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Combating Hunger: The Public Distribution System

The Public Distribution System (PDS) in India has had a long and chequered history. From being a wartime rationing system in the 1940s, it emerged into a nationwide network serving multiple objectives including price stabilisation, reaching foodgrains to deficient regions and providing basic food security to the poor. The National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013 made access to subsidised foodgrains through the PDS for 75 per cent of rural and 50 per cent of urban populations a legal entitlement. The PDS has since seen further expansion and a structural shift away from poverty-line-based targeting. Yet, issues such as inadequate coverage based on outdated population figures, exclusion of some marginalised populations, a narrow focus on cereals and digital exclusions remain. While addressing these, the PDS must be reimagined towards responding to the present challenges of poor dietary diversity as well as crop diversity.

Combating Hunger: The Public Distribution System

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In 2013, the policy for public distribution of foodgrains in India was brought under a statutory framework with the enactment of the National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013. While the public distribution system (PDS) itself has a long and chequered history in India, this chapter focuses substantially on the period after 2013. The PDS was originally introduced as a wartime rationing initiative as early as 1940 by the colonial government (Mooij 1998). Implementation was concentrated in urban centres, including Bombay and Calcutta (Sen 1981), to manage war-related shortages and price fluctuations. ‘Food security for the masses’, however, was not a concern for the colonial government and it is ironic that the Bengal Famine took place not long after the introduction of the rationing system.

In 1957, the Foodgrains Enquiry Committee (1957), cited in Mooij (1998), recommended the creation of a network of ‘fair price’ shops for the distribution of food to poorer sections of the population, following which the system expanded, although still primarily in urban areas. With the establishment of the Food Corporation of India in 1965 and the Agricultural Prices Committee (later renamed Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices) (Mooij 1999), food distribution expanded

significantly into rural areas during the 1970s and 1980s (Mooij 1998). The next significant change in food distribution policy came with the introduction of the

The Right to Food and the Constitution of India

Article 21: No person shall be deprived of his life or personal liberty except according to procedure established by law.

Article 39: The State shall, in particular, direct its policy towards securing—
(a) that the citizens, men and women equally, have the right to an adequate means of livelihood.

Article 47: The State shall regard the raising of the level of nutrition and the standard of living of its people and the improvement of public health as among its primary duties.

Preamble of National Food Security Act

‘An Act to provide for food and nutritional security in human life cycle approach, by ensuring access to adequate quantity of quality food at affordable prices to people to live a life with dignity and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto.’

Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS) in 1997, which aimed to focus on households designated as ‘below poverty line’ (BPL). BPL and ‘above poverty line’ (APL) cards were issued by state governments based on a BPL survey conducted by the Union Ministry of Rural Development. The central issue prices and quantity of foodgrains varied for these two groups. Under the TPDS, BPL households were entitled to 35 kg of foodgrains per month at highly subsidised issue prices (₹5.65 per kg of rice and ₹4.15 per kg of wheat). APL prices were higher and the quantity also varied. The Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) scheme was introduced by the Government of India in the year 2000, for households identified as ‘poorest of the poor’, with foodgrains provided at lower prices, ₹3 for rice and ₹2 for wheat. The TPDS remained in operation until 2013, when Parliament enacted the NFSA.

The NFSA took a step towards fulfilling obligations under Articles 21, 39(a) and 47 of the Constitution of India (Rajya Sabha Secretariat 2014). The genesis of the National Food Security Bill can be traced back to a writ petition filed in the Supreme Court of India in 2001 by the Rajasthan unit of the People’s Union of Civil Liberties. The

petition was filed in the backdrop of a severe drought and argued that the denial of the right to food amounted to a denial of the right to life, thereby violating the fundamental right to life and personal liberty under Article 21 of the Indian Constitution. From 2001 to 2017, the Supreme Court, along with court-appointed commissioners, oversaw the implementation of food-related public policies of the Union government. The *People’s Union of Civil Liberties v. Union of India* case was disposed of by the Supreme Court only in 2017, following the enactment of the NFSA in 2013. Several Supreme Court orders issued during the pendency of the case, however, were pivotal in shaping food-related public policy in India, including the PDS, the

Integrated Child Development Services, the Mid-Day Meal Scheme and the Sam-poorna Gramin Rozgar Yojana (the precursor to the NREGA enacted in 2005).

The PDS has been significant both for distributing subsidised foodgrains to the poor and for transferring foodgrains from surplus to food-deficit regions, as well as for functioning as a key mechanism of price stabilisation through minimum support price (MSP)-based procurement and sales operations. While the PDS also plays an important role in agricultural procurement and price stabilisation, this chapter focuses on its direct welfare dimensions and therefore restricts itself to entitlements under the NFSA. The links with agriculture and procurement policy are therefore not discussed.¹

In the context of the TPDS, the country witnessed a major debate on universalisation versus targeting in social welfare policy. Many academics and policy-makers favoured targeting as a cost-saving measure, replacing the PDS with cash transfers and reducing the fiscal burden (Kapur, Mukhopadhyay and Subramanian 2008; Kotwal, Murugkar and Ramaswami 2011). On the other hand, concerns regarding targeting errors and the limitations of a poverty-line-based PDS led many to argue for a universal or near-universal system. It was argued that the richest sections of the population (roughly the top quintile) could be identified and excluded relatively easily, while the rest should be covered (Himanshu and Sen 2011; Drèze and Khera 2013; Mander 2015). While these debates shaped the context in which the NFSA emerged, this chapter focuses primarily on the post-NFSA period rather than earlier debates on BPL-based targeting, the BPL census, inclusion and exclusion errors and differentiated pricing within the TPDS. The chapter examines PDS entitlements under the NFSA and the implications for coverage, followed by a discussion of current gaps and challenges. It concludes with recommendations for strengthening the PDS towards ensuring food security for all.

11.1

National Food Security Act, 2013

The NFSA brought the implementation of the TPDS under a statutory framework and created entitlements to subsidised foodgrains for 75 per cent of the rural population and 50 per cent of the urban population in India.² The Act substantially reshaped the legal and institutional framework of the PDS. It specified that the eldest adult woman in a household would be recognised as the head of household on the ration card (see Section 13). It also discontinued the earlier classification of households into BPL and APL categories. Instead, the NFSA introduced a new entitlement structure with two categories of beneficiaries. ‘Priority households’ became entitled to 5 kg of foodgrains per person per month, while the AAY scheme contin-

¹ For a discussion on pre-NFSA debates, see Mander (2015).

² See Section 3 of the NFSA, 2013.

ued under the Act. The NFSA also introduced uniform issue prices across categories, initially fixing prices at ₹3 per kg for rice, ₹2 for wheat and ₹1 for millets. Following the introduction of the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY) in 2020, the foodgrains are now distributed free of cost to all priority and AAY cardholders. The PMGKAY has since been extended until December 2029.

The NFSA required state governments to identify eligible households within one year of its enactment (see Section 10(b)). Implementation, however, was initially delayed. Only ten states and union territories completed the identification of beneficiary households within the stipulated period, while twenty-five states sought extensions through executive orders (Comptroller and Auditor General of India 2016; Mander and Bunders-Aelen 2017).

State governments were required to specify criteria for identifying beneficiary households under the Act. Its enactment and implementation offered an opportunity to correct flawed ration cardholder lists that were previously in use and to ensure that households in need of foodgrains were brought within its ambit through progressive inclusion and exclusion criteria. The administrative procedures adopted for identification varied substantially across states. Some states, such as Odisha, drew up and refined inclusion and exclusion criteria and undertook fresh identification exercises for beneficiary households, while Chhattisgarh and Bihar used the Socio-Economic Caste Census (SECC) data for similar identification. However, as noted by the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) report (CAG 2016), some state governments, including Karnataka and Maharashtra continued to rely on pre-existing BPL, APL and AAY lists for extending PDS benefits under the NFSA.

11.2 Expansion in PDS coverage post-NFSA

One of the major contributions of the NFSA was its move away from the earlier poverty line-based targeting system. Under the previous system, the number of BPL households to be covered was determined using headcount poverty ratios in urban and rural areas, as estimated periodically by the Planning Commission on the basis of National Sample Survey (NSS) consumption expenditure data. States were then required to identify eligible households within these fixed quotas through BPL censuses. As a result, the number of households entitled to subsidised foodgrains remained effectively capped by poverty-ratio-based allocations.

The process of identifying BPL households was widely criticised for being both administratively cumbersome and exclusionary. Although the total number of beneficiaries was determined using sample survey data, the actual identification of households depended on large-scale censuses based on simplified eligibility criteria. A BPL census conducted in 2002 drew considerable criticism for failing to identify many deserving households (Drèze and Khera 2010; Alkire and Seth 2013). Contro-

versies surrounding the NSS consumption expenditure data for 1999–2000 further complicated the revision of poverty estimates. In response, the Supreme Court directed the Union government to continue foodgrain allocations on the basis of the Planning Commission’s 1993–94 poverty ratios, effectively fixing the national BPL quota at 36 per cent until the enactment of the NFSA (Right to Food Campaign n.d.). The Court also called for a fresh BPL survey, although this did not take place until the SECC was conducted in 2011. Following the expansion in coverage under NFSA, several states used SECC data to identify beneficiary households.

The NFSA marked a significant shift away from this earlier targeting architecture by substantially expanding the coverage of subsidised foodgrains. While the Act did not introduce a universal PDS, it fixed coverage at 75 per cent of the rural population and 50 per cent of the urban population. State-wise allocations were subsequently determined in a manner that accounted for interstate variations in poverty and income levels. The expansion was particularly significant in poorer states where PDS coverage had previously remained limited. Several states, including Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Odisha and Tamil Nadu, had already expanded their BPL coverage prior to the enactment of the NFSA. To prevent these states from receiving lower foodgrain allocations under the new framework, the Act provided for additional ‘tide-over’ allocations based on previous levels of distribution at APL prices. These developments reflected the growing importance of state-level initiatives in shaping the reach and functioning of the PDS.

Following the enactment of the NFSA, effective PDS coverage expanded substantially.³ However, the structure of entitlements also changed. Under the earlier BPL system, households were generally entitled to 35 kg of foodgrains per month. Under the NFSA, this shifted to an individual entitlement of 5 kg per person per month, equivalent to 25 kg for a household of five members. Although this reduced the quantity available to some erstwhile BPL households, issue prices under the NFSA were lower than earlier subsidised prices. Subsequently, with the introduction of the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY) during the COVID-19 pandemic, foodgrains began to be distributed free of cost.

Figure 11.1 and Annexure 11.2 present a comparative picture of the expansion in PDS coverage following the enactment of the NFSA. Based on Census 2011 population estimates, the number of persons eligible for subsidised foodgrains increased to 81.34 crore (Foodgrain Bulletin 2025), compared to the nationally estimated 36.3 crore persons in BPL households in 2013 (Foodgrain Bulletin 2013). Including pre-existing state-level expansions, the estimated number of persons covered through BPL and AAY cards prior to the NFSA was around 59 crore. Overall, the expansion under the NFSA increased the number of persons receiving subsidised foodgrains by roughly 22 crore.

³ The APL category had, by this time, become almost dysfunctional in these states.

Public Distribution System under the National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013

SECTION

3

Right to Receive Foodgrains at Subsidized Prices

PRIORITY HOUSEHOLDS

5 kg

Per person per month at subsidized prices from TPDS

ANTYODAYA ANNA YOJANA *

35 kg

Per household per month (as specified by Central Government for each State)

* refers to the scheme launched by the Central Government on 25 December 2000; and as modified from time to time.

COVERAGE ENTITLEMENTS

The entitlements of persons belonging to eligible households shall extend up to:

75% of the rural population

50% of the urban population

SECTION

9

Coverage of Population

DETERMINATION OF COVERAGE

The percentage coverage under the Targeted Public Distribution System in rural and urban areas for each State shall be determined by the **Central Government**. The total number of persons to be covered in such rural and urban areas of the State shall be calculated on the basis of population estimates as per the **census of which the relevant figures have been published**.

SECTION

10

State Government to Identify Priority Households

STATE RESPONSIBILITIES

The State Government shall, within the number of persons determined under Section 9 for the rural and urban areas, identify priority households in accordance with guidelines framed under this sub-section. States must complete identification within **365 days** after the commencement of the Act.

IDENTIFICATION PROCESS

- a) Households to be covered under the Antyodaya Anna Yojana (to the extent specified under sub-section (1) of section 3), in accordance with the guidelines applicable to the said scheme.
- b) The remaining households as priority households to be covered under TPDS, in accordance with such guidelines as the State Government may specify.

The increase was particularly pronounced in states that had not previously operated expanded state-specific schemes (see Figure 11.1 and Annexure 11.2). For example, coverage in Bihar increased from 3.95 crore persons to 8.71 crore persons, while in Uttar Pradesh, it increased from 6.64 crore to 15.20 crore persons. In contrast, southern states such as Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Telangana had already increased their BPL coverage to numbers higher than what they received under the NFSA. However, enhanced central allocations may have reduced the financial burden on these state governments to some extent.

The expansion in coverage, particularly in states where the PDS had earlier been described as ‘languishing’ (Khera 2011), contributed significantly to strengthening the system. Improvements were also reflected in declining estimates of leakages. While leakages in the PDS were estimated at 45–47 per cent based on the 2011–12 consumption expenditure data, more recent estimates based on the Household Consumption Expenditure Survey (HCES) 2022–23 place leakages in the range of 22–28 per cent (Khera 2024; Puri and Pingali 2025). Estimates based on HCES 2023–24 suggest a further decline in leakages to 8.8 per cent (Puri and Pingali 2025).

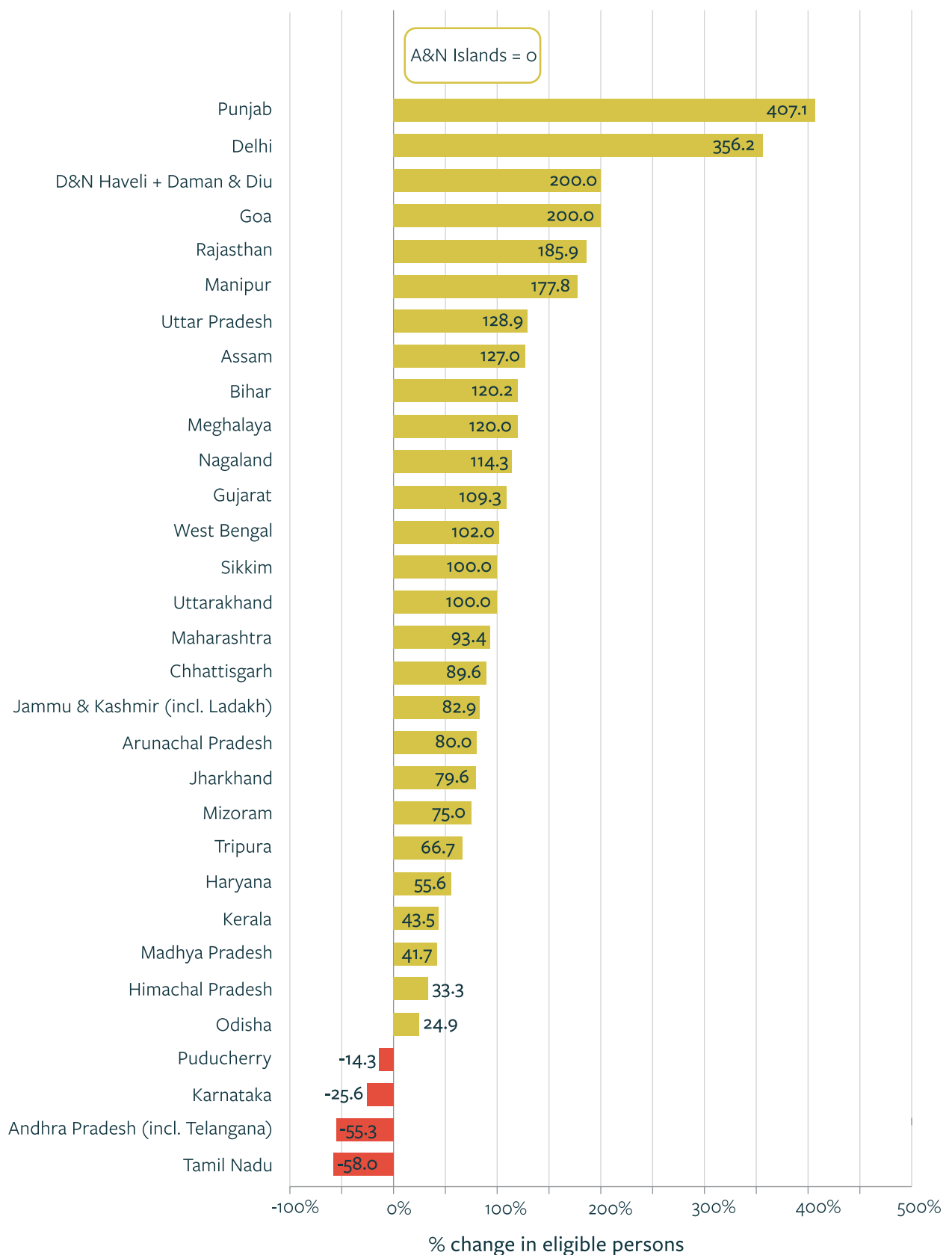
Overall, there is substantial evidence that the reach and effectiveness of the PDS improved following the introduction of the NFSA and associated reforms, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. At the same time, significant exclusions continue to persist (Sinha 2023). The following section examines some of the major challenges that continue to shape the functioning of the PDS.

11.3 Challenges in PDS under NFSA

11.3.1 Exclusions due to outdated population figures

The number of persons to be covered under the NFSA was determined on the basis of Census 2011 population figures. Although population levels have increased since then, the coverage figures have not been revised because of delays in conducting the decennial census, which was due in 2021 and is now expected to be completed only in 2027. As a result, NFSA coverage continues to rely on outdated population estimates. While [Section 9](#) of the NFSA links coverage to officially published Census figures, the [Targeted Public Distribution System \(Control\) Order, 2015](#), introduced state-wise ceilings on the number of persons eligible to receive subsidised foodgrains under the Act. Using official [population projections of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare](#), we estimate that more than fourteen crore additional persons who would otherwise be entitled under the NFSA were excluded in 2025 because coverage levels were not updated in line with the population growth.

Figure 11.1: Priority population under NFSA (2013) versus pre-NFSA BPL cardholders (pre-NFSA includes state BPL cards) (% change)



Sources and notes: Foodgrain Bulletins, GoI.

1. % change = $(\text{NFSA coverage} - \text{pre-NFSA BPL}) / \text{pre-NFSA BPL} \times 100$.

2. Chandigarh and Lakshadweep excluded (pre-NFSA BPL = 0).

3. All figures from Foodgrain Bulletins of respective years

4. States in red had near-universal PDS coverage even before the NFSA.

The impact of outdated population figures varies considerably across states. Since there is no centralised data on the total number of ration cards, including those issued under state schemes, we⁵ use HCES 2023–24 data on households purchasing cereals from the PDS as a proxy for effective coverage. This provides a better estimate than data on ration-card possession alone, as it captures the actual use of PDS entitlements. According to HCES 2023–24, 69.91 per cent of households reported purchasing foodgrains from the PDS. This includes coverage through both

NFSA: Provisions on Transparency

Section 11: The State Government shall place the list of the identified eligible households in the public domain and display it prominently.

Section 27: All Targeted Public Distribution System related records shall be placed in the public domain and kept open for inspection to the public, in such manner as may be prescribed by the State Government.

NFSA and state-level schemes. Using data from state portals, [Khera and Somanchi \(2020\)](#) arrive at a similar estimate of overall coverage.

As shown in Figure 11.2 (and Annexure 11.3), states without substantial state-level expansions tend to report lower effective coverage relative to NFSA norms. For instance, in Delhi, while 43.4 per cent of the population is covered under NFSA allocations, only 28.7 per cent reported receiving foodgrains from the PDS according to HCES estimates. Similar gaps are visible in states

such as Bihar and Gujarat. On the other hand, several southern states, along with states such as West Bengal, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, report coverage levels higher than NFSA allocations because of broader state-level schemes.

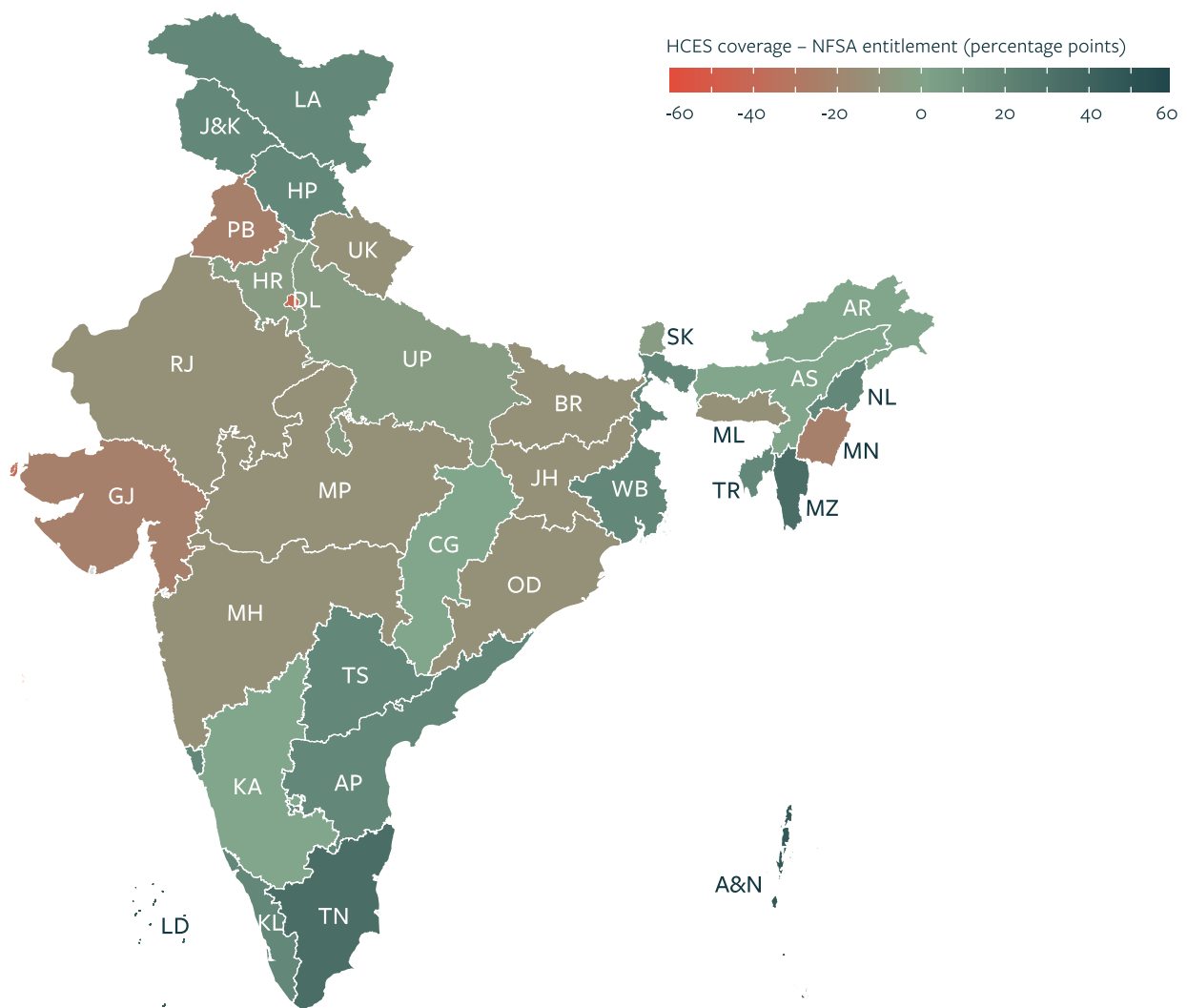
The persistence of outdated coverage ceilings has therefore created new forms of exclusion despite the overall expansion of the PDS under the NFSA. Periodic revision of eligible population figures using officially published population projections, rather than waiting for a full census, would help ensure that coverage keeps pace with demographic change. Meanwhile, state governments must continue issuing ration cards on an ongoing basis and periodically revise identification criteria for priority households. In some states, income cut-offs used for determining eligibility remain extremely low and are not regularly updated for inflation. For example, in Maharashtra, only households with annual incomes below ₹59,000 in urban areas and ₹44,000 in rural areas are eligible for priority household cards,⁴ amounting to less than ₹5,000 per month.

11.3.2 Card cancellations and lack of transparency

The NFSA requires state governments to identify eligible households under the TPDS (Sections 9 and 10) and maintain updated public lists of beneficiaries

⁴ See [Food, Civil Supplies and Consumer Protection Department, Government of Maharashtra, 2013](#)

⁵ We thank Anshuman Singh, CSIE, APU for support with analysing HCES data

Figure 11.2: PDS Coverage Gap: HCES, 2023–24 vs. NFSA Norms (in % points)

Sources and notes: Percentage covered in 2023–24 estimated from HCES unit-level data, by authors.

State-wise required priority persons under NFSA, 2013 from Foodgrain Bulletin, Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution.

Values represent the difference between the share of households purchasing cereals from PDS (HCES, 2023–24) and the share entitled to PDS access under NFSA norms. Positive values indicate higher actual coverage than mandated; negative values indicate lower.

(Sections 11 and 27). In practice, however, transparency in the preparation, revision and deletion of ration cards remains uneven across states. Some states, such as Odisha, publicised inclusion and exclusion criteria widely during the preparation of beneficiary lists through newspaper advertisements and village-level announcements. However, updated beneficiary lists and details of deletions are often not made publicly accessible in a consistent or transparent manner.

This assumes particular importance because state governments are required to periodically revise beneficiary lists to account for changes arising from migration, births, deaths, marriage and changes in socio-economic status. Given the state-wise ceilings on NFSA coverage, transparency in the deletion and addition of ration cards becomes essential to ensure accountability and prevent arbitrary exclusions. Public disclosure of deleted and newly added beneficiaries would also enable affected

households and civil society groups to verify changes and pursue grievances where necessary.

Concerns regarding transparency have become more significant in the context of large-scale card cancellations linked to digitisation and eKYC processes. In response to a question in Parliament (Rajya Sabha Unstarred Question No. 216 2025), the Union government stated that 2.49 crore ration cards had been deleted between 2020 and 2025 ‘as a result of digitisation efforts’. The stated reasons included duplication, identification of ineligible beneficiaries, eKYC mismatch, death and permanent migration. However, no disaggregated data were provided on the relative contribution of these categories. Reports from the field further suggest that beneficiaries are often unaware of the reasons for cancellation of their ration cards. Since individual-level ration card data are not publicly available, it becomes difficult for affected households, community groups and civil society organisations to independently verify deletions or pursue grievance redressal.

11.3.4 Digitisation, Aadhaar and related exclusions

Another major concern in the implementation of the TPDS under the NFSA relates to Aadhaar-based digitisation and authentication systems. Key problems associated with Aadhaar-linked implementation include the exclusion of eligible households due to the absence of Aadhaar cards, errors in Aadhaar records or difficulties in linking Aadhaar with ration cards. Exclusions have also resulted from the mandatory use of Aadhaar-enabled Point of Sale devices at ration shops, particularly in areas affected by unreliable electricity and internet connectivity. In such situations, beneficiaries may be denied rations, required to make repeated visits to ration shops or face cancellation of ration cards (Nayak and Nehra 2017). Some of the gravest consequences of Aadhaar-linked implementation failures have been documented in cases of starvation deaths linked to ration denial and card cancellations. The Right to Food Campaign has documented more than twenty-five such cases since 2016 (Dutta 2020).

Concerns regarding Aadhaar-enabled welfare delivery have been raised since the early stages of implementation. Critics have argued that biometric authentication systems used in the PDS remain vulnerable to infrastructural failures, technological errors and authentication problems, particularly when implemented at scale (Ramanathan 2011). Nevertheless, more established mechanisms for improving transparency and accountability in the PDS – including wall paintings, social audits, vigilance committees and local grievance redress mechanisms – have received comparatively less policy attention. The expansion of Aadhaar-linked verification processes has further intensified concerns regarding exclusion.

The Supreme Court’s judgment in Justice K.S. Puttaswamy v Union of India, 2018, popularly known as the Aadhaar judgment, upheld the validity of Aad-

CASE STUDY

Santoshi Kumari, aged 11 | Simdega district, Jharkhand

Santoshi Kumari belonged to a Dalit family in Simdega district, Jharkhand and lived with her mother, grandmother, younger sibling and father, who was reportedly suffering from mental illness. Her parents struggled to sustain the household through irregular wage labour, and the family was critically dependent on subsidised ration from the PDS for everyday survival. However, the family was reportedly denied PDS rations after Aadhaar-linkage was made mandatory for ration cards in 2017. Santoshi had dropped out of school and assisted with grazing livestock. In September 2017, she died following prolonged food deprivation. According to accounts by her family, they had attempted to feed her tea leaves and salt during this period, despite her severe illness and hunger. The family had been unable to access PDS rations due to difficulties in linking their ration card with Aadhaar.

(Mander 2017; Right to Food Campaign 2018)

haar-based technologies in the implementation of welfare programmes, including the PDS, despite concerns regarding exclusion and implementation failures. The judgment also marked a shift away from earlier governmental acknowledgements of the problems associated with mandatory Aadhaar linkage in welfare delivery.

A Government of India [notification issued in 2018](#) clarified that no eligible household should be denied subsidised foodgrains, nor should ration cards be cancelled solely for lack of Aadhaar linkage ([Government of India 2018](#)). Even so, reports of Aadhaar-linked ration denial have continued to emerge from various parts of the country. Concerns regarding exclusion have intensified further with the introduction of eKYC procedures for linking and verification of PDS beneficiaries and Aadhaar data. In March 2025, the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution directed states to complete Aadhaar-linked verification of all beneficiaries by the end of April 2025 ([Government of India 2025](#)). Reports from several states suggest that the eKYC drive exacerbated existing implementation difficulties and increased the risk of exclusion for vulnerable households ([Panda and Dash 2025](#)).

11.4 Expanding the PDS basket

There are numerous implementation challenges relating to the PDS that need immediate attention. Alongside, there is also a need to expand the basket of

commodities distributed through the PDS to include other nutritious food items such as pulses and edible oils, thereby enabling the system to make a more meaningful contribution to addressing food insecurity. The NFSA itself recognises this need. Section 12(2)(f) identifies the ‘diversification of commodities distributed under the Public Distribution System over a period of time’ as one of the reforms to be progressively undertaken under the TPDS.

Using HCES 2023–24 data, we identify states where more than 1 per cent of households reported purchasing pulses (or receiving them free of cost) or edible oils through the PDS. The data suggests that eleven states – Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Kerala, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Tripura and Uttarakhand – distribute pulses through the PDS. Whereas edible oils are distributed through the PDS in a smaller number of states, including Gujarat, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu and Tripura (see Table 11.1).

Table 11.1: Diversification in PDS

State	Proportion of households purchasing/receiving any amount from PDS		
	Pulses (in %)	Pulses (Free) (in %)	Edible Oil (in %)
Andhra Pradesh	8.2	0.0	0.1
Chhattisgarh	3.3	1.2	0.0
Gujarat	11.8	1.2	3.6
Haryana	0.0	0.0	40.4
Himachal Pradesh	78.9	0.2	79.1
Jharkhand	2.5	14.4	0.0
Kerala	1.3	0.1	0.1
Maharashtra	4.4	0.4	4.0
Rajasthan	0.1	12.4	11.3
Tamil Nadu	78.1	1.5	72.3
Tripura	58.7	0.0	12.9
Uttarakhand	9.7	0.1	0.0
All India	8.2	1.3	8.0

Sources and notes: Authors’ calculations based on Household Consumption Expenditure Survey, National Statistical Office, 2023–24

11.5 Conclusion

The TPDS under the NFSA remains one of the most important programmes for ensuring food security in India. Persistently high levels of food insecurity, malnutrition and nutritional deprivation continue to underscore the importance of the PDS as a central component of India's welfare architecture. As the chapter has shown, however, significant challenges remain in ensuring effective, equitable and accountable implementation of the system. One of the most urgent concerns is the need to revise beneficiary coverage in line with current population estimates so that the legally mandated proportions of the rural and urban population remain entitled to subsidised foodgrains under the NFSA in all states.

Greater transparency in the issuance, updating and cancellation of ration cards is equally necessary, particularly in light of growing concerns regarding exclusion linked to digitisation and Aadhaar-based authentication processes. Efforts to improve efficiency in welfare delivery cannot come at the cost of access to food entitlements for vulnerable households. The chapter also highlights the need to strengthen accountability and grievance redress mechanisms within the PDS. Long-standing local accountability measures such as social audits, vigilance committees and public disclosure of beneficiary lists remain important safeguards against exclusion and arbitrary cancellation of entitlements. The nutritional contribution of the PDS can similarly be diversified by expanding the basket of commodities distributed through the system beyond cereals to include items such as pulses and edible oils.

Ensuring food security for all requires moving beyond a narrow focus on grain distribution towards a more decentralised, equitable and nutrition-sensitive food system. In this regard, the broader objectives relating to food and nutritional security outlined in Section 31 and Schedule III of the NFSA deserve far greater policy attention than they have received thus far.

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