

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE HUNGER WATCH

The Right to Food campaign along with a number of other networks launched the 'Hunger Watch' in September 2020 to track the situation of hunger amongst vulnerable and marginalised communities in different parts of the country, in the context of the COVID pandemic. The Hunger Watch aims to conduct field surveys followed by local action towards demanding access to entitlements as well as drawing attention of governments and media to the prevailing situation of hunger in the country.

The Hunger Watch was conducted in 11 states. Vulnerable communities in rural and urban areas were identified by local activists/researchers who then shortlisted the households to be surveyed within these communities based on group discussions with the community. A simple questionnaire was developed and administered using smart phones. This is one of the few in-person surveys that have been conducted since the pandemic. While the data being presented may not be representative of the district, state or country, they do, however, tell a story of deprivation of thousands of households in similar situations.

The preliminary results from the Hunger Watch that we share here, show that the hunger situation is grave, even five months after the lockdown has ended. While this support from the government programmes has been crucial, the staggering levels of hunger witnessed during the Hunger Watch also showed the inadequacy of measures announced in the Pradhan Mantri Gareeb Kalyan Yojana (PMGKY). Many are left out and even among those who did get the entitlements, the overall consumption was still lower than what it was before the lockdown. This calls for urgently strengthening and expansion of these schemes.

The main findings from the survey are presented below. Based on the capacity and resources of the local organisations, a varied number of households have been surveyed in different states. The figures presented here are not weighted by the sample size or population of the states but are simple averages. A detailed report with further details and disaggregation will be released soon.

Profile of Respondents

- 3,994 respondents from 11 states (Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Delhi, Telangana, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal)
- 2,186 in rural areas and 1,808 in urban areas
- Uttar Pradesh (967), Madhya Pradesh (558), Gujarat(403), Rajasthan(374), Maharashtra(249), Chhattisgarh(187), Jharkhand(179), Delhi(146), Telangana(81), Tamil Nadu(66) and West Bengal(784)

Low income: 79% of the respondents had income less than Rs 7,000 per month before the lockdown. 41% of them earned less than Rs 3,000 per month before the lockdown.

Marginalised Communities:

- Roughly 59% of the respondents were Dalits/Adivasis, 23% were OBC and about 4% were PVTG. About 64% identified themselves as Hindus while 20% were Muslims.
- 55% of the respondents were women.
- 24% were slum dwellers, 14% were single women headed households and 7% of the respondents had households with a member who was disabled.
- About 45% were casual labourers and 15% were farmers.

Change in Consumption Patterns in September-October compared to before lockdown

Compared to pre-lockdown incomes in September/October still remain affected

- About 43% of them had no income in April-May. Out of these people, only about 3% have gone back to income levels of what it was before lockdown. 56% of those who had no income in April-May continued to have no income in September-October.
- Compared to April-May, while fewer people had no income, roughly 62% of the respondents said that their income reduced in September-October compared to pre-lockdown. And, among those whose income reduced, for about one in four respondents, the income was half of what they earned before lockdown.

In summary, what we see is that for a large majority of people, there is no change in their economic status from what it was in April-May.

Consumption of cereals, pulses and vegetables “decreased a lot” in September/October compared to pre-lockdown

- 53% reported that their consumption of rice/wheat has decreased in September-October and for about one in four it has “decreased a lot.”
- 64% reported that their consumption of dal has decreased in September-October of which about 28% reported that it has “decreased a lot.”
- 73% reported that their consumption of green vegetables has decreased in September-October and for about 38% it has “decreased a lot.”
- About 77% of the PVTG families reported to have reduced the quantity of food consumption in September-October compared to before lockdown. Quantity of food consumption decreased for about 74% of the Dalits and for about 36% it ‘decreased a lot’. About 54% of the Adivasis reported that their quantity of food consumption decreased. About 7% reported that their quantity of food consumption increased in the last 30 days. About 69% of the OBCs said that their consumption either decreased somewhat or decreased a lot and just 3% said that their quantity of food consumption increased in September-October. For about 68% of those in the general category, the quantity either ‘decreased somewhat’ or ‘decreased a lot’ and only about 3% reported that their consumption increased.

Reduction on Consumption of Eggs/Non-veg items staggering

- About 17% of our respondents said that they consumed eggs/nonveg ‘often’ before the lockdown. Among them, 91% said that their eggs/meat consumption has decreased in September-October and a staggering 58% said that it has “decreased a lot.” About 46% of the respondents said that they consumed eggs/meat ‘sometimes’ before the lockdown and among them, 76% reported that their egg/meat consumption has decreased.

Large proportion skip meals and go to bed hungry

- About 56% of the respondents never had to skip meals before lockdown. Of them, one in seven had to either skip meals ‘often’ or ‘sometimes’ in September-October

- In September-October, about 27% respondents sometimes went to bed without eating. About one in 20 households **often** went to bed without eating.

Overall decline in nutritional quality and quantity, even the relatively better off affected badly

- About 71% reported that the nutritional quality of food has worsened in September-October from what it was before lockdown of which about 40% said it's become "much worse." While lower income groups were affected more, 62% of those who earned more than Rs 15,000 per month before lockdown reported that their nutritional quality worsened in September-October compared to before lockdown.
- Two-thirds reported that the quantity of food has either decreased somewhat or decreased a lot now compared to before lockdown. 28% reported decreased a lot.

Need to borrow money for food has increased for all

- For about 45%, the need to borrow money for food has increased from pre-lockdown periods. Even among those in the highest income bracket (> Rs 15,000 per month pre-lockdown), about 42% reported that their need to borrow money has increased. This again points to the fact that the need to borrow money for food was high regardless of the income levels of the household. Moreover, the need to borrow money among Dalits was 23 percentage points more than those in the 'General' category.

Discrimination Faced

- One in four Dalits and one in four Muslims report they faced discrimination in accessing food since lockdown and about 12% of Adivasis faced discrimination. This was one in ten among those in the 'General' category.

Access to Entitlements

- 70% have some kind of ration cards that gives them subsidised grains ((priority, AAY, state ration cards etc, including 2% who had temporary cards/coupons)
- 86% of those who had any ration card that is eligible for subsidised grains, said they received their usual entitlement of foodgrains from April to August
- 88% of those who had NFSA ration cards (1715 households) said that they did receive the free grains that were given under PMGKAY from April to August
- 57% households with school going children (2531 households) said their children received mid-day meals or alternative (dry rations/cash) in September-October
- 48% households with young children/pregnant lactating women (2125 households) said they received supplementary or alternative (dry rations/cash) from anganwadis during September-October