



## **Measuring Results Reducing Corruption in the the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act in Odisha, India**

<b>CSO:</b>	Visionaries of Creative Action for Liberation and Progress (VICALP)
<b>Years:</b>	2009
<b>Country:</b>	Odisha State, India
<b>Amount:</b>	\$ 20,900 USD
<b>Sector:</b>	Controlling Corruption in Delivery of Social Services: Social Safety Net

<b>Corruption Problem:</b>	Benefits of a nationally financed entitlement program do not reach the intended beneficiaries
<b>Tools employed:</b>	RTI, Capacity Building, Social Audit, Constructive Engagement, Coalition Building, Citizen Monitoring, Advocacy

Corruption in India is rampant and especially harmful where the effects of embezzlement, extortion and bribery affect the poorest. Following a report that 75% of the funds budgeted for the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) had been shifted into officials’ pockets, VICALP, a local CSO, set out to affect change. VICALP implemented the “Reducing the opportunities for corruption in NREGA in 12 Panchayats of Mohana block of Gajapati district, Odisha” project, using capacity building exercises to empower communities and capacitate citizens to monitor how social safety net provisions were implemented by the authorities. Prompting authorities to be more transparent and accountable in accordance with the rules and regulations that should govern the delivery of social services were an effective way to achieve better service delivery and ensure citizens’ rights to the entitlements as stipulated in NREGA.

### **Corruption Problem Addressed**

NREGA and the Right to Information Act (RTI) are the two most progressive pieces of legislation in the history of India. If implemented in letter and spirit, these historic acts have the potential to transform rural India. While the RTI Act provides

provisions for citizens to demand information from authorities, NREGA assures that a certain amount of workdays is given to the unemployed, paying basic wages and complying with the minimum standards of a decent workplace. Odisha is the poorest state in India with a very high percentage of the rural population living in abject poverty and with chronic hunger.

In 2007, the government of Odisha claimed that 154,118 families eligible to receive benefits under NREGA completed 100 days of employment and received respective payment. The Centre for Environment and Food Security (CEFS) conducted a survey on NREGA implementation in 100 villages in the 6 poorest districts in Odisha in the same year. According to CFES, families in Odisha were given an average of 57 days of paid. Furthermore, not more than 5 days of actual employment time had been allotted to each family in average. There was not a single instance of 100 day employment in any of the 100 surveyed villages. The study revealed that 75% of the NREGA funds earmarked for Odisha were pocketed by officials during 2006/2007. With its findings, CFES approached the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court charged the Government of Odisha with a Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) inquiry. This is clear evidence of deep rooted corruption in NREGA in Odisha State.

## Actions Taken by VICALP

To initiate the project, VICALP conducted a sample survey in 50 villages and found that corruption in NREGA was even worse than the findings of the CEFS survey indicated. Even for job card applications, people had to bribe officials and many workers never received wages. VICALP targeted 49 villages and indirectly involved 200 villages from 12 Panchayats. Major activities included:

- Promotion of community based organizations (CBOs) in the target villages;
- Formation of 12 anti-corruption “Social Watch Committees” (SWCs) in 12 Panchayats;
- Intensive training of 84 Social Watch Volunteers (SWVs) on NREGA and RTI-use;
- Panchayat level orientation training for 1031 community leaders;
- 156 bi-monthly meetings by SWCs to review and monitor NREGA corruption, developing Panchayat level target plans by people’s committees;
- Instructions an assistance using the RTI to expose corruption;
- Establishing constructive engagement and a working relationship with government officials to reduce opportunities for corruption to take place;
- Ensuring peoples participation in Gram Sabha meetings;
- Conducting social audits in 12 target panchayats;
- Asserting people’s rights through lobbying and advocacy;

Implementing these activities, VICALP had to overcome a variety of challenges:

1. Corrupt officials and members of the Panchayat Raj Institution (PRI) used strong-arm tactics (threats, physical attacks, false charges, and urging villagers not to allow VICALP workers

and social watch volunteers to enter the villages) to block project implementation.

2. Uncooperative government officials created hurdles – at least in the beginning of the project.
3. Communal violence proved to be an obstacle for inter-community action for several months.

Despite these obstacles, the program facilitators, social watch volunteers, and campaign leaders made extra efforts to achieve the project’s goals. A mass gathering involving all the department heads and PRI members was organized at the block headquarters. This gathering proved to be a turning point in soliciting constructive engagement with government officials and PRI members. Department heads and PRI leaders were forced to take a public stand on the issue and concluded to be paying special attention henceforth. The anti-corruption campaign received a notable boost. VICALP frequently discussed project progress with the District Collector also, keeping the issues and constructive collaboration with authorities on the top of the agenda. As the District Collector started to pay attention to the grievances of anti-corruption campaign leaders, RTI requests received responses and some of the corrupt officials were punished. The campaign gained momentum.



Chandiput village job card holders demanding work

## Impact and Results Achieved

An internal evaluation by VICALP and an external evaluation by PRIYA (New Delhi) assessed the impact of the project: VICALP has established a strong base in 200 villages through village level CBOs. The Social Watch Volunteers have helped the anti-corruption campaign to spread. This has provided opportunities for community solidarity and has strengthened community organizations to fight corruption.

Constructive engagement not only enhanced community confidence but also made citizens more skilful and effective as negotiators and leaders. This community empowerment will ultimately promote the sustainability of the project. The entire process is completely owned by communities. VICALP and the communities also noted that here are sincere and responsible government officers who are looking for opportunities to help fight injustice and corruption. The campaign tried to actively involve these officials to reduce the opportunities for corruption.

The following are some of the impacts of VICALP's anti-corruption campaign:

	<u>Before</u> Project Implementation	<u>After</u> Project Implementation
Targeted households have job cards for work (percent)	40	98
Applicants paying bribes for job cards (percent)	65	0
Job card applications received by the Panchayat office (percent)	47	100

Job card holders receiving receipts for registration (percent)	25	100
Job cards updated (percent)	33	100
Job card applicants denied (percent)	42	0
Job cards held by the job card holders (percent)	9	100
Awareness about NREGA	14	70
NREGA vigilance committees active in village (percent)	33	100
Job holder paid in cash (rather than by check) (percent)	62	0
Job holders paid more than 70 rupees/day (percent)	55	70
Drinking water at worksite facility (percent)	4	100
First aid at worksite facility (percent)	3	50
Child care at worksite facility (percent)	36	70

Results furthermore include, that

- ✓ 100% of job card holders have accounts and passbooks in their name.
- ✓ 110 cases of irregularities were identified and discussed.
- ✓ RTI requests were filed for 55 of these cases, 25 out of them were solved by the block grievance cell, 20 cases are at the second level, 2 cases have been forwarded to the Odisha RTI commission, and 9 others were resolved before the response to the RTI request.



- ✓ A Junior Engineer of the block was fined 15,000 rupees.
- ✓ A Junior Engineer returned money which he had taken as a bribe.
- ✓ A village level worker was suspended for corruption.
- ✓ 74 new NREGA projects were sanctioned.
- ✓ The number of NREGA work days increased.
- ✓ NREGA average wages increased from 35 to 90 rupees per day.
- ✓ Gram Sabha meetings in 11 Panchayats had the participation of 60-70% of the villagers.

These findings document the results that a relatively small intervention can make; Fostering civil society to hold the government accountable to the promises made.

## Documentation

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

Other project documents including the baseline survey, quarterly reports, semi-annual reports, annual reports, and the final evaluation report by PRIYA (New Delhi) can be found on VICALP’s website at <http://www.vicalp.org/>

The Centre for Environment and Food Security (CEFS) webpage can be found at <http://www.cefs-india.org/>