

India: At Least 15 Have Died of Starvation in Jharkhand in Last One Year, Say Activists

Wednesday 10 October 2018, by [The Wire \(IN\)](#) (Date first published: 28 September 2018).

On the occasion of Santoshi Kumari's death anniversary, the Right To Food Campaign has issued a statement, in which it has put forth certain demands to stop starvation deaths in the state.

New Delhi: In the wake of starvation deaths in Jharkhand, the Right To Food Campaign has issued a statement, putting forth certain demands and suggestions that could stop them.

Santoshi Kumari, an 11-year-old girl in Simdega, died of starvation a year ago today. On the anniversary of her death, the Right To Food Campaign in its statement has said that in Jharkhand, close to 40% of children under the age of five are malnourished and in the past year, at least 15 people have died due to hunger. The deceased – six Adivasis, four Dalits and five individuals from backward castes – were denied security pensions or rations from PDS.

Five of these families didn't possess a ration card and five others "faced sustained issues with Aadhaar-based biometric authentication, leading to denial of rations", the statement says. Additionally, six persons were denied social security pensions and Aadhaar-related issues played a role in the hunger deaths of ten such cases.

Stating that the Jharkhand government has not "initiated any action to stop the persistent starvation deaths in the state", the Campaign has put forth the following demands:

- Aadhaar should not be mandatory for any welfare scheme and Aadhaar-based biometric authentication should be discontinued.
- The list of families whose ration cards were cancelled and those whose names were struck off pension lists for not linking their Aadhaar, should be made public immediately and also re-start their rations and pensions with immediate effect.
- The Public Distribution System should be made universal in rural areas, and PVTG families and single women should be given Antyodaya cards.
- Private ration dealers should be removed immediately and replaced with gram panchayat/women's organisations.
- To improve the situation of nutrition in the state, pulses and edible oil should be made available at affordable rates in the Public Distribution System.
- The maternity benefit entitlement should be increased from Rs 5000 (under the Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana) to R. 6000 as mandated in the National Food Security Act. It should also not be restricted only to the first child.
- All pregnant and lactating women should be given five eggs per week.
- All children should be given five eggs per week in anganwadis and Midday meals.
- Anganwadis should be established in all hamlets of the state. Education system in Anganwadis to be strengthened. And children to be served hot-cooked food instead of ready-to-eat food.
- All elderly, widow, and disabled persons in the state should be given social security pension of

at least Rs 2000/month on time.

- Jharkhand's MGNREGA wage rate should be increased to at least the state's minimum wage.
- All households to be given right to 200 days of work per year in MGNREGA.
- All MGNREGA workers to be paid within 15 days under any circumstances.

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