

Several irregularities in functioning of NREGA and pensions in Baran and Sirohi

During the last three weeks, a survey of five government social security schemes organised by IIT Delhi was conducted in 10 states by university students and other young researchers. The schemes that were studied include NREGA, PDS, pensions, Anganwadi programme and Midday Meals. The team visiting Rajasthan visited Basthooni (Basthooni GP), Pagara (Bakanpura GP), Dand Chhatrapura (Relawan GP) and Simlod (Simlod GP) in Kishanganj block of Baran and Kaseendra (Achapura GP), Ker (Isra GP), Reechhri (Dunagree GP) and Rajpura (Siwera) in Pindwara block of Sirohi.

Several irregularities were found in the functioning of NREGA. There was a large unmet demand for work and no payment of unemployment allowance. Those who have got work have not been paid full wages, and payment is usually delayed by a few months. We received complaints that old people are prohibited from working on NREGA worksites, and only one person per household is allowed to work at a time.

Pension schemes for the elderly and widows had more irregularities in Baran than Sirohi. In the former district, pension money is usually given at intervals of 2-3 months, and often the entire amount is also not paid. In Pagara and Dand Chhatrapura pension amounts are supposed to be delivered by money orders, but in the former village people had to go to the bank to get their pension, and in the latter village had to go to the post man's house. In simlod pensions are collected from the bank, but entries are not regularly made in the passbook. However, it was heartening to hear that many old people and widows had been recently enrolled in the pension schemes, as a result of a state government order of expanding the coverage of pensions for these categories of vulnerable people.

Most of the surveyed BPL and Antyodaya card holders were regularly receiving their full quota of grain from the PDS. Although the prices of sugar, wheat for BPL cardholders and atta for APL cardholders have reduced since April 2013, some ration dealers in Sirohi continued to charge the older rates. Except in Kaseendra and Ker, most APL cardholders were being denied their monthly entitlement of 10kg of atta in both the districts. Based on our report about the irregularities in the PDS of Richdi, the BDO of the block ordered that the dealer supplying rations to this village be removed and the dealer supplying to the rest of the villages of the gram panchayat, start supplying to Richdi as well.

Anganwadi services of supplementary nutrition, immunization and weighing of children were more regular than the pre-school education and health services under this scheme. Parents and children expressed satisfaction with the Midday Meal Scheme, but more so in Pindwara than in Kishanganj. In Simlod, some people complained that in the Midday Meal Scheme, children of Banjara and Sahariya communities are made to sit separately from children of higher castes. They are even given separate plates.

Our field experience of the past three weeks has confirmed how crucial these social security schemes are for people to live with dignity. We earnestly urge government officials, the media and civil society organizations to support in their various capacities people's efforts to access their basic rights through these schemes.

The Rajasthan Survey Team

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