

State level meeting of Right to Food Campaign – Chhattisgarh

Date: 23rd July 2011

Venue: Pastoral Centre, Raipur

The state level meeting of the right to food campaign – Chhattisgarh was organized dated 23rd July 2011 at Raipur, to discuss and plan future course of action for addressing emerging issues in right to food arena. The state level meeting of the state campaign was organized after interval of around one and a half year, and it received good response from organizations working in different parts of the state. Around 40 representatives from organizations working in 13 districts were present for the meeting. Members associated with four state level alliances working on the issues of resource ownership and land rights were present along with Jan Swasthya Abhiyan. Representatives from five state level support organizations also actively participated in the meeting.

The main agenda of this meeting was as follows:

- **To review the status of the implementation of state sponsored food and livelihood programs monitored by the right to food campaign**
- **To discuss emerging issues such as implication on poor of socio-economic and caste census 2011, proposal of alteration of food grains to cash transfer in PDS by central government and impact of the state governments ration card verification drive on the poor**
- **Re-structure the state campaign- Formation of state level organizing committee to co-ordinate campaign activity in the state.**
- **Plan strategic response to the emerging issues and concerns of right to food campaign**

The meeting began with the welcome address by the Mr. Gangaram Paikra- Convener of state right to food campaign. He set the tone of the programme by briefing about updates on the recent extended steering committee meeting of national right to food campaign held at Bhopal on 2/3 July 2011.

Review of implementation of food and livelihood schemes:

All the organizations represented the status of implementation various food schemes in their respective districts. The session was chaired by Ms. Renuka Ekka and Mr. Shambhu from Loksahabhangi Manch. The followings are the scheme wise major concerns raised by all:

1. Mid day meal

- All the districts raised their concerns over involvement of the teacher in the implementation of MDM from the new session. It is observed that the quality and regularity of the food distribution has declined.
- Many teachers are unhappy with this new responsibility as their lot of time is devoted for it, some of them are involved in corruption.
- The bank account is in joint name of SHG and Teacher. SHG members have to spent time and wait for convenient timing of teacher for withdrawal of money as his presence in banks for withdrawal is mandatory.
- The menu is not officially stipulated by the Collectors in all districts. Therefore food distribution is according to old norms.
- Children and guardians are not consulted while planning menu of MDM
- SHG do not receive rice on regular basis on PDS in some of the districts.
- Mostly PDS shops provide half boiled (Usna) rice for MDM, which is disliked by the children.
- SHG's face loss due to improper procurement facility as grain rots very often.
- Payments are delayed for three to eight months creating lot of trouble in implementation.
- The number of children enrolled in school and payment made to SHG's according to students number varies.
- MDM in urban centers made by centralized agency and has problems in quality

2. Integrated child developmental scheme

- Concerns are more with distribution of ready to eat food. The quality is low and distribution is irregular.
- The role of community in the monitoring of services is very weak. Mahtari Panchayats are inactive.
- The attendance of children is very low in the centre; Pre- school education is severely affected.
- Role of SHG is only as supplier of items, No role in cooking or monitoring.
- According to policy, SHG's can avail payments in advance. But in reality payments are delayed for more than three months.
- Lot of corruption in the recruitment of AWW's. Norms are non transparent.

3. Public distribution System

- Opening of the shops is irregular and inconvenient
- Half boil (Usna) rice is distributed to poor. This rice is does not suit eating habits and culture of people.
- PDS card Verification drive in September 2010. Many eligible cards rejected in verification process. No grain distribution in some centers during two months verification drive.
- Quality of food grain is deteriorating
- SHG's operating ration shops are harassed by the officials for money

- Kerosene is inaccessible in many areas.
- No allotment for APL card holders.
- The other items such as dal, oil also need to be distributed. Good experience of distributing dal in Bastar region.

4. Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Scheme

- Payments are irregular in all districts
- On record MGNREGA works are opened, But labourers are disinterested due to delayed payments.

Response by the State Advisor- Commissioners to Supreme Court – Right to food case:

Mr. Samir Garg- State advisor to Supreme Court Commissioners responded to the various queries posed by the participants in the first session. He briefed the gathering about the stand of the national campaign in the execution of various schemes and role of Supreme Court commissioners in monitoring of it. He explained both the local implementation issues and policy concerns. The scheme wise response of state advisor is as follows:

1. Mid day meal

- The first and foremost concern is about the rights of the children in mid day meal. The menu and the entitlements are not well defined in the state. It is responsibility of the Collectors to finalize menu for the mid day meal.
- The involvement of the teacher in the implementation of mid day meal is of grave concern. It affects both quality of the food and education. In the Koriya district campaign was successful in pressurizing district administration to revert the decision of involvement of teacher in MDM. Others need to replicate it.
- Delayed payments to the SHG's for preparing mid day meal has caused several problems. But they have managed to supply food to the children. With teacher's involvement in monitoring aspects, things would be difficult.

2. Integrated child developmental scheme

- Chhattisgarh has managed to dismantle the contractors stale in SNP due to pressure from campaign. Despite clear order from the Supreme Court the department is trying to give back door entry to the contractors.
- At central level department is trying to substitute food to the micronutrient. Campaign need to maintain its pressure on the government for the provision of freshly and locally cooked to the children.
- We need to demand to decentralize the SNP preparation especially ready to cook food from sector level to panchayat level.
- Universal coverage is stipulated by norms. It should be ensured that every child gets access to ICDS services.
- Community's participation need to be strengthened for quality control of food supplied.

- Appointment procedure for anganwadi workers is quite an objective process. The current corruption is due to lack of knowledge of such norms and lack of transparency. We need to demand transparency at district level.

3. Public distribution System

- Campaign need to challenge the ration card verification in the state. Around five lakh ration cards are cancelled in the state. Most of them without giving any valid reason for it.

4. Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Scheme

- Community is lacking trust due to uncertainty in wage disbursement. We need to organize people to demand for timely wage payments as villagers are looking for other employment options.
- For timely payments Andhra Pradesh model of daily muster roll update need to be advocated.
- The average man days in the state are saturated at 35-40 days per annum. We need to generate more demand for work from laborers.

5. Socio-economic and caste census

- In BPL estimation the fundamental issue is fixation of cut-off poverty ratio at central level; it needs to be challenged as it has grave consequences at local level.
- The transparency in recent mechanism is very low as role of gram sabha is curtailed.

6. Cash transfers

- Chhattisgarh government is not in favour of cash transfers instead of PDS food grain. But in solidarity of national campaign we need to oppose move to alter cash transfers to food grain in PDS.
- It is important to sustain the PDS system as it ensures access of the poor to food grain and minimum support price to the crop of the farmers.

STRATEGIC RESPONSE

The Final session was chaired by Mr. Vijenrda from NCAS. He emphasized on the need of regular sharing thematic and policy related information by the campaign secretariat to the organizations working on right to food issues. It is utterly important and helpful for the knowledge building of the grass root organizations. He also mentioned need to demonstrate the success models of scheme implementation by the civil society organizations in the state.

All the representatives shared the need to work on both at the local level and state level to pursue the issues related implementation of food schemes and recent policy initiatives. Followings are the issues decided by consensus for collective action and follow up in the state:

- **Socio-economic and caste census**

It was felt by all the representatives that as a campaign we need to express our disagreements regarding various processes lay down for the socio- economic and casts census. The deprivation scores criteria and overall cut off ratio of poverty will result in exclusion of many eligible families from the state to be enlisted in BPL. It will have long term impact on these families as they automatically get cut off from the entire chain of benefits. The group mainly objected the state government's passiveness in the entire process as they have not registered the protest for such exclusionary criteria for identification of poor. It was also decided to attract the attention of Hon. Governor as the current processes completely ignore the role of gram sabha in the entire process and it violates special norms set up for the schedule area. In this regard the following action points were decided:

1. Media is silent on the poverty survey to be begun from 16th August in Chhattisgarh. One press conference should be organized on behalf of right to food campaign on the proposed survey and our concerns on behalf of the poor.
2. It is decided to send post cards from all the parts of the state to the Governor, raising his attention to the fact that the gram sabha is completely ignored in the process of identification of poor. He should be requested to include this provision in the scheduled area as provisioned in the PESA act.
3. Delegation on behalf of the campaign should meet various representatives in the state assembly and ask them to raise question on the process stipulated for the poverty estimation and its impact on the poor of the state.

- **Ration card verification process**

Around 5 lakh ration cards are cancelled in the state governments recent verification drive. Half of them are from urban and half from the rural area. The maximum ration cards are rejected for not filing application by the beneficiary for the renewal of ration card. State level data of cancellation of data was provided in this meeting. It is decided that:

1. The concerns over exclusion of eligible families due to non- compliance of administrative process should be shared with the food and civil supply department on the behalf of the RTF campaign.
2. The similar data can be collected at the districts level and the concerns over wrong rejections should be put up and followed up with the district officials.

- **Implementation of mid- day meal**

It was also discussed to take up one of the food schemes for monitoring in the entire state. It would help in creating state level pressure for policy change. The major concerns were shared in the first session over implementation of mid day meal in the schools. Therefore it is decided to focus on the following aspects of the mid day meal.

1. Organizations should collect menu chart stipulated by the respective collector of the district. The implementation should be monitored according to the menu chart.
2. Delegation should meet district officials and state level delegation at the state level to express concerns and grievances over involvement of the principle/ teacher in the

implementation of the mid day meal as it is affecting both education of the children and quality of the food supplied.

- **Formation of district level networks of right to food campaign**

It is decided to form district level networks of the organizations working on the right to food issues. The following organizations have taken responsibility to organize the district level meeting of the organization and plan out course of action in their respective districts to address issues concerning right to food.

Sr.No	District	Organization	Sr.No	District	Organization
1.	Bilaspur	Gandhi Gram Vikas Samiti	2.	Raipur	Dalit adiwasi manch
3.	Dhamatari	Adiwasi Janadhikar sanghatan/ Nawrachana	4.	Raigadh	Jan Chetna Manch
5.	Sarguja	RIDE	6.	Kawardha	Astha Samiti
7.	Janjger-Champa	Jan Jagaran Samiti	8.	Korba	CG Viklang manch
9.	Kanker	Rachana manch	10.	Jashpur	Chaupal
11	Bastar	Disha Kendra	12.	Koriya	Adiwasi adhikar samiti
13.	Mahasamund	Chhattisgarh Grameen Vikas Evam Kalyan Samaj Sevi Sanstha			

Out of eighteen district in the state thirteen districts are covered for the formation for district level network and immediate action on the issues of BPL survey, verification and wrong cancellation of ration card and monitoring of the mid day meal.

Conclusion:

Meeting was concluded with the vote of thanks by the convener of the state right to food campaign with the hope that by forming the district level network and consistent follow up at the local level on the right to food issue campaign will grow and strengthen in the future.



