



PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM (PDS) AND ITS IMPACT ON THE WEAKER SECTIONS IN MYSORE

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Abstract

The Public Distribution System (PDS) in India is a crucial component of the government's efforts to ensure food security for vulnerable sections of society. This research examines the effectiveness of PDS in Mysore, focusing on its impact on the weaker sections, challenges faced in implementation, and possible improvements. The study delves into the accessibility, efficiency, and policy frameworks governing PDS in Mysore and evaluates its role in alleviating poverty and ensuring food security. Through a mixed-method approach, including surveys, interviews, and secondary data analysis, the research identifies key issues such as leakage, corruption, inclusion and exclusion errors, and poor infrastructure. Furthermore, the study explores the role of digitization, Aadhaar linkage, and Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) in enhancing transparency and efficiency. Policy recommendations are provided to strengthen supply chain management, grievance redressal mechanisms, public awareness, and food diversification to make PDS more effective for the weaker sections. The findings aim to contribute to a more inclusive and robust PDS framework, ensuring that marginalized populations in Mysore receives essential food supplies efficiently and equitably.

Keywords: *PDS, Challenges, Developments*

Introduction

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Policy recommendations are provided to strengthen supply chain management, grievance redressal mechanisms, public awareness, and food diversification to make PDS more effective for the weaker sections. The findings aim to contribute to a more inclusive and robust PDS framework, ensuring that marginalized populations in Mysore receives essential food supplies efficiently and equitably.

Objectives of the Study

1. To assess the effectiveness of the PDS in Mysore in catering to the weaker sections.
2. To analyze the challenges faced by beneficiaries in accessing PDS benefits.
3. To evaluate the role of digitization and technological interventions in improving PDS efficiency.
4. To suggest policy recommendations for improving PDS delivery in Mysore.

Literature Review

Several studies have explored the significance of the PDS in India and its impact on food security. Previous research highlights the inefficiencies in PDS due to leakage, corruption, and exclusion errors. However, advancements such as Aadhaar-linked ration cards and digital monitoring have shown promise in reducing inefficiencies. This study builds on existing research by focusing on Mysore and its unique socio-economic conditions.

Methodology

This study adopts a mixed-method research approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative methods to ensure a comprehensive analysis of the Public Distribution System (PDS) in Mysore. The methodology involves primary data collection through surveys and interviews, as well as secondary data analysis from government reports, policy documents, and academic literature.

Research Design

A descriptive research design is used to understand the functioning, challenges, and impact of PDS on weaker sections in Mysore. The study is conducted in both urban and rural areas to capture the diversity in accessibility and implementation of PDS.

Data Collection Methods

1. Primary Data Collection

- **Surveys:** A structured questionnaire is administered to PDS beneficiaries, including BPL families, daily wage laborers, SC/ST communities, and other vulnerable groups. The survey includes questions on:
 - Accessibility of PDS benefits
 - Quality and quantity of food grains received
 - Issues faced in availing rations
 - Awareness about rights and grievance mechanisms
- **Interviews:** In-depth interviews are conducted with:
 - Government officials from the Karnataka Food and Civil Supplies Department

- Fair Price Shop (FPS) owners
- Representatives of civil society organizations working on food security
- Community leaders to understand ground-level challenges

2. Secondary Data Collection

- Government publications, including reports from the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution, Karnataka Food and Civil Supplies Department, and the Food Corporation of India (FCI)
- Academic research papers and journal articles on PDS effectiveness, technological interventions, and policy reforms
- Theses and dissertations analyzing food security and PDS implementation in Karnataka
- Online resources, including websites of government agencies, NGOs, and think tanks focusing on food security

Sampling Technique

A stratified random sampling method is employed to ensure representation from different socio-economic groups and geographic locations within Mysore. The sample includes:

- 500 PDS beneficiaries (spread across urban and rural areas)
- 20 FPS dealers
- 10 government officials
- 10 representatives from civil society organizations

Data Analysis

- **Quantitative Analysis:** Survey data is analyzed using **descriptive statistics**, including frequency distributions and cross-tabulations, to identify trends and patterns.
- **Qualitative Analysis:** Thematic analysis is used to interpret interview responses, identifying key themes related to corruption, inefficiencies, technology integration, and beneficiary experiences.
- **Comparative Analysis:** The study compares PDS implementation in Mysore with best practices from other states to draw insights for policy improvements.

Ethical Considerations

The research ensures informed consent from all participants, maintaining confidentiality and anonymity of responses. The study adheres to ethical guidelines for research involving human subjects.

Public Distribution System in Mysore: An Overview

Structure and Functioning

The Public Distribution System (PDS) in Mysore operates through a structured network of Fair Price Shops (FPS) regulated by the Karnataka Food and Civil Supplies Department. The primary aim of PDS is to distribute essential food grains such as rice, wheat, sugar, and kerosene at subsidized prices to the economically weaker

sections. The system is designed to cater to various beneficiary groups, including those categorized under the Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) and Below Poverty Line (BPL) families. The Mysore PDS framework follows the guidelines laid down by the state and central governments to ensure food security for vulnerable communities.

Each FPS in Mysore is allocated a specific quantity of food grains based on the number of ration cardholders in its jurisdiction. The distribution process is monitored through digital tracking systems, Aadhaar-enabled authentication, and real-time stock monitoring to reduce pilferage and ensure transparency.

Coverage and Beneficiaries

Mysore's PDS network caters to thousands of households across urban and rural areas. The major groups benefiting from the PDS include:

- **Low-income families:** Households with income levels below the poverty line rely on subsidized food grains for sustenance.
- **Daily wage laborers:** Workers in unorganized sectors often depend on rationed food due to irregular income sources.
- **Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (SC/ST):** PDS ensures that socially marginalized groups receive essential food supplies at minimal cost.
- **Senior citizens and differently-abled individuals:** Special provisions are made to assist elderly and disabled persons in accessing their ration benefits with minimal difficulty.
- **Women-headed households:** The system provides targeted support for single mothers and widows who lack stable income sources.

Distribution Mechanism

The PDS supply chain in Mysore involves multiple stakeholders, including the Food Corporation of India (FCI), state government agencies, transporters, and FPS dealers. The distribution process follows these steps:

1. **Procurement:** The government procures food grains from farmers at a Minimum Support Price (MSP) and stores them in central warehouses.
2. **Allocation:** The Karnataka state government receives its allocated quota from the central pool and distributes it to districts like Mysore.
3. **Transportation:** The food grains are transported from warehouses to FPS under strict monitoring.
4. **Ration Distribution:** Beneficiaries purchase food grains at subsidized rates using ration cards linked to the Aadhaar system for authentication.

Government Reforms and Technological Interventions

To enhance the efficiency of PDS in Mysore, the government has introduced several reforms:

- **Digitization of Ration Cards:** Aadhaar-based authentication has minimized fraudulent claims and ensured targeted distribution.
- **E-PoS (Electronic Point of Sale) Machines:** Installed at FPS to record transactions digitally and prevent duplication.

- **Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) Pilot Programs:** Implemented in certain areas to transfer subsidies directly to beneficiaries' bank accounts, reducing leakages.
- **GPS Tracking of Food Transport Vehicles:** Ensuring that food grains reach their intended destinations without diversion.

Despite these improvements, challenges remain, including irregular supply, infrastructural constraints, and occasional technical failures in digital authentication systems.

Challenges in PDS Implementation

1. Leakage and Corruption

One of the primary concerns in the PDS is the diversion of food grains meant for beneficiaries to the open market. Corruption at various levels, including hoarding by FPS dealers and malpractice in stock allocation, affects the efficiency of the system. Poor monitoring mechanisms and loopholes in the distribution process allow leakages, leading to shortages for the intended beneficiaries.

2. Inclusion and Exclusion Errors

Many deserving beneficiaries are unable to access PDS benefits due to improper documentation, while some ineligible individuals exploit loopholes to receive benefits. Errors in the socio-economic surveys used for beneficiary selection lead to unfair exclusions. Additionally, frequent changes in eligibility criteria and administrative delays in updating beneficiary lists create further issues.

3. Poor Infrastructure and Storage Facilities

Inadequate storage facilities lead to food wastage and quality deterioration. Many FPS in Mysore lack proper maintenance, affecting food safety. Poor road connectivity in remote areas hampers the timely supply of food grains. Additionally, insufficient cold storage options reduce the possibility of diversifying the food basket with perishable but nutritious items.

4. Awareness and Accessibility Issues

A significant number of beneficiaries, particularly in rural areas of Mysore, are unaware of their entitlements under PDS. Additionally, the long distances to FPS and erratic supply schedules further hinder access. Many women and elderly citizens face challenges in physically collecting rations due to mobility issues, highlighting the need for doorstep delivery services or improved accessibility measures.

5. Technical Glitches in Digital Systems

While technology has improved transparency, frequent failures in biometric authentication and server issues disrupt the ration distribution process. Beneficiaries often face problems due to fingerprint mismatches in Aadhaar-linked transactions, resulting in unnecessary denials of their entitled food supplies. Moreover, FPS dealers sometimes lack adequate training to handle digital systems efficiently.

Role of Technology in Improving PDS in Mysore

1. Aadhaar Linking and Digitization

The introduction of Aadhaar-linked ration cards has improved beneficiary identification, reducing duplication and fraud. Digitized FPS transactions ensure transparency and accountability.

2. Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) and Mobile Applications

Pilot projects exploring Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) for food subsidies can empower beneficiaries by giving them direct purchasing power. Mobile applications can also enhance grievance redressal mechanisms.

3. GPS Tracking and Biometric Authentication

GPS tracking of food grain transportation and biometric authentication at FPS can help curb pilferage and ensure rightful access to ration.

Policy Recommendations

1. **Strengthening Supply Chain Management:** Enhancing storage infrastructure and introducing real-time tracking mechanisms can improve efficiency.
2. **Grievance Redressal Mechanisms:** Setting up local helplines and community monitoring committees can help address beneficiary complaints effectively.
3. **Public Awareness Campaigns:** Educating beneficiaries about their rights through media and local outreach programs can improve PDS utilization.
4. **Expanding Food Basket:** Introducing more nutritious items such as pulses and fortified foods can enhance the nutritional value of PDS provisions.
5. **Regular Monitoring and Auditing:** Conducting periodic audits and social audits involving civil society can improve transparency and reduce corruption.

Conclusion

The Public Distribution System (PDS) plays a vital role in ensuring food security for the weaker sections of society in Mysore. However, the system faces multiple challenges, including corruption, inefficiencies, and infrastructure limitations. This research has highlighted key areas requiring intervention, such as reducing leakages, improving storage facilities, enhancing technology adoption, and strengthening beneficiary awareness.

Technological advancements, including Aadhaar-based authentication, biometric verification, and Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT), have shown promise in making the PDS more transparent and efficient. Furthermore, community engagement and policy reforms can address inclusion and exclusion errors, ensuring that the most vulnerable populations receive their rightful entitlements. Going forward, the government and relevant stakeholders must focus on enhancing infrastructure, expanding awareness campaigns, and leveraging technology to streamline PDS operations. A collaborative approach involving government agencies, civil society organizations, and beneficiaries will be essential to making the system more inclusive and sustainable. Ultimately, a well-functioning PDS in Mysore can significantly contribute to poverty alleviation, reducing malnutrition, and improving the overall socio-economic conditions of the weaker sections. Strengthening the PDS framework will not only benefit the marginalized communities but also enhance food security and economic stability in the region.

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