

Date: Tue, 9 Oct 2007 05:43:59 +0100 (BST)
From: Chitta Behera <chittabehera1@yahoo.co.in>
Subject: Re: [OREGS Watch] Fwd: [Rozgar] Forthcoming NREGA social audits and surveys
To: oregs-watch@googlegroups.com

Dear Raju,

Happy to learn that you along with a team from outside are going to survey the NRREGA works and facilitate the holding of social audit in different villages across the State. But before you start doing so, you should first of all focus on setting aright at the State level a Himalayan blunder that stalks the NREGA works all over in Orissa. Unless that is done first, no survey nor any social audit would yield any tangible results, and would rather confound the confusion further. To put the matter straight, the format of the muster roll being used at each Panchayat level on being issued by the Programme Officers on the direction from the State Panchayatiraj Department is not the format recommended either by the Operational Guidelines or OREGS-2006. Both guidelines and OREGS recommend the muster roll to be maintained in B-3 Form (vide Para-30 of OREGS-2006). But the muster roll now being used in Orissa is in A-5 Form, which is not only different in nomenclature, but also divergent in substance from B-3 Form. As you would see for yourself, the B-3 Form contains inter alia 31 columns, each representing a specific date in the month, while the so-called A-5 Form provides inter alia for the 6 columns in a week only. While in case of B-3, there is space for mentioning the exact amount of wages that a worker receives on a particular date, in case of A-5 only the consolidated money received by a worker for a period of 6 days is mentioned. So it is theoretically impossible to derive the exact amount of wages that a worker received on a particular date from the study of the muster roll in A-5 Form. But as you know, the mandate of the NREG Act is to see whether a worker ordinarily working for seven hours in a day on a time-rate or piece-rate basis gets at least the minimum daily wages. More importantly, as per the B-3 format, the worker needs to sign against the amount of wages received or due for each date, immaterial whether he receives it on a daily or periodic basis. But as per A-5 Format, he puts his signature only against the consolidated amount for 6 days.

Thus the ubiquitous use of muster roll in the illegitimate A-5 Form in Orissa keeps open the floodgate of manipulation and corruption at the level of both Programme Officer and Gram Panchayat with higher authorities at District and State level acquiescing in this malafide game. There perhaps can't be a better and more handy and more foolproof ploy than this A-5 Format of Muster Roll to embezzle the public money in broad daylight and with full legal sanction by a select club of Block officials and Panchayat functionaries with the upper echelon of bureaucrats and leaders sanctioning and sharing the loot and civil society groups watching the same innocuously.

In fact, such a fake Muster Roll being used at GP level came to the notice of the whole team of visiting NGO activists when I as a resource person had accompanied them on a field visit to village Bhurudubani in Rajabasa GP of Baripada Sadar Block, Mayurbhanj district on 26th Sept. last as a part of ToT on NREGA and Social audit organised jointly by PRIA and local NGO Sadhana. A little later on the day I shared this finding at length with Sri Bidyut Mohanty of Spread, Koraput who was the other resource person for the said programme. Sri Mohanty attested before me that the muster roll in A-5 form was being used all over the State and no body has ever taken cognisance, let alone protested against it. Back to the training venue at SODA, all the participants themselves compared the A-5 with B-3 and could realise the big hiatus that existed between the two.

Raju, ironically enough, I noticed and shared with Bidyut another big flaw that pervades the well-known yellow booklet 'Muster Roll Watch' designed by MKSS, Rajasthan and published by OREGS Watch. I remember, quite a few months back you had given me a copy of this booklet for my information and observation. While returning from the field visit I took a copy of it from Bidyut and read it all over again just to know what kind of muster roll it recommended. It was an amazing discovery for me that though the booklet refers to Central Operational Guidelines a number of times as the authoritative text in respect of muster roll, its own conception of a muster roll is radically different from the one recommended by the Guidelines. Like the fake A-5 muster roll of Orissa, its design of muster roll has no space for day-to-day record of wage payment, but is premised on a consolidated payment spanning a period of days as prevalent in Rajasthan in pre-NREGA days. The preface to the yellow booklet lays bare this outdated conception of muster roll in crystal clear language too. Thus in fine, the yellow booklet howsoever dear it might have become by now to its users in Orissa or elsewhere, it is not modelled after the B-3 format as recommended by Operational Guidelines or OREGS-2006 and deserves therefore to be substantially amended and updated in tune with the letter and spirit of NREG Act, 2005 forthwith on grounds legal and otherwise.

Hopefully, under the circumstances, before setting out for a survey at ground level, you and OREGS Watch Group should settle with the Secretary and Director of PR Dept Orissa as to why an illegal Form of Muster Roll in A-5 is being used for NREGA works in place of the OREGS recommended Form B-3, even after 10 months since OREGS was notified in Dec 2006.

In solidarity with OREGS Watch,

Chitta Behera
Mobile- 9437577546