

Hunger, Access, and Assurance: Public Distribution System and Food Security among BPL Households in Kerala

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Abstract

The Public Distribution System (PDS) is a government initiative aimed at providing essential food items to economically disadvantaged sections of society, particularly Below Poverty Line (BPL) families. It is a crucial component of India's food security framework, designed to ensure that every citizen has access to adequate and affordable food. PDS operates through a network of fair price shops, where subsidized food grains such as rice, wheat, and sugar are distributed to eligible households. Households with an aggregate annual income less than Rs. 24,200 have been categorized under this group. The public distribution system developed as a mechanism for managing scarcity through efficient distribution. The distribution of affordable food grains is a priority, ensuring that high-quality products are accessible to all. The article focus on the effectiveness of PDS in ensuring food security among BPL families in Kerala.

Keywords: Public Distribution System (PDS), food security, nutrition, Below Poverty Line (BPL), Ration shops.

Introduction

The public distribution system is an Indian food security system established under the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food, and Public Distribution. It evolved as a system to ensure food security for the population. The management of scarcity through the distribution of affordable foods is carried out by both the central and state governments. The Food Corporation of India (FCI), a government organization, has taken on the responsibility of procuring, storing, transporting, and distributing food grains to the state governments. This includes the allocation of food grains within the state and the identification of areas in need. Among eligible families, the responsibility of issuing ration cards and overseeing the functioning of fair price shops (fpss) falls under the jurisdiction of state governments. Additionally, the public distribution system, which is currently in place, is managed by the respective state governments. Commodities such as wheat, rice, sugar, and kerosene are being distributed to the states and union territories, along with additional items of mass consumption like pulses, edible oils, and spices, through public distribution system outlets.

Till 1992, public distribution system was general entitlement scheme for all consumers without any specific target. The revamped public distribution system (RPDS) was launched in June 1992, with a view to strengthen and streamline the public distribution system as well as to improve its reach in the far-flung, hilly, remote an inaccessible areas where a substantial section of the underprivileged classes

lives. In June 1997, the government of India launched the Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS) with a Focus on the poor. Under TPDS, beneficiaries were divided into two categories: Household below the poverty line (BPL), and household above the poverty line (APL). Antyodaya Anna Yojan(AAY):AAY was a step in the direction of making TPDS aim at reducing hunger among the poorest segments of the BPL population.

Objectives of the Study

- To evaluate PDS'S impact on food security and nutrition among BPL families in Kerala.
- To access coverage of PDS among BPL families in Thrissur corporation.

Methodology.

The study is based on primary and secondary data. Primary data is collected through a well structured survey schedule from 50 sample respondents. The sample respondents are selected through a convenient sampling method. The secondary data is collected from published and unpublished sources like newspapers , websites ,publications etc. The area selected for the study is Thrissur district has a well-established PDS network under the Civil Supplies Department, with its District Supply Office and multiple Taluk Supply Offices managing ration distribution through numerous fair price shops (FPS) across the district.

Public Distribution System in Kerala

The civil supplies department discharges the important responsibilities of public distribution enforcement of markets discipline and promotion of consumer awareness and protection of their interest. In the 1960s and 1970s it won many accolades for the pioneering achievements in the implementation of universal rationing system. The department of civil supplies functions under the department of food, civil supplies and consumer affairs of the government of Kerala. The commissioner of civil supplies is the principal advisor to the minister in charge of food and civil supplies. The director of civil supplies is the administrative head of the department of civil supplies. He exercises the statutory functions entrusted with him under the Kerala rationing order, public distribution system (control) order, 2001 and other control orders issued by the government of Kerala under the Essential Commodities Act.

The public distribution system came into existence in the state with effect from 1 July 1965. The state which has very high deficit in the production of food grains, the public distribution system has great relevance and importance. Keeping in view the importance and need of promotion of consumer awareness and protection of human rights, government have formed a separate wing in the food, civil supplies and consumer affairs department in the secretariat to attend the subject, consumer affairs. Similarly a consumer affair cell has been formed in the commissioner of civil supplies also. In June 1997, the government of India launched the Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS) with a Focus on the poor. Under TPDS, beneficiaries were divided into two categories: Household below the poverty line (BPL), and household above the poverty line (APL). Antyodaya Anna Yojan(AAY):AAY was a step in the direction of making TPDS aim at reducing hunger among the poorest segments of the BPL population.

Findings of the Study

Based on the survey of 50 households, the findings clearly indicate that the Public Distribution System

(PDS) in Kerala has been largely effective in achieving food security among the beneficiaries. With respect to adequacy of consumption, a substantial majority of households reported that PDS supplies meet their food requirements to a considerable extent. Nearly 30 per cent of respondents stated that PDS is almost always adequate for their consumption, while another 36 per cent reported that it is often adequate. Together, these figures show that 66 per cent of households regularly depend on PDS to meet their consumption needs. An additional 24 per cent reported that PDS is sometimes adequate, suggesting partial dependence. Only a small proportion (6 per cent) indicated that PDS is never adequate, pointing to limited exclusion or insufficiency. This reflects the significant role of PDS in ensuring minimum food availability for most households.

In terms of pricing, the system appears to be affordable for the majority of respondents. Half of the households (50 per cent) perceived PDS prices as medium, while 32 per cent considered them low and 8 per cent very low. Thus, 90 per cent of respondents viewed PDS prices as reasonable or affordable, which strengthens access to essential food items for economically vulnerable households. Only 10 per cent perceived prices as high, indicating that price is generally not a major barrier to access. Regarding the quality of commodities, the overall satisfaction level is also high. About 50 per cent of respondents rated the quality as good, while 40 per cent found it acceptable. Additionally, 8 per cent rated the quality as very good. This means that 98 per cent of respondents expressed at least an acceptable level of satisfaction with the quality of food grains supplied through PDS, with only a marginal 2 per cent reporting very poor quality. Such results highlight improvements in procurement, storage, and distribution mechanisms in Kerala's PDS.

Overall, the survey results demonstrate that the PDS in Kerala is effective in promoting food security by ensuring adequate availability, affordable prices, and acceptable quality of essential food commodities. While a small section of households still faces issues related to adequacy and quality, the system largely fulfills its objective of providing reliable food support, thereby contributing positively to household-level food security in the state. From the survey of 50 households we can understand that 36% says that PDS often adequate for their consumption, 24% says that PDS sometimes adequate their consumption 30% says that PDS almost always adequate their consumption, 6% says that PDS never adequate their consumption. On the basis of the survey of 50 household we can understand that 50% of respondent have the opinion that price is medium and 32% have opinion price is low, 10% have opinion price is high and 8% have the opinion price is very low. The result of the study shows that the respondents satisfaction level of quality of commodities. 50% of respondents have the opinion that the quality is good, 40% have the opinion the quality is acceptable, 8% have opinion of very good and 2% have the opinion of very poor.

Suggestions and Conclusion

The public distribution system should ensure that there is an adequate supply of goods for the beneficiaries. The commodities must be of high quality, and the government must guarantee that the food grains and other essential items distributed are not of inferior quality or contaminated. The public distribution system should be transparent, and the beneficiaries should be well-informed about their entitlements. The government should ensure that the information about the public distribution is effectively communicated. For several a long time, the public distribution system in Kerala turned into taken into consideration an powerful degree of food security, a model for maximum other states. However, the salient capabilities of Kerala's model that received widespread popularity and appreciation

in the mechanism of Public distribution system.

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