1. Fifth Schedule, Tribal Rights & Land Acquisition: The Sundargarh Ruling

Syllabus Connection: GS-2 (Indian Constitution, Fifth Schedule, Statutory Bodies, Devolution of Powers to Local Levels).

Context & Judicial Ruling: In Bibol Toppo v. Odisha Government and others, a two-judge Bench of the Supreme Court set aside the acquisition of land in Sundargarh district (across Kukuda, Bihabandha, and Lanjiberna villages) for limestone mining by Dalmia Cements Bharat Limited. The Orissa High Court had previously ruled that prior consent was merely "directory" when the State acquires land on behalf of a private entity; the Supreme Court reversed this, ruling that prior consent is mandatory.

Statutory Mandate (LARR Act, 2013):

Under Section 41 of the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, 2013 (LARR Act), prior consent of the **Gram Sabha** is mandatory before acquiring land in Scheduled Areas.

Land acquisition for private companies requires the consent of at least **80% of affected families**, conducted alongside a Social Impact Assessment (SIA).

The Court emphasized that paying compensation for loss or surface damage is not equivalent to acquiring the land under the 2013 Act.

Constitutional Linkages:

Under **Article 244(1)** and the **Fifth Schedule**, the President declares Scheduled Areas, while the Governor possesses discretionary powers to modify or suspend parliamentary/state laws.

The Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 (**PESA**) extends local self-governance and mandates consultation or consent of the Gram Sabha for land acquisition and mineral concessions.

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2. Electoral Roll Governance: Special Intensive Revision (SIR) vs. Summary Revisions

Syllabus Connection: GS-2 (Elections, RPA 1950/1951, Role of the Election Commission of India).

Context: The Election Commission of India (ECI) introduced corrective measures following Supreme Court scrutiny of mass deletions during the Special Intensive Revision (SIR).

SIR vs. Special Summary Revision (SSR):

SIR: An intensive re-enumeration where every elector must return an enumeration form; in 13 States under SIR, the electorate contracted from 49.61 crore to 45.22 crore (a net loss of over 4.3 crore voters), with deletions reaching 32.8% in Delhi.

SSR: A lighter, routine roll-updating process that adds or corrects names without demanding citizenship proof or historical roll cross-matching.

Legal Mechanisms & Institutional Roles:

The **Electoral Registration Officer (ERO)** is appointed by the ECI in consultation with the State Government under the Representation of the People Act, 1950.

Under **Rule 21(1) of the Registration of Electors Rules, 1960**, electors can restore their old Electors Photo Identity Card (EPIC) numbers and continuous enrolment records.

EROs are mandated to personally cross-verify deletions whenever deletions exceed **2% of a polling station's electorate**.

Structural Criticisms: Relief remains incomplete because electors who relocated to other states or whose SIR concluded (e.g., Bihar and West Bengal) are relegated to Form 6 (fresh enrolment), losing their historical continuity and triggering citizenship documentation scrutiny.

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3. State Capacity & Bureaucratic Governance: "The Great Stagnation"

Syllabus Connection: GS-2 (Role of Civil Services in a Democracy, Public Policy, Governance Interventions).

The Core Paradox: While India's economy and statutory responsibilities expanded, state capacity—the administrative ability to staff, implement, and enforce public decisions—stagnated.

Structural Deficits:

Public Employment Contraction: Public employment peaked at 3.84% of the population in 1981 and has fallen to just above 2%, the lowest in Asia.

Judicial & Administrative Shortfalls: India possesses only **1.1 judges per lakh people**. Key administrative offices face severe vacancies (e.g., 27% in Gurugram's DC office, and upwards of 40% in various states).

Under-resourced Third Tier: In China and the US, roughly two-thirds of public personnel work in local government, whereas India's local government staffing is a fraction (one-fifth) of that proportion.

Governance Fallout:

Bureaucratic overload leads to selective regulatory enforcement and rent-seeking.

States routinely underspend allocated capital budgets because of an inability to design and administer complex schemes, precipitating an administrative bias toward unconditional **cash transfers** instead of public service delivery.

Sanctioned vacancies are systematically used as an informal mechanism for fiscal deficit control.

Institutional Initiatives:

Mission Karmayogi (2020): National Programme for Civil Services Capacity Building shifting training from "rule-based" to "role-based" delivery through the iGOT platform.

Capacity Building Commission (CBC): Superintends Annual Capacity Building Plans under the Prime Minister-chaired Public Human Resources Council.

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4. Administrative Ethics & Last-Mile Delivery: The Karmayogi Sankalpa

Syllabus Connection: GS-2 (Accountability and Last Mile Delivery) & GS-4 (Ethics and Public Service Values).

Core Concept: Launched by the Cabinet Secretary, the **Karmayogi Sankalpa** moves capacity building from counting "courses completed" on portals to evaluating "one tangible change in practice that a citizen can feel" within an officer's existing authority.

Operational Design:

- Over 1 lakh civil servants pledged a written, dated resolution on the **iGOT Karmayogi** platform.
- Follow-ups are structured across **three checkpoints over 90 days** by Karmayogi Bharat.
- Focuses on discretionary authority that requires no external budgetary approvals or higher administrative sanctions.

Case-Study Driven Leadership: Formulated during NITI Aayog's "National Workshop on Leadership as Mission", drawing lessons from the 2001 Kutch earthquake reconstruction, the Covid response, the Lakhpati Didi initiative, and space economy reforms.

Operational Challenges: Reliance on self-reported outcomes, follow-up bottlenecks at scale, short tenures/frequent administrative transfers, and inability to resolve inter-departmental bottlenecks.

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5. Labour Reforms, Retrenchment & Social Security Architecture

Syllabus Connection: GS-3 (Indian Economy, Employment, Labour Code Reforms).

Consolidation of Labour Laws: 29 central labour statutes were consolidated into four Codes: Code on Wages (2019), Industrial Relations Code (2020), Code on Social Security (2020), and OSHWC Code (2020). Labour falls under the **Concurrent List** (Seventh Schedule).

Key Provisions & Structural Shifts:

Layoff & Closure Thresholds: The Industrial Relations Code, 2020 raised the prior government permission threshold for layoffs, retrenchment, and closure from 100 to **300 or more workers**.

Dispute Adjudication: Abolished specialized Labour Courts, folding adjudication into **Industrial Tribunals**.

Narrow Protections: Mandatory statutory layoff procedures largely cover manufacturing, coal mining, and plantations, excluding vast sections of the service, tech, and unorganized sectors.

Gig & Informal Workers: Defined under the Code on Social Security, supported by data collection via the **e-Shram portal** and proposed aggregator-financed welfare funds.

Severance Pay Deficits & Taxation:

Severance is legally mandated only in select sectors, with employers commonly paying a lump sum without retraining or placement support.

The state taxes severance payouts as "profit in lieu of salary" and "income from other sources", eroding financial buffers.

Comparative International Models: Germany operates an earnings-linked unemployment insurance scheme; the United States finances relief through payroll taxes modulated by an "experience rating" (reflecting employer layoff histories).

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6. Power Sector Dynamics: Coal Reserves, Base-Load Deficits & Spot Markets

Syllabus Connection: GS-3 (Infrastructure: Energy, Grid Stability, Conventional vs. Non-Conventional Power).

The Base-Load Challenge:

Solar power generation drops off steeply at dusk, while summer demand spikes, placing the burden of the evening peak on coal-based thermal plants.

Earlier policy under the National Electricity Plan (2017–22) limited thermal expansions in expectation of rapid renewable additions, but storage solutions failed to bridge the gap.

The Central Electricity Authority (CEA) reassessed demand, forecasting a requirement of **105 to 150 GW of new coal capacity by 2035**.

Coal Stock Depletion & Market Strains:

Coal inventories at thermal plants shrank by **66%** between April and September in the current cycle (reaching 20.79 MT by mid-November against normative requirements of ~59 MT).

To bridge supply gaps, distribution companies (discoms) turned to short-term tenders on the **DEEP portal** and the **High Price Day-Ahead Market (HP-DAM)**, where discovered prices reached **₹19–20 per unit**, double the standard spot power exchange price cap of ₹10 per unit.

Grid Frequency Vulnerability: Operating frequencies have breached the mandated lower floor of **49.9 Hz**, exposing system imbalances during evening peaks.

7. Decentralised Renewable Energy vs. Mega-Solar Parks

Syllabus Connection: GS-3 (Energy, Inclusive Growth, Decentralised Infrastructure).

Megaproject Pitfalls: Centralised solar megaparks receive nearly ten times the fiscal and policy capital of decentralized solar. Bent Flyvbjerg's "Iron Law of Megaprojects" warns that large-scale infrastructure projects systematically suffer from cost overruns, delays, and benefit shortfalls.

Barriers for Small & Rural Prosumers:

- High borrowing costs from NBFCs due to commercial banks prioritizing large developers.
- Distribution of substandard solar equipment to rural buyers and MSMEs with negligible warranty enforcement.
- Financially distressed state-owned rural discoms prioritize wholesale power procurement and load balancing over net-metered distributed consumers.

National Policy Initiatives:

- **PM Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana (2024):** Administered by the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE), targeting 1 crore rooftop solar installations by March 2027 (though lacking battery storage subsidies).
- **PM-KUSUM (2019):** Promotes decentralized agricultural solar plants, solar pumps, and feeder-level solarisation; however, Component A lacks capital subsidies, placing upfront costs on farmers.

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UPSC-Style Prelims Practice MCQs

Q1. With reference to the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement (LARR) Act, 2013, consider the following statements:

Under Section 41 of the Act, prior consent of the Gram Sabha is mandatory for land acquisition in Scheduled Areas.

In cases of land acquisition for private companies, the consent of at least 80% of the affected families is required.

Payment of compensation for surface damage or loss automatically confers acquisition rights to a mining lessee without following the procedure under the 2013 Act.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?
(a) 1 and 2 only
(b) 2 and 3 only
(c) 1 and 3 only
(d) 1, 2 and 3

Q2. Under the Constitution of India and statutory provisions relating to Scheduled Areas, consider the following statements:

The declaration of an area as a Scheduled Area under the Fifth Schedule is made through an executive notification issued by the Governor of the concerned State.

Under the Fifth Schedule, the Governor has the authority to direct that an Act of Parliament does not apply to a Scheduled Area in the State.

The Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 (PESA) extends the provisions of Part IX of the Constitution to Scheduled Areas.

How many of the above statements are correct?
(a) Only one
(b) Only two
(c) All three
(d) None

Q3. With reference to electoral administration in India, consider the following statements:

1. The Electoral Registration Officer (ERO) is appointed by the Election Commission of India in consultation with the State Government under the Representation of the People Act, 1950.
2. Under the Registration of Electors Rules, 1960, an elector whose name was erroneously deleted during roll revisions cannot retain their original Electors Photo Identity Card (EPIC) number upon re-inclusion.
3. An ERO is mandated to personally cross-verify roll deletions whenever deletions exceed 2% of a polling station's electorate during the Special Summary Revision.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?
(a) 1 and 2 only
(b) 1 and 3 only
(c) 3 only
(d) 1, 2 and 3

Q4. Consider the following statements regarding the revision of electoral rolls in India:

The Special Intensive Revision (SIR) involves an intensive house-to-house check where every elector is required to submit an enumeration form.

The Special Summary Revision (SSR) requires all applicants to submit historical documentation establishing proof of citizenship.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?
(a) 1 only
(b) 2 only
(c) Both 1 and 2
(d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q5. In the context of state capacity and governance structures in India, consider the following statements:

India's total public employment as a percentage of the population currently stands at its highest point since independence.

In India, the share of government employees serving in local government tiers is significantly lower than that in China and the United States.

Unfilled vacancies in state administrative cadres have been documented as an informal mechanism utilized by governments to control fiscal deficits.

Which of the statements given above are correct?
(a) 1 and 2 only
(b) 2 and 3 only
(c) 1 and 3 only
(d) 1, 2 and 3

Q6. With reference to civil service capacity building initiatives in India, consider the following statements:

1. Mission Karmayogi seeks to transition civil service training from a "role-based" approach to a strict "rule-based" procedural orientation.
2. The Capacity Building Commission functions under the oversight of a Public Human Resources Council chaired by the Union Minister of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions.
3. The iGOT Karmayogi digital platform serves as the technological backbone for competency-based online training across government tiers.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?
(a) 1 and 2 only
(b) 3 only
(c) 2 and 3 only
(d) 1, 2 and 3

Q7. What is the primary objective of the "Karmayogi Sankalpa" initiative recently launched for civil servants?
(a) Mandating a minimum quota of 100 online training hours on the iGOT platform annually.
(b) Instituting performance-linked salary incentives for Group 'A' central civil servants.
(c) Encouraging each civil servant to commit to one tangible practice change within their own authority to improve citizen experience.
(d) Establishing direct recruitment of domain specialists through lateral entry across all district collectorates.

Q8. With reference to the Industrial Relations Code, 2020, consider the following statements:

1. It replaces the erstwhile system of Labour Courts with Industrial Tribunals.
2. The threshold of workers for an industrial establishment to obtain prior government permission before layoffs, retrenchment, or closure was raised from 100 to 300 workers.
3. Labour is categorized under the Union List of the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution of India.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?
(a) 1 only
(b) 1 and 2 only
(c) 2 and 3 only
(d) 1, 2 and 3

Q9. Consider the following statements regarding social security and retrenchment in India:

1. Under Indian tax laws, severance payments received by retrenched workers can be taxed under the heads "profit in lieu of salary" and "income from other sources".
2. The e-Shram portal serves as a comprehensive national database specifically dedicated to registering formal corporate sector employees.
3. The Code on Social Security, 2020 introduces a statutory definition for platform workers and gig workers.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?
(a) 1 and 2 only
(b) 1 and 3 only
(c) 3 only
(d) 1, 2 and 3

Q10. In international comparisons of unemployment insurance systems, what is meant by the concept of "experience rating" as practiced in the United States?
(a) Determining a worker's monthly payout solely based on their total cumulative years of employment.
(b) Setting an employer's payroll tax rate according to their past history of worker layoffs and claims.
(c) Linking state unemployment benefits to the employee's educational qualification and performance appraisal scores.
(d) Exempting start-up enterprises from unemployment tax contributions during their initial three years.

Q11. With reference to the Indian electricity market and grid operations, consider the following statements:

The High Price Day-Ahead Market (HP-DAM) on power exchanges permits tariff discovery above the standard spot price ceiling of ₹10 per unit.

The Discovery of Efficient Electricity Price (DEEP) portal facilitates short-term power procurement tenders by distribution companies.

As per grid standards, the Indian national electricity grid's mandated lower operational frequency limit is 49.9 Hz.

How many of the above statements are correct?
(a) Only one
(b) Only two
(c) All three
(d) None

Q12. Regarding base-load power planning and thermal generation in India, consider the following statements:

The National Electricity Plan (2017–22) called for massive public sector additions to greenfield coal-fired thermal capacity.

The Central Electricity Authority (CEA) projected a need for 105 to 150 GW of additional coal capacity by 2035 to manage peak demand and intermittent renewable integration.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?
(a) 1 only
(b) 2 only
(c) Both 1 and 2
(d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q13. Consider the following pairs:

Thinker / Concept	Associated Core Idea / Theory
1. Bent Flyvbjerg	"Iron Law of Megaprojects" (Over budget, over time, under benefits)
2. E. F. Schumacher	Concept of "Appropriate Technology" (People-centred and decentralized)
3. Reservation Wage	Maximum wage that an employer is legally permitted to pay a contract worker

How many of the pairs given above are correctly matched?
(a) Only one pair
(b) Only two pairs
(c) All three pairs
(d) None of the pairs

Q14. With reference to government schemes for solar energy in India, consider the following statements:

The PM Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana aims to install rooftop solar systems in one crore households by March 2027.

Component A of the PM-KUSUM scheme provides a 70% direct central capital subsidy for setting up decentralized ground-mounted solar plants on fallow land.

The PM Surya Ghar scheme currently includes a direct central capital subsidy for home battery energy storage systems.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?
(a) 1 only
(b) 1 and 2 only
(c) 2 and 3 only
(d) 1, 2 and 3

Q15. Consider the following:
Assertion (A): Several Indian states demonstrate a growing policy preference toward launching unconditional direct cash transfer schemes over expanding public administrative delivery machinery.
Reason (R): A depleted civil service cadre and severe administrative under-staffing limit the institutional capacity of states to execute and supervise complex public services.
In the context of the above, which one of the following is correct?
(a) Both (A) and (R) are true and (R) is the correct explanation of (A).
(b) Both (A) and (R) are true but (R) is not the correct explanation of (A).
(c) (A) is true but (R) is false.
(d) (A) is false but (R) is true.

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Answer Key & Explanations

Que	Ans	Primary Reference / Topic
Q1	**(a)**	LARR Act, 2013 & Gram Sabha Consent
Q2	**(b)**	Fifth Schedule & PESA, 1996
Q3	**(b)**	RPA 1950, ERO Duties & Registration Rules
Q4	**(a)**	SIR vs. SSR Modalities
Q5	**(b)**	State Capacity & Staffing Realities
Q6	**(b)**	Mission Karmayogi Institutional Architecture
Q7	**(c)**	Karmayogi Sankalpa Pledge Framework
Q8	**(b)**	Industrial Relations Code, 2020 Provisions
Q9	**(b)**	Social Security, e-Shram & Severance Taxes
Q10	**(b)**	Comparative Social Policy: US Experience Rating
Q11	**(c)**	Power Market & Grid Operational Parameters
Q12	**(b)**	Base-load Policy & CEA Projections
Q13	**(b)**	Economic & Administrative Concepts
Q14	**(a)**	Decentralized Solar Schemes (PM Surya Ghar & KUSUM)

Q15	(a)	Bureaucratic Capacity & Development Choices

Detailed Explanations

Q1 Explanation: (a)

Statement 1 is correct: Section 41 of the LARR Act, 2013 strictly requires prior consent of the Gram Sabha before acquiring land in Scheduled Areas.

Statement 2 is correct: Where acquisition is conducted for private companies, the consent of at least 80% of affected families is statutorily mandated along with an SIA.

Statement 3 is incorrect: The Supreme Court (Bibol Toppo v. Odisha) held that paying compensation for surface damage/loss under a mining lease is not equivalent to land acquisition, and miners cannot bypass mandatory LARR Act acquisition processes.

Q2 Explanation: (b)

Statement 1 is incorrect: Under Article 244(1) and the Fifth Schedule, Scheduled Areas are declared by an order of the **President of India**, not the Governor.

Statement 2 is correct: The Governor is empowered under Para 5(1) of the Fifth Schedule to direct that any Act of Parliament or State Legislature shall not apply or shall apply with modifications to a Scheduled Area.

Statement 3 is correct: PESA (1996) extends the provisions of Panchayats (Part IX) to Fifth Schedule Areas, safeguarding tribal self-rule.

Q3 Explanation: (b)

Statement 1 is correct: The ERO is appointed by the ECI in consultation with the State Government under the Representation of the People Act, 1950.

Statement 2 is incorrect: Under Rule 21(1) of the Registration of Electors Rules, 1960, restoring electors through the enumeration route allows them to retain their original EPIC number and past enrolment record.

Statement 3 is correct: The ECI mandated that EROs must personally cross-verify roll deletions whenever they exceed 2% of a polling station's total electorate.

Q4 Explanation: (a)

Statement 1 is correct: The Special Intensive Revision (SIR) is an intensive re-check where each elector is required to return an enumeration form.

Statement 2 is incorrect: The Special Summary Revision (SSR) is a lighter update that adds or corrects entries and does not demand proof of citizenship or matching with historical rolls.

Q5 Explanation: (b)

Statement 1 is incorrect: Total public employment peaked at 3.84% in 1981 and has plummeted to just above 2%, making it the lowest in Asia.

Statement 2 is correct: In China and the US, two-thirds of all government workers work in local government tiers—roughly five times the proportion observed in India.

Statement 3 is correct: Leaving sanctioned civil service posts vacant is widely used as a stealth fiscal mechanism to suppress recurring wage expenditure.

Q6 Explanation: (b)

Statement 1 is incorrect: Mission Karmayogi was designed to transition the civil service from a "rule-based" procedural orientation to a proactive "role-based" delivery orientation.

Statement 2 is incorrect: The Capacity Building Commission works under the Public Human Resources Council, which is chaired by the **Prime Minister** (not the Union Minister of Personnel).

Statement 3 is correct: The iGOT Karmayogi digital platform delivers online competency-based training across all tiers of administration.

Q7 Explanation: (c)

The Karmayogi Sankalpa involves officers taking a formal pledge to enact "one change in leadership practice, within their own authority, for the citizens they serve", emphasizing immediate executive action over passive training certificates.

Q8 Explanation: (b)

Statement 1 is correct: The Industrial Relations Code, 2020 folds multiple dispute adjudicating bodies, including Labour Courts, into two-member Industrial Tribunals.

Statement 2 is correct: The threshold requiring prior government approval for layoff, retrenchment, or closure was raised from 100 to 300 or more workers.

Statement 3 is incorrect: Labour is an entry in the **Concurrent List** (List III) of the Seventh Schedule, enabling both Centre and States to legislate.

Q9 Explanation: (b)

Statement 1 is correct: Severance pay is taxed by tax authorities under "profit in lieu of salary", with formerly exempt portions categorized as "income from other sources".

Statement 2 is incorrect: The e-Shram portal is specifically designed as a national database for unorganised and gig/platform workers, not formal corporate employees.

Statement 3 is correct: The Code on Social Security, 2020 statutorily recognized and defined platform and gig workers for the first time.

Q10 Explanation: (b)

In the United States unemployment insurance model, "experience rating" adjusts an employer's payroll tax liability upward or downward based on the volume of unemployment claims filed by their former employees.

Q11 Explanation: (c)

All three statements are correct: The HP-DAM segment allows prices up to ₹20/unit, bypassing the standard ₹10 spot cap. The Ministry of Power's DEEP portal hosts short-term power procurement tenders. Grid India maintains the mandatory operational grid frequency floor at 49.9 Hz.

Q12 Explanation: (b)

Statement 1 is incorrect: The National Electricity Plan (2017–22) explicitly avoided planning new coal thermal capacity beyond plants already under construction, prioritizing renewable targets.

Statement 2 is correct: Reassessing intermittent renewable generation and evening peak demand, the CEA called for adding 105 to 150 GW of coal capacity by 2035.

Q13 Explanation: (b)

Pair 1 is correctly matched: Bent Flyvbjerg formulated the "Iron Law of Megaprojects" ("over budget, over time, under benefits, over and over again").

Pair 2 is correctly matched: E.F. Schumacher pioneered "Appropriate Technology"—decentralized, labour-intensive, and resource-efficient.

Pair 3 is incorrectly matched: The "Reservation Wage" is an economic term denoting the **minimum wage** a worker is willing to accept to take up employment, not a legal maximum ceiling.

Q14 Explanation: (a)

Statement 1 is correct: PM Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana (launched in 2024 by MNRE) targets rooftop solar on 1 crore households by March 2027.

Statement 2 is incorrect: Component A of PM-KUSUM provides **no capital subsidy**, leaving farmers to finance the full cost of the solar plant.

Statement 3 is incorrect: PM Surya Ghar does not subsidize battery energy storage systems, requiring connected households to rely on the grid after sunset.

Q15 Explanation: (a)

Both statements are true, and (R) directly explains (A): Due to administrative understaffing and the loss of frontline administrative capacity, states lack the machinery to execute complex, monitoring-intensive schemes, driving a shift toward cash transfers that bypass administrative delivery bottlenecks