One Nation One Ration Card - A Review

Click here to know more on the ONORC system

Why in news?

- The Union Finance Minister recently stated that the "One Nation One Ration Card (ONORC)" scheme now covers 68.8 crore beneficiaries under the PDS across 28 states and UTs.
- In this context, here is a look at the performance of the ONORC nationally and with special reference to Odisha.

What is ONORC?

- The central idea of the ONORC is to make the PDS completely portable.
- It aims to allow beneficiaries to lift entitled ration from any part of the country.
- The central government will deduct this ration from the quota of the home state and add it in the quota of the selling state.

What is the case with Odisha?

- Odisha joined the ONORC system in June 2020.
- But, there is no record of a transaction allowing an Odia migrant to lift her stock from another state, or any transaction at all under this scheme.
- **Aadhaar seeding** - On September 15, 2019, the state government declared that only those beneficiaries whose Aadhaar was seeded with their ration card could lift their entitled foodgrain through ABBA
    - Aadhaar-based Biometric Authentication (ABBA)
- Media reports suggest that more than 18 lakh beneficiaries lost their rights to withdraw foodgrain as their ration card was not seeded with Aadhaar.
- It is not clear how many could get back into the system afterwards.
- Beneficiaries have been deleted even if they had Aadhaar cards but these weren't seeded with their ration cards.
- Mandatory ABBA for withdrawing entitled ration had a detrimental impact on particular groups.
- These include the elderly, the disabled, and the physically incapacitated people.

- They find it difficult to physically visit PDS shops or whose fingerprints are not accurately read by authentication machines.

What is the picture at the national level?

- Nationally, monthly transactions show close to 24,500 beneficiaries on nearly 3,500 cards who lifted their entitled ration from states other than their home state.
- From June till November 15 of 2020, merely around 95,800 beneficiaries through around 12,850 ration cards have benefited.
- Notably, this is a small fraction of the 22 crore PDS beneficiaries in India.
- It is clear that despite tall claims, very few beneficiaries have actually benefited from the scheme.
- **Intrastate portability** of ration transactions is much higher than interstate portability.
    - In October 2020, 1.45 core transactions took place through intrastate portability.
    - A majority of this was in Andhra Pradesh (42.5 lakh), Rajasthan (28.1 lakh), Bihar (22.6 lakh), U.P. (11.5 lakh) and Telangana (11 lakh).
- Implementing ONORC within a state does not require any additional arrangements as it follows already operational procedures of entitlement and price.

What are the procedural shortfalls?

- Despite the Centre’s claims about the implementation of the ONORC over the past year, there is no clarity on the operating procedures and beneficiary entitlements.
- For instance, each state has a different price and basket of entitlements.
- Various operating factors like fixing of prices, entitlements and payments, and sharing of migrant data between states remain unaddressed.
    - Would the rice-eating Odia get rice or wheat in a wheat-providing state like Rajasthan?
    - Would beneficiaries of Tamil Nadu, who get ration free of cost, have to pay for receiving the ration in another state?

What is the way forward?

- It is essential that a detailed cost-benefit analysis of the ONORC is undertaken.
- This is to address the concern around the exclusion of beneficiaries without any evidence, to indicate the trade-offs of portability.
- The administrative burdens for beneficiaries should be addressed to make

the system more accessible to them.

Source: The Indian Express

