

Govt moves to tighten audit norms in rural job scheme

The Narendra Modi government has moved to plug leakages in the rural job scheme, tightening norms for social audits of the programme to ensure speedy follow-up on their findings.

The move comes a fortnight after the prime minister called the scheme “a living reminder” of failures of the previous regime.

The Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD) has asked all states to put in place a governing body for social audit unit set up to facilitate review of implementation of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) by gram sabhas.

The governing body will have of a principal accountant general or his or her nominee, the Principal Secretary of the Rural Development Department of the state, and five members selected by the state from reputed individuals or institutions with long-standing field-level experience in the conduct of social audits either in the state or outside.

The director of the social audit unit should be convenor of the governing body, which should also consist of representatives of other government departments carrying out such assessment of their programmes, according to a letter by MoRD Joint Secretary (MGNREGS) R Subramanyam to all states.

He also told the state officials responsible for implementation of the scheme that the MoRD itself would nominate agencies to conduct special social audits in areas where such assessment was not conducted according to the rules, due to either violence or resistance or non-cooperation by local officials, organisations or individuals.

The MoRD also informed the states that cases of denial of entitlements detected by social audits should be referred to ombudsmen, who should be requested to register such cases as suo motu complaints for expeditious disposal and passing of awards within 30 days after their filing.

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act came into force in 2006 to legally guarantee minimum livelihood security to the rural populace. It guarantees 100 days of wage employment in a financial year to every household with adults ready to do unskilled manual work.

No durable assets

Though the scheme—a pet project of Congress president Sonia Gandhi—has provided employment to over 34.5 crore households since 2006-07, it has been criticised for not creating

durable infrastructural assets in villages, although the Union government has spent over Rs 2.07 lakh crore for the programme till 2013-14.

The Congress-led UPA government in had 2011 notified the MGNREGA Audit of Scheme Rules 2011, which required states to identify or establish independent organisations as social audit units to let gram sabhas conduct social audits.

Many states, however, took a long time to constitute social audit units, and the MoRD subsequently found significant deficiencies in the way the audits were conducted in several areas across the country.

In its latest communiqué to state governments, the MoRD has said reports of social audit units would be reviewed once a month.

(Deccan Herald)