Policy Watch - One Nation One Ration Card

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One Nation One Ration Card Scheme which will allow **portability of food security benefits** will be available across the country from **1st July, 2020.** This means poor migrant workers will be able to buy subsidized rice and wheat from any ration shop in the country.

Highlights of the Scheme

- The scheme is all about **inter-state portability of ration cards.** It enables the beneficiaries who are taking food grains under the Public Distribution System (PDS) to access the same benefits if they happen to migrate from one part of the country to the other, in a seamless manner.

- India has been computerising its PDS operations for quite a few years. This scheme of inter state portability is a logical progression to the next level of enabling seamless public services under the PDS, throughout the country.
- The government is going to launch the scheme on a pilot basis in August by having four states in two clusters namely Andhra Pradesh and Telangana and Maharashtra and Gujarat.
    - These states have fully computerized their PDS operations and are fully on board to affect this transition to inter state portability.

How important is this scheme for migrant labourers in the country?

- **Historically, India has had food security benefit schemes which have domicile based access.**
- 45.36 crore people or **37% of the population is that of migrant labourers.** The scheme is therefore important for anyone who is going to move from one place to the other.
    - It happens that when one moves from one place to the other (for e.g. a government employee being transferred from one place to another), it takes about **two to three months to get a ration card** at that next place and then further more time to start getting commodities against the same.
- **After the implementation of the scheme, it would be ensured that a migrant is able to access the benefits which is due to him in any part of the country.** This would be ensured on the basis of **Aadhaar authentication** and a validated data.

How important is the scheme for curbing corruption?

- Prior to the announcement of the scheme, the government embarked on **weeding out bogus ration cards.** In fact, in the last five years, the government has managed to delete nearly 3 crore duplicate and bogus ration cards. This also helped the government in cleaning up the data of the PDS.
- In One Nation One Ration Card Scheme, the fundamental prerequisite is **deduplication** so that it is ensured that the same person does not figure as a beneficiary in two different locations of the country.
- With the help of the scheme, the government would be able to **rightly target the beneficiaries** to provide them with the foodgrains under the PDS. The scheme is **linked with Aadhaar and biometrics,** this removes most possibilities of corruption.
- The government is creating **a central data repository** to get all the details of ration card which are being maintained by states so that the repository acts as a clearing house or a server to do the cross checking on the basis of Aadhaar authentication. This ensures that there is no corruption or duplication of the benefits that are being passed on to the beneficiaries. The government will ensure all these things with the help of technology.

How the government is ensuring food security in the country?

- The government is **covering nearly 81 crore people** of the country under the National Food Security Act (NFSA) based on the 2011 census.
- Under the NFSA, the government is covering some of the most vulnerable sections namely the **antyodaya families** who get 35 kgs/month as a family and **the priority households** where the members of the family get 5 kgs/month of food grains.
- The government is also ensuring enough food stock in the country.
- Distributing food grains is a joint responsibility of central and state governments. It has been made very clear to all the states that **no genuine beneficiary should be turned back only for the reason of not possessing Aadhaar.**
- The government has other mechanisms through which the beneficiaries can prove their bonafides and take the benefits.
- One Nation One Ration scheme will further help in **adding to the nutritional values** of the poor consumers.
- The scheme will **add to the integration of the country** as wherever a person goes, he will be able to get food grains at that place.

How the government will ensure the implementation of the scheme?

- Within a particular state, there will be an **intra state portability.** There are ten states which are fully ready for the same. These are: Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Haryana, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Telangana and Tripura.
  - In these ten states, 100% PoS machines have been arranged for green distribution and all PDS shops have been connected to the internet.
  - It has been seen on the ground that a beneficiary within such a state can go freely and take PDS rations from other shop i.e. apart from the shop that is nominated for him.
- Building on this intra state portability, the government is **building clusters on pilot basis** so that inter state portability is ensured within a limited number of states.

Depot Online System

- **The government is planning to integrate PDS with Depot Online System.**
- Integrating with the help of technology, the depots which have stocks and distribution activities is logical, to ensure that one has a complete blueprint of the transaction system that goes in the area of PDS.
- **There is a need to keep a track on the inventory that is being received and distributed from the depots,** so that one is able to integrate the total supply chain of the PDS beginning from the delivery of the food grains to the state agencies by FCI to the delivery to a customer.

Challenges

- Since the scheme is based on technology, the government may face some **technical challenges** during the implementation of the scheme.
- Few regional parties have expressed apprehensions on bearing the **cost of additional ration cards.** This is a matter which is to be settled between the states and the Government of India.
- One of the apprehensions mentioned by few states is the **cost of additional food grain to be supplied to the migrant workers.**
    - However, the whole system is based on the entitlements mandated under the NFSA and this prevents the charges of additional cost. Beneficiaries will continue to pay the same issue prices that are fixed under the NFSA.

Way Forward

- The food security scheme under the NFSA costs more than Rs 1 lakh crore per year. It is very expensive but is highly needed. There is a need to ensure that subsidized food grains ultimately go to the person or the family that is entitled to.
- The One Nation One Ration Card should also include access to health and other things.
    - At the principal level, within the government, there is broad consensus on having a unified kind of service delivery system based on technology and identity.
    - A unified service platform combining all the citizen centric services on the basis of few parameters of identity and other indicators of technology, is the need of the hour.

With One Nation One Ration Card Scheme, the focus of the government is on improving efficiency and delivery of services.