

HOW FAR HAVE GOVERNMENT SCHEMES REACHED THE PEOPLE OF GUJARAT?

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Government policies & interventions for development in various Sectors and issues arising out of their design & implementation incl. Housing

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Over the past two decades, welfare schemes have come to constitute an important dimension of governance that affects voters' choices and assessment. Most governments aggressively design, implement and advertise various targeted schemes and general welfare measures. Gujarat is no exception. Therefore, the claims of the BJP government and the perceptions of voters about these claims are bound to be important factors in this election.

Have the welfare schemes of the the Central and State governments actually benefited the targeted sections in Gujarat? We tried to examine the reach of these schemes. The Gujarat government has implemented many schemes for the marginalised sections. We asked the voters whether they availed of the benefits of these schemes in the last five years. Close to two in every three households in Gujarat said they benefited from the free ration scheme: 68% from the poorer section and 72% from the lower class said they got free ration under the scheme.

Other than the free ration scheme, there is a provision of buying ration at subsidised price under the PDS. Around one in four households purchased ration at a subsidised cost; the proportion of the beneficiaries of this scheme went up to one in three among poorer voters.

Both these schemes were more effective in rural Gujarat than urban Gujarat. Data suggest that three-fourths of the households in rural Gujarat got free ration and a little over one-thirds bought ration at subsidised prices under the PDS scheme. The success of the scheme could also be ascertained from the fact that nine out of 10 voters from Adivasi households said that they got free ration and close to two-thirds bought ration at a cheaper price. Three-fourths of the surveyed Dalit households also got ration free of cost.

The Kisan Samman Nidhi scheme, for farmers, has had positive outcomes. Close to half the voters from farming households received monetary benefits under this scheme. In the survey, 8% of farming households said they also received the benefits of other agricultural schemes which they used to buy fertilizers, seed, machinery. etc. at subsidised prices.

Voters also acknowledged that they have received the benefits of free health treatment. Two-fifths said that their households benefited from the health scheme which provides them free or subsidised healthcare facilities. The data suggest that rural voters and voters from marginalised castes and communities benefited more than others from the health schemes implemented by the Gujarat government in the last five years.

Other schemes which benefited the voters were electricity and water free of cost or at cheap rates (13%), direct cash transfers (12%) and the provision of money to build a house (11%). The beneficiaries of these schemes were higher in rural Gujarat than in urban Gujarat and were mainly from Dalit and Adivasi households.

To sum up, the manner in which welfare schemes have affected people in Gujarat is somewhat uneven (Tables 1 and 2). Some schemes have been implemented well. Targeted groups have benefited from free ration, PDS, Kisan Samman Nidhi and, to some extent, the health scheme.

The benefits of other schemes have not yet reached the targeted sections as not many voters said they benefited from these. Yet, the goodwill earned through these schemes could be a valuable asset for the BJP.

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