

Analysing The Effectiveness of The Public Distribution System Across Two Different Slum Typologies in Mumbai

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ABSTRACT

The Public Distribution System (PDS) is an essential welfare mechanism in India, providing food security to millions of people. However, despite its widespread presence, there are inefficiencies in its function, creating barriers and preventing access, most notably in informal urban slum settlements.

This research analyses the performance of PDS in two different slum typologies in Mumbai—Mankhurd Transit Camp (formal) and Ganpat Patil Nagar (informal)—through household-level experiences using a multiple case study design. Through a mix of semi-structured interviews, structured questionnaires, and quantitative surveys, the research identifies major issues like ration card inconsistencies, stock misallocation, Corruption at Fair Price Shops (FPS), and poor grievance redressal mechanisms. The research findings underscore systemic problems such as the low quality of food, scarcity of food quantities and unreliability of FPS operations. Black-market selling and malpractices also withhold from the poor their rightful portions, while geographical and socio-economic obstacles create hindrances in terms of efficiency of access.

The study calls for immediate policy reforms, regular data updating to avoid misallocation, and a well-built grievance redressal mechanism. The study highlights the need for an inclusive urban welfare strategy that ensures the optimal distribution of PDS to weaker segments of our society.

1. INTRODUCTION

Food security, in the modern world, is one of the major challenges faced by developing countries around the globe. India in the present day, with its urbanisation and continuous population growth, is home to many slums consisting of shabby unstructured housing, poor access to basic services and high levels of poverty. These conditions contribute to the increasing troubles of extreme food insecurity.

As of 2024, India houses over 104 million slum dwellers, with Mumbai alone hosting 9 million individuals (41.3%) living in slum settlements. However, these slums are not homogenous; they vary widely based on their demographic structure, legal status, access to services and many other aspects.

It is necessary for the authorities to address the needs of this demographic of marginalised communities, as economic growth often leaves them behind. In order to counter this poverty scenario, India has organised various public welfare schemes to help provide marginalised communities with access to basic necessities, either free of cost or at largely subsidised prices. This, in turn, also helps to reduce poverty in the country.

One major welfare system implemented by India is the Public Distribution System (PDS). The PDS was designed to provide subsidised food and commodities essential to sustain low-income households. However, systems such as this face challenges when applied uniformly across diverse slum types.

PDS as a system originally emerged in India during the World War as a solution to the rising food shortages across the country. In 1951, post-independence, when India was in the trenches of extreme inflationary pressures, the government took up rationing as a social policy while aiming to create a system for the country's growth. In the first five-year plan, the PDS system was set to cover the rural areas facing food shortages and help them make ends meet. However, when the second five-year plan commenced, food production had plummeted to the lowest levels. So, the government officially introduced the Public Distribution System [PDS] to ensure the supply of all vital necessities to people in need around the country.

It is supposed to ensure the order of the market forces and work as an effective stabilising factor. 'PDS also serves as an effective tool of social welfare and directly contributes to the development of the rural population at large and the poorest of the poor, who cannot afford to buy necessary and essential items from the open market.' (Brij Pal, 2011; Pandit et al., 2011).

Supply of food under PDS is done via the Food Corporation of India [FCI]. It purchases a chunk of India's wheat and rice outputs. These purchases are made from the farmers at a Minimum Support Price [MSP], which is declared by the government of India. FCI can get these food grains in large volumes as long as the stock satisfies the Fair Average Quality [FAQ] standards. For the year 2024-25, FCI has successfully procured 266 Lakh Metric Tonnes (LMT) of wheat during the current Rabi Marketing Season (RMS), surpassing 2023-24's figure of 262 LMT and securing the nation's food grain sufficiency. (*Press Information Bureau, n.d.*)

FCI, on its own, does not deal with the supply of the stock but rather sticks to the task of procurement and storage. The purchase price incurred by the FCI after subtracting the sale price and its internal costs is reimbursed via food subsidies from the government.

However, the effectiveness of these welfare schemes varies significantly across different urban backgrounds and settings, especially in slum areas, where access and distribution are heavily influenced by factors such as administrative inefficiencies, informal settlements, and socio-economic disparities.

This study analyses the effectiveness of the PDS across two distinct slum typologies in Mumbai—Mankhurd transit camp and Ganpat Patil Nagar.

By analysing the experiences of the people residing in these slum areas, this study assesses if the current system adequately satisfies the urban poor or if the vulnerable conditions of these slum-dwellers and the existing research gap persist.

Hence, regular welfare policy evaluations are essential to ensure that government interventions remain relevant and effective. This study will contribute to understanding the gaps in food security implementation in urban poverty settings, offering insights into how food security policies can be better implemented into the realities of slum dwellers in Mumbai.

1.2 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Food security and access to basic nutrition are fundamental rights of human beings, yet we live in a world where half the population eats one meal a day to survive and even that they can barely afford.

When countries like India, where the residing poor are in such large numbers, come up with welfare schemes such as the PDS aiming to reduce barriers to accessing subsidized food, it is a must that it works through and actually helps people.

The Indian government, in the year 2024 -25, allocated Rs 2,13,020 crore to the PDS system and department. Although it is a 4% decrease from the previous year's allocation, it is still a good chunk of Indian reserves. Thus, it should be ensured that it is actually being used for its allocated purpose. When middlemen come and profit away from welfare schemes made for poverty-ridden households, it is a loss for both the poor and the state.

Apart from this, marginalized communities are in dire need of help from the system for survival and nutrition. In such scenarios, it becomes extremely important to ensure the smooth working of such welfare-based systems.

Despite being a crucial welfare scheme, the effectiveness of the PDS is inconsistent across different urban settings and slums. Factors such as ration card eligibility, administrative inefficiencies, supply shortages and corruption significantly impact residents' access to essential food supplies.

Another aspect that makes studying the allotment and distribution of PDS essential is the diverse nature of the slums that coexist and house the poor in our country. To design policies for the people, one must understand the lived realities of these communities, their needs, challenges, and lifestyles. Understanding the gap between their perception of 'what they deserve to get' versus 'what they actually get' highlights inefficiencies in the system that even secondary data cannot capture. The numbers and figures may show us trends but not the entire story of what they go through. So, primary research is very significant when dealing with the issues of lower-income groups in our society.

This research is significant because of the individual cases and complaints recorded by families living there. We got to see a shift in people's aspirations regarding their life and their hopes, showing us how deep-rooted the problems are. Mankhurd respondents being vocal about their problems in accessing PDS gave us a deeper look at the problems faced by these slums on a day-to-day basis.

With this study, we aim to analyse these existing disparities by examining the challenges the slum dwellers face in various operations of the PDS, such as obtaining the ration card, the quality of the food provided and their overall experience with this welfare system. Our study will focus on two distinct slums from Mumbai that have not been studied before and will try to bring conclusions regarding their experience with PDS. The slum settlements are:

- Mankhurd (a large, formal slum with formal recognition and access to government services).
- Ganpat Patil Nagar (a smaller, informal settlement where residents often struggle with legal barriers to welfare schemes).

1.3 LITERATURE REVIEW

The Public Distribution System has always been a crucial mechanism for providing subsidised food to lower-income households in India. Several studies show significant gaps in the functioning of the PDS, specifically in slum areas. The evolution of PDS has shifted from a universal approach to a now a more focused one that specifically targets the most impoverished sections of society and tries to benefit them. The shift to this approach, while once aimed at checking the vastly wasteful functioning of the scheme, has instead led to inclusion errors and

leakages, as enunciated by George & McKay (2019). In the case of urban slums, such as Ganpat Patil Nagar, where many households do not possess the required legal recognition of their settlement, this problem has intensified because PDS benefits are not easy to access.

As Joshi et al. (2019) notes, exclusion from the state subsidy program is most pronounced in the un-notified slums, where residents do not have the proper documentation to access such services. This problem is, of course, not unique to the slums in Mumbai, as evidence from other areas of India shows that too many slum dwellers, especially in informal settlements, find it extremely difficult to obtain ration cards or access FPS. Also further asserted by Maitra (2017), inefficiencies in the PDS sharpen the vulnerabilities of this section to the risk of food insecurity.

Corruption and poor distribution are the most important issues faced by both the slums. Pierce (2017) lists many obstacles to PDS access in slum areas, including institutional, economic, and political constraints. Corruption, stock diversion, and political interference at the FPS level divest households of their full entitlement.

It is also important to note that Fair Price Shops (FPS) are often unable to maintain regular supplies, leading to severe food shortages. Jain & Tronic (2021) have pointed out that 'governments' failure to curb corruption in PDS is a breach of its obligations'. States' responsibility to deliver foodgrains to the households is hindered because of unnecessary malpractices such as stock diversion to the black markets or even overcharging to PDS users.

Besides, in many cases, FPS is unable to make regular supplies, which leads to a lower availability of food grains. Within this context, residents of slums like Ganpat Patil Nagar are particularly vulnerable since they neither enjoy political nor institutional backing that could alleviate their condition (Brij Pal, 2011; Pandit et al., 2011).

Their problems are further fuelled by manual and technical inefficiencies. Many studies mention that reliance on paper-based processes in FPS shops causes irregularities in their work as it can lead to fake stock entries, lower grade supplies and false information provided about stock availability and quality. (Pandit et al.).

This, paired with the inadequate quantity and quality of food supplies provided by PDS, increases the severity of the food poverty problems. A study on PDS in Tamil Nadu found that 70% of its respondents were dissatisfied with FPS supplies due to 'poor quality', 'under-weighment' and 'inconsistent availability' being cited as reasons. (Nakkiran, 2004). These concerns are even more pronounced among the economically poorer sections of society who rely heavily on subsidised food grains.

Additionally, users of PDS have also complained about the problems of receiving ‘deliberate misinformation’ regarding the quantities they are entitled to in the supply. One of the studies on FPS in Uttar Pradesh by (Pandey et al, 2023) found that FPS owners were misreporting ration supply, causing families to be deprived of 10 to 15 kgs of foodgrains every month. Low literacy levels and lesser digital awareness, which handicap them from realising their allotted quantities, also keep the slum residents unaware of such malpractices.

The lack of effective governance and accountability mechanisms in PDS operations strengthens these problems. Pierce (2017) highlights that insufficient oversight at local levels exerts a perpetuating background of abuses and inefficiencies, rendering the system unable to deliver its promised benefits. Slum dwellers must rely on informal networks or buy at inflated rates from the local markets, thus making them vulnerable to more economic distresses.

Based on this observation and findings, this study will examine the operation of PDS in slum settings in Mumbai, with particular reference to challenges faced by slum dwellers in accessing their food entitlements, to improve the understanding of how PDS might be improved to better serve marginalised populations in urban spaces.

1.4 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this study include:

- Examining the functioning of the PDS system in relation to household socio-economic characteristics.
- Assessing the major challenges in accessing and utilizing PDS services in the selected slums.
- Exploring improvement strategies based on community feedback

1.5.1 METHODOLOGY

This study follows a multiple case study approach, where each household serves as an individual case. The cases are rooted within two distinct slum typologies in Mumbai—Mankhurd Transit Camp and Ganpat Patil Nagar. This approach allows for an in-depth exploration of household-level experiences with the Public Distribution System (PDS) while identifying patterns across different socio-economic and infrastructural structures.

The population for this study is a total of 15 households selected as case units, where eight households are from Mankhurd Transit Camp, and seven are from Ganpat Patil Nagar. The sample was chosen based on variability in size, population density, economic status, and

infrastructural distinctions among the two slums to capture a diverse range of experiences with PDS accessibility and utilisation.

A snowball sampling method was used to identify households, where initial respondents referred the researcher to others facing similar or distinct challenges.

For the overall quantitative analysis, we collected an additional 15 samples to carry out fundamental descriptive statistical analysis with the data.

1.5.2 Data Types

This study employs both quantitative and qualitative data, with Quantitative Data such as Household demographics, ration card details, frequency of PDS usage, food quantity received and Qualitative Data such as Household experiences, perceptions of PDS effectiveness, and challenges faced in obtaining ration.

1.5.3 Data Collection Techniques

- **Semi-Structured Interviews:** Conducted with household representatives to explore their experiences with PDS, barriers to access, issues related to ration card validity and issuance, and suggestions for improvement.
- **Structured Questionnaires:** Used to collect standardised data on PDS access and utilisation, demographics, and frequency of food shortages.

1.5.4 Data Analysis Techniques

- **Descriptive Statistics:** Used to summarise demographic trends and frequency of PDS-related issues across households.
- **Thematic Analysis:** Identifies common themes in administrative challenges, malpractices, quality and quantity issues, and grievances related to PDS across households.

1.5.4 Fieldwork Process

Before the fieldwork process, we first prepared structured interview questions based on the household questionnaire survey pattern from the "SOCIO-ECONOMIC SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE" (THE UGANDA NATIONAL HOUSEHOLD SURVEY 2005/06). After finalising the questionnaire, we obtained prior permission from our institution and NGO workers, who worked as a bridge between the respondents/slum dwellers and researchers or government officials by acting as intermediaries.

For the interview, a 10-minute limit mark was assigned to each interview, during which we inquired about their demographics, ration card ownership, and the benefits they avail from the scheme. We also tried to identify the common challenges, if any, that they face in accessing PDS. The data was collected using the "Kobo collect" application and was organised accordingly.

1.5.5 Data Analysis

Once interviews and primary data collection were done, the analysis was divided into two fundamental aspects.

First, descriptive statistics were calculated using demographic data with the help of basic Excel formulas to analyse the first objective. We calculated demographic trends and the frequency of PDS-related issues.

Then, we used a thematic analysis method for the second and third objectives. Multiple themes were observed and noted across the 15 cases studied. The reoccurring themes were highlighted as key concepts and findings for our research. Based on these key themes, we further analysed the effectiveness of PDS in these slums and respondents' perceptions about the same.

1.6 LIMITATIONS

This study aimed to focus on the effectiveness of PDS among slum households and across all household members, irrespective of their gender. However, the responses we received for the study were mainly from women as they explained that women were the ones primarily engaged in PDS operations and transactions and thus were expected to have more insights and a better understanding of the household ration requirements. Although we also tried to interview male family members, the responses provided incomplete data points due to unawareness. This creates a gap in this study since the male perspective is limited.

Another aspect is that the data collected is self-reported information directly taken from the respondents. This could be affected by respondents' recall bias or even their social desirability or specified bias and could thus impact the accuracy of the final results.

The issues of stock misallocation and other FPS malpractices were reported by respondents and studied from the literature. However, no direct verification for the same has been done through FPS audits or visits, making it difficult to confirm these claims.

2. BACKGROUND

Before we dive into understanding the effectiveness of the Public Distribution System across the two slums, it is important for us to look at the key characteristics of both slums. This will help

the readers visualize the living conditions of the respondents so that we can get context for their perspectives, needs, and challenges.

2.1 Ganpat Patil Nagar

Ganpat Patil Nagar, located in the Dahisar region of western Mumbai, is one of the poorest and most informal slums in Mumbai city. This settlement consists of makeshift unstructured houses with no planning, mud floors and walls made from tin sheets (Patra). Thus, most of the houses in this region were Kuccha, with a few exceptions of Semi-Pukka households. All these houses are stacked together, laying in a cramped layout, offering no living, breathing space or even the basic necessities. The state of common toilets is unhygienic and poorly maintained, and there are scarce sources of clean water. There is an overall unclean, unhygienic environment which lacks infrastructure.

People live in close-knit families and are commonly engaged in daily wage jobs. Education levels are commonly low, with people pursuing education till secondary schooling. After that, most start working in menial jobs to sustain their households.

Despite these poor living conditions, most of the fifteen women we interviewed expressed comparatively less 'apparent' discomfort about their situation. Many responded with a resigned acceptance, saying, "We are used to this now. Smaller spaces mean close-knit families, and that is nice." This shows that there is a normalization of hardship, where they believe that is what they have to do, and this feeling arises from a sense of hopelessness, an acceptance that their situations and lives are unlikely to change. They argue that 'although we have less space, we all live closely together. This keeps stronger family bonds.' They try to find the positives in their lifestyle so as not to be burdened with unhappiness or dissatisfaction.

However, they did express concerns regarding the poor quality of roads due to their fear of frequent accidents and the safety risks to their children. Many women also mentioned the various physical brawls that are common in such slum areas, which further highlights the challenges of living in such settlements.

Moreover, when it comes to the PDS system, most respondents were aware that they were receiving less than their entitled shares, but these people remained unaware of the malpractices done by FPS owners. Unlike the women in Mankhurd, they were not willing to be a part of any disputes or even to 'demand their rights', fearing repercussions such as losing access to food or even eviction.

2.2 Mankhurd Transit Camp (Mandala)

Mankhurd Transit Camp, also known as Mandala Camp, is a structured slum with pucca houses. Unlike other slum structures, the informal slum pockets located in this Mankhurd-Govandi belt are individually managed by NGO workers who strive to secure better living conditions for these slum dwellers.

Thanks to efforts from such devoted workers, residents in the Mankhurd Transit Camp have access to basic facilities such as drainage systems, comparatively cleaner toilets, and structured row houses. As mentioned, they have pucca houses made of cement walls and cemented rooftops. And even though poor, muddy, uneven roads characterize the main entrances to these slum settlements, the interior structures are much more organized and cleaner.

The people living in these slums have slightly bigger families and better living conditions. Few of the households here have salaried employees, and in education, there are even a few who pursued Graduation. This depicts better socio-economic conditions at Mankhurd Transit Camp compared to Ganpat Patil Nagar.

Before visiting the transit camp, we contacted Ms Madhuri Vishwanath, an NGO worker who has played a key role in facilitating improvements in the area. For our study, we interviewed fifteen women and one man, each representing their respective households. Most of the women were aged between 25 and 45 years, and they were the ones majorly involved in the PDS operations,

Compared to Ganpat Patil Nagar, where many residents seemed resigned to their circumstances, the women in Mankhurd were more aware of their rights and vocal about the challenges they faced in availing the benefits from PDS. They actively demanded better services and were not afraid to express their grievances.

Household structures here typically consist of couples living with their children and sometimes parents. Many families have children pursuing higher education, reflecting relatively better living conditions and incomes than those in other smaller slums. Interestingly, the one male we interviewed had limited knowledge about his household's PDS usage, highlighting how PDS responsibilities largely fall on women.

3. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Objective 1 - Examining the functioning of the PDS system in relation to household socio-economic characteristics.

➤ **Descriptive statistical analysis**

3.1 DEMOGRAPHIC COMPOSITION

3.1.1 Household size Distribution and Composition

SEPARATE			
	Ganpat Patil Nagar	MANKHURD	OVERALL
Mean	5.133333	6.25	5.677419
Median	5	6	5
Mode	5	5	5

The data shows that households in Mankhurd tend to be larger than those in Ganpat Patil Nagar, with a mean household size of 6.25, higher than 5.13 in GPN. The median and mode values also suggest that a household in Mankhurd typically has six members, and in GPN, it should have five.

Households with more members have higher food requirements, which increases their dependence on PDS. However, given the shortfalls in the PDS supply, which will be looked at further in this research, these households experience food insufficiency before the ration cycle of the following month as food gets over in almost fifteen days.

When the allocated PDS facilities do not increase with the rise in family size, it will further strain these households, forcing them to depend on other market purchases for food grains to make ends meet, adding to their financial burden.

In both slums, the typical household size, or mode, is five members. This suggests that when PDS develops food baskets, they should keep in mind a family size of a minimum of five members to satisfy and suffice a little for all the households. However, since Mankhurd has a higher average household size, food insecurity may be more noticeable if ration entitlements are not made accordingly.

3.1.2 Earning Members & Economic Distribution

	Households	EARNING MEMBERS	PERCENTAGE
Ganpat Patil Nagar	7	1	46.66667
	8	2	53.33333
	0	3	0
Mankhurd Transit Camp	9	1	56.25
	5	2	31.25
	1	3	6.25
Overall	16	1	51.6129
	12	2	41.9354
	2	3	6.4516

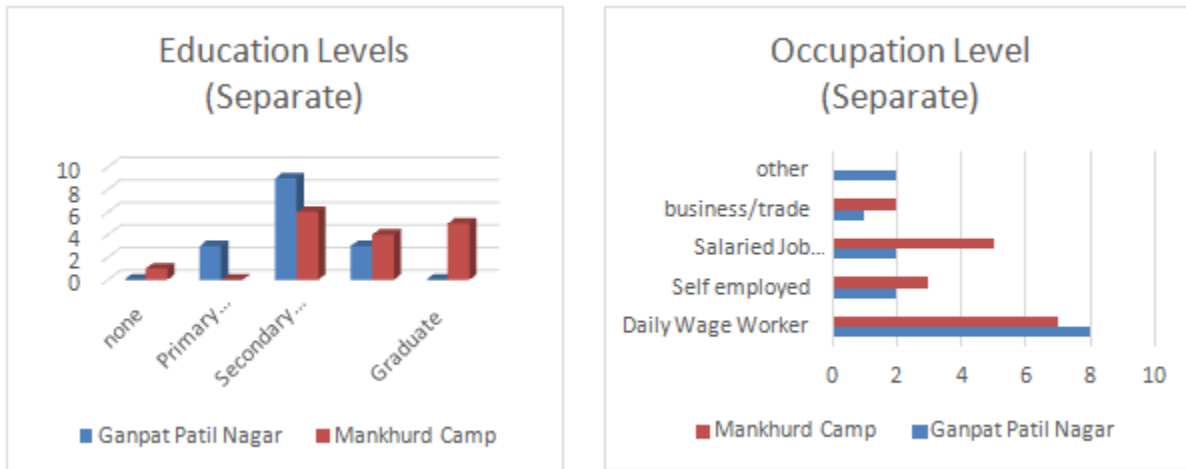
This data indicates that many households in GPN and Mankhurd rely on single-earning members. 51.6% of all the surveyed households have only one earning member or one source of income alone (marked 6.25%), showing a higher proportion than GPN (46.67%). Households with two earners are comparatively fewer, with only 41.9% overall, and there are rare cases of families with three earners, with only 6.25% of cases noted. These multi-earner households were more commonly noted to be in the Mankhurd slum.

Single-earner households are more vulnerable to insufficiencies and food poverty. As majority of the slums depend on just one income source, they are highly dependent on the PDS system for their food security. It puts more financial strain on them and limits their financial buffer in case of PDS shortfalls or price fluctuations in the market, directly affecting their food needs.

In multi-earner households, there is better food security. Households with more than one income source could afford to purchase food from the market even if PDS supplies fall short, reducing their vulnerability.

The data highlights a clear economic disparity—areas having a higher concentration of single-earner households, making them more dependent on PDS and more at-risk during ration shortages. When PDS inefficiencies impact these households disproportionately, it comprises their ability to meet the basic nutritional needs of these slum dwellers. This leads to suggestions for targeted policy interventions to improve food security for single-earner households.

3.1.3 Education & Occupation



- **Education Levels and PDS Dependency**

Most respondents in both slums have studied only up to secondary schooling, with Ganpat Patil Nagar showing much higher concentrations of people at this level. This indicated that there is limited educational background in these slum settlements, which could be because of their lower socio-economic living conditions. This will lead to the population ending up with menial, informal, low-wage jobs, thus hindering their access to Formal employment. This would, in turn, increase their dependency on schemes like PDS for food security.

Mankhurd transit camps show a few more data points of higher secondary education, which could indicate that they have better socio-economic conditions than GPN, allowing them to attain greater levels of education.

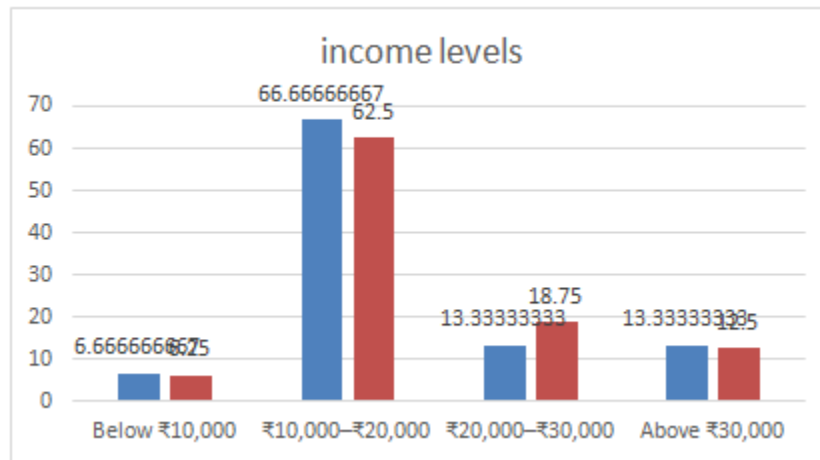
Mankhurd exclusively showed cases of graduates suggesting that Ganpat Patil Nagar lacks educational continuity, potentially due to financial constraints, lack of infrastructure, or early dropout rates.

- **Occupation Levels and PDS Dependency**

A high concentration of workers in both the slums are engaged in daily wage menial jobs, particularly in the GPN, which further aligns with their issue of income stability and financial vulnerability. This makes PDS act as a crucial support system for these households.

Mankhurd has some share of salaried jobs and self-employed individuals, which suggests some economic stability compared to Ganpat Patil Nagar, which is dominated by the informal sector.

3.1.4 Income Brackets & Percentage Distribution



Most households in both the slums have an income bracket of ₹10,000–₹20,000, which includes 66.66% of households in Ganpat Patil Nagar and 62.5% in Mankhurd. Households in this range qualify as BPL (Below Poverty Line) beneficiaries and get a chunk of their monthly ration from the PDS scheme.

Moreover, even the lower-income groups with income brackets below ₹10000, although only 6.6% of the total households, depend more on the PDS system and get bigger chunks of subsidized food from the scheme. Their weaker earnings make purchasing food from the market even more challenging.

Both these sets of households receive a clearer demarcation of poverty and, therefore, have higher access to subsidized food through PDS.

However, it is a different situation for households earning between ₹20,000–₹30,000 (13.3% in Ganpat Patil Nagar, 18% in Mankhurd) as they may experience a worse decline in PDS sufficiency.

These households are at risk since they could fall under the ‘excluded but still struggling’ category, whereby they may be excluded from many of the PDS benefits given their comparatively higher levels of income but may still lack food security without PDS support, causing them to end up with insufficient help from the PDS.

13% of Ganpat Patil Nagar households and 12.5% of Mankhurd households earn above ₹30,000, indicating greater financial security. These households rely less on PDS because they have higher incomes and can afford market-based food consumption.

Ganpat Patil Nagar shows a slightly higher dependence on PDS, given the larger concentration of lower-income households compared to Mankhurd.

3.1.5 Migration Status

	migration status		percentage		
	Ganpat Patil Nagar	percentage	Mankhurd	percentage	Total
migrated	5	16.12903	4	12.90323	9
not migrated	10	32.25806	12	38.70968	22

We can observe that in both slums, there is a larger proportion of non-migrant households.

Higher Proportion of Non-Migrants Suggests Stability in Slum Settlements 32.25% in Ganpat Patil Nagar and 38.70% in Mankhurd. These families have been established and have lived in these regions for many years. Such long-term residents are likely to have established PDS access, as they have had time to register for ration cards, update these cards and work well with bureaucratic processes.

However, problems arise for the smaller group of migrants, i.e. 16.13% in Ganpat Patil Nagar and 12.90% in Mankhurd, who may face more barriers to PDS access than usual. This may be because newly migrated families often face documentation problems, making it difficult for them to enrol in the PDS system, even if they qualify based on income. This also makes it difficult for them to regularly update their details as they are unaware of the bureaucratic processes of this region.

The percentage of migrants is slightly higher in Ganpat Patil Nagar, further hammering the fact that it is a more transient or recently established slum compared to Mankhurd.

3.1.6 Housing Type & Ownership

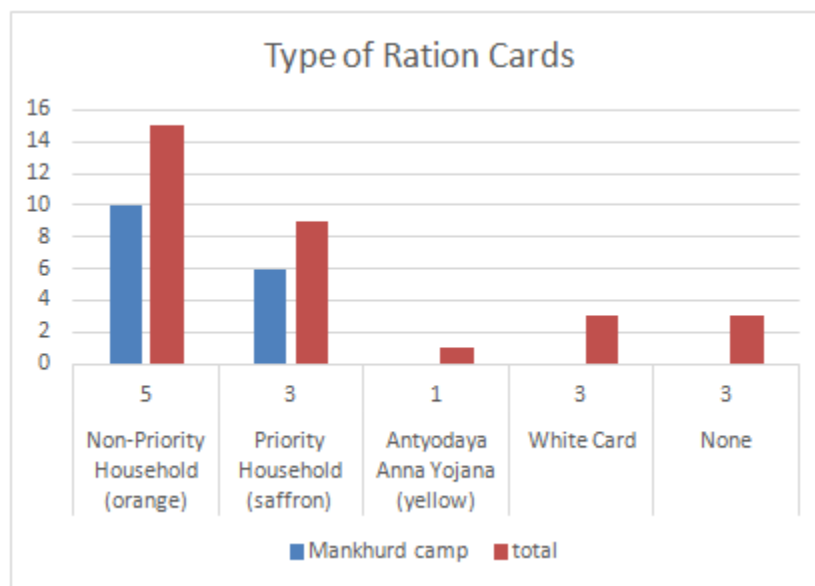
HOUSE TYPE	OWNERSHIP		Grand Total
	no	yes	
KUCCHA	7	3	10
PUKKA	3	15	18
Semi PUKKA	1	2	3
Grand Total	11	20	31

Among the different households, we can see that Pukka households tend to have more ownership, with 83.35 of the Pukka households being owners, which would suggest greater stability in the residence. This is further testified because most Pukka houses were in the Mankhurd slum, and those respondents had greater financial stability.

Among kuccha house residents, only 30% own their homes, indicating higher instability in residence. Residents who are renters and do not have access to the formal ownership of their house struggle with address verification, making it difficult to obtain a ration card. This also increases their difficulties in being assigned and accessing Fair Price Shops (FPS) closer to their rented homes. The scenario is slightly better for semi-pukka residents as they have better stability than Kuccha houses but less than Pukka houses.

3.2 PDS-SPECIFIC QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

3.2.1 Ration Card Ownership & Type



Some of the key observations here show us that Ganpat Patil Nagar has higher exclusion rates, with three out of 15 households not having ration cards. Compared to this, all 16 households in Mankhurd camp had and were using the ration card. This suggests that GNP residents face more exclusion from the benefits of PDS for various reasons, such as documentation barriers and lack of proof of residence.

Most of the households in both the slums possess NPH (Non-Priority Household) cards or Priority Household (PH) Cards, which allow them access to subsidized foodgrains,

Overall, 15 households, i.e. 48.37%, are issued Non-Priority Household (orange) cards, whereas only Nine households (29%) have Priority Household (saffron) cards, which grant better benefits under the National Food Security Act (NFSA).

There is a greater ratio of PH and NPH cardholders in the Mankhurd Camp, which could signify improved PDS inclusion.

Just a single family in Ganpat Patil Nagar (3.22%) possesses an AAY (yellow) card, which is assigned to the most impoverished of the poor. Three families possess White Cards intended for better-off people and are granted no PDS services.

Residents of Mankhurd Camp enjoy greater PDS access, with higher Priority and Non-Priority Household cardholders.

3.2.2 Distance & Transportation to Ration Shops

DISTANCE	No. of families facing difficulty in reaching FPS	TIME	No. of families facing difficulty in reaching FPS
Less than 500	3	less than 10	1
500 to 1km	3	10 to 20	10
more than 1km	12	20 to 30	2

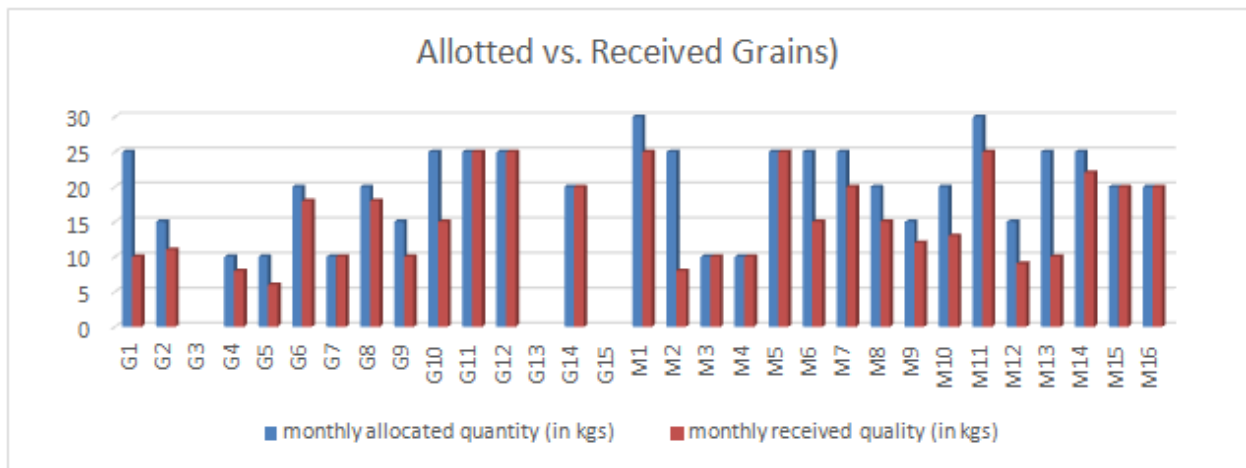
Comparing the time spent and distance spent for reaching FPS shops and the difficulty faced by the respondents, the outcomes suggest that Longer Distance represents Higher Difficulty for slum dwellers to reach and access the benefits of the PDS system.

Households above 1 km distance are most affected, and 12 households had difficulty accessing Fair Price Shops (FPS). This is to prove that distance is a primary obstacle, especially in smaller slums where the FPS locations would be further away.

Ten households experienced difficulty when the time taken to travel was between 10 to 20 minutes, implying that moderate distances can also be problematic, perhaps because of bad roads or access to transport. One household experienced difficulty when the travel was less than 10 minutes, supporting that shorter distances facilitate access.

Therefore, Households located further from FPS face more difficulty, increasing indirect costs such as travel time and cost.

3.2.3 Entitlement vs. Reality



We can observe in the results that the allocated amount is usually greater than the received amount in most households, revealing that households receive less than what they are entitled to or are allowed to. This deficit varies across different households, implying distribution irregularities.

A few households, such as G1, M11, and M15, show a significant shortfall between entitlement and delivery, which could indicate possible leakages or inefficiencies. Others like G12, G13, and M5 end up experiencing smaller shortfalls, perhaps reflecting some households being in a better position to access the distribution network.

However, one of the major issues is that these families are unable to include all the names of their family members on the ration card. So, even though they receive what they are entitled to, they receive less than they should.

This kind of Discrepancy could be caused due to -

- o Diversion or leakage in the supply chain.
- o Irregular distribution practices at Fair Price Shops (FPS).
- o Household-level barriers such as lack of awareness, corruption, or availability of stock at FPS.

3.2.4 Average Shortfall Calculation

For this study, we calculated the average shortfall using the following formula:

average shortfall = $([(\text{Allotted} - \text{Received}) / \text{Allotted}] * 100)$.

· Average Shortfall % (Overall) – 21.35802

· Filtered Average Shortfall % (Only for Deficit Cases) - 32.03704

(Ignoring the scenario's where allotted ration was received)

Households get, on average, 21.36% short of their entitled amount of grains. This reflects a systemic shortfall in the distribution mechanism because of leakages, irregular supply, or distribution inefficiencies at FPS.

Excluding deficit cases where the entire entitlement has been taken, the shortage increases to 32.04%.

This implies that in cases where households are experiencing shortages in rations, they end up losing almost one-third of their rights to grains. This implies that the deficit is way more serious in certain families and could cause much greater harm.

The more significant shortages in cases of deficits imply unequal access to entitlement, where specific households are systematically deprived as a result of documentation problems, corruption, or malpractices at the FPS level.

CHAPTER 4:

Objective 2 - Assessing the major challenges in accessing and utilizing PDS services in the selected slums.

➤ Thematical analysis

4.1 Poor Quality of Rationed Food

Quality is one of the most important aspects brought up by people in both slums. They talked about how bad the quality is provided. Ladies mentioned that, even after getting the ration, they must mix some store-bought wheat into it. Otherwise, the wheat from the ration shop does not hold structure or cook. They mentioned that 20 per cent of what they receive is just dirt and stones, and it takes a long time and effort for them to clear all of that out. Instances were mentioned of the presence of faecal matter in the ration provided, but people's desperation

outweighed their disgust, making them wash those foodgrains and still consume them. One of the ladies in the Mankhurd slum said something along the lines of:

"We get the same type of quality that is given to grazing animals like cow goat, and all. One time, the ration that came had a large piece of faecal matter. But we had to wash it and consume it anyways"

4.2 Shortage in Food Quantity & Missing Essentials

The assigned quantity is far too low to suffice huge families; above that, these FPS shops further reduce the quantity that they hand out to the public. Most families noted that ration from FPS shops do not last more than 15 days for their houses. In many scenarios, families who are supposed to get 5kg per person have reported getting only 3kg per person or even less. This leads to reduced consumption of rationed food for the days they consume. This also costs them extra money that they have to spend to get ration for the next half of the month. Also, they mentioned that the provided items, i.e. rice and wheat, are barely enough for families and that basic necessities are needed to run a house. Many people commented that discontinuing the provision of kerosene, without any substitution by gas pipelines, has caused severe fuel shortages among families. Also, the extra items like sugar, oil, and pulses received during festivals or special occasions are sold to them at sparse quantities and higher prices.

4.3 Unreliable FPS Shop Operations

Another major issue highlighted was the irregular nature of the FPS shops, which are open or closed without any prior information provided to the public. Usually, people have to queue up in front of the FPS for long hours, costing them their entire day, and sometimes they are made to run back and forth multiple times in 3 to 5 days to get ration finally. Even once they do find the ration shop to be open, the FPS people give multiple excuses, most of the times it being "net is not working. Server is lagging. Systems are down." or something along these lines asking people to come back another day to collect their ration.

4.4 Widespread Malpractices & Black Market Selling

We found many complaints about malpractice in both slum areas. Where in one slum it was more heard of than seen, in the bigger slum of Mankhurd, the slum dwellers have been eyewitnesses to various malpractices, including detouring their portion of ration and selling the products assigned to them at higher prices to others and them also. It has been mentioned that when stock arrives at the FPS, for the first two nights, the shop is either closed or only half open, and in the nighttime itself, the shops sell off all high-quality stuff such as sugar, pulses, and other essentials to a 2nd

or even a third party. Finally, whatever the leftovers are given to these slum dwellers, or sometimes they are sent back empty-handed. One of the ladies mentioned:

"Till the day there is ration in the shop, they will sell it in black. They will take what is rightfully ours, and then sell it to us itself"

4.5 Geographical, Physical Barriers & Socio-Economic Barriers to Access

Many respondents expressed significant challenges due to the long distances to ration shops, with some walking for more than 20 minutes each way to collect their rations. The high transport costs and the physical burden of carrying heavy rations back home are major issues, especially for those with limited means. The poor state of the roads, with uneven surfaces, potholes, and lack of proper infrastructure, further exacerbates the difficulty, making the journey both tiring and dangerous. Many people complained about the risk of injury while carrying heavy loads through these unsafe roads, adding to the mental and physical strain. Lower income levels also play a role, as respondents with limited financial resources are unable to afford alternative transport, thus relying on walking. Additionally, some respondents noted that being migrants might contribute to poorer treatment at ration shops, though only a few individuals mentioned this. For the most part, the arduous travel and the risks associated with it are what create the most significant barriers to accessing the PDS for many of these households.

4.6 Broken Grievance Redressal System

In the smaller slums, people are largely unaware of any grievance redressals that might exist. They try to reach out directly to the FPS shops for help, but that does not work either, and they are ignored. In the Mankhurd slum, people know some mechanisms, such as the knowledge of the complaint book placed in FPS shops or ration offices or the ration officer responsible for that particular area. However, even people in these slums have the same thing to say: even with such mechanisms and having tried them out, nothing has worked, and nothing has given them satisfactory results. Nevertheless, none of their problems have been solved, and they are still seeking help.

4.7 Misdirected Ration Card Allocation

From the analysis done so far, it is clear that there are many inefficiencies in the assignment of the ration card. Two definite kinds of scenarios exist; firstly that, people have been assigned the wrong card and are thus getting more or lesser number of foodgrains than what is allocated to them. It may be that from the beginning, they were assigned the wrong cards, or with time, their financial status changed, which has not been accounted for by the ration department. There are also problems that occur in getting a ration card in the first place, where the person is made to

run around for months before finally being given a ration card. A minimum of 3 months is noted to be a standard number stated by people in both slums. They say that every time they go, they are sent back empty-handed and asked to return another time.

4.8 Difficulty in Updating Ration Card Details

Going along the same lines as the prior problem, because of administrative delays and neglect, slum dwellers also face the common problem of adding the names of their grown-up children to the ration cards. According to them, this process takes a lot of time, and they are made to face unnecessary hurdles that discourage them from doing so. This leaves them with fewer names on their cards, which means lesser quantities of food provided to them.

4.9 Death of Aspirations & Acceptance of Poverty

Acceptance of their life conditions and being satisfied with what they have. The death of aspirations for the poor, where they are satisfied with their living conditions, never being able to look outside their walls of despair and poverty, and not having the chance or power to reach a position better than their existing life, as mentioned by Anirudh Kashyap in his book the broken ladder.

Chapter 5:

5.1 Objective 3 - Exploring improvement strategies based on community feedback.

➤ Findings and Analysis - Thematical analysis

5.1.1 Permanent Ration Cards for All Residents

Many residents either lack ration cards or have only temporary ones, restricting their access to benefits from the PDS system. This causes an inability to update ration card details and leads to an insufficient supply of food grains to households. Thus, this was one of the major concerns in both slums. The lack of proper documentation excludes many families from accessing PDS benefits, which is why the respondents strongly advocated for the issuance of permanent ration cards to ensure consistent access to benefits.

5.1.2 More Consistent and Reliable Ration Supply

Irregular stock availability and sudden ration shortages were other common troubles in accessing PDS. Both communities in Ganpat Patil Nagar and Mankhurd Transit Camp have complained excessively regarding their frustrations over the PDS shops remaining closed for weeks, leaving them helpless and forcing them to rely on expensive market-bought foodgrains. They also complain about the unavailability of stock. This has led to multiple suggestions from the

respondents to have efficiently functioning FPS shops that are open frequently, with regular stock replenishments to prevent food insecurity.

5.1.3 Ration Items Beyond Just Rice and Wheat

Many respondents have raised concerns regarding the lack of essential items like pulses, oil, and vegetables among the items supplied via the PDS scheme. Both slums repeatedly emphasized the need for nutritious food. They say that the Current ration is insufficient for a balanced diet and could affect overall health. They wish for a healthy family upbringing and a balanced homecooked meal that cannot be made using only wheat and rice. Especially without fuel, one cannot cook and prepare even a simple everyday meal. Therefore, almost every respondent has asked for the provision of a variety of items other than wheat and rice.

5.1.4 Strict Monitoring to Prevent Corruption in Ration Distribution

Respondents have complained about Shopkeepers allegedly diverting rations to the black market. Residents mentioned corruption as the biggest barrier to getting fair rations. Without monitoring, shopkeepers exploit the system, leaving genuine beneficiaries without food. This makes food insecurity worse for these low-income households. Raising their voices or demanding what is rightfully theirs has not given them any fruitful outcomes. Thus, they suggest strict monitoring or strict action to be taken against any malpractices that these FPS shops would carry out to assure the people that these FPS owners get away with malpractices.

5.1.5 More FPS shops for better accessibility

Accessibility to PDS shops that are too far for many residents, leads to the issues of overcrowding and inability in accessing the PDS benefits effectively. When it is too far to travel or takes too long to reach, people may get discouraged since it may cost them a lot. For instance, a daily wage worker spending his/her entire day travelling to faraway FPS shops or even standing in long queues waiting for their ration would lose an entire day of earnings, which is something simply not affordable for families who are striving to survive. Ganpat Patil Nagar residents specifically demanded more PDS shops.

5.1.6 Better Grievance Redressal Mechanisms

One of the most common suggestions was to have better redressal mechanisms so that when they face trouble regarding timely access to PDS, they have a medium to content to solve the arising problem. Presently, there are barely any redressal mechanisms available, and the ones present also do not function well and have never solved any issue or complaint raised by the slum

dwellers. Thus, they request a system that ensures their issues are heard and solved in a timely manner.

5.2 Further Discussions and Analysis

Based on our analysis, some of the findings contradict the prior studies.

One of the main aspects found was that some of the newer technology applications, like the biometric systems installed for the use of ration cards or computerized systems assigned to create ease in the management of Fair Price Shops, had a discouraging instead of an uplifting impact. This is because many FPS operators use system failures as a reason by citing 'system down' for denying access to rations. This has not received extensive widespread attention in earlier research and contradicts the prior research, which mentions that automated systems would help uplift PDS access twice as before.

Likewise, a formal grievance redress mechanism, which I found to be a significant problem, was not mentioned in previous research.

Lastly, although a few studies address the overall dissatisfaction with the PDS, I discovered there existed a strange satisfaction among certain households of the smaller slums, whereby, due to the acceptance of the imperfections of the system, its inhabitants did not rebel but instead accepted it; which runs sharply contrary to similar activism or discontent being heard throughout its overall scope.

6. CONCLUSION

For a country like India, welfare schemes such as the Public Distribution System will always be essential and beneficial. It was created to uplift the people and create equitable growth for our country. However, despite the tremendous progress, our schemes to help the lower-income groups of our country are still lacking.

Despite its intent to provide food security, the PDS system remains bound by inefficiencies, especially in the smaller informal slum regions lost amidst the shine of the big, prospering cities. These slum dwellers face exclusion errors and administrative hurdles preventing access to entitlements.

Malpractices and ill deeds of Corruption, stock diversion, and misinformation at the Fair Price Shop level continue to deprive these vulnerable households of their allocated food supplies, thus worsening food insecurity. Poor grievance redressal mechanisms increase the irregularities in ration distribution, calling for greater transparency in the system.

Such problems require immediate reforms in the PDS, including data reliability, grievance mechanisms and supply chain transparency to provide equitable and efficient distribution. Improving monitoring systems and incorporating digital tracking mechanisms can improve the effectiveness of the system.

Aside from short-term administrative changes, the research emphasizes the general policy lessons for urban poverty and welfare management in India, such that housing strategies and food security initiatives are coordinated to ensure equal access for all urban dwellers, be they settled or not, to social protection mechanisms.

While this analysis sheds important light on challenges, multi-stakeholder participation of government, civil society, and local communities must ensure these reforms' success. One can ensure that only through inclusionary policy-making, constant monitoring, and technological advancements can the PDS realize its potential as a welfare system that helps lower-income groups residing in India.

7. POLICY SUGGESTIONS

Based on this research and its findings, the author recommends two key policy introductions to enhance the effectiveness of the Public Distribution System. They are:

a. Periodic Data Updates:

a.1 Recommendation - Conduct data updates every two to three years to ensure the timely addition of new household members to ration cards.

a.2 Rationale - one of the major causes of inaccuracies and inefficiencies in the PDS operations is due to inaccurate data entries and outdated details of the existing slum households. Financial status and household sizes have changed over the years, leading to misallocated ration cards and insufficient supplies. This can be solved if the data for all the households are updated periodically, ensuring equitable distribution of ration supplies.

b. Efficient Grievance Redressal System:

b.1 Recommendation -Establish a streamlined complaint system with multiple reporting channels (helpline, mobile app, physical registers) with strict response timeframes to ensure grievances are recorded and tracked.

b.2 Rationale –

unresolved and unheard grievances were among the most common complaints across all the 15 case studies. It indicates a need for an established grievance redressal system. Numerous

instances of complaints being ignored or not being solved in time and even the unavailability of channels to report malpractices cause hopelessness among the slum dwellers. Thus, creating such a system may help them report their issues effectively, resolve their issues, and restore their trust in the transparency of the PDS system.

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