

CEGC Delegation to Orissa

A delegation of the Central Employment Guarantee Council (CEGC) visited Orissa on 20-23 November 2007 to study the implementation of NREGA and hold discussions with the state government. The delegation consisted of Ashk Ali Tak, Subhashini Ali, Jean Drèze, Ramachandra Khuntia, Robert Minz and Annie Raja. The delegates made field visits to Kalahandi, Mayurbhanj and Sundergarh districts on 20-22 November, and held detailed discussions with the state government as well as civil society organizations on 23 November.

The Council delegation took note of several recent reports on NREGA in Orissa, including those prepared by (1) the Indian School of Women's Development Studies, (2) the Centre for Environment and Food Security, (3) the G.B. Pant Social Science Institute (based on a field survey conducted in October 2007), and (4) the Fact Finding Committee constituted by the Government of Orissa under GO 33339/PR (which submitted a report on 15 November).

Based on the field visits, the delegates are of the view that NREGA has a tremendous potential in Orissa. Where work is available, NREGA is a lifeline for the rural poor, and there was evident appreciation of it among disadvantaged sections of the population. If the Act is implemented in letter and spirit, it can go a long way in eliminating poverty and hunger, as well as in bringing about social change in rural areas. The delegation also appreciates the recent efforts that have been made in the state (by the government as well as non-government organizations) to ensure that people are able to secure their entitlements under the Act, e.g. through innovative modes of information disclosure and wage payments.

However, the potential of NREGA continues to be held up by some, in particular the implementation of transparency safeguards.

The Council delegation urged the Government of Orissa to ensure strict implementation of the transparency safeguards. The following are particularly important: (1) re-design of the job cards; (2) complete distribution and regular maintenance of job cards; (3) use of a single, uniform, numbered muster roll throughout the state; (4) strict enforcement of the ban on contractors; (5) conducting of social audits as per Guidelines; (6) prompt action on complaints; and (7) effective grievance redressal arrangements.

Constructive discussions were also held on a range of other issues such as staff appointments, transparency and consistency of records, awareness generation, work measurement, appointment of mates (from among the workers), the participation of line departments (especially the Forest Department) in NREGA, and the payment of unemployment allowance.

A positive response was received from the state government to the delegation's recommendations. Assurances of prompt follow-up action were also received from the

Chief Minister. The delegation will be watching further developments with keen interest, including the redressal of all complaints submitted during the Council's visit within 30 days, as assured on 23 November by the state government.

Central Employment Guarantee Council Member
Bhubaneswar, 23 November 2007