

Gram Pradhans tried to disrupt the citizen's social audit



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This social audit is being carried out by the citizens on the development work done under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS).

The Miyaganj block development office had earlier provided documents related to NREGS after one and a half years struggle at UP State Information Commission under Right to Information Act. These documents are being verified by the citizens themselves in the ongoing social audit.

The Gram Pradhans had spread the rumour that high court has granted a stay-order against the social audit. In many Gram Panchayats including Bhadua, Barha Kala, Kulha Ataura and Korari khurd, the social audit work remained suspended for few hours owing to the rumour. However when people demanded a copy of the High Court stay-order, the Gram Pradhans couldn't produce any copy. The people thereby decided that unless they get to see a copy of the stay order, they will not stop the social audit.

The resistance put up by the Gram Pradhans in some gram panchayats on the pretext of a rumour to disrupt the social audit, slowly started giving way to the mounting public pressure to continue the social audit. Only in one gram panchayat, Korari Khurd, the social audit remained paralyzed for the entire day because of never-ending arguments between the gram pradhan and the social audit team. Interestingly enough, the people we could speak to in this village, reported that their 'job cards' are with the Gram Pradhan. Job cards under NREGS should be with the worker at all times.

Gram pradhans are resistant to the social audit because it will potentially expose the gross-irregularities, corruption and in-discrepancies in the work done under NREGS. NREGS is playing a phenomenal role in empowering the weakest sections of the society to hold the 'mighty' accountable. Many gram pradhans have accepted verbally that irregularities have taken place in the NREGS work. It is only a matter of few days now when findings of the social audit will expose them all in a public hearing on 28 May.

It is evident from the stiff resistance of Gram pradhans to the citizen's social audit that despite of the legal provisions under National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) and Right to Information Act (RTI)

that empowers a common citizen with the right to hold those-in-power accountable and increases transparency, the ruling class is trying unsuccessfully to derail the process because of its vested interest.

The social audit team met 108 people in Gram Panchayat Kulha Ataura who wanted to get work under NREGS but their job cards were not made. Annat Ram (son of Bhola) said that he had submitted his photograph 3 times for the job card in past two years and the job card was finally delivered to him this morning. Upon further investigation, the social audit team discovered that just few hours earlier that morning, most of the job cards were distributed in this village. These job cards already show an entry for 10 days work to dig a water body 'Chaptenwa Talaab' further deep. Ram Baran (son of Madhav) said that although he didn't get a single day of work, still his job card shows 24 days of work. Muster Roll obtained through RTI application, didn't show his name even.

The job card of Bhaiya Lal (son of Ram Prasad) shows 68 days of work although in reality he got work only for 4 days. About 65 people in this gram panchayat are below the poverty line (BPL), possessing a BPL 'rashion' card to get food grains and sugar from the public distribution system (PDS). But in the last 5 years, none of these 65 people got even a single grain from PDS. Antyodaya 'rashion' cards do show some distribution but in reality it hasn't taken place.

Despite of the 'High Court stay order' rumour and stiff resistance put up by the Gram Pradhans and other vested interests, it gives me hope that the steely resolve of the people to conduct the social audit related to their own development and welfare, could prevail. The social audit, as expected, is exposing gross-irregularities.

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