

SMART PDS SCHEME

A Bold Initiative In Digitisation

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The National Food Security Act, 2013 (NFSA), governs the country's largest beneficiary-centric programme. The Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS) provides food security to 81.35 crore persons every month.

SMART– Public Distribution System

As the Centre has begun moving towards the implementation of the Scheme for Modernisation and Reforms through Technology in Public Distribution System (SMART-PDS) to prevent leakage of foodgrains, increasing the efficiency of the distribution chain and ensuring the availability of such provisions for migrants, a lot of data is being generated and stored every day by states/UTs. Data Analytics on the TPDS ecosystem is allowing us to generate critical information about the beneficiaries, their food security needs and patterns of migration.

Challenges in PDS and efforts to solve it

The lack of credible and dynamic data on consumption and mobility patterns was always a big challenge for planners to ensure efficient delivery of critical central welfare schemes to the most vulnerable sections of our society. It was felt that the data generated can be leveraged for the delivery of many other central schemes and welfare programmes.

The SMART-PDS initiative of the Department of Food and Public Distribution (DFPD) to implement data-driven decision-making will go a long way in addressing this deficit. Convergence and integration with the use of AI can really be a game changer for people as well as governments in bringing accountability across all programmes. The national leadership deserves credit for pushing through these vital trans-ministerial convergences.

The Centre now plans to use the data analytics/Bi platforms and other ICT tools and technologies and deepen PDS reforms. There will be a standardisation of the PDS operation through the use of technology and integrating the same with FCI, CWC, transport supply chain of rail and road, Ministry of Education, Women and Child Development and UIDAI. Technology-led reforms are expected to overcome the state-level technological limitations of PDS operations concerning IT hardware, software and technical manpower. This will also institutionalise an integrated central system for all PDS-related operations across all states/UTs.

electronic Point of Sale (ePoS)

Today, nearly 93 per cent of the total monthly allocated foodgrains are distributed through the Aadhaar authentication mode using electronic Point of Sale (ePoS) devices. This dividend is directly attributed to the 100 per cent digitisation of ration cards, online management of beneficiaries' data, computerisation of foodgrains' allocation and supply chain management systems in all states/UTs, and the installation of ePoS devices in almost the entire country.

Integrated Management of Public Distribution System (IM-PDS)

To sustain the reforms brought in by the End-to-end Computerisation of TPDS Operations scheme and address the above key challenges, the government has launched a Central Sector Scheme-Integrated Management of Public Distribution System (IM-PDS). Its main objectives are—

1. Implementation of One Nation One Ration Card (nation-wide portability),
2. creation of a national-level data repository for de-duplication of beneficiary/ration cards data;
3. creation of integrated data infrastructure/systems across ration card management;
4. allocation, supply chain of foodgrains and FPS automation among Centre and all states.

Public Distribution System

- The Public Distribution System (PDS) is a system brought in to ensure distribution of food grains at low cost and management in emergency situations. This system started in 1947 and it works for the distribution of food and non-food items at subsidized rates for the poor in the country.
- Food and some non-food items are made available at a subsidized rate through a chain of 'fair price shops' (FPS) or ration shops set up under the public distribution system. Major food grains like wheat, rice, sugar and kerosene are delivered through this scheme by public distribution shops across the country.
- The scheme is administered by the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution. The main objective of this scheme is to provide food grains to the weaker sections of the country at affordable rates. The National Food Security Act, (NFSA) 2013 legally entitled 75% of the rural population and 50% of the urban population to receive subsidized food grains under the Targeted Public Distribution System. The Food Corporation of India does the procurement and maintenance work for the PDS, while the state governments have to ensure the distribution of ration and other essential commodities.

Food Corporation of India (FCI)

The Food Corporation of India, the main agency providing food grains for the Public Distribution System, was established in 1965. The primary function of the corporation is to purchase, sell, store, operate, supply, distribute food grains and other food items. Its main objective is to ensure that on one hand the farmer gets the right price for his produce and on the other hand the consumers get food grains at the central prices fixed by the Government of India.

One Nation One Ration Card (ONORC)

Presently, the ONORC plan is seamlessly functional in all 36 States/UTs and is consistently recording over 3.5 crore monthly portable transactions. This count is steadily improving. Since its inception in August 2019 in just four states, ONORC has so far recorded more than 100 crore portability transactions, including both inter-state and intra-state transactions. The data generated during this process has now become a tool for many other central ministries and state governments. Some of these spinoffs include benefits for the e-Shram Portal, Ayushman Bharat, and PM-Street Vendors AtmaNirbhar Nidhi (PM-SVANidhi) Yojana.

The Union Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare (MoAFW) envisages family-based ONORC/ration card data to map the beneficiaries. Similarly, with the granting unique of a unique (Aadhaar) number to the newly born, the possibility of tracking their nutrition from ICDS centres to PM Poshan and then as PDS beneficiaries in a seamless manner will become a reality. These are only a few examples list can be exhaustive.

From PDS to Targeted PDS

Until 1992, the PDS was a general entitlement scheme for all consumers without any specific target. From the year 1992, PDS was called RPDS (revamped PDS) i.e. improved PDS, in which special attention was paid to poor families, especially poor living in remote, hilly and difficult areas, and in the year 1997, RPDS, TPDS (targeted PDS) ie Target became PDS, in which fair shops were established for distribution of food grains at subsidized rates.

Flaws in food security system -

- ↳ Limited benefits for the poor from the Public Distribution System To Excellence
- ↳ Regional disparities in PDS benefits
- ↳ only accessible to urban people
- ↳ food subsidy burden
- ↳ inability to operate
- ↳ Increase in prices as a result of PDS
- ↳ rigging in pds

Expected Question

Que. Consider the following statements –

1. The National Food Security Act, (NFSA) 2013 legally entitled 75% of the rural population and 50% of the urban population to receive subsidized foodgrains under the Targeted Public Distribution System.
2. The main agency providing food grains for the Public Distribution System is the Food Corporation of India.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

- (a) Only 1 (b) Only 2
(c) Both 1 and 2 (d) Neither 1 nor 2

Answer : C

Mains Expected Question & Format

Que.: Throw light on the Public Distribution System in India and discuss the challenges related to it and the efforts made to solve them.

Answer Format :

- ❖ Discuss in detail the Public Distribution System of India.
- ❖ State the challenges related to PDS.
- ❖ Write the ongoing efforts to overcome these challenges.
- ❖ Give a balanced conclusion.

Note: - The question of the main examination given for practice is designed keeping in mind the upcoming UPSC mains examination. Therefore, to get an answer to this question, you can take the help of this source as well as other sources related to this topic.