

The MGNREGA – A success story



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The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) is an Indian labor law and social security measure that was passed in 2006 in order to guarantee the 'right to work'. It aims to improve the living conditions in rural areas and to ensure a more stable financial situation by providing at least 100 days of wage employment in a year to every household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work. For many underprivileged families the participation in this program can be a great measure to build up the base for a permanently improved financial status in the future.

Sakhi Trust regularly organizes meetings with the women in different villages who are considered as potential participants in the program in order to inform them about their rights and their possibilities. We tell them about the MGNREGA program and show them how to take part in it. The first step is to apply for the so-called job card of which each family can only get one. Every person

receiving such a job card is thereby given a job for 100 days.

One of the many women who could take advantage of the MGNREGA program lives in Papinakanahalli. She is 50 years old and comes from a Devadasi family and she actively initiated the program in her village and was mobilizing a lot of women to take part in it. She had worked as an agricultural laborer for many years, but once the mines in the area around the village began to thrive, a lot of people including her gave up working in their fields to earn their money through mining work instead.

The unused fields then quickly became some kind of dumping yards and are furthermore used as toilets since most of the inhabitants of the village don't have proper lavatories in their houses. That is because the mining workers don't earn enough money to finance real toilets since most of them receive a salary of only 40 or 50 rupees per day. Also, it is a common belief among the village inhabitants that you shouldn't have a toilet in your house for reasons of hygiene and cleanliness.



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If there are any public sanitary facilities, then they are in a very bad condition.

But the lack of proper toilets and the use of the fields instead causes some severe problems meaning that many people suffer from serious health issues such as stomachache or anemia. Especially the women are affected by these issues due to the fact that they are not allowed to do their business on the open fields in sunlight, where everyone can see them, as a result of which they only use the fields before sunrise and then have to wait until sunset again. That is an unacceptable imposition for all of the women, particularly if they have already reached a certain age or if they are pregnant, for example.

Since the people don't have access to or money for healthcare centers, they usually experience no treatment or help concerning their illnesses and various health problems which additionally arise from the hard work in the mines under bad conditions.

Sakhi met up with a lot of members of the village community to arrange some motivation workshops promoting the construction of sanitary facilities by informing them about the importance of proper toilets in terms of hygiene and prevention of health issues.

Following that Sakhi supported the people who actually decided to get some toilets and helped especially the women and the young girls to organize themselves in some women's' or youth groups. Due to the amount of mobilized people who were now willing to build some sanitary fittings Sakhi could convince the Grampanchayat (the local administration) to give out some financial means to start the construction of many bathrooms and toilets.

Today there are around 400 women in Papinakanahalli working as part of the MGNREGA program. Due to the program they are now earning a salary of 246 rupees per day. The women are organized in a women's' group as a result of which they are now able to raise their voice and address arising problems themselves meaning that they remain in direct contact and discussion with the Grampanchayat. With the credits received through the program 26 families could build some proper toilets to remarkably improve their hygienic condition. Furthermore, 18 houses were built as new homes for Devadasi families.



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