

Where are my rights?

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) for better governance

Dipanjan Chakraborty Aaditeshwar Seth
+91-9711913881 dipanjan@cse.iitd.ernet.in
School of IT, IIT Delhi

What are some of the social welfare schemes launched by the Indian government?

National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA), Public Distribution System (PDS), Janani Suraksha Yojna (JSY), Indira Awaas Yojna (IAY), Rashtriya Swasthya Beema Yojna (RSBY)

What are the common issues heard about these schemes? (examples cited are symbolic but close to reality)

- What is NREGA?
- How much rice should I get under PDS?
- I do not have a NREGA Job Card
- I did not get paid for working in NREGA
- I did not get the full amount for IAY
- The road that was built under NREGA got washed away in the last rains

Why do these issues occur in these schemes?

We argue that this is caused by 3 main reasons:

- **Awareness** for the schemes is low. Further, awareness about the various clauses in the schemes is also low. [What is NREGA? How much wages will I get?]
- No proper **audit and validation** about the running of the schemes is carried out by the Government. [Two toilets were supposed to be built in our school but they have not been built.]
- There are no proper **grievance redressal** mechanisms available to the beneficiaries. [I have not been paid for working under NREGA. Who do I complain to?]

How do we propose to bridge these gaps?

We have to take into account that:

- The literacy rate among the target audience is low, so our technologies must be **text-free** as far as possible.
- Our technologies must be **low-cost**, preferably readily available in the house.

We propose to use a suite of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), namely Interactive TV-DVDs (video DVDs that run on normal DVD players), Interactive Voice Response Systems (IVRs) (on mobile phones) and Community Radio Stations (CRs) (on FM enabled devices).

Video Volunteers is an organisation which produces small socially relevant videos (e.g. PDS, RTE, corruption, etc.). We are partnering with them to package their videos into regular TV-DVDs so that the people featured in these videos may watch them too. We

couple these videos with **multiple-choice quizzes** on the videos that can be answered using the remote control of the DVD player. We argue that this level of interactivity will increase the information retention rates of the people. We are piloting this in Jharkhand.

Most data related to NREGA is available online (<http://nrega.nic.in>, <http://nrega.ap.gov.in>). But the beneficiaries, with very low levels of literacy, are unable to access the data. **We use automated voice calls to take this information to the beneficiaries.** We are piloting this in one mandal in Andhra Pradesh and one block in Chhattisgarh in collaboration with Stanford University and IIIT Delhi. We have a mapping of phone numbers and NREGA Job Cards for these places. We run a computer program that monitors these websites weekly. Whenever there is an update against these Job Cards on the websites the program automatically makes phone calls to these numbers: e.g. “A payment of Rs. 250 has been released to your account according to the records. If you have received the amount please press 1, if you have not received the amount please press 2.” If the beneficiary has not received the amount she/he is presented with the option of allowing us to **lodge a complaint** on her/his behalf.

We are running a campaign “MNREGA mera haq” with Alfaz-e-Mewat (a Mewat based Community Radio Station). This is a bi-weekly radio programme. During this programme we advertise the number of our Mobile Vaani system (flagship product of Gram Vaani) (011 6603 2893). This is a **social network over voice** where the callers engage on discussions around NREGA. This is a call-back-on-missed-call system, so the callers do not incur any cost. We are also running a NREGA survey on this number. The plan is to get the data on the NREGA websites verified by the beneficiaries.

Using these ICT tools we argue we will be able to improve the awareness on social schemes, provide an avenue for people to obtain information and allow the beneficiaries to audit public data and file grievances when aggrieved.

How are the results of the experiments?

- **75%** of the aggrieved beneficiaries in our pilot in Andhra Pradesh agreed to file a grievance through us.
- Highlights from the NREGA survey running in Mewat, Haryana:
 - Do you have a NREGA Job Card?
 - Yes: 18% No: 82%
 - How many days of work are you guaranteed under NREGA?
 - 100 days: 47% 70 days: 53%
 - Have you worked under NREGA?
 - Yes: 26% No: 74%
 - Are heavy machines used in your village for NREGA work (this is not allowed by law)?
 - Yes: 41% No: 59%
 - Have you exercised your right to demand work?
 - Yes: 50% No: 50%