Old-Age Pension Scheme in Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh

AASHISH GUPTA

A survey of the functioning of the National Old-Age Pension Scheme in two districts of Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh reveals that beneficiaries have difficulties in accessing the banking system and face inordinate delays in receiving their meagre pensions. Yet, the scheme functions as an important provider of social security to the elderly. The findings suggest that a reasonable increase in the amount of the pension and streamlining the delivery mechanism would significantly help reduce old-age vulnerabilities in the two states.

Thanks are due to the Department of Humanities and Social Science, Indian Institute of Technology Madras for funding the fieldwork for this study; to Sudhir Chella Rajan, Kalpana K, Jean Drèze, Reetika Khera, Kunal Keshri, Alex Thomas and Karthik Rao Cavale for helpful comments and guidance; to Shyama Singh and Pachathi Singh in Latehar (Jharkhand) and Narendra in Sarguja (Chhattisgarh) for helping organise and conduct interviews; and to the NREGA Sahayata Kendra, Manika, and Chaupal Chhattisgarh for hospitality.

Aashish Gupta (*aashishygupta@gmail.com*) is a research assistant at the Department of Economics, University of Allahabad.

1 Introduction

Vulnerabilities and deprivations, while present throughout one's lifetime, intensify during old age. Senescence leads to greater susceptibility to diseases and syndromes, a reduced ability to work and earn, and bodily decline – from hearing difficulties to memory problems. Societies undertake a variety of measures to reduce these vulnerabilities, which include providing increased income and medical assistance.[1]

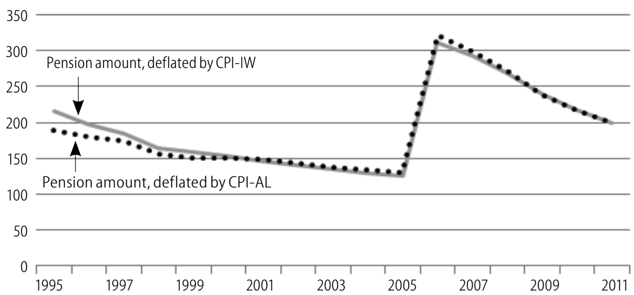
While the proportion of the workforce in formal employment and the proportion of elderly people having access to formal pensions remain low in India, a small non-contributory pension scheme, called the National Old-Age Pension Scheme (NOAPS), sometimes supplemented by state schemes, provides pensions for about 19.6 million people above the age of 60 (Government of India 2012b: 202).[2] This paper reports the findings of a survey conducted in March 2011 in one district each in Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh to evaluate the functioning of the NOAPS. It focuses on aspects related to the delivery mechanism, corruption and leakages in the scheme, and its impact on mitigating old-age vulnerabilities. Section 2 introduces the NOAPS, and Section 3 outlines the findings of previous studies on it. Section 4 explains the methodology of the survey, while Section 5 presents its main findings. The last section comprises recommendations and conclusions.

2 National Old-Age Pension Scheme

The NOAPS is a targeted social pension scheme for the elderly, which is a part of the National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP). It is a non-contributory pension scheme, also called a social transfer, which currently mandates a transfer of Rs 200 per month from the central government to people above the age of 60 living below the poverty line (the amount is Rs 500 per month for those above the age of 80). State governments are encouraged to contribute an equal amount, but, in practice, the scheme varies across states in terms of coverage, the amount contributed by state governments, eligibility criteria, and implementation.[3] Introduced in 1995, the NSAP initially consisted of three schemes (National Old-Age Benefit Scheme, National Family Benefit Scheme, and National Maternity Benefit Scheme) supervised by the Ministry of Rural Development.[4] The pension was Rs 75 per month, while the eligibility age was 65 years. In 2006-07, this was revised to Rs 200 per month. In April 2011, the eligibility age was reduced to 60, while the pension for beneficiaries above 80 years was increased to Rs 500 per month.

Figure 1 shows the monthly central government contribution to pensions in constant 2011-12 prices since the scheme's inception, deflated by the consumer price index for industrial workers and the consumer price index for agricultural labourers. It shows that in real terms the monthly pension amount contributed by the central government for beneficiaries aged 60 to 80 is almost the same today as it was in 1995.[5] The real monthly pension declined for a decade after 1995, then jumped up in 2006 when the pension amount was revised, but in the absence of any revision after that, the pension amount today (more specifically, the amount contributed by the central government) is at the same level as the real pension amount in 1995. The stagnation of the pension amount in real terms is striking – and difficult to justify – in the light of robust gross domestic product (GDP) growth and growth in government revenues in this period.

Figure 1: Monthly Contribution of Central Government to Pensions (Rs)
Constant 2011-12 Prices



Source: RBI 2012 for price indices and Government of India (2012b).

The Supreme Court, in *People's Union for Civil Liberties vs Union of India* (civil writ petition 196 of 2001, better known as the right to food case), in its interim orders (SC Commissioners 2011) mandated the following.

- State governments shall complete the identification of persons entitled for a pension under the NOAPS, and ensure that it is paid regularly.
- Payment of the pension under the scheme shall be made before seventh day of each month.
- The scheme shall not be discontinued without any preceding order from the Supreme Court.
- The NOAPS grants paid by the central government to the state governments under "additional central assistance" shall not be diverted for any other purposes.

These orders in the right to food case are "judiciable", and they have given an impetus to local movements, while also creating a monitoring system through "food commissioners" and state-level advisors to the commissioners.[6] In addition, there is pressure to index pensions to the rate of inflation, particularly from grass-roots organisations and campaigns (see, for example, Pension Parishad 2012 and Right to Food Campaign 2012).

3 Previous Research on NOAPS

Research and evaluation studies on the NOAPS have been limited, especially given the importance of the scheme. An early review was done by Rajan (2001), using data from the Ministry of Rural Development on the financial outlays and performance. Rajan finds that the "disbursement rates of the scheme", that is, the utilisation of funds, has improved over time, from 74% in 1995-06 to 95% in 1999-2000. The proportion of beneficiaries who are women, scheduled castes (SCs), and scheduled tribes (STs) has increased over the years. Palacios and Sluchynsky (2006) report that in 2000 the benefit under the scheme was about 10% of the per capita national income.[7] Alam (2004) discusses the method used to target the benefits, and finds that allocations to states had an upper limit (or a "ceiling") – this was calculated by multiplying the population over 65 in a state with its overall poverty rate, and then halving it. Thus, in 2000-01, only about half the population above 65 below the poverty line was considered "worthy of pension benefits", while it was assumed that poverty among the elderly was prevalent at the same rate as poverty among the general population.

The Indian Human Development Survey (IHDS) 2004-05 (Desai et al 2010) asked questions related to the NOAPS and found that 9% of the respondents above 60 years were beneficiaries, and about 88% of the villages studied had access to the scheme. A greater proportion of the beneficiaries were women (10.6% above the age of 60 were covered, while for men the figure was 7.3%). The beneficiaries were more likely to be from vulnerable sections and living in rural areas. They were also often dalit or adivasi, uneducated, and from the bottom income quintile. World Bank 2011b (Table 3.7) analyses IHDS data to find that the median annual NOAPS benefit among eligible households was Rs 2,008 (approximately Rs 170 per month).

Dutta et al (2009) analyse IHDS data and study the NOAPS in Rajasthan and Karnataka through a representative survey conducted in 20 taluks of each state. Their findings are that pensions in Rajasthan, Karnataka, and at the all-India level are targeted progressively. In other words, a large proportion of the beneficiaries are poor and vulnerable. These findings, nevertheless, should be interpreted carefully, and it could be argued that the IHDS shows a large number of poor or vulnerable old people who should have been covered by the scheme but are not because of targeting errors.[8] Rajasthan and Karnataka have low levels of corruption and leakage in the Dutta et al (2009) study. According to them, "on average in Karnataka, enrolled pensioners receive 96% of their pension and in Rajasthan 93%" (ibid: 67). But they also found evidence of corruption,

> A large number of pensioners – one in five in Karnataka, and one in four in Rajasthan – report paying small bribes to the postman and government officials. A small number of pensioners in both states report receiving much less than they are entitled to, or no pension at all (ibid: 67).

In a paper that discusses the findings of the Rajasthan social pension survey in detail, Dutta (2008) reports that awareness levels are high, and "the demographic criteria" of the age for eligibility is followed strictly, but only about one-third of the respondents satisfy the "destitution" criteria specified in the scheme. Dutta et al (2009) conclude that social pensions "perform well", and characterise the pensions delivered through the NSAP as "small but effective". In this context, it is worth mentioning the findings of a recent social audit of the scheme in Araria district of Bihar. It found that one to two instalments in a year were not given to the beneficiaries, but embezzled by the postmaster and his cronies (Jan Jagran Shakti Sanghatan 2012).

In an evaluation of the application process carried out in 2003-2004 in the Marathwada region of Maharashtra, Pellissery (2005: 8) observes that enrolling for pensions requires getting an application form, which is an ordeal because it is available only to those who "know how to get things done". The application form was 15 pages long, and applying for a pension required an age certificate, an income/property certificate, and a certificate of residency. Even if all this was submitted, the application could be rejected, or the pension could fail to reach the beneficiary.

Some studies have tried to understand the impact of the pension scheme. HelpAge (2009: 1) finds that the "beneficiaries were in need, and highly valued the pension". The Planning Commission (2011) reports a high degree of satisfaction with the functioning of the scheme in Jammu and Kashmir. It also finds that 82% of the funds between 2000 and 2007 were utilised. However, delays were common in the delivery of pensions, the available staff was inadequate, and some payments had been missed.

4 Survey and Respondents

The field work for this study in Latehar district of Jharkhand and Sarguja district of Chhattisgarh was conducted in March 2011. Both districts have a large ST population, and are often referred to as "backward districts". Latehar is a district affected by left-wing extremism, and is widely associated with corruption and misgovernance (this was true of Sarguja as well until recently).[9] A block each was picked from both the districts, and three villages were randomly selected from the panchayat-wise list of villages in each block. In each village, five male and five female recipients were randomly sampled from the "beneficiary list of NOAPS" available with the block development officer (BDO).[10] The beneficiaries answered a questionnaire on food and income adequacy, health status, and benefits under the NOAPS and other social assistance programmes. A total of 60 responses (29 male and 31 female) were generated from the six villages in two blocks in the two districts. Banks were also visited in both the districts to understand the process and problems associated with the disbursement of pensions.[11] Table 1 gives the background of the respondents.

Table 1: Respondents' Background

Age Profile		Social Background		Marital Background		Source of Livelihood	
60 - 65	17	Muslim	5	Married	33	No source	24
65 - 75	35	OBC	15	Widowed	15	No reliable source	10
75 - 90	9	ST	40	Separated/ abandoned	12	One or more sources	26
Total	60		60		60		60

A majority of the respondents were from STs, while a smaller number belonged to Other Backward Classes (OBCs). A much smaller number (five) were Muslim.[12] About half the beneficiaries were currently married, while the other half were either abandoned or widowed. Nearly half the respondents did not have any source of livelihood apart from the pension, making them very dependent on it, and also underscoring the need for such a pension scheme. The respondents were generally poor, faced multiple health problems, and were often very frail. Their responses are the basis of the discussion that follows on the functioning of the NOAPS in these two districts.

5 Main Findings

Both Latehar and Sarguja have been covered by the NOAPS since it began in 1995. At the time of the survey, the Chhattisgarh government provided Rs 300 per month to each beneficiary, whereas in Jharkhand the amount was Rs 400 per month. In both states, the central government contribution was Rs 200 per month and the state government contributed the rest.

5.1 Corruption in the Scheme

From the survey, it was found out that the scheme functioned without much corruption, and most people could get their full pension without having to pay a "cut", a "pc" or a "commission" to anyone (Table 2). The respondents were asked, "What was the amount of money that you got under the NOAPS the last time?" and "Did you have to pay anyone to be enrolled in the pension scheme?" In addition, their passbooks were cross-checked with their recollections of the amounts they had withdrawn from the bank the last three times. This was to see whether middlemen or bank employees were siphoning off a part of their pension. It should be noted that there was a risk of respondents not reporting corruption, and these findings should therefore be viewed as the minimum level of corruption in the scheme.

Table 2: Corruption in the NOAPS

Number of Respondents Reporting that they	Sarguja	Latehar	Total
Had to pay a bribe while enrolling for the pension	2	6	8
Had to pay a bribe while getting the pension entitlement	0	4	4
Total (out of 60 respondents)	2	10	12

Of the 60 respondents, four reported giving a small bribe of between Rs 20 and Rs 10. All of them were in Latehar and the bribes had been paid before the transition to the banking system.[13] All the respondents reported that they received the full amounts mentioned in their bank account passbooks, and could accurately recollect the amounts that had been credited to their accounts. Two respondents in Sarguja and six in Latehar reported paying bribes between Rs 200 and Rs 50 to become beneficiaries under the NOAPS. Finally, and importantly, out of the 60 names sampled from the beneficiary lists, none were fake.

5.2 Delivery of Pensions

At the time of the survey, pensions were delivered through banks in Latehar and Sarguja. This transition to the banking system took place after individual accounts were opened for all pension recipients between late 2009 and early 2010. Before the transition, in Sarguja, the amount used to be transferred directly to the account of the head of the panchayat (sarpanch), who would withdraw it and give beneficiaries their pension in cash in a village meeting. In Latehar, the beneficiaries reported that pensions used to be delivered at the compound of the BDO's office in cash on a pre-specified and fixed date.

The transition to the banking system does not seem to be working well for the beneficiaries of the NOAPS in Latehar and Sarguja. Manika and Lakhanpur villages had about 3,000 and 2,500 beneficiaries respectively. Those in Manika were served by two banks and those in Lakhanpur by one. On the day pensions were delivered, the banks had to serve at least a few hundred more customers than they normally did, something they were not equipped to, given their staff and other resource constraints. The beneficiaries who could not be served had to make repeat visits to the bank, and the average time they had to spend at the bank to receive their pension was very high (Table 3).

Table 3: Delays at the Bank (Last Time Pension Was Received)

	Sarguja	Latehar
Proportion of beneficiaries reporting more than one trip to the bank (%)	47	40
Average time spent at the bank to withdraw pension (hours)	4.3	4.6

The banking system makes it compulsory for the recipients to be present in person to receive their pension because they have to sign or place their thumb impressions on the withdrawal slips at the time of taking money from their accounts. Very old recipients have to be accompanied by family members or friends, who lose out on a day's earnings (this also happens to beneficiaries who have some source of livelihood) while also having to spend on transport.[14] This system, while having the advantage of reducing the possibility of graft, makes it difficult for older pensioners to access their pension, even having to spend money for it, thus reducing benefits.

Even if the banking system or transport facilities improve, the aged will find accessing the banking system a daunting challenge.[15] Indeed, a majority in both Sarguja and Latehar expressed a preference for receiving pensions through the block or panchayat system, as they used to earlier. As Table 4 shows, more than three-fourths of the respondents preferred receiving pensions in their villages in cash through panchayati raj institutions.

Table 4: Bank vs Panchayat: Preference in Delivery of Pensions

Number of Respondents Preferring to Receive Pensions through	Sarguja	Latehar	Total
Bank	7	1	8
Panchayat	20	26	46
No preference	3	3	6
Total	30	30	60

5.3 Delays in Pensions

Another aspect that undermines the effectiveness of the pension scheme is pervasive delays in delivery of pensions, in both Latehar and Sarguja. Indeed, pensions can be delayed for as long as six months. Table 5 shows the average delay in delivery of pension based on responses from respondents and examination of their bank passbooks.

At the time of the survey, it had been two months since pensions had been delivered in Latehar, while three or four months had lapsed since pensions were delivered in Sarguja (Table 6). The beneficiaries were not sure if they would receive their pensions any time soon.

A related issue is of information about the delivery of pensions. Since delivery is so erratic, beneficiaries are never sure whether the pension has been delivered to the bank or not. They rely on word of mouth, have to make visits to the bank or the block office to enquire, or just wait (Table 7). This lack of reliable information about the delivery sometimes results in beneficiaries making unnecessary trips to the bank.

Table 5: Average Delay in Delivery of Pension

Average Delay in Pension Reported by Beneficiaries	Sarguja	Latehar	Total
Up to two months	22	3	25
Three months	8	1	9
Four months	0	7	7
Five months	0	7	7
Six months	0	7	7
More than six months	0	5	5
Total	30	30	60

Table 6: Time since Delivery of Last Pension

Delay in Pension Reported by Beneficiaries	Sarguja	Latehar	Total
Up to two months	3	25	28
Three months	11	2	3
Four months	10	3	14
Five months	1	0	10
Six months	4	0	4
More than six months	1	0	1
Total	30	30	60

Understandably, delays add to the hardship of beneficiaries, especially those who have no other source of livelihood.[16] These delays do not seem to be to extract money from the beneficiaries, but because of problems related to the flow of funds between the centre and state governments, or the state government and the district administration.

Discussions with the BDO in Latehar revealed that in Jharkhand, initially, pensions and transfers to the bank were handled at the block level. There were delays in the pension at the time of the transition because the process was slow. It was difficult to get accounts opened for beneficiaries and the transfer of funds from the district's bank account to the block's bank account was held up because of various administrative reasons. After some time, the entire system of transfers to the pensioners' bank accounts was taken over at the district level – the pension amounts were transferred from the district's bank account to the bank accounts of the beneficiaries. This avoided the intermediary step of transferring pensions to the block, but because the district itself had limited capacity to disburse pensions, the delays became prolonged.

Table 7: Information about Delivery of Pension

How Respondents Get Information about the Delivery of Pension in Their Bank Account	Sarguja	Latehar	Total
Through sachiv/sarpanch (panchayat functionaries)	5	4	9
Through other beneficiaries	8	15	23
No source of information	17	11	28
Total	30	30	60

Banking officials in both districts showed records related to the transfer of pensions, which revealed that they transferred funds to beneficiaries' accounts in a day or two, almost as soon as they received them. There are delays during the stage of withdrawal because of the rush of beneficiaries at banks and limited staff to disburse money, but the transfers to the accounts have already been done by then.

5.4 Impact and Adequacy of Pension

The pension is very important in the lives of beneficiaries, as Table 8 (p 58) illustrates. One in two respondents felt that it helped meet essential needs, such as food expenses, health expenses, and expenses for other needs, while keeping them out of debt

Table 8: Self-reported Impact of Pension

Proportion (%) of Respondents Reporting that the Pension Helped Them	Sarguja	Latehar	Overall
Meet food expenses	80	33	57
Meet health expenses	20	77	48
Meet other basic needs	87	26	57
Avoid debt	46	58	52
Avoid dependence on family members	90	46	68
Contribute to social expenses	3	23	13

or having to depend on family members.[17]

Respondents in Sarguja reported a direct impact of pensions on their ability to meet food and basic needs. While that helped them avoid dependence on their families, the pension was not enough to meet health or other family needs. This appeared to be the case because the pension amount is still small. Respondents in Latehar reported a much lower ability to avoid hunger, possibly due to that, on average, pensions are more likely to be delayed there than in Sarguja. In Latehar, the beneficiaries tended to spend money to meet health needs in the private sector, and (to a smaller extent) to meet large family expenses, such as for marriages and other functions. A reason for such a high spending on healthcare in Latehar could be the non-functioning of the public health system, which forces dependence on private healthcare, something that is not seen in Sarguja. Similarly, a reason why a large number of respondents felt that the pension helped meet food expenses in Sarguja could be because unlike Latehar, all of them were entitled to subsidised grains through the public distribution system. They could easily buy grains with their pension and still have a substantial portion left over.[18]

Despite this, respondents felt that the pension amount was insufficient to meet basic needs. Indeed, all the respondents in Sarguja and Latehar said that the pension amount had to be increased. The survey had a section which asked respondents to list their most basic needs related to food, health, and other necessary expenditures, and decide what proportion of it could be met through their own livelihood and income sources or through contributions from family members. The difference between the expenditures and the income sources was taken as the minimum amount that the pension should provide. On average, the minimum amount of pension in Latehar came to Rs 730 per month, while in Sarguja it was around Rs 700 per month. The pension amounts are much lower than this, and, according to the recipients, in need of an upward revision.[19]

6 Recommendations and Conclusions

The findings of this study are that the major lacuna in the NOAPS is in the delivery of pensions – in particular, difficulties in accessing the banking system and pervasive delays. As discussed, respondents expressed a preference for receiving pensions in their panchayats. Clearly, any system that requires the beneficiaries to travel longer distances should be discouraged, while giving them a choice in selecting the mode of delivery should be encouraged.[20] However, significant efforts will be needed to improve administrative responsiveness to recipients' choices, to reduce the possibility of corruption in payments through panchayats, and to improve the accessibility and reliability of the banking system. The causes of delays in payment of pensions are not properly understood. This research suggests that the fault lies mainly with the administrative machinery and the flow of funds between different levels of the administration, and not with banks.[21]

Apart from delays, respondents said that the pension amount, while being very important to them, fell short of their expenditures on basic needs, which they often had to forgo for lack of money. So, demands to increase the pension amount, and to periodically revise it in accordance with the rate of inflation, are relevant. This has been echoed by large campaigns of various civil society organisations, such as the Pension Parishad and the Right to Food Campaign.[22]

This study finds little evidence of corruption, even in areas known for misgovernance. That the NOAPS functions without much corruption even in some of the poorest, most inaccessible and worst-governed areas, and can help mitigate old-age vulnerabilities is an important finding. This strengthens the case for expansion of the coverage of the scheme, as well as for increasing the amount of the monthly pension.

NOTES

1 For a summary of the vulnerabilities and deprivations social protection measures can be designed to combat, see ILO (2010a), and for the extent of social security coverage for the elderly around the world, see ILO (2010a), Palacios and Sluchynsky (2006) and Chapter 4 of ILO (2010b).

2 The number of beneficiaries in the NOAPS is expected to increase because the eligibility age for pensions was lowered from 65 to 60 years in April 2011. The Ministry of Rural Development estimates that the number of beneficiaries will go up to 27.8 million in 2012-13 (see Government of India 2012b: 64).

3 For details of state-wise contributions to the NOAPS, see Annexure XVI, Government of India (2012b). The NSAP was based on the experience of similar schemes initiated by various state governments. On these state schemes, see Dev (1998), Alam (2004) and Kumar and Anand (2006).

4 In 2001-02, the National Maternity Benefit Scheme was transferred to the ministry of women and child development (and later renamed the Janani Suraksha Yojana), while disability and widow pensions were added to the NSAP in February 2009 (Government of India 2009a, 2009b).

5 This graph ignores state-wise contributions because of the absence of data.

6 For more on this as well as the right to food case, see Drèze (2004), Birchfield and Corsi (2009), and Srinivasan and Narayanan (2007).

7 In 2011, assuming a monthly transfer of Rs 400, it was still equivalent to about 10% of per capita gross national income, though the contribution of the central government was only about 5% of the per capita GNP.

8 The IHDS shows that only 15% of the elderly respondents belonging to the bottom quintile are covered by the NOAPS. This is a worrying statistic, but consistent with the literature on exclusion errors of BPL targeting in India (see, for instance, Drèze and Khera (2010) and the literature cited there).

9 A few days before the survey, activist Niyamat Ansari was murdered after exposing corruption in the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme in the district. For an account of corruption and misgovernance in Palamu district, of which Latehar was a part, see Drèze (2003). In the case of Sarguja, Drèze 2010 discusses corruption in the public distribution system (PDS) in the past, and its subsequent turnaround and improvement.

10 The selected blocks were Manika in Latehar and Lakhanpur in Sarguja.

11 These visits were on days the pensions were being disbursed. The cashiers and managers of the banks were also interviewed.

12 None of the respondents were SC, most likely because these are predominantly tribal districts, and none of them belonged to the upper castes.

13 The transition to the banking system in both Sarguja and Jharkhand took place in late 2009 and early 2010.

14 For instance, at the time of the survey in March, it was time for *mahua* flower collection in both Latehar and Sarguja. Collecting and/or selling *mahua* flowers is an important activity and source of livelihood for the elderly, and many respondents rued the loss of time because they had had to make several trips to the bank to collect their pension.

15 This point has been recognised in some studies of the NOAPS. Pellissery (2005) notes this in a

village in the Marathwada region, "Banks are not located in or near small villages like Saralgaon, making accessing benefits especially difficult for infirm beneficiaries. Postmen used to bring benefits even to the most remote villages." Similarly, Planning Commission (2009) reports, "Some of the beneficiaries also mentioned that they were more comfortable with the money order mode of payment of pension. It is, therefore, suggested that the system of sending money orders be reintroduced and the beneficiaries may be given the choice whether to receive the pension through banks or post offices." These findings are contrary to some of the available literature, which favours delivery of pensions through banks. Farrington et al (2003) characterise the banking system and information technology as "new opportunities" and argue that "Direct transfers through a central agency, such as the post office or certain banks, is particularly beneficial for the weaker states." Bihar, noting the sobering experience of delivering pensions through banks, is currently switching to delivery of pensions to homes or through nearby "cluster camps". However, these cluster camps will only be organised every three months, making the beneficiaries wait a long time to receive their pensions (Jagran Post 2012).

16 Some public action has been devoted to getting the pension delivered on time (in particular, a Supreme Court interim order in civil writ petition 196 of 2001 in *PUCL vs Union of India*, but also local street protests and demonstrations). Delays in the delivery of pensions have been reported in the literature. For instance, Dutta (2008) has a useful discussion on the process of disbursement of pensions and the possible causes of delays in Rajasthan. There are some studies on similar delays in the payment of wages in the MGNREGA (Khera 2010).

17 These findings are similar to those of HelpAge (2009).

18 At the time of the survey, Chhattisgarh offered subsidised rice (35 kg per household per month) through its PDS at either Re 1 or Rs 2 per kg depending on the type of ration card. While the prices of subsidised grain in Latehar were similar, only about 20% of the respondents were eligible for it. On the revival of the PDS in Chhattisgarh, see Puri 2012 and the literature cited there.

19 These findings related to the adequacy of pensions. The preferences and needs of respondents should also be kept in mind while deciding the pension amount (instead of just fiscal considerations). As of now, the scheme does not take into account personal or regional differences in the amount of pension it allocates (except for allocating a higher amount for beneficiaries aged above 80). Richer states often have more generous payments to beneficiaries because of greater fiscal capacity. For instance, Goa and Delhi contributed Rs 800 per month per beneficiary, while Bihar did not contribute anything to the NOAPS in 2011-12.

20 The recommendation that beneficiaries be allowed to choose the method of payment has been made in Planning Commission 2009. It is not clear yet how successful the business correspondent model or Aadhaar-enabled payments will be in this. On this, see Bhatti (2012), Khera (2011) and Bhatti et al (2012). While discussing unique identification number applications for the NOAPS, Bhatti et al (2012) say, "This UID application is also problematic, for three reasons. First, fingerprint recognition is particularly difficult with the elderly. Second, the formalities of switching to a new system can also be very forbidding for them. Third, many old people are too frail to collect their pension in person, and normally send a relative – the Aadhaar system makes that impossible. In Ratu, we saw an old man literally crawling for several kilometres to collect his pension from the Aadhaar system, instead of sending his son as he used to do."

21 Apart from Dutta (2008), World Bank (2011a) has a discussion on the possible causes for delays.

22 See pensionparishad.org and righttofoodindia.org for more details. The Working Group Social Protection Policy for the Eleventh Five-Year Plan recommended, "NOAPS should provide pension to all 'BPL' aged above 60 years with a minimum pension of Rs 400 pm. The pension amount should be reviewed every three years." But even this limited recommendation is yet to be accepted (see Ministry of Rural Development 2006).

REFERENCES

Alam, Moneer (2004): "Ageing, Old Age Income Security and Reforms: An Exploration of the Indian Situation", *Economic & Political Weekly*, Vol 39, No 33.

Bhatti, Bharat (2012): "Aadhaar-Enabled Payments for NREGA Workers", *Economic & Political Weekly*, Vol 47, No 49.

Birchfield, L and J Corsi (2009): "Between Starvation and Globalization: Realizing the Right to Food in India", *Michigan Journal of International Law*, Vol 31.

Desai, S, A Dubey, B L Joshi, M Sen, A Shariff and R Vanneman (2010): *Human Development in India: Challenges for a Society in Transition* (Oxford University Press: New Delhi).

Dev, S Mahendra (1998): "Government Intervention and Social Security for Rural Labour" in R Radhakrishna and A N Sharma (ed.), *Empowering Rural Labour in India: Market, State and Mobilization* (New Delhi: Institute for Human Development), pp 173-204.

Drèze, J and R Khera (2010): "The BPL Census and a Possible Alternative", *Economic & Political Weekly*, Vol 40, No 9.

Drèze, Jean (2003): "Praying for Food Security", *Hindu*, 27 October.

– (2004): "Democracy and the Right to Food", *Economic & Political Weekly*, Vol 39, No 17.

– (2010): "The Task of Making the PDS Work", *Hindu*, 8 July.

Dutta, Puja Vasudeva (2008): "The Performance of Social Pensions in India: The Case of Rajasthan", SP Discussion Paper 0834, South Asia Social Protection Unit, World Bank, available at http://siteresources.worldbank.org/SOCIALPROTECTION/Resources/SP-Discussion-papers/Pensions-DP/0834.pdf

Dutta, P V, S Howes and R Murgai (2009): "Small but Effective: India's Targeted Unconditional Transfers", *Economic & Political Weekly*, Vol 45, No 52.

Farrington, J, N C Saxena, T Barton and R Nayak (2003): "Post Offices, Pensions and Computers: New Opportunities for Combining Growth and Social Protection in Weekly Integrated Rural Areas?", *Natural Resource Perspectives*, No 87.

Government of India (2009a): "Office Memorandum: Guidelines for Central Assistance under the Indira Gandhi National Disability Pension Scheme (IGNDPS) as Part of National Social Assistance Programme", Ministry of Rural Development, New Delhi, available at http://nsap.nic.in/Guidelines/guidelines%20on%20IGNDPS%2030sep09.pdf

– (2009b): "Office Memorandum: Guidelines for Central Assistance under the Indira Gandhi National Widow Pension Scheme (IGNWPS) as Part of National Social Assistance Programme", Ministry of Rural Development, New Delhi, available at http://nsap.nic.in/Guidelines/guidelines%20on%20IGNWPS%2030sep09.pdf

– (2012a): "National Social Assistance Programme", Ministry of Rural Development, New Delhi, available at http://rural.nic.in/sites/downloads/programmes-schemes/NSAP%20Intro.doc.

– (2012b): *Annual Report 2011-12*, Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India, Ministry of Rural Development, New Delhi.

HelpAge International (2009): *The Social Pension in India: A Participatory Study of Poverty Reduction Impact and Role of Monitoring Groups* (London: HelpAge International).

International Labour Organisation (2010a): *Extending Social Security to All: A Guide through Challenges and Options,* International Labour Organisation, Geneva.

– (2010b): *The World Social Security Report 2010/11: Providing Coverage in Times of Crisis and Beyond,* International Labour Organisation, Geneva.

Jagran Post (2012): "Bihar: Forget Tension, Get Pension in Cash", 2 March, available at http://post.jagran.com/Bihar-Forget-tension-get-pension-in-cash-1330681384

Jan Jagran Shakti Sangathan (2012): *Report on Social Audit of Social Security Pensions in Araria* (JJSS: Araria).

Khera, Reetika (2010): "Wages of Delay", *Frontline*, 27 (10), 8-21 May.

– (2011): "The UID Project and Welfare Schemes", *Economic & Political Weekly*, Vol 46, No 9.

Kumar, A and N Anand (2006): "Poverty Target Programs for the Elderly in India: With Special Reference to the National Old Age Pension Scheme, 1995", Background Paper for the Chronic Poverty Report 2008-09, Chronic Poverty Research Centre.

Ministry of Rural Development (2006): *Report on the Working Group on Social Protection Policy – National Social Assistance Programme and Associated Programmes,* Government of India, New Delhi.

Palacios, R and O Sluchynsky (2006): "Social Pensions Part I: Their Role in the Overall Pension System", *Social Protection Discussion Paper 0601*, World Bank, Washington DC.

Pellissery, Sony (2005): "Process Deficits or Political Constraints: Bottom-up Evaluation of Non-Contributory Social Protection Policy for Rural Labourers in India", CPRC Working Paper 54, Chronic Poverty Research Centre.

Pension Parishad (2012): "About Pension Parishad", Pension Parishad, New Delhi, available at http://pensionparishad.org/pension/about-pension-parishad/

Planning Commission (2011): *Evaluation Report on National Old Age Pension Scheme (NOAPS) – Jammu and Kashmir,* Planning Evaluation Organisation, Planning Commission, New Delhi.

Puri, Raghav (2012): "Reforming the Public Distribution System: Lessons from Chhattisgarh", *Economic & Political Weekly*, Vol 47, No 5.

Rajan, S Irudaya (2001): "Social Assistance for Poor Elderly: How Effective?", *Economic & Political Weekly*, Vol 36, No 8.

Reserve Bank of India (2012): "240. Consumer Price Index – Annual Variation" in *Handbook of Statistics on the Indian Economy* (New Delhi: Reserve Bank of India).

Right to Food Campaign (2012): "Press Conference on the Demands of the Jharkhand Jattha for a Comprehensive National Food Security Act", Right to Food Campaign, Ranchi, available at http://www.righttofoodindia.org/data/right_to_food_act_data/events/state_yatra_october_2012/October_2012_jharkhand_yatra_press_release_press_conference_15_october_2012_english.pdf

SC Commissioners (2011): "Interim Orders of the Supreme Court in the Right to Food Case Concerning NOAPS", available at http://www.sc-commissioners.org/FoodSchemes/NOAPS.html

Srinivasan, V and S Narayanan (2007): "Food Policy and Social Movements: Reflections on the Right to Food Campaign in India", Case Study No 11-1 of the Program "Food Policy for Developing Countries: The Role of the Government in the Global Food System."

World Bank (2011a): *Social Protection for a Changing India,* Volume I (Washington DC: World Bank).

– (2011b): *Social Protection for a Changing India,* Volume II (Washington DC: World Bank).