

PRESS NOTE

Poor implementation and misleading government guidelines of PDS in Berhampur make beneficiaries get out of their entitlements.

“Facts of Social Audit of Public Distribution System in Berhampur slums”

9th August, 2012 at Ganjam Kala Parishad, Berhampur

Youth for Social Development (YSD) a not-for-profit independent social research and development organization promoting transparency, accountability and good governance has assessed quality of service delivery of Public Distribution System by using social audit methodology in slums in Berhampur city of Odisha. Trained citizen volunteers with a set of inventories monitored/checked the quality, transparency and accountability level of fair price shops (FPS) in Berhampur city with the participation of beneficiaries, shop owners, vigilance monitoring committee and public officials. They also checked the available infrastructure, information and provisions as per guidelines at the FPS. The citizen monitors audited five (%) FPSs, interviewed 134 beneficiaries in six slums, five (5) shop owners and all officials including supply inspectors, ACSO and DCSO.

Glimpses of the Social Audit of Public Distribution System

- Most of the beneficiaries interviewed are belongs to scheduled caste (83.6%) are from SC category, less than one fifth (14.9%) belongs to other categories and are 14.9% and only 2% are from Other Backward Class.
- Most of the beneficiaries (84%) are categorized under poverty as BPL, 10% under Antodaya, 5% from APL and only 1% is Annapurna.
- More than half of the people respondents (59%) opined on that ration shops are opens 15 days in a month, less than one fourth (24.6%) opined seven days in a month, 14.2% replied that the FPS opens all the 30 days and only 2.2% replied two days in a month.
- Most of the (72.4%) respondents reported that FPS opens twice in a day i.e. morning 8am to 10am and evening 4pm to 8pm, while 16.4% reported the shops only open in the evening from 4pm to 8pm, and 11.2% reported the shops open in the morning from 8am to 12noon.
- Most of the beneficiaries (91.8%) who cross checked the weight of the rationed items found variation ranging from 10-15% (2 to 4 kilograms) in the quantity supplied in a case of 25 kilograms of BPL rice.
- With regard to the quality of the food items supplied most of (76.1%) the respondents found it to be good and only 23.9% found satisfactory.

- Surprisingly (100%) of the beneficiaries complained that the shop owner refuses to allow them to buy their food items on an installment basis.
- Surprisingly all most all the beneficiaries complained that the delayed quota's are denied by the shop owner.
- Surprisingly almost half of (50%) the beneficiaries reported that they have not seen any informative board in front of the FPS.
- Shockingly, those who seen a informative board, it was extremely rare (14.2%) that information related to "stock, price of food grains, opening and closing stock information, list of vigilance committee member and their contact details"
- 72.4% of the beneficiaries have reported of hanging a list of beneficiaries in the FPS and that is held by the shop owner.
- Responding to grievances (where to complain?) in case of difficulties, problems and misappropriations, most respondents (89.6%) hardly found the name, address and phone number of the authority.
- 87.3% of the beneficiaries didn't find any information on PDS government guidelines, periodic orders issued to FPS by the civil supply department, Supreme Court orders etc.

Shop owners Perspective

- Surprisingly, almost all the FPS shop owners are not able to bear the expenditure incurred for running FPS (i.e. transportation, shop rent, electricity, record maintenance, assistant's salary and stationary etc.)
- It is noted that none of the FPS owners have any knowledge of the Supreme Court guidelines on food security and also the state guidelines of PDS.
- The commissions that owners receive from the civil supply department for the distribution of rationed items are insufficient to run the FPS shop. Moreover, shop owners experience delays in receipt of their commissions.
- Surprisingly there is no vigilance committee functioning as such in any dealer points/or communities.

Checking of FPS

- Very few shops have an electronic weighing machine and most have insufficient space for storage of food grains.
- Most shops have a citizen information board but the information listed is incomplete and not updated. (e.g. stock position, price, quota of different beneficiary etc.)
- None of the shop owners have disclosed the list of beneficiaries under various schemes and the list of Vigilance Monitoring Committees.
- No shop owners have the address or phone number of the public authority to whom the citizen can complain in case of a problem, misappropriation etc.

- Surprisingly few shop owners have not disclosed their license number and have not made public of the government's periodic circulars or Supreme Court orders on PDS.
- Citizen Monitors did not find any visitor's register in most of the shops.
- No shop owner have displayed the sample of food grains supplied to the beneficiaries even if there is provision to demonstrate samples of different food grains.

Public Officials

- There are only two supply inspectors inspecting 133 FPSs in Berhampur. So there is still doubt in frequency of visits of supply inspector's to FPSs.
- No supply inspector interacts any of the card holders during their visits to the FPSs.
- Lack of sufficient staff obstruct in the way of effective implementation of PDS.
- There are no facilities for social audit in PDS and no public hearing organized.
- Sufficient staff and citizen awareness will help in seamless implementation of PDS are the two important suggestions given by the senior officials.

Citizen complaints

- Limited availability of rations (due to shop holding odd operating hours, distance between shop and home, and dealer refusing to allow citizens to purchase rations on an installment basis)
- Poor quality and quantity of rations (attributed to supplier corruption, lack of shop infrastructure, i.e., weighing scales, and external monitoring)
- Lack of transparency and information on PDS service norms and complaint procedure (due to both lack in government oversight and shop owners not posting required PDS information on their display board)

Shop owner complaints

- Lack of citizen awareness and insufficient government staff contributes to ineffective implementation of PDS
- Lack of transparency and accountability among sub-divisional level officials and wholesale distributors regarding proper implementation of PDS

Government official complaints

- Limited staff to effectively implement PDS
- Limited knowledge among citizens and shop owners regarding PDS rules and regulations
- Inadequate knowledge and behavior of supply inspector in PDS implementation

Suggestions

- Facilities needed for PDS social audit and public hearings to be conducted
- Increased beneficiary and supplier awareness regarding proper implementation of PDS
- Increased interactions and understanding between all PDS service providers, suppliers, officials, and beneficiaries
- FPS undergo strict monitoring by civil supply department

- FPS made to adopt electronic scales for weighing provisions
- Regular supply of sugar and wheat provided to BPL families
- FPS made to adopt regular operational hours and adhere to such hours in practice

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Public Awareness Campaign by BMC and Supply Department

- BMC and the public Supply Department should jointly initiate a public awareness campaign in different wards and among communities to increase knowledge among Fair Price Shop owners and citizens regarding PDS norms and expectations.
- BMC and the Supply Department should jointly publish materials in the form a pamphlet to be distributed door-to-door detailing the PDS complaint process and the contact information of the appropriate authority with which to register complaints.

Government transparency regarding implementation of PDS

- Mandatory government guidelines for implementation of PDS should be made publicly available via BMC website.
- All information regarding the regular monitoring and evaluation mechanisms of PDS implementation and policy should be publicly available via BMC website. This should include the roles and responsibilities of both Town and Retail Level Committees in the monitoring and evaluation of PDS
- BMC website should contain a menu called “Public Distribution System” and the information on service delivery norms, roles and responsibilities of citizens and service providers as well as complaints procedures should be enclosed in the menu.

Regular monitoring and evaluation

- A helpdesk should be established in BMC to receive and respond to civil complaints regarding PDS.
- Independent supply inspectors should be increased to ensure that the actual quota of rationed items that the FPS owner receives matched the agreed quota and that the rationed items meet quality control standards (proper distribution of rationed items from civil supply department to FPS). Supply inspectors should be required to interact with cardholders during their visits to FPS.
- Shop inspectors should be increased to ensure that FPSs are adhering to service delivery norms (quality, quantity, time, and price) and keeping proper information and records.
- FPS owners should be regularly informed of their role and responsibilities (by shop inspectors) to citizens and penalized if found to be in violation of those responsibilities.
- Both Town and Retail Level Committees should adhere to their prescribed PDS monitoring rules and regulations and be regularly expected to submit progress reports detailing status of PDS implementation to PDS government officials

Necessary Budget Allocation

- Shop owners must receive the remuneration necessary to properly maintain their FPS and bear all necessary expenditures
- Provisions should be made so a regular supply of wheat and sugar be provided to BPL families
- Sufficient government staff should be hired to effectively implement PDS

Capacity building of Public Officials

- Mandatory PDS training and information workshops should be held among public officials in charge of implementing PDS
- Training of officials should include knowledge on the Supreme Court guidelines on food security and also the state guidelines on PDS as well as updates on orders passed on PDS

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