

Study of Mid Day Meal, Antyodaya and Annapurna Schemes in Lower Assam

District wise List of Villages Surveyed

Sl.No.;;	Bongaigaon District ¹	Goalpara District	Kokrajhar District	Dhubri District
1	East Kamarpara	Borjhora No. 1	Bangalpara	Alurbhui
2	Palashguri	Dipalsung	Deulguri	Bagerkhoj
3	Doholapara	Gelajari	Khunguri	Abhyakuti Salbari
4	Khagrabari	Dwarka	Tukrajhar No.1	Jor-nagara
5	Khantalguri	Gengamari	Balapara No. 2	Chokrosila
6	Samgami (Samgaon)	Kakuapara	Dologaon	Tintila
7	Basbary No.1	Gojapara	Choto Kuchakati	Sirigram Part 5
8	Basbary No. 2	Amguri	Bengtol No. 2 (Sonapur)	Damodapur
9	Kharija Dolaigaon - 2	Bhoiskuli	Bengtol No. 1	Pukuripara No.2
10	Chowrabari	Mojaipara	Serfanguri	Bandorpara

All villages covered now under administration of Chirang District of Bodo Territorial Administered Districts.

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We acknowledge the support of Birendra Rabha who interviewed four - five beneficiaries in Goalpara district.

¹ All villages (except Serial 9) transferred under Chirang district of Bodo Territorial Administered Districts.

Salient Features of survey results in the villages in the Districts of Lower Assam

District	Bongaigaon	Goalpara	Dhubri	Kokrajhar
Date of survey	15 th – 17 th May '04	21 st – 25 th May '04	14 th – 16 th 04'	31 st May, 4 th – 6 th June 04
Mid-day meal:				
Dry ration	Yes, in all the schools.	Most of the schools	Yes, in all the schools	Only 4 schools out of 10.
Aware of provision for utensils, kitchen shed, firewood, carrying charges-Rs 50/quintal?	Most people say No	No	No	No
Cooked meals provided regularly?	No cooked meals	Minimum 7 days and Max.20 days in a month.	No cooked meals	16 – 21 days
Quantity of dry ration distributed /child/month?	Some school provide less than 3kg rice	If provided less than 3kg/child/month	1.530 -2.500 kg	2.500 kg
Carrying charges?	Students contribute 90 paise to Rs 3.00 per month	Given Rs20 – 35/quintal	-	-
Management of cooked meals?	-	Village committee; utensils taken from Anganwadi; if not sufficient hire from outside costing Rs 5 for each pot.	-	Village committee
Cooked by?	-	Mahila group/selected cook group	-	Mother's groups, women and gents group or by daily labour
Place for kitchen?	Nil	Somebody's house/ club buildings	-	Clubs, use plastic sheets.
Payment for cook?	-	Voluntarily	-	2kg of rice
Money for oil/firewood etc	-	Committee selling part of supplied rice, sells	-	Sells rice of the holidays.

		sacks and the firewood contributed by the students. Each household of the village donates Rs. 1 – 3 per child per month.		
Antyodaya:				
Village Headman/Secretary/President aware of the scheme?	Know it's for poor families but do not know in details of selection procedure.	No	No	No
Beneficiary lifts full quota of rice?	Most don't get full quota	Minimum 23 -35 kg of rice	24 – 35kgs per month	25, 30, 32,34 in kg
Regularity of rice distribution?	Not regular	No	Sometimes after two months	Sometimes after two months.
Enlisted by:	Dealer /through influential person	Dealer or through influential person	Dealer	Dealer
Any village representative consulted for selection of beneficiary?	No	No	No	Yes, in one or two villages.

- ✓ In Dhubri and Bongaigaon district no schools provided cooked mid- day meals.
- ✓ Goalpara and Kokrajhar presents mixed findings of both dry rations in most of the schools and mid- meals in some. Very few numbers of schools provide meals after selling certain quantity of rice. Turns are taken by the mahila group, men's group, mothers groups,etc who give daily labour to cook the mid day meals.
- ✓ No village representative is aware of Antyodaya/ Annapurna scheme in detail. Antyodaya beneficiaries don't get the full quota of rice.
- ✓ Dealer does the selection of the beneficiaries.
- ✓ **Annapurna:** Stopped from 1st November 2001 as per the dealing assistant of the SDO (civil) of Bongaigaon district.
- ✓ Goalpara and Kokrajhar though innovative in cooking systems are unlikely to be sustain their effort in carrying out mid-day meal scheme.

Detailed Report of the survey

Introduction

At least ten schools and ten villages were visited in one or two blocks in each district. We had printed small information leaflets about each scheme and these were distributed after the study was completed in each village. Most people who have been interviewed were surprised about the schemes and the information available for them. Most of them, for the first time heard that the government can sanction money from existing D.R.D.A schemes for utensils, kitchensheds, cooks, fuel, daal, oil and other requirements for the mid-day meals. Some of the poor beneficiaries do not know how much they are entitled to and its rate fixed by the government. There is no publicity either in the form of posters or through notice boards. Selection of the beneficiaries is usually done by the dealer in all the villages surveyed. Although some of the areas surveyed are under BTC now and there is no active Panchayat, one expects involvement of general public somewhere at least. Therefore, the selection is not in accordance with the guidelines of the Supreme Court orders. The schemes have gone in different direction. In fact an authority of the Kokrajhar district of Assam has ordered for the implementation of cooked meals by December 2003 without any financial assistance!

Mid Day Meal Scheme

Schools of the **Boro Bazaar Block** under Bongaigaon² district that was surveyed do not supply cooked meals. They provide only dry rations. Some of the head of the schools of the district complained that the ration sacks are always torn, so it's difficult to provide 3kg per child per month as they are instructed. They complained that the 50 kg of rice sacks contain only about 40 – 45 kg. In some schools, they estimate it's even around 35 kg.

Jatin Basumatary of the Kanthalguri school says that they charge Rs 3/- per month from each student for the carrying charge. Another school headmistress (whose school has not been recorded here as the village has no beneficiary of Antyodaya and Annapurna) said that they charge 90 paise from each student for the carrying charge. The headmaster of East Kamarpara School said he never knew it has to be given in cooked form and that this survey was the first time he had learnt of it.

No schools of the **Dhubri district** provided 3kg of rice and no cooked meals from day one. The school headmaster of Chakrashila said that he managed to give only 1.530 kg of rice in the month of November 2003 and in other month 2.500 kg per child. He also said it's difficult to provide mid-day meal here as there is no well or hand pump in the school compound. In the same district there is a single teacher school who has not come for the school for the last three months. Abhyakuti Salbari School has provided only 8.495 kg of ration against 18kg in the last six months. Maqbul Hussain of the Tintila School couldn't say how much rice has been given as the dealer himself *has supplied directly to the children*. In Damodar School only 7.915kg was distributed in the last six months. As one student of the Goalpara district admitted, he has been given only 5kg of rice in the past two months.

Albis Muchahary a headmaster of the No.2 Bengtol (Sonapur) of the Kokrajhar district says they have not received rations in the month of February and April 2004. In the past they have been able to provide only 2.5 kg dry rations per student in a month. It is reported that no school in the area could provide 3kg of rice for each student. Deulguri School headmaster of

² Now under Chirang District of Bodo Territorial Administered Districts.

the Kokrajhar district says they have started giving meals only since May 2004. They are providing meals for 16 days in a month. Thursday being market day and Saturday being half day, no meals are being given. Ration for these two days is sold as they need to purchase dal, salt and other kitchen requirements. They have also bought plastic sheets for making kitchen sheds. The village committee has selected two women to perform cooking duties. They get 2 kg of rice a day. One month allotted rations have not been distributed in order to sell them/ exchange them to purchase utensils. They said that even then that amount is still not sufficient to buy other requirements. They also sell holiday rations. For the firewood, each student has been asked to contribute one piece of firewood for the meal every day.

Bangalpara of the Kokrajhar district is the only school within the district surveyed that provides regular meals for the children. Part of the management is done by selling half of the quantity of rice in order to purchase mustard oil, dal and other requirement. When asked in details how the mid-day meal is cooked, the committee members said that 2-3 households cooked the meal turn by turn. According to this system that has been ingeniously worked out, if a particular household cannot send any individual then it must send a daily wage labourer for the job. Even the poorer families cannot escape from this condition. In one of the villages of Kokrajhar district the school headmistress said that she was thinking hard whether to provide cooked meals during the rainy season as they have no kitchen shed or any extra buildings. The same headmistress informed that they may be able to build a kitchen shed might be a kitchen shed with the estimated cost of Rs 15000/- as discussed recently. Otherwise they would change the idea of providing meal because of the weather. One of the education committee members who is also the member of the Panchayat has given me a letter sent by the Block Elementary Education Officer about the implementation of the cooked meals by December 2003. Discussions were held in the village just before the day of this study to find ways of implementing the scheme. One of the village members when met in the same village Serfanguri of the Kokrajhar district said that they can't provide cooked meals as the schools is overcrowded with students. The assistant headmaster of the school said they are facing difficulties in providing even dry rations as they have combined classes with the nursery level. He also felt that if the school has to provide meals to the children, the normal teaching work carried out by teachers will be affected especially during this cultivation season. They planned to discuss about its implementation the day after my visit. The headmaster of the village school wondered aloud as to how they would provide mid day meals as the school doesn't have any utensils.

The school headmaster of the Tukrajhar school said that they will be providing mid day meals from 7th June 04' onwards. He informed that they may be able to provide cooked meals for 17 days a month. Cooking will be done voluntarily by the mothers' group of the village. Some other schools of the area have provided meals only once in the month of April '04. One of the village education members of the Balapara school does not know exactly how much ration has been distributed. However, another member of the education committee replied that earlier only 1.5 kg of rice used to be given, but on 4th June they have distributed 2.5 kg per child. Dologaon school headmistress informed me that the school had provided mid day meals only in the month of December 2003 for twenty days.

In Goalpara district very few schools provided cooked meals. Some of the schools have stopped giving meals for reasons of bad weather or management difficulties faced by the village committee. Interestingly, the village committee manages to provide cooked meals after selling allotted quantity of rice for Saturday, Sunday and other holidays allegedly as per the instructions given by the authorities. With that amount, oil, dal, vegetables and other

requirements are also purchased. The committee also sells empty ration sacks for the same purpose. Each student has to contribute one or two pieces of firewood for the cooking. An amount of Rs 1 – 3 is being collected from each household every month to meet the expenses of cooked meals. In some schools only 7 days cooked meals are being provided every month while others provide at least 21 days in a month. Borjhora or Bamudona School provides 10 – 11 days cooked meals every month and even that depends on the amount of supply of quantity of rice. One of the school committee members said that they have to hire utensils from Anganwadi and if not sufficient, they have to hire them at Rs 5/- per pot from the local market. Mid-day meals are being cooked turn wise by *mahila* group and gents group in this village. Cooking is done in one or the other household if the weather is bad; or else it is done in the school compound. This is the system of few schools that has been providing the meals. But most of schools are distributing only the dry rations. Dipalsung School provided cooked meals only in the month of April 04' for seven days. As one student of the Dipalsung School admitted, he got 5kg of rice for the two months.

Abdul Mozid, a Block Development Officer of Balijana Block under Goalpara district comments that not all the government schools would be able to provide mid-day meals. He says that the amount of dry rations is not sufficient for all the schools. He says that the Government has instructed them to supply the rations only for a certain numbers of school.

The survey could not find even a single individual who knows the details about the scheme. The provision of kitchen shed, cooking helpers, fuel and utensil, dal, oil and carrying charges came as a matter of surprise. They have reported that it is the first time that they have received information about such provision in details. Not even the schools committee president or the secretary too knows the scheme.

Almost all the schools provide dry ration or the mid day meals only on the basis of the enrolment. No kitchen shed and cooking helpers are available at any of the surveyed schools. Most of the schools and villages never knew that the central government has placed such an order to the states.

Antyodaya

Antyodaya is in full coverage in the surveyed districts of Assam, but have not followed the given guidelines of the Supreme Court. It is informed that the dealer and village influential persons without the knowledge of the village headman/president/secretary are selecting the beneficiary. And the listed names will only be the agenda of discussion, if there's a gram sabha meeting. Good numbers of the villages have not heard about the gram sabha. The village leaders in most of the village do not know the age criteria for the selection of the beneficiary. They say they have heard that these schemes are meant for the poorest of the poor families. (In most areas surveyed, no panchayat elections were held because of formation of the Bodo Territorial Council.)

Most of the beneficiaries of Antyodaya said that they have not been selected by the Village headman/Secretary/President. Most of them were not sure how their name had been enlisted. They came to know only after the ration had reached the village or through the dealer.

In one or two villages, even if the real beneficiary had died, their sons or daughter continue to be the beneficiary. Late Kanto of Serfanguri village under the Kokrajhar district died on 6th of Decemeber 2003 but their children are still Antyodaya beneficiaries.

Antyodaya beneficiaries in most villages are not receiving the allotted amount. Most beneficiaries are provided 30kg, others 32kg and 34 kg of rice a month. However, the distribution of rations is not regular. Sometimes there's a gap between two to three months. For instance in Deulguri village under the Kokrajhar district it is reported that the beneficiaries have not received the rations for the past three months. One of the beneficiaries of Damodopur village under Dhubri district reported that he had not received rations for the last two months. When there's a gap, the beneficiary sometimes – not always - received two months allotted rice at a stretch. And sometimes they just miss the rations because they do not come to know of it. Sodeswari of the village Dologaon of the Kokrajhar district says sometimes they don't get the rice as the dealer complained about the shortage in supply of rice. Beneficiaries of the Choto Kuchakata village of Kokrajhar district reported that ration distribution is on a competition basis. Those who can collect more can take whatever they want. It happens sometimes like a bird fighting for a piece of grain. Poorest people get 2 kg free rice as *adi* (*adi* = word used for “share” as in share cropping also called “adi”) with the dealer although he does not buy his quota of 35 kgs. Obviously, lifting for two or three months allotted rice also means a big burden for the poor beneficiaries to collect at one time. Raj Kumar Adhikary, a poor Antyodaya beneficiary can collect the ration only if he gets financial assistance from someone. He says sometimes nobody informs him at the time of distribution and he misses it.

In Goalpara district, some of the beneficiaries are reported to have received 23.5 - 25 Kg of rice but when the card was checked during the survey, it is seen to have written 35 kg of rice. Basuri Rabha of Mojaipara village under Goalpara district gets only 24 kg of rice. Gelajari village beneficiary of Dhubri gets 25 kg of rice instead in the card is written 35kg by the dealer. In Dipalsing village under the Goalpara district beneficiaries received 23.5 kg of rice (the 0.5 kgs fractions are due to the ‘cutting’ made for transportation). Other beneficiaries' cards remained with the dealer. They say the dealer does not allow the card to be with the beneficiary. In most of the villages, the beneficiary is not getting the full benefit. Beneficiaries of Dipalsing under Goalpara district get 23.5 kg of ration. On other occasions if the beneficiary does not have any amount to buy the ration, in that case the dealer gives 6 kg of rice free of cost and the rest is kept by the dealer. They say this is the *Adi* system (*vide supra*). This incident has been found in Kokrajhar and Goalpara district also. Another beneficiary of Balapara village in Kokrajhar district says she has not lifted the ration since as she has given the card to one of her sisters who is using it!!.

Some of the dealers in Dhubri are also charged with changing the good quality of grains with bad quality grain in the shop. On the part of the beneficiaries, they feel that they should lift whatever the dealer provides. They do not question the dealer and it is his version that is accepted as final, whether it is to pay a higher charge, or to pay a transportation charge, or that he is getting a lesser quality (or even quantity) of rice from the District.

None of the village Gaonburas, president or secretary knew the details about the scheme. When interviewed many have said it is the first time they have heard of such criteria and provisions. In fact, the Samabay Samity (the PDS co-operative society) has asked Simson a village headman of the village Sefanguri of the Kokrajhar to select the person who has attained 35 years of age to be as Antyodaya beneficiary!

No beneficiaries have been given rice at Rs.3/kg. Some dealers take Rs. 3.50 – 5/kg of rice. The dealers say the rate has been increased due to the transportation fare as they have to

spend from their own pocket. One of the women dealers in Kokrajhar says she has paid to the police an amount of Rs 150/-. This amount paid depends on the quantity of rice lifted from the Samity office as the lady dealer informed.

While discussing various problems, one of the dealers in the Dhubri district says a “contract system” is going on in their Samabay Samity. As the officer of the Samabay Samity cannot lift the rice from the F.C.I godown due to the lack of funds in his office, the officer takes a loan on small interest from some other big businessman and purchases the ration. Again, the dealer has to buy the ration giving that interest from the office. This may be one of the reasons why the dealer has to demand an extra amount from the beneficiary. Other dealers simply tell the people about the carrying charge and charge them extra for it. This “contract system” that the dealer justified as the reason for extra charges is a simple business mechanism that is followed by any profit making business (just as any cooperative society is supposed to be) and the interest paid to raise capital should be worked out from the margins of business before accepting the responsibility of distributing PDS or Antyodaya grain for the government!

In Khagrabari village under the Bongaigaon district there is a very old lady whose age could be around between 90 – 100 years old. She has no son and no daughter around to assist her. This old lady was not given a card by the village headman or the dealer at the first instance. No body had approached her. She heard about the scheme, met the dealer personally with much difficulty as she is unable to walk properly. Then the dealer after knowing her fully well had given an Antyodaya card. But the lady even when given the card can't collect the whole amount of rice. Sometimes she can collect 10 kg of rice in a month; the remaining quantity is being collected by the neighbour. In this village only the richer people are getting the benefit of Antyodaya scheme but the number of poor families are just left out. Benga Brahma an Antyodaya beneficiary from Khagrabari of Bongaigaon district says his name has been given by the Muslim dalal (term used for middlemen who move from village to village making people sign application for various government schemes at a commission) from some other village. Jambi Brahma of the Palasguri village of Bongaigaon says she has received 52kg of rice for two months.

Annapurna scheme

Annapurna scheme is not implemented in the districts surveyed. A sub-divisional official of Bongaigaon said that there was an official instruction from the government that from 1st November 2001 onwards Annapurna scheme would not be implemented. Previous beneficiaries of Annapurna scheme responded that they have not received the rations in the last two years.

Limitations of the Study

The beneficiaries could not be informed well in advance about the questionnaire. Though we had targeted 5 beneficiaries in each village of study, the investigator could meet only two to five Antyodaya beneficiaries in most of the villages as the others had either gone for their daily wage labour or else the village leaders were not interested in introducing the researcher to them.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, we would like to recommend the following:

1. **Centre's overall responsibility towards its citizens.** Whether it is the Centre or the State that lacks the funds to implement the schemes is not a matter for us to bother about. What we are worried about is that children—50% of who are found to be malnourished in health studies- and the destitute do not get help while the Centre and the State blame each other for the fiasco. In crucial issues like these, the 75:25 criteria cannot be held as a reason for neither to react. Just because the State does not spend 25% should not mean that the Centre will abdicate its responsibility of spending the 75%. Between the two, the Centre as elder statesman should pay for the welfare of its citizens if the State government fails to carry out its responsibility and charge a penalty to the State either in the form of interest or even dismissal of government if this happens too often!! In no case should the voiceless suffer in the battle of State and the Centre for changing the 75:25 structure to a 90:10 structure for all rural development fund allocations.
2. **Duty of information.** Just as people are fighting for the right to information, government machineries must be forced to carry out their duty of information. It should entail certain mandatory information to be passed not only to all panchayat members where they exist, but also to village people. There is no reason why the 1% allocation of all DRDA funds amounting to approximately Rs 1 crore per year for each district cannot be properly utilised by putting up painted bill boards in every panchayat bhawan, using all walls of government buildings for detailing out the eligibility of various schemes of the department, etc. Pamphlets and booklets on development schemes, list of BPL families, etc in vernacular languages can be printed and displayed in information centres with the help of youth clubs, mahila samitis, farm management committees, SHGs and other such institutions at very low costs as experiments from MP have shown. Such centres at 2500 – 5000 population level (not panchayat level as 10000 population in Assam involves about 30-40 small and big villages/hamlets and is not a cohesive unit) can go along way in arming people with enough knowledge to watch over the implementation of government schemes. Failure to make available such information that can be read / understood by most sections of society should be seen as a dereliction of duty by the State.
3. **Bodo Territorial Council areas.** At the earliest, some mechanism for BTC administered areas should also be worked out so that list of BPL beneficiaries can be selected for various schemes more transparently.
4. **BPL lists.** As a new government takes over, the BPL lists are revised. This list should be freed from such vagaries and should be available freely and universally.
5. **Selection from within BPL.** Selecting the poorest of the poor is getting us nowhere. The undersigned has found only 1 or 2 households with a BPL card or an IAY house in an entire hamlet with none of the households owning more than 1 or 2 bigha (7.5 bighas= 1 hectare). Each one is a daily wage earner and very vulnerable to hunger thanks to the umpteen bandhs in the area. While all of them should have had a BPL card, only a fraction gets the benefits – despite official letters to the districts written by us pointing out the same – because the largesse is distributed not by virtue of the status of BPL, but by allotment of 10 or 15 ‘vacancies’ for the entire gram panchayat, that in turn gets evenly distributed to every village instead of selecting those worst off irrespective of which village they live! This quota system of increasing targets every year to select the BPL families must go forthwith, especially with respect to those schemes where survival is affected.

6. **PDS / Antyodaya** Despite the lofty ideals of the PDS system and the Antyodaya scheme, there needs to be an empathetic approach to the provisions. The poor are unable to pay for 35 kgs at a time even if the rations are available at only Rs 3.00. Provision for collecting their rations every week or 10 days should be made.
7. **Accountability of dealers** by public/ public audit for reviewing of the Antyodaya and BPL list needs to be introduced. A strict and exemplary action should also be initiated. Provisions of Sec 304 may be made applicable to PDS dealers who indulge in corruption in schemes like Antyodaya as the timely provision of food at the right cost can make the difference of life and death for the destitute BPL household!!
8. **Mid-day meal schemes** There is a serious need to review the workability of the scheme. The undersigned has personally spoken to DCs in lower Assam who claim that they have neither received any written order that makes it compulsory for all primary schools to serve cooked meals, nor have they received any guidelines or funds to do so. The need for wells / hand pumps in schools besides other infrastructure to cook cannot be brushed away easily now.
9. Though Goalpara and Kokrajhar have very **innovatively** set up systems to provide cooked meals to their children, they are unlikely to sustain their effort in carrying out mid-day meal scheme.
10. As the undersigned was also not aware of the winding up of the Annapurna scheme (i am still not sure), it is suggested that all advisors be exposed to the various government schemes in vogue and the duties and rights of the Advisor. A basic foundation exposure and a regular update can be arranged.



Sunil Kaul
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