

PRESS NOTE

Poor quality and delayed implementation of PMGSY rural roads affects tribal development in Gajapati, Odisha

106 PMGSY rural roads pending since 2001-02

Pregnant women died without reaching the hospital, BPL families spend two days to get their food items from PDS shop, teacher can't reach to the school even students are there, students can't attend high school and college for higher studies all these problems faced by the villagers of Madha, Burusunda and Sindling of Kainpur Panchayat in Rayagada block of Gajapati district, due to no access to all weather roads to their villages. Rural roads are major means of mainstreaming the remote tribal villagers and to achieve the socio economic upliftment of rural masses specifically in targeted IAP districts. Govt. of India launched PMGSY in 2000 to connect the unconnected habitations with all weather roads consists more than 250 populations. Gajapati district being one of the poorest and tribal dominated (IAP) districts in Odisha has been far behind in road connectivity and rural infrastructure. There are 106 rural roads (in 76 PMGSY packages) are under construction since 2001.

Youth for Social Development with the support from the Affiliated Network for Social Accountability- South Asia Region (World Bank Institute) has initiated to bring transparency and accountability in the tender process of PMGSY rural roads by engaging communities, civil society and government officials. This eventually will result in efficient use of public money and improve the rural road ultimately the lives of the remote tribal people. In this regard YSD sensitised communities and trained 32 citizen monitors on use of social accountability tools specifically the use of Right to Information, check the tender selection process and most importantly the implementation of post tender PMGSY rural road construction.

Tender process monitoring of PMGSY was carried by the researches of YSD and experts like retired engineers with a set of indicators like process followed, norms and standard, publicity, clarity, eligibility of bidders, tender evaluation and grading, rejection grounds, timeliness, documentary compliance and general observation. Citizen monitoring of 20 ongoing roads was carried out by using a field monitoring inventory consisting of a set of observations interspersed with tests using monitoring equipment. The observations and tests pertained to different steps involved various stages of construction and involved attributes like, formation (length, width) and carriageway width, thickness of the layer, camber (cross slope), quality of compaction, size and gradation of aggregates (quality of materials used), shoulder width, shoulder camber, etc.

Surprising results found among them immense delay in completion of the road construction violates the PMGSY guideline (supposed to complete within 9-12 calendar months). 106 roads (in 76 packages) are under construction beginning in the year 2001-02. Most of the roads 64 packages sanctioned in 2006 to 2009 and 42 packages work awarded during 2007 to 2009. The department officials, contractors/companies implementing PMGSY roads are mostly responsible for the

immense delay as per the information gathered from the rural development department. No action has been taken by the government and if taken there is no response from the contractors even in 7 roads (in 2 packages) contractors filled case against the department in the High Court. The cases pending since a long period the willingness of the department to take further action in construction of roads and nexus between the contractors and officials ultimately creates problem for the communities who wait for a road since a long time.

Communities in these localities asked information regarding the PMGSY roads (i.e. status, quality, payments made, completion period, responsibility etc.) by filling 251 RTI applications. Among them 51 rejected intentionally & in many cases wrong and inaccurate information provided by the rural development department to the communities. Violations the right to information of the citizens are also clearly seen.

The findings of the social audit are depressing and a lot of question arises with regard to the efficiency and integrity of the implementing agency. The contractors given the tender violate many guidelines of the PMGSY roads are as follows.

- In most of the roads road information in the citizen informative board are not visible and broken.
- In many roads there are undulations and surface bleedings are clearly visible, at many places roller marks are there and soils are not adequately compacted.
- On the whole, the performance of the ongoing roads are just about manages to cross the 'medium' score bar in a score of three (i.e. high, medium and low). The mean score obtained by the roads are 3.0 to 4.40 in a maximum possible score of six (6) and the level of adherence to quality specifications remain at 50% to 74%.
- It possibly indicates that the enforcement of quality control measures by the government departments is not strict.
- There are differences in the quantity and quality agreed by the contractors in the bill of quantity which clearly reflects the violation of PMGSY guidelines and can't avoid corruption and lack of accountability of the officials.

About Youth for Social Development

YSD works to improve the lives of the tribal, rural and urban poor in Odisha. YSD work with local communities, women, youth and vulnerable groups to promote good governance, social accountability and transparency through research, public education, capacity building, documentation, people centered advocacy and participatory development action.

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