

SC seeks data on social security schemes in drought-hit areas

In a PIL filed by non-profit Swaraj Abhiyan, the apex court asks the government to reply on the steps taken in these regions by 22 January



The petition had sought the Supreme Court's intervention to ensure adequate relief for drought-affected regions. Photo: Reuters

New Delhi: The Supreme Court on Monday asked the Centre to collate data on the various social security schemes being implemented in the 12 drought-affected states.

The 12 states are Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Jharkhand, Bihar, Haryana, Chhattisgarh and Odisha.

In a public interest litigation (PIL) filed by non-profit Swaraj Abhiyan, a bench comprising Madan B. Lokur and R.K. Agarwal asked the government to reply indicating the steps taken in these regions by 22 January.

The petition had sought the court's intervention to ensure adequate relief for drought-affected regions.

The court also asked the Centre to collate data on rainfall, implementation of National Food Security Act, Mid-day Meal Scheme and the Rural Employment Guarantee Act.

The food security law places an obligation on the state to provide 5kg of food grain to per person per month at a subsidized rate through the public distribution system (PDS), which many states, including Uttar Pradesh, are yet to implement.

According to a survey by Swaraj Abhiyan, Bundelkhand region is facing crop loss, disputes over water, starvation, and deaths due to hunger and malnutrition. The survey covered over 1,200 households in 108 villages spread across seven districts in Bundelkhand. Conducted between 27 October and 9 November, it was designed by Yogendra Yadav, founder of Swaraj Abhiyan, and economist Jean Dreze.

The petition also sought timely disbursement of crop loans, drought compensation, help in procurement of subsidized cattle fodder and formulating an integrated water policy.

India is facing an agrarian crisis, with at least nine states declaring drought many of its regions, *Mint* reported in November. The southwest monsoon recorded a deficit of 14%, the second straight year of sub-par rains; last year's rain deficit was 12%. This year, 302 of the 640 districts in India experienced deficit rains, or at least a 20% shortfall compared with the average.

States including Karnataka, Odisha, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana have declared drought while Haryana and Bihar are likely to follow suit.

The first six states have asked for `24,341 crore aid from the central government. On 4 December, agriculture minister Radha Mohan Singh told Parliament that deficit rain in 2015 has affected crops spread over an area of 19 million hectare in seven states among nine that declared drought.