



Establishing a Rural Call Centre and Using Social Watch Groups to Monitor Public Service Delivery in India

CSO:	SAMBANDH
Years:	2009-2011
Country:	Orissa, India
Amount:	\$35,000 USD
Sector:	Controlling Corruption in Delivery of Social Services: Social Safety Net

Corruption Problem:	Corruption in Service Delivery Scheme to Entitled Citizens
Tools employed:	Citizen Monitoring, RTI, Survey, Information Hotline, Capacity Building, Coalition Building, Awareness Campaign

Poor service delivery in the government administered National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS) have led a local CSO, SAMBANDH, to increase citizen awareness and participation in the Odisha District of Orissa, India. SAMBANDH conducted surveys, mobilized the community and facilitated the formation of Social Watch Groups (SWG) to increase transparency and elicit authorities to exert greater responsiveness. Through its actions, SA has successfully implemented the “Monitoring Corruption using Rural Call Centres and Social Watch Groups in India” project.

Corruption Problem Addressed

SAMBANDH acquired substantial experience in social sector development in Odisha. Based on its experience, focus group discussions and a baseline survey, SAMBANDH identified serious deficiencies in the NREGS. For example, job cards were not being issued as required; government officials charged money for registration; payments were frequently delayed; and work was not done as planned. In addition, people were not involved in the planning process, and mandatory worksite facilities were not available.

The baseline survey revealed that two out of three of the NREGS participants reported that job card

entries were not done regularly, and that no one received the officially authorized 100 days of work; 59% mentioned that muster roll entries were not done on the worksite; 62% that work was provided beyond the 5 Km limit; and 67% that they had not participated in the social audit process and other planning activities. There was a lack of “collective voice”, a weak regional network, lack of support from relevant government officials, and lack of skills and knowledge among the service providers at the local level, all of which contributed to corrupt practices. SAMBANDH concluded that community members lacked information on NREGS. There was a lack of participation on the demand side and of accountability on the supply side. No corrective action was taken because of the lack of a proper monitoring process, and equally if not more importantly, there was corruption across the board in managing the MGNREGS system.

Actions Taken by SAMBANDH

To overcome the identified corruption problems, SAMBANDH sought to work with all key stakeholders involved. Key activities included:

- Formation and training of a Social Watch Group (SWG) at the block level to regularly monitor the implementation of the program and



identify any corrupt activities. SWGs include 40 volunteer representatives of the media, local politicians, teachers, members of SHGs, and representatives of local NGOs and the community. They met each month to assess the implementation of local government schemes and services and discuss strategies to deal with the failures and abuses that are uncovered. These included holding public meetings and working with the local media to publicize the problems revealed and taking up specific issues with the relevant public officials in a constructive manner aimed at solving problems rather than punishing individuals.

- Establishment of a Rural Call Centre (RCC) as a viable enterprise managed by a capable entrepreneur. The RCC has played a key role in enabling villagers to access information related to their entitlements under NREGS and other programs and more generally to enable citizens to get information on benefits and entitlements from different public agencies. The entrepreneur participated in the block level meetings and established a good rapport with different agencies to get information and help the community. The Centre manager assists visitors in obtaining the information they are seeking and to resolve their queries. By making data available the Centre assists social auditing under the RTI Act.
- Selection and training of transparency workers from the villages. This was coordinated with members of the SWG.
- Organization of media workshops, which provided the people with the opportunity to speak up.
- Formation of a coalition of social development partners to discuss corruption and related issues at the regional level.

- Production of IEC materials for community training and advocacy. Materials developed included a Social Watch Bulletin, brochures and posters explaining the work of the SWG and Rural Call Centres and thematic posters against corruption.



Community discussions in a village

Impact and Results Achieved

Constructive community and media involvement from the very beginning contributed substantially to get the attention of all relevant stakeholders and to implement the project successfully. The major innovation was the formation of the SWG and the establishment of the viable RCC. The SWG met regularly, discussed relevant matters, and submitted issues to the concerned authorities for corrective action. Most importantly, the RCC proved to be a successful and sustainable business, while fulfilling all of its objectives with a view to fighting corruption and empowering citizens. More than 1000 people visited the RCC for different kinds of information.

Overall, the project's activities have led to better implementation of NREGS in the project area, which has benefited the community members. As a result, false entries in job cards have stopped, muster roll entries are now being made on the worksite itself, 65% are getting full wages for the



number of days worked (compared to 35% before the project started), wages paid to men and women is equal, all those who applied for a job got it within the maximum of 15 days, 173 people were finally paid, minimum worksite facilities are available, and there is now participation of community people in the planning process.

The project was welcomed by most of the stakeholders, except for some of the “vested interest” groups, mainly government officials. During implementation, the main challenges turned out to be poor government budget allocation and utilization; failure of resources to reach the service providers/users, hampered by poor expenditure tracking; weak incentives for effective service providers, leading to low motivation and casual indifference of the people - a serious problem with collective “voice raising”; weak political buy-in among the different stakeholders, leading to a weak social accountability structure and also weak regional networking.

Although government officials were initially reluctant, after their participation in the orientation session and a block-level meeting joined by the media, they started to take corrective action on the complaints lodged. For example, junior engineers were suspended and transferred, and information on the budget allocation for a local road was shared with the community members. Finally, but importantly, various Oriya dailies printed news items on issues regarding the project and MGNREGS which put pressure on local politicians and officials to be responsive.

Documentation

Project completion reports (PCRs) and Project completion assessments (PCAs) can be accessed at www.ptfund.org under the “Where-we-work” tab.

SAMBANDH’s website can be accessed at <http://sambandh.org/default.asp>

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