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**Title of the paper**

*Redressing food security policy in India – from the state to the 'local'.*

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## **Redressing food security policy in India – from the state to the ‘local’.**

### **Abstract**

My paper reflects, through the study of Araria district of Bihar India, a new form of engagement can be established where the people’s participation, local knowledge, community food grain bank etc can easily work as an effective mechanism to ensure food security for the poor.

The paper outlines two perspectives to this food policy discourse. One is highly ‘modernistic, state of art, technocratic supra view’ where the information concerning rationing and accessibility is dominated by the state agencies and private actors. The second view is more ‘conventional yet new-age, participatory infra view’ where the knowledge and participation of the locals is crucial to the development of the policies. This makes the locals as subjects and not just objects, of change. The locals and the countryside form the crucial premise of the political and policy life.

The paper is divided into three parts. The first part discusses the issue of food insecurity and two paradigms significantly. The second part discusses in detail the emerging results and experiences of the presence of ‘local’ in the food policy. And, third part seeks the synthesis, a dialogue between two dichotomous axis should be clubbed together majorly.

**Key words:** Food security, Rationing, Sustainability, Social security.

## **Introduction**

“Every man, woman and child has the inalienable right to be free from hunger and malnutrition.....”<sup>1</sup>

Food is one of the most basic of human needs. As long as starvation and deprivation exist, the slogan raised by the World Food Conference as above looms large over humanity. When every nation attains food security for its people, there begins the journey towards prosperity. Food security for a country means sufficient quantity of essential commodities produced, stored properly and made available to all of the people, especially the under privileged sections.

According to definition emerging out of World Food Summit, ‘Food Security exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food which meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life. Household food security is the application of this concept to the family level with individuals within households as the focus of concern’. (WFS, 1996)

I maintain that in food security discourse, broadly there are two perspectives. One is the technocratic, supra view which maintains that food insecurity can be tackled with the help of numbers, statistics etc. This perspective maintain that when a state has the correct knowledge about its beneficiaries, their entitlements, a right kind of approach towards the public policy will certainly lead to a sustainable social security.

The processes and parameters of food security policy like identification of correct beneficiaries, inclusion exclusion error, AAY, Priority households etc. are with the state and state is better equipped to ensure food security through the social security policy. But the

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<sup>1</sup> This quote is of 1974 World Food Conference. I have taken it from Tamini’s book. Please see for details, WFC, 1974 and Taimini, 2001.

local people are equally capable and they have adapted the environment and working in their own way to ensure food security.

Achieving food security fully and especially at household level, is a major concern in India too. Poverty and food insecurity are closely related (Sen, 1981). People are said to be living in poverty when they lack resources or money needed to satisfy their basic needs (Sen, 1981). When food security issues were first highlighted in the seventies, the question was whether a nation or a region could command enough food to meet the aggregate requirements of its people. Special attention was paid to fluctuations in aggregate food supply, and food security interventions were primarily concerned with providing effective buffer mechanisms against such fluctuations. In this context, food security measures came to be identified with macro-level instruments such as national and international storage of food and balance-of-payments support for countries facing temporary food shortages (Frankenberger, 1992).

It was soon realized, however, that this gave a very limited view of the food security problem. A large segment of a population could be living in hunger even if the country had sufficient food in the aggregate during normal times. Likewise, a sizeable section of the population could plunge into hunger during moments of crisis, even if the nation had an adequate 'cushion' to maintain aggregate food availability. Adequacy at the aggregate level does not necessarily ensure adequacy at the household or individual level.

This point seems obvious enough, but it took some time to redirect the discussions on food security away from the macro level i.e. 'nation' to towards the more micro aspects '*household*', and still further towards the '*individual*'.

In a same way, it is still have remained an idea to develop that how state and local knowledge can together work towards the food security for all. Dilemma is in the state-led food security

policy, people's knowledge, local grain management, participation is negligible. In the State led policy there is has no scope where people can come and participate in the decision making machinery. Whereas experiences suggest that local knowledge is itself provides the plethora of examples of food security.

In this part, the state-led food security policy through Public Distribution System (PDS) have been analyzed and efforts have been made to summaries all the technicalities, processes in a nut shell to make people understand the whole perspective. This also reflects that nowhere the local people are mentioned as part of agency and participating and working in any form. The only role a local man has is that of a beneficiary or a consumer.

### **1. State-led Food security policy -**

In India, Food Security mainly focused on supply of food grains and the medium was Public Distribution System. Public Distribution System is a rationing mechanism that entitles households to specified quantities of selected commodities at subsidized prices. In other words, it is an instrument for ensuring availability of certain essential commodities for consumption at subsidized rates to the people, particularly the poor. The commodities distributed under PDS include rice, Wheat, sugar, edible oil and kerosene. The Government of India, through the Food Corporation of India (FCI) established in 1965, procures and stocks food grains and releases every month for distribution through the PDS network across the country.

The Objectives of PDS are as follows (Swaminathan, 2000):

1. Maintaining Price Stability.
2. Rationing during times of scarcity.
3. Raising the welfare of the poor.
4. Keeping a check on the private trade

Public Distribution System (PDS) has been established in India as a War time measure, distributing food grains, to combat famine and price spirals, especially in regard to food grains, viz. Rice and Wheat. In view of the Government of India, “the PDS aims at insulating the consumer from the impact of rising prices of these commodities and maintaining the minimum nutritional status of our population. (Bhaskar, 2004) The PDS supplies have a stabilizing effect on Open Market prices by increasing availability, removing scarcity psychosis and deterring speculative tendencies”. (GOI, 1991-92)

As part of structural adjustments made by the Government of India to reduce public expenditure, the PDS in India was modified as Revamped Public Distribution System (RPDS) during 1992. It was intended to give thrust to providing food grains at subsidized rates to people in specific geographical areas like hilly regions, drought-prone areas, urban slum areas, deserts, tribal areas etc., where people were facing hardships.

Later on, Targeted Public Distribution System [TPDS) has been introduced in 1997, giving emphasis to providing benefits to poorer sections of the population, i.e. targeting households on the basis of income criterion. The Targeted PDS uses income poverty line to demarcate ‘poor’ and ‘non-poor’ households. People are classified as Below Poverty Line (BPL] and Above Poverty Line (APL). Special ration cards are issued to families below the poverty line. Food grains like rice and wheat are distributed to the people below poverty line at specially subsidized price. The weaknesses of the Public Distribution System have been augmented by the introduction of structural adjustment policies in the 1990s, intended for reduction in public expenditure.

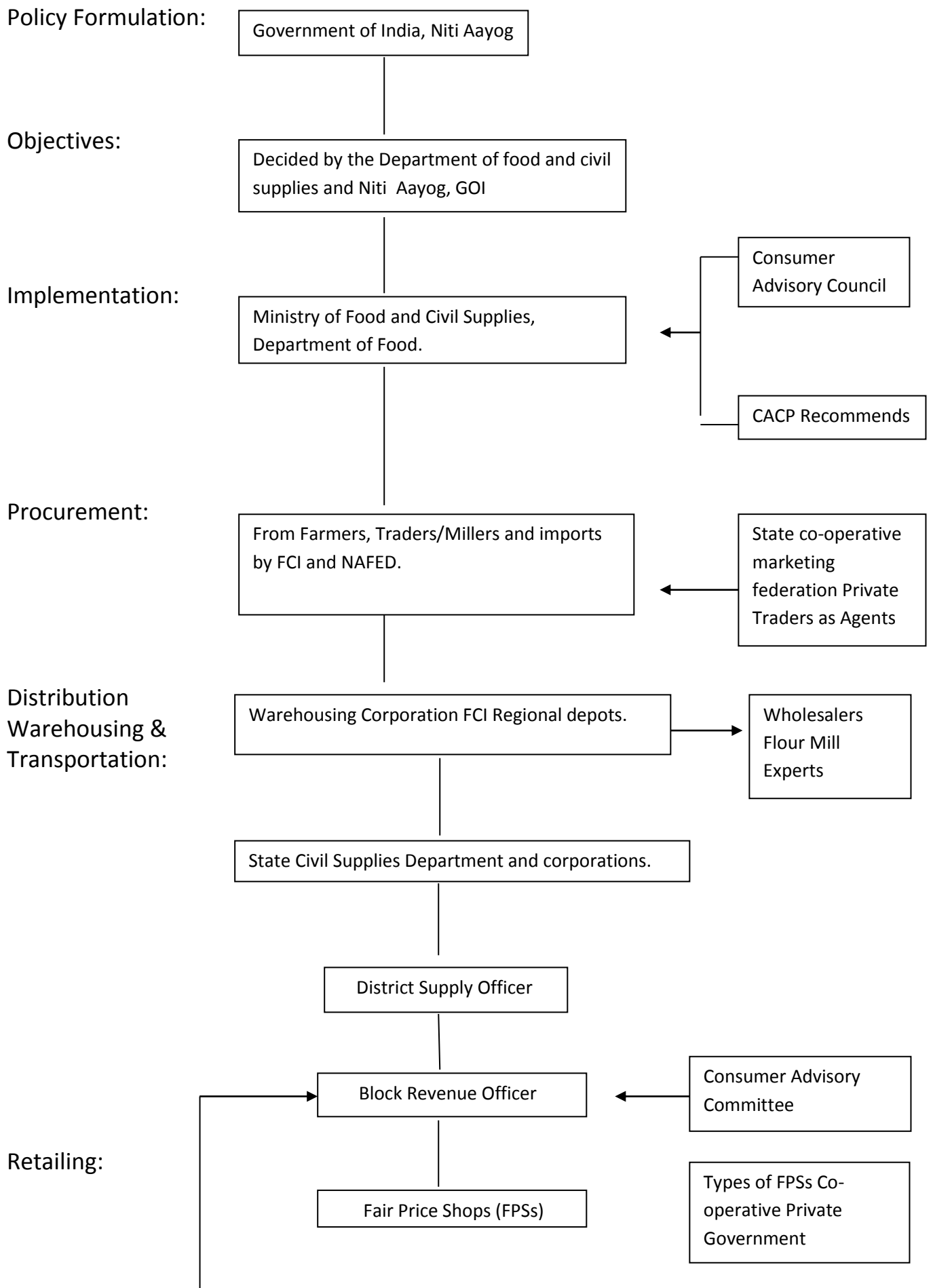
### **1.1 Organizational structure of PDS**

The organizational structure of PDS in India is shown in Figure 1.1. The organizational setup of PDS in India is a mixture of Union and State tasks and responsibilities. The Government of India decides, in dialogue with the relevant States, how much food grain should be

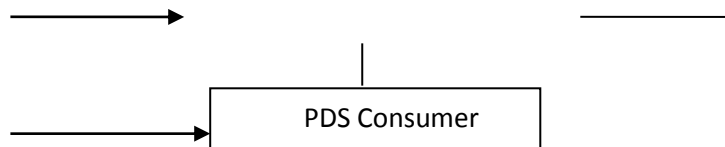
procured in each State. It also decides on procurement prices. This is done on the basis of advice from the Commission on Agricultural Costs and Prices, which calculates the costs of production and estimates a reasonable remunerative price for the food grain produced and supplied to the PDS by the farmers. In principle, these prices are the same for each State. There are different prices for different qualities, but there are no price differentials that relate to ecological and/ or other production conditions. In the implementation of procurement policy, individual states make only small adjustments-always upwards- to these recommended prices.

In contrast to the centrally administered prices, the mode of procurement is decided by the State governments. Procurement may take place through open market purchases, by market purchases in which the government exercises the right of preemption, by a levy on producers, traders or millers, by agents under a system of monopoly procurement, etc. In many States procurement is supported by a law specially made for this purpose. Usually, the Food Corporation of India (FCI) is the procurement agent. The FCI, however cannot enforce procurement policy. The State Food and / or Civil Supplies Department and special Task Forces are responsible for enforcing procurement policy

**Figure 1.1 Organizational Structure of PDS in India**



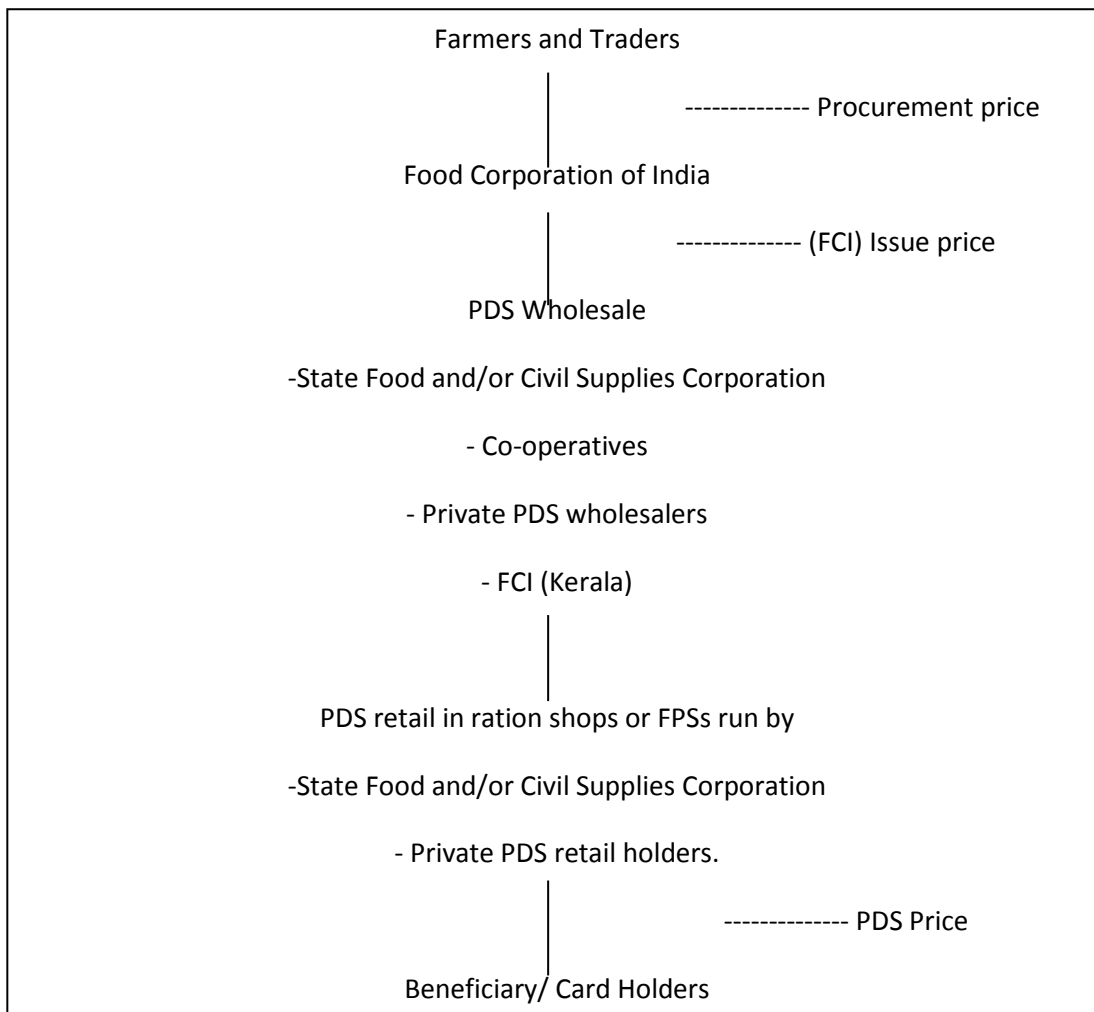




Dependent on the mode of procurement and the price difference between the open market price and procurement price, this enforcement is more or less troublesome. (Jos, 1996)

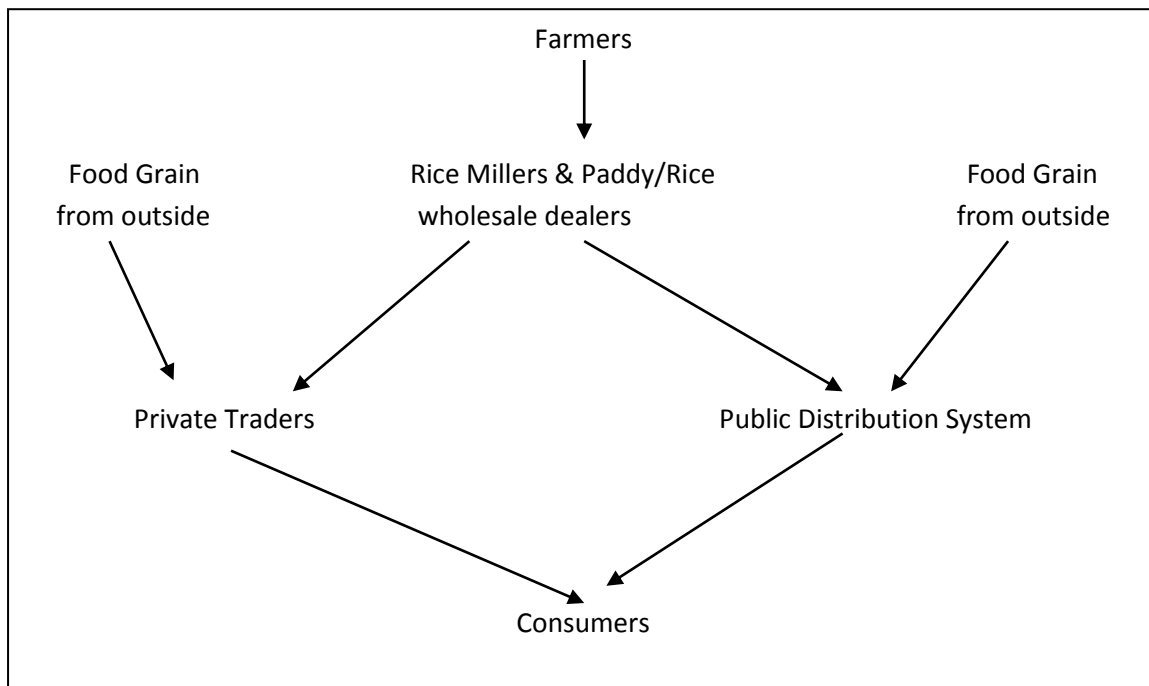
The Food Corporation of India has many large warehouses in different parts of the country where the food grains are stored after procurement. Food may be transported from the FCI Warehouse to another on the basis of distribution decisions made by the Government of India (GOI), in consultation with the State governments. Apart from allocation to the States, the GoI also fixes the issue price, that is the selling price of the FCI. As far as distribution within the States is concerned, the State government is again, the policy making institution. It can decide how to distribute the allocated food (to everybody, to targeted groups only, to concentrate on cities or on rural areas etc.) and at what price. Each State has its own distribution policy. The State department of Food and/or Civil Supplies monitors this distribution process. In many States trading corporations have been established which act as PDS Wholesalers. They bring food from FCI Warehouses to storage places near to the retail points, the so-called Fair Price Shops. The retail sale of PDS commodities is undertaken either by these State corporations or by private fair price shop owners.

**Figure 1.2 Schematic outline of the PDS**



This is a schematic outline of flows of food grains and distribution of responsibilities shown in Figure 1.2. It is important to add that not all procured food grain is readily available for distribution. The Government of India also maintains a buffer stock of 20-30 million tonnes, to be drawn upon only in times of severe scarcity. Furthermore, the above described scheme is a) cross-cut by several GoI distribution schemes meant for selected categories of people (for instance, food for work programmes], in which not the State governments but the central government formulates distribution policy, and b) supplemented with additional state government programmes in the sense of (own, State-wise) procurement and distribution activities.

**Figure 1.3 Schematic View of the Food Grain Market in Araria, Bihar: Parallel Markets<sup>2</sup>**



The Figure 1.3 clearly shows a dual marketing system. The PDS exists alongside the open market. The flow of food grains is split at the top of the figure. The largest part of the food grains is channelled to the open market, while a meagre per cent of rice and wheat only goes to the PDS. Consumers purchase from both sources. But can consumer really able to purchase the amount and quality grains they want? That is a serious question because of inflation etc.

### **1 .2. PDS In context: Poverty and markets**

In India, a very specific definition has been traditionally used, namely fulfillment of the nutritional requirement of 2400 calories per person per day in rural areas and 2100 calories in urban areas. The poverty line is defined as that level of expenditure at which a person accesses this minimal level of calorie intake (which is not the same as the level of

<sup>2</sup> About parallel markets, First I read in Jos Mooij's book. & later, I found similar trends in my field too. For more, please see Schematic View of the Food Grain Market in South India: Parallel Markets in Mooij (1996).

expenditure required solely for accessing this intake). The practice has been to take the level of expenditure corresponding to the poverty line in some base year and to update it for subsequent years for each state using the Consumer Price Index Number for Agricultural Labourers for rural areas and the Consumer Price Index Number for Industrial Workers for urban areas. (ER, 2006)

The National Sample Survey Organization has estimated the incidence of poverty in the country during 1999-2000 as follows: Poverty ratio for rural - 27.1 per cent, urban- 23.6 per cent and combined- 26.1 per cent , whereas the projection for the year 2007 is 21.1 per cent - rural, 15.1 per cent – urban and combined 19.3 per cent.

Although poverty estimates vary enormously, it is clear that a very substantial part of the Indian population lives below the poverty line, which means that their income is not sufficient to buy enough food. About 80 per cent of these poor people live in rural areas. These poor people may be agricultural labourers, marginal producers, fishermen, village craftsmen or persons employed in construction of local industries. In many cases, they are underemployed. Sometimes, they are involved as small peasants in food production themselves, but forced to sell a high proportion of their output after the harvest to meet immediate cash requirements like outstanding debts. Later in the season, these peasants have to buy again from the market for their daily needs. This cycle of distress buying and selling usually under the compulsion of debts have been analyzed as “forced commercialization”. (Bhaduri, 1985)

Extreme poverty and inefficient access to food co-exist with self-sufficiency at the all-India level. With the exception of a few years of droughts and bad harvests, since 1976 India has procured enough food grains to feed its population. Of course, this does not imply that each

region is self-sufficient. Some regions depend on large food imports, while others export food grains. It is estimated that between 75 and 80 per cent of the food grains is marketed. The remainder is exchanged outside the market or consumed by the producers themselves. Marketing is done by private agents and by the state. Private trade is of a polarized nature, with large mercantile firms on the one hand and petty traders handling insignificant quantities on the other. (Clay, 1988)

The strategy of Indian government to change these characteristics of the food market has been at least threefold. The government has 1) taken measures to promote growth of production, through producer-friendly food price policy, technological inputs, subsidies to farmers etc. 2) organized interventions in the food system: procurement, maintaining of a buffer stock and distribution of subsidized food and 3) introduced regulation and control of private trade practices, through so-called regulated markets and additional legal measures (e.g. the Essential Commodities Act).

Along with the PDS, an important element of India's food security regime has been the public works programmes that provide employment to the poor during hard times, to create community assets through labour-intensive work and to pay the labourers in food grain or other food items (Ravallion 1991). The two major public works programmes, called the national rural employment programme (NREP) and the rural landless employment programme (RLEP), were initiated in the 1970s during the sixth and seventh five-year plans. These were then merged into the jawahar rozgar yojana (JRY) in 1989. JRY was meant to offer the poor employment through asset creation in rural areas. JRY was subsequently redesigned in 1999 into the jawahar gram samrudhi yojana (JGSY) to convert it into a project that was primarily for economic infrastructure creation, with employment as a

secondary objective. The centrally-sponsored employment assurance scheme (EAS), launched in 1993, had objectives similar to the JRY programme.

In 2001, FFW was launched as a component of EAS in some states. Soon afterwards, EAS, JGSY, and FFW were merged into sampoorna grameen rozgar yojana (SGRY). In order to mount a direct attack on poverty and food insecurity, the national government had enacted two landmark pieces of legislation in recent years, namely the Mahathma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) and the right to food bill. The MGNREGA (2006) is one of the biggest public action programmes in the country, meant to enhance livelihood security in rural areas by providing at least 100 days of guaranteed wage employment in a financial year to every household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work. The right to food bill seeks to provide access to food grain through a universal public distribution system.

**Table 1: Timeline of PDS 1930s to present**

<b>Evolution of PDS</b>	<b>Timeline</b>	<b>Details</b>
PDS	1940s	Launched as general entitlement scheme
TPDS	1997	PDS was revamped to target poor households
Antyodaya Anna Yojana	2000	Scheme launched to target the “poorest of the poor”
PDS Control Order	2001	Government notified this Order to administer TPDS
PUCL vs. Union of India	2001	Ongoing case in Supreme Court contending that “right to food” is a fundamental right
National Food Security Act	2013	Act to provide legal right to food to the poor

## **Essential Commodities Act and PDS (Control) Order**

TPDS is administered under the Public Distribution System (Control) Order 2001<sup>3</sup>, notified under the Essential Commodities Act, 1955 (ECA)<sup>4</sup>. The ECA regulates the production, supply, and distribution of essential commodities including edible oils, food crops such as wheat, rice, and sugar, among others. It regulates prices, cultivation and distribution of essential commodities. The PDS (Control) Order, 2001 specifies the framework for the implementation of TPDS. It highlights key aspects of the scheme including the method of identification of beneficiaries, the issue of food grains, and the mechanism for distribution of food grains from the centre to states.

## **PUCL vs. Union of India, 2001**

In 2001, the People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL) filed a writ petition in the Supreme Court contending that the "right to food" is essential to the right to life as provided in Article 21 of the Constitution. During the ongoing litigation, the Court has issued several interim orders, including the implementation of eight central schemes as legal entitlements<sup>5</sup>. These include PDS, Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY), the Mid-Day Meal Scheme, and Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS). In 2008, the Court ordered that Below Poverty Line (BPL) families be entitled to 35 kg of food grains per month at subsidised prices<sup>6</sup>.

## **National Food Security Act, 2013**

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<sup>3</sup> The Public Distribution System (Control) Order, 2001, Department of Food and Public Distribution, <http://dfpd.nic.in/?q=node/104>.

<sup>4</sup> The Essential Commodities Act, 1955, Department of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution, <http://consumeraffairs.nic.in/consumer/sites/default/files/userfiles/ecact1955.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> Interim order dated November 28, 2001 PUCL vs. Union of India and Ors., Supreme Court Writ Petition [Civil] No. 196 of 2001

<sup>6</sup> Interim order dated January 10, 2008 in PUCL vs. Union of India and Ors., Supreme Court Writ Petition [Civil] No. 196 of 2001.

The National Food Security Act gives statutory backing to the TPDS. This legislation marks a shift in the right to food as a legal right rather than a general entitlement. The Act classifies the population into three categories: excluded (i.e., no entitlement), priority (entitlement), and Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY; higher entitlement). It establishes responsibilities for the centre and states and creates a grievance redressal mechanism to address non-delivery of entitlements.

### **Identification of eligible households under existing TPDS**

The government launched TPDS in order to target food grains entitlements to poor households. Therefore, identification and classification of beneficiaries is crucial to fulfil the goals of the scheme.

**Categorisation of beneficiaries APL and BPL** Under TPDS, beneficiaries were divided into two categories:

- a.) Households below the poverty line or BPL; and
- b.) Households above the poverty line or APL.

BPL beneficiaries that are currently covered under TPDS were identified through a detailed process when TPDS was initially launched. The Planning Commission calculated state-wise estimates of the total number of BPL beneficiaries that would be covered under TPDS. Each state government was responsible for identifying eligible BPL households on the basis of inclusion and exclusion criteria evolved by the Ministry of Rural Development. Such households were entitled to receive a BPL ration card. APL households were not identified and any household above the poverty line could typically apply for an APL ration card.

### **Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY)**



The AAY scheme was launched in December 2000 for the poorest among the BPL families. Individuals in the following priority groups are entitled to an AAY card, including: (i) landless agricultural labourers, (ii) marginal farmers, (iii) rural artisans/craftsmen such as potters and tanners, (iv) slum dwellers, (v) persons earning their livelihood on a daily basis in the informal sector such as porters, rickshaw pullers, cobblers, (vi) destitute, (vii) households headed by widows or terminally ill persons, disabled persons, persons aged 60 years or more with no assured means of subsistence, and (viii) all primitive tribal households.

### Entitlements under TPDS

Eligible beneficiaries are entitled to subsidised food grains such as wheat and rice. States have the discretion to provide other commodities such as sugar, kerosene, and fortified under TPDS. Table 2 indicates the entitlements across categories.

**Table 2: Number of beneficiaries and entitlements**

Category	No.of families	Beneficiaries (crore)	Entitlements of food grains
AAY	2.43		35kg
BPL	4.09		35kg
APL	11.52		15-35kg
<b>Total</b>	18.04		

Sources: DFPD, PRS (2013)<sup>7</sup>

**Table 3: Process for identification of eligible households**

The centre and states identify eligible BPL households through a detailed process, as seen in Table 3.

Authority	Role	Details
National Organisation	Sample Survey	Conducts sample survey of consumer expenditure every five years. Consumer expenditure is the expenditure of a household on some basic goods and services. The expenditure on this basket of goods is the basis for the poverty line.

<sup>7</sup> Please see Unstarred Question No. 256, Lok Sabha, Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution, Answered on February 26, 2013; Department of Food and Public Distribution; PRS.

<b>Niti Aayog (earlier Planning Commission during 2013)</b>	Estimates state-wise poverty, i.e., the number of people below the poverty line	Uses NSSO household expenditure data
<b>Central Government</b>	Allocates food grains to each state based on state-wise poverty estimates of Planning Commission and population projections of the Registrar General of India as of March 2000	The number of BPL families has been calculated using 1993-94 poverty estimates by Planning Commission. This number has not been revised despite the release of new poverty estimates by the Planning Commission in 2004-05 and 2011-12
<b>Ministry of Rural Development<sup>8</sup></b>	Comes out with criteria for inclusion and exclusion from BPL list as part of its BPL Census	Criteria for classification of BPL families, as per BPL Census 2002, include parameters like size of land holding, clothing owned, food security, means of livelihood etc.
<b>State Government</b>	Identify eligible households	Based on above criteria

Sources: Department of Food and Public Distribution; Planning Commission; Ministry of Rural Development; PRS.

### Changes in TPDS with Food Security Act, 2013

The National Food Security Act, 2013 seeks to make the right to food a statutory right. The Act implemented some key changes to the erstwhile TPDS, as can be seen in Table 4.

**Table 4: Comparison of TPDS with the National Food Security Act**

Provision	TPDS	National Food Security Act, 2013.
<b>Implication for „right to food“</b>	Set up under administrative order; no legal backing	Provides statutory backing for right to food
<b>Coverage</b>	90.2 crore beneficiaries = 18.04 crore families x 5 (average no. of members in a family)	Up to 75% of rural and up to 50% of urban population, about 81.34 crore beneficiaries <sup>9</sup>
<b>Categories</b>	AAY, BPL, APL	AAY, Priority and excluded

<sup>8</sup> Chapter 18, Annual Report 2012-13, Ministry of Rural Development, <http://rural.nic.in/sites/downloads/programmes-schemes/Poverty%20Studies.pdf>.

<sup>9</sup> Please see Lok Sabha Unstarred Question No. 6511, Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution, Answered on May 7, 2013.

<b>Entitlements per category</b>	BPL and AAY: 35 kg/family/month APL: 15 – 35 kg/family/month	Priority: 5 kg/person/month AAY: 35 kg/family/month
<b>Prices of food grains</b>	AAY: Rs 3/kg for rice, Rs 2/kg for wheat, and Re 1/kg for coarse grains Other categories: differs across states	All categories: Rs 3/kg for rice, Rs 2/kg for wheat, and Re 1/kg for coarse grains
<b>Identification of beneficiaries</b>	Centre: a.) releases state-wise estimates of population to be covered under TPDS b.) creates criteria for identification  States: a.) Identify eligible households	Centre: releases state-wise estimates of population to be covered under Act States: a.) create criteria for identification b.) identify eligible households
<b>Centre-state responsibility</b>	Centre: procurement; state-wise allocation; transport of grains up to state depots; storage States: delivery of grains from state depots to ration shop to beneficiary	Same as current system with some additions Centre: provides food security allowance to states to pass on to beneficiaries Centre and states: not responsible for failure to supply food grains during force majeure conditions, e.g., war, flood, drought
<b>Grievance redressal mechanism</b>	State governments responsible for ensuring monitoring; vigilance committees to be set up at state, district, block and ration shop levels	Appoints district grievance redressal officers; establishes State Food Commissions; and vigilance committees at state, district, block and ration shop levels

Sources: PDS (Control) Order, 2001; National Food Security Act, 2013; PRS.

## **NFSA in Bihar**

The NFSA became law in 2013, but only a few states have implemented it in initial stage. Bihar was one of them. In Bihar, the implementation of the act officially began on 1 February 2014.

The NFSA guarantees three sets of entitlements. These are subsidised food from the public distribution system (PDS); nutritious meals for children; and maternity entitlements. PDS entitlements says 5 kg of foodgrains per person per month at prices Rs 3, 2 and 1 per kg for rice, wheat and millets, respectively for all households in the “Priority” category, along with the continuation of the Antyodaya programme.

Under the Antyodaya programme, the poorest of the poor households are entitled to 35 kg of foodgrains per month at the same prices. Priority and Antyodaya households are referred to as “eligible households” in the act. The act does not specify eligibility criteria, but the mandatory coverage of the PDS is 75% in rural areas and 50% in urban areas at the national level, to be adjusted state-wise (by the central government) so that poorer states have higher coverage. In Bihar, which is one of the poorest states of India, this mandatory coverage is 86% in rural areas and 75% in urban areas.

Here, we can see that the assessment of household food security is based on identification, food supply, categories etc. As a result, a decrease in food supply was regarded as the only cause of household food insecurity. More recent views state that food insecurity should not be seen as a problem of inadequate food supply only, but also as a problem of inadequate purchasing power (Sen, 1981). According to Borton and Shoham cited by Frankenberger (1992), researchers realised that food insecurity occurred in situations where food was available but not accessible, because of the erosion of people’s entitlement to food. In other words, people become food insecure because they lack entitlements and this fits to the context of Indian food security as well. One of the prominent lacunas this policy has that it is

so technical in language, highly mechanized and bureaucratic in nature. This policy works in the close nexus of state officials, middlemen etc and it is very less participatory in nature does not take into account people led food security initiatives.

The next section of this paper traces the experiences of people led initiatives and mechanism through the study of two villages in the Araria district of Bihar. This segment tries to show that how people are also running certain mechanisms to achieve food security and those knowledge, process, initiative are also should be given equal importance and should be connected with the state-led policy to make the whole regime more efficiently equipped, informed and participatory. State-led policy brings the expertise and local knowledge brings information and experiences of the locality. Experts know the numbers and locals know the locality and a policy will work better in amalgamation of both.

## **2. The public sphere and food- state to 'local'**

Humans exploits resources for social purposes and the cultural goals and values behind them create the conditions for the individual use and modification of resources, as people attempt to meet their basic needs. Any study in political anthropology and human ecology must take into account these conditions, and therefore, it is imperative to ground analyses in individual activity appropriately culturally contextualized.

### **2.1 From political and populations to resources and actors.**

The paradigmatic shift, from ecosystem and populations to resources and actors, not only brings political anthropology closer in line with theory in evolutionary ecology, which emphasizes individuals, but also reflects a general move in anthropology "from social structure to social process, from treating populations as uniform to examining diversity and

variability within them, and from normative and jural aspects to behavioural aspects of social relations". (Orlove, 1980)

In formulating a practice approach in political anthropology, a question that necessarily arises is how individual action and hierarchical structuring actually affect production and resource use in specific research contexts like gender issues in food security. At this point, with help of some case studies and their narratives I will explain the practice and food security approach of the locals. The villages of which I will share experiences are of Raghunathpur (North), Hasanpur, Achra and Dumariya. The group discussions and surveys have been done to gain the insights and experiences.

## **2.2 Right to food: NFSA in action, Araria, Bihar.**

I am here presenting few insights from the field. Data was collected from 200 households in four villages. Structured and un-structured questionnaire and group discussions have been done to understand the real essence of the public distribution system. I chose for villages in the Araria district of Bihar. In Bihar, the NFSA has been implemented and it confers a legal right to food grain on the poor. The NFSA allocates food grain per person. The NFSA is considered to be a modified version of the TPDS, which is designed to curb leakages. Various measures have been proposed under the NFSA to increase the efficiency of the delivery system including doorstep delivery of rations and stringent monitoring of the functioning of the PDS by involving local authorities. The identification of beneficiaries under the NFSA is ideally based on the Socio Economic and Caste Census (SECC), 2011, which uses several more criteria beyond the income-expenditure method used in the previous rounds of the BPL census.

**Table 5. Coverage of households**

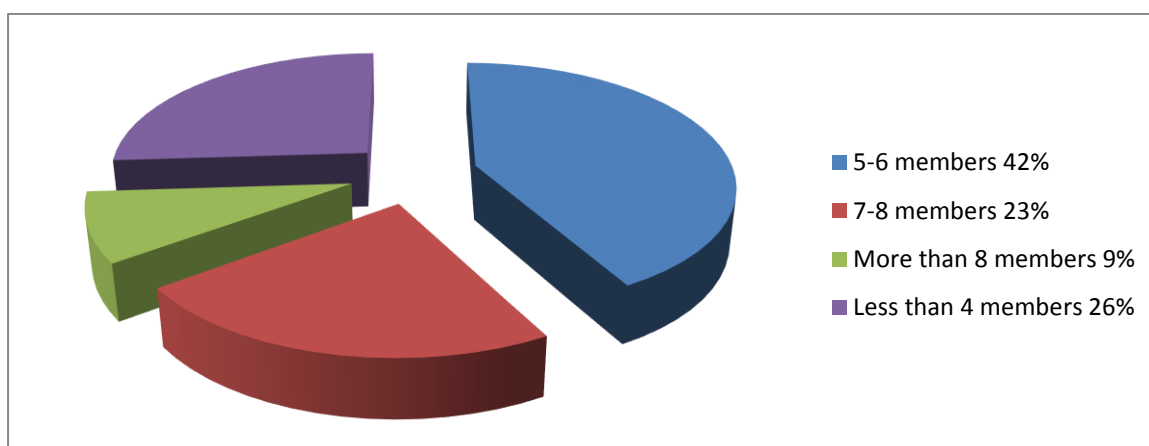
Village	BPL/PHH	AAY	Total
Raghunath Pur (North)	31	19	50
Hasanpur	32	18	50
Achra	34	16	50
Dumariya	27	23	50
<b>Total</b>	<b>124</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>200</b>

Source: Based on the field work.

BPL: Below Poverty Line. PHH: Priority Household. AAY: Antodaya Anna Yojna.

Note: APL (Above Poverty Line) allocation is zero under the NFSA in Bihar.

**Fig 2.1 Household Size of Respondents**



Almost half of all respondents (43%) had between 5-6 members in the household. 91% of all respondents have between 4-8 members in their households. Importantly, 71% had 5 or more members in their households.

**Table 2.3 Amount of Grain Received by Respondents**

<b>Grain received (in kgs.)</b>	<b>%age of respondents</b>
Less than 10 kgs	4.15
11-19kgs	16.48
20-29kgs	7.77
30kgs	18.12
31-34kgs	14.32
35kg	8.81
More than 35 kgs	1.05
No Response	0.97
Not Applicable	29.68
Total	100.0

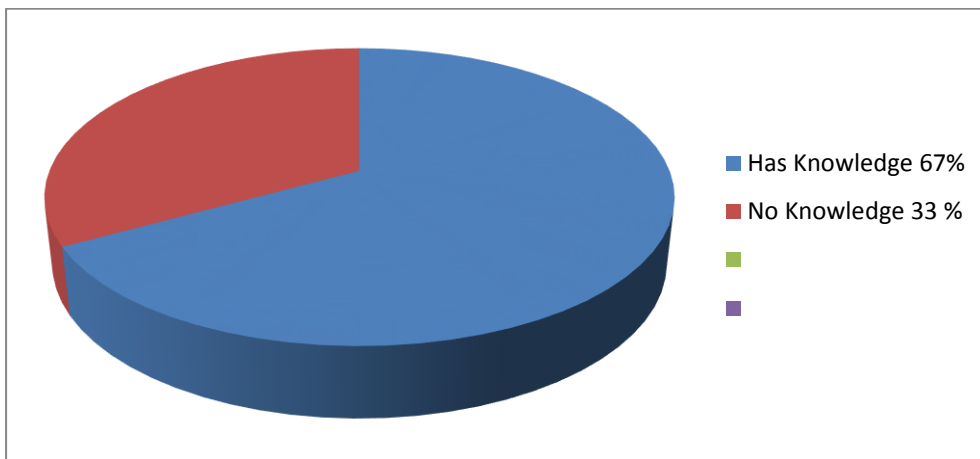
The outreach of the NFSA is higher than the TPDS while entitlement became individual specific. It is 5kg per person for priority households (revised BPL group) under the NFSA. It becomes more beneficial for the large households compared to the small families. The entitlement of a small family of 4 members became 20kg per month under NFSA while it was 35kg per month under TPDS. Another important feature of the NFSA is that it provides for the stoppage of food grain allocation to the APL category. Allocation for the APL category has been one of the main sources of diversion of food grain from the PDS for a long time.

Nearly 20% respondents received or lifted less than amount of rations (20 kgs) for BPL/PHH families; while 26% of total respondents received or lifted near or less than 30 kgs of rations. 23% of AAY entitled households get between 31-35 kg of grains.



While discussing with the beneficiaries, people informed that they could not lift the stipulated amount of rice. The short lifting of PDS rice is often seen to be on account of lack of cash on the few days when the ration rice is available, because of the PDS dealer not giving the full quota saying that he received less than his quota or the ration shop timings interfering with the daily wage timings of the BPL/PHH families.

**Fig 2.4 Knowledge about amount of grain beneficiary suppose to get**



33% of the respondents do not have an idea about how much rations they are entitled to get. However, respondents said that in spite of the criticism about the functioning of the TPDS and less awareness, PDS plays an important role in covering the food grain requirement of poor families..

**Table 6. Respondent’s Satisfaction with the performance of FPSs.**

Performance of FPSs	%age of respondents.
Poor	0.53

Good	32.55
Very Good	16.29
Some time good – Sometime bad	46.12
Cant say	3.52
No Response	0.99
Total	100.0

More than half of the respondents surveyed expressed satisfaction with the quality of grain that they got from the PDS and most felt that it was good. But an equal number felt the quality of rice from the PDS to be inconsistent – sometimes good and sometimes bad .

**Table 7. Periodicity of receiving the ration.**

<b>When ration is got by beneficiaries.</b>	<b>%age of respondents</b>
Every month	23.01
Every alternate month	19.07
Once within 2-6 months	17.57
After every six months	40.35
Total	100.0

Regularity is an important thing for disbursing ration as the poor would need it on time. But one common thing that all respondents say that there is no fixed day for getting their ration. 23% said that they get each month their ration but almost everyday they have to go to see whether the ration came or not. However, 37% of respondents say that they get their ration only once within six months if not more. And, and a huge 40% said that they get after six months but still they are satisfied with the system to a extent. I find that a high share of poor people with BPL/PHH/AAY ration cards withdraw rations on a regular basis if rations are available at the FPS.

The Public Distribution System suffers many problems still. Significant problem lies with the leakages in the form of diversion of food grain because of systemic weaknesses. The identification error is still prevailing too where to a extent Inappropriate identification of BPL/PHH families and the huge cost of misidentification along with inefficiencies in the supply chain contribute to the high cost of delivery. The distribution chain of the PDS is riddled with malpractice at different levels including the administrative level. I was told that the return from BPL/PHH cards is quite high, so there is a rush to get a new card. Eligible people do not always receive ration cards if they are not politically well connected or are unwilling to pay a bribe. The government charges a token fee of Re. 1 to issue a new ration card. However, I observed during study that field survey that to issue a new ration card in rural parts of Bihar almost 50-100 rs were taken from the beneficiaries.

The identification of eligible households is crucial in running the food security programme successfully. Bihar had issued new ration cards in a hurry to implement the NFSA within the stipulated timeframe resulting in incorrect identification of eligible households. To rectify the mistakes, a huge number of bogus cards were cancelled in the state in 2014 and new cards had been issued partially at the time of the field survey.(NCAER, 2015)

Data show that TPDS is improving in Bihar and the participation of people will make it more efficient. A more informed mechanism is the need. Beneficiaries have a little awareness about the existence of a grievance redressal mechanism, beneficiaries are completely in the dark about how the monitoring system works. The NFSA has also emphasised the need to involve local authorities in monitoring through the establishment of vigilance committees. I also found during my visit that no such vigilance committees has been formed during that time. The beneficiaries agreed that really an effective monitoring system, more informed

mechanism and their participation are definitely crucial to ensure the right to food for all, something that state machinery have so far failed to do.

The identification of target households, promptness of the delivery system and effective monitoring of the food security programme are the main areas that need attention. People maintained that the identification process needs to be state or region-specific. The policy has to be contextual and as the states' priorities/grievances/choices are different across the country, the policy should fit the bill. Digitisation of ration card is going on but correct identification is more important. Biometric information of all cardholders in a household (head of the family and other members of the household), and its linking with their Aadhar card number and storing the data will definitely make the system more advanced and fully transparent and accessible by all. Beneficiaries said that major hindrance they face is in term of lack of awareness regarding their entitlement, their right. Display boards containing the correct information about entitlement, availability of food grain and issue price should be maintained at all FPSs. Panchayat sevaks should be made aware of their role in the PDS. More participation is expected from civil society and local NGOs. The grievance redressal mechanism needs to be revamped immediately. Awareness campaigns regarding the grievance redressal mechanism should be conducted with the help of local NGOss and civil society.

### **2.3 The practices of people:**

Indigenous system of knowledge and practice, in particular peasant livelihoods in farming and local adaptation and practices have gained attention among social scientists in recent years for their capacity to sustain agrarian communities, even when altered by forces of political and economic change (Brokensha et al., 1980; Chamber, 1983; Richards, 1985; Altieri, and Hecht, 1990) That local environments can be sustainably managed by resident

populations has been demonstrated in contexts as diverse as indigenous pastoralism, forestry, and farming. (Little, 1984; Cernea, 1985; Dyson-Hudson, 1985; Horowitz, 1985)

Community Grain Banks (CGBs) by Women.



**Source: Hasanpur panchayat.**

In Panchayats: Hasanpur, Dumaraiya, community grain banks are run by local people and most interesting fact is that it has been mostly managed women. Bihar Integrated Rural Development Project (BIRDP) works with the poor in difficult to reach areas. The population in the region where BIRDP operates is one of the poorest and most vulnerable populations in the state. Their livelihood is primarily subsistence oriented and depends on a combination of agriculture and wage labour. Lack of a sustainable livelihood opportunities forces many of the families to migrate to distant places in search of alternative livelihoods.

Many of them stay in their work places for almost six months and return to their homes during the agricultural season. The housing in many of the villages is in very bad shape. Many of them do not possess ration card and most of them are not able to access the ration timely. The CGBs were designed to address the problem of extreme poverty and hunger among the such communities. The project enables the community to expand their livelihood

base through productive use of land, water, forest resources, access to financial services, markets, linkage to various government schemes, and capacity building.

Grain banks were established in those villages where the majority of the population belongs to BPL/AAY or priority households. BIRDP played a key role in creating awareness on grain banks and mobilisation of households into grain bank groups. Each grain bank group consists of 50-70 households, represented by an earning member of the household, preferably women. The participating member of the household contributes a fixed quantity of food grains. Since their contribution alone is insufficient to meet the food grain requirement, each grain bank group is assisted with financial assistance from BIRDP and local NGOs for the purchase of food grain. The agency's work ranges from mobilisation to capacity building to financing. The members collectively decide the type and quantity of grain to be purchased and stocked. These savings in food grain along with the grain purchased by using the financial assistance from NGOs, are pooled together and stored in a common storage structures managed by a grain bank committee. The members are allowed to borrow food grain at times of difficulty.

### **2.3.1 Feminization of food security.**

Two aspects of the changes that I have traced in these villages suggest that food security issue is essentially getting feminized and keen attention is required to acknowledge this. The first is the increase in women's independent production of grain essentially paddy and other food crops like maize and vegetables. The second is the relative increase in women's labour inputs to household food production, in comparison to men's, in terms of both tasks and times as men have concentrated their efforts on high range non-food commercial crops like makhaan (lotus seeds).



**मेरे हक़ मेरे पहचान पत्र**

जोब कार्ड		मतदाता कार्ड
बैंक पासबुक		एएफएच बीपीएल सामान्य राशन कार्ड
जमीन पट्टा		जच्चा बच्चा कार्ड
किसान क्रेडिट कार्ड		राष्ट्रीय स्वास्थ्य बीमा योजना
बी.पी.एल. नंबर		जाति पहचान प्रमाणपत्र

जानकारी और संगठन शक्ति से करे हक़ प्राप्त, बने सशक्त और पर्याप्त

Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana (MKSP) is one of the first programmes of the government that recognizes the increasing feminization of agriculture and the role of women in farming. It does not make formal ownership of land the basis for working with women farmers, by also reaching out to women who are from land-owning households, landless women, sharecroppers, collectives who are leasing land and women practicing livelihood allied to agriculture. Participation in the programme however is not adequate to bring recognition to women farmers.

Changing normative and institutional beliefs for the recognition of women farmers requires forums for critical reflection and collective action to challenge systemic patriarchies to make a dent on gender discriminatory beliefs and practices. Gender discrimination is lived and experienced in intersection with other social identities producing multiple vulnerabilities.

The implementation of MKSP by Bihar Rural Livelihood Programme BRLP-Jeevika has brought notable changes in the lives of women farmers. Poorvanchal village organisation has given opportunities to rural women to break many a barriers, learn numerous new skills and perform new tasks. The particular significance among the many achievements of MKSP in Bihar is enabling women farmers to procure seeds and food grains, and engage with market structures.





Field: Raghunath Pur. (Sagunia Devi, Bijli Devi, Sumita Devi, Meena Devi from left to right)

Sagunia Devi said *“My husband always seeks my advice and permission before working on our fields. He recognises me as a partner and a farmer of equal, if not more merit. I feel more empowered, more secure and more free. For food to we feel more secure, as now I can go easily to ration shop, get my entitlements and can talk to officials. I don’t go to bed empty stomach now”*.

Bijli Devi, Sumita Devi and Meena Devi says in one united voice *“Hum aage badhenge to Humara parivaar bhi aage badhega. Hamara baccha sab bhi school jayega, aacha padhega, aacha khayega”* (When I advance and grow, My family too grows. Our children will also go to school, will eat good food ).

### **3 Policy with people:**

Stating all these, I want to conclude that all these efforts should be more highlighted and the social security policy on NFSA should be make more participatory in its orientation. Within

democracies, the citizens should be able to participate in decision making about issues that affect their vital interests. Within a democracy, citizens have a right to be involved in decisions that affect their vital interests. Secondly, but no less importantly, we suspected that public involvement could resolve some of the dilemmas inherent in rationing decisions and lead to better decisions. The general public would not just bring new ideas and experiences to the decision-making process, but also encourage authorities to think more carefully about what they want to achieve and why, to scrutinise its own assumptions and to be more open about its deliberations.(Coote, 1997). Thirdly, the ‘muddling through’ was not an attractive or feasible option, and that involving the public in explicit rationing decisions would lead to greater trust and confidence in the food security policies.(Hunter: 1997)

Firstly, for citizens to engage in a debate about rationing, they need some basic information about how the food policies currently works, and how rationing decisions are made. Secondly, citizens need the opportunity to consider why rationing must take place. The Right based framework have gained great attention and recognition among the global food community as a strategy to potentially overcome barriers that other-wise neither sector could respond to on its own. Governments have been facing increasing pressure to take action to prevent and reduce chronic hunger while experiencing fiscal constraints. This has made right framework and peoples’ involvement an attractive mechanism to collaborate with the state to address hunger and food insecurities. Together it can achieve a shared food security objective based on some degree of shared decision-making and efficient state apparatus. The community involvement in the food security policies can lead to the condition in which all community residents obtain a safe, culturally appropriate, nutritionally sound diet through rationing also which will promote equity, community reliance and social justice. Involving the people can develop just, sustainable, and diverse food system. Through it, the food needs

of everyone, including people with low incomes can be met. It can promote good nutrition and health and can revitalize local communities and build self-reliance and collaboration. Further, it promotes community economic development and strengthens local and regional food systems. It can work as platform to link the farmers and consumers, and support sustainable and family-scale farming. It promotes good working conditions and sustainable livelihoods for farmers and food system workers. It builds capacity for people to create change through education and empowerment.

A rights approach is predicated on the idea that people have the right and the duty to participate in civic life, including the development, implementation, and evaluation of policies and programs.(Ziegler, 2001) To facilitate and ensure participation, there must be administrative

commitment to establish and maintain open avenues to legitimate forms of participation by people with all types of backgrounds. (CESCR, 1999) This is an area in which those advocating a human rights approach to health problems have yet to succeed. (Mosfegh, 1994) Sharing information and encouraging education through direct, easy-to-understand language, clear venues for feedback and public participation, and reference to clear benchmarks and targets for food security would facilitate participation. Transparency is vital to increasing participation of the public.

According to the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, a national strategy should establish the appropriate mechanisms that (1) utilize monitoring systems to identify emerging threats to the right to adequate food, (2) improve coordination between relevant agencies at the national, state, and local level, (3) improve accountability, with a clear allocation of responsibilities and timeframes for progressive implementation of the right to food, and (4)

ensure the adequate public participation that includes the most food-insecure segments of the population. (Schutter, 2008)

Jean Dreze had said that “the right to food is a somewhat complex right that does not readily translate into well defined entitlements and responsibilities. The scope for enforcing it through the courts can be significantly enlarged (e.g. by consolidating legal provisions for the right to food), but serious difficulties are involved in making it fully justiciable. Nevertheless, the right to food can bring new interventions within the realm of possibility in at least three different ways: through legal action, through democratic practice, and through public perceptions”. (Dreze, 2004) Further, he said that “the right to food is to be achieved, it needs to be linked with other economic and social rights, such as the right to education, the right to work, the right to information and the right to health. These economic and social rights complement and reinforce each other. Taken in isolation, each of them has its limitations, and may not even be realisable within the present structure of property rights. Taken together, however, they hold the promise of radical change in public priorities and democratic politics”. (Dreze, 2004) The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (*MGNREGA*) and Food for work (FFW) collaboration demonstrate models of food security with quality and equity.

Key to the success of this approach has been the efforts to understand and address and assimilate the locals around food policy in sensitive ways that stand the challenges. Involving both people and state in discussions about food security and people as the prime stakeholders will facilitate the willingness to challenge, re-address and reformulate the insecurities, inequity and injustices concerning food security policies.

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