



M.A. PUBLIC POLICY

2 Years Masters Programme

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EXTENDING PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM

How a ration shop in Dantewada is restoring normalcy by providing grains

Thanks to the efforts of district police and administration, villagers are recovering from Naxal violence

GARGI VERMA

RAIPUR, JANUARY 26

TWENTY-EIGHT-year old Devi Podiam, a resident of Potali village in Dantewada district of Chhattisgarh, is used to allocating two full days at the beginning of each month just to walk over 10 km to a ration shop in Tirkapara in order to get monthly supplies of rice and other necessities for her family. So it is a great relief and a considerable change of routine for her that a ration shop was opened in her own village on January 15.

"I won't have to walk so much anymore. Now I can even send my children to the shop to fetch me the supplies," she said. Her ordeal of walking to the shop in Tirkapara started 16 years ago when the ration shop in Potali village was forced to be closed by Naxals. The new shop, which has been set up with the help of the local police, will not just serve Potali but also stock up enough to cater to the demand from 5 other villages situated nearby.

"We set up a camp in November 2019 in Potali, amidst heavy resistance (from the people)," Dantewada SP Abhishek Pallav said. Deep inside what the police call extreme Naxal conflict zone, the village had risen against the police forces and their camp. "We have had to work constantly to win the trust of people. Right from providing first aid help to understanding their issues and ideating with them for the solutions, it has taken time. But now, we have plans to set up electricity and ashrams for girls and boys here," Pallav said.

For activists, however, the shop is a case of help arriving too little too late. "The villagers needed facilities like food, health care and electricity even before. The villagers wrote letters after letters, and no heed was paid to them. Now suddenly the government wants to paint a rosy picture once the camp is set up," tribal rights activist Soni Sori said.

In Dantewada, facilities have not reached everywhere. While several villages are still waiting for electricity, reaching the closest ration shop is not easy. "We have 152 ration shops, out of which 124 are in rural areas. Each gram panchayat has one. There are villages we have recently managed to set up camps in, reducing the distance from 15 to 3 km to the closest shop. Yet during the rainy

The ration shop in Potali village getting stocked. It serves five other villages situated nearby *Express*EXPLAINED
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Why a ration shop matters

There are several areas in Dantewada district of Chhattisgarh where Naxal violence in the past disrupted the delivery of essential services. Potali village's ration shop was one such casualty. And it meant that poor men and women from Potali and nearby villages had to forgo a couple of days income and walk for several hours to get their monthly ration. A shop in their village ends that ordeal.



season, accessibility is less," Dantewada collector Topeshwar Verma said.

For Potali, however, things have picked up pace since the protest in 2019. "The protests were mostly under Naxal pressure. We are working with the people now," Verma added. The village that has had no medical centre and was mostly inaccessible, now has weekly markets on Wednesday where medical centres are set up too.

Like most of the villagers, the thirty-year-old Kamal Mandavi, the shopkeeper of the new shed-like shop painted in tricolour at the outskirts of the village, barely remembers the old shop. "There was a shop here, long back," he said before adding, "yaad nahi kab tha (I don't remember when that was)".

Mandavi who ran the shop earlier at Tirkapara said, "I had to travel over 7 km every day to get to that shop. Now it's in my own village. It definitely makes things easier, more accessible".

The Chhattisgarh government provides rice, salt, sugar, lentils and in Bastar region, jaggery to all ration card owners in the state through its ration fair price shops. "We have already helped the shop stock up and people have already begun using the shop," Pallav said.

Devi's husband, thirty-year-old Baldev Podiam had to earlier take the day off to accompany his wife to the ration shop.

"Now, we can go back to obtaining ration every month," he said. He added with pride, "The shop is in our village, near my house in Patelpada. We are the closest to it now".

‘From smart classes to libraries to better meals, schools in UP getting transformed’

SATISH DWIVEDI, Minister for Basic Education in Uttar Pradesh government speaks to AVANEESH MISHRA to explain how the state is improving the infrastructure in its primary schools.

When we last talked to the Chief Minister, he said that his special focus is on increasing the enrollment of students. What is the plan for that?

We do not target for a number but our strategy is that no kid in Uttar Pradesh stays out of school. We run a separate programme for out-of-school children. At the district level, we have a coordinator to bring children to schools. Our teachers are also making special efforts; they go into the villages and inquire if there is a kid who is still not going to school. They convince parents to send their kids to schools. The result is that since the BJP government came to power the enrollment has risen from 1.30 crore to 1.80 crore.

Interestingly, a reverse trend has started. In villages, children going to private schools are now coming back to government schools. The reason is that the government schools are getting the better building, there are concrete floors, wall paintings and furniture. We have 15,000 English medium Model schools, of which 4,000 have got smart classes. The process for the next 4,000 has started. Our target is that we provide smart classes in all 15,000 schools. Even a lot of Hindi medium schools are getting smart classes through different organisations and Corporate Social Responsibility provision. For exams, there is an organisation called Room to Read that is providing libraries to government primary schools in urban areas.

Regarding better buildings and smart classes, the government had started Operation Kayakalp. What has been the response so far?

The word Kayakalp itself means bringing overall change in something. Under this, at several places, we have changed the whole face of schools. There are renovations, paintings, new walls at schools. In this, we had a huge challenge that there are more than 1.59 lakh schools and we did not have enough funds to renovate everything. We then had an idea that the panchayats get money every year for maintenance of gram sabha properties. Generally, we used to see that village pradhans were spending on new things but

THE
POLICY INTERVIEW
SATISH DWIVEDI

Minister for Basic Education, Uttar Pradesh

not on maintenance works. So we gave an order that the maintenance funds have to be invested on the renovation of schools on a priority basis. On the one hand, our schools got better and on the other, corruption in maintenance funds also stopped.

All this happens under the supervision of the panchayat department. Our department only does the audit of where there is a need for renovation. We also do cross-verification to avoid corruption. As per August 2019 data around 91,000 schools have benefited from the Operation Kayakalp.

There have been several negative news reports about the Mid-day meal scheme in Uttar Pradesh. How are we going to make things better?

If you go through the number of complaints then you will get to see that things are better in our government. Before we were in power there was a general complaint that in most of the places there is no mid-day meal at all and there was widespread corruption. Now, I can say this with confidence, there rarely will be a complaint that no mid-day meal was prepared at a particular school.

We also became very conscious of food quality. The complaints we get these days is because alertness has increased and we have made the public aware, we have permanent flying squads in the leadership of AD (basic education) and they go to check things.

FROM STATES
REFORMS TRACKER

TRIPURA

Policy to transform the tourism potential

THE STATE government has drafted a new tourism policy aimed at pivoting the potential of the state to generate employment and boost entrepreneurship. The tweaked policy, when enacted, will likely to stay in effect for a period of five years. According to the state's tourism minister Pranajit Singha Roy, the government policy will have a tourism vision and will look at different types of tourism potential in the state such as spiritual, health, film and tea tourism among others.

UTTAR PRADESH

Liquor licence policy made more transparent

THE LICENCE fee for countrymade liquor in Uttar Pradesh has been increased by 10%, for beer by 15% and for foreign liquor by 20%. The decision was taken on Tuesday during a state cabinet meeting that gave its nod to the 2020-21 excise policy. "The government has made a simple and transparent excise policy. Renewal of licences will be done through e-lottery. Under the new policy, one person will be allowed to have only two shops in the state," Principal Secretary, Excise, Sanjay Bhooosreddy said.

TELANGANA

Policy for Non-Resident Telanganites

The Telangana state government has sent a three-member team, headed by Chief Secretary Somesh Kumar, to Kerala to study how that state looks after the welfare of non-resident Keralites. The aim of this exercise is to help Telangana to draft its own policy for non-resident Telanganites.

Digitisation is helping the Goa govt to better track liquor production, boost revenues

SMITA NAIR

PANJIM, JANUARY 26

A DIGITISATION initiative has now enabled the Goa's Excise Department to monitor the process of liquor production in the state, track its movement, and help an otherwise debt-burdened state to identify revenue generative excise slabs. It is to the credit of this evolving interface — initially designed in 2014 — that Amit Satija, Commissioner of Excise, says the department was able to zero in on Indian Made Foreign Liquor (IMFL) category of liquor as the more excise generative vertical than beer. "Eventually that is its core purpose, helping shape policies, build revenue for the government, and create accountability and transparency and better business environment," says Satija.

The online repository, named Goa Excise Management System, today has a live inter-

face with over 7,000 bars, and around 60 distilleries and manufacturing units, with over 2,000 liquor labels registered. With Goa following the Portuguese administrative models, the excise department functions very differently from other state excise offices across the country, parallel to a vast and diverse model of distribution. Initially, documents including licences, permits, no-objection certificates were all punched in physically, with piles of documents required for transport or commercial purchase and sale of liquor at the distributor and retailer's end.

With the new interface, excise officials say the whole exercise is now on the virtual world — with records saved for posterity, cutting any scope for fudging documents.

In 2014, when the interface was designed a need was felt as the short-staffed excise offices were burdened with growing liquor

needs of a tourism state involved files left pending at various levels, delay in sanctioning permits, or worse, files getting lost. Complaints kept piling, and documents at several levels went through several cycles of scrutiny.

"By 2016-2017, we steadily improved the management and the digitisation reached a state where 'moving the file' stopped. The physical file as we know is now eliminated," says Satija.

In short, the exercise accounts for the liquor manufactured at every stage, with a full production of raw material to end product accounted for, thus enabling pilferages to be curbed.

Further, the whole licence history of every unit is monitored and granted through the interface with all the corresponding documents saved in the server — and available when needed.

THE
SOLUTION

MAHARASHTRA/HEALTH CARE

State school canteens adopt healthier menus, curb obesity

TABASSUM BARNAGARWALA

MUMBAI, JANUARY 26

WHEN IT began, it was in the form of inspections in school and college canteens, small discussions with principals to do away with aerated drinks, packaged chips, specially vada pavs that seemed a favourite in every canteen. But eventually, it was a humungous task with the Maharashtra Food and Drug Administration (FDA) reaching out to a lakh schools and colleges across Maharashtra to change canteen menus and inculcate healthier options. The move has been met with a small measure of success — across Mumbai, 29 schools and colleges, and across the state, some 250 schools have modified their canteen menus.

It started with a circular in May 2019 from the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) banning junk food and food high

Parle Tilak High School caterer switched from maida to wheat buns *Express*

in fat, salt, sugar content in school canteens. "We didn't expect an overnight change. Our food inspectors would visit canteens, advise the principal to remove cold drinks, junk food. It was encouraging to see at least few respond, although we would have liked more schools to come forward," says Ananya Rege, food safety officer in state's FDA.

In the last seven months, at least 1,000 such schools and colleges have been visited since. In Vile Parle, a middle-class locality in Mumbai's suburbs, Parle Tilak English High School's canteen earlier sold vada pavs — the favourite quick bite for Maharashtrians — for Rs 10. "We realised kids were eating maida and a deep-fried item. Our caterer improvised and starting using wheat flour to make burger buns and stuffed vegetables in the patty," said principal Swapna Trailokya. Caterer Vishwas Kulkarni first experimented with pulao and salad but children did not like it. "The challenge is to give them nutritious

food, which is also tasty and light on the pocket. I then prepared a wheat flour-based burger," he says.

It took weeks for FDA to counsel principals, caterers and parents. They would hold two-hour-long sessions in schools and explain to students the impact of junk food. To parents and teachers, food safety officers would explain alternatives to chips and cold drinks.

The need to do away with junk stems from rising obesity cases amongst children in schools. Right to Information data gathered by NGO Praja Foundation shows in 2018-19 civil schools recorded 1,421 "overweight" children in Mumbai.

Maharashtra FDA commissioner Pallavi Darade said they are urging University Grants Commission to make a healthy menu a compulsion for schools and colleges. "Right now, it is an educative approach. But to make everyone comply will also need some form of regulation," she said.