

India: Violations of the Right to Food and Work Rampant Across the Country, Made Worse by Aadhaar

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Today people from 14 states testified about their situation of hunger and unemployment in a national public hearing at the Gandhi Peace Foundation, organised by the Right to Food Campaign. These testimonies were heard by a panel comprising of activists, journalists, lawyers, legislators, scholars and trade union leaders.

Denial of ration to eligible households

The hearing began with testimonies from families that are denied a ration card, even though they meet their state's criteria for inclusion in the Public Distribution System under the National Food Security Act. Balakram (an Adivasi from Chhattisgarh), Sharda Ben (a Dalit from Gujarat) and Pratap Singh (from Madhya Pradesh) testified about the denial of a ration card. Vishwanath from Jharkhand shared about **Budhni Soren's** – a tribal woman from Giridih – death due to hunger in January 2018. **Dipa Sinha** who participated in the fact finding team to inquire about the starvation death of **Amir Jahan** in Moradabad (Uttar Pradesh) said that her family did not know how to apply for a ration card. Her husband, had to leave the work of rickshaw pulling due to tuberculosis and migrate to Pune in search of work. Debashish, a sarpanch from Koraput (Odisha) share about the situation of food security in his area. He said that of the 1393 households in his Gram Panchayat, 175 households do not have a ration card, even though they applied over a year ago. Some homeless persons from Delhi testified that they are unable to get an Aadhaar card and are denied several entitlements in the absence of identification documents.

D Raja, a member of the Rajya Sabha said that the Parliament should be discussing these important issues, but the legislative body does not function the way it should. **Shelha Rashid** said that government is squeezing funding on public services but is also not providing details of its expenditure on areas such as defence deals.

After listening to these cases, **Reetika Khera** commented that although many poor households are excluded from the ambit of food security, the Campaign should draw strengths from its victories. She added that the National Food Security Act is one such success – limited as it might be – as it has significantly expanded the coverage of the Public Distribution System. In the same vein, Niyaj from Karnataka shared that because of the struggle of people, children of his state are now entitled to milk and eggs in the school midday meals. **Rajiv Gowda**, a Rajya Sabha member from Karnataka admitted that his

party had brought Aadhaar, but its intention was not to use the Unique Identification system as a tool for exclusion.

No pension for many vulnerable persons

This was followed by testimonies of vulnerable persons denied social security pension. **Gulshan Khatoun** of NOIDA has three sons with disability, but neither of them receives pension. **Maida Khatoun**, also from NOIDA, is a widow who does not get pension. **Ranjeet Kaur**, a woman with disability in her leg, has been many empty promises of a pension from the Amritsar (Punjab) District Collector.

Aadhaar-enabled hunger

Activists of the Campaign shared about starvation deaths caused due to the denial of services due to the mandatory integration of welfare with Aadhaar. **Taramani Sahu** from Simdega (Jharkhand) talked about Santoshi's hunger death due to the cancellation of her family's ration card in the absence of Aadhaar seeding. Details of hunger deaths of three brothers of Gokarna (Karnataka) to discontinuation of ration for want of Aadhaar were presented by Narsimha.

As per official data, there are 19.5 lakh ration cards in Delhi, but in January 2018 almost a quarter of them were unable to access ration due to Aadhaar-based biometric authentication failure.

Other members of the panel included **Annie Raja, Bhasha Singh, Harsh Mander, Kavita Srivastava, Mira Shiva, Neha Dixit, Prashant Bhushan, Saksham Khosla, Vandana Prasad** and **Usha Ramanathan**.

For a presentation of summaries of close to a 100 case studies, [see this](#).

For further information about these case studies and a compilation of starvation deaths over the past two years, [see this](#).

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