

# Evaluating the Impact of Fair Price Shops on Food Security: A Comprehensive Study within the Aspirational District Programme in Hazaribagh, Jharkhand

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## Abstract

The Aspirational District Programme, initiated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in January 2018, aims to promote equitable development across 115 identified districts in India, including 19 in Jharkhand, with Hazaribagh situated in the North Chotanagpur division. This program operates under 49 indicators spread across five key sectors: Health and Nutrition, Education, Agriculture and Water Resources, Financial Inclusion and Skill Development, and Basic Infrastructure. A critical aspect of this initiative is the Health and Nutrition sector, which emphasizes the provision of nutritious food to ensure that no one faces hunger. Food security is vital in assessing whether individuals have consistent access to food, particularly through the Public Distribution System (PDS). This system includes numerous Fair Price Shops, or ration shops, tasked with delivering essential goods to individuals categorized as Below Poverty Line (BPL), Priority House Holds (PHH), and those under the Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) in Jharkhand, aimed at supporting the most impoverished families with subsidized rates set by the central government.

My research focuses on several Fair Price Shops in Hazaribagh district, employing survey methods to gather primary data. The objective is to gain insights into the actual conditions of these ration shops and to evaluate the extent of benefits received by the local population.

**Keywords:** Aspirational District Programme, Food Security, Nutrition, Public Distribution System, Fair Price Shops, Ration Shops.

## Introduction

### Background of the Study

Aspirational District Programme (ADP) is a central level programme launched to uplift 115 districts of India which includes 19 from Jharkhand with the motto of “Sabka Saath Sabka Vikas” which means inclusive development, leaving no one behind. ADP works under the 5 major sectors- Health and Nutrition, Education, Agriculture and Water Resources, Financial Inclusion and Skill Development and Basic Infrastructure. The very first sector, health and nutrition also includes food security. It aims for bringing the nutritious food to the access of each and every individual i.e., no one should be left hungry.

Public Distribution System (PDS) with the collaborative effort of centre and state is in prevalence in the form of fair price shops in each and every district. It was introduced by Britishers during World War 2 which was reintroduced after India gained independence due to high inflation. In 1960s PDS focussed on distributing food grains in urban areas that were experiencing food shortages but due to the positive impact of green revolution, in 1970s and 1980s it was extended to tribal blocks and areas of high incidence of poverty. Later the Revamped Public Distribution System (RPDS) was launched in June 1992, to widen its reach in the distant, hilly, remote and inaccessible areas where a major population of poor live. In June, 1997, the Government of India launched the Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS) with focus on the poor where state possess the responsibility of identifying of the poor for delivery of the food grain and its distribution in the more transparent way.

Hazaribagh, situated in Jharkhand, comes under the programme of Aspirational District. Thus, my study revolves around the function of fair price shops in this district to understand the level of its effectiveness in achieving food security and hence, achieving one of the sectors of Aspirational District Programme.

Ration Shops in Hazaribagh provide the food grain and other essential commodities to 3 categories of ration card holders- Green Card ( who does not fall under BPL or AAY but still require assistance), Yellow Card to AAY ( Antyodaya Anna Yojana) and Red Card to PHH ( Priority Household).

These shops provide –

- 20 kg ration on 4 members which include only 5 kg rice to Green Card Holders.
- 35 kg ration per card to AAY which includes 14 kg wheat and 21 kg rice.
- 5 kg per person under the PHH which includes 4 kg rice and 1 kg wheat.
- Kerosene- 1 litre per month to AAY and PHH.
- Sugar- once in 3 months to only AAY
- Salt- 1 kg per card – not frequently but within 3 to 4 months.
- Chana Dal- monthly- 1 Re per kg to all card holders.
- Thaila started from now
- Calendar- Once in a year
- Dhoti/ Sari/ Lungi- one out of 3- Rs 10 per piece- twice in a year.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Since the launch of Aspirational District Programme, it is important to study or analyse the work done in this respect. Public Distribution System, though is in existence since a longer time period, it is essential to assess its effectiveness in achieving the food security which indirectly will also assess the nutrition that the people are gaining to understand the level of achievements that have been acquired under the theme- Health and Nutrition of Aspirational District Programme.

The problem persists in getting the ground reality of the ration shops that are working under the PDS to know the actual scenario of the food security in a particular region and to understand the point of views of beneficiaries.

My study dwells on bringing into light the effectiveness of the Fair Price Shops (Ration Shops) of the Hazaribagh District under the 5 parameters –

1. Stock and Availability
2. Quality of Food Grains
3. Distribution Process
4. Challenges Faced

## 5. Support from the Government

### Objectives of the Study

- To find the status of stocks and availability of food grains and other essential items along with its quality and distribution process in fair price shops of Hazaribagh.
- To assess the challenges faced and support gained from the government by the Public Distributors in Hazaribagh.
- To internally compare the status of ration shops between the three blocks of the same Hazaribagh District.

### Significance of the Study

- This study will help in understanding the importance of food security.
- It will help in analysing the extent to which the ration shops have been able to achieve the food security in a small town Hazaribagh of Jharkhand.
- This study will also bring into light the problems and challenges faced by the distributors of Hazaribagh.
- The intercomparison between the distributors of three different blocks of Hazaribagh will help in analysing the difference if it exists.

### Methodology

This study has been done only by taking the data from **primary sources** using the **random sampling method**.

#### Sample:

Three of the blocks of Hazaribagh district have been taken as the sample- Sadar Block (urban), Katkamsandi Block (sub-urban) and Churchu Block (rural).

My sample size for all three block is 10 each, a total of 30 samples.

The tool used for the collection of data is **Open-Ended Schedule**.

A schedule is the tool used by the researcher for collecting data directly from the respondents. It is filled by the researcher and the questions are asked in an interview mode.

#### Construction of Schedule:

The schedule constructed by me consisted of certain questions that were open-ended and interview was conducted between me, the researcher and the respondents. Questions listed in the schedule were as follows:

- Do you get enough food supplies (like rice, wheat) every month?
- Are the food items available in your shop on time for everyone?
- Do you ever run out of stock before the next supply arrives?
- Is the quality of food grains good?
- Do people complain about the quality of food items?
- Do you use a machine (e-pos) for selling rations?
- Do you have any problem with the machine or the adhaar system?
- Do people get their full share of rations every month?
- What are the main problems you face in running the shop?

- DO you receive any help or training from the government to improve your shop’s service?
- What kind of support would help you do your job better?

**Data Collection and Analysis**

**1. Stock and Availability**

**Total Sample: 30**

Sadar Block (SB): 10

Katkamsandi Block (KB): 10

Churchu Block (CB): 10

In terms of: % of FPSs

<b>BLOCKS</b>	<b>WHO AGREE WITH ENOUGH FOOD SUPPLIES EVERY MONTH</b>	<b>WHO ARE IN FAVOUR OF AVAILABILITY OF FOOD ITEMS ON TIME FOR BENEFICIARIES</b>	<b>WHO SUFFER SHORTAGE OF STOCK BEFORE THE NEXT SUPPLY ARRIVES</b>
SADAR	80%	90%	10%
KATKAMSANDI	70%	90%	30%
CHURCHU	40%	50%	60%

In the above table, we can clearly see that the condition of rural block FPS is much poorer than that of the urban and sub-urban blocks’ FPSs. The reason that the dealers gave is that beneficiaries list is too much due to which stock often comes to an end when other people arrive. They also said that in initial months, the food supplies are enough but later it is either delayed or lesser comes to the destination. They maximum time faces the shortage of the stocks of rice, wheat.

The Sadar and katkamsandi Blocks of Hazaribagh, which is in urban and sub- urban areas respectively are much satisfied with the stock’s sufficiency and also its availability for those who are entitled. According to them, they get sufficient food supply every month. Only 3 among the dealers of Katkamsandi stated about the end of the stock in the middle month.

**2. Quality of Food Grains**

In terms of: % of FPSs who agrees with

<b>BLOCKS</b>	<b>GOOD QUALITY</b>	<b>AVERAGE QUALITY</b>	<b>POOR QUALITY</b>	<b>COMPLAIN AGAINST QUALITY BY THE PEOPLE</b>
SADAR	80%	20%	None	None
KATKAMSANDI	10%	90%	None	None
CHURCHU	None	100%	None	None

Analysing the above data, we can see that most of the dealers of urban area appreciated the quality of the food grains that are available through government. Some even claimed it to be better than that available in the normal market. They also asserted about no complaints from the beneficiaries regarding its quality. The dealers of Katkamsandi Block were in favour of the average quality and did not boast much on the quality. According to them, beneficiaries are having no complaints for the quality and they even do not expect the best quality in free.

The dealers of rural block too agree with the quality of the food grains to be average. In totality, no dealers gave any negative statement on the quality of the food grains, nor any beneficiaries. The main reason spotted is actually they don't have much expectation and were focussing much on 100% availability of the food grains than the quality.

### 3. Distribution Process

In Terms Of: % of FPSs

<b>BLOCKS</b>	<b>WHO USE E-POS FOR SELLING RATIONS</b>	<b>WHO FACE ANY PROBLEM WITH THE MACHINE</b>
SADAR	100%	20%
KATKAMSANDI	100%	60%
CHURCHU	100%	100%

We can clearly see that all the FPSs uses e-Pos machine for identity authenticity of the users which has been launched by the government for the eradication of ghost cards i.e., the card used by non – beneficiaries or the same beneficiaries for multiple times.

But, two of the dealers of urban block complained about late replacement of the machine when it gets outdated or faces problem in its functioning.

Six of the dealers in sub- urban block complained about slow network of 2G still being followed for e-Pos Machine due to which the entries are done very slowly. Thus, people need to form a long queue and wait for a longer time.

All the dealers of rural block have the issue with the network of internet connectivity. It is very difficult for the distributors to connect the e-Pos machine. Thus, in many of the time the beneficiaries name are quoted on the wall of the shop and since the villagers are easily identifiable so the distribution is even done manually in these blocks.

Though, there is availability of the machine but due to poor network the dealers of sub urban area and rural area faces much problem either asking the beneficiaries to wait or providing them the items manually with later entry.

### 4. Challenges Faced

<b>SADAR BLOCK</b>	<b>KATKAMSANDI BLOCK</b>	<b>CHURCHU BLOCK</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Time gap in the change of the defective e-Pos machine (70%)</li> <li>➤ Slow network (30%)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Slow network (80%)</li> <li>➤ No Commission given (40%)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Very slow network (100%)</li> <li>➤ Very less commission (40%)</li> </ul>

The above mentioned are the major challenges faced by the dealers of each of the three blocks.

The Urban Block dealers did not give any statement on low commission rather they were focussing much on the time gap taken in replacement of the e-Pos machine when it gets obsolete and 3 dealers complained about the slow network, who were situated far behind.

Most of the dealers of sub-urban block complained about the slow network of 2G through which the e-Pos machine is connected. 4 of the dealers took courage to speak about the low commission that they get from the government in return of their service for which they also once went on strike.

All the dealers of rural block complained about slow network for the functioning of machine and some complained about the commission as well.

**5. Support from the Government**

<b>BLOCKS</b>	<b>% of FPS that receive training from the government</b>	<b>Kind of support needed by the FPSs to do the job better</b>
Sadar	100%	Need the quick replacement of damaged machine, fast network
Katkamsandi	100%	Fast network of at least 4G, Appraisal in commission, more food items to be included.
Churchu	100%	Bigger space for the shop, Timely availability of food items, fast network.

The dealers of all the three blocks asserted that they get timely training from the government whenever any new scheme or machine is launched. They also stated that there is monthly meeting with the MO (Marketing Officer) in block for any help or queries.

There are some more support and help from the government that the distributors are seeking from the government. Sadar Block as facing the difficulties in time taken for replacement of machine want it to be solved for the flawless and smooth function of the system and also desire for the fast network.

Katkamsandi Block dealers seek for fast network and also commission to be given on time and hike in commission whereas Churchu Block dealers are struggling with the space in their shop as they want bigger size of their shop and also want timely and enough availability of the items that are to be distributed.

**Findings**

- 80% of the dealers of urban block, 70% of the dealers of sub- urban block and 40% of that of rural block has the enough stock of food supplies and other essential items every month.
- Most of the dealers of urban and sub- urban block has enough stock whereas rural block is striving for its sufficiency as the beneficiaries’ size is much more in rural areas.
- Since Sadar and Katkamsandi Blocks have sufficient stock, thus, its availability for beneficiaries’ too is much higher in these blocks in comparison with that of the rural block.
- There is very less shortage of stock before the next supply arrives in the urban and sub- urban area whereas, rural blocks even lag behind in these criteria. 60% suffer from the shortage of stock.
- The quality of the food grains available is from good to average. Though, on an average the major support for the quality is regarding the average quality.
- All the dealers are provided with the e-Pos machine for distribution but there are many problems related to it faced by all the dealers especially by the rural block.
- Major Challenges faced by the dealers are – slow network, less commission and availability problem for the rural block.
- All the dealers are equipped with the timely training related to any use of machine or any new food items but they seek much more support from the government for making it an effective way of enhancing food security.



### Suggestions

- More of the food items should be included by the Government in FPS either free or in a very subsidized rate.
- Government should monitor on the working of the e-Pos machine and should quickly replace it if found any problem.
- The network of at least 4G should be given to these dealers for avoiding any long queue of the poor people and their unnecessary wait
- The dealers should be given sufficient commission and also timely incentive for their effort.
- Government should have a check on rural blocks for enough availability of the stock of food and other essential items.

### Conclusion

Fair Price Shops plays very important role in enhancing food security but it has failed to achieve the target 100% especially the rural blocks' FPS. There has definitely been an increment in food security as people have been aware of it and has started availing the facility. No provision of Ghost Card is being followed because of the use of e-Pos machine but the provision of making the card even of the needy people has become too difficult. In Jharkhand, nowadays, only the green card is being provided and no red and yellow card as earlier. The online process of making the card scare the poor needy people as the middlemen cheat the poor people and charge money from them. In spite of being needy, the poor people has switched to normal purchase of food items only which is a matter of great concern.

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