



## EDITORIAL: THE HINDU

### GENERAL STUDIES 3: ECONOMY

#### TOPIC: PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM

DATE: 09.01.2025

#### THE RIGHT TO FOOD AND THE STRUGGLE WITH THE PDS

##### Exclusion from Public Distribution System (PDS) Rolls

Recent reports from Jharkhand, Odisha, and Bihar reveal alarming gaps in the Public Distribution System (PDS), with many households excluded from PDS rolls. This exclusion denies marginalized families access to essential rations, exacerbating food insecurity in vulnerable communities.

##### Impact on Marginalized Communities: The Musahar Case

The Musahar community in Bihar, among the most marginalized caste groups, faces acute challenges:

- **Lack of Ration Cards:** Many Musahar households in Patna district lack active ration cards, leaving families without food support.
- **Partial Exclusion:** Even when cards are available, they often exclude some family members, further marginalizing these communities.

##### Biometric Verification Issues

Mandatory biometric verification at Fair Price Shops (FPS) has introduced additional barriers:

- **Verification Failures:** Names are struck off PDS rolls due to technical failures in biometric authentication.
- **Reapplication Challenges:** Affected individuals are forced to reapply for new ration cards, prolonging their access to rations.

##### Corruption in PDS Implementation

Corruption undermines the PDS, depriving beneficiaries of their entitled food supplies:

- **Food Grain Shortages:** Households with Priority Household (PHH) cards often receive only four kilograms of food grain per person, against the mandated five kilograms.
- **Poor Quality Grains:** The rice distributed is of substandard quality, and wheat is frequently unavailable.

##### Documentation and Enrollment Barriers

Cumbersome documentation requirements hinder PDS enrollment:



- **Unnecessary Demands:** Documents like caste, income, and residence certificates are demanded, despite not being mandated by the National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013, or the PDS Control Order, 2015.
- **Widespread Issues:** Similar barriers are reported in Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh, and Madhya Pradesh, disproportionately affecting vulnerable populations.

## Exploitation by Middlemen

The bureaucratic complexities have created opportunities for exploitation:

- **High Charges:** Middlemen charge applicants over ₹3,000 to procure ration cards, often without delivering results.
- **Delayed Issuance:** Many ration card applications remain pending for 4 to 18 months, violating the 30-day issuance timeline mandated by the 2015 order.

## Governance and Welfare Disconnect

Governments' focus on digitization and "smart cities" has led to a disconnect from grassroots welfare:

- **Systemic Flaws:** Bureaucratic red tape and official indifference exacerbate food insecurity among marginalized groups.
- **Indifference to Needs:** The failure to prioritize basic welfare measures over procedural formalities has worsened access to essential rations.

## Way Forward

To address these challenges, the following steps are essential:

- **Universal Enrollment:** Simplify and ensure universal PDS enrollment to eliminate barriers.
- **Reduce Documentation:** Minimize documentation requirements to align with legal provisions under the NFSA, 2013.
- **Combat Corruption:** Strengthen oversight mechanisms to curb corruption and ensure beneficiaries receive full entitlements.
- **Simplify Processes:** Streamline application processes and establish robust grievance redressal systems.
- **Uphold Right to Food:** Governments must prioritize food security as a fundamental right, as upheld in *People's Union of Civil Liberties vs Union of India (1996)*.



# PL RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY

MAKING YOU SERVE THE NATION

## Conclusion

The PDS plays a critical role in ensuring food security for India's most vulnerable populations. Addressing systemic flaws, corruption, and bureaucratic hurdles while prioritizing inclusivity can significantly enhance the program's effectiveness. Governments must focus on bridging the welfare disconnect and safeguarding the fundamental right to food for all citizens.

**Source:** <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/the-right-to-food-and-the-struggle-with-the-pds/article69077387.ece>

