

Minutes of the Meeting

Date: June 15th, 2013

**R. Prasanna
District Collector,
Sarguja, Chhattisgarh**

We met the DC at his residence to discuss our survey findings, focusing especially on pensions in the four villages of Surguja. On being informed that 75% of our respondents had not received pensions in the past 4 months, the DC expressing urgent concern, in one swift move, rung up the block office at Lakhanpur to enquire about why the payments were being delayed.

From what he could gather, the payments had been made about 10 days ago. He also told us that Chhattisgarh's robust ration system has helped in easing the situation for pensioners. Having said that, he gave us enough space to place our findings before him. He looked informed about the changes that are being made in the mode of payments at block levels and agreed to the fact that there have been delays in April's payment but was confident that the payments for May and June were already processed.

On the point of there being no fixed date for making payments causing pensioners to make multiple visits to banks/post offices located far off, he pulled out his tablet, swiped around and appeared to make a note of it. He conceded that it's ridiculous to expect people to travel so far to collect payments all the time. "They probably spend Rs.200 to collect their pension of Rs.200."

In fact, he said that a similar idea of having fixed days has been implemented in the state Primary Health Centres where the elderly are given a yellow card, which they can present at the hospitals and avoid the tiring and time consuming queues. And, so he accepted our recommendation of having at least one fixed day in the week dedicated to pensioners for making payments. Accepting this suggestion, he added that post offices here were not well equipped to handle such large transactions, overburdened, as they are, with the weight of NREGA payments as well.

He also agreed with us on the point that the Gram Panchayat should be in charge of delivering payments, citing the reason, tongue-in-cheek, that, "They can pay Rs.200 worth of pensions. Out of a 100, 2 Sarpanch's might eat the funds, but remaining 98 will pay this small amount to the pensioners; they'll have other funds to eat out of."

The DC suggested that we extend our survey to at least 2 blocks in a district, as that will render a more comprehensive understanding of such issues at the district level. Overall, the meeting was encouraging, with the DC showing more interest than was expected (especially since he had Sun Music Live playing on mute on the flat screen behind us displaying superstar Vijay's distracting pelvic thrusts).