Issues with social benefit schemes

What is the issue?

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Recent instances proves mandatory digitisation is causing immense pain and suffering to the poorest and most marginalised of this country.

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What are issues with Aadhaar in Jharkhand?

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- Recently 11-year old girl in Jharkhand died tragically due to starvation.
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- The family of the girl, who allegedly died of starvation, had Aadhaar.
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- This incident raises the concern that Social welfare beneficiaries must have the option to choose a convenient payment mode.
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- The Jharkhand Minister for Public Distribution has rescinded the order requiring the cancellation of ration cards not seeded with Aadhaar.
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- This is another addition to a long list of mass exclusions that a callous state claims as “savings”.
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What is the issue with Rajasthan elderly pension scheme?

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- **Rajasthan-**Recently the State government announced that pension forms would be accepted only ‘online’ through ‘e-mitra Kendras or licensed private sector operators.

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- Previously, to apply for a pension, an eligible person could submit pension forms to the panchayat.
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- Now, the applicant must have with themAadhaar and Bhamashah cards (a State-level identification platform similar to Aadhaar system), upload all the documents, submit their biometrics, pay a small fee and wait for verification and sanction.
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- This process is supposed to cost Rs. 11 but “enterprising” e-mitras charge Rs. 100.
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- The meagre pension gives them some semblance of dignity and independence.
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- Though effective digital applications exist, the question is this: who does digitisation serve? And, are there other, better mechanisms freely available? The most sensible policy would be to provide a parallel digital option.
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What measures needs to be taken?

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- A demand that beneficiaries have the option to choose a payment mode that is convenient to them has been assiduously ignored.
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- There is, for instance, the plea to retain the option of choosing the panchayat route for pension applications.
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- A useful digital-based reform would have been to have an automatic pension sanction as soon as people become eligible for it.
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- The policies being pushed through, appear to be more out of a concern for administrative convenience than the right to life.
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- Issues related to Consultation, Transparency, Accountability must be answered as soon as possible.

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- In many instances pensions schemes were restarted and eased after the intervention of civil society organisations, such interventions needs to be encouraged.
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Way forward

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- For the elderly poor, end-to-end digitisation of social security pension processes is a disaster waiting to happen.
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- There are countless such people across India, who are now bewildered and suffering the consequences of new digital systems.
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- A disturbing lack of empathy, transparency and participation is allowing the weakest to be bullied into what is being portrayed as a way ahead.
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Source: The Hindu

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