



# Wada Na Todo ABHIYAN

Holding The Government Accountable to Its Promise to End Poverty & Social Exclusion

## PRESS RELEASE

### REPORT RELEASE: PROMISES AND REALITY 2020-2021 – CITIZENS' REPORT ON THE YEAR TWO OF THE NDA II GOVERNMENT:

One of the central pillars of Wada Na Todo Abhiyan's (WNTA) work is the annual review report of the elected government's performance within different sectors, issues and communities to document an assessment against the electoral promises and Constitutional mandates. Continuing this effort to mirror the concerns and voices of the marginalised communities and promote governance accountability, we are releasing '**Promises & Reality 2020-2021: Citizen's Report on 2nd Year of NDA-II Government**' on **Thursday, July 22, 2021** (03.00 – 05:00 pm IST).

The report release would be followed by a panel discussion with Ms. Brinda Karat (former Member of Parliament, Rajya Sabha), Prof. Rajeev Gowda (former Member of Parliament, Rajya Sabha), Mr. Salil Shetty (former Secretary-General of Amnesty International) and Ms. Arfa Khanum Sherwani (Senior Editor, Wire.in).

Click here to register: [https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN\\_GjPbtRvfQEObcrYxU85eAQ](https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_GjPbtRvfQEObcrYxU85eAQ)

The report examines some of the key policies of the government and interventions made during May 2020 - April 2021 through the impact these have had on the lives of India's citizens, and particularly marginalized sections. Given the significant context of the pandemic during the focus period, each chapter duly centres its assessment around COVID-19 spread, the lockdown, and the devastating second wave.

The COVID-19 pandemic has spiralled from a health crisis to a socio-economic crisis, furthering and creating even more vulnerabilities. While the pandemic and the nationwide lockdown had a multifaceted impact on the economy and the society, it was the marginalized communities who bore a disproportionate brunt of the pandemic.

A plethora of initiatives by the government to mitigate the impact of the pandemic and provide relief and rehabilitation to those most adversely affected were seen in 2020-21. Although, the report in its findings reveals that, the seeming impact of these initiatives has been inadequate – with critics attributing the consequences of the pandemic to governmental mismanagement, diminishing civic space, and divisive, political narratives.

Some facts supporting this claim, as stated in 33 chapters of this year's report, are:

- Funds worth Rs. 6,935 crores were diverted from the National Rural Health Mission towards expenses related to COVID-19, and various critical national health programs like tuberculosis, immunization, maternal and child health, and more suffered drastically due to it.
- Government introduced distribution of ration to non-ration card holders to support livelihoods during and after the lockdown imposed due to the pandemic, but gaps in implementation resulted in 76% people belonging to De-notified and Nomadic Tribes not receiving this benefit.
- After almost a year since the national lockdown in March 2020, research evidence suggests that of the migrants who left cities and industrial towns for their native villages and small towns, 35.4 % are still unemployed, another 35.8 % are involved in agriculture as self-employed labour, perhaps on their joint family farms, while only 4.6 % were employed under MGNREGA and other public works.

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- Despite soaring unemployment, MGNREGA has witnessed a reduction in budget provision for FY 2021-22 by Rs. 38,500 crores from the earlier Rs. 1,11,500 crores (35% reduction) allocation in the Revised Estimates for FY 2020-21 – significantly limiting livelihood opportunities for many in need in rural areas.
- Budget for education saw further reduction from an already meagre 2.18% of the budget to 1.74% in FY 2021-22. Also, already neglected in terms of allocation, child protection sector saw a further reduction in 2021-22 by 42.85 % in comparison to last year.
- While dependence on digital services since the pandemic has been encouraged, it is not accompanied with a corresponding increase in access to digital infrastructure. 55% of children in economically vulnerable households could not access the learning material as they did not have smartphones.
- With guidelines for “staying at home” and “maintaining social distancing”, plights of the homeless were completely ignored. They could not maintain the requisite distance in overcrowded shelters, 54% shelters lacked drinking water, 61% didn’t have sanitary facilities and 92% women of the category didn’t have access to a shelter at all.
- Disability inclusive guidelines by the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities were initially inaccessible, and research evidence brought to light that only 7.6% of working age persons with disabilities were covered by the Indira Gandhi Disability Pension (NSAP), used to provide COVID-19 relief, while there was no coverage for children with disabilities.
- Lockdown forced several women to be stuck in vulnerable situations. 4320 complaints under “Protection of Women Against Domestic Violence” were filed between March-September, 2020. Of the caste-based atrocities reported by Dalit women, 10% were cases of rape.
- Between March 25 and May 31, 2020, 55 journalists “faced arrest, registration of FIRs, summons or show cause notices, physical assaults, alleged destruction of properties and threats” for reporting on COVID-19 or “exercising freedom of opinion and expression”.
- COVID-relief benefits of food and cash benefits were primarily available to those with legal identity documents, which kept the poorest away from accessing them.
- The central government brought amendments in Mines and Mineral (Development and Regulations) Amendment Act 2021, that allowed 100 % foreign direct investment, and gave sweeping powers to the central or state government to declare any area as reserve and to be used for mining.
- The enactment of a new set of farm laws by the central government in the midst of the pandemic opened up the agricultural sector to corporate capital. Fearing the implications of the new laws, farmers have been protesting with all their might, with many having lost their lives due to the hardships of the weather and living conditions.
- Amendments to the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act in September 2020 crippled the civil society response to the second wave of the pandemic, and also had a huge deterring impact on the morale of civil society in India.

The report also addresses the questions of how to move forward, and some key that recommendations emerged are:

- The most efficient and just way to combat inflation would be to increase direct taxes because indirect taxes disproportionately affect the poor. Impose a 2 per cent COVID-19 cess on individuals earning more than INR 2 crore per annum.
- There is a need to focus on allied services that contribute a significant share of rural income especially, in rainfed/dryland regions.

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- As India battles the second wave of the deadly virus and prepares for the third, CSOs must be supported and valued by the government. The perspectives and assets of the Indian civil society must not only be acknowledged but also supported in every way possible to overcome the exodus imposed by the pandemic
- Introduce a people's vaccine that is free, procured at a low, regulated price, procured centrally and distributed equally to support a quick return to normalcy.
- The draft policy for migrant workers penned by NITI Aayog is a step in the right direction. The policy needs to be finalized after due consultations and be given teeth and powers through financial allocations and units within the ministry of labour for implementation.
- Access to basic infrastructural requirements like a mobile phone/ television in case of online learning, or subsidised travel to educational or skill institutions, presence of creches, care giving facilities so that women can also join and sustain training.
- In a post-COVID-19 scenario, we need to emerge beyond the silos of education, livelihoods, health, food security, violence to understand that people's lives are interconnected and impacted by structural norms like occupational segregation.
- Digital access is crucial but not sufficient. People will have to be trained to understand i) how to operate devices, ii) how to access essential government services iii) how to protect themselves from the various risks that internet as a medium present.
- A back-to-school campaign is extremely important for children to continue education. There is a high risk of children from vulnerable families dropping out.

A diverse membership of WNTA has come together to produce this objective assessment of the government's work, seen from the lens of equity and how government decisions impact the most marginalized, vulnerable and poorest sections of the country's population. We hope for this to be a constructive exercise that can lead to horizontal and vertical partnerships between civil society, government and any other stakeholders.

**About us:** WNTA is a civil society campaign aimed at promoting governance accountability focused on ending poverty and social exclusion in India. The campaign coalition was formed in 2004 and is associated with 3000+ civil society organizations, networks, and forums from across all states since then.

**About 'Promises & Reality' reports:** This year's report is the 11<sup>th</sup> edition of our flagship 'Promises & Reality' reports. We have been releasing these reports reviewing different periods of governance since 2008. More information available on our website.

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A copy of this report would be uploaded after the release on our website: [wadanatodo.net](http://wadanatodo.net)

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