

## Rural employment scheme to cover all 596 rural districts

The government's flagship National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS) will be rolled out in all 596 rural districts in 2008-09, Finance Minister P. Chidambaram said Friday.

The minister made the announcement while unveiling the national budget in the Lok Sabha.

NREGS was launched in February 2006 in 200 districts and later extended to another 130 districts to provide employment to the poor. Till December 2007, a total of 25.7 million households have benefited by the scheme.

The share of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in the scheme was pegged at 61.79 percent in 2006-07 and 58.29 percent in 2007-08. The participation of women in the scheme was estimated to be 44 percent till December 2007.

From April 2008, the scheme will be implemented in the remaining rural districts of the country.

The ministry of rural development, the nodal agency for implementing the scheme, has targeted 100 percent online data management in 200 first-phase districts by March to maintain transparency and accountability.

Officials said the implementation process in districts in the next phase would benefit from the experiences gathered earlier.

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