

Measuring Rural People Awareness and Access to various government schemes – A Baseline study in six villages of Buxar District of Bihar

Abstract

The Bihar Census 2011 revealed that the state has the third highest population in the country of which around 88.71 percent live in the villages of rural areas. The population growth rate recorded for this decade (2001-2011) was 88.71%. Keeping pace with the vast population growth, in the recent past, Government's policy and programmes have laid strong emphasis on rural development through poverty alleviation, generation of income and employment opportunities and provision of infrastructure and basic facilities to meet the needs of rural poor. The central and state governments of India introduced number of plans and schemes on regular interval for the benefit of rural population especially those living below poverty line.

The number of such welfare schemes seems countless such that it is even difficult for any official to list all of them at once. One of the key objectives of these schemes is to ensure growth and inclusivity. But despite such huge efforts being made by the government the actual implementation of these programmes and schemes remains a far reality with little access and awareness of these among the rural masses.

The present research paper depicts the measure of access and awareness of people to such schemes in the Buxar district of Bihar where the interventions of Sahaj (NGO) has begun. Researchers worked with Sahaj, a NGO working in the states of Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. The major findings of the study are related to level of awareness in people about gram sabha's functioning, running helplines like Jigyasa and access to various welfare schemes like MNREGA, pensions, etc. The paper highlights the present status and scenario of government schemes and programs in terms of their actual benefit to people. The findings explore the real challenges before the government to reach maximum people to enhance the viability and devise strategies to improve the awareness and access to such schemes.

Background

Sahaj works in the villages of Bihar towards awareness generation and capacity building of volunteers and community groups. It works towards information dissemination of various government schemes among the target groups, facilitates application making through trained volunteer leaders. Sahaj has a regular and

intensive training programme for all community members who volunteer with Sahaj. Beginning its interventions in the Buxar district Sahaj conducted the present baseline surveys in the 6 villages of Niyayipur, Hadipuri and Chausa ward number 11 in Chausa panchayat, Nathpur in Itarhi Panchayat and Rawal Dera and KrishnaBrahm in Nuaon Panchayat during December 2012 to February

2013. The purpose was to understand the state of functioning of various programs and schemes in terms of their actual reach and



benefit to people to be able to work towards the gap areas identified during the interventions in these areas. Another important intention of the baseline survey was to provide first-hand experience to the community an insight into systematic planning and using the data to plan interventions for themselves through the Gram Sabha.

Objectives of the Baseline Survey

The two main objectives of the study were:

1. Creating a database of primary information of families and village resources and identification of their needs.
2. Measuring the awareness and access to various government schemes in the six villages of Buxar district



Methodology

The study applied mixed methodology – a combination of quantitative and qualitative techniques - to collect information from the field. The data has been collected from six villages of Buxar district where Sahaj has its interventions.

The survey was conducted through

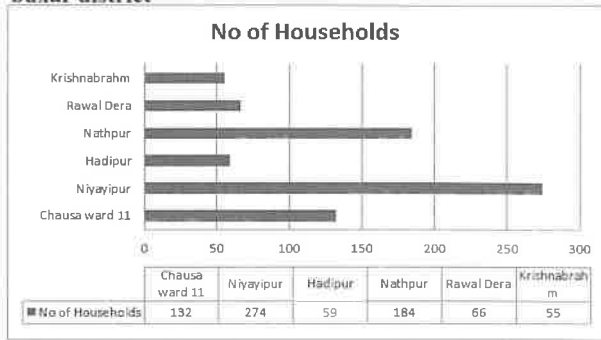
1. Community resource mapping exercise along with people of the villages in groups
2. Household survey using semi-structured questionnaire

Before conducting the exercise an orientation exercise was carried on with community groups. A detailed discussion was carried on about the objectives with the people. The community groups were also informed about its use in village level planning and how we can use it in Gram Sabha. Volunteers were invited from the community after these discussions. They were then trained using dummy respondents and also pilot testing of questionnaire was done before the actual data collection. A draft questionnaire was first drafted and pilot tested with 15 people and changes were incorporated based on feedback emerging from it. A resource mapping exercise was undertaken with the community to map households and community resources.

Population of study

All the households were covered for the study. 770 Households in total from all the six villages from Buxar district were covered (Fig.1). The data was analysed using SPSS.

Figure 1 showing no. of households in the six villages of buxar district



Points kept in mind while conducting survey:

1. Previous experience with baselines has been that if the community does not own and understand the purpose and process it leads to creation of unrealistic expectations among people about the organisation conducting the survey. Thus, purpose of the survey was clearly discussed with the villagers.



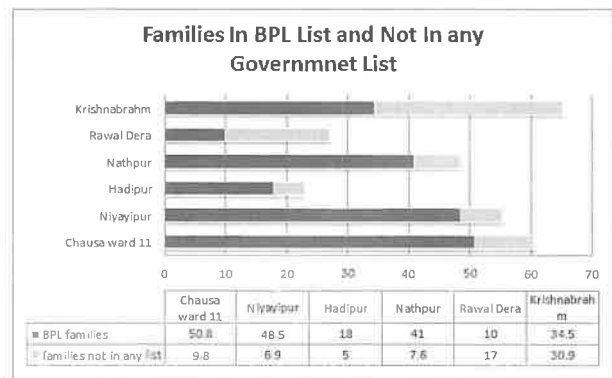
2. Involvement of village people has been ensured for credibility of the data. Lack of understanding and non-involvement leads to distrust in the minds of people and the information becomes either exaggerated as in case where a service is required and under-reported like incomes and employment.

Findings:

Each of the six villages under study are quite different from each other, thus no general conclusions have been drawn. However, some important commonalities visible are as follows:

1. In all the six villages there are large numbers of households who have not even been enumerated in the BPL list of the government. They are not included in any of the category in the list. Krishnabrahm village has the highest percentage (30.9%) of people not enumerated (Fig. 2).

Fig. 2 Percentage of households as per the BPL list per village



1. Nearly 45% people get information about government schemes from other people excluding panchayat functionaries. This number varies significantly across villages going up to even 75% in some. (Fig.3) TV and Radio and newspaper form less than 15% through which information is reaching people in all villages. The helplines started by government have also not been of much help. Less than 10% households know about MNREGA and Jigyasa help lines (Fig.4). Although a significant number of people (30%) responded that the Right to Public Service (RTPS) has made access to few schemes a little easier as compared to earlier

which is one positive feedback provided by few people in the villages.

Figure 3 Other people as source of information about government schemes for people

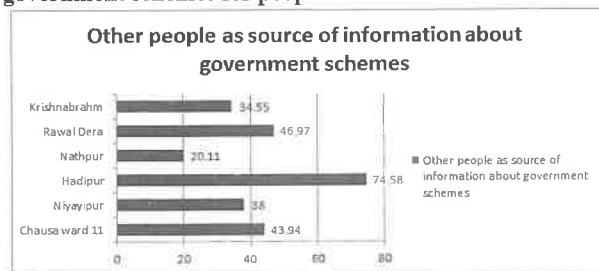
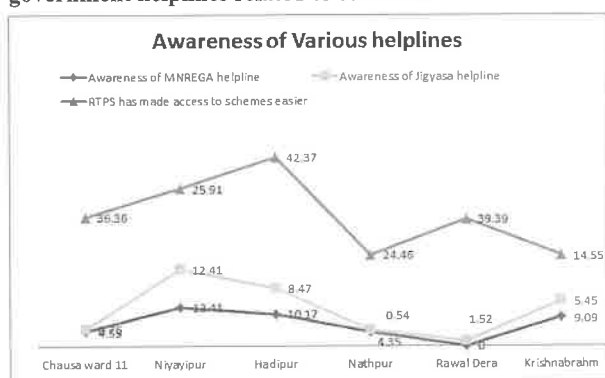
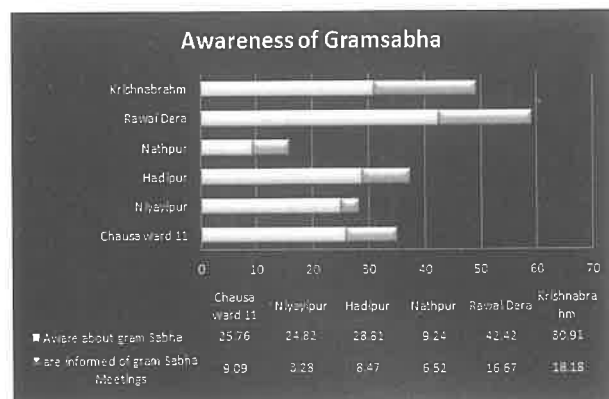


Figure 4 percentage of people aware about various government helplines related to schemes.



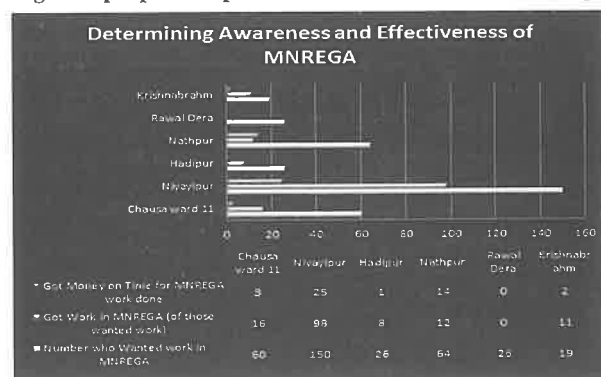
- Only about 27% households are aware about what Gram Sabha is. Only 10% households responded that they are informed about Gram Sabha meetings. This highly indicates unawareness among people about their basic rights and the system of government of which they are supposed to be active participants (Fig.5).

Figure 5 percentage of people aware about Gram Sabhas



4. 345 of 770 households in the six villages responded as wanting to work in MNREGA. Thus demand for work under MNREGA is high but 60% of those did not get work. (Fig.6) The present data also relates and validates other reports published regarding the status of MNREGA. The Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India, in a report released on August 1, 2013 have pointed out large-scale discrepancies in the implementation of the Centre's rural job programme in Bihar. CAG report mentions that only seven percent of a total of 13.4million registered families holding MNREGA job cards were provided jobs for 100 days from 2007 to 2013.

Figure 6 people's responses about MNREGA in six villages



- There are other major social issues also reported still prevalent in the villages like Child marriages with 176 child marriages reported in the 6 villages despite various schemes and campaigns to reduce them. (Table 1)

Table1 Percentage of child marriages

Name of the Village	Percentage of child marriages reported
Nyayipur	47
Chausa Ward 11	33
Nathpur	6
Haadipur	2
Rawaldera	8
Krishnabrahm	4

6. The status of child rights provisions are also not reported to be good which clearly indicates all the efforts made by government going in vein with little or no desired outcomes. 182 children were reported as having dropped out of school which will be an under-reporting as experience has shown more than these being enrolled but out of school. Less than 15% families know about Right to Education and its provisions and majority are not aware about school management committees and permanent committees of Panchayats.

Table 2 Shows awareness about Right to education among people

Name of the Village	Percentage of Households aware about RTI
Nyayipur	11
Chausa Ward 11	22
Nathpur	13
Haadipur	27
Rawaldera	7
Krishnabrahm	20

7. Information and access to vocational skills programme is very glaring despite both the state government's and national government giving major push to it. Lack of skill and vocational guidance programs and required support for entrepreneurship were sighted as major reasons for not being able to start business despite intending to start one. A large number of households reported that they wanted to start a business but could not do so for lack of ideas and understanding of what and how to go about it (Fig 7).

Figure 7 Response regarding idea of starting business and experiences



Suggestions:

1. Making a pro-people government with increased transparency in the systems is the most important step to good governance and development. The proper flow and sharing of information makes the entire system transparent which would reduce the malfunctioning being caused by undesirable elements. Awareness among people would demand for reform and call for more responsive administration.
2. As reported in the findings people get aware about important information mainly through local sources in the villages, thus the role of extension workers appointed by panchayats/ government or alternatives like NGOs could be explored and incorporated as part of the system on regular basis to strengthen the system of information flow.
3. Ward members and panchayat functionaries are the closest representatives of people. However, they are still far behind in providing information and facilitating access to people. This could be because of limited skills and poor information on their part itself. Capacity building of panchayat members and having an information repository at the panchayat level will be of great help in this.

4. The role of Common Service centres (CSC) is also crucial in this. As they are networked with the cyber world and hence capable of accessing information available there. Private enterprise for providing information can also be promoted at the village level on the lines of CSCs.

References:

1. Bohra O P (2000), "Decentralisation and Devolution of Powers and Functions to Panchayats", Journal of Rural Development, Vol. 19, No. 2, pp. 185-197.
2. Burney S M H (1967), "Panchayati Raj and Resource Mobilisation", Kurukshetra, Vol. 16, No. 1, pp. 35-40 and 43.
3. Chandrashekar B K (2000) (Ed.), Panchayati Raj in India: Status Report, 1999, Task Force on Panchayati Raj, Rajiv Gandhi Foundation, New Delhi, March.
4. Das, Arvind N., 1983. Agrarian Unrest and Socio-economic Changes in Bihar, 1900-1980. Delhi: Manohar.
5. Das, Arvind N., 1992. The Republic of Bihar. New Delhi: Penguin.
6. Government of Bihar, various years. Crops and Seasons Report. Patna: Directorate of Statistics and Evaluation.
7. Government of Bihar, various years.

Statistical Abstracts. Patna: Directorate of Statistics and Evaluation.

9. Hauser, Walter, 1961. 'The Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha, 1929-1949: A Study of an Indian Peasant Movement'. PhD Thesis, University of Chicago.
10. Januzzi, F.T., 1974. Agrarian Crisis in India: The Case of Bihar. New Delhi: SangamBooks.
11. Jha, Praveen K., 1997a. Agricultural Labour in India. New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House.

Authors:

- Dr. Hari Shankar Shyam, Assistant Professor, School of Business Studies, Sharda University
- Mr Shwetank Mishra, Team Leader, Sahaj, Ranchi
- Dr. Deepti Dutt, PhD, Psychology, Delhi University
- Mr. Shashank Mehra, Assistant Professor, School of Business Studies, Sharda University
- Dr. Anil Roy Dubey, Associate Professor, Skyline University, Sharjah
