



Right  
to food and  
work campaign,  
West Bengal

খাদ্য ও কাজের  
অধিকারের আন্দোলন,  
পশ্চিম বঙ্গ

## Right to Food and Work Campaign, West Bengal

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### **Hunger Situation Worsening , Finds Hunger Watch Study , West Bengal**

*Will mere forms fill our stomachs? wonder Right to Food activists about the ruling government's latest initiative Duara Sarkar which seems to be a more of a poll gimmick than real governance.*

- 1 in 5 people (18.7%) went to bed hungry in the last 30 days in West Bengal.
- Percentage of families where family members have to skip meals has doubled.
- 44 % are reporting that they have to borrow more to meet their food needs
- 27% expect further deterioration in their food situation
- Almost half (47%) say nutritional quality of food has become worse
- 80% report a decline in consumption of non-vegetarian food (egg, meat, fish)
- 68% report a fall in pulses, 69% in vegetables and 66% report a decrease in consumption of wheat and rice in the last 30 days
- 32% respondents reported that income had been reduced by half in the last 30 days

While there is a concerted effort by the Central and State government to make us believe that now that lockdown has been eased, things are back to 'normal' , the preliminary findings given above of the Hunger Watch Bengal study reveal a much starker reality based on empirical data.

Over 100 enumerators from 20 civil society organizations, trade unions and NGOs were involved in conducting this survey with 2906 vulnerable households spread over 21 districts, which is part of a larger nationwide survey conducted across 11 states of India - Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Delhi, Telangana, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal (<http://www.righttofoodcampaign.in/media>).

In addition to the data revealed above, 11% of the families participating in the state wide Study, did not possess ration cards and , 69% of the families had priority or Antodaya Anna Yojana cards with 83 per cent of the respondents receiving their usual entitlements of food grains from the ration shops every month. From April to August, 73.41 per cent of the respondents who were NFSA beneficiary received free food grains every month. 85 per cent of the respondents reported that children received dry rations for mid-day meals in the last 30 days. While this showed the large dependence, scope and outreach of these services in the survival of the the vulnerable, unfortunately, the Central Government responded by withdrawal of these basic services instead of enhancement and plugging of dire loopholes. Hence the situation is worsened by stopping the Prime Minister's Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY) under which till November all National Food Security Act ration card holders (62% in West Bengal) were getting an extra 5 kgs of foodgrains and 1 kg of pulses free. It has also responded by forcibly passing the three Farmers Acts and 4 Labour Codes, all of which drive farmers and workers into more precarious situations and help enrich a handful of corporates .

The State Government, on the other hand has responded with a gimmick – the *Duare Duare Sarkar* programme, a mass contact program by the bureaucracy, where all are being encouraged to fill up



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forms to get ration cards, job cards, work under NREGA etc. The question however is – will the mere filling up of forms fill people’s stomachs if there are no food grains to back up the new ration cards that are issued? Will the State Government provide work to all those who fill up application forms for work and for new job cards without augmenting the financial resources available for the 100 days programme?

While it is a positive thing (unlike other states that have been part of the national study) 90% of the participants in WB Hunger Watch felt that they did not face any discrimination while accessing food / work services due to their social identities; however, this small ray of hope can soon change with the strongly communal colour that the upcoming state elections have already attained.

For a Brief of the preliminary findings of Hunger Watch West Bengal, please use the following link:-

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1DSrCDFj26c9xbS23fjSsQnZYKZNRXLjC/view?usp=sharing>