

Consumer Awareness and Protection in Public Distribution System in Odisha : A Study of Two Districts, Mayurbhanj and Balasore

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ABSTRACT

An ideal consumer can save himself from being exploited when he or she is alert, responsible and environment friendly, literate and aware of the existing laws protecting its welfare. An economy, in which consumers are aware, can practice their duties and exercise their rights freely, the efficiency of the sellers and producers will be higher and so the economy will be more developed. To protect the consumer against the exploitative practices of the sellers, Consumer Protection Act, 1986 was enacted. With this background the paper makes an attempt to know the present provisions under Public Distribution system to protect the welfare of the consumers and to examine the extent of awareness of their rights with regard to time, quantity and price of the products to which they are entitled and the impact of such concentrated and well coordinated effort on which a huge amount has been invested. The paper has made an empirical analysis to know the extent of awareness and consciousness regarding their rights under social safety net, like PDS and the power to raise their voice in proper forum and to know the loopholes which withholds the consumer to reap the benefits. The fieldwork has been carried out from a sample of 1200 beneficiaries in five villages of two less developed, tribal dominated districts of Odisha, Mayurbhanj and Balasore, deliberately chosen to represent various levels of economic development within the tribal and rural areas of the state. PDS shop owners have also be solicited for their views as regards complaints of the consumers The study observed that the PDS beneficiaries are mostly aware of the time, quantity and the rate of the products they are entitled to. But they often faced problems in the regularity of product supply. Major problem was many BPL households do not have cards. Some have lost it and some others have given it as a mortgage. Some of the households complained that they are not aware whether they are entitled to get a PDS, AAY or Annapurna card. The most excruciating observation of the study was that almost all the beneficiaries are not aware where exactly to raise a voice to express their grievances.

Key Words : Consumer Protection Act, 1986, Antodaya Anna Yojana, TPDS

INTRODUCTION

An ideal consumer is alert, responsible and environment friendly, buys only when there is a need, prevents himself/herself from being cheated and knows his/her rights and duties. An economy, in which consumers are aware, can practice their duties and exercise their rights freely, the efficiency of the sellers and producers will be higher and so the economy will be more developed. Various factors have been responsible for consumer exploitation such as illiteracy, lack of information,

monopoly in production, asymmetric information and unequal market power etc. The need for consumer protection arises because of information asymmetries and unequal market power. Laws and policies that safeguard (at low cost) the interests of the consumers are accordingly important for development and growth of markets. To protect the consumer against the exploitative practices of the sellers, Consumer Protection Act, 1986 was enacted. The Act envisages a three tier quasi judicial system comprising (i) District Consumer Disputes Redressal Forum, (ii) State Consumer Disputes Redressal

Commission and (iii) National Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission. It is highly crucial to know how far the consumers under Public Distribution System, the instrument through which the Govt. tries to achieve food security, are aware of their rights and the provisions for protecting themselves from exploitation.

Review of literature:

Consumers' awareness and protection has gained importance in almost all the economies. Scholarly studies have probed the various dimensions of its need, method and effects. Present exercise reviews a few of those. Some of these exclusively probe consumers' awareness and protection, while some others concentrate on different aspects of PDS which, directly or indirectly, highlight the plight of the consumers in this subsidy driven programme.

Rudinger (1967) has observed that Consumer education is a by-product of consumer information and consumer protection. The growth of consumer consciousness has caused a great awareness of the need for consumer education. One of the main factors in bringing about the current, greater, consumer awareness was the publication of *Which?* (And for some years *Shopper's Guide*). *Which?* reports the results of comparative tests of goods and services available to the shopper. When the first issue appeared in 1957, it made a tremendous impact because, for the first time, the names and prices of all the brands and models tested were given, in full, side by side with the results of the tests and the assessments of the product's value, even where a product was 'not recommended'. When this first *Which?* Was published, the word consumer was hardly used, and the concept of consumer research (research on behalf of the consumer, not - like market research - into his preferences) was not clearly defined, nor were the differences between consumer protection, consumer enlightenment, and consumer information. These are all inter-dependent and all, to a certain extent, aspects of consumer education.

Agbonifoh and Edoreh (1986) postulate that the consumer is the king in the marketplace. They observe that this doctrine is closely related to *laissez-faire* with regard to products failing or succeeding, though market inequalities make it difficult to succeed in this. The authors advocate that the factors which handicap consumers in relation to sellers are product complexities, making it difficult for consumers to make reasoned comparisons, lack of interest and capability on the part of consumers

to obtain and evaluate necessary product information, inequalities in income distribution and consumer ignorance and lack of expertise. Using a 3-part questionnaire, in the Benin City in Nigeria, administered to a sample of 50 adults from each of nine zones with a range of questions they have concluded that a low level of consumer awareness is, for a developing country, because of low levels of formal education and a lack of consumer organization put the consumers at a disadvantage. They have outlined policy recommendations to assist in aiding the consumer to become more adept (through laws and education) at discovering their rights.

Al-Ghamdi *et al.* (2007) examined the role of consumer protection agencies. In the light of growing importance of consumerism in developing countries, the paper measures the level of satisfaction with the services provided by five different consumer protection agencies, in a chosen country, Saudi Arabia. Based on a questionnaire survey conducted in Saudi Arabia and a model developed for this study, this empirical research attempts to determine customers' satisfaction with consumer protection agencies. The study indicates that overall satisfaction is primarily derived from the objectives and roles played by consumer protection agencies. The findings of this study have implications on the manner in which consumer protection agencies in Saudi Arabia must operate.

The Case study by Morris and Reeson (1978), is primarily concerned with the 'economic determinants of consumer complaints' rather than with the socio-economic or psychological characteristics of complaints. They spotlight consumer complaints as an important signaling device - government action is undertaken as a result of them and they provide an index of consumer dissatisfaction which increases in importance as further data becomes available. The study ranges across data relating to England and Wales which demonstrates that consumer durables, as a purchase category, are more likely to be involved in more complaints than other purchases. It proclaims that, despite the importance, consumer complaints have attracted little attention in the marketing, management and economics literature (this omission is much more marked in the UK than in the USA or the rest of Western Europe).

The study by Foxall (1978), points out some deficiencies in consumer attitudes. It confirms that the emergence of consumerism has, generally, been welcomed, not only by customers, journalists and

educators, but even by businessmen who, ostensibly, have most to lose from the activities of an organised consumer movement. The study demonstrates that the actual behaviour of consumerists is given as evidence that there are aspects of the consumer movement which are of help to no-one, least of all consumers. It confirms the concern specifically with consumerists' expressed and implicit attitudes towards the effects of consumer protection measures on private and social costs; the realities of consumer behaviour and the needs of the customer; and the workings of the modern competitive marketing system. It sums up that consumerism leads to decisions being made on behalf of consumers, rather than by consumers, which can only harm consumers and this cannot be disregarded.

Larsen and Lawson (2013) have examined the relationship between the development of consumer rights and the emergence of the contemporary consumer movement. Rethinking the contemporary consumer movement as a new social movement (NSM) enables a closer examination of the actors, opponents and goals of the movement, and how governments and other political institutions responded by conceptualizing and developing a set of "consumer rights". The researchers have used the lens of NSM theory to examine the historical development of, and relationship between, consumer rights and the contemporary consumer movement. As a NSM, the goal of the contemporary consumer movement is to bring about ideological change. However, this paper argues that the development of "consumer rights" can be read as an attempt by oppositional forces to co-opt the goals of the movement, thereby neutralising the threat of the movement and negating the opportunity for radical ideological change. Identifying that co-optation can occur not only through the actors, but also via the "totality" or goals of a movement, broadens our understanding of how NSMs decline or are institutionalised. The paper offers a critical interpretation of the origins and purpose of "consumer rights". It suggests that rather than being read as a success of the contemporary consumer movement, consumer rights actually represent a co-optation of the movement, which served to placate consumer activists while actually maintaining the very structures of advanced market capitalism and consumer culture the movement sought to destabilize.

In India consumer protection was given importance in long past. Kautilya's Arthashastra mentions the protection of consumer's interest against exploitation by

producers and sellers. Malpractices such as adulteration, overcharging and underweighting of the goods were considered as punishable offences. The Indian ethos and culture promotes wise consumption.

Lizzy (1993), based on a study on consumer awareness in Kerala, underlines that in the districts with relatively high literacy rate consumer complaints received by the district forums are high. The study records that even though the forums are easily accessible; the impact of these, in terms of grievance redressal has remained marginal. Paucity of funds, lack of proper place to function has deteriorated the efficacy of the district forums. State Commission is in no way better. Chances of cases being rejected were observed to be very high. This speaks of unawareness of the consumers about the technicalities of the act and their reluctance to seek advice. In some districts consumer awareness has improved due the efforts of the voluntary services as the forums do not extend any consultancy services. The study suggests that like Gujarat, a Consumer Affairs and Protection Agency could be set up to look after the interests of the consumers. But, consumer education is the most important factor to utilize the redressal machinery.

Raksit (2003) has also observed that even the TPDS has not performed well. Gaiha (2003) underlines that even though realization of the right to food is slow, difficult and uncertain, yet it can spread awareness. More significantly, it has the potential to provide a strong foundation for poverty alleviation programmes which can enable the government to do what they should and can sharpen the focus of CSOs as an active agents of these programmes.

Mooji's paper (2001) contends poor performance of the PDS scheme in the undivided Bihar (Bihar and Jharkhand). It observes that even though many people benefit from the existing set up, yet there are people within almost all categories of stakeholders who are dissatisfied with the large scale misappropriation of food grains. The paper argues that there exists the scope for change. But the change requires strategic political maneuvering and initially a low key approach, so that the strong vested interests are not awakened and antagonized.

Suryanarayana (2008) observes that nearly four fifth of the households in the rural areas and two thirds in the urban centers are already covered by the PDS. Yet a minor subset of the ration card holding households depended upon PDS. In general, even AAY and BPL card households obtained about thirty per cent of their

food consumption from PDS. This could be because either inadequate PDS entitlement or reasons like poor quality, high transaction cost, inadequate physical access and availability or unawareness. The paper underlines that the issue of PDS is not universalisation but improved functioning, greater efficiency and BPL friendliness.

The paper by Jha (2002) observes that the state governments have not taken proper initiatives in implementing the judicial directives. It also highlights that the effort to wipe out hunger need more concerted effort, such as, widespread public action, in which people themselves, aware and conscious of their rights, seek to challenge and remind the government of its responsibilities.

Dreze and Sen (1989), in their volume, 'Hunger and Public Action', highlighted that public participation can have powerful positive roles on government policies. These could be both 'collaborative' and 'adversarial'. Collaborative role of the public is essential for health campaign, literacy awareness, land reforms and other endeavours where co-operative effort is essential. To initiate these endeavours and to ensure government's honest and serious action, adversarial pressure from the public is crucial. This could be possible through socio-political activism, media pressure and informed public criticism.

A good number of schemes have been in operation under the aegis of various state governments. But most of these have remained almost non-functional. Sincere effort to create awareness that access to food is a legitimate entitlement can put pressure on the government to effectively implement various food schemes. A forceful demand for regular and genuine distribution of food and that too in right time, through PDS and pragmatic classification of BPL and APL families have already been taken up by various organizations and independent groups. But the success of such endeavour in a less developed state like Odisha is yet to be appraised.

Under this broad backdrop, the present exercise is an attempt to examine consumers' awareness and protection under Public Distribution System, a subsidy driven scheme which aims to provide subsistence food requirement to the people below the poverty line. The study mainly address if the poor and needy consumers in this welfare scheme getting their due in appropriate quantity, proper quality and in right time. If not, are they aware where to vent their grievances? Are they conscious of the laws enacted and implemented, from

time to time, to protect their interest? Are they knowledgeable of the various agencies extending and implementing consumer welfare schemes? If all these answers are in negative, then what is the role of the Government, academia and the public? Certainly, it is not only to make the consumers at the grassroots aware, conscious and knowledgeable but to induce them so that they can shed their fear and come up to the forum to speak out their problems. Within this broad framework, the research work has the following objectives.

Objectives of the study:

1. To identify the problems faced by the consumers under Public Distribution System and to detail the quantity constraints, quality constraints and time constraints in the system;
2. To assess awareness of the consumers about the laws to protect their interest;
3. To look into whether the consumers are approaching the appropriate authority for the different constraints they are facing;
4. To prescribe specifically tailored policy measures to take care of the interest of these socially and economically vulnerable group of consumers at the grassroots.

METHODOLOGY

The study has deployed a multitude of research methodologies, such as desktop research, key informant interviews, a survey of rural inhabitants comprising a tribal and a non-tribal segment, and a survey of a stratified random sample of distributors in PDS. The fieldwork has been carried out in five villages of two less developed, tribal dominated districts of Odisha, Mayurbhanj and Balasore, deliberately chosen to represent various levels of economic development within the tribal and rural areas of the state.

The desktop research has involved a comprehensive review of national and international literature, as well as the collection and processing of secondary data. Specific datasets used in the work has included annual Economic Surveys of the state, District Statistical Handbooks, official records of the Public Distribution System and District Consumer Information Centres.

Key informant interviews have been conducted to examine how far the existing institutional and social environment encourages and facilitates consumer awareness. Key informants are the people with

considerable knowledge of the areas under investigation as well as providers of education, training, health care and other support. NGOs and Self Help Groups active in the area under study are also considered as key informants. A well structured questionnaire has been used for the purpose. A total of 10-20 key informant interviews have been conducted in the sample area. A sample of 1200 beneficiaries has been interviewed for the study. PDS shop owners have also be solicited for their views as regards complaints of the consumers

Public Distribution System (PDS) and Consumer Protection in Odisha:

In Odisha, as reported by the Activities Report of the Food Supplies and Consumer Welfare Department (2011-12), Government of Odisha, a total of 84,01,332 families are covered under the PDS. From them 36,90,932 families have BPL cards, 12,52,321 families have AAY cards and 34,58,079 families have APL cards. Another 64,800 number of senior citizens have Annapurna Ration cards.

The PDS system in the state is being operated through a network of 30,710 FPS dealers. There are a number of institutional FPS owners which include 764 Co-operative Societies, 3,718 Gram Panchayats and 7,951 Self Help Groups (SHG)s, which also operate as FPS dealers. The rest are individual FPS owners.

The BPL card holders in the state and both the BPL and non-BPL ones in KBK district are eligible to get 25 kg rice per month at Re 1 per kg. AAY card holders get 35 kg per month at the same rate. Per month the BPL and AAY card holders are entitled to get 2 kg of sugar at Rs. 13.50 per kg and 4 liters of kerosene oil at Rs. 12.32 to Rs. 12.65 per liter. The non-KBK APL card holders will get rice as per availability, and 10-15 kg of wheat, at Rs. 9.30 and Rs. 7 per kg, respectively. Their entitlement of kerosene oil is the same as the BPL and AAY card holder. Depending on the variations in allocation certain changes in the retailed quantities could be made. These will be officially communicated through the FPS outlets by putting up necessary notices.

To ensure smooth distribution of the PDS commodities and to prevent hoarding and black marketing, enforcement squads have been constituted at the state, zonal and district level to conduct routine as well as surprise checks at the dealer points including rice meals, petrol pumps and gas agencies. These squads enquire the irregularities and take appropriate action.

The government of Odisha has made necessary provision to redress the grievances of the PDS consumers. 1. In the first method they can register their grievance through a toll free number (1800-34567700), fax the same (0674-2536641), or e-mail at fscw@sanjoghelpline.in. The objective is to help the consumers to register their grievances and track and acknowledge its status till these are redressed. 4172 calls have been received of which 3775 case have been disposed off and 397 are pending till the end of January 2012 (Activities Report, 2011-12 of the Food Supplies and Consumer Welfare Department). 2. Secondly, the beneficiary can lodge a complaint in the complaint book available at the FPS before the retailer level advisory committee, concerned official of FS&CW Department or collector of the district. 3. In the third case beneficiaries can approach the concerned personnel of the department to report their grievances: i. At the Block level: Block Development Officer/ Marketing Inspector / Inspector of Supplies, ii. At Sub-divisional level: Sub-Collector and Assistant Civil Supply Officer, iii. At the District level: Collector, Civil Supply Officer and Assistant Civil Supply Officer of the district level, iv. At the Government level: from the Under Secretary to the level of Commissioner cum Secretary/ Principal Secretary.

These apart, the Central as well as the State Governments have spent crores of rupees for 'Strengthening Consumer Forums', creating consumer awareness through street plays, Palla, Daskathia, posters, banners, hoardings etc., setting up consumer clubs, creating consumer awareness among students and many more. Details of these are available in the official website, www.foododisha.in.

Effort in the PDS and creating consumer awareness is laudable. But what has been the effect of such concerted and well coordinated effort on which a huge amount has been invested. Have these become fruitful in making the consumers really aware of their rights? Have these schemes made the poor and vulnerable consumers conscious when they are deprived of the basic subsistence they are entitled to get under different social safety nets like PDS? Have these enabled the consumers to raise their voice in the proper forum? If the answers to all these are in affirmative then to what extent? Is there any lacuna, any loophole which withholds the consumer to reap the benefits in full? Present exercise is an attempt to arrest some of these issues

Public Distribution System (PDS) and Consumer Protection Act, 1986:

The PDS scheme is jointly carried out by the Central and the State governments. The Food Corporation of India (FCI) procures; stores and transfers commodities to the central godowns, the state governments lift and distribute those through a network of Fair Price Shops (FPS). The PDS scheme was revamped in January 1992 (RPDS). The new scheme concentrated on 1,752 backward and remote blocks in drought-prone, desert, hilly and tribal dominated areas. Food grains in those outlets are sold at prices lower than the PDS outlets. In 1997 some drastic changes were incorporated, making the scheme targeted PDS (TPDS). This scheme operates through two separate distribution channels. Under the first channel the central government transfers to the state governments, wheat and rice at about half the issue price set for PDS. It is the responsibility of the state governments to identify and issue special cards to the poor who can get 10 kg of food grains per month. In the second channel, wheat and rice are sold at a price close to the market price. This channel is to be phased out gradually.

The operational responsibility for allocation and distribution of food grains lies within the States/Union Territories (UT). Identification of eligible Below Poverty Line (BPL) families, issuance of ration cards to them and supervision over and monitoring the functioning of FPSs rests with the concerned State/UT Government. An individual may approach the Food and Civil Supplies office of the concerned State/UT for the issue of BPL/ Above Poverty Line (APL)/ Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) cards. Under TPDS, a BPL family and an AAY card holder is entitled to get 35 kg. per month. Allocation of food grains for APL families is made depending upon availability of food grain stocks in the Central Pool and past off take by the State/UT. The allocations for APL families in States/UTs range between 15 to 35 kg per family per month.

Under PDS the consumers should ensure that

commodities are provided in correct weight without denial and there should be a display board placed in front of every shop indicating available commodities along with respective quantities and selling price. Sample of the commodities is placed for the notice of the card holders. Further, in the absence of any of the above complaint can be made to the Civil Supplies and Consumer Protection Department and complaints could be launched online through the websites and toll free numbers given by the states/UTs.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Awareness of the PDS Consumers:

Awareness of the sample PDS consumers with respect to different aspect of the system was assessed. Findings related to the same are presented in the present section.

Awareness about timely availability of getting the product:

Table 1 depicts the awareness of the consumers about the timely availability of the products under the PDS. It was observed that of the 1152 sample households 1040, comprising 90% of the total sample were aware about regular availability of the product. Only 10% were not aware about the regularity. Little divergence was observed in this pattern across the districts. 524 sample households from Balasore district, comprising 91% of the sample from this district expressed their awareness while 9% did not. The corresponding figures for the Mayurbhanj district was 516 (89%) and 61 (11%).

Apart from regularity consumer awareness about timely availability of the products was also assessed. The sample households were asked about their awareness as regards the specific date of supply of the products under PDS scheme. 78% of the sample households were aware about the timing of the product supply while the rest 22% were not. 81% of the sample households from the Balasore district knew about the specific dates of

Table 1 : Awareness about Timely Availability of Getting the Product

Sample	Availability of the product regularly						Availability of product in time					
	Yes		No		Total		Yes		No		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Total	1040	90	112	10	1152	100	896	78	256	22	1152	100
BLS	524	91	51	9	575	100	464	81	111	19	575	100
MBJ	516	89	61	11	577	100	432	75	145	25	577	100

Source: Researcher's observation

product supply while 19% expressed their ignorance about the matter. In the sample households from Mayurbhanj relatively less awareness was observed as 75% of the sample households from this district were aware about the timing of product availability while 25% were not. This reveals that relatively less developed tribal dominated Mayurbhanj, there is less awareness.

Awareness about time of getting the product:

PDS products are supplied on a particular date of every month. The sample households were asked about their awareness about the time of getting the products. 92% of the total sample households had the knowledge of the time when the products will be available while only 8% did not. In the Balasore district awareness is comparatively more as 93% of the sample households from this district had the knowledge of the time of getting the product while in Mayurbhanj 91% had the knowledge (Table 2).

The 90 households who are not knowledgeable about the time of getting the product were asked about the reason for the same. 64 of them, 34 from Balasore and 30 from Mayurbhanj, expressed that there was no display board mentioning the time of availability of the product. 63 sample households, 27 from Balasore and 36 from Mayurbhanj, expressed that products are not supplied on a particular date so that they will be aware of the time of availability.

Awareness about whom to approach (Raise a voice):

The sample households were asked about how they raised a voice in the event of non-availability of the product in time or non-availability in right quantity or any

irregularity in product supply. It was observed that 257 sample households, 111 from Balasore and 146 from Myurbhanj, have faced some problem in the above cited areas. It is heartening to observe that 235 households comprising 91% of the total sample households who faced some problem, raised a voice for their cause while only 22 households comprising 9% of this group did not raise a voice to register a complaint. District specific proportions of those who did not raise a voice is 8% and 10% of the sample from Balasore and Mayurbhanj, respectively. Details of the observation are presented in the Table 3.

Majority of the complaints (53%) are registered with the Gram Panchayat Officer. Next in order comes those registered with the distributors, 22%. Sample households also raised a voice with the SHGs of which they are the members and the local NGOs. But their number is very less, 5% and 7%, respectively. 5% of the households also expressed their problem to other people like, the local school teachers or any educated person in the village. Sample across the districts reflect almost the same pattern. But proportion the sample households from the Balasore district exceed that from Mayurbhanj as regards complaints with the Gram Panchayat Officer and Distributor is concerned. In all other channels of complaint booking the Mayurbhanj is at an advantage. SHGs and NGOs seem more active in Mayurbhanj in registering the complaints.

Awareness created by whom to complain about the product:

In the next step the sample households were asked about who created awareness to raise a voice before

Table 2 : Awareness about time of getting the product

Sample	Aware		Not Aware		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Total	1062	92	90	8	1152	100
BLS	536	93	39	7	575	100
MBJ	526	91	51	9	577	100

Table 3 : Awareness about whom to approach (Raise a voice)

Sample	Whom did you approach												Total	
	Distributor		SHG		NGO		Gram Panchayat Officer		Others		None			
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Total	56	22	14	5	17	7	136	53	12	5	22	9	257	100
BLS	34	31	4	4	5	5	58	52	2	2	8	7	111	100
MBJ	22	15	10	7	12	8	78	53	10	7	14	10	146	100

the appropriate authority. It was observed that only 292 (25%) of the households were aware about where to complain and the rest 75% were not. It is interesting to observe that in Balasore district the proportion of the sample households who are not aware is relatively more (78%) than those in Mayurbhanj (72%).

Majority of the households who were aware (71%) revealed that they received the knowledge from the Panchayat Office. Next in order comes the group of households who are made themselves aware on their own effort (35%). This pattern is reflected in the district specific samples as well.

Awareness about other details:

The sample households were asked regarding awareness about other schemes. It was observed that 987 households, *i.e.*, 86% of the total sample are knowledgeable about the details of other schemes even if they do not avail the benefit of the same. The households are in close proximity and hence remain in contact with each other. Therefore, they know the benefits which other types of card holders are getting. The rest 14% of the sample who do not have any idea about other types of cards are mainly old persons. They are satisfied with the benefits they get and are not concerned about what other schemes are providing. When asked they expressed their nonchalance as they are not able to change their own card.

The sample households were asked about display board containing the details of the shop, quantity of the product available etc. 59% of them expressed their awareness about the display board while 41% said that they have not noticed it. The unaware households expresses that there is no need of the display board as

they know the details from the PDS dealer and other card holders. So the display board does not fulfill any particular need and hence often goes unnoticed.

When enquired about display of the sample of the products available in the PDS shop 69% of the sample households revealed that they have observed display of the sample of the products while 31% said they have not. The sample of the products available in the store are displayed in the front but people often ignore it as they have to buy whatever product is available. So even if the sample is displayed they just do not pay any attention to it.

Awareness across sample features:

The sample households were enquired about their general awareness about the PDS scheme. It was observed that they were quite knowledgeable about the rate, time and quantity of the products they are entitled to. But in the event of any problem related to these they were not very aware whom to approach and how to lodge a complaint. In the next step the study attempted to assess the awareness about lodging a complaint with the appropriate authority who is empowered to redress their grievances. The details are presented in the Table 1.6

The survey has observed that In the Balasore district 130 households comprising 23% of the total sample were aware of the appropriate authority to be approached in the event of any problem related to the PDS scheme. In the Mayurbhanj the proportion is relatively larger, 28% of the sample from the district. This reveals that majority of the households, nearly two thirds, are not aware about the authority to whom they can approach to solve their problems. It may be due to active NGOs, SHGs or more cooperating officials, awareness in the tribal dominated

Table 4 : Awareness created by whom to complain about the product

Sample	Aware about Where to Complain about the Problem										Not Aware		Total	
	Own Effort		NGO		SHG		Panchayat Office		Total		N	%	N	%
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%				
Total	101	35	16	5	9	3	206	71	292	100	860	75	1152	100
BLS	47	37	18	14	12	9	92	72	128	100	447	78	575	100
MBJ	54	33	9	5	3	2	114	70	164	100	413	72	577	100

Table 5 : Awareness about other details

Details	Yes	No	Total
Awareness about other schemes	987 (86%)	165 (14%)	1152 (100%)
Awareness about display board	675 (59%)	477 (41%)	1152 (100%)
Awareness about display of Sample of the Products	794 (69%)	358 (31%)	1152 (100%)

Mayurbhanj is slightly more.

Across the family types the nuclear families were relatively more unaware as 79% of this group could not tell whom to approach in the event of any problem related to PDS. In the case joint family the proportion is 73%. With larger number of family members the latter category seems to be more aware. It may also be possible that due to large family size and hence, greater dependency on PDS product this group is more aware as regards where to raise a voice. Yet the extent of unawareness is painfully high.

It was observed that across different social groups the general caste people are more aware of the authority to be approached in the event of any problem related to the scheme. 55% of this group knew whom to approach. And in this group alone the proportion of the sample households who are aware exceeds the other counterpart. But in the other three caste categories reverse is the case. In the SC, ST and OBC sample households 62 %, 81% and 51 %, respectively had no idea about whom to approach to redress the grievance.

Awareness of the sample households across economic groups was assessed to examine the relationship between need and awareness. In these categories also the level of unawareness is extremely high. 85% of the BPL households in the sample were not aware about whom to approach. In the APL category the proportion is %. This shows that the relatively needy group is less aware about the authority before whom a complaint could be raised.

Awareness of the sample categories when divided into different occupation reveals no different a picture. Majority of the households had agriculture as their prime occupation. 21% of the agricultural labourers, 24% of the self-employed in agriculture, and 22% of those self-employed in non-agriculture are aware of where to go to tell about the problem in PDS system. Only 9% of the rural labourers in the sample were aware while none of the artisans were. Other occupation holders are bit aware as only 38% of them know whom to approach in the event of a problem.

Table 6 : Awareness across sample categories

District	Aware		Not Aware		Sample Size	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Balalsore	130	23	447	77	577	100
Mayurbhanj	162	28	413	72	575	100
Type of Family and Awareness						
Family Type	N	%	N	%	N	%
Nuclear	234	21	858	79	1092	100
Joint	16	27	44	73	60	100
Social Group and Awareness						
Social Group	N	%	N	%	N	%
SC	96	38	156	62	252	100
ST	94	19	395	81	489	100
OBC	143	49	146	51	289	100
Other	67	55	55	45	122	100
Economic status and Awareness						
Economic Status	N	%	N	%	N	%
BPL	125	15	697	85	822	100
APL	114	35	216	65	330	100
Occupation Status and Awareness						
Occupation	N	%	N	%	N	%
Agricultural labour	43	21	161	79	204	100
Other Rural labour	32	8	345	92	377	100
Self Employed in Agriculture	54	24	175	76	229	100
Self Employed in Non-agriculture	9	22	32	78	41	100
Artisans	0	0	5	100	5	100
Others	112	38	184	62	296	100

Table 7 : Type of Awareness programme which you feel is the most beneficial

1	Hoarding	756	66
2	Wall painting	887	77
3	TV Advertisement	342	30
4	News Paper Advertisement	221	19
5	Display in GP Office	214	19
6	Others (All the households specified to hold timely meetings.)	1152	100

Awareness programmes conducted and the benefits:

It was observed that no awareness programme has ever been conducted in the sample villages to make the beneficiaries aware of the scheme, changes in the same or any other facility the beneficiaries are entitled to. They even did not know where to lodge a complaint in the event of any deviation from the entitlement, any problem faced in the quality and quantity of the product, non-receipt of the ration in time or any issue like loss of the card etc.

Present exercise arrested the issue by asking the sample households about different methods of creating awareness. These are presented in the Table 7.

All the sample households opined that they were made much aware through the pattern of the survey conducted and discussion with the investigators. If such meetings are conducted at regular intervals they could approach the appropriate authority in the event of any problem. These meetings could be conducted by the local Panchayat office or the Block office where they were willing to travel.

Next in order comes the position of wall painting. But some of the households express doubt that wall painting may not contain all the information. Moreover, it is difficult to change the wall painting to incorporate new information like change in the quantity of the entitled product.

Hoardings have the same disadvantage like wall painting. Again hoardings placed in a particular location in the village is not accessible to all.

Other mediums of knowledge spread like TV advertisement, newspaper advertisement and display in the Panchayat office did not get much appreciation. Even though TV is relatively more accepted yet some households observed that the timing of the telecast may not be suitable always. Illiterate households did not prefer newspaper advertisement. Moreover newspapers are not accessible by all. Display in the Gram Panchayat office was also not accepted as very few households visit the office only when there is an urgent need. So any display

in the office is not beneficial.

Conclusion:

Thus, there is awareness on the part of the beneficiaries with regard to time, quantity and the rate of the products, but they have often faced the problem of regularity of supply. Cards have not been given to the deserving BPL households in certain cases. Some have lost it and some others have given it as a mortgage. Some of the households complained that they are not aware whether they are entitled to get a PDS, AAY or Annapurna card. The most excruciating observation of the study was that almost all the beneficiaries are not aware where exactly to raise a voice to express their grievances. No annual survey is done of Ration Cards in the State which is mandatory requirement as per the PDS Control Order 2001. Many deserving families had been left out from the BPL list and many well to do families have obtained BPL or even AAY cards. It is felt that there should be a periodical checking of ration cards and this should be continuous process. Public meetings are never held. The card holders are not aware of such meetings. Neither there has been any review meeting of the PDS scheme. The beneficiaries have never participated in any such meetings.

There exists the complaint redress mechanism which is neither systematic nor effective. Most of the households are unaware whom to approach to speak about their problems. Therefore, most of the grievances of the common persons go unheard and unattended. By conducting meetings at regular intervals the PDS consumers should be made aware of the procedure by which they can raise a voice. It is recommended that an effective complaint redress system for PDS related grievances be initiated wherein the beneficiaries may register and also follow up their complaints. The results of the grievance should be notified within a specific time line. There exists a toll free number and website to register a complaint. But these are beyond the reach of the poor, little educated and ignorant PDS consumers.

Households have opined that timely meeting will be the most appropriate method to make people aware. Still to further enlighten the people of their rights and entitlements, pamphlets, posters must be published and widely circulated. Local TV channels may also be requested to show all these above mentioned details on their scrolls to create awareness among the people. A Public hearing for PDS on the lines of the Lok Adalat which should include the complaint redressing officer should be convened at a designated place, time and day in every quarter, where general public can seek to resolve outstanding issues pertaining to the PDS. These issues may include those relating to their category / entitlements, non-issuance of the cards, bifurcation of cards, wrong inclusion of APL, complaints regarding under-weightment etc.

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