

SPANDAN SAMAJ SEVA SAMITI

LET'S MAKE WORLD A BETTER PLACE

ACTIVITY REPORT 2008-2009

Spandan continued its earlier initiated process towards facilitating Fair & Transparent implementation of NREGA, Drawing attention to gradually declining Food Security among the poor in the region leading to growing menace of malnutrition and deaths among U5 children, Working towards better implementation of RTI Act, Setting micro models as policy influencing reference points for qualitative improvements in ICDS and turning urban wastage into development resource for rural poor.....

BACKDROP: FOOD INSECURE KORKU

Khalwa block of Khandwa district in Madhya Pradesh has been hard hit by Food Insecurity among the vulnerable Korku tribe. Being marginal farmers or landless and having shifted to growing of cash crops has brought in an unsavory starvation scenario in the region. At least three months during the year pose severe Household Food Insecurity. The *distress migration* to neighboring districts has grown over the years. The tragedy has doubled with the government stance at reducing the ration quota of Below Poverty Line families. During past two years it has witnessed a slash of around 40% every month. The point is emphasized by a striking example of PDS ration shop at Roshni village that has to distribute grains to 630 BPL families across 7 villages. The shop receives monthly allocation of just 100 quintal wheat and 25 quintal rice. Obviously each card holder can access just 57% of the stipulated grain quota. On the other hand the grain rates in the open market have made most of the poor inaccessible to food. The Korku has been forced to consume *churi*, the broken bits of rice and highly adulterated. There have been increased incidences of families borrowing grains or money to buy grains. This has greatly affected the most vulnerable U5 Korku children. The malnutrition among them has reached an alarming proportion and during the year claimed lives of 62 children across just two dozen villages and saw more than 1000 children brought to Nutritional Rehabilitation Center in a nutritional emergency situation. NREGA has lacked desired mechanism to curb corruption and to ensure Right to Work. The touts and middlemen have flourished with wage earners further troubled.

Malnutrition in Madhya Pradesh



"Extremely Alarming"

REAL
MEDICINE
FOUNDATION

ANECDOTE INTERVENTION BY SPANDAN

Since past couple of years Spandan has been trying to intervene meaningfully in this scenario. Strategically it has tried to raise this issue and Advocate pro poor policy amends in this regard.

Public Hearing:

A Public Hearing was organized at Khandwa district head quarters on 10th June 2008. It was attended by more than 200 men and women from Khalwa block having long standing grievances not redressed or even heard at. The Public Hearing focused mainly on overdue payments of NREGA beneficiaries, the operational bottlenecks in National Old Age Pension Scheme, problems of reduced grain quota under PDS and administrative hurdles at accessing information under RTI.

The CEO Janpad Panchayat and representative of CEO Zilla Panchayat accepted the invitation and gave a patient hearing to peoples' grievances. A reference document with needed details was presented to Administration for quick redress. The document contained related case studies and data and suggestions.

This proved very effective. The overdue payment of 7 families from village Nagotar was released promptly. These families were forced to sell or mortgage their valuables just to pay the labors employed by them under the Kapildhara sub scheme.

The Public Hearing appraised the district administration on many discrepancies concerning NREGA, RTI and NOAP as observed at the grassroots.

Malnutrition:

Since August 08 the reports of malnutrition deaths began to pour in. First report was from village Karwani having lost 6 children. Then Spandan browsed many villages and brought to light the cases of 62 children across just 23 villages. National and International media strongly raised the concern. The Government was pressured and acted in relief mode by bringing severely malnourished children to Nutrition Rehabilitation Center. About 1000 children were brought to NRC demonstrating the grave situation. The Field



surveys demonstrated that more than 70% children suffer from malnutrition. The reports and documentation of Spandan facilitated enquiries from District to National officials. The issue of malnutrition received an apt attention. The reports appropriately revealed the severity of household hunger at homes that had lost their children and the system failure obstructing food and employment benefits trickling to most of these poor families.

Spandan conducted sampled surveys across two neighboring districts namely Burhanpur and Khargone to emphasize the point that the situation of malnutrition is equally worse there too. The Government by and large has been on denial mode about deaths having occurred due to malnutrition.

The Advisor to Supreme Court in MP was apprised of the situation and he held discussions with the Chief Secretary GoMP and presented viable solutions to curb malnutrition. A PIL has also been filed with Jabalpur HighCourt questioning the deaths of children.

RUTF:

With malnutrition at peak and hundreds of children in Nutrition rehab centers, the Plumpy Nut an imported Ready to use Therapeutic Food was introduced. Spandan put a strong opposition to it on the ground that it cannot be the permanent solution and our

children need not depend on imported remedies until local alternatives are found and proved ineffective. Now government has withdrawn it.

Universalization:

Spandan identified many pockets where children failed to make it to existing Anganwadis due to several factors including the geographical distance. Based on Supreme Court directives in this regard, the survey was done and request was forwarded to Women & Child Development department. But as it takes some time, the community was mobilized to start centers on their own. The community will contribute by providing a place and identifying a woman to take care of children voluntarily. Spandan will arrange for logistics like mats, utensils, toys and games and dresses. Three such centers have been started at village Salidhana and Mathni. The W&CD department has come forward to provide Take Home rations and speeding up the process for their formal sanction. The Salidhana center has received the sanction and Anganwadi building construction work has begun.

Child Friendly Anganwadis:

Aware of the fact that Government's response to malnutrition has been skewed towards universalization and food based intervention at the cost of quality and attention to other determinants of malnutrition, Spandan initiated a micro intervention to turn Anganwadis into a Child Friendly place. This is being done with material support from GOONJ. The



Anganwadis are given a facelift with community participation and equipped with toys, games and educational materials. This effort has brought significant change across half a dozen of Anganwadis that have become a hub of activity for children and their retention time at center has significantly improved. This has had a therapeutically effect with comparatively lesser malnourished children and has facilitated easy service delivery like immunization, weighing and grading and health checks. Spandan plans to turn 100 Anganwadis into child friendly centers by this year.

Facilitating NREGA:

Since its beginning in 2006, Spandan has been facilitating its transparent implementation. On one hand the wage earners are sensitized on their Right to Work while on the other hand it has exposed cases of corruption as observed at the grassroots. This year too cases of unduly delayed payments were brought to the notice of the Administration. On the other hand efforts were made to assist beneficiaries of Kapil Dhara get the withheld payments. Presently the payment through Bank is being facilitated. Case studies and incidences highlighting bottlenecks are being brought to knowledge of implementers. Now a process has been set in motion to empower the communities to participate meaningfully in Social Audits under NREGA.



Assisting Aged:

50 aged from village Udiyapur Raiyyat and Ambada were assisted to have their Old age Pension account opened at the banks/post offices. The forms were filled, photographs arranged and amount collected to open the account. It has helped them as there were reports of siphoning off their pension money as cash transaction was involved.

Making RTI work:

Spandan is endeavoring to make RTI a powerful tool to ensure Transparency & Accountability in Public Works. This year too the pressure was kept on by apprising district Administration on various hurdles posed before the applicant. A report of half a dozen cases where applicants were harassed and denied information was compiled and forwarded to State Information Commission. The District Collector was summoned and directed to improve the status of RTI. Similarly Superintendent of Police too was summoned to State Information Commission for not providing the information on time. Cases of villagers being asked money for information too were brought to attention of Administration.

Wastage as Resources:

Spandan in collaboration with GOONJ has been attempting to define the role of old clothes and materials in development. Cloth for work has been initiated in Salidhana, Ambada, Roshni, Battu, Mathni and Dabhia villages. Here tribal families have volunteered to develop their own assets in lieu of their clothing needs being taken care of. The case of Salidhana and Ambada are striking where families have dug a well and undertook extensive land bunding works. Government now has come forward to concretize the Salidhana well in appreciation of peoples' volunteerism.



Saving Korku Language

As per latest UNESCO report, Korku language has been earmarked as "endangered" among 198 listed languages in India. There has been no written tradition and in course of oral handover and external influence has endangered this rich language. Spandan is trying to conserve the Korku language by documenting it and trying to include it in pre school education where children can learn dual language: their mother tongue and the one that they need for formal schooling.

Women Empowerment

Spandan upholds gender equity and has been at women's empowerment. It has been proactively generating awareness and assisting victimized women within the recently enacted Protection of women from Domestic Violence act. The victims are counseled and assisted in finding legal aid.

Reaching out the child:

Spandan has been relating to children in need and those in conflict with law. This is being done through linkages established with local NGOs running child labor schools. Spandan and GOONJ resources toys, games, stationary and clothes for them. This material support has boosted the attendance and retention of child labors in the school. The children in Observation Home (Juvenile Homes) are being interacted with directly. The efforts are being made to make their stay at home more comfortable and creative. The children are

provided with clothing, games, toys and educational materials beside regular sessions with them.

IN FIGURES ACHIEVEMENTS

The year's achievement in statistics is as follows:

- ✦ 1110 wage earners from 16 villages were assisted to receive their long withheld payments under NREGA.
- ✦ 450 wage earners from 5 villages were assisted to apply for work under NREGA.
- ✦ 133 Old Aged have been included in NOAP from 11 villages.
- ✦ 104 families were assisted to stake claims for BPL list and 30 were included.
- ✦ 112 old aged were assisted to have their Bank or Post office accounts opened.
- ✦ 03 Anganwadis started with peoples' participation according to Supreme Court directives. All of them provided nutrition by W&CD department.
- ✦ 10 Anganwadis converted into child friendly centers.
- ✦ 25 acres of land improved under Cloth for Work.
- ✦ Families of 62 children that died due malnutrition have been provided Antyodaya Anna Yojana ration cards.
- ✦ More than 900 children brought to Nutrition Rehabilitation Centers in Nutritional emergency situation and their lives could be saved.
- ✦ Shaktimaan Project started in the region. Presently ongoing in 50 nutritionally sensitive villages.
- ✦ Ration shops of 7 malnutrition sensitive pockets ordered to be opened regularly.
- ✦ 6 cases of RTI referred to State Information Commission.

IMPACT OF OUR INTERVENTION

- ❖ Government persuaded to view Malnutrition as a grave State-wide problem.
- ❖ District Administration activated to keep vigil especially during peak seasons of malnutrition.
- ❖ Media sensitized to take up the issue of malnutrition seriously.
- ❖ PIL accepted by the MP High Court.
- ❖ Imported RUTF suspended at NRCs. Generated wide discussions and debate.
- ❖ AHRC intervention prompted government to provide AAY ration cards to the families of deceased children.
- ❖ Public Hearing facilitated quick grievance redress and ensured release delayed payment of hundreds of wage earners.
- ❖ A process facilitated to open Bank/Post Office Accounts for NOAP beneficiaries.
- ❖ Cloth for work promoted spirit of volunteerism for development.
- ❖ District Administration became more concerned towards RTI applications.

For Information & Support

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