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Finally, the gram pradhans respect the rights of the people



[editor](#) · 16:06, 25 May 2008 · 13436 views · 3 min read



Two local residents of Miyaganj block, Unnao district (UP, India) Virendra Singh and Yashwant Rao, had written to Block Development Officer (BDO) of Miyaganj seeking support to conduct the social audit of NREGS. The BDO wrote to every pradhan in this block seeking their cooperation in submitting all documents pertinent to the NREGS. On behalf of all pradhans, the president of the Pradhans' association, had filed a writ petition in the High Court demanding a stay order, which she did get on 22 May. It was this stay order which had spread the perception that the pradhans have obtained a stay against the social audit.

However the people's movements conducting the social audit have taken a position that the citizens are given the legal right to conduct a social audit of NREGS related work under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA). Conducting this social audit doesn't depend upon the support or permission of the BDO. The documents needed to conduct a social audit have already been obtained under the Right to Information (RTI) Act 2005. Therefore the social audit can be conducted even without the support of pradhans by directly talking to the labourers/ workers and verifying the work done under NREGS on-site. The people have decided to exercise this right and conduct the social audit in Miyaganj.

On fifth day of social audit, the work was paralysed by the ruckus created by the goons sent by pradhans in four gram panchayats, namely – sindhari khurd, makhdoompur shah safi, deepagarhi and mustafabaad. These goons of Pradhans were drunk, and wielded lathis (batons) to terrorise the citizens conducting the social audit. However by evening the resistance withered away and the people could resume the social audit process.

In presence of BDO, it was clarified to the pradhans that the motive of conducting a social audit was not to instigate some action on pradhans but to fully implement all the provisions of the NREGA. The real power in democracy rests with the people and therefore the struggle to safeguard, protect and exercise the rights of people to conduct a social audit, is fundamentally an empowerment process strengthening the rights of the most disadvantaged.

Most of the pradhans have understood the main objectives of the NREGS social audit, and expressing their respect to democracy and the rights of the people, they have assured of their cooperation in the audit.

In gram panchayat Nurulla Nagar, earlier it was reported that the photocopy of the bill shows a purchase of 3000 bricks for Rs 74,481. Today the gram pradhan showed the original receipt and clarified that while doing the photocopy of the bill, the figure of '33,000' was copied as '3,000' because of a folded corner.

Earlier in social audit, gross inadequacies were reported from Gram

Panchayat Aaseevan. The complete name of this gram panchayat is Aaseevan Lok Man.

The number of local rights campaigners and activists leading this audit is increasing - including Yeshwant Rao and Virendra Singh. Local wing of Bhartiya Kissan Union has also provided full support.

Dr Sandeep Pandey

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