

Minutes of the meeting of the Food Commissioner with the District Collector and other senior district officers of district, Chandauli, 30th January, 2003

At the outset the District Collector, Sri Mritunjay Kumar Narayan, a young, enthusiastic and committed IAS officer, briefed the Supreme Court Commissioner, Dr Saxena, about the various steps that he had taken to improve transparency and accountability in the food related schemes. He has himself been touring the most backward part of the district, fixing dates well in advance and personally supervising the distribution of various welfare schemes. He has devised a system of monitoring complaints and grievances, and requested the NGOs and others who are interested in improving delivery to remain in touch with him and constantly brief him about the delivery issues in the field.

On my suggestion it was decided to conduct a social audit of all important government schemes in the village Amdaha in panchayat Golawat on the 16th February in the presence of the entire village and civil society representatives. The official team would be headed by the CDO, Sri Ajay Kumar Singh, who would reach there by 11:30 AM along with the official records showing complete record of all important government schemes, including musterroll since 1st April, 2002. The names of the beneficiaries would be read out to the villages and cent per cent verification will be done of not only the names of and amount given to beneficiaries, but also the quality of SGRY and other works done. The Collector also agreed to do so for at least one village in two months in future too.

Dr Saxena thanked the Collector for organising the meeting and calling the officers connected with food based schemes. He requested that the district may consider the following suggestions for improving implementation of the schemes mentioned in the various Supreme Court orders:

1. It is in the interest of the district to draw and fully utilise the entire quota of subsidised foodgrains and other funds from GOI, and ensure

that these are properly distributed to the poor and deserving. Therefore the Collector should monitor the progress of the schemes every month, identify the bottlenecks and request the state government for modification in the guidelines, if necessary. In many schemes, such as TPDS for BPL, SCP (drought), NMDS, and NFBS, the district has either not been able to get the required quota/allocation from the state/GOI or the quota given to the district is not fully utilised. It is easier to correct the macro picture by removing bottlenecks in distribution, and pursuing vigorously with higher ups for allocation.

2. At the same time, the micro picture, which requires efficient distribution and delivery, needs to be further improved. The district may identify pockets of hunger and distress and do a sample check of the schemes at the village level on the lines suggested above for village Amdaha. A few such audits if well publicised will really electrify the field machinery, and they will realise that they cannot get away with sloppy work. Reports thus obtained should be widely shared with the public by putting it on the district website.
3. All important circulars as well as progress of the schemes should be put on the website, so that its dissemination is facilitated. The Collector accepted my suggestion of compiling all that relevant information, which is not generally available with the public (such as names of Antyodaya beneficiaries), and which even Pradhans like to keep it to themselves(musterroll), print a booklet and allow private vendors, STD shops to sell that booklet at a price. This will reduce the dependence of the ordinary person on administration, and improve transparency at all levels.
4. All complaints and news items pertaining to hunger deaths must immediately be enquired into by a senior officer, who should also look into the progress of food based and other safety net schemes in that locality for the past six months. It is quite likely that these schemes

are not functioning smoothly in that village/locality that has led to distress or malnutrition death.

As regards progress on the individual schemes, the following suggestions were made by the Food Commissioner:

Foodgrain distribution in SGRY needs to be improved. As against 451 lakhs of available money in SGRY I, expenditure was 340 lakhs, but as against 1370 tonnes of foodgrains distribution was only 137 tonnes. In Naogarh block too, as against 32 tonnes of lifted foodgrain, only 10 tonnes was distributed. Similarly in SGRY II, fund utilisation was 349 lakhs out of 449 lakhs, but only 323 tonnes out of 1378 tonnes of quota of foodgrains was lifted. Thus whereas cash distribution is more than 80%, grain distribution is less than 20% of the allotted quota. There was no complaint about the quality of foodgrains, but its supply from the FCI Varanasi was irregular. The other problem was that the state government had not given any margin for transport in case of the Antyodaya quota, leading to complaints of over-charging.

The district has received an allotment of 3605 tonnes under Special Component Plan (drought relief) under which the district could pay 8.5 kg of foodgrains as daily wages and the cash component of wages could be linked with any on-going scheme. Although more than 3 months have passed, works under this scheme have still not started. I requested the officers concerned to remove bottlenecks, as there should be a lot of labour intensive works, such as renovation of canals and tanks, afforestation, soil conservation, etc. that could be undertaken with this allocation. I gave the example of Anantapur (Andhra Pradesh), where the district has utilised 2.2 lakh tonnes rice worth about Rs 160 crores for several developmental programmes in a year's time. Several hundred schools have got boundary walls, each panchayat has a building now, and tanks have been dug and renovated. As SGRY permits use of funds and foodgrains for private assets for SCs/STs and BPL category of people, the district had even got household

toilets constructed with 3 kg of rice, and no cash payment. Similar innovative vision is expected from Chandauli.

The district has identified 4,900, 18,549, and 102,451 people under the Annapurna, Antyodaya and BPL categories. Although lifting is satisfactory under the first two categories, only about 65-70% of foodgrains are being lifted and distributed under the BPL category. The district should examine bottlenecks in detail and take remedial action to ensure better distribution of the entire BPL quota. For instance, the district could ask for more wheat than rice, if that is the people's preference. As GOI has more wheat than rice, there should be no problem in accepting this demand. Then, the district could allow the card holders to lift the backlog of previous months too. It is the experience that people are often turned away from the shops if they demand the unlifted quota of previous months. Women self-help groups and other such societies and even NGOs should be considered for giving shops in far flung and difficult areas. Storage capacity at the blocks should be improved. More godowns could easily be constructed with SCP grain quota, by linking it with SGRY cash.

The state government has not yet started the scheme of serving hot cooked meals in UP, which is violation of Supreme Court's orders. This needs to be again brought to the notice of Chief Secretary who is requested to follow the example of Orissa, Rajasthan, Gujarat, and Andhra Pradesh where the scheme is running. The district has a quota of 97 EGS schools out of which only 47 have been opened. This is another good scheme under which the remote and backward areas can be helped.

The Old Age Pension is being distributed to 12331 beneficiaries through the banks and their sixty branches. 11,192 beneficiaries have been given both the instalments of the year, and the rest would too be given the second instalment soon. However, the state government has made no allocation for administrative expenses of 4%, which was allowed when the scheme was a CSS. I request the state government to kindly consider this. In order to ensure that deaths do not reduce the number of beneficiaries, it is desirable that a waiting list (this could be of Annapurna beneficiaries) is prepared.

Some banks take a lot of time in making funds available to the beneficiaries. They should be made aware of the Supreme Court orders in this respect.

Under the NMBS, the allocation to the district of only 18 lakh Rs is woefully inadequate, which covers only 3600 births, whereas for a BPL population of 6 lakhs in the district the number of births could easily be 20,000 out of which at least 12,000 would satisfy all the conditions of the scheme. The district should therefore ask for a higher quota from the state. Similarly the allocation under NFBS for only 230 deaths seems inadequate. The procedure in such schemes needs to be simplified. Often there are too many unnecessary certificates that are demanded. For instance, SDM is supposed to verify that the family belonged to the BPL category, whereas the BPL ration card is a sufficient proof of this fact. Cheques to these people are issued from the district head office, whereas the tahsils too have a sub-treasury and powers need to be delegated to the tahsildar to issue the cheque.