

Empty Stomachs - Tall Claims

More than 90 per cent of the workforce belonged to the informal sector suddenly found themselves out of jobs and they have no social security to fall back. More than 450 million migrant workers lost their livelihoods. Whatever meager savings they had have soon dried up. The agricultural labour lost their opportunity to earn and peasants stared at their crops finding no way to harvest. Most of the toiling people had gone to bed with empty stomachs whose numbers grew as the lockdown continued.

Narendra Modi made a tall claim that his government ensures no one will go hungry. The Finance Minister followed suit by announcing *Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana* as part of covid relief package. This scheme had to cover 800 million ration card holders providing 5kg of rice or wheat and 1kg channa for 3months. This was grossly inadequate. It should have been 10kg foodgrain per person for six month period.

According to Food Corporation of India, there was a stock of 266.29 lakh tones of rice and 550.31 lakh tones of wheat, excluding the foodgrain stocks purchased, but not yet reached its godowns. The foodgrains are being procured and maintained by the government as buffer stock to distribute in emergency situations like corona virus. The present stock is far excess of the normal. It is a well known fact that the stocks are not at all stored properly and as the monsoon sets in they begin to rot.

Yet the performance of the scheme even during present grave time is not an ideal one. The Union Food and Public Distribution Ministry claimed that 116.02 lakh tones of foodgrains have been lifted under the scheme by 21 states. How much of it actually reached the cardholders is yet to be ascertained. This writerwitnessed the diversion of rice stock in the fair price shop by a minister to supply cooked food in his name.

The ministry claimed that 93% grains allotted to the states was distributed targeting 74.05 crore beneficiaries in April. In May the distribution stood at 91% reaching 72.9% cardholders and in June 71% of allocation went to 56.81% beneficiaries. The PM extended this tapering scheme upto November.

At the same time, Modi was silent on another foodgrain distribution scheme designed to provide free rations to 8 crore migrant workers for three months. Its performance was dismal. It reached less than 15% of targeted migrant workers (8crore) while thier actual number is more than 45 crore.

Overall, foodgrains were distributed to 1.21 crore people in May, 15% of the target. In June, less than 93 lakh people, about 11.6% received rations. The state governments claim they could not distribute the full component of food allocated under the *aatmanirbhar* package, as they did not have that many migrants in need! (sickening to listen).

Telangana lifted its entire allocation under the scheme from the central pool, but did not distribute it at all. AP distributed grain to 600 people in May and 800 people in June. Gujarat distributed grain to just over 4500 in May (0.1% of target) and none in June. On the other end, Rajasthan distributed grain to more than 42 lakh people each month, 95% of its target. (see Table)

Distribution %To beneficiaries	States
0	AP, Goa,Telangana
>0 - <5	Gijarat,Jharkand,odisha,Meghalaya,MP,uttarkhand,Bihar,UP,Kerala
>5 - <20	Chhattisgarh,TN,Sikkim,Maharashtra,Tripura,Manipur,WB,J&K
<20 - <50	Karnataka,Mizoram,Punjab,Assam,Arunachal,Delhi
>50	Haryana,Nagaland,HP,Rajasthan

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