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# COMMUNITY MGNREGS PROGRAMME FOR NAXALITE AFFECTED AREAS

DOCUMENTATION OF BEST PRACTICE

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) is a progressive rights based approach to development which legally entitles 100 days of minimum wage employment to rural households. The act, launched by the Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in 2006, is the first step towards realising the right to work that is included in the constitution as one of the directive principles of state policy. MGNREGS seeks to provide “at least one hundred days of guaranteed employment at the statutory minimum wage” to adult members of every rural household who volunteer to do casual manual work. The act has the scope to reach every nook and corner of the country, and if properly implemented, to transform the socio-political and economic environment of rural, as well as urban, India.

By demanding certain provisions, the Act has the potential to spur development in even the most underdeveloped and backward areas of the country. . The Payment of Wages Act checks delays in the payment of wages to workers. There are provisions for compensation and treatment in case of injury during work, for on-site safe drinking water, and for care of small children. The act also forbids the use of contractors and labour displacing machines. Another important provision says that at least fifty percent of the projects, in terms of value, are to be implemented through the *gram panchayats*; this keeps scheme functioning closely linked to local level needs. Each gram panchayat is to prepare a development plan and maintain a list of possible works to be taken up under the programme. As and when demand for work arises, the recommendations of the gram sabha are considered. The great number of provisions to ensure a functioning scheme is crucial for inclusive and people-centric development of backwards places like Balaghat.

Balaghat is a Naxal affected area of Madhya Pradesh where unskilled workers are abundant. The district administration of Balaghat envisaged development in the region through implementation of MGNREGS with a participatory approach. The primary objectives of the programme were to create wage employment through successful implementation of MGNREGS and to involve the community in all levels of implementation. The programme, however, went beyond the creation of wage employment and managed to wean off the local community from the influence of Naxals.

The administration took the alternative development approach to identify the needs and desires of the people. MGNREGS brought in the desired funds for catalysing the development initiatives to foster activities promoting priority areas as identified by the local community, including agricultural irrigation, road connectivity, health, and education. 693 gram panchayats, 500 Joint Forest Management Committees, 11,515 Self Help Groups and Water User Associations were selected as implementation agencies, in addition to existing line departments, to facilitate effective implementation and transparency in consumption of funds.

The administrator also integrated funds from additional central schemes such as rural road building, backward regions grant fund, MP and MLA local area development fund, state government's watershed programme to support MGNREGS projects.

In 2008-2009, the administration generated wage employment for 2.27 lakh individuals. Road construction, particularly a 90 kilometre stretch connecting Ukwa to Lanji, is one of the major successes. Within three years, about 28,000 hectares of new land was irrigated. *Tendu* leaf collection and bamboo cutting started in forested areas. Migration dropped significantly as locals found work in their region. The number of Naxal attacks fell from 21 in 2005 to none in 2009. The scheme has also resulted in capacity building of the local public administration.

The success that the scheme has seen through effective planning and participatory implementation provides a model for other underdeveloped and Naxal affected areas of India to replicate. In acknowledgement of this accomplishment, the Balaghat district MGNREGA team has been given the Award for Excellence in NREGA Administration, 2007-08 and 2008-09 by the Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India and Prime Minister's Award for Excellence in Public Administration, 2007-08 by the Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions, Government of India.

## **BACKGROUND**

Balaghat district is one of the 33 districts of India that has been affected by Naxalites the greatest. Around 30 percent of the district was considered unapproachable by the administration up until a few years ago, and hence the Naxal influence is pinpointed as a reason for the region's underdevelopment and unemployment.

Balaghat is located on the south-eastern border of Madhya Pradesh, on the tri-junction of the states of Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Maharashtra. The district has a population of 14.97 lakhs, residing in an area of 9229 square kilometres. The district has dense forests on its east, difficult mountain terrain in the central part and the west is mostly divided into paddy growing agricultural fields. The district had a host of problems ranging from mono-cropped agriculture production, scarcity of industries, low wages, and lack of alternative employment opportunities. Poverty stemming mainly from the lack of employment opportunities pushed many youth to join the Maoist insurgent group. The difficult terrain and district's location at the tri-junction of three states makes it a prime breeding ground for Naxalism.

The district administration of Balaghat geared up to catalyse development in the region with a population of about 1.5 million through the implementation of MGNREGS in 2006. To fully understand the issue at hand, the administration took the help of unofficial channels to learn the realities of the local alienation from the government and inclination towards Naxalism.

Prior to MGNREGS implementation in the district, the administration was not effective in providing for public welfare. Overall lack of administrative pursuit of development efforts and the absence of trust in the government by the local community were the main reasons for strong Naxal influence.

At the time, Naxalites were taking measures to gain the trust of the villagers. The Naxalites regularly helped the villagers with food and medicines. They took responsibility for the orphan kids and provided security and sustenance to girls who had no family to look after them.

Taking a cue from the Naxalites, the district administration began to replicate welfare service delivery as the Naxalites had been doing for some time. For example, they began organising medical camps at weekly markets, where they arranged for a team of doctors - skin specialists, orthopaedics, and gynaecologists - to visit. This was of immense help as the district saw high incidences of such ailments.

Efforts were also undertaken to mitigate food constraints in the village through implementation of the Public Distribution system (PDS). Through PDS, the administration issued green and yellow ration cards - green cards for up to 20 kilogrammes of rice or wheat in a month and

yellow ration cards for up to 35 kilogrammes of food grains at subsidised rates per family as per scale of food grains fixed by the Government of India.

The administration undertook a 'People's Perception Management' strategy through which measures such as community policing for facilitating government interaction with the community were pursued. The locals shared their aspirations, problems and expectations with the officials which brought about new opportunities for both parties. Gradually, citizens slowly began to initiate meetings out of their own free will with government officials to discuss development interventions.

The district administration, through the camps and meetings organised in the weekly markets, identified the needs of the community. Meetings were comprehensive and participatory in nature. Thirteen government departments (Revenue, police, forest, rural development, health, education, tribal development, rural engineering departments, PWD, electricity department, and food) participated in meetings. Along with all these district level officials, representatives from the zila parishad and wards, sarpanches, upsurpanches, panchayat secretaries, office bearers of Joint Forest Management Committees, and SHG representatives joined. These inclusive meetings carved out the main priority areas of the community which needed to be addressed through the MGNREGS.

## OBJECTIVE

- To implement the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS) in Balaghat District, Madhya Pradesh, a Naxal affected area, including creation of a minimum of 100 days wage employment on demand and provision of unemployment allowance if employment is not provided within 15 days of demand for wage employment.
- To involve the local community in all aspects of implementation
- To wean away the locals from Naxal influence
- To ensure overall development of the region

## WORKING DESIGN

In 2006, the district administration began a process of learning the needs and priorities of the local people through first-hand interactions. **One hundred and fifteen meetings** were held with common villagers, sarpanches, upsurpanches, panchayat secretaries, office bearers of Joint Forest Management Committees and related government officials to identify priority areas of

the community such as livelihood generation programmes, health, education, road connectivity, land development and irrigation facilities, plantation and watershed management.

The high number of works pursued under the scheme necessitated a **cooperative effort**; hence, the administration sought out 693 gram panchayats, 500 forest committees and 11515 Self Help Groups to communally discuss the direction of the scheme. . The line departments gave technical guidance for large projects and assisted grassroots agencies in recordkeeping. The inclusion of all sectors of the community helped to develop an empowered group that could break free of prior vested interest groups.



Activities undertaken as part of **MGNREGS implementation are linked with government missions**. For example, haryali mission, involves people in environmental protection and water conservation through large scale afforestation activities in the rainy season. Additionally, the jal-abhisheka mission, promotes participatory excavation of old water tanks. By integrating MGNREGS with state priorities, a sense of urgency was instilled in work implementation and therefore, it helped to move the scheme in the right direction.

To address specific local development issues along with security concerns, the administration **leveraged funds from central schemes** such as rural road building, backward regions grant fund, MP and MLA local area development fund, state government's watershed programme, for projects pursued under NREGS. Scheme efforts were integrated; for example, the Water Bound Macadam under MGNREGS and blacktopping from PWD funds, and well construction under MGNREGS and pump provision under *Swaranjayanti Gram Swarojgar Yojana* came together. Thus, the conversion of funds and schemes allowed for not only generation of more employment opportunities but also enhancement in infrastructure and other assets.

To expand the annual employment cycle beyond 100 days, the administration planned a range of income generating **forest activities** like bamboo felling and tendu patta collection. The step was taken to check distressed migration in the region.

An **awareness campaign** was initiated for the workers to access their rights under the act. The campaign focused on generating awareness on the rights of workers, registration in worksites, work allocation, wages, obligations of work output and submission of complaints and grievances. Awareness campaigns also targeted government officials, representatives and

various other implementing agencies to help them in meeting the expectations of workers. Workshops, awareness camps, wall paintings, hoardings, street plays, posters and pamphlets, press releases, radio and TV programmes were employed for this purpose. A media cell was also launched for wider publicity of the scheme. To keep all stakeholders updated on the scheme, a radio programme named *Namaskar Balaghat* was broadcasted in the mornings.

**Training of officials and locals** was crucial to the success of participatory development. Training workshops were held regularly at all the three tiers of the panchayati raj. The training sessions were carried out by the district administration to impart knowledge and skills to the implementing agencies for addressing problems encountered in planning and execution of the programmes.

The Superintendent of Police also took on the responsibility of carrying out training sessions to sensitise the police personnel in the handling of locals, specifically in regards to naxal-related issues.

In sum, the implementing agencies were first made aware of their rights and obligations, and then were trained to carry them out effectively.

Monthly statements of funds were obtained from banks. **Panchayats expenditure was regularly monitored.** Those who spent more than 3 lakhs a month were monitored for excess expenditure. The Panchayats that spent less were monitored for their slow progress and the Panchayats which had less than 1 lakh in their accounts were provided with funding to progress in their assignments. The implementation agencies were trained in bookkeeping. Monthly squaring of accounts was introduced to check corruption in managing funds. **Accounts were also disclosed and discussed in gram sabha meetings,** enabling the community to analyse and question the application of funds under MGNREGS.

Panchayats were directed to make **five year perspective plans.** The Gram Panchayats were trained to demand funds under the scheme by using a simple method of calculation. This allowed panchayats to put pressure on the district administration to expedite fund transfers for development activities.

**Field and table monitoring** were extremely important for ensuring a high quality of work. MIS software was employed to ensure table monitoring. Regular meetings were also helpful in bringing out grievances. Regular inspections by block officials and the prompt responses to feedback made for transparent and improved quality of works.

**Gram Sabha involvement** was also crucial to policy formation and implementation. Regular meetings were held at the Gram Sabha level which determined the beneficiaries, selection of work, progress of the project and social audit of completed works.

**Social audits** were carried out in the presence of villagers so that any objections that arose could be physically verified on the spot. The major part of the social audit report is published on the web, making it easily accessible for anyone and everyone to investigate.

To ensure transparency, **Vigilance and Monitoring Committees** are formed at the district, block and village level. The district level committee is headed by the MP, the block level by a MLA and a leader other than the sarpanch heads the village level committee. The committee meetings address all issues pertaining to transparency and accountability of the programme. The issues raised in the committees were redressed with vigour. Thus the committees not only ensured accountability but also redressed public grievances. Worksite boards, wall paintings, response to RTI queries were measures undertaken under MGNREGS to ensure proactive disclosure of information. Inspection and complaint registers were established in workplaces to assist with grievance redressal. Complaint boxes were also provided to Panchayats for quick disposal.

To avoid complaints and possibilities of leakages of funds and exploitation by vested interests, **wage payments were only made through bank or post offices**. This also helped in increasing the savings of the workers. Zero balance accounts were created for all workers by organising camps in coordination with the bank officials.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The Governance Knowledge Centre (GKC) research team identified community MGNREGS as a best practice because the programme was a success in implementing MGNREGA in a highly Naxal affected region which went beyond the objective of generating wage employment and further pursued inclusive development of the region.

The team used both primary and secondary research methods for the preparation of this best practice document.

Conducting desk based secondary research, available through online material and documents obtained from the administration, the team gathered important information on the background, operations and achievements of Community MGNREGS in the Naxal affected Balaghat district of Madhya Pradesh. In order to validate the secondary research findings, the team adopted the interview method to carry out primary research.

Responses were obtained from the then DM of Balaghat district, Mr Gulshan Bumra, on many important aspects of implementation of the programme. The insights obtained were utilised with the desk research to prepare this document.



## KEY STAKEHOLDERS

- The District Administration, Balaghat, Madhya Pradesh.
- Major administrative departments of the district- 13 government departments - revenue department, police department, forest department, rural development, health, education, tribal development, rural engineering departments, PWD, electricity department, food department.
- Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs)
- Joint Forest Management Committees
- Self Help Groups
- NREGA workers

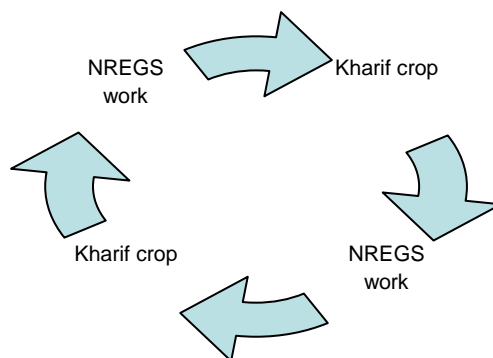
## LESSONS LEARNED

MGNREGS in Naxal affected Balaghat and its successful implementation in the district through a people centric and participatory approach to development planning, not only generated ample employment avenues for the locals, but also helped in developing infrastructure, social security measures and good governance practices in the region. The indicators of success are many which are reflected not only in numbers, but also in the attitudes of the local inhabitants. Scheme implementation went beyond creating wage employment to encompass long term and effective community building measures, infrastructure and people's perception management towards government administration. The relationship between the government and the facilitators with the locals improved through this effort and in turn, decreased the impact of Naxal influence through sensitive policing and development dynamics.

## FOCUS ON HOLISTIC POVERTY REDUCTION

### EMPLOYMENT THROUGHOUT THE YEAR

Prior to the scheme, only limited employment opportunities existed in Balaghat district which is heavily marked by the large unskilled population. For a few months out of the year, locals engaged in agriculture production; there was little work except during the kharif season (July through October). With the implementation of the Annual Employment Cycle in convergence with various existing schemes in the district, those seeking work could be employed throughout the year in their own village.



In 2008-09, a total of 179.80 crores was effectively used in the district, giving wage employment to 2.27 lakh people. A total of 135.47 lakhs of man-days were generated out of which 81.06 lakhs (60%) were for women, 15.02 lakhs (11%) Schedule Castes and 40.17 lakhs (30%) Schedules Tribes. The percentage of SCs and STs in the district is 8% and 22% respectively.

*Comparative analysis of expenditure and employment generated in Balaghat district compared to the district averages of MP and all India\**

Year	Balaghat		Madhya Pradesh			India		
	Expenditure (Crore)	No. of households provided employment (Lakhs)	No of Districts*	Average District Expenditure (Crore)	No. of households provided employment (Lakhs)	No of Districts*	Average District Expenditure (Crore)	No. of households provided employment (Lakhs)
2006-07	133.90	2.48	18	103.48	1.59	200	45.31	1.05
2007-08	131.36	2.08	31	93.28	1.40	330	48.48	1.03
2008-09	179.80	2.27	48	74.06	1.08	619	43.91	0.73

Source: nrega.nic.in

#### INCREASE IN WAGES

Year	Wage Rate
2004-2005	Rupees 30.00
2005-2006	Rupees 35.00
2006-2007	Rupees 40.00
2007-2008	Rupees 59.00
2008-2009	Rupees 70.00

There has been an increase in the wage negotiation capacity of workers as well as of the wage rate. At prevailing wage rates from 100 days employment a worker earned up to rupees 8500 a year. Prior to NREGS the wage rates in the region were extremely low as shown in the table (right). With the wide implementation of the scheme and its fixed and widely publicised wage rates, the market wage rates increased to a great extent. Even agricultural and industrial labourers witnessed a hike in salaries.

## REDUCED DISTRESSED MIGRATION

With the availability of employment opportunities around the year in a higher wage rate, the workers were spared the route of distressed migration. *Tendu* leaf collection and bamboo cutting also started in Naxal affected forest areas. Overall work opportunities curbed the migration rate in Balaghat. The village migration register exposes the following data:

Year	Migration	
	Family	Population
2005-2006	1452	4217
2006-2007	1284	3664
2007-2008	1140	3284
2008-2009	1008	2840

## IMPROVED ROAD CONNECTIVITY

The district had poor road connectivity which was one of the major reasons of the area remained underdeveloped. Poor road connectivity triggered an administrative stalemate especially during the rainy season, thus making it a safe haven for Naxalites. In implementing the scheme by converging it with other central programmes, it was possible to build long thorough roads that cut across the Naxal affected areas. The PWD and Rural Engineering Department were responsible for the construction of these roads. Under the technical guidance of Rural Engineering Services, Panchayats constructed link and approach roads connecting the long thorough roads in the region. The newly developed road connectivity allowed the people to access and explore new markets for their agriculture and forest products. Education and health opportunities were also enhanced. Administrative operations were streamlined as well. **The table below shows the hike in road development from 2006-7 to 2007-8:**

Year	Route (km)
2004-2005	272.63
2005-2006	520.24
2006-2007	519.7
2007-2008	2019.39
2008-2009	2228

## APPROPRIATE COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

### DISTRIBUTION OF FUNDS ACCORDING TO COMMUNITY NEEDS

The distribution of funds was according to priority areas identified by the community. This effective distribution led to balanced growth in all the priority areas.

	Expenses on completed work (Crores)	Percentage
<b>Irrigation</b>	54.63	42.11
<b>Road connectivity</b>	26.26	20.24
<b>Water conservation</b>	27.19	20.96
<b>Aforestation</b>	21.66	16.9p
<b>Total</b>	129.74	100.00

### NAXAL INFLUENCE

Baihar, paraswada, Lanji, Birsa and Kimapur were considered inaccessible areas due to their association with Naxalism. Through articulate measures of People's Perception Management such as community policing the government built up informal networks in the village. Many villagers who were earlier Naxalite sympathisers began to help the police. As the development scenario changed, the Naxalites could not succeed in persuading the village youth to join them. An analysis of Naxal related crimes in the district over the years are given below:

Year	Naxal crimes
2004	13
2005	21
2006	10
2007	12
2008	07
2009	00

## SCHEME CONVERGENCE

### HEALTH CARE

Improved road connectivity also helped to improve health facilities in the district. The administration was in a better position to organise mobile health clinics, '*janani express*'. Improved transport and communication facilities broadened the villagers' knowledge, which were reflected in their new health and sanitation practices, especially through an increase in the number of institutional deliveries.

### REVOLUTIONISED IRRIGATION FACILITY

Within three years of implementation of the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, 27,600 hectares of new land was irrigated. Excavation of new tanks and renovation of existing tanks to increase the capacity utilisation were undertaken for this purpose. Thousands of kilometres of canals were renovated to rejuvenate the irrigation facility in the district as identified as a priority area by the community. Improved irrigation facilities revolutionized agriculture opportunities in the region resulting in crop intensity and diversity.



### GRAM-VAN AND COMMUNITY AFFORESTATION

The Forest Department started a bamboo production scheme, where bamboo plantation work was started in forest areas after a long gap period. The activity was extended to private fields to provide additional income to the people. Through MGNREGS funding, *Gram-van* was conceptualised and implemented; Two to three hectares were selected from the available community lands for afforestation for which fences were built, wells were dug and wards were made for care.

Integration of funds from kapil-dhara yojna, swarnajayanti Gram Swarojgar Yojana helped farmers immensely. In the individual beneficiary oriented kapil-dhara scheme the SC, ST and BPL farmers were given individual wells for minor irrigation. Convergence of Gram swarojgar yojana brought pumps to small and marginal farmers. Improved irrigation facilities empowered farmers to cultivate cereal, vegetable, fruits throughout the year.



#### FOREST REVENUE BOOM

Forest activities have grown a great deal in the region. The resumption in forest activities like tendu leaf collection, bamboo cutting has generated large levels of forest based revenues for the government, and locals have also availed regular forest employment and subsidy benefits.

Trends in revenue generation from forest activities are as follows:

Year	Revenue ( lakhs)
2004-2005	37.70
2005-2006	33.91
2006-2007	28.40
2007-2008	48.02
2008-2009	55.26

Through citizen-centric governance and integration of various development schemes, the district administration brought about a paradigmatic shift in the development scenario of Balaghat district of MP. The National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS) has been instrumental in reducing Naxal attacks in the region.

In acknowledgement of this accomplishment the Balaghat district NREGA team has been given the Award for Excellence in NREGA Administration for the year 2007-08 & 2008-09 by the Ministry of Rural Development Government of India and Prime Minister's Award for Excellence in Public Administration for the year 2007-08 by the Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions, Government of India.

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For further information, please contact Mr. Naimur Rahman, Director, OWFI.

## Appendix A- Interview Questionnaire

1. What was the employment situation in Balaghat district, MP prior to the Community MGNREGS programme? What about the overall development of the area in terms of infrastructure, health and livelihood activities etc.? (Can you provide us any data)
2. According to our research, medical camps were organised to build trust between the government and the citizens before the Community MGNREGS programme began. How were these carried out? What sort of impact did they have? Other than medical camps, what all did you do to build trust with the local people? Would you like to share another few endeavours taken to build trust prior to implementation of NREGS in Balaghat?
3. What inspired the Community MGNREGS programme? What are its major components?
  - Why was participatory development used? Was training required for this effort- if so, how was training pursued?
  - According to our background research, meetings were organised in the local markets on a weekly basis. How were these meetings executed? Who attended these meetings and what were their outcomes?
  - Overall development is the major goal of the programme. How are development efforts prioritised? For example, it seems that health, road infrastructure and livelihood activities (i.e. leaf and bamboo) have been emphasised.
4. What are the challenges in pursuing this programme, particularly Naxal-related issues? How were these overcome or are currently being dealt with?
5. What are the major achievements of the programme?

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