

Food Availability in the Poorest Households

Report of a survey in central Jharkhand

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I) Introduction

As food security and hunger preoccupations have become a recurrent topic in all the Indian newspapers due to the monsoon failures of 2009, it is more meaningful than ever to consider the situation of the poorest households of Jharkhand, one of the most food insecure states in India. The 2003 Food Insecurity Atlas of Rural India¹ published by the M. S. Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF) presents a map depicting Jharkhand as one of just two extremely food insecure states in India, thus requiring some “immediate attention”. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), which made a summarization of all the previous definitions, “Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food which meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life. Household food security is the application of this concept to the family level, with individuals within households as the focus of concern”². The report of Dr. Ramesh Sharan and Neelkanth on the “Status of implementation of food related social security schemes in Jharkhand” utilises two further concepts in discussing food insecurities: “chronic and transitory”: *“Transitory food insecurity is a temporary decline in a household’s access to adequate food. Chronic food insecurity is a condition of continuous inadequate diet caused by inability to acquire food. It affects households that persistently lack the ability either to buy enough food or to produce their own. Hence, poverty is considered the root cause of chronic food insecurity”*.³

One obvious expression of food insecurity is hunger. The International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) in 2008 published the India State Hunger Index that enables comparisons between Indian states but also with other nation states. The Index is alarming: all the states of India, which as a nation state ranks 66 among 88 countries, are classified as suffering from high hunger prevalence. The worst-performing states are Madhya Pradesh, which ranks between two very poor African countries (Ethiopia and Chad), followed by Bihar and Jharkhand, which are classified as worse than Zimbabwe and Haiti⁴. Jharkhand is hence one of India’s states facing the biggest problems regarding hunger and malnutrition. To know how high the food insecurity is, and to understand what the main reasons for such a situation are, we have conducted a survey to analyze food availability in villages and particularly in the poorest households. This report presents the results of this survey in central Jharkhand.

¹ M. S. Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF), *Food Insecurity Atlas of Rural India*, <http://www.mssrf.org/fs/atlas/rural.htm>, 2003, accessed on 25/08/2009.

² Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, *Trade reforms and food security*, Chapter 2: Food security: concepts and measurement, <http://www.fao.org/docrep/005/y4671e/y4671e00.HTM>, 2003, accessed on 25/08/2009.

³ Ramesh Sharan & Neelkanth, “Status of implementation of food related social security schemes in Jharkhand”, *Gram Swaraj Abhiyan, Jharkhand*, Ranchi, December 2002, p. 9.

⁴ Jayati Ghosh, “Food for all”. *Frontline*, 2009, Volume 26, Number 17, p. 131.

The aim of this survey is to show how much the poorest households in Jharkhand suffer from a lack of access to basic food and to which point they are unable to satisfy their basic needs. Most of these households are cultivating their own fields in order to have enough rice to eat for at least a part of the year, but the poorest among them are landless and so cannot even count on their own production. Moreover, Jharkhand unlike many states did not benefit from the Green Revolution and for this reason and others has very low acreage under irrigation. Jharkhand's rural inhabitants persistently state that above all they would like irrigation facilities.

According to the census of 2001⁵ more than a quarter of Jharkhand's population is tribal. This survey is designed to enable us to see if there are significant differences between tribal and non-tribal households, and if the tribal households are more likely to suffer from food insecurity despite their wide traditional knowledge regarding crop varieties.

This report examines food availability of households in Jharkhand and enables the:

- Identification of the main deficiencies in the food regime of the poorest households and the crucial changes needed to rectify these.
- Determination of the main reasons of households' lack of access to a sufficient amount of food, among which is the problem of unemployment.
- Highlighting of the failure of the Targeted Public Distribution System and other social schemes that aim to procure food to the poorest households.

⁵ "Focus on tribal? Decline", *The Telegraph*, 19/09/2005, http://www.telegraphindia.com/1050919/asp/jharkhand/story_5244990.asp, accessed on 29/08/09.

II) Methodology

The Gene Campaign was interested in establishing the real living conditions of the poorest households in Jharkhand in order to be able to focus the government's interest on this issue. After developing a survey form in both English and Hindi, accompanied principally by Kamesh Bedia, we took the English form to the field, to ask the questions in Hindi or the local spoken dialect, and to directly translate and fill the English form. This technique allowed me to follow the actual conversations taking place with the household representatives; necessary so to understand the different situations of each household and all their needs. If I had left the forms to be filled in my absence, I would have been uncertain as to the technique employed to conduct the survey.

The survey form was developed so to analyze some statistical results and to make some conclusions on the general situation of the poorest households in the area selected. However we found that the yes/no format of some questions did not give us enough explanation for the problems faced by each family and the reasons for their very low access to food. This is probably the biggest limitation of the survey methodology. In an attempt to overcome this, we chose to focus on a smaller geographical area in order to spend more time in each village, to try to understand what was actually happening and to ask more questions on a case by case basis.

This way of proceeding led us to focus only on central Jharkhand, which means that the survey is not representative of the entire state, and especially of its more remote districts. However having an idea of the situation of food availability in areas close to the state capital Ranchi in many ways does allow us to gain insights into what may be happening in more distant areas, since it follows that the populations of more remote areas will have more difficulties in accessing dealers' shops and in finding diversified sources of income. The statistics of this survey should therefore be understood to represent a tentative determination of the present situation of some of Jharkhand's poorest households and their main problems.

This survey focused on central Jharkhand (areas around Ranchi) and particularly on two districts: Ranchi and Khunti. Furthermore, and because of time limitations and the prevailing socio-political situation, we chose to work in one block in each of these districts and to avoid more sensitive areas. As explained above however, this allowed us the possibility to spend more time in each block in order to understand if there are significant differences between villages in the same areas, and between households, and to understand the main problems in the villages and how these populations are reacting, particularly when faced with hunger.

In both blocks, Ormanjhi (Ranchi District) and Karra (Khunti District), villages were selected in order to best represent the whole area of the block, from east to west and from north to south, though avoiding villages facing social tensions, and to be as representative as possible of the poorest households. We attempted to select the poorest villages using the criteria of distance to main roads, proportion of Scheduled Tribe (ST) and Scheduled Caste (SC) households, and also by number of households that have been registered as Below Poverty Line (BPL) by the government. The BPL-list for all the villages is available on-line⁶. I read through the list for both the blocks and selected the villages having the longest lists, and the lowest scores for the BPL households (score between 0 and 20). In this way we ensured we would cover the poorest families of the area according to the government definition. We privileged small villages (most of them having less than 200 households) on the assumption that the living conditions would be even harder for these people, for in such villages would be less chances for small businesses and perhaps less infrastructure.

The following table is a list of the selected villages. The villages' profile is in Annex.

List of sample villages:

ORMANJHI BLOCK	KARRA BLOCK
Ulatu	Chiyur
Jidu and Baghin Banda	Bingaon
Jirarbar	Lodhma
Kamta	Ludru
Kurum	Tungaon
Chapra Kocha	

Identification of the poorest households was the greatest problem faced, because of the complexity of the definition. Poverty can be quantified in various ways through the use of different indicators, which complicates its determination. For example, one factor which influences the amount of food available for each household member is the size of a household. The size of their land holding determines their yield in each season, and household size determines the availability of household labour which includes potential to migrate in search of work. We thus tried to include households of different sizes whilst conducting the research.

An important decision taken was that we would base our research on the BPL-list of the government in order to select the poorest households. It is widely known and admitted that

⁶ List of the BPL households in every block: http://ranchi.nic.in/bpl_blockwise.htm, 2002 Census, accessed on 20/07/09.

government sources are not updated and that some very poor households are not included under the Below Poverty Line (BPL) listing, and so we used the list only as a starting point. Once in the villages, we met the head of the village or some well informed persons and also based our research on the villagers' perceptions of who were the poorest households among them. Utilizing both sources of information along with our own criteria we were thus able to locate and to survey on average between 10 and 20 very poor households in each selected village. Ultimately the BPL-households constitute 68% of our sample size, whereas the remaining households were selected once we had arrived in the village by comparing the living conditions of the different households.

Our sample is not aiming to be representative by number of surveys completed, since the sample size is 112 households. Yet the sample can be considered to be significant because of the wide range of questions we have asked, and these questions, once added up, show some very clear conclusions.

III) Present situation and food availability in the poorest villages

1. The most striking fact that became apparent was households' extremely limited access to financial resources. Most of the households are earning a very small amount of money despite the fact that most of them are ready to work very hard. The remuneration of their labour work is indeed very low, most of the time between Rs. 30 and Rs. 90 per day, and the villagers most of the time have no other opportunities of work, like business or service, because of the remote location of their villages. Half of the sampled households are earning less than Rs. 19,200 a year, whilst the annual wage is on average Rs. 22,507. This is very small and does not allow the people to live a decent life by any standards.
2. The fact that part-unemployment is widespread in central Jharkhand is corroborated by the lack of work opportunities we recorded during our survey. 17% of the labour workers declared they have been unemployed during at least half of the month, in every month. As a result we can imagine that most of the households have members migrating in order to find work in some other states. Yet very few sampled households registered their members as migrants. Only 6% of the total surveyed households explained that one or two of their members were migrating; and these households were concentrated in three different villages though most of them hailed from the village of Tungaon. We found that villagers were migrating in groups to the same place (most of the villagers of Tungaon are migrating to Mumbai) for approximately six months, in order to work as labourers. This highlights the big problem of lack of employment opportunities in Jharkhand. The men reported that they were migrating far away in order to earn more money because the salaries are higher there, and because they will spend less money for coming back home than if they would migrate to a nearer place.

It therefore seems apparent that the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) is not widespread or well-established enough in this area of Jharkhand, since it should provide 100 days of employment in a year for all these workers. Some men claimed to be employed under NREGA yet the majority of these people are being paid less than Rs. 90 a day. Compare this with the government declared minimum wage for unskilled workers in Jharkhand, which was in June increased to Rs. 99 per day from its previous rate of Rs. 92 per day⁷.

⁷ Rudra Biswas, "Minimum wage hike- Variable dearness allowance revised", *The Telegraph*, 02/06/2009, http://www.telegraphindia.com/1090602/jsp/jharkhand/story_11049681.jsp, accessed on the 26/08/09

3. To get by households have to work very hard, including by involving most of their members in labouring work. In some households where the children are too small to work the women have to stay at home to take care of them. In these frequent cases, the



Women transplanting paddy in the fields

household faces a real nightmare if and when the head of the household becomes ill. Some women are then left with no option but to work every day for a very low salary (often half of the salary a man would earn) to make ends meet. This is also at the expense of their household life and well-being. If there are no other sources of income, these

households often suffer from hunger and face the threat of starvation. Moreover, and among the widows we asked, some of these households are receiving no help from the Public Distribution System, some of them are receiving between 25 and 30 kg of food grains per month, but none of the households were getting the 35 kg that should be distributed to such sensitive households.

4. The poorest households in central Jharkhand are characterized by their small land holdings. 21% of the households we asked are landless, and most of them Scheduled Tribes or Scheduled Castes. The land holding size is between 2 and 100 decimals for more than 80% of the sample households and from such a land holding households can only have a very small harvest. This fact is reinforced by the lack of agricultural means, in particular irrigation facilities – two-thirds of the sampled households, including those who have no land at all, have no irrigated land. Half of the surveyed households obtain less than 500 kg of rice (the main crop) from their harvest.

5. More than 95% of the sampled households have less than eight months worth of rice to eat thanks to their harvest, while over 60% have less than 5 months rice, which means that they must be able to procure themselves grain for the rest of the year. Their lack of money makes the food grain shortage even worse. Considering the fact that more than 50% of the



Rice stocked in bamboo basket

households are composed of six or more members, the amount of money they earn (on average around Rs. 22,500 yearly) is insufficient to satisfy the entire households' needs. That is why nearly 84% of the households borrow some grains from their neighbours when their grain stock comes to an end.

6. Many if not most of the households have a very poor food regime: they eat mostly rice, cheap vegetables like potatoes, and tree leaves (which they call saag, meaning 'spinach'). Moreover, more than 10% of the households eat mostly rice without any vegetables but only with salt and rice water. More than 10% of the households also reported that they have only two meals a day during a season or throughout the whole year. Most of the households are vegetarians (only a few persons conceded that they sometimes eat fish or meat) and are eating pulses only weekly or monthly. This very poor food regime can obviously cause health troubles since a vegetarian diet should be diversified and should include some pulses or beans which are a rich source of protein. Finally, considering that only 17%, 7% and 2% of the households cultivate millets, pulses and maize respectively, we can assert that rice is the major constituent of their diets. The reasons for this high prevalence of single-crop farming are several. Firstly, respondents stated that in the last few years there have been big failures in the monsoon rains, which led to the failure of millet and maize cultivation. The farmers in Jharkhand are indeed strongly dependent on the monsoon. Secondly, pulses seeds are more expensive than rice or millet seeds, and farmers explained that they can often not afford the seeds of pulses and instead prefer to spend their money on buying cheaper seeds. According to the villagers of Bingaon, millet seeds cost Rs. 8 per kg while pulses seeds cost Rs. 14 per kg.

7. The lack of irrigation facilities is a real problem, which along with small land holdings and lack of other inputs results in an insufficient harvest for most of the farmers. Therefore only 4% of the farming households cultivating paddy are selling a part of their harvest as an additional source of income. Those who cultivate some vegetables thanks to a little irrigation are more likely to sell their produce: around 43% of the farmers cultivating vegetables are selling a part of their harvest to the market. Vegetables are thus a more profitable crop and a source of diversity for households' diets. Nevertheless only 52% of the



Women cleaning spinach before to sell it on the market

selected households had the capacity and resources to cultivate vegetables.

8. Last but not least, about half of the surveyed households (55%) suffer from a hunger situation for at least a few days each year, and many of them cannot afford three meals a day throughout the whole year. About 50% of the households declared that they suffer from hunger during at least one month of each year. Landless households are more likely to suffer from hunger since nearly three-quarters of landless households declared that they suffer from hunger as compared to nearly one half of landed households. According to this survey, a smaller proportion of tribal households are suffering from hunger as compared to other households, even if the percentage remains high for both groups: 44% for the tribal households, and 67% for the non-tribal households. This difference can partially be explained through the fact that tribal households are more likely, in times of hunger and when food grains are unavailable, to consume wild vegetables or wild tubers from the forest. In fact, 43% of the surveyed tribal households declared that they eat some wild vegetables and tubers when their stocks of food grains and vegetables come to an end, whereas only 35% of the non-tribal households are doing the same. That the difference is not so wide can be explained by the fact that these social groups have been living side by side for many years, and thus tend to have very similar food habits. We noticed more differences between villages which differed according to their facilities and connection with urban areas, rather than differences between tribal and non-tribal neighbours who are living in the same way.

IV) The failures of the Public Distribution System

1. The most recent Below Poverty Line (BPL) Census of the Ministry of Rural Development is dated 2002, and therefore the present day BPL-list needs to be updated through a new census. Jharkhandis are presently often found talking about which criteria should be taken into account in such a census. The previous census took into account those households whose annual income was less than Rs. 20,000 and those having less than two hectares of land alongside other criteria. During our survey we noticed that very poor households, who have a very poor diet and suffer every year from hunger, are earning on average Rs. 22,500, which appears to be too much to be considered as “below the poverty line”. According to an article by Dilip D’Souza published in India Together, “the official definition of the poverty line assumed that you spend all your money on food”⁸. This may be the heart of the problem, for this definition obviously overlooks expenses incurred by households for their clothing, transport, and also for the paying back of loans. The latter is a big issue, for most households have to borrow money from different sources (money lenders, their families, Self Help Groups, and more rarely from banks) for various reasons such as to pay for the wedding of their children, to buy seeds, tools or livestock, or for health care.

The majority of the poorest households (80% of those surveyed), who earn less than Rs. 5,000 a year, cannot afford to take loans. The proportion of households who can afford to take loans increases with annual income; nearly 50% of the households earning between Rs. 10,000 and Rs. 30,000 owe some money in the form of loans taken. The majority of loans appear small – most of the time less than Rs. 10,000 and not over Rs. 30,000 – yet such amounts represent a year’s salary for such households. In some villages where we carried out our survey, we found that the government has paid back the loans of farmers that were taken for agricultural purposes. This was the case for the villagers of Chiyur (Karra Block), but it remains a rare initiative among all the villages we visited. It can also be postulated that repaying farmers’ loans is not a long term solution to their wider problems.

2. There seems to be a fair degree of confusion in Jharkhand in peoples’ understanding of the differences between the various social schemes like the Targeted Public Distribution System and the Annapurna system: villagers appear to be unaware of which amounts of food they should receive with which card. Indeed, 32% of BPL-listed households, according to our survey, own a yellow card, which means that they fall under the

⁸ Dilip D’Souza, “A thin Indian line”, *India together*, 17/03/2006,

<http://www.indiatogether.org/2006/mar/ddz-povline.htm>, accessed on 27/08/09

Annapurna scheme. These households should not have a yellow card rather they should have a red or green card. The Annapurna scheme should however provide free food grains to old aged people, who are helpless and cannot afford to buy any cereals; there is thus a wrong allowance of the cards because it is not the case of these families. It is clearly noteworthy that these cards have not been allotted to single persons but most of the time to households having four or more persons. However, this card should only be allotted on an individual basis rather than being allotted to a whole household as are the BPL cards⁹.

3. A further observed problem is the incorrect inclusion or exclusion of some households in the Below Poverty Line-list. Although our basic assumption was that the BPL-households were among the poorest, we rapidly came to realize that a great number of very poor households having hardly any access to food resources were not regarded as BPL, whilst on the other hand some relatively well-off households (APL, or Above Poverty Line) had access to the Targeted Public Distribution System through having BPL cards. Those poor households having no card are thus forgotten by the government in their social schemes, and have no access to the additional grains they are eligible to receive. Things do not seem to have changed in recent times: an evaluation report of the Indian Government's Planning Commission in 2005 identified the afore-mentioned errors in the PDS: "The implementation of TPDS is plagued by large Errors of Exclusion (of BPL households) and Inclusion (of APL), and by the prevalence of ghost BPL cards. Some States have issued more cards than the number of households, while some others have the problem of unidentified households".¹⁰ Even though Jharkhand as an independent state was not a part of the survey undertaken in order to make this evaluation (data were collected between 1997 and 2001 whilst Jharkhand was still a part of Bihar), the problems of Jharkhand's TPDS can be identified to be of the same nature as those found in Bihar and across the country.
4. 29% of the surveyed BPL-households do not possess any card and this prevents them from having access to PDS food grains, or constitutes a further reason for the shopkeeper to be able to overcharge them. The reasons we found for such a mistake were various, and we can quote some of them as following:
 - Some BPL-households have been separated into two, when sons marry and separate from their parents and siblings. Even though they no longer live under the same roof

⁹ Ramesh Sharan & Neelkanth, "Status of implementation of food related social security schemes in Jharkhand", *Gram Swaraj Abhiyan, Jharkhand*, Ranchi, December 2002, p. 27.

¹⁰ Programme Evaluation Organisation, Planning Commission – Government of India, *Performance Evaluation of Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS)*, New Delhi, March 2005, p. VII.

and do not share the same food, they still have only one BPL card to share because they have been unable to procure a second card.

- Sometimes, particularly in cases where a yellow card has been distributed to a household instead of a red card, the head of the household who was the owner of the card has died and the household have thus lost their ability to have access to food grains.

These two examples show clearly the need for actualizing the data and adopting a “dynamic” identification of the poorest and most vulnerable households, which would capture changes in household compositions as often as possible.

In Chapra Kocha (Ormanjhi Block), one of the poorest villages visited, the failure of the PDS was most apparent. This village is almost 100% tribal (39 Scheduled Tribe households for one Other Backward Caste, or OBC) and has 70% of its households registered on the government BPL-List. Nevertheless, none of the surveyed households (all of them were BPL households in a clear food insecure situation) possessed a card giving them access to food grains.

5. Many of the households who do own a card do not get the amount of rice or wheat allocated to them, and most of the time they only get grains every two or three months. The previous mentioned evaluation report of the Planning Commission reported that “about 58 per cent of the subsidized food grains issued from the Central Pool do not reach the BPL households because of identification errors, nontransparent operation and unethical practices in the implementation of TPDS.”¹¹ Rice and wheat are available at different rates in different villages, and therefore it is apparent that there is little uniformity across the state concerning the price and the quantity of distributed grains. That this continues to happen is facilitated by the beneficiaries of the social schemes being unaware of their rights and what they should be getting at which price.

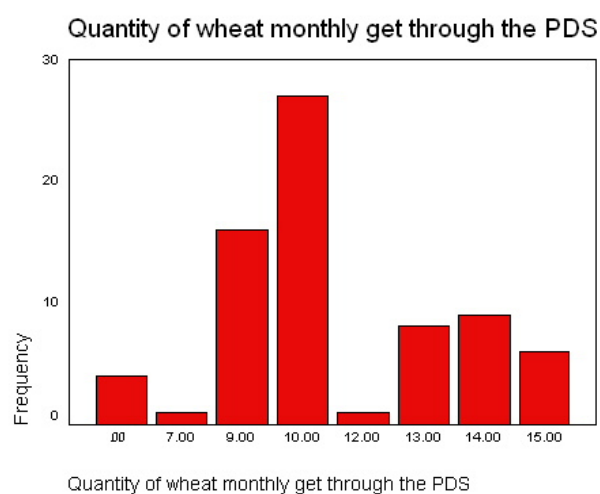
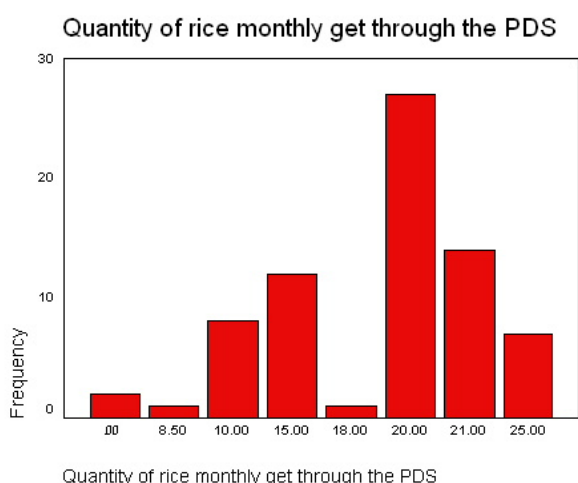
Not one of the surveyed households declared owning a green card under the Antyodaya Anna Yojana scheme yet we found that nearly 87% of these poor households are buying some rice at the rate of Rs. 3 per kg and around 68% are getting wheat at the rate of Rs. 2 per kg, which are the rates of the grains under the Antyodaya Anna Yojana scheme. The price of the rice distributed to the households who claimed that they had a red card varied greatly from Rs. 3 to Rs. 7 per kg, or even Rs.12 as reported by a household in Jidu, Ormanjhi Block. The price of wheat for these same BPL-households varied from Rs. 2 to Rs. 6 per kg. Lastly, while 25% of sample households possessed a yellow card under the Annapurna Yojana scheme, still none of them were getting the rice for free; rather the price ranged between Rs. 2 and Rs. 3 per kg among the villages.

¹¹ Ibid, p. 4.

Official prices of the food grains

	Quantity (in kg)		Rate (in Rs.)	
	Wheat	Rice	Wheat	Rice
Red card (TPDS)	21	14	5	6
Green card (Antyodaya Anna Yojana)	21	14	2	3
Yellow card (Annapurna Yojana)		10		free

Source: Status of implementation of food related social security schemes in Jharkhand, 2002



Source: This research, using SPSS-Analysis.

Note: the above two graphs' sample size is 72 households, because the data sets do not include the 40 sampled households who do not have any cards or access to the PDS.

6. In conclusion there is little evidence that the cards provided to poor households by the government schemes have any effect on households' access to sufficient quantities of food. According to our survey 51% of the households owning a red card and 64% of those owning a yellow card suffer from hunger each year, whereas 51% of the households without any card also suffer from hunger. The very weak correlation between the two variables "owning a card" and "not suffering from hunger" (Cramer's V approx. 0.1), enables us to conclude that there have been and are big failures in the Public Distribution System. The Targeted Public Distribution System was launched in 1997 and "it was designed to include all the poor households and raise the unit subsidy

and ration quota considerably for them.”¹² Today, however, the Government of India suggests reducing the number of households having access to the PDS (by eliminating the APL households in the system) in order to reach its promised goal of 25 kg of grains per BPL family at Rs. 3 a kg.¹³ Contrary to this many organizations and Indian states are today claiming that it would be better for India to apply a universal PDS, which would provide grains to everybody and thus avoid a great amount of corruption, and make it more likely that the poorest would get sufficient grains.

¹² Programme Evaluation Organisation, Planning Commission – Government of India, *Performance Evaluation of Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS)*, New Delhi, March 2005, p. 5.

¹³ Gargi Parsai, “States oppose Centre’s proposal, insist on food for all”, *The Hindu*, 21/08/2009, <http://www.thehindu.com/2009/08/21/stories/2009082160321000.htm>, accessed on 24/08/09.

Conclusion

- The situation of the poorest families in rural central Jharkhand is worrying: hunger situations are widespread among the households (more than 54%), two meals a day instead of three is an ordinary situation, and households have a very poor diet, mostly constituted of rice, wild or cheap vegetables and leaves (like saag).
- Most of the households in this area possess very small land holdings, aside from those who are landless. The government has provided two room houses to most of the landless households however this alone is insufficient to improve their living conditions since they are totally dependent on external sources of income and cannot rely upon their own production. Farming households on average get less than 500 kg rice from their harvest which is not enough to feed their family through the year.
- The rate of part-unemployment is quite high and households earn on average Rs. 22,500 per year, which is not enough to cover their whole expenses in terms of food, clothes, transport, health care and loans. The NREGA system is improperly implemented in this area and needs to be developed to function better.
- The BPL-list of the government needs to be updated to include new criteria and more transparency, in order to resolve its large inclusion and exclusion failures.
- There is a lack of information and transparency in the distribution of cards under the different social schemes. Some BPL-households receive a Annapurna Yojana card (yellow card) and still get more than 10kg rice but at a different rate, whereas some other households possess a BPL-card (red card) while they pay for their grains at the rate of the Antyodaya Anna Yojana scheme (green card). There is thus an urgent need for clarification and information. At the least, a new census to evaluate the changing needs of the households should be prioritized.
- Considering the small impact the Public Distribution System has for many households, it is perhaps necessary to rethink the system. Many seem to be of the view that a universal food distribution system, which would reduce corruption, would increase the effectiveness of delivering food to the poorest.

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Annex

Village profiles and interesting notes about them:

Ormanjhi Block, Ranchi district:

Ulatu: This is a village of approximately 100 households, located at a distance of less than five kilometers from the main road, National Highway 33. The village is divided into two “tolis” (hamlets), one of them being mostly tribal. More than half of Ulatu’s households are considered as Below Poverty Line and among them are some landless households with very few resources. Many of Ulatu’s farming households do share cropping in order to get a bigger harvest than what their land would otherwise permit them. Share cropping is a widespread practice in Jharkhand, and involves one household taking another’s land, paying all the input costs for production, and on harvesting the crop sharing the produce roughly half and half.

Jidu and Baghin Banda: Jidu is located approximately two kilometres from National Highway 33, which also links the state capital Ranchi, the block head-quarter Ormanjhi, and the neighbouring district head-quarter Ramgarh – all main towns. Jidu village contains about 150 households, half tribal and half non-tribal, and all very poor. According to government sources there should be 71 Below Poverty Line households but according to the villagers there are more (about 100). We decided to ask BPL households as well as non-BPL, to see if the food availability was better for one or another group; however what was most apparent was that many of the tribal households were living in a gloomy situation without receiving any government support. During the two days we spent in the villages we also interviewed a man living in the neighbouring village of Baghin Banda.

Jirarbar and Kamta: These two neighbouring villages are located in the south-west part of the block and thus represent a more remote area. Jirarbar is constituted of 100 households, half tribal and half non-tribal, and almost half of them are registered on the BPL-list of the block. Kamta, on the other hand, is a bigger village with more than 200 households and most of them belonging to general castes (rather than scheduled castes or tribes). Yet still, according to the government, 172 of 250 households are very poor. This therefore required our attention, for the villagers had a very different perception – they declared that only 50-60 households were living in hard conditions. We found that some very poor households, some of them large (having about 12 members) and with land holdings between zero and 60 decimals only, were neither identified as Below Poverty Line nor had they been registered for any other social programme of the government.

Kurum: This is a very poor village, hardly accessible by other means than motorcycle or walking and composed of three different “tolis”. Among the 150 households, around 18 of them are living on a small piece of land offered by the government and have therefore no land on which to cultivate crops. Although these households are included in the Targeted Public Distribution System, many other households with difficult living conditions are excluded from the system.

Chapra Kocha: This very poor tribal village is located in a remote area of Ormanjhi Block and is mostly composed of upland, which makes agricultural work very tough. According to the villagers, half of the 40 households were really poor, what was less than the government’s estimate of three quarters of the total households. Yet still none of the households we asked were in possession of a card under any of the social programmes. Moreover, the villagers of Chapra Kocha were all paid an equivalent amount for their labour work under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) system, but they asserted that their wages were only Rs. 40 per day for the women and Rs. 60 for the men. This is illegal since wages under the NREGA system should be the same for men and women and should be much higher, Rs. 99 for all persons.

Karra block, Khunti district:

Lodhma: This is a large village, composed of about 350 households and divided into different “tolis”. Even though it is situated on a main road running through the block, where some small businesses and hotels can be found and which makes it well connected to Ranchi, it remains a very poor village, mostly non-tribal. Here we interviewed two old helpless persons, both of whom having absolutely no sources of income for they are unable to work. Of the two, just one had a card whilst the other had no card and no access to grains. The poverty was indeed striking given the size of the village and its proximity to the main city.

Bingaon: This is one of the biggest villages we visited alongside Lodhma, and includes about 300-350 households. Half of the households are very poor and have very small land holdings with absolutely no irrigation facilities. The NREGA system is working in this village, and the villagers are getting paid Rs. 92 per day, which is close to the official minimum wage of Rs. 99 per day, which shows that this situation is better than that of Chapra Kocha.

Chiyur: Despite the fact that Chiyur is located not far from a main road, the village remains in a quite remote area, with few facilities and a high proportion of poor households. More than half of the households fall under the TPDS according to the government list. This is one of the villages where we found that the problem of part-unemployment and very low wages

was the worst, with all the surveyed people answering that they earned less than Rs. 15,000 per year. The people of Chiyur have a really poor diet, consuming pulses and vegetables only occasionally.

Ludru: This village contains between only 55 and 65 households and according to the villagers every household has got a red or a yellow card that gives them access to food grains. These are actually very poor households in an inaccessible area. The biggest problem faced by the villagers every year is one of a lack of irrigation, since there are 20 wells in the village but they all become dry in March which prevents them from cultivating large quantities of vegetables for income generation.

Tungaon: This remote village, located in the eastern part of Karra Block and in the middle of a forest, is according to its villagers constituted of about 175 households (a little more than the government's estimate). Nearly all are considered to be BPL. 50% of the land is classified as wasteland area because there is a lack of irrigation facilities and the fields are mostly upland. Thus many people are migrating to Mumbai in order to find some labour work.