

Bihar moving towards computerization of Public Distribution System

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PATNA: Bihar is fast catching up towards computerization of the public distribution system (PDS) and implementation of IT-based solution to ensure transparency and accountability. In some districts, It has checked the leakages to ensure that the targeted PDS beneficiaries get the allocated quantity of grains and other items.

After the Supreme Court order for implementing ePDS across the country, Bihar government has taken initiatives in some districts to computerize information about dealers and beneficiaries. Mainly two districts Munger and Jehanabad have achieved good results and are way ahead of others in utilizing information technology for ensuring transparency, said an official.

The main components of ePDS are integrated weight management system, Management Information System (MIS), inventory management, GPS-based fleet tracking for grain transportation, SMS-based information dissemination and public grievance redressal forum.

"Some other districts like Gaya and Buxar have also tried to solve the transparency problems of PDS. Most of the districts have concentrated on informing the PDS beneficiaries through SMSes about the availability of grains with the dealers," said a senior official of the food and civil supplies department.

Gaya ePDS offers a comprehensive citizens' portal. Consumers can register with the portal www.pdsonline.in. Panchayat/ward vigilance committee members are informed through SMSes about the offtake of grains by dealers. This helps citizens to demand their quota of grains, kerosene oil and other items, and dealers are in no position to make excuses.

"Knowledge... is the biggest asset in the hands of beneficiaries. Now they know when foodgrain/kerosene oil have arrived at the dealers' shops and how much. So it is impossible for dealers to hide the facts and indulge in black marketing," DM Munger Kuldip Narayan told TOI over phone.

The portal www.pdsmunger.in shows the latest position of stocks and delivery to all its 3,37,703 PDS card holders spread over 12 blocks of the district. The portal also gives details of dealers and scheme-wise beneficiaries.

"After the usage of GPS for monitoring transport vehicles in Munger, this has been copied in many other districts. For officers of the department, it ensures greater control and for the PDS system as a whole, it means more efficiency and less leakage," claimed Munger DM.

Computerised coupon distribution system and scanning of paid coupons components were started in June 2012. At the same time GPS monitoring system was also started. The coupons for period June 2012-May 2013 were to be distributed in June. So it was most suited time to implement these components", DM Munger Narayan told TOI.

"The PDS has now record of each and every beneficiary and coupon. Similar system has also been started in Jehanabad. The system has evolved over last three months because of constant improvement and discussion with DM Jehanabad", DM Munger said.

Inquiries revealed that the day to day problems have been solved and transparency has been infused in the PDS to a large extent. The SMS received by beneficiaries was a pleasant surprise at first. But now people expect SMS every now and then informing about lifting. Further review meeting is being done on basis of website data so marketing officers and supply inspectors are unable to hide reality.

"This has also led to surprise inspection of PDS shop without knowledge of departmental officers. Such inspection also trapped some errant dealers involved in black marketing", said Jehanabad DM D Balamurugan.