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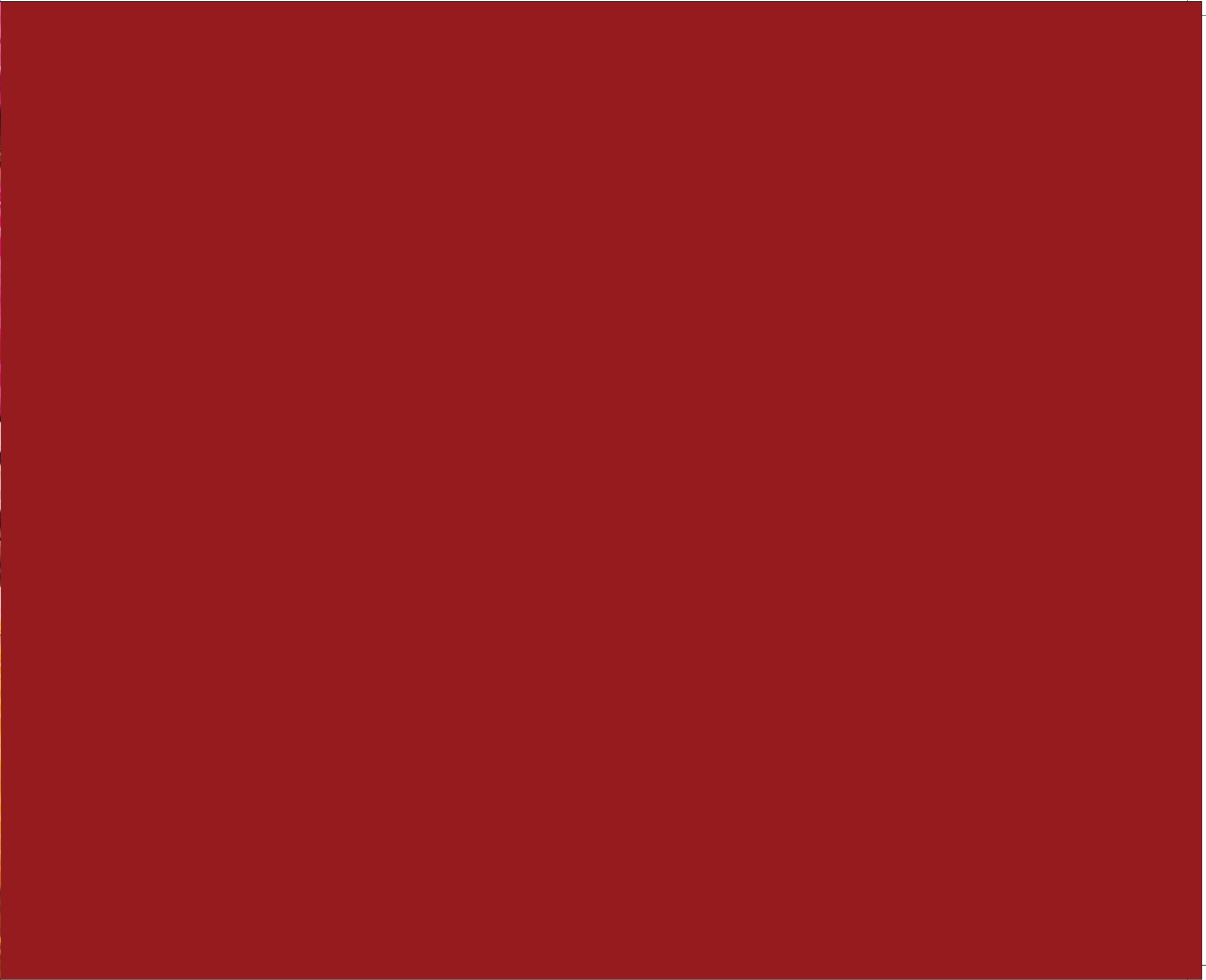
Empowering lives through
Mahatma Gandhi NREGA

UNDP support to Government of India:

A unique collaboration

POCKET

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Introduction

Today India is among the top five fastest growing economies of the world. Indian economy also exhibited remarkable resilience in recovering from the global financial and economic crisis of 2008. However, the progress on human development in the country has not been commensurate with the promise held out by rapid economic growth. The latest UNDPs Human Development Report 2011 ranks India at 134 among 187 countries. Further, the Approach Paper for Twelfth Five Year Plan indicates that India is likely to miss the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) targets, except the one on poverty. India's performance on MDGs has been a mixed bag with progress on some indicators being encouraging while on others has been much less than anticipated. Hunger, malnutrition, maternal and infant mortality are glaring challenges in context of MDGs. These are largely explained by prevaling gender inequalities. In addition, the MDG report also point out that the share of the poor is likely to increase from 64% to 71% across the following states; Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Maharastra and Uttrakhand. The prevailing situation indicates that in India, even during the absence of a financial and economic crisis, with a fast growing economy, the challenge of employment as well as poverty and vulnerability of a large segment of its population has been a major area of concern.

While a higher growth is one of the necessary condition for generating more employment and providing decent work conditions, policymakers have always focused on the need for a number of dedicated policies for employment creation to tackle the basic problems of poverty and deprivation. An important step was the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), implemented by the Government of India's Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD), it aims at enhancing the livelihoods security of people in rural areas by guaranteeing hundred days of wage – employment in a financial year to a rural household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work.

Six years since its inception, this law has shown extraordinary promise. It has brought the "right to work" to the front stage of the discussion on social protection. MGNREGA represents a significant innovation in relation to the short-term and emergency based public works tradition. Among its innovations, key ones include : (a) Self-targeting – this means that the programme does not target people living below poverty line. It is the nature of the work provided – manual and unskilled – that determines the demand for work (b) any household can demand up to 100 days of work that should be provided within 15 days under the penalty of the state having to pay unemployment benefit; (c) the inclusion of social audits and social accountability mechanisms to increase accountability and enhance social participation.

MGNREGA fulfills the policy prescription of a development process in which people actively participate in the development processes. In the long term, this legislation has the potential to address poverty in a holistic manner – which includes mitigating the impact of climate change, preserving natural resources, overcoming social inequalities and creating a base for sustainable and long term development.

Since the inception of MGNREGA in 2005, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has supported the Government of India in strengthening the implementation of the Act through ICT based innovations, monitoring and research, fostering community awareness to create a more informed and energetic demand side, as well as capacity development for an effective   decentralised delivery mechanism. UNDP has lent strategic support to this key government social protection progamme.

The programmatic support has been crafted in a manner that innovatively addresses the governance challenges that reveal themselves while the law is being operationalized by investing in innovative prototypes and by informing policy frameworks that can be adapted and replicated with government resources. The project is designed to provide technical and knowledge support at macro, meso and micro levels. This ranges from exploring new ways to strengthen governance at a micro level on the one hand, to lending support to key policy adjustments such as Government guidelines related to Convergence at the macro level.

As the current phase of the project comes to a successful culmination, this publication seeks to document, explore and understand the various ways in which this unique partnership between the Government of India and UNDP has worked. The experience is rich with stories of successes and learning's and transition to a new social contract which is more equitable and participatory.

UNDP lends support to operationalise
Mahatma Gandhi NREGA

A knowledge and technical partnership to enable transparent, accountable and equitable implementation

Furthering UNDP's commitment towards better governance and equal opportunities

UNDP has been working with the government, civil society and people of India since 1961 to support and encourage the development of their own solutions for global and national development challenges. The cooperation between Government of India and UNDP is based on a five year Country Programme Document (CPD), prepared under the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF). The priorities of current UNDAF (2007-2012) are in line with India's 11th Five Year Plan and aim to accelerate the achievement of the MDGs by 2015.

The outcomes of the current UNDAF are built around the key objective of "promoting social, economic and political inclusion for the most disadvantaged, especially women and girls".

A cornerstone of Government of India's 11th Five Year Plan is its sustainable poverty alleviation strategy which is based on increasing productive employment opportunities to ensure a more inclusive growth process. MGNREGA is a key instrument for operationalising this strategy. While it is a landmark legislation that promotes decentralisation, transparency, accountability and participation – critical elements for democratic governance - it faces several implementation challenges. UNDP has collaborated with the Government to address some of these challenges and has been supporting the MoRD since 2006 with the main objective of enabling transparent, accountable and efficient implementation of MGNREGA along with enhancing levels of community awareness.

An association based on technical and knowledge inputs

UNDP has aligned itself as a knowledge and technical partner with the Government of India in its efforts to operationalise the Act. UNDP India's Mid Term Review of the Country Programme Action Plan 2001-2012 describes the collaboration as strategic, in which UNDP's limited resource, in comparison with Government investment, has been "used to improve the system of payment to workers, strengthening the management and monitoring systems and development of social audit guidelines."

Instilling elements of good management and innovative solutions

Despite the popular support that the Act has gained in the past few years, it has also been subjected to scrutiny from media, practitioners, activists and academicians and Parliamentarians. Much of these concerns stem from the inherent difficulties of taking a liberal, rights based legislation to field, endowed with funds of unprecedented scale. UNDP's strength as a trusted partner of the Government lies in its ability to engage closely with the government to address these challenges.

"UNDP support is a unique example of partnership between a national law with domestic funding and international agency. It creates space for policy entrepreneurship and lab testing of ideas for upscaling as policy and practice"

– Amita Sharma, former Joint Secretary & National Project Director, Ministry of Rural Development

The responsibility for implementing a rights based programme guaranteed by law lies with the national government. UNDP adds value by bringing in technical expertise and in demonstrating new approaches to better delivery of a rights based social protection programmes led by the Government.

Over the last five years, UNDP has committed USD 7 million to support effective implementation of the MGNREGA. This catalytic contribution, in partnership with the MoRD, has been able to directly and positively impact the largest rural employment programme in the world (with an annual Government of India allocation of over USD 8 billion), reaching over 200 million of the poorest people in India, including 50% women, 23 % of Scheduled Castes and 17 % of Scheduled Tribes. The partnership between MoRD and UNDP has resulted in improvements in delivery, transparency, Monitoring and Information Systems, and quality technical guidance to the programme.

Success factors

Using innovative ways to addressing critical implementation gaps, forging new partnerships ; promoting elements of good management such as high quality technical expertise in key functional areas; supporting sophisticated Management Information Systems (MIS) and data analysis systems; designing capacity development tools and modules for better planning and implementation; partnerships with research and management institutions for concurrent monitoring and remedial action; and innovative mechanisms to test new approaches were some of the success factors.

Impact UNDP's support to Mahatma Gandhi NREGA has created a repertoire of mechanisms, partnerships, network and replicable prototypes such as Professional Institutional Network (PIN), Human Development Innovations, ICT pilots, Convergence guidelines

Strengthening the implementation of MGNREGA
Key Strategies

Phase 1: Preparing the base

During the initial phase to operationalise the largest workfare programme in the world and implementing its unique rights based features required establishment of strong systems of managing data and information, monitoring mechanisms, tools for awareness generation and communication, and technical skills to plan and implement physical assets at community level. Therefore, to enhance capacities of central and state governments as well as implementing partners at local level, the focus of UNDP's initial support focussed on development of national and sub-national communication strategies, development of various capacity development tools to support the central and state governments and development of modules and prototypes for Information and Communication Technology (ICT) based Management Information Systems (MIS) and Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) systems.

Phase 2: Deepening engagement

Subsequently the capacity development efforts of the programme graduated towards technical expertise, strengthening management capacities, supervision, concurrent monitoring , demonstration of prototypes to address implementation issues, including transparency, timely wage payments, and convergence.

Key strategies:

(1) Establishing Technical Cell within the MoRD to strengthen institutional capacity at National level

Direct support to Ministry for improved implementation and monitoring

(2) Development of capacity development tools and capacity enhancement of stakeholders

Operation guidelines and manuals on different works permissible under Mahatma Gandhi NREGA

(3) Awareness generation initiatives

Improving outreach and awareness regarding Mahatma Gandhi NREGA through advocacy and communication campaigns, IEC material such as primers for workers, local elected leaders, films among others

(4) Knowledge network and facilitation of knowledge exchange

An e-network of district collectors and state and district officials involved in MGNREGA implementation, for sharing of solutions and best practices

(5) ICT pilots to improve transparency and accountability

Exploring the potential of ICT technology in providing democratic and accountable platforms for citizens and in ensuring access to entitlements

(6) Constitution of the Professional Institutional Network (PIN) for concurrent monitoring

Qualitative, concurrent and external evaluation by prestigious institutions across the country provide feedback to improve implementation

(7) An Innovation Fund to promote innovations for the next phase of Mahatma Gandhi NREGA

Innovation pilots address human development challenges for MGNREGA workers and provide important lessons for a possible expansion of the programme

(8) Support monitoring of convergence pilots

Monitoring support provided to convergence pilots that integrate MGNREGA objectives with other programmes to rejuvenate the natural resource base in key states, to ensure long term benefits and sustainable development

Key response to
implementation challenges

Constitution of the Professional Institutional Network (PIN)

Challenge: Inform the process of implementation critically from the perspective of sustainable employment to address chronic poverty

It was evident from the early days that implementation of MGNREGA would be constrained by complex and dynamic factors. The Monitoring and Evaluation System, comprising of regular performance review meetings and data compiled through MIS, are extremely important indicators of progress. However, they fail to adequately capture the impact on human development, the nature of obstacles created by structural impediments. Therefore, a well researched and qualitative assessment was required to present a critical understanding of the gaps.

Response: Concurrent monitoring by a network of top-level research institutes

At a round table conference in August 2008, more than fifty leading academic institutions committed their support to realize the full potential of Mahatma Gandhi NREGA. Under the guidance of MoRD, UNDP constituted the Professional Institutional Network (PIN). At present there are 84 member institutes including the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs), the Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs), the Administrative Staff College of India, the Indian Institute of Forest Management (IIFM) and many other professional institutions and agricultural universities comprising of the premier academia of the country.

The PIN has been constituted as a steady and sustainable intervention that will enhance the quality of the programme. Core objective of the network has been to undertake concurrent monitoring across the States at district and block level. Based on their research, the PIN studies offer recommendations for remedial measures and future interventions for the District and

State Government to adopt. The main focus is to strengthen the implementation at the district level and support with well researched and localized solutions. The studies also highlight efficient management practices that could be replicated in other contexts.

Member institutes with academic and technical excellence have placed researchers who use intensive qualitative methods, spent substantial time on the work sites and interacted with all stakeholders including panchayat and district level officials for an in-depth assessment. As a result these studies have unraveled issues related to implementation, sustainable employment and associated human development, that could lend a new perspective to the way policy makers and practitioners approach Mahatma Gandhi NREGA subsequently. While the monitoring studies are mainly focused on salient features of the Act such as increase in income, employment opportunities, inclusion of women and marginalized communities, reduction in distress migration etc, they also examine the human condition in general – with emphasis on empowerment of women, impact on the governance potential of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), agricultural productivity, natural resource management and the bearings it may have on climate change.

Thus, an important contribution of the PIN mechanism, apart from objective monitoring, is also the strengthening of Mahatma Gandhi NREGA monitoring framework. The kind of indicators along which PIN partners are capturing Mahatma Gandhi NREGA performance information, allow for measurement of programme outputs and outcomes and not just activities.

Key Achievements: A vast repertoire of sharp policy and practice recommendations to strengthen District level implementation

o   An high quality knowledge network comprising of 84 institutes has provided a formidable body of research for self reflection and future enhancements

o   Over six years a compendium of studies have been commissioned and completed. There are several that have looked at thematic issues such as empowerment of women and environmental concerns. The studies conduct evaluation at the district and block level and offer localized solutions.

o   PIN findings provided in-depth analysis of a wide range of issues including – enhanced income generation, livelihood opportunities, durability of the assets created, resource management, financial inclusion, trends in distress migration, overall impact on human development etc. Assessment of the programme implementation has been deepened from output based monitoring to outcome based.

o   Findings of PIN have informed the note on "Reforms in MGNREGA implementation" published recently by the MoRD which presents some of the key challenges faced by the programme and offers solutions which could be adopted by the State and District authorities.

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Durable and relevant assets are created when communities identify their own needs: best practice from Ramnagar, Uttarkhand

While conducting its research in two districts of Uttarakhand, IIT Roorkee found an irrigation project that exemplifies the merits of participatory planning in creating durable and relevant assets. Although a perennial stream flows through Ram Nagar, a village in the Udham Singh Nagar district of Uttarakhand, farmers use sub-surface water by installing direct irrigation tubewells. As a result over the years water supply has reduced, impacting cultivation. Gram Pradhan Balbir Singh in consultation with the members of Gram Sabha identified the potential of using the readily available water supply from the stream and decided to undertake the excavation of an irrigation channel as an Mahatma Gandhi NREGA work. This channel is expected to irrigate 4000 hectares of land and benefit 10 villages. Result of a simple but participatory decision, this project is a model of how planning is most effective when community led. Productively using a free flowing surface water source instead of draining out finite ground water is a notable water resource management practice.

Kapildhara is an extremely successful and popular scheme. But is it sustainable?

Indian Institute of Forest Management delves deeper

In Madhya Pradesh which has the highest concentration of dry land with only 24% of the cropped area irrigated, Kapildhara sub scheme of Mahatma Gandhi NREGA provides irrigation facility through small dug wells, tanks, farm ponds to small and marginal farmers. Popularity of this scheme prompted Indian Institute of Forest Management (IIFM) to undertake an assessment study of Kapildhara's impact. The purpose was to evaluate the ecological sustainability of these groundwater wells and address the concern that unless adequate and regular recharging measures were in place, the practice could soon become unsustainable. The positive impact of irrigation would be reversed and the wells would dry up.

IIFM prepared a checklist of presence/absence of recharging measures (ponds, watershed activities, effective recharge pits, farm pond, farm bund and afforestation) in the vicinity of all Kapildhara sites in the districts of Dhar, Ujjain and Chhindwara.

Observations revealed that even though recharges were happening, they were chance occurrences and not planned at all. The study has recommended that planned recharging is crucially important for the continuing success of this scheme. It has recommended an integrated approach to form a cluster of villages so that in each cluster the number of wells may be balanced by the recharge activities done according to site suitability.

The decision to delve deeper into a sub scheme of MGNREGA that enjoys such popularity and has contributed to greater income, was an intuitive and academically informed decision which forms the basic principle of monitoring undertaken by the PIN.

The Innovation Fund

Challenge: To realize the full potential and look beyond

When legislation is administered on a nation wide mission mode, so that it attains universality, there is usually limited scope for reflection. Yet the space of policy is best left open to interpretation and creative adjustments. The Government of India and UNDP recognized that the potential of Mahatma Gandhi NREGA far exceeds that of an employment assurance intervention. Apart from income increase, arrested migration, creation of public assets and other stated objectives, the framework of the Act has potential to spur changes in the domain of human development.

Response: Civil Society encouraged to innovate

UNDP established an Innovation Fund within the MoRD to promote innovation that will feed into the Mahatma Gandhi NREGA Plus design and explore next generation issues like durability of assets, literacy and skills of workers, sustainable livelihoods, human development aspects, financial inclusion among others.

Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) were encouraged to explore new ways to strengthen implementation and energise the rural livelihood base. The initiative was formulated keeping in mind the socio-economic vulnerability of the wage seekers. The average MGNREGA worker exhibits low levels of human development indicators, earn their means through unskilled and hard manual labour, exploiting, often in an unplanned manner, the natural resource base. Unless sustainable measures are put in place, the rural poor seeking employment under the Act will remain exposed to health hazards, natural disasters and aggravate the ill effects of climate change. All of this will adversely affect employment opportunities and reduce their ability to move out of the poverty trap. Initiatives that promote durable assets, sustainable and green livelihood, skill development, functional literacy, financial inclusion are key to the long term success and relevance of the Act.

The Innovation Pilots

14 CSOs have implemented innovation pilots on work sites and their hinterland. These pilots were launched across select districts to develop prototypes that could be scaled up to create a sustainable and relevant pipeline of employment, enhance income through skill development and market linkages and improve the overall human condition.

Innovation Highlights

Innovation	Contribution to Mahatma Gandhi NREGA
Intensive IEC campaign and literacy drive (Development Alternatives)	An informed and energetic demand side - more jobs generated, accountability systems in place
Resource mapping of villages through GIS technology, sample shelf of work created and convergence planned (Development Alternatives)	GIS used to create a localized, real time, geo-economically sound resource base of villages for decentralized planning; strengthened PRIs, job pipeline reflecting actual need, better resource management
Labour Cooperative of job seekers promoting skill development including non farm, ability to participate in planning through Gram Sabhas (NIDAN)	Informed citizenship leveraging the strength of collective action and participation
Farming extension practices for better yield, farming and non farming skill development – pouch making, assembling and selling solar lanterns, masonry etc – linking SHGs with market and providing micro credit, traditional irrigation measures in convergence with relevant departments (SEWA)	Increasing scope of work for more employment opportunities and creation of more diverse social infrastructure for better living standards, sustained productivity and a climate resilient growthSkilled and semi-skilled work included within scope of the Act to improve and enhance the range of 'permissible works'Ensure that traditional industries requiring specific skill sets are protected and become new contributors to the economy
ICT enabled People Information Kiosks and biometric operated hand held devices provide personalized information to wage seekers regarding their job card status, wages accumulated, person days utilized, shelf of work, attendance register – the entire gamut of information available as per provisions of the Act (One World South Asia)	Democratic potential of technology used to create access, a strong and empowered demand side, accountability, augmented income Biometric as means of identification ICT gateway for all information and transaction related to MNREGA including issue of job cards, receipt etc, removing all power barriers
Linking MNREGA to rural energy generation, energy plantation, installation and maintenance of wood gasifier as a captive power source in each village (TATA Energy Research Institute)	A low carbon energy solution with sustainable employment opportunity, rural electrification at a low cost leading to drastic improvement in living conditions and related growth In convergence with Ministry of New and Renewable Energy and Ministry of Environment & Forest, a ubiquitous energy solution liked to MNREGA with the Panchayat as the implementing agency

Udaipur and Rajasmand districts of South Rajasthan benefitted from an intensive Agricultural Skilling program run by SEVA Mandir

The objective was to establish a direct link between development of natural resources to long term employability and overall economic growth. The intervention builds on the fact that water conservation and land improvement works, key factors in agricultural productivity, account for more than 85% of the total MGNREGA works. In association with state agriculture department, agricultural universities etc, the project enhances agricultural and related skills of the farmers and help them diversify their farming activities, besides ensuring proper utilization and planning of the associated resources.

Water harvesting has increased water level in a number of wells making irrigation possible through recharge. More than 80% of land left fallow during the rabi season is now cultivable, improving the cropping intensity. Livestock has become more profitable by the introduction of better breeds. Villagers have benefitted exceedingly from raising Sirohi bucks, which are superior to the local variety and command a much higher price in the market. Cattle Camps have been organized to build awareness regarding cattle health, vaccinations, sterilisations etc. Other innovations such as a community seed bank with readily available seeds of various variety, vegetable farming, vermicompost pits, use of iron equipments have all improved the yield and earning of the farmers besides making optimal use of and preserving the natural resources. Linked to MGNREGA, the assets built in the process are planned, environment friendly and create no strain on the resource base.

Child Care Facility at Work Site

An ingenious undertaking, Balwadis are crèche facilities at the work site for infants and children developed by SEVA Mandir in Udaipur and Rajasmand districts of Rajasthan. While crèche is a mandatory provision in the MGNREGA Act, even if the ground reality is disappointing as rarely this facility is available, Balwadi is an attempt to contribute further to child care. Not only does it allow the mother to seek employment, through cooked meals and carefully planned diet, it attempts to improve the nutritional levels of the children. Majority of children suffer from malnutrition and anaemia. At the Balwadis, they are served nutritional food and older children are enrolled in classes with specially crafted curriculum so that they don't miss out on their schooling.

Use of GIS Technology for resource mapping, planning and creation of Shelf of Projects, Development Alternatives

Tikamgarh district, Madhya Pradesh

Jhansi district, Uttar Pradesh

Planning is the most essential part for the successful implementation of MG NREGA. Section 16 of the Act specifies that the Gram Panchayat should draw up the development plan and shelf of work as per the Gram Sabha recommendations. Unavailability of easily accessible and updated resource mapping hampers the planning process. Development Alternatives conducted a mapping exercise with the help of Geographical Information Systems (GIS) to capture and analyse the lay of the land. A resource table was formed indicating resources/infrastructure presently available in the village to identify gaps and aid the planning process of Gram Panchayats. Ladpura Village with total population of 785, has 3 wells, 1 pond and no primary health centre, irrigation canal and toilets. Armed with resources mapped and analysed real time, Development Alternatives embarked on the next stage of the project – creation of a sample shelf of projects for two Gram Panchayats. Through focus group discussions and in depth interactions the entire community was involved in the process of planning. The sample shelf of work created clearly demonstrated that the potential of MGNREGA is much larger than projected during previous financial years. The portfolio of work can be rich and diverse when drawn up in consultation with the community with the GIS mapped resources as a reference.

This demonstration provides an important lesson on the value of adopting GIS to create a localized, real time, geo-economically sound resource base of villages for decentralized planning; strengthened PRIs, job pipeline reflecting actual need, better resource management

Key Gains: Crafting Mahatma Gandhi NREGA Plus

From ICT based solutions for banking, job cards etc, self help groups, child care on site, functional literacy, skill development of workers in farming as well non farming activities, capacity building of PRIs, inclusion of handicrafts in permissible works to prevent demise of traditional skills and rural energy generation through energy plantations, the pilots expand and enrich the scope and sustainability of employability itself. The MoRD has recognized the potential of these prototypes as important building blocks for the future.

Based on the results of ICT pilots using biometric authentication for wage payment and provision of user friendly information to wage seekers, the Government has published a strategy document titled "National Framework for Biometrics Enabled ICT for People Empowerment under MNREGA" in preparation for a national roll out of the model.

Gram Panchayats have been instructed to begin using ICT based gateways modeled on the innovation pilots in select districts of Kerala, Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh, Orissa and Uttar Pradesh, to enable real time transactions and ensure protection of the job seekers entitlements. The low cost ATM model tested in Tamil Nadu has provided important pointers and lessons to banks, including the Reserve Bank of India, to promote financial inclusion.

The Technical Cell

Challenge: Insufficient technical and professional expertise impedes proper planning and implementation of Mahatma Gandhi NREGA

One of the fundamental structural flaws that impede MGNREGA from realizing its full potential is the paucity of dedicated resources. Bureaucrats at the district and block level are stretched beyond their capacities to deliver effectively. The Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) lack sufficient training and technical expertise. As a result the work pipeline is not optimal, payments are delayed, accountability suffers and infrastructure is not durable.

Workforce is limited not just in terms of numbers but appropriate technical and management skills as well, required to shoulder the complex and multifaceted responsibility of taking the programme to its fulfillment in a meaningful and democratic way. This has been an issue of grave concern with planners, civil society and academics and has featured as a top priority in every charter of reform.

The overarching responsibility of better implementation lies with the MoRD. Run on the principle of decentralized governance, resource and personnel gap will need to be addressed at extremely localized levels, through systemic interventions and innovative measures such as barefoot engineers, rozgaar mitras or a skilled rozgar sewak. The support system required is enormous and the Government will need to invest major resources and planning to address this gap over the next few phases. Recognising this need as a key strategic pillar at the onset of its collaboration, UNDP proposed to build a strategic support system within the Ministry. This technical support team was instituted to support MoRD in developing high quality capacity development tools, IEC material, guidelines and conduct regular field visits – all of which were designed provide important guidance to district and sub-district levels for better implementation.

Response: Strengthening Institutional Capacity at the National Level

A Technical Cell was established within the MoRD in 2008 to provide direct support to the Ministry for improved implementation and monitoring of MGNREGA. Constituted as a body that works closely with the programme implementation machinery, the Technical Cell provides professional assistance and technical support. It endows various aspects of the governance with specialized inputs in key thematic areas such as engineering and planning, training, data analysis, M&E, MIS, communications, knowledge management and IT.

Key Impact: Improved implementation by providing strategic, operational and technical support

The secretariat has facilitated strategic as well as functional review of programme implementation processes at various levels of governance. It has served as the hub for knowledge sharing, dissemination of best practices and monitoring of programme implementation to provide feedback to policy-makers. Based on the contribution and value of the technical support, both MoRD and the external evaluation have suggested instituting state level secretariats in the next phase of partnership.

(1) Feedback to policy makers at national and state level on implementation issues

Technical Cell collates feedback from multiple M&E mechanisms - National Level Monitor (NLM), findings of the Professional Institutional Network (PIN), implementers of the Innovation Project, Convergence monitoring partners, citizen feedback received as grievances through RTI queries – to bring serious irregularities from the ground to the MoRD's notice.

(2) Quality and durability of assets: Technical assistance to districts on Mahatma Gandhi NREGA works

A significant challenge faced by programme throughout India is poor quality and short-term durability of the assets created. Local engineers are often unaware of the technical standards that ought to be followed. Supervision is inadequate on the work sites.

In order to address these issues the Technical Cell visited work sites spread across districts in more than 20 States including Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Orissa, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal.

Soil and irrigation works were surveyed extensively and gaps identified.

It was found for instance that durability of roads built to provide all weather connectivity is often affected due to lack of technical planning. A road project often neglects or fails to build an effective drainage system as a result of which after a few rains the integrity of the road weakens and gets damaged.

These gaps arise largely due to the fact that before commencement of the work, appropriate surveys and technical analysis are not conducted. Works are commissioned without technical measures and standards in place. There are very few trained resources such as experienced engineers or site supervisors on ground.

At every location, on completion of survey, the Technical Cell held a workshop or discussion with the stakeholders, including the District Magistrate and members of the Panchayat to generate awareness regarding the technical standards that ought to be enforced. The work sites were investigated in detail and structural and planning flaws discussed. In depth presentations were made of the field observations and suggestions for corrective measures. Convergence with other ongoing schemes were discussed and recommended as well. These capacity building measures were received with great enthusiasm and several district officers indicated that all commissioned work would make an effort to abide by the recommendations.

An expert group was set up, chaired by the CEO, National Rainfed Areas Authority (NRAA) to promote convergence of watershed programmes with Mahatma Gandhi NREGA. The expert group was tasked to design a seamless integration and also prescribe farming systems specific to the land use and water availability of different agro-climatic regions to ensure sustainable use of resources. In Andhra Pradesh and Gujarat, various innovative methods of convergence with watershed projects under Integrated Watershed Management Programme (IWMP) were designed and implemented.

Way Forward: Deepening the reach of technical support at the district level

Quality of assets created would be impacted with more direct and local support from the Technical Cell. Currently a junior level technical assistant supervises five to ten districts at a time severely impeding the planning, design and quality control of the works. Presence of a Technical Cell at the state level with dedicated resources has the potential to remedy this situation with immediately demonstrable impact.

> A user friendly and illustrated Field Manual for Public Works Based on findings made during the field visits to districts the Technical Cell prepared a field manual with illustrations, to guide and facilitate works in the districts.
>
> Planning for public works is effective only when it happens at the Panchayat and village level where there is a dearth of specialized inputs informing the selection of work site, designing, planning, layout, execution and maintenance. The Technical Cell put together a lively and illustrated operation manual with detailed comments on each segment of activity. Common mistakes to avoid were pointed out and detailed suggestions were offered on strengthening the technical quality.

(3) Ensuring a smooth run of the programme using various governance tools

o   Managing the MIS and eliciting key information from the rich database

MGNREGA has the largest public policy database in the country - the MIS website developed by National Informatics Centre (NIC) has information of 117 million households. It has been recognised and awarded as the best Government website. The Technical Cell is responsible for maintaining real time information updates on the website in coordination with the State MIS officers. Based on MIS data findings, the Technical Cell provides regular feedback to the policy makers regarding implementation at the State level. Based on these inputs the Centre issues circulars for corrective measures. In order to build capacity of functionaries and aid them in entering data on MIS, block level training workshops have been conducted in various states.

o   Modules for Labour Budgeting and Social Audit

Technical Cell has designed two key tools for strengthened implementation- labour budgets and social audit. These tools ensure participatory, systematic and transparent planning. The online format developed by the Cell elicits information required to address critical issues and prepare an informed forecast. These modules, available online, enable Gram Panchayats and other stakeholders to upload all proceedings of social audits, planning of works and estimation of demand for next financial year. Since 2009 more than 90% of the Gram Panchayats have used the Labour Budget module to plan their forecast.

o   Redressing Grievances

Technical Cell is responsible for regular monitoring of MIS alerts, which show up in the system to indicate malpractice or violation of norms. The concerned State is immediately alerted so that real time corrective measures can take place.

(4) Promoting convergence with other centrally sponsored schemes

It has been observed that at the district and block level, officials, elected representatives and other relevant actors are not fully aware of convergence related possibilities or potential activities regarding the implementation of the MGNREGA. To alleviate this problem, Technical Cell has prepared Joint Convergence Guidelines to foster convergence with other ongoing programmes of different departments, ministries and programmes such as Ministry of Water Resources (MOWR), Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY) under MoRD, Ministry of Environment & Forests (MoEF) and Integrated Watershed Management Programme (IWMP). The guidelines were prepared by Technical Cell after consulting the officials of concerned department or ministry. Key officials were interviewed. In the guidelines prepared, the commonality of target area, beneficiaries, processes of most of the schemes and implementing agencies at the grass-root level were taken in view.

Awareness
Generating Initiatives

Challenge: Lack of awareness on entitlements

Reach of the Act depends on self selection. Hence it is a prerequisite for the job seeker to be aware of the entitlements to be able to avail of them. Hence awareness generation is one of the most crucial factors that will enable a greater demand for work. Historically, given the literacy levels, language diversity and difficulty of access, adequate awareness is an almost insurmountable hindrance in development. Given the universality of the intended social reach, the task at hand is tremendous.

Response: Empowering through information

In the first phase of collaboration, one of the earliest tasks undertaken was to create and execute a communication strategy that would ensure an understanding of the scheme among key stakeholders such as rural households, inform the PRIs, user groups, local government officials, NGOs and local communities. A wide range of IEC material was developed and disseminated. Rigorous field testing was conducted at the district level in target states to ensure impactful and relevant messaging. Short films, TV spots and posters were developed in local languages. Training films for officials, several publications on success stories, best practices, primers etc have been produced.

Key Gains:

The key contribution has been in the quality of information and communication material for various stakeholders – 30 films and TV spots, several publications with success stories have been made available customized for local government officials, elected leaders, workers, implementing agencies and media.

A compilation of more than 700 news and opinion articles capture the evolution, various issues faced over time and the redressal achieved. Manuals such as Rozgar Sutra and Sarpanch Pustak are invaluable legacies for practitioners, job seekers and all other stakeholders.

Establishing a Knowledge Network and facilitation of Knowledge Exchange

Challenge: Roadblocks need local solutions

Given the vast scope of the programme, a generalized prescription fails to address the problems that surface in implementing the Act. This calls for local and dynamic solutions which a framework of recommendations would be unable to address.

Response: A solution bank

Implementation challenges emerge across the country at various levels (state, district and sub-district) that can be met through identification of local solutions. An e-knowledge network called NREGANET has been established to facilitate knowledge sharing, for all officials responsible for implementation. A Community of Practitioners, NREGANET facilitates knowledge sharing and lateral transfer of local solutions amongst district and state officials. In addition, exchange of best practices among officials has been facilitated through India's leading administrative training institute, the Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration. The challenges and successes of implementing MGNREGA have been shared through an international seminar with participation from 13 countries including Brazil, Ghana, Iran, Mexico and Nigeria. This has led to creation of informal global networks facilitating information exchange and exploration of collaboration opportunities.

Key Gains

o   Best practices compiled as a practitioners reference in the NREGA NET series

o   District Awards instituted by the Ministry to recognize ground breaking work – a motivation for the District Collector to improve delivery

Development of capacity building tools and capacity enhancement of stakeholders

Challenge: Technical guidance and planning for durable assets creation

Quality of roads, irrigation channels and other permissible public works is affected due to lack of supervision and awareness regarding technical standards. Durability of the assets created play an important role in generating future employment, raising productivity and making the rural economy buoyant. Hence all these factors hinge on proper and long term planning, work site surveys, convergence and quality control.

Response: Imparting skills and training to the implementers and users through manuals and guidelines

Operational manuals and guidelines for the different categories of permissible works, such as watershed development, afforestation, rural roads etc have been developed. These tools have been used to provide detailed guidance to workers, locally elected representatives and officials on how permissible works can be planned and executed at state, district and sub-district levels for maximum impact, i.e., employment generation and creation of durable and useful public assets.

Supporting Convergence:

Substantial public investments have been made to strengthen the rural economy and livelihood base of the poor and marginalised sections of the population. Consolidation of these resources would be key to effectively and holistically address the causes of chronic poverty and ensure sustainable development.

Convergence establishes meaningful relationships between plural, diverse development strands, normally left unconnected, into a rich play of multiplier effects – Convergence Guidelines, MoRD

When the first task of ensuring employment for the rural poor across the country is underway, the Government has committed itself to expanding the scope of MGNREGA through an inter-sectoral approach. Harmonisation of strategies at all levels is needed to address the economic, environmental and social dimensions of a programme which runs on the principle of endogenous sustainability and ownership of the people.

MGNREGA converges with Watershed Programmes, National Agriculture Development Programme (Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana), National Horticulture Mission, Scheme of Artificial Recharge of Ground Water through Dug well and Backward Region Grant Fund

Guidelines:

The Ministry of Rural Development has developed and disseminated Guidelines for Convergence of MGNREGA with different schemes and specific programmes viz. Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), National Afforestation Programme and other schemes of the Ministry of Forest & Environment (MoEF), Schemes of the Ministry of Water Resources (MoWR), PMGSY (Department of Rural Development), Swarnajayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojna (Department of Rural Development), Watershed Development Programmes (Department of Land Resources, Ministry of Rural Development). On the basis of these guidelines, convergence pilots have been undertaken in 115 pilot districts in 22 states, identified by the MoE&F, MoWR and ICAR. Best practices from these locations will be identified and scaled up nationally.

UNDP has provided Monitoring and hand-holding support in some of these districts.

Drafting the guidelines:

UNDP coordinated the setting up of a Task Force set up by the MoRD to explore strategy for convergence, including representatives from Ministry of Water Resources and Ministry of Forest & Environment, Department of Land Resources, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Human Resources, Ministry of Women and Child Development. Two sub-groups were constituted under the Task Force. Ongoing development programmes were extensively reviewed and discussions held with the concerned Ministries to identify possibilities of convergent action. A draft report was put up for response and expert practitioners were called in for their reviews. The final report incorporated feedback from a range of stakeholders, including district level innovations that were undertaken on the principle of convergence as best practices.

Separate guidelines have been laid down for each Ministry.

Main objectives of Convergence:

o   Synergies between different government programmes/schemes for effective planning, process and implementation.

o   Sustainable development through concerted planning, use of natural resources and in creating an interdependent eco-system

o   Funds from other sources enlarge the volume available to create more durable assets.

How does Convergence work?

Funds available with PRIs from other sources such as the National Finance Commission, State Finance Commission, State Departments and other Central or Centrally Sponsored Schemes such as Swarnajayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojna, Drought Prone Areas Programme, Integrated Wasteland Development Project, Backward Region Grant Fund can be dovetailed with other rural development funds for the construction of durable community assets under the works permissible. However, core funds of schemes should not be used as substitute resources by different departments and agencies for their own activities.

Expected outcomes of convergence:

o   Increase in Social Capital: Collective planning and implementation among different stakeholders enhances social capital and results in better management and work output.

o   Increase in Physical Capital: Durable assets are created and land productivity is improved.

o   Preserved and Self Sustaining Ecology: Synergised approach to natural resource base regeneration through afforestation, drought proofing, flood proofing, and watershed results in effective use of resources.

o   Mitigates Effects of Climate Change: Ecologically sound public works is fostering green growth, reducing CO2 emissions and building more sturdy safeguards against natural hazards. Planned activities such as afforestation contributes to offsetting industrial pollution.

o   Enhanced Economic Opportunities: Range of income opportunities have opened up through activities such as pisciculture resulting in greater savings, investments and consumption power.

o   Strengthening Democratic Processes: Convergence awareness and planning at the grassroot level leads to greater ownership of projects

Case Study:

Village Saru – Pool of Prosperity

One of the earliest attempts at convergence in the Ganjam district of Orissa, was in the village of Saru. Located in the Hinjlicut block, Saru's main source of sustenance is agriculture. A fledgling agrarian economy and chronic poverty that assails almost the entire stretch of southern Orissa has inflated seasonal migration of the young and able from this village. MGNREGA has brought optimism and slowly the dynamics of Village Saru are changing. People were ready and eager for change – particularly those who have stayed behind including women.

Few years ago two traditional ponds were dug to be used as water tanks for irrigation. Strong embankments were raised around these water bodies. The local administration indentified the need and scope to elicit more returns from the investment of labour and public asset. To open up more options for livelihood the fisheries and horticulture department were contacted and the process of convergence initiated. The fisheries department provided training to the villagers and encouraged them to engage in pisciculture. It was then a question of who would manage the fish tanks. The Panchayat decided to hand over the responsibility to Maa Mangala, a Self Help Group. Reports indicate that the SHG draw a profit of Rs 5 lakhs per annum.

The embankments of the tank provided strategic location for plantation of fruit bearing trees. In response to a call for a holistic improvement of livelihood, the horticulture department supplied a variety of saplings and assisted the villagers in planting trees such as coconut, guava, papaya and banana. In one section of the embankments a farmer put up a vegetable patch which earned him Rs 40,000.

The tanks have become a hub for additional, sustainable and green intensive income opportunities. As a direct impact, water stored in the de-silted tanks provide sufficient irrigation, enabling the farmer to raise double and triple cropping in the catchment areas of the tanks.

A glance at impact in numbers:

Out of an estimated expenditure amounting to Rs 62038/-, an amount of Rs 25663/- has already been spent on plantation.

62 coconut plants and 200 other plants (Acacia menzium) have been raised along the four sides of the pond.

State Bank of India, Saru has sanctioned a loan of Rs.3 lakh to the SHG members with Rs 1 lakh as subsidy component.

Five year lease value of the pond happens to be Rs 51,400/- to be paid to the GP.

Transparency and accountability through
ICT pilots and social audits

Promise of a fair, equal and transparent delivery is foundation of MGNREGA. Situating one of worlds largest employment assurance programme in a rights based framework, the text echoes the social and legal context of a citizenship empowered by tools such as Right to Information and ICT. Recognising the basic tenant of a progressive legislation as one which is accountable to the people, the Act has put in place non negotiable measures to ensure transparency and accountability. Yet given the expanse, complex social structures, diversity, literacy levels and paucity of skilled personnel, challenges remain. Corruption continues to haunt proper implementation resulting in cynicism regarding the efficacy of the Act in popular discourse.

An ICT enabled operating framework

UNDP has supported the setting up ICT pilots that have the potential to be scaled up across the country to ensure transparent transaction of wages, access to jobs and reducing structural inequalities that impede the job seeker.

Some of these initiatives have contributed substantially to mainstream the urgent need for ICT deployment in processes and payment methods – resulting in the publication of a National Framework for ICTs. This assertion at the highest policy level refers to mechanisms such as the People Information Kiosk that have been put in place in UNDP supported pilots as key strategies to open up information and to deliver entitlement.

ICT has been the corner stone of UNDP's collaboration with the Government. Early on the roadmap was based on the following strategies which laid emphasis on providing people timely, authenticated and direct access:

o   Support people centred public information system for enhancing people's employment potential

o   Reduce human intermediation thereby reducing leakages and ensure timely access to entitlement, including wage disbursement

o   Improve access to information and accountability

In consultation with the MoRD, MoIT and other concerned departments the strategy has been piloted in select districts.

People Information Kiosk at Bhilwara

At Bhilwara people touch information. They visualize it when it comes wafting through the radio, on the computer that speaks and the touch screen that responds to their fingers. In the desert plains of Rajasthan, information is a tactile entity. For the men and women who regularly drop by at the Soochna Seva Kendra (People Information Kiosk), information is a compatriot and insider who gets them their rights.

An unusual ICT deployment by One World South Asia, an implementing partner of the Innovation Fund Projects instituted by UNDP, use of Internet, Radio and Mobile telephony, in three districts of Bhilwara and Udaipur, has catalyzed an incredibly empowered and optimistic citizenry.

"Being able to get this information simply through my fingerprint makes me feel more independent. I do not need to rely on anyone for information"

– Rekha Devi, job seeker

ICT gives agency and voice to citizens

The Information Kiosk is a social space where the job seekers come to realize their entitlement yet, in a complete departure from tradition, they come with a voice and confidence. Their rights, in the form of job cards, wages, a perusal of the muster roll, personal history, all of that is delivered without discrimination or delay.

The three Info Kiosks serve a total of 20 villages and are located in the premises of the Panchayat. The protagonist of the set up is a computer which has voice to text facilities, a touch screen and is linked up with the MIS database on the nrega.nic.in website. Workers come in to seek information on the status of their job cards, general information related to the works planned, to generate pay slips etc. Access is granted through biometric authentication enclosing the worker in a private microcosm of transaction and information.

> "The ICT pilot project has spawned an eco-system of innovation for strengthening implementation of Mahatma Gandhi NREGA. When the cost of Hand Held Devices come down, once can hope to see delivery of enhanced services beyond problem solving"
>
> — Naimur Rehman, CEO, One World South Asia

Recently few additional dimensions have furthered the interactivity of this kiosk. The job seeker can now directly apply for a job through the kiosk. This new feature has displaced the need for a manual application through Form 6.

While the Info-Kiosk is a destination that promotes agency in the job seekers, to expand the coverage of these facilities, OWSA has introduced biometric enabled Hand Held Devices. These devices travel to the workers on the field and help them seek information, apply for jobs and query their payments. Equipped with biometric and GPS verified attendance tracking system, it is used to draw up a worksite e-muster roll. Worksite attendance tracked in this manner dismisses any possibility of fraudulence such as proxy attendance for ghost workers.

The kiosk and Hand Held Devices are supplemented by awareness programmes on a Community Radio and a Digital Knowledge Repository.

Building financial inclusion: Banker at every doorstep

Wages are disbursed through biometric technology enabled Smart cards in Bhilwara

Timely payment of wages to a growing mass of workers seeking employment under MGNREGA faces severe implementation challenges. For many workers, accessing their bank accounts entails hours of commute and cost. The post office machinery is stretched beyond capacity and limited financial literacy adds to the woes. Funded by the UNDP Innovation Fund, BASIX has fielded a model of financial inclusion in the district of Bhilwara in Rajasthan. A test run in seven villages has achieved impressive results. Biometric cards were organized for workers to access their bank accounts through business correspondent designated by the Central Bank of India. These smart cards transformed banking – a major hurdle for more than 80% of the workers who lacked the confidence or ability to make simple transactions such as deposits or withdrawals – to a simple automation, activated by their fingertips. The business correspondent is the customer service point which connects the worker through a mobile phone with GPRS to the Bank server. Using biometric technology, a worker's identification number is authenticated by a smart chip installed in the phone and in a matter of minutes, in the comfort of home or at the worksite, banking transactions are conducted.

BASIX has also organized financial awareness trainings for workers and orientation sessions for Gram Rozgar Sevaks and Gram Panchayat members.

The MoRD has recently issued a directive to the States asking them to strengthen the Business Correspondent Model in order to reduce delays in wage payments (MoRD note on Reforms, Sept 2011)

ATMs in Cuddalore: Transparent and timely disbursement of wages

Low cost ATMs with biometric authentication and local language interface established a new approach linking rural banking with Mahatma Gandhi NREGA. Incubated by the Indian Institute of Technology, Chennai, the ATMs were designed to address some of the key concerns at the heart of an accountable and just implementation of the Act – transparent, timely and secure wage disbursement.

These ATMs were set up in four villages of Cuddalore district in Tamil Nadu. these energy efficient machines are conducive to scaling up with meager investment and maintenance costs.

Finger prints are used for registration as well as authentication for each transaction ensuring complete transparency in disbursement of wages.

The initial days were not without obstacles, particularly the rural users inherent discomfort with technology, interrupted power supply and slow dispensation of cash. Aided by a vigorous IEC campaign which hand held the users through the banking process, these ATMs soon became locales of empowered access and entitlement. The uncertainty of receiving entitled wages in time, often large portions of it claimed unlawfully by middlemen, was removed completely. Women users were able to withdraw their own earnings, spend as per their own discretions and keep aside savings.

"The pilot was an important step to assess how technology can be used to serve the underserved and whether basic skills of banking and saving habits can be generated in the rural population. The lessons learnt are significant for the future"

– Prof Ashok Jhunjhunwala, IIT Chennai

New Thinking inspired by the project

Nationalised banks such as SBI have strengthened the authentication and user interface of their ATMs

To deepen the reach of banking in the rural areas, IIT Chennai is developing a voice based biometric authentication system for banking through mobile phone

Citizens feedback captured through a smart tool in the fields of Andhra Pradesh

TRIAGE is a portable device that digitally records grievances and feedback of the workers

A small device that fits in the palm of hand listens to the grievances of people, captures their voice and gives them hope that their stories will be heard and necessary action taken. In the Medak, Chitoor and Anantpur districts of Andhra Pradesh, Centre for Environment Concerns is reaching out to wage seekers with TRIAGE (Tool for Real Time Information and Action for Governance and Empowerment), development jointly with other software and hardware technology companies. Low cost, digitised and portable, this device records information about the respondents and records their feedback.

To Deliver as Promised

The biggest recession since 1929 has stirred up concerns across the world. As a recent ILO report states the crisis has spawned new breeding grounds for discrimination at work and in society generally. The ones to be affected the most are those who are most vulnerable. Decades of achievement could be wiped off the slate in one sweep of measures and austerity drives. Now more than ever, it is important to revisit the definition of economic justice as intrinsic to social justice. Access to decent employment is an asserted strategy and a political commitment scripted in the Millennium Development Goals. With its large rural base, India plans to address poverty and a fledgling rural economy through an employment assurance programme, a legally binding commitment to improve incomes and thereby uplift the living conditions of millions.

The roadmap of UNDP's support to Mahatma Gandhi NREGA is laid out in Annual Work Plans towards achieving the following outcomes:

1. Technical Cell has provided critical inputs to the MoRD in thematic areas such as Water Shed Management, Irrigation and Soil Engineering, social audits, ICT, gender and communication; improvement of monitoring mechanisms, grievance redressal and in maintaining a strong and real time feedback loop to the policy makers; assessment of technical gaps in assets and other public works, capacity building measures such as Guidelines and Manuals to address technical needs

2. The PIN studies have deepened analysis of implementation with extensive qualitiative research; outcome indicators of these research studies have helped develop a repository of localized intervention and strategies to strengthen implementation

3 .Models for capacity enhancement of Panchayati Raj Institutions have been established and tested.

4. Sharpened the focus on ICT as a crucial enabler for citizens to assert their rights and take greater control of the process; developed effective models of access based on ICT.

5. Innovations such as the Information Kiosk, biometric enabled hand held devices, biometric ATM and mobile banking have set a trend for an enabled future to address wage payment delays, discrepancy in job card allocation, choice of work sites, interference of panchayati workers.

6. Based on the success of these initiatives, the Government has rolled out a national framework for ICT Solutions.

7. A space created to test next generation issues such as developing literacy and skills of workers, financial inclusion, human development aspects, improving work site facilities and enhancing energy security. Innovations attempted by 14 civil society organisations have generated prototypes and pilots that will feed into the Mahatma Gandhi NREGA Plus design process. Human development capabilities are being developed on the platform of basic livelihood security: Capacity building for NREGA workers for financial literacy, functional literacy, skill-building and livelihood training, health.

8. Knowledge Network for best practice dissemination among District Programme Coordinators and NREGA functionaries. 1100 members at present

9. Resource Materials for capacity development of workers at all levels. Works manuals for afforestation, rural roads, watershed for rural users (engineers, PRIs,); Literacy Primer for workers; Capacity building of PRIs: Sarpanch Manual; Knowledge dissemination through Films and publications

Lessons learned

o   Capacity development at all levels of governance, national, state, district and sub-district, is a crucial imperative for the delivery of a rights based employment guarantee programme that aspires to achieve universal coverage

o   High quality technical support embedded at the State level is required to ensure quality and durability of assets created, sustainable planning, strong programme management techniques etc

o   Demand side needs to be strengthened through awareness generation regarding their entitlements, provisions of the act, ability to use information, participatory planning and about the long term implications of the Act

o   Extensive professional networks / partnerships with a range of civil society actors; mechanisms for knowledge sharing and learning within the programme and outside add tremendous qualitative value to a government programme

o   Constant innovation and exploration of next generation issues; convergence with other programmes for wage security, self employment, skills development, and natural resource development; instituting bold governance reform including promotion of decentralization, community auditing mechanisms, intensive capacity development of all levels of officials and elected leaders, use of ICT for business process re engineering are essential pre-requesites for success of the programme

Way forward:

In the forthcoming phase of collaboration, UNDP, along with other development partners, will continue to provide technical, knowledge and policy advisory support and establish concurrent monitoring mechanisms to track social impact of the programme.

State level engagement will be deepened through technical secretariats in the rural development department, professional network for concurrent monitoring, innovation pilots and promotion of convergence with other schemes. Engagement will be deepened in a few districts to provide lessons for replication and upscaling. These districts will serve as a platform for rural transformation and act as "Policy Laboratory" for planners.

"UNDP has partnered with the Ministry of Rural Development since inception of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act. Several innovations in implementation and monitoring have been put in place to improve delivery of entitlements under this unique rights-based programme. Going forward UNDP remains committed to lending strategic knowledge and technical support to ensure that the Act attain its full potential as a key driver of sustainable growth and human development in India."

– Caitlin Wiesen, Country Director, UNDP India

A key imperative will be to generate awareness regarding the vulnerabilities and risks associated with climate change. Sustainability and climate resilience of assets will be ensured through community level training, strategic technical inputs and careful planning. Targeted training will be conducted for village, block and district level officials including engineers and technical supervisors on design of climate risk resilience measures in Mahatma Gandhi NREGA works and rural infrastructure projects. The climate change experts in state level technical cells will evaluate existing community level investments for climate risks with climate resilient options identified for implementation. Support will be provided for pilot implementation of cost-effective, scalable climate resilience strategies.

Partnerships with civil society, management, technology and other academic institutions will be an important strategy to empower communities and build capacities. To further strengthen decentralized planning, microplanning by Gram Sabha will be facilitated and participation of excluded groups encouraged.

Recognising the fact that lessons learnt from monitoring and impact evaluation of MGNREGA have wider applicability for other social protection programmes, UNDP will leverage its vast global development network to facilitate South-South exchange.

UNDP Administrator, Helen Clark, an ardent ambassador of Mahatma Gandhi NREGA as a model Employment Guarantee Policy

On the occasion of International Poverty Day on 17th October, UNDP Administrator Helen Clark, in her message, spoke about Mahatma Gandhi NREGA as an instance of path breaking legislation and measure for sustainable development. Policy measures such as this would be key to battling the challenge of a better, poverty free life for a staggering 7 billion population of the world. Ever since her visit to the far flung Rajasthan village of Bhilwara, Clark has showcased Mahatma Gandhi NREGA at knowledge platforms across the world. Speaking at a symposium 'Millennium Development Goals and Human Development In India; Achievement and Challenges,' Clark said, "UNDP looks forward to taking its relationship with India to a new level of engagement in South-South cooperation."[Among these experiences], the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme... is an example of the knowledge and experience that India could export to other developing countries for transformational change." (UNDP Policy Brief, April 2010)

Helen Clark saw at first hand the innovations that UNDP is collaborating on with the Ministry of Rural Development. She visited a water conservation work site and discussed new projects which allow for workers to receive wages through fingerprint technology.

"There are very many exciting aspects to this scheme, but most exciting of course is the benefit it can bring to women, men, and families," said Clark. "We hope by working 100 days per year, there will be more money for food for the family, more money for health care, and more money for people to be able to support themselves." (Press Release)

Badam Devi, the wife of a struggling farmer from Kandha village in Bhilwara, had first registered herself as a wage seeker two years ago. With the income she has been able to ensure that her family of six no longer worries about where the next meal comes from when the land does not yield enough in the water-starved village, that the birth of her first grandchild takes place in a well-equipped hospital and her daughter-in-law gets the care that a mother needs. Badam Devi welcomed the UNDP Administrator into her home as she proudly proclaimed how income from employment under MGNREGA helped her build two new concrete rooms enabling her to keep her sons and their families under one roof. In Kandha village, MGNREGA provides employment to virtually all 200 households. Badam Devi is one of the many women UNDP Administrator Miss Clark interacted with on her trip to Bhilwara.

Participatory approach to planning: Community develops Mahatma Gandhi NREGA works pipeline

As the sun sets on Mohanpura, a small village in the Bhilwara district of Rajasthan, a group of villagers assemble at the Gram Panchayat meeting. Overcoming caste barriers, they engage in an intensive discussion about infrastructure that should be built under Mahatma Gandhi NREGA. Encouraged and supported by the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA), these villagers form an informed collective who take active part in planning community assets. A village development council comprising of seven women and three men of different castes have been constituted. On the basis of participatory discussions the council will develop a village development plan complete with a budget and timeline for each project.

Although most villager are engaged in the construction of a nearby road that links the village of Fatehpura, Rukhma Danoga, a mother of four, points out the urgent need for works related to water conservation. Her input will inform the process of participatory planning and help develop a works pipeline that is in sync with the needs of the village, ensuring that the community assets built are relevant and improve the living conditions of the community

Orissa communities create natural resource based productive assets

In the conflict ridden district of Kandhamal, Mahatma Gandhi NREGA has demonstrated its potential to rehabilitate communities through sustainable employment opportunities. Professional Assistance for Development Action (PRADAN) has encouraged the Gram Panchayats to develop natural resource based assets instead of focusing only on conventional infrastructure such as roads and ponds. Through participatory planning the community has developed a pipeline of resource generation activities which contribute to improving land productivity and diversifying cropping pattern. The impact is clearly evident in the entrepreneurial decisions of farmers, even those with small land holdings, to develop ponds for the extremely lucrative fish culture. PRADAN has encouraged farmers in upper land levels to develop mango plantations, pulses in the midland and paddy cultivation in lower levels to optimize land productivity. Sustained employment opportunities has played an important role in healing the scars left behind by violent riots. The District Peace Level Committee, recognising the potential of MGNREGA as an agent of communal harmony. A guideline has been issued that in every affected village one labour intensive work will be started as "Work for Peace" with equal participation from both communities.

Simple but strategic solutions

The People Information Kiosk is a simple biometric enabled ICT solution that demystifies accountability and brings to the citizen in a snapshot, the summary of wages received and pending, number of work days remaining, schedule of works, the muster roll and every little detail that realizes the right to decent work. Innovative models such as these have tremendous power to neutralize the exclusionary factors related to caste and gender.