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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY: ENABLING TRANSPARENCY AND EFFICIENCY IN MGNREGS IMPLEMENTATION: A LEARNING FROM THE EXPOSURE VISIT TO SRIKAKULAM DISTRICT, ANDHRA PRADESH

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Abstract:

The extensive use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has changed the fundamental principal of delivery of services in every aspect of life, including various functions of the government. This has resulted in increasing efficiency, creating transparency, and streamlining expenses in the government Organizations. Today, Electronic Governance (popularly referred as e-governance) has emerged as a keyword for all such IT applications that are deployed by government bodies to deliver solutions and information to the masses. Generally, e-governance is considered as "online government"; however, many non-Internet technologies like telephone, fax, SMS, wireless networks and services, CCTVs, tracking systems, biometric identification, road traffic management and enforcement, identity cards, smart cards, etc., can be used in this context.

KEY WORDS:

Information and Communication Technology , Organizations , Electronic Governance .

INTRODUCTION:

The long-term benefits that evolve out of deploying ICT solutions are better decision making abilities for the govt organizations, and reduction in overall operational expenditure over a period of time. Information and Communication Technology ushers in multiple benefits for the govt and the masses by strengthening the very fabric of democracy and ensuring greater citizen participation at all levels of governance. It leads to automation of services, making sure that information regarding every work of public welfare is easily available to all citizens and eliminates corruption by adding lot more transparency in the governments functioning.

Background of Exposure Visit to Srikakulam District, Andhra Pradesh

Implementation of MGNREGS in its true spirit has always been a challenge for the executants since its inception. Though there are so many reasons behind it but delay in wage payments has been considered to be the prime reason for unwillingness of most of the workers to participate in MGNREGS. In order to address the issue of delay payment, so many IT interventions have been implemented in different states. Similarly a piloting of MGNREGS payment under e-FMS in postal department has been completed recently six months before in Odisha. Despite this effort, the result under MGNREGS is not much

satisfactory.

The expenditure under MGNREGS in Odisha was 117772.3 Lakhs in the year 2012-13 and this year as of 28th February, 14, the expenditure is 97905.45 Lakhs. Though MGNREGS payment under e-FMS has been introduced recently both in banks and post offices but there is no internet connectivity in number of post offices in Odisha where more than 70 percent of MGNREGS workers have their accounts because of the remote location of the banks from them. There are large of interested wage seekers who have not yet opened their accounts in spite of several efforts in post offices and banks due to the cumbersome process and shortage of staff in post offices and banks. In these circumstances, it is difficult to say how long it will take to open the accounts of interested job seekers and provide payment to wage seekers as soon as possible within fifteen days. In addition to the number of issues, the above mentioned points are some of the key issues because the success and failure of MGNREGS depends mostly on payment.

It was on 2nd February, 2014, the plan for exposure of visit to Srikakulam emerged when the ex-collector, Koraput, Mr. Sachin Ramchandra Jadav happen to came in contact with the collector of Srikakulam district, Andhra Pradesh, Mr. Saurabh Gaur during the national award giving ceremony under "District Award for effective initiative under MGNREGA Administration" held at Delhi. The collector, Srikakulam welcomed the visit of some officials of Koraput district to see the best practices of MGNREGS in Srikakulam district that place them in the distinction at national level. This is to be mentioned here that Srikakulam district, Andhra Pradesh got the national award under MGNREGS for High Level Inclusive Employment Generation and Koraput district got for Leadership in Challenging Circumstances.

It may be noticed that according to the MGNREGA report, the expenditure under MGNREGS in Andhra Pradesh was 512178.76 Lakhs in the year 2012-13 which was nearly five times more than the MGNREGS expenditure of Odisha in that financial year. And this year, as of, 28th February' 2014, the expenditure is 434552.1 Lakhs which is nearly five times more that of the MGNREGS expenditure of Odisha this year. If the attention is paid to the number of households provided employment, it was 5852306 in Andhra Pradesh and 1599276 in Odisha in the year 2012-13. And as of 28th, February,14, it was 5615545 in Andhra Pradesh and 1463046 in Odisha. The number of households employed is nearly four times more in Andhra Pradesh in comparison to Odisha in both the years.

As referred to the total number of potential workforce including both main workers and marginal workers in both the states, it is found that the state of Odisha has to move a step ahead to provide employment to the large number workforce willing to work. As per 2001 census, the total number of main workers and marginal workers in Andhra Pradesh was 21,662,192 and in Odisha it was 14,276,488. This data show that nearly 1.5 times more number of workforce are there in Andhra Pradesh but it is able to provide five times more number of employment and make five times more amount of expenditure under MGNREGS. Though MGNREGS is demand driven but unwillingness of the people to make demand in certain villages surely leaves a question to be answered.

Knowing the highest expenditure under MGNREGS through inclusive employment generation in the neibouring district, Srikakulam as well as in neibouring state Andhra Pradesh, the Ex-collector, Koraput with a noble intention in mind discussed with district MGNREGA officials of Koraput district for the visit. A team of ten members was finalized for the visit including the district MGNREGS Coordinator, ltants, two BDOs of Koraput and Semiliguda blocks, two junior engineers (JEs), one MGNREGS assistant three IPE Global MGNREGA consultants. The Koraput collector had a discussion with the Srikakulam collector and finalized the tentative schedule of the visit for 17th and 18th February, 2014. As per the plan and discussion, the exposure team went on an exposure visit to MGNREGA intervention at Srikakulam district on 17th February, 2014 and have learnt a lot from the visit on a good deal of issues relating to the MGNREGS implementation as a scheme for poverty alleviation through rural employment generation and creation of livelihood resource base in the rural area. The detail of the visit as follows:

As per the schedule, the exposure team reached at Rajam Mandal of Srikakulam district on 17th February' 2014 at 10 AM. After a short introduction with the officials of the Mandal, the discussion was held on the tentative schedule of the two days visit. The exposure team was briefed about the short profile of Srikakulam district along with the roles and responsibilities of the key official working under MGNREGS and the status of progress under MGNREGS in the district as on date.

Staffing Structure under MGNREGS in Andhra Pradesh

As reported, The District as a unit of administration in the state of Andhra Pradesh consists of some Mandals and Mandal consists of some Gram Panchayats (GPs) and GP consists of some habitations (villages). It was informed that for the operationalization of MGNREGS from the ground level to the district level, the state administration has made a very structured arrangement of officials under District Water Management Agency (DWMA).

The organogram of the officials playing various roles in the department from the GP level to the district level as follows:
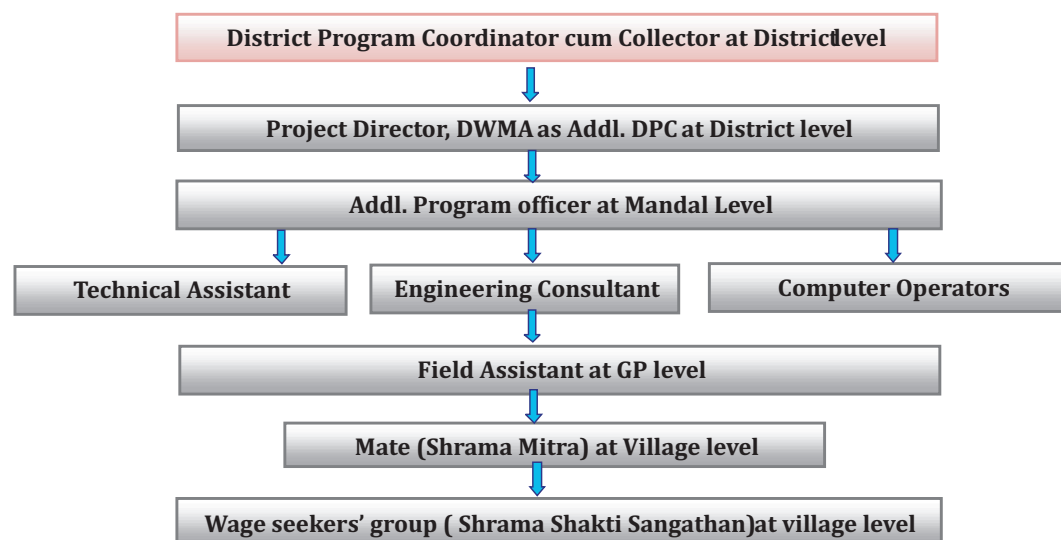
(Figure 1- Organization structure of the MGNREGS officials under DWMA, Srikakulam)

As reported, there are a total of 35 Engineer Consultants, 181 Technical Assistants, & 1250 Field Assistants engaged to implement the MGNREGS scheme for 1104 GPs of 38 Mandals at the Srikakulam district. A Technical Assistant is appointed to look after on average work sites of 6-8 GPs. As per the state official order, all the MGNREGA workers of every village have been formed to homogenous groups named as Shrama Shakti Sangathana (SSS). Each group has 5 to 30 job seekers and is headed by a Shrama Mitra elected by the group members. As per online information there are a total of 32593 SSS groups with a total of 5, 40,696 job cards holders.

ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES OF OFFICIALS

There is a step to step coordination of each officials working under MGNREGS in the state. The Roles and responsibilities of the officials are equally shared to plan, implement, implement, monitor the scheme at various levels smoothly. As the state of Odisha, the DPC & Addl. DPC have a role of monitoring and approval of various projects sanctioned from the Gram Sabha at district level and Addl. Program Officer (APO) does it at block level.

Some Technical Assistants, one Engineering Consultant and 2-3 computer operators are placed at Mandal level to provide the technical support in estimation, measurement and generation of FTOs, wage slip etc. The work of Technical Assistant is to make an estimation of each and every work making physical visits to the sites by entering the information in each data input sheet developed for various works. He does it before the work and on every sixth day during the work. In addition to it, he uploads the photo copy of the site from the field with the help of GPS enabled mobile which is further verified in sample by the Engineer Consultant and APO at Mandal level before passing for payment by the latter.

The district officials ensure the timely disbursement of wages to the workers in coordination with the paying agencies like post office and also ensure faster hassle free work allocation, estimation and measurement of the works through GPS enabled cell phone with the support of a technical agency named "Blue Frog". The district and Mandal officials also coordinate with the various agencies like Horticulture, Forest, Minor Irrigation, ITDA etc. at the district level.

ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES OF DISBURSING AGENCIES OFFICIALS:

As per the instruction of the state government, the Accounts of all the interested MGNREGS job seekers are opened either in banks or post offices taking the data base of Adhar Card detail available online. There are 55 Bank branches all around the district along with one each post office at GP level to cater the requirement of the timely payment of the wages to the wage seekers at their door step and for which each

BPM/CSP is being provided a cash limit of 75 thousand at GP level with a hand held devise for matching finger prints of the wage receivers.

With due online sample verification of the required information online, the Engineer Consultant and APO at Mandal level click online for pass for payment. After pass for payment, a pay order/ FTO gets generated at Mandal level along with wage slips reflecting the names of the beneficiaries and respective wages. The same order is transferred to the banks and head post offices along with the list beneficiaries and the entitled amount. As per the government's instruction, the wage seeker gets payment on production of wage slip with bio metric validation at his door step within fifteen days. As all the transactions are made online, the district and other officials easily track the transactions.

Out of the 38 Mandals of the district, it was planned to be taken to the exposure team to three MGNREGS sites located at three different Mandals i.e. Ranjam, Palakonda and Seethampeta and to one computer centre at Srikakulam Mandal. At first, the team was taken to Bomminaiduvalasa habitation of Ranjam Mandal to show and make interact with the Shrama Shakti Sanghathana and to show the process of making demand by them in group and making the process of payment.

Shrama Shakti Sanghathana:

It was understood from the MGNREGA officials that with the Order of Andhra Pradesh state government, a number of MGNREGA homogenous groups named as Shrama Shakti Sanghathana have been formed in every habitation taking the MGNREGA workers. Each Shrama Shakti Sanghathana is headed by a Shrama Mitra belonging to that group and is selected by the same group on a rotation basis annually. Each group has a belonging to that group and is selected by the same group on a rotation basis annually. Each group has a

(Figure 1: Workers engaged SSS wise in the Cattle Pond worksite

particular name and identification number. The number of members in each group range from 5 to 30 members. Each habitation has more than one such Shrama Shakti Sanghathana. A worker has to be a member of any fixed labour group to demand for MGNREGA work.

Demand Generation for work:

The MGNREGA workers of each Shrama Shakti Sangha make demand before the Shrama Mitra of their group and the Shrama Mitra records the demand in C-1 blue form and submit to the Field Assistant. The Field Assistant is a person appointed to look after the MGNREGS work in a GP consisting of 3 to 5 habitations located at a distance ranging from 1 to 5 Kms.

Dated Receipt, Muster Roll and Work Allocation:

The Field Assistant taking the demand from the Shrama Mitra issues the Muster Roll with a dated receipt to him/her after entering demands. Each dated receipt is attached to the Muster Roll against the demand. The manual Muster Roll that is one of the total four hard copies of documents maintained as a case record contains the name of the group demanded for jobs, its identification number and the names of all the members of that group with a space for their signature and a space to record their attendance. Besides, it contains the name of project
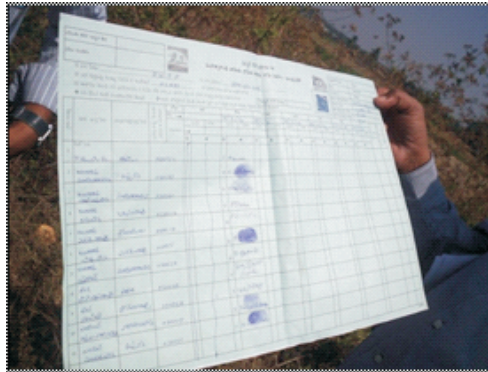
(Figure 2: Snaps of the filled muster roll at worksite)

allotted for the work with its code and period of work allocation (Start and end date) against the present demand. While interaction with the job seekers, it was understood that the date of start of the work is told to them by the Shrama Mitra and it starts accordingly. Either they the job seekers are engaged either in an ongoing work or they are engaged in a project from the list of the approved projects for their village within 5KM distance from their habitation.

Role of Shrama Mitra and Worksite Facilities:

It was also understood that each Shrama Mitra has been provided with a toolkit (small bag) in the name of the group containing one medicine kit with emergency medicines, one tape for measurement, one writing pad, one small book on MGNREGA etc which he or she carries everyday to the work site with a Muster Roll. Likewise, each group has been provided with tarpaulin for making shed at the work place which remains with Shrama Mitra.

(Figure 3& 4- First Aid Box & Tarpaulin at Worksites given to each SSS)

Each Shrama Mitra gets three rupees each per day per man day of his group in addition to his own wage for engaging in work as like other workers. Three rupees each per day per man day is provided for making lay out, taking attendance, for providing water, shed and medicine at the work place etc.

ONLINE ATTENDANCE OF THE WORKERS:

It was revealed from the interaction with the MGNREGA workers at the worksite that the workers come to the work place around 8AM. The Field Assistant records their attendance in the Muster Roll and uploads the attendance online standing on the place of work just after the start of the work. Each Field Assistant has been provided with a GPS enabled mobile loaded with the MGNREGA software developed by the state of Andhra Pradesh with the help of which they are able to send the attendance of every day work online to the MGNREGA server. The online attendance uploaded by the Field Assistant goes direct to the

MGNREGA server where Additional Program Officer (APO) makes a sample verification taking the on line information of both the Field Assistant and Technical Assistants and taking the

**(Figure 5: Field Assistant sending Online Attendance at Worksite)**

report of the Engineering Consultant. The Field Assistant uploads attendance of the workers to the server from the field every day.

Online Measurement of the work:

The interaction with the MGNREGS workers and officials revealed that a Technical Assistant has been appointed for three to four GPs for taking measurement of the work carried out by a group on every sixth day. It was revealed that certain steps are followed for making the measurement like coordinating GPS points of the particular work, taking photo copies of the work and uploading the same online with a GPS enabled mobile application provided to him by the administration loaded with MGNREGA software. He also fills the necessary information of measurement of a work like length, breadth, lid, lift etc. in a particular format and enters in the online software which automatically generate the quantum of work and the amount of payment in total and in average.

Process of Wage Payment to wage seekers:

The APO going to the login ID makes necessary verification of the given information by the Field Assistant and the Technical Assistant and also takes the online approval of the Engineering consultant and makes approval for the payment online which automatically generates a Fund Transfer Order (FTO) as well as Wage Slip. The FTO is submitted to the
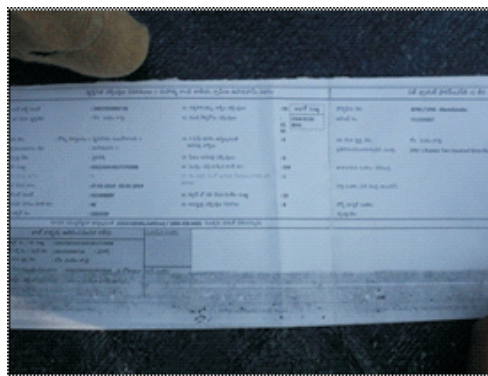
(Figure 6: Pay Order Generated to each Beneficiary)

bank or post office for the payment and two copies of the same is kept in district office and Mandal. Wage Slips are provided to the wage seekers. The wage seeker on the production of the wage slip gets the payment from the post office, bank or from CSP where he or she has an account giving a biometric proof. It

was observed that wage seekers are getting their payments within fifteen days in most of the cases. Wherever there is no internet connectivity it goes beyond fifteen days but not beyond one month.

Interaction with the beneficiary of Indirama Patcha Thoranam:

After interacting with the MGNREGA workers in the Cattle pond worksite, the team was taken to see the convergence work of MGNREGA with the beneficiaries of Indirama Patcha Thoranam scheme at 11:30 AM. Under this scheme, one poorest of the poor household of a GP will be allotted up to 200 trees and will given a Tree Patta (Tree ownership document). The total cost of the plantation of trees will be borne under the head of MGNREGS. The beneficiary will be given Rs. 3500 as labour cost for the watch and ward and watering for the growth of the plant up to five years of the plantation. The cost break up is Rs.4.16 for watering and Rs.15 for watch and ward per plant per day.

The team also was taken to show the similar convergence site at Bejji village of Palakonda Mandal and to make interaction with the beneficiaries of Indira Jala Prabha beneficiaries where the convergence of MGNREGS has been done with this scheme in collaboration with the NABARD and department of Andhra Pradesh Minor Irrigation Project and Horticulture.

(Figure 7 &8: Indira Jala Prabha Project at Bejji Village in Palakonda Mandal)

The team was exposed to similar convergence site of land development and plantation of Puliputti GP of Seethampeta Mandal and Rural Connectivity works of Peddarama GP where convergence of MGNREGS has been with CC Road scheme.

Interaction with Shrama Shakti Sanghathana Federation:

It was observed that a Shrama Shakti Sanghathana Federation is formed at GP level taking 20 to 40 Shrama Shakti Sanghathanas of a GP. The team visited one such Federation existed at Meredubaka GP of Ranjam Mandal. It was informed that two each representatives of each Shrama Shakti Sanghathana become the executive members of the Federation. One member is elected by the executive members as the president, one as secretary and one as treasurer of the federation. The Federation holds meeting once in a month on fixed day on the third Wednesday of a month where issues, constraints, problems relating to MGNREGA implementation in the GP is discussed. The three office bearers of the Federation participate in the nodal meeting of the Mandal on every 23rd of the month to place their issues, problems and suggestion.

(Figure 9 &10: Conduction of SSS Federation meeting at GP level)

The three members are provided with TA/DA for their participation. Some principles of the Federation is that all should be the MGNREGA workers and none of the office bearers should belong to any of the MGNREGA officials at the GP, Mandal or District level. The term of the office bearers will be for one year.

End to end online procedure of MGNREGS software application:

Knowing the 100 percent involvement of software application for the MGNREGS implementation in the state of Andhra Pradesh, the team was interested to know the end to end process of the MGNREGS implementation starting from planning for projects at Palli Sabha to the payment received by the wage seekers at his own habitation. The Andhra Pradesh Government has developed separate software exclusively for MGNREGA for Andhra Pradesh which is completely different from the other software in India working on the same aspect. the

(Figure 11: Presentation on end to end process of online application)

govt. of A.P. has also designed a MIS for tracking the wage disbursment on a real time basis. Surprisingly It was informed to the team that 91.01% of the payments get disbursed within 3 days of crediting in to the wage seekers' account. More than 90 percent of the paper work has been reduced in this process, the time gap of each step has been reduced to the major extent, the transparency and accountability aspect has been clearly visible from this process. Besides, it has not only increased the number of employment but has developed the confidence level of the wage seekers that if they work under MGNREGS, then they will surely get their payment.

(Figure 11- Online MIS specially designed by TCS for Govt. of A.P. on MGNREGS)

Learnings from Exposure Visit

1-Making demand in group with the help of authorized elected group leader boosts the demand.

2-The group leader who is named as Shrama Mitra is given Rs.3 for each man days per day of his group members which motivates him to mobilize for labourers of his group.

3-As Rs.3 is provided for arrangement of necessary worksite facility for a group, there is less possibility corruption relating to providing work facility as in Odisha in most of the places worksite facilities are not found. A closer group can monitor that.

4-As medicine kit and tarpaulin has been provided to each Shrama Mitra, it becomes easy to bring those to worksite easily.

5-Also one each tape has been provided to Shrama Mitra which makes easy for the group to measure and know the quantity of work the group is expected to do and have done on that day.

6-One Field Assistant is recruited for one GP. Hence, he find it easy to move to all the work sites because each GP has 3 to 6 habitation at distance 1 to 5 KMs not beyond that.

7-The Field Assistants find it easy to put attendance of all the workers group wise because each one of them has been provided with GPS enabled mobile loaded with MGNREGS software of Andhra Pradesh.

8-The Field Assistant captures the demand, saves and views it and makes work allocation from the field without going to the computer centre.

9- As the attendance of the workers group wise is taken every day, there is a less possibility of corruption. Besides, the wage seekers get payment on the out turn basis. Hence, if the numbers of workers increase the average out turn of the work will become less so also the payment. Hence, there is an in built check and balance measure among the group members and a type of concurrent social audit of the out turn and payment.

10-There is a specific day for specific activity. Hence, the delays are avoided at each level.

11-As everything is done on line, the computer system does not allow to go to next step without the completion of the previous step. For example, in case of measurement, one cannot measure the output without taking coordinating points of the work for measure in GPS and up loading the same to the server from the work site.

12-Every Technical Assistant and Engineering consultants have been provided with the GPS enabled mobile that helps them to take the measurement as per the requirement from the field without going to the computer centre.

13-Each Technical Assistant has been allotted to take the measurement of more than one GP.

14-As the measurement is done online with GPS service, one is bound to go to the site and fill up the necessary information as per the requirement of the online format like lead and lift, length, breadth, depth, slope etc.

15-As everything is done online, there is less of paper work and less number of files. For example, the Case record contains only four hard copies i.e. demand form, receipt of demand, Muster Roll and Measurement book.

16-As there is good coordination between implementing agencies and paying agencies, it has helped in opening of MGNREGA accounts and payment.

17-Paying agencies have been instructed by the state administration to open accounts for the job seekers taking the Adhar data base available online because of which more than 95 percent of accounts have been opened for the wage seekers.

18-Payment is made to the job seekers by the paying agencies on production pay slip that is auto generated after processing of FTO.

19-Payment disbursement at the village level is done by BPM and CSP through biometric hand handled devise which makes the payment faster and checks corruption.

20-Shrama Shakti Sanghthan Federation is working as an unit of the workers to identify and address the problems and constraint of MGNREGES and place it before the administration on 23rd of every month to address it for which they are provided TA/DA.

21-There is special consideration in the whole process of implementation for the SCs, STs, women and differently abled.

22-The recent information on MGNREGS is dispalyed on the notice board and village wall of GP office in the local language

CONCLUSION

Planning and implementation of MGNREGS with the help of Information and Communication Technology, a separate software in the state of Andhara Pradesh is worth noticing as it has improved the

performance of the scheme to the satisfactory level by increasing the number employment, providing the immediate payment to the wage seekers at their door step and in checking the corruption in bringing more transparency, efficiency and accountability in to the system. Simultaneously, it has improved in creation of livelihood resource base of the rural people which is also one of the important objectives of the scheme. Adoption of similar software and strategy in the state of Odisha and other states would similarly help in achievement of better results for the poor people of the rural areas. As it is a low cost and cost effective technology, adoption and application of the same would boost the employment and help in creation of more assets in rural area and bring a remarkable revolution in the state like Odisha and other where the MGNREGS performance is very low and help in better achievement of MGNREGS mandates.

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