

# Knowledge, Power & Action : Towards an Understanding of Implementation Failures in a Government Scheme



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Biswatosh Saha & Ram Kumar Kakani  
XLRI Jamshedpur



# Introduction

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- ❑ This paper is an interpretational journey through the process of implementation of the food for work wage employment generation program ... known as ... Sampoorna Grameen Rozgar Yojana (SGRY)
- ❑ SGRY is designed and sponsored by the Central Government in India.
- ❑ The scheme was designed to provide wage employment support to the lowest strata of rural society during the lean agricultural season by taking up a program of rural public asset and infrastructure construction.
  - Lean agriculture season is when demand for wage labour linked rural economic activities is at its lowest.



# SGRY ...

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- ❑ The scheme was launched with an ambitious target of generating 100 crore mandays of employment in rural areas
- ❑ In 2002-03, the allocation on SGRY by Government of India was more than Rs 9,000 crores
  - More than half-of the allocation was in the form of food grains supplied by FCI i.e., more than 5 million tonnes of grains (rice and wheat)
- ❑ Funds and food grains were allocated every year in each district based on - a) the backwardness of the district; b) submission of reports; and c) utilization of past allocation of resources

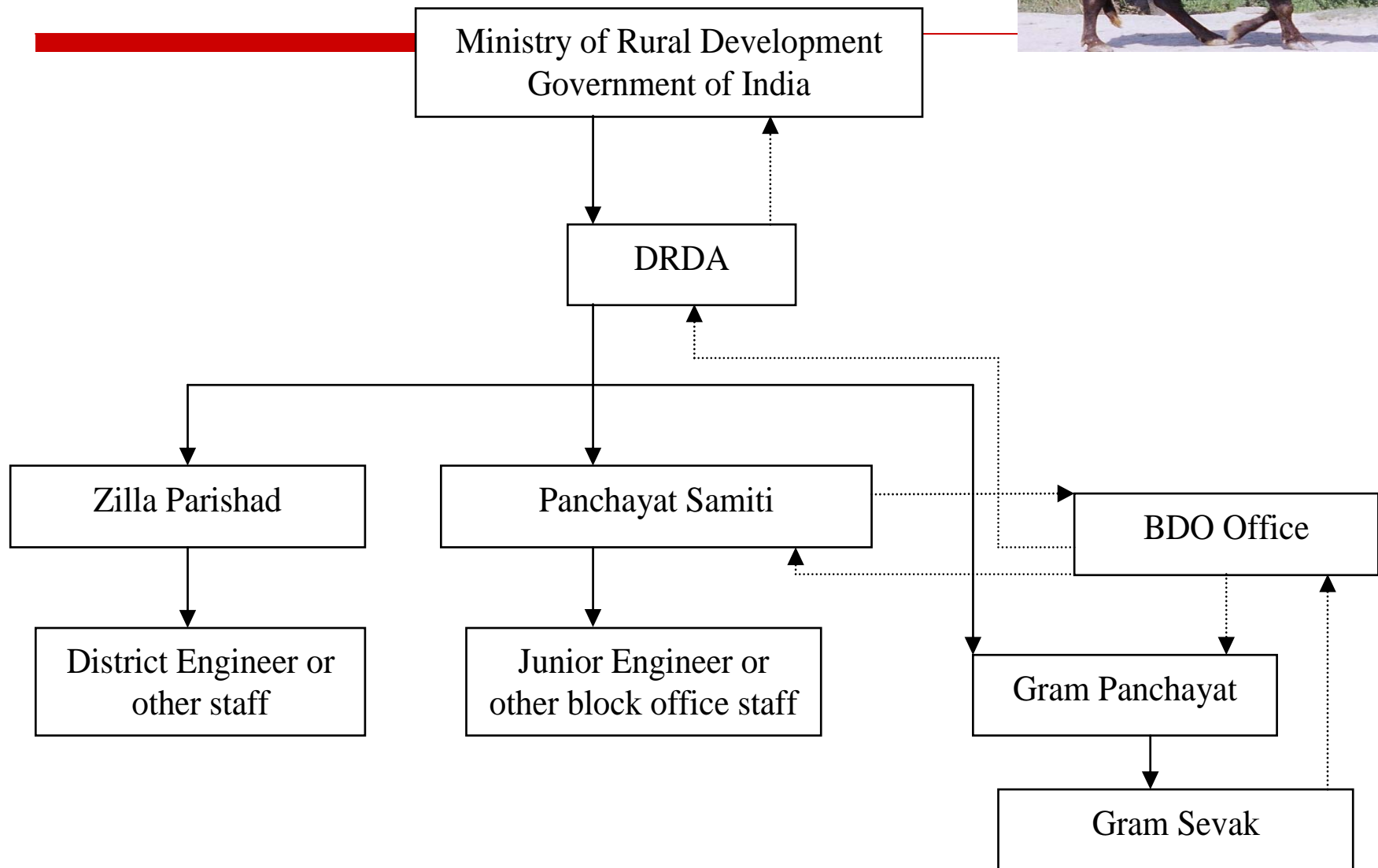


# Design of SGRY

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- ❑ The design of the program, in terms of 'norms' and 'rules' that governed implementation flowed out of a 'knowledge claim'
- ❑ What is 'Knowledge Claim' here ...
- ❑ A perception about the rural reality shared by those who designed the program at the level of the central government.

# SGRY Process



# District-wise Blocks and Panchayats selected for study



District →	Bhojpur	East Champaran	Khagaria	Katihar
No. of blocks	14	27	7	16
Blocks selected	Jagdishpur, Charpokhri	Turkaulia, Areraj	Parwatta, Beldaur	Korha, Mansahi
Number of Panchayats in selected blocks	20 and 11 respectively	16 and 14 respectively	22 and 16 respectively	23 and 7 respectively





**A Pacca (Pakka) Road Constructed under SGRY in Katihar Dt.**



# Probing Further ...

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- The design of the program flowed out of a perception about the rural reality at the level of the central government.
- The paper took up a few such 'norms' as defined within the structure of the scheme and looked into how it was interpreted and often 'breached' at the 'level of implementation' by agencies responsible for implementation.
- 'Level of Implementation' here is the field of 'action'.





## Implementation Guidelines ...

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- ❑ The guidelines emphasize that labour intensive works are to be taken up in the scheme
- ❑ For works taken up in the scheme, the 'norms' specify an implicit wage:non-wage ratio at 3:1
  - At least 5 Kg of grains are to be provided per man-day (through PDS), with the remaining part of the minimum wage being provided as cash payment
- ❑ Non adherence to the implicit ratio has costs for the local government bodies
  - Low food grain utilization would lead to lower food grain and fund allocation for the next year

# Implementation

## Issues ...

- ❑ We found most projects taken up would involve around 10-15% of project expense as wage payment
- ❑ The deviation from the norm is to be interpreted
- ❑ The guidelines also indicate that the process of selection of works should be participatory and projects that satisfy 'felt needs' of the local community are to be taken



# Implementation Issues ...

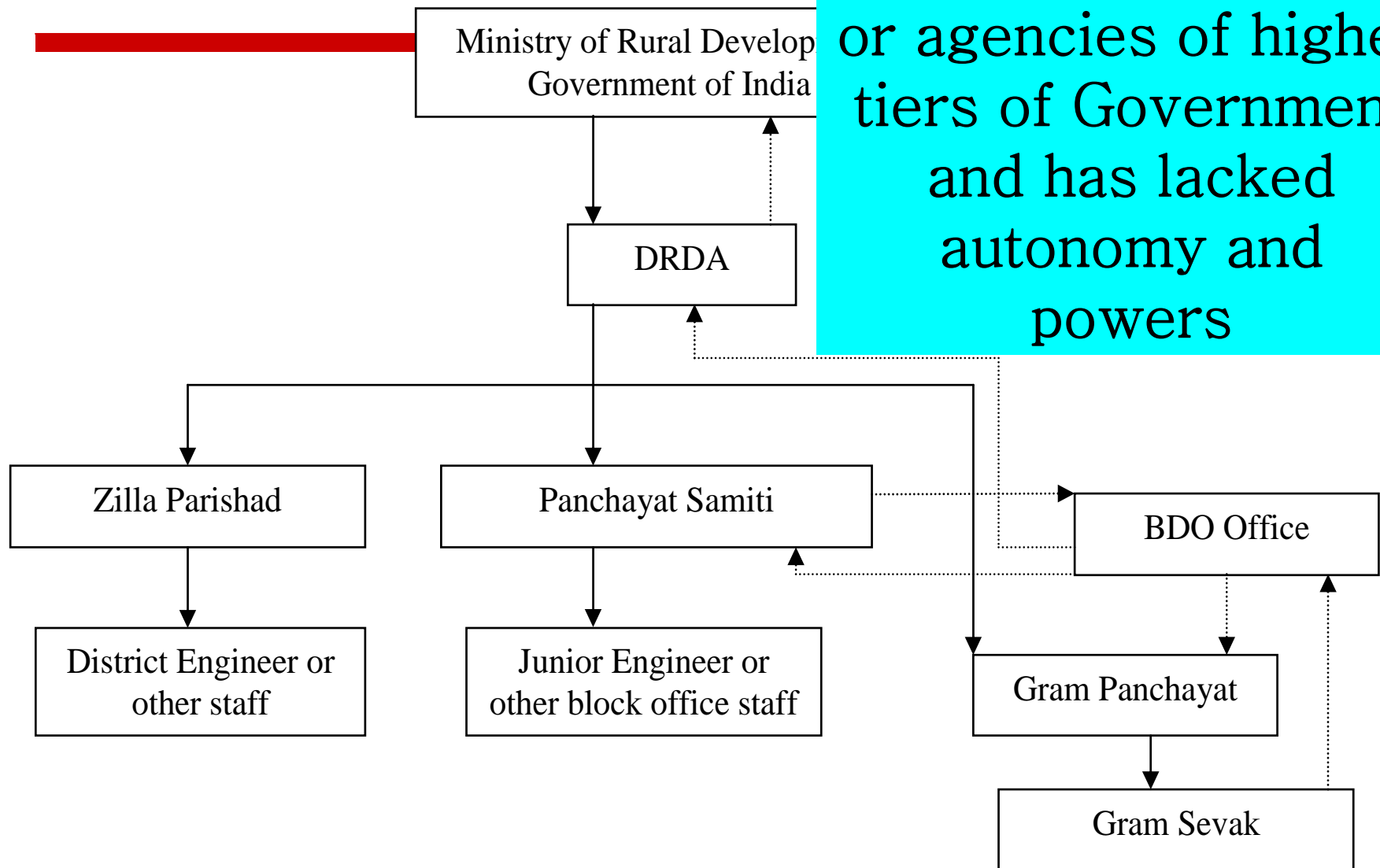
**What is a 'felt need' of the rural community then and how does it find an expression?**



- At the local level there was cross-class agreement on the need for material intensive works, preferably permanent structures
  - A honest gram pradhan aptly summed up – *“all elected representatives have to deviate from ‘norms’ of the scheme, otherwise you cannot carry any development work. So, breaking the rule is OKAY – but local villagers know who is ‘honest’ and breaks rules to carry out work in a proper way and vice-versa.*

# SGRY Process

Local Government in Rural India continues to be viewed as arms or agencies of higher tiers of Government and has lacked autonomy and powers



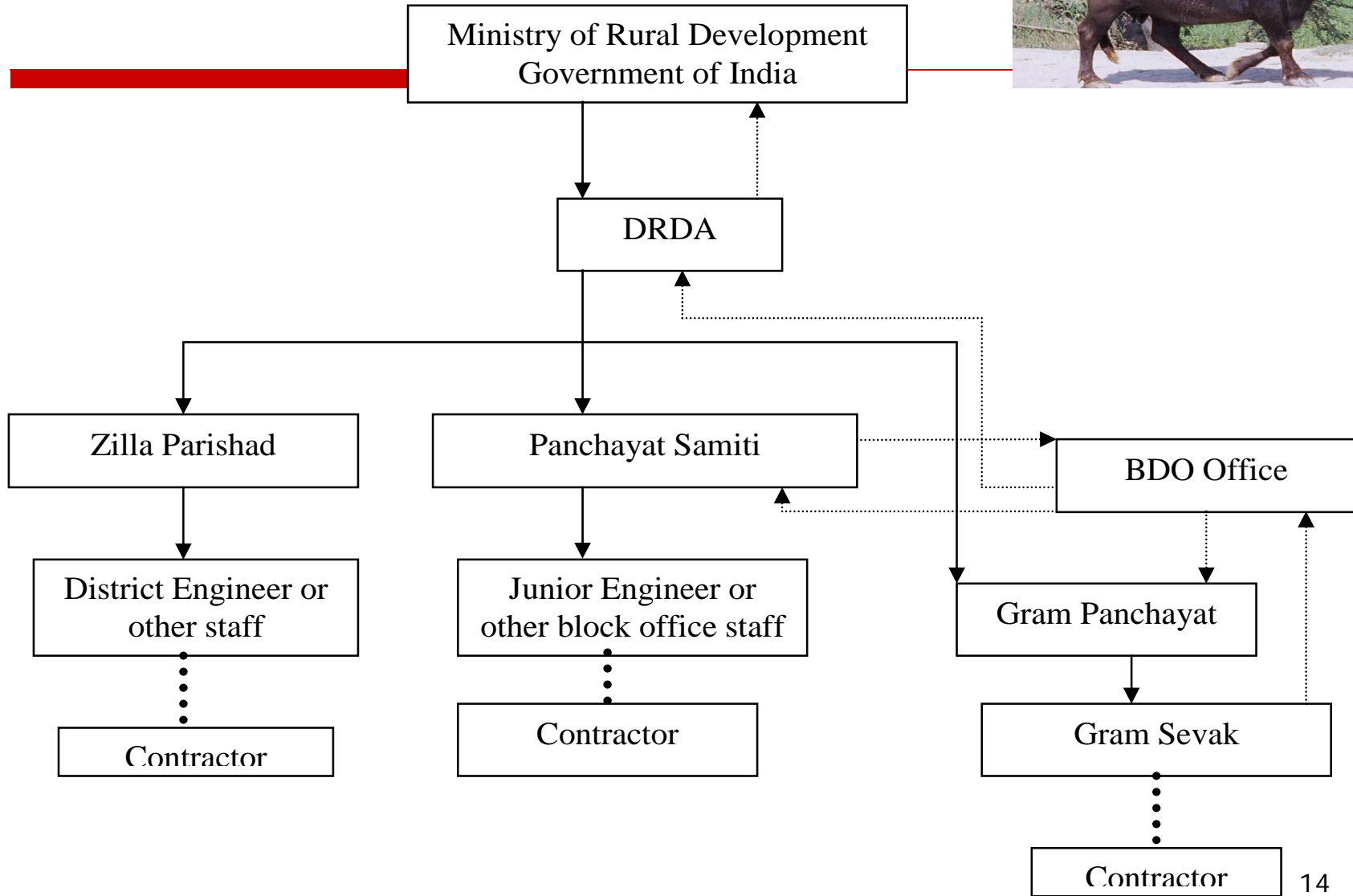
# SGRY Process



➔ The ‘modern’ state and its representatives – the local administration become powerful in the name of protecting the interests of the lowest sections of rural society from exploitation by the ‘local elite’

➔ So, local bodies are mere implementation agencies of rural development programs of ‘national’ or ‘provincial’ governments

**AGENCIES INVOLVED IN SGRY AND THEIR RELATIONS**





# SGRY Gaps ...

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- 'Norms' and 'rules' define actionability of the conceptual knowledge claims
- For the one weighed by powerlessness in being governed, knowledge claims often get generated only in action – since an autonomous discourse is lacking
- Deviation from the 'norms' is therefore 'the norm' in action
- The documents (or records) will not provide relevant information to judge i.e., the documented information looks at all deviation from norms in the same light – the 'honest' and the 'dishonest'.
- Is this legitimate?

# SGRY Gaps ...

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- How is this data fudging allowed?
- The need to tamper with the data arises partly from the diverging interests of the implementers (the local political class) whose revealed 'felt needs' are biased towards material intensive projects while the norms of the project as determined by the central government are different.
- There is local level exchange between the administration and the local political class. Extra legal rents are generated leading to leakage of resources.





# Analysis of Failure

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- ❑ It is common to explain such phenomenon as cases of 'implementation failure'
- ❑ ... to be tackled through tightening of systems.
- ❑ We argue that there is nothing called an 'implementation failure'.
- ❑ Central to this argument is the claim that 'context' and the 'life world' of actors and agencies placed at different tiers of the system differ

# Failure Analysis (continued)

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- ❑ The planners in Ministry of Rural Development, the 'local' administration in the blocks and districts, the 'local' political class (including the elected representatives of Panchayat bodies) that implement the projects, local elite class, and the wage laborer (or the rural commoner) dwell in different 'worlds'.
- ❑ Their strategic imperatives differ.



# Discussion

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- ❑ The multiple 'contexts' and the agents implicated therein, must therefore, negotiate - particularly, at the interface of contexts.
- ❑ In the actionable domain this negotiation occurs, but the negotiation is organized around 'deviation' from the norms.
- ❑ The norm fails to hold in implementation – in the 'folk world'.



# Discussion ...

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- ❑ The norm and its deviation continue to exist in simultaneity. The knowledge claim of this 'other' can exist only as a stealthy subversion.
- ❑ The knowledge claim derived from the 'folk world' of action fails to negotiate and redefine the dominant conceptual claim, because the folk-world lacks the power.
- ❑ This lack of power has two senses
  - a lack of power over the material domain
  - an inability to create and nurture an autonomous local discourse that can engage in a contest.



# Conclusion

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- ❑ The strategist and the associated knowledge claim needs to seek to unravel and understand the 'other' over whom governance is sought – since, the 'other' is important to strategy.
- ❑ But, this process is neither smooth nor does it necessarily occur.
- ❑ The multiple actors in multiple contexts most often are located asymmetrically with respect to access to power.



# Conclusion

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- ❑ What would a redefined knowledge claim, an alternative structure of such interventions as SGRY, look like?
- ❑ We did not indulge in that in this paper.
  - We merely confronted the multiple contexts in an effort to seek out the process of implementation of a conceptual knowledge claim and how it encounters the actionable domain.
- ❑ It needs a reassertion of power of the 'folk-world' and new possibilities of 'action' imagined.
- ❑ In that creative flight of fancy, the local discourse that will lend voice must be nurtured.



# Limitations

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- We do not provide a 'data-rich', 'technically correct' account
- In fact, we reject much of the structured data ...
- We depend on anecdotes, pieces of evidence (often mined from data), snippets of conversation, and pieces of dialogue
- Reasons ...
  - The process of information generation and processing is itself enmeshed in power conflicts
  - There are significant noises in the data (not often referred to in past studies to attain sanctity and scientificity)



**A Virtual Classroom?**





**Purnea-Saharsa National Highway**



**State Highway in Khagaria Dist.**

A photograph showing a flooded area in Bagmati, Nepal. In the foreground, the top of a grey metal structure is visible, featuring two silver spherical ornaments. A dirt path leads from the foreground towards a yellow tractor decorated with red flowers. The tractor is positioned on the path, which is flanked by green grass and a large, calm body of water. In the background, a tall flagpole with a red flag stands against a clear blue sky. The overall scene depicts a rural landscape affected by flooding.

**An Annual Affair Due to Floods in Bagmati**

Thank You<sup>27</sup>