

Q&A with Sahanivasa coordinator Mr. Chennaiah

The goal is to have as many people as possible understand the provisions of the Act. Everyone is out to loot the money that is coming through the Act. There is a lot of corruption. This corruption has to be combated to ensure good implementation of the Act. The goal is to strengthen people's groups so that this corruption is exposed and corrupt practices are made impossible. Sahanivasa has over two decades experience in making people aware of their rights. One example is their struggle for minimum wage – now Sahanivasa does not need to intervene at all. People organize themselves and demand minimum wages.

(1) What are the booklets and educational pamphlets and what is the material being translated?

There are 13 types of tables, records to be maintained, the material is quite complicated. Sahanivasa is preparing a resource book which contains the ACT (which is in Hindi and English and is the portion which needs translation), and additional material to fill in the gaps, add guidelines, information on how to understand various sections of the Act etc. Everything will be compiled into a resource book.

The pamphlets are practical procedures to follow, a description on the different types of work that can be done to qualify for employment under the Act, the nitty-gritty details and will also focus on sections of the population who will usually be ignored, like differently-abled people, etc. The Act is supposed to serve such groups as well but contains no details on how that can be done. Sahanivasa will fill the gaps.

(2) Who are the youth to be trained?

They are class X pass youth, who are sometimes village level youth leaders. They will be the key people. They will travel from village to village talking to people, conducting meetings, etc.

(3) What is an example of corruption?

Wages are paid through post office accounts. Middlemen come and talk to them, and ask them to come and work for them instead, often for lower pay, identify work that will get approved easily, and pick that (example, widening an existing canal which might not be really needed). Middle men will be in cahoots with the govt official, get the NREGA grant, and get the work done, and 200% profit. They are contractors who have linkages with the bureaucrats. People will go to them to get paid everyday (though lower wages) instead of getting paid once in 15 days through the post office. The middle men will contribute to temples, etc. to appear as good guys.

Tackling corruption is not trivial. They had many social audits under APVVU. at the end only a handful were suspended. Instead of cleaning up after corrupt incidents the plan is to get the people involved in the beginning so that the nexus can be prevented.

(4) An example of awareness of process:

As part of the Act wages are paid once per 15 days, given through the post office accounts. People need to open an account to get paid. People might not be aware of that, and Sahanivasa's work will make them aware of these processes. If they have never done this before Sahanivasa will help them walk through the steps.

(5) What is a mandal?

A mandal is like a block, slightly smaller than a taluk. The unit that is called a block in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka is called a mandal in Andhra Pradesh.

The proposal to Asha is for 3 mandals, one of them overlaps with the mandal where Asha-MIT/Boston has the educational centers. They will get the help of the teachers at those centers for some of the work.

(6) What is the population that will be covered by this project?

About 2 lakhs (this the labor population). This area is not the green belt, so that there is not a lot of agricultural resources for income.

They are talking to AID for doing this work in another 6 mandals. Rajeev is getting in touch with AID College Park.

(7) How long will this project continue?

If done for 2-3 years people will internalize the issue. Might not be necessary after 3-4-5 years the budget will be modified after the first year (for example, no translation will be necessary; also after the first year some things might change, some other things might be stressed based on how the project progresses.)

(8) Interaction with other NGOs

NREGA has been implemented in 13 districts. APVVU has base in 8 districts. Sahanivasa is working on encouraging NGOs in the area to get involved, with their own resources. (Young India project in Anantapur, Nisarga (AID funds will be used through Nisarga, which is coordinated by Ajay Kumar, who used to be with APVVU), organizations in Mahboobnagar.

The state govt. is comfortable working with unions like APVVU. For the last 20 years they have been demanding this as part of their struggle for min. wages. APVVU wants to help other NGOs use their expertise, on how to work collaboratively to combat corruption, wants to exchange information and help them. They will bring together smaller NGOs and govt. officials to build a relationship. Govt. will ignore smaller NGOs otherwise.

(9) What is the role of the coordinator?

The coordinator will be for both this work and for educational centers. The coordinator is different from the organizers. The plan is for one organizer per mandal for NREGA and coordinator is for all programs – the NREGA work and the educational centers supported by Asha-MIT/Boston.

(10) What is a social audit?

The requirement of social audit has been incorporated into the Act. But the govt's social audit is an eye wash. The project will help youth conduct the social audit. The youth will organize the meeting with the people and the govt. officials (govt. officials have to come by law). In front of them people will be asked whether this is their signature (instead of some spurious signature by middlemen). The youth will be trained on conducting this, on how to check records, etc. Report of social audit will be submitted to the govt

They have collaborated with MKSS (Aruna Roy's work).

(11) What is a public hearing?

They will train people to talk publicly - serve notice to govt - like a public tribunal 'so and so things have come to our notice'. for ex. when something is seriously wrong, a public hearing will be called. ex -corrupt person gave wages and asked people to leave for relatives house - so that houses are locked and social audit cannot be conducted! Another example is when someone in their cadre was kidnapped asking him to take leave and not participate in the social audit. When such incidents come to their notice people will call for a public hearing. This technique has to been used in their other struggles.

They are also keeping in mind other efforts - there are some bureaucrats who opposed the act saying it will be very corrupt. With a lot of public exposes, they are afraid that these bureaucrats will use that to say the Act should not be there.

(12) Cultural training

The cultural training is for village rural youth who have shown an aptitude for this kind of work and have an interest in this, whom they have to know through other marches (they are talented). This will be conducted at a central place. After training youth will go back to villages and sensitize the people. Training will be given by an expert in cultural programs for such issues, they have some regular resource people, one Mr. poornchandra rao. one mr. govindappa from anantapur.

Cultural trainee travel costs include resource people travel costs.

Cultural trainees are different from youth trainees for the general work.

(13) Caravans:

People will go on marches, go from village to village, ask them how things are happening, tell them what is happening in other villages etc. This will not be conducted in the initial stages but in the later stages. It will be conducted for a week at different stages in each mandal through cycle/walk. Everyone will walk, APUVVU folks, Sahanivasa folks, youth, experts, everyone will participate.