

Facilitating implementation of government rural job scheme in Koraput District, Odisha, India



BOIPARIGUDA KSHETRA SAMITI (BKS)

Background and Overview

Trócaire has supported community mobilisation initiatives in Boipariguda Block, Koraput District in Odisha, India since 2010 through its partner organisation, BKS. A key initiative has been engaging with communities for proper implementation of a government rural job scheme with a view to increasing the effectiveness of this scheme, and to mobilise local government resources towards this aim.

BKS has been working with the communities of Boipariguda Block towards more sustainable livelihoods through active participation in the local governance system since 2010. BKS has facilitated and coordinated the implementation of the MGNREGS (the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme) in 44 villages of 2 Gram Panchayats¹ in participation with community members through Community based Organisations (CBOs). This work has contributed to an important need in the district, as many sectors of society have not been able to access government programmes.

Due to a lack of knowledge about how government job schemes work, delayed payments and a lack of accountability, communities often do not receive the benefits due to them. They tend to migrate to other districts seeking a better income as labourers under private landlords, rather than stay in their

Box 1:

The MGNREGS is a government job scheme that guarantees rural households 100 days of paid work every year doing unskilled manual labour. It is a powerful instrument towards ensuring inclusive growth in rural India through its impact on social protection, livelihood security and democratic empowerment. MGNREGS allows communities to actively participate in the decisions on key work schemes required in the local area and also permits rigorous monitoring of these works through social audits. Learn more about how MGNREGS works here: <http://www.nrega.nic.in/netnrega/forum/2-MGNREGA.pdf>

villages, and seek work through the government job scheme. Once they migrate, they also become ineligible for other local benefit schemes. This dynamic has contributed to local governance being unresponsive, negligent and unaccountable, which in turn results in communities becoming more marginalised and vulnerable. Through BKS' intervention, communities have become more aware of their rights, have participated more actively in holding local government to account and have obtained real results in terms of increased

¹ Village-level statutory democratic institution of local self-government that has been given constitutional status under 73rd and 74th Amendments of the Indian Constitution.

benefits, timely payment of owed wages, improved worksite facilities and more user-friendly and transparent procedures.

The core components of the programme were as follows:

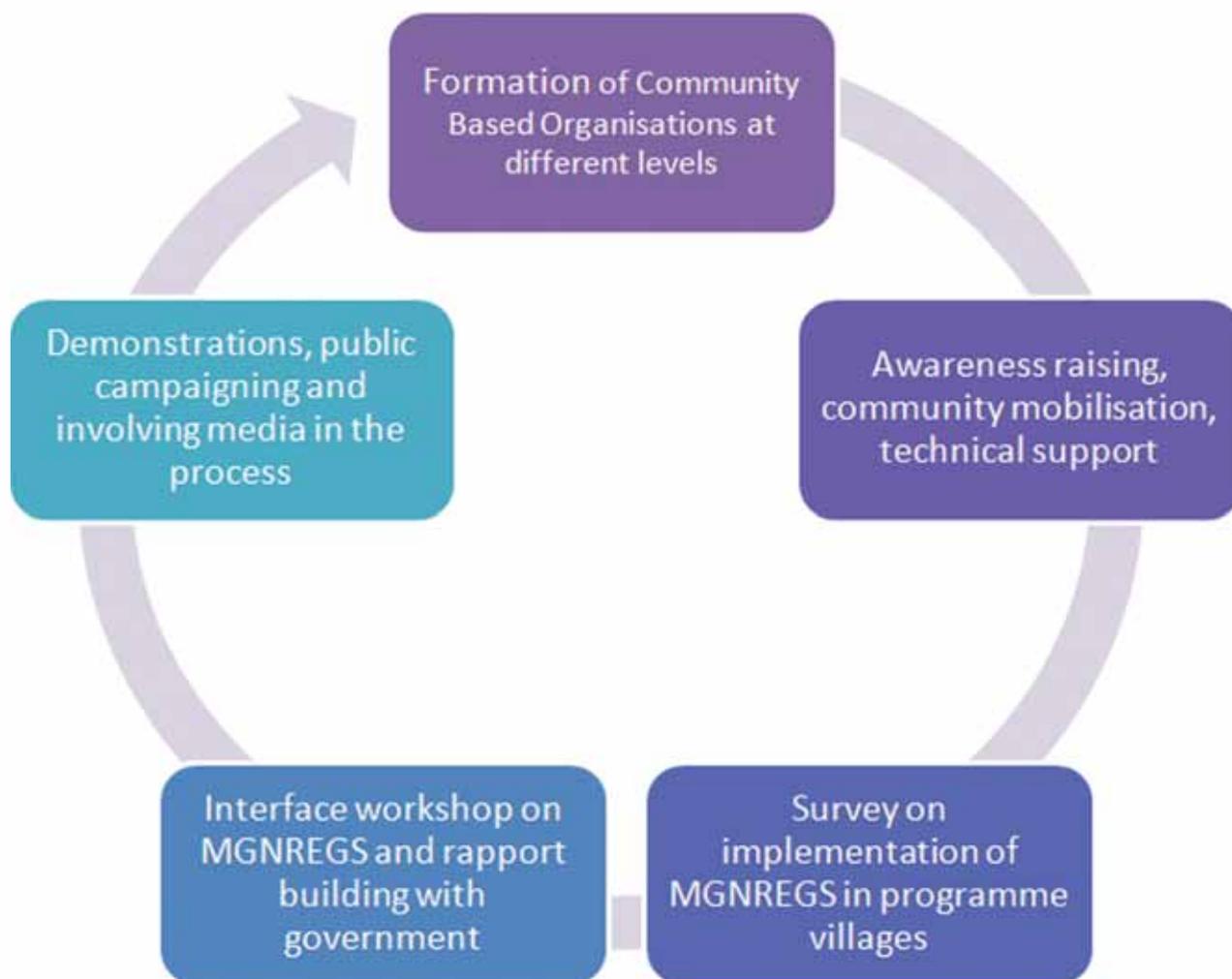
- Building capacities of communities to identify issues related to the implementation of MGNREGS and to enable them to prepare collective action plans to resolve these issues.
- Formation of Community Based Organisations (CBOs) through community mobilisation towards enhanced community participation in development and decision making processes. Village Development Committees (VDC)² were formed in each of the 30 villages. In order to exert pressure at higher levels of government, Panchayat Development Committees (PDC) and Block Level People’s Federation (BLPF) were also formed and strengthened. Members of Panchayat Development Committees are drawn from the VDC.

Impact

Formal CBOs established at village, Panchayat and Block level to address different issues

Community based organisations (CBOs) were established at Village, Panchayat and Block levels so that community members could come together and raise their voices on various issues related to the proper implementation of MGNREGS, social security schemes and the functioning of pallisabha³ and gramsabha⁴. Community leaders emerged in all the target villages and they are helping the communities to avail of their entitlements under these government schemes and local governance structures. The leaders facilitate village planning and its integration in Panchayat development plans. Community leaders are helping their communities identify common issues and engage with different authorities to create pressure on the government through rallies, public meetings, and filing of complaints. The

Strategies



² VDC, PDC and BLPF - People federations are formed at three levels (Village, Panchayat and Block) to enable communities to assert their rights at large. These are autonomous bodies and are not controlled by any external agencies.



▲ Ramchandra Burudi of Baapaniguda village: Farm Pond under MGNREGS

They had never taken a step like this before and this gave them more confidence and brought unity among the villagers to deal with these kinds of issues in the future. At the same time, they recognised that this was a temporary partial solution and they needed to take further action in a much bigger way with the help of neighbouring Panchayat (Bodaput) and mobilise resources from the government to solve the problem permanently.

Increased community participation and citizen empowerment

BKS introduced a village level **MGNREGS tracking register** and the villagers managed the register and tracked the progress of MGNREGS work in their village. The information collected has provided a database for dealing with specific misappropriation issues, which is also very useful for advocacy efforts, which the community also contributes to.

The Government has the mandate to conduct a **social audit** on MGNREGS twice a year. BKS worked as a government **nodal agency for the social audit** of MGNREGS in the villages of Boipariguda Block. BKS conducted preparatory meetings in the villages on the social audit process to ensure and facilitate the participation of the community in the public hearing. BKS also conducted the pallisabha meeting in the Umuriaguda and Paliguda village before the social audit and piloted this approach in many villages. As a result villagers as well as VDC leaders got a platform to raise misappropriation issues in front of the government authority and more than 80% of community members participated in the public hearing. On the day of the hearing, the community provided a written complaint along with individual testimonies. The community leaders also demanded that the government authority conduct the social audit as per the guidelines. During the process, job seekers and community leaders of both Mahuli and Chandrapada Panchayats raised issues such as payment irregularities, incomplete work, project initiation meetings, worksite facilities and inaccurate maintenance of documents like expenditure statements, job card and attendance register and the failure by the social audit committee to be formed by the due date and to know their exact role and responsibilities.

Improved job scheme implementation

Due to the effective participation of community members in village development planning and the MGNREGS plan, various resources have been mobilised for village development through MGNREGS and the job scheme is functioning better.

- 2022 job seekers obtained MGNREGS job cards.
- 1944 households from 44 villages (60% of the target population) have availed of 40-45 days of work.
- 20 households in Mahuli Panchayat completed 100 days of work each and were able to join the government housing scheme.
- Denial by MGNREGS officials that they received villagers' job demands has decreased significantly in 2 Panchayats i.e. Mahuli and Chandrapada.
- All job seekers now receive acknowledgement of their demand.
- Shorter delays in wage payment due to immediate follow-up by VDC leaders.
- 22 solid roads, 15 culverts, water harvesting structures and drying yards have been created under MGNREGS work.
- 40% increase in women job seekers receiving work compared to the previous year.
- The problems presented at the social audit by CBO leaders were resolved (late payment, project initiation meeting, work site facilities and other types of MGNREGS plans).
- 20 new priority projects mobilized in MGNREGS in 2 Panchayats, such as 17 connecting roads, 3 farm ponds and a playground, as per the village development plan.
- Delays in wage payment solved in 8 villages for 180 workers (70 men and 110 women) by lobbying the Block office.



▲ During construction of new connecting road from Lenja to Khandiguda under MGNREGA

Challenges faced during programme

Excessive interference of vested interest groups biased some community leaders:

Although it is against the provision of the scheme, external local contractors still get involved in MGNREGS and their nexus with the government implementing agency is strong, deep rooted and systematic. These local contractors are able to influence community leaders and threaten BKS staff. Unfortunately, as a single organisation, it is difficult to devise an effective strategy to combat this. There is no civil society organisation network or platform at district or state level for dealing with MGNREGS issues. BKS has highlighted these issues through CBOs at Block and District level continuously and have organised communities to resist this influence, as well as carrying out advocacy with Panchayat representatives, Government and other CBOs. However, it remains an ongoing challenge.

Delayed wage payment:

Despite some improvement on this issue, delayed wage payment remains the long term struggle of job seekers. BKS

introduced a village level monthly tracking system where villagers track the details of work, payment and other related issues under MGNREGS, and based on the evidence register complaints at Block offices to sort out the problems. The evidence also allows community leaders to carry out advocacy on these issues and also keeps the MGNREGS implementing agencies and community informed. However, it remains an ongoing challenge.

No proper redress mechanism and ineffectiveness of social audit process:

There are many areas where the MGNREGS is being poorly implemented, including delayed wage payment, denial of work in the face of high demand, particularly by women job seekers, poor worksite facilities, insufficient planning, and community plans not being included in Block plans. However, there is no proper government redress mechanism available. Although community leaders and job seekers work hard to bring all of these issues as complaints during the social audits, the reality is that they are not properly redressed by the government. To follow up on this, the issues are highlighted by community leaders at Panchayat and Block nodal meetings and the District collector's office, with the facilitation of BKS. However it remains an ongoing challenge.

- ▼ Women from three villages (Lenja, Khandiguda and Meshaguda) went to their Panchayat office to demand regularisation of MGNREGS work



Community plans are not included in the MGNREGS plan:

In MGNREGS only infrastructure related plans like connecting roads are included on a priority basis by the Government. Community plans that focus on land development, individual plantation, cowsheds and support for agricultural development are generally not included, despite lobbying by community leaders using various platforms. However, this year communities prepared their labour budget and priorities for village development ahead of MGNREGS planning, and were able to include land development, cowsheds and harvesting yards and also have collaborated with Government for better convergence.

Lessons Learned



There is a need to establish proper coordination between the implementing agency, Panchayat representatives and community leaders for better convergence of MGNREGS.

Community involvement with media to highlight their issues for community development is a good strategy. Community leaders were able to highlight MGNREGS issues in local print media and this led to steps being taken to solve them after they were noticed by administration.

Continuous engagement of leaders with different MGNREGS duty bearers is helping communities achieve their rights. There are some issues in MGNREGS like the payment system, the social audit process, priority plan inclusion and misappropriation that need continuous follow-up and engagement at different levels by the leaders so that communities are able to get their entitlements.

It is very important to complete the whole cycle of MGNREGS from village planning, implementation to monitoring in selected villages so that the learning of the same can replicate to other villages.

MGNREGS planning at village level help community to prioritize their needs and demand accordingly.

The simple tracking system is a great community monitoring tool to track the progress of MGNREGS work and provides specific evidence for advocacy at different levels.

Role of BKS

- Awareness building at community level, facilitation of micro plan preparation and their approval at Gramsabha meetings.
- Training the community on various MGNREGS entitlements, how to demand work under the scheme and leadership development
- Conducting Project Initiation Meeting
- Facilitating social audits as per MGNREGS norms at Block and District level and engaging the community to actively participate in them.
- Intensive training to selected leaders who can transfer their knowledge to the community on the MGNREGS process, specifically focusing on labour budgeting, planning and implementation.
- Supporting women to increase job demand.
- Adoption of a simple tracking system on MGNREGS for easy monitoring by the community.
- Provide strategic direction to communities to deal with various aspects of MGNREGS and to establish linkages with Government, Panchayat Representatives and media for better coordination and convergence.

▼ Community leaders demanding regularisation of MGNREGA work at Block Office



Village Development Committee play a vital role in implementing MGNREGS work

Lenja and Meshaguda are two villages in Mahuli Panchayat, Boipariguda Block, Koraput District. The distance between Lenja and Meshaguda is just two kilometres but people face difficulty in travelling between them as there is no connection road. The special Gramsabha programme of 2012 approved construction of a road but the work did not take place as planned. The villagers followed up on the issue through their Village Development Committees with the higher authorities as well as putting it before the subsequent Pallisabha and Gramsabha meetings. After repeated efforts, the same plan was integrated into the Panchayat plan. During the 2013-14 financial year, the job card holders of the two villages had a joint meeting and decided to apply to work on constructing the road under MGNREGS. They also applied for new job cards for eligible villagers, and took steps towards getting bank pass books opened. In total their efforts led to 22 new job cards being issued, so that a total of 70 job card holders (45 women and 25 men) applied to work on the connecting road. It was approved and notice was given by the Panchayat informing the same.

Unfortunately a well-known contractor of the area demanded to implement the work. However, the villagers opposed this and used their Village

Development Committees to propose that the work would be done by them under the supervision of the VDC leaders and the Gramasathi⁵ would monitor the day to day progress. The decision infuriated the contractor who claimed that he would use his influence to block it. The villagers' response was:

"we will not allow you to interfere in our work. Even if we do not get paid for this, it won't matter. We will be happily walking down a road that we built with our own hands".

The contractor desisted his efforts to block the villagers' plan. The Gramasathi called all the job seekers and the work started. Drinking water, shade and medical support was provided for the workers at the work site. After 18 days, one kilometre of the 2 kilometre stretch was completed. However a government official who came to inspect the work, informed the villagers that there would be a lengthy delay in payment. The villagers participated in a social audit where they raised the issue and also made a complaint to the Block Development Officer (BDO). Within three days, most of the outstanding wages were paid, and the balance was settled shortly after that. The Gramasathi stated:

"due to the MGNREGS training received from BKS, we learnt that in MGNREGS work no contractor is to be involved. That is why we were insisting that the work be done by the villagers. We also learnt about the MGNREGS work process and felt that we would do a better job than the contractors. We also decided to donate some of our wages to the village development fund."

▼ Awareness programme for women to increase job demand



⁵ Village coordination panel formed by the Government but selected through the Pallisabha. This panel helps community members apply for jobs under the MGNREGS.

Conclusion

Community Based Organisations (CBOs) are present at village, Panchayat and Block level. Now they are able to identify their issues and engage in advocacy at various levels, community leaders have emerged as social capital and they are helping communities to avail of various benefits under government schemes. Participation has increased in decision making processes such as pallisabha, gramsabha, and nodal meetings at block and district offices. Women are mobilized and participate in planning and raising issues using various

platforms. Communities have been accessing various benefits from different government schemes by adopting effective strategies through a CBO approach. There is more demand from communities and Pallisabha and Gramsabha decision making structures are now functioning more effectively. Communities collectively take decisions and have developed their own strategies to deal with various issues related to governance, conflict, and schematic misappropriations. Skills and knowledge have improved among community members on various schemes and its provisions. Participation of women and minorities in village decision making processes has also increased.

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