

**EVALUATION OF FOOD FOR WORK PROGRAMME - 1980**

1. **The Study**

In 1979, the then Ministry of Rural Reconstruction felt that the 'Food for Work Programme' (FWP), instituted in 1977, should be evaluated so that the experience gained would assist in the formulation of suitable future policy. Accordingly, the Programme Evaluation Organisation conducted a quick field survey of the Programme during the months of September and October, 1979. The Interim Report of the study was published in December, 1979. The Final Report, analysing the Programme in its wider ramifications, was brought out in November, 1980.

Details of Objectives of the study and its methodology are not spelt out here to dispense with repetition. For these aspects, the readers may kindly refer to the summary of the Interim Report presented under Study No.108.

2. **Main Findings**

The findings listed here are those which have not been included in the Interim Report.

1. 13 out of the 20 selected districts sent periodical progress reports regarding the conduct of the FWP to the concerned authorities. No details of physical checking and inspection of works were available in two districts. No Specific Staff was sanctioned either at the Centre or in the States for the execution of the Programme. The work was managed by utilising the services of the existing staff through re-adjustment. In 8 of the selected States, Panchayats were the implementing agencies of the programme at the village level. The village level arrangements were, on the whole, satisfactory.

2. The arrangements for the distribution of food grains varied across states and districts. Distribution was mainly entrusted with fair price shops and village Panchayats. Distribution was mostly carried out either through coupon system or through Muster Rolls. Nearly 79% of the selected beneficiaries were satisfied with the

system of distribution of foodgrains followed in their villages. Dissatisfaction was mainly due to the inadequacy of stocks, delayed payments, remoteness of the distributing centres and overcrowding in fair price shops. In 4 districts, no checks were applied at the village level to ensure the fair distribution of foodgrains to labourers. In another 6 districts, misutilisation prevailed despite checkings.

3. During 1977-78, the rate of utilisation of foodgrains was generally low due to the late starting of the Programme. During 1978-79, the utilisation of wheat was 100% in 5 selected States and above 90% in four other States. During 1977-78, utilisation of foodgrains was nil in one district whereas it was 100% in six out of 11 districts taking up the Programme. During 1978-79 only 2 districts reported 100% utilisation of rice whereas 7 districts reported 100 percent utilisation of wheat. Out of 66 villages for which data were available, 51 (77 per cent) reported cent per cent utilisation of food grains. There were considerable delays in the supply of foodgrains to villages. 50% of the selected villages reported the receipt of good quality foodgrains while nearly 78% of the selected beneficiaries reported the same. The utilisation of foodgrains was beset with various difficulties and malpractices (listed in the interim Report). During 1978-79, two selected States reported negative additionality in the value of foodgrains utilised.

4. 53% of the selected beneficiaries belonged to the age group 16-30 years and 30.5% to the age group 31-45 years. Of the beneficiaries who belonged to the age group 0-15 years, about 70% belonged to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, indicating the depth of their deprivation. The additional employment generated per selected household through the FWP during 1978-79 over the previous year varied from 2 to 167 mandays. The corresponding figure for additional income varied from Rs 23 to Rs. 1569. However, it was revealed by the beneficiaries that the benefits were short-term and seasonal in nature and did not provide them a continuous and permanent income stream.

5. 71% of the selected beneficiaries reported that the works under the FWP were available within the village of their residence. Only less than 10% received wages fully in cash, the rest in cash and kind or only in kind. In 13 out of the 20 selected districts, the wages were paid in time. Only 52% of the sample beneficiaries

admitted that the wages paid under the FWP were sufficient to meet their daily expenses. 45% of the selected beneficiaries reported that the wages paid under the programme were equal to the prevalent market rates, while 30% reported that the FWP wages were higher than the market rates. Another 25% maintained that the FWP wages were lower than the market rates.

6. In most of the selected districts, both plan and non-plan works were undertaken. During 1978-79, a total expenditure of Rs.24 lakhs was incurred on creation of community assets. Out of the 20 selected districts, road works were taken up in most of the districts, programme of minor irrigation in 13 districts, construction of assets like school buildings, dispensary buildings, Harijan Chaupals, etc in 9 districts and drainage programme in 4 districts. Out of 264 works taken up, 53.4% were of durable nature and 46.6% of non-durable nature. Some of the works could not be completed because of erratic supply of foodgrains, shortage of building materials, shortage of funds with the Panchayats and rains.

7. About 36% of the selected respondents admitted that their consumption levels had gone up due to the FWP. The increase in income helped them in meeting some of their social obligations. Dearth of skilled hands made the local people learn non-traditional occupations like carpentry and mason work. Improvements in communication system facilitated trade and commerce. Construction of roads linking villages and towns opened better access to health and education. Thefts and crimes born out of hunger came down due to the implementation of the programme. Despite these tangible developments, it was apprehended and was evidenced in some cases that the durable assets created under the programme might benefit only the upper strata of the village community.

### **3. Major Suggestions**

Those suggestions which have been listed out in the Interim Report (study No.108) are excluded.

1. The question of expanding the scope of the programme to cover other activities, such as, social forestry, plantation development, maintenance and beautification of ancient historical monuments in the rural areas may be considered.

2. Since the majority of the rural poor suffers from mal-nutrition, it is suggested that the government may widen the range of foodgrains distributed to include nutritional food items like milk, meat, cheese, fish and Sukhadi (a nutritive sweet).

3. Considering the opinion of the vast majority of the selected beneficiaries, payment of wages may be made on a daily or weekly basis. Efforts should also be made to measure the works within three four days after their completion so that payments to the beneficiaries are made immediately thereafter.

4. Considering the inter-state and inter-district variations in the arrangements for the distribution of foodgrains, it is suggested that the distribution of foodgrains may be channelised through the public distribution system in all the states on a uniform basis. The Food Corporation of India should be directed to ensure the timely supply of foodgrains. The FCI may be made the sole supply and distributing agency upto fair price shops.

5. In order to locate the real-felt needs of the village community, it may be desirable to organise or activate local groups, unions, associations and other voluntary agencies working for the welfare of the rural poor.

6. The scope of the programme may be widened to include activities like the construction of houses for the weaker sections, construction of forest roads connecting remote villages, plantation of trees to withstand soil erosion, development of handicrafts, etc.

7. Moreover, in-depth studies of the programme must be made. Research Studies covering the cost-benefit aspects of the assets created, impact of the programme on the state and national economies, impact on land value, income distribution and nutrition etc. may be attempted.