

Section I: INTRODUCTION

Since September last year, the condition of Sahariya Adivasis has been given wide coverage in the media. These 'primitive tribes' are found in large numbers on both sides of the Rajasthan - Madhya Pradesh border. News about this clan started appearing in national dailies when accounts of starvation deaths among them were reported from the district of Baran in Rajasthan and later from Ganj Basauda Tehsil of Vidisha district in Madhya Pradesh. Subsequently, similar reports were received from Phori and Chharch of Shivpuri district. According to Express News Service, the Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh held a press conference on Saturday the 23rd of November 2002 to reply to allegations of such 'starvation deaths'. It reports that he dismissed all claims that the deaths were due to starvation, but "*left open the possibility of deaths due to acute malnutrition and related diseases.*" The news item also carried reports of large-scale death of cattle and other livestock in the region. In similar vein, the Rajasthan government investigated the deaths in Baran and said that these were due to "*malnutrition coupled with disease*".

Several independent reports by civil society groups, the media, state government and the centre, have been published regarding the situation in Rajasthan. Subsequently Baran stayed in focus and the Government of Rajasthan consequently stepped up relief activities in the region. Employment created by such works increased significantly and various other measures including the improved distribution of grain through the public distribution system were taken up, to mitigate hunger and to prevent starvation. In Madhya Pradesh however, we have not yet heard of independent reports of such a kind. This was the motivating factor to take up a study that looks at the condition of the Sahariyas in Madhya Pradesh.

The Sahariya predicament

Social indicators of Sahariyas tell a very sad tale. These groups typically suffer from very high levels of malnutrition. An ICMR report¹ of Sahariyas in Madhya Pradesh claims that 93% of Sahariya children are malnourished, with 15% of the children being found to be 'severely malnourished'. The percentage of children underweight, 'wasted' or 'stunted' are all above 70%. With such high rates of malnutrition among children, one cannot expect to see healthy adults. Anaemia is found in close to 87% of all adults with over half of them suffering from 'mild to severe anaemia'. These figures are among the worst in the world. The fragile constitution of the Sahariyas leaves them extremely vulnerable to all kinds of

¹ See Table 1

health risks. This would in all probability lead to premature deaths in the absence of adequate relief measures, when faced with the added impact of a severe drought.

One of the reasons often attributed to the deteriorating condition of the Sahariyas is the increasing threat to their livelihood, which comes under severe strain from various quarters. The Sahariyas are dependent on forest produce and have been adversely affected by the reduction in forest cover. Considering that a large number of them are landless and often dependent on the work provided by nearby stone quarries, the subsequent closing down of several of these illegal quarries has further added to their misery. The drought in turn has robbed them of the possibility of earning their livelihood as agricultural labourers, from farm employment. Since the drought conditions are often widespread, options of finding employment outside are also limited. The loss of their livestock due to the lack of water and food has further reduced their slender asset base and exposed them to greater risks.

Table 1: Index of Nutrition among Children: A Comparative Chart

S.NO	INDICATOR	SAHARIYAS*	WORLD'S WORST**
1	Under-nutrition in preschool children	93.5 %	Not available
2.	Proportion of underweight children	74.3%	56% (Bangladesh)
3	Proportion of children Stunted	75.4%	64% (Bangladesh)
4	Proportion of children 'Wasted'	20%	18% (Ethiopia)

Source: *A study of Sahariyas in Sheopur and Shivpuri district by Regional medical research centre for tribals, Jabalpur ** From State of the world's children report 1998

The Location

Sheopur district lies in the Northern Chambal region of Madhya Pradesh and shares a border with Rajasthan. It has a population of nearly 5.6 lakh according to the 2001 census, with a heavy concentration of tribals. About one fifth of the population consists of primitive tribes², a large proportion of whom are Sahariya Adivasis. The region is one of the poorest in the country with a particularly poor record with respect to nutrition and health indicators. Infant

² In 1991 there were 86638 people who were classified as primitive tribes in Sheopur.

mortality rate in Sheopur for example is 110, compared to 86 for Madhya Pradesh as a whole. Close to 40 % of the Sheopur population lives below the poverty line, and the number of Sahariyas below the poverty line is likely to be much higher.

This report looks at the Sahariya predicament in the context of the 'right to food', concentrating in particular on the extent to which the Orders of the Supreme Court³ have been complied with. Since we intended to look at the implementation of various centrally sponsored schemes, we chose to study the performance of a district⁴ with a strong concentration of Sahariyas. Sheopur was thus selected for examination.

Nature of the report

The news reports and subsequent visits to the Chambal region of Madhya Pradesh had brought to light issues of concern regarding food security in the area. An earlier letter dated 24 April 2003⁵ had been written to the administration however little seems to have been done in that regard. The primary aim of this report is to further identify and raise issues about the nature of social security in the region concerned. Though it is based on field-based inputs, we do not mean it to be a mere investigative report. The issues raised here, we feel, are general to the larger Chambal region. We hope this will help in mootng larger policy changes than mere remedial measures in the areas visited.

The Scope

The field visit was conducted in the last week of June 2003. A large part of the report is based on extensive investigation done in the panchayats of Hirapur and Panwada, both of which come under the administrative Block of Karahal. Apart from conversations with the villagers of these areas, interactions with officials and members of civil society proved to be a valuable source of information on the situation in the district as a whole.

Poverty and increasing loss of livelihood of the Sahariyas has increased the importance of social security mechanism for a dignified survival. The purpose of our visit was to examine how the social security schemes functioned in the district. We covered various schemes that were a part of the directions of the Supreme Court in the right to food litigation. We paid

³ In the case, PUCL vs. UoI and Others [Writ/petition (Civil) No. 196/2001]

⁴ It is much easier to see if directions of the court are implemented in a district, rather than with respect to Sahariyas in particular. E.g. we can see if SGRY was doubled during May - July 2003 in an administrative area such as a district, whereas it would be impossible to do it with reference to Sahariyas who lives in pockets of contiguous districts.

⁵ Copy of the letter is given in Annexure 17

much importance to wage employment programmes, social security pensions, the distribution of grain through the Antyodya Ann Yojana and nutrition programmes for children. Relief employment works are among the most important social security measures during drought. These typically provide employment to the able bodied who are willing to take up '*unskilled manual labour*' at minimum wages. For the ones who are unable to take up any physical labour either due to old age or disability, the administration provides social security pensions. These are offered to the aged destitute, widows without support and to disabled children and adults. Antyodya is a scheme for providing highly subsidised grain to the '*poorest of poor*'. Finally we looked at the Mid-Day Meal Scheme and the Integrated Child Development Services (Anganwadi) that aim to simultaneously meet the two goals of providing nutrition and education to children.

Impending wave of starvation

An important issue we wish to highlight is the impending wave of starvation in the next few months, till the next harvest is done. A large number of Sahariya households have run out of grains. Relief works have stopped and the chances of them finding private employment is grim. At the same time, they have to work hard on ensuring a crop this season. We are deeply concerned that there will be a wave of starvation, and the possibility of debilitating consequences if measures are not take immediately to address them.

Section II: COMPLIANCE WITH SUPREME COURT ORDERS

We sought to examine the performance of the district in honouring the 'Right to food'. What the right implies is open to interpretation, so we started by looking at the status of implementation of the Orders of the Supreme Court in the right to food litigation⁶. The following table summarises the performance of Sheopur in implementing the directions. The analysis has been done on the basis of field visits, examination of official data, and interviews across the spectrum, as explained in the sections to follow.

Table 2: Status of implementation of directions of the Supreme Court in Sheopur

DIRECTION OF THE SUPREME COURT	STATUS OF IMPLEMENTATION
<i>Order of July 23, 2001</i>	
Ensure that food is provided to the aged, infirm, disabled, destitute, pregnant and lactating women and destitute children especially if their families are unable to provide for them	Very small number of aged, infirm and the destitute are covered by the various schemes. Many elderly and children in particular are undergoing starvation. Further, the level of under nutrition among children is unacceptably high.
PDS shops to open regularly and supplies to be available when the shops are open	There is a wide network of PDS shops catering to 533 villages and 219 gram panchayats. However, PDS shops fail to remain open on all working days and supplies are generally available for few days in a month if at all.
<i>Order of November 28, 2001</i>	
Complete BPL identification, issue cards, and start distributing grains	Identification was completed well in time, and the second round of identification is currently in progress.
Complete identification and issue of cards to Antyodya beneficiaries and process of distribution of grains to begin.	Initial round of identification was done well in time.
If Antyodya beneficiaries are unable to lift grains due to penury, consider providing grains free of cost	The official data for the district suggests that there is 100 % lifting. On the ground, various beneficiaries are not lifting grains, many due to penury. There appears to be

⁶ PUCL Vs UoI and Ors.

	<p>no mechanism to provide free grants to Antyodya beneficiaries. There is an alternate scheme of maintaining 5 quintals of grain with the Panchayat, to be distributed to those in danger of starvation. However, this is <i>ad hoc</i> and appears to be dysfunctional. Systematic methods would be of added relevance now since aged destitute, widows, and primitive tribes are being given Antyodya cards as a right.</p>
<p>Provide cooked mid day meals to all children in government and government aided primary schools</p>	<p>In Karahal the adivasi block, cooked meals are being provided since 1997. But it was left to the schools to choose if cooked meals should be provided. Now this has been made compulsory. In the other two blocks, it is not clear if all schools are providing cooked meals. But the deadline for implementing the order (June 2002) was clearly violated.</p>
<p>FCI and States to do joint inspection of food grains before lifting them.</p>	<p>There were many complaints on the quality of grains in mid day meal programme, though we did not go into this question systematically. It appears that there are compromises in both quality and quantity of grains sent to the schools. This issue needs further examination.</p>
<p>Old Age Pension beneficiaries to be identified and payments to be started</p>	<p>More beneficiaries were identified in MP than was provided for by the Government of India. GoMP supplements the grants from the centre with a significant component of its own. But, many aged destitute remain uncovered. There are just 2586 old age pension beneficiaries in Sheopur. Field visits revealed many instances of those needing support, but getting none.</p>
<p>Identify Annapoorna beneficiaries and start</p>	<p>Only 1,110 people have been identified for</p>

distributing grains	the scheme, since GoMP claims that all eligible people are being covered by pensions. The beneficiaries have lost their entitlement this financial year with no advance notice, or alternative, since the scheme has been closed.
Each Anganwadi to serve 0-6 children, pregnant and lactating women, adolescent girls and aged destitute	The Anganwadis in Sheopur cover a small percentage of the 1,10,469 children that do exist in the age group 0-6. There is no systematic coverage of the aged destitute, pregnant and lactating women or adolescent girls. Anganwadis are understaffed in Sheopur and it is likely that the coverage of 0-3 children is very low. This needs further examination.
Have an Anganwadi in each settlement	The total number of Anganwadis operational as per the information in November 2001 is 296 in Sheopur as opposed to the 533 villages that exist. Since each village has many settlements, the coverage of Anganwadis is far smaller than required.
All BPL pregnant women should be given Rs.500 through the Sarpanch 8-12 weeks prior to delivery for each of the first two births	The number of women receiving the benefit suggests that most eligible women are not receiving the benefit.
BPL family to be paid Rs. 10,000/- within four weeks through a local Sarpanch, whenever the primary breadwinner of the family dies.	Few people in the villages we visited had received the benefit. Under anonymity, we were told that fake accounts are opened and people who are not eligible claim the money. This issue needs further examination
Translate the orders in the local language and give them wide publicity	GoMP claimed in an affidavit that the order had been complied with. It is impossible to verify if posters were pasted in 2001. But we found that people did not even know of their entitlements in general and of the

	NMBS and NFBS in particular. This makes us question the 'efforts' taken to spread information about entitlements and about the Courts Orders.
Names of beneficiaries of various schemes to be pasted in various locations in the locality	<p>We can say with confidence that this order has been violated in most places. No one we met knew of lists that were pasted. Incidentally we happened to be in Panwada on a day scheduled to have a gram sabha meeting. This was called to discuss the prospective beneficiaries under the revised BPL list. However it turned out to be just a declaration of the number of people who had been selected, and no names were discussed.</p> <p>When we wanted to obtain the list of beneficiaries, we were chased from one office to another and it was not even clear to the officers, or us where we could obtain the lists.</p>
<i>Order of May 8, 2002</i>	
The gram panchayats shall frame employment generation proposals in accordance with the SGRY guidelines. These proposals shall be approved and sanctioned by the Gram Panchayats and the work started expeditiously	All secretaries we met told us that they had been 'informed' of the projects that were chosen. The sarpanch of Hirapur, for example, had requested the sanction of a 'tanki'. The administration however chose to sanction projects of its own choice. In any case the process is clearly not gram sabha driven.
The gram sabhas are entitled to conduct Social Audits into all Food/ Employment schemes	No gram sabha has conducted a social audit to our knowledge. In any case, relevant information is so heavily guarded, that even the Commissioners team found it difficult to obtain.
Gram Sabhas are entitled to monitor the implementation of the various schemes and have access to relevant information	This direction is clearly violated in letter and in spirit. Despite 'desperate attempts', even the <i>upsarpanch</i> of Hirapur was not

	able to access the Panchayat records. Even with the personal intervention of the Commissioner of the Supreme Court, we found it difficult to access documents. For the civil society, and for the gram sabha, information is way beyond access.
<i>Order of May 2, 2003</i>	
Double the resource allocation (both grain and cash) for the SGRY for the months of May, June and July 2003.	SGRY has not been doubled in the district despite distress demand for employment. Very few projects have been sanctioned under the second stream and none at all in the first. Even the allocation under the normal quota remains unutilised.
Famine codes will be binding in the months of May, June and July. However, if better measures are incorporated in other schemes, these may be implemented instead	We did not have the chance to see the provisions of the famine code. In any case, we were told that there is no copy of the famine code with the district administration itself. We did not venture to enquire if it was being implemented.
Licences of ration shop dealers to be cancelled if they (i) do not open on time, (ii) overcharge, (iii) retain ration cards, (iv) make false entries in BPL cards, or (v) engage in black marketing	(Ad hoc inspections were happening and three truck loads of grain on its way to the black market was seized just before we reached Sheopur. Given the fact that PDS dealers are able to give Antyodya beneficiaries much below par and are able to get away with it, itself questions the existing monitoring system.) In Hirapur for example, we found the dealer violating 4 out of the 5 counts given here. This was despite the fact that written complaints had been given to the collector. The public distribution system in Sheopur needs a thorough examination.
The following groups to be given Antyodya cards: (1) Aged, infirm, disabled, destitute men and women, pregnant and lactating destitute	The district and the state on the whole should be given kudos for taking this up actively. The destitute and the primitive

<p>women; (2) widows and other single women with no regular support; (3) old persons (aged 60 or above) with no regular support and no assured means of subsistence; (4) households with a disabled adult and no assured means of subsistence; (5) households where due to old age, lack of physical or mental fitness, social customs, need to care for a disabled, or other reasons, no adult member is available to engage in gainful employment outside the house; and (6) primitive tribes</p>	<p>tribes were to be identified and cards given by 7 July 2003. Given the pace of work, it is unlikely that the process would be completed by the deadline, but there was definite progress towards this goal. It appears that Madhya Pradesh is working on this more actively than most other states.</p>
---	--

SECTION III: HUNGER IN HIRAPUR - A CASE STUDY

Much of our field investigation happened in Hirapur Panchayat. The Panchayat is within one hour's train ride from Sheopur town. It has a population of just below 5,000, a large proportion of them being Sahariyas. While we short listed eight Panchayats for study, we had to spend most of our time in searching for records. We settled on Hirapur given its relatively easy accessibility. Further a team of students from Delhi School of Economics had visited the Panchayat on an earlier occasion, which gave us the advantage of some prior information.

Hirapur has seen three years of drought and an especially severe spell last year. The drought had resulted in a wave of starvation, destitution and death of cattle, elderly and children. We spent a significant amount of time in 'Marka Tapra' one of the colonies of the village inhabited completely by the Sahariyas. Hunger and starvation looms large over the village and everyone experience's its effect; the able bodied, the children and the aged.

Collapse of livelihood

The drought has severely shrunk the employment opportunities leaving the already poor families with little income for sustenance. The rain has come and it is likely to bring a good crop. But the worst is not yet over for the Sahariyas. With the coming of the rains employment prospects have dwindled and even the limited 'relief works' that were started have to be completed by June 30. This will lead to a dry spell as far as employment works are concerned between the period July and November, by which time hopefully the Bajra crop would have been harvested. For the landless inhabitants of 'Marka Tapra' however this provides little consolation. Many Sahariya women collect wood from the forest to sell in Sheopur. The government has not been of much help. People say that they managed just about 15 - 20 days of employment in relief works in the past year. Wages are paid mostly by 'task rate' and often the extent of work provided is restricted to just one 'gadda' per family to dig, yielding just 10 kilos of grain in a day for the entire family.

A large proportion of the population comprises of casual labour who need local employment to earn their livelihood, of which relief works carried out by the administration, is the most important element. A major problem with such works is that the employment generated is very low. The consequences are there to see. The villagers took us to the house of **Goru** who died two months ago after a spell of ill health. He leaves behind a wife who is bed-ridden and unable to fend for herself. She depends on the charity of her neighbours, who are unsure

about where their next meal comes from. **Devi Ram** who lives close to her recounts that he and other villagers help the old lady occasionally. 'We can give her food now and then, but how can we support her for months at end, especially when our own children are going hungry?' he quips. His house like that of most others in the locality has no stock of grain at all. He had received about 20 days of employment in the 'relief works' in the last year. With this and the meagre employment that he gets elsewhere he tries hard to feed his family, leaving little scope for charity.

As we started enquiring about recent deaths, we were taken to an isolated thatched hut that remains unused after its inhabitant, **Pannu** died. His wife had met the same fate a year ago. Though old, Pannu had to depend totally on wage labour for his income. When he developed a sickness two months ago, the villagers gave an application to the 'Patwari' of the village asking him to arrange support for Pannu. The Patwari arranged 5 kgs of grain and did not follow it up. Five days later, Pannu died. His only other form of support was the pensions that he used to receive but that too had stopped for the last twelve months. Lacking employment opportunities and any means of regular support, Pannu died about three months ago.

No stock of grain

Most sahariyas live a hand to mouth existence. They have no option but to go hungry in the absence of stock of grain. Most of the villagers had not got enough employment to enable them to store grain for the time when the rains would come and employment would be at an all time low. In many other Panchayats, people were able to save a few quintals of grain to last them for the next three months. This is unlike Hirapur, which has not been able to attract adequate relief works. "Go and check any of our houses and see for yourselves if any grain is found," we were challenged. We were led from house to house and given a long wooden stick to check if there was any grain in store. Again and again we found the empty floor of the storage bins.

Elimination of livestock

The drought has already taken its toll. Unable to fend for themselves, most of them have had no option but to abandon their livestock. Twenty-three⁷ households, almost 90% of houses in 'Marka Tapra, have seen their livestock dying in the last few months. Of these, more than 90% of the households saw deaths, where the number of cattle that died were two or higher. With this, for many their only asset and source of livelihood has been destroyed.

⁷ See Annexure 1

Withdrawn Benefits: The effect on the aged

The cruelest impact of the drought has been on the elderly people. At least four⁸ old people have died in the last year in 'Marka Tapra' alone and many more are living with unhopeful prospects for the futures. Annapoorna, a programme targeted at the aged destitute who do not receive pensions was done away with in March 2003. The ten kilos of grain received free of cost, was for most beneficiaries the only source of food, apart from charity. Old age and widow pensions, given to the elderly who have little or no means of support have also been abruptly stopped for some beneficiaries. The consequences are long periods of extreme hunger. In Hirapur, as elsewhere in the district, we met people who were undergoing starvation but have lost pension entitlements.

A case in point is that of **Gyani Bai** widow of Hira who died in February this year. She claims her husband died due to lack of food and water. *"He had to eat plastic and paper in desperation"*, she adds. Gyani Bai was preparing her breakfast when we met her. The food consisted of a 'chutney of leaves' she had collected from the forest. She had picked some kind of wild 'saag', which she had ground and mixed with water to make chutney. The only form of monetary support was the monthly pension, which she used to receive. However this stopped a year back, the administration offering her no reason for the same. **Ram Kori Bai** has a similar tale to tell. A widow she has a son who ran away many years ago and has not been heard from since. Her two daughters are married with neither being in a position to support her. Her husband Misya, died a month ago of 'sans ki bimari' preceded by many days of severe hunger. She was getting pensions earlier but has not received a rupee for the last four months. She claims that the pensions were the only income that she had and it was useful for her and Misya to meet basic food expenses.

The villagers insisted that we go to the canal bank to meet **Duria**. We were led to a row of ramshackle huts that could at the most provide some shade from the sun for a part of the day. Duria's hut boasted of one bed. The only other 'asset' we saw was a dusty and neglected plate. The two cows he owned had died due to lack of food and water. Like many of the elderly destitute he too lives on occasional charity. He used to get pensions, which have stopped. We were not able to ascertain when this happened. In any case, he did not seem too interested in the possibility of the next installment ever reaching him.

⁸ Goru, Pannu, Hira and Misya

The Children of Hirapur

Many children in Hirapur are visibly malnourished and incapable of standing a bout of severe illness. In extreme cases, we were able to observe children who had a thin frame and potbellies resembling severe stages of malnutrition. At least three children⁹ have died in the drought of diseases in the last year. Lack of clean drinking water and inadequate nourishment leaves them with little chance of survival should one of them fall sick. Preliminary investigations reveal that the deaths were due to illness, beyond which we did not pursue the issue since we were not equipped to handle it. But the lack of access to primary health facilities for these people was palpable.

⁹ Of the three we were told about the specific case of six year old Dileep s/o Banshi, resident of 'Marka tapra', Hirapur. We were unable to inquire about the other two.

SECTION IV: THE SCHEMES IN OPERATION

This section presents a picture of how the social security system functions in Hirapur. The good news is that a system exists, but it does not function as well as it should. We will first look at the operation of 'Relief Works'. Relief works and Sampoon Grameen Rozgar Yojana (SGRY) are the main wage employment programmes undertaken in the district, payments for which were being made only in grain in Sheopur.

4.1 Relief works in Hirapur¹⁰

4.1.1 Low Allocations: If all resources allocated for relief wage employment programmes were fully utilised, it could create just 20¹¹ days of employment per family for the whole year. This converts an income of just Rs. 83 per family per month. In Hirapur, people¹² reported that they received employment of about fifteen days in the last year, compared to over three hundred days required¹³ to reach the poverty line level of income, in the absence of other sources of income. To consider another example, the employment assurance scheme sought to create hundred days of employment in the normal year to enable the poor families to reach the poverty line. On several occasions desperate demand for more employment in the form of community assets required, have been made. The Sarpanch gave us letters that had been given to the Collector demanding additional works. Three such letters¹⁴ are attached. This is in addition to affidavits¹⁵ given to us by the residents of the village, requesting more relief works to be started in the hope that this would lead to more public works being undertaken in the area. However the administration seems to have turned a blind eye to such requests.

4.1.2 Non-Utilization of Funds: Money allocated for employment creation is low, but its utilisation is lower still. Officially all projects should be completed by June 30 and by June 27 just two out of eight projects sanctioned had been completed (see table 3 below). Mud roads that had been started in February still lay incomplete in the month of June. There did not appear to be any intention of completing them. If all the resources that were sanctioned had been utilised efficiently and fully, it could have created approx. twenty days of employment as against the fifteen reported to have actually been available. An approach road between 'Kashipur' and 'Punjabi Tapra' was sanctioned with a total allocation of 150 quintals of grain.

¹⁰ A detailed table has been given in Annexure 21

¹¹ Refer to table 4

¹² This refers to people who have not migrated, and those in need of employment, whereas the average employment of 20 days is calculated for one person per family.

¹³ The poverty line level of income in 1999 - 2000 was Rs 311 per capita for rural areas in MP. The monthly income required for a family of five is Rs. 1555, just to reach the poverty line. Given the wage rate of Rs. 50, it requires full 31 days of employment per month per family to reach that level.

¹⁴ See Annexures 2 - 4, with MP State Minorities Commission Letterheads)

¹⁵ See Annexures 5 & 6

But work had not started since people in 'Punjabi Tapra' objected to the building of the road where their land was being cultivated. The grain however has already come and the sanction is likely to lapse unless the project is 'certified as complete'. Three days before projects were supposed to be closed, we found most works incomplete. These could very well end up as ghost projects and further inquiry into such works is required.

Table 3: Status of Wage Employment Programmes in Hirapur

S.NO	NAME OF WORK	STATUS (Status as on July 30, 2003)
1	Approach Road Kichoosingh Tapra to Neher*	Incomplete
2	Naveen Talab-Patalgarh*	Work in progress. Work started as late as June 20. By June 27, only 50 Quintals had been disbursed out of 654 sanctioned
3	Approach Road Girdharpur to Jharer*	Work in progress. By June 25 the secretary told us that that project has not started since forest department is obstructing the work, demanding clearance from it. By 27 th work started despite not getting clearance.
4	Approach Road Punjab Tapra to Kashipur*	Not Started. Some grain has come, but the work has not started since the road passes through fields bearing crops, the farmers had objected to the work.
5	Approach road Adivasi colony (Patal garh) to Jharer **	Incomplete. According to the secretary, the road has been laid, but levelling needs to be done for which the secretary claims that about 40 people will work for one week.
6	Hiraman Talaya**	Abandoned
7	Approach road Girdarpur to Railway track**	Complete
8	Approach Road Railway Track to Marka-Tapra**	Complete

Source: * Details of all Relief Works Sanctioned, Grameen Yantrika Sewa, Office of the Collector, Sheopur ** Secretary, Gram Panchayat Hirapur

4.1.3 Untimely relief: Little or no employment has been created between February and June. Works under SGRY came to a close by February and drought relief works had not started till the second week of June. Work on a 'talab' in Partalgarh implemented by the Water Resources Department was on by late June, but it was not clear when it was started. In any case, little or no employment was created between January and May in a drought year. Most of the drought relief works started in June were undertaken in order to meet the official deadline of June 30, for completion of all works. The 'year-end rush' to utilise the funds as well as the failure to start relief works in times of acute distress indicates the low priority given to such projects.

Table 5: Lack of Relief Works during January - May, the crucial months in a drought year

Month	Number of works Undertaken	Reference*
Nov- Dec 2002	4	1, 6, 7, 8
Jan - May 2003	None	Not applicable
June 2003	3	2, 4, 5

(Note: * refers to the serial number of the project as in Table 3 above)

4.1.4 Corruption: In case of wage employment programmes, irregularities in the use of funds can most often be traced to fudged muster rolls. We were able to obtain the muster rolls of three projects in Hirapur. Since we did not get completion certificates, it is not clear if the muster rolls are complete. Of the three complete muster rolls we were able to obtain, we found two¹⁶of them were fudged due to corruption, and a third¹⁷was fudged since tractors had been used illegally. It is possible that there was corruption in this project too. A resident mentioned that the 'murram' on this road was supposed to be six inches thick, but only one inch was laid in the road. The road was in a pathetic condition by the time we visited it.

We received the copy of a letter sent to the Collector by several 'Panch' members of Hirapur Panchayat. The letter highlights corruption in relief works¹⁸and claims that the approach road constructed between Girdharpur Sehrana and Railway Track was built with tractors for which Rs 25,000 was paid. They further allege that 145 quintals of wheat received for construction works has been sold in the open market by the Sarpanch of the Panchayat. It is not clear if the Collector conducted an investigation into the matter.

¹⁶Approach Road between Kichoosingh Tapra and Neher and Approach Road from Girdharpur Sehrana to Railway Track

¹⁷Approach road from Marka Tapra to Railway Track

¹⁸ A Copy of the letter is given in Annexure 7

Box 1: Muster rolls what they are and what they mean

Muster rolls are accounts registers to maintain details of employment and wages paid to each worker. In employment programmes like SGRY or food-for-work programme, most of the money is utilised in wages, which makes the muster roll the most important accounts book in these programmes. Typically these contain the name of the worker, unit of work done (according to task or number of days), payment made, signature or the thumb impression of the labourer, etc.

Muster rolls are fudged where there is corruption, to show more expenses than have actually been incurred. This is done by showing names of people who have not worked on the project or by paying less and entering more. When social audits were initiated in Rajasthan, people found to their surprise that even dead people had worked with them, at least in muster rolls!

Muster rolls are key to establish corruption in employment programmes. Due to this, they are guarded jealously by agencies and are kept away from public access. In Rajasthan, due to a strong movement for the right to information, muster rolls are more accessible to the common person. The impact of this is that corruption in relief works has almost disappeared in good parts of the state. Apart from Rajasthan it is difficult to access it in most other states. If corruption needs to be dealt with ensuring access to muster rolls is the way.

Box 2: Grain for new Pattedars to improve their land

Ninety-one quintals of grain was given to Hirapur Panchayat for distribution to new 'patta' holders to improve their land. The secretary told us that this was given under 'relief works', but it is likely that it was distributed under another state scheme. It is quite probable that he told us this since he was unable to account for the grains he had received on account of relief works. Of the six quintals allocated to each of the 17 new 'Pattedars', 3 quintals have been given to each of them as the first instalment. When we checked the register, we found that officially 3.2 quintals had been shown as having been distributed.

Further, the grain was supposed to be distributed free of cost. Conversations with the beneficiaries revealed that each of them had to pay Rs. 300 to receive it. Subsequently we received an affidavit from the secretary confessing to distributing 20 KGs less. He claimed that the grain was dropped at the ration dealer's place, who then distributed it. The PDS dealer confessed to have taken Rs. 300 from each beneficiary. This happened only after we told him that the 'Pattedars' were willing to give us in writing, about paying Rs. 300 for the grain they had received. The list of 'Pattedars' is given in Annexure 23.

4.1.5 Quality of Works: A natural consequence of a lack of a structured system is the poor quality of works that emerges. Half the works started lay incomplete. The mud roads in particular have already gone waste. The only two works that were completed this season have already disintegrated. Kicchoosingh to Neher road, for example, was started in February and was stopped after a few days of work. The semi complete road stands exposed to rain today and is bound to become a nuisance rather than the asset it was supposed to be. The 'Marka Tapra' road has been built with such little clay (murrum) that it proves difficult to use. Most other projects were "in progress" and we will have to wait for a few months to see the fate of the resources employed in them.

Box 3: Case of Approach Road between Kicchusingh Tapra and Nehar

The work on this project had originally started in February and suspended thereafter since the sanctioned grains were not sent. The Panchayat Secretary informed us that only 51 quintals out of the 144 allotted, had been received. Regarding the status of the project he told us that all the 'mitti work' had been completed, the only thing remaining was a layer of 'murrām', on a road that was sanctioned to be 500 meters long. When we obtained the list of all relief works in the district we found that the road was supposed to be 700 meters long. We confronted him with this on a later date. He then changed his story to say that another 200 meters remains to be built. Since none of the projects we visited had boards giving details of the projects, we were unable to verify if projects are done as per specifications.

When we asked him for the muster rolls we were told that they had been sent to the block for an annual audit and that he did not maintain a copy. After much argument he consented to give us the 'kacha copy'. A volunteer verified this 'rough register'. He was able to ~~verify~~ verify the names in Marka tapra alone, but close to 70% of the names in the kacha record was found in this colony alone. The records matched more or less perfectly. In some other colonies we did a sample check and people reported that they received just as much grain as the register indicated.

Once we started protesting with the administration about not receiving original copies of muster rolls, the secretary met us again and promised to give us the originals. He 'confessed' that the originals were with him and brought them to us two days later. The muster rolls had the same names as the kacha records. Fifteen names that were duplicates in the kacha records (possibly since they worked on different occasions) were merged in the original muster roll. For example the name of Birbal appears in S. No. 55 and 103 in the kacha record. This has been amalgamated in the muster roll into one record, which presents no problem.

However a comparison between the kacha records and the muster rolls indicate the possibility of corruption. The muster rolls claims that each person got 70 KGs, whereas our verification as well as the entries in kacha records show that people have got much less than that. The work in this project lasted for just three days, but the musters mentions that each person worked for 7 days. Another indication of fudging is evident from the fact that many people who saw the musters said that they were capable of signing, whereas the musters had their thumb imprints. The rough records have their signatures whereas the muster has the thumb imprints. The case of Pitam son of Lakha is an example. We obtained his signature in a separate sheet (copy given in Annexure 18). This matches with the kacha record, whereas the muster has a different signature. A copy of the two, are given in Annexure 19 and 20.

4.1.6 Ola Pedith Relief Work: A Case Study

Wage employment work was sanctioned under the title of 'Ola Pedith' to provide employment for farmers who had lost their wheat crop due to sleet. We are not clear under which scheme this was taken up, although the secretary told us that this is a part of 'sukha grasth' i.e. relief works. In our initial sitting with him, the only detail we had with us was how much grain the Panchayat had received from the civil supplies corporation. He told us that he got 127 quintals for the work and built the Girdarpur - Railway track approach road with it. We asked him how many were employed in the project and we were told that 150 'gaddas' were dug. At 10 KG per gadda, this accounts for just 15 quintals, far short of 127 quintals. When we pointed this out, after some thought, he told us that he constructed the Hiranman Talia too with that money. This did not tally either, for he said that he got 250 Gaddas dug. He then went on to add 'Railway track to Marka Tapra road' to the list.

He told us that he undertook various works under this but was not clear on what had actually been sanctioned. When we asked him for the project estimate, which would have the details, he told us that he had been instructed by a block level officer to start the work. Since this had been done orally, he did not have any estimates with him. The works he told us of included:

Approach road from Girdarpur to Railway track: We verified that the work had indeed been done. The secretary claimed that the work went on for a week, whereas most people we met said that it went on for two days. We examined both the 'kacha records' and the 'original muster roll' of the approach road between Girdarpur and Railway Track. The two had stark discrepancies. **According to the 'kacha records', 42 quintals of grain were distributed, but the muster rolls record that 168 quintals were distributed in the project.** Again we do not know if this is a complete muster roll.

Hiranman Talaya¹⁹: It is likely that this work was not a part of the ola pedith, but was subsequently added to account for the wages paid on site by the secretary.

Approach road from Marka Tapra to Railway track: This road was built using a tractor with very little labour to supplement it. The guidelines for relief works clearly state that only labour intensive works should be undertaken. While the sarpanch and the secretary initially denied this, the latter finally confessed to the fact that tractors had been used in the project²⁰.

¹⁹ See Box 3 for greater details

²⁰ See Annexure 24 for a signed affidavit from the Secretary admitting to the above

In order to pay for their use he had to fudge the muster rolls. He told us that he was under pressure to finish the project, and that people had refused to work on it. His confession came just hours before we left and we had no time to verify his story. But it is likely that there is some truth in it. We were not able to decipher why people refused to work on this project. It is possible that the secretary had asked people of a particular colony to work who then refused to do so for reasons we are not able to comprehend. The case needs more examination but what there is no doubt about is that the muster rolls for this particular project were fudged. The secretary admitted to this in the affidavit mentioned above

Box 4: Hiranman talia - 'approved' without a plan, started without a sanction, ended without completion!

Hiranman Talaya best illustrates the breakdown of administrative systems in the district. The Gram Panchayat was 'orally' instructed to start work on building the tank. The work 'was to be sanctioned' under relief works. The Gram Panchayat had hardly worked for a day when the Water Resources Department (Irrigation) claimed that the project had been allocated to them. After a minor scuffle, the department restarted the work under its banner. It in turn worked for one day and stopped work. The project was finally abandoned. What remains of the project is a few hundred odd meaningless trenches dug by both the agencies.

When we enquired, we were told in private conversations that the project had been abandoned since the department had found rocks in the site area and had thus found the project to be technically infeasible. It was clear that no technical or economic evaluation was done prior to starting the project. Keeping with this, we are unable to find the names of projects like these in the list of relief works that have been sanctioned this year. Further, the payment that was done by Hirapur Panchayat has been added on to the muster rolls of the 'Ola pedith' work.

How can a project be started without sanctions or evaluations? It appears that Hiranman Talia was 'sanctioned' by a team of officials over the table so that activities could be started to coincide with the visit of a VIP. Once the team decided the project, the agencies were intimidated by the word of mouth that they have to start the project in a specified location. The only concrete detail they were given was the amount that is 'sanctioned' for the project. At times dozens of projects are started in one go and in this confusion, two agencies were instructed orally to start the work. Once the agency is instructed, the engineers are then told of the project. To comply with formalities they are asked to prepare a technical evaluation in such a manner that matches the sanction already decided.

4.1.7 Breakdown of Administrative Systems: There were strong indications that a breakdown of administrative systems across a spectrum of functions had occurred. Project selection and sanction are done from the 'armchair', documentation is scarce and most works are started word of mouth. Measures of transparency are the biggest casualty with it being virtually impossible for anyone to access even basic information. Implementation suffers from serious coordination problems and finally the monitoring system is highly suspect, if at all functional.

The secretary who was coordinating all the Panchayat works did not have a single project estimate. He said that as a norm he is instructed orally to start projects and later an 'order' is issued that has details of financial sanctions. The secretary from Bandali and people in various implementing agencies also shared the same information with us. As a result, projects are ill planned. Hiranman Talia was started in a rocky area where a pond should never have been attempted. In many places watershed projects are constructed on upish land, where it is not possible for water to flow in. Unless the concept of 'a shelf of works' is taken up seriously, it is likely that this predicament will stay for a long time to come. It would be instructive to do an evaluation of the status of projects undertaken in the past couple of years.

Another phenomena which almost seems institutionalised is the one of first filling a rough register or as it is locally referred to 'Kacha Copy'. Once the project is over the final muster rolls are prepared. This was seen to most certainly hold in the case of the road between Kicchoosingh and Neher and the one between Girdharpur and Railway track. It was also reported to be happening in the construction of the road between Girdharpur and Jharer. In another illustrative case of bad planning, we were told that no muster rolls had been prepared as yet for the approach road constructed between Patalgarh and Jharer. The reason offered was the fact that the Collector's office, which supplies indexed muster rolls for relief works, had run out of the necessary stationery.

4.1.8 Lack of Transparency: Absence of transparency and the collapse of a monitoring system together have abetted corruption in the district. Citizen's right to information does not seem to have much value on the ground in Hirapur and at large in Sheopur. Even backed by the authority granted to us by virtue of representing the Commissioners and starting our search with a meeting with the Collector, we found it extremely difficult to access muster rolls, project estimates, and other documents. Before we got the first piece of document we had to visit the Collector's office, the Zilla Panchayat office, the Block office, the Gram Panchayat

office and those of various other implementing agencies. We were even denied photocopies of documents that were available. Box 4 refers to our ordeal in detail.

Transparency does not just suffer due to a lack of access. The absence of a system of documentation is another reason. At one point, there was genuine confusion as to where the muster rolls of relief works are maintained. A member in the team was told in the block office, that her search for project estimates is bound to be futile since these are often not created at all. In the case of other schemes, it is not even clear as to who maintains which record. While access to information needs to be improved, the system of documentation needs a complete overhaul as well.

Box 5: Transparency and the Right to Information-A first hand account

A crucial element needed for any transparent system is the availability of timely and accurate information. Assisting, as we were the Commissioners appointed by the Supreme Court, it was taken for granted that no problems would be faced on that front. We were however proved wrong. On arrival and a consequent meeting with the Collector we were assured that all assistance would be provided. It took us five days of shuffling between government offices at the Panchayat, block and district level and several meetings with officials to get three sets of muster rolls for Hirapur. This was despite having a copy of an order passed by the Collector himself, allowing access to such documents. (Copy of orders in annexure 22) In all it took us three visits to the block office in Karahal town, three visits to Hirapur village, numerous trips to the collector's office, and services of four volunteers, a food inspector, the Zilla Panchayat CEO, and the Collector himself to get the muster rolls. It is a little unlikely that many civil society organizations or worse still individual citizens have access to such a range of resources! We requested muster rolls for a project of Public Works Department. The block office in Karahal (where the project was being implemented) referred to the district office of the department. The district office promptly told us that it was available in the block. We got a great consolation when they agreed to fetch it for us. That was not the end of the story. After a long time of 'it will arrive any time now' we were finally given the permission to 'inspect' the muster roll. Needless to say, merely looking at a few hundred names is not going to lead us anywhere. After we protested vehemently for an hour, we were told that they should seek the permission of the collector to give us the photocopy. The collector referred us to the executive engineer, who gave us an appointment and disappeared. After another hour of protest for photocopies, we were given a partial set. Once we discovered this, we were told that the SDM in charge was not able to ~~verify~~verify and sign the whole set, and so we can only inspect the other part. Finally we had to organize a team to write down twenty-two pages of a muster roll to enable us to ~~verify~~verify them.

4.2 Social security for the aged: Pensions and Annapurna

As mentioned earlier, the elderly are often the worst affected by a drought. It should be noted that most of the cases of starvation that were mentioned in section II were individuals who were at some point or another beneficiaries of the pension scheme. Inadequacy of coverage, irregular and erratic payments and corruption have together reduced the effectiveness of the social security system for the aged destitute in Hirapur.

4.2.1 Sudden withdrawal of benefits: It is crucial that a social security system, especially for those without income, is stable and predictable. In Hirapur we found that pensioners enter and leave the list periodically. In December 2002 for example, twenty-four i.e. one third of the pensioners were removed off the list without notice. We were informed that a drive was conducted to remove ineligible beneficiaries from the BPL list. Since BPL status is one of the conditions needed to be eligible to receive pensions, many people lost their pension entitlement. No prior notice was given and none of the pensioners we met had any idea why their entitlement had been removed. Needless to say none of them knew of an official redressal mechanism that they could appeal to. It is likely that many deserving people were removed from the list yet we have heard of no efforts on the part of the administration to ensure that deserving people are not removed. In Hirapur²¹, as elsewhere in the district, we met people who were undergoing starvation but have lost pension entitlements (e.g. Ram Kori Bai).

Annapoorna scheme for the aged destitute has been discontinued in Sheopur as elsewhere in the state, even though the Supreme Court had directed the states to implement this scheme fully in its order of November 28, 2001. This scheme provides 10 KG of grain free of cost to aged destitute who are 'eligible for pensions, but are not receiving it'. The scheme has been withdrawn and it is not clear if all beneficiaries will get pensions instead. The situation on the ground is that Annapoorna has ceased to exist in a drought year and pensions have not been given as yet. This can add much misery to beneficiaries who have come to depend on the scheme. Unfortunately, we were unable to meet all the beneficiaries in the Panchayat to determine the effect of withdrawal on them. Discussions with the CEO at the Block Panchayat Office revealed that orders had been given directing Gram Panchayats to give 10 kgs of wheat per month to the destitute, including Annapurna beneficiaries who have lost their entitlement. Such payments are to be made from the 5 quintal given to every Panchayat for ad-hoc purposes. Such an ad hoc measure is no substitute for a structured scheme. The

²¹ Copies of payments register for the last year is given in Annexure 8 - 12

annapoorna beneficiaries should immediately be given pensions to cover for their loss of entitlement, and pensions should be put on a long-term, stable footing.

4.2.2 Irregular payments: For the ones who continue to receive pensions the payments are extremely irregular and unpredictable, causing much hardship. The Supreme Court has given clear directions that pensions should be paid by the 7th of every month. The order is clearly and consistently violated in Sheopur. Pensions are hardly paid more than once every three months. Worse still, the arrival of pensions is completely unpredictable, so much so that some people are unclear if their pensions have been stopped or are just delayed. Annexures 8 -12, present the list of beneficiaries who got payment in different months in Hirapur. This illustrates both the fact that pensions are not paid each month, and the fact that a large number of people were removed after December. The situation seems to be similar in other villages as well. Aadh Kunwar²² in Panwada told us that she always receives her pensions once in three months and is never given Rs 450, which is the amount due to her.

4.2.3 Corruption in pension payments: In Sheopur, corruption in the payment of pensions is widespread. Pensions are collected by the Secretary and handed over to the beneficiaries. In the process, pensioners are regularly underpaid. Logically, if payments are made every three months the pensioner is entitled to receive Rs. 450 whereas amounts received are typically less than this. In December, payment was given to pensioners after four months and Rs. 300 was paid instead of Rs. 600. The witness who had to sign the pension register had protested and has made a note of it in the register itself²³. Subsequently, we were given a copy of the register containing records for payments made for November and December by the Secretary. This for one contained different looking signatures of the witness and there were also inconsistencies in the signature or the thumb imprint of beneficiaries.

Duria and Pannu have not received pensions for some time now but their name is on all the lists given to us. Whether someone is appropriating his entitlement needs checking into. Given the fact the pensions entitlement is already a small amount, corruption leads to much misery among the destitute who often rely on this as their only source of income for food, medicines and other expenses.

Unlawful means of appropriating payments meant for pensions must be covered up in the official records. One way in which this can be done is by forging the signatures or thumb impressions made in the registers meant to record the receipt of such payments. When we

²² Aadh Kunwar w/o Jagannath, pass book number 2550

²³ See copy in Annexure 8

examined the records, we found that some people had 'signed' in some months and had put 'thumb impressions' in other months, which seems highly unlikely²⁴. Similarly, we found the same signature for Mr. Dharampal and Mr Ram Kishan in the pension list for December 2002²⁵.

In a letter given by several members of Hirapur Panchayat to the Collector²⁶, it is alleged that the selection of beneficiaries under Annapurna and Pensions was misguided, with those who were favoured by the Sarpanch being chosen to receive the benefit. It said further that most often these are people who have land and houses of their own. We were however unable to verify these claims.

4.3 Social Security for the Destitute: Corruption in the Antyodya Ann Yojana

The PDS dealer²⁷ in Hirapur was employing every possible means of cheating the beneficiaries. As a clear sign of corruption we found ration cards in which entries for the amount purchased was marked with 35 KGs when beneficiaries had never received amounts greater than 20 KGs²⁸. In Hirapur we were told that when they received one quota of ration, their cards were filled for many months. In one such case, the beneficiary had just got rations and we found his card to be filled till September, though it was still only the month of June²⁹.

Further, it is likely that many cards have not been distributed to the beneficiaries at all. The card of Munna S/o. Manful of Girdharpur, for example, was retained by the ration shop dealer, for many months after it was issued, till it was discovered and the card was given to its rightful owner. Various (false) entries had already been made by this time. We tried to get a list of Antyodya beneficiaries to see if there were other beneficiaries who have not received their cards, but were led from one office to another. It is necessary to ~~verify~~verify the list to find out how serious this problem is.

Most beneficiaries in Hirapur told us that they have never got the 35 KGs they are entitled to. Some did not have the cash needed to buy the grain, but of the rest who could afford to, many were told that there were no stocks to be distributed. The PDS dealer accepted that he does not give people 35 KGs. He claimed that he receives just 24 quintals each month (17

²⁴ See Annexure 13

²⁵ See Annexure 9

²⁶ See Annexure 7

²⁷ The ration shop in Hirapur Panchayat is run as some sort of 'cooperative' but all effective control lies with Mr. Laxman, the PDS dealer.

²⁸ A copy of an affidavit written by villagers is given in Annexure 14

²⁹ Kamlesh card no 52041, copy in Annexure 15

quintals of wheat and 7 quintals of rice each month) amounting to a total of 72 quintals for the current financial year as against the 114.45 that should be allocated for Hirapur³⁰. Given this, he has to ration the available grain and give a reduced amount to each beneficiary.

Interestingly, the data we got from the civil supplies department indicates that the off-take for Sheopur District on the whole is greater than 100% @ 35 KGs per beneficiary, but strangely enough the stock sent to Hirapur is much lower at about 30 KGs per beneficiary per month. (See table below) This means that all beneficiaries are taking 35 KGs each month in the district, but not in Hirapur. If the picture is the same in other Panchayats, there is a strong likelihood that a mini scam is occurring in the district with grains being siphoned off before they reach the PDS dealer.

The Supreme Court directed in May 2003 that all primitive tribes should receive Antyodya cards. According to 1991 Census there were over eighty thousand such people in Sheopur district alone. By June 2003 just 3735 families have been given Antyodya cards. It is reported that by the time the Supreme Court Order is complied with, 14440 more households will be covered. This also goes to show the number of PTG households that had not been given cards earlier. Hopefully, all primitive tribes will receive Antyodya cards by the time this report is released.

Table 6: Allocation and Lifting Antyodya grain in quintals, for April-June'2003

Area	Actual allocation Made*			Amount Lifted by PDS dealers*			Number of beneficiaries	Total Allocation as per the number of beneficiaries **
	Wheat	Rice	Total	Wheat	Rice	Total		
Sheopur	4320	360	4680	4575	371	4946	4466	4689
Hirapur	84	14	98	84	14	98	109	115

Note: **Calculated as follows; number of beneficiaries@35KGs for three months

Source: *Food, Civil Supplies and Consumer Affairs

³⁰ Refer to table 6 for greater details

4.4 Targeting Children: ICDS and Mid-Day Meal Scheme

The mid-day meal scheme was not in operation during our visit since the schools were closed for summer vacations. However, preparations were on in the district for the summer session. Officials in the Zilla Panchayat told us that till a year back it was optional for schools to serve mid-day meals. After the Supreme Court directions however, this has been made compulsory. Further, we were told that the level of supervision has increased with respect to the mid-day meal scheme. This has ensured that for the first time the off-take of grains in the district for mid-day meal scheme has reached 100%. The coverage of the scheme however, needs to be increased. Off take figures for the year 2002-2003 according to Food, Civil Supplies and Consumer Affairs was 21,218 quintals. This is enough to provide 70,726 children, with three kilos of grain every month for ten months of the year, though the number of children enrolled in primary schools, in 2001 was closer to 84,845.

Our reports indicated that most of the schools were serving mid-day meals, but the quality of meals was left wanting. In many schools, merely boiled wheat was being served. Many children appreciated even this, since it protected them from hunger for a part of the day. But such a meal is clearly of little nutritional value.

Mid-day meal scheme is being operated with no specific allocation for conversion and other incidental expenses by the state government. The Panchayats have been directed to pay for jaggery, oil, salt, firewood and wages for helpers from their own funds. The funds of the Panchayats being rather limited, the part that is compromised on is the quality of meals provided. The mid-day meal scheme in Madhya Pradesh on the whole appears to be a great opportunity, gone wasted. Minor improvements in the scheme to improve the nutrition content, adding a component of micronutrients, iron supplementation, de-worming, etc. can greatly improve the impact of mid-day meal scheme. These would require a marginal increase in budget outlays and some institutional changes including providing earmarked funds for mid-day meals.

The anganwadi was operational during summer. Children get a small measure of Dalia each day. Parents reported that the quantity is insignificant, but it still provided children a tiny meal in the day. In the context of severe hunger, an increased measure of Dalia should be considered. The Anganwadi worker was also serving Dalia to several aged destitute who were undergoing starvation. One of the villagers explained us that she did so to keep them from dying. This appeared to be a function of her charity rather than of design. We did not

hear of any adolescent girl making use of the anganwadi facility, but given that no systematic inquiry was made we cannot claim this with absolute certainty.

In both the mid day meal scheme and ICDS, the Government of India has massive arrears of transportation costs. This runs into over ten lakh rupees for Sheopur, for the mid day meal scheme alone. We have heard of similar complaints from other states too, a matter that needs urgent attention by Ministry of Human Resource Development, GoI.

4.5 Other schemes:

A large number of social security schemes exist for the needy but their implementation leaves much to be desired. The official delivery mechanism under the NFBS and NMBS puts the onus of distributing the benefits onto the gram Panchayats. In order to investigate the working of the two, the Secretary of Hirapur Panchayat was asked for the list of those who have received money in the last two years. He denied having any involvement in either the selection or the distribution and cited this to be the reason for his inability to supply us with any information. Whether this was done to deny us from talking to the beneficiaries or was in a bid to keep corruption hidden remains a moot point.

The residents of "Marka Tapra" were not aware of the existence of such schemes. Clearly the dissemination of information and knowledge of ones entitlements is a first step towards any kind of poverty alleviation, one that seems to have been conveniently sidestepped by the administration. It seems that the guidelines used by the district regarding the NMBS is a criteria of age above 21 though the central guidelines say 19. Since this could potentially exclude needy individuals it needs to be clarified.

Information received about the number of beneficiaries who have received payments in the last year at the district level for these schemes presents a dismal picture. We examined the records of four³¹ Panchayats. Together, they would have a population of close to 7,500³². Just two people in all these Panchayats had received benefits under the NFBS³³. As far as the NMBS is concerned in the last year only 329 beneficiaries received money in the whole

³¹ Hirapur, Morawan, Bandali and Panwada

³² The combined population of the four Panchayats was 7,345 in 1991. The growth of population in the district was 3.3% from 1991 - 2001. Given the same rate, these Panchayats would have a combined population of 7587

³³ Shrimati Kalo Bai w/o Ramlal Adivasi, resident of Hirapur and Shri Deshraj s/o Prasadi Adivasi, resident of Morawan

district, in comparison with the 936³⁴ that potentially could be eligible for the scheme. Whether this is on account of low a number of applications (a consequence of lack of information) or low utilization needs to be investigated. In either case, clearly the problems of non-utilization and low allocation need to be addressed.

³⁴Assuming that 28365 BPL households (1997-98) would have at least one eligible woman and taking a rural birth rate of 33.6 for MP (SRS Bulletin, 1998)

SECTION V: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

A large part of the persistent and widespread picture of acute hunger that was seen in Sheopur, stems from shortcomings in the implementation of relief works and other social security schemes directed at the destitute. An enquiry into the functioning of various food and employment schemes presents a dismal picture. A summary of the main findings is presented below.

Inadequate Relief: In Hirapur, adults reported that they received employment of less than twenty days in the last year, compared to approx. seventy three days required for a family of five to reach the poverty line level of income. Low allocations combined with low utilization of funds sanctioned, incomplete projects and the use of labour-displacing machines has resulted in low levels of employment generation. No new SGRY project has been started in the current financial year under the first stream, violating the direction of the Supreme Court to double SGRY during April to June 2003. Regarding the second stream, allocations have been made but no money has been distributed as yet. This was to assist people during the crucial period when distress demand for employment is at very high levels.

Untimely relief: Little or no employment has been created in the period from February to June. Most of the relief works started after June 10, one starting as late as June 27, all in order to meet the official deadline of June 30 by which date all works must be completed. The 'year-end rush' to utilize the funds as well as the failure to start relief works indicates the low priority given to such works.

Improper use of cash component of projects: All the SGRY works and some of those undertaken under drought relief programmes have a cash component apart from the payment made in kind (grains). The guidelines clearly state that this should be used only for works for which it has been sanctioned. We found many instances where this was being flouted and the money utilized for the creation of other assets at the discretion of the Gram Panchayats. Conversations revealed that this is a common phenomenon in the district, even though the district level authorities claim it is permitted under very 'special' circumstances.

Wage Arrears: In Hirapur, we did not hear of any wage arrears, but there are reports of delay in payment from other parts of the district. This is in clear violation of the directions of the Supreme Court that payments must be made within one week of work done. For e.g. the Gowardakala Road constructed in Panwada, has wage arrears of over two months, which have still not been paid.

Poor selection and implementation of projects: A large part of the problem stems from the lack of a structured and effective system of monitoring and redressal. The selection of projects is not based on a formal system of project appraisal or evaluation. A large number of works are started word of mouth, with the formalities being completed after the project is over. They seem to be based neither on demands made by gram sabhas nor on technical and economic evaluations. Improper selection and unplanned implementation of projects has resulted in the creation of many unproductive assets. The rampant use of a system of first filling details in a 'kacha copy' (rough register) and then transferring these to the muster rolls abets corruption and clearly needs correction.

Sudden withdrawal of benefits: Last year, one-third of the beneficiaries receiving pensions in Hirapur were removed from the list without any prior notice. The Annapoorna program was also withdrawn this March with most beneficiaries not receiving any alternate form of relief.

Irregular payments: The Supreme Court has given clear directions that pensions should be paid by the 7th of each month. The order is being violated and payment is made once every three months, if not more infrequently. The unpredictability of payments undermines the very security that these payments are supposed to provide, causing much hardship.

Full entitlements not received: In Hirapur no beneficiary of the Antodya Ann Yojana we met had received more than 25 KGs in a month compared to the 35 KGs they are entitled to. A similar picture emerges from elsewhere in the district. This is the case when in actuality the off take is 100%, from the MP State Civil Supplies Corporation. The phenomenon extends to pension payments as well. Beneficiaries, routinely receive less than the amount they are supposed to get.

Retaining cards of beneficiaries: Cards of beneficiaries are often retained by the PDS dealer and grains diverted or appropriated by him. This is especially so in cases where the rightful owners of the cards cannot afford to buy grain from the PDS shop.

Lack of information: Most of the people we met had little knowledge about their entitlements. This was especially apparent in the case of the NFBS and NMBS. Similarly few were aware that they were entitled to 35 kilos of grain under the Antyodya Ann Yojana. In no project we visited, did we see notice boards illustrating clearly the details of projects. In addition all orders of the Supreme Court regarding wide publicity to be given to the names of

beneficiaries under various schemes and translation of its orders in the local language has been violated in most places.

Lack of Transparency: Madhya Pradesh is one of the few states to have enacted the right to information legislation. They also have a widely publicized 'Citizens Charter' for every department. However the process of getting information was long and daunting, despite the fact that we were representing the Commissioners. On one visit to the Block Panchayat office, we were told there was a gram sabha meeting in Panwada to discuss the names in the revised BPL list. Conversations with the people who attended the meeting revealed that no such list was discussed. Only the total number of cards that would be allocated was announced. Given the fact that in most villages in Sheopur gram sabha meetings are not held, this was infact a pleasant surprise.

Several days were wasted in trying to get information on where and how different documents could be obtained. Every office would claim ignorance or pass the buck on to the district offices. When documents were located, photocopies were not given and in the rare cases that they were , they would be incomplete. This is despite the fact that the right to information booklet has been published giving clear instructions as to which public document can be procured where. Needless to say, all efforts by us as well as local 'karya kartas' to get this booklet failed.

Corruption: There is enough evidence of widespread corruption in nearly all the schemes that were in operation in Sheopur. As far as relief works are concerned, corruption can often be traced to the muster rolls. We were able to obtain just three muster rolls during our stay, all pertaining to works undertaken in Hirapur. We found all three to be fudged. In another case seventeen new pattedars were charged for grain that was to be given free of cost and the quantity distributed was lower that that actually provided for.

As far as pension payments are concerned, we found names of individuals who had not received pensions but whose names had been put in the register acknowledging receipt of payment. We did not however have the occasion to verify each name on the list of beneficiaries given to us, in order to reveal whether there were any fake names or whether money was being received against individuals who had died.

Corruption in the public distribution system appears rampant. We found several such cases in Hirapur, but this is likely to be part of a much wider phenomenon. Significant amount of time was spent evaluating the Antyodya Ann Yojana, where many instances of fake entries in

ration cards were made. This was done either by overstating the amount of grain purchased every time or by entering for subsequent months against which no grain had actually been received.

SECTION VI: CONCLUDING REMARKS

We hope the report calls attention to various issues. Foremost among them is that **Sahariyas in Sheopur are facing the prospect of starvation in the next few months to come. We underscore the urgent need for further employment, medical camps and other social security measures.** Beyond these, many long term measures need be taken to improve the condition of people of Sheopur. As a first step, the administration should also be asked to account for the failure to implement various directions of the Supreme Court. A closer examination of the performance of the district both on paper and on the ground needs to be taken, based on which long-term measures can be taken up. These should involve not just measures to tackle hunger, but to tackle the larger problem of malnutrition. We emphasise strongly on the need for a bold plan to give a concrete shape to the 'right to food' in Sheopur.