

Report on Implementation of Interim Orders of the Supreme Court in the Right to Food case in Tikamgarh District, Madhya Pradesh

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Tikamgarh district in Sagar Revenue Division is situated in the central-northern part of the State. The district is bound by Jhansi and Lalitpur districts of Uttar Pradesh on the west, Hamirpur district of U.P. in the north, Chattarpur district in the east and the southern edge of the district touches Sagar district. The western boundary of the district is carved out by river Janmi and the eastern boundary by river Dhasan. This district was formerly a part of the Bundelkhand region. Total area of the district is 5048 sq. kms. The district headquarters is located at Tikamgarh. This area is marked with the problem of low water table. The dalits and the tribals are dependent on rainfed agriculture. Due to continuous drought for the last three years, the economy of the region, based on agriculture and livestock, has collapsed. Migration for work is continuously increasing specially among Sahariya and Dalits.

The Sahariyas, a primitive tribe, face a long history of social ostracism, living in separate hamlets on the outskirts of the main village settlements. In the recent drought in MP, the main starvation deaths were among the Sahariyas, who must be the poorest and most malnourished people in India. The Sahariyas in Tikamgarh make their living through labour, wood-selling and making Siyari shrub baskets. They are forced to migrate as far as Delhi in search of work. A few who have land mainly grow coarse cereals and maize. There a large number of dalit communities like Ahirwar, Vanshkar, Sutrakar, Kumhar, Bedia, Bhangi and Khangar. They belong to the bottom of the caste hierarchy and are generally landless. Their main economic activities are casual labour, earthenware making, bidi making and bamboo basket weaving. A recent government order entitles them to land but the implementation of this order has not been effective since the upper castes have not allowed them to gain control over this land.

A total of three villages of Prithvipur Block of Tikamgarh District were visited during the trip. These form part of the working area of an NGO, Sambhav Social Service Organisation, who have been working here for several years. The focus was on Sahariya and Dalit hamlets of these villages.

¹ This report is based on the visit by my representative Ms. Jyotsna Jain to Prithvipur Block of Tikamgarh District from the 18th to the 19th of July 2004. She was assisted during the visit by activists of Sambhav Social Service Organisation, an NGO working in the area for several years.

List of Villages visited in Prithvipur Block, Tikamgarh District

Village	Gram Panchayat	Distance from the Block Office (kms.)
1 Atarra	Atarra	8
2 Papaoni	Papaoni	13
3 Bachora	Bachora	7

Scheme-wise Summary of Findings

1. Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS) and Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY)

Ration cards

- In Atarra, we found that at least four eligible persons (including Sahariya adivasis and those dalits who fall in the aged, infirm and widows category) have not been issued AAY cards.
- In Atarra we found at least ten dalit families whose names feature in the BPL list who do not have ration cards.

PDS outlets—location and days of opening

- Only one out of three villages (Bachora) has a PDS outlet located in the village itself. In the remaining two villages (Atarra and Papaoni) the outlet is outside the village at a distance ranging from two to five Kms.
- All three PDS shops open only for 2 – 4 days in a month. For instance, the shopkeeper at the Bachora PDS shop stays in Prithvipur and opens the shop only for 2 or 3 days in a month and that too for a few hours. The ration is hurriedly distributed to a few people who are around and then the shop is shut.

Distribution of ration

- BPL card holders in Atarra have not got any ration only once (in March 2004) during the last one year. In Bachora the BPL card holders have not got ration at all for the last four years.

Entitlement of ration

- In Atarra we found that at least two AAY families are getting even less than one third of the total entitlement of grain.
- In Papaoni, underweighing of ration is a common practice, due to which AAY ration card holders get less than the amount entered in the ration card. For example, the shopkeeper will tell customers that he is giving 35 kg. of grain and will also enter the same amount in the card. However, in reality, about 3 kg. less is given. Also, stones are used, instead of conventional weights, for measuring. Even though the ration is distributed regularly, a number of people are deprived of their monthly quota of ration due to shortage of ration at the shop.
- In Bachora distribution of ration to AAY card holders is irregular. We found that some AAY card holders had got only 5 kg. of rice and 40 kg. of wheat just once in the last five months.

- Sugar has not been available at all in the ration shops at Atarra and Papaoni for more than five years. In these villages, kerosene is sold at a price of Rs. 10/- per litre which is higher than the prescribed rate.

Ration Distribution in Parts

- Ration is not given in parts in any of the three villages.

2. Mid-day Meal Scheme (MDMS)

- The quality and quantity of the mid-day meals is not satisfactory. In Atarra, meals are not served daily. The quality is so poor that the children are rarely able to eat it. In Papaoni, the rotis are very small and light. Though edible, it is clear that less than the prescribed 100 grams of wheat per student is being used. In Bachora the mid-day meal has been served only on three days since the beginning of the session in July.
- Very often the meager meals served in all three villages are under-cooked. The vegetable is tasteless and watery so children do not eat it and it gets thrown away.
- The cooks in all three villages are not dalits.

3. Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS)

- Panjiri is distributed in all the three villages. But in most cases the quality and the quantity is not satisfactory.
- In all three villages quantities given are less than the prescribed norm.
- In Atarra dry Panjiri is distributed only once a week. Its quality is often poor. In Papaoni, Panjiri mixed with water is given daily to the children but it is so tasteless that the children are unable to eat it. At times this Panjiri contains worms also. Barely edible dry Panjiri is distributed in Bachora anganwadi.
- Adolescent girls are not given anything at all in all three villages.
- Bachora anganwadi does not have a dedicated building. Furthermore, the anganwadi is about 1 km away from the dalit hamlet making it extremely difficult for small dalit children to reach there.

4. National Maternity Benefit Scheme (NMBS)

- In Adivasi/ Dalit hamlets of Papaoni and Bachora it was found that no woman had ever got this benefit.
- In Atarra at least 17 women had applied for benefits under this scheme in December 2003 but are yet to receive any so far.

5. National Family Benefit Scheme (NFBS)

- In Atarra there are at least two families who have applied for benefits under the NFBS but are yet to receive any.
- In Adivasi/Dalit hamlets of the other two villages no one has ever received any benefits under this scheme.

6. Annapurna Yojana

- Annapurna Yojana has not been resumed in any of the three villages so far despite the Supreme Court order to the contrary.

7. Widow Pension

- We found that at least two widows in Atarra, two in Papaoni and one in Bachora are not receiving this benefit.

8. Employment Generation

- In village Atarra, the Gram Panchayat (GP) had constructed a road in financial year 2003–2004. However, labour payment for 500 person-days has not been made till date.
- In Bachora, the GP constructed a submersible causeway (*rapta*). However, instead of employing the dalit and adivasi labour available in the village, labour was sourced from outside.
- In Papaoni, no work was initiated at all by the GP in the current financial year.
- Out-migration for livelihood is a very common feature of the area. Some women from Bachora village decided not to migrate in the rainy season this year, despite great difficulty because last year some of them lost their children due to snake bites on new migrant sites.
- Many dalit families in this hamlet have been given land by the Government but the people have no access to it because they have been threatened with dire consequences by the higher castes who are illegally occupying the land.