

Corruption in Food for Work Scheme

Malfunctioning in Food for Work Programme In block Fatehpur, District-Mau,U.P.

One of the main reasons for hunger and malnutrition in rural India is lacking access to land and employment opportunities for rural landless workers. These already marginalized people face an uncertain future usually forgotten in the shade of the uprising high-tech temples in the big cities.

Still, the vast majority of the Indian people (over 65%) live in the rural areas with far more than a third living below the poverty line and are threatened by hunger and malnutrition. Government has launched the “ Sampoorna Grameen Rozgar Yojana”, a food for work programme offering work opportunities mainly in the rural areas. This is a scheme launched by the Central Government and is being implemented through the local self-administration units (Village Panchayats). The employment remuneration comprises 5 kg of grains and a small amount of money, so that both cash and kind amount to the notified minimum wages. The grain (in this case it was rice) is usually delivered by the Food Corporation of India to the local Panchayat units, who are in charge to distribute the rice within the scheme. In Mau District, situated in the Eastern part of the state Uttar Pradesh, people working under the scheme are entitled to Rs. 23 and 5 kg of rice per working day. But in Fatehpur Mandav block of Mau District, for the period between April 2002 and March 2003 the workers in the district have only received the money, but not the rice. On the average, about 100 kg of rice is already owed to each worker under the scheme. Considering the low cash payment, the people and their families are highly dependent on this rice ration. There is evidence that the rice could not be distributed due to mismanagement and corruption in the upper part of the delivering process of the rice ration. Already 584,5 tons of rice has been issued to the Local Marketing Inspector, out of which only 247 tons have been delivered further to the Gram Panchayats (village administrations). Even these 247 tons did not reach the people they were meant for: The *total* amount of missing rice comprises over 500 tons. This situation becomes even more delicate in the light of the decision of the Supreme Court of India of May 2nd, 2003, which directed that the grain and cash allocations for the whole program should be doubled as they are not sufficient.

Although the responsible inspector has apologised on April 26th 2003 and promised to distribute the missing rice within a week, nothing has happened. Furthermore, some district authorities have claimed that the “disappeared” rice, which was meant for the poor, is sold in the black market of the neighbouring states. These officers now face possible difficulties with senior officials for providing this information

On July 5, 2003, **Right to Food Campaign -U.P.** deligation met to state minister of Food and Civil Supply-Uttar Pradesh for time bound enquiry.

(Written by Ms. Azra Khan, FIAN-U.P.)