

Report on the Training and Social Audit undertaken in Rongara
Community Development Block,
South Garo Hills, Meghalaya under the aegis of the
National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA)
August 2007



View of Chitmang peak.

Pic: Samrakshan Charitable Trust.



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List of Acronyms

- National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA)
- Meghalaya Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MREGS)
- Employment Guarantee Scheme (EGS)
- Swaranjayati Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY)
- District Rural Development Agency (DRDA)
- District Programme Coordinator (DPC)
- Assistant District Programme Coordinator (ADPC)
- District Employment Council (DEC)
- Block Employment Council (BEC)
- Area Employment Councils (AEC)
- Village Employment Councils (VEC)
- Self Help Groups (SHG)
- State Institute of Rural Development (SIRD)
- Block Development Officer (BDO)
- Project Officer (PO)
- Gram Sewak Circles (GSC)
- Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)

I. Executive Summary

Samrakshan Trust has been working in Rongara Community Development Block of South Garo Hills since 2004 to conserve the rich biodiversity of the region through the active involvement of the local community. From the very beginning the Trust has endeavoured to work in close coordination with the District Administration. A MoU was signed in October 2006 with the District Administration to impart training to AEC on the NREGA (the Act) and MREGS (the Scheme)¹ in order to enhance the capacities of the community in Rongara Community Development Block to make optimal use of the opportunities provided by the NREGA.

In accordance with the MoU, training was imparted to 36 AEC in 15 GSC from November 14, 2006 to February 1, 2007. A Social Audit of the MREGS implementation was also carried out from May 14 to 25, 2007 at the behest of the District Administration, and 33 AEC and 111 VEC were covered under the exercise. A presentation on the findings was made at the Block Headquarters on May 29, 2007, and besides community representatives, the ADPC and other block level officials attended the presentation.

Briefly sharing the outcomes, the total sum expended for implementation of the MREGS in Rongara Community Development Block during the financial year 2006-07 (the actual implementation period was four months i.e. November 2006 to February 2007) was around Rs. 1.29 crore, and approximately 85% of this was towards labour payment. Nearly 45% of the funds were spent on plantation projects with land development, minor irrigation projects, water harvesting, wet terrace, and road and footpath construction comprising the rest. Plantations in the context mean raising private orchards of areca nut, cashew nut, rubber, orange and agar. Among the shortcomings that were pointed out by representatives of several AEC and VEC was the lack of enthusiasm on the part of Gram Sewaks for the scheme, the former were also confused about the roles and responsibilities of the different actors – Rongara BDO, South Garo Hills MREGS Cell, SIRD, and Samrakshan Trust vis-à-vis the scheme. Issues that emerged during the training programmes as well as findings from the Social Audit are shared in detail in the sections that follow.

In conclusion one may state that there are bound to be initial hiccups in the implementation of the Act, which seeks to bring about a paradigm shift in the manner of implementation of government schemes. Rather than see these in a negative light the issues that have emerged need to be viewed as pointers towards setting up an ideal model for implementation of the Act in the region.

¹ According to sub-section (1) of Section 4 of the NREGA, State Governments have been given the power to notify a scheme for implementation of the NREGA, thus the Government of Meghalaya came out with a notification spelling out the details of the Meghalaya Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme 2006

II. About Samrakshan Trust.

Samrakshan Trust has an ongoing Integrated Conservation Development Programme in the Rongara Community Development Block of South Garo Hills – Meghalaya. The field office is at Baghmara the district headquarters of South Garo Hills. The Meghalaya field office works towards:

1. Enhancing Livelihood Security.

Samrakshan Trust fosters community institutions that would act as a platform to effectively deliver conservation friendly livelihood plans. The Trust's role has been towards capacity enhancement of these institutions to enable them to access funds from the state agencies including banks for livelihood activities; and be independent of external agencies including Samrakshan in the long run.

2. Engendering Conservation Consciousness & Participatory Wildlife Monitoring.

Samrakshan Trust undertakes activities like screening of wildlife films, sketching & story telling sessions and celebration of environment events. These are aimed at engendering pride among community members towards the natural wealth of their lands. The trust also obtains information, in a structured manner, to develop an understanding of the areas used by elephants within village boundaries, their movement patterns, dietary preferences etc.; besides collecting information on presence of various birds, mammals and reptiles in the landscape.

III. Collaboration with the District Administration

A MoU was signed in August 2005 with the DRDA wherein the Trust undertook to form, develop and train SHG in a selected area of Rongara Community Development Block under the aegis of the SGSY and facilitate their linkages with various credit institutions. This was followed by another MoU signed in October 2006 between the District Administration and the Trust, for the latter to impart training to the AEC for ensuring successful implementation of the MREGS.

a. MoU for imparting training on the NREGA

The MREGS Notification of the Government of Meghalaya says that *The Block Employment Council and all the line departments concerned and the Registered Societies of repute, SHG federations, and Watershed Committees will be responsible to mobilize and build capacities of the wage-seekers to access their rights and entitlements provided under the Scheme.* In keeping with this pronouncement the District Administration entered into an agreement with Samrakshan Trust in October 2006 to train the AEC across Rongara Community Development Block enabling them to better understand the NREGA, the salient features of the MREGS, the roles and

responsibilities of the various institutions, drawing up perspective plans (shelf of works) and book-keeping and management skills.

i. Training Programme for the AEC

Two staff members of the Trust who were first rigorously trained in all aspects of the NREGA and the MREGS were given the responsibility of conducting training programmes for the AEC. In addition to these two personnel the Coordinator of the Livelihood and Self Help Group programme of the Trust played an active role in conducting and monitoring the training programmes. An exhaustive training plan was drawn up in consultation with the BDO and shared with the Gram Sewaks and the concerned AEC.



Training on NREGA in Aking and Block Headquarter.



Pics: Samrakshan Charitable Trust.

Training of all the three modules was imparted to 36 AEC in 15 GSC from November 14, 2006 to February 1, 2007. The modules were meant to enhance the skills of the AEC members towards better implementation and management of the Scheme.

Module 1

Introduction to NREGA, various terms used under the NREGA and entitlement and rights under the Act, the roles and responsibilities of the various institutions in the implementation, and the process of identification and planning for the works proposed to be undertaken.

Module 2

Books of accounts and other registers to be maintained by the AEC, book-keeping with an emphasis on the cash book.

Module 3

SHG, sub-village level institutions and importance and necessity of grass root participation in the planning and implementation of schemes.

ii. Experiences and issues from the training programme

As shared earlier the training comprised three modules and was undertaken over a three month period beginning November 2006. The response from the

community was one of great enthusiasm and anticipation. The following are some of the issues that emerged during the training:

- Appointment of Community Coordinators - The community coordinators had not been selected in most cases till the time of the training programmes. While the Notification says “The AEC/VEC assisted by the Gram Sevak and the Community Coordinator shall be responsible for identification of the works in the village area and for executing and supervising such works”.
- Non-receipt of administrative charges - The AEC had not received, till the time of training, Rs. 3,000/- administrative charges as stipulated².
- Lack of participation of Gram Sewaks - Some of the AEC are dissatisfied with the low levels of cooperation and enthusiasm shown by the Gram Sewaks towards the Act and as a corollary have difficulties in interacting with the BDO. Even during the training sessions conducted by Samrakshan Trust the Grams Sewaks were absent despite instructions from their office to remain present.
- Training related - A single training for book keeping seemed insufficient for the AEC members. Some of the AEC members continued to be confused over maintenance of the stipulated books.
- Communication gaps - Some of the AEC believe that they have been misinformed by the authorities as was in a case where a member was told that a certain percentage from approved ‘material component’ of each project will be deducted towards meeting the administrative expenses of the district cell.
- Non-receipt of first aid boxes - The AEC had not received the First Aid Box till the time of trainings. While the Act says “Workers are entitled for work site facilities like safe drinking water, shade for children and periods of rest, first-aid box with adequate material for emergency treatment of minor injuries and other health hazards connected with the work”.

b. Social Audit of the NREGA in Rongara Community Development Block

In May 2007, the Trust was asked to conduct Social Audit for the AEC and the VEC formed under the NREGA in the Rongara Community Development Block.

This is in accordance with the notification, which says “*Social audit shall be taken up to make the planning, implementation and evaluation of EGS more participatory, transparent and accountable. Social audit shall not be retrospective but an ongoing process of participation to ensure that legal guarantees and entitlements flow to the workers in a legitimate way. Social audit shall be done in three stages - pre, during and post implementation. Social audit shall be integrated into the critical activities of EGS.*”

² Faculty from SIRD communicated the amount i.e. Rs.3000/- to be paid as administrative charges to AEC at the time of training organized for District officials and NGOs

According to the Act “Social Audit is an ongoing process through which the potential beneficiaries and other stakeholders of an activity or project are involved at every stage: from the planning to implementation, monitoring and evaluation. This process helps in ensuring that the activity of project is designed and implemented in a manner that is most suited to the prevailing local conditions appropriately reflects priorities and preferences of those affected by it, and most effectively serves public interest.”

Questionnaires (Annexures 1 and 2) were framed to ascertain adherence to the parameters specified in the NREGA and MREGS. The questionnaires were drawn up based on a checklist provided by the DRDA and were administered to the AEC and VEC by the Trust personnel. A four member team including the three personnel involved in the training programme was set up to undertake the Social Audit and complete the exercise in an appropriate manner and within the stipulated period. In addition to interacting with the AEC and VEC members, the team also verified the books maintained by these institutions. 33 out of the 36 AEC, and 105 out of the 111 VEC in the Rongara Community Development Block were covered in the exercise. Findings from the exercise were shared with community representatives and block level officials at a presentation held at the headquarters of the Rongara Community Development Block on May 29, 2007.

i. Findings and issues that emerged from the Social Audit

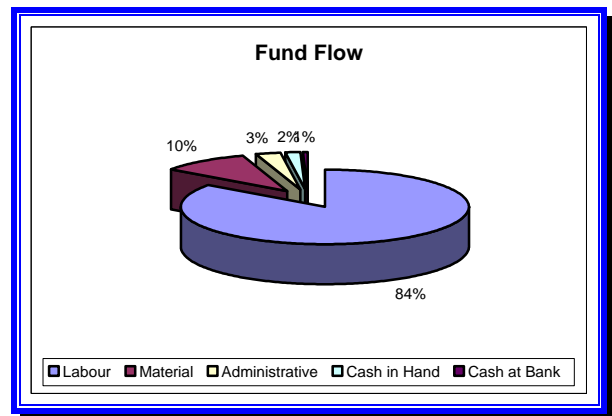
Findings

Table 1 showing number of AEC fulfilling the basic criteria

S.No	Criteria	Number of AEC	%
1.	Maintaining information wall	0	0
2.	Employing contractor	0	0
3.	Maintaining muster roll at worksite	33	100
4.	Operating Joint Bank Account	33	100
5.	Having 30% women membership	30	91
6.	Having women office-bearers	16	49
7.	Project received as per prioritization by VEC	26	79



Social Audit underway in an AEC - Pic: Samrakshan Charitable Trust.



Pie diagram showing fund flow of the MREGS 06-07

- Fund flow - The total sum expended during the year 2006-07 (actual implementation period being four months i.e. November 2006 to February 2007) was around Rs. 1.29 crore, of this Rs. 1.10 crore was towards labour payment, Rs. 13 lakh was the material cost, administrative costs were another Rs. 3.5 lakh and the cash in hand and bank added up to Rs. 2.75 lakh.
- A bulk of the sum i.e. Rs. 55.16 lakh was spent on plantation projects mostly those of areca nut, cashew nut, rubber, orange, bamboo and agar, while projects on land development, minor irrigation, water harvesting, wet terraces, road and foot path construction together came to Rs. 68.30 lakh.
- Non-receipt of job cards - Of the 105 VEC visited 61 VEC had people (one or more) who had applied for job cards but had not received them.
- Vigilance and Monitoring Committee - The Act says, “...every work sanctioned under the scheme, there should be a local vigilance and monitoring committee, composed of members of the locality or village where the work is undertaken, to monitor the progress and quality of work while it is in progress”. The team found 76 VEC of the 111 VEC visited did not have the said committees.
- Information Wall - While the Notification says “An Information Wall shall be built in every village. One side of the Wall shall be painted with long-term information like task-wise wage rates to be adopted for the year, non-negotiables, important guidelines, shelf of works identified, etc. The other side of the wall shall be updated with weekly information like work-wise number of labour working, materials procured and consumed, expenditure, etc. None of the 33 AEC were maintaining the information wall.
- Membership of the AEC - 30 out of 33 of the AEC visited by the team had 30% women members. While this is certainly in-keeping with the guidelines in the Notification which says, “30 % of the members of the AEC must be women, and in case of any shortfall, the Block Employment Council (BEC) may nominate additional women members to ensure that 30% of the AEC comprises women”, efforts need to be made to ensure that the representation of women in the AEC does not remain only at the stipulated number but goes well beyond.
- Office bearers of the AEC - While the Notification says “The 3(three) elected members will consist of one female, one male & the Village Traditional Headman / Nokma of the village”, the team found that only 16 out of 33 AEC had women office bearers.
- Payment of wages - 10 out of 33 AEC were paying wages on fortnightly basis.

Table 2 showing number of VEC fulfilling the basic criteria

S.No	Criteria	VEC	%
1.	Nos of VEC having hh that have not applied for job cards	28	27
2.	Nos of VEC having hh that have not received job cards	61	58
3.	Nos of VEC that have vigilance and monitoring committees	29	28
4.	Nos of VEC that do not have vigilance and monitoring committees	76	72

(hh - households)

Issues

- Non-issue of Booklets - Booklets accompanying job card are not being issued to the job card-holders.
- Absence of Gram Sevaks from work sites - Gram Sewaks are not visiting the work sites and as a result are not aware of the issues AEC and VEC members are confronted with. This when the Notification clearly says “The VEC assisted by the Gram Sevak and the Community Coordinator shall be responsible for identification of the works in the village area and for executing and supervising such works.”
- Non-allotment of funds for community coordinator - Funds allotted for community coordinators have not been released.
- Lack of sufficient technical assistance - Sufficient technical assistance has not been provided to the AEC and VEC. While the notification says *The PO shall scrutinize the annual plan received from the VEC for its technical feasibility and satisfy himself / herself that the plan meets the likely demand for employment based on the registrations and previous experience.*
- Absence of clarity on roles - AEC and VEC members were confused with different roles being played by State Institute of Rural Development (SIRD), Rongara BDO, South Garo Hills MREGS Cell and Samrakshan Trust.
- Halt in programme implementation - An issue that continues to perplex members of the community is the halt in implementation of the MREGS in South Garo Hills. This was raised by community representatives at the time of presentation of the Social Audit exercise and continues to be of major concern to them.

IV. Acknowledgements.

1. Villagers of Rongara Community Development Block
2. AEC and VEC of Rongara Community Development Block
3. Block office, Rongara Community Development Block.
4. DRDA, South Garo Hills, Government of Meghalaya.
5. Office of the Deputy Commissioner, South Garo Hills, Government of Meghalaya.
6. State Institute of Rural Development (SIRD), Meghalaya
7. West Garo Hills Community Resource Management Society, Tura

V. Annexures

Annexure 1 - SAMRAKSHAN CHARITABLE TRUST - MEGHALAYA

Social Audit with AEC

1.	Date and time of Social Audit	
2.	Name of AEC	
3.	Number of VEC under the AEC?	
4.	Name of Gram Sevak Circle	
5.	Name of Block	

Sensitization and training programme:

1.	Have you received any training?	
2.	By whom?	
3.	Are you satisfied with the training?	
4.	Is NGO conducted training at your place?	
5.	Did you attend training at Block Head Quarter? How many times?	

Formation of institution:

1.	Have you formed village monitoring committee?	
2.	Did the AEC constitute within a radius of 2.5 km?	
3.	Does the AEC constitute from the representative of all VECs?	
4.	Does the office bearer's election done in democratic manner?	
5.	Does the AEC constitute 30% of women members?	
6.	Is there joint bank account in the name of AEC?	
7.	Is there any women member as office bearer in the AEC?	

Preparation of perspective plan:

1.	Does VEC member suggest shelf of work?	
2.	Does Project Officer and line department prepared estimate based on the shelf of work? If not, why?	
3.	Have you aware on your sanctioned works?	
4.	Have the schemes been approved by BEC?	

Application and allotment of works:

1.	How did you forward job applications to PO?	
2.	Could you start work within 15 days of applying for job?	
3.	How is the women's participation?	
4.	Did work sanction as per the prioritization made by VEC?	

Magnitude of work:

1.	Number of project implemented	Total days	Number of man-days	Amount of wage paid
	a)			
	b)			
	c)			
	d)			

	e)			
	f)			
	g)			
	h)			
	Total			

Maintenance of Muster Roll and payment of wages:

1.	Have you maintain Muster Roll at worksite?	
2.	Have you taken attendance at commencing and ending of the works?	
3.	Did Gram Sevak or technical assistant attend at worksite to do the measurement?	
4.	What is the mode of payment and frequency? (daily, weekly or monthly)	
5.	Have you read out the muster roll during wage payment to labourers?	
6.	Have you passed resolution before money withdrawal from bank?	
7.	Have you submit the copy resolution to bank?	
8.	The deposits and withdrawals reflect in cash book?	
	a. Amount received from Block, please specify received in cash or bank or in both?	
	b. Amount paid to labour.	
	c. Amount received towards administrative expenditure.	
9.	Have you paid "10%" if the work allotted beyond 5 km?	
10.	Have you used all allotted muster roll?	

Maintenance of books:

1.	Job card application register	
2.	Work application register	
3.	Work register	
4.	Expenditure register	
5.	Muster Roll register	
6.	Asset register	
7.	Complain register	
8.	Cash book	
9.	Ledger register	

The general information:

1.	Did any contractor involve in execution of NREG schemes?	
2.	Are any disable person employed at the worksite?	
3.	Have you maintain an information wall?	
4.	Are any board/ hoarding available at the worksite giving full details?	
5.	Have you finish work as the plan or estimate?	
6.	Is there any saving with AEC?	

Social Audit Team

Sr.	Name	Signature
1.		
2.		
3.		

Annexure 2 - SAMRAKSHAN CHARITABLE TRUST - MEGHALAYA
Social Audit with VEC

1.	Date and Time of Social Audit	
2.	Name of VEC	
3.	Number of Households	
4.	Name of AEC	
5.	Name of Gram Sevak Circle	
6.	Name of Block	

Sensitization and training programme:

1.	Have you received any awareness campaign or training?	
2.	By whom?	
3.	Are you satisfied with the training?	
4.	Is NGO conducted training in your place?	
5.	Did you attend training at Block Head Quarter? How many times?	

Formation of institution:

1.	Did you select VEC representative to AEC in democratic manner?	
2.	Have you formed village monitoring committee?	
3.	Is any women representative to AEC from your VEC?	

Issue of Job Cards

1.	Did you apply for job card?	
2.	Did all members (adult) of the household include in job card?	
3.	Did all applicants receive job card?	
4.	Is there distinct job card number?	
5.	When did you receive the job card? (Month and year)	

Magnitude of work:

1.	Number of project implemented	Total days	Number of man-days	Amount of wage paid
	a)			
	b)			
	c)			
	d)			
	e)			
	Total			

Preparation of perspective plan:

1.	Have you suggested works towards preparing perspective plan?	
2.	Does all households involve towards identifying works?	
3.	Have you aware about plan and estimate? Have you got any copy of estimate?	
4.	Does all shelf of work fall under permissible category under NREGA?	

Application and allotment of works:

1.	Did applicants applied in individually or in group?	
2.	How did you applied for the job?	
3.	Have you got work within 15 days of applying for job?	
4.	Have you got work within AEC circle (in the radius of 5 km)?	
5.	How is the women's participation?	
6.	Percentage of job seekers?	
7.	Did work sanction as per the prioritization made by VEC?	

Maintenance of Muster Roll and payment of wages:

1.	Have you maintain Muster Roll at worksite?	
2.	Have you taken attendance at commencing and ending of the works?	
3.	How much wage have you received per day per person?	
4.	Did Gram Sevak or technical assistant attend at worksite to do the measurement?	
5.	What is the mode of payment and frequency? (daily, weekly or monthly)	
6.	Have you read out muster roll before made the payment?	
7.	Are equal wage paid to men and women?	
8.	Have you received "10%" if the work allotted beyond 5 km?	
9.	How many members from each households seeking work (an average)?	

Measurement of work:

1.	Did any technical assistant visit worksite? If yes, how many time?	
2.	Did s/he take any measurement?	

What books have you maintain?

1.		
2.		

The general information:

1.	Did any contractor involve in execution of NREG schemes?	
2.	Have you got other facilities like crèche, drinking water, aid box available at the worksite?	
3.	Are any disable person employed at the worksite?	
4.	Did individual members open a bank account?	

Social Agreement:

1.	How many SHGs have you formed in the village?	
2.	Have you signed any social agreement with government?	
3.	Participation in education?	

Social Audit Team:

<i>Sr.</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Signature</i>

Contact Details.

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