

Guaranteeing Employment, Guaranteeing Livelihood: MGNREGA and INRM

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Linking INRM with MGNREGS can prove to be a win-win option, with villagers building infrastructure on their lands are long term assets and being paid for their labour by the government.

MGNREGA (2005)

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA, 2005), is a landmark legislation in India's policy-making history. It marks the country's first substantial social security cover for the rural poor. This Act is particularly significant, in that it recognizes and establishes the Right to Work as fundamental to leading a life of dignity. This is in keeping with India's rights-based approach to development.

MGNREGA, 2005, legally mandates provision of work within 15 days to anyone who is willing to do unskilled manual labour on public works at a statutory minimum wage, subject to a limit of 100 days of work, per nuclear family, per year. The Act clearly articulates transparency safeguards, which include the maintenance of records (job cards recording entitlements, written demand for work, muster rolls, measurement books and asset registers) held in the custody of multiple stakeholders, issue of dated receipts, strict time-bound allocation of work and payment of wages, worksite information boards, village-level monitoring committees, regular block-, district-and state-level work inspections and social audits.

The Act has four main objectives, as articulated by NREGA Operational Guidelines 2008, issued by the Ministry of Rural Development:

- Provision of a secure social safety net for vulnerable groups, through demand-based, unskilled, wage employment.
- Contribution of durable assets for improved social and physical rural infrastructure, which address factors of chronic poverty—drought, deforestation and soil erosion.
- Empowerment of rural masses through education in a political rights-based language.

- ♦ Strengthening grass-roots democracy by employing people to act as vigilantes, and ensuring accountability and transparency in governance through the institution of social audit.

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MGNREGA, in the current national policy context, is the flagship legislation of the incumbent United Progressive Alliance (UPA)-led central government. It seems that the Act is now a veritable political cash cow, with significant electoral gains for political parties. Where ever the Act has been implemented in its true spirit, the MGNREGS is transforming the geography and income-security status of villages and entire districts. Accordingly, the budgetary allocation to the programme has increased manifold over the years and is currently pegged at a whopping Rs 40,000 crores (400 billion) for the fiscal year 2011–12, making it the most ambitious and expensive development intervention of the national government. The sheer volume of resources (financial, human, administrative and environmental), engaged in the implementation of this Act makes it a significant agenda in public policy debate today in the country.

INTEGRATED NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT (INRM)

INRM evolved in response to several developments in the global agronomy, following growing demands on food production and the ecological unsustainability of prevalent technological and chemical solutions. It championed the cause of localized, grass-roots action research methods as opposed to the top-down, technocratic approach of international agricultural

institutes. The conditions that INRM opposed have and continue to be a stark reality of the agricultural sector in India and most other developing countries. Furthermore, the decline of small and marginal farming prospects, traditional organic

farming methods and the growing digital gap between urban and rural areas have had disastrous implications for the bulk of the Indian population that continues to be dependent on agriculture and agro-related occupations as their main source of livelihood.

One of the definitions of INRM states it as 'a conscious process of incorporating the multiple aspects of natural resource use (be they bio-physical, socio-political or economic) into a system of sustainable management to meet the production goals of farmers and other direct users (food security, profitability, risk aversion) as well as the goals of the wider community (poverty alleviation, welfare of future generations, environmental conservation).' Simply put, it combines managing the use of natural resources along with their conservation and sustenance by augmenting social, physical, human, natural and financial capital. The INRM promotes the construction and educated, rational use of simple (and complex, where required) mud/stone/cement structures, depending on the topography, which aids land development and water harvesting towards sustainable livelihoods.

The potential benefits of an INRM-based the approach to land and water harvesting in predominantly rain-fed and mono-cropped Indian agriculture are enormous. INRM is a cost-effective way of arresting soil degradation, drought and famine, and

improving productivity while ensuring ecological sustainability. In the face of pronounced climate change; these benefits cannot be underestimated in the short and/or the long run. However, a highly diversified topography would imply that each agro-climatic zone would require its own set of unique INRM technologies and models with further intra-zonal variations. Moreover, a dedicated space for policy dialogue and sustained grass-roots action is required, to realize the true potential of INRM by allowing for large-scale activity.

During the decade 1980–90, India introduced watershed development in areas characterized by rain-fed agriculture and untouched by the gains of the Green Revolution. Much hype was created over the immense usefulness and relative

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simplicity of watersheds. An International Food Policy Research Institute study in 2002 of watershed projects in Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh concluded that the hype, however, was premature and restricted to a few exceptional stories. The study found that high

levels of public participation, sound technical input, effective management by NGOs or an NGO-Government collaboration, and ensuring the sharing of net gains among all local residents were the keys to successful watershed projects. Nearly two decades after the introduction of watersheds, the need to see more significant results may draw us to pay more attention to the above lessons. While implementing INRM, which further builds on the watershed approach, we must, therefore, pay greater attention to the social capital in determining its success.



RELEVANCE OF INRM TO THE ACT

The MGNREGA is, fundamen-tally, a guarantee of employment in rural areas. Hence, the works necessarily have to be labour-intensive and non-skill specific. Accordingly, the Act bans any machine works and permits a whole range of earthen works, which meet the above requirements.

INRM encourages creativity in the planning of works, relying significantly on common sense, indigenous knowledge and the collective aspirations of the residents.

An employment guarantee such as this one was foreseen to potentially generate a huge response from the poor, the rural unemployed, the under-employed and the seasonally employed households. Thus, it was decided that all this labour must be directed towards the creation of productive structures that aid water harvesting, land development and rural connectivity. The eligibility criteria for determining permissible works under MGNREGA champion the cause of rural development through the advancement of rural livelihoods and infrastructure while addressing factors of poverty such as drought, deforestation and soil erosion. Schedule I of the Act lists the permissible works under the following categories.

- **Water Resources:** Conservation and harvesting of water resources; renovation and maintenance of traditional water bodies; micro and minor irrigation works; flood control and protection works.
- **Afforestation:** Tree plantations by the

Forest department, in convergence with the Horticulture department, as measures of drought proofing.

- **Land Development:** Land levelling and construction of earthen *bunds* on farmlands.

- **Rural Connectivity:** Construction of all-weather earthen roads, including culverts and drains, where appropriate.

- **Require Maintenance:** All the above assets created, to ensure durability.¹

All of the above works seek to strengthen the existing natural base of rural areas while enhancing productivity and encouraging a more efficient use of natural resources to improve livelihoods. This is in absolute tandem with the goals of INRM, which works on these with scientific insight and in an integrated manner so as not to lose the effectiveness of the works undertaken.

It has been repeatedly observed in MGNREGA schemes that administrative imagination is rather limited in permitting a diverse range of works. Sanctions are typically given for the construction of *kaccha* roads, sizeable ponds and irrigation wells. These are mostly ill-planned and inefficiently executed. Most structures are left incomplete due to lags in the measurement of work and subsequent wage payment. These structures do not get the requisite attention because they are economical in their budgetary outlays. The authorities show greater enthusiasm about the construction of

¹ Note that all of these works whereas mostly undertaken on public lands are also encouraged on private lands. However, a priority list of eligible beneficiaries stipulates taking up works on lands belonging to the Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribe households, beneficiaries of land reforms, Indira Awas Yojana (IAY), Below Poverty Line (BPL) families and lands of small/marginal farmers.

irrigation check dams and concrete road works, where both the contractors and the officers can indulge in some rent-seeking.

INRM encourages creativity in the planning of works, relying significantly on common sense, indigenous knowledge and the collective aspirations of the residents. This, at the same time, necessitates the congregation of the village for active planning, implementation and monitoring of the works. Thus, INRM strengthens grass-roots democratic institutions, which ensure the success of MGNREGA schemes that rely heavily on the beneficiaries' vigilance and monitoring.

In several rural areas on the periphery of or within accessible proximity of urban areas, the wage rate under the MGNREGA is less than the market or city wage rate. Moreover, labour work on non-MGNREGS works is remunerated on a daily basis as opposed to the weekly/fortnightly payment schedule of MGNREGA, which is further routinely violated. However, under INRM, people are ready to settle for slightly lower wages due to the non-monetary benefits to farmland productivity, which bears an immediate effect on the foodsecurity of the households and their livelihood. Furthermore, increased participation on the works ensures collective monitoring of timely payments.

Most important, the MGNREGA is an employment guarantee for only 100 days in a year. This makes it strictly a safety net and does not help households reach livelihood security. Introducing INRM in MGNREGA would help households gain wage payment through 100 days of work plus economic value-addition of existing assets such as land and the collective natural resource assets in the community, helping them inch towards a more secure livelihood.

KANDHAMAL DISTRICT, ORISSA

The scenic Kandhamal district lies in a high altitude zone (300–1,100 m above sealevel) in the Eastern Ghats, characterized by inter-spreading, thickly forested hill ranges and narrow valley tracts (National Informatics Centre, NIC, 2010). Despite this rich natural resource base, Kandhamal is one of the least developed districts in Orissa and one of the poorest in the country.

Livelihoods

The existing sources of livelihood for the rural population here are agriculture, livestock rearing and forest produce. Agricultural practices, productivity and output are highly sub-optimal. Only nine per cent of the geographical area is cultivated. The net sown area is only 15 per cent, of which up-lands, medium lands and lowlands constitute roughly 82 per cent, 12 per cent and 6 per cent, respectively. Despite a low population density, the average sown area is 0.5 ha per family—that too of very poor quality. As per government records, the irrigation potential created is about 11 per cent of the net sown area. Low productivity, erratic rainfall and meagre landholdings force the tribal people to practice shifting cultivation in forests, to grow black gram, paddy, millet and pulses.

The share of income from the forest produce such as *mahua* (used to brew country liquor), *siali* leaves (used to make organic leaflet dining plates and bowls), *tendu* leaves (used to roll traditional cigarettes), firewood, charcoal, jackfruit and other seasonal fruits is quite significant. Most people rear livestock such as goats, pigs and poultry to meet the needs during an emergency but the herd sizes are always small due to the risk involved in case of an outbreak of disease. Besides subsistence crops during the *kharif* season, most people grow spices such as turmeric and ginger.

In December 2007 and August 2008, Kandhamal witnessed severe communal riots between the Hindu tribal and the Christian Dalit communities. Tensions continued for almost a year after the rioting was controlled in late 2008. However, stability did not return to the affected areas until 2009, when riot victims were able to return to their villages and resume their daily life.

RELEVANCE OF THE COLLABORATION IN KANDHAMAL

Poverty and Agrarian Crisis

The people of Kandhamal are afflicted by abject poverty and lack of livelihood opportunities. Poor infrastructure, scarce husbandry of natural resources, low agricultural productivity, lack of access to credit and technology, and the poor health and literacy status of the families contribute to widespread poverty in the region. For the majority, land is the main resource, besides labour, and agriculture is the principal occupation. Because of the risk of crop failure due to moisture stress in the uplands and flash floods in the lowlands, agriculture does not attract adequate investments and the returns are low. The region has limited ground water and there is virtually no scope for large and medium irrigation projects due to the undulating nature of the terrain. The younger generation sees agriculture as less remunerative than wage employment in towns and cities. The nutrient status and the productivity of the farmland, thus, are on the decline. Low productivity leads to poor husbandry, which further reduces productivity, resulting in widespread resource degradation and impoverishment of the people.

An integrated approach to natural resource management, focusing on the efficient management of soil, water and vegetation resources, is extremely important.

INRM provides multiple alternatives for harvesting the high water run-off in this region. These options have largely remained untapped and a very low percentage of the net sown area is irrigated. An integrated approach to natural resource

management (NRM), focusing on the efficient management of soil, water and vegetation resources, is extremely important. INRM would not only help to optimize and increase the productivity of land and water resources but also ensure household food security and eliminate mass poverty in the region. The techniques and measures used for rainwater harvesting and land husbandry are along the lines of the works proposed under MGNREGA. Such livelihoods assets creation combined with agriculture extension would eventually reduce the people's dependence on unskilled labour work.

Interventions in the natural environment, however, can take time to deliver the full-potential results. Thus, if INRM is implemented under MGNREGS, wage payments can cushion these time lags for beneficiaries while also providing funds to undertake INRM works on their lands. On an average, 150 to 200 person-days of employment can be generated for developing every hectare of such land; and opportunities in each village and can provide 100 days of employment to its residents for at least three to five years.

Livelihood Insecurity

Routine life in Kandhamal has been gravely disturbed due to the riots in 2008–09. Constant curfew led to inaccessibility to daily necessities such as food, fuel and fodder. Minority Christians were shunted out of their

villages and had to live in refugee camps for close to a year whereas several tribal persons were wanted in criminal rioting cases and were absconding to avoid arrest. Uprooted from their natural residence, people faced acute food insecurity for a year or two. Immediate intervention was required in these areas to help the people recover and rebuild their lives and livelihood.

MGNREGA was a ready reckoner because people only had to demand work and they would be provided it. However, the victims who had lost animals, houses and land in the rioting, had to incur great costs, to rebuild their lives. The cost of making their lands cultivable, left fallow for the period, could be borne under the MGNREGA budget and taken up in the scheme of INRM planning.

Technical Support

The smooth and proper implementation of INRM requires a strong technical support system. Either technical agencies from civil society needed to come forward to provide the expertise or the existing technical staff base of the administration needed to be expanded. However, expanding the official capacity would mean a lot of time for recruitment, training and then added vigilance. Given the substantial number of civil society organizations already involved in livelihoods-based work in Kandhamal, there was a ready base to tap into.

PRADAN, working in Kandhamal since 2000, was in a unique position to be able to lead this collaboration of INRM under MGNREGS for its long-standing engagement in other

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livelihood activities in the district. PRADAN was already doing INRM under watershed, Orissa Tribal Empowerment and Livelihoods Programme (OTELP) and Oxfam-funded projects in Kandhamal. Apart from this, it has been leading a strong and widespread network of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) in diverse livelihood strengthening initiatives such

as improving the prevalent agricultural and horticultural practices, livestock rearing and development of rural enterprises. MGNREGS also provides access to larger funds for the expansion and popularization of INRM, both with the administration and the people. Thus, strong grass-roots networks and experience in social mobilization, capacity building and INRM activities made the PRADAN team in Kandhamal the most competent to demonstrate and introduce the possibilities of collaboration between INRM and MGNREGA.

CONCEPTUALIZATION OF THE PROGRAMME

PRADAN's engagement in using INRM with MGNREGA is founded on its firm belief in the need to bring INRM to the mainstream. The Kandhamal team had been in discussions with the district administration to pursue INRM under the MGNREGS, ever since its introduction in 2006. The resident teams even prepared an indicative INRM plan for two villages, namely, Madinat (Budrukia Gram Panchayat, Balliguda block) and Gunjigaon (Sirtiguda GP, K. Nuagaon block). However, these were not approved of by the district.

The then District Collector *Manish Verma*, showed keenness in INRM. He organized a

visit of the district departmental staff (departments of soil and water conservation, watershed and District Rural Development Authority) to a village in Mayurbhanj district in Orissa where PRADAN had done substantial INRM work. This

was before the first incidents of rioting in December 2007. Following the exposure visit, Verma was keen to take up similar projects in other parts of the district. However, the second incidents of rioting occurred in August 2008 and Verma was transferred from the district. The new Collector, Krishan Kumar, focused all his efforts on fostering communal harmony and proposed shifting the introduction of INRM to the next year. Eight months into inter-community peace-building efforts, Kumar became interested in INRM. He began planning for it at the district level and suggested the inclusion of other NGOs apart from PRADAN to be part of the initiative. It was decided that 'INRM under MGNREGA' would be tested as a pilot project in select villages of some blocks in Kandhamal district. The Collector's efforts were strongly backed by the Special Administrator for Kandhamal Affairs, Madhusudan Padhi. It was primarily because of the initiative taken by these two enterprising bureaucrats that this programme took off.

A list of 300 villages was drawn up in seven blocks, namely Balliguda, Daringbadi, K. Nuagaon, Phiringia, Raikia, Tikabali and Tumudibandh, as pilot villages. PRADAN was selected as the nodal NGO and assigned to train and assist seven other partner NGOs (SWATI, PRADATA, JAGRUTI, Kalpavriksha, Seva Bharti, Council of Professional Social Workers and Samanwita) for proper

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implementation of the above programme. Each NGO was assigned approximately 30–40 villages per block whereas PRADAN was allotted double the figure (approximately 60–80). The NGOs were involved in orienting pilot villages about MGNREGA, collecting

baseline-data surveys and preparing micro-plans along with resident villagers. The NGOs were also to extend support to villages during the course of implementation of their plans. All the stakeholders, administration, civil society organizations and field staff were trained and given clear briefs on their respective roles and responsibilities in the scheme of things.

PRADAN had already demonstrated INRM work to the residents of two villages—Poilasahi and Gunjigaon in Barakhama GP, Balliguda block. The demonstrations were supported by the LWR (Lutheran World Reserves) in Poilasahi and Oxfam in Gunjigaon. PRADAN was also active in implementing OTELP in 33 villages of Balliguda block. Its engagement with INRM, its processes, constituent structures and their impact had been observed and appreciated, and because of the success, there was a general air of enthusiasm.

IMPLEMENTING INRM UNDER MGNREGA

The Basic Framework of the Pilot Projects

In October 2009, at a meeting chaired by Madhusudan Padhi at Kandhamal district headquarters, a framework was decided upon to implement INRM under MGNREGS, with the assistance of NGOs.

PRADAN, Balliguda, was chosen as the nodal NGO for the pilot owing to its expertise and enterprise in encouraging the district to take

up INRM work. Seven more field NGOs were identified to provide assistance in the implementation of the programme. The partner NGOs were identified on the basis of established grass-roots networks in the district

and previous livelihoods-related work experience. Each of these organizations was assigned a specific project area of 30–40 villages.

As the nodal NGO, PRADAN was assigned additional responsibilities for guiding the pilot. These included:

- a) Preparing a model INRM plan for a sample village.
- b) Training and capacity-building of the field staff and the implementing agencies. This included:
 - A one-day orientation programme for the implementing block and NGO staff.
 - A five-day training in INRM for the field staff and the Community Resource Persons (CRPs), to be held in batches.
- c) Providing continuous assistance to the field NGOs by deploying personnel to constantly supervise and monitor progress.
- d) Assisting Deferred Procedure Call–MGNREGS in monitoring, reviewing and evaluating INRM in the district.
- e) Undertaking any other work to strengthen the processes involved and achieve the desired objectives.

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The field NGOs could identify project areas in two ways:

- a) Convergence model: INRM under MGNREGA would be taken up in areas where the field NGO was already implementing INRM-like activities under other programmes such as watershed, OTELP or the WADI² project under the NABARD in the district.
- b) Non-convergence model: The field NGO selects villages in non-watershed/OTELP areas. However, the villages will primarily be in the areas where the NGO had had some presence for a while.

A baseline survey was decided upon, to enable the benchmarking progress of the INRM activity in project areas. The survey will be conducted at two levels:

- a) Village level: To collect the basic statistics pertaining to the prevalent asset holding, physical and social infrastructure, availability of basic utilities and agronomic activities.
- b) Household level: To capture the agricultural productivity, area under the second crop, horticulture crops, crop loans, incidence of *Podu*, involvement in fisheries and livestock rearing, migration status, participation under MGNREGS.

² WADI model funded by NABARD, supports tribal families with less than five acres of land, with one acre *wadi* (small orchard) for raising 60 fruit plants (such as mango/cashew/amlam or any other remunerative fruit crop) suitable to the local area and 600 forestry plants on the boundary. The Wadi model of tribal development attempts to holistically address production, processing and marketing of the crop produce and other needs. Other development interventions in environment (soil conservation in the *wadis*, water resource and agriculture development, gender and health) are woven around the *wadi*.

Implementing Structure

Each project area is led by a Project Team, comprising the following.

Community Involvement

- a) Village Development Committees/ Farmers Clubs (VDC/FC) will be formed in every village (along the guidelines for forming VDCs under OTELP/NABARD schemes); these will take responsibility for the implementation of INRM in their own village. These would be registered under the Society Registration Act. A *Gram Sanjojak*, elected by the VDC and trained extensively by the partner NGO, will be the Secretary of the Committee. He will be the CRP to mobilize INRM activities, supervise worksite management and facilitate payments.
- b) Common Interest Groups (CIGs) will be formed of the beneficiaries with allied interests such as landless persons, who could lose out on the benefits of private land development activities. A CIG of such persons could be used to assist them in earning remuneration through pisciculture, processing and marketing of non-timber forest produce, etc. The President and the Secretary of the CIG are members of the VDC/FC.

Village Development Plan (VDP)

The NGOs in the field assist the VDC in preparing their respective VDPs, with the following details.

- a) A household-wise detail of the type and number of MGNREGS works to be taken up by the VDC.
- b) Details of bigger projects that could be taken up by the GPs/Line Departments.
- c) Village Horticulture Plan, indicating the land area and the number of households to be targeted for the NHM coverage.

- d) Afforestation plan, relevant to the needs of the community.
- e) Other requirements of the village, with respect to strengthening of education, infrastructure, connectivity, etc., in order of priority.
- f) Scope for pisciculture and livestock development.
- g) List of landless persons, requiring land for house construction and/or agriculture.
- h) Any other matter adjudged relevant by the VDC towards the goal of village development.

Execution of Works

- a) Village Level: Works under MGNREGS will be executed under the supervision of the VDC/FC. The work order will be issued in the name of the *Gram Sanjojak* (known in other states as the MGNREGS mate), who will act as the CRP and the Secretary of the VDC.
- b) Block Level: The Block Development Officer (BDO) will be the nodal officer for INRM in the corresponding block. He will be in charge of the coordination, supervision, monitoring and timely flow of funds. The procedures, as prescribed by the Department of Panchayati Raj, to facilitate the measurement of work and the release of payments to bank/postal accounts of job card holders under MGNREGS, will be applicable even in the collaboration with INRM and is to be followed by the BDO. The BDO will have to assign one Junior Engineer (JE) as an INRM-JE, for measuring and certifying the amount of work done.
- c) District Level: A number of personnel will be identified and trained at every level, to constitute a District Resource Group (DRG), which will help in the

implementation, review and monitoring of the project.

Flow of Funds

The CRP's remuneration will be decided as per government guidelines from time to time. Material expenditure will be reimbursed to the *Gram Sanjojak* or the VDC, depending on who has borne the expenditure. Field NGOs may avail of assistance from NABARD to form FCs, to further institutionalize the MGNREGS processes, as agreed upon by NABARD.

Travel expenses of team leaders and supervisors of NGOs will be compensated out of the funds available under the administrative cost heads of MGNREGS. This will be limited to a maximum of three per cent of MGNREGS expenditure registered online under INRM by the partner NGO.

Review Standards

Clear targets to be achieved, under the collaboration of INRM and MGNREGS, were set out. Performance on each of these targets (including the partner NGOs) will be the standards by which the degree of success of the pilot would be assessed.

- a) **Primary Targets**
 - Registration of all rural households under MGNREGS by December 2009.
 - Issuance of job cards to all registered house-holds.
 - Facilitation of open-ing of bank/postal account for all the registered house-holds by December 2009.
 - Social mobilization for achieving at least 65 per cent of the potential under MGNREGS for 2009–10 for project villages (that is, 65 per cent

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of job cards completing 100 days).

- Capacity building of all CRPs in project areas by 20th November 2009.

b) **Secondary Targets**

- Increase in area under the second crop.
- Improvement in water level.
- Development of horticulture on the Wadi model.
- Increase in forest coverage.
- Reduction in migration.
- Increase in absorption of crop loans.

Coordination and Review

The following institutional mechanisms were developed at the block and district levels to co-ordinate, supervise and monitor various activities under the INRM project.

- a) **Block level:** Fortnightly block MGNREGS Review Meeting (BNRM), to be held on fixed days (alternate Tuesdays) for co-ordinating and monitoring various matters related to INRM.
- b) **District level:** Regular meetings to be held with the BDOs, partner NGOs and other staff, to ensure close co-ordination and monitoring of the project activities.

PREPARATION AND IMPLEMENTATION

PRADAN's Objective and Approach

PRADAN Balliguda embarked on this project with the idea of expanding its current base of INRM work in Kandhamal, using the extensive reach and resources of MGNREGS, with the possibility of further convergence with other agencies and programmes. The primary objective of the project was to help families, dependent on wage employment, demand for and access their entitlements

under the MGNREGA, and work towards generating sustainable livelihoods from their own resources. Thus, target families in the project area can not only access employment but also acquire productive assets (ponds/tanks, productive lands, plantations and wells) under MGNREGA and enhance their livelihoods through improved agriculture, in convergence with other government programmes such as Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana, and National Food Security Mission.

Kandhamal's topography is such that it has no midlands—just up-lands and lowlands and, therefore, the natural resource treatment has to be from ridge to valley. Second, in keeping with the categorized prioritization of the private land development in MGNREGA, it was decided to take up works on the lands of the poorest in every pilot village. PRADAN also sought to use its large women's SHG network base to mobilize support for the pilot and accelerate the shift in livelihood base from forest to land-based (agriculture) and, in particular, to settled cultivation.

Orientation of all Stake-holders

A total of 32 exposure visits were organized for nearly 1,670 administrative officials, elected representatives and civil society members, to make them appreciate the relevance of such activities to the community and the scope of replicating them under MGNREGS. Besides, workshops were also organized at the district and block levels, to develop a common understanding among different actors on the promotion of these activities under MGNREGS. About 250 participants took part in eight workshops.

Prevalent SHGs, with their strong orientation to thinking about livelihoods through previous training and experience, saw the MGNREGA as a perfect opportunity to align some of their plans and activities with.

Participants included BDOs, AEs, JEs, VLWs, GRSs, GSs, PRI members and NGO staff. They were educated about suitable schemes and structures that could be taken up in INRM under MGNREGA.

Identification of Project Areas

The DRDA identified eligible partner NGOs and corresponding project areas. PRADAN placed its demand of preferential places to work in (namely, K. Nuagaon, Balliguda and Tumudibandh blocks) and these were agreed to and sanctioned for the pilots. Meetings with block authorities and the NGO partners and, subsequently, with the DRDA and the block at the district level were conducted to decide on the NGOs and the villages that would be allocated to them. The completion of this process then paved the way for training, planning and implementation of the pilot.

PRADAN identified 66 villages in three blocks (31 villages in K. Nuagaon, 13 in Tumudibandh and 22 in Balliguda) for INRM planning and implementation under MGNREGA. Given its choice of the non-convergence model, the guiding consideration was to select villages where no other projects of land/water development/ watershed had been taken up. The villages were also characterized by a high incidence of poverty, significant tribal population and low awareness about government schemes. Agriculture was the primary source of livelihood in these villages, followed by daily wage labour after the monsoons.

Baseline Data Collection

Selected residents of the pilot villages collected the baseline data of individual families in different village-level meetings.

They had been trained to collect information by using a format, jointly developed by PRADAN and the district. Triangulation of information was done through cross-checking the group's views and the block-level data.

The CSPs and the CRPs work together to help the villagers understand the provisions of MGNREGA, register and demand employment, develop plans, demand their execution and implement them.

CSPs and CRPs

CRPs and Community Service Providers (CSPs) play an important role in inspiring the villagers to act. They were selected by the villagers because of their prior experience, comprehension of people's needs, skills and their degree of co-operation.

Awareness Generation

One of the critical gaps in the implementation of MGNREGA in Kandhamal was the beneficiaries' lack of awareness about the Act's entitlements. Thus, a number of exposure visits, training, meetings and awareness campaigns were organized, using different tools such as the 'MGNREGA Rath', posters, booklets and pamphlets, and skits. Moreover, awareness generation about MGNREGA has been established as a continuous agenda in SHG cluster meetings.

Their training included both classroom and field lessons. They were paid at the rate of Rs 100 per day, as and when engaged.

SHG Involvement

Prevalent SHGs, with their strong orientation to thinking about livelihoods through previous training and experience, saw the MGNREGA as a perfect opportunity to align some of their plans and activities with. They began to take a keen interest in helping their members recognize and access their rights under MGNREGA, by ensuring asset creation plans for individual members and demanding their timely execution. Families left out of this fold were subsequently organized into SHGs and informed about MGNREGA and the project. SHGs formed by other actors in these villages were also taken on board, to implement the project. The SHGs are also federated at the panchayat level as clusters, for further sustainability of their efforts. Around 150 SHGs exist in the project villages, of which 20 are newly formed.

In addition, one villager per 100 households is engaged as the *Gram Sanjojak* by the block, to execute the works, supervise worksites, conduct measurement of works, maintain muster rolls and assist in payment of wages. They receive a day's wage of Rs 103 for every 25 labour-days generated. They were trained by both—the PRADAN staff as well as the block officials. The CSPs and the CRPs work together to help the villagers understand the provisions of MGNREGA, register and demand employment, develop plans, demand their execution and implement them.

Village Development

Plans (VDP)

VDPs were developed in 48 villages covering 2,560 households, based on household needs and existing livelihood resources. The CSPs and the CRPs along with PRADAN professionals helped the households in developing these plans. The planning exercises were conducted over four to five days in the following manner:

- a) **Concept seeding:** Intensive orientation of the villagers so that they may build an appreciation of the:
 - ♦ Importance and potential of the natural resources.

- Impact of the natural resources on the lives and livelihood of the people.
- b) **Resource mapping:** Plotting of different land types, water bodies, ridgelines, drainage line and the direction of water flow on a revenue map of the village.
- c) **Ownership mapping:** Recording the pattern of land ownership in the village, which would help identify lands that are mostly owned by poor families. This involves two steps:
 - Wealth ranking exercise
 - Collection of ownership data and present land use
- d) **Problem identification:** Analysing and delineating the problems for each patch of land. This was required for generating alternative options to overcome the problems of the respective patches and, thereby, enhance productivity.
- e) **Patch-wise plan development:** Finalizing plans for each patch of land in consultation with the owners.
- f) **Household-level plan finalization:** The plans were then consolidated to ensure plans for every household. Common plans were made for landless families.
- g) **Budget finalization:** Standard cost estimates were prepared for each activity demanded by the people and approval was taken for these from the district administration. So village-wise budgets were made, taking into account the approved unit costs.
- h) **Committee formation:** In each village, a committee of village representatives

The SHG is the basic unit of mobilization in the rights-education under MGNREGA. Regular and continuous orientation of SHG members about their rights under the MGNREGA has helped members claim their entitlements.

was formed to pursue the issue of work orders, execution and timely wage payment, with support from CSPs.

Demand and Execution of Works

After the submission by the VDP, the VDC has to wait until the administrative and

technical sanctions for the plans come through the concerned agency. Plans up to a total worth of five lakhs are sanctioned by the GP; up to 10 lakhs by the block and up to 20 lakhs by the district administration. A plan passed by the GP cannot be rejected by the district because it is a people's plan. Once the VDP is sanctioned, the villagers can place demands for work as and when they need it or in the decided timeline for taking up the construction of various INRM structures, as specified in the MGNREGS plan.

Once the plans are approved, an elected *Gram Sanjojak* receives the work order on behalf of the village and opens the corresponding worksite. He is in-charge of maintaining the records of work, completed by the workers, measuring them, entering them in the muster roll (MR) and measurement book (MB) and submitting them in time to the GP's office to facilitate payments. The work of the *Gram Sanjojak* is scrutinized by all the workers and a vigilance committee, comprising the villagers. The measurements of the *Gram Sanjojak* are verified every week/fortnight by the JE, to guard against irregularities. Payments have to be made within 15 days of receiving the MR. Payments are made to bank/postal accounts of the workers, to ensure transparency and accountability.

Formation of Vigilance Committees

The *pallisabha* (also known as the *gram sabha* in other parts of India) forms a vigilance committee and selects the members for it. Its composition is generally kept to within 20 members. In

small hamlets, the entire population is a part of the committee. The committee approves weekly/fortnightly plans of work to be taken up in the stated priorities of ridge-to-valley development and the poorest first consideration. Its functions are to keep vigil on the MR entries, measurement of work by the *Gram Sanjojak*, as well as sorting out the payment issues at the village level. It is also called in for trouble-shooting, for example, to resolve the task incompatibilities with minimum wage rate payment compulsions and solving the odd cases of workers completing more than 100 days of work. The vigilance committee seeks to understand the reason for such anomalies and accordingly deals with them.

Helping Members Access Rights under MGNREGA: The SHG is the basic unit of mobilization in the rights-education under MGNREGA. Regular and continuous orientation of SHG members about their rights under the MGNREGA has helped members claim their entitlements. Plans are studied and the SHGs and clusters regularly review the execution of their plans. The SHG members approach the GP and the block office, to demand job cards, work orders and payments, as and when required.

CONVERGENCE

INRM activities under MGNREGA were also converged with the Line Departments of horticulture, forest, soil and water con-

Watershed schemes only have a life of seven years. Thus, the limited funding and lifespan of the scheme automatically creates the space for intervention under MGNREGA.

servation, and agriculture. It was decided that no convergence would be taken up either by the DRDA or at the block level. All convergence planning and implementation would take place in direct liaison with the concerned Line Department.

INRM lays emphasis on the optimum utilization of available resources. Hence, for the proper utilization of assets and to create sustainable livelihood options, convergence planning was restricted to the district level.

Horticulture—Mango, Banana Plantations

In the case of horticulture, plans were prepared by the villagers following the identification of suitable areas and detailed discussions in the VDC. These plans were forwarded to the horticulture department, which then inspected the area, studied the plan submitted and passed the sanctions, once approved. Usually, plantations of fruit crops are sanctioned as they help, in soil retention and providing an additional income through the sale of fruit. The Junior Horticulture Officer looks after the MRs, measurement of work and payments in these works. He is assisted by the *Gram Sanjojak*. Additionally, an Udyaan Sathi (local person), trained by the horticulture department, helps the workers and the GS understand the finer details of maintaining plantations. Labour payment is done by the DRDA under MGNREGA. Currently, there is an agreement between the horticulture department and the district to not sanction more than 40 trees per family because of the man-days it eats up in the individual employment limit of each worker.

Agriculture

There are several concurrent agro-schemes of the Government of India that seek to attain

food security of the country. Through these schemes, the government plans to increase the productivity of primary food crops such as pulses, rice and wheat. However, the corresponding agronomic practices these crops require for their upkeep are mostly management-oriented. They involve management of soil health and its moisture retention capacity, water resources and timeliness of inter-culture. Over and above this, these efforts need to be substantiated with proper land and water resource management, which can be provided through INRM works. Thus, the agriculture department is now planning to take up work in INRM villages. The necessary pre-requisites for advanced farming are already available in these villages. The department does not conduct its works on small landholdings and, hence, the villagers need to come together and allow works collectively on their lands. INRM villages provide the right environment in this respect. The unity of the villages (achieved through planning and monitoring of schemes through the VDC and the Vigilance Committee) makes them eligible beneficiaries of the programmes.

Soil and Water Conservation

The Soil and Water Conservation department conducts its programmes only in the villages where INRM is being conducted in convergence with watershed schemes by some partner NGOs. Watershed schemes only have a life of seven years. Thus, the limited funding and lifespan of the scheme automatically creates the space for intervention under MGNREGA. Labour payment for these works is covered under MGNREGA. It typically takes up structures

INRM planning process under MGNREGA allowed villagers to decide the order and the time-frame of works, and allowed the possibility of taking up ridge to valley works and of prioritising works on the lands of the poorest.

such as farm ponds (eight different models), contour bunds, etc.

TECHNICAL INTERVENTIONS AND INNOVATIONS

Implementing INRM under MGNREGA, in two or three hundred villages for a pilot project, is in itself a

significant innovation in the Act's brief history. Enabling a smooth collaboration, however, required further innovations suitable to INRM within the Act's regulatory framework without violating its core.

VDP

Active participation of workers in planning brings a sense of ownership of the schemes undertaken. Thus, the process of congregating at the village and drafting plans was given special importance in generating awareness and consensus on the project. This paved the way for the creation and strengthening of the VDCs, providing villagers the opportunity to draft their own development vision aided by the technical expertise of NGOs. In the standard planning process of the MGNREGA, the lack of participation and collective interest by the villagers, results in the local elite usurping the schemes in their own favour. Even with collective effort, the lack of supporting expertise may result in ill-planned and thus ineffective schemes getting incorporated.

Another departure from the standard MGNREGS planning was that, under INRM, plans were made regardless of financial considerations. The total budget of all the schemes suggested was to be divided by the number of job card-holders and their maximum potential of 100 days per worker.

Finally, the plan was to be submitted to the block, and depending on the time-frame required to complete the drafted plan, the budget would be sanctioned for a period from one up to three years.

Single Work Order

A single work order is to be issued for the whole village instead of for individual families. This is not usually the practice. After the plan is submitted, technical blueprints, and budgets are prepared for the schemes and following the demand of work by any villager(s), a particular scheme is sanctioned. This results in sanctioning of schemes, in the wrong time-frame. INRM planning process under MGNREGA allowed villagers to decide the order and the time-frame of works, and allowed the possibility of taking up ridge to valley works and of prioritising works on the lands of the poorest.

Technical Outlay Alterations

Unlike standard INRM works, MGNREGA

would only allow for smaller structures because plans were sanctioned on private lands, which were mostly small landholdings. Thus, there were several alterations in the technical blueprints drawn for INRM structures, for instance, building pits in more than five per cent of the land in very small land-holdings. SWATI (one of the partner NGOs) worked with gravity flow irrigation with INRM for the first time in Barepanga village, Taladankia GP, Phiringia block, with support from Sir Jamshedji Tata Trust.

Forest Rights Act (FRA) Land Development

Newly acquired lands under the Forest Rights Act were a boost to the livelihood of many poor households. However, making them cultivable was an expensive task. This was taken up under the pilot project and land development activities such as levelling land and creating *bunds* around farms were taken up on these lands.