

1. 'One Nation One Ration Card' will disrupt the PDS

Context:

- The proposed One Nation One Ration Card scheme could throw up a logistical nightmare, calling for frenzied, fleet-footed responses from civil supplies departments across the country.

What is 'One Nation One Ration Card' scheme?

- This scheme allows portability of food security benefits will be available across the country. This means poor migrant workers will be able to buy subsidized rice and wheat from any ration shop in the country.
- One Nation One Ration Card (RC) will ensure all beneficiaries especially migrants can access PDS across the nation from any PDS shop of their own choice.
- This scheme of interstate portability is a logical progression to the next level of enabling seamless public services under the PDS, throughout the country.

Need of the Scheme:

- According to the report, 45.36 crore people or 37% of the population is that of migrant labourers. The scheme is therefore important for anyone who is going to move from one place to the other.

Significance of the Scheme:

- In ONORC, the fundamental prerequisite is deduplication so that it is ensured that the same person does not figure as a beneficiary in two different locations of the country.
- With the help of the scheme, the government would be able to rightly target the beneficiaries to provide them with the food grains under the PDS.
- The scheme is linked with Aadhaar and biometrics, this removes most possibilities of corruption.
- The government is creating a central data repository to get all the details of ration card which are being maintained by states so that the repository acts as a clearing house or a server to do the cross checking on the basis of Aadhaar authentication.

Issues regarding the implementation of the scheme:

- Under the National Food Security Act, grains are allocated by the Centre to States, who then identify the beneficiaries to set procurement requirements.
- At present, an FPS receives the monthly quota of products strictly in accordance with the number of people assigned to it.

- For example, if 10,000 cards are assigned to a particular FPS, and each card is on average entitled 1-4 kg of sugar per month, the civil supplies department would deliver to the FPS 40,000 kg of sugar.
- The ONORC, when fully operational would disrupt this practice, as some FPSs may have to cater to more number of cards even as others cater to less, owing to migration of people. This could throw up a logistical nightmare across the country.
- The problem with ONORC is it perpetuates and is woven round the age-old PDS. The Food Corporation of India (FCI) procures cereals at the minimum support price announced by the Central government, and must at times store them without adequate space.

Alternate Ways to Address the Issue:

- The loss of food and enormous overheads entailed by the food bureaucracy can be avoided if the existing regime is replaced by a fool-proof food coupon system targeting the poor, wherein a BPL family can buy rice, pulses, sugar and oil from any kirana store at the market price, by either paying fully through the coupon or by cash, if the amount due exceeds the monthly coupon value.
- The coupon system, in addition, does not limit the food options available. Coarse cereal like bajra or corn with nutritious pulses can be obtained in lieu of the one-size-fits all packages of cereals and sugar.
- If fraud/forgery is a concern, the government can think in terms of direct benefit transfer (DBT) into the Aadhaar-seeded bank accounts. This will also curb trafficking of the coupons.

Source: The Business Line