

## **DBT Ordeal Continues in Nagri (Jharkhand)**

### **Despite Massive Protests from Gram Sabhas**

Jharkhand's misguided "DBT for food subsidy" pilot in Nagri Block (Ranchi District) is yet to be discontinued, despite virtually unanimous opposition to it from Gram Sabhas. The sequence of events is as follows:

1. The Nagri pilot was initiated in early October 2017. Public protests erupted almost immediately and have continued ever since.
2. Under the DBT system, people have to collect their food subsidy in cash from the bank before using it to buy rice from the ration shop at Rs 32 per kg. Earlier, they were able to buy rice from the ration shop at Re 1 per kg.
3. In February 2018, a survey conducted by student volunteers in 13 randomly-selected villages of Nagri Block revealed that the pilot was causing enormous hardship to the people of Nagri – a summary of the survey findings (released on 24 Feb 2018) is attached.
4. On 26 February 2018, thousands of aggrieved people from Nagri walked from there to the Governor's house in Ranchi to demand to the discontinuation of DBT in favour of the earlier system.
5. Not convinced with the survey findings, the Government of Jharkhand promised to complete its own "social audit" of the pilot by the end of March and take a decision soon after that.
6. The social audit was completed in April 2018 by the Social Audit Unit of the GoJ's Rural Development Department. A copy of the social audit report's Executive Summary (obtained under the Right to Information Act) is attached, along with a summary table.
7. The social audit broadly confirms the results of the earlier survey. Large numbers of people in Nagri are deprived of food rations due to DBT, and even larger numbers face enormous hardship as they make expensive and time-consuming trips to the bank, Pragma Kendra and ration shop.
8. Like the February survey, the social audit also found near-unanimous opposition to DBT in Nagri. In fact, the proportion of respondents who opposed DBT was the same in both cases: 97%!
9. During the April social audit, Gram Sabhas were also held in 38 villages (out of 46) to discuss the DBT pilot. According to the attached Executive Summary of the social audit report, 36 out of 38 Gram Sabhas unanimously said "NO TO DBT" and demanded a return to the old PDS system.
10. On 28 May 2018, the Government of Jharkhand wrote to the Central Government requesting permission to discontinue the DBT pilot in Nagri. The letter argues that this pilot violates the National Food Security Act (NFSA) – correct, but then why was it started in the first place?

**Four months after the 26 February demonstration, the government is yet to take a decision on the DBT pilot. It has not even released the social audit report. Meanwhile, the people of Nagri continue to suffer and wait for an end to this ordeal.**