

**Report of FCFC Meeting at DBSS, Tezpur
on
Good Governance on Public Distribution System**



Diocesan Board of Social Service (DBSS), Tezpur organized a three day meeting on Good Governance on Public Distribution System at CNI Conference Hall from 17th – 19th May 2011. Delegates representing different organisations from Manipur and Assam attended the programme. There were altogether 11 (eleven) organisations and 28 (Twenty eight) participants.

Sl.No	Name	Designation	Name & Address of the org
1	Mr Janki Pegu	Member	People's Right Forum, Secretarial Office, NEN, Guwahati. Enmail:- jonaijankipegu@yahoo.co.in
2	Sanjeev Das	Activist	Swaraj Jana Sangathan, C/O DBSS, NEI
3	Godfrey Hereh	Secretary	Nawa Bihan Samaj, Saboti, PO Box-11, North Lakhimpur, Assam
4	Isahak Baghwar	Field Supervisor	Sewa Kendra, Dibrugarh Assam
5	Ajoy Aind	Secretary	Swaraj Jana Sangathan, C/O DBSS, NEI
6	Hema Das	Secretary	Eastern Action Socio-Eco Dev Trust (EAST) Tezpur, Assam
7	Anjali Das	Member	-----do-----
8	Mohiti Das	Coomunity organizer	-----do-----
9	Mumai Pheiga	Secretary	RNBA, Imphal
10	Amanda Pheiga	Member	RNBA, Imphal
11	Amita Devi	Staff	People's resource Dev Asso, Bishnupur, Manipur
12	Helam Haokip	Secretary	IRMA, Senapati, Manipur
13	Luke Horo	Letercy Person	PAJHRA, Tezpur
14	Mukta Hemrom	Documantation incharge	PAJHRA, Tezpur
15	Sanjeev Kandulna	Asst. Adivasi Vision 2020	PAJHRA, Tezpur
16	Salim Minz	Dist. Secretary	HUL, Kokrajhar
17	Adv.Ravi Sagar	Director	Legal Cell for Human Rights, Guwahati
18	Adv. Tresa Pappu	Staff	Legal Cell for Human Rights, Guwahati
19	Barnabas Kindo	Dist Secretary	HUL, Golaghat, Assam
20	Joseph Minz	General Secretary, AASAA Central Committee	AASAA (All Adivasi Student Asso of Assam)
21	Prabhat Panika	Secretary	AASAA Udalguri Dist Committee
22	Stephan Ekka	Director	PAJHRA
23	Wilfred Topno	Secretary	People's Action for Dev(PAD)
24	Gabriel Horo	Member	People's Action for Dev(PAD)
25	Manshid	Member	People's Action for Dev(PAD)
26	Nizula Kachua	Dist. Secretary	HUL Sonitpur
27	Rev Pradeep Kawah	Prog. Co-Ordinator	DBSS, NEI
28	Nirod Daimari	Staff	DBSS,NEI



The broad objective of the programme was shared by **Mr. Mumai Pheiga**, Regional Convener, FCFC, NEI to engage partners of FCFC to come together and celebrate each others' work and learn from them. It was again a space given to the partners to discuss on the core issue of governance in public distribution system.

The two day programme focussed on sharing and learning from each other. Many of the participants had no definite information about the PDS scheme and it was an occasion for them to learn from those who were actively involved on this issue, especially by DBSS team. Besides, the Assam Government's Order copy on PDS which was distributed to the participants helped to clarify on the concepts. The DBSS team shared on their success stories and this helped the participants to understand the probabilities and the risk factors involved in the work. Further the exposure to Baithabhanga village and interaction with the villagers helped the participants to understand the status of PDS in the rural areas and their fight against the corruption involved in the department.

Day 1 (17.5.2011)



The first day began with the introduction and inauguration of the programme followed by the keynote address by the **Deputy Director of Food and Civil Supplies (DDS), Tezpur Mr. Ratneswar Basumutary**. In his address, the DDS made the distinction between APL, BPL and AAY and spoke elaborately about them. He acknowledged that leakages do take place in implementation of PDS among which kerosene being the worst affected. He mentioned that kerosene is soluble in diesel and so this product is mostly routed to oil depots by unscrupulous traders causing enormous hardship to people. In case of rice the carrying charge is not paid to the agents due to which they charge extra amount per kg of rice from the customers to compensate for their losses but at the same time he also mentioned that an extra amount of rice is also given to the agents to compensate for their losses incurred in transportation. As for *atta*, he alleged that the tribal people do not know its usage. Its quality is also compromised at the source of processing as no proper cleaning is done. Iodised salt is available in the FPS (Fair price shop) of Assam and J&K only to avoid shortages of the commodity, he said. Other states do not enjoy this benefit. But the price of iodised salt remains the same as that of open market prices on the product. The participants also interacted with the DDS and its implementation in Sonitpur district. They cited various instances when the activists had approached him for its proper implementation. From the interaction it became clear that on some occasions actions were taken against defaulting agents whereas in most of the cases the complaints had remained unattended to. The DDS also assured that more of such complaints be brought to his notice with proof so that he could take effective action against and he seemed cornered. He also asked the NGOs to support the government in proper implementation of the scheme by keeping a watch on the agents and people involved in the scheme.

Day 2 (18.5.2011)

On the second day Rev. Pradeep Kawah led the group to discuss on the Government's Order on PDS. He also placed before the participants some of the documents relating to action taken up by the DBSS team in proper implementation of PDS in the rural areas – the case being of Balipara block. Before that Mr. Janki Pegu shared the keynote address of DDS to update the participants what had transpired in the previous day's meeting. However, from his sharing it became clear that the participants were not satisfied with the kind of information the DDS gave. He evaded

many of the core issues affecting PDS and lacked proper information about his own department. The DDS did not mention the question of how an agent is selected and what are the pre requisites or where should the FPS be located. He did not speak about the vigilance commission – its composition and role neither did he mention anything about the role of the panchayat ward members or the *Gaonburah* (village headman). While he said that the keynote address was not satisfactory, he informed the participants about how the PDS should be functioning and who the responsible persons are. Some of the highlights he brought forward are:

- A population of 1000 in a gram sabha select the agent.
- The agent should not work under the government.
- The agent should be financially sound so as to lift the commodities.
- The Fair Price Shop(s) (FPS) should be conveniently located so that people can have easy access to it.
- The Vigilance Committee should be comprised of ward member, the Gaonburah etc...
- Before lifting the commodity, the agent has to get a signature from the ward member. The ward member will sign the purchase application only when he/she is satisfied on verification that the items of consumption is fully utilised and there is a need for another consignment.
- A display board showing the commodities available, their price and stock needs to be put outside the shop.
- The FPS should also display the list of beneficiaries.
- The samples of the commodities should be kept for inspection by the vigilance committee and also for the general public to see.
- The GPSS is an autonomous body and the chairman is a representative of the people. He/she is elected by the agents who are the shareholders of GPSS.
- The responsibility of the chairman/vice chairman is to visit every FPS for monitoring and inspection.
- The Supply Inspector has to visit all the FPS and check its implementation. He also has to see how many people have not got the BPL card and report to the concerned authorities.

A general discussion was held on the status of PDS in both the state of Manipur and Assam where the participants highlighted the issues of their respective districts from where they had come.



The participant from *Senapati district of Manipur* Mrs. Helam Haokin said that PDS cards are not with the beneficiaries. They do not even know what commodities and in what quantity they should get from the FPS as only rice is supplied through it and that too irregularly. In the district, the selection of the agent becomes a gift from a politician. She wanted to know how an agent is selected.

The participant from Imphal valley said that the situation is no different in municipalities as the agents are selected by the politicians and only those close to them can get BPL cards though the quantity of ration they get remains a debatable issue. For participants to understand better the functioning of PDS they suggested for one or two ToT for members.

The participants were then divided into three groups to discuss and understand on the government's order on PDS after which they shared their points.

During the presentation, the participants highlighted the key points of the Govt's Order which were considered important by them. While group 1 presented a list of points, group 2 highlighted the role of the Supply Inspector and the right of the Card Holder. Group 3 could not complete going through the Order but they too had similar points as shared by other two groups. The points were all related to the Government's Order. However, confusion prevailed among the participants with regard to criteria or income of a person on which a person is categorised as BPL with the figure of income as discussed ranged from Rs. 10,000/- to Rs. 15,000/- . The participants decided to confirm this and find out.

During the presentation and discussion a list was made on the findings and the facts. They are:

Findings	Facts
Lack of awareness	Community Not well informed
Allotment done	Not sufficient
Role not played well	No board displayed about timing, lifting, quantity of PDS items available etc...
Samples have to be displayed in FPS	Samples are not seen anywhere
Allotment order should be informed to agents, MLAs, PRI, media, Internet	Allotment order never informed
Commodity should be distributed in instalment	No instalment system
Quality food items have to be distributed	Poor quality of food items which are not meant for consumption is sold
Supply Inspector should visit qtrly	Inspectors rarely visit FPS and inspect the documents
	Cancellation of licenses have been done when complaints have reached to concerned authorities
According to 2006 Government Order, vigilance committee to be formed comprising of local MLA, Panchayat representatives, SHGs, etc...	No formal selection of vigilance committee is done
	No computerisation of data. Not available in its official website
RTI as a tool	Casual / tampered information given. Even BPL families charged for getting information under RTI

Community Experience

Nirod Daimary, Issue Facilitator, DBSS shared about his experience in working among the community on the implementation and people's knowledge about PDS. He raised the following points:

- In the villages, people having cards only know about rice and kerosene.
- The card holders are not aware of the stipulated amount of a particular commodity they should get. They believe what the agent writes in the book (which very often corresponds to their allotment) but never try to verify.
- When awareness is given to the people (which normally is the duty of the department), the activists are charged by the government officials with false allegation of instigating the people.

Ajay Aind, one of the DBSS staffs, shared his experience on this issue. He said that on 15 March 2010 BPL cards of about 12 people including his were cancelled without any reason. When he enquired about it in the FPS, they replied him that they were ignorant about it and that the order had come from the top. He then discussed the matter with the people and filed an RTI in three different places – the panchayat, circle office and at the district, asking in which gram sabha the list had been cancelled. The reply came pretty soon. A meeting then was called in which the government officials were also present. The matter was discussed but it was interesting to know that he had been reported dead and that was the reason why they had cancelled his name and this was done with physical verification by the officials, according to the information provided through RTI. However, the matter was not taken forward and now all those whose names had been cancelled have been restored and they are getting their ration.

At this point, the participants felt the need to build a legal support system while working in this issue so that such kind of instances could be dealt with effectively.

Mrs. Hema Das Secretary “The East” too shared her experiences. She said that initially she was very excited to work on the issue of PDS. When she gradually began to bring to the notice of the people the malpractices of the retailer, she realised that people were not with her. The people supported the retailer. They began alleging her of having secret agenda. People were divided in the village. Subsequently there were no participants in her programmes. Now she is seen as threat to the village. She felt that the people need to be made aware about the scheme and they should be convinced of their entitlement.



The group then went for lunch. At 2:30 pm a team of **DBSS performed street theatre on the Adivasi issues of domestic work and trafficking, implementation of MGNREGA and PDS**. They portrayed the actual happenings in the villages and tea gardens. The participants were moved by their excellent acting skills and presentation of the issues in a very effective manner. The participants then gave their comments and awarded the group with Rs. 1000/- cash from their end.

The meeting of the second concluded at 5:00 pm

Day 3 (19.5.2011)

Field visit



The team went to Baithabhanga village to find out the functioning of PDS. When the team reached, they interacted with the people who had already gathered. Members of some organisations too were present like Mansiri Anchalik Gram Unnayan Parishad, Purbanchal Nari Jagriti Sangram Samiti, and three SHGs. Some people came when the discussion was in progress. The visiting team enquired about the status of PDS in the village and tried to weigh their awareness level on the scheme. From the discussion it seemed that the people were aware and DBSS had played its role well in mobilising the people on bringing the culprits to book. The people also wanted to know about the status of PDS in other places like Manipur and other districts of Assam from where the team had come. Team members from different places shared their experiences on the issue .

Initially the people had expected that the team would do something on the issue as not everything is ok in the area though. But Rev. Pradeep Kawah intervened and made it clear to the villagers that the team had come to learn and see the status and implementation of PDS in their area. The

team members also took this opportunity to make the people aware on the scheme – the process of selection of beneficiaries, who can own a FPS, people involved etc...



During the meeting the people also decided that they will convene a meeting on 26 May 2011 in their village to discuss about bringing the FPS shop in their village, which is now located in a faraway place. The Gaonburah who was present in the meeting took the responsibility to convene the meeting and send information to people in the village.

Conclusion:-

The three days workshop gave us a picture of how we can together to address the issues of PDS and social exclusion experienced by Adivasis of Assam.

The 28 participated organizations representatives also shared on forming strong forum to take the issue at the state as well as National level.

Reported By:-

1. Barnabas Kindo
2. Rev Pradeep Kawah

Date:- 26/05/11