Volume : 2 | Issue : 2 | Feb 2013 • ISSN No 2277 - 8160

Research Paper | Economics

# Food Security Programme in India: Who Sows! Who Reaps ?

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**ABSTRACT**

*Food security is one of the current global challenges of economy. It feeds the 6.9 billion people in the world today. However, access and distribution of food in order that people do not have to die due to hunger continues to remain elusive even in the 21st century making food security one of the major global challenges. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), World Food Programme (WFP) and other organizations of the United Nations; World Food Convention (WFC); and other Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) are providing food in emergencies and helping save many people's lives. But their efforts to strengthen capacities of countries to reduce hunger have remained inadequate. Some country programmes, in particular China and Brazil, have been successful through the progress they have achieved in providing access to food for their people and reducing poverty. 'Targeted Public Distribution System' (TPDS) in India launched in 1997, seeks transparent and accountable distribution of food for the poor. If TPDS meets the challenges of efficient and accountable implementation, it can ensure people have regular physical and economic access to sufficient food to meet nutritional needs.*

**KEYWORDS: PDS, Role, Consumption, India**

## INTRODUCTION

The History of Public Distribution System (PDS) in India is traced as early as Second World War when the Govt. of India through Department of Food introduced the first structured public distribution of cereals through rationing system. This program was launched as a part compensatory was relief program and therefore it was abolished in 1943. Under a different banner and with diversified and widened objectives the program was re-launched in 1950 to cushion the inflationary pressures in the economy. The planned economic development impressed the need for the same the system has become a powerful tool in the hands of the government partly used as a social welfare program. Over a period of time the system as such became more sluggish in its approach and effectiveness on account of increased agricultural productivity and easy availability of food grains. Again in 1958 on account of drop in food grain production, there were major policy changes introduced by the government in procurement and control trading of cereals and food grains.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

It was only in 1965 the Public Distribution System was strengthened by forming Food Corporation of India and Agricultural Price Commission. The combined policies of minimum support price and maintaining the distribution with appropriate buffer stock has become important gizmo in the hands of government to attain the following objectives:

- To provide food grains and other essential items to vulnerable sections of the society at subsidized prices.
- To have moderate influence on the open market prices of cereals since the distribution of it constitutes and fairly bid share of total marketable surplus.
- To ensure equitable distribution of essential commodities across different income groups especially poor.

## METHODOLOGY

This research paper is the form of an explanatory study in analyzing the existing food security programme. The systematic review, summary, collection and/or synthesis of existing research, reports and publications are used in the present study. Data collected was carefully analysed and used to generate both qualitative and quantitative findings using the appropriate data analysis software.

## ENHANCEMENT OF PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM

The attainment of above objectives have helped considerable segment of the population directly and indirectly. But at the same time the existing malpractices in various stages of policy implementation and higher operational cost has reduced the effectiveness of PDS. In a Minister level evaluation program of PDS carried out in1991 pointed several merits and demerits in the current operation procedure. The main finding was that despite of drawbacks the program was suppose to continue because it was a part of welfare strategy of both central and state government.

In the light of this several changes were introduced in order to make the program more effective and universal and it was called as 'Revamped PDS'(RPDS). The catchments area of RPDS was the population residing in remote and hilly areas covering 1775 blocks. Area specific programs such as Drought Prone Area Program, Integrated Tribal Development Project, Desert Development Program and certain designed hilly areas were identified to improve the PDS infrastructure in consultation with central and respective state governments. Food grains were issued to states at 50 paise below the central issue price (CIP) with scale of issue up to rural areas, issue of new cards, inclusion of new commodities such as tea salt, pulses and soaps etc. hiring of intermediary godowns in-order to improve the supply chain were introduced cancellation of bogus cards and setting up of vigilance teams were carried out by State governments.

A net gain from this program even after introduction of new techniques was not up to the expectation on account of existence of leakages at several levels. It was practically not possible to revamp such enormous bureaucratic system and therefore it was decided to revert the nature of PDS from universal to target oriented. Thus in June 1997, 'Targeted Public Distribution System' (TPDS) was launched with New Zealand vigour to specifically benefit those living below poverty line with annual family income less the 15000/-. The objective was to supply food grains at affordable prices to these families. Under TPDS, the BPL families would get an assured and increased supply of 10 kg to 20 kg. of food grains per family per month at 50% of economical cost APL ( above poverty line) families were to receive were to the same to economical cost w.e.f. from 1/4/2000 State Govt.'s were requested to issue food grains with a difference of not more than 50 paise per kg. over and above CIP for BPL families with the exception of "Antyodaya Anna Yojana" (AAY) where the end retained at Rs.2 kg. for wheat and Rs. 3 kg. for rice, AAY scheme was launched in 2000 to supply food grains to poorest of the poor population who were not capable to buy the same at BPL prices. The scheme was expanded to cover additional 150 lakh population with widows a s head of the household, terminally ill persons, disabled persons, persons above 60 years of age with no assured means of subsistence, landless labours, marginal farmers, rural artisans, craftsman, workers engaged in unorganized sector like snake charmers, hand cart pullers, fruit and flowers sellers, rag pickers, cobblers etc. covering both rural and urban areas. As on 30.04.2009, under AAY scheme 242.75 lakhs families were covered by the States/UTs.

## FOOD SECURITY PROGRAMME AND THE ROLE OF STATES/UTs

The proportion of consumerables obtained from PDS to total consumption provides some idea about the role of PDS in catering to the needs of the population. PDS consumption constituted only 11 percent of the total per capita consumption in rural India (Table-1). This share was higher for southern states, viz., Maharastra, Himachal Pradesh, and Jammu and Kashmir, and lower for the eastern and northern states. The share for the poorest quintile was 17 percent, and 6 percent for the rich-

est quintile. Here too, the share for the poorest quintile was higher for southern and western states, including Rajasthan, as compared to the eastern and northern states (Table-1).

The share of PDS consumption for urban India (7.7 percent) was lower than that of rural India. This is true for most states. For example, in Karnataka, the PDS consumption share in rural areas was 47.5 percent while it was 17.4 percent in urban areas. Jammu and Kashmir was the only state in which the urban share was much higher than that of rural areas.

**Table-1**
**Per capita monthly PDS food grain purchases and their share in total Per capita**
**monthly food grain consumption in Rural area by quintiles in 2004-05**

| States/UTs | PDS purchases as % to total consumption | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | q1 | q2 | q3 | q4 | q5 | All |
| Jammu and Kashmir | 33.12 | 32.59 | 31.43 | 18.50 | 13.71 | 25.33 |
| Himachal Pradesh | 45.96 | 35.05 | 33.17 | 28.94 | 15.50 | 32.74 |
| Punjab | 0.27 | 0.29 | 0.05 | 0.40 | 0.01 | 0.21 |
| Harayana | 4.58 | 3.62 | 1.67 | 0.61 | 0.41 | 2.27 |
| Rajasthan | 19.76 | 14.08 | 9.25 | 4.76 | 5.10 | 10.28 |
| Uttar Pradesh | 6.18 | 3.48 | 2.53 | 2.35 | 1.46 | 3.27 |
| Bihar | 2.16 | 0.89 | 1.19 | 0.58 | 0.61 | 1.09 |
| Assam | 7.60 | 5.13 | 2.65 | 1.38 | 1.86 | 3.74 |
| West Bengal | 6.06 | 3.57 | 3.03 | 2.24 | 1.49 | 3.29 |
| Orissa | 15.98 | 8.66 | 5.56 | 3.62 | 1.80 | 6.79 |
| Madhya Pradesh | 22.57 | 12.76 | 12.65 | 8.80 | 4.95 | 12.45 |
| Gujarat | 25.46 | 18.08 | 14.81 | 10.88 | 3.15 | 14.32 |
| Maharastra | 39.46 | 29.83 | 23.30 | 19.92 | 13.87 | 23.90 |
| Andhra Pradesh | 32.77 | 26.05 | 23.09 | 19.92 | 13.87 | 22.99 |
| Karnataka | 68.47 | 58.98 | 44.09 | 41.43 | 26.95 | 47.53 |
| Kerala | 40.73 | 23.71 | 17.85 | 11.87 | 7.51 | 20.63 |
| Tamil Nadu | 50.24 | 44.26 | 42.23 | 38.01 | 26.72 | 40.36 |
| Other States/UTs | 32.22 | 14.10 | 10.52 | 8.51 | 5.59 | 10.85 |
| India | 17.04 | 12.37 | 10.52 | 8.51 | 5.59 | 10.85 |

Source: Estimated from NSS Round Unit Level Data

Note: Bihar, MP and UP refer to pre-recognized states; A household is said to access PDS if it reports making purchases from PDS

## SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The existing procedure for selection of BPL families is cumbersome. Migrant or poor families living in makeshift arrangement find it extremely difficult to produce residential proof. On the spot verification of such families can be carried out by providing them ration entitlement authority slips' a sort of temporary arrangement to help them lift the rations from PDS.

Strict enforcement of Supreme Court directives at state level in the case of BPL, Antyodaya and Annapoorna Scheme, that every eligible person should receive the benefit of these schemes. In spite of mounting food inflation and changing market trends, the economic criteria for the BPL categories have not changed accordingly. The increment in limit from 15000/- to 24200/- per annum is insufficient. A large number of homeless and poor living in unauthorized colonies in urban areas have been denied ration cards, and are not able to avail of PDS. Assistance to such cases can be provided by the authorizes with the help of civil societies by providing special time bound cards with similar allotments as Antyodaya Yojana. It has been noticed that a large number of the ration cards are used only as a legal document of the residential proof. The family identity cards should be issued top people which will lead to a decreased demand for ration cards. After getting a card, the period within which he should be getting the entitlement should be stated clearly and concisely. The lack of information about the quota which is entitled to card holder creates possibilities of leakage at different levels.

In some states, such as Bihar, Jharkand and UP, APL quota are not released on the ground that they did not lift it in the past when the market price was low. In fact these states are not in such financial strength like southern states where high subsidies by the state governments are supporting the PDS to APL cardholders. Another drawback attached with the APL card holders is that their quota is not a as fixed as BPL card holders. It gives an opportunity to dealer to refuse supplies to these APL Cardholders.

In this regard, a criterion within the BPL card holders should be developed with the adjusted features of APL. The allotted quota can be lesser form the entitlements from BPL but it will be assured. This system will abolish the APL cards and minimize the leakages from current APL cardholders' distribution. In the places where running of the PDS shops is not feasible due to small number of the BPL and Antayodaya beneficiaries, the government should incorporate mobile distribution vans. To ensure quality, sealed sample from government godowns should be displayed in ration shops. This system is already in place in paper and even finds a mention on every ration card, but is not practiced.

The uniform structure of distribution without any scope for 'consumer choice" is not practicable for the areas which are not same in natural features. In such conditions, the local inclusion of local produce incorporated with food grains in a flexible manner will be more feasible for the system as well as to the beneficiaries. The holdup associated with the different procedures and formalities regarding to quota allotments by the FCI/SFC is a big problem of current distribution system and whole supply chain from main dealers to the local supplies and the most 'targeted beneficiaries' are the main victims of it. This unnecessary delay can be reduced by the proper use of electronic innovations in money transfers and receiving orders for releasing of quotas. This will bring efficiency with transparency in the entire operation without any unusual delay.

Fair Price Shops are the core part of the distribution system which is closely linked with the beneficiaries. In selection of FPSs dealer the two essentialities must be fulfilled by the contender , first, the contract will be given to the shopkeeper who is already running a viable shop in the area with the concern of local bodies and second , the continuation of the license of FSPs will depend on not only its turnover but also on the consumers' feedback . Moreover, the members of the local bodies will be permitted to inspect the shop and authorize for sending the reports or consumer grievances to concern authorities. To make the system profitable these FPSs should be encouraged to sell non-cereal items too. This approach of multi-product shop will improve their viability.

## CONCLUSION

In June 4th 2009, the statement made by the President Pratibha Patil about the formulation of 'National Food Security Act' is an indication of far-reaching change in the India's food security programme. Initial package sounds optimist in the sense that 'each below poverty line (BPL family would be entitled by law to get 25 kg. of rice or wheat per month at Rs. 3/- per kg. But the formulation of act has generated different inquisitives about the selection of beneficiaries, allotments and distribution procedures. As number of BPL households would be fixed by the Central Government based on the recent poverty estimates of the Planning Commission (presently of 2004-05). Accordingly to these estimates the number of BPL households will come down from 6.52 crore to 5.91 crore to whom there isn't any provision for the assistance. Issued BPL cards will expire after five years and the most important that the multiplicity of food schemes will abandoned in the new law.

Despite of all inquisitives, the persistence of Food Security Programme is indispensable for sustaining the nutritional requirement of the ever growing population, providing insulation to the population living below poverty line against inflation and other economic fluctuations. But a complete restructuring of the food subsidy programme is vital in order to reduce the burden of subsidies ad futile public expenditure due to inefficiency and certain leakages. Only after this the present Food Security Programme or the future National Food Security Act may help people in a more effective and efficient manner.

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