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The effectiveness of Public Distribution System (PDS) in Nawada district of Bihar: Notes from the field

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Abstract

Eradication of food insecurity and hunger have been the most important objectives since the beginning of Public Distribution System (PDS). 87% of the rural population and 61% of urban residents were found to be calorie deficient during 2009-10 in Bihar even after six decades of implementation of PDS. The success of any welfare policy depends on the accountability and transparency of implementing authority and the awareness of the beneficiaries. The paper based on field study of three villages in Nawada district of Bihar. The present paper will try to describe the effectiveness of public distribution system (PDS) in Nawada district of Bihar.

Keywords: Public Distribution System (PDS), Scheduled caste, undernutrition, food security, cash transfer

Introduction

Bihar has the highest proportion of people living below the official poverty line among Indian states, (a line which is often considered akin to the starvation line: Mander 2012), with 53.3% of the state's population classified as poor in 2009-10 (Planning Commission 2012). Health indicators also show Bihar lagging behind most of the other states. From the National Sample Survey, it can be incurred that 87% of the rural population and 61% of urban residents were found to be calorie deficient during 2009-10 in Bihar. Twenty seven percent of the children, i.e., one in four are either wasted or too thin for their height which is the result of a recent illness. More than half of the children, i.e., 56% are thereby underweight, which considers both chronic and acute undernutrition. (NFHS-3, Bihar, 2008:18) [5].

National Food Security Act has been passed in 2013 [6] with objective to provide food and nutritional security at affordable price to live a life with dignity. The Act provides for coverage of upto 75% of the rural population and upto 50% of the urban population for receiving subsidized foodgrains under Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS), thus covering about two-thirds of the population. The deep-rooted incidence of poverty and malnutrition in Bihar implies heavy reliance on PDS allocations throughout the state.

One of the main problems of the PDS in Bihar is poor delivery of food-grains. The PDS in Bihar has historically been riddled with huge problems of leakage and malfunction. The Planning Commission in its 2005 performance evaluation of the schemes estimated that 75% of PDS foodgrains did not reach its intended beneficiaries in Bihar compared to the national average of 57% (Planning Commission 2005) [3]. Comparable National Sample Survey data analysed by Khera (2012) suggested that in the same year (2004-05), 91% of the PDS foodgrains in Bihar were diverted from their eligible recipients. Five years later, in 2009-10, while most major states had improved their PDS performance, the progress in Bihar was much slower, and in 2009-10, 75% of the PDS foodgrains in Bihar still failed to reach their intended beneficiaries. The FPS-beneficiary interface is the core site where PDS leakage occurs. The Planning Commission (2005: IX) [3] calculated (conservatively) that more than 50% of foodgrain diversion in Bihar occur at the FPS level.

Methodology

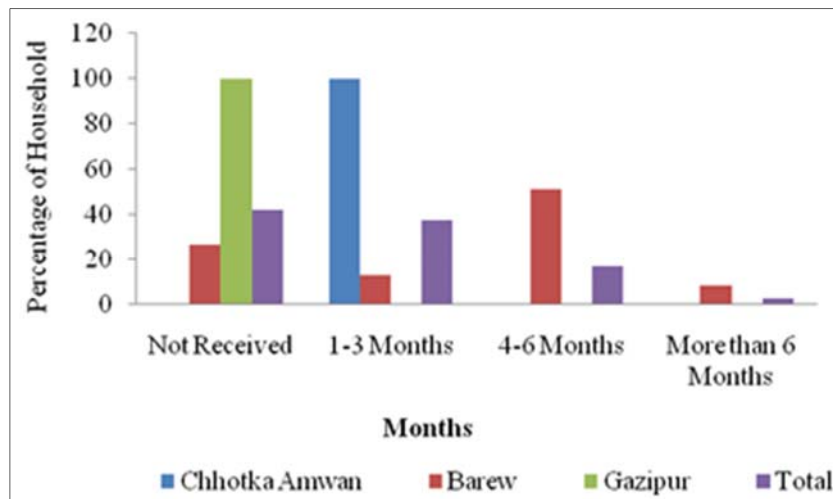
For the purposes of the study being proposed, three suitable villages (Chotki Amawn, Gazipur and Barew) of Akbarpur Block in Nawada District were selected for a field observation.

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Total 180 households are randomly selected (sixty households from each village) for study. The present paper will try to describe the effectiveness of public distribution system (PDS) in Nawada district of Bihar.

Results and Discussion

Figure 1 shows the month wise explanation of ration received by the sample households. Village-wise segregation of PDS data suggests that performance of the PDS is better in Brew compared to other two villages.

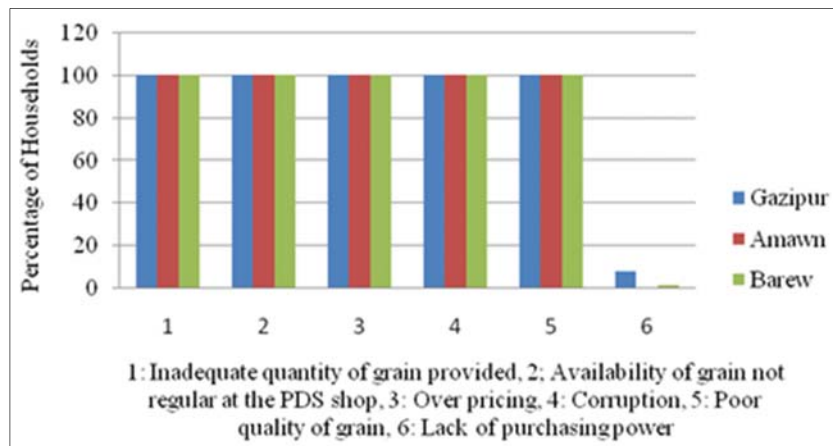


Source: Field Work

Fig 1: Ration Received Month wise

Out of 180 sample households, forty two percent households did not receive the ration due to lack of ration card or that they have received ration card very recently. Thirty eight percent households had received the ration less than four months. Seventeen percent households had received the ration between 4 to 6 months. Only two household had received more than 6 months ration. In other words, not a single household had received the full amount of ration in previous year. In Gazipur village, PDS beneficiaries never received ration in last one year. PDS is better implemented in Barew as compared to other two villages. Most of the households received ration on every alternate month in

Barew. PDS is more successful in Barew because the PDS beneficiaries are more aware about their rights. PDS beneficiaries belong from all categories in Barew but in other two villages, most of the beneficiaries are from Scheduled caste and poor Backward caste. If these poor asked their right then PDS owner threaten to beneficiaries. So we can say that implementation and success of PDS very much depend on the social, economic and political status of the beneficiaries. In Barew village, PDS beneficiaries are economically well, politically more active and PDS beneficiaries belong from all categories.



Source: Field Work

Fig 2: Problem Faced in Availing Food Grain

Figure 2 represents the problem faced in availing food grain by the beneficiaries. All the beneficiary of PDS says that they are not getting the full quantity of food grain. PDS dealer also charge extra for grain. The quality of grain is also poor. Most of respondents say that poor quality of grain is distributed by the PDS dealer and good quality of grain is

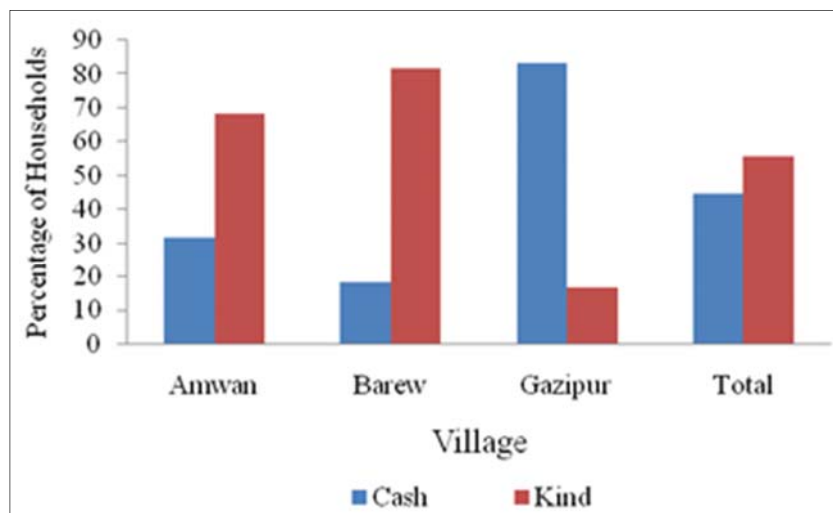
sold in the open market. Five households in Gazipur and only one household in Barew say that they did not have enough money to buy grain when ration was distributed. Kamla Devi, a mushar women says that if we complain to the PDS owner, their response is “ration nahi aaya hai jaha complain karna hai karo, tumahara hi ration bechkar case

ladenge” (Ration was not allotted to me, where ever you want to complain you do, will fight the case by selling your ration only).

Devnarayan Ravidas said that “whenever we complained, PDS owner said that ration were not issued from the "Food Corporation of India" so we are not distributing, if you

complain repeatedly then your quota will get transfer to other village”.

Keshri devi, another Scheduled caste women said that “PDS owner checked the quality of grain, if it is good then they sold in the open market whereas if the quality of grain is poor then only they distribute it. Some people even pay money to get ration card but still they fail to get the ration”.



Source: Field Work

Fig 3: Desirable Method of PDS

To reduce the diversion of PDS grain, the government is thinking about conditional cash transfer. This particular figure 3 explains the desirable method of public distribution system. Fifty six percent of sample households said that they prefer grain compared to forty four percent in favour of cash transfer. In Barew village, more than eighty percent PDS beneficiary demanded grain because in this village people get their ration on every alternate month as above figure shows. In contrast to Barew, more than 80 percent demanded cash in Gazipur village because people never received ration in last one year. It show that where PDS is functional, people preferred ration over cash. Corruption in the PDS and poor quality of grain were important reasons for preferring cash.

In spite of poor delivery of grain, fifty six percent sample households prefer kind in place of direct cash transfer. Most of the respondents say that we can consume grain directly with the other family members but if we get cash instead of grain it may be spent in activities other than the purchasing of food. Manti devi says that if we get cash then husband will drink alcohol from that money and then whole family will sleep hungry so we prefer grain.

Respondents had many reasons for preferring the PDS to cash transfers: poor access to banks and post offices, food security, not good experience of other cash transfer programmes, apprehensions regarding possible Misuse of cash, and familiarity with the existing system, among others.

Conclusion and Discussion

From above detailed description of field data, it can be inferred that PDS is better implemented in Barew compare to other two villages. PDS beneficiaries are getting their ration in every alternate month. All the scheduled castes are deprived from the government social security schemes in the Chhotki Amawan village. PDS distributor distributes less

ration compared to other communities. Out of 226 households, 125 households are from scheduled caste in Ghazipur village. All scheduled castes are landless. About 70% scheduled caste migrate for work. These poorest sections of society are not getting any benefits of food security schemes. Ration has never been distributed in last one year.

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