

Citizens conducting social audit of government work under NREGS in Unnao (UP)



[editor](#) · 16:14, 21 May 2008 · 16208 views · 4 min read



The preparations are underway to conduct the social audit of National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS) in Miyaganj development block of Unnao district in UP.

The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act 2005 bestows the rights to citizens to conduct a social audit of the work carried out under the act.

Before this Act came into place, the citizens had the only choice to lodge a complaint with concerned officer reporting the drawbacks or shortcomings. It was completely on the discretion of the officer whether to take that

complaint forward and act upon it, or drop it. The citizens were mute spectators and the right to act upon a complaint or turn a blind's eye to it was the privileges of the officers.

From this perspective, the right of an ordinary citizen to conduct a social audit on development work under the NREGA is a revolutionary step forward in Indian democracy.

It is only a matter of time that the people of this country will begin demanding similar rights to conduct a social audit on other development schemes of the government.

The way governance functions in India, those-in-power doesn't feel accountable to the people. Those people who are part of the governance mechanisms feel that to act, to decide and to spend the public exchequer money are their special prerogatives. Therefore it is not surprising that when people are demanding information from the authorities about different schemes and government departments, the officials are under severe duress. They aren't used to this kind of accountability.

On 4 December 2006, when a native of Unnao district Yashwant Rao had demanded information from the Block Development Officer of Miyaganj using Right-to-Information Act (RTI) regarding the work carried out under the NREGS, he was denied. When Yashwant lodged a complaint about this denial of information at the UP State Information Commission, he then received a letter from the block development office informing him to deposit Rs 1,58,400 and take the documents he wanted copies of. Under the RTI Act, if the information is provided within one month, then the receiver needs to pay Rs 2 per page. But the block development office had stamped an arbitrary rate of Rs 2,400 per gram panchayat to provide information for the NREGS work carried out in 66 gram panchayats. After more than a year and 10 hearings at UP State Information Commission, the block development office was finally ordered to provide all the information free-of-cost to the applicant (Yashwant).

In April 2008, documents related to NREGS work in 65 out of 66 gram panchayats were finally provided to Yashwant.

Although under NREGA the information related to the work carried out under NREGS should be provided within 7 days on actual costs, but still it is a triumph of people's democratic rights even if they have received it after one and a half years! The officials tried their level best to delay or derail the process at every step, but eventually they had to adhere to the legal provisions under the NREGA and RTI Act, which strengthens democracy at the grassroots tremendously.

Now the local people of Miyaganj block and other citizens with support from social organizations are conducting a social audit for the next 6 days in each of the gram panchayats to verify the information related to development work which is provided by the authorities. This kind of democratic and empowering activity in this region is not heard of so far. In this social audit, citizens from other districts of UP like Lucknow, Hardoi, Kanpur, Varanasi, Gazipur and Ballia and some people from other states like Haryana and Rajasthan are also taking active part.

Currently about 100 citizens who will be leading the social audit are being briefed and oriented at the Block Development office of Miyaganj block in Unnao. They are studying the muster rolls provided by the government and also planning on ways to sensitize people they meet to be more aware and proactive in protecting their own rights.

Dr Sandeep Pandey

(The author is a senior social activist, recipient of Ramon Magsaysay Award 2002 and heads National Alliance of People's Movements (NAPM) in India)



editor

Please send your comments to editor@assamtimes.org