



Working Paper No. 28

Research Area: Development

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# **Food for the Footloose: An Analysis of the Mukhyamantri Dal Bhat Yojana in Jharkhand**

**Anjor Bhaskar**

May 2025

**Azim Premji University**

Anjor Bhaskar (2025).

*Working Paper Series - Food for the Footloose: An Analysis of the Mukhyamantri Dal Bhat Yojana in Jharkhand* (Working Paper No. 28).

**DOI Link:** [doi.org/10.61933/wps.28.2025.5](https://doi.org/10.61933/wps.28.2025.5)

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# Food for the Footloose: An Analysis of the Mukhyamantri Dal Bhat Yojana in Jharkhand

Anjor Bhaskar



**Abstract:** *There is a large and growing mobile, unsettled, kitchenless population 'out there' which lacks food and nutrition security. Most of them belong to the unorganised sector and many of them face extremely harsh living and working conditions. This footloose population is largely excluded from most social security interventions. Many of them, particularly migrant workers, do not possess documents which enable them to purchase grain from the subsidised public distribution system. They also suffer from much higher rates of under-nutrition than the settled populations. However, despite the obvious threat of hunger and food insecurity among the footloose, the subject has largely remained ignored like a blind spot in the academic and policy discourse on hunger, food security and urbanisation.*

*Policies to set up and operate canteens providing subsidised cooked meals offer a solution for the food and nutrition insecurity faced by the urban poor footloose. However, their precise role and performance has not been studied or understood.*

*This study of the Mukhyamantri Dal Bhat Yojana in Ranchi city of Jharkhand, therefore, is expected to help to understand the role of a state sponsored subsidised meal programme in addressing food insecurity of the urban footloose poor. Through a comprehensive analysis of the programme, it attempts to understand the performance of the policy as well as understand factors which drive its performance.*

**Keywords:** *Food Security, Welfare Policy, Implementation, Policy Process, Footloose*

**Jel Classification:** *J61, I38, J68, E26*



# Food for the Footloose: An Analysis of the Mukhyamantri Dal Bhat Yojana in Jharkhand

Anjor Bhaskar

## Introduction

### *Food Insecurity In India*

India's development has been marked by the contradictory trends of very high economic growth rates coupled with poor development outcomes. What is particularly disturbing are the extremely high levels of food insecurity and hunger still prevalent in India.

Despite being the second fastest growing economy in the world for a sustained period of time, India slipped from the 95th rank to the 102nd rank out of 117 countries in 2019 in the Global Hunger Index<sup>1</sup>. By 2024, this rank had fallen further to 105th out of 127 countries, placing India in the "serious" category<sup>2</sup>.

In 2019-21, nearly 35.5% (over 1/3rd) of India's children under 5 years of age were stunted – a measure of chronic undernutrition – according to the 5th National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5), 2019-21. This proportion had come down from 38.4% in 2015-16 and 48% in 2005-06.

Out of every 1000 children who are born alive in the country, over 35 die before their 1st birthday and over 41 children die before their 5th birthday according to the NFHS-5.

It is not just children who are undernourished. Around 15% of the overall population of India is estimated to be undernourished. In numerical terms, 194.6 million Indians were undernourished, the highest in the world, according to the annual report titled "The State of Food Insecurity in the World, 2015" by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO, IFAD and WFP 2015).

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1 <https://www.globalhungerindex.org/results/>

2 <https://www.globalhungerindex.org/india.html>

In fact, in recent years, the number of food insecure people in the world as a whole has actually been rising according to the report “State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2024”. Barring 2016 and 2017 – the two years when the prevalence of undernourishment declined – the number of undernourished people and the prevalence of undernourishment has been consistently increasing between 2014 and 2023 (the latest year for which data is available). According to the report, in 2014, 7.3% of the world’s total population, or 538.7 million people, were undernourished. In 2022, however, the estimated proportion of undernourished people rose to 9.1%, or 723.8 million people.

The report also describes the proportion and number of people who suffered from severe or moderate levels of undernourishment. Over 864 million people, or 10.7% of the world’s population, experienced “severe” food insecurity in 2023. Further, another 18.2% of the world’s population, or about 1.46 billion people, experienced moderate levels of food insecurity. In all, about 2.3 billion people experienced moderate or severe levels of food insecurity in 2023 (FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO, 2024).

The report also shows how the number and proportion of people facing severe food insecurity actually rose between 2017 and 2018 in Asia and this rise is attributed largely to South Asian countries – primarily India (which is facing an unemployment crisis) and Pakistan (which is facing a growth deceleration). Over the longer time period, however, there is a clear decline in the proportion of undernourished people, from 22.2% in 2004-06, to 14.5% in 2016-18. Over the same period, the number of undernourished people has gone down from 253.9 million to 194.4 million (FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO, 2019).

Though the long-term trend shows some improvement in most development indicators, the Covid-19 pandemic is likely to have reversed this trend significantly, as employment and incomes – particularly among the most vulnerable sections of the society – fell drastically during the lockdown and this is likely to take a significant time to recover.

Hunger debilitates one’s quality of life, productivity, health and the opportunity to achieve one’s full self. While hunger and food insecurity have always afflicted humanity, they should not be tolerated in today’s times. Amartya Sen explains how *“hunger in the modern world is more intolerable than past hunger not because it is typically more intense, but because it is now so unnecessary. The enormous expansion of productive power that has taken place over the last few centuries has made it possible, for the first time in history, to guarantee adequate food for all”* (Sen, 1987).

While there is some recognition of the hunger and food insecurity among the rural poor, little is known about hunger in the cities.

### ***Policies to Address Food Insecurity in India***

There are various policies to address food insecurity and hunger in India which have been in existence for several decades. Some of these schemes to ensure access and affordability of food to the poor became part of an enforceable national legislation when the right to nutritious and

hygienic food was recognized by the Indian Parliament with the passage of the National Food Security Act, 2013 (NFSA) (GoI 2013). The NFSA, according to its own preamble, is

*“An Act to provide for food and nutritional security in human life cycle approach, by ensuring access to adequate quantity of quality food at affordable prices to people to live a life with dignity...” (GoI 2013).*

### ***The Invisibility of the Urban Poor Footloose***

However, like most social security measures, the NFSA also tends to ignore a large section of the urban population. This can be termed as the mobile, unsettled, ‘out-there’, footloose, floating or kitchenless population<sup>3</sup>. For the first seven years, the NFSA did not have any provision for migrants to be able to access foodgrains under the Public Distribution Scheme (PDS). During the Covid pandemic in 2020-21, the Government introduced portability under PDS through the One Nation, One Ration Card Scheme (ONORC). However, hurdles such as Aadhaar linkage, Aadhaar seeding, biometric authentication, discrimination by ration dealers against migrants, and supply side issues have led to limited access to ration through the PDS by migrants (Shekhar, 2024).

Jan Breman, in his book ‘Footloose Labour: Working in India’s Informal Economy’ describes footloose labour as the workers who are pushed out of the agrarian labour market and depend on casual work. Such labour is characterised by extreme vulnerability, as they are hired and fired according to the need of the moment, and transferred for the duration of the job to destinations far away from the home area (Breman, 1996).

For the purpose of this paper, we define the footloose as the city’s poor population that does not have access to a kitchen or to home-cooked food, and cannot access food through other public measures (such as anganwadi centres, school mid-day meals etc.) to ensure food security. Hence they would not be able to make use of free or subsidised food, rations and fuel (provided through PDS) and are left to fend for themselves. They, therefore, mostly depend upon outside sources of cooked food. These sources may include religious or other institutions such as temples, mosques, gurudwaras, street food stalls, roadside dhabas, low-cost restaurants or other means such as begging for food, and eating with friends.

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3 Such people, whom we call the ‘footloose’ may include the following set of people:

- Rickshaw pullers
- Migrant labourers (construction workers, shop assistants, skilled workers, assistants of skilled workers, traders, including child labourers)
- Homeless people including beggars, labourers, shop workers (for instance dhaba workers, scrap shop workers including child workers), waste pickers, traders (for instance people selling small items such as fruits and vegetables).
- Drivers (auto drivers, truck drivers, bus drivers, cab drivers)
- People who come to the city looking for work
- Students, either pursuing their education, or preparing for competitive exams or looking for work
- People who come to the city to visit hospitals, courts, government offices etc. Such people often have to spend long periods (often months) in the city without any proper arrangements for food or shelter.

This footloose population is largely excluded from most social security interventions. Many of them, particularly migrant workers, do not possess documents which enable them to purchase grain from the subsidised public distribution system (UNESCO 2013)<sup>4</sup>. Further, even when they are able to procure rations under PDS through the ONORC scheme, the footloose may not be able to cook the rations to provide for themselves due to unavailability of a kitchen, utensils, fuel, time or because their work may take them far from their homes so that eating home-cooked food may be infeasible.

### ***Food Insecurity among the Urban Poor Footloose***

The footloose also suffer from much higher rates of under-nutrition than the settled populations (IFPRI 2002). Many of them depend on street food, which has sometimes been found to be unhygienic and lacking in nutritive content, and makes them further vulnerable to diseases and infections (Choudhury et al. 2011; Muyanja et al. 2011; Rahman, Rahman, and Ansary 2014).

Homeless people constitute a significant proportion of the urban footloose population. The problems they face in accessing nutrition are well documented. For instance, the Centre for Equity Studies conducted an extensive study of the food procurement practices of the homeless in several major Indian cities including a very detailed study in Delhi (Harsh Mander and Smita Jacob 2010). They found that affordable 'market options' (dhabas, street food stalls etc.) fail miserably at providing affordable, nutritious and hygienic food to the homeless. They also found that most homeless people did not prefer to eat free food at religious institutions for various reasons (such as poor food quality and quantity, lack of respect and even restrictions on their access to food).

Using Campbell's definition to study the food acquisition and intake among homeless adults in Delhi, Mander and Jacob (2010) explored the nature of food insecurity faced by them. Their study led to three important findings.

Firstly, while the homeless would often eat in sufficient quantities, the dietary diversity was often poor. *"The quantities of food available to homeless people in cities may be - but are not always - sufficient, however, the quality tends to be monotonous, very elementary, often of poor nutritional value, and - in the nature of their existence - unhygienic. In Delhi, for instance, 22.5 per cent people ate nothing but cereals in the two days prior to the interview, and another 25 ate vegetables or protein food only once."* The poor quality of food also leads to disease and loss of productivity. *"Most of the purchased food usually compromises on the quality content, ensuring frequent bouts of sickness and consequently affecting the number of labour days they are able to put in"* (Harsh Mander and Smita Jacob 2010).

Secondly, while they often did get food, the means of obtaining food were not always those which were socially acceptable or dignified.

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4 UNESCO (2013) therefore states that "although a few states have issued government orders from time to time to enable intra-state migrant workers to access PDS, there is very little awareness of such schemes among both government officials and migrants, leading to poor uptake. Furthermore, they do not include inter-state migrants".

*“Most homeless people are forced to depend extensively on external sources for their food – through purchase, foraging, or receiving food in charity. In Delhi, only 7 out of 93 homeless respondents reported cooking their own meals, more so, when the sample of the study has under-represented the dominant group of single men living on the streets). 41 purchased their dinner, 8 ate at shrines, 2 begged and another 2 foraged in the railway station” (Mander and Jacob, 2010).*

However, even hunger and lack of food could not force all of them to visit charities.

*“On days when there was no food, in Delhi, 51 per cent of the homeless respondents admitted to seeking free food from religious places, another 20.5 per cent depend on friends for food (many of these street children)” (Mander and Jacob, 2010).*

Contrary to popular perception, dignity was found to be valued and protected by the homeless, pretty much the same as anyone else. Which is why *“21 per cent of the people said that they prefer to stay hungry than depend on charity from religious places, relatives and community members”*. (Harsh Mander and Smita Jacob 2010).

Thirdly, the homeless spent a large part of their incomes on food, leaving little for meeting other basic expenses. *“63 per cent of the homeless people interviewed reported spending 50 to 90 per cent of their income on food, with nearly 12 per cent spending almost the whole of their income to get their daily food”* (Harsh Mander and Smita Jacob 2010).

Clearly, it is not just the homeless who suffer from food and nutrition insecurity. There is a large and growing mobile, unsettled, kitchenless population ‘out there’ which lacks food and nutrition security. Most of them belong to the unorganised sector and many of them face extremely harsh living and working conditions. The living and working conditions of workers in the unorganised sector have been studied extensively in the Report on Conditions of Work and Promotion of Livelihoods in the Unorganised Sector (National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganised Sector 2007). The report highlights the poor conditions of work, including low wages, pathetic physical conditions of work, exploitative work hours without proper rest or holidays and absolute lack of social security faced by the majority of the poor unorganised sector workers. For instance, for rickshaw pullers, the report mentions, *“the stressful life with no rest day (as they cannot afford it) coupled with unhygienic living conditions and limited food results in poor health of most workers”* (NCEUS, 2007: pp 27). Similarly, for wage workers in the unorganised sector, the report mentions, *“taken as a whole, the conditions of informal wage workers are nothing but deplorable. The failure to ensure a modicum of human dignity at work to this vast multitude of working poor should have received far more political and policy attention than what has been the case hitherto”* (NCEUS, 2007: pp 70).

### *Lack of Data on the Footloose*

However, despite the obvious threat of hunger and food insecurity among the footloose, the subject has largely remained ignored like a blind spot in the academic discourse on hunger. The bulk of such literature focuses on households and individuals residing within those households. Even the definitions of hunger are centred around the 'household'. More participatory epistemologies have been recently developed to assess and understand hunger but these are largely centred around the notion of the 'community' - a largely rural concept, which again captures deprivation at the level of the community, household and individuals within households. Academic understanding and policy analyses are largely based on household surveys, focused group discussions (FGDs) with communities of people living together or nearby, or other forms of qualitative data. However, whether quantitative or qualitative, the data is collected taking households as the reference point. Recently, with increasing awareness of intra-household disparities in consumption (which leads to the relative deprivation of women, children and elderly) there are attempts to capture the intra-household allocation of resources and patterns of food consumption. These surveys, almost entirely exclude the footloose urban poor, whose experiences of hunger, patterns of food intake, consumption and expenditure are not reflected in any of these surveys or studies.

There is barely any attempt to decipher and understand the new and emerging forms of hunger and food insecurity which are arising as a result of urbanisation. Shradha Biyani, therefore, writes "the few instances in which urbanization and food systems have been drawn together on a comprehensive, policy-orientated basis (rather than in a focused empirical study) tend to be comprehensive overviews in which food is discussed in terms of its links to household economy, health and nutrition" (Shradha Biyani, 2011).

In other words, the individual outside the household is largely a blind spot for those studying food security and urbanisation.

Take the case of the three main sources of data on hunger and food security in India - the quinquennial surveys conducted by the National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO) of India, the (nearly) decadal surveys conducted by the Indian Institute of Population Sciences (called the National Family Health Surveys) and the surveys conducted by the National Nutrition Monitoring Bureau (NNMB). These surveys collect data regarding food consumption and expenditure for households. The respondents, from amongst the people present in the household at the time of survey are asked to recall the food consumed by them or the expenditure incurred by them on various food items over the previous 24 hours, 7 days and 30 days. The surveys largely ignore the dietary intake of members not eating within the house. The only question asked is the number of times household members in total eat outside and the amount spent on processed foods.

Several qualitative studies of food intake patterns have also been conducted. These studies are largely located amongst rural communities or urban slum residents and help to understand the nature and causes of hunger amongst them.

In a detailed study of hunger and food insecurity faced by individuals, households and communities in villages in North India, Amitava Mukherjee outlines three types of causes of hunger - Proximate Causes, Underlying Causes and Basic Causes. Much of the hunger and food insecurity faced by the rural poor, it was found, was related to the crop cycle and the success or failure of crops (Mukherjee and others 2004). Several studies by Amartya Sen and Jean Drèze and colleagues have revealed that hunger and food insecurity are caused by a failure of entitlements - the basic one being the entitlements from the state - in the form of subsidised food and kerosene through the PDS, or food through Mid Day Meal/PM POSHAN Scheme, ICDS etc.

The same analysis, however, cannot be applied to the footloose as the nature and causes of their hunger are likely to be different from other rural or urban poor who eat at home or eat home-cooked food.

Mander and Jacob (2010) therefore find in their study of the eating patterns of urban homeless people that *“the eating pattern and the kind of food consumed by urban homeless people vary on a daily basis, depending on how much they earn and whether they earn at all. Therefore, food insecurity of the urban homeless, unlike the chronic nature of rural hunger, may manifest itself in a transitory manner”*. Further *“in spite of this transitory nature, research suggests that urban homeless are much more prone to food insecurity than their rural counterparts since urban homeless persons are directly dependent upon the highs and lows of the labour market”* (Harsh Mander and Smita Jacob 2010).

### **Objectives of the Study**

To address the food insecurity among the footloose and homeless in urban areas, many states have initiated state supported community kitchen programmes which provide subsidised meals to those who wish to eat. These are government sponsored programmes to set up canteens which provide wholesome meals at nominal prices. They are generally open to all but target those who may be food insecure. These include Tamil Nadu's Amma Canteens, Odisha's Ahar Yojana, Chhattisgarh's Annapurna Canteens, Delhi's Jan Ahar Yojana, and Karnataka's Indira Canteens. Out of all the states where such community kitchen policies are in existence currently, Jharkhand's Mukhyamantri Dal Bhat Yojana is one of the earliest.

However, there is very little literature to understand the role that such programmes play in addressing food insecurity among the urban footloose poor.

The study of the Mukhyamantri Dal Bhat Yojana in Ranchi city of Jharkhand, therefore, is expected to help understand the role of a state sponsored subsidised meal programme in addressing food insecurity of the urban footloose poor.

That is what this research hopes to achieve. It hopes to answer three questions:

1. What is the role of a state subsidised meal programme in addressing food insecurity among the urban footloose poor?

2. What shapes the policy and why does it perform the way it does?
3. From this policy, what do we learn about the larger (social) policy system that underlies and shapes (social) policy performance?

### *Approach and Methodology*

The study uses an institutional approach to examine how a policy is shaped and why it performs the way it does, how it operates at a particular level of performance and achieves some goals more than others. This implies studying how groups of people bound by certain common rules/norms/practices impact upon the policy. Such an institutional approach requires a detailed understanding of the context, the culture, the implicit rules, norms, practices of the institutions to which the stakeholders/actors belong (i.e., the state, market or social collective).

This is possible using a case study approach to understand how the specific social protection policy is shaped, rolled out, implemented and how it performs in a particular context and location.

The case study involved the use of both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection. Qualitative methods were adopted to collect data on aspects of the policy such as how the policy was rolled out, how the policy was implemented through the years, how it evolved and changed over time, who were the actors involved in the policy, the perceptions of the various stakeholders about the scheme, how the various stakeholders acted and interacted with each other to shape the policy and its outcomes. Examples of qualitative methods used for the study are document analysis, content analysis, field notes, and key informant interviews.

In addition, quantitative methods were used to collect data on aspects such as the status of implementation of the scheme, the profile of customers at the canteens, the perceptions of the customers at the canteens towards the scheme and its implementation. In this section, I describe the sources of data which were used and the methods which were used to collect data from these sources. Quantitative methods, such as surveys, and beneficiary listing are used for the study.

### *Sampling Strategy*

#### **Selection of canteens**

The sampling strategy was designed in a manner so as to take into account the expected diversity of the performance of the programme and the profiles of beneficiaries across the different Dal Bhat Kendras.

At the beginning of the survey, there were 10 canteens in the city. I therefore decided to survey all 10 canteens in order to capture the diversity across these canteens. However, as soon as the quantitative survey began, one of the canteens (located at the Town Hall in Ranchi) closed down as another government building was going to be constructed at the site of the canteen. Therefore, the survey could only be done at 9 canteens.

### Selection of beneficiaries

One of the goals of the survey was to understand the number of customers eating at the canteens everyday as compared to the reported number of customers. This was only possible by listing all the beneficiaries who came to the canteen on a particular day.

However, there was a possibility that the specific day chosen could turn out to be an 'odd' day due to any extraneous factors (such as rains, an event in the city, illness of the canteen operators or staff). Therefore, to account for this, I decided to survey the beneficiaries at each canteen on two separate days. It was expected that this would average out the impact of any extraneous factors which might cause variations in the number of beneficiaries at a canteen on any particular day.

The dates for the survey of the canteen were not announced to the canteen operators in order to ensure that it did not influence their behaviour.

### Survey Tool

A survey format was used to collect information about beneficiaries. The survey format had the questions in different columns (such as name, occupation, age, gender, place of origin) and the entries for different customers were made along the rows.

The survey tool contained both structured and semi structured questions and would serve the purpose of both the quantitative as well as some of the qualitative aspects of the study.

### *The Mukhyamantri Dal Bhat Yojana in Jharkhand*



**Figure 1: A Dal Bhat Canteen (subsidised meal canteens) at Mango Bus Stand in Jamshedpur city of Jharkhand. The canteen serves food, rice, dal and vegetable for Rs. 5 per plate, with an additional Rs. 10 for a serving of fish. The canteen seemed to be extremely popular - especially among the Bengali migrants in the city since it serves fish along with the regular meals. These Dal Bhat canteens are spread across the important areas of the city.**



**Figure 2: Bablu, a rickshaw puller in Jamshedpur, waiting for passengers at the Sakchi crossing in Jamshedpur city of Jharkhand, explains that on days when his business is low, he purchases extra plates of food from the Dal Bhat Canteens and takes it home for his wife and children. Thus, for as low as Rs. 20, he is able to feed the entire family properly.**



**Figure 3: Mukesh, a rickshaw puller, while ferrying me from Kanta toli to Harmu area in Ranchi (the capital city of the state of Jharkhand), explained that he often eats at the Dal Bhat Canteen near the railway station. This enables him to cut his food expenses by half - from Rs. 40 per meal to Rs. 20 per meal.**

The policy was started in August 2011 by the Government of Jharkhand, which was headed by the then Chief Minister Arjun Munda (belonging to the Bharatiya Janata Party). The goal was to provide a decent wholesome and hygienic meal at a nominal price to the poor in cities. The programme involved setting up outlets at various places in cities across the state. These outlets are located at places which were frequented by the urban footloose poor such as bus stands, railway stations, government and charitable hospitals, and markets. The canteens are supposed to serve wholesome cooked meals consisting of rice, pulses and vegetables (the staple diet in the state) at Rs. 5 per meal. Each regular urban canteen is supposed to serve 400 meals. The Government provides these canteens with 200gm rice and 12.5 chana or soyabean nuggets per person/meal. The intervention was advertised as an important innovation for securing the right to adequate food and nutrition, particularly of the cities' mobile population (Sanjay Ojha, 2013).

The policy is extremely crucial for Jharkhand since the state has one of the worst development outcomes with high levels of poverty, hunger and starvation, coupled with high levels of urbanisation. In addition, services and amenities are very heavily concentrated in urban areas with rural areas suffering from major deficits in infrastructure and service provisioning – particularly healthcare and administration. This means that there is a possibility of a large proportion of footloose poor to be present in Jharkhand's cities which is likely to benefit from the community kitchen policy. The population below the poverty line in Jharkhand in 2011-12 was 37 %, which was the second highest in the country after Chhattisgarh which had 39.93 % below the poverty line. This was, of course, significantly more than the national average of 21.9 %.

In 2011-12, 269.3 million people were below the poverty line at the national level and 12.4 million in Jharkhand. The study of the Mukhyamantri Dal Bhat Yojana in Ranchi city of Jharkhand, therefore, is expected to help to understand the role of a state sponsored subsidised meal programme in addressing food insecurity of the urban footloose poor.

This exercise is all the more pertinent given the fact that the policy exists in some states and there is a demand from food security activists to expand the same to other states as well. In fact, seeing the demand for these policies, political parties have also included them in their manifestos. In the recent West Bengal elections, the election manifesto of BJP promised setting up Annapurna canteens for the poor. As more and more states consider launching such schemes, it would be worth knowing the factors which make the policies succeed as well as the factors which may hamper such policies from providing food security to the urban poor footloose.

The study was conducted in Ranchi city of Jharkhand. Among the cities of Jharkhand, Ranchi is likely to have the highest proportion of such urban poor footloose. Being the capital of the state, it is home to the major public institutions such as the High Court, Ministries and Secretariats and the largest government hospitals in the state (RIMS and Sadar Hospital). Owing to its central location within the state of Jharkhand, it is also a major transportation hub with four major bus stands and two major railway stations.

At the start of the study, there were 10 Dal Bhat canteens in Ranchi city. One of them was closed later as the government wanted to construct another building in the location.

Data collection for this study involved detailed interviews with coordinators of these 10 canteens as well as all officials and private individuals involved in the delivery of the policy in Ranchi, a detailed analysis of all official policy communication with the Ranchi district administration (responsible for delivery of the policy in Ranchi), a detailed participant observation of all canteens over a three-day period as well as surveys of all customers who visited the canteens over a two-day period (a total of 1898 customers).

## **Findings**

### ***Overall Performance of the Policy***

I find that while the policy succeeds on some fronts, there are many challenges as well. Let us look at the successes first. Dal Bhat Canteens *do* exist in all the locations where they are supposed to exist and are broadly located in areas where the urban poor footloose are concentrated. The canteens open every day, cook fresh food every day and serve this food to anyone who wants to eat at the given price (no one is charged more than five rupees unless they specifically ask for more than one meal or special items). In other words, no one who is willing to pay five rupees for a meal is denied food at the canteen. In some cases, even those who cannot afford are provided meals. Further, the scheme is very well targeted, reaching only the most deprived communities. Policy makers are

often at pains to devise effective means of targeting social protection policies to ensure benefits are delivered only to the most deprived communities. To achieve this, eligibility criteria are defined for most policies and mechanisms are put in place to ensure that only the eligible persons are able to access the policy. In the process, however, there are often several exclusions, and many of the most deprived people are left out of the policy due to their inability to fulfil the requirements to prove eligibility. The Mukhyamantri Dal Bhat Yojana does not face any such issues, as the beneficiaries of the scheme - those who eat at the Dal Bhat Canteens - are only the most deprived people among the urban footloose poor.

This daily provision of meals is possible because there is a functional food delivery system whereby ration - rice and soybean - is delivered every month to the canteens. Throughout my field work, I did not hear of a single instance, since 2015, where canteens could not provide meals due to non-delivery of ration from the government.

While these can be counted as successes of the policy, there are various failures - low outreach of the policy, inflated number of beneficiaries, poor quality of food, less quantity of food provided per meal forcing people to purchase more than one meal, dilapidated condition of the infrastructure and poor surrounding spaces.

However, there was significant variation in performance across different canteens. The average number of daily visitors to a canteen varies from 26 in one canteen to 159 in another - whereas the stipulated number of visitors is the same in both. There is also enormous variation in food quality, amount of food provided per meal, conditions of the canteen and in the behaviour of the staff at the canteen towards the customers. The opening and closing timings are also highly irregular, as witnessed during the survey and as reported by several customers. Though official policy communications do not specify the opening and closing timings for canteens, the expectation is that they open in the morning and continue till late in the afternoon. Canteen operators, however, generally cook a certain amount of food and close down as soon as the food gets over.

### ***Actual Number of Beneficiaries versus Reported Number of Beneficiaries***

Over the two days of the survey, 1898 visitors came to the canteens which amounts to an average of 949 visitors per day. Assuming this is the average number of daily visitors visiting the canteen, we estimate that these canteens are visited by nearly 28,470 people in a month and nearly 3,41,640 visitors over the course of a year.

These 1898 persons who were surveyed at the 9 centres bought 2815 meals (several people bought more than one meal - either because they found the quantity to be too less to fill their stomach or because they were buying for other family members as well).

In their reports, however, all canteens report feeding the stipulated number of meals i.e. 400 (or 600 in case of the canteens at RIMS hospital or Sadar hospital which are designated as Adarsh Dal Bhat Kendra and hence are supposed to feed 600 people in a day). However, the actual numbers fed

(according to the survey estimates) are given in Table 1. It compares the number of customers the canteen feeds according to official records and the actual numbers fed.

**Table 1: As the table shows, each of the surveyed canteens fed the stipulated number of customers as per records though the actual number of people eating was much less (only 23.725% of the recorded number overall).**

Number of customers on each day and the number of customers as % of the customers each centre feeds as per record			
Canteen	Average Number of Visitors in a day	Number of Customers fed as per records	Number of customers as % of number of customers the centre is meant to cater each day
Canteen 1	50	400	12.50
Canteen 2	69.5	400	17.38
Canteen 3	77.5	400	19.38
Canteen 4	25.5	400	6.38
Canteen 5	85.5	400	21.38
Canteen 6	159	400	39.75
Canteen 7	282.5	600	47.08
Canteen 8	139.5	600	23.25
Canteen 9	60	400	15.00
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>949</b>	<b>4000</b>	<b>23.725</b>

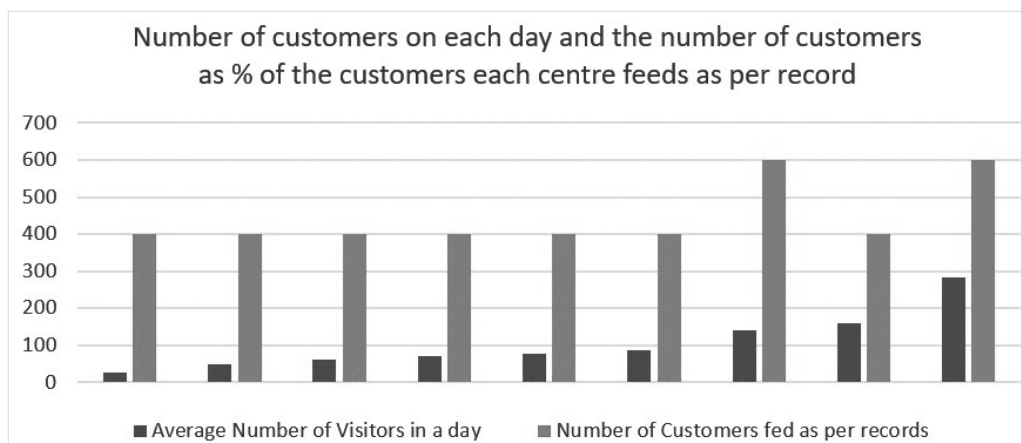
Source: Author's survey of Customers at each Dal Bhat Canteen in Ranchi over two days.

## Discussion

### *Policy Performance*

As we learn from the survey of Dal Bhat Canteens, there are several positive things about the performance of the policy – such as all canteens opening every day, food being provided to the most disadvantaged people, and no one being excluded from the policy. However, there is a grim side to the policy. Poor quality of food and infrastructure, small window in which the canteens open and low number of people who end up eating meals at the canteen. Canteens feed only around 24% of the number of customers that they are feeding on record. In other words, this means that around 76% of the beneficiaries to these canteens are ghosts – fake names inserted by canteen operators and that there is massive and widespread over-reporting of the number of customers at the Dal Bhat Kendras. This over-reporting is well-known and acknowledged by the officials managing the programme, as revealed in discussions with the District Supply Officer (DSO) and the Marketing Officers (MOs) overseeing the programme's implementation. According to them, the excess rice, soyabean and chana is sold in the open market at the market price. The revenue thus earned, is used to finance the purchase of material such as oil and fuel to run the canteens and earn a profit.

Figure 4 presents the same data graphically. The darker bars are the number of customers actually eating whereas the lighter bars are the number of customers visiting the canteen on record. It is easy to see that there is a huge gap between the two which is likely fulfilled using fake entries in the canteen registers.

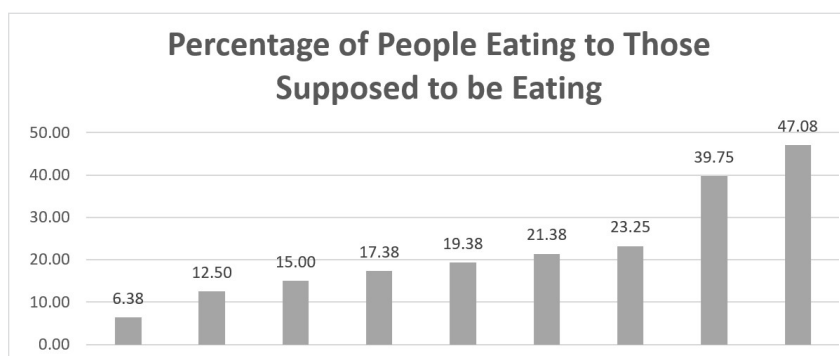


Source: Author’s Survey of 1898 Customers

**Figure 4: A comparison of the daily average of the recorded number of customers with the actual number of customers shows the actual number of customers at canteens is only a small fraction of the recorded number.**

While the overall picture is grim, there is some degree of variation across canteens in the proportion of customers who are real versus the proportion which are ghosts. It is difficult to compare across canteens from the above graph since some canteens are supposed to serve 400 customers while some are supposed to serve 600 customers.

A better way to compare would therefore be to simply compare the proportion of the recorded number of customers who are actually fed at each canteen. In other words, if a canteen is supposed to feed 400 people in a day and only feeds 50, then the proportion of actually fed versus recorded customers would be 12.5%. Similarly if another canteen is supposed to feed 600 customers but actually feeds 60, then the proportion of actually fed customers to recorded customers is 10%. Therefore, even though the number of customers fed in the second case is higher, the proportion is lower. This is what Figure 5 presents.



Source: Author’s Survey of 1898 Customers

**Figure 5: There is huge variation in the ratio of people actually eating**

**to the recorded number of people eating at the canteens.**

As Figure 5 shows, the proportion of actually fed customers to recorded customers ranged from around 6% at one canteen to around 47% at another canteen.

Thus, the scheme allows for a lot of scope for overstating the number of customers each month and utilising the excess amount of rice, soyabean and chana.

Table 2 presents the occupational profile of the customers at the canteens.

**Table 2: Occupational Profile of Customers at Dal Bhat Canteens in Ranchi.**

<b>Who is Eating at the Canteens: Distribution of Dal Bhat Kendra Customers by Occupation/ Activity (%)</b>	
Construction Labour	27.45
Farmer /Fisher	14.96
Rickshaw Puller	13.17
Students/ Children	8.06
Housewife	4.48
Beggar	1.95
People who can't work due to ill health, old age or are mentally unsound	0.37
Unemployed/ Person Looking for work	0.16

Source: Author's Survey

As Table 2 shows, the construction workers, farmers/fishers and rickshaw pullers make up nearly 55% of the customers at the Dal Bhat Kendras.

By activity status, nearly 85% of the customers are workers while only around 15% are non-workers.

**Table 3: Breakup of Customers visiting the Dal Bhat Canteens in Ranchi by Activity Status**

<b>Distribution of Customers by Activity Status</b>	
<b>Activity status</b>	<b>%</b>
Workers	84.99
Non workers	15.02
Grand Total	100

Source: Author's Survey

Despite the fact that these canteens are operated by women SHGs, women themselves constitute a relatively small proportion of the customers at the canteens. Overall, only around 16% of the customers visiting the canteens are women.

Table 4 shows the gender breakup of customers at each of the canteens.

**Table 4: Sex Composition of Customers at Dal Bhat Canteens in Ranchi**

Female Customers as Percentage of All Customers by Centre				
Centre	No. of Male Customers	No. of Female Customers	%	Total number of Customers over 2 days
Khad Gadha	169	2	1.2	171
Seva Sadan	115	5	4.3	120
Doranda	147	8	5.4	155
ITI	48	3	6.3	51
Birsa Chowk	91	9	9.9	100
Dhurwa	125	13	10.4	138
Sadar Hospital	246	33	13.4	279
Railway Station	272	46	16.9	318
RIMS	415	150	36.1	565
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>1628</b>	<b>269</b>	<b>16.52</b>	<b>1897</b>

Source: Author's Survey

An interesting observation is that the proportion of women is greater at canteens which are located near hospitals as opposed to canteens which are located near bus stands.

A survey of customers on their perceptions revealed that most customers ate at the canteens simply because it was affordable. Rarely did any of the customers eat at the canteens because they liked the quality of the food (although some customers did report that they found the food to be 'fresh').

All of this leads us to the question of what shapes the policy and what drives the policy to perform the way it does. Why does it perform well in some respects and so poorly in other respects?

### *Why does the policy perform the way it does?*

One of the key findings of the policy is that the policy itself is highly dynamic and changing constantly. It is difficult to describe the policy design because the design itself has been continuously changing. The policy has witnessed numerous additions, modifications, and reforms. Some of these changes are responses to situations while others are initiatives of the executive.

The second key finding is that the policy design itself makes the policy unfeasible to implement. However, the street level bureaucrats still manage to implement and sustain the policy using innovation, creativity (*jugaad*) and corruption.

Thirdly, the combination of several factors leads to the policy reaching a (temporary) sub-optimal equilibrium from the point of achievement of policy goals and developmental outcomes.

The factors which aid policy performance and achievement of policy goals are the simplicity of the policy design, and the existence of a structure for food procurement and distribution (the state food corporation). Meanwhile, the factors which hamper policy performance include poor economic planning for the policy, low allocation of resources for the policy, treatment of welfare as largesse and limited capacity of the government to implement policies.

Finally, some factors act both ways. Strong bureaucratic will and capacity at the beginning help to ensure the roll out of the policy. However, as the will and capacity begins to weaken, this reflects in stagnation in the policy. Similarly, pressure from civil society helped to implement the policy in the first place and then to re-start it when it was stopped in 2014, but the absence of civil society involvement at other times in the implementation of the policy also contributes to stagnation and poor implementation of the policy. Similarly, the media plays an important role in highlighting the canteen-level issues in the policy, but stops short of raising some of the fundamental policy-related concerns.

### *Going Forward*

Overall, this study of the Mukhyamantri Dal Bhat Yojana in Jharkhand confirms the findings of earlier studies such as SPPG (2018) and Abraham (2019). Community Kitchen Programmes are extremely important for providing food security to the urban poor footloose. This is highlighted in several of the beneficiaries' statements which describe how they find the policy to be a boon and without which, they (and sometimes even their families) would either have had to stay hungry or compromise on other essential expenses.

It is clear from the study that state subsidised meal programmes are extremely crucial in providing some semblance of food security to the footloose population which is ignored by all other food security programmes of the government. They provide wholesome meals to people who would otherwise have to skip meals or have to forgo expenditure on other essentials in order to fill their stomachs. The footloose are people who are excluded from the market or who are 'adversely included' in the market as they are not able to earn enough to secure their own food. The footloose are also unable to access the security offered by their communities, since they are away from their family and community. Therefore, the responsibility of ensuring food security for them falls upon the state. Existing policies of the state are targeted towards households and those living in their own homes and, therefore, exclude the footloose who are outside their homes and cannot access them. Community kitchen programmes play a crucial role by addressing this gap and providing food security to the footloose.

However, poor design and implementation can severely curtail the scale and impact of such programmes. As we saw in the case of the Mukhyamantri Dal Bhat Yojana in Ranchi, the poor performance of the policy in terms of the quality and quantity of food provided, the limited timings of the canteen, the small quantities of food cooked and the poor infrastructure and services at the canteens meant that the scale and impact of the programme was very limited. On the other hand, improvements in design and delivery of the programme can massively increase the scale and impact of the programme upon the food insecurity among the urban poor footloose.

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**Azim Premji University**  
Survey No. 66  
Burugunte Village  
Bikkanahalli Main Road  
Sarjapura, Bengaluru - 562125

Website: [azimpremjiuniversity.edu.in](http://azimpremjiuniversity.edu.in)