

Press Coverage of Press Conference on 28 November 2011 and Jan Manch on 29 November 2011[#]

Dreze calls BPL census 'Kaun Banega Scorepati'

Chetan Chauhan, The Hindustan Times, 29 Nov 11

<http://www.hindustantimes.com/India-news/NewDelhi/Jean-Dreze-terms-govt-s-BPL-census-Kaun-Banega-Scorepati/Article1-775189.aspx>

Uddi Gujjar from Rajasthan is a widow with two minor sons. She owns a bigha of unirrigated land and lives in a two-room house with a cement roof. So far, she is considered deprived, and is entitled to government benefits. But under the Social Economic Caste Census (SECC), she will not make the cut. Cases like hers - which would include many of the country's 30 crore poor - have prompted development economist Jean Dreze to term SECC 'Kaun Banega Scorepati'.

The census, started about four months ago, is being conducted by the rural development ministry.

The idea is to identify the poor who would be eligible for different schemes, including subsidised ration.

The census aims to rank households on a scale of 0 to 7 depending on deprivation. For each deprivation, the household gets one point. But qualifying for the points is no mean task.

Consider the following conditions:

Anyone with a living in a one-room house, with tin roof and brick walls will not be poor. A household should not have adult members between the age of 16 and 59 (very rare) to be considered poor.

During a Right To Food campaign, a month ago a group of NGOs, tested the census methodology in a village in Rajasthan. Only three families met the criteria for poverty though as many as 27 families have BPL cards.

Manas Ranjan, a member of the campaign, said "If a household lives in a room whose dimensions are enough for a person to sleep or stand, they will not get a deprivation point ...," he said.

Dreze said the government had put the cart before the horse by deciding to introduce the proposed food security law in the winter session before SECC is completed. Describing the proposed law as "ill-devised" with a "straightjacket approach", he said.

[#]Prepared by CFAR (Center for Advocacy and Research) and Right to Food Campaign Secretariat

Right to Food campaign faults govt policy

Times Of India, 29 November 2011

<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Right-to-Food-campaign-faults-govt-policy/articleshow/10910841.cms>

NEW DELHI: If you have a kutchra house or have a tarpaulin to cover yourself, the socio-caste survey will not consider you homeless. If a farmer has a hand-pump provided by the government or a kisan patra to take loans against that, the same BPL scheme could now disqualify him from a BPL card.

If a widow has a 16 year-old son, she may end up losing the BPL status because the child is defined as an adult - even though MNREGA refuses to engage those below 18 years. If you have two rooms instead of one in your kutchra house, you could also lose out the BPL status.

The Right to Food (RTF) campaign on Monday brought out these glaring examples of the failure of the new Socio-Economic Caste Survey to demand a universal PDS instead of a targeted approach as planned by UPA.

Claiming that the survey would leave several lakh rightful claimants outside the new BPL list, the RTF campaign will gather a 1,000 such 'zero scorepati' people in Delhi on Tuesday, demanding that government needs to clarify on selection of beneficiaries before it considers the National Food Security bill.

"The criteria being used to identify the poor under the survey are dubious and the food bill is a blunder," said National Advisory Council member Jean Dreze addressing the media here on Monday.

"How can the food bill be enacted without knowing the criteria for selecting the beneficiaries," he said. "It's like putting the cart before the horse," he added.

Earlier, the Planning Commission and the rural development ministry had announced that it would dispense with the artificial poverty-line based cut-off for beneficiaries of the proposed food security bill. They had said the survey would be used as the basis for the identification of the poor, and set up a committee to finalize it. But Dreze and his colleagues pointed out that even as such glaring lacunae continued to exist, the survey had begun in several states like Rajasthan and Orissa and completed in some like Tripura.

Another member of the RTF campaign said the Union rural development ministry had been insensitive when approached with the problems in the survey, and had given 'non-answers' to its pointed interventions even as the exercise continued.

Put off food Bill, BPL census, says Jean Dreze

BUSINESS STANDARD, 29 November 2011

<http://business-standard.com/india/news/put-off-food-bill-bpl-census-says-jean-dreze/457005/>

The Planning Commission which was recently forced to go back on its stand of a Rs 32 poverty line after protests from the Right to Food campaign, is facing a fresh challenge. The campaign activists led by Jean Dreze and others including NAC members have accused the Rural Development Ministry and the Planning Commission of achieving the purpose of the Rs 32 poverty line through the ongoing Social and Economic Caste Census.

The census was able to exclude 67 per cent of people as non BPL in a village where the activists did a mock survey. The activists would descend on Delhi with villagers from different states where the census is on to prove the point that it is as unfair as the poverty line. Dreze on Monday said that finding a place in the BPL category was next to impossible given the 13 point exclusion criteria that is followed.

He said that the method of identification of poor would jeopardise the food security Bill itself. I appeal that the food Bill is held over for some time until this census is sorted out. Now you are putting the cart before the horse, he said .

The Food Security Bill draft by the Food Ministry provides for a 25 per cent exclusion of rural citizens from the food scheme. Out of the rest people would be categorised as BPL and non BPL.

As per the SECC 13 point exclusion criteria, possession of even one of these is enough to keep a person out of BPL category, even if he has all criteria for automatic inclusion or even three to four of the 10 odd deprivation indicators.

Dreze opposes tabling of draft food Bill in Parliament

Indian Express, 29 November 2011

<http://www.indianexpress.com/news/Dreze-opposes-tabling-of-draft-food-Bill-in-Parliament/881765/>

Jean Dreze, former member of the Sonia Gandhi-led National Advisory Council, said on Monday it would be a “blunder” if the government introduced its draft National Food Security Bill in Parliament.

“The current Bill is not ready to meet the desired objectives. It will be a blunder to table it in this format in Parliament. The Bill provides an opportunity to tackle the challenge of massive malnutrition, especially among children, in the country. But it appears that this opportunity is about to be missed,” he told a press conference here.

Dreze cautioned the government against hurrying its version to Parliament.

Jan Manch on proposed food Bill today

Gargi Parsai, The Hindu, 29 November 2011

<http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/article2669219.ece>

Even as a controversy is raging over the government decision to allow FDI in retail, activity is seen on the food security front, with several parties proposing to join a “Jan Manch” (public discussion) about the proposed National Food Security Bill organised here on Tuesday.

“Almost all political parties have confirmed their participation” in the event being organised by the Right to Food Campaign, human rights activist Kavita Srivastava told a press conference here on Monday. “We are questioning them to state their stand on the proposed Bill, which is flawed on many counts and is, at best, a targeted food security.”

The activists who addressed the press conference pointed out the many flaws in the ongoing Socio-Economic Caste Census (SECC) survey on which they were in dialogue with the Ministry of Rural Development. According to the activists, the survey would end up keeping more people out of the public distribution system than it would include.

Nutrition security

The activists, who are seeking universal PDS and the linking of food security with nutrition security, said they were sceptical of the manner the government was proceeding.

“The Bill in its present form cannot be introduced in Parliament. It is better to delay the Act than come up with a Bill that is a blunder and does more harm than good,” said Mr. Drez.

Wondering how a Bill that had no clarity on who its beneficiaries would be could be brought to Parliament, he said it was like putting a cart before the horse. “The Bill undermines the efforts of several States that are moving towards universalisation. This proposed Bill re-imposes targeting with a multi-layered system that has no clarity and can end up being more destructive.”

Biometric identification

According to Ms. Ritika, linking PDS with the ‘Aadhar’ was unnecessary and the biometric identification of beneficiaries had no role in the entire chain. “It will only end up in the harassment of beneficiaries whose signatures or thumb impressions may not match. ‘Aadhar’ cannot plug leakage or pilferages.”

Ms. Deepa sounded an alarm bell for the inclusion, in the draft Bill that was posted on the Food Ministry’s website, of micronutrient fortified foods or ready-to-eat commercial meals, opening the doors for private and multi-national companies to enter the food chain for commercial benefits. “This will not really address the requirement of child nutrition, especially when India tops the nations with most malnourished children.”

The activists said that the entire exercise of identifying beneficiaries seemed geared towards finding people to fit the category that the proposed Bill provides for.

Parameters of poverty

They presented at the press conference farmer families and widows from the Fagi village near Jaipur, who bemoaned that under the new parameters of poverty, only three out of the current 122 Below Poverty Line households would qualify under the proposed food security bill.

The Bill proposes to cover 75 per cent population in rural areas and 50 per cent in urban areas with subsidised foodgrains.

Govt opposes Food Security Bill provisions

ASIAN AGE 29 November 2011

<http://www.asianage.com/delhi/govt-opposes-food-security-bill-provisions-032>

The Delhi government has opposed certain provisions of the National Food Security Bill draft saying the proposed universalisation of foodgrain entitlements to majority of the population would be very “difficult to implement”.

In a letter to Union food minister K.V. Thomas, the Delhi government said corruption was rampant in the current public distribution system, and that desired results would not be achieved if no structural changes were made in the distribution mechanism.

“The idea of universalisation of food grain entitlements to majority of population will be very difficult to implement. We have reservations on certain provisions of the Bill,” top Delhi government sources said. The Food Security Bill seeks to provide a legal entitlement to subsidised foodgrain to 75 per cent of the country’s rural population and 50 per cent of urban India.

The National Advisory Council (NAC), headed by Sonia Gandhi, had recommended to the government to grant legal entitlement of subsidised foodgrain to 75 per cent of population covering both “priority” and “general” households.

The city government said it preferred cash entitlements against giving foodgrain to Below Poverty Line families and other beneficiaries in urban areas while contending that foodgrain could be provided to the needy families in rural areas.

The letter has been written by Delhi food and civil supplies minister Harun Yusuf. Meanwhile, with just a month left for the beginning of nursery admissions, Delhi education minister Arvinder Singh Lovely indicated on Monday that there will be almost no change in guidelines for enrolment issued last year.

“The guidelines will almost remain same as last year,” Lovely said replying to a question. He said the guidelines are likely to be issued next month and the admission process will start in January.

Unanimous opposition to 'targeted' Food Security Bill

Gargi Parsai, The Hindu, 30 Nov 11

<http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/article2672038.ece>



Prakash Javadekar, Binayak Sen, D. Raja, Brinda Karat, P. Rajeev and Swami Aqnvish at a Jan Manch organised by the Right to Food Campaign in New Delhi on Tuesday. Photo: V. Sudershan

Cutting across party lines, several members of Parliament backed a universal public distribution system to ensure food security for all citizens “as a right” and vowed to oppose the ‘targeted’ food security bill in Parliament.

Among the participants at a Jan Manch organised by the Right to Food Campaign were G. Vivekananda, K. Keshava Rao and Mani Shankar Aiyer (Congress), Prakash Javadekar (BJP), Brinda Karat and P. Rajeev (CPI-M), D. Raja (CPI), Mohan Singh (Samajwadi Party) and Ali Anwar (Janata Dal-United).

“This is a wrong Bill and we will oppose it when it will be introduced in Parliament. We will also oppose it in the Standing Committee,” announced Ms. Karat, terming the proposed National Food Security Bill as “National Food Insecurity Bill”.

Lashing out against the government for “dividing the poor” in the name of giving subsidised food grains to “identified beneficiaries” on the basis of the ongoing Socio-Economic Caste Census, Ms. Karat also accused the members of the National Advisory Council (NAC) of “compromising” with the provisions of the Bill.

“They did a good job, but then they compromised and gave a chance to the government [to bring such a Bill],” she said in the presence of NAC members Aruna Roy, Harsh Mander and former member Jean Drez.

Ms. Karat said it was a “joke” that the government — in a federal structure — is asking States to identify only as many poor who could fit into the Centre's numbers of poverty. Seeing a World Bank conspiracy in the new “flawed” methodology being adopted to identify the poor, she condemned it and said: “The caste census should not in any way be linked to food entitlement as it will undermine the principle of rightful access to food entitlement.”

Ms. Karat and others, including Congress MP Mr. Rao, rejected the provision for cash transfers in lieu of food grains. Skits were organised on the occasion to highlight the pitfalls in cash transfers.

Though Mr. Rao initially supported cash transfers, he changed his stance in the face of a wave of protest from the participants from 10 States and said cash coupons would only apply to subsidies given to inputs such as fertilizers.

While activists rued the absence of any political pressure for a universal food security bill, at least two MPs — Mr. Raja and Mr. Anwar — called for building public pressure outside Parliament to force the government to bring an effective legislation.

Charging the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance with bringing the Bill “with an eye on elections,” Mr. Javadekar said the Centre was imposing its policies and laws on States that went against the federal structure.

Mr. Raja declared that his party was observing December 15 as a day for “food security” to press their demand for a “genuine, strong legislation which guarantees right to food for all.” Samajwadi Party general secretary Mohan Singh supported universal PDS and opposed cash transfers but the JD(U) MP from Bihar remained non-committal on cash transfers. as Bihar is one of the States that backs cash transfers.

The draft Bill, which is soon to be taken to the Union Cabinet for approval, provides for coverage of 75 per cent population in rural areas and 50 per cent in urban areas with subsidised grains under law.

Food bill: 25% poor will miss benefits

Neeraj Thakur , DNA, 30 Nov 11

http://www.dnaindia.com/india/report_food-bill-25pct-poor-will-miss-benefits_1619200

Bholanath Jaina, a physically-disabled person from Orissa is planning to shut down his PCO booth which is his only source of regular income. Reason: he does not want to lose his BPL status and entitlements attached with it.

The new socio-caste survey that is being carried out by the government, “has some vague criteria” that will exclude 25% of rural population from the BPL (below poverty line) category and benefits attached with it, says an activist associated with the movement.

Jaina was in Delhi to take part in the Right to Food (RTF) campaign, a movement that is demanding the government should not use the ongoing Social Economic and Caste Census (SECC) to identify the number of beneficiaries under the proposed Right to Food Act.

The census aims to rank households on a scale of 0 to 7 depending on deprivation. For each factor — such as owning a kutchra house or having a landline phone — the family gets one point. And scoring even one point excludes the family from the BPL category.

Jaina currently gets 25 kg foodgrain per month for Rs 2 per kg. Being a disabled person, he gets a monthly salary of Rs 200. “I cannot afford to lose my BPL status for the sake of my PCO booth. I will not be able survive on my PCO booth’s income,” Jaina said.

The civil society group that has formed the Right to Food Campaign is planning to stage a large scale protest from December 13 to 23.

“As per the ongoing socio-economic survey, about 25% of the rural population will not get any benefits under the Right to Food Act,” said Jean Dreze, development economist, who is a part of the campaign. The proposed Act is estimated to cost the government Rs90,000 crore in terms of subsidy. The civil society has accused the government of conspiring to exclude a large number of people from the beneficiaries’ list. But the government claims they want to take the benefits only to the real needy people.

NAC members protest against Food Security Bill

Deccan Herald, 30 Nov 2011

<http://www.deccanherald.com/content/208255/nac-members-protest-against-food.html>

Differences between the government and the National Advisory Council headed by Congress president Sonia Gandhi over the Food Security Bill reached the streets on Tuesday with civil society activists staging a stir against the "minimalist approach" of the official draft of the legislation.

Aruna Roy, NAC member, and Jean Dreze, a former member, joined other civil society activists on a demonstration at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi, and not only criticised the “flawed” and “restricted” approach of the draft National Food Security Bill, but also pointed out the inadequacy of the ongoing socio economic and caste census that the government wants the proposed legislation to rely upon to choose its beneficiaries.

They demanded that the proposed National Food Security Act must expand the ambit of the existing provisions for providing subsidised foodgrains, instead of curtailing them.

The proposed Act must refrain from continuing with the Targeted Public Distribution System and, instead, universalise it. Both Roy and Dreze were members of the NAC Working Group on Food Security, which prepared a draft National Food Security Bill and forwarded it to the government earlier this year.

The government, however, diluted some of the NAC recommendations and came out with another draft, which is set to be placed before the Union Cabinet for approval in the second week of December.

The Right To Food Campaign (RTFC) – a network of civil society organisations – on Tuesday wrote to all MPs, alleging that the draft prepared by the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution trimmed down “the very modest entitlements proposed by the NAC”.

The government’s draft of the Bill seeks to cover up to 75 per cent of rural population and 50 per cent of urban households with a proposed monthly entitlement of 7 kg foodgrain per person, at Rs 3 per kg for rice, Rs 2 per kg for wheat and Re 1 per kg for coarse grains. “The main goal of the government’s draft seems to be to minimise its obligations, restrict people’s entitlements and avoid any accountability,” said Dreze.

Roy said the draft Bill threatened to undermine the Public Distribution System by imposing an ill-advised straightjacket on the State governments.

The RTFC activists said the draft Bill perpetuated the failed model of “BPL targeting”. “It provides for subsidised food to priority and general households only, with the numbers of such households being decided through poverty estimates of the Planning Commission. It is giving legitimacy to the very unpopular APL-BPL selection process, which is more known for its exclusion and inclusion errors and its use in partisan politics rather than proper targeting,” they wrote to the MPs.

Deprivation criteria' in census will exclude vast sections of poor from entitlements

Hindu Businessline , 29 November 2011

<http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/industry-and-economy/government-and-policy/article2671501.ece>

The ongoing Socio-Economic and Caste Census (SECC), to be used for identifying the rural poor for extending food and other entitlements, will end up excluding vast sections of the vulnerable, including the disabled, say food rights activists.

A pilot survey in a Rajasthan village showed that 67 per cent of people would be left out of the below-poverty-line category or 'priority' list after using the seven-point SECC 'deprivation criteria', former National Advisory Council member and Right to Food (RTF) activist, Prof. Jean Dreze, told reporters. At present, 21 families in this village are BPL. After the pilot survey, only three families qualified under the SECC norms, he said.

Ms Uddi Gujjar, a MNREGA (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee) worker from Tikel Purohitaan village, said she was a widow and living with two school-going sons aged 17 and 15. A BPL card holder, she has one *bigha* land and gets about 25 kg grain from the ration shop at Rs 2 a kg.

"I will lose my BPL status if the SECC deprivation criteria is applied because my *kuccha* home has a thin roof and my son is above 16 years old," she said.

The SECC ranks households on a scale of zero to seven on a list of seven deprivations — households with only one room, *kuccha* walls and roof, no adult member between ages 16 and 59, households headed by women with no adult male between 16 and 59, households with disabled and no able-bodied adult, scheduled caste or scheduled tribe (SC/ST) households, those with no literate adult above 25 years and landless households deriving a major part of income from manual labour.

But it is the 13-point 'automatic exclusion' criteria that is arbitrary and may lead to enormous social tensions, said RTF activists.

For instance, there are many disabled poor who have got specialised cycles from the Government, or landless fishermen who have been forced to motorise their boats to compete with big trawlers or SC/ST families who have been given Government subsidy to install water pumps.

"All these people will be automatically excluded and pushed into further penury," they said, and urged the Advisory Committee of the SECC to address the "flaws" and ensure greater participation of gram sabhas and panchayats in the verification process.

The activists are also reaching out to Members of Parliament of all political parties to prevent the National Food Security Bill being introduced in its present form. The Bill is slated to be tabled in the ongoing Parliament session.

Food Bill monitor asks Centre to plug gaps

Ashish Sinha , India Today, 29 Nov 2011

<http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/national-food-security-bill-upa-parliament/1/161952.html>

The Centre's embarrassing U-turn on its controversial definition of rural and urban poor, based on the daily expenditure threshold of Rs.26 and Rs.32, respectively, could return to haunt it in a strange way. A crucial civil society campaign, monitoring the National Food Security Bill, has warned the UPA government against hasty introduction of the flagship legislation in Parliament and pointed out too many anomalies in the ongoing Socio-Economic and Caste Census (SECC).

After the poverty definition faux pas, the rural development ministry and the Planning Commission had presented the SECC - based on a complex exclusion, inclusion, deprivation assessment and ranking criteria of households - as a foolproof means to enumerate the country's poor

The SECC data for rural and urban India is supposed to act as the base to identify the beneficiaries of the various development and anti-poverty schemes.

But on the basis of an independent headcount conducted in a Rajasthan village, the Right to Food Campaign has pointed out that the SECC's faulty enumeration criteria is failing to classify many vulnerable households as poor.

The campaign has alleged that the headcount, which will also be the country's first 'caste census' in 80 years, could well be failing to meet even that goal as the enumeration is being conducted in a questionable and hasty manner.

If true, this could turn explosive because the government has assured all political parties of preparing the country's caste demography database through SECC. The political class had pressed for a 'caste census' so that authentic statistics on the population of various castes could be available.

"The National Food Security Bill is not yet ready. It has major problems. It will be a blunder to present the current Bill in Parliament," economist and National Advisory Council member Jean DrÃze, who is associated with the campaign, said.

"There is total confusion on the system being used for SECC. How can you enact a law without identifying the beneficiaries? The NAC couldn't spell out a sensible criteria for it. There is no clarity on how 'priority' and 'general' households are to be identified," he added.

The campaign, whose 'Roti Bhaat Satyagraha' has entered the fifth week, presented case studies of four households from Tikel Purohitaan village of Rajasthan's Jaipur, mocking the SECC as a 'Kaun Banega Scorepati' enumeration because the exercise excludes and includes families on the basis of points. For instance, the SECC score of Jagdish Gujjar, a 60-year-old villager from the OBC category, will be either zero or one. Gujjar has two mud huts built with bricks without using cement, but this could well be classified as a 'pucca house' earning him a zero score. It could go up to one if 2.5 bighas of unirrigated land, which is now in his father's name, is not considered as belonging to Jagdish. Uddi Gujjar, a poor widow with two sons - 17-year-old Hanuman and 15-year-old Prithviraj - will be excluded because the enumerator might classify her 'kutcha' house as 'pucca' since it has a cement sheet as its roof.

"I get 25 kg of foodgrain at Rs.2 per kg from the ration shop," Uddi said. But she is all set to have her name struck off the BPL list in the SECC survey.

MPs assure protesters of comprehensive Food Security Bill

IANS, 29 November 2011

MPs and leaders from various political parties Tuesday said an inclusive Food Security Act with universal Public Distribution System (PDS) will be taken up in parliament soon.

The assurance came at a 'Jan Manch (public discussion)' organised by the Right To Food Campaign here at Jantar Mantar which saw several political leaders including D. Raja of Communist Party of India (CPI), Brinda Karat of Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M), and Prakash Javadekar of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) meet hundreds of protesters from around 10 states.

"Once the government tables the Food Security Bill, we will do whatever it takes to ensure that your demands are taken up in a concerted way," said Raja.

The leaders had a face to face interaction with the protesters and criticised the government's socio-economic caste census, terming it flawed and ineffective to recognize many vulnerable poor due its faulty enumeration.

"We demand that the caste census should not in any way be linked with food entitlements as it will undermine the principle of rightful access to food entitlement," said Karat.

The gathering, also protesting against the government's plan to replace PDS with cash coupons, was assured by the leaders that no such plan would be implemented.

"For the poor there is no question of substituting grains with cash as it will aggravate the existing distress and deprivation of food among the poor... The Act is creating more insecurity than security," said Javadekar.

"The Food Security Act will not weaken the public distribution system and if grains have to be replaced it has to be with grains and any shift to cash coupons will only apply to the subsidies given to inputs like fertilizers," K. Keshav Rao, representing the Congress, said. –Indo-Asian News service

Planning Commission big stumbling block in the path of India's progress'

The demand for universal public distribution system is justified, says Congress leader and former cabinet minister Mani Shankar Aiyar. He spoke to Jyotika Sood on what made him join the Right for food Campaign at Jantar Mantar on November 29. Excerpts:



What do you think about the Right to Food Campaign?

The demand for the universal public distribution system (PDS) is absolutely correct. It is not true that only 15 to 20 per cent of Indian population needs food. If you go by the standards on food requirement, at least 80 per cent of population in India needs food security and universal PDS is an answer to it. The Right to Food Campaign as the cause will have an impact on millions of lives and I feel that National Food Security Act should surely address the demand of universal PDS.

Why do you support this Right to Food Campaign?

Can you see that man holding a placard stating 'Planning Commission should be closed' (pointing to a placard holding activist). I agree and support his demand. Planning Commission is a big stumbling block on the road of progress for India. They come out with such unrealistic ideas, which the government is ready to implement without asking questions. Now be it Socio-Economic and Caste Census for PDS or Foreign Direct Investment in retail. The public outcry is being outrightly rejected, it seems.

There was a time when Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Planning Commission deputy chairman Montek Singh Ahluwalia were in favour of closing this government establishment, and unfortunately now both are a part of it and supporting its demands.

The commission is neglecting democracy completely for its vision. In the 12th Five-Year Plan approach paper, the Planning Commission says that Indian economy is growing at more than 8 per cent. But after six paragraphs they confess to the increasing poverty rate. In this 200 page document, the Planning Commission nowhere mentions how it wants to address the growing gap.

Right to Food Campaign activists say many poor people would be left out of the Below Poverty Line list after the ongoing Socio-Economic and Caste Census because of the faulty criteria adopted by the government. Your comments

The government needs to understand that families like mine which fall in the category of above the poverty line (APL) would not go to the government ration shops to buy food and would prefer to get it from the market. Instead of conducting a SECC survey to find beneficiaries for PDS, the government

should leave it to the people to decide whether they want to avail it or not. Most APL families would exclude themselves and the state governments can remove them from their lists. This would be the best way to find the beneficiaries for PDS rather than government taking decision whom to give it to. The government should not draw a line for people who can access food under PDS.

How can it be done?

The government should prepare its package in such a way that they are targeted more towards poor. For example, more cereals like wheat and rice under PDS. It will help poor to come forward and will discourage people APL. The question is not of resources as there is no dearth of it. It's the notorious and the corrupt civil supplies department which is responsible and does not allow the food to go to the beneficiaries. The delivery mechanism for PDS with the help of Panchayats can work better.

Can you explain how delivery mechanism for PDS can work with Panchayats?

There are 300,000 panchayats with 3.2 million panchayat representatives in India. Out of these, 1.2 million are women and 86,000 among them are holding office, which is a substantial number. Each village can run its own PDS with a grain bank. The work of panchayats could be monitored by gram sabhas and this will help to eliminate Food Civil Supply department that is one of the big reasons for wastage and leakages in PDS. Besides, with such a decentralised work, expenditure on PDS will also come down.

What do you think about cash transfer in PDS?

I'm not at all certain about whether it's possible or or if it will work. As an economics student, I would like to tell you that the first lesson we learn in economics is that more money chasing scarce goods will reinforce inflation. So cash transfer is absolutely an absurd idea. Besides, you cannot replace cash with food, ever.

Mail Today, 29 November 2011

Slow down! Food Bill monitor asks Centre to plug gaps

By Ashish Sinha in New Delhi

THE CENTRE'S embarrassing U-turn on its controversial definition of rural and urban poor, based on the daily expenditure threshold of ₹26 and ₹32, respectively, could return to haunt it in a strange way.

A crucial civil society campaign, monitoring the National Food Security Bill, has warned the UPA government against hasty introduction of the flagship legislation in Parliament and pointed out too many anomalies in the ongoing Socio-Economic and Caste Census (SECC).

After the poverty definition faux pas, the rural development ministry and the Planning Commission had presented the SECC — based on a complex exclusion, inclusion, deprivation assessment and ranking criteria of households — as a foolproof means to enumerate the country's poor.

The SECC data for rural and urban India is supposed to act as the base to identify the beneficiaries of the various development and anti-poverty schemes.

But on the basis of an independent headcount conducted in a Rajasthan village, the Right to Food Campaign has



Faulty enumeration criteria fails to classify many household as poor.

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questionable and hasty manner.

If true, this could turn explosive because the government has assured all political parties of preparing the country's caste demography database through SECC. The political class had pressed for a 'caste census' so that authentic statistics on the population of various castes could be available.

Records being collected in questionable & hasty manner

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"There is total confusion on the system being used for SECC. How can you enact a law without identifying the beneficiaries? The NAC couldn't spell out a sensible criteria for it. There is no clarity on how 'priority' and 'general' households are to be identified," he added.

The campaign, whose 'Roti Bhaat Satyagraha' has entered the fifth week, presented case studies of four households from Tikel Purohitaan village of Rajasthan's Jaipur, mocking the SECC as a 'Kaun Banega Stonepati' enumeration because the exercise excludes and includes families on the basis of points.

For instance, the SECC score of Jagdish Gujjar, a 60-year-old villager from the OBC category, will be either zero or one. Gujjar has two mud huts built with bricks without using cement, but this could well be classified as a 'pucca house' earning him a zero score. It could go up to one if 2.5 bighas of unirrigated land, which is now in his father's name, is not considered as belonging to Jagdish.

Uddi Gujjar, a poor widow with two sons — 17-year-old Hanuman and 15-year-old Prithviraj — will be excluded because the enumerator might classify her 'kutcha' house as 'pucca' since it has a cement sheet as its roof.

"I get 25 kg of foodgrain at ₹2 per kg from the ration shop," Uddi said. But she is all set to have her name struck off the BPL list in the SECC survey.



व्यापक राष्ट्रीय खाद्य सुरक्षा कानून की मांग करते हुए मंगलवार को जंतर मंतर पर देश भर से सैकड़ों की संख्या में लोग एकत्रित हुए। रोजी-रोटी अधिकार अभियान के तहत लोगों की मांग थी कि जल्द से जल्द राष्ट्रीय खाद्य सुरक्षा कानून लाया जाए, जिसमें न सिर्फ जन आपूर्ति की तमाम व्यवस्था हो बल्कि लोगों के भोजन के अधिकार की रक्षा के दूसरे उपायों पर भी योजनाएं बनें। यहां आए लोगों के समर्थन के लिए सांसद वृंदा करात, जाने माने समाज सेवी विनायक सेन, राज्य सभा सदस्य डी राजा भी उपस्थित हुए।

Hindustan



Amar Ujala



Food security caps stay

Basant Kumar Mohanty, The Telegraph, 2 Dec 11

GRAIN RIGHTS
Highlights of the food security bill

- Subsidised grains for up to 75 per cent of rural population and up to 50 per cent of urban population
- Beneficiaries divided into priority and general categories
- 7kg of grain per person per month for priority households at prices not exceeding Rs 3/2/1 for 1kg of rice/wheat/coarse grains
- Not less than 3kg of grain per person per month for general households at prices not exceeding half the minimum support price (MSP) for wheat and coarse grains, and not exceeding half the derived MSP (recalculated MSP after de-husking of paddy) of rice
- Nutritional support for children and lactating mothers
- Monthly allowance of Rs 1,000 over six months for lactating mothers
- One free meal every day for the destitute
- Affordable meals at community kitchens for the homeless
- Two free meals a day for up to three months for the disaster-hit
- Financial implication estimated at Rs 94,973cr a year

New Delhi, Dec. 1: Up to three-fourths of villagers and half of city dwellers will be entitled to subsidised food grains under a new bill, with the Centre refusing to budge on the volume of grain entitlement and continuing with upper limits for beneficiaries.

The National Food Security Bill, redrafted on the basis of feedback from states and civil society groups, will soon be sent to the cabinet so that it can be introduced in the ongoing session of Parliament.

Various food rights groups had demonstrated here this week demanding subsidised food grains for all citizens at 50kg a month for a family of five, without any classification. But the government has stuck to the entitlements and proportion of beneficiaries mentioned in the first draft.

The bill provides for differential grain entitlements to families depending on their economic condition. It says at least 46 per cent of the rural population will be considered the priority group and will stand to receive a higher quantity of grain at a cheaper price than the 29 per cent villagers in the general category.

In urban areas, 28 per cent of the population will come under the priority category.

The percentage of beneficiaries, however, may vary from state to state. The ongoing socio-economic caste census will suggest the exact number of beneficiaries.

“Various studies have suggested the percentage of the poor may be less than 75 per cent in rural areas and less than 50 per cent in urban areas. That is why the upper limits have been set. But the percentages may vary from state to state,” a central government source said.

Under the revised bill, an estimated 2.25 crore women will get Rs 6,000 each apart from free meals at anganwadi centres.

In exceptional situations, the bill provides for cash transfer and food coupons. People living in difficult terrains might get this benefit.

Subsidised grains are now provided under the public distribution system (PDS). Certain organisations working on food security want the PDS replaced by cash transfer, a demand the Bihar government too backs on the ground that the PDS is “time-consuming and cost-intensive”.

But the central government source said: “The bill allows cash transfer in exceptional cases but the PDS will not be replaced. It is being revamped by introducing computerisation and maintaining transparency in records.”

The financial implication of the bill is estimated to be Rs 94,973 crore a year. The Centre will be obliged to regularly supply grains to PDS outlets while the states have to ensure proper implementation.

The states will bear certain costs relating to the maternal allowance and free meals for the destitute and disaster-hit. Certain states such as Bengal and Punjab have asked the Union food ministry to clarify the cost-sharing formula.

Food rights activists are disappointed at the government’s refusal to increase the entitlements and make food security universal.

Activist Nikhil Dey said: “The basic feature of the proposed law is un-implementable. It speaks of a 46 per cent priority category. How will you select the 46 per cent? It will be arbitrary.”

Kavita Srivastava, national secretary of the People’s Union for Civil Liberties, said all citizens should be entitled to subsidised grains whether they choose to take it or not.

She criticised the ongoing socio-economic caste census, saying it may exclude many poor people from the below-poverty-line (BPL) list.

“Our study suggests that the exclusion error will be very high.... Deserving people will not find place in the BPL list. Therefore, they may not get the benefit of PDS grains,” she said.

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