



A Welcome Move: On the free grains scheme under food security law

The Hindu

Paper - III
(Poverty & Food Security)

❖ The Centre's taking up the burden for free food grain distribution in 2023 will provide relief to States.

The Government has decided not to extend the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana, (PMGKY), a scheme that ran between April 2020 to December 2022 (except for a short period in between), and provided additional allocation of food grains, i.e., rice or wheat from the central pool at five kilograms a month free of cost to beneficiaries under the National Food Security Act (NFSA).

Food Security

The general principle of food security includes three major dimensions, viz., access, availability, and utilization. India, as a member of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, is committed to ensuring the right to freedom from hunger and to adequate food.

Benefits from PMGKY

PMGKY absorbed the shock of the pandemic for the extreme poor and also brought in political dividends for the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party in many States that had elections this year, including Uttar Pradesh in particular.

While discontinuing the scheme, the Government has said that it will bear the expenses of food grains under the NFSA for 2023 and ensure free ration under the Act for the estimated 81.35 crore beneficiaries for that year.

What is the status now?

In other words, ration card holders can now avail 5 kg of wheat or rice per month for free rather than at a subsidised rate, while Antyodaya Anna Yojana cardholders will receive 35 kg of free foodgrains. As the estimated number of 81.35 crore beneficiaries is still based on Census 2011 numbers and Public Distribution System entitlements have been limited to ration card holders and quotas framed by the Union Government.

Some States have gone on to expand benefits to others through the NFSA and other schemes. By taking on the burden of the expenditure for this distribution, the Union government, which has estimated an additional amount of ₹2 lakh crore for the scheme, has provided limited but welcome relief in monetary terms for States.

Food Distribution and Subsidy Provision

While the expenditure numbers on food distribution and subsidy provisions seem fiscally expensive, the schemes have provided distress relief to the most needy, helped the Government control its food buffer stocks better, and also reduced wastage of procured food grains at a time when procurement figures for rice and wheat by the Food Corporation of India remain high.

The PDS and the PMGKY have not only enabled basic food security but have also acted as income transfers for the poor by allowing them to buy other commodities that they could not have afforded if not for the benefits.

Targeted Distribution and Universalization of PDS

There is, of course, the question of whether targeted distribution, including the identification of priority households and the “poorest of the poor”, has really helped the benefits reaching the deserving with concerns about diversion of foodgrains.

But as rights activists have argued, the more robust solution could be a universalisation of the PDS, which has already worked well in a few States such as Tamil Nadu, as the scheme would be availed by anyone in need instead of a flawed targeting system.

National Food Security Act

- ➔ The Government has notified the National Food Security Act, 2013, passed by the Parliament on 10th September, 2013, with the objective of providing adequate quality food grains to the people at affordable prices to lead a dignified life. The approach is to provide food and nutritional security.
- ➔ The Act provides for coverage of 75% of the rural population and 50% of the urban population to receive subsidized food grains under the Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS), thus covering about two-thirds of the population. The eligible person is entitled to receive 5 kg of foodgrains per person per month at subsidized prices of Rs.3/2/1 per kg for rice/wheat/coarse cereals respectively.
- ➔ The Act also lays special emphasis on nutritional support for women and children. Pregnant women and lactating mothers are also entitled to receive maternity benefit of at least Rs.6000 in addition to food during pregnancy and 6 months after child birth. Children up to the age of 14 years are also entitled to receive food as per the prescribed nutritional standards.
- ➔ Under this law, there is a provision that the beneficiaries should get the prescribed food grains for them, for this, the rule of payment of food security allowance in case of non-supply of food grains was implemented in January 2015.

Food Insecurity

Food insecurity is defined as irregular access to nutritious and sufficient food due to a lack of money or other resources. During food insecurity people face starvation.

Public Distribution System (PDS)

Public Distribution System means distribution of essential commodities to a large number of people through fair price shop at regular intervals. Rice, wheat, sugar, kerosene etc. are given under the Public Distribution System. The PDS is a major instrument in the government's economic policy to ensure availability of food grains at affordable prices and to enhance food security.

Fair Price Shop (FPS)

A public distribution shop, also known as a fair price shop, is a part of India's public distribution system set up by the Government of India to distribute rations at subsidized prices to the poor.

Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY)

- ➔ The implementation of the Antyodaya Anna Yojana under the Targeted Public Distribution System was a step towards reducing hunger among the poorest section of the population below the poverty line. A national sample survey exercise pointed to the fact that about 5% of the total population in the country sleeps without two meals a day. This segment of the population can be called the "starving" segment.
- ➔ To make the Targeted Public Distribution System more focused and targeted towards this section of the population, the 'Antyodaya Anna Yojana' was launched in December, 2000 for one crore poorest households.
- ➔ Antyodaya Anna Yojana aims to identify one crore poorest of the poor families from below poverty line families covered under the Targeted Public Distribution System within the state and provide them at highly subsidized rates of Rs 2 per kg wheat and Rs 3 per kg rice. It is envisaged to provide food grains.

- ➔ The norm of issue which was initially 25 kg per family per month has been increased to 35 kg per family per month with effect from 1st April, 2002

Present Situation

- ➔ The Central Government had launched the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY) in April 2020 for the poor and needy amidst the Corona pandemic and the lockdown. The deadline of this scheme has been extended from time to time.
- ➔ The Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana has been merged with the National Food Security Act and now the entire grain will be given free of cost under the Food Security Act.
- ➔ Under the National Food Security Act, rice is given at Re 3 per kg, wheat at Rs 2 per kg and millets at Re 1 per kg. Now the beneficiaries will not have to pay any cost for this.
- ➔ The National Food Security Act covers 50% of the urban population and 75% of the rural population of the country. There are 2 categories of beneficiaries under this. Antyodaya Anna Yojana in which each family is given 35 kg of food grains every month. Second, in the families of the general category, each person gets 5 kg of food grains per month.
- ➔ The government gets about Rs 13,900 crore per year from the sale of subsidized wheat, rice and coarse grains under the Food Security Act, while Rs 15,000 crore is spent per month on the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana. The food security bill will increase by Rs 13,900 crore to Rs 200,000 crore due to distribution of free food grains under the National Food Security Act. On the other hand, the closure of Garib Kalyan Yojana will save Rs 1.8 lakh crore in a year.
- ➔ Seven lakh tonnes of wheat and 33 lakh tonnes of rice were required every month under the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana. And under the National Food Security Act, 13.67 lakh tonnes of wheat and 31.72 lakh tonnes of rice were allocated in December.

Expected Question

Que. With reference to the National Food Security Act, 2013, consider the following statements-

1. Pregnant women and lactating mothers are also entitled to receive maternity benefit of at least Rs.6000 in addition to food during pregnancy and 6 months after child birth.
2. Arrangement for payment of food security allowance in case of non-supply of food grains.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- (a) Only 1 (b) Only
(c) Neither 1 nor 2 (d) Both 1 and 2

Answer : D

Mains Expected Question & Format

Que.: Recently, the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana has been merged with the National Food Security Act. Throw light on the National Food Security Act, 2013, Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY), and Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY) brought to ensure food security in the country.

Answer Format :

- ❖ Briefly discuss the merger of Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana with the National Food Security Act.
- ❖ Explain the National Food Security Act, 2013, Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) and Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKY).
- ❖ Give a balanced conclusion keeping in view the food safety.

Note: - The question of the main examination given for practice is designed keeping in mind the upcoming UPSC mains examination. Therefore, to get an answer to this question, you can take the help of this source as well as other sources related to this topic.