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Manor, JG, (2011) Enforcing Transparency: Enhancing Poor People's Access to Information in India.
ESRC End of Award Report, RES-167-25-0337. Swindon: ESRC

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RESEARCH COUNCIL END OF AWARD REPORT



For awards ending on or after 1 November 2009

This End of Award Report should be completed and submitted using the **grant reference** as the email subject, to **reportsofficer@esrc.ac.uk** on or before the due date.

The final instalment of the grant will not be paid until an End of Award Report is completed in full and accepted by ESRC.

Grant holders whose End of Award Report is overdue or incomplete will not be eligible for further ESRC funding until the Report is accepted. ESRC reserves the right to recover a sum of the expenditure incurred on the grant if the End of Award Report is overdue. (Please see Section 5 of the ESRC Research Funding Guide for details.)

Please refer to the Guidance notes when completing this End of Award Report.

Grant Reference	RES-167-25-0337		
Grant Title	Enforcing Transparency: Enhancing Poor People's Access to Information in India		
Grant Start Date	1 January 2008	Total Amount	£183,178.28
Grant End Date	30 April 2011	Expended:	
Grant holding Institution	Institute of Commonwealth Studies, School of Advanced Study, University of London		
Grant Holder	James Manor		
Grant Holder's Contact Details	Address	Email	
	Institute of Commonwealth Studies, Senate House, University of London, Malet Street, London WC1E 7HU	james.manor@sas.ac.uk	
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Co-Investigators (as per project application):		Institution	

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1. NON-TECHNICAL SUMMARY

Please provide below a project summary written in non-technical language. The summary may be used by ESRC to publicise your work and should explain the aims and findings of the project. *[Max 250 words]*

We analysed the workings of the world's largest poverty programme, India's Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA). It is meant to be demand-driven – giving every rural household the right to 100 days employment annually on works projects, as a hedge against destitution. It has stronger transparency mechanisms than any poverty programme on earth. We focused intensely on them.

Our findings are complex and ambiguous. Some are encouraging. It is harder to steal from the NREGA than from any other Indian programme, it is exceedingly difficult to steal from workers' wages, and those wages make a significant material difference to a vast number of households. But our study revealed both the best and worst of the Indian state. It is admirable that the government should have created such a progressive programme, implemented it determinedly, and funded it generously. But we encountered an acute 'allergy' among many bureaucrats and politicians to transparency and downward accountability.

We found that enhanced transparency is insufficient to ensure fundamental change. Downward accountability – which occurs less often – is also required, and harder to achieve.

We found that political dynamics strongly influence events, for good and ill. A key virtue of this programme is its potential impact on poor people's 'political capacity': their political awareness, confidence, skills and connections – a severe shortage of which is one important dimension of their 'poverty'. But officials' 'allergy' curtailed the NREGA's constructive impact on political capacity.

Civil society organisations improve that impact, but their reach is limited.

2. PROJECT OVERVIEW

a) Objectives

Please state the aims and objectives of your project as outlined in your proposal to the ESRC. *[Max 200 words]*

We succeeded in moving beyond vague, general analyses of access to information and transparency, and in developing an authoritative analysis of NREGA impact on the poor. We gave the Ministry that ran it and the Prime Minister's Office ideas which triggered policy change to enhance poor people's access to information (see Impacts below). We shared ideas with civil society organisations that help poor people make better use of information. When we got full access to NREGA data, we found that it did not yield detailed accounts of NREGA workings, but they helped inform our surveys of poor people in 2 states which fulfilled that objective. (A dataset containing the results of those surveys, submitted to ESDS – together with our book text – complete that task.) We have disseminated findings to Indian government and civil society actors in many discussions & to development agencies in a December 2010 workshop. Three policy papers have been developed and are being disseminated through the UN University and the International Centre for Local Democracy (Sweden). In January 2012 we will consult further with CHRI, Samarthan and PRIA (civil society organisations to which we have given evidence for policy papers) about further policy papers (which they prefer to be joint efforts). A full account of these will appear in our early 2012 Impacts report.

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b) Project Changes

Please describe any changes made to the original aims and objectives, and confirm that these were agreed with the ESRC. Please also detail any changes to the grant holder's institutional affiliation, project staffing or funding. *[Max 200 words]*

The aims and objectives remained unchanged. As the research proceeded, it became apparent that the core issue of transparency was intimately bound up with other issues such as accountability, and with the broad workings of the government programme that we were studying. We therefore examined those things as well. But that was anticipated in our proposal.

No changes occurred in institutional affiliation, project staffing or funding.

c) Methodology

Please describe the methodology that you employed in the project. Please also note any ethical issues that arose during the course of the work, the effects of this and any action taken. *[Max. 500 words]*

We used both surveys which yielded quantitative data, and interviews with poor people at the grassroots and with knowledgeable informants at all levels which yielded qualitative evidence.

The surveys were conducted among poor people in carefully selected localities in each of the two states. The types of localities visited in each state were similar. In each, we conducted surveys in areas where civil society organisations were, and were not, active – to assess their impact. We also selected a range of localities which captured the social diversity (especially among the poor) within each state – for example, localities where 'tribals' (Adivasis) were numerically strong, and localities where Dalits (ex-untouchables) were numerically strong.

The samples were carefully constructed so that a representative sample of the rural poor (based on census data) – in terms of age, gender, caste, etc. – would be consulted.

The surveys were administered in both states by the same, well trained team of enumerators – to avoid variations in results which might have arisen if different teams had been deployed. Each team consisted of half men and half women, so that men could interview men and women could interview women (an advisable practice in India).

Surveys contained very specific questions, so that they did not elicit vague answers to general queries. They asked about every step in a poor person's interactions with the NREGA system, and about local social and political dynamics which influence the programme's implementation. Surveys also asked about the uses to which NREGA wages were put, about the impact of wages on the material well being of poor people, and about the possible impact of engagement by poor people with the NREGA and thus the public sphere on their 'political capacity' (see above).

We conducted interviews with poor people and knowledgeable informants in the same localities where the surveys had previously occurred – and in others. We did intense interviewing in a small number of districts of each state, and did so less intensively in others – to place the main research sites in comparative perspective. We sought to analyse 'best case' districts (where the NREGA was working well), 'worst case' districts, and ambiguous districts. (The last of these categories contains most districts.) We interviewed elected politicians and bureaucrats, as well as knowledgeable informants independent of government (civil society activists, journalists, lawyers, other professional people, information technology specialists since the NREGA makes heavy use of IT, etc.), at sub-district and district levels. This yielded

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insights into political dynamics, attempts at corrupt acts, conditions which make corrupt acts possible, the 'allergy' among many bureaucrats and politicians to transparency and accountability, the crucial interactions between elected local councils and sub-district bureaucrats, and every aspect of the NREGA's management.

We also interviewed bureaucrats and politicians at the state level, along with knowledgeable informants – and similar people at the national level. We maintained dialogues with many other analysts who are studying aspects of the NREGA. Several of these sources above the local level provided documents of various types which have been thoroughly examined.

d) Project Findings

Please summarise the findings of the project, referring where appropriate to outputs recorded on the ESRC website. Any future research plans should also be identified. *[Max 500 words]*

(This brief account only begins to explain our complex findings.)

The NREGA's strong transparency mechanisms, plus mandatory payments to workers through bank accounts, make it extremely difficult for powerful actors at the local level to steal from workers' wages. The bank accounts also reveal attempted thefts to workers. So these mechanisms make poor workers more politically aware and sometimes more assertive.

But since the mechanisms almost entirely target the local level, they do not restrain corrupt officials at higher levels from squeezing local actors for kickbacks before issuing essential approvals. Also, because many political actors at all levels are strongly 'allergic' to transparency and downward accountability, they often prevent the only transparency mechanism which they can sabotage -- social audits -- from working effectively. So the transparency mechanisms have limitations.

Our analysis encountered the Indian state at both its best and worst. The 'best' is evident from national leaders' willingness to create a rights-based, demand-driven programme -- with teeth, to ensure that those two things often become realities. India's leaders welcome the massive uptake on the NREGA, even though that implies immense expenditure. They allowed progressive civil society leaders to help design the programme – even though the latter included provisions that reveal attempts at theft to poor people, which inspires discontent among them and catalyses proactive engagement by them in local politics. Few other governments in the developing world have the confidence and the progressive outlook to contemplate such things. This ensures that in many localities, the 'political capacity' of poor people has been enhanced – so that their 'poverty' is reduced not just in economic terms but in terms of their capabilities. Powerful actors who have supported the effective functioning of the NREGA at key points include (surprisingly) Members of Parliament, and at the state level, progressive senior politicians and bureaucrats in many (though not all) states. NREGA wages have often enabled poor people to feed their families adequately, to avoid 'distress migration' for work (which disrupts family life and prevents children from attending school), and to make small investments that increase incomes further. That erodes iniquitous ties of dependency upon local elites.

The 'worst' of the Indian state is apparent in the resistance of many other political actors to transparency and downward accountability. That has often caused opportunities for NREGA employment to be rationed and bestowed from above – which defeats the intention of enlightened leaders that it be rights-based and demand-driven. And in many places, too little effort has been made to make poor rural dwellers aware that they have the right to work. Our surveys show awareness of that to be dismal.

The same state that suffers from a strong 'allergy' to transparency and downward

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accountability also created the NREGA – which challenges that allergy. These different impulses coexist incongruously at the heart of the Indian state today.

e) Contributions to wider ESRC initiatives (eg Research Programmes or Networks)

If your project was part of a wider ESRC initiative, please describe your contributions to the initiative's objectives and activities and note any effect on your project resulting from participation. *[Max. 200 words]*

Our project was not part of a wider ESRC initiative.

3. EARLY AND ANTICIPATED IMPACTS

a) Summary of Impacts to date

Please summarise any impacts of the project to date, referring where appropriate to associated outputs recorded on the ESRC website. This should include both scientific impacts (relevant to the academic community) and economic and societal impacts (relevant to broader society). The impact can be relevant to any organisation, community or individual. *[Max. 400 words]*

The main impact among scholars and policy analysts will occur when the book that we are completing is published. Our findings have, however, had considerable influence via lectures and as yet unpublished papers to various groups: an international conference organised by the Indian government, the UNDP, the International Centre for Local Democracy (Sweden), the U.S. Agency for International Development, the World Bank's Asia governance centre (Bangkok), the Global Transparency Initiative (Cape Town), a workshop for scholars, civil society leaders, international development agencies, and government policy makers in Delhi in December 2010, and at Jawaharlal Nehru University, Johns Hopkins University, the Carter Center (Atlanta), the New School (New York), and the Universities of Mysore, Hyderabad, London, Leiden, and Johannesburg.

We have been surprised by our impact in the 'real world'. We have repeatedly shared findings with India's Planning Commission and Rural Development Ministry. At the Ministry's request, we identified three significant problems affecting the NREGA. They solved two immediately, by introducing changes that we suggested. The third (and most serious) problem could only be tackled at the highest levels of government. We therefore raised the issue with an official we knew in the Prime Minister's Office. He requested a memo explaining the problem and a solution. This was provided. Our arguments were then considered in inter-ministerial meetings. We also discussed the issue with an influential official in the ruling party who agreed to press for a change in policy. Eleven months later (things take time), the change was made.

Finally, in June 2011, we were invited to explain the NREGA in Pretoria to officials from the South African President's Office, the Treasury and other ministries. They are considering a version of the Indian programme. This was well received. We also gave a lecture on the Indian programme in Johannesburg where the discussant was the leader of the Congress of South African Trade Unions – a powerful figure within the ruling party and a strong advocate of an employment guarantee scheme. His presence ensured that the discussion was aired on television

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and on the front pages of newspapers the next day. All of this appears to have enhanced the prospects for such a programme in South Africa. After returning from South Africa, we have been drawn into discussions with the South Africa desk at the International Secretariat of Amnesty International which is interested in encouraging an employment guarantee programme in that country.

b) Anticipated/Potential Future Impacts

Please outline any anticipated or potential impacts (scientific or economic and societal) that you believe your project might have in future. *[Max. 200 words]*

We anticipate that the book which we are writing (which covers the entire research project and which is nearing completion) will have a significant impact among academics and people in the policy community when it appears.

We also remain in discussion with officials in the Indian government, especially in the Planning Commission and the Ministry of Rural Development about the workings of the rural employment programme which we have studied. And as luck would have it, the new minister appointed at Rural Development last week is a person with strong analytical capacities, with whom we have worked closely before. It therefore seems likely that we will continue to make an impact within the government.

We have also been told that we should expect requests from senior officials in the South African government, and in the Congress of South African Trade Unions, for further briefings on the working of the Indian programme – as they consider the adoption of something similar.

You will be asked to complete an ESRC Impact Report 12 months after the end date of your award. The Impact Report will ask for details of any impacts that have arisen since the completion of the End of Award Report.

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4. DECLARATIONS

Please ensure that sections A, B and C below are completed and signed by the appropriate individuals.
The End of Award Report will not be accepted unless all sections are signed.

Please note hard copies are NOT required; electronic signatures are accepted and should be used.

A: To be completed by Grant Holder

Please read the following statements. Tick ONE statement under ii) and iii), then sign with an electronic signature at the end of the section (this should be a image of your actual signature).

i) The Project

This Report is an accurate overview of the project, its findings and impacts. All co-investigators named in the proposal to ESRC or appointed subsequently have seen and approved the Report.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
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ii) Submissions to the ESRC website (research catalogue)

Output and impact information has been submitted to the ESRC website. Details of any future outputs and impacts will be submitted as soon as they become available.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
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OR

This grant has not yet produced any outputs or impacts. Details of any future outputs and impacts will be submitted to the ESRC website as soon as they become available.	<input type="checkbox"/>
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OR

This grant is not listed on the ESRC website.	<input type="checkbox"/>
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iii) Submission of Datasets

Datasets arising from this grant have been offered for deposit with the Economic and Social Data Service.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
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OR

Datasets that were anticipated in the grant proposal have not been produced and the Economic and Social Data Service has been notified.	<input type="checkbox"/>
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OR

No datasets were proposed or produced from this grant.	<input type="checkbox"/>
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