

## **NREGA in Abu Road, Rajasthan**

**Rina Bhattacharya, Research Fellow  
and Ratna M. Sudarshan, Director**

**Institute of Social Studies Trust,  
Core 6A, UG Floor, India Habitat Centre,  
Lodi Road, New Delhi 110003**

Comments welcome at

[rina.isst@spectranet.com](mailto:rina.isst@spectranet.com)

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## ***Abstract***

*This paper seeks to discuss the experience of the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act in selected villages in Abu Road block, Sirohi District, Rajasthan and some of the implications for action and research.*

*The Act was implemented in early 2006 in two hundred districts of India. The underlying principles of NREGA are to check distress migration, provide 100 days of guaranteed wage work at wages not less than Rs 60/ with provision of basic amenities at the worksites and to create assets towards sustainable development. A survey of 1251 households in 11 villages in Abu Road block, Sirohi district, Rajasthan was carried out by the Institute of Social Studies Trust and Doosra Dashak in early 2007. The survey indicates that roughly 87 % of the sampled households had participated in NREGA works. The paper suggests that there is a need to recognize the high incidence of short term and short distance migration as a means of livelihood, which is not captured in conventional measures of 'migration'. The circumstances in which NREGA can be expected to impact such migration has much to do with both level of wages paid and the quality of assets. Entitlements of the workers at the worksite have been an important dimension of NREGA implementation, and actual conditions in Abu Road are explored.*

Public works have a long history in India and have been particularly associated with a form of cash transfer to ameliorate distress at times of famine. The NREGA builds upon the experience of earlier such programmes (especially the MEGS) and is different from them in that it is designed as a statutory obligation of the state and a right of the citizen. It also seeks to be distinguished from cash transfers by emphasizing on the one hand the link between productivity and earnings, and on the other the building up of assets that would in due course contribute to local development. While recognizing that such wider impacts will take time to materialize, it is contended here that any assessment of the NREGA needs to examine these aspects. The findings of the study on which this paper is based also suggest that recognition of ground realities and early corrections are both crucial to future impacts.

The state of Rajasthan is often described as one of the more 'successful' of the NREGA efforts<sup>1</sup>. At the same time the unfortunate incident during a social audit in 2007 suggests a huge reluctance for transparency<sup>2</sup>. Clearly, the programme is important enough to incite passions. Equally clearly, there are divergent groups and different understandings of how it should be implemented and translated 'on the ground'.

The first section of the paper discusses the context of work and livelihood against which the NREGA has been started in Abu Road, Rajasthan. Section 2 briefly discusses the findings of a household survey and participation in the NREGA. Section 3 examines the conditions of work on sites, and nature of the assets currently supported through the programme. The last section presents the key emerging issues from this study.

## **Section 1: Context: Livelihood and Work in Abu Road**

Abu Road block has a population of 184,487<sup>3</sup> of which 68% is classified as Scheduled Tribes, dependent on forests for livelihood. Of the total area 65% consists of forest with only 6 % of the land area<sup>4</sup> being under cultivation. The yield on land tends to be low due to erosion of soil quality. Area under cultivation is dependent on the monsoons and given the low and fluctuating rainfall, over the period 2001-05, Abu Road had been declared a drought area. Consequently, the 'food for work' programme was implemented at that time.

Shortage of water not just for irrigation but for drinking is reported from most villages. Situated in hilly and remote areas, many of the villages have limited access to electricity, health and education services, and lack road connectivity. Livelihood systems have been affected by depleting natural resources due to

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<sup>1</sup> Yamini Aiyar, Indian Express, Dec 27, 2007

<sup>2</sup> Sunny Sebastian, Hindu, Dec 1, 2007

<sup>3</sup> <http://sirohi.nic.in/dprofile.htm>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.janchetna.org/landuse.html>

deforestation, and further by denial of rights in forested areas as a result of reservation of forest land.

In this situation, and in the absence of any other source of regular income, migration to urban areas in Rajasthan or in the adjoining state of Gujarat in search of wage labour is fairly common. Such migration is at a peak during the months of November and December. Most migrants return home before Holi (late February, March). Several different types of migration can be observed: in some cases the entire family moves out of the village for 4-6 months, at times leaving one member behind to look after animals; in other cases only one or two members of the household are away to earn a livelihood. It is important to note that the duration of stay away from home varies from 10 days to four months or more.

### **Short term migration and livelihood**

Defining the term 'migration' to include short term movements allows us to see that for most people, livelihood is not derived from any one source – nor from just one place. Macro level surveys and official data require a longer period of absence from home (four to six months) for a person to be classified as a migrant. The major sources of migration data in India are the NSS and Census. Analyses of Census & NSS (1999-2000) data show that overall migration has actually decreased recently<sup>5</sup> because they do not adequately cover temporary migration. It needs to be emphasized that at the same time, there is substantial field evidence suggesting continuation, perhaps increase, in short term and temporary migration linked to the non-availability of adequate work opportunities at the place of residence. Previous research has established the multiple sources of livelihood - a single worker may be doing as many as 10-12 different activities<sup>6</sup> at different times in the course of a year; in addition to this, the fact that people move from one place to another in order to earn their livelihood also needs to be recognised.

In some areas rural-urban movements reflect lack of work, for example in drought prone villages, where there is clearly a 'push' factor. In other areas particularly those that are close to urban centers, expanding work opportunities in as a result of urbanization acts as a 'pull' factor. A third situation leading to increased mobility is contraction in agricultural markets, as a result of competition brought about by liberalization and globalization, so that marginal farmers and poor groups who can not compete may be pushed out to urban areas for work<sup>7</sup>.

A number of village studies show marked increase in temporary migration<sup>8</sup>. Given the mix of reasons and situations that persuade people into movement and

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<sup>5</sup>Migration as a percentage of incremental urban population has been obtained as 21 per cent in the 1990s, marginally less than noted in the previous decade' ..... Kundu, (2003)

<sup>6</sup> Subrahmanya, R.K.A. &R, Jhabwala,(2000) 'Meeting Basic Needs: The Unorganised Sector and Social Security' pp-17-29.

<sup>7</sup> Deshingkar, P.2004 "Understanding the implications of migration for pro-poor agricultural growth", Paper prepared for the OECD/DAC (Development Cooperation Directorate) POVNET Agriculture Task Group Meeting, Helsinki, 17-18 June.

<sup>8</sup>Khandelwal R and Katiyar,S (2003) and Katiyar,S (2006).

migration, both accumulative and coping migration can be observed. Through accumulative migration the economic position of the household improves. In other circumstances migration can be seen as a coping or survival strategy. The out migration streams from well endowed region can be both accumulative as well as coping; the same is true for poor region<sup>9</sup>.

### **NREGA and Migration**

One of the objectives of the NREGA is to put an end to 'distress' migration. Through the implementation of the NREGA<sup>10</sup>, 100 days of guaranteed employment is to be made available to every rural household. This additional work may, or may not, be adequate to significantly impact migration.<sup>11</sup> One study suggests that with an average of 5.7 persons per household, and with 2.9 persons in the age of 19-56 yrs per household, there is a surplus labour supply of 1.9 persons per household (assuming that agriculture will be able to absorb one person fully per year). At full employment of 273 person days, 1.9 persons will need work for 519 days. The study found that the number of wage days available through local and migratory wage labour was 208 days. This leaves a deficit of 311 days. Out of this, the NREGS can provide a maximum of 100 days, leaving a gap of 211 days (Katiyar 2006). However, the further potential of the NREGA is through the wider impacts: creation of durable assets is expected to increase the employment generating capacity of the local economy over time.

## **Section II: NREGA: Migration, Gender and Development: A Study in Abu Road**

This section briefly reports on a study of the implementation of the NREGA in Abu Road, Sirohi District, Rajasthan.

### **Sample**

A quick study of selected villages in Abu Road was carried out by ISST in partnership with Doosra Dashak, in early 2006. The study was supported by the ILO, New Delhi. Village Mahikhera located in the plains and Nichlagarh located in the hills were part of this study. A year later, in early 2007, a household survey was carried out in a group of villages surrounding these two villages. The sample was distributed over eleven villages out of which six villages were located in the hilly area and five in the plains. The objective was to study the participation level of the rural households in the NREGS, with special attention to women's participation; the types of works completed during April 2006- March 2007 under NREGS; the conditions of work on the sites and worker entitlements; and the

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<sup>9</sup> Deshingkar, P. and D. Start (2003) "Seasonal migration for livelihoods, coping, accumulation and exclusion", Working PaperNo. 220, Overseas Development Institute, London

<sup>10</sup> Ministry of Rural Development, (2005) National Rural Employment Guarantee Act 2005:Operational Guidelines. [http://nrega.nic.in/Nrega\\_guidelines.pdf](http://nrega.nic.in/Nrega_guidelines.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> Katiyar, Sudhir(2006). Wages of adolescence: Annual exodus of tribal adolescents from South Rajasthan to Bt cotton seed plots of North Gujarat. <http://www.migrationindia.org/casestudy/case%20satudy%20-%20sudhir%20katiyar.pdf>

current nature and level of migration. These studies provide a baseline from which the progress of the scheme can be assessed.

Table 1 presents some data on the population and estimated number of households. There is a difference in the data as per the Census 2001 and that collected by Doosra Dashak, which is with reference to the period 2004 - 2006. It was decided that around 35 to 45 percent of the households from each of the villages will be selected for the survey, and the table shows the number of households selected for the survey from each of the villages located in hilly and plain areas of Abu Road. The total number of households surveyed is 1251.

**Table1: Total Population & Number of Households in the Selected Villages of Abu Road**

Villages	Census 2001		Doosra Dashak-2004,2006			Selected Households
	Total Population	Number of Households		Total Population	Number of Households	
<b>Hilly Area</b>						
Jayadra	828	143	Jayadra	828	143	81
Kyari	473	88	Kyari	642	81	31
Nichlakhejra	1087	166	Nichlakhejra	1126	187	89
Nichlagarh	2264	392	Nichlagarh	2379	405	180
Nichlibor	383	67	Nichlibor	508	81	32
Uplagarh	2103	347	Uplagarh	2447	502	259
<b>Total</b>	<b>7138</b>	<b>1203</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>7930</b>	<b>1399</b>	<b>672</b>
<b>Plain Area</b>						
Chanar	3493	606	Chanar	3493	606	122
Fatehpura	938	130	Fatehpura	1044	201	81
Girwar	3889	671	Girwar	3889	671	208
Mahi-khera	1547	239	Mahi-khera	1895	305	141
Chandela(Chorvao)	2549	454	Chandela (Chorvao)	316	76	27
<b>Total</b>	<b>9867</b>	<b>1646</b>		<b>10637</b>	<b>1859</b>	<b>579</b>

*Source: District Census Handbook: Part-A & B, Sirohi District, Census of India, 2001*

*Drought & Health Survey, Doosra Dashak Project, Abu Road, 2004, 2006*

### **Participation in the NREGS**

Table 2 below shows the number of households reporting participation in the NREGS works as well as those that did not participate and the reasons why – which include migration, refusal of work, no job cards and those that had cards but did not want to access this work.

**Table: 2 Number of Households surveyed by types of households**

	<b>Bhakar (hilly area (%))</b>	<b>Bhittrot (Plain) (%)</b>	<b>Total (%)</b>
Migrant HHs	1.0	1.2	1.1
HHs refused work on job cards	0.4	0.3	0.4
HHs with no job cards	2.2	3.1	2.6
HHs where job cards not used	4.8	12.3	8.2
HHs participated in NREGA	91.5	83.1	87.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>672</b>	<b>579</b>	<b>1251</b>

*Note: figures indicate column percentage*

*Source: ISST Household Survey, 2007*

As the table shows, around 1 percent of households in the sample did not participate and instead migrated away. Entire families go to places in Gujarat and work there as agricultural labourers for 6-8 months. Most of these families are given shelter to stay near the field and food to eat. Such migrants return home for four months during the monsoon. In some households we managed to collect information from their relatives/family members left behind. One of the reasons given for migration was that the wage offered under NREGA is too low therefore they continue the tradition of going out of the village for wage work.

Less than 1 percent household reported that they were refused work on grounds that work was not available, or the muster roll already had the necessary number of workers required for the particular work site. A few households (2.6 %) reported not having any job cards, usually because adult members of the household were away at the time that cards were being made. Some households (over 8 %) did not use their cards. However the survey found that an impressive 87.6% of the sampled households did participate in NREGA works.

Another aspect of livelihoods in the area is the fact that many people cannot find work within the village and therefore commute short distances on a regular basis. This is summarized in Table 3 below. The usual place of work for men in the hill villages requires commuting to places outside the village but within the block (55%) and similarly for 22% of men in the plains. Most others (35% in the hills, 70% in the plains) find work within the village. With women however the majority find work within the village (68% in the hills and 93% in the plains).

**Table: 3 Place of Work**

SL. No	Place of work	Hilly Area		Plain Area		Total	
		Male (%)	Female (%)	Male (%)	Female (%)	Male (%)	Female (%)
1	Within 5 km from the place of residence	35	68	70	93	52	81
2	Outside village within the block	55	28	22	3	39	15

3	Outside the block within the district	4	2	4	1	4	1
4	Outside the district within the state	-	-	-	-	-	-
5	others	5	2	4	3	5	2
	<b>Total</b>	<b>381</b>	<b>244</b>	<b>279</b>	<b>243</b>	<b>690</b>	<b>487</b>

Source: ISST Household Survey, 2007

It is also found that over 50% of women report being workers and more than 50% of men and women seek casual wage work.

Among the households participating in NREGA, 55 percent are from hilly area as against 45 percent from the plain area. Percentage of male participation works out to be at 44 percent as against 56 percent female participation. If we look at the ratio between households participated in NREGA and individuals, it works out to be an average of 1.5 persons per household.

Some further details of participation in the NREGS are given in Table 4 below.

**Table 4: Household worked in NREGS by number of days in Hilly and Plain Area**

Number of days worked in NREGS	Number of households		Total
	Hilly Area	Plain Area	
Less than 15 days	20	58	78
16-31 days	35	55	90
32-47 days	46	55	101
48-63 days	114	73	187
64-79 days	123	52	175
80-95 days	156	63	219
96+	121	125	246
<b>Total</b>	<b>615</b>	<b>481</b>	<b>1096</b>

Source: ISST Household Survey, 2007

Roughly one fifth of the households had been able to get over 96 days of work.

In general women outnumbered the men in terms of number of days of participation in NREGA. Among those who have completed 100 days of work in NREGA, 70 percent are women as against 30 percent men (Table 5). This is quite close to the block level data given below in Table 6.



**Table 5: Number of Days Worked in NREGS by Households by Gender in Hilly and Plain Area**

Number of Days worked in NREGS	Hilly Area			Plain Area		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Less than 15 Days	52	57	109	76	88	164
16-31 days	110	80	190	78	75	153
32-47 days	66	93	159	61	67	128
48-63 days	90	111	201	36	79	115
64-79 days	50	65	115	20	44	64
80-95 days	36	48	84	15	42	57
96+	18	25	43	7	36	43
<b>Total</b>	<b>422</b>	<b>479</b>	<b>901</b>	<b>293</b>	<b>431</b>	<b>724</b>
<b>100</b>	<b>18</b> <b>(42)</b>	<b>25</b> <b>(58)</b>	<b>43</b> <b>100</b>	<b>6</b> <b>(18)</b>	<b>27</b> <b>(82)</b>	<b>33</b> <b>100</b>

*Note: Figures in brackets indicate row percentage*

*Source: ISST Household Survey, 2007*

**Table 6: Activities Undertaken in NREGA and Participation of Workers**

Total number of completed works	Total number of workers participated	percent of women's participation
273	17370	72 percent

*Source B.D.O. office, Abu Road, 2006*

### **Section III: Creation of Durable Assets**

Works carried out under the NREGA are expected to build up durable assets in the village in turn stimulating further development. The process of implementation is expected to involve local communities through representative institutions so that assets created will respond to felt deficiencies in the local economy.

An analysis of the responses of the households on works completed in or near their village is presented below. 53 percent reported that the nature of the works was 'gravel road construction', of which 22% were described as 'incomplete road' and another 27.4 % responses were for 'nadi kodai' (Table-7). Another 12 % said 'nothing happened' i.e. no impact was felt of the works/ purpose of works was not clear to the participants.

Road construction dominates the choice of works.

Data from the Block Development Office confirms that during February 2006-March 2007, priority has been given to gravel roads and digging of tanks.

‘Anicuts’ and ‘Medbandi’<sup>12</sup>, effective in preventing soil erosion especially in the hilly areas of the district are practically missing.

**Table 7: Number of works completed in/near your village.**

Sl. No	Responses	Hilly Area	Plain Area	Total
1	Incomplete Gravel road	(55)	(45)	<b>285</b> {21.8}
2	Gravel road construction	(88)	(12)	<b>408</b> {31.2}
3	Nari Kodai	(62)	(38)	<b>359</b> {27.4}
4	Anicuts are made	(100)	-	<b>4</b> {0.3}
5	Canal cleaning /reconstruction	-	(100)	<b>3</b> {0.2}
6	Nothing happened	(6)	(94)	<b>153</b> {11.7}
7	No idea	(12)	(88)	<b>93</b> {7.1}
8	Not Applicable	(100)	-	<b>2</b> {0.1}
	Total			<b>1307</b>

*Note: Figures in brackets indicate row percentage*

*Figures in { } indicate column percentage*

*Source: ISST Household Survey, 2007*

**Table 8: Type and Number of Works Done (Feb 2006- 07 March)**

Type of Works Done	Number of Works Done
Nadi	145
Gravel Road	178
Anicut	40
Medbandi	06
Nali banana	16
Nursery	02
<b>Total</b>	<b>387*</b>

Source B.D.O. office, Abu Road, 2006

\*273 works are completed and 114 works are on-going.

The survey tried to find out if households had observed any perceptible impact of participation in the NREGA and the responses are summarized in Table 9.

<sup>12</sup> Medbandi is a stone embankment built on the lower side of an agriculture field on a hill slope to conserve soil and moisture and create a level field for cultivation.

**Table 9: Benefits to the households from NREGS works**

Sl. No.	Responses	Hilly Area	Plain Area	Total
	<b><i>More cash in hand</i></b>			<b>45%</b>
1	Could buy food grains and clothes	(94)	(6)	<b>34</b>
2	Got wage work	(42)	(58)	<b>468</b>
3	Could spent on children's education	(100)	-	<b>8</b>
4	Save money on transportation	(80)	(20)	<b>5</b>
5	Earned extra money	(100)	-	<b>1</b>
	<b><i>Roads and improved access:</i></b>			<b>34%</b>
6	Access to road	(81)	(19)	<b>373</b>
2	Benefited but road is far off	(78)	(22)	<b>23</b>
8	Sick people can be taken to the hospital	(100)		<b>2</b>
	<b><i>Water related benefits</i></b>			<b>7%</b>
9	Due to nari kodai animals are getting enough water	(38)	(62)	<b>37</b>
10	Availability of drinking water	(91)	(9)	<b>11</b>
11	Water can be stored	(89)	(11)	<b>36</b>
	<b><i>No gain</i></b>			<b>14%</b>
12	No gain	(39)	(61)	<b>147</b>
13	Due to monsoon the structure got washed away	(67)	(33)	<b>9</b>
14	Canal water leaked into the agricultural field	(100)	-	<b>2</b>
	<b>Total</b>			<b>1156</b>

*Note: Figures in brackets indicate row percentage*

*Source: ISST Household Survey, 2007*

As the table shows, roughly 45% report an economic benefit through additional cash in hand, 7% of the responses suggest benefits from easier availability of water and 34 % from easier access to roads. The balance 14% reported no or negative benefits.

### **Entitlements of workers**

Entitlements of the workers at the worksite have been an important dimension of NREGS implementation. Review of worksites around selected villages once a month between October 2006 and April 2007 showed that:

- Creche facility has not been provided at the sites at all.
- Drinking water facility has been provided at all the sites.
- Medical kit has not been available on the site. Only few medicines were kept by the mates for emergency. The medicines /gel /bandage needed to treat cuts/injuries were missing.
- Tent has been provided for shade but not at all sites.
- The measurement of task remains a puzzle for the mate/Panchayat/labour. It is hard to understand from the parameters who decide what, against

what norms. However, the Junior Engineer<sup>13</sup> gave the measurement details to ISST researchers which he follows to make the payment of wages. For a person to get the state minimum wage of Rs 73 per day, she/he has to dig up 1.67 cubic meter or 58.96 gun ft. Recent task revision has reduced the task for per person as 1.36 cubic meter/54 gun ft. It is found that no one has received Rs 73 as wage. But the rate has improved and in some places people have received as high as Rs 63. Earlier study had recorded the receipt of wage could be as low as twenty five rupees<sup>14</sup>.

Comparing the situation in early 2006 and early 2007, it seems there has been some improvement in the average wages earned, but this is still below the state minimum wage.

At a minimum, a crèche ensures that young children do not hurt themselves at the worksite and are provided with basic care. Failure to provide crèches may be restricting the participation of women. Alternatively, children may be left alone or unattended while the mother works, or in the care of an older sister who would then stay back from school.

Discussions at a workshop confirm that this often happens. As one woman put it, 'we will fill our stomach first, study comes later' - '*Pet pehle bharenge, padhai baad me sochenge.*' Her own granddaughter had dropped out of school to look after the younger siblings at home while her mother was away at the worksite.

#### **Section IV: Emerging issues**

The survey in Abu Road shows that a significant percentage of households have participated in the NREGA works including a high percentage of women. The wages earned however are below the state minimum and this is the first issue that needs to be recorded, i.e. the lack of awareness and information about the basis on which wages are to be paid and the level of earnings that is possible.

Conditions of work on the sites do not meet the intentions, and in particular, reasons behind the failure to provide crèches need to be further explored as well as the inadequate training/ information/ awareness of the mates on the medical kits and medicines provided for use at the sites.

Until wages improve and quality of assets improves there is unlikely to be any impact of the NREGA on either migration or local development.

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<sup>13</sup> Researchers from ISST and Doosra Dashak met the junior the engineer on 20<sup>th</sup> January 2007 at the Employment Officer's chamber to get some insight on the task measurement issue. Also we wanted to know if officials of Abu Road block follow any measurement rate list like the one used in Dungarpur district. We were informed that the measurement of task is done against the norms mentioned in the text. However there was no official document as such kept on record in the office of the employment officer who co-ordinates the NREGA programme in the entire block.

<sup>14</sup> ISST, 2006 Women and the NREGA, SRO-New Delhi, 7 June

It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that so far the ‘success’ of the NREGA has been some amount of cash transfer to the needy. The process of implementation involves articulation of priorities by villagers and choice of works to reflect these priorities and result in the creation of durable assets in turn stimulating local development. However in this area it was found that the majority of people especially the women in the village do not attend Gram Sabha. It seems that Gram Sabha is not yet capable of formulating projects and negotiating it further. Until these systems become more responsive and better informed the choice of assets will continue to be determined by convenience of local officials and will be restricted by the skills that are locally available.

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