

## Village campaigns expose poor state of Gram Sabha, NREGA and PDS

The process of strengthening Gram Sabha in Assam was initiated in the year 2006 by conducting series of awareness and capacity building programmes along with 20 like minded People's Organization/CBO's and NGO's. These series of programme helped the participants to realize that the Gram Sabha is the core component of the Panchayat Raj System. Unfortunately the functioning of actual Gram Sabha is not evident in any of the Panchayat area in Assam. To ascertain the actual status of GS an action plan was initiated by the Network by filing mass RTI. On 11<sup>th</sup> Dec'06 165 RTI were filed at deferent places to get the status of GS. The information collected on the filled RTI convinced the networking NGO's that the programme conducted by Govt. in the name of Gram sabha was not a constitutional Gram Sabha. Thus the unconstitutional function of the so called Gram Sabha resulted in perpetual irregularities of all kinds of Social Security Schemes like NREGA, PDS etc.

To emphasis the demand for proper functioning of Gram sabha POs felt a mass mobilization at Panchayat level and demonstration at the district. The final Pada Yatra at District HQ of Tezpur on 8<sup>th</sup> March, 2010 was the very next step of continuous struggle of the community that was started from 2006-07.

### **Activities**

**Gram Sabha, NREGA and PDS** Campaign 2010 involves several activities at different stages that was initiated from 2006-07. The continuous struggle of the POs at different level to demand for proper implementation of GS bore optimum results till 2009. To keep the flow of the struggle POs organized the PADA YATRA at Panchayat level from 1<sup>st</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> March 2010, it was the part of the **Gram Sabha, NREGA and PDS** Campaign 2010.

In Assam, planning was done at NEI DBSS-level planning meeting held on February 6, 2010, followed by Panchayats/village-level meetings. Participating SHGs, people's organizations and DBSS staffs had through meeting to finalize the proceedings on 23<sup>rd</sup> February, where DBSS played the role of a platform to have discussion on network initiation by partner NGOs and other likeminded NGOs.

Subsequently, the village-level campaign was held in a total of 100 villages by 2 POs (MAGUP & SWARAJ), they both are small, grassroots organizations.

The main activities carried out were holding village meetings, awareness rallies, and interactions with NREGA workers and displaying information about the NREGA at prominent places.

Along with these activities, POs gathered first-hand information about the state of the NREGA in the villages.

The picture that emerged was disheartening.

### **Official apathy**

It is well known that the NREGA is a non-starter in many parts of the state because of open resistance from block development office, or Panchayats, who do not want to take on the additional work.

**pdfMachine - is a pdf writer that produces quality PDF files with ease!**

**Get yours now!**

"Thank you very much! I can use Acrobat Distiller or the Acrobat PDFWriter but I consider your product a lot easier to use and much preferable to Adobe's" A.Sarras - USA

The virtual strike by these officials appears to have received tacit support from block- and Panchayat-level authorities like tehsildars and block development officers. Even the preliminary step of registering households and issuing job cards has not been taken in many villages.

For example, in Mansiri where the PADA YATRA was conducted in 70 villages of 7 Panchayats, PO found that:

- No information about the NREGA had been made available, as there was not a single constitutional Gram sabha held in the village level.
- In all villages except gram Panchayats and local government officials had little knowledge about NREGA processes like registering households, preparing village plans, forming vigilance committees, and obtaining work on demand.
- None of the PDS shop from the reference areas is following the guide lines given in the essential commodity Act.
- The procedures of the selections of BPL beneficiaries are not according to the guide line.
- For example .....In Solabari, forms for getting job cards had been filled but the cards had not been issued. Likewise in Ratanjuli, where the campaign was conducted in 50 villages of five Panchayats, PO reported that no signs of government publicity efforts were visible. Around 1,500 households from these villages had applied for job cards and demanded work, but only half the applicants had received job cards. Many people reported that they could not apply for job cards as they were not informed the coming of officials to receive applications and take photographs.

More than two years after the NREGA was launched in the country, the process of registering households and issuing job cards is far from satisfactory in the district.

The figures reported from villages in the district covered by the campaign, 4,260 households applied for job cards but less than 700 cards issued (till Nov 2009).

### **Involvement of Gram Sabhas**

**Across the campaign villages, the involvement of actual gram sabha in preparing micro plans and identifying priority works and beneficiaries were barely visible.**

### **Other issues**

Where work has started under the NREGA, the workers reported a number of problems. In all these 100 villages people complained that

- There were no facilities such as a shelter for small children, drinking water, first aid, etc, at the work sites.
- Work had stopped due to lack of coordination between officials at the village and block levels.
- No compensation for accidents.

### **Programme on 8<sup>th</sup> March 2010, NEI Tezpur DBSS**

1. By 10 am busloads of villagers started arriving at the starting location for the Pada Yatra. The participating villages are 20 to 60 kilometers from Tezpur and the villagers had collectively contributed for the transport. About 1500 people representing all the blocks came for the programme. Significantly almost 3/4 of the participants were women.

2. There were emotion laden speeches from representatives of each of the 3 POs (PNJSS, MAGUP, and SWARAJ).

**pdfMachine - is a pdf writer that produces quality PDF files with ease!**

**Get yours now!**

"Thank you very much! I can use Acrobat Distiller or the Acrobat PDFWriter but I consider your product a lot easier to use and much preferable to Adobe's" A.Sarras - USA

3. The Pada Yatra started at around 11.30 am. The women led the march organized in double file, ensuring there was minimal disruption of traffic. The rallyists carried several banners about their movement and there was mild sloganeering to keep the tempo of the marchers. Pamphlets were distributed all along the way.



4. The rally covered all the important squares of the small town, including DRDA office and converged in the Deputy Commissioner Office road at around 1.00 pm. With the marchers seated in neat formations in their flamboyantly bright colored sarees, the road appeared to be a valley of wild flowers from the makeshift stage.

5. People requested Deputy Commissioner to come out of his office to talk to them, since DC was on protocol, At 1.15 pm a delegation from DC came to talk and receive petition people protesting against, Nirod IF spoke to him whether he assures of making things happen for us all, he refused and people too shown no interest on listening him. People decided to wait till DC himself comes to talk to them.

6. At around 2:30 pm DC appeared and tried to convey his message, but representatives of POs told that they were there not to listen but to tell him their demand, after hearing the position of the petitioners the official orally admitted that “Gram Sabha is important for the selection of beneficiaries at the villages and so from this day onwards he himself will be checking these irregularities and take immediate action against PDS suppliers and NREGA if found guilty”.

7. The meeting ended with the above reporting to the gathering amidst huge cheering. The exuberant crowd loaded back in the buses and started on their journey home at around 4 pm. There was a mood of festivity all around - in spite of an extremely uncertain tomorrow, today at least was theirs.

### Participants

PNJSS – 283 (F) & 143 (M)

MAGUP – 369 (F) & 153 (M)

SWARAJ – 297 (F) & 182 (M)

### Networking NGOs

**pdfMachine - is a pdf writer that produces quality PDF files with ease!**

**Get yours now!**

“Thank you very much! I can use Acrobat Distiller or the Acrobat PDFWriter but I consider your product a lot easier to use and much preferable to Adobe's” A.Sarras - USA

TSSS (Tezpur Social Service Society) – 21 (F) & 12 (M)  
The EAST – 13 (F) & 8 (M)  
PAD (People Action for Development) – 6 (F) & 3(M)  
PHAJRA – 5 (F) & 2(M)  
LCHR (Legal Cell for Human Rights) – 1 (M)

### Some snaps of the Pada Yatra



Preparation .....



**pdfMachine** - is a pdf writer that produces quality PDF files with ease!

**Get yours now!**

"Thank you very much! I can use Acrobat Distiller or the Acrobat PDFWriter but I consider your product a lot easier to use and much preferable to Adobe's" A.Sarras - USA

..... emotion laden speeches by PO members.



PNJSS guiding the force...

pdfMachine - is a pdf writer that produces quality PDF files with ease!

Get yours now!

"Thank you very much! I can use Acrobat Distiller or the Acrobat PDFWriter but I consider your product a lot easier to use and much preferable to Adobe's" A.Sarras - USA



The Network partners.



**pdfMachine** - is a pdf writer that produces quality PDF files with ease!

**Get yours now!**

"Thank you very much! I can use Acrobat Distiller or the Acrobat PDFWriter but I consider your product a lot easier to use and much preferable to Adobe's" A.Sarras - USA

Security ensured by the Dist. Administration



Waiting for justice after 60 years of Independence.

**pdfMachine** - is a pdf writer that produces quality PDF files with ease!

**Get yours now!**

"Thank you very much! I can use Acrobat Distiller or the Acrobat PDFWriter but I consider your product a lot easier to use and much preferable to Adobe's" A.Sarras - USA



...at DC Office.

**pdfMachine** - is a pdf writer that produces quality PDF files with ease!

**Get yours now!**

"Thank you very much! I can use Acrobat Distiller or the Acrobat PDFWriter but I consider your product a lot easier to use and much preferable to Adobe's" A.Sarras - USA