

MKSS and Jan Sunwais

Under the slogan 'Our Money-Our Accounts', MKSS workers and villagers organised themselves to demand their local administrators to provide them with an account of all expenditure made in relation to development work sanctioned for the area. While there was resistance at all levels, little by little, as public pressure continued and the media began to take notice, the Government relented and eventually provided the information requested.

MKSS then used the information disclosed to organise 'social audits' of the administration's books. They organised Jan Sunwais/public hearings to see if the information in the government's records tallied with the reality of the villagers' own knowledge of what was happening on the ground. Not surprisingly, it did not. At each public hearing, a description of the development project, its timelines, implementation methods, budget and outputs would be read out along with the record of who had been employed, how long they had worked and how much they had been paid. Villagers would then stand up and point out discrepancies - dead people were listed, amounts paid were recorded as being higher than in reality, absent workers were marked present and their pay recorded as given, and thumb impressions that prove receipt of payments were found to be forged. Most tellingly, public works like roads, though never actually constructed, were marked completed in government books. Though many villagers were illiterate, through face-to-face public hearings they could scrutinise complex and detailed accounts, question their representatives and make them answerable on the basis of hard evidence.