Implementing the MG National Rural Employment Guarantee Act in Rajasthan

How to facilitate rural poor's access to work?

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Abstract

This thesis discusses the implementation of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) in Rajasthan. Looking specifically at two factors, the role of the Gram Panchayat leader/the Sarpanch and the role of civil society organisations (CSOs) in making work accessible for rural poor. MGNREGA is an important source of income for rural poor in Rajasthan, because of the dry and difficult climate, in addition to the challenge of finding other suitable jobs close to home. Based on interviews and a case study of a Gram Panchayat in Rajasthan, this thesis discuss the role of the Sarpanch from an institutional, top-down perspective and CSOs involvement from a bottom-up perspective. I find that if the Sarpanch does not initiate MGNREGA and engage people to work under the program, the implementation of MGNREGA will not happen. Institutional structures have not reached all the way down to the lowest levels of government, where rural poor follow a person instead of a state in their everyday life. CSOs can contribute to the implementation of MGNREGA by cooperating with the government, or by being an independent actor monitoring and evaluating the program. Their involvement is not always wanted, as the case of Rajasthan shows. However, this thesis also indicates the importance of CSOs in enhancing knowledge and understanding of MGNREGA.

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1   Introduction

About fifty per cent of the total workforce in India work in the agriculture sector, which according to research fellow Ashok. K. Pankaj is increasingly overcrowded, characterised by low productivity and with "little impact on the livelihood conditions of the population dependent on it" (Pankaj, 2012b, p. 7). The central government in India has developed several different welfare schemes to provide rural poor with employment. This is important because close to 70 per cent of the Indian population of 1.3 billion people live in rural areas (Pradhan, 2016). The latest scheme, now 10 years old, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), represents a shift in Indian welfare policies because it is making work a right. Under MGNRGEGA, any person living in rural India has the right to 100 days of employment each financial year.

This shift also puts the responsibility of demanding work onto the rural poor themselves. Previously the Gram Panchayat[1] leader, the Sarpanch, or other government officials have distributed welfare benefits in India. MGNREGA aims to change the relation between rural poor and the state, by engaging the poor and letting them decide when they need work, and how much. However, the situation on the ground does not always resemble the idea that MGNREGA represent. For many, the shift has not happened because there is still a tendency among the rural population to abstain from criticism of the Sarpanch and to wait for benefits from the state. The implementation of MGNREGA in Rajasthan is the focal point of this thesis. I will be looking at how different degrees of personal commitment and civil society's involvement are key factors influencing the implementation process.

The realm of my research

To grasp the challenges of implementing MGNREGA in Rajasthan, this thesis will focus on two specific factors influencing the execution of MGNREGA and how well rural poor access the program: namely the role of the Sarpanch and the role of civil society organisations (CSOs). My two main research questions are:

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[1] The Gram Panchayat is an elected council at the village level, with one elected leader, the Sarpanch. Gram Panchayats often consist of several villages.

- How does the Sarpanch influence the availability of work and rural poor's access to work?
- What role does civil society and civil society organisations play in making rural poor engaged and accessing work under MGNREGA?

Both these factors determine how rural poor meet and see the state, in what degree they are active and engaged in their own welfare, and the general implementation of MGNREGA in Rajasthan. This state is an intriguing choice because it did very well in the first years of MGNREGA and was one of the best performing states in India. This later changed, and between 2010 and 2012 there have been a distinct drop in MGNREGAs performance, marked by a fall in days worked per worker.

My research looks at the level above the rural poor, above the benefiters of MGNREGA. This is because according to my research questions, and my limited time for research, it made sense to focus on the role of the Sarpanch, local politics and civil society instead of the rural poor accessing MGNREGA.

My study illuminates the importance of an active Sarpanch for MGNREGA to work well. If the Sarpanch does not support MGNREGA, the program will struggle. However, civil society organisations (CSOs) can contribute with support to the Sarpanch, making it easier for him/her to execute the program, as well as increase people's knowledge of MGNREGA.

MGNREGA is important to study because according to India's Finance Minister, Arun Jaitley, the way to include the rural population in economic growth "is to boost the public spending in rural sectors to economically empower the people to achieve higher growth targets" (Pressv Information Bureau, 2016). MGNREGA is a boost, and has the potential to improve the lives of rural people, by giving them a secure income. It is also the world's largest work programme. Therefore, because of the impact that this program is making, and has the potential to make, in-depth studies of specific areas will help broaden the understanding of MGNREGA, and contribute to improve its implementation.

Rajasthan

Rajasthan is situated in the north-western corner of India and is India's largest state by area. The state is mostly covered by desert, creating a dry and difficult climate for agriculture. The state has high levels of poverty and illiteracy, low levels of economic growth and high gender

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inequality (Chopra, 2014). Agriculture is the main income for most people, but in recent years this has become increasingly challenging because of sporadic rainfalls and reoccurring droughts (ibid). MGNREGA therefore has the potential to be an important source of income for rural poor who are no longer able to rely on agriculture for wages.

Governing Rajasthan today is Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), and the Chief Minister is Vasudhara Raje. The state is divided into three governing levels, named Panchayat Raj Institutions. They are: District level, Block level and Gram Panchayat/village level. There are 33 districts /Zila Panchayats in Rajasthan. They are responsible for monitoring and supervision of work under MGNREGA (Chopra, 2014). The block level is responsible for seven to twelve GPs, and this is where the main administration of MGNREGA staff sit. The staff consists of engineers, technicians and accountants, among others. Approval of plans for work under MGNREGA is granted at the block level. The lowest level of government is the GP. The GP consist of six or seven villages, depending on their size, and often covers a total of 3000 to 5000 people. The leader of the GP is the Sarpanch and elections are held every five years (CUTS-CART, 2016b).

The state government in Rajasthan has made efforts to change the structures of politics and clientelism in the state, to make distribution of welfare goods more fair and transparent. Clientelism is here defined as trading goods and services for political support. A richer definition of the term suggests that "clientelism is a way of describing the pattern of unequal, hierarchical exchange characteristic of feudal society, in which patrons and clients were tied to durable relationships by a powerful sense of obligation and duty" (Hopkin, 2006). Political scientist Rob Jenkins and Professor James Manor (2015) argue that Rajasthan is pursuing a politics of 'post-clientelist' initiatives. They define these initiatives as "government programmes that are substantially protected from political actors who wish to divert resources in order to distribute them as patronage to networks of clients" (Jenkins & Manor, 2015, p. 174). However, clientelism still exists because of traditional structures and patron-client relations. The patron is either a landowner or a political actor who seeks support from clients, often rural poor or landless, who support the patron in exchange of protection or other goods (Ruud, Heierstad, & Flåten, 2014, p. 120). Nonetheless, MGNREGA has the potential to contribute to a decrease of clientelism and more 'post-clientelist' relations because of its demand-based formulation and high degrees of transparency and monitoring (ibid).

MGNREGA

MGNREGA was enacted by law in 2005, and the implementation started in 2006. MGNREGA is the final avatar of a set of employment schemes, some dating back to India's independence. The first scheme guaranteeing work came in the early 1970s in Maharashtra and was based on self-selection[2]. The central government designed several schemes using Maharashtra as a model. In 1993 the Employment Assurance Scheme (EAS) came into place, ultimately assuring 100 days of employment to rural poor (Das, 2013, pp. 103-106). The different schemes that followed EAS paved the way for today's MGNREGA.

There are several reasons why MGNREGA became a right and not just another scheme. The economic liberalisation made jobs in agriculture more important, because of the stagnation in employment generation (Pankaj, 2012b). Rural poor were also becoming more vocal, demanding influence and benefits. Furthermore, and especially relevant for this thesis, civil society and CSOs were pushing the right to work. Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS) was one of the main contributors to MGNREGA. MKSS is a non-party people's movement formed in 1990 in Rajasthan. A rough translation of the name reads: "organisation for the empowerment of workers and peasants" (MKSS, 2010). MKSS is a political organisation working to "challenge the inequality and inequity of distribution of power in the socio-economic structures" (MKSS, 2010).

In MKSS' struggle for the rights of the rural poor, the organisation particularly emphasised the 'right to information', the 'right to know', and 'participatory democracy' (Kidambi, 2003). Its knowledge and ideas about implementation of welfare schemes played a crucial role in the planning of MGNREGA (Jenkins & Manor, 2015).

The Indian constitution differs between fundamental rights and directive principles. Fundamental rights are political and civil rights, and directive principles are social and economic rights (Corbridge, Harris, & Jeffrey, 2013, p. 104). MGNREGA "is considered to be in furtherance of the realization of the economic right to work as envisioned in the directive principles" (Das, 2013, p. 112). The fact that directive principles are now enacted by law is changing rural poor's access to and understanding of welfare programs.

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[2] The meaning of self-selection is that people, who can earn more than what they get from the employment program, will not select to do this work. Only people who are in need of welfare, and do not have other options, will select to work under the program. This is different from selection done by the government based on selection criteria's, as caste, income, religion, etc.

The objective of the act is the creation of durable assets and strengthening the livelihood resource base of the rural poor, keeping them from falling into extreme poverty (Ministry of Rural Development, 2016c). One way this is happening is through changes in wage relations between the rural poor and employers: that is to assure actual payment of the state's minimum wage in addition to the broadening of rural poor's knowledge of minimum wage. Information about these aspects are enhancing their bargaining power and leverage in the labor market (Drèze & Sen, 2013, p. 202).

As mentioned earlier, MGNREGA represents a shift from previous government programs because of its rights-based focus, but it also represents a shift in the way of enabling rural structures. According to political economist Arun Kumar Nayak, MGNREGA "has become a significant instrument for strengthening grass root level community participation and decentralized governance system by giving a pivotal role to Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs) in planning, monitoring and implementation, and towards regeneration of natural resources" (Nayak, 2015). Both these aspects contribute to the state engaging more with the rural poor, enhancing their rights as citizens of India. By citizen, I mean a person who has rights and obligations as a member of a nation, in this case India. All those who possess citizenship are equal before the nation (UNESCO, unknown). However, in India, many poor do not access their rights, because they are unaware about what they are, and because the government does not fulfil its obligations to all its citizens.

In the following, I wish to introduce one of the main aspects of the program, namely mandatory social audits. Social audits are a review of MGNREGA made to give people a say in the monitoring and feedback process.

Social audits

Every six months an independent unit should perform social audits of MGNREGA in the GP. This is unique for a public work program, lifting transparency, accountability and monitoring of work to a new level (Pankaj, 2012b, p. 27). By making social audits mandatory:

> The Mahatma Gandhi NREGA gives citizens the right to social audits of all work and expenditures. This includes complete access to all records, and a Management Information System (MIS)[3] that provides real time information online, pro-active

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[3] MIS stands for Management Information System, and is an online system developed to monitor MGNREGA work. The different levels of governance are responsible for continuously updating the MIS so that it shows real time information, available to anyone who would want it.

disclosure through wall writings and facilitations of social audit through independent social audit units. (Ministry of Rural Development, 2016b, p. 38)

The actual execution of social audits is however often lacking because clear guidelines for social audits are absent. Therefore, social audits have been performed by, in the cases they have actually happened, a variety of actors. Both the local government, state government, CSOs, and rural poor have been involved. There are complicating factors for all these different actors. The local government is not always a neutral auditor, because they might not be interested in critique. Rural poor are in many cases illiterate and have little experience with organising audits, and CSOs are not always present or neutral either.

To clarify the uncertainty around social audits, the central government sent out a Notification of Audit of Schemes rules in 2011, mandating that there should be set up a social audit unit that is independent from the implementing departments (Department of Rural Development, 2015). However, executing these rules is taking time, as the discussion in chapter three and four will show.

MGNREGA in Rajasthan

Because of the reoccurring droughts and high levels of poverty, Rajasthan has experience in developing and implementing work schemes. The know-how that CSOs like MKSS had with welfare schemes in Rajasthan, and the state's active involvement in the creation of the act, are two of the main reasons for the high performance of the act in its early years (Chopra, 2014). According to data on the performance of states from 2006-2007, Rajasthan was the state with the most positive result – that is, with the highest number of work-days generated – with 77 days, just over Assam's 70 days. After them, Madhya Pradesh falls far behind with 56, and the rest of the states had less than 50 days generated (Drèze & Oldiges, 2011, p. 25). Of the households working under MGNREGA in Rajasthan, 75 percent got 100 days of work in 2006-2007. Clearly, the high rate of workdays shows the need for this kind of program in the state (Chopra, 2014).

The fall in implementation that then follows is therefore difficult to understand. After 2010 total expenditure and number of workdays under MGNREGA fell drastically, to almost half of what it was before 2010 (Chopra, 2014). Rajasthan was still a relatively high performing state, as most other states were generating less than 50 days of work per

household. Since 2010, Rajasthan has provided between 45 and 55 days of work per household per year (Ministry of Rural Development, 2016a).

A commonly cited reason for fewer workdays in Rajasthan after 2010 is a fall in demand, often an explanation supported by state-level officials and bureaucrats. They say people are demanding less because of higher wages and more jobs available outside MGNREGA (Chopra, 2014). However, there is no real proof that the reason for fewer workdays is fall in demand. No major employment opportunities and increase in available jobs have taken place in Rajasthan over this period, and drought is still occurring each year. Rather, there is a widespread and unmet demand in the state. People are demanding work but there is no work available, or the local government is not interested in implementing MGNREGA. The supply side factors are therefore failing (ibid). This will be part of the discussion later, along with how this affected the participation of CSOs under MGNREGA in the state under study.

A short note on caste

Caste is here defined as a hierarchal system creating social stratification in India (Ruud et al., 2014, pp. 86-88). In certain pockets in India, dominant castes are ruling, and the caste leaders rule the village. They often distribute work to people from their own caste or give it out as benefits in exchange for support (Himanshu, Mukhopadhyay, & Sharan, 2015). My empirical data does not focus on caste or comment on its relevance. In my case study of Gaanv GP, I did not understand if there was a dominant caste in the GP. This is most likely because they did not open up to me about this topic, in addition to me not asking the right questions. It would have been a bigger project to understand the effect of caste on access to work under MGNREGA. The ethical challenges would also have been greater, since caste is a sensitive topic. Considering my material and the focus of this thesis, patron-client relations are arguably more relevant for the discussion.

Structure of thesis

This thesis will continue with a chapter looking at the methodology used to gather the data, in addition to a description of the theories employed in order to understand this material. The main section of the thesis consists of two chapters, each devoted to the two research questions. The first of these, chapter three, discusses the role of the Sarpanch and local

political structures in implementing MGNREGA, looking at how the Sarpanch plan, carry out and maintain the program. Chapter four explores how civil society and CSOs partake in MGNREGA and what their roles are, especially when it comes to how they relate to the government structures, and their part in creating awareness and fighting corruption. Chapter five will conclude the thesis.

2 Methodology and Theoretical perspectives

Methodology

The collection of empirical material for this thesis took place during the spring of 2016, when I was interning for JustJobs Network in New Delhi. JustJobs Network is a think tank researching how to create more and better jobs, both in India and globally. I had already decided to write my thesis on MGNREGA and on civil society's role before I started the internship. I expanded my approach in order to include the role of the Sarpanch during my time at JustJobs Network and in the field. This is because I got interested in how their involvement shaped MGNREGA.

I have taken a keen interest in MGNREGA prior to this particularly study. During my internship I wrote a research paper on a newly launched skill program under MGNREGA, focusing on how to use this new program to improve the female labor force participation in India. My interest over the years has given me a broad understanding of the program on a theoretical level. However, what I was lacking was insight into the situation on 'the ground' and the challenges people face in accessing and implementing the program.

To connect with organisations working on MGNREGA I used my network in New Delhi. The process of finding an organisation willing to help was long and tedious. Through this process, Consumer Unity & Trust Society, Centre for Consumer Action, Research and Training (CUTS CART)[4] turned out to be my best access point to the field. Suggested by a friend, this organisation proved open and willing to help.

CUTS CART had done a couple of projects linked to MGNREGA. This was however not CUTS CARTs main field of work. Nonetheless, the organisation had a wide range of contacts in Jaipur I could meet, and a Gram Panchayat (GP) for me to visit. CUTS CARTs response and willingness to help shaped my fieldwork and methodology, leading me to choose both a case study of a specific GP and a general study of MGNREGA in Rajasthan. I

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[4] Consumer Unity & Trust Society, Centre for Consumer Action, Research and Training (CUTS CART) is a civil society organisation based in Jaipur. They work on development from the consumer's point of view, as well as good governance and Right to Information. I had two interviews with CUTS CART, where several people were present, at their main office in Jaipur. Therefore, I will only refer to the organisation instead of names of people from CUTS CART. The first interview took place 04.05.2016 and the 23.05.2016.

used semi-structured interviews and observation in the GP in addition to previous studies and reports on MGNREGA.

At the time of my field study, I had spent almost a year in New Delhi, working for the Norwegian Embassy for six months before my internship at JustJobs Network. My time in India influenced the way I held the interviews and how I interpreted the answers from my informants. When I conducted the interviews it was an advantage to know the culture relatively well. My background as a Norwegian, who has grown up in an egalitarian and social-democratic society, also influenced my understanding of MGNREGA. The difference between the Norwegian welfare system and the Indian welfare system is significant. As I am in support of good welfare systems and already have a predisposed idea about what that entails, this is something I needed to consider in my analysis.

I travelled twice to Jaipur, first to meet with CUTS CART employees (and for them to meet me). My first trip to Jaipur was important for us to build a bond, making them more engaged in organising meetings and interviews for me. CUTS CART had broad knowledge about the implementation of MGNREGA in Jaipur and Rajasthan, but also gave me insights into the local structures in the state. The second time I travelled to Jaipur I conducted interviews, had follow-up conversations with CUTS CART and visited the GP.

In my case, using a combination of case study and interviews was necessary as I do not have the required language skills or contacts to do a fully case study-based thesis. Combining the case study of Gaanv GP with interviews of experts on the topic, that spoke English, proved to give me valuable knowledge about the implementation of MGNREGA on the ground, as well as of the challenges MGNREGA face in general.

My thesis thus sheds light on general issues pertaining to MGNREGA, not only in Rajasthan, but also all over India. My main objective is to explore the implementation of MGNREGA in Rajasthan by going in-depth into the area. However, it seems fair to state that my findings and my research questions will, at least to some extent, illuminate general aspects of how MGNREGA functions in other parts of India as well.

Semi-structured interviews

Interviews were the main source of material for my thesis. CUTS CART set up the interviews by using their contacts in Jaipur. This meant that they were in control over whom I interviewed. I gave them this responsibility and I am aware that the selection could therefore be lopsided. I had eight interviews in Jaipur, two of them with CUTS CART. The other six

interviews were with a range of people connected to MGNREGA in different ways. I interviewed people from the government in Jaipur, governmental organisations, research institutes and civil society organisations (CSOs). This gave me a broad perspective on MGNREGAs implementation from a variety of actors. CUTS CART provided me with interviews that I would never have been able to get myself, and this was invaluable for my thesis.

In Delhi, I conducted two interviews with organisations working on MGNREGA. In addition, I used material from two interviews with experts on MGNREGA, originally conducted for a previous research paper. These interviews are good supplements to my understanding of the program, and are important in order to look at the broader Indian picture, and not only the case of Jaipur and Rajasthan.

The interviews were semi-structured, meaning I had prepared an interview guide, but did not follow it strictly, to be able to adjust the interviews according to the individual respondent (Thaagard, 1998, p. 81). I also developed the guide during my interviews adding new questions, as I better understood what was important. I let the interviewees speak freely about MGNREGA and their thoughts, guiding the conversation towards my research questions and focus. I formulated my questions to be open and neutral, in order not to lead the informants or to influence them with my opinions.

My presence at the interviews as a foreigner, will have affected the information I received because they viewed me as an outsider. An employee from CUTS CART accompanied me at most of the interviews in Jaipur. It was not always clear if his presence made people less or more open to me. They could have withheld information because they did not want to say anything 'wrong' in front of him, or opened up more to me because they knew him from before (Thaagard, 1998, p. 91).

I used both recording and written notes during the interviews. I recorded my interviews with CUTS CART and CSOs in New Delhi. However, in Jaipur, the interview settings varied, they were often in loud places where recording would not have worked. At the end of each day, I transcribed the interviews, to take advantage of my fresh memory.

Case study of a Gram Panchayat

With this case study, I refer to a study of one defined unit, used to shed light on the implementation of MGNREGA (Wæhle & Sterri, 2016). I used both observation and interviews in my case study of Gaanv, to comprehend the situation in the Gram Panchayat

(GP) and the implementation of MGNREGA. CUTS CART chose Gaanv as they had good relations with the Sarpanch there, and on the day we intended to go MGNREGA work was happening. An employee from CUTS CART set up and accompanied me during the visit. The presence of a CUTS CART employee made the inhabitants of Gaanv open up more, as he was an Indian male, and knew the Sarpanch from before. One disadvantage was that he did not always interpret everything that was said during the visit. I believe I lost some information from this, but nothing that would change the outcome of my thesis.

I got sufficient information from the visit, but I did not have time to let people get to know me, and open up. It would have been ideal to have several visits to the GP with an interpreter, to get a deeper understanding of rural structures and village life. This was however not within my grasp, considering the size of my thesis, my time available and my research questions.

At a glance - Gaanv[5]

On arrival I were greeted by the Sarpanch[6], a middle aged man with an eagerness to show me around. The trip through the GP to the worksite, showed that there is a clear gender-related gap between what men do and women do. The men I encountered were either sitting in the shade, talking on their phones or playing games, sitting outside their houses or chatting in groups. The women I encountered were working outside their houses, sweeping, carrying water and taking care of the children. During my previous talks with CUTS CART it came up that men do not work in their own village, or they do not work at all (CUTS-CART, 2016a). This became even more evident when I came to the worksite, where there were only women working. I asked if men worked on the program in this GP, they said yes. Job cards[7] are issued on a household basis, and if women cannot go then men would work, but this does not happen regularly.

This was the only MGNREGA site in the GP, as the Sarpanch was waiting to get work approved for this financial year. He had gone around letting people know this work was available. This was necessary because people had little knowledge about how to demand work, since the previous Sarpanch had not initiated MGNREGA. The Sarpanch told me most

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[5] Gaanv is not the real name of the Gram Panchayat I visited. I have anonymised the name to avoid recognition.
[6] He will be referred to as the Sarpanch of Gaanv.
[7] Each household in rural India has the right to apply for a MGNREGA job card. When you have received a job card, you can apply for work. How much work you work is registered in the job card.

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of the women present were illiterate. This became evident when they showed me their papers - their ID, their bank cards, as this was something they had, but did not fully understand how to use. One woman was waving her papers in the air, looking utterly lost, as these papers made no sense to her. The woman's reaction thus becomes a powerful and telling image of the frustration – and perhaps also the sense of alienation – that many illiterate Indians must feel when facing the system, not only in Rajasthan but also across the span of MGNREGA and similar programs.

Challenges & Ethical considerations

As a white female in India I did sometimes experience that I did not get the same respect as men, and that people talked to me in a condescending way. How much this influenced my interviews is difficult for me to assess. At times, I felt a bit out of place, but this might happen to anyone doing fieldwork in an unfamiliar setting. Traveling around was more of a challenge, and it made me exhausted at the end of every day. It is important to recognize that this could have influenced my general perception of India and MGNREGA.

Before the interviews, I informed all respondents about who I was and why I was doing the interviews, upon which they all consented to participate. I have therefore decided to not anonymise my interviewees. However, in one of my interviews, I was told to not quote the person on something specific he said, and I will therefore anonymise this when necessary. Considering the Sarpanch of Gaanv gave me honest and important insight, which I understand as sensitive at times, the GP will be anonymised. This approach is based on the advice from the Norwegian Research Ethics Committees and their ethical guidelines for research ethics in the social sciences, humanities, law and theology (The Norwegian National Committees For Research Ethics, 2016).

Theoretical perspectives

This thesis will use the governance model as an overarching theoretical model in order to understand the implementation of MGNREGA. Governance is the process of decision-making and the process of implementing these decisions. This is the broadest sense of governance. It does not prescribe any specific type of rule or implementation, but simply states that someone is making decisions and implementing them in one way or another. Whereas governance is easy to define, good governance is not. This is because it is a widely discussed and loosely defined concept. UNESCAPs definition is a good place to start: "Good governance has eight major characteristics. It is participatory, consensus oriented, accountable, transparent, responsive, effective and efficient, equitable and inclusive and follows the rule of law" (UNESCAP, unknown). These eight major characteristics are very broad, but outline the importance of engaging people to be active, giving them trust in the system by creating accountability based on the rule of law. What the word 'good' also entails is a tense of morality, making it difficult for ordinary people to oppose it (Vyasulu, 2015).

In *Seeing the State: Governance and governmentality in India* (2005) the researchers Stuart Corbridge, Glyn Williams, Manoj Srivastava and René Véron understand governance as "prevailing patterns by which public power is exercised in a given social context" (p. 135). It is about how people see the government, in their actions. They further go on to look at good governance. Linking this to the free marked and liberalism, and defining good governance as "those patterns of rule which protected the individual citizens from political society and from unrepresentative government" (ibid p.155).

The discussion about governance and what it entails started in the 1990s, when development strategies did not work as well as many politicians and researchers had foreseen. They realised that it was not enough to have appropriate and good policies, they had to be followed by thoroughly considered implementation. This had long been taken for granted. Thinking that if the policies are good enough, the implementation will automatically follow (Corbridge et al., 2013, p. 159).

How do you then go from deciding upon appropriate policies to creating governance, preferably good governance? The researchers Stuart Corbridge, John Harris and Craig Jeffrey suggest two policy changes in *India Today: Economy, Politics & Society* (2013). One is to let the market solve issues of implementation by privatizing services. India is increasingly favouring this way by outsourcing government responsibility to private companies. The other is more fitting to our topic and in line with the aim of MGNREGA. This approach is about

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including members of the local communities, with participation as the focus, in all aspects of politics, from its design to the implementation and monitoring of public services. Local knowledge is the priority in this policy direction. (Corbridge et al., 2013, p. 161). Both these two policy directions can include CSOs, giving them the responsibility to implement as well as help citizens be a part of the implementation process.

In *Politics of Welfare* (2015), Assistant Professor Rajesh Dev writes about how MGNREGA is engaging rural poor:

> The act allows 'claimants' to demand unemployment allowance, impose penalty on state officials for failing to render their duties, interrogate lapses on their part in open forums, and scrutinize records; MGNREGS thereby strives to radicalize the citizen-state relationship, and expand and deepen popular democratic control of the state especially at the local level (Dev, 2015, p. 138).

Even though many of the elements in the quotation are not always there, the presence of only one will contribute to better governance. Before going further, it is worth mentioning that some argue that the project of good governance is a way to push the responsibility of the state onto others, like CSOs and the citizens. This line of critique further holds that such a focus is part of the neoliberal project to lessen state control, and to empower the poor, without redistributing resources, but through decentralisation and community participation (Harriss, 2007).

Decentralisation

One way to create more accountability on part of the government and increase the participation of citizens is by decentralising the power. Corbridge et al (2005) suggest three distinctions that are relevant to bear in mind when talking about decentralisation:

> (a) deconcentrating, or the dispersal of agents of higher level of government to lower level arenas; (b) fiscal decentralisation, or the transfer of budgetary resources to lower level arenas; and (c) devolution, or transfer of democratic and administrative powers to lower levels of government. (Corbridge, Williams, Srivastava, & Véron, 2005, pp. 155-156)

The process of decentralization commencing in India from the 1990s and onwards was part of prime minister Rao Narasimhas plan to deal "with what Atul Kohli had called India's 'growing crisis of governability'" (Corbridge et al., 2005, p. 158). According to Professor of

International Affairs Atul Kohli, bureaucracy was too big and unruly, and the space between the citizens and its government was too wide (ibid).

Decentralization meant that the government came closer to its citizens, and made it easier for the population to participate and understand what the state was doing (Corbridge et al., 2013, p. 161). However, according to Corbridge et al (2013) some prerequisites are needed for decentralisation to work well: "(i) the elected bodies should have adequate powers; (ii) they should be provided with adequate resources; and (iii) they must be provided with adequate accountability mechanism" (ibid p. 169). Moreover, according to the same authors the practical achievement of decentralisation in India is limited. It is not working as it should and citizens are not more engaged, with the exception of two or three states. It also appears that patronage democracy is still flourishing (ibid p. 176).

Patronage democracy

Patronage democracy is about using public goods and basic services, that should be available to every citizen, as trading goods, sold to the highest bidder (Corbridge et al., 2013, p. 12) In India, patronage democracy and a paternalistic attitude is fairly common. Corbridge et al (2013) write, "Indian politicians have long resisted the transfer of resources and authority to local bodies, because of the loss that it would entail of some of their powers of patronage" (ibid p. 170). This is also linked to clientelism and the patron-client relations that we find in India. The paternalistic attitude is slowly changing towards an assertive approach. It started with the participatory development initiatives in the beginning of 1990's, where the Employment Assurance Scheme played a vital role. A demand emerged "for the greater voice of men and women in the political process, and in the selection of particular development projects" (Corbridge et al., 2005, p. 43). This would hinder the 'selling' of public goods, and instead give the power to citizens.

Accountability and corruption

Good governance requires clear accountability and trust in the system. However, in India today, there is lack of trust in the system, both at the lower-levels and at the higher-levels, which might be caused by and lead to corruption (Corbridge et al., 2005, p. 167). The international definition of corruption states that you are corrupt if you use your position for personal gain (Ruud et al., 2014, p. 130). This is a limited definition of corruption, but

sufficient for this thesis. In India, corruption is widespread and it is part of everyday life. Bribes, for instance, are necessary in many situations to get what you want or are entitled to (ibid p. 131). It is a challenge that government officials in India use their position to take bribes and to embezzle money from different welfare schemes to their own gain.

Economist Jean Drèze and Professor of Economics and Philosophy Amartya Sen discuss the link between accountability and corruption in the book *An Uncertain Glory* (2013).

> The issue of accountability related closely to that of corruption, which has received a great deal of attention recently in Indian political debates. In the absence of good systems of accountability, there may not only be serious neglect of duties, but much temptation for officials to deliver at high 'prices' what they are actually supposed to deliver freely, as part of their job. (Drèze & Sen, 2013, pp. 94-95)

The issue of corruption is frequently seen on the political agenda in recent years. The inbuilt transparency and accountability mechanism in MGNREGA show the increased consciousness about the issue, and the willingness to fight it.

Seeing the state

Governance does not only decide how government officials behave and understand the state, it influences the way people at the bottom behold and interact with the state. An agenda of good governance is important for government employees to see the poor as citizens (Corbridge et al., 2005, p. 150). *Seeing the State: Governance and governmentality in India* by Corbridge et al (2005) is an in-depth study of how people make sense of the state in India, based on fieldwork conducted in Eastern India. The study is a gateway to understanding state-poor relations in rural India and how "spaces of citizenship are being created, or perhaps widened, in the wake of the good governance agenda and the popular mobilization to which it can give rise" (Corbridge et al., 2005, p. 5).

Corbridge et al (2005) argue, "the sightings of the state that poorer people make are never straightforward or unitary" (Corbridge et al., 2005, p. 8). Previous experience with the state, and public accounts of how the state is performing and treating people influence rural poor's perception of the state. At the same time, local relations, social structures and politics contribute to people's view of the state. Ideally, people should have the same understanding of the state, of course with some degree of variation. Good governance is important to create this general idea about the state.

A challenge in India is that vernacular understandings[8] of the state are entrenched in local level officials. These are the officials that rural poor in India meet, and who influence their understandings of the state. For rural poor seeking work under MGNREGA, it is the Sarpanch and GP secretary they meet, and who are defining voices in how they see the state (Corbridge et al., 2005, pp. 18-19).

The Sarpanch and the CSOs are both engaging in good governance practice by trying to encourage rural poor to access their rights. At the same time, decentralisation, patronage and corruption influence the outcome of their actions.

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[8] Vernacular understanding are interpretations of something foreign, like good governance or the state's role, into a local context (Ruud, 2010, p. 30).

3 The power of the Sarpanch

This chapter will look at the implementation from a top-down perspective and see how the different governing structures influence MGNREGA and contribute to creating an execution of the program that is inclusive, accountable, transparent, efficient and follows the rule of law. When talking about the implementation of MGNREGA, I will refer to the process of planning, carrying out and maintaining the program. This chapter will focus on how the local government and the Gram Panchayat (GP) leader, the Sarpanch, put MGNREGA into action, going from being a set of instructions to its practical implications on 'the ground'. The Sarpanch is important because he[9] is the head the GP, and few can challenge his authority.

During my visit to Gaanv, an example came up showing the importance of the Sarpanch. In Gaanv, the state water connection was turned off because the previous Sarpanch did not care about it. He did not encourage villagers to pay their water bills, and hence, people did not. He also did not maintain the water pumps and the connections as needed. "Water is life in Rajasthan," they told me several times during my visit, and the consequences were therefore critical for people in Gaanv. When the current Sarpanch took office, he engaged people to pay their water bill and convinced the state to turn the water back on (Sarpanch, 2016).

One of the principal aims of MGNREGA is to invest in the rural structures, through giving more responsibility to the Panchayat Ray Institutions (PRIs). This is an extension of the decentralisation project started in 1992 with the passage of the constitutional 73th Amendment Act by the Indian Parliament. This amendment gives more power to the elected three-tier local governments, the PRIs, in an aim to ensure inclusion and empowerment in an era of high growth (Ambasta, 2012, p. 336). According to National Coordinator of Civil Society Consortium on NREGA Pramadesh Ambasta, "this systemic move towards decentralisation has paved the way for a host of people-centred legislations such as the MGNREGA, the forest rights act, etc…" (ibid). However, it was not before MGNREGA came into place that the local government got actual funds to reside over, and power to plan and carry out welfare programs (Nayak, 2015). Presiding over funds is one thing, being able to implement a program is quite another.

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[9] I will use he in reference to the Sarpanch through the text, this is because there is a high probability that the Sarpanch is male in Rajasthan.

The role of the Sarpanch is not only to administer the GP and making sure everything works. He also needs to engage people to participate by increasing their knowledge and information about different welfare program and how to access them. This is especially the case under MGNREGA because people need a lot of information to access work.

This chapter will first look at the importance of building the capacity of the Sarpanch, so that he knows how to plan work under MGNREGA. Secondly, I discuss the challenges of carrying out the program, considering how the Sarpanch informs and helps the rural poor to fill out applications. The last part will look at the monitoring of work and of the Sarpanch, and how rural poor and the different government structures evaluate MGNREGA. The arguments in this chapter find that the Sarpanch has a lot of power in the village and the GP, and if he personally does not want to implement MGNREGA, it will not happen. The institutional structures are increasing its monitoring and influence over local power. However, not sufficiently to create inclusive and effective implementation of the program. For any work to take place under MGNREGA, the Sarpanch need the capacity to plan work, and for work to be approved.

Capacity building and approval of plan

How well the Sarpanches know MGNREGA varies, and this influences the planning and implementation of the program. In the beginning, capacity building of the Sarpanches and government officials might have been there. However, the Sarpanch is an elected position, and might change every five years. This means that since 2006, GPs may have had several different Sarpanches. They all need to know how to plan for MGNREGA, and to send in enough plans to cover the whole year. The personal commitment and will of the Sarpanch to build his understanding of MGNREGA and to plan enough work is essential for MGNREGA to function properly.

Capacity building

GPs experienced a flooding of funds available almost overnight, when MGNREGA came into place. At the same time as the Sarpanches had little or no experience or capacity to handle this. Both CUTS CART, a civil society organisation (CSO) working on good governance and

consumer issues, and Manish Tiwari[10], Joint Director at Shiv Charan Mathur Social Policy Research Institute, have seen this happen. They have seen how this halters a good planning process and implementation of MGNREGA. Tiwari made this clear when he said that devolution of power is in theory good, but there is lack of training (Tiwari, 2016).

Moreover, Tiwari and CUTS CART both focused on the amount of schemes and responsibilities the GP and the Sarpanch have, with limited resources. The GPs in Rajasthan covers over 100 schemes with only one full time secretary. CUTS CART stated that "earlier they had 200 000[11] rupees worth of total budget, and then almost overnight, they have 20 million rupees[12]" (CUTS-CART, 2016a). This increase was significant, and a challenge if you do not have the training to manage large sums of money. According to CUTS CART, now they have appointed one assistant secretary as well, because of the amount of work. Tiwari added that in some cases, the Sarpanch might be illiterate, and then the only person with an education is the GP secretary, and the potential assistant secretary (Tiwari, 2016). However, the Sarpanch himself emphasized that education is important for the village leader to do a good job. He says that it is mandatory for the Sarpanch to know how to read and write (Sarpanch, 2016). He also said that it is ironical that the Sarpanch of a GP needs to have passed middle school in Rajasthan when there are no rules for Members of Parliament or the Prime Minister of India to be literate (ibid).

The Sarpanch in Gaanv told me he has received training on MGNREGA, which indicates that the picture might not be as negative as the arguments put forth by Tiwari and CUTS CART, suggest. What we need to remember when talking about the Sarpanch in Gaanv is that he is considered an active Sarpanch, hence, the training could have been something he sought out himself. This shows the importance of personal commitment and engagement to access capacity building. However, it also suggests the existence of formal training schemes in Jaipur district, since the Sarpanch managed to get it.

If the Sarpanch is not interested or engaged with MGNREGA, then it is the secretary's role to keep the wheels turning. The secretary is the administrative head of the village. However, the Sarpanch of Gaanv stated that the secretary and not the Sarpanch rule 80 to 90 per cent of GPs in Rajasthan because the Sarpanch is not present (Sarpanch, 2016). The

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[10] Manish Tiwari is the Joint Director of Shiv Charan Mathur Social Policy Research Institute. It is an institute doing research for the government, as well as getting funding from other institutions and international organisations. The interview took place at his office in Jaipur, with CUTS CART employee present.
[11] Estimated 3000 USD
[12] Estimated 300 000 USD

secretary's responsibilities are administration and registration. However, when the Sarpanch does not do his job, the secretary also has to implement welfare programs, like MGNREGA. Another challenge for the Sarpanches is that part of their job is to mediate in fights and quarrels in the village, something that takes up a lot of time (ibid). If the Sarpanch is not present, the secretary gets too many responsibilities, which seems to hamper the success of MGNREGA.

The Sarpanch is responsible for building the capacity of villager, and specifically teaching rural poor what their rights are under the program. When the secretary is the person running the GP he does not have time to travel around informing about the programs available for the villagers (Sarpanch, 2016). This is because he has enough work and responsibilities as it is. In Gaanv, the Sarpanch has been active in promoting work and other schemes in the GP. In his view if he does not take initiative, then things will not happen (ibid). According to Kamal Tank[13], who works for Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS), villagers are used to the secretary being an authoritative figure, and they therefore trust what he says (Tank, 2016). It is worth noting that the secretary could also have personal motives, and not always be as neutral as expected from a government official. Personal commitment to the job, and MGNREGA, would therefore play a part, although to a lesser degree compared to the Sarpanch.

Thus, looking at this from the perspective of good governance, which is meant to be inclusive, follow the rule of law and be accountable, we see several challenges. If you do not train and inform the lower levels, then there will be shortcomings in the implementation of MGNREGA. Institutionalising a good system for capacity building should be the responsibility of the district and state level, making it mandatory to attend training for new Sarpanches. It is difficult for the Sarpanch to engage rural poor if he does not know himself what their entitlements are, or how to execute them. In some cases, when the government is not able to provide adequate training and capacity building of Sarpanches, secretaries and villagers, CSOs step in and help. The next chapter will look closer into what role CSOs can play here, and how they are doing in Rajasthan. Capacity building is not the only challenge facing good planning of MGNREGA, the process of plan approval is also topic of concern.

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[13] Kamal Tank works with Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS), a civil society organisation in Rajasthan. The interview took place in a café in Jaipur.

Approval of plans

April is an important month in India, as this is the start of a new financial year[14], and hence, new plans for MGNREGA. April is also the beginning of the dry season in Rajasthan, and people are therefore increasingly demanding work from MGNREGA. According to CUTS CART, "Gram Panchayats start planning work for the new financial year only when they have received money for the new financial year" (CUTS-CART, 2016a). This means that the GP starts to plan new projects in April, and submit them for approval. CUTS CART stated that the approval process could take up to three months. This leads to work not being available before the monsoon arrives, a time when work is easy to find in rural areas (CUTS-CART, 2016a). My case study confirms this issue. When I visited the Sarpanch in May, he was waiting for approval of work for the new financial year. According to the Sarpanch, currently the plans were with the block level, the level above the Sarpanch, where approval of work plans takes place (Sarpanch, 2016). Approval of work seems to be a bottleneck for work under MGNREGA, especially because spring (March-June) is the most crucial season for workers and the time in which they need MGNREGA the most.

This aspect of planning is interesting because there was work going on in the GP I visited. However, this work was from last year, and was not a new project approved for this year. This made me wonder if approved work is available a year from approval date, or from when the new financial year begins, meaning that all plans 'expire' when the financial year ends. If the first is true, this should not be as big of an issue as the argument above suggests, since there should be work available. However, this depends on the Sarpanchs capacity to plan enough work to last a full year. If the second is true, then the gap of plans available is still there, meaning that for several months there are no plans or work made accessible. Upon asking Ambuj Kishore[15], Programmes Director of Association for Rural Advancement through Voluntary Action and Local Involvement (Aravali), about approved work available, he did not agree with the perception of CUTS CART. His understanding was that if people demanded work in April, they would get work in April (Kishore, 2016).

Furthermore, having enough work available is a challenge for both scenarios mentioned above. GPs do not create enough plans. Hence, when people need work, for

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[14] The Indian financial year runs from 1 April to 31 March.
[15] Ambuj Kishore is Programmes Director for Association for Rural Advancement through Voluntary Action and Local Involvement (Aravali), established by the Government of Rajasthan. The interview took place at his office in Jaipur. Aravali works on rural advancement through enhancing involvement, and he therefore has insights into MGNREGA work.

example in April, there are no or few plans left, even if the plans where still valid from last year. To tackle the issue of meeting demand, the MGNREGA Master Circular for Financial Year 2016-2017 stresses the importance of having shelved projects available. This includes a set of approved work plans that is available when there is sudden demand and should be two times the anticipated demand for employment (Ministry of Rural Development, 2016b). Manish Tiwari does not see that shelved projects would work in the near future. He understands it should be there, but to his knowledge, the situation in the GPs is that they do not have shelved projects available (Tiwari, 2016). Capacity of the Sarpanch to create enough shelved projects is also a challenge (Singh, Joshi, & Joshi, 2012). In Gaanv there were no mentioning of shelved projects, confirming Tiwaris suspicion.

Sending the plans for approval is ultimately the responsibility of the Sarpanch. GPs and Gram Sabhas (GS)[16] are involved in the process of deciding what kind of work the GP needs, but if the Sarpanch does not send the plans in time, there will not be work available. When the plans are sent, it is up to the higher-levels to approve them. Government officials working at different levels of approving work for MGNREGA, often have their own agendas, influencing the process of approval. The period it takes for approval of work is therefore at times politically motivated and/or influenced by personal preferences of specific Sarpanches or GPs. Rabi Thapa, writer for Effective States and Inlusive Development (ESID) (2014) write that:

> At the block level, local political conditions affected funding for MGNREGA projects: in Rajasthan, the ruling party was channelling funds to its base in swing constituencies. Block and Gram Panchayat functionaries therefore have the potential to act as 'valves' to direct funds to certain constituencies; supply has to be 'opened' rather than demanded. (Thapa, 2014)

In this way approval of plans depends on who you know, and if your constituency is important for the ruling party. None of my interviewees elaborated on this topic, making me question how common this is in Rajasthan. However, I did not explicitly ask a question about this topic, which might have given me answers.

Moreover, there are other reasons for lack of approval of plans. Kamal Tank told me that there is little cooperation in implementing MGNREGA, because there is not enough money to earn in the process (Tank, 2016). It could also be institutional problems slowing

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[16] The GS consist of every adult in the village. The role of the Gram Sabha is to oversee the GPs finances and to audit the GP.

down the implementation, meaning lack of personnel or resources to process the applications of plans within reasonable time. Tiwari mentioned that technical input is not available for MGNREGA. Anupama Jorwal, Chief Executive Officer in Jaipur,[17] supports this argument and points to how technical staff is missing on the local level (Jorwal, 2016). Why this is missing does not seem to be clear, it might be because not enough people are employed in these positions, giving a perception of them not existing, or because there does not exist technical staff.

How the Sarpanch tackles his responsibility of planning work, in addition to having to rely on the process of approval of work, are challenges to the planning process and the establishment of effective and inclusive implementation of MGNREGA. The many complications that might happen with approval of work, shown above, makes it difficult for workers to rely on MGNREGA. This leads to people not demanding work, because they know they will not get it anyway. CUTS CART remarked during our interview that local politicians and Sarpanches say there is no demand, and therefore no work. However, the real reason is often the opposite: no jobs are available. Showing how the supply side, the institutional mechanism is struggling. If the Sarpanch does not want to learn about MGNREGA, or does not care about governing his GP, the institutional mechanism is not currently strong enough to prevent this, leading to no plans for MGNREGA work in the GPs. However, if the plans are there, then the next step will be to carry out the program. Corruption is a factor that hinders the implementation of MGNREGA, and is especially prevalent in the process of carrying out the program.

Challenges in implementation

Economist Jean Drèze, and economist and social scientist Reetika Khera write that "the positive impact of NREGA[18] has also been undermined by rampant corruption" (Drèze & Khera, 2011, p. 65). The large amounts of money transferred to GPs overnight, created a high interest in MGNREGA. This is one of the explanations for the good results of MGNREGA in the beginning. Manish Tiwari and CUTS CART both highlighted this aspect, and commented on how the fall in implementation of MGNREGA in Rajasthan is partly because of the inbuilt transparency. This makes it difficult to be corrupt, and hence, corrupt people move away from

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[17] Anupama Jorwal is Chief Executive Officer in Jaipur Zila Parishad/district. The interview took place in her office in Jaipur, with a CUTS CART employee present.
[18] NREGA was renamed MGNREGA in 2009, hence, some articles refer to MGNREGA as NREGA.

the rural development departments to other less transparent departments. This is positive because it reduces corruption, but at the same time, it brings down the implementation of MGNREGA because there are fewer people involved. CUST CART where of the perception that corruption was present, but not a major concern for MGNREGA today (CUTS-CART, 2016a).

In Gaanv, the Sarpanch sits in front of the GP building regularly to help people and fill out forms for them. He does his work outside so that people can see what he is doing, and that he in fact is working. He tries to be transparent and not corrupt. It is however not easy when the pay he gets is very low. According to the Sarpanch he get 3500[19] rupees a month for a fulltime job. He has decided to not take this money as he wants to be corrupt free (Sarpanch, 2016). He has, however, told CUTS CART earlier that this is very difficult. The reason for this is because there are many temptations, and he has to accommodate people at his office on a regular basis. As many as 15-20 people might show up every day, and the Sarpanch offers them tea, cold drinks and snacks. This is not covered by the government in any way. He used this to explain why people are taking money from the GP to personal use, because they cannot afford the expenses (Sarpanch, 2016). The Sarpanch of Gaanv gives an interesting perspective on corruption. He says he will not take the money, however, he also defends that people are corrupt to a certain degree, because the wages are too low. The Sarpanch of Gaanv must already be fairly well off, since he is not taking any money for his job, and still can cover expenses. Not everyone could afford not being paid, and in other GPs corruption could therefore be a bigger challenge.

Furthermore, corruption is a challenge in India because "local level officials hold vernacular understandings of the state, not resembling the ideas of fairness and generalised morality that should be embedded in the state" (Corbridge et al., 2005, p. 20). They rule in the way they see fit, not always associated with the central government's goal for transparent and accountable implementation. Changes are happening, and technology is playing an increasingly important part in fighting corruption, as will be discussed later.

Another challenge for MGNREGA is that the program is experiencing program fatigue, meaning that the government has become tired of working with the program, shown by fall in implementation and workdays after 2010. Tiwari mentioned that this is not unique to MGNREGA, it is a general issue with social sector programs in Rajasthan and across states (Tiwari, 2016). Increased monitoring and transparency is one reason for this, making it harder

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[19] Estimated 52.5 USD

for people to be corrupt and earn extra money under the program. Madhya Pradesh has experienced a similar slowdown in implementation, explained by both anti-corruption dynamics and "increased unwillingness of bureaucrats and elected panchayat leaders at the sub-district and local levels to implement the program" (Jenkins & Manor, 2015, p. 185). This shows that this trend is not only happening in Rajasthan, but also other states that have been performing well.

Kamal Tank pointed out the continued corruption under MGNREGA, saying that everyone is making money, illegally of the scheme. It used to be through putting in fake names in the muster roles[20], but this is not possible anymore because of the emphasis on transparency. Now they hire machines under the program, and deduct the payment for the machines of the wages of workers. In this way, they are actually involving the poor in their practices, making them corrupt as well. This is a worrisome development that illuminates the continuing innovation in how to be corrupt[21] (Tank, 2016). Rural poor are also facing challenges when they apply for work. To get work under MGNREGA, rural poor have to fill out an application form, form six.

Applying for work

Form six is an essential part of MGNREGA and for creating engaged citizens in rural India. Filling out the form is often seen as just a mere formality in Rajasthan, and in some cases done after the applicant has started working (Singh et al., 2012, p. 137). Upon turning in the form, a receipt should be provided. The receipt is important because it means demand is registered in the system, as well as giving the applicant the right to unemployment allowance if work is not provided within 15 days. However, the receipt is in many cases withheld. One reason for this is that the local government and the Sarpanch do not want to pay an unemployment allowance if they do not manage to provide work within the allotted timeframe.

Therefore, in Rajasthan this unemployment provision has limited value as it is not implemented (Singh et al., 2012, p. 137). The central government pays for MGNREGA, however, unemployment allowance is the state's responsibilities. What Krishna Tyagi[22],

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[20] Muster rolls are the list of people who have worked at a MGNREGA worksite.
[21] Kamal Tank has experience from the field, and have therefore more insight into the reality of corruption than research organisations and government officials might have.
[22] Krishna Tyagi is a Consultant for the Government of Rajasthan on MGNREGA. Previously worked with CSOs. Interview took place at a cafeteria in Jaipur, and a CUTS CART employee was present.

MGNREGA consultant for the Government of Rajasthan, told me was that the government in Rajasthan has said unemployment allowances are to be taken out of the wage of local officials, or the Sarpanch, if they cannot give people work within 15 days (Tyagi, 2016). If this were the case, this would be a realistic explanation for not giving receipts, as there are multiple reasons for work not being available when people demand it, as the discussion above has showed. This arrangement of taking unemployment allowance out of the wage of government officials or the Sarpanches forces the responsibility of implementation down to the bottom, to the Sarpanch, without giving them the necessary capacity or help to succeed. It also creates a perception of no demand for work in the GPs, as mentioned in the introduction (Himanshu et al., 2015).

The point of the unemployment allowance seems to be to create accountability between the implementer and the rural poor. Instead, it leads to work not being registered and government officials being afraid of registering and starting the work process in case they do not supply work within 15 days. Those who suffer the most from this 'punishment' are the people, the villagers and the potential MGNREGA workers, not the Sarpanches or the government officials. This is contributing to villagers seeing the state as not working. People do not have the knowledge and understanding to demand their unemployment allowance, and therefore they do not get work or money. This also shows how implementation of unemployment allowance can affect the general execution of MGNREGA. Rajasthan's choice is one way to do it, other states could have chosen different options, depending on the state's economic situation as well as commitment to the implementation of MGNREGA.

Jorwal was honest about the challenge of form six and the accompanying receipt. Initially the local government resisted giving the form and following procedure, one reason being the challenge of receipts as the above discussion shows. However, the increased monitoring is making receipts more frequent (Jorwal, 2016). The Jaipur district government and the Government of Rajasthan have taken measures to fight this issue, by widening the scope of where you can get assistance to fill out and submit form six. Five to six different places should now be available in the GPs to submit the form. Compared to before, when there was only one place to turn in form six, this measure has affected MGNREGA positively (Jorwal, 2016). Jorwal's openness about the challenges of implementing MGNREGA and providing receipts shows her broad understanding of how MGNREGA works in Rajasthan.

However, I did not get a clear answer to what kind of places Jorwal was referring to, and whose responsibility it was following up the new places. Illiteracy[23] is still a challenge one should not take lightly, and the increase in places to get assistance and submit the form is a small measure. Education should be high on the development agenda, as this will improve the implementation of MGNREGA, in addition to increasing the welfare of rural poor.

Through extensive fieldwork CUTS CART found out that there was demand, people asked for work, but the GP or other officials were not giving proper receipt. As a consequence, they could say that there was no demand, or low demand in the village[24] (CUTS-CART, 2016a). Anuj Bharti[25], who works for a government run CSO, Vikaas, was reluctant to go into details about the implementation of MGNREGA. Bharti did confide in me that local governments are not accepting applications because they do not want to give a receipt, ultimately revealing that there in fact is a demand when they say it is not (Bharti, 2016). Lack of receipt is a sensitive issue because it shows that the government is not able to control the program, and that corruption is a major challenge.

In Gaanv, the Sarpanch is the one filling out the forms for the villagers. He therefore has a lot of power in deciding who should get work, and who should get a receipt for their demand. The topic of receipts did not come up during my interview and thus I do not know for sure if he is giving them out or not. He is filling out the forms because many are illiterate, (Sarpanch, 2016). This could be an act of patronage towards the rural poor, giving them work as a favour expecting something in return. On the other hand, he could be engaging them along the way, trying to teach them to fill out the forms themselves.

One example showing the power of the Sarpanch, in addition to his lack of capacity and knowledge about all aspects of MGNREGA, came to the fore during my interview in Gaanv. Upon being asked why there was no crèches[26] at the worksite, the Sarpanch answered that he does not fill out this request in the form. People do not know that they can apply for this, it has to be stated on their form six, and this is filled out by the Sarpanch. The Sarpanch did however say that they would appoint a woman for this job, if enough people requested crèches (Sarpanch, 2016). The Sarpanch knows crèches should exist, but he does not fill it out

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[23] The literacy rate in Rajasthan is according to the 2011 census is 79.19 percent for male and 47.76 percent for females (Gupta, 2013, p. 6). Considering that most of the workers under MGNREGA are women, this is a challenge for the implementation of the program.

[24] The fieldwork took place in 2012. It looks at 66 GPs in all 33 districts of Rajasthan (CUTS-CART, 2016a).

[25] Anuj Bharti works for Vikaas, an organisation connected to the government in Rajasthan. Interview took place in Jaipur. The organisation works on rural and urban development, and their head office is in Jodhpur.

[26] Child care facilities for children under the age of 5 is mandatory to have at MGNREGA worksites of requested in form six.

in the form because he does not think he has the resources to pay someone to do the job. He does not fully grasp the concept, and the entitlement parts of MGNREGA. If demand for crèches are there, there should also be money available. The example gives us an understanding of how difficult it is to cover all aspects of what MGNREGA mandates in rural everyday life, and how important capacity building is.

The above discussion shows that corruption is a challenge, both at the GP level – as discussed with regard to form six – as well as at the level of the state, particularly with regard to program fatigue. To create a good system of governance, the elimination of corruption is necessary. In India this is difficult because of the way corruption is entrenched in many aspects of society. People also have their own understandings of what and how the state should act. If the increased transparency and measures to fight corruption is hindering people from getting work, it makes it worth considering that some degree of corruption might be the lesser of two evils, as rural poor not getting work is more precarious.

Jean Drèze and Professor of Economics and Philosophy Amartya Sen (2013) suggest three institutional changes to fight corruption: first, fostering transparency and accessibility of information to reduce corruption. Second, create an environment that does not tolerate misdeeds, as corruption often is seen as 'standard behaviour'. Third, putting in place realistic threats of prosecution and sanctions. Here it is important to encourage citizens to be active and speak up about corrupt behaviour (Drèze & Sen, 2013, p. 96). The next section will look closer into what the government is doing in Rajasthan and Jaipur to fight corruption and make the Sarpanch more responsible.

Monitoring of work

According to Jorwal, increased monitoring has been a key development in Jaipur, improving the implementation of MGNREGA. She talked about how they have officers going out for inspection, and that technology is playing a larger role in the monitoring process (Jorwal, 2016). MGNREGA is one of the most technologically advanced programs in India, as all activity is registered online, in the Management Information System (MIS). Hence, Jorwal can sit in Jaipur and monitor the implementation of MGNREGA in the villages. This is creating accountability and improving the top-down implementation of the program.

Technology's increased role in the monitoring process is relevant to mention, because it has rapidly multiplied the governments' options for monitoring. One way to follow up the

implementation of the program locally is to use video conferences, making it easier and faster to connect with rural India, and to gather larger groups who are geographically distant[27] (Jorwal, 2016). Jorwal told me that they are using these conferences as a naming and shaming opportunity, forcing the different levels of government to be more accountable and improve their implementation of MGNREGA. Members of the legislative assembly in the state become active as well, meeting with the district councils to make them more accountable. Hence, the monitoring process involves all state actors, from the elected members in the state legislative assembly, to the district, down to the block and GP levels (ibid).

Jorwal's positive attitude towards monitoring and how well it is working in Jaipur, is understandable considering her position. CUTS CART is however not as convinced that monitoring is happening in the way Jorwal describes. CUTS CART employees have seen that there is not enough human resources in Jaipur district and Rajasthan to go into the field to monitor and provide feedback. Monitoring is not happening with the GPs, creating lack of accountability and giving Sarpanches freedom to do as they wish (CUTS-CART, 2016a).

Some of my other interviewees also mentioned the significance of technology. Krishna Tyagi argued that the online registration forced under the MGNREGA, is making GP, block and district level more aware and thus improving the monitoring of each other. According to Tyagi it also contributes to hinder corruption, because there is not enough profit to get out of the system, as the discussion about program fatigue mentions (Tyagi, 2016). Kamal Tank pointed out the neutrality of technology, and how it is difficult to cheat with the numbers, making it an important tool to fight corruption. However, he thinks it will take time before the full benefits of technology will improve the program substantially (Tank, 2016).

During my visit to the GP, internet seemed to be an issue. We went from the MGNREGA work site to an office where they had a computer, internet, scanner, printer etc. This was called an electronic service point, and at this service point one person was working fulltime to assist GP inhabitants in using the computer and filling out forms online. It was well equipped, but the GP experienced several difficulties with internet connectivity. Sometimes they had to sit on a roof for it to work. Technology has come a long way, but still not long enough in rural locations, areas that are also suffering from irregular power cuts. Monitoring is also giving people a chance to be involved, either by voicing their opinion to the Ombudsman or through social audits.

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[27] Internet is a challenge she did not mention, but that I would assume is not always stable or available.

Ombudsman

The top-down monitoring mentioned above is one way to monitor the implementation of MGNREGA, especially focusing on the need for accountability and transparency. Another way to achieve this is to encourage rural poor to submit reports on the implementation of MGNREGA, through different channels. According to the rules: "Section 30, Schedule I of the Mahatma Gandhi NREGA mandates that there shall be an ombudsman for each district for receiving grievances…" (Ministry of Rural Development, 2016b, p. 43). Grievance redressal is a way of giving people a say, letting them participate, and creating engaged citizens. Jorwal stated that in Jaipur, the Ombudsman system is working well. The complaints are examined by the Ombudsman and action is taken (Jorwal, 2016).

CUTS CART highlighted the importance of the Ombudsman at the district level, since the volume of grievances under MGNREGA is very high. After Jaipur got an Ombudsman it fast-tracked the complaint resolution. This is a very transparent process (CUTS-CART, 2016b). Being able to deal with grievances is important for a program to function well. According to CUTS CART, maybe one of the most important parts to make it a success (ibid). Tyagi mentioned the Ombudsman as a helpline, letting people raise their issues. According to his experience the grievances that were real would be addressed (Tyagi, 2016).

Hence, different actors from CSOs and the government confirm that the grievance redressal system is functioning in Jaipur, giving people an outlet for their complaints. It is an important way for people to meet the state, and their treatment will influence how well they think the state is doing. Kamal Tank is the most critical of my interviewees, saying that the grievance system is not functioning (Tank, 2016). His background from civil society and as an activist could both mean that he is principally negative to how the state works, but also that he has more experience with how rural poor meet the state.

Social audits

The social audits are another way to fight corruption, and to engage rural poor. As mentioned in the first chapter, it is difficult to find a solution to how the social audit process should be done in Rajasthan. Researchers Surjit Singh, Varsha Joshi and K.N. Joshi argue that "government auditing has been taking place regularly twice in a year. But social audit, except for some done with the help of MKSS in Karauli, was a rare phenomenon" (Singh et al., 2012, p. 144). Since the mandated social audit rules are in the implementation phase, the

Sarpanch still has a lot of power. According to Kamal Tank, the Sarpanch selects the ones who are allowed to do social audits, giving the Sarpanch power to control the process and the information that would come out of it. However, Tank sees benefits of social audits as they can act as a bridge between people and the government. When corrupt officials and representatives have to stand in front of their people answering to their deeds, they stop being corrupt, and more openness is facilitated (Tank, 2016).

In 2009 there was an initiative to implement social audits in Rajasthan, and eleven teams where selected to do social audits in eleven Panchayats. Nikhil Dey, an activist and member of MKSS, laid down a set of rules contributing to making the process fair and transparent. The exercise revealed loopholes in the implementation, and served as a training ground for the villagers in how to be engaged and active citizens. The next chapter will discuss more in detail how social audits are an important tool to engage rural poor. The audits were, however, not well received by the Sarpanches because of the amount of corruption they uncovered. After filing a complaint to the Rajasthan High Court, an informal ban was put on CSOs helping out in the social audit process (Sushmita, 2013). Thapa write that "in Rajasthan, the early success of social mobilisation, demonstrated through extensive social audits, led to a backlash from Gram Panchayat heads (Sarpanchs) and ultimately the state" (Thapa, 2014). This is also supported by Kamal Tank's view on the social audit process in Rajasthan. He talks about the large amounts of corruption that came out of these social audits, and the protests it lead to by the Sarpanches (Tank, 2016).

The Sarpanch in Gaanv has decided to hold social audits every month, instead of every sixth month. He holds it outside his office or the GP building, to hear the issues of the villagers (Sarpanch, 2016). This is admirable, but since there was no work last year, the number of social audits performed is uncertain. Another issue is whether the villagers dare to voice their opinions to their Sarpanch, as they could be afraid of the consequences of critique, depending on what kind of relation they have with the Sarpanch. This is why an independent auditor should do the social audit process. The discussion above shows us the importance of monitoring to improve the governance of MGNREGA, reducing corruption and engaging rural poor to be active citizens. Social audits also teach rural poor about MGNREGA, making it easier for them to apply for work. Monitoring is necessary from both the people on 'the ground' as well as the institutions for MGNREGA to work well. Influencing all parts of the discussion above, and the last point of this chapter, are social structures.

Social structures

Local structures and community constellations are a broad and complicated area, and will only be touched upon lightly in this thesis. It is however important to mention, because of the large diversity in India when it comes to relations of caste, class, gender and religion, and the role these factors have in the implementation of welfare programs like MGNREGA. Those who have social control in the GP also control the program. The elected leaders, like the Sarpanch, can play different roles. He can be the patron of the GP, using a more paternalistic approach when it comes to distribution of welfare benefits and implementation of MGNREGA. On the other hand, he could be the GPs elected leader, their representative, abiding to what the villagers want, including them in the process and following the rule of law. A combination of the two roles are probably most common.

I did not ask explicit questions about the role of social structures during my interviews, one reason being that it is more sensitive than other topics. My interviewees did therefore not remark on social structures as a big challenge for the implementation of MGNREGA. Tiwari mentioned that the village structure, social factors and religion are all important factors, but we did not go further into this. In Rajasthan, selection of work and allocation of jobs are in some cases affected by local power dynamics (Singh et al., 2012, p. 141). Since the Sarpanch position is an elected one, the Sarpanch need to take care of his voters. This might mean to give them extra benefits or distribute jobs under MGNREGA to specific groups of people.

Furthermore, one interesting aspect of MGNREGA is how it is contributing to change the social structures of the GPs, especially for women. As a majority of the workers under MGNREGA are women, this means that their bargaining power, their knowledge and understanding of MGNREGA and their income increases. Paternalist authority is deeply entrenched in Indian society, and Rajasthan "…forms part of a larger cultural belt of Hindi heartland, characterised by low human development, social conservatism and slow pace of modernisation" (Singh et al., 2012, p. 130). The high participation of women under the program are challenging these structures. According to CUTS CART, MGNREGA has been a game changer in rural Rajasthan, increasing the economic status of rural poor, and women, which changes the traditional structures (CUTS-CART, 2016b). Women work under MGNREGA because few other jobs are available in rural areas. More importantly, they get equal wage as men under the program, and therefore many would choose to work under MGNREGA rather than taking other jobs.

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In Gaanv, the Sarpanch was encouraging more women to participate and stand for election to the GP. He sees how elected representatives feel empowered and therefore take more responsibility and action in the GP. During my visit to Gaanv, a female GP member was following us around. It was her first time as elected representative for the GP. This had empowered her and given her more confidence. She is experiencing a big change, feeling more responsible for the inhabitants of Gaanv and she wants to know what the needs of the rural people are (Female GP member, 2016). The female elective was involved with many schemes, and participated at GP meetings. Since all the workers at the worksite I visited were female, the significance of having a woman representing them in the GP was of high importance. The female elective was encouraging women to work, and to be independent.

Thus, my analysis shows the importance of an active Sarpanch, both in implementing MGNREGA in general but also in encouraging woman to participate in the GP. The institutional top-down approach has not reached all the way down to the villagers, who are following a person, the Sarpanch, rather than the formal rules of the state in their everyday lives. The GP is contributing to a more inclusive process of implementation, a consequence of decentralisation of power. However, hampering the continued progress of MGNREGA is lack of good planning, linked to the importance of capacity building, and training of both Sarpanches and rural poor in filling out forms and following the rules of MGNREGA. Corruption is there, but the increased monitoring, the Ombudsman and social audits are helping to improve accountability and transparency in rural Rajasthan. Furthermore, rural villagers are increasingly engaging, participating and giving feedback. There is still a long way to go, but slowly rural poor are becoming more active and engaged citizens. Civil society and CSOs have a part to play here, as the next discussion will show.

4 Civil society's role

When the Sarpanch and the government struggle with the implementation of MGNREGA, there are ways that civil society can contribute to enhance its execution. Civil society has a role to play in creating good governance in India. Corbridge, Harris and Jeffrey (2013) write that good governance is not only about writing good policies and how the government implements these policies, a broader perspective is necessary. Furthermore they maintain that 'good governance' "is a term that has come to be used very widely, partly in recognition of the fact that the effective management of public affairs must often involve other actors as well as 'the government'" (Corbridge et al., 2013, p. 159). In this case, we will look at the role civil society organisations (CSOs) play in the implementation of MGNREGA. CSOs contribute with the bottom-up perspective. They are directly engaging with villagers and see their challenges and needs, in addition to cooperating with the government. This chapter will address how CSOs are creating assertive citizens, who claim access to work under MGNREGA. With assertive citizens, I refer to active, engaged and knowledgeable people.

The UN defines civil society as the 'third sector' of society. It consists of CSOs and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) (UnitedNations, unknown). This is a short and concise way to define civil society, however, in the Indian context, civil society is a more complicated term. Corbridge et al (2013) discuss how to define the Indian civil society using Partha Chatterjee's work on civil and political society as a starting point. Chatterjee defines civil society in India as upper-middle class Indians, rich Indians, who occupy a place in civil society based on autonomy, equality, contracts and the rule of law. Opposite them you find the political society consisting of the poor, who do not follow the rule of law, and are dependent on government resources and help (Corbridge et al., 2013, pp. 224-225). Chatterjee's study contributes with an important perspective on different spheres of society in India. However, today there is no sharp divide between a rich upper-class of Indians and the rest of the population when it comes to participating in civil society. Corbridge et al (2013) write:

> Poor people increasingly imagine themselves as citizens capable of critiquing the state, and much of their mobilization occurs via legal channels, and with reference to abstract notions of rights, which they understand and embrace. To make these points is to expose the inadequacy of Chatterjee's vision of civil and political society as a model for understanding the political sociology of contemporary India. (Corbridge et al., 2013, p. 237)

This is what we see happening with workers under MGNREGA. They are more actively engaging with the state, using the law to claim what is rightfully theirs. Therefore, Chatterjee's approach to civil society is different from the way I will use the term. My focus is on a broader perspective of civil society. This perspective looks closer at how CSOs influence the implementation of MGNREGA and in the process are making rural poor into assertive citizens of India.

We also need to define CSOs and NGOs before we move on. CSOs are a broader term entailing all organisations that are part of civil society. This means organisations that work for profit, that have connections to the government in some way, as well as non-profit organisations based on volunteer action. NGOs are a more defined group in the civil society, in the way that they are non-profit organisations who are independent from government participation and involvement. One way to define NGOs in an Indian setting is:

> Organizations that are generally formed by professionals or quasi professionals from the middle or lower middle class, either to serve or work with the poor, or to channel financial support to community-based or grassroots organizations (CBOs or GROs) of the poor. The NGOs are generally non-membership organizations and have salaried employees. (Sen, 1999, p. 332)

This description gives a broad understanding of what NGOs are, but in the Indian context it is difficult to generalise, and local structures, politics and social differences would influence the definition of NGOs. My interviewees used both the term NGOs and CSOs when talking about the role of civil society. I do not think they always made a clear distinction between these two types of organisations, using the terms interchangeably[28].

In the MGNREGA Master Circular for Financial Year 2016-2017 the role of civil society in the implementation process is referred to the following way:

> Section 2(g) of MGNREGA states that "implementing agency" included any department of the central government or state government, a Zila Parishad, Panchayat at intermediate level, Gram Panchayat or any local authority or government undertaking or non-governmental organisation duly authorised to undertake the implementation of any work taken up under the scheme. (Ministry of Rural Development, 2016b, p. 61)

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[28] I will use the term CSOs, unless my interviewees use NGOs.

This quotation shows that NGOs can assist in implementing MGNREGA given they are duly authorised. Just after this statement, the Master Circular states that the government wants civil society and NGOs to be in the facilitation role, and not a direct implementer of the program (ibid). It does not seem to be clear what the central government wants CSOs to do, making it up to state and local governments to decide their involvement.

I will be using four CSOs as examples to understand how CSOs work with MGNREGA, and how they collaborate with the government. They are; Food first Information & Action Network (FIAN) India; Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS); Association for Rural Advancement through Voluntary Action and Local (Aravali) and Poorest Areas Civil Society (PACS).

Cooperate with the government or not?

My interviews gave me an understanding of CSOs often having two options when it comes to working with MGNREGA. They can work with the government, assisting it in various ways, or they can work in opposition to the government as activists and critical judges. Working with the government creates more options, but reduces the possibility of raising critique. When working in opposition, on the other hand, the CSOs can easier be vocal about challenges facing the implementation of MGNREGA, shedding light on corruption and similar problems. Krishna Tyagi, MGNREGA consultant for the Government of Rajasthan, said that MGNREGA needs assistance from civil society, and that CSOs could play the activist doing advocacy work, or be a partner. Both are not possible, you have to choose your side (Tyagi, 2016). Pramadesh Ambasta, National Coordinator of Civil Society Consortium on NREGA, write about the different forms that civil society initiatives can take under MGNREGA; "1. Support to GPs in planning, implementation and social audit. 2. Capacity building, mobilisation and monitoring. 3. Social audit, vigilance and advocacy" (Ambasta, 2012, p. 361). The first and second can take place in cooperation with the government, however the third demands higher degrees of autonomy. Government welcomes CSOs who support their programs, but do not seem to appreciate independent critique.

At the same time as they do not appreciate critique, the government needs the involvement of the civil society and CSOs, in different forms, for MGNREGA to function well. They need them either as service providers, assisting the government, or to monitor and

increase the knowledge about MGNREGA. Rajpal[29], national programmes officer for PACS, said that on a national level, even government is not able to provide sufficient capacity to the implementing agencies and they therefore need to seek support from CSOs. He mentions that there are some formal partnerships, particularly for technical support, planning and capacity building, and that he has experienced government encouraging CSOs to participate.

Abhiroop Mukhopadhyay[30], Professor at Indian Statistical Institute, gave me an example for why the government needs NGOs, although his example was linked to a scheme to prevent child abuse in villages[31]. If the government wants to put together groups to monitor and prevent child abuse in a village, it does not know how to go about, as it does not have the connections or mechanism to set down groups in the village. The government needs the help of NGOs to understand the local context, and to learn who should be in the groups and how sensitive the issue is. NGOs are seen as more neutral actors, that village inhabitants trust more than government officials or the Sarpanch (Mukhopadhyay, 2016). The example shows how NGOs and the government need each other to facilitate participation, accountability and inclusiveness. That the government is depending on CSOs in this way is in some degree problematic, indicating lack of resources and control. What is important to remember, and I will come back to this point later, is that CSOs and NGOs exist in many forms and variations, and not all of them have good intentions.

Furthermore, CSO's involvement depends on the general implementation of MGNREGA. In Rajasthan, as pointed out earlier, there was a fall in implementation of MGNREGA after 2010. Manish Tiwari,[32] the Joint Director for Social Policy Research Institute in Jaipur, talked about this aspect during our interview. He told me that some years back, maybe three or four, CSOs were very engaged in the program, but this changed because the government thought they were interfering too much. He said that MGNREGA had done well in Rajasthan because of the fruitful dynamics between CSOs and government, its best years being between 2009-2012 (Tiwari, 2016). Kamal Tank, who works for MKSS, noted how MKSS used to work closely with the government, being the binding component between

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[29] Rajpal is the national program manager for Poorest Areas Civil Society (PACS). The interview took place in New Delhi.
[30] Abhiroop Mukhopadhyay is Associate Professor in the department of Economics at Indian Statistical Institute, recent topics of research is the implementation and effects of MGNREGA. The interview took place in New Delhi.
[31] I do not know where in India he is referring to – it is a more generic example.
[32] Manish Tiwari has worked with CSOs for years, and has therefore experienced the change of attitude towards CSOs.

the people and the government. Now however, the state government is not interested in cooperation with MKSS or CSOs, and he perceives a clear loss of interest after 2011[33] (Tank, 2016). They are not interested because CSOs uncover corruption, through monitoring and social audits, a more detailed discussion on this follows later. CUTS CART, a CSO working on good governance and consumer issues, believes that there are still CSOs doing a good job, despite a more hostile environment for CSO's under MGNREGA.

Such organisation working with the government in Jaipur and Rajasthan, is Association for Rural Advancement through voluntary action and local involvement (Aravali). Aravali was initiated in 1994 by the Government of Rajasthan to promote voluntary action for socio-economic development of the state and the formal operations started in 1997. Their mission is to act as an interface between the Government and the voluntary organisations (Aravali, unknown). Ambuj Kishore, Programmes Director of Aravali, told me about the importance of government and voluntary organisations collaborating to improve rural development in Rajasthan. One of the key mandates of Aravali is to build small organisations, NGOs, to train them and increase the quality of their work. Aravali has about 150 partner organisations, and has a unique position between the government and NGOs. Kishore mentioned that they had done a state consultation in 2006, focusing on the role and involvement of NGOs under MGNREGA. He told me a lot of success had happened after this, more people are getting job cards and demanding work, along with adequate facilities being provided at the work sights (Kishore, 2016).

Kishore was positive to MGNREGA, although we should keep in mind that his position in a government initiated CSO makes it difficult for him to be critical. He thinks Aravali is making a difference and that MGNREGA is performing better in rural areas because of this cooperation between the government and NGOs (Kishore, 2016). It is problematic that he cannot be more critical, considering that he has insight into how MGNREGA works, and where the program faces challenges.

To broaden the view, Political scientist Rob Jenkins and Professor James Manor (2015) compare how CSOs work with MGNREGA in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh (MP). In Rajasthan, CSO and the government have a long history of involvement with each other because of the state's experience with work programmes and other welfare schemes. This was not the case in MP, where CSOs and the government did not interact much in the years before

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[33] My interviewees are not clear about when the fall in implementation happened, most likely because it was not felt immediately in the villages or it took time for CSOs to see the changes.

MGNREGA. Nonetheless, CSOs in MP involved themselves in developing the plans for implementing MGNREGA, because their grassroots experience was needed in the planning, leading to cooperating between the government and CSOs. MP also had a vibrant and developed Gram Panchayat (GP) system compared to Rajasthan. In Rajasthan, the development of GP institutions - linked to the decentralisation – was established only after the introduction of MGNREGA (Jenkins & Manor, 2015, pp. 177-181). Presented here are two states where CSOs are involved with the government. In MP, CSOs where needed because of their experience; in Rajasthan, they continued their tradition of involvement (ibid).

What this comparison shows, is that civil society's engagement with MGNREGA can happen in different ways, both leading to improvement of implementation. In contrast to the success in Rajasthan and MP there are states like Bihar and Jharkhand, where CSOs involvement are weak, and CSOs have not been active in mobilising people and engaging with MGNREGA. The implementation of MGNREGA in Bihar and Jharkand is low, and lack of CSOs can be one explanation for this. Improvement are happening in Bihar and Jharkand in terms of CSO involvement, but slowly (Pankaj, 2012a, p. 116).

Tiwari said that MGNREGA is now running the way the government wants it to in Rajasthan, with less interference from civil society[34]. He does not think the government is interested in promoting the involvement of CSOs because they are afraid of what they might find (Tiwari, 2016). However, according to Kamal Tank, who is more actively involved with CSOs on a day to day basis, a change happened after 2014, and the government of Rajasthan is now taking new initiatives, and creating new spaces for CSOs to be active (Tank, 2016). Anupama Jorwal, Chief Executive Officer in Jaipur, says that they are engaging with civil society, confirming what Tank observes. She referred to a recent workshop the district government had involving CSOs and other actors in the MGNREGA field (Jorwal, 2016).

Hence, the discussion above shows the difficulties CSO face in engaging with MGNREGA. The government need CSOs, but are not clear on how they should participate, as service providers or as monitoring agents. Either option can create awareness by increasing people's knowledge and encouraging them to participate, however, it is more difficult for those who are cooperating with the government to freely monitor and report on corruption.

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[34] His insight comes from both government experience and CSO work, substantiating his statement.

Corruption and monitoring

CSOs play a crucial role in the monitoring of MGNREGA. According to CUTS CART, if NGOs are missing, the right feedback is not reaching the government, which means that steps to reform the program are difficult to take (CUTS-CART, 2016a). Several of my interviewees thinks that feedback to the government is one of the most important roles of CSOs when it comes to MGNREGA.

Mukhopadhyay reflects upon the importance of NGOs under MGNREGA on a national level. According to him NGOs are important because they help with the recording. He said that since MGNREGA is so 'people and record intensive', civil society and NGOs are necessary (Mukhopadhyay, 2016). Suman[35], Director of FIAN India, also holds this to be an important role for NGOs. FIAN India monitors and highlights gaps under MGNREGA on a national level. They document facts and take stock of the violations made, sharing this with the government and media, hence, contributing to uncovering the challenges MGNREGA faces. Suman stated that it is difficult to argue with facts, especially if they are documented by locals who are working under MGNREGA and who knows it's challenges (Suman, 2016). Monitoring is essential in order to fight corruption. When local officials and the Sarpanch knows CSOs are watching, and people are willing to testify about how MGNREGA is performing, it is harder for them to avoid implementation. Of course, engaged rural poor are the ideal, and it is not always easy for rural poor to speak up in fear of consequences they might suffer in the village. As mentioned in the previous chapter, social structures play an important role here, and might make it difficult for CSOs to work in the villages. Being an outsider can both be an advantage, as they are perceived as neutral, but also a disadvantage because of scepticism towards strangers. PACS, Poorest Areas Civil Society, works on both creating awareness, monitoring and advocating for improved implementation of MGNREGA.

PACS is a national organisation working in central and east India, across seven states. PACS was launched in 2009, and it is an initiative of the UK Government's Department for International Development (DFID). Rajpal said that PACS focuses on three steps to give locals better access to their rights. First, they ensure that people have the capacity to demand and that institutions know how to receive the demand. The second focus in on the decision making process, getting people's representation in the planning process. Third, generating

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[35] Suman is Director of Food first Information & Action Network (FIAN) India. FIAN India is a registered Indian section of FIAN international. The interview took place in FIAN's office, in New Delhi.

evidence and using this to influence the government. Included here is acting as a mediator between locals and the implementation authority (Rajpal, 2016). What Rajpal raised as particularly important was to create more platforms where locals and the service providers[36] can meet. This makes the service provider less intimidating and easier to approach (ibid). PACS and its associated NGOs work on creating assertive citizens, by training them, teaching them about what their rights and entitlements are, and giving them more options to interact with government officials (Rajpal, 2016). More meeting points also make it easier for the Sarpanch and other government officials to build relations to the rural poor and users of MGNREGA. Leading to both rural poor and government officials viewing each other in a different, more positive way.

Next, I will turn to how the CSOs have an important function when it comes to creating awareness of MGNREGA, with awareness, I refer to knowledge about and understanding of MGNREGA.

Creating awareness

For monitoring and feedback to work, the local users of MGNREGA need to be conscious about their rights. Therefore, increasing knowledge about how MGNREGA works and what rights rural poor have is the first step CSOs need to make in order to improve the implementation of the program. The role of the Sarpanch in creating awareness was touched upon shortly in the previous chapter, it is however clear that the Sarpanch and the local government are not able to enhance people's knowledge about MGNREGA sufficiently for people to get access to work. Reasons for this being lack of adequate resources as well as personal commitments. Thus, the involvement of CSOs is crucial.

Ratna M. Sudarshan[37], previously Director of Institute of Social Studies Trust, argued that knowledge about MGNREGA is one of the highest compared to other entitlement programs in India, because CSOs have been part of MGNREGA since its very beginning[38] (Sudarshan, 2016). Rajpal agrees with this, saying that MGNREGA is one of the most popular acts and programs in India. People know about the program even though they do not

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[36] Rajpal referred to those who implement MGNREGA in the villages as the service provider, in most cases this would be the GP, the Sarpanch or whomever has been appointed to oversee the implementation of MGNREGA.
[37] 37 Ratna Sudarshan is the previous Director of Institute of Social Sciences Trust (ISST) and her main areas of research is gender equality and social change. The interview took place in New Delhi, at ISST head office.
[38] Media and word of mouth would also increase people's knowledge about MGNREGA. I have not mentioned these two factors in this thesis, however, I am aware about their importance.

have any direct relations to the act, and this is mainly the contribution of NGOs (Rajpal, 2016). There is however, a difference between having heard about MGNREGA and knowing how to demand your rights. This means knowing how to claim work and entitlements, and whose responsibility it is to fulfil them. Economist and social scientist Reetika Khera and economist Jean Drèze (2011) write that awareness was a challenge in the beginning of MGNREGA. A national NREGA survey from 2008 show that less than half of the MGNREGA workers knew they were entitled to 100 days of work, similarly, half was aware about their right to work within 15 days (Drèze & Khera, 2011, pp. 49-50). The survey finds that awareness levels in Rajasthan were among the highest in the country, where 90 percent of the sample workers knew they were entitled to 100 days of work. One explanation for this is the vibrant civil society in Rajasthan (ibid). This section will look into FIAN India, MKSS and CUTS CARTs role in increasing knowledge about MGNREGA.

FIAN India work across several states, spreading information about MGNREGA by organising workshops and training local government, community leaders and villagers. According to Suman, it is not enough to focus on building consciousness of villagers in how they should demand work, but local leaders and government officials need training in how to respond to these demands (Suman, 2016). Similarly, MKSS has worked on increasing know-how in Rajasthan. MKSS works on the ground, as well as with district, state and national level advocacy. Kamal mentioned one project where they had gone to GPs to teach them about MGNREGA. They took out the ten most important rights and proceeded to write these on the Panchayat walls, in an understandable manner[39] (Tank, 2016). Another way they are working in the villages is by suggesting that the GP puts up a transparency board outside their main building, letting people know the progress of the program, how much the wages are and similar information. This pressure for transparency goes all the way up to the state level, where they are pushing the government to be more transparent (ibid).

CUTS CARTs experience is different, in the way that they did not intend to improve rural poor's knowledge about MGNREGA. They did a survey of 66 GPs, two from each district in Rajasthan. By asking people questions, and answering questions on MGNREGA, in the long run, this enhanced rural poor's knowledge and understanding of how to access work under MGNREGA. CUTS CART used the collected data to share a status report on

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[39] It does not help if the text is in an understandable manner, if people are illiterate. As the previous chapter notes, education levels are a challenge for MGNREGA to work well. However, people can learn what is says if it is read out loud, or talked about in the village.

MGNREGA with media and government officials, leading to changes in the implementation of MGNREGA from the Rajasthan's government side (CUTS-CART, 2016a).

According to Sudarshan, people have the information they need. The low demand nationally is because people choose not to participate. She thinks that when there is an incentive to work and get money from the state, people make an effort to get the information needed (Sudarshan, 2016). Both Suman from FIAN India and Tank from MKSS would disagree with this statement, seeing that people need MGNREGA, but do not know how to access it properly or demand work when it is not given. However, CUTS CART concur that people are aware about their right to work in Rajasthan. The issue, they say, is with the smaller things, like entitlements at the place of work, that they should have water, medical facilities and crèches (CUTS-CART, 2016a). CSOs need to go into the field to see how MGNREGA works in villages, and to teach people about their entitlements (CUTS-CART, 2016a).

CUTS CART has seen that awareness about the importance of form six has increased. In the beginning, few knew how to file this, but CUTS CART argue that because of CSOs involvement, more people are now aware. One of the CUTS CART employees used an example about job cards, saying that the government was not doing enough to help people get job cards. NGOs were therefore going door to door to get people to register. They experienced that marginalised/excluded[40] groups had not received a job card at all, even after five years they did not have job cards (ibid). PACS aims at helping excluded communities claim their rights and entitlements more effectively, reducing the gap between these groups and the general population (PACS, 2016). NGOs and civil society play a key role according to CUTS CART in including marginalised communities under MGNREGA. These communities are often 'forgotten' by the state government in addition to lacking the know-how of applying for work under MGNREGA (CUTS-CART, 2016a). Why these communities are 'forgotten' is difficult to explain. One reason could be that they are not in any patron-client relations, which means patrons would not prioritize them. Another could be illiteracy, which would reduce their chances of being heard.

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[40] It is difficult to define marginalised groups because it would depend on what the person saying it thinks it means, as well as geographic setting. However, in India, those who experience marginalisation are often women, indigenous people, those who belong to the lowest casts or are without a caste, disabled and elderly people.

The Sarpanch in Gaanv said there was not enough knowledge among the villagers about their rights, not only MGNREGA, but other welfare benefits and entitlements as well. There are also issues with lack of legal documents, like Aadhaar[41] card or other ID papers, to their entitlements (Sarpanch, 2016). He questioned how much NGOs in New Delhi knew about this issue and how it affects the implementation of MGNREGA and other welfare programs. The Sarpanch said that NGOs are helping, but there are too many programs to focus on, therefore, awareness levels depend on the priority of the NGOs. He did not know if there were any NGOs working with increasing knowledge of MGNREGA in the GP, and he was not interested in talking more about the role of civil society and NGOs. Here it is important to keep in mind that he has previously worked with CSOs, therefore it is significant that he does not want to elaborate more on CSOs importance. This should be of interest for him, but it did not seem to concern him at all. I did not want to push him on this topic. I therefore do not have a clear understanding for his lack of interest in CSOs. One explanation could be that since he felt he was doing a good job as Sarpanch, he did not need the assistance of CSOs.

The Government of Rajasthan is also realising the importance of increasing the understanding of MGNREGA. Jorwal said that on Thursdays, the day off for MGNREGA workers, the district level is reaching out to Gram Sabhas (GS) to educate them about their rights (Jorwal, 2016). I did not hear about this during my visit to Gaanv, or from any of my other interviewees, which can indicate that this is not happening, but it could also just not have come up because I did not ask the right questions[42].

Enhancing people's knowledge of their rights and training them to claim their rights is increasing rural poor's bargaining power with the local government and officials. This might change their perception of the state, depending on how much knowledge they have, and how government representatives treat them. CSOs are doing an important job in increasing knowledge of different aspects under MGNREGA. CSOs involvement could assist in improving the implementation of MGNREGA by increasing the participation of villagers, making MGNREGA more inclusive. Investment in engaged citizens is a long-term goal that will improve the implementation of MGNREGA together with other development programs in India. If people stay passive, good implementation of MGNREGA is difficult to achieve

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[41] Aadhaar card is a 12-digit unique identity number, serving as proof of identity and residency. It is a national identity card that is accepted all over India.
[42] I am aware that my interviewees and the field visit does not represent the full picture of MGNREGA in Jaipur or Rajasthan.

because you will lack inclusiveness and engagement of people. Furthermore, to fight corruption and increase monitoring of MGNREGA, there are two tools that CSOs can use: the Right to Information and social audits.

Right to Information

The Right to Information act (RTI) of 2005 has strong roots in the civil society movement in Rajasthan and especially with MKSS. It was inspired by the passing of Right to Information Law in May 2000 in Rajasthan (Corbridge et al., 2005, p. 223). The aim of the act is to increase government accountability and change the way bureaucracy works, as well as emphasize freedom of expression and address official censorship (Corbridge et al., 2013, p. 155). RTI is used by CSOs to shed light on practices they think are not working well, or if they see signs of corruption. The act guarantees unrestricted access to government documents within 30 days of application, to any citizen who applies for it (Drèze & Sen, 2013, p. 100). RTI is enormously popular, as citizens use it on a regular basis (ibid).

The conceptualization of RTI and MGNREGA happened at the same time, and this is one of the reasons for the inbuilt transparency provision under MGNREGA. According to CUTS CART, MGNREGA is design wise perfect, because of civil society's involvement and the accountability and transparency measures (CUTS-CART, 2016a). As a MGNREGA worker, you have the right to request any information, free of charge, within 7 days. CUTS CART stated that the very act of sending in a request will speed up the process of getting work, or any other entitlements under MGNREGA (CUTS-CART, 2016a). The RTI gives people a way of responding to unfairness, lack of work and of wages. This provision itself is important since it gives more power to the people. However, considering that many of the workers under MGNREGA are illiterate[43], and that they lack knowledge about what their entitlements under MGNREGA are, the use of RTIs might be limited.

By contrast, for CSOs who are aware about how to use RTIs, it is useful. Civil society and CSOs can bombard the government with RTIs[44] (CUTS-CART, 2016a). When it comes to curbing corruption, using RTIs as a naming and shaming tool has been helpful. Combining vigorous public campaigns, RTIs and media can help in changing the publics opinion about corruption, making it less acceptable (Drèze & Sen, 2013, p. 97).

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[43] Here again general education is an important point.
[44] The RTIs cost money to file, and I do not think all smaller CSOs can bombard the local government with RTIs. However, they are still an important accountability mechanism that can be used if necessary.

Social audits

Nationally, Rajpal see mobilising and monitoring as an important role for CSOs because the government cannot conduct social audits. People need to do this, and NGOs can activate people and mobilise them to participate (Rajpal, 2016). Knowledge and capacity building is a problem here as mentioned earlier, because people do not know how to do social audits. CSOs can build consciousness and knowledge about social audits, and then help in conducting them.

Mukhopadhyay thinks the most important role of CSOs under MGNREGA is auditing. He believes that the big success of MGNREGA in Rajasthan was because of CSOs involvement in the social auditing process (Mukhopadhyay, 2016). As referred to in the previous chapter, a petition in Rajasthan put an informal ban on civil society's involvement in the social audit process in 2009. The informal ban was a result of all the corruption that social auditing brought forward, showing how important this process is for MGNREGA. Arguably, this can have influenced the fall in implementation that Rajasthan experienced after 2010 because CSOs were discouraged from assisting.

Moreover, representatives from CUTS CART talked about the role of NGOs in the social audit process in Rajasthan, but their understanding of NGOs involvement is not coherent. During our conversation, they were not clear about the role NGOs played in the beginning, before the informal ban came into place. They however argue that the current situation is that NGOs do not participate, and that social auditing is a failure (CUTS-CART, 2016a).

In Madhya Pradesh, CSOs had to win contracts from the government to do social auditing. This is a good way of regulation their involvement, however, the contract went to the lowest bidder, and the organisations who won were often phoney, and did little or nothing to implement social audits. The real CSOs could not afford to bid as low as the phoney organisations, except in a few districts. In these districts the CSOs run with a loss to get a chance to implement social audits (Jenkins & Manor, 2015, p. 181).

In Rajasthan, a different perspective on the social audits process comes from MKSS, who has been focusing on training people to do social audits, creating policies and a manual for how to perform the auditing. Kamal Tank mentioned that they made a manual in collaboration with the state government, which is coherent with the discussion in the previous chapter of MKSS involvement with the state. In 2009, MKSS trained people from all government departments and CSOs to perform these social audits, before the informal ban

was in place (Tank, 2016). It is not only the government who are sceptical to MKSS and their involvement, one of my interviewees told me he thinks MKSS lacks knowledge about the situation on the ground, and that MKSS' involvement with social audits have not been successful (Tyagi, 2016).

However much CSOs involves themselves in social audits and in the monitoring process in general, it is necessary with a strong institutional foundation in the GP for social audits to work. Senior Fellow Ashok K. Pankaj write in *Right to Work and Rural India* (2012), using Bihar and Jharkand as examples, about how social audits are significantly improving the delivery of MGNREGA. However, social audits are almost absent in both states. Pankaj finds that "some initiatives by some agents of civil society in certain pockets of the states are quite inadequate to substitute for institutionalised social audit, an important provision to enforce transparency and accountability" (Pankaj, 2012a, p. 115). These states are different from Rajasthan, but the importance of a coherent institutional framework is the same for these three states. What is important is therefore for CSOs to improve the overall knowledge and understanding of MGNREGA, so that villagers can demand more from the government. This will, however, not make a difference if the local institutions are not working at all.

Furthermore, in order to revitalize the social audit process in Rajasthan, the state government started a pilot project in 2015 involving all stakeholders including CSOs and MGNREGA workers. The state government realised that it could not conduct social audits because of its interests in the matter, and special social audit teams where appointed[45]. Training of villages and MGNREGA workers was part of the project, so that in the future the GS's can perform social audits themselves (Department of Rural Development, 2015). The ideal situation would be that the villagers themselves organise the social audits, instead of being dependent on CSOs or the government. However, those who take initiative during the village meetings, like the Gram Sabhas, are often active in politics or have an agenda, and enhancing their influence might not lead to uncovering corruption in the GP.

The current situation in Rajasthan seems to be that social audits do not work unless there is political will, like an active Sarpanch initiating it or the district or state government pushing it forward. Furthermore, rural poor are dependent on someone informing them about

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[45] Worth noting here is that it is unlikely that the officials appointing the teams are neutral and they will most likely be biased in their selection.

their rights, like the Sarpanch, their neighbour, the mate[46] at the worksite or CSO representatives. The next paragraph considers the limitations that CSOs have, and the challenges government and MGNREGA workers might face when working with them.

Limitation of CSOs

It might be easy to forget that all CSOs do not have good intentions, and they do not all contribute in a positive way to MGNREGA. Kamal Tank reflected on this challenge, himself being from the realm of civil society, he was aware that involving NGOs could have both positive and negative effects (Tank, 2016). Some of my interviewees mentioned that several of the CSOs had limited knowledge of the situation on the ground, where the actual implementation of MGNREGA is happening. Krishna Tyagi said that he has seen heads of CSOs roam around in Jaipur, trying to influence the government or cooperate with them, but rarely go to villages to learn about the situation on the ground and understand how MGNREGA is developing (Tyagi, 2016). Tyagi thinks that civil society and CSOs need to understand the whole process of MGNREGA, because it is a dynamic program with continuous changes. He wants CSOs to not just blame, but help rectify the situation (ibid). Kamal Tank supports this, interestingly enough, since MKSS has gotten the same critique by others, showing that it is not always easy to see your own situation. Worth mentioning here is that many CSOs are often run by middle-class activists, which at times can blur their perception of the issues and challenges poor people face in accessing MGNREGA (Corbridge et al., 2013, p. 117). This might be because they have not been to the villages and talked to for example MGNREGA workers, and therefore they do not grasp the challenges people face. However, they could also understand the rural poor's situation well, it is therefore difficult to say something general about CSOs understanding here.

Moreover, Kamal Tank said NGOs involvement was negative because they are not always efficient, and they might have their own agendas (Tank, 2016). Ambuj Kishore supports that the involvement of NGOs varies in success. There are all kinds of NGOs and CSOs in the same way as there are different government departments and officials. Some do

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[46] At each worksite in Rajasthan, there are designated mates, who are responsible for maintaining the muster rolls (list of people working) and the daily supervision of MGNREGA work (Singh et al., 2012, p. 145). The mate system in an important area of innovation in Rajasthan, that has improved the productivity, the work environment and the transparency norms (Drèze & Khera, 2011, p. 79).

good work, other do not (Kishore, 2016). The difference is that with government there exists some sort of accountability and monitoring, as seen earlier. "Who are monitoring the NGOs?" asked Mukhopadhyay. They are also subject to corruption, and lack of accountability, but there are no clear lines for whose responsibility it is to monitor the civil society[47] (Mukhopadhyay, 2016). On the contrary, there do exist a fair bit of monitoring of CSOs, especially financially, so the situation might not be as bleak as Mukhopadhyay argue.

Lastly, dominant social forces in the villages tend to limit the power of NGOs. Those who are in power in the villages might hinder the implementation of MGNREGA because "proper implementation of these programmes may alter material conditions, access to resources and information, status, and positions of power, thereby threatening the existing power structure at the local level" (Sen, 1999, p. 350). Proper implementation of MGNREGA could lead to loss of patron status, and would explain why some Sarpanches and government officials are not engaging with MGNREGA.

Hence, blindly thinking CSO and civil society's involvement leads to improved implementation is naive. It is the same situation with CSOs as with government departments and the Sarpanch; personal commitment is important, and there are differences between the same type of organisations in how well they are doing. That some CSOs might be inefficient and not capable enough makes it more understandable that not all Sarpanches want to work with CSOs. There seems to be a trust issue between different levels of government and CSOs, making it harder for them to work together.

A peoples program?

The involvement of civil society and CSOs are increasing the importance of villagers under MGNREGA, their voice escalates, giving them more power as citizens of India. CUTS CART has said that the bigger role of NGOs are to unite people, and get their voices heard (CUTS-CART, 2016a). Since MGNREGA is a rights-based program, MGNREGA is giving people more confidence in their demands, and they are getting trained to claim their rights. However, people's involvement in the program has not been entirely successful. As the above discussion shows, it is difficult to engage people sufficiently. It is difficult for CSOs to know their role, and it is difficult for MGNREGA to function if the local government is not

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[47] Mukhopadhyay is a researcher based in New Delhi, and his comment is a general critique of CSOs. How much knowledge he has about CSOs working on the ground, in villages is uncertain. However, his insight is invaluable in giving a different perspective on the role of CSOs.

supporting the program. Tiwari said that if the government does not want MGNREGA, they can suffocate it, and people will have little to say (Tiwari, 2016).

From the intellectual, academic side, Kamal Tank argues MGNREGA is a people's program, and it is giving people self-respect. From the people's side, the village level, it is more difficult to see the involvement of rural poor (Tank, 2016). Not everyone understand that it is demand-based, often the Sarpanch grants work when he sees it fit, or there is work available. For the Sarpanch it might be useful for people not to know they can demand work, so he looks like a benevolent patron when he distributes work. Kishore remarked that one problem is that MGNREGA is a government program, however much CSOs were involved in its development, it is still a government program. According to Kishore, making MGNREGA a people's program would improve the implementation and the impact. The program would also be more visible because people would feel more ownership and spread the word (Kishore, 2016).

CUTS CART argues that people are changing, and with that their knowledge and understanding of their entitlements. RTI plays a role here, as well as other right-based changes over the last ten years. People are ready for a new system and their mindsets, and the governments' attitudes, are transforming (CUTS-CART, 2016a). MGNREGA still has a way to go before it has fully created engaged and active citizens. This should be a long-term goal of both CSOs and the government.

5 Conclusion

This thesis analyses the role of the Sarpanch and the role of CSOs under MGNREGA. These two factors and their effects on MGNREGA are important to examine because the work people receive under MGNREGA is contributing to changing people's lives. Rural poor are increasingly claiming their rights by being engaged and active citizens. Throughout this study I have looked at how the Sarpanch influence availability of work and implementation of MGNREGA, in addition to what role CSOs play in making rural poor engaged and access work under MGNREGA.

Rajasthan as a case was interesting to consider because of the state's history with CSOs, as well as its experience of implementing work programs before MGNREGA. This was marked by the high number of workdays Rajasthan produced between 2006 and 2010. This changed after 2010, for several reasons. CSOs did not have the same role to play after 2010. They were banned from participating in social audits after 2009, and the government no longer welcomed their involvement in the same way as before. The fall in implementation was by the government blamed on people not demanding work, but the discussion in this thesis shows that availability of work is a challenge. Clearly, the Sarpanch does not plan for enough work. This is because he lacks capacity to do so, in addition to personal will. Here CSOs can help with building the capacity of the Sarpanch, but also giving rural poor the necessary tools and knowledge to claim their rights and access work.

The top-down approach to implement good governance, a governance model that is participatory, inclusive, accountable, transparent, efficient and that follow the rule of law, is to a large degree dependent on the will of the Sarpanch. My study shows how difficult it is to penetrate all the way down to the lowest levels of governance, institutionalising good governance. This is because personal will and commitment of the Sarpanch is essential for anything to work in the Gram Panchayat. There are changes, and the district in Jaipur is making an effort to create more accountability and transparency with the role of the Ombudsman and social audits, fighting corruption. Still, there is a way to go here.

CSOs are working from the bottom-up to engage rural poor, in addition to connecting with the government on different levels, either to monitor work or to cooperate in the implementation of the program. The part CSOs can play is not always clear, and depends on the will of the CSO and the will of the local government in letting CSOs partake. MGNREGA

is well known today because of the active involvement of CSOs from the start, increasing people's knowledge about the program, and helping them claim their rightful benefits.

10 years of MGNREGA have gone by, changes have been made, but arguably not to a sufficient degree. However, MGNREGA has the potential to change rural structures in the sense that it gives more power to local elected leader, and especially the rural poor. MGNREGA opens up more to the possibility of CSOs. If the program continues the focus on accountability and transparency, the potential is there for MGNREGA to escalate its relevance and contribute to better governance.

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Appendix 1: Abbreviations

MGNREGA: Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act

CSO: Civil Society Organisations

GP: Gram Panchayat

GS: Gram Sabha

NGO: Non-Governmental Organisation

CUTS CART: Consumer Unity Trust Society - Centre for Consumer Action, Research and Training

Aravali: Association for Rural Advancement through Voluntary Action and Local Involvement

PACS: Poorest Areas Civil Society

FIAN India: Food first Information & Action Network India

RTI: Right to Information

MIS: Management Information System

MKSS: Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan

Appendix 2: List of informants

CUTS CART. Interview 04.05.2016 & 23.05.2016

An organisation working on development from the consumer's point of view, as well as good governance and Right to Information. Jaipur.

Sarpanch of Gaanv. Interview 25.05.2016

Jaipur.

Rajpal. Interview 22.03.2016

National program manager for Poorest Area Civil Societies (PACS). New Delhi.

Suman. Interview 06.04.2016

Director of Food first Information & Action Network (FIAN) India. FIAN India is a registered Indian section of FIAN international, working on the right to food, and the right to work. New Delhi.

Ratna M. Sudarshan. Interview 16.03.2016

Previous Director of Institute of Social Sciences Trust (ISST) and her main areas of research is gender equality and social change. New Delhi.

Manish Tiwari. Interview 24.05.2016

Joint Director of Shiv Charan Mathur Social Policy Research Institute. It is an institute doing research for the government as well as getting funding from other institutions and international organisations.

Krishna Tyagi. Interview 24.05.2016

Consultant for the Government of Rajasthan on MGNREGA. Previously worked with CSOs. Jaipur.

Anupama Jorwal. Interview 24.05.2016

Chief Executive Officer in the District of Jaipur. Jaipur.

Ambuj Kishore. Interview 05.05.2016

Programmes Director of Association for Rural Advancement through Voluntary Action and

Local Involvement (Aravali), established by the Government of Rajasthan. Aravali works on rural advancement through enhancing involvement. Jaipur.

Kamal Tank. Interview 27.05.2016
Works for Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS), a civil society organisation in Rajasthan. MKSS focus on the empowerment of rural workers and peasants. Jaipur.

Abhiroop Mukhopadhyay. Interview 13.04.2016
Associate Professor in the department of Economics at Indian Statistical Institute, recent topics of research is the implementation and effects of MGNREGA. New Delhi.

Anuj Bharti. 26.05.2016
Works for Vikaas, an organisation connected to the government in Rajasthan. The organisation works on rural and urban development, and their head office is in Jodhpur. Jaipur.