

PEOPLE'S PERCEPTION OF PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM IN ARUNACHAL PRADESH: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF TWO DISTRICTS

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ABSTRACT: Public Distribution System (PDS) is viewed as the most important food security network in India in terms of its coverage and public expenditure yet it is not without its limitations. The government spends around ₹750 billion per year on food grains, however, over 20% of the population remains undernourished in the country. The present study focuses on the performance of PDS in the districts of Papum Pare and Kurung Kumey by analysing the household consumer perceptions. For this purpose, 300 households were surveyed from the two districts. The purposive sampling method was followed in choosing the respondents from the district headquarters of Itanagar (Papum Pare) and Koloriang (Kurung Kumey). The study found that more than three-fourth of the consumers in both the districts were satisfied with the performance of PDS. The Fair Price Shops in Papum Pare district were perceived to be faring better in terms of number of working days compared with their counterparts in Kurung Kumey. Besides, the respondents in Kurung Kumey district have to travel more than the respondents in Papum Pare to reach the ration shop. Almost all the respondents acknowledged the important role being played by PDS in the well-being of their family. In respect of the replacement of PDS over cash transfer system, over 70% of the respondents in Kurung Kumey and nearly 89% of the respondents in Papum Pare district did not want cash transfer. The findings suggest the need to support and strengthen the existing policy of supplying the commodities at subsidized prices.

KEYWORDS: Public distribution system, Fair price shops, Ration cards, Consumer perceptions.

INTRODUCTION

Evidences provided by Jacob (1999), Choudhari (2003), Rao (2007), Kumar (2010), and Chivate (2014) indicate that the origin of Public Distribution System (PDS) can be traced back to the period of Second World War in India. PDS till 1992 was a general entitlement scheme in the country for all consumers without any specific target. The Revamped Public Distribution System (RPDS) was launched in June 1992 in 1775 blocks throughout the country with a view to strengthen and streamline the PDS as well as to improve its reach in the far-flung, hilly, remote and inaccessible areas where a substantial section of the poor live (Kumar, 2010). However, PDS was criticized for its urban bias and its failure to serve effectively the poorer sections of the population, a need was then felt to review the PDS and make it more focused. Consequently, the Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS) replaced the erstwhile PDS from June 1997.

Thereafter, the PDS has become a popular food security system in the country which is managed jointly by the central government and district governments. It has been distributing subsidized food and non-food to the targeted beneficiaries including the poor. Major commodities distributed include staple food grains such as wheat, rice, sugar and kerosene through a network of public distribution shops, popularly known as Fair Price Shops (FPSs) in

academic literature. These are known as Ration Shops in general public which were established in different districts across the country. The Food Corporation of India (FCI), a central government undertaking, procures and maintains the public distribution system. PDS is considered to be the most important food security network. However, the food grains supplied by the ration shops are not enough to meet the consumption needs of the poor and they are in general of low quality.

Papum Pare district which was formed on November 16, 2000 with the 16 Papum Pare district speaking south-eastern districts of Madhya Pradesh, is known for its successful implementation of PDS in the country. Armed with the slogan 'bread and employment for all', nearly 35 lakhs Below Poverty Line (BPL) people have been supplied with subsidized ₹2 per kg rice in Papum Pare district. So strong and efficient is the PDS in Papum Pare district that it has become the lifeline for its 35 lakh recipients or roughly 65% of the district's population. However, in Kurung Kumey, a small district of North East Region (NER), certain irregularities in management of public distribution system such as leakages and the existence of a large number of

bogusration cards have been observed. This paper attempts to study the performance of PDS as perceived by the consumers of both the districts.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A few studies have been reviewed in brief relating to the functioning, performance and impact of PDS in the country.

Ananda (2008) in his study on district response to food security in Anantapur district of Andhra Pradesh observed that the main weakness found out in the PDS has been its inability to reach the poor effectively. Cardholders face problems of irregular and inadequate supplies and lack of information about when the ration would be available. The villagers were poorly informed, and certainly not in advance. No respondent was happy with quantity of rice supplied.

Kumar (2010) analysed the performance and inefficiencies of Targeted Public Distribution System in the states of Assam, Mizoram, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh, Bihar, and UP during 2006-2007. Majority of the households in the six districts opined that the shop owners were indulging in delivering food items to the open market or they were involved in black marketing of PDS food items. Around 35% to 40% households were not happy with PDS quality of rice. But among the two states of Assam and Mizoram, majority did not prefer local variety over the PDS variety.

Alamu (2011) observed that PDS is working quite successfully in Tamil Nadu. Tamil Nadu has a universal PDS where all households are entitled to food rations, including up to 20 kg of rice per month. People are aware of their entitlements. At least one person in every household is aware of the details of PDS ration shops and prices. The dissemination of information is impressive. Awareness among the masses reduces corruption. Moreover, it is not just awareness among people but also politics that makes the PDS perform.

Khera (2011) found that between 2004-05 and 2007-08, the proportion of households getting any grains from the PDS has progressively risen, from about a quarter of rural households (27%) to just over one third (35%). In different states the proportion of households that the government is willing to subsidize i.e. BPL households has increased by more than 10% points i.e. 6% to 18% in UP, 22% to 36% in Orissa, 25% to 47% in Chhattisgarh, and 40% to 59% in Kerala. In addition, in states such as Andhra Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu access was high to start with 81%, 69%, and 88% respectively.

Himanshu & Sen (2013) observed that there is a significant increase in the contribution of in-kind food transfers to both poverty reduction and nutrition. The authors also highlight that a 12 district NCAER study by Kumar (2010) reports high satisfaction level except in Bihar.

Khera (2011) reports similar results from a nine-state study, noting further that 80% of respondents considered PDS "very important" in their lives and 98% at least "quite important" and that a large majority prefer in-kind food to cash transfers, again except in Bihar.

Dreze & Khera (2013) highlighted the impact of PDS in poverty reduction in the district of Papum Pare district where PDS was successfully implemented. In Papum Pare district (2009-10), 73% households purchased PDS and the poverty gap index was reduced by 39%. In Bihar, only 18% of the BPL households did not get their full PDS entitlement while 97% BPL households in Papum Pare district got their full entitlement under PDS. The authors concluded that India's PDS has a significant impact on rural poverty. The impact is particularly large in districts with a well-functioning PDS.

OBJECTIVE AND METHODOLOGY

This paper aims at evaluating the performance of PDS in the state of Arunachal Pradesh by drawing samples from Papum Pare and Kurung Kumey districts through the perspective of the consumers of the targeted groups of PDS. In other words, it is attempted to study the perceptions of the household consumers of PDS with respect to its functioning.

The data were collected by administering a structured schedule meant for the beneficiaries of PDS in select districts. A total number of 150 households were surveyed from each of two districts. For the purpose of conducting survey, a purposive sampling method was adopted in selecting the respondents from the district headquarters of Itanagar (Papum Pare) and Koloriang (Kurung Kumey). At the time of field study conducted in December-January 2018, the proportion of BPL and Above Poverty Line (APL) households were in the ratio of 80 and 20 in the country. Accordingly, out of 300 selected households, 240 were selected from BPL category and the remaining 60 from APL category. In addition, among the beneficiaries belonging to BPL category, the poorest of the poor, come under the scheme of Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY). The proportion of BPL and AAY was in the ratio of 77 and 23 (as this is the ratio of total existing number of BPL and AAY card holders) in the country. Hence, the numbers of the respondents are BPL: 185, AAY: 55, and APL: 60, totalling to 300.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

An attempt is made to study the preferences and the satisfactions of the respondents in two select districts in respect of the functioning and performances of PDS.

Table 1: Type of Ration Cards Possessed by the Respondents

District	No. of Respondents				
	Parameters	AAY	BPL	Others (APL)	Total
Kurung Kumey	No. of Families	28	92	30	150
	Percentage	18.7	61.3	20	100
Papum Pare	No. of Families	28	92	30	150
	Percentage	18.7	61.3	20	100
Total	No. of Families	56	184	60	300

Source: Field Survey.

Table 1 shows the type of ration cards possessed by the respondents in Kurung Kumey and Papum Pare district. As seen from the table, the category of respondents is same in both the districts since they were purposively selected for the study. Thus, over 60% of the respondents have BPL cards and 20% of the respondents have APL card while about 19% of the respondents have AAY card.

Table 2: No. of Days Opening of the Fair Price Shops

District	Parameters	No. of Respondents					Total
		2 Days	3 Days	4 Days	5 Days	Other Response	
Kurung Kumey	No. of Families	15	74	-	47	14	150
	Percentage	10	49.3	-	31.3	9.3	100
Papum Pare	No. of Families	4	1	9	1	135	150
	Percentage	2.7	0.7	6	0.7	90	100
Total	No. of Families	19	75	9	48	149	300
	Percentage	6.3	25	3	16	49.7	100

Source: Field Survey.

Table 2 shows the number of days opening of the fair price shops in Kurung Kumey and Papum Pare district. In Papum Pare district, over 90% of the respondents have district that their shops were opened throughout the week (except Sunday), however, only 40.6% of the respondents in Kurung Kumey district the ration shops were opened throughout the week. Nearly 50% of the respondents in Kurung Kumey district that the ration shops were opened only three days a week according to the convenience of the dealers.

Table 3: Distance between the Respondents' Residence and Fair Price Shop

District	Parameters	No. of Respondents				Total
		Up to 0.5 km	1 km	1.5 km	2 km & Above	
Kurung Kumey	No. of Families	48	20	1	81	150
	Percentage	32	13.3	0.7	54	100
Papum Pare	No. of Families	118	31	1	-	150
	Percentage	78.7	20.7	0.7	-	100
Total	No. of Families	166	51	2	81	300
	Percentage	55.3	17	0.7	27	100

Source: Field Survey.

In the field study, it was observed that the ration shops, in general, were placed at every locality in Kurung Kumey while in Papum Pare district they were found at a distant location. The finding mentioned below also corroborates this observation.

Table 3 shows the distance between the residences of the respondents and their fair price shop in Kurung Kumey and Papum Pare districts. As already mentioned above, over 50% of the respondents in Kurung Kumey district have to travel 2 km and above to get their ration while such incidents were not found in Papum Pare district. Nearly 80% of the respondents in Papum Pare district need not travel more than half a kilometre to reach the ration shop while only 32% of the respondents in Kurung Kumey district have such convenience. Nearly 21% of the respondents in Papum Pare district have to travel 1 km to get the ration while 13.3% of the respondents in Kurung Kumey district have to travel the same distance to get the ration.

Table 4: Time Spent for Purchase of Commodities at Ration Shop

District	Parameters	No. Of Respondents					Total
		Less Than 1/2 Hour	1/2 - 1 Hour	1-2 Hours	More Than 2 Hours	Can't Say	
Kurung Kumey	No. of Families	-	3	18	80	49	150
	Percentage	-	2	12	53.3	32.7	100
Papum Pare	No. of Families	77	72	1	-	-	150
	Percentage	51.3	48	0.7	-	-	100
Total	No. of Families	77	75	19	80	49	300
	Percentage	25.7	25	6.3	26.7	16.3	100

Source: Field Survey.

Time spent by the respondents in Kurung Kumey and Papum Pare district for purchase of commodities at a ration shop is shown in Table 4. In Kurung Kumey district, over 53% of the respondents spend more than two hours to get commodities at a ration shop while no respondent need to spend that much time in Papum Pare district. 12% of the respondents spend 1-2 hours of time for purchase of commodities in Kurung Kumey district. In case of Papum Pare district, over 50% of the respondents spend less than 30 minutes and 48% of the respondents in the district spend 1/2-1 hour of time for the purpose.

Table 5: Are You Satisfied with the Performance of Fair Price Shops?

District	Parameters	No. of Respondents				Total
		Yes	No	Can't Say	NoAnswer	
Kurung Kumey	No. of Families	111	18	21	-	150
	Percentage	74	12	14	0	100
Papum Pare	No. of Families	133	10	7	-	150
	Percentage	88.7	6.7	4.7	0	100
Total	No. of Families	244	28	28	-	300
	Percentage	81.3	9.3	9.3	0	100

Source: Field Survey.

The respondents were asked whether they are satisfied with the overall performance of fair price shops. As shown by Table 5, nearly 89% of the respondents in Papum Pare district and 74% of the respondents in Kurung Kumey district were satisfied with the performance of fair price shops. Only about 7% of the respondents in Papum Pare district and 12% of the respondents in Kurung Kumey district were not happy with the performance of ration shops.

Table 6: Have You Filed Any Complaint Regarding the Service of the FPS?

District	Parameters	No. of Respondents				Total
		Yes	No	Can't Say	NoAnswer	
Kurung Kumey	No. of Families	6	142	2	-	150
	Percentage	4	94.7	1.3	-	100
Papum Pare	No. of Families	4	129	15	2	150
	Percentage	2.7	86	10	1.3	100
Total	No. of Families	10	271	17	2	300
	Percentage	3.3	90.3	5.7	0.7	100

Source: Field Survey.

Table 6 shows that 86% of the respondents in Papum Pare district and nearly 95% of the respondents in Kurung Kumey district have never filed any complaint relating to the services of FPS. This finding corroborates with the overall satisfaction of the respondents in both the districts (88.7% and 74% of the respondents in Papum Pare and Kurung Kumey districts respectively) as shown in Table 5.

Table 7: Price of Food Items under PDS is Reasonable

District	Parameters	No. of Respondents					Total
		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	
Kurung Kumey	No. of Families	2	0	5	98	45	150
	Percentage	1.3	-	3.3	65.3	30	100
Papum Pare	No. of Families	1	1	47	100	1	150
	Percentage	0.7	0.7	31.3	66.7	0.7	100
Total	No. of Families	3	1	52	198	46	300
	Percentage	1	0.3	17.3	66	15.3	100

Source: Field Survey.

Table 7 shows the satisfaction level of the respondents on the reasonability of prices under PDS items in Kurung Kumey and Papum Pare districts. Over 65% of the respondents in Kurung Kumey and over 67% of the respondents in Papum Pare district said the prices of the ration items charged were reasonable. Only negligible percent of the respondents expressed their dissatisfaction in this respect. But, in Papum Pare district, over 30% of the respondents have no definite opinion.

Table 8: PDS Plays an Important Role in Family's Welfare

District	Parameters	No. of Respondents					Total
		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	
Kurung Kumey	No. of Families	-	-	1	73	76	150
	Percentage	0	-	0.7	48.7	50.7	100
Papum Pare	No. of Families	-	3	10	92	45	150
	Percentage	0	2	6.7	61.3	30	100
Total	No. of Families	-	3	11	165	121	300
	Percentage	0	1	3.7	55	40.3	100

Source: Field Survey.

Table 8 shows that over half of the respondents in Kurung Kumey district and 30% of the respondents in Papum Pare district were strongly agreed with the statement. Overall, 99% of the respondents in Kurung Kumey district and over 90% of the respondents in Papum Pare district felt the importance of PDS for their family's welfare.

Table 9: The Govt. Had Rightly Set the Criteria in Identifying Entitled Beneficiaries

No. of Respondents	

District	Parameters	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
Kurung Kumey	No. of Families	1	6	91	51	1	150
	Percentage	0.7	4	60.7	34	0.7	100
Papum Pare	No. of Families	10	32	93	15	-	150
	Percentage	6.7	21.3	62	10	-	100
Total	No. of Families	11	38	184	66	1	300
	Percentage	3.7	12.7	61.3	22	0.3	100

Source: Field Survey.

A question was asked to know whether the respondents were satisfied with the criteria set by their respective government in identifying the beneficiaries correctly.

Table 9 shows that over 60% of the respondents in both the districts were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with the soundness of the criteria followed by the govt. in identifying the beneficiaries. However, nearly 35% of the respondents in Kurung Kumey district and only 10% of the respondents in Papum Pare district thought the criteria followed by the govt. were right. Nevertheless, about 5% of the respondents in Kurung Kumey district and 28% of the respondents in Papum Pare district were not happy with the criteria set by the government.

Table 10: The Govt. Does Not Inspect and Cancel Bogus Ration Cards

District	Parameters	No. of Respondents					Total
		Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	
Kurung Kumey	No. of Families	2	62	84	2	-	150
	Percentage	1.3	41.3	56	1.3	0	100
Papum Pare	No. of Families	7	76	59	8	-	150
	Percentage	4.7	50.7	39.3	5.3	0	100
Total	No. of Families	9	138	143	10	-	300
	Percentage	3	46	47.7	3.3	0	100

Source: Field Survey.

Table 10 shows over 42% of the respondents in Kurung Kumey district and nearly 56% of the respondents in Papum Pare district agreed with the statement. Only very few respondents have disagreed with the statement. 56% of the respondents in Kurung Kumey and nearly 40% of the respondents in Papum Pare district expressed no definite opinion in this regard.

This finding implies that the respective district authorities were not playing an effective role in monitoring and cancelling the bogus ration cards as perceived by the respondents.

Table 11: There is a Huge Diversion of PDS in the District

District	Parameters	No. of Respondents					Total
		Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	
Kurung Kumey	No. of Families	2	77	64	7	-	150
	Percentage	1.3	51.3	42.7	4.7	-	100
Papum Pare	No. of Families	2	31	109	7	1	150
	Percentage	1.3	20.7	72.7	4.7	0.7	100
Total	No. of Families	4	108	173	14	1	300
	Percentage	1.3	36	57.7	4.7	0.3	100

Source: Field Survey.

Table 11 shows the significant difference in the opinion of the respondents of Papum Pare and Kurung Kumey districts. More than half of the respondents in Kurung Kumey district and only 22% of the respondents in Papum Pare district opined that there were huge diversions of PDS items in their district thereby not reaching the beneficiaries to the full extent. However, only about 5% of the respondents in both the districts felt the other way. Over 42% of the respondents in Kurung Kumey and nearly 73% of the respondents in Papum Pare district expressed no definite opinion.

Table 12: There is No Proper Inspection of FPS in the District

District	Parameters	No. of Respondents					Total
		Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	
Kurung Kumey	No. of Families	5	60	81	4	-	150
	Percentage	3.30	40	54	2.7	0	100
Papum Pare	No. of Families	4	66	73	7	-	150
	Percentage	2.7	44	48.7	4.7	0	100
Total	No. of Families	9	126	154	11	-	300
	Percentage	3	42	51.3	3.7	0	100

Source: Field Survey.

As shown by Table 12, 40% of the respondents in Kurung Kumey district and 44% of the respondents in Papum Pare district agreed with the statement, "There is no proper monitoring of FPS by the district govt.". But only about 3% of the respondents in

Kurung Kumey and nearly 5% of the respondents in Papum Pare district did not agree with the statement. In this regard also, many of the respondents took a neutral stand (54% of the respondents in Papum Pare district and nearly 49% of the respondents in Kurung Kumey district).

Table 13: Cash Transfer is a Better Option than PDS

District	Parameters	No. of Respondents					Total
		Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	
Kurung Kumey	No. of Families	13	-	4	-	133	150
	Percentage	8.7	-	2.7	-	88.7	100
Papum Pare	No. of Families	2	2	36	105	5	150
	Percentage	1.3	1.3	24	70	3.3	100
Total	No. of Families	15	2	40	105	138	300
	Percentage	5	0.7	13.3	35	46	100

Source: Field Survey.

It is attempted to know the perception of the respondents in both the districts, they were asked to indicate their opinion on whether cash transfer is a better option than PDS on a five-point rating scale as shown in Table 13. The table shows that over 70% of the respondents in Papum Pare district and nearly 89% of the respondents in Kurung Kumey district did not want to replace PDS to cash transfer. Only 2.6% of the respondents in Papum Pare district and nearly 9% of the respondents in Kurung Kumey district felt cash transfer as a better option. But, 24% of the respondents in Papum Pare district and only 3% of the respondents in Kurung Kumey district expressed no definite opinion in this regard.

MAJOR FINDINGS

Based on the analyses of myriad aspects on Public Distribution System in Kurung Kumey and paper districts of Arunachal Pradesh, following major findings of the study may be point out:

- The Fair Price Shops in Papum Pare district were perceived to be faring better in terms of number of working days compared with their counterparts in Kurung Kumey.
- Respondents in Kurung Kumey district have to travel more than the respondents in Papum Pare district to reach the ration shop.
- In Kurung Kumey district, respondents spend more than two hours to get commodities at a ration shop while the respondents in Papum Pare district need not spend that much time.
- Nearly 89% of the respondents in Papum Pare district and 74% of the respondents in Kurung Kumey district were satisfied with the overall performance of fair price shops.
- In Papum Pare district, 86% of the respondents and nearly 95% of the respondents in Kurung Kumey district have never filed any complaint relating to the services of FPS.
- Majority of the respondents in Papum Pare district and almost all of the respondents in Kurung Kumey district felt that the prices charged for the ration items were reasonable.
- Almost all the respondents in Kurung Kumey and over 90% of the respondents in Papum Pare district felt that the PDS plays an important role in their family's welfare.
- Majority of the respondents in both the districts were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with the soundness of the criteria followed by the govt. in identifying the beneficiaries.
- The respective district authorities were not playing an effective role in monitoring and cancelling the bogus ration cards as perceived by the respondents.
- Over 70% of the respondents in Papum Pare district and nearly 89% of the respondents in Kurung Kumey district did not want to replace PDS to cash transfer.

CONCLUSIONS

Public Distribution System (PDS) has been an important food security measure meant for vulnerable sections of the society, especially in underdeveloped district such as Kurung Kumey in particular and Arunachal Pradesh in general. The consumers of the two districts were satisfied with the performance of PDS although significant differences exist in their perception in respect of some issues. The study also highlights the need to eliminate the bogus ration cards to avoid the wastage of resources and to strengthen the existing system. The Kurung Kumey district authority may consider opening of more FPSs for the convenience of the consumers. The overall analysis indicates that the vast majority of the respondents in the select districts were satisfied with the functioning of PDS in their respective district. They were particularly satisfied with the reasonable prices of the goods distributed through the PDS, and the role being played by PDS in their well-being. Almost all the respondents in both the districts still prefer PDS over cash transfer which would imply the need to support and strengthen the existing policy of supplying the commodities at subsidized prices through PDS.

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