

An essential part of Plan's work is to help create spaces for children and young people to discuss together the issues which affect their lives, then ensure adults respect their views so that children may be involved in community decision-making. This communication has been prepared with and by children directly and is intended to give a general sense of the kinds of issues children discuss and how they work together.

Children Helping to Create a Better Tomorrow!

The Government of India is implementing the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee scheme. This scheme guarantees a hundred days of wage-employment a year to a member of a rural household who volunteers to do unskilled manual work. Shri Bhuvneshwari Mahila Ashram (SBMA) together with Plan is playing an important role in spreading awareness of this scheme amongst people. Under the Employment Guarantee Act, social audits are suggested tools to ensure quality and transparency in the implementation of the employment guarantee scheme. Each village council is responsible for carrying out the audit and the Village Panchayat (village level governance body) which is also responsible for the implementation of the scheme is answerable to the council.

Dear Sponsor,

A warm hello from the Himalayas!

We, the girls and boys from the Uttarkashi district in the state of Uttarakhand feel proud to be able to share with you about our involvement in the larger issues of our community. Recently, we had the opportunity to be a part of a **social audit** process carried out in our area. We were fascinated to hear about it from the staff of SBMA-Plan and were very excited to



Social audit committee interviewing the villagers

learn that we could also be a part of it. Twenty seven of us - nine children and eighteen youths formed an audit committee and were given training on how to conduct the audit. We had members from all sections of the society and our group including ten girls.

Normally, a social audit is conducted by the village council and to be a member of the village council, one has to be above eighteen years. Nevertheless, because we have been taking part in discussions and planning of our community's development activities as part of children's groups, we were welcomed in the audit committee as well. It gave us great confidence and will also help us become more responsible citizens in the future.

"During the social audit, we felt we could play an important role in our society and can

actually participate in and influence our community development programmes." – Rajdeep, M, 17 yrs

How we did it...

After having trained us, SBMA-Plan also helped us in contacting the government officials at village, block and district level to conduct the audit on different construction sites done under the employment guarantee scheme, such as canals, check dams, rain water catchments and plantation boundary walls. We divided ourselves into three groups. The first group was responsible for checking the documents on the scheme such as the plan of the project, records of the meetings, people's applications and reports on the work done. The second group talked to the villagers to find out whether people were aware

of the scheme, if they were able to benefit from it and if they were provided with facilities at the work site such as a first aid box, drinking water, children's crèches, and shade for them to rest under and for use by any children who accompany their parents to the work site. The employer is also supposed to give insurance and additional labour charge if the site is more than five kilometres away from the community. The third group went to the construction site to verify the quality of the actual construction and of the material used.

“We always see men dominating and women rarely getting any opportunities. It was good to see so many women engaged not only in the employment scheme, but also in the audit process” – Meena, F, 18 yrs

We discovered...

Although the villagers were familiar with the scheme, they were not fully aware of their rights and the benefits provided in the scheme and therefore were not able to benefit fully from it. On many construction sites the first aid boxes, drinking water, insurance, additional wages and shade facilities were not provided. In most villages, the reports and records were not maintained. The village Panchayat was unaware of its duties and the village council did not know that they could question the Panchayat or play a role in the audit process. We also faced some reluctance from some of the Panchayat member. Some village council members shared that the Panchayat had made many promises about this scheme which were never fulfilled. They felt that this was just another survey and would not result in any concrete action. But, we did not lose heart and continued with our work. We have now put together our findings in form of a report and we are going to share it with our communities, the village council, the village Panchayat and other government officials. We were originally going to do this audit in ten villages, but as people began to get convinced of what we were doing, we got their support and were able to do it in thirteen villages. We have also made plans to talk about our findings during our children's group meetings as well as during different trainings that are conducted for the village council members.



Audit committee checking the records of the scheme



Audit committee checking the canal construction

A Ray of Hope...

Immediately after the audit in Bongadi village, the first aid box, drinking water and shade were provided at the work site. This small achievement motivates us to continue our efforts. Many Panchayat members have also promised to follow this example and are welcoming the audit. We hope that soon, people will be familiar not only with various schemes and facilities provided by the government, but also will be empowered to demand them and will be able to question authorities who fail to provide them. Social audits have

proven to be strong tools to empower people. SBMA-Plan is planning to train more children and youth on how to help plan, monitor and evaluate their village development activities and be part of social audits. **Our contribution may be small, but we believe every drop counts!**

“BE THE CHANGE YOU WANT TO SEE IN THE WORLD.” – Mahatma Gandhi

This document has been prepared by Richa Silakari (India Country Office) based on the views expressed by children and youth who participated in the social audit process.

**Names have been changed for child protection purposes*