

Adivasis' Right to Food: Overcoming Obstacles in the Public Distribution System

Preliminary Findings of the Study



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Background:

Living in the rugged and remote terrains of the Eastern Ghats, Adivasi communities in Andhra Pradesh face significant challenges in accessing Fair Price Shops (FPSs) i.e. ration depots due to difficult commuting conditions and limited public transportation infrastructure. The ration depots are often located far from their scattered habitations, creating a particular burden for vulnerable groups such as single women, widows, the elderly, and disabled individuals.

In this context, the PDS 'doorstep delivery system,' technically known as the Mobile Dispenser Unit (MDU) system, was introduced by the erstwhile Government of Andhra Pradesh in 2021 with the aim of distributing rations at doorsteps. In the doorstep delivery system, an MDU operator (the driver of a mini goods carrier) was responsible for lifting rations in bulk from the local FPS and visiting each locality for distribution. Beneficiaries were informed through village volunteers about the day and time of the MDU visit, so they could be available at home to collect their rations. Essentially, ration distribution responsibilities were given to MDU operators, while FPS dealers served as suppliers of rations to MDUs.

In this context LibTech India has conducted a study. Although the larger study aimed to examine the rights conferred under NFSA for PDS beneficiaries, this note is limited to understanding Adivasis' experience with MDUs and their efficacy in comparison to the FPS system.

About the Study:

The study aimed to examine the rights conferred by the National Food Security Act (NFSA) 2013 for entitlement holders of PDS in the context of Adivasis in ITDA Paderu. The study explored exclusions, information systems, last-mile challenges in availing entitlements, grievance redressal systems, and a comparison of the doorstep delivery system with the erstwhile FPS system with respect to PDS.

As part of the study, we gathered information from 790 households by interviewing members from 10 randomly selected shandies out of a total of 40, covering 11 mandals within the Paderu ITDA. The survey took place in October 2023. However, we have also conducted qualitative interviews of Adivasis and officials from village to district level.

Preliminary Findings of the Study:

- MDUs in tribal areas did not reach every doorstep to deliver rations, even for villages with road connections. Instead, MDUs were parked at fixed locations in or near a village where people would go to collect their rations.
- For villages without road connections, MDUs were parked in nearby villages with road access, requiring people to walk to collect their rations.
- However, the study observed that the doorstep delivery system contributed to reducing the distance, time, and cost (including opportunity cost) involved in collecting rations each month.
- 83% of respondents prefer the doorstep delivery system over the ration depot system for collecting rations. Only 9% preferred the FPS system, while 8% said they were fine with both.
- 92% of the respondents said that the distance to fetch rations is higher in the FPS system.
- 92% of the respondents said that the time to travel to collect rice grains is higher in the FPS system.
- 93% of the respondents said that the cost to travel to collect rice grains is higher in the FPS system.
- 93% of the respondents said that the work lost to collect rice grains is higher in the FPS system.
- 90% of the respondents said that the number of trips to collect rice grains is higher in the FPS system.
- 75% of the respondents said that instances of receiving less rice grains than entitled are higher in the FPS system.
- 75% of the respondents said that instances of missing rice grains completely are higher in the FPS system.
- 65% of the respondents said that instances of being forced to buy additional items to collect rice grains are higher in the FPS system.
- 71% of the respondents said that the grievance redressal system is better in the doorstep delivery system.
- 99% of the respondents preferred to collect their ration rather than receiving the amount for food grains under the DBT scheme. .

Recommendations:

- The state government should reconsider any proposal to revert to the old FPS system by removing the doorstep delivery system.

- Continue and strengthen the doorstep delivery system (MDU) to address the significant challenges Adivasis face.
- Improve MDU operations to enhance efficiency and ensure timely visits.
- Enhance accessibility and reduce associated costs with MDU operations.
- Strengthen grievance redressal mechanisms for both MDU and FPS systems.
- Prevent exploitation and ensure beneficiaries receive their full entitlements without discrepancies.
- Promote awareness about PDS rights and entitlements among beneficiaries.
- Consider community feedback for policy decisions to meet the needs and preferences of Adivasi communities.
- Consult Gram Sabhas before making any key policy changes in PDS disbursement.



Team Behind the report

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