

NREGA, People's Participation and Gram Panchayat Planning: Some Lessons from West Bengal

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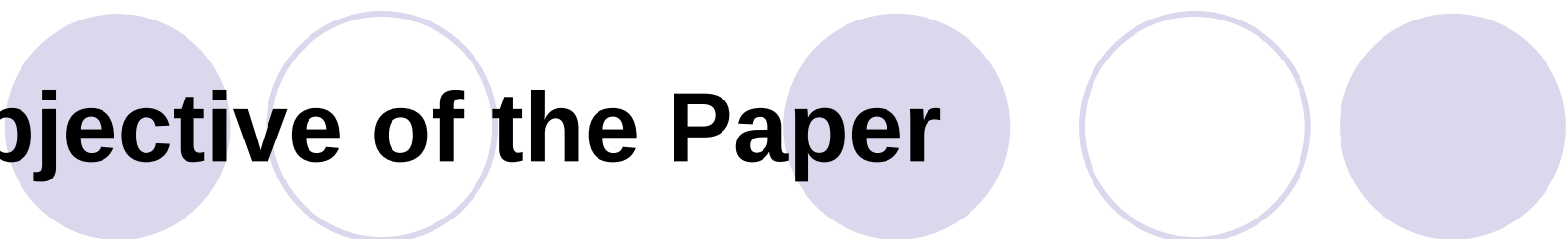
NREGA & GP Planning

NREGA as a tool for participatory gram panchayat (GP) planning –

- better at poverty reduction and human development,
- better at convergence,
- better at local development,
- better ownership and political accountability

vis-à-vis

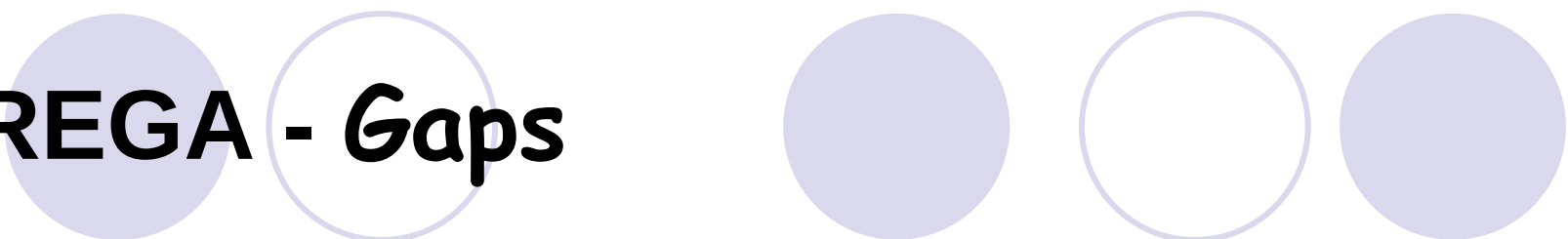
stereotyped usage as one-off tool for wage employment



Objective of the Paper

How NREGS was adapted in West Bengal
under Strengthening Rural Development
(SRD) programme
for
people's planning and implementation

NREGA - Gaps



- Lacks framework for engaging stakeholders in planning, implementation and monitoring
- "Half hearted implementation"
- Rapid scaling up without accommodating lessons learnt
- Corruption and irregularities

Other Issues in NREGA

- lack of awareness among beneficiaries
- meager provisions for administrative expenses
- shortage of staff
- weak redressal procedure
- over-burdened administrative machinery at panchayat level
- widespread corruption
- delay in wage payment and underpayment
- absence of work site facilities,
- presence of contractors,
- non-availability of muster rolls at the worksite,
- work disruption due to election code of conduct

Village Assembly Based Village Panchayat Planning

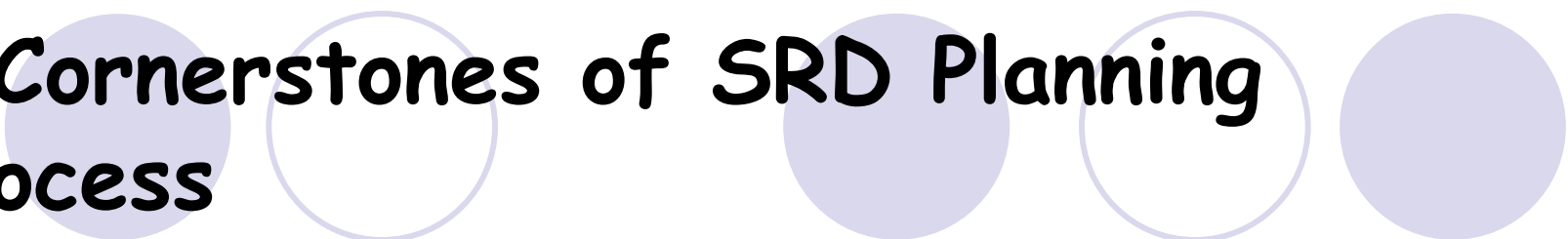
NREGS utilized
for Gram Sangshad (GS)-
based Gram Panchayat
(GP) planning process in
West Bengal

First phase - 6 most backward
districts -Uttar Dinajpur,
Dakshin Dinajpur, Malda,
Murshidabad, Purulia and
Birbhum

Second phase - commenced in 6
more districts and in 3rd phase,
another 6 districts will be
covered



4 Cornerstones of SRD Planning Process



- Empowerment of women SHG's and their capacity building,
- Smooth funding from banks/DRDAs,
- Flow of NREGS resources and
- Convergence of activities of line agencies into SRD planning process

Significance of the 4 Cornerstones

- Empowerment of women's SHG's crucial to the SRD process
- Resources from NREGS provide lifeline to the SRD planning process for livelihoods and asset creation/maintenance
- Cooperation from line agencies and banking system help to provide support

SRD Programme - 4 outputs

- A road map to deepen rural decentralization;
- An institutional framework and capacities in PRIs, line departments etc.
- Pro-poor participatory planning, implementation and monitoring systems across PRIs; and
- Enhancement of resources and utilization for pro-poor local development



Plans at GS and GP level - 7 sectors

- a) Education
- b) Public health
- c) Women and child development
- d) Agriculture and allied activities
- e) Industry
- f) Infrastructure and
- g) Others

Plan Activities - 3 Clusters



- Information dissemination and awareness raising;
- Training; and
- Tangible interventions (e.g. de-silting of ponds, construction activities, providing seed capital to SHG members etc.)

Compatibility of SRD and NREGS

- In practice, NREGS helps to provide almost unlimited resource backup to SRD
- SRD helps to plan NREGS activities with public consultation
- SRD helps to contribute towards better implementation and sustainability

Stages of SRD

Stage 1 - “pre-planning stage at the GS level”,

- The process of mass campaigning, posters and direct public consultation help to raise local awareness -on rights and privileges, development objectives, resources available and involvement
- In stage 1 of SRD the local GUS or Village Development Committee is formed

Stage 2 - “approaching community profiling”

- involves motivating women and poor to organize SHG's
- productive engagement for social/resource mapping to generate and analyze own data
- to put forward their ideas and preferences
- Engagement amongst political parties and opponents for coalition building

Stage 3 - "Planning Stage at GS level"

- identification of local needs, planning activities,
- prioritization and selection of work plans at the GS level
- NREGS utilized to fit with a variety of locally prioritized activities

Stage 4 - "Planning Stage at the GP level"

- GS plans are integrated into one GP plan
- Provides an important platform for integrating the NREGS works at the GP level.



Stages 5 & 6 of SRD and NREGS

- **Stage 5** - plan appraisal stage
- **Stage 6** - modification of plans, authorization and funding
- Stage 6 also beneficial for re-looking at the NREGS activities and finalizing for implementation

People's planning and NREGS mutually supportive

- GP planning process starts from people's data, involves local people from very start
- resources available under NREGS is critical
- able to plan works in a more holistic manner; and
- implement with full knowledge of resources under NREGS and others
- People-led GP planning helps NREGS to relate to SGSY or PMGSRY or NWDPRA

5 aspects of people's planning contributes towards NREGS

- a 'right to employment' tool, local asset-building and poverty reduction
- better convergence of NREGS when planned with other programmes - with broader perspective and context
- resources under NREGS seen as "Untied Funds" at local level
- NREGS based on people's planning enhances accountability and provides an institutional feedback mechanism.
- chances of community assets meeting local needs better and scope for local monitoring