

# AADHAAR, DIGITAL RIGHTS AND WELFARE DELIVERY

Report of Two-Day Consultation,  
in collaboration with NUSRL, Ranchi



Compiled by LibTech, India

# Table of Contents

## Aadhaar, Digital Rights and Welfare Delivery - A Two-Day Consultation

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Background and Objectives.....                                      | 2  |
| Day 1 - Inaugural Proceedings, Research Presentations, and Workshop |    |
| Introductory Remarks and Inaugural Proceedings.....                 | 3  |
| Jharkhand LibTech Presentation.....                                 | 5  |
| Jean Drèze on Aadhaar's PAAP.....                                   | 7  |
| Andhra Pradesh LibTech Presentation.....                            | 8  |
| Summary by Rajendran Narayanan.....                                 | 9  |
| Working Groups.....   | 9  |
| Day 2 - Panel Discussions, Special Address, and Action Points       |    |
| Panel One.....  | 14 |
| Question and Answers.....   | 17 |
| James Herenj Address.....   | 17 |
| Special Panel - The Way Forward.....                                | 18 |
| Closing Remarks by Jean Dreze.....                                  | 19 |
| Valedictory Address by Dr. Jisu Ketan Pattanaik.....                | 20 |
| Vote of Thanks.....   | 20 |

# Aadhaar, Digital Rights and Welfare Delivery

Report of Two-Day Consultation in collaboration with NUSRL, Ranchi

**Date:** 15-16 April 2026

**Time:** 9:00 AM onwards

**Participants:** APF partner organisations, LibTech Andhra Pradesh and Jharkhand team members, Civil Society practitioners, students and faculty from CCRP, NUSRL, Ranchi and Aadhaar Operators. A total of 77 participants took part in the Two-Day Consultation on Aadhaar, Digital Rights and Welfare Delivery.

## Background and Objectives

Initially launched as a voluntary biometric ID to streamline welfare access and curb duplication, Aadhaar has evolved into a near-mandatory gateway for most public services in India, revealing deep implementation flaws that contradict claims of efficiency and inclusion. Grassroots evidence from rural and tribal areas highlights persistent Aadhaar-linked exclusions in programs such as MGNREGA, NSAP, PDS, and PM-KISAN. LibTech India has documented these issues for the last few years across states like Andhra Pradesh, Jharkhand, Odisha, and Telangana, exacerbated by biometric failures, faulty infrastructure, poor grievance redressal mechanisms, and weak accountability.

The two-day consultation, hosted by **LibTech India** in partnership with **Cahir on Consumer Research and Policy (CCRP)**, **National University of Study and Research in Law (NUSRL)**, Ranchi, on 15–16 April 2026, was organized to address such Aadhaar-linked exclusions in welfare delivery, drawing on cross-state and cross-sector field experiences from civil society organisations. It brought together a diverse group of stakeholders—including civil society practitioners and grassroots groups focused on welfare and digital entitlements, as well as researchers, academics, technologists, and practitioners working on Aadhaar, digital governance, and welfare delivery—to share insights and co-develop solutions.

The consultation aimed to:

- Present and reflect on cross-state field experiences of civil society organisations, including LibTech India and other partners, on Aadhaar-related challenges in welfare access and delivery.
- Reflect on strategies adopted by civil society organisations to mitigate Aadhaar-induced exclusions and support affected individuals and communities.
- Facilitate dialogue between practitioners and researchers to identify practical solutions for improving Aadhaar's functioning in welfare delivery and to reflect on its wider implications for digital governance and accountability.
- Co-develop a manual on Aadhaar to help organisations across the country navigate related issues.

## Day 1 - Inaugural Proceedings, Research Presentations, and Workshop



### Introductory Remarks and Inaugural Proceedings

The consultation commenced with a brief introduction by **Sameet Panda (LibTech)**, who outlined the key objectives: sharing cross-state field experiences on Aadhaar-related welfare challenges, reflecting on civil society strategies to mitigate exclusions, fostering dialogue for practical solutions, and co-developing a navigational manual for organisations nationwide.

This was followed by remarks from **Mr Abhinav Gupta, Faculty Convenor, CCRP, NUSRL, Ranchi**, on Aadhaar's impacts. He shared the journey with LibTech India, from planning the initial meeting two months earlier to conceptualising the consultation, which sparked collaborative insights into the system's real-world effects.

Following a brief lamp lighting ceremony, **Prof. (Dr.) Ashok K. Patil**, Vice-Chancellor, NUSRL, Ranchi, inaugurated the event with a substantive address. He traced Aadhaar's origins, emphasized its role in curbing leakages, duplication, and misuse of government facilities, and positioned it as one of the Indian government's most efficient social experiments. Acknowledging its evolution from voluntary to near-mandatory in practice, he delved into socio-legal complexities, including:

- Violations of Article 21 of the Constitution of India regarding Right to Life and Personal Liberty (e.g., food under PDS, pensions under SSP, wages under MGNREGA).
- Disproportionate biometric failure burdens on the marginalized.
- Bureaucratic discretion and opacity.
- Fragmented accountability mechanisms.

Professor Patil advocated for a rights-centric legal framework that prohibits rights denial due to biometric failures, alongside decentralised, accessible, time-bound grievance redressal,

and technology redesign attuned to socio-economic diversity. He underscored the conflict of rights versus efficiency and administrative ease, declaring,

*“Technology must serve the citizen, not the other way around.”*

*~ Prof. (Dr.) A.K. Patil*

**Mr. Niraj Kumar**, Director of UIDAI Regional Office, Ranchi, began with an anecdote of his travel experience to the Delhi UIDAI headquarters. He described how the entirety of his two-and-a-half-day trip—from the step outside his home in Ranchi to the airport, hotel, office, and back—he did not use a single rupee of physical currency, nor a single physical document or card, highlighting the integration of digital payment systems in our everyday lives.

He then spoke about how Aadhaar’s role has increased manifold with better transparency, noting that in 1985, when Rajiv Gandhi was Prime Minister, only 15 paise reached the beneficiary out of every rupee; now in 2026, with JAM (Jan Dhan, Aadhaar, and Mobile), every rupee reaches the rightsholder directly. He addressed data redundancy, periodic audits, and clarified that biometric data is never shared and sharing demographic data requires an order from a sitting judge. Referencing Jean Drèze’s Economic Times article, he highlighted the "Perpetual Aadhaar Alignment Problem" (PAAP), using it to illustrate issues with Voter ID, PAN, and bank seeding operating as different ecosystems. He also mentioned that age reduction is a cultural problem in Jharkhand and Bihar, such as reducing by a year for school admissions and late registration of birth certificates. Finally, he discussed technology alignment errors, like 2G ePOS machines being incompatible with 4G connectivity.

Following his remarks, **Jean Drèze** requested two commitments and a third question to the UIDAI Director: (i) A visit with Jean Dreze and team to districts to understand the ground realities of Aadhaar. (ii) Preside over a public hearing to discuss these issues. (iii) And what is UIDAI doing to make local solutions possible?

**Director, UIDAI Jharkhand** responded appreciatively, expressing receptiveness to continuing channels of communication.

**Sameet Panda** closed the inaugural session with a vote of thanks to the Vice-Chancellor and UIDAI Director. He also referenced Devahuti’s article in The Wire to highlight her recommendations taken up by the Madras High Court in the Pushpam vs UIDAI (2025) case.

## Jharkhand LibTech Presentation



**Devahuti Sarkar** delivered the Jharkhand LibTech Team's presentation, sharing granular ground-level findings on Aadhaar challenges over the past one-and-a-half years from Latehar (Jharkhand), Odisha, and Mangal Tower, an Aadhaar Seva Kendra (ASK) in Ranchi. She screened a video revealing long queues outside the centre at around 11 a.m., including travellers from Bihar and Bengal. Based on surveys of 100 people over three months and other case studies, she presented an analysis of inadequate infrastructure and technology failures in Aadhaar. She outlined the hierarchy of Aadhaar centres (lowest to highest) :

- Local-level access points (CSC, BSC, Bank, Post Office).
- Block/District Office Aadhaar Centre.
- Aadhaar Seva Kendra (ASK).
- Regional or State Office.

**Case study - Siblings with switched biometrics:** Two siblings enrolled at the same centre found their fingerprint and iris data had been swapped in the system. Repeated authentication attempts triggered deactivation. They requested to cancel their Aadhaar in 2025, but that has not been processed yet. They have no option but to wait while the children are unable to appear for exams.

ASKs have emerged as one-stop solutions because local-level access points are either closed, unauthorized, or unequipped to process all applications, compounded by inadequate operator training and higher rejection rates at the local level. Aadhaar operators remain unaccountable by design.

At ASK Mangal Tower, Ranchi, experiences included long queues and extreme rush, with no assistance for filling English-language forms, inconsistent information prompting multiple visits, and lack of accountability in technical design and grievance redressal. Key issues highlighted were:

- Very little transparency leading to applicants stuck in process limbo.
- Weak status tracking (mAadhaar shows vague messages) and no unified case tracking.
- Non-functional grievance redressal mechanisms.
- Lack of accountability for systemic failures and rejections.
- Zero tolerance for human variation via rigid document validation policies.
- Disproportionate requirements (e.g., gazette notification for name changes), burdening rural populations.
- Information asymmetry leading to multiple expensive, futile trips.

**Devahuti** asked **Niraj Kumar**, Director of UIDAI (Unique Identification Authority of India) Jharkhand some questions, who provided detailed responses:

*On operators' lack of training:* Kumar explained the formal process of registration and examination via NSEIT (National Securities Depository Limited – IT), after which individuals become certified operators. Jharkhand has over 2,500 centers, including Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited (BSNL), postal offices, and banks at the local level.

*First-time Aadhaar for adults (18+):* When an individual aged 18 or above applies for Aadhaar for the first time, the system questions: "Why do you need Aadhaar now?" This requires clearance via the state government portal, involving physical verification.

*Operator accountability:* All details appear on-screen for the individual to review, though literacy and language barriers pose challenges. There's a dual authentication process (applicant's fingerprint first, followed by the operator's). High rejection rates trigger penalties and blacklisting for operators.

*Date of birth (DoB) changes:* He noted with scrutiny, "Why change DoB when you are only born once? How do I know you are the same individual?", treating discrepancies as separate identities requiring proof, such as an attested letter from an Anganwadi worker in case of non-institutional delivery and approval from the RMCO (Registrar Medical Circle Office for Births and Deaths).

*Name changes:* These necessitate a Gazette notification, approved only by the concerned authority. Kumar elaborated, "Every problem has a solution, but every solution has a problem," attributing many issues to lack of awareness about Aadhaar processes and timely compliance. He claimed that less stringent rules would only increase problems.

Devahuti countered by stressing Aadhaar's linkage to welfare delivery, compelling people to enroll/update at different life stages for food, employment, education, and pensions, with the system's limited capabilities imposing a disproportionate burden on the most marginalised. Niraj acknowledged that linking pre-existing entitlements, such as wages and education, to Aadhaar creates rights barriers due to integration challenges.

## Jean Drèze on Aadhaar's PAAP

Following the Q&A, **Jean Drèze** addressed the session, contrasting Niraj Kumar's anecdote by noting that while Aadhaar works seamlessly for some, for most it becomes a matter of life and death. He recalled 2010 assurances that Aadhaar would remain voluntary and facilitative, fingerprint and phone number optional, with Chapter 8 of the Aadhaar Act mandating supervision of UIDAI (Unique Identification Authority of India) operations but highlighted how practice has made it mostly compulsory, enabled eKYC (Electronic Know Your Customer), sharing of demographic data except private entities, and led to Chapter 8's removal.

### Perpetual Aadhaar Alignment Problem

Coined by Jean Drèze.  
Correcting one linked record creates discrepancies in another.  
The individual is trapped in an endless cycle of corrections with no exit.

He illustrated the "Perpetual Aadhaar Alignment Problem" (PAAP) through 10 cases from Manika block in Latehar, each case depicting a distinct failure mode in Aadhaar's ecosystem:

|  |
|--|
| 1. Wrong demographic data aligned with Voter ID, creating new discrepancies.                                       |
| 2. 2018 Airtel Wallet and MGNREGA (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act) mismatches.             |
| 3. Misuse of fingerprints to loot rightsholders via UIDAI systems.   |
| 4. High biometric failure rates.   |
| 5. Increased date-of-birth (DoB) inconsistency (most defaulting to January 1).                                     |
| 6. Disabled individuals and children (lacking digital birth certificates) without Aadhaar.                         |
| 7. Discontinued pensions, ration cards (RC), and job cards due to Aadhaar issues.                                  |
| 8. Loss of Aadhaar itself.   |
| 9. KYC problems—2014 Jan Dhan Yojana account openings and 2024 eKYC causing overcrowded banks and frozen accounts. |
| 10. Aadhaar ID linkage issues with education (e.g., Exam ID card or AAPAAR ID).                                    |

He explained how operators' misinterpretations of spelling, the cultural practice of naming women "Devi" among other things, results in one woman having multiple valid names unrecognised by the system.

**Case study - Four years, three wrong dates of birth:** A man spent four years trying to correct his daughter's DoB (entered as 2009 instead of 2006). The operator corrected it to 2016 (a three-year error in the opposite direction), making re-correction nearly impossible and blocking her school exam ID and AAPAAR enrollment. A second girl paid an operator ₹200 to edit her DoB, unaware that photoshopping the document without updating the database means authentication still fails.

Drèze concluded with a fundamental critique of Aadhaar as an invasive identity system that is incompatible with democracy and serves as surveillance infrastructure.

**Mr. Niraj Kumar** thanked Jean for his detailed feedback, stating that he had made note of the concerns raised. He clarified that biometric updates occur at ages 5 and 15, with UIDAI conducting camps on a daily basis in schools, but emphasized the need for collaboration with other stakeholders to address these challenges effectively.

## **Andhra Pradesh LibTech Presentation**

**Yalachala Harisha** and **Savara Venkatesh** from Velugu Association presented field findings from Cheepurupally Kothuru (Andhra Pradesh), highlighting Aadhaar barriers under Pradhan Mantri Jan Man (PM Jan Man) scheme, where domicile certificates should allow Aadhaar enrollment without additional documents and yet UIDAI (Unique Identification Authority of India) rejects them.

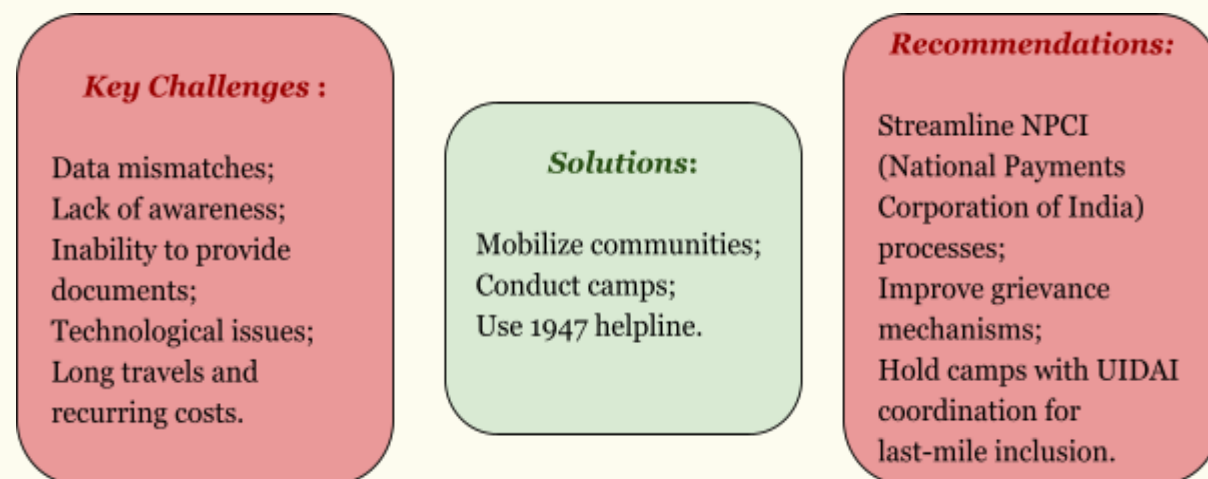
**Case study - Dilip, 8 years old, Cheepurupalli, Kothuru:** Dilip is the only child in his village not attending school. Without a birth certificate, he cannot obtain Aadhaar. Without Aadhaar, he cannot get an APAAR ID. His headmaster allows him to sit and learn informally but he has no access to uniforms or mid-day meals. The exclusion is invisible to the system.

Under "One India One Student," they presented a case from Janniguda village, Kothru mandal, where late date-of-birth (DoB) registration prevented Aadhaar for 40 children, blocking APAAR IDs. In MGNREGA (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act), job cards were deleted with reasons such as "unwilling to work". After multiple rejections for one individual (others reinstated), the root cause was found to be incorrect Aadhaar gender.

*"A small error during enrollment leads to 3-4 years of financial exclusion."*

*~ Yalacha Harisha*

Another case from Kothaguda under Thalliki Vandhanam Scheme involved suspended Aadhaar for a mother and child who were unaware of the process and an issue arose in 2021 onward due to Proof of Identity (POI)/Proof of Address (POA) mismatches and missed mandatory biometric updates at age 5. Her Aadhaar was reactivated with Velugu Association's assistance in 2025.



**Kishore BDS** (LibTech) discussed post-enrollment hurdles, including persistent data mismatches, unawareness among Aadhaar operators of an individual's prior enrollment status, and the absence of mechanisms to verify enrollment before proceeding. He highlighted issues such as phone number mismatches, website discrepancies (e.g., mAadhaar app vs. portal data), and print errors such as age inconsistencies, which trap users in prolonged correction cycles.

## Summary by Rajendran Narayanan

**Rajendran** summarized the session by referencing the Japanese film *Rashomon* (1950), which shows a murder from conflicting perspectives. He drew parallels to Aadhaar's dual realities of efficiency gains versus systemic problems, calling them "Aadhaar ke PAAP ke das avatar".

He traced Aadhaar's roots as a digital identity system focused on national security during India's 1990s-2000s economic liberalization. This shifted accountability from government to individuals in rights-based welfare, as seen in Special Intensive Revision (SIR) processes and broader welfare delivery.

Rajendran noted evasive official responses like vague reasons for two-thirds of MGNREGA job cards being deleted as "unwilling to work." He asked, "Kaunsa sach sach hai, kaunsa sach nahi hai?" He closed by emphasizing thinking from a "Know Your Rights" framework and transitioning to six thematic working groups for discussing solutions.

## Working Groups



Following Rajendran's summary, participants broke into six thematic working groups for one and half hours to discuss Aadhaar-related problems and potential solutions. The groups were organised by the following themes:

- Supporting Documents
- Aadhaar Enrolment and Infrastructure
- Aadhaar Seeding and Authentication
- Aadhaar Update
- Lost/Deactivated/Cancelled Aadhaar
- Information Ecosystem and Grievance Redressal

Each group then presented their findings and proposed solutions. The session was moderated and summed up by **Gurjeet Ji**.

### GROUP 1 : SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS

| PROBLEMS   | SOLUTIONS   |
|--|---|
| <b>Birth certificates:</b> Issues in generating a birth certificate for babies born without institutional delivery, wrong details being replicated in Aadhaar, no transparency on procedure to be followed if birth certificate is made after the 21-day limit, new digital birth certificate rules. | <b>Birth certificates:</b> Awareness campaigns on the 21-day timeline for speedy birth certificates and the process beyond this timeline; local birth tracking from different databases such as vaccination in anganwadis; standardized SOPs for late applications that can be made available to the people; periodical government outreach to ensure no child is excluded; ICDS/ASHA workers must be facilitated to help children make birth |
| <b>Voter ID:</b> Printing/spelling errors, outdated/wrong photos, and age mismatches;  |   |

|   |   |
|---|---|
| deletions during Special Intensive Revision (SIR) blocks Aadhaar enrolment or update processes that require Voter ID as Proof of Identity (PoI); inaccessible SDO-level helpdesks.  | certificates and Aadhaar; application tracking portal for Aadhaar.  |
| <b>Domicile certificates:</b> Lengthy processes are involved in issuing domicile certificates which are frequently rejected in Aadhaar applications; operators are unaware that the JANMAN certificate issued to Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups is a valid PoI. Operators are unaware that this category field exists in their system. | <b>Domicile:</b> Fast-track issuance; inter-departmental convergence; greater acceptance as valid Aadhaar document. |
| <b>Passport:</b> While this is a valid PoI, PoA and Proof of DoB, very few people have this document, cascading linkages between Passport and Voter ID and Aadhaar required.  |   |

#### AUDIENCE QUESTIONS/INPUTS

- ❖ Extending the 21-day birth certificate deadline will benefit many families who do not have enough resources or access to the lengthy process of making a birth certificate officially prescribed beyond the 21-day mark.
- ❖ Solutions for children/poor parents lacking Aadhaar or funds to access Aadhaar centres are essential if Aadhaar is linked to welfare.
- ❖ Post-marriage Aadhaar needs for women.

### GROUP 2 : AADHAAR ENROLLMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE

| PROBLEMS   | SOLUTIONS  |
|--|--|
| <b>0-18 age group:</b> Lack of Birth Certificate in cases of non-institutional delivery; parents lacking Aadhaar (lack of clarity); single parents; children in orphanages; orphans living with relatives; people without documents; disabilities not processed locally. | <b>0-18 age group:</b> Form and letter to Sachiv further forwarded to the block office for non-institutional births are acceptable; one parent's Aadhaar suffices for single parents; warden's letter for children in orphanages; relative's name on birth certificate or issuing affidavit/guardianship certificate for orphans; digital domicile certificate for no documents; biometric exception for disabilities. |
| <b>18+ enrollment:</b> No local centers, poor information; unrecognized fingerprints/iris; distant centers, limited daily slots, server delays, very few Aadhaar Seva Kendras (ASKs).  |  |

**18+ enrolment:** Bhuvan app to locate centers; organize remote camps; post office collaboration; state community outreach.

#### AUDIENCE QUESTIONS/INPUTS

- ❖ In Madhya Pradesh, collectors intervene with medical age assessment.
- ❖ Clarify discretionary powers and step-by-step processes.
- ❖ West Bengal: Orphanage Aadhaar with single name causes Voter ID linkage issues.
- ❖ Long-term residents (20+ years) from other states face barriers.

### GROUP 3 : AADHAAR SEEDING AND AUTHENTICATION

| PROBLEMS  | SOLUTIONS  |
|---|--|
| Mobile number not linked to Aadhaar, out of network/recharge, OTP not received (especially migrants with single family phones). | Improve information access and awareness of center-specific processes.                   |
| Biometric failures (fingerprint/face recognition not recognized).   | Village/panchayat-level camps for applications and education.                            |
| No information on which bank account the Aadhaar number is seeded.  | SMS confirmation of successful seeding with correct details.                             |
| Data mismatches (name, address, date of birth).   | Bypass mechanisms (e.g., physical verification/satyapan) with government accountability. |
| Server downtime delaying corrections.   | Block-level tools to identify linked mobile numbers.                                     |
| Unsuccessful Aadhaar seeding disrupts Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT).  | Enhanced operator training.  |
| eKYC (Electronic Know Your Customer) failures deprive ration access.  | Scheme-specific drives (especially ration).  |
| NSAP (National Social Assistance Programme) pensions blocked by IRIS failure.   |  |

#### AUDIENCE QUESTIONS/INPUTS

- ❖ Barwadih: Biometric data mismatches.
- ❖ Need common eKYC across schemes/services.

## GROUP 4 : AADHAAR UPDATE

| PROBLEMS   | SOLUTIONS  |
|--|--|
| People unaware of update needs until rights/entitlements are denied, creating urgency. | Spread awareness via wall paintings to curb local corruption.                    |
| Regional process variations due to operator/official discretion, even within states.   | Standardize rules across regions.  |
| Frequently changing rules (e.g., cannot update two details simultaneously).            | Train operators on rule changes; disseminate info through videos, WhatsApp.      |
| Lack of document information/availability; inactive linked phone numbers block OTP.    | Accept alternative proofs (Anganwadi, vaccination records)                       |
| Unclear update status/transparency; vague rejection reasons prevent fixes              | Standardize mAadhaar rejection codes with resolution steps and escalation paths. |
| Operator bribes exploiting information gaps; multiple costly center visits.            | Decentralize update centers; authorize Gram Sabhas for recognition.              |
| Data mismatches cause update failures; husbands withholding OTP from separated wives.  | Create block-level committees for community solutions and official coordination. |
| <b>AUDIENCE QUESTIONS/INPUTS</b>   |  |
| ❖ Date-of-birth updates rejected at regional offices after exceeding limits.           |  |

## GROUP 5 : LOST/ CANCELLED/ DEACTIVATED AADHAAR

| PROBLEMS   | SOLUTIONS   |
|--|---|
| <b>Lost Aadhaar:</b> Migration, theft/misplacement; tribal women's Aadhaar held by husbands; early unawareness of Aadhaar's importance; unlinked mobile numbers. | <b>Lost Aadhaar:</b> Family profile retrieval (e.g., father's Aadhaar to recover son's); provide old Aadhaar number during new applications; multi-department verification. |
| <b>Cancelled Aadhaar:</b> Incorrect demographic details entered; missed biometric updates.   | <b>Cancelled/Deactivated:</b> SMS alerts to Aadhaar holders upon cancellation; use 1947 toll-free helpline; raise awareness at  |

|   |   |
|---|---|
|   | individual/community levels, especially during elections. |
| <b>Deactivated Aadhaar:</b> Worse than cancellation (prevents re-enrollment); lack of awareness during elections/community dissemination. |   |
| Lack of document information/availability; inactive linked phone numbers block OTP.   |   |

#### AUDIENCE QUESTIONS/INPUTS

- ❖ Compile reasons and solutions for lost/deactivated/cancelled cases.
- ❖ Display deactivation reasons on mAadhaar.
- ❖ Standardize terminology (deactivated vs. suspended).
- ❖ Family profiling risks placing undue burden on Aadhaar holders.

### GROUP 6 : GRIEVANCE REDRESSAL

| PROBLEMS  | SOLUTIONS  |
|---|--|
| Information gaps for citizens, officials, operators (changing documents/rules; operators outdated post-6-month exams; UIDAI experiments without ground feedback). | Village/tola camps with operators in panchayat sabha.<br>Awareness via wall paintings/discussion in panchayat/ mahila samuh. |
| Mobile access barriers for Aadhaar linking/biometric updates (unclear timing, e.g., children under/over 5).   |  |
| Demographic updates: Long queues, high costs/time, repeated visits.   | Mobile camps by Education/WCD (successful offline in Andhra Pradesh).  |
| No guidance on update/grievance locations/rules, causing rejections.  | 1947 helpline  |
| Operator bribes; unclear rejections; unknown update limits (name/gender).   | Register operators as supervisors for advanced functions.  |
| Government departments denied Aadhaar data (workarounds needed); corporates have easier access.   | UIDAI Twitter for NGO materials/updates.   |
| DoB changes: Once at operator level, needs  |  |

|   |  |
|---|--|
| birth certificate (21-day law limit + fines); Mukhiya statement digitally verified. |  |
| Name changes: Post-marriage certificate required.                                   |  |
| Lost Aadhaar: Relies on linked mobile/EID/operator biometrics.                      | EID for rejections or lost Aadhaar.                |
| DBT/pension "proof of life" failures.   | Pension-specific camps; post offices (if enabled). |

### AUDIENCE QUESTIONS/INPUTS

- ❖ Date-of-birth updates rejected at regional offices after exceeding limits.

## Day 2 - Panel Discussions, Special Address, and Action Points

### Panel One



The second day opened with a panel discussion featuring practitioners and advocates from organizations working nationwide :

|                                    |  |
|------------------------------------|--|
| SABIR AHMED<br>SABAR Institute     | PARAMITA PRANJAL<br>Gramvaani                                    |
| SWATI JADHAV<br>Work Fair and Free | VENKAT KRISHNA<br>Tribal Welfare Dept. - Govt. of Andhra Pradesh |
| MAYANK PRATAP<br>Indus Action      | SANJANA SAXENA<br>Indus Action                                   |

**Sabir Ahamed** structured his talk around three questions: (i) What are Aadhaar's core issues? (ii) What ground solutions have been tried? (iii) Which solutions can be scaled interstate? He recapped session anecdotes, noting West Bengal's paradox: government de-emphasizes Aadhaar, but bureaucrats favor it for PDS (Public Distribution System) linkage and creeping education mandates, driven by corruption in uniform/stationery records. He argued children should not suffer for adult malfeasance: RTE (Right to Education Act, 2009) guarantees universal access to education, yet biometric compliance is increasingly required for admissions, scholarships, attendance (tied to mid-day meals), and UDISE (Unified District Information System for Education) data entry and despite Aadhaar not being officially mandatory, teachers enforce it. Core Structural Issues (from a child rights perspective):

- No genuine consent: Children coerced into biometrics, embedding them in surveillance regime.
- Biometric burden: Authentication failures exclude children from rights, not leakage sources.
- Parent/guardian linkage: Creates self-selection bias where only families with Aadhaar and timely information can enroll children, violating non-discrimination (e.g., Bal Aadhaar mandatorily linked to parent's Aadhaar).

Examples include NET/JEE examinees without Aadhaar waiting extra 15 minutes outside halls, compounding invisible barriers. He emphasised that children aren't consumers, beneficiaries, or suspects; RTE must remain universal without screening. The way forward is to eliminate selection bias and biometric prerequisites for barrier-free education access.

**Sanjana Saxena** discussed protecting social security schemes to break intergenerational poverty, outlining Indus Action's post-COVID-19 partnership with Chhattisgarh Labour Department. Interventions focus on technology, capacity building, process redesign, and policy changes to center laborers' voices.

Featured Schemes:

- Minimata Mahtari Jatan Yojana (MMJY), Chhattisgarh : For registered Building and Construction Workers (DOC/BCoW under 1996 Act); self-funded with high autonomy (₹20,000 aid); requires only Aadhaar via ABPS (Aadhaar-Based Payment System).
- Asanghatit Karmakar Prastuti Sahayata Yojana (AKPSY): For unorganized workers (VoW, unavailable in many states); state-funded; needs bank account/IFSC after lengthy verification (no ABPS).

Case Example: Punjab floods (past 2 years), VoW registered in BCoW needed home rebuilding funds; and sympathetic District Collector (DC) added laborers to official lists.

MMJY Aadhaar Integration Process:

- eKYC labour card (biometric/retina/mobile OTP) at BoCW center.
- Scheme application with birth certificate authenticity verified by Dept of Statistics.
- Entitlement release.

eKYC Role & Gaps: Eliminates duplicates, improves accuracy; gaps in Raipur, Bilaspur, Durg (remote areas like Sukma use approximate match).

Complexities: Labourers' worn fingerprints fail from rough materials/chemicals; alternatives like OTP/IRIS/FRS also fail.

Challenges: Document gaps (no ID, marksheet, NOC); Aadhaar stalls causing digital exclusion; awareness deficits.

**Paramita Panjal** detailed ground realities of welfare service delivery, showcasing Graamvani's IVR (Interactive Voice Response) system to bridge literacy gaps, delivering Aadhaar information in local languages at users' convenience across Jharkhand, Bihar, UP, MP, Delhi, and parts of Rajasthan.

She highlighted pervasive unawareness of Aadhaar updates/additions, compounded by misconceptions (updates presumed free, though ₹75 for demographic/₹125 for biometric changes apply). This leads to lost day wages from futile visits, operator fraud (issuing extra slips for profit), and unawareness of policy change compounded by government silence fueling public restlessness. Rumors proliferate amid government silence and media amplifies fears (e.g., "Aadhaar number used to empty bank accounts") while virtual Aadhaar numbers remain unknown and rejected by private service providers despite legal validity. PIB posts prove insufficient amid information silos; CSOs need rapid channels for communicating ever- evolving information.

*"Information is the start of the entire process."*

*~ Paramita Panjal*

**Swati Jadhav** documented the "double burden" faced by migrant workers as both citizens and labourers, particularly in the cases of KYC mismatches, OTP issues, only YYYY format birth certificates, name changes with suffixes, lost Aadhaar, and adult enrollment barriers.

Specific Regional Challenges:

- Rajasthan requires SDM verification, Patwari physical checks, and stamped letters for name related changes.
- Local centers commit frequent operator mistakes and lack information.

Linkage Failures across Schemes:

- Ayushman Bharat/ABHA: Denied due to Aadhaar-ration KYC/OTP mismatches, blocking health access.
- e-Shram: Authentication fails without explanation (server issues, detail mismatches, OTP problems).
- PM Awas: Requires all family Aadhaars updated for housing eligibility.
- e-Nirman: Excludes education support for construction workers' children.
- NFSA rations: Single mothers/widows with 200+ approved applications a year ago still await Block Office lists.
- ONORC: Migrants forced back to native places despite promised portability.

**Case study - SUCCESS STORY : Silicosis death benefits effectively linked for direct payouts**

**Case study : 70-year-old worker's Aadhaar lists age 53, reducing compensation from ₹4-5 lakh to ₹1.2 lakh.**

Strategies: Post office collaborations, awareness camps, community-led systems, welfare portability, automatic BCoW linkage.

**Venkat Krishna** illustrated Aadhaar's inclusion gaps using the Forest Rights Act (FRA) in Andhra Pradesh: out of 2 lakh claims filed, only 1 lakh 92 received recognition, creating a false narrative of high coverage (80% processed). He highlighted untapped benefits like MGNREGA's extra 50 days of work, PM-KISAN's ₹6,000 annual support, and Annadata Sukhibhava's ₹14,000 yearly aid blocked by Aadhaar barriers.

Addressing rapid outreach, he outlined three options: (1) Direct people to Aadhaar centers; (2) Field registration and case facilitation; (3) Collate data from existing government portals. Post-discussion consensus favoured a combination of (2) and (3). Andhra Pradesh Tribal Welfare Department scaled backend uploads from 22,000 to 78,000 people accessing extra MGNREGA days. He also cautioned that localized solutions fail due to Aadhaar operators' unawareness.

## Question and Answers

**Vineet** from MKSS (Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan) asked where enrollment/update information goes, who verifies/rejects it, and the process flow. **Venkat Krishna** clarified: For enrollment (under 18), digitally verifiable birth certificates (BC) trigger automatic approval; offline documents require Block Development Officer (BDO) approval after ground verification. Aadhaar updates demand exact matches (including spaces), though case sensitivity (uppercase/lowercase) is not enforced.

**Sanjana** shared two instances of UIDAI coordination with departments. First, addressing Punjab's drug outflow/misuse from primary treatment centers, KYC mechanisms were introduced however per UIDAI's 100-150 technical rules, many are too technical for departments to implement. Second, during a Chhattisgarh Aadhaar camp, Hyderabad UIDAI office cooperated effectively, sending representatives to facilitate operations. She also reported 15-20 worker applications rejected by the BoCW department due to OTP and biometric failures. Officials cited "not in our mandate," highlighting the urgent need for worker sensitization and departmental training to address Aadhaar-related exclusions. **Venkat Krishna** detailed practical workarounds for common Aadhaar technical issues, particularly for children via ICDS (Integrated Child Development Services) and schools. Sabir noted that teachers often show sympathy (except for scholarships, uniforms, exams where they're more insistent). He informed that Bangla Sahayta Kendra's doorstep service for minor Aadhaar related changes was denied. He noted West Bengal CSOs avoid Aadhaar help due to fake Aadhaar factories.

As per **Krishna**, in Andhra Pradesh, NPCI payment database gaps prevent reaching 30,000 people directly, so they send ₹1 test transactions and if bounced, bankers reveal names/numbers for follow-up.

"Instead of taking people to Aadhaar centres, we take Aadhaar centres to people."

**Rajendran's** Query: Asked about different biometric organizations contracted with UIDAI and their payments. No resolution to this.

## James Herenj Address

**James Herenj** (NREGA Watch) observed, "Aadhaar has left our people in tears; policymakers only think of how to make it more complex to entangle the individual."

He called for micro-studies to collect data, analyze departmental guidelines for contradictions, and identify anchors for the day's issues. Like the RTF network, he proposed forming a forum of organizations and collectives for press conferences or public interest litigation.

Next steps include creating a booklet documenting practical solutions from field work, followed by six months of data collection to approach the government with tiered solution lists.

## Special Panel - The Way Forward



A dedicated action-planning panel, comprising representatives (left to right) **Saraswati Karra** from the Society for Rural Action, **Laavanya Tamang** from Rethink Aadhaar, **Vineet** from Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan, and **Sunny Bhagat** from the Azim Premji Foundation presented a structured framework of forward-looking commitments and responsibilities for all participants.

**Sunny Bhagat** highlighted the lack of in-depth work on Aadhaar, crowd demands at seva kendras (local centers), immediate system failures, and weak grievance redressal tied to local institutions. He questioned the complexity, "When the operator is the regulator, how can the

maker assume the position of checker?" and advocated addressing issues locally with the government via regional languages and tracking mechanisms. He linked this to the DPDP Act, noting erasure rights under Section 17, potential government data uses, emergency powers to access and sell data, contrasting it with Europe's GDPR where citizens have strong erasure rights. He noted the arising tension of misalignment between sarkaar (state) and samaaj (society). To bridge gaps, he proposed regular, systematic meetings using existing structures: Gramin level DC offices, block-level baithaks for accountability, small camps instead of overcrowded centers, state IT departments and Aadhaar centers for digital info, CSO interactions, social audits, and TAC institutions to voice community exclusion.

**Vineet** emphasized fighting for rights and policy changes via protests and media, stressing post-application transparency issues where users can't track status on the Aadhaar portal. He recommended building personal knowledge by logging into portals to check available data, followed by CSOs engaging the government, conducting trainings for post offices, banks, and DUIT operators, documenting every case meticulously, and escalating collectively.

He also suggested formally registering grievances using the UIDAI portal plus the 1947 helpline (record calls as evidence) . For cases like disabled individuals denied biometrics, download court orders and present them to operators. We must also explore empowering post office staff at the local level, to deal with Aadhaar cases on a weekly/bi-weekly basis.

**Laavanya** introduced Rethink Aadhaar as a dedicated campaign critically examining Aadhaar's design flaws, privacy risks, and exclusionary impacts, with active involvement in Supreme Court litigation and advocacy. They publish detailed updates every 2-3 months via their newsletter and website (rethinkaadhaar.in), tracking policy shifts and developments. With technology here to stay, she advocated building strong understanding through an online knowledge session reviewing status, guidelines, and data. Ongoing dialogue with Ranchi UIDAI should include documenting cases, complexities, periodic sharing, a published manual, and checklists for portal rejection codes. Next, foster panchayat and community dialogues for sustained information flow, alongside civil society advocacy, state-level operator trainings, and monthly meetings. Work with the government on resolutions like document-free gram sabha verification. For Kendra Sarkar scheme access, pursue scheme-wise solutions and bypass mechanisms under consistent pressure, for instance, post-COVID, Dumka women stranded in Bangalore secured compensation. Prepare evidence collection formats with Rethink Aadhaar volunteers so issues can be escalated legally through a PIL.

**Saraswati Devi** described how ground-level Aadhaar problems create constant hopelessness among people. She recommended spreading information through morning walks, wall paintings, street plays (nukkar naatak), gram sabha meetings, and camps, while checking panchayat lists for individuals lacking documents and leveraging panchayat, mukhya, and BLOs for access. Previously, no block Aadhaar center existed until a letter prompted its opening. She also advocated for daily panchayat-level centers. She suggested using gram sabha letters escalating from panchayat to block, with fixed timelines, receipts, and introducing a weekly "Aadhaar Diwas" modeled on Rozgaar Diwas, driven by community campaigns.

Audience members shared suggestions, starting with an analogy likening Aadhaar to chaat masala, a spice the government sprinkles into every "dish" (scheme or service), prompting the question of which combinations truly work and which are forced. They debated the necessity of linking one digital ID to another, and grappled with where to strategically resist overreach versus where such integration holds practical value. Even in jails, people granted bail remain trapped without Aadhaar or documents, underscoring life-altering exclusions. One question that emerged was: How to ensure justice delivery in instances where exclusion is not viewed as such? They called for pressuring District Collectors (DCs) to recognize these as real barriers.

### **Closing Remarks by Jean Dreze**

**Jean** summed up the discussion with the poignant question: *Aadhaar ke Chakravayu se Kaise Nikle?* (How do we escape Aadhaar's vicious cycle?) He stressed tightening the grip on UIDAI through sustained pressure with public hearings, media coverage, engaging journalists, and, when necessary, court action.

### **Valedictory Address by Dr. Jisu Ketan Pattanaik**

**Dr. Jisu Ketan Pattanaik** delivered heartfelt thanks for the two-day workshop. As a sociologist, he recalled first meeting Jean Drèze at TISS and hosting him at NUSRL, Ranchi in 2014, and positioned NUSRL, Ranchi as a think tank for the state government.

He highlighted the Multidimensional Poverty Index report, which ranked Jharkhand second (after Bihar), with a 27% tribal population, underscoring the critical need to ensure access to welfare. He extended sincere thanks and best wishes to all.

### **Vote of Thanks**

**Vivek** (Libtech) extended a vote of thanks to NUSRL, the Vice Chancellor, Registrar, Professor Abhinav, and all participants.

**Professor Abhinav** also offered thanks, stating:

“ यह पहला पड़ाव है,  
आगे लड़ाई लंबी है,  
चाहे वह रोड पे हो या कोर्ट में । ”

(This is just the first step; the fight is long , whether in court or on the roads.)

