

# **COVID 19 and Public Distribution system in Chhattisgarh: A Study**

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**Abstract** The COVID-19 pandemic has caused the whole world to face an economic crisis and hence putting people even more at risk of food insecurity; supply chain setup has been disrupted severely due to numerous transport restrictions. This review provides Associate in understanding concerning the food security scenario in Chhattisgarh state in particular the poor and vulnerable population, small and marginal farmers during the COVID-19 pandemic. It also analyses the steps taken by the government of India to address the food security challenges during COVID-19. We have discussed the importance of macrolevel thinking and various measures that can be taken to strengthen public distribution system in Chhattisgarh state. We have also discussed policies to support the small and marginal farmers, wage laborers, and migrant workers.

**Keyword-** COVID-19, Food security, Public distribution system, Fair price shops, NFSA, Food entitlement

## **Introduction**

Rising food prices, so that it is going very difficult for poor people to survive their life, that's why more attention given by the government to the public and policy. As we know that food safety is a big matter for everyone because production of food grains not sufficient for all the people. The Chhattisgarh government is fully aware about the food security so that they started to manage food grain and give food grain to every household who has a card. Chhattisgarh Government started many programmes like – core PDS –meri merge yojana, E-kerosene yojana, call centre, rice festival, PDS online programme etc. Approximately 91% people would benefit from this law. The Chhattisgarh food security bill is not only for food security but also for balanced food with maximum protein. State government faced many problem like leakages, lack of transparency, awareness, so that government has taken it very seriously and decided to computerization of records for success of this decision government has taken action and started many programs Supreme Court gave an order to other state

government to follow the online public distribution system of Chhattisgarh Government has sanctioned 17500 thousand for Iodized salt, 450000 thousands for Sugar distribution, 4200900 thousand for Gram distribution, 420090 thousand for Grain distribution and 10thousand for Development of PDS. The Chhattisgarh government is first state who passed own Food security bill, 2012. And the divided the family in the four groups – 1 Antyodaya households 2 Priority households 3 General households 4 Excluded households. So it is very easy to identify the family.

The public distribution system is functioning well: nearly all PDS shops were open (99%), had adequate supplies (92–99% depending on the food item), and provided free allotments to citizens (99%). Private shops experienced limited food scarcity during the first month of lockdown. Cross-validation exercises, including a survey of Anganwadi workers and a survey of almost 4,000 women in Raipur district, corroborate online survey results. Expanding the reach of Chhattisgarh's PDS can help contain rural economic distress and potentially stabilize food prices.

### **About the food shop survey**

The Chhattisgarh government and researchers collaborated on a food availability survey across 20 districts from April 10th to April 18th, which covered 4,000 gram panchayats. The survey was administered by the Department of Food, Civil Supplies, and Consumer Protection in Chhattisgarh, and was completed by panchayat-level department secretaries, accountants, and officers. Response rate: Our research team received data on 4,256 of the state's 12,129 PDS shops (35%) and 28,156 private shops across 3,955 gram panchayats (GPs) and 301 wards in 20 districts<sup>1</sup>. See appendix figure A1 for the survey completion rate<sup>2</sup> for each district. Higher poverty districts had lower completion rates, suggesting a need for additional data collection in these districts.

### **Food expenditure estimates Recommendations:**

- Make food items available in PDS shops to stabilize prices in private shops . Prices for chana in private shops in panchayats where PDS shops also stock chana are Rs. 5 lower than panchayats where PDS shops do not stock chana (10% reduction). This result holds even if we only look at prices within districts where chana is traditionally eaten (like Bastar). However, chana is not widely available in PDS shops in the state. For example, Bemetra, Durg, Mungeli, and Raipur districts did not distribute chana in any PDS shops.

- Explore sending pulses and edible oil at fixed prices through PDS for the next several months. This step could help households easily meet a wider array of nutritional needs while protecting against temporary price inflation of basic goods.
- Assess why some shops report 0% lifting. While the total number of shops that report zero lifting is low in March, it represents a 12-fold increase when compared to the average number of 0-lifting shops Figure 3: Chana price in panchayats where PDS do vs. do not stock chana in the previous 3 months.
- Shift remaining manual entry PDS shops to the digitized system to get a more accurate representation of food insecurity. Data were not available for 319 manual-entry PDS shops, 95% of which are located in Bijapur, Narayanpur, and Sukma districts, poorer districts affected by left wing extremism
- PDS shops should actively monitor shortages and respond with increased rations in areas with high rates of food insecurity.

## **Conclusion:**

- PDS and private shops are open: Between April 1-15, 99% of PDS shops and 96% of private shops were open for an average of 6 hours per day.
- Social distancing measures are followed in both PDS and private shops: 99% of shops followed at least one standard social distancing practice (see Figure 1). The most common practice is placing marks on the ground to keep customers apart.
- PDS shops rarely experienced food shortages: 99% of PDS shops provided rice and 92% of PDS shops provided salt.
- PDS shops are largely complying with the state's ration ordinances<sup>3</sup>: Rice is free for 5 out of 6 ration card types (except APL ration cards). Only 1% of PDS shops (40 PDS shops) charge for rice.

Cross-validation: Chhattisgarhi women's surveys We used two surveys of Chhattisgarhi women to partially cross-validate local official responses. Anganwadi female workers: We conducted qualitative interviews with 15 **Anganwadi workers (AWWs)** in 15-gram panchayats in 5 districts. Of these, 13 were already covered in our PDS survey.

- All AWWs reported PDS shops have enough food stock. The two districts where AWWs replied but PDS surveys were not completed stated similar PDS availability but lower access to fruits and vegetables.
- 27% of AWWs reported that while households were eating more rice and dal than 4 This sample is part of an on-going research study of a mobile phone-based information system for women that the research team has been conducting in Raipur district since 2018. 5 We limit analysis to the 11,990 PDS digitized PDS shops, which account for 97.5% of all PDS shops in the state. 6 At the time of writing this report, the equivalent April and May 2020 data were not yet available. prior to the lockdown, people were not replacing green vegetables with cheaper vegetables.
- 21% of AWWs observed the following health-related issues in the community: feeling weak, loss of appetite, weight loss, and feeling increasingly irritated. Rural women's survey: We conducted a phone survey with 3,951 women in 180 GPs in Raipur district<sup>4</sup>. 120 of these 180 GPs were already covered in our PDS survey.
- 95% of respondents reported receiving rations from the PDS shop. 98% report that free rice was available in their PDS.
- 34% of households are eating less or worry that they will run out of food.

Distribution of Survey Participants Administrative PDS data, we obtained administrative data from the Department of Food, Civil Supplies and Consumer Protection in Chhattisgarh. The data cover the period from April 2019 to March 2020 for all the PDS shops in the state. For each PDS shop in the time period, the data show allotment (how much the PDS is supposed to receive), receiving (how much it received), and distribution (how much was lifted by beneficiaries) for four food items: chana, salt, rice, and sugar. We also obtained the percentage of rice lifted for April and May 2020. On average, 93% of ration card holders retrieved the allotted rice for April and May 2020. In March 2020, 98% of all the rice that was allotted for PDS shops in the state was distributed to beneficiaries.

The research team conducted a study in 2019 with poor rural households in the district of Raipur and found very similar estimates of monthly household food expenditures. We assume the average Chhattisgarhi family has 4.5 members, as indicated by Census data. shops did not lift any rice in March. Half of the shops with zero lifting were in Surajpur (13 shops) and Baloda Bazar districts (23 shops).

Overall, PDS is working well. But certain parts of the state experience problems with getting food to beneficiaries. A dynamic dashboard showing data for district-level monthly allotment, receiving, and distribution of chana, rice, salt, and sugar, and the percent of PDS shops that distributed zero rice can be found here. Availability of rice and sugar, and food security under Raipur Women Survey and PDS Survey Looking Ahead: The Need to Expand PDS All reports for rural India suggest continued economic distress in the coming summer months, especially as roughly 200,000 migrant workers are expected to return to Chhattisgarh this summer. Despite a well-functioning PDS system, the survey of Raipur women indicates that food insecurity remains a primary worry for households. In addition, current rations and cash transfers to Jan Dhan accounts cannot fully meet caloric needs of the poor (see table 2). Survey data collected earlier in 2019 suggest a poor Chhattisgarhi household spends approximately Rs. 2,800 per month on food<sup>7</sup>. Data collected from this survey on the price of goods in private shops suggest free rations only help households cover anywhere from Rs. 440 to Rs. 932 of monthly food expenditure, depending on PDS allotment. While monthly Rs. 500 Jan Dhan cash transfers help, without a way to earn other income, the poorest households will still need more food or money to meet basic needs. Moreover, 51% of women in our citizen survey report not receiving the JDY transfers. Value of free rations (rice @ 22/kg, chana @ 52/kg) (Rs

### **Recommendations**

To handle COVID-19 situation, following are the recommendations for better implementation of measures.

- In response to COVID-19 pandemic, the government of India may universalize the PDS at least for one year to help the rural poor to overcome the economic distress. There is a need now to provide food grains to anyone who comes to the ration shops with or without a ration card. This year food grains stock of FCI approaches around 77 million tons in March before rabi harvest and there is a need to create extra space in FCI go down for rabi procurement. So, the government can release more stocks for free or at a nominal price over existing allocations. The universalization of PDS is the way forward and easily attainable.
- In addition to non-government organizations, a network of community kitchens and self-help groups should be used for the delivery of food to the needy population. Food grains for this purpose may be provided through PDS.

- In the current situation of lockdown, since chakki shops are closed, wheat grains cannot provide much help. Considering this situation, the government should distribute wheat flour/rice to the beneficiaries for the next few months. Social distancing at ration shops can be maintained by placing guiding markers in front of the shops. For community awareness about the new entitlements and COVID-19, social distancing, hand sanitization, etc. social media-based messages to the PDS shop keepers and to beneficiaries can be provided. Footoperated sanitization stations can be installed in the PDS centers. It is expected from all food business operators to ensure that the persons handling food at any stage do not show any symptoms of COVID-19, and if any such cases are detected, strict measures to isolate them should be taken.<sup>19</sup> There is a need to give some more relaxation to the agriculture sector during the lockdown so that farmers can start harvesting immediately. The government of Chhattisgarh with the local bodies can organize village wise procurement at minimum support price immediately.

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