



Challenges of Public Service Distribution in India

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ABSTRACT:

The biggest challenge before Government is to ensure 'inclusive' growth so that the gains from increased national income are shared by all sections of society. In particular, it is imperative that a high quality of basic services be provided to all citizens, since these are not only ends in themselves, but also play a critical role in enhancing individual capabilities to participate fully in the growth of the economy. Since public service delivery impacts lives of millions of people, of it is one of the most important and crucial components of good governance. The government makes certain that public services are always available without interruption and that everyone can afford them. It implies that citizens must receive services. India is a developing nation, and inclusive and sustainable socioeconomic development can only be attained by improving the delivery of public services. Government department through which most of the public services are delivered are organized according to bureaucratic model. They are hierarchical in structure with superior subordinate relationships, reliance on control through inspection; rigid rules and procedures; preference for precedence, top-down planning and communication and bottom-up reporting; merit cum seniority-based promotions and security of services. Nevertheless, the public is extremely unhappy with the way public services are currently provided at all governmental levels. This article highlights the criticality of improving public service delivery and the challenges before bureaucracy to achieve it. The article finally highlights the need to have effective public management of our resources and to create open, transparent and accountable systems of public service delivery. ("Indian Public Service Delivery: Opportunities and Challenges," 2013)

Keywords: Public Services, Distribution, Governance, Management, Challenges etc.

INTRODUCTION:

In order to provide food and non-food items to India's impoverished at reduced prices, the Government of India established the Public Distribution System (PDS), a food security system, under the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food, and Public Distribution. Staple food grains like wheat, rice, sugar, and necessary fuels like kerosene are among the major commodities distributed through a network of fair price stores,

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also called ration shops, set up in various states throughout the nation. The PDS is purchased and maintained by the government-owned Food Corporation of India. Apart from China, India has the world's largest grain stock as of June 2022, and the government spends ₹750 billion on it. Food is obtained from the net food surplus states, primarily from the wealthier but smaller states of Punjab and Haryana, which supply 28–44% of India's PDS's rice and 70–90% of its wheat. The food is then transferred to other net negative producer states, which produce less than they consume. State governments are in charge of distributing food grains to the nation's impoverished. In India, there were 505,879 fair price stores (FPS) as of 2011. A household above the poverty line is entitled to 15 kg of foodgrain per month, which can be redeemed with a card, while every family below the poverty line is eligible for 35 kg of rice or wheat. Nonetheless, there are issues with the distribution process' effectiveness.

It is regarded as the most significant food security network in terms of coverage and public spending. The impoverished can, however, consume enough food grains provided by the ration shops. The PDS came under fire in the 1980s and 1990s for its urban bias and inability to adequately assist the less fortunate segments of society. The Targeted PDS is costly, and corruption was rampant until the early 2000s. (Wikipedia contributors, 2026)

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

- 1.To study the history of Public Distribution system.
- 2.To study the challenges before Public Distribution System.

THE HISTORY OF PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM:

Public Distribution System in the 1960s:

During the interwar years, the nation had a public distribution system for necessities. However, the severe food shortages of the 1960s gave rise to PDS, which focused on distributing foodgrains in urban areas of scarcity. PDS had made a significant contribution to keeping the price increase of food grains under control and guaranteeing urban consumers' access to food. In the 1970s and 1980s, PDS expanded its reach to tribal blocks and high-poverty areas as the country's agricultural output increased following the Green Revolution.

Revamped Public Distribution System (RPDS):

The Revamped Public Distribution System (RPDS) was introduced in June 1992 with the goal of strengthening and streamlining the PDS as well as expanding its reach in the remote, hilly, and inaccessible areas where a significant portion of the impoverished reside. It encompassed 1775 blocks where area-specific initiatives like the Drought Prone Area Program (DPAP), Integrated Tribal Development Projects (ITDP), and Desert Development Program (DDP) were being carried out, as well as in some Designated Hill Areas (DHA) that were chosen for special attention after consulting with state governments. The States received food grains for distribution in RPDS areas at a price that was 50 paise less than the Central Issue Price. Each card could weigh up to 20 kg.

Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS)

The Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS) was introduced by the Indian government in June 1997 with an emphasis on the impoverished. According to the PDS, states had to create and put into place reliable plans for identifying the impoverished in order to deliver foodgrains and distribute them in an open and responsible way at the FPS level. When the program was first implemented, it was meant to help roughly 6 crore low-income families, for whom 72 lakh tonnes of food grains were set aside each year. The Planning Commission's 1993–1994 State-by-State poverty estimates, which were based on the methodology of the "Expert Group on estimation of proportion and number of poor" chaired by the late Prof. Lakdawala, were used by the States to identify the poor under the program. At the time of the TPDS's introduction, the distribution of food grains among the States and UTs was determined by the average annual off-take of food grains under the PDS over the previous ten years.

Yojana Antodaya Anna (AAY)

AAY was a step toward TPDS's goal of lowering hunger among the BPL population's poorest segments. According to a National Sample Survey exercise, roughly 5% of the nation's population goes without two square meals each day. One could refer to this segment of the populace as "hungry." The "Antyodaya Anna Yojana" (AAY) was introduced in December 2000 for one crore of the poorest families in order to more effectively target and concentrate TPDS on this group. AAY entailed identifying one crore of the poorest families among the BPL families covered by TPDS in the States and giving them food grains at a heavily subsidized rate of Rs. 2/-per kg for wheat and Rs. 3/-per kg for rice. The cost of distribution, including



margin to dealers and retailers and transportation expenses, had to be borne by the States/UTs. As a result, the scheme's consumers received the full food subsidy.

Since then, the AAY Scheme has grown to include the following 2.50 crore of the poorest households:

1. Initial Growth

In 2003–04, an additional 50 lakh BPL households headed by widows, people with terminal illnesses, people with disabilities, or people 60 years of age or older without guaranteed means of subsistence or social support were added to the AAY Scheme. On June 3, 2003, an order was issued to this effect. With this expansion, 23% of BPL families, or 1.5 crore families, were now covered by the AAY.

2. The Second Growth

An additional 50 lakh BPL families were added to the AAY, as stated in the Union Budget 2004–05, by incorporating, among other things, all households at risk of hunger. On August 3, 2004, an order was issued to this effect. The guidelines outlined the following standards for identifying these households:

- a) Landless agricultural laborers, marginal farmers, rural artisans and craftsmen, including potters, tanners, weavers, blacksmiths, carpenters, slum dwellers, and people who work in the informal sector on a daily basis, such as porters, coolies, rickshaw pullers, hand cart pullers, fruit and flower vendors, snake charmers, rag pickers, cobblers, destitute, and other similar groups in both rural and urban areas.
- b) Families with widows, terminally ill, disabled, or older individuals (60 years or older) who lack a reliable source of income or social support.
- c) Widows, people with terminal illnesses, people with disabilities, people 60 years of age or older, and single men or women without guaranteed sources of income or support from their families or society.
- d) Every rudimentary tribal home.

3. The Third Extension

The AAY was extended to cover an additional 50 lakh BPL households, bringing its coverage to 2.5 crore households (or 38% of BPL), as stated in the Union Budget 2005-06. On May 12, 2005, an order was issued to this effect. (NFSA, n.d.)

CHALLENGES BEFORE PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM:

Identification of beneficiaries:

Households that are Below Poverty Line (BPL) and Above Poverty Line (APL) have substantial inclusion and exclusion errors in the beneficiary statistics.

The targeting problem is made worse by inconsistent government estimates of household actual income and a lack of trustworthy regular data.

Corruption and leaks:

The PDS has been the subject of numerous reports of corruption and leaks, with corrupt officials and middlemen either reselling subsidized goods to beneficiaries at higher prices or diverting them for sale on the open market.

Growing financial burden and subsidy:

The cost of acquiring and transporting food grains is nearly six times their retail price, which calls into question the scheme's long-term viability.

The food subsidy is anticipated to grow as a result of increased grain procurement, related costs, and other factors. In this regard, the Shanta Kumar Committee suggested that FCI transfer all wheat and paddy procurement activities to states that have developed a suitable infrastructure for procurement and have acquired enough experience in this area.

Lack of storage capacity with FCI:

Despite a notable increase in purchases, FCI's owned and hired storage capacity has not increased in tandem with the growth in purchases.

Inconsistent quality:

According to the great majority of respondents, the quality of the ration fluctuates; it can be excellent at times and awful at others. The poor quality of the rice and wheat was the main source of criticism.



Lack of nutritional security:

Historically, the PDS has concentrated on distributing a small number of basic staples, like rice, wheat, and sugar, with little regional variation in the kinds of products offered.

Strategies for making it transparent and efficient:

Universal PDS: Every household in Tamil Nadu is entitled to subsidized food grains under the state's universal PDS. Errors in inclusion and exclusion are decreased in this way.

Reduce the government's subsidy burden:

The Economic Survey 2020 recommended restricting PDS to the poorest 40% of the population in order to boost its efficacy.

Digitalization:

In order to streamline TPDS, states like Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh have put IT measures in place. These include digitizing ration cards, using GPS to track deliveries, and having citizens use SMS-based monitoring. Using Aadhaar improves authentication and helps avoid duplication.

Computerization was suggested in the Justice Wadhwa Committee Report for PDS (2011) as a way to stop diversion and enable secure identification at ration stores.

Direct Cash Transfers:

To prevent leakage and diversions, the government is requesting that States and UTs select Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT).

Increasing storage capacity:

To make the system more efficient, the Shanta Kumar Committee suggested private involvement in distribution and storage. According to this suggestion, storage facilities are constructed by private investors and leased by FCI for a ten-year guaranteed period under the Private Entrepreneur Guarantee (PEG) Scheme.



Expanded product selection:

Make your purchasing basket more diverse. Incorporating regional grains into PDS would guarantee nutritional security while also cutting costs. Fortified grains were suggested to be included in the program by the Justice Wadhwa Committee.

One Nation One Ration Card Scheme:

This would lower exclusion errors and assist the migrant population in accessing PDS benefits.

Local control:

To ensure accountability and transparency, community and civil society organizations should be involved in the PDS's implementation and supervision. For instance, the Fair Price Shops may be supervised and managed by the Gram Panchayat. (*What Are the Major Challenges of the Public Distribution System (PDS) in India? How Can It Be Made Effective and Transparent? (150 Words, 10 Marks) - PWOnlyIAS, n.d.*)

CONCLUSION:

India is a developing nation, and inclusive and sustainable socioeconomic development can be attained through improved public service delivery. Government departments that are organized according to a bureaucratic model provide the majority of public services. Their organizational structure is hierarchical, with superior subordinate relationships, a reliance on inspection for control, strict rules and procedures, a preference for precedence, top-down planning and communication, bottom-up reporting, seniority and merit-based promotions, as well as service security. However, the public is deeply dissatisfied with the current state of public services at all levels of government. This article emphasizes how important it is to enhance public service delivery and the obstacles bureaucracy faces in doing so. The article concludes by emphasizing the necessity of open, accountable, and transparent public service delivery systems as well as efficient public management of our resources. ("Public Service Delivery in India: Challenges and Opportunities," 2013) PDS is currently a lifeline for millions of people, and the pandemic made its significance clear. To increase the system's effectiveness, however, a lot of work needs to be done. PDS needs to quickly reinvent itself in order to effectively reduce hunger among millions of people living in poverty. It must specifically change its inflexible planning procedures into adaptable and responsive ones that can swiftly meet the wildly fluctuating demand. (*What Are the Major Challenges of the Public*



Distribution System (PDS) in India? How Can It Be Made Effective and Transparent? (150 Words, 10 Marks) - PWOnlyIAS, n.d.)

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What are the major challenges of the public distribution system (PDS) in India? How can it be made effective and transparent? (150 words, 10 marks) - PWOnlyIAS. (n.d.). PWOnlyIAS.
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