

Raju: 1 Billion(!) Trees planted in a Day!

Author - Samarpita Mukherjee Sharma, Published on - 5.8.2014

An Indian civil servant, SM Raju, has come up with a novel way of providing employment to millions of poor in the eastern state of Bihar. *According to a report by BBC from September 19th, 2009 with the title " Meeting India's tree planting guru", SM Raju organised 300'000 villagers from 7,500 Villages from Bihar state in a mass tree planting ceremony held on August 30th, 2009. As per the BBC, report the target was the plantation of one billion trees within a single day from 6 am to 6 pm.* Compiled by Samarpita Mukherjee Sharma OK, folks. We thought we're cool by off-setting a few grams of CO2. Here's how to go at it. Yes, you CAN do this in your place, if people wake up. What a legend! Check out Raju: *The 'green' man*

Raju is a senior civil servant presently posted as Commissioner of Tirhut Division in Bihar, India. He has introduced innovations in the field of poverty elimination through social forestry at the bottom line of economic pyramid in rural Bihar. He has also integrated the Indian government's rural employment scheme (NREGA) to forest development. Raju has served the state of Bihar for the last 18 years. He hails from the state of Karnataka is an Agriculture Science graduate. Born in a village called Sultanpet, Chikkaballapur District (Karnataka, India) on 3 July 1960 in a family of farmers, he was christened Sultanpet Munilakkappa Raju.

"They would get the full payment if they can ensure the survival of 90% of the plants under their care. For a 75-80% survival rate, they will be paid only half the wage. If the survival rate is less than 75%, the families in the group will be replaced," the guidelines say.

Achievements Raju's work has led to an increase in environment related consciousness in the government of Bihar, which has earmarked a sum of Rs. 700 crore (Approximately 150 million US dollars) for this project for a period of three years. Rural Bihar underwent an extreme level of depletion of forest cover in the last fifty years, resulting in massive level of drought and flood in the past decades. His past achievements include the redevelopment of Mahabodhi temple and its precincts in Bodhi Gaya as the District Magistrate of Gaya in the late 90s. It is believed that Gautama Buddha received enlightenment there. The project was supported by the Overseas Economic Co-operative Fund, Bihar. Through the efforts of Raju, the temple complex received world heritage monument recognition by UNESCO. **'Lack of awareness'** Raju has linked his "social forestry" programme to the central government's National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) which is also designed to provide employment to poor people. I told the villagers that they would get 100 days employment in a year simply by planting trees and protecting them SM Raju. Under NREGA – initiated in February 2006 as the government's most ambitious employment generation scheme for poor people – the authorities are bound by law to provide a minimum of 100 days of employment a year to members of families living below the poverty line. About 44% of Bihar's population falls into this category. "The scheme has brought benefits to thousands of families since its implementation," said a recent International Labour Organisation report. But Mr Raju says that Bihar – being the poorest and most lawless state of India – has not been able to spend the allocated NREGA funds. "This is because of a lack of awareness among officials about the scheme," he said. The poor monsoon this year has led to lower agricultural outputs, while flash floods in some northern districts have made the situation even worse, he said. "So the idea struck to my mind, why not involve families below the poverty line in social forestry and give them employment under this scheme for 100 days? "Under the scheme, each family can earn a minimum of 10,200 rupees (\$210)."

The path he followed

The civil servant immediately made a blueprint of his idea and got the support of senior state officials. In June Mr Raju released a comprehensive booklet of "dos and don'ts" and distributed it to village heads and district officials. His initiative meant that NREGA funds were fully utilised – in the past this has not always been the case. "I told the villagers that they would get 100 days employment in a year simply by planting trees and protecting them. The old, handicapped and widows would be given preference," he explained. Every village council has now been given a target of planting 50,000 saplings – a group of four families has to plant 200 seedlings and they must protect them for three years till the plants grow sturdier. Under NREGA rules, each worker has to be paid 100 rupees (\$2) per day for 100 days in a year. World record Recently, he made a world record by planting 9.6 million plants in a single day with the help of villagers in the state of Bihar, India. The Guinness Book of World Records registered the plantation of 5,41,176 saplings on a single day on July 15, 2009, in Pakistan. However, the state of Bihar broke the record by planting almost 20 times more trees on a single day, although this has not been included in the book as of December 2009.

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