



# OXFAM INDIA PUSHES FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF FREE MEDICINES SCHEME

Join us by signing postcards and sending them to the Prime Minister

Shocking, but true! Over 50 per cent Indians do not have regular access to even essential medicines according to World Health Organization (WHO).

The total out of pocket annual expenditure on medicines by Indians is Rs. 161,704 crores. This translates into an average Indian spending about Rs. 3.66 per day on medicines. In a country where a significant pie of its population earns less than Rs. 28 per day, spending on basic medicines is a luxury. **It is therefore not surprising that 23% Indians do not seek treatment due to non affordability.**

Bringing in a ray of hope to the common man the Prime Minister, Dr. Manmohan Singh, during his independence day speech last year (on 15th Aug, 2012), announced that the government is "formulating a scheme for distribution of free medicines through Government hospitals and health centres". As a follow up to this announcement, in September 2012, the Health Minister declared that Rs. 1,300 crores will be provided to states for purchase of medicines and setting up of a central procurement agency for bulk procurement of drugs.

Almost a year after this announcement the scheme has not been implemented. The Planning Commission has been citing fund constraints as a reason to forgo the implementation of this scheme. No allocation of any sort has been made to the States so far. But this bureaucracy leaves the common man totally at a loss.

In a novel and powerful initiative, Oxfam India took the occasion of the closing down of telegram services of the Indian Post to remind the Prime Minister of his promise to provide free medicines to all, that he had made on last year's Independence Day. Oxfam India members across the country, some of them braving torrential rain, queued up at post offices on July 15, 2013 to send telegrams to the Prime Minister. They also encouraged collectives of the urban poor and other civil society organizations to send



"We are still waiting at the counter" – Oxfam India staff displaying their telegram messages

telegrams urging him to implement this critical scheme urgently.

The telegram route was chosen to highlight the urgency of the situation. Simple and powerful messages like - "Last 15<sup>th</sup> August you announced free medicines for all from the Red Fort. I am still waiting at the counter" told their own story.

Oxfam India's campaign does not end with the telegrams. It is now putting together a follow up plan that will include post cards and other action points across the country to build pressure on the government to implement the free medicines scheme immediately. The campaign asks people to send postcards and use the social media to keep reminding the government of its promise.

The campaign forms a part of Oxfam India's vision of empowering the poor and the marginalized to demand their rights.

Oxfam been working relentlessly on access to medicines issues for over two decades. In India, the organisation has been working with partners like Prayas in Rajasthan demanding free medicines since 2009.

The only state to have implemented the scheme is Rajasthan. It has been successfully running a free medicines scheme since October 2011. Rajasthan spends Rs. 300 crores a year to provide 400 types of free medicines to patients

in Government hospitals. Everyday approximately 2 lakh people benefit from this scheme. The number of patients going to Government hospitals for treatment in the State has increased by 56% as a result of this scheme according to Managing Director, Rajasthan Medical Services Corporation which is implementing the scheme.

The Rajasthan experience also shows that medicines procured in bulk by their generic names cost 40-4000% less. This disparity is possible because most of the medicines are not under any price control.

As Indians it is time for us to wake up and collectively ask for our rights. It is time to bring about revolutionary changes in this country. We urge you to come forward and support!

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## A HOT MEAL KEEPS CHILDREN IN SCHOOL

Half of the world's hungry live in India; the majority of them being children. To ensure that fewer and fewer children go to bed hungry, the Supreme Court of India in one of its landmark decisions, linked a school feeding program to the government's education program. This was to encourage poor families to enrol their children into government schools so their children would be guaranteed at least one square meal a day called the Midday Meal program.

The mid-day meal scheme in its present form was introduced in 1995 to tackle the problem of malnutrition among children and boost school attendance. Billed as the world's largest school feeding scheme, it reaches out to about 12 crore children in over 12.65 lakh schools/Early Guarantee Scheme (EGS) centres across the country.

However, there are issues of quality which bog down the implementation of the scheme. Sometimes hygiene plays the devil, sometimes adulteration. What caused all the harm last month in a government primary school in Bihar's Saran district was cooking oil kept in a can of pesticides.



Right to Food activists staging a dharna in Patna demanding an investigation into the deaths of 22 children due to eating poisonous mid-day meal

The lunch killed 27 children—all between age four and 12—at a government school in Chhapra district in Bihar, about 80km from the state capital Patna.

Unfortunately, a scheme that was introduced to keep children motivated to come to school is becoming a deterrent to the very reason for which it had been implemented.

Oxfam India and its partners have demanded a full investigation into the free mid-day meal scheme following the Bihar deaths. Koshish Trust, one of Oxfam India's partners that is also a key member of the Right to Food campaign in Bihar has been commissioned by the Supreme Court to oversee the mid day

meal programme in the State. In a recent survey, the Trust pointed out that the program was not being implemented properly because of lack of funds and poor quality food. The monitoring process is ineffective since just a handful of schools are surveyed and that too only once or twice a year. Poor storage facilities and lack of proper utensils and plates also added to the inefficiency of implementation of the scheme.

There is serious lack of accountability in the implementation on the ground, especially in states such as Uttar Pradesh and Bihar

The diversion of funds and food grains, teachers preparing meals and spending less time in teaching and lack of food hygiene, reduction in food quantity are serious concerns being faced in the implementation of the mid-day meal scheme.

Therefore, Oxfam India and its partners under the aegis of the right to food campaign have initiated mass public action in Bihar demanding an improvement in the implementation of food security scheme and other health related schemes for the poor. This included a demonstration in Patna involving civil society organisations, theatre personalities, intellectuals and members of the general public. They also handed over a memorandum containing charter of demands to the Governor.

It is critical for the Government to immediately take steps to improve the management and implementation of the midday meal scheme and put quality control measures in place. The school management committees and parents must be involved in monitoring the programme.

Active steps such as these would ensure that this ambitious scheme is rolled out in all its intended magnitude to truly benefit millions of children across the length and breadth of the country.



A hot meal being served to children in a school in Bhatauli village in district Gumla, Jharkhand after a community-led intervention ensured that the mid-day meal scheme which was stopped in 2011 was implemented again. Oxfam India and its partner CINI, motivated the community members to write to the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) resulting in the scheme's re-instatement

## UTTARAKHAND DISASTER:

### “I want to stand on my own feet again”

- Bimal Rawat

22 year old Bimal Rawat from Tiwri village in Guptkashi district used to wait eagerly for pilgrims on their way to Kedarnath. Ferrying pilgrims to the shrine on his mule was his source of livelihood. He and many other young men from his village queued up each morning at the bazaar waiting for business from visiting tourists.

On June 14 2013, everything changed for Bimal as the devastating floods took away all that he had—his family, his house, his two mules, his other belongings.

Left alone to fend for his aunt and her two children, Bimal has still not come to grips with life.

Oxfam India launched its relief operation in Uttarakhand on June 22, 2013 along with its partners JVS and HPSS.

While speaking to a relief crew member Bimal expressed his concern about how uncertain he feels his future is. Losing his only source of income makes him feel helpless. Determined to restart life he says, “I want to stand on my own feet again.”

Oxfam India’s approach goes beyond relief. Since Uttarakhand is one of its focus states Oxfam India is committed to working in the State for the long-term and help Bimal and many others like him who need to have a continuous source of income to be able to lead a life of dignity.

The need in the short term is emergency food security, shelter, water and sanitation and in the medium and long term, extends to sustainability and livelihood creation.

Given that markets are functional in interior locations, Oxfam India is planning targeted cash transfers to the most vulnerable households. The beneficiaries will particularly include women who have lost the sole wage earners of their families and have to support children and old parents.

Oxfam India is also planning initiatives for helping families to reclaim their land damaged by the floods.

All this work is only possible with the support of our partners and donors who have generously come forward to

#### OXFAM INDIA’S RESPONSE SO FAR

- 1033 households supported (approximately 6,200 people) in Rudraprayag and Uttarkashi districts.
- 583 households supplied with food ration packets in Rudraprayag district
- 62 families supported with emergency shelter items and non-food item kits in Rudraprayag district.
- 328 households in Uttarkashi supported with food ration aid
- 60 families supported with Non-food items like tarpaulins, ground sheets, blankets and hygiene kits in Uttarkashi

help us do the needful. Rebuilding is an extensive and time consuming process and Oxfam India is committed to making Uttarakhand a thriving state once again.



Bimal Rawat was the recipient of the emergency shelter and support kit distributed by the Oxfam India team in Uttarakhand

# THINK BEFORE YOU EAT

Think. Eat. Save. The theme for this year's World Environment Day is an anti-food waste and food loss campaign targeted at encouraging individuals to reduce their food-print.

In this regard, 'obesity' is a new word coined to describe the prevalent situation where many well-to-do people put on weight and fall sick because of over-eating while there are many others who go hungry and remain malnourished.

The impact of food waste is not just financial. Environmentally too, food waste leads to wasteful use of chemicals such as fertilizers and pesticides; more fuel for transportation; and more rotting food, creating more methane – one of the most harmful greenhouse gases that contributes to climate change. The vast amount of food going to landfills makes a significant contribution to global warming.

*(Contributions from donors are welcome. Send your article, thought, stories to delhi@oxfamindia.org)*

Food loss and waste also lead to a substantial loss of resources, including water, land, energy, labour and capital.

In India, a significant part of the huge amounts of food grains stored in godowns and in the open by the Food Corporation of India, either rots or is eaten by rodents.

Food waste and losses occur mainly at the early stages of the food chain and can be traced to financial, managerial and technical constraints in harvesting techniques as well as storage and cooling facilities. A strengthening of the the supply chain by supporting farmers and making investments in infrastructure and transportation could help reduce the amount of food loss and waste.

– Prahlad Shekhawat,  
an Oxfam India Legacy donor

## ACCORDING TO THE UN FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION (FAO):

- 1.3 billion tonnes of food is wasted across the world every year. This is equivalent to the amount produced in the entire sub-Saharan Africa.
- One in every seven people in the world goes to bed hungry every day.
- More than 20,000 children under the age of 5 die daily from hunger.

## WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Support local farmers.
- Avoid over packaging, avoid genetically modified food until independent research can verify, avoid or minimize chemical pesticides.
- Grow your own vegetables on roof tops and in common unused urban spaces.
- Collect food waste separately and use it for composted manure.
- Become informed about how food is produced, processed and consumed.
- Reuse leftovers.

## BECOME A 'FRIEND OF OXFAM'!

Donate Monthly to empower the lives of poor and marginalised and bring a lasting change. Your monthly contribution will help us continue in our mission to create a more equal, just, and sustainable world.



ऑक्सफैम इंडिया  
**OXFAM**  
India

### Enclosed is my first monthly donation of

**Rs. 500** Provide coaching support to lagging children

**Rs. 800** Create awareness to reduce acceptance of violence against women

**Rs 500** Create Awareness on health and hygiene in disaster prone areas.

### I wish to donate by Credit Card

Visa  Master Card

Name of the Bank .....

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### I wish to donate by ECS

Please contact our Loyalty Programme Team at +91 (0) 11 4653 8000 Ext. 118/ 140 between 10:00 AM to 5:00 PM from Monday to Friday to sign up your monthly pledge and become a 'Friend of Oxfam'.

All donations are 50% tax deductible U/S 80G of IT Act, 1961. All donations in favour of Humanitarian Response and Disaster Risk Reduction are 100% tax deductible U/S 35AC of IT Act, 1961

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