Project coordinator (District Collector) and *Pradhan* (of related block) and only after need assessment by *Gram Sabha* and technical analysis of the work by technical person.

Development. Problem of related to staff, including lack of staff, or inefficient staff, or staff without adequate power and facilities, or low paid staff and some other problems related to them were found evident in the meetings and interviews. The present staff justify their weak accountability by blaming above-mentioned situations. To hold them accountable, deployment of efficient and adequate staff should take place, with focus on the following suggestions:

- Appointment of exclusive Programme Officers equipped with all required infrastructure and powers (related to executing agency at grassroots) with the responsibility of only NREGS at every block should be made as early as possible.
- The grassroots level staff with reasonable salary and qualification should be recruited directly by the Government without any involvement of external agency. This will draw efficient staffs for the work and exploitation could also be minimised (Staff have been recruited through external agency which exploits the personnel recruited through them).
- Deployment of female mate should be made compulsory at the worksites where female workers are 60 percent or more. This will help female workers to report their difficulties.

Convergence of Scheme. Other schemes for development should be converged with NREGS to increase the cohesion in the process of development, which include:

- The recess at the worksite can be used for running literacy programme.
- Auxiliary Nursing Midwives can visit the worksite and get most of the women at a place for regular check up and advice.
- Women workers can be motivated to formulate Self Help Groups (SHGs) and thus engaging them in other income generating activities also.
- Subsidy can be given to those who are willing to invest in alternative source of income like cow, goat etc., by clubbing it with self employment schemes.

Capacity Building. Mate is the most important link between wage earners and service providers so S/he should be very responsible, understanding and efficient. During CSC, the ill-behaviour of mate was very strongly reported so there should be integrated training of mate on various aspects, e.g. work measurement, gender sensitivity, record keeping, behaviour etc. Regular monitoring (with increased frequency) and vigilance by various different level officials and PRI representatives, who should be particularly trained for monitoring and inspection, should be made mandatory.

Grievance Redressal Mechanism. Use of telecommunication can be very beautifully incorporated in the by setting up a local helpline on call centre model with toll free number and should be made known to all villagers. It will be very helpful for illiterate workers to solve their problems. This will solve several problems of grievance redress, information dissemination and awareness generation.

Social Audit. The member selected in the Social Audit forum¹⁰ should be asked to submit affidavit saying that they are not relative of *Sarpanch* or *Panchayat* Secretary. Government should evolve proper mechanism to accomplish Social Audit with involvement of private players at least once in a year and they should be given protection in case of any emergency.

¹⁰ A forum of five people to execute audit formed in each *Gram Panchayat*

Others. To minimise asset inequalities in *Gram Panchayats*, the ratio of labour and material should be maintained at the *Gram Panchayat* level to avoid any conflict or disappointment. Old age and handicapped people are not easily incorporated in the scheme because of their low capability. Some special measures like task reduction/easy work for handicapped/old people should be evolved for them. Separate job cards need to be made for married couples, living in joint family, even if they have joint ration card. A public private partnership (PPP) in the field of NREGS should be established for bringing transparency and accountability, as being done in the field of education. Evolving the labour intensive processes which can create semi *pucca* structures rather than washable works and adopting them in making the structures semi *pucca* can be very useful in case of NREGS, where ratio of labour and material is kept 60:40. For example, the *kutcha* gravel roads can be pressed by using small implement made for the purpose (instead of using roller) to make it semi- *pucca* and more durable.

IMPACT ON PERFORMANCE

Operational Changes

- **Capacity building:** Capacity building of mate is taking place for measuring the work done on a daily basis by a group of five people and making payment. Work done is now measured on a daily basis in the presence of the beneficiaries. All beneficiaries have been provided with a measuring tape also.
- **Facilities at worksites:** District level authorities have issued orders to ensure amenities at work sites are made available according to the provision.
- **Appointment of women supervisors:** Initiatives taken for the appointment of more female supervisors. The list has been prepared of the high school pass out girls and training is imparted to them to work as mate. The deployment of female mate is taking place.
- **Availability of forms for demanding work:** Forms are now available in all important places in the village
- **Open training:** An open training on various aspects of ‘measurement’ is conducted on every Wednesday¹¹ for the advantage of the beneficiaries, which is optional.
- **Initiative to accommodate Social Accountability Tool:** Department of planning has ordered its evaluation cell together with the Centre for Good Governance at HCM-RIPA (Jaipur) to collaborate with CUTS CART to work for conducting a Training of Trainers (ToT) on CSC exploring the possibility of implementing it in other sectors too.
- District Baanswara of Rajasthan has started running *Satat Shiksha Karyakram* (Continuing Education Programme) during time of recess under NREGS. At several places, *Prerak* (Facilitator) of *Satat Shiksh Karyakram* are appointed as mate, who executes the work of both *Prerak* as well as Mate. This was one of the project’s recommendations.

Policy Changes

- **Setting up of task force to explore possibility of convergence:** A Task Force has been set up to explore more comprehensive and effective possibilities of convergence with NREGA. The Task Force is in the process of reviewing convergence strategies for NREGA.

¹¹ Wednesday is kept as holiday for labourers for bank related works.

- **Payment of wages through saving accounts:** The Government has decided to stop direct cash payment to the beneficiaries and open bank accounts to transfer their wages. Majority of NREGS wages are being paid through bank and post offices savings account now.
- **Insurance coverage to workers:** The Government of India approved the inclusion of NREGS workers/ beneficiaries under *Janashree Bima Yojna* (JBY)
- **Measurement of technical feasibility:** A circular has been issued to start measuring technical feasibility of the proposals sent by the *Gram Panchayat* by forming a technical committee including experts/engineers drawn from various departments of the district.
- **Removal of intermediary agency:** It has been decided to remove the intermediary agency between the government and contractual staffs and government will directly appraise the staffs with regard to continuing or discontinuing their services.

Changes in Development Outcomes

- **Citizen awareness & empowerment:** There is an increase in awareness of NREGA entitlements and beneficiaries are realising that they have the power and opportunity to evaluate/assess the actions of the service providers
- **Women empowerment:** Women supervisors are being appointed under NREGS and increased participation of women in household decision making processes as they earn.



Reference

CUTS Centre for Consumer Action, Research & Training (2008). “Assessing Implementation of NREGS as per provision of NREGA in Sirohi district of Rajasthan”, Final Report.