State Government considering creches on NREGA worksites

Special Correspondent

— Photo: R. Ragu

***making SUGGESTIONS:* (From left) Members of the Central Employment Guarantee Council Jean Dreze, Aruna Roy and Annie Raja at press conference in Chennai on Saturday.**

CHENNAI: The State government will "consider" providing crèches on National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) worksites in Villupuram district, where local anganwadis and balwadis are not operational, Director of Rural Development Gagandeep Singh Bedi said here on Saturday.

He was responding to the recommendations of a social audit of the act conducted in Villupuram by the district administration and NREGA Watch — a coalition of NGOs, labour unions, women's groups and Dalit rights organisations.

"Only in very few work sites did we see crèche facilities," said Annie Raja, member of the Central Employment Guarantee Council and general secretary, National Federation of Indian Women.

While anganwadis are usually open for operation from 9.30 a.m., work sanctioned under the NREGA often commences at 7 a.m., Ms. Raja noted.

A survey of NREGA participants conducted by NREGA Watch reveals that seventy per cent of respondents stated that "there were no childcare facilities at the worksite" and eighty five per cent of mothers who left their children at home said they "would certainly bring their children" to the worksite if a crèche was provided.

The survey also reveals that while that the anganwadi system works for older children, it poses problems for women with infants.

Only five per cent of surveyed women said that they left infants in anganwadis.

The NREGA, passed in 2005, mandates that "provisions shall be made to depute workers… to look after children below the age of six years" who accompany women to work sites.

Rural Development Minister M.K. Stalin had said on Friday that the recommendation that a crèche was needed on work sites would not be acted upon by the administration, since most villages in Tamil Nadu had multiple anganwadis or balwadis.