

# Facilitating community monitoring of government entitlements towards ensuring transparency and public accountability in Koraput District



## Overview and Background

Through its partner organisation South Orissa Voluntary Action (SOVA), Trócaire has supported community based monitoring of government benefit schemes in the Koraput District, Odisha, India since 2009. Many eligible families in this district do not receive their entitlements under these schemes due to lack of information, lack of participation and a dysfunctional community review mechanism. SOVA introduced a Community Monitoring and Information System (CMIS) in 39 villages under 3 Panchayats<sup>1</sup> in Koraput, to monitor the government's rural employment scheme, national food security scheme and different pension schemes at three levels – household, village and Panchayat. The purpose of the Community Monitoring and Information System has been to build communities' confidence and capacity to voice their needs, demand better service delivery, influence decision making and monitor execution and outcomes of the schemes so that they are more transparent, more accountable to the public they serve and ultimately more responsive to the needs of the people.

### BOX 1:

Structurally, the Community Monitoring and Information Chart is a 4ft x 5ft pictorial chart with 23 indicators which are used by the community to track the progress of basic issues such as no. of job cardholders, no. of eligible beneficiaries vs. no. of actual beneficiaries, receipt of wages under the job scheme, receipt of benefits under the Public Distribution System. Through monitoring, community members become aware of the different entitlements and why they are not accessing them.

In the Koraput District, approximately 65% of the population are tribal and Dalit<sup>2</sup> as per the 2011 census. The female literacy rate is 39% and female representation in the Panchayat Raj Institution (PRI)<sup>3</sup> is at 50%<sup>4</sup>. Though local

<sup>1</sup> Local self-governance structure part of the Panchayati Raj Institution (see footnote 3). It usually has jurisdiction over a number of small villages or "hamlets" and covers a population of up to 5,000 citizens.

<sup>2</sup> A Dalit is the term used for a section of Indian society traditionally considered 'Untouchable'. The Constitution of India recognises them as 'Scheduled Caste'.

<sup>3</sup> System of local governance in India comprising four tiers of government (Village, Panchayat, Block, District). Through these structures local people can influence official governance processes, including decisions on the utilisation of government development funds.

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.ordistricts.nic.in/district\\_profile/dist\\_glance.php](http://www.ordistricts.nic.in/district_profile/dist_glance.php)

communities have the power to review and monitor the accessibility and benefits of different social security schemes, and identify beneficiaries, local government officials still have control over the monitoring and approval process of the benefit schemes for eligible families. There is no other platform for community members to discuss the schemes and benefits except at Panchayat meetings and only village level representatives of the Panchayat, called ward members, participate in these meetings. Other community members are not even present at the meeting nor do they have any information about its functioning. Communities have no specific quantitative information about the food and social security schemes, and thus many eligible beneficiaries are excluded and deprived of their benefits.

## The Community Monitoring and Information System

The Community Monitoring and Information System introduced by SOVA involved developing an innovative community based monitoring tool with inputs and suggestions from community members gathered through different information sharing mechanisms. The process of developing the tool, called the Community Monitoring and Information Chart (CMIC) was as follows:

### Developing the Community Monitoring and Information Chart

#### Structure and functions of the Community Monitoring and Information Chart:

The chart is made of flex and is displayed in a visible area in each village. Village demography such as name of village, Panchayat, Block, total number of households, total population and caste is mentioned at the top. There are 16 columns and 24 rows. The columns refer to activities, indicator, baseline information and name of the 12 months. The 24 rows consist of 23 monitoring indicators and one row

▼ CMIC tracking of Jhiligan Village



#### First stage preparation

- Issues and challenges in availing different entitlements under the various schemes were identified and prioritised by communities in the 39 villages at village level meetings.

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- A 6ft x 4ft CMIC was drawn up with 29 indicators identified by the community, related to livelihood, health and education.

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- The indicators were shared with different stakeholders (Government officials at Panchayat and Block level, PRI members) for feedback.

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- Their feedback was that the number of indicators should be reduced, more focus given to monitoring the work scheme and that the tool should be based on the capacity of the community to manage data.

#### Finalisation of the tool

- After integrating feedback from different stakeholders and suggestions from the communities, 19 indicators were selected.

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- A sample CMIC was developed for field testing and shared with District Rural Development Agency (DRDA) officials.

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- DRDA officials' suggestions and the field test results were collected and discussed at community level. In the end, 23 indicators were included in the final version of the tool on three major schemes of government i.e. job scheme, food scheme and pension schemes.

naming the months. Each year starts in April (as per the government financial year) and is written in the local language with pictorial representation. The baseline column presents the status of the different government social security schemes to measure progressive changes against each month.

Each village has a Village Development Committee consisting of 11 members. These function as Community-Based Organisation (CBO) structures. These committees review the progress and gaps of the CMIC in their respective villages during monthly meetings. Three selected members of the committee collect the monthly information from households on the monitoring indicators, compile the information and share the compilation report at Village and Panchayat Development Committee meetings. At these meetings, all men and women from the village in question participate and review the compilation report. Beneficiary families present their issues and needs, whereas other community members give their suggestions to address these issues. Committee leaders and eligible beneficiaries co-develop a plan of action to follow up on issues raised. Trained volunteers or community leaders update the CMIC regularly. Each month the tracked information is compiled at Panchayat level and presented at different meetings at that level to provide information and address issues and gaps.

▲ Community Monitoring and Information Chart

**The 23 monitoring indicators displayed in the CMIC are:**

1. No. of families with a job card.
2. No. of families without a job card.
3. No. of families eligible for a job card.
4. No. of families that have applied for a job card.
5. No. of families with a saving pass book.
6. No. of applications for a saving pass book.
7. No. of applications for work under MGNREGA<sup>5</sup> scheme.
8. No. of families getting work under MGNREGA scheme.
9. No. of persons getting work under MGNREGA scheme.
10. No. of workdays created under MGNREGA scheme.
11. No. of families getting unemployment benefit under MGNREGA scheme.
12. No. of families with a ration card.
13. No. of families eligible for a ration card.
14. No. of applications for a ration card.
15. No. of families receiving an old age pension.
16. No. of families eligible for old age pension scheme.
17. No. of applications for old age pension scheme.
18. No. of families receiving a widow’s pension.
19. No. of families eligible for a widow’s pension.
20. No. of applications for a widow’s pension.
21. No. of families receiving a disability pension.
22. No. of families eligible for a disability pension.
23. No. of families that have applied for a disability pension.

<sup>5</sup> Government rural work scheme

## Strategy and Approaches to enhance effectiveness

To ensure successful implementation of the Community Monitoring and Information System and its effectiveness as a tool for social accountability, SOVA used the following strategy and approaches:

**Communication, Information and Capacity Building of different stakeholders:**

Effective communication strategies, access to information and capacity building have a direct impact on the quality of participation and on the overall success of the Community Monitoring and Information System. Informed communities are the key to effective CMIS implementation. The capacity of community, village volunteers and the leaders of the Village Development Committees is another key factor. The capacity to understand and analyse the government schemes is a basic prerequisite for undertaking CMIS implementation. This involves training and developing guides and training materials for the community members conducting the monitoring. Training a wider number of community members and different stakeholders can increase the critical mass of analytical skills within the community. Monitoring programmes by community members is a critical component of any development programme. SOVA conducted systematic training and capacity building programmes for community

members and CBO leaders on the Community Monitoring and Information Chart to collect information through constant monitoring and analysing the information and sharing it with the Panchayat if necessary at higher level for effective functioning of the village monitoring committees.



▲ Village volunteer orienting women on CMIC at Heruguda colony village



▲ Orientation to women leaders on Community Monitoring and Information Chart

**Strengthening the Community Based Organisations (CBOs):**

The Village Development Committee and Panchayat Development Committee leaders were responsible for implementation of the Community Monitoring and Information System and its related activities, from planning to implementation and monitoring. The approach largely focused on working with leaders in the community to increase awareness on the government schemes and on community rights more generally. It included training on the government schemes, technical and advocacy skills, capacity to mobilise and the effective use of media, responsibility and accountability to their own members. SOVA made an effort to promote an enabling environment for civil society and to build the organizational and technical capacity of CBOs.

**Advocacy:**

The most crucial and challenging element of a social accountability strategy is to be able to elicit a response from public officials and create a real change. The most effective

strategies usually involve direct interaction and negotiation with the concerned government counterparts. Village Development Committee and Panchayat Development Committee leaders have regularly participated in the meetings and interacted with government service providers regarding entitlements. The evidence provided in the CMIC enables them and other community representatives to conduct advocacy at Panchayat, Block and District administration level.

**Overall impact**

This programme started in 2009, and while substantial progress has taken place, deeper and more systemic changes are still required. There are still irregularities in the practical implementation of the work scheme (MGNREGA)<sup>6</sup>, the food scheme (PDS)<sup>7</sup> and the pension schemes, which means that many male and female beneficiaries are still unable to receive their full benefits through these schemes. However, clear progress has also been made as outlined below. Additionally, information from the Community Monitoring and Information Chart (CMIC) gives both community, government authorities and other stakeholders a complete community-led picture on the status of government job (MGNREGA), food (PDS) and pension schemes at the village level, providing clear evidence with which to conduct advocacy and negotiation towards ensuring the rights of eligible families. CMIC tracking over three years in 39 villages led to the following results:

**Table 1: Status of service delivery in three social security schemes after 3 years of CMIS in 39 villages**

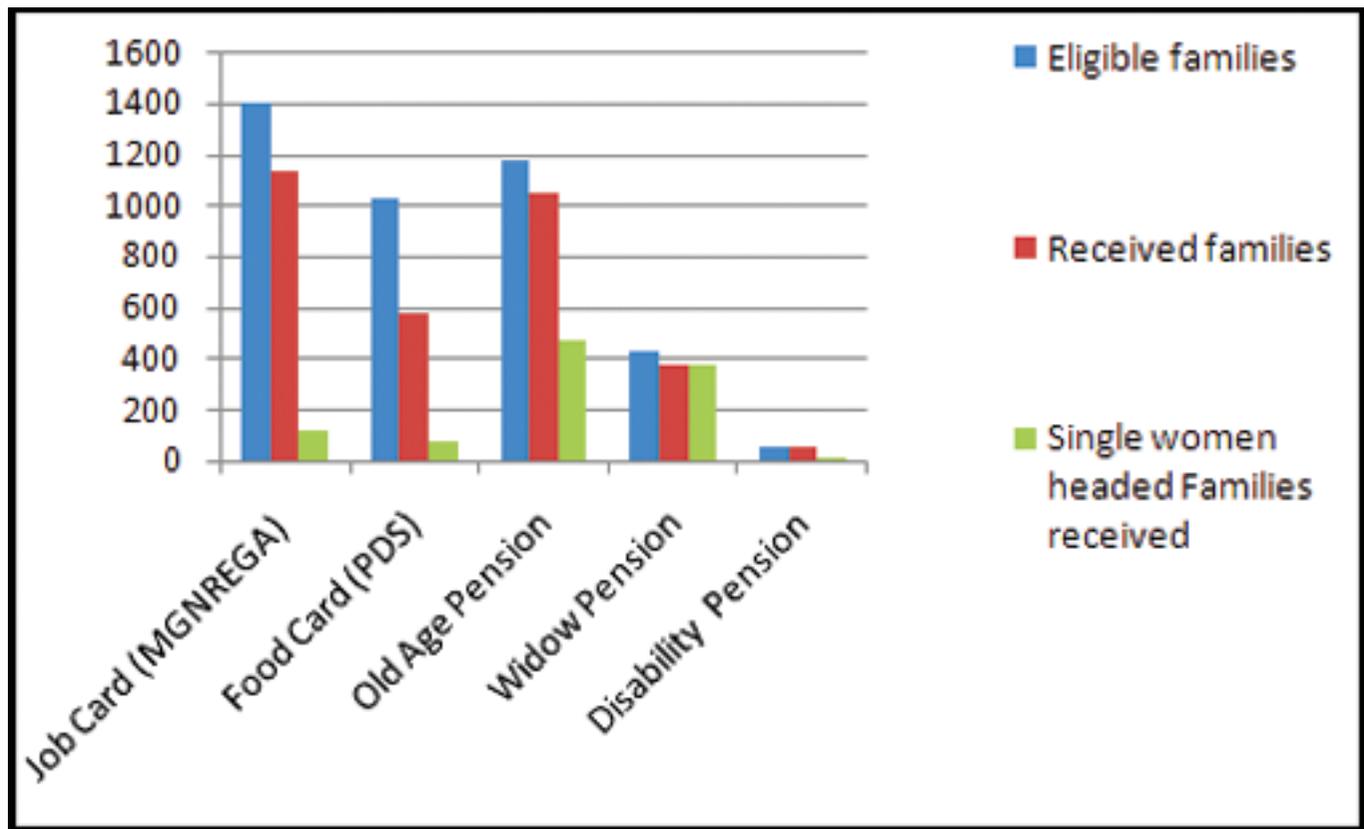
Government Schemes	No. of eligible families in 2009	No. of families that received benefit	No. of single women/widows families received benefit out of total beneficiaries
Job Card (MGNREGA)	1398	1128	117
Saving Pass Book <sup>8</sup> (MGNREGA)	1398	1128	117
Food Card (PDS)	1022	572	77
Old Age Pension	1172	1044	472
Widow's Pension	426	378	378
Disability Pension	56	56	13

<sup>6</sup> MGNREGA (the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act) is a government job scheme that guarantees rural households 100 days of paid work every year doing unskilled manual labour.

<sup>7</sup> The Public Distribution System (PDS) is a government food security system in India. It distributes subsidized food and non-food items to poor families.

<sup>8</sup> A saving pass book is required by job cardholders in order to withdraw wages.

Graph 1: Status of service delivery in three social security schemes after 3 years of CMIS in 39 villages



*“Moke budhabudi pension mila, ebke susta hali - I got my old age pension and now I can live in peace. During village monitoring using the monitoring chart, our village committee leaders identified me as an old age pensioner and they supported me in applying for the benefits card, which I received after four months from the Panchayat. And regularly over the past six months I have been getting 300 INR (6 dollars) every month. Before I struggled to get food for myself; sometimes my relatives had to support me as I have no children or any other family support. This 300 INR saves my life – it is not enough but it helps towards buying rice for the month and I feel I am entitled to this money.” - Dalimbo Muduli.*



▲ Dalimbo Muduli, Balipadarguda Village

**Increased community participation in democratic governance (more process oriented):**

The information from the Community Monitoring and Information Chart (CMIC) provides evidence and creates scope for village leaders and eligible beneficiaries to participate at Panchayat and Block level meetings to raise their issues. Previously tribal and Dalit families were not part of these meetings. Only a few Panchayat Raj Institution representatives, some middle men, literate persons and a few eligible beneficiaries used to attend meetings and the decision-making was the remit of government officials. During a baseline study it was found that only 30% of eligible men and 10% of eligible women used to attend the meetings, but after developing the CMIC, this changed. Community leaders started identifying their issues and improved their knowledge on their entitlements. Self-confidence increased among the families, and this resulted in increased participation at Panchayat level meetings. Now up to 70% of eligible men and 40% eligible women attend. Increased participation encourages the community to address other village issues besides the social security schemes. Communities have started raising their voice regarding their health and education entitlements. Also, they have developed capacity on their entitlements related to different programmes. Communities have mobilized around getting a child care centre, drinking water facilities, schools and teachers, regular immunization, and irrigation support for cultivation.



▲ Village volunteer orienting women at Beheraguda Village, Lima Panchayat

**Improved public accountability:**

The Community Monitoring and Information Chart gives a real picture about the status of entitlement of communities. The beneficiaries have acquired knowledge about their entitlements. Panchayat Raj Institution representatives, beneficiaries, community leaders are discussing their rights with evidence from the CMIC at Panchayat and Block nodal meetings. This process is enforced to improve accountability within the governance system. Village Development Committee leaders share the collected information with elected representatives to highlight the need for the provision of key entitlements. During these meetings, joint plans are made by the government and village development committee members to address gaps in the system. This helps the government to become more responsive to people’s needs; in addition this process also improved relations between the community and government.

**Community empowerment:**

Experience shows that community based monitoring can promote empowerment by increasing the voice of the poor. Women are now regularly participating in Panchayat and Block nodal meetings and getting information from government officials. They are actively participating in village development committee meetings and taking decisions on village development. These monthly meetings and



▲ Damu Mali of maliguda supporting for tracking.tif

community discussions on different issues related to vulnerable families create scope for families to come forward and advocate for their entitlements. Through linkages with Block and District administration offices, communities have gained the power to advocate for their rights and entitlements. Communities have become empowered in identifying issues, participating in decision-making processes and mobilising government resources.

In the structure of Village Development Committee, 50% of members are reserved for women. Of the Governing body, a woman should be in the role of President, Secretary or Treasurer. This structure promotes women’s participation in decision making at the village level. As some of the CMIC indicators also give information about women’s benefits under the different schemes, women have become more aware of their entitlements. In review meetings, priority is given to single, widowed and elderly women and while developing monthly plans of action for entitlement, the majority of women are included for accessing benefits.

**Challenges:**

**Threats from middle men due to losing control over beneficiary allotment:**

Previously middle men were involved in obtaining the benefits from these schemes and passing them onto beneficiaries. They were involved in the village level meetings and as they are among the most influential people in the village, they are seen to be able to bring great changes in the community. After SOVA initiated this project, community leaders and eligible families have been directly addressing their own issues, are motivated to ensure and demand their rights as a community approach and have been getting their benefits. However, this has resulted in threats from these middle men who see their role becoming irrelevant.

**Regular change of trained village volunteers for regular tracking is a concern:**

When village volunteers are trained by SOVA, they tend to be subsequently head hunted by the local government, instead of staying on to manage the CMI. Presently there are lots of government programmes going on in villages, and therefore local government is offering incentives for literate and trained village youth to be local volunteers for these programmes. Thus retaining village volunteers has been a considerable challenge.

**Delay in receiving entitlements decreases community faith in the monitoring tool:**

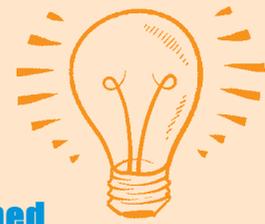
While addressing the problems within the implementation of the schemes, some beneficiaries expected to see immediate benefits and their faith in the community monitoring tool wanes when some of the issues take longer to address than they initially anticipated. To mitigate this,

SOVA conducted meetings with bankers and other government functionaries to relay concerns around delays, as well as inviting government officials to participate in village meetings, so villagers can directly communicate with them and hear reasons for the delays. These measures increased their hope and faith of getting the benefits.

**Community expectations without understanding government norms create mistrust of the system:**

As mentioned above, involving government officials in community meetings and discussions helped in understanding the cause of delay and reasons for not getting the benefit.

*“Goan kutumbo amor goan re chitra dekhi moke pension pain bachila ari panchyat thanu card dela - I registered myself through the community monitoring chart as a beneficiary for a pension and the local government gave me a widow’s pension card. After the death of my husband 3 years ago, I was really suffering to manage my family. I have 3 children, two girls and one boy. The eldest girl is 15. I was doing day labouring and earned about 700 to 800 INR (10 dollars) per month which was our only source of income – but it was not enough. I shared my issue with the Village Development Committee and they supported me in submitting an application to the Panchayat for a widow’s pension. After a year I got a pension card and since last year I have been receiving 300 INR (6 dollars) each month. This amount helps me to purchase PDS rice and other household groceries for me and my children.*”



**Lessons learned**

**Communities accepted the pictorial monitoring tool using local language:**

Using a pictorial tool in the local language with indicators related to their daily survival made it easier for communities to accept and monitor. It has provided 100% percent accuracy in entitlement monitoring at local level. Previously tribal women, widows, single women and old women had no access to community platforms to address their own issues and to recognise their eligibility for entitlements under the different schemes. The Community Monitoring and Information System has given them such a platform. Now 89% of widows and 92% of elderly women from the project villages are included under the pension scheme.

**Number of indicators in the monitoring tool should be based on the capacity of the community to manage data:**

Community could not able to manage the huge number of data was realise during finalisation of CMIS Chart. Initially 29 numbers of monitoring indicator were identified but it failed to implement in community level.

**Community based monitoring really depends on good facilitators and facilitating organisations:**

Community based monitoring takes time. It takes time for communities to understand why they are monitoring. Therefore facilitators need a lot of patience and require support from all levels of government and a multitude of players with differing skills and capacities. The role of facilitators are key, not least because they ensure that data should be gathered systematically and consistently from individuals, households and communities.

## Role of SOVA

- Orientation and training to communities especially village youth and village leaders on CMIC and data management.
- Practical demonstration at village level for two months and collection of information from household level.
- Data management facilitation and support. supportnagement.
- Ensure job scheme, food scheme and pension schemes are monitored at household level.
- Compile records of findings and support village leaders to present cumulative findings at the Village and Panchayat Development Committee meetings.

## Conclusion:

The Community Monitoring and Information Chart is a pictorial tool that helps even illiterate people understand and take ownership for their village issues. It has proven to be more effective than the methods adopted by the Government through using the register. It is community-friendly and easier to track by both literate and illiterate people. The implementation process increases curiosity among the community as it provides a picture of the village with regards to those who have benefitted and those who are waiting to benefit. This increases community participation especially among women. Presently the Government has given responsibility to the Panchayats to ensure the rights of every family through family tracking but the Panchayats have been using registers to collect information at village level, which effectively excludes the participation of illiterate people. The Community Monitoring and Information Chart could be replicable in all villages of a Panchayat. Different government projects like Odisha Livelihood Mission (OLM) and the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) have given ownership to communities to improve the livelihoods and health status of vulnerable families. The Community Monitoring and Information System could be easily replicated to monitor these government programs.

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