

A Study on the Effectiveness of the Public Distribution System in India (With Special Reference to Chhattisgarh State)

Abstract

Food security means that all the people of a country are able to get adequate quantity of food at affordable price on timely and reliable basis. Food security has been one the major developmental priorities for rural India since the inception of the country's five year planning process. It was being realised by the Indian planners in the beginning itself that the need of increasing domestic production of food grains so as to make the country self –sufficient in food grains. Therefore, the government of India adopted the strategy of self –sufficiency in food grains in the early phase of Indian planning. High production of food grains does not automatically solve the problem food security.

Keywords: Public Distribution System, Food Security, Poverty, Famine, Price Stability, Management of PDS.

Introduction

India is predominantly is an agricultural country and major portion of the population depends upon agriculture for their livelihoods. The economic conditions of India before independence were completely different as compared to the present economic conditions. The problem of poverty is a curse to mankind and has ruined lives of poor for years. Since the 1950s the Indian Government has initiated many programmes for the reduction of poverty- Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP), Rural Landless and Employment Generation Programmes (RLEGP), Training Rural Youth for Self-Employment (TRYSEM), Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MNREGA), and Pradhan Mantari Gram Sadak Yojna (PMGSY) etc. Amongst the various poverty alleviation programmes Public Distribution System is one of them. Public Distribution System plays vital role in our country and throughout the world.

Food security also means that food is available to the needy persons at affordable prices. Public Distribution system is an essential part of food security. The Government of India has launched a scheme of PDS. The basic objective of the PDS in India is to provide cheap and subsidised food to the poor and thereby to protect consumers from the impact of rising of food products.

The Public Distribution System (PDS) evolved as a system of management of scarcity and for distribution of food grains at affordable prices. Over the years, PDS has become an important part of Government's policy for management of food economy in the country. PDS is supplement in nature and is not intended to make available the entire requirement of any of the commodities distributed under it to a household or a section of the society. PDS is operated under the joint responsibility of the Central and the State Governments. The central government takes the responsibility for procurement, storage, transportation and bulk allocation of food grains at subsidised prices. For this purpose, in 1965 Food Corporation of India was set up. The primary function of FCI is to undertake the purchase, storage, transportation, distribution and sale of food grains and other foodstuffs. The operational responsibility including allocation within State, identification of eligible families, issue of ration cards and supervision of the functioning of the Fair Price Shops (FPSs) rests with the State Governments. Under the PDS, presently commodities, namely wheat, rice and coarse grains are being allocated to the States/UTs for distribution. States/UTs also distribute additional items of mass consumption through the PDS outlets such as sugar, pulses, edible oil, iodized salt, spices, and etc.as per their requirement. There is at present a network of about 4.61 lakh PDS retail outlets in the country.

History of Public Distribution System

The Public Distribution System (PDS) in India is more than half a century old as rationing was first introduced in 1939 in Bombay by the



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British Government as a measure to ensure equitable distribution of food grains to the urban consumers in the face of rising prices. Thus, rationing in times of crisis like famine was the historical precursor to the national policy for stabilization and management of food grains. Various schemes have been introduced under PDS by Government of India, to ensure food security for all and a hunger free India.

The main objectives of PDS in India was –

1. Maintaining price stability
2. Raising welfare of the poor (by providing access to basic foods at reasonable prices to the vulnerable people).
3. Rationing during the situation of scarcity
4. Keeping a check on private trade

Food security is a major concern in a developing country like India. The rapid rise in the prices of food grains has endangered the food security of the whole world. According to the World Bank, the average 83% increase in the prices of food grains during last three years has put a question mark on the food security of the whole world. Food insecurity poses a threat to the overall development of a nation. Rapid increase in food prices is causing acute problems of hunger and malnutrition in poor countries.

In recent years, food insecurity has become a serious challenge. The stock of food grains available with the government agencies as on 1-7-2001 was 61.96 million tonnes, which constituted of 22.75 million tonnes of rice and 38.92 million tonnes of wheat. This level of stock was well above the buffer stock norms prescribed by the government. Thus, the problem today on the food front is not one of scarcity but that of managing the surplus. Definition of food security given by the Rome Declaration on World Food Security at the World Food Summit, held in 1996 "food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life." Food insecurity is not the same as hunger. It is a much wider problem. Hunger is, of course, one of the main aspects of food security.

India bears a disproportionate share of the world's hunger and under nutrition burden which is unfavourable even in comparison to sub-Saharan Africa. A majority of the people in India suffer from protein, calorie inadequacy, and micronutrient deficiency, which have debilitating consequences for health and wellbeing throughout life and inter-generationally. Only about 30% of children have both protein and calorie adequacy and almost half the children are underweight. International evidence points to the fact that in developing country contexts like India's, investments in reducing hunger and meeting basic food needs will have greatest immediate and long-term impact on nutritional status, health and other development outcomes. Related issues such as adequacy of food grain production, agrarian and land use policies should be suitably reviewed in light of these food security objectives. The country is heading towards a situation of food deficit because the overall food grain production has stagnated. This has resulted in higher prices and

unavailability of food grains affecting the most vulnerable groups.

It is fact that the working of the Public Distribution System differs from state to state and region to region. Studies point out that while states like Chhattisgarh, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh the PDS has been able to become an important vehicle in providing food and other essential to the vulnerable sections of the society, in states like Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh ,Bihar and West Bengal the working of the PDS needs to be improved. The major concerns against the current PDS is that it has homogenized Indian food system by supplying only two grains, rice and wheat, as grains to feed the country's population which has a very diverse food and culinary culture. Consequently, in dry land India, which had rich millet based food culture, people have been completely. Poverty is also a major hurdle in the path of food security. Prof. Amartya has rightly said that the causes of hunger in India currently are the wide prevalence of poverty and the inability of a large section of the population to buy food or to establish entitlement over an adequate amount of food, keeping this fact in mind government of India has launched many anti-poverty programmes especially meant to promote development and employment of the poor persons of the country deprived of their culturally unique, nutritionally extraordinary local food systems.

Chhattisgarh is a state in Central India, with Raipur as the state capital. It is the 10th largest state in India, with an area of 135,192 sq. km. With a population, Chhattisgarh is the 16th most-populated state of the nation. As per census 2011, Chhattisgarh has population of 2.55 crores of which India constitutes (121.06 crores) with 2.11 per cent. On the other hand state constitutes geographical area with 1.35 lakh sq.km. Of which India have (132.87 lakh sq.km.) 4.11 per cent.

Chhattisgarh state is the first state to have its own food security act. Chhattisgarh is a state which is also known as the rice bowl of the country because of its strong presence in agricultural production and is mostly tribal dominated state. Nearly half of the Chhattisgarh's population has been estimated to be below poverty line. According to the report of the panel headed by former PMEAC chairman C.Ranagarajan 47.9 per cent people are poor in the Chhattisgarh state and are one of the most backward states in the country.

Current study has been undertaken to answer the questions regarding number of issues which have been arising at present scenario related to PDS and food insecurity, such as

1. Failure to serve the BPL population
2. Lack of transparency and accountability
3. Diversion / leakages of food grains to the open market
4. Maoist menace in supply of food grains
5. Poor quality of food grains supplied
6. Delay in allocation and transportation of food grains
7. Limited reach of food grains and often FPSs remains closed.
8. Issues of improper identification of beneficiaries

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Public Distribution System

Through public Distribution System consumers are provided food grains through Fair Price Shops at reasonable prices. 6501 Fair Price Shops were operating at the time of creation of Chhattisgarh State. 4532 new Fair Price Shops were established after the formation of the state. 11033 fair price shops were operating in the state as on September 2013. Out of which 4177 are being operated through panchayats, 4315 through service cooperative societies, and 2372 through women self-help groups, 152 through forest security societies and 17 urban bodies.

Ration Cards Issued under Chhattisgarh Food Security Act, 2012

There is a provision of issuing ration cards to eligible persons under Chhattisgarh Food Security Act, 2012 to provide essential commodities to consumers through fair price shops at subsidized price. Gram Panchayats have the right to issue Antyodaya, Priority and General ration cards in rural areas and Municipal Corporation/ municipal council/ nagar panchayat have similar right in their area of jurisdiction. Officer authorized by the collector has the right to issue ration cards of Chief Minister Food Grain Assistance Scheme, Antyodaya Anna Yojana and Annapurna Yojana.

Transparency in Public Distribution System

Following actions have been taken for transparency and effective control in allotment of ration material of PDS, supply to fair price shops and distribution of ration material to beneficiaries by the State Government.

Online PDS System

Computerisation work of PDS was started in the year 2007 and till now whole process from the state level to supply centres of Chhattisgarh State Civil Supplies Corporation has been computerised. All district Food Offices have been connected to State Headquarter through internet for computerisation of Public Distribution System. For allotment of ration material, database of all 11033 fair price shops of the states was prepared and on the basis of ration cards registered with them from January 2008 shop wise ration materials is being issued by the Food Directorate through the medium of computer.

It has been directed by the order dated 14.09.11 of honourable Supreme Court to implement computerised PDS system of Chhattisgarh state in other states of the country as well.

Rice Festival

Rice Festival has been started by the state government from February 2008 for regular monitoring of distribution of ration material of PDS. Rice festival is organized on the first day of the Haat Bazaar scheduled after 6 days of each month in villages where fair price shops are operating and where weekly Haat Bazaar are also held and rice festival is held on 7 days of each month in the remaining villages where fair price shops are operating. Through organisation of this festival, ration material can be procured by ration card holder on the specified date.

Call Centre

Call Centre sufficient arrangement had been made by the Food Department through the use of information technology for the objective of enhancing

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transparency and public participation in distribution of ration material of PDS. Telephone no. of call centre is being operated by the Food Department from January 2008, is 1800-233-3663 and this is a toll free line, through which any citizen can obtain information of PDS and other schemes being run by the Food Department and can also register a complaint. Till now 8174 complaints have been registered, out of complaints received, 7851 complaints have been resolved.

Public Participation Website

Public participation website (www.cg.nic.in/citizen) is a new experiment of the state government. Any citizen can register himself on this website free of cost. After registration, citizens could get the facility to send complaints and suggestions relating to the Food Department through e-mail. After this registration, citizens could register through sms for information of ration shops. 34507 mobile nos. are registered at present for sms of food storage.

E-Kerosene Scheme- for making kerosene allotment and supply of process of fair price shops more transparent state government has started E-Kerosene scheme from August 2012.

Conclusion

There are both the brighter side as well as darker side of the picture related to the Public Distribution System. The brighter side of the picture should be encouraged while the darker side of the picture should be brightened. This will be possible only when there is change in the mentality of all the players of the public distribution system. Everything should be carried out with proper laws, rules and regulations.

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