

“I want world sympathy in this battle of right against might”  
M.K. Gandhi, Dandi, 1930

2<sup>nd</sup> February 2009, JJA supporters threatened subtly and not so subtly to stay out of panchayat level mobilizations for NREGA by an assorted group of block and panchayat level elected representatives. Before this on visits to Jamua panchayat similar threats were metted out to them by the local Mukhya, her husband and supporters.

The Jan Jagaran Abhiyan (JJA) a nascent group working in Araria, believes in a just and equitable society. In it's endeavour to reach out to the last person it has found the NREGA a useful tool for mobilization. For a high out-migration district like Araria the NREGA also promises work in the village and thus saving workers from hazards of an unknown land and giving them a chance to stay back in their village and plan for it's development.

**November 17-21<sup>st</sup>:** Abhiyan carried out it's first padyatra, focusing on spreading awareness about the NREGA and also motivating workers to apply for work.

**December 12<sup>th</sup>, 2008:** Post Padyatra workers tried getting their applications received at the GP level, failing which a collective meeting with the PO was conducted on December 12<sup>th</sup>, 2008. The PO received work and job card applications.

**December 28<sup>th</sup> –29<sup>th</sup>, 2008:** Even when the NREGA states that workers demanding work should be given work within 15 days of their demand no works were opened even when the 15 days were over. Given this scenario workers and JJA supporters gathered at the 4 panchayats where they had asked for works with the slogan “kaam nahin to bhatta do”.



Clockwise: Rozgar diwas, workers ask for work at GP Sharanpur (29-12-2008) and GP Kismat Khawaspur (28-12-2008)



The Rozgar diwas threw up the same results in all 4 panchayats, there was no work to be opened at the GP level.

In the meanwhile Abhiyan karyakartas and supporters held panchayat level meetings in three neighbouring panchayats (Bangama, Chikni and Rampur Kodarkatti) where the same twin policy of spreading awareness and motivating workers to ask for work was adopted.

Another 15 days passed and still nothing. Feeling that nothing would happen if we kept waiting a large mobilization was planned for 29<sup>th</sup> January, 2009. Abiyan supporters went around the 8 panchayats where contacts had been made and workers had applied for work.

### **29<sup>th</sup> January 2009 Block Level Protest**

Our primary demands for this block level protest were:

- 1- Ensuring that work is given to people who demand work.**
- 2- Pay unemployment allowances due to workers.**
- 3- Ensuring that bank/post office accounts are opened in a speedy manner.**
- 4- Till accounts are opened cash payments should be continued and orders issued in this regard.**
- 5- Availability of the PRS at the GP level should be made known to GP residents through public notices. Along with the Rozgar diwas (to be held weekly on Wednesdays in every GP) GP offices need to be open on a daily basis to address the issues related to NREGA at the GP level.**
- 6- Making job cards available with all workers and that the cards are not hoarded by representatives and middlemen.**



L-R: A cross section of the gathering at the 29<sup>th</sup> protest, PO (NREGA, Araria block) addressing the gathering

The entire proceedings of the event started at around 12 noon. After sharing the contents of the memorandum and presenting the same to the PO, the PO was invited by a delegation of worker representatives from each panchayat, to address the gathered workers and address their demands.

To our first demand for work, the PO assured the gathering that even when the PRS were on strike, he would make alternative arrangements and start works, by February 5<sup>th</sup>, in Panchayats where demand for work was raised. He was however reluctant to receive unemployment allowance applications and refused to do so. To the other demands there were clear assurances but we reached a stalemate since the PO refused to receive the unemployment allowance applications.

After hours of negotiations, with failures the PO finally accepted to receive applications for unemployment allowance. A small but significant victory!





contribution in Indian Rupees. The Abhiyan is not a registered organization but we maintain our accounts and issue receipts for the donations we receive. Our expenses from 5<sup>th</sup> October to 5<sup>th</sup> December were given in our last update before this all expenses were voluntary and the Abhiyan made no reimbursements, though for flood relief work we took institutional and individual support (budget for which has already been sent). We will send future accounts updates like the last one from time to time.

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