

Manika Survey 2013: Summary Findings

This report summarises the main findings of a survey conducted in four villages of Manika Block of Latehar district in June 2013. The survey focused on five entitlement programmes: the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), midday meals (MDM), the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA), the Public Distribution System (PDS), and social security pensions for widows and the elderly. In each village, the survey team filled a village questionnaire, interviewed 25 households and 12 pensioners, verified the entire list of pensioners, and inspected the local ration shop. The four villages are: Vishnubandh (Vishnubandh Gram Panchayat), Bhatko (Kope GP), Patna (Janho GP) and Purni Palheya (Banduwa GP).

NREGA

- There has been very little NREGA work in these villages after 2008.
- A very large proportion of NREGA wage payments were made in cash, even after bank (or post office) payments became mandatory. For example, in Patna, payments for work done in 2013 are still made in cash – presumably by contractors who withdraw money from people’s post office accounts without their knowledge.
- Most job card holders have not worked under NREGA in the year 2012-13, although their electronic Jobcards (downloaded from the NREGA website) show that they have worked on various schemes. This suggests that money has been siphoned off.

PDS

- The ration shops in the sample villages are functioning and distributing rice to BPL households every month. However, *none of them provide 35 kgs of rice per month to BPL households*. In most cases they provide 30 to 32 kgs instead of 35 kgs.
- There was a lack of clarity among beneficiaries and ration dealers about the entitlements of “Atirikt” households. Beneficiaries also did not have information on whether they were going to continue to receive ration.
- Ration is not provided after the 15th of the month, if someone happens to go a day late.
- On asking dealers about providing lesser ration than the sanctioned amount, they spoke about a cut at the Block level. “Doorstep delivery” of PDS rice from the Block to the ration shops has been temporarily withdrawn, and this forces them to bear transportation costs.

Old Age and Widow Pensions

- No major irregularities were found in the pension lists – most of the people on the list are eligible and receive their pension. However, the payments are irregular.
- There are no arrangements for regular monthly payment on a fixed date (as per Supreme Court orders). Also, pensioners are not informed when payments are made. As a result, many pensioners have to visit the bank many times to collect their pension.
- The last pension payment in the entire Block was made in the month of March and this was for the month of January.

- In all the four villages, it was observed that pensioners above the age of 80 are only receiving an amount of Rs 400.
- Most passbooks were not updated. Some passbooks are completely blank, ever since they the bank account opened.
- In every village, there are many people who have a BPL Card and are eligible for a pension but not get one.
- Pensioners have to travel a long distance (to the block headquarters) to withdraw their pension from the bank. They take five to seven hours, on average, to collect their pension. There is no separate queue for pensioners at the bank, causing further delays.
- There are at least 3 to 5 people in every village who are dead but whose names are still on the pension lists. Pension money continues to be credited to their defunct accounts, sometimes several years after their death.
- “Double sanction” (two pensions being sanctioned for the same person) has been observed in the pension records (see Annexure). 43 names in the list of 1187 widow pensions and 41 in the list of 3960 old-age pensions are cases of double sanction. Double pensions are not actually paid, because banks de-duplicate the lists before payment, but double sanctions deprive other potential beneficiaries of a pension.
- Some pensioners are told by the ration dealer that they cannot a pension as well as PDS rations, and in some cases (e.g. in Vishnubandh) their PDS rations have been discontinued.
- Compared with Dumka (where a similar survey was conducted), pensioners in Manika are less dependent on middlemen. This can be credited to the fact that camps have been held at the Block level to select pension beneficiaries.

ICDS and MDM

- The coverage of ICDS has significantly expanded. However, many children are still excluded from ICDS because the nearest Anganwadi is too far.
- The services that were provided at most Anganwadis are immunisation, health check-up, take-home rations (THR) and provision of iron tablet.
- The services which are not provided in most of the Anganwadis are cooked midday meals on a daily basis, pre-school education and referral services. Some of these Anganwadis also did not have adequate infrastructure facilities.
- The midday meal programme is functioning relatively well in all villages, but the official menu is not being followed. In particular, none of the schools are providing an egg.

Conclusion: For most of these programmes (except NREGA), there are some visible improvements compared with earlier years. However, the general situation remains absolutely dismal, with most people deprived of basic entitlements that could make a big difference to their lives. In the case of NREGA, there is a serious crisis – very little work is available and delays in wage payments are

rampant, forcing people to migrate to distance places for work. There is an urgent need for radical improvement in all these programmes.