

UID not be mandatory for welfare and social sector programmes
17th November 2016

The coercive and mandatory use of aadhaar in welfare delivery is causing unprecedented havoc, exclusion, and harassment to the most vulnerable citizens from accessing their legal entitlements to welfare and social support.

In blatant violation of the orders of the Supreme Court, that have been reiterated six times, prohibiting Union of India from making aadhaar mandatory for citizens to access services; Union of India continues to insist on people having an aadhaar card before they can avail welfare services. This has led to mass exclusion of at least up to 30% of entitled citizens from accessing their existing rights and benefits.

On 16th November 2016, several citizen groups, social movements, campaigns and civil society organisations came together to resist the undemocratic and unlawful decision taken by the Union of India, of insisting on citizens having aadhaar to claim their services. These included representation from Jan Jagran Shakti Sangathan, Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan, Soocha and Rozgar Abhiyan, Pension Parishad, Delhi Solidarity Group, Satark Nagrik Sangathan, National Hawkers Federation, National Fisherworkers Forum, Jagdalpur Legal Aid Group, Liberation Technology India, IT for Change, Campaign for Judicial Accountability, Samaj Parivartan Shakti Sangathan, Ashray Adhikar Abhiyan, Delhi Forum, JOSH, Right to Food Campaign, National Domestic Workers Union, Kachra Kamgar Union, Swaraj Abhiyan, Kerala Swatantra Matsya Thozhilalali Federation, Centre for Community Support and Social Development, National Foundation of India, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Van Panchayat Morcha, National Federation of Indian Women, National Alliance for Peoples Movements and Centre for Financial Accountability, The Research Collective, Programme for Social Action and Public Finance Public Accountability Collective.

Based on credible evidence emerging from the ground on the destruction caused to peoples' rights and entitlements through the insistence of biometric authentication, a decision was taken to bring together a Peoples' Report on aadhaar and UID. There are also plans to support and work towards a series of public actions such as state and national public hearings, developing and publicizing correct information on the implications of aadhaar, including through a website for building awareness on the issue, conduct micro studies on the impact of aadhaar on welfare delivery etc. to present the actual impact, which is in complete contrast with the narrative of "efficiency" that the State continues to propagate.

This has been decided based on the multitude instances presented during the course of the consultation about how the most poor and marginalized are being deprived of their basic services and rights through the coercive demand of having an aadhaar number.

Shankar Singh of Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan, Rajasthan, said that based on recent government figures, it had emerged that of the approximately 68 lakh pensioners availing old age, widow, and disability pensions in the state, the government had cancelled pensions of approximately 7 lakh people, and temporarily stopped the pensions of approximately 3 lakh people. Out of these, nearly 2 lakh accounts had been suspended, as the account holders had been

declared as having died. However, upon field verification conducted by MKSS in one Gram Panchayat alone (Kushalpura Gram Panchayat, Bhim Block), it was found that 21 out of the 44 pensioners declared dead by the administration, were in fact alive. **Most disturbingly, 4 old age pensioners actually died after their pensions were inexplicably stopped and before the error could be rectified.** Forced to act on the basis of this limited data, the administration re-examined the data for the entire state, and after this verification, 1309 of the 3729 pension accounts cancelled earlier, in Bhim block alone, were restarted.

Biometric authentication did not work for nearly 30% of the ration card holders, because of data entry errors in “seeding” and due to frequent fingerprint authentication failures of those dependent on manual labour to earn their livelihoods, either on farms, mines, or quarries. In August, only about 63.5 lakh of total approximately 99.7 lakh people in Rajasthan were able to get their ration grains after biometric authentication. Despite such a high failure rate, the Government of Rajasthan continues to deny the extraordinary rates of exclusion, by stating that this was “weeding out” of bogus beneficiaries from the system, said Nikhil Dey of MKSS. It is important to mention that the State Government has not taken any criminal and disciplinary action against any agency for continuing to deliver services to apparently bogus beneficiaries prior to the introduction of aadhaar.

T. Peter of National Fisherworkers’ Forum said that aadhaar authentication of the fisherfolk had failed regularly, as their hands had suffered damage and dermal abrasions due to holding and pulling fishing nets for their livelihood.

Shaktiman Ghosh of National Hawkers’ Federation said that in Jharkhand, the government had tried to make aadhaar registration mandatory for hawkers, which was an attack on their livelihood. He also said that the government had been forced to roll back this proposal, after ten day’ protest by the Federation. He raised the question as to why registration of hawkers under aadhaar was necessary, when identity cards had already been provided by unions, and other professional bodies.

Anjali Bhardwaj of Satark Nagrik Sangathan, Delhi, said that aadhaar was being used as a tool to exclude people from pensions and ration. Aadhaar authentication was being done without any transparency on user’s rights, and without any grievance redress, and compensation, in case of system failures. She also pointed out that with the use of video footage that network failures are prevalent in the capital city.

Ashish Ranjan, an activist with Jan Jagran Shakti Sangathan, said that medical establishments had started asking for aadhaar mandatorily from those seeking treatment, and officials declined to share any government notification showing the legal sanction for this.

Sunita, of Domestic Workers Union, said that small enrollment camp establishments were demanding Rs. 200 from people to do the aadhaar enrollment for them. She raised a legitimate question as to why the government was asking for aadhaar proof when they already had ration cards and pension papers.

What emerged was a picture of not just a complete disruption of existing systems, but also several case studies of fraud and corruption within the new system, such as jamming the point of sale machine by toothpicks by field functionaries in Chattisgarh, in order to extract cash. In Kukukheda panchayat of Rajsamand district in Rajasthan, an outright fraud by the PDS dealer in seeding his own aadhaar card number versus multiple ration card numbers, was also put forward. These instances indicated that far apart from reducing corruption, the introduction of aadhaar was resulting in the practice of new forms of corruption.

An immense anger is being felt by persons who have been unjustly excluded from accessing their legitimate legal entitlements. This consultation aimed at bringing together a fraction of such persons and organisations, and is a step towards building an evidence based counter narrative to the unilateral lies being spun by the State on the positive impacts of aadhaar in the delivery of public programmes.

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