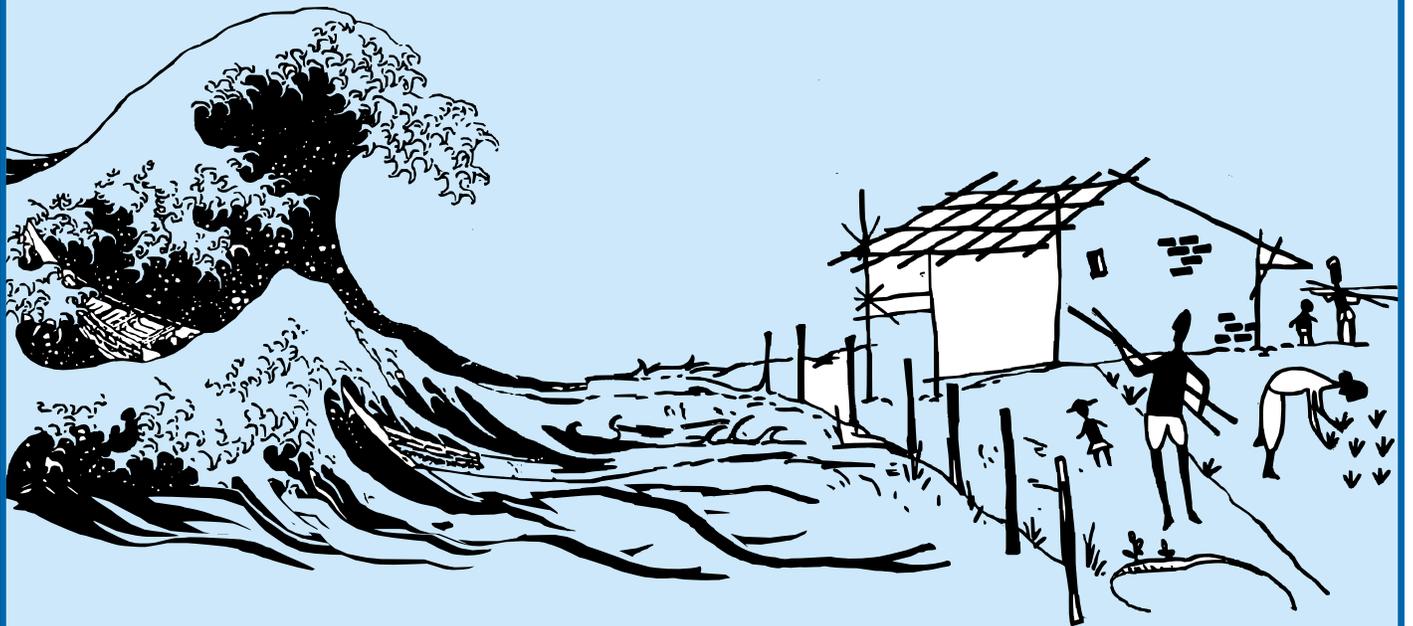


Re-building Our Lives

A Backgrounder on the Right to Work in
the Context of Post Tsunami Reconstruction



Reconstruction for Development Centres (RDC)

A collaborative information system for informed and participative reconstruction
by A&D, CED, ISED, Praxis, TNDTF, supported by Fondation de France
www.rdc.net.in

Disaster Response: Need for Employment Guarantee **1**

The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) is the culmination of long struggles in different parts of India over more than 30 years. It enshrines the notion that every Indian has a right to work and employment in the area that s/he resides. It is not a dole. Hence, it emphatically affirms that local residents can influence type of works undertaken under the Act.

- Employment Guarantee: A hard fight for a right
- The potential developmental benefits of Employment Guarantee Act
- Why the guarantee of work is important?

NREGA and Disaster **5**

NREGA is eminently suited for Post-disaster reconstruction and rehabilitation. It can focus on long-term development and strengthening of human and physical capital.

- Long-term development
- Poster – You have the Right to Work

Participating Makes a Difference **9**

Participation is the key. If the stranglehold of the experts, bureaucrats and contractors on the works undertaken under NREGA is to be broken, it is very essential that local bodies and grassroots make use of the provision for their participation in the decision-making.

- Role of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) in Employment Guarantee
- Poster – Let's work to rebuild our lives (after the tsunami)

Right to Information and NREGA **12**

The timely enactment of RTI act comes as a sort of shot in the arm for the NREGA. The right to information and the NREGA goes hand in hand. NREGA includes various provisions for transparency and accountability.

- Poster – Where has all the money gone?

Why the Employment Guarantee Act Will Work **14**

This is no passivity-inducing dole of a moodily munificent welfare state, subject to the budgetary constraints and rules and regulations to suit implementing authorities. This is a statutorily assured and judicially enforceable right/entitlement of citizens of the country.

Resource Materials on NREGA **16**

Articles, posters, CDs, websites, etc for further reading, watching and surfing.



Disaster Response: Need for Employment Guarantee

All of us, who have been affected by the tsunami, have seen the worst. Many people have commended our resilience and how we have faced the crisis. Now that the tsunami response and post tsunami reconstruction programme is reaching its final phase, namely “long term development”, we need to look back and see what it has done to us, and make some definite choices about the future.

Many leaders have opined that the tsunami has created a very dependent community. A community which was self-reliant, and hard working has now started looking for free dole outs. One leader of the agricultural labourers movement regretted that the way funds are pouring in, the Union members have become like beggars depending on others for their development, and have stopped struggling to uphold the human rights of survivors.

This is mainly because all the aid that has come in after the tsunami has been distributed by these agencies as if it was charity. The long-term impact of this aid has not been considered. Instead of strengthening the development mechanisms and institutions, it seems as though the aid agencies have undermined them.

In this booklet, we will explore how the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) is not only an anti-poverty programme, but also a potential tool of empowerment for rural labourers and an effective response to disasters like the tsunami.

According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), “Decent work matters in crisis. It is a powerful, tested rope that pulls people and societies out of crises and sets them on a sustainable development path. Decent and stable

jobs offer crisis-affected people not only income, but also freedom, security, dignity, self-esteem, hope, and a stake in the reconciliation and reconstruction of their communities”. (ILO-Crisis Response and Reconstruction Programme, August 28, 2006, ILO. <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/employment/crisis/index.htm> [C.ELDOC1.tsunami.ILO-crisis-response.htm])

An ILO member (on an Asian Development Bank-World Bank-United Nations Damage Assessment Mission) who visited some of the tsunami affected villages in Tamil Nadu in February 2005 said, “I was a little surprised to observe that the employment generation programmes then in operation in the state were not being deployed in the affected areas of the districts”.

When responding to a crisis, one should try to take advantage of existing programmes before trying to set up totally new ones. The rationale is not difficult to see. In any administrative system, everything takes time, at least in the initial stages. Confirmation of plans, approval for proposals and disbursement of funds do not happen quickly. In contrast, an existing programme can be expanded and extended much more easily and rapidly: the guidelines are in place and government staff already know how to run it. Therefore, the local administration in the tsunami-affected districts should take advantage of ongoing national programmes like the

Sampoorna Grameen Rozgar Yojana and expand its operations to the affected areas of the state. (**Employment Guarantee and Crisis Response**, J. Krishnamurty, Economic & Political Weekly, March 04, 2006. [C.ELDOC1.H40a.040306EPW789.html])

The NREGA has been implemented in 200 selected districts of the country, including three of the 13 districts affected by the tsunami. It would have been more prudent, if considering the debilitating affects of the tsunami, followed by other smaller disasters like the floods, the NREGA could have been extended to all the affected districts in the state.

Employment Guarantee: A Hard Fight for a Right

It must be remembered that the NREGA was enacted after a long struggle by agricultural labourers, in different parts of the country. It was Dr V S Page, Chairman of the Maharashtra Legislature Council, who inspired the Employment Guarantee Scheme in response to the three-year drought in Maharashtra between 1972 and 1974. Since then, agricultural labourers' unions including the Bharat Mazdoor Sabha have struggled continuously to keep the scheme alive. (Finally in 1977 the scheme got converted into an Act at the state level.) In the early 80s, the Andhra Pradesh Vyavasaya Coolie Sangha, along with several NGOs, organised out several rallies to fight for the Right to Work and for enactment of an Employment Guarantee Scheme throughout the country on the lines of Maharashtra.

Amongst the national-level actions was a national seminar in Hyderabad in 1989 and a cycle rally with over 1000 cyclists from various parts of India to New Delhi in 1989. This culminated in a National Rally, joined by Bharat Mazdoor Sabha, Paschim Banga Khet Majoor Samity, Tamil Nadu Agriculture Labour Sangha now Tamil Nadu Agricultural Labour Movement (TALM), where a

critique of the rural development schemes and the feasibility and desirability of EGA were discussed with S R Sankaran, the then Rural Development Secretary, Government of India.

On 31 July, 1991, the National Commission on Rural Labour (NCRL) submitted its report and recommended that, for the betterment of agricultural labourers, the Right to Work should be accepted as a fundamental right with certain qualifications and an Employment Guarantee Act should be enacted to implement this. A parliamentary sub-committee on rural labour led by Gurudas Dasgupta also endorsed that employment guarantee was the need of the hour. A few years later, the central government adopted the Employment Assurance Scheme (EAS) as a limited way of providing guaranteed employment for 100 days, though it did not receive any statutory backing.

In 2003, the organisations and individuals who informally created the Right to Food Campaign undertook a week-long campaign demanding an Employment Guarantee Act in various states. This culminated in a National Day of Action on the Right to Work on 1st May, 2003. Campaigns on the issue picked up in various states before the Lok Sabha elections in 2004. All parties were also asked to include the promise to pass a National Rural Employment Guarantee Act in their manifestoes. These campaigns met with some success. The Common Minimum Programme has as its first point the assurance that the United Progressive Alliance shall enact a National Employment Guarantee Act.

The National Convention on the Right to Food and Work in Bhopal in June 2004, attended by over 500 delegates from 120 organisations, declared the need for the immediate adoption of a National Rural Employment Guarantee Act.

Currently, NREGA is being implemented only in 200 districts on a pilot basis. The plan is to extend it to the entire country, as early as possible. However, certain vested interests have sought to discredit the implementation of the Act as wasteful expenditure. It is in this light that the so-called unskilled labourers from all other places are relying on the labourers in the covered areas to prove how successful and meaningful such an initiative can be.

The best way to ensure that the implementation is successful is to influence the decision making in your village so that the works undertaken are helpful for the long-term livelihoods of the poor, for disaster preparedness and response.

The potential developmental benefits of the Employment Guarantee Act

An effective Employment Guarantee Act would help to protect rural households from poverty and hunger. In fact, a “full-fledged” EGA (with an unlimited individual guarantee of work, not restricted to “100 days per households per year”) would enable most poor household in rural India to cross the poverty line. Secondly, it would lead to a dramatic reduction of rural-urban migration. If work is available in the village, many families will stay in place instead of heading for the cities. Thirdly, guaranteed employment can be a major source of empowerment for women. Based on past experience, women are likely to account for a large proportion of labourers employed under the Act, and guaranteed employment will give them some economic independence. Fourthly, the Employment Guarantee Act is an opportunity to create useful assets in rural areas.

Above all, guaranteed employment is likely to change power equations in the rural society and to foster a more equitable social order. (**Employment Guarantee Act A Primer**, <http://www.righttofoodindia.org> [C.ELDOC1.H40a.21jan05IE1.html])



Employment Perspective of Tamil Nadu

The problem of poverty is directly related to the existence of unemployment, underemployment and low productive employment.

Petty land holdings are a special characteristic of Tamil Nadu's agriculture. While at the national level, marginal holdings accounted for 59% of the total operational holdings, for Tamil Nadu it is as high as 73%.

Disguised employment is acute among small and marginal farmers and agricultural households. Landless rural households account for over 60% in the State.

(**Employment Perspective**,

http://www.tn.gov.in/spc/annualplan/ap2004-05/ch1_3.pdf

[C.ELDOC1.tsunami.Employment-perspectives.pdf])

Why is the guarantee of work important?

- A guarantee of employment strengthens the bargaining power of those who are demanding work.
- A demand-driven approach ensures that employment is provided where and when it is most needed. When employment is allocated from the top down, the whims of bureaucrats and politicians often matter more than the real needs of the people.
- An employment guarantee scheme also facilitates the inclusion of the poorest of the poor in employment programmes. When employment opportunities are limited, those with greater clout and better connections (among potential workers) tend to get the work at the expense of the more vulnerable. In contrast, an open-ended employment guarantee is based on “self-selection”, whereby the poor themselves decide whether or not to participate.
- The right to work brings economic security in people's lives, especially women. Today, labourers cannot count on employment being provided to them during the lean season. The result is massive seasonal migration,

Strengths of EGA

It is self-targeting: rich people do not like to do manual labour to earn a low wage.

It is self-adjusting: fewer people come to an EG programme when (say) the harvest drives up demand for labour.

EG is self-liquidating: In a prosperous region, there would be no takers, and the EG programme would die a natural death.

(Learning from Mayurbhanj, Ila Patnaik, The Indian Express, January 21, 2005.
[C.ELDOC.H40a.21jan05IE1.html])

especially in dry land areas. An employment guarantee programme would give labourers greater confidence in the prospect of local employment and discourage seasonal migration. It will help to protect rural households from poverty and hunger.

- A legally binding Employment Guarantee Act is likely to be far more durable than ad hoc employment schemes, as it will place a judicially enforceable obligation on the state and give bargaining power to the labourers.

(The Right to Work, Right to Food Campaign,
www.righttofoodindia.org
[C.ELDOC1.H40a.right-to-work-draft.doc])

Further Reading

National Rural Employment Guarantee ACT, 2005- Dilution of Right to Work? A paper presented by K. Loganathan, State President, TALM in the National Consultation on the Draft Social Security Bills, NREG Act and NCL's Comprehensive Bill for the workers in the unorganized sector held in New Delhi
[C.ELDOC1.tsunami/NREGA-K.Loganathan.html]

National Rural Employment Guarantee Programme Sewa's Perception And Implications, A Perspective Note, Reema Nanavaty & Divya Pandya, SEWA [C.ELDOC1.tsunami.NREGA-SEWAs-perception.doc]

Rural Employment Guarantee Act Safety Net for Poor in Rural Areas, The Hindu, March 1, 2005.
[C.ELDOC1.tsunami.safetynet-article.html]

Work for Pro-poor Growth, Maxine Olson, Economic Times, October 20, 2005.
(<http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/articleshow/msid-1268550,prtpage-1.cms>)
[C.ELDOC1.H40a.20oct05et1.pdf]

Why Employment Guarantee Scheme Will Work Niranjana Sahoo, Observer Research Foundation, Vol. III Issue. 38; September 26, 2005.
<http://www.observerindia.com/strategic/st050930.htm>
[C.ELDOC1.tsunami/Why_EGS_will_Work.html]

NREGA and Disaster

There are many lessons to learn from the past approaches to natural and man-made disasters. Unfortunately the response after any disaster focuses on physical reconstruction rather than how individuals and communities can rebuild livelihoods that are sustainable. Hence people are unable to drive their own recovery at a later stage.

The NREGA should be flexible and responsive in all disaster situations. Firstly, the administrative system should be well trained and well prepared to deal with the sudden onset of any disaster. As part of the NREGA, an emergency fund should be

set up at the state level with clear rules governing its use. All the people responsible for the implementation of NREGA should be able to take decisions and follow special procedures to avoid any delays in the execution of works. Wage employment opportunities should be expanded as per the need.

Arrangements should be made to provide job cards, receive applications and provide work to victims at a very short notice.

The range of work opportunities should be widened to cover the types of work needed to be done in the aftermath of a disaster/crisis. This should include, among others, clearing of debris, clearing of agricultural, pastoral and plantation land (after a tsunami), and simple repair/restoration of the infrastructure using labour-based methods. Fortunately, Schedule I of the NREGA, paragraph 1 (ix) already makes it possible to expand the types of work that may be taken up.

The list of permissible work should be expanded by an appropriate central government notification. This should be done now instead of waiting for a disaster to happen. (**Employment Guarantee and Crisis Response**, J. Krishnamurty, Economic & Political Weekly, March 04, 2006) [C.ELDOC1.H40a.040306EPW789.html]

Combining Food Security with NREGA

K S Gopal, CEC, Hyderabad, has proposed that grain should be given to all card holders, irrespective of the work given or done, on loan against the payment under NREGA.

This will ensure that Food Security is provided on the assurance that those in a crisis, at times of emergencies, based on the recovery of work that will be provided under the EGA.

This adds another dimension of guarantee. You are given as much work as you need to take care of your food needs.

(**Is the Euphoria Justified?**, K S Gopal, Economic & Political Weekly, October 15, 2005. [C.ELDOC1.H40a.151005EPW4523.html])

Works Provided under EGA

- water conservation and water harvesting
- drought proofing (including afforestation and tree plantation)
- irrigation canals including micro and minor irrigation works
- provision of irrigation facility to land owned by households belonging to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes or land of beneficiaries of land reforms or that of the beneficiaries under the Indira Awas Yojana of the Government of India
- renovation of traditional water bodies including desilting of tanks
- land development
- flood control and protection works including drainage in water logged areas
- rural connectivity
- wasteland development
- any other work which may be notified by the government.

(National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, Tamil Nadu, 2005, Righttofoodindia.org, January 01, 2005.
<http://www.righttofoodindia.org/data/egs-tndraft.doc>
[C.ELDOC1.tsunami.NREGA-Tamilnadu-draft.doc])

Long-term Development

Since long-term development is the ultimate goal of all anti-poverty programmes, and true development is the best form of disaster preparedness, the works allowed under the NREGA should also be widened to include decentralised sustainable livelihood and other social sector activities.

For example, Kirtiman Awasthi, in the magazine Down to Earth opines that the government will have to prioritise the type of works that can be included so that the scheme also increases rural

productivity and, ultimately, the rural economy.

(Implementing the Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, Kirtiman Awasthi, June 15, 2006. <http://www.downtoearth.org.in> [J.ELDOC1.H40a.15jun06dte1.pdf])

The Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) believes that most workers in the rural areas do have skills by which they can earn their livelihoods. They feel the employment generated through EGA will go beyond the 100 days and will be more long lasting provided the following works are included.

- (1) Work linked to agriculture such as agro-processing (flour mill), food processing (spices, papad-khakhra making), and watershed development.
- (2) Artisanal work such as weaving, printing, leatherwork, carpentry, plumbing, stitching, embroidery.
- (3) Services such as training, health care (selling medicines, counseling, dais work), child care and old age care, which are a growing demand.
- (4) Works of public interest can be sponsored by government, including environmental work like nursery raising, tree-plantation, cleaning campaign, recycling, water harvesting, operation and maintenance of water resources such as hand pumps, pipelines.

- (5) Many such works that may be local to the area (paper cup making, bidi rolling). (National Rural Employment Guarantee Programme: Sewa's Perception And Implications, A Perspective Note, Reema Nanavaty & Divya Pandya, SEWA.
[C.ELDOC1.tsunami.NREGA-SEWAs-perception.doc])

K P Kannan goes a step further. He says that if the success of an employment guarantee is linked to progressive enhancement of human development via the formation and strengthening of physical and human capital, it would require design and implementation of projects at the local level, especially at the village and block levels. This calls for qualified labour

(skilled/educated labour). One way to ensure the supply of such qualified labour at the local level would be to open up employment under the EGA to educate unemployed in the villages by offering the same manual labour rate. The difference between a normative wage rate and the actual wages paid will be the contribution of such educated labour to the employment guarantee programme. (**Linking Guarantee to Human Development**, *K P Kannan*, Economic & Political Weekly, October 15, 2005. [C.ELDOC1.H40a.1510005EPW4518.html])

Labour Bank

The concept of a labour bank at the village panchayat level would help energise the working of the panchayat institutions. Such a labour bank will have the facility for the unemployed seeking work under EG to “deposit” their available days for work in every season or year with all relevant information such as gender, age, educational background, skill, and so on. On the basis of such information, appropriate employment programmes could be designed and implemented in an orderly fashion.

(**Linking Guarantee to Human Development**, *K P Kannan*, Economic & Political Weekly, October 15, 2005. [C.ELDOC1.H40a.1510005EPW4518.html])

You have the **RIGHT TO WORK!**



Under EGA, you have the right to
100 days employment
in a year, for each family
within 5 km of your residence
within 15 days from application
on local development project

You will find more information in the *[NREGA backgrounder]*
or at your Gram Panchayat

Participating Makes a Difference

There is general consensus among donor agencies, NGOs, and official bodies that unless there is participation leading to ownership of the local people in the rehabilitation and recovery process, all the benefits accrued during the relief and rehabilitation phases are bound to be short-lived, and may not live to resist another disaster.

However, it is mainly those who are owners of productive assets like land, boats, factories, or capital, who have participated in whatever livelihood and rehabilitation programmes that tsunami reconstruction has had to offer. It is not possible for those who seek work for survival to decide or choose the kind of work that they should do. Thus, development programmes tend to get decided without the participation of those who most need them.

Under the EGA however, not only can anyone ask for 100 days work in a year, but s/he can also take part in the Gram Sabha, and influence the committees on the kind of works that can be taken up.

In the section on long-term development, we have already seen how the selection of work and the nature of employment provided will be critical in deciding the long term benefits of the EGA. Thus, participation is not for token purposes only, as most development programmes these days tend to make it. It is critical to ensure that the selection

of works is in the long-term interests of the local people.

The power to select works must be taken away from bureaucrats, engineers and sarpanches. The villagers, especially those offering to work, must plan and create assets that they see as enhancing their quality of life. It is important that

Rajasthan shows the way

The Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan took up the challenge of a comprehensive social mobilisation for the employment guarantee. The mobilisation involved as many as 658 volunteer participants from all over India, 250 from the district itself, as well as 10 from Bangladesh.

Jan Sunwais - public hearings - were held in as many places as possible, and the process culminated in a huge sammelan held at the district headquarters, where bureaucrats and officials involved in the process were also invited, to hear first hand of the actual conditions at the work sites.

A mass social audit initiative of employment guarantee works in Dungarpur district of Rajasthan produced encouraging results.

(Walking with a purpose, Sowmya Kerbart-Sivakumar
<http://www.frontline.in/stories/20060519002903500.htm>
[C.ELDOC1.H40a.19may06frn1.pdf])

these worker groups decide on the works to be taken up and even develop as a collective to manage the entire scheme within the next two or three years. Towards this end, it is a must to develop a cadre of village-based barefoot engineers who can assist the community – as most works would be small in nature – as well as monitor the works. (Is the Euphoria Justified, K S Gopal, Economic & Political Weekly, October 15, 2005. [C.ELDOC1.H40a.151005EPW4523.html])

This itself will be an enormous step towards the empowerment of vulnerable sections of our society. They will learn to actively participate in democratic institutions at the grass-roots and acquire a greater role in decision-making and control over resources. Such empowerment is the essence of rural development. (Linking Guarantee to Human Development, K P Kannan, Economic & Political Weekly, October 15, 2005. [C.ELDOC1.H40a.1510005EPW4518.html])

The Gram Sabha is the statutorily mandated institutional mechanism for eliciting community participation. In addition, other methods of community participation could be evolved such as local vigilance and monitoring committees, local beneficiary committees, local self-help groups, user groups, and other grassroots structures that broaden the base of participation so that the implementation of the Act has transparency and public accountability.

Role of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) in EG

Local bodies are nearer to people and in a better position to undertake tasks, as they know the requirements and are familiar with local areas, are answerable to the community and will ensure total transparency in working and usage of funds. (Community-Based Disaster Preparedness, Prevention and Mitigation: Sustainable Approaches, Dr. Vinod K. Sharma, National Centre for Disaster Management. [C.ELDOC1.tsunami.CBDP-Sustainable-Approaches.pdf])

PRIs have a key role under the Act. Gram Sabhas, self help groups, local monitoring committees, beneficiary groups and other forms of community-based organisations are the basic agencies which will run and monitor the programme.

After the Tsunami,
LET'S WORK
to rebuild our lives!

You have the right to
decide what work is undertaken
under NREGA.



You are the one who knows best
what is good for your village.

Participate in the Gram Sabha,
SHARE YOUR IDEAS!

You will find more information in the *[NREGA backgrounder]*
or at your Gram Panchayat

Right to Information and NREGA



The Employment Guarantee Act goes hand in hand with the Right to Information Act. The NREGA includes various provisions for transparency and accountability.

For instance, job cards are to be issued to all labourers, wages are to be paid directly to the person concerned and in presence of independent persons of the community on pre-announced dates, every work site should have notices of rates and estimates and people engaged in work.

Every year a public report is to be presented at each level on the work that has been done under the NREGA and what its outcomes have been. The Gram Panchayat will present this report to the Gram Sabha, the State Government to the State Legislature and the Central Government to the Parliament. **(Prime Minister's Speech on NREGA,** <http://pmindia.nic.in/lspeech.asp?id=273> [C.ELDOC1.tsunami.PM-speech-NREGA.doc])

People can exercise their rights under the Right to Information Act and access records and information on all aspects of work like muster rolls, payment registers and employment estimates. They should be made available in the public domain for scrutiny and verification.

(Employment Guarantee Act: A Primer, Right to food Campaign, www.righttofoodindia.org [C.ELDOC1.H40a.EGA-primer.doc])

The Right to Information is an important tool for fighting corruption and is essential for the success of the Employment Guarantee Act.

(Right to Information Act, 2005
[C.ELDOC.0412.right-information-act.pdf])

A Primer on Right to Information Act
[C.ELDOC1.B82c.rti-booklet1.doc])

In spite of an Employment Guarantee Act, contractors continue to maintain stranglehold over public works, machines are engaged, full and timely payment of wages still remains an illusive dream and muster rolls continue to be fabricated away from the eyes of the public, making a complete mockery of the Act. The food grains as part of the 'Food for Work' programmes also do not reach the labourers.

The resistance by bureaucracy to give up its control, lack of transparency and no possibility of democratic intervention by the people ensures the failure of poverty alleviation measures of the government. The number of ration cards meant for the poor in a village gets decided not by the village panchayats, but by the block level officials. Similarly, which public works have to be undertaken gets decided by the officials, often in collusion with contractors, and not by the people.

(Government vs. NGOs, A. Sankar, Executive Director, EMPOWER, Tuticorin [extract from an email])

WHERE HAS ALL THE MONEY GONE?



HE FOUGHT FOR OUR RIGHTS, NOW IT'S OUR TURN

We have the RIGHT TO KNOW how the money collected for Tsunami Rehabilitation has been spent. Use the RIGHT TO INFORMATION ACT. File an **application** with the Public Information Officer at your Collectorate.

RIGHT TO INFORMATION ACT

WE HAVE THE RIGHT TO KNOW

Why The Employment Guarantee Act Will Work

In the past, government employment programmes have been essentially relief works. A welfare state initiates these programmes to lower the pain of people in distress. It is a top-down dole. The EGA is different. It enshrines work as a right of the people. It also puts the onus on the people to demand work. Government responds to their demand. This makes a big difference. The only possible check to corruption in government works is a vigilant people.

The onus of success of the EGA is on the people themselves. It will succeed only if they are aware of it to begin with. And then active in deciding what works their gram panchayat should take up. And finally in exercising the necessary vigilance to check corruption. This is no passivity-inducing dole of a moodily munificent welfare state. It is a programme of and by the people. If they are not active, if they are not vigilant, it will not succeed.

Grass roots people's organisations have a critical role to play here - in mobilising people to deploy the powers inherent in their right to information.

(Saving the Employment Guarantee Act, Mihir Shah, Economic & Political Weekly, February 12, 2005. [C.ELDOC.H40a.12feb05epw3.pdf])

India of 2005 is far more aware and better informed. Apart from growing physical connectivity, the emergent digital and information technologies are rapidly bridging the information gap.

Second, what comes as a sort of shot in the arm for the EGS is the timely enactment of the Right to Information Act.

Third, numerous voluntary organisations that have been waging relentless campaigns for freedom of information would not let the EGS become another failed scheme.

Fourth, the panchayats, which are to be the torchbearers of the employment scheme, would play a critical role in making the Act work.

Finally, the Employment Guarantee Scheme is different from the many employment generation programmes. It is because they were implemented as programmes, subject to budgetary constraints and rules and regulations to suit implementing authorities. They were not statutorily assured and judicially enforceable rights/entitlements of free citizens of the country.

(Why Employment Guarantee Scheme will Work, Niranjan Sahoo, Observer Research Foundation, Vol. III, Issue 38; September 26, 2005. <http://www.observerindia.com/strategic/st050930.htm> [C.ELDOC1.tsunami/Why_EGS_will_Work.html])

In order to protect the gains of the Right to Work and Employment Guarantee and ensure its success, we need to participate in the process. As pointed out by the ILO, the best way to deliver at the time of a crisis is to deliver work, and the best way to deliver work is through an existing scheme, where the ground work, infrastructure, rules, and system are in place.

The design of the NREGA is to build durable community assets, with the full participation of the community. The best preparedness for deciding, and contributing in terms of work and taking ownership of the rehabilitation and construction programme, will happen when people are assured that they will get employment and wages while at the same time they have their right to decide what they want to do. More importantly, they have a regular practice of doing this, in an

ongoing scheme. And therefore do not need to feel helpless at organising, and delivering their own development.

Labour is not charity. Our constitution guarantees you the Right to Work. The NREGA provides you 100 days of work on minimum wages. It is you who must decide how the works are to be done and only this will help build a sustainable, and disaster resistant future.

Resource Materials on NREGA

Employment Guarantee Act, A Primer, Right to food Campaign, www.righttofoodindia.org [C.ELDOC1.H40a.EGA-primer.doc]

One day orientation programme on National Rural Employment Guarantee Act 2005 conducted by DRDA, Tiruvannamalai. [C.ELDOC1.tsunami.NREGA_Orientation Programme.pdf]

Employment Guarantee Act, A Primer, Nikhil Dey, Jean Dreze, Reethi Khera, National Book Trust, 2006. [R.H40a.607]

Slide shows

National Rural Employment Guarantee Act 2005 by Jean Dreze (English and Tamil)

The National Employment Guarantee Act 2005 by MKSS, Rajasthan

Posters

A set of three posters on NREGA in Tamil produced by CED under RDC Project in partnership with A&D, ISED, Praxis, TNDTF

A poster on Right to Information Act in Tamil produced by CED under RDC Project in partnership with A&D, ISED, Praxis, TNDTF

Articles in Tamil available at CED

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‘Net-working’

Together

[TAMIL, 38 mins 7 secs, PAL-VCD-Colour]

A film on the livelihoods of the coastal communities and their fight against the global market hegemony.

Boats, boats everywhere but not a fish to catch ! This may only be partly true about the fast depleting sea resources. But several NGOs and other organisations have already begun talking about diversification and alternative employment for the fishing community. The threat from globalisation is another cause for worry.

One way to sustain is through forming cooperatives controlled by the members. A group of women in Rajakamangalamthurai have formed such a sangha.

Most fishermen say they only know fishing yet there are a few willing to explore opportunities beyond fishing. So, how easy or difficult is the reconstruction of their livelihood? How can the NGOs and the local people take up this mammoth task of keeping the traditional economy alive and growing? Find out in "Net-working together".

Our

Coast

Our

Right

[Tamil, 54 mins, PAL VCD Colour]

A film explaining the Coastal Regulation Zone and the economics and politics of its implementation from the point of view of local community rights

The traditional fishermen have a manifest and inherited right to the coast given by nature. Their way of life is tied intrinsically to the Coast – it sustains their livelihood, their culture and cosmos.

After the tsunami the government has at best tried to "disincentivise" people from staying in their traditional habitat, by pushing them to relocate away from the coast.

The argument remains.....the law, which was originally formed to protect fishermen and their livelihood is now being used against their interest. The government says that the fishermen cannot continue living within 200 meters of the high tide line.

On the other hand it acquiesces in cordoning off these areas by hotels and aquaculture farms.

The films are accompanied by information booklets in Tamil and provides references to other information. It is part of a series of AV material on Tsunami related issues.

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Centre for Education and Documentation

3 Suleman Chambers, 4 Battery Street
Mumbai - 400 001
Ph: 2202 0019 Email: cedbom@doccentre.net



www.doccentre.net

Plot 7, 8th Main, Domlur 2nd Stage, IIIrd Phase
Bangalore-560 071
Ph: 2535 3397 Email: cedban@doccentre.net