A STUDY ON

"The Public Distribution System, especially on Ration Card and its impact on challenges to access essential commodities with reference to Bakaliaghat, KarbiAnglong"

A dissertation submitted to the Department of Social Work for the partial fulfilment of the requirement for the award of the degree of Master of Social Work



Submitted to

Department of Social Work

MSSV, Guwahati Unit

Submitted by
Romit Terang
MSW 4th semester

Registration No : MSW-0023-008-001326

Roll no : MSW 21/23

Session: 2023-2025

MAHAPURUSHA SRIMANTA SANKARADEVA VISWAVIDYALAYA GUWAHATI UNIT, RUPNAGAR 781032, ASSAM

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মহাপুৰুষ শ্ৰীমন্ত শঙ্কৰদেৱ বিশ্ববিদ্যালয় MAHAPURUSHA SRIMANTA SANKARADEVA VISWAVIDYALAYA

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GUWAHATI CONSTITUENT UNIT
Sankari Sanskriti Kendra, Rupnagar, Bhangagarh, Guwahati-781032, Assam

Department of Social Work

CERTIFICATE

I have the pleasure to certify that Sri Romit Terang, MSW 4th Semester student bearing Roll No: MSW-21/23 with Registration No:MSSV-0023-008-001326of 2023, MSSV has successfully completed the dissertation entitled "A Study onthe Public Distribution System, especially on Ration Card and its impact on challenges to access essential commodities with reference to Bakaliaghat, Karbi Anglong

He has made a successful completion of this research by his own.

I wish him bright future.

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মহাপুৰুষ শ্ৰীমন্ত শঙ্কৰদেৱ বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়

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CERTIFICATE FROM SUPERVISOR

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The work reported in this research has not been submitted elsewhere and thefacts presented here are true to the best of my knowledge.

I wish him all the very best for his future endeavour.

Place: MSSV, Guwahati unit

1010812025 Date:

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DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I, Sri Romit Terang, student of 4th Semester, Department of Social Work, (Roll No. MSW 21/23 and Registration No: MSSV-0023-008-001326 of 2023), Guwahati Unit, Mahapurusha Srimanta SankaradevaViswavidyalaya (MSSV), hereby declare that the research study titled "A study on Public Distribution System, especially on Ration Card and its impact on challenges to access essential commodities with reference to Bakaliaghat, KarbiAnglong.", is my original work under the guidance of Rajlakhi Baruah, Assistant Professor, Department of Social Work, MSSV, Guwahati Unit., and that all sources used in the study have been properly cited and acknowledged.

I affirm that this research study has not been previously submitted for academic credit or publication, nor has it been copied or plagiarized in whole or in part from any other source.

I confirm that all data collected for the research study has been obtained through ethical means, and that all participants involved in the study were informed about the purpose and nature of the research, and gave their informed consent to participate.

Romit Terang

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ABSTRACT

The Public Distribution System (PDS) and ration card usage have become an important part of daily life in rural areas like Bakaliaghat in Assam. This study looks at how the ration card system affects penniless and low-income families in the region. While ration cards have helped many families get access to essential food items at lower prices, there are still many challenges in how the system works. Problems like irregular distribution, shortage of supplies, corruption at local levels, and lack of proper awareness among beneficiaries often affect its success.

Through this research, which uses a qualitative approach, field visits, and interviews with local villagers and ration card holders, both the benefits and difficulties of the Ration Card are brought to light. On the positive side, the ration card helps reduce hunger and food insecurity. But on the other hand, people still face issues like long waiting hours, misbehaviour at fair price shops, and confusion about which rights they are eligible for.

This study shows that while the public plays a key role in supporting poor families, it needs more transparency, better monitoring, and awareness programs to truly serve its purpose. The government must ensure that fair price shops function properly, complaint resolution systems are in place, and deserving families are not left out. Strengthening the Ration Card system in a people-friendly and fair way is essential for building a more secure and just food distribution system in Bakaliaghat and other rural areas.

Keywords: Ration Card, Public Distribution System, Rural Families, Beneficiary Experience, Bakaliaghat.

ABBREVIATION

AAY : Antyodaya Anna Yojana

APL : Above Poverty Line

BPL: Below Poverty Line

ICDS: Integrated Child Development Services

IoT : Internet of Things

JAM: Jan Dhan-Aadhaar-Mobile

MDM: Mid-Day Meal

NFSA: National Food Security Act

OTP: One-Time Password

PDS: Public Distribution System

RFID: Radio Frequency Identification

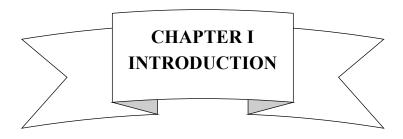
SC : Scheduled Caste

ST : Scheduled Tribe

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In India, food security has always been an important goal, especially for the poor and vulnerable sections of society. To support this, the government started a system called the Public Distribution System (PDS). Through this system, essential food items like rice, wheat, and sugar are provided at low prices to people who need them most. These items are made available through local shops, which are often called fair price shops or ration shops. To access the benefits of PDS, families are given a ration card. This card acts like an identity proof for getting subsidized food and is issued by the government based on the income and status of the household. Different types of ration cards are given to different categories of people such as those living which are below the poverty line (BPL), Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) card holders, and those above the poverty line (APL), though this has changed with newer policies. Taken action in 2013, the National Food Security Act (NFSA) reviewed food assistance in India by allowing eligible households a legal rights to subsidized food grains under the public distribution system structure. This policy shift aimed to enhance accountability and formalize food rights for vulnerable populations." Under the NFSA, the government ensures that about two-thirds of India's population gets regular food support. The Act also focuses on nutritional support for women and children, along with the regular distribution of grains. The ration card system thereby plays a major role in connecting people with the distribution system and National Food Security. It helps identify who is eligible for food support, and ensures that benefits reach the right families. In this way, the ration card becomes more than just a document – it becomes a lifeline for many rural and poor households, helping them to meet their daily food needs.

The Public Distribution System and the National Food Security Act in India

India's Public Distribution System (PDS) is acknowledged as one of the most large scale food security initiatives globally. Its purpose is to provide essential items such as rice, wheat, sugar, and kerosene at subsidized rates to low-income households. In 2013, the

Indian government introduced the National Food Security Act (NFSA), which transformed the approach to food distribution by offering it as a legal entitlement rather than a welfare measure. The NFSA aims to support approximately two-thirds of the nation's population, both in rural and urban regions, by ensuring monthly allocations of food grains—5 kilograms per individual for Priority Households and 35 kilograms per household for those under the Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY).

In addition to food grain distribution, the NFSA also integrates nutritional programs for vulnerable populations such as children, pregnant women, and lactating mothers through schemes like the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) and Mid-Day Meal (MDM). The Act mandates transparency in operations, identification of rightful beneficiaries, and the establishment of grievance redressal systems, thereby promoting accountability within the delivery framework.

Despite its ambitious goals, both the PDS and NFSA face considerable implementation challenges. These include difficulties in identifying beneficiaries accurately, corruption, distribution inefficiencies, and infrastructure deficits, especially in tribal and remote areas. Nevertheless, these schemes signify a strong commitment by the state to uphold the right to food and improve nutrition among marginalized groups.

dignity, and survival.But here's the thing: while the NFSA looks great on paper, it doesn't work the same everywhere.

Importance of the Programs

The introduction of the NFSA helped formalize the PDS structure, aiming to reduce corruption and enhance access. The success of such a large-scale scheme, however, is highly dependent on effective local governance and active community involvement. In states such as Tamil Nadu and Chhattisgarh, the system has evolved to include innovations like home delivery and digital monitoring, resulting in smoother operations. Conversely, many tribal

and remote regions, including parts of Assam, continue to face logistical, social, and administrative hurdles.

In Assam's Karbi Anglong district, the sub-division of Bakaliaghat exemplifies the unique challenges facing tribal populations. Limited connectivity, poor infrastructure, and low awareness among citizens hinder effective implementation of welfare programs. Here, a ration card represents not only access to subsidized food but also a symbol of governmental support. In some instances, families struggle to obtain even one full meal a day, underscoring the critical role of the PDS in these areas.

Local governance structures, such as the Town Committee in Bakaliaghat, play a key role in bridging policy and community realities. Their collaboration with fair price shop dealers and awareness campaigns has led to improvements in food delivery services. However, issues like digital mismatches, outdated records, and lack of information persist, often excluding those most in need.

Public Distribution System in Tamil Nadu and Chhattisgarh: A brief understanding

Certain states have demonstrated exemplary performance in PDS delivery. Tamil Nadu and Chhattisgarh, for instance, have effectively utilized technological tools, decentralization, and community participation to enhance their systems. These states provide examples of how administrative efficiency and proactive governance can transform food security into a functioning reality.

In contrast, states with infrastructural or geographical constraints, such as Odisha, Jharkhand, and Assam, often struggle with irregularities in supply, corruption, and limited outreach. Technological advancements like aadhaar integration and biometric authentication have improved transparency in many areas. Still, in regions with poor digital

infrastructure, these very tools can become barriers to access, particularly for elderly and illiterate populations.

Rationale of the Study

This research aims to assess how effectively the ration card system operates in Bakaliaghat. While national-level policies offer legal guarantees of food- security, their real-world execution remains uneven. The study focuses on whether the poorest households—especially those below the poverty line—are actually receiving the benefits intended for them. Furthermore, it examines the role of local leadership and governance in facilitating or hindering these outcomes.

Through this localized lens, the study seeks to contribute to broader discussions about equity in welfare delivery. By closely observing a community's interaction with state-run schemes, this work sheds light on the gaps between legislation and lived experience. Drawing inspiration from Amartya Sen's capability approach, the research emphasizes the need for not just the distribution of resources, but also equitable access and utilization.

1.1 Operational Definitions

Public Distribution System (PDS):

Public Distribution System is a government-administered program that distributes essential commodities like rice and wheat at subsidized prices to economically disadvantaged households. In rural and tribal areas such as Karbi Anglong, it serves as a vital source of support against hunger and poverty.

Ration Card

Ration Card refers to an official document issued by the government that allows eligible families in Bakaliaghat to access subsidized food items like rice through the Public Distribution System (PDS). It is used as a means to identify and provide food support to low-income households.

Challenges

Challenges mean the common problems rural and tribal people face in getting essential items through the PDS, like irregular supply, poor quality, long distance to ration shops, and lack of proper information.

Essential commodities

Essential commodities are the basic goods provided through the PDS that people need for daily living, like rice, wheat, sugar, and kerosene. These are important for rural and tribal families to meet their basic needs.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The situation regarding ration card usage in Bakaliaghat, Karbi Anglong, uncovers a range of ongoing issues that delay the effectiveness of the Public Distribution System (PDS) in the region. Numerous number of people mentioned delays in receiving their ration supplies, with some households facing inconsistent distribution schedules or being informed that surplus and goods were not available. A unusual issue is the classification of ration card holders, where genuinely needy families are either excluded or inaccurately categorized, resulting in diminished entitlements or complete ineligibility. Several participants pointed out that even though they possessed valid ration cards, they did not obtain their full share of commodities, often due to reported diversion or corruption at the local level. The lack of

literacy and awareness among villagers regarding their rights also leads to misuse or underutilization of available benefits. Some families have been waiting for updated ration cards despite multiple applications, and problems with Aadhaar linking have caused deserving beneficiaries to be left out. Moreover, the long distances to fair-price shops, along with poor transportation options in the hilly terrain, further limit consistent access. These challenges collectively weaken the goal of ensuring food security for marginalized communities in Bakaliaghat and emphasize the necessity for systemic reforms and enhanced implementation.

1.3 Significance of the study

This study will aim to view light on the Ration Card System in Bakaliaghat and address some key questions. It will look into the reasons for the free supply distribution, the quality of the food provided, and whether the community is genuinely benefiting. The study will also investigate why certain individuals face challenges in accessing these government benefits. By holding these issues, we can pinpoint gaps and think about how to make the system much better for everyone involved.

The importance of examining the usage of ration cards stems from its direct link to food security, poverty reduction, and the overall welfare of rural and disadvantaged communities. In regions such as Bakaliaghat, where consistent income and resources are limited, the ration card acts as an essential tool to help families fulfill their daily nutritional requirements through the Public Distribution System (PDS). This research holds significant relevance as it shows the operations, efficiency, and obstacles of this system from a grassroots perspective. While government initiatives may appear effective in theory, their true impact can only be assessed through the lived experiences of individuals. The ration card is more than just a welfare document; it frequently serves as identification, proof of residence, and eligibility for additional benefits such as LPG subsidies or pension programs.

When it malfunctions due to name discrepancies, biometric mismatches, or inconsistent supply, it directly influences people's survival and sense of dignity.

The purpose of this study was to grab not only how the system functions but also how it is felt by those who rely on it. It is important for everyone including policymakers, local governments in Panchayati Raj administrators, social workers, and ordinary citizens to recognize these challenges. Although the ration card might appear to be a minor aspect of governance, for many, it represents the life source to survival. This research reveals recurring issues such as irregular distribution, lack of awareness, digital illiteracy, and social exclusion. These problems extend beyond technicalities; they are fundamentally human concerns. When a mother forgoes meals to ensure her children are fed, or when an elderly individual travels long distances to rectify a document error, the necessity of an equitable and functional ration system becomes unmistakable. Hence, this research is not merely academic; it is a call to acknowledge, enhance, and safeguard the fundamental right to food and dignity.

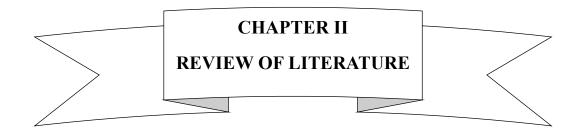
1.4 Objective of the Study

- 1. To explore the impact of ration card in Bakaliaghat, Karbi Anglong district.
- 2. To know about the Quality of Ration provided by the government.
- 3. To study the challenges faced by Ration Card holders in accessing subsidized food grains.

1.5 Research Questions

To achieve the objectives of the study, research questions were developed. These are-

- 1. How does the ration card system affect the livelihoods of families in Bakaliaghat, Karbi Anglong district?
- 2. What problems do ration card holders encounter when trying to obtain quality and adequate subsidized food grains in Bakaliaghat?
- 3. How do beneficiaries describe their experiences with the distribution process and the behavior of ration shop officials?
- 4. What are the experiences of beneficiaries regarding the quality, quantity, and consistency of food grains received through the Ration Card?



REVIEW OF LITERATURE

- 1. Panda, Mohanty, Nayak, and Shastri (2020) conducted a study on "Malnutrition and poverty in India:does the use of public distribution system matters?" examined the link between poverty, malnutrition, and the Public Distribution System (PDS) in India. Their study found that access to Public Distribution System significantly reduces malnutrition, especially among poor households. The authors suggest that strengthening the PDS can help improve food security and nutritional outcomes in rural areas. Their findings highlight the importance of targeted public welfare schemes in addressing hunger and poverty.
- Gupta and Mishra (2018) conducted a study on "Public Distribution System in Uttar Pradesh: access, utilization and impact" explored the functioning of the Public Distribution System (PDS) in Uttar Pradesh, one of the most populous and economically diverse states in India. Their study focused on three key aspects: access to the PDS, its utilization by households, and its overall impact on food security and poverty alleviation. Using primary survey data and household-level analysis, the authors found that while the PDS plays an important role in providing food grains at subsidized prices, there are significant challenges related to inclusion, exclusion errors, and irregularities in supply. The research revealed that although most Below Poverty Line (BPL) families were aware of and accessed the PDS, many Above Poverty Line (APL) families were left out despite being in need. There were also issues like delays in delivery, poor quality of food grains, and leakages in the supply chain. These problems affected the credibility and efficiency of the system. However, in areas where the PDS functioned well, there was a noticeable positive impact on household food consumption and reduction in hunger. The authors recommended better monitoring mechanisms, improved transparency, and the use of technology (like Aadhaar-based

biometric systems) to ensure that benefits reach the intended beneficiaries. They also emphasized the need for state-level reforms to make the system more inclusive and effective. This study is significant because it shows the real-world problems faced by beneficiaries of the PDS and shows that while the scheme has potential, its impact largely depends on how well it is implemented at the ground level.

- 3. **Khera (2011)** conducted a study on "India's public distribution system: utilisation and imapet" and examined the performance, utilization, and impact of India's Public Distribution System (PDS) across various states. The study used data from the National Sample Survey (NSS) to evaluate how effectively the PDS reached households and contributed to food security. Khera found that while the PDS had faced serious issues in the past such as leakage, corruption, and low coverage recent reforms in several states led to noticeable improvements in both access and delivery. States like Tamil Nadu and Chhattisgarh were shown as success stories due to better governance, doorto-door grain delivery, and use of technology. These states managed to reduce leakages and increased the share of grains reaching the intended beneficiaries. In contrast, states with weaker administrative systems continued to struggle with inefficiency and poor outcomes.
- 4. Sahoo, Krishna, and Kumbhare (2019) conducted a critical review of "effectiveness of the public distribution system: a critical review", focusing on how well it meets its intended goals of food security and poverty reduction. The authors reviewed multiple studies and data sources to evaluate the system's performance across different regions. Their analysis showed that the PDS has played a significant role in stabilizing food prices, improving household food access, and offering nutritional support to the poor. However, the paper also pointed out major drawbacks, such as corruption, diversion of food grains, and inefficiencies in identification of beneficiaries. These issues have led to both inclusion errors (ineligible people receiving benefits) and exclusion errors (needy people being left out). The study also showed the uneven

performance of the PDS across Indian states, with better results in states that have adopted reforms like digitization, biometric authentication, and transparency measures. The authors suggested that instead of replacing the PDS with direct cash transfers, it should be strengthened through better monitoring, accountability, and awareness programs. The paper concluded that although the PDS has several weaknesses, it remains a important tool for ensuring food security if implemented effectively.

5. Bourai et.al (2015) conducted a case study titled "Public Distribution System and Food Security in India: A Case Study of Uttarakhand", in which he examined the functioning and effectiveness of the Public Distribution System (PDS) in ensuring food security within the state of Uttarakhand. The study analyzed the structure, implementation, and outcomes of the Public distribution system, particularly focusing on how well the system addressed hunger and nutritional needs among economically vulnerable households. The research revealed that the public distribution system played a significant role in providing subsidized food grains to poor families, thereby contributing positively to household food security and reducing incidences of hunger. However, the study also focused several persistent challenges, such as irregular supply chains, limited infrastructure in remote areas, and instances of corruption and mismanagement at the local level. Bourai pointed out that many beneficiaries experienced difficulties in accessing ration shops due to geographic barriers and administrative inefficiencies. Despite these issues, the research found that a majority of eligible households valued the scheme and depended on it for essential food items. To enhance the system's effectiveness, the study recommended the adoption of improved monitoring practices, digital record-keeping, and greater accountability in food grain delivery. Bourai concluded that while the PDS has notable shortcomings, it remains a critical instrument for achieving food and nutritional security in under served

- regions like Uttarakhand, and reforms focused on governance and technology could significantly improve its outcomes.
- 6. Narayan (2021), in his article titled "Time for Universal Public Distribution System: Food Mountains and Pandemic Hunger in India" published in the Indian Journal of Human Development, critically analyzed the limitations of India's targeted Public Distribution System (PDS), especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study highlighted a paradoxical situation where India maintained large government-held stocks of food grains ("food mountains") even as hunger, unemployment, and food insecurity escalated among the vulnerable sections of society. Narayan argued that the current targeted PDS framework, which restricts access based on ration card ownership and eligibility documentation, excluded many needy individuals—particularly migrant workers and informal sector laborers who were severely affected during the lockdown period. The author emphasized that such exclusion errors, coupled with delays and administrative inefficiencies, weakened the responsiveness of the system during a crisis when timely food support was critical. The paper made a strong case for a universal PDS, which would ensure that every individual, irrespective of documentation status, has access to subsidized food. Narayan underscored that food security should be treated as a fundamental right, rather than a conditional welfare benefit. The study recommended reforms such as simplified eligibility criteria, expanded coverage, and the use of technology to streamline delivery and reduce bureaucratic hurdles. In conclusion, Narayan asserted that universalizing the PDS is both feasible and **necessary**, particularly given India's food surplus and the urgent need to prevent hunger in times of crisis. The research positioned universal PDS as a long-term investment in social protection, equity, and resilience.
- 7. Dahake, Banode, Selokar, Chikhale, and Jogekar (2022) presented "a review paper on public ration distribution system using deep learning", and showed how deep learning can improve the Public Distribution System (PDS) in India. Their paper

focused on addressing long-standing issues such as fraud, duplicate ration cards, and poor tracking of food distribution. The authors suggested that integrating advanced technologies like artificial intelligence and deep learning into the PDS could make the system more transparent and efficient. They proposed the use of biometric verification, image recognition, and real-time monitoring to enhance the accuracy of beneficiary identification and to reduce leakages. Their study also emphasized the need for digital infrastructure, such as smart ration shops and combined data systems, to support these innovations. While the paper focused more on the technological possibilities than on ground-level implementation, it shows the potential of modern tools to solve old problems in public food distribution. The authors concluded that using deep learning could revolutionize the PDS by making it more accountable, reducing corruption, and ensuring timely delivery of essential food supplies.

8. Amruth, Yashaswini, Latha, Vijaylakshmi, and Rakshitha (2019) explored the concept of a"Smart ration delivery" system aimed at modernizing India's Public Distribution System (PDS). Their study focused on designing a more transparent and automated ration delivery model using technology such as RFID(Radio Frequency Identification), IoT (Internet of Things) devices, and smart cards. The goal was to eliminate issues like corruption, delays, and human error that are common in traditional PDS operations. The proposed system includes digital identification of beneficiaries, automated ration dispensing machines, and centralized data tracking. These features are intended to ensure fair distribution, reduce leakages, and improve service delivery, especially in rural areas. The authors emphasized that by integrating smart technologies, ration shops could operate more efficiently while reducing manual intervention. Though their project was mostly conceptual and experimental, it demonstrated the potential benefits of combining engineering solutions with social welfare services. The authors concluded that adopting smart ration systems could

- improve reliability, accountability, and speed in the distribution process, ultimately supporting food security for the underprivileged.
- 9. **Krishnamurthy, Pathania, and Tandon (2014)** conducted an empirical study on the "Public DistributionSystem (PDS) reforms and consumption in Chhattisgarh", India, analyzing their impact on household consumption patterns. The authors found that significant improvements in PDS performance occurred following reforms initiated by the state government. These reforms included the establishment of a transparent procurement process, the expansion of fair price shops, and the involvement of community-based organizations in distribution. As a result, there was a notable increase in the consumption of subsidized food grains among households, particularly benefiting the poor and marginalized sections of society. The study also shows that the success of these reforms was attributed to strong political will, administrative commitment, and active community participation. The authors emphasized that Chhattisgarh's experience serves as a model for other states aiming to enhance food security through PDS reforms. They concluded that systemic changes, when effectively implemented, can lead to substantial improvements in the delivery of essential services to the needy.
- 10. Masiero (2015) conducted a study and explored "will the jam trinity dismantle the pds? economic and political weekly" and showed whether the JAM trinityJan Dhan bank accounts, Aadhaar identification, and mobile connectivitycould lead to the end of the Public Distribution System (PDS) in India. The article raised concerns that replacing food subsidies with direct cash transfers might weaken food security for the poor. Masiero argued that while JAM aims to improve efficiency, there are many risks, such as lack of digital access, poor banking infrastructure in rural areas, and difficulties faced by vulnerable groups. The PDS, despite its flaws, remains an essential safety net for millions. The author concluded that instead of dismantling the PDS, JAM should be

- used to strengthen and support it, ensuring better transparency and delivery without excluding the needy.
- 11. **Mooij (1999)** examined the intersection of food policy and electoral politics in India, with a particular focus on the functioning of the Public Distribution System (PDS) in Bihar and Karnataka. Her study focused on how political interests and power structures shape the implementation and outcomes of food distribution policies. In Bihar, the PDS was found to be deeply entangled in a network of political patronage, where local elites and politicians used the system as a tool to maintain influence and voter loyalty, often at the expense of efficiency and fairness. Conversely, in Karnataka, the PDS exhibited relatively better outcomes due to stronger political engagement and a more inclusive governance approach. Mooij argued that the effectiveness of the PDS cannot be assessed in isolation from the political environment in which it operates. The study emphasized that lasting reforms in the PDS require a nuanced understanding of local political dynamics and a commitment to dismantling entrenched power imbalances. Her findings underline the importance of aligning food policy goals with transparent and accountable political processes to achieve genuine food security.
- 12. Muralidharan, Niehaus, and Sukhtankar (2014) conducted a study on "Building state capacity: Evidence from biometric smart cards in India" and investigate how introducing biometric smart cards in welfare schemes can strengthen state capacity and improve service delivery in India. Focusing on Andhra Pradesh, their study uses a randomized evaluation to assess the impact of replacing traditional paper-based systems with biometric authentication for programs like the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS) and social security pensions. The results were promising—payments became more timely and predictable, and there was a noticeable reduction in leakages and corruption. Beneficiaries faced fewer delays and were more satisfied with the new system. Interestingly, the study highlights that these improvements occurred without major changes to the existing bureaucracy, showing

that even modest technological interventions can lead to meaningful administrative reform. What makes this study stand out is its practical approach to addressing systemic inefficiencies, offering concrete evidence that digital tools can enhance governance in developing countries. This is especially relevant in the Indian context, where public service delivery often suffers from issues like fraud and inefficiency. The paper adds significant value to the broader conversation on digitization and public policy, proving that the thoughtful application of technology can lead to better outcomes for both the state and its citizens.

13. Puri (2012) conducts a study on "Reforming the public distribution system: Lessons from Chattisgarh" examines the public distribution system (PDS) reforms undertaken in Chhattisgarh, offering valuable insights into how targeted governance changes can significantly improve food security delivery. The article outlines the state's efforts to revamp the PDS by increasing transparency, decentralizing grain distribution, and involving local bodies like gram panchayats and cooperatives. One of the key strategies included computerizing supply chains and setting up grievance redress mechanisms, which helped curb corruption and ensured timely delivery of food grains. As a result, Chhattisgarh witnessed a substantial improvement in PDS coverage and efficiency, with fewer leakages and more satisfied beneficiaries. Puri's work demonstrates how political will and administrative innovation at the state level can transform public welfare schemes that often suffer from inefficiency in other regions. This case study is particularly relevant for states trying to improve food distribution systems without overhauling national policies. It also underscores the importance of state-level experimentation in policy reform, especially in a diverse country like India where local governance plays a critical role. Overall, the article provides a grounded, real-world example of successful reform, making it highly useful for anyone studying welfare delivery in rural India.

- 14. Sinha (2015) conducted a study on "Cash for food-A misplaced idea" critically examines the growing push for replacing in-kind food transfers with direct cash transfers in India's public distribution system (PDS). The article argues that the idea of "cash for food" is based on misplaced assumptions about market accessibility and pricing, especially in rural and remote areas. Sinha points out that while cash transfers may appear more efficient on paper, they risk undermining food security by exposing vulnerable populations to market volatility, inflation, and supply shortages. Using field evidence and policy analysis, the author shows that many beneficiaries prefer receiving subsidized food grains rather than money, as it provides a tangible and reliable source of sustenance. The article also raises concerns about exclusion errors, technological challenges, and the readiness of banking infrastructure in rural areas. Sinha's critique highlights the need to consider local realities and the socio-economic context before adopting one-size-fits-all policy solutions. This piece adds an important counterpoint to the debate on welfare reform in India, reminding policymakers that efficiency should not come at the cost of accessibility and food security.
- 15. Nagavarapu and Sekhri (2014) conducted a study on "A study of an SMS-based monitoring project" explore the potential of using mobile technology to tackle corruption in India's public distribution system (PDS). Their study focuses on an innovative SMS-based monitoring initiative aimed at reducing pilferage by increasing transparency and involving citizens in tracking grain delivery. The idea was simple: send regular SMS alerts to registered beneficiaries about the dispatch and arrival of food grains at local fair price shops. The authors found that while the concept had promise, its impact was mixed due to several ground-level challenges. Low awareness among beneficiaries, limited mobile access, and weak follow-up mechanisms hindered the effectiveness of the project. However, the study is significant in showing how even low-cost technological interventions can contribute to accountability when combined with active community participation and proper institutional support. It highlights that

tech-based reforms alone are not enough—they need to be supported by infrastructure, awareness campaigns, and responsive governance. This case offers practical insights into the limitations and possibilities of digital tools in improving welfare delivery in India.

- 16. Vaidehi, Reddy, and Banerjee (2021) conducts a study on "Explaining caste-based digital divide in India" and delve into the persistent caste-based digital divide in India, offering a nuanced look at how structural inequalities continue to shape access to digital resources. Drawing from both data analysis and socio-economic context, the study highlights that individuals from marginalized caste groups—particularly Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs)—face significant barriers in accessing internet services, digital devices, and online platforms. These disparities aren't just due to income gaps, but also stem from systemic exclusion, educational disadvantages, and geographic isolation. The authors argue that digital inequality reinforces existing social hierarchies, making it harder for marginalized communities to benefit from digital governance, education, or employment opportunities. This paper is especially relevant in discussions on the digitization of public services in India, including reforms like biometric-based ration systems or online grievance redress. Without addressing the caste-based digital divide, such reforms may risk excluding those who are already vulnerable. The study adds a critical dimension to policy conversations, urging inclusive digital strategies that go beyond just providing infrastructure.
- 17. Masiero and Buddha (2021) conducted a study "Data justice in digital social welfare: A study of the Rythu Bharosa scheme" explore the concept of data justice in the context of digital welfare through an in-depth study of the Rythu Bharosa scheme in Andhra Pradesh. This scheme, which delivers financial support to farmers via digital platforms, serves as a case study for understanding how data systems interact with social welfare in practice. The authors argue that while digitalization can streamline welfare distribution, it can also reinforce exclusion and inequality if not designed

carefully. Through fieldwork and analysis, they reveal issues such as data mismatches, technical errors, and lack of transparency, which often prevent eligible beneficiaries from receiving timely support. More importantly, the paper shifts the conversation from digital efficiency to digital fairness, raising questions about who controls data, who gets left out, and how grievances are addressed. Their findings underscore the need for more inclusive and accountable digital welfare systems that are sensitive to local realities. This study contributes meaningfully to debates around digital governance in India, showing that digital innovation must be paired with ethical and equitable data practices to truly serve the public good.

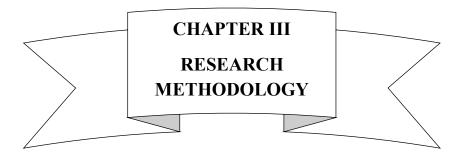
18. Malhotra and Maloo (2017) conducted a research on "Understanding food inflation in India: A machinelearning approach" take a novel approach to studying food inflation in India by applying machine learning techniques to analyze economic trends. Their research moves beyond traditional economic models and leverages data-driven methods to identify key variables influencing food price fluctuations. Using algorithms like random forests and support vector machines, the authors are able to uncover complex, non-linear relationships between factors such as rainfall, international prices, supply chain bottlenecks, and policy interventions. One of the standout findings is the strong role played by monsoon variability and global market signals in shaping domestic food inflation. The paper also emphasizes the predictive power of machine learning in economic research, especially for developing countries where structural issues often distort market signals. Although the study is more technical in nature, it offers important implications for food policy and price stabilization in India. Understanding what drives inflation is crucial for managing programs like the public distribution system (PDS), which depend heavily on stable food prices. This research shows how technology and data science can complement economic planning, helping policymakers make more informed decisions.

- 19. Ghosh, Mallick, Chattopadhay, and Basu (2021) present a unique methodological approach to understanding "Strata-based quantification of distributional uncertainty in socio-economic indicators: A comparative study of Indian states" across Indian states by applying a strata-based framework to measure distributional uncertainty. The study emphasizes that averages alone often hide the deeper inequality within and between population groups. By integrating uncertainty quantification into their analysis, the authors provide a more nuanced view of how development indicators like income, education, and access to welfare—vary not just across states but within different social strata. Their approach helps reveal patterns of exclusion that traditional statistical tools might miss. This is particularly important in the Indian context, where caste, class, and regional differences shape access to resources. The research also offers a comparative analysis, showing that some states perform better not just in overall averages but in reducing internal inequality. This study is especially relevant for designing inclusive policies and welfare programs, as it stresses the need for datasensitive planning that recognizes hidden disparities. It contributes significantly to discussions around equitable development, pushing for a shift from mere policy coverage to deeper policy impact.
- 20. **Khera (2011)** conducts a study on "Trends in diversion of grains from the public distribution system" and provides an in-depth analysis of the long-standing issue of grain diversion in India's Public Distribution System (PDS), focused the scale and persistence of leakages across states. Drawing from both secondary data and field-level observations, the study identifies how and why grains meant for the poor often end up being siphoned off before reaching intended beneficiaries. Khera argues that although diversion was once widespread, recent years have seen a marked improvement in some states, thanks to reforms such as end-to-end computerization, better monitoring, and increased transparency. Importantly, she challenges the narrative that the PDS is inherently flawed, showing instead that its performance varies widely by region and is

strongly influenced by political will and administrative capacity. The paper underscores that when effectively managed, the PDS remains a vital tool in combating hunger and poverty. Khera's work adds empirical weight to the argument for reform over replacement, making a strong case for improving, rather than discarding, in-kind food support. This study is highly relevant in ongoing debates about welfare delivery models in India.

- 21. Drèze and Khera (2015) examined a research on "Understanding leakages in the public distribution system" revisit the issue of leakages in India's Public Distribution System (PDS), offering a more recent and balanced perspective on its performance. They argue that while the PDS has historically been plagued by corruption and inefficiencies, recent improvements—especially in states like Chhattisgarh and Odisha—show that meaningful reforms can significantly reduce leakages. Using National Sample Survey data, the authors demonstrate that the extent of grain diversion has decreased over the years, largely due to better monitoring, computerization, and community-level oversight. They emphasize that the common narrative of a "broken" PDS is outdated and overly simplistic. Instead, they propose that with the right policy focus and administrative commitment, the system can effectively serve its purpose of ensuring food security for millions. Their work is especially important for policymakers and researchers who may be considering replacing the PDS with cash transfers, as it highlights the value of strengthening existing structures rather than discarding them. This article contributes to a more nuanced understanding of welfare delivery, showing that targeted, state-led reforms can lead to tangible results.
- 22. Chand and Singh (2023) provide a comprehensive analysis of India's food policy trajectory in their study "From Green Revolution to Amrit Kaal", placing significant focus on the Public Distribution System (PDS) as a central mechanism for ensuring food security. Their review acknowledges the historical role of the PDS in price stabilization and nutritional support for vulnerable populations, while also candidly

addressing its operational challenges such as regional disparities, leakage of food grains, and inefficiencies in beneficiary targeting. The authors note that while these issues have long plagued the system, recent reforms under the National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013 particularly the digitization of ration cards and the integration of Aadhaar for identity verification, have started to address some of these inefficiencies, enhancing both accuracy and accountability in food grain distribution. Importantly, they argue that achieving food security in India requires a multi-pronged approach that extends beyond distribution mechanisms to include support for agricultural production, rising household incomes, and better nutritional literacy. Their work contributes meaningfully to the debate on welfare reform by suggesting that rather than dismantling the PDS in favor of alternative models like cash transfers, policymakers should focus on modernizing and strengthening the system. This perspective reinforces the idea that a reformed PDS remains indispensable in the broader architecture of food security in India.



Research methodology refers to the processes involved in conducting a study from topic selection and participant recruitment to data collection and analysis. Because this study focus on individuals' real-world experiences and viewpoints, particularly in a rural context, a qualitative research approach was employed. This method allows for an exploration of the deeper significance behind individuals' narratives, emotions, and contexts, which quantitative data alone could not capture.

The chapter details the research framework, describes the study location, explains how participants were selected, and specifies the data collection methods used—primarily interviews and personal discussions. It also clears the approach taken to analyze the gathered information and the identification of themes and patterns. Great care was taken to uphold privacy, secure informed consent, and honor the dignity of each participant. In summary, this chapter provides a comprehensive understanding of how the study was carried out thoughtfully, truthfully, and meaningfully, ensuring that the participants' voices were acknowledged and valued.

3.1 Theoretical framework

A theoretical framework is like a guide or lens through which you look at your research topic. It's based on existing theories and ideas that help explain how and why certain things happen. In a dissertation, the theoretical framework connects your research to the bigger picture, it shows what theories support your study and helps you explain your findings. This study is grounded in the **Theory of Welfare Economics**, which offers a useful lens to understand how economic policies and government welfare programs affect social well-being. This approach is particularly relevant for studying the ration card system in rural and tribal areas, such as Bakaliaghat in the Karbi Anglong district, where people often rely heavily on public support. This chapter presents the core principles of welfare economics and explains how they relate to the structure and functioning of the Public Distribution

System (PDS) in Bakaliaghat. Welfare economics is a branch of economics focused on evaluating how resources are allocated and how these allocations influence individual well-being. It aims to achieve two main goals: efficiency and equity.

Efficiency, also called Pareto optimal, was introduced by economist Vilfredo Pareto. It describes a situation where no one can be made better off without making someone else worse off. However, efficiency alone does not guarantee fairness. This is where equity fairness in the distribution of resources and opportunities becomes important.

Alfred Marshall, one of the early scholars in welfare economics, believed that economic development should improve human welfare, not just increase wealth (Marshall, 1920). Building on this idea, Amartya Sen introduced the concepts of capabilities and functioning, arguing that true development is about expanding people's freedoms to live the lives they value (Sen, 1999). The ration card system, part of India's Public Distribution System (PDS), is a state-led welfare measure designed to promote food security and reduce poverty. From a welfare economics viewpoint, this system aims to:

- Address market failures, where private markets do not ensure food access for the poor.
- Redistribute essential goods through subsidies.
- Reduce inequalities in marginalized communities.

Ration cards provide access to subsidized food grains and serve as identifiers for inclusion in other welfare programs. Evaluating the system involves examining how it is targeted, how it operates, and how well it achieves intended welfare outcomes such as improved well-being, equity, and reduced vulnerability. In Bakaliaghat, a rural and tribal area within Karbi Anglong, the ration card system plays a significant role. The region is home to several indigenous communities with high levels of economic dependency, low literacy, and poor access to private food markets. For many households, the ration card is the primary means of ensuring food security and accessing government welfare programs.

Welfare economics provides a structured framework to assess whether the ration card system in Bakaliaghat is truly enhancing social welfare or if inefficiencies are undermining its goals. Welfare economics is an appropriate theoretical framework for this study because it enables the evaluation of both outcomes (such as food access, equity, and well-being) and processes (such as targeting, distribution, and implementation) within the ration card system. By applying the principles of welfare economics, this research will examine how effectively the ration card program is functioning in Bakaliaghat. It will assess whether the system reaches the intended beneficiaries and contributes to improving their living standards. This framework also allows for the analysis of how public policy interventions can be strengthened to better promote efficiency, equity, and justice in rural and tribal contexts.

3.2 Research Design

The research design for this study is **Qualitative** and **Exploratory** in nature. It is aimed to explore and understand how ration cards are used by people in the rural area of Bakaliaghat in Karbi Anglong district. Through this study, the focus is on the real-life experiences of individuals and how ration cards affect their everyday lives, especially in terms of food access and government benefits. A qualitative design helps in capturing people's opinions, feelings, and challenges in their own words. The research tries to understand not just the usefulness of the ration card but also the issues that come with it. It allows the researcher to explore common themes and patterns by closely listening to the respondents' voices and identifying what matters most to them.

3.3 Universe of the Study

The universe of the study refers to the entire group from which the researcher selects the participants. In this case, the universe consists of all rural households in Bakaliaghat under Karbi Anglong district, Assam, who are ration card holders. The study mainly focuses on low-income families, including daily wage earners, small farmers, housewives, and other vulnerable groups who depend on the Public Distribution System for their food security. The village areas chosen for the study were those where people commonly rely on ration cards to receive food grains and other government schemes. This group is important to study because they are directly affected by how well or poorly the ration system works. The researcher wanted to hear from people who are actually experiencing the ration system, both its benefits and its problems, so that the findings could reflect the real situation of the community.



Figure: Area of study

3.4 Sampling Technique

The sampling technique used in this study was Purposive sampling, a form of Non-probability sampling technique. This means that the researcher selected individuals who had direct experience with ration cards and were willing to talk about it. This method is common in qualitative research because it allows the researcher to choose participants who can provide the most useful and relevant information. Instead of selecting people randomly, the researcher focused on those from different walks of life such as party workers, government school cooks, daily wage labourer, farmers, and elderly pensioners, who all use ration cards in their daily lives. This helped the researcher gather a range of different experiences and views. The aim was not to cover a large number of people but to understand deeply what a few selected people think and feel about the ration card system in their area. It helped in creating a clear and realistic picture of the system.

3.5 Sample size

The sample size of the study is 11 respondents. These 11 individuals were selected based on their different backgrounds, types of livelihood, and ration card usage. The size is small but suitable for a qualitative study, where the goal is to explore in detail rather than generalize to a whole population. Each person's experience was recorded carefully to understand how they use their ration card, what benefits they receive, and what challenges they face. The idea was to gather enough information to identify patterns and common themes without making the data too large to manage. This number allowed the researcher to listen properly to each participant and give enough attention to their stories. It also helped in ensuring that the findings are based on real, lived experiences of individuals and not just numbers or surveys.

3.6 Methods for data collection

Primary Method: In-depth Interviews

The main method used to collect data for this study was **in-depth**, **face-to-face interviews** with the villagers of Bakaliaghat. The researcher personally met each respondent, often in their own homes or at nearby places where they felt at ease. These interviews were carried out in a relaxed and friendly environment, allowing people to speak freely about their experiences without any pressure. Instead of following a rigid questionnaire, the researcher used a set of guiding questions, which helped keep the conversation open-ended and natural. This approach allowed for the collection of rich, personal stories and emotional insights—things that are often overlooked in more formal surveys. Every interview was conducted with the respondent's permission and was **audio recorded** to ensure accuracy. These recordings were later transcribed into detailed narratives, capturing the voices and lived realities of the participants. This method helped uncover both the **positive impacts and the ongoing challenges** faced by people in using ration cards, giving a fuller understanding of their day-to-day lives.

Secondary Method: Observations and Informal Conversations

In addition to the recorded interviews, the researcher also relied on **direct observations** and **casual conversations** during visits to the villages. While not formally documented like the interviews, these informal interactions added depth to the research by providing context on how people lived, what their surroundings were like, and how they spoke about ration cards in everyday life. These secondary sources helped to cross-check and enrich the information gathered during the interviews, offering a more **grounded and realistic** view of the situation on the ground.

3.7 Ethical Consideration

- The purpose of the research was clearly explained to each participant before starting the interview.
- Everyone who took part in the study gave their verbal permission to be interviewed.
- Taking part in the study was completely voluntary, and participants were free to say no or stop the interview at any time without any pressure.
- Participants were assured that their names and personal details would be kept private.
 Pseudonyms (fake names) were used in the final report to protect their identity.
- No personal information was shared with anyone outside the study.
- All interviews were carried out in a respectful and caring way, especially when talking about money problems or personal matters.
- The researcher made sure that the participants felt safe, comfortable, and listened to during the interview.
- The information collected was used only for academic purposes and was kept safe to prevent any misuse.
- Every effort was made to follow proper ethical practices and ensure that no one was harmed, hurt, or taken advantage of during the research.

3.8 Tool for Data Analysis

- Thematic analysis was used as the main method for analyzing the qualitative data.
- Interview responses were carefully read and re-read by the researcher.
- The goal was to identify repeated ideas, key patterns, and common experiences shared by the participants.
- These repeated patterns were grouped into themes to organize the data.
- The themes helped explain:
- > The impact of ration cards on daily life

- > The quality of ration distribution
- ➤ The challenges faced by ration card holders
- This method made it possible to present the findings in a clear, organized, and meaningful way.
- The analysis reflected the real voices and lived experiences of the people interviewed.

3.9 Inclusion Criteria

Only the following types of participants were included in the study:

- Residents of rural Bakaliaghat under Karbi Anglong district.
- Individuals who possess a valid ration card (APL, BPL, or Antyodaya).
 - Respondents who use the ration card regularly for accessing Public Distribution
 System (PDS) items.
 - People with at least one year of experience using the ration system.
 - Participants from various backgrounds like farmers, daily wage earners, cooks, pensioners, etc.
 - Both male and female respondents, above the age of 18 years.
 - Willing participants who gave verbal or informal consent to take part in the study.

3.10 Exclusion Criteria

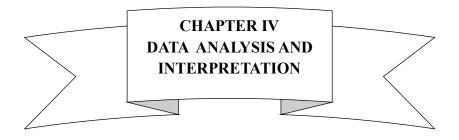
The following types of individuals were not included in the study:

- People without a ration card or those who had just recently received one.
- Individuals under the age of 18.
- Anyone who was unable to communicate clearly due to physical or mental challenges.
- Respondents who were not willing to participate or felt uncomfortable during the process.

- Government officials or Fair Price Shop dealers, as the study focused on users, not providers.
- Residents from urban areas or other parts of Karbi Anglong outside the rural Bakaliaghat area.

3.11 Limitations of the Study

- Limited Respondent Group: Most of the people interviewed were from my own area, including family members, relatives, and close contacts. Because of this, the views collected may not fully represent the wider population.
- Small Area Coverage: The study was done in only one part of the region, so the results may not apply to other villages or districts where the Public Distribution System may work differently.
- Short Time for Data Collection: Due to time limits and academic deadlines, I had only a few days to collect the information. With more time, I could have gathered more detailed and varied responses.
- No Use of Numbers or Statistics: This study focused on personal stories and opinions.
 It didn't include surveys or statistical data, which could have added more depth and comparison to the findings.
- **People's Answers May Not Be Fully Accurate**: The study depended on what people said during the interviews. Some may have forgotten details or felt uncomfortable sharing honest opinions about issues like corruption, poverty.



This chapter shares the heartfelt stories of fifteen people from Bakaliaghat in Karbi Anglong, gathered through in-depth conversations. It shows into how ration cards shape their daily lives, exploring the benefits they bring, the challenges they face, and their hopes for a better system. These voices like the farmers, small vendors, daily wage earners, school cooks, and homemakers reflect the diverse heartbeat of the community. Their experiences offer a window into the Public Distribution System (PDS), revealing both its vital role and the gaps that leave families struggling at the grassroots level.

4.1 Access and Awareness

Everyone in Bakaliaghat seems to know about ration cards word spreads fast in a close-knit community. Most respondents applied for their cards years ago, eager to benefit from the scheme. But knowing about it doesn't mean getting it easily. Respondent 1 and respondent 12 shared how delays and confusion slowed them down. Issues like Aadhaar card mismatches or unclear instructions left them frustrated. Respondent 5, for example, had to lean on panchayat officials to make sense of the paperwork. Awareness is not the issue, people want to access their rations. But the system feels like a puzzle, especially for those without the time or know-how to navigate it. Rural families often rely on neighbors or local leaders for help, pointing to a gap in institutional support. Simplifying processes and offering clearer guidance could make all the difference. The experience at ration shops often leaves a disappointment. Respondent 5 and respondent 7 spoke of shopkeepers' rude or dismissive attitudes, which stung as much as the long waits. For respondent 14, just getting to the shop was a challenge, some are far away or closed at inconvenient times. Ration shops are not just about food; they are about dignity. Unkind treatment or inaccessible locations hit hard, especially for women, the elderly, and daily wage earners juggling tight schedules. Training shopkeepers to be empathetic and improving shop hours could transform the experience.

Fairness is a big concern in Bakaliaghat. Respondent 9 and respondent 3 noticed some families getting more than others, regardless of need. Respondent 7 worried about elderly neighbors missing out due to biometric glitches, leaving a sense of injustice in the air.

4.2 A Lifeline, but Only Half Full

For most, the ration card means rice—a staple that keeps hunger at bay. The amount varies by family size, but it's a constant in their lives. Yet, respondents like respondent 6 and respondent 10 shared a common concern that is rice alone is not enough. They rarely, if ever, receive extras like oil, pulses, or sugar, forcing them to stretch their meager budgets for other essentials.

The Public Distribution System is a lifeline, but it's a bare-bones one. Families are grateful for the rice, but it doesn't meet their full nutritional needs. To truly support food security, the system needs to offer a wider range of essentials, easing the financial strain on rural households.

4.3 Quality of distribution

The quality of ration rice was a sore point for many. Respondent 11 and respondent 8 described rice that was often old, broken, or even worm-infested hardly fit for a meal. On rare occasions, respondent 3 noted, the rice was decent, but this inconsistency across shops left people feeling cheated. Poor quality undermines trust in the system. When families receive substandard rice, it's not just about food it feels like a lack of respect. Better quality control at fair price shops could restore confidence and ensure people get what they deserve.

4.4 Biometric Authentication

Biometric authentication, meant to make things fairer, often does the opposite. Elderly respondents like Respondent 2 and laborers like respondent 11 struggled with worn fingerprints or faulty machines, sometimes leaving them empty-handed despite being eligible.

Technology can exclude the very people it's meant to help. Worn hands from years of hard work or unreliable machines shouldn't mean going hungry. Backup options, like manual verification, could bridge this digital divide and ensure no one is left out.

4.5 Behaviour of Dealers and Shop Accessibility

The experience at ration shops often leaves a bitter taste. Respondent 5 and respondent 7 spoke of shopkeepers' rude or dismissive attitudes, which stung as much as the long waits.

4.5.1 Addressing barriers faced by Vulnerable Groups

Ration shops represent more than just a source of food; they symbolize dignity.

Unpleasant interactions or difficult-to-reach locations can significantly impact individuals, particularly women, seniors, and daily laborers managing busy routines. Providing training for shopkeepers in empathy and extending shop hours has the potential to greatly enhance the overall experience.

4.6 Perception of Fairness and Inclusion

Fairness is a big concern in Bakaliaghat. Respondent 9 and respondent 3 noticed some families getting more than others, regardless of need. Respondent 7 worried about elderly neighbors missing out due to biometric glitches, leaving a sense of injustice in the air.

4.6.1. Promoting Fairness and Transparency in Distribution

When the distribution appears uneven, it promotes feelings of hatred. Individuals desire a system they can rely on one that is open and treats all parties fairly. Well-defined guidelines and supervision could promote equity and restore confidence in the PDS.

4.7 Coping Mechanisms and Community Support

When rations fall short, community spirit shines. mixes ration rice with market purchases or borrows from neighbors. Respondent 10 shares with family when biometric issues block access. These acts of kindness keep families going.

Neighbors are a safety net when the system falters, but it's not a fix. Relying on each other adds pressure to already stretched households. A more reliable PDS would ease this burden, letting communities thrive without constant workarounds.

4.8 Gendered Impact of Ration Card Usage

For women like respondents 5 and 11 Ration cards are critical for feeding their families. But they face extra hurdles rushing between chores to reach shops or enduring disrespectful treatment. These challenges take an emotional toll.

Women, often the backbone of their households, feel the system's flaws most acutely. Their time and dignity need to be prioritized. Gender-sensitive policies, like flexible shop hours or respectful service, could lighten their load.

4.9 Hopes and Suggestions for Improvement

Despite the frustrations, people value the ration card scheme and want it to work better. They dream of more items like pulses, oil, and sugar, smoother biometric processes, fairer distribution, and shops that are easier to reach. Their suggestions come from lived experience, not just wishful thinking.

The people of Bakaliaghat aren't just pointing out problems they're offering solutions. Listening to their ideas could shape a more inclusive, effective PDS that truly meets their needs



5.1 Key Findings

This study explored the experiences of rural households in Bakaliaghat, Karbi Anglong, regarding their access to and utilization of the ration card system. Based on in-depth interviews with 15 respondents from varied socioeconomic backgrounds, several recurring themes emerged:

1. Ration Card as an Essential Safety Net

For most respondents, the ration card serves as a vital support system, especially during financial hardships. In households with minimal or no income, the subsidized rice is often the only reliable source of food. While imperfect, the scheme is widely viewed as essential for preventing hunger.

2. Challenges with Biometric Authentication

Many respondents particularly the elderly and daily wage laborers reported repeated issues with biometric verification. Worn-out fingerprints and faulty machines often led to denial of rations, even for those who were eligible, exposing a serious technological barrier.

3. Narrow Range of Rationed Commodities

Respondents consistently stated that they received only rice through the Public Distribution System (PDS). Items such as pulses, oil, and kerosene, which were previously distributed, are now either unavailable or highly inconsistent. This limited provisioning does not meet the full dietary or cooking needs of families.

4. Inconsistent and Poor-Quality SuppliesA recurring concern was the poor quality of rice. Some beneficiaries described receiving broken, discolored, or insectinfested grains. Others reported acceptable quality, highlighting inconsistencies between distribution centers and raising concerns about overall quality control.

5. Access and Infrastructure Barriers

Traveling to distant fair-price shops over poorly maintained roads was cited as a major obstacle, especially for women and the elderly. Many walked several kilometers, often without transportation or support, to collect their entitlements.

6. Disrespect and Favoritism at Distribution Points

Several participants described rude or dismissive behavior from ration dealers. Some perceived favoritism, with influential or politically connected families receiving better service or larger portions, while less connected individuals faced neglect or delays.

7. Gender-Specific Struggles

Women reported added burdens, including managing household duties while spending significant time accessing rations. Many shared experiences of humiliation at distribution points or fear of being turned away, leading to emotional stress and anxiety.

8. Community-Based Coping Strategies

In response to system failures, many households relied on neighbors or extended family. Practices like food-sharing and informal borrowing were common, reflecting strong communal ties but also underscoring the unreliability of formal mechanisms.

Key Findings on Ration Card System in Bakaliaghat

1. Mixed Experiences: Helpful but Frustrating

- The ration card system helps poor families get food.
- But many people are unhappy due to rules and poor management.

2. Exclusion Due to Rules and Technology

- Some families are left out because of strict rules.
- Fingerprint machines often don't work properly.
- Suggestion: Allow OTPs or regular ID cards as other options.

3. Lack of Access in Remote Areas

- People in faraway villages face trouble reaching ration shops.
- Suggestion: Use mobile ration vans to deliver food to these areas.

4. Limited Food Items

- Ration usually includes only rice, which is not enough for a healthy diet.
- Poor families can't afford items like pulses, oil, and salt.
- Suggestion: Bring back these items through local suppliers.

5. Poor Quality and No Complaint System

- Rice quality is often bad.
- There is no easy way to complain.
- Suggestion: Do regular quality checks and let locals help monitor.
- Also set up a simple way to report problems.

6. Problems Faced by Women

- Women collect rations and face long waits, safety issues, and rude staff.
- Suggestions:

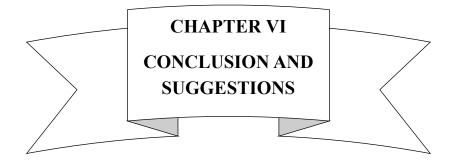
Train staff to behave better.

Offer home delivery for those who can't travel.

Give extra support to women-headed families.

7. Unfair Distribution and Political Influence

- Some families get benefits because of political links.
- Others are left out.
- Suggestion: Update the ration list fairly and openly.
- Involve village groups or social organizations to help.



Conclusion

The examination of ration card use in Bakaliaghat indicates that while the Public Distribution System (PDS) has been essential in enhancing food security for rural families, numerous challenges at the implementation level remain. The experiences gathered present a blend of appreciation and disappointment—a dual nature that illustrates the intricate reality of social welfare programs in isolated regions.

For many families, the ration card is more than just a paper—it is a vital source of support. Women overseeing households, elderly individuals living independently, and low-income daily laborers shared how the monthly provision of rice and other necessities was crucial for their survival during times of unemployment, sickness, or rising prices. Their accounts reflected a quiet strength—a determination to make the most of any assistance they received.

However, the system has its shortcomings. Respondents reported issues such as missing names, regular shortages of supplies, bias at ration shops, and confusion over eligibility requirements. The discontent expressed extended beyond the amount of food received; it was also about the lack of respect and clarity in the process. People desired fair treatment, not to be seen as liabilities to the state.

In the end, the results will show the necessity for a more compassionate and adaptive ration distribution system one that acknowledges local circumstances, fosters trust within the community, and guarantees that benefits genuinely reach those in need. The effectiveness of any welfare initiative depends not merely on policy formulation but also on how it is implemented at the local level. This research emphasizes the significance of heeding the perspectives of beneficiaries to enhance and maintain such crucial safety nets in rural India.

The narratives from Bakaliaghat illustrate that ration cards serve as key support for many households, providing a buffer against hunger and economic struggles. For those in poverty,

these cards are vital for survival subsidized food grains help keep families afloat during difficult periods, such as when jobs become scarce or health issues arise. Older individuals recounted how rations often represent their sole consistent source of nutrition, while single mothers expressed the relief of being able to feed their families, even in tight financial situations.

However, the system has its flaws. Individuals describe the irritation of dealing with a difficult to handle process having difficulty registering, updating names, or getting on the Below Poverty Line list despite clearly demonstrating need. Fair-price shops frequently compound the challenges, with delays in supplies, insufficient quantities of goods, or impolite shopkeepers. For daily wage workers, each additional trip to the shop equates to lost earnings and increased expenses. Furthermore, the way individuals are treated—dismissed, left waiting without an explanation, or addressed harshly leaves them feeling belittled and ignored.

Nevertheless, there is hopefulness in the way communities come together. Residents revealed how local leaders or neighbors assisted them in navigating the system or resolving issues. These small acts of kindness focus the possibilities that arise when people support one another. The conclusion is evident: the ration card system is life-saving, yet it requires improvements to be fairer, more compassionate, and easier to navigate. Pay attention to the voices of the people in Bakaliaghat, with their resilience and quiet strength, could transform this initiative into one that not only nourishes but also respects and uplifts those it aims to help. Their input is essential for the program to succeed.

Suggestions

In light of the insights and stories gathered during this research, the following recommendations aim to enhance the effectiveness, accessibility, and overall impact of the ration card system in Bakaliaghat and other rural areas:

1. Enhanced Awareness Initiatives

Many respondents indicated uncertainty regarding their entitlements, alterations in card classifications (APL/BPL), or the procedure for updating cardholder details. Awareness campaigns utilizing local dialects and community gatherings could help close this knowledge gap and enable villagers to claim their rightful benefits.

2. Routine Updating and Supervision of Beneficiary Lists

Many beneficiaries noted discrepancies in the ration distribution list, where some genuinely in need were omitted, while more affluent households still received assistance. A transparent and frequently updated verification process, potentially involving local panchayat and community leaders, would promote equity.

3. Assurance of Timely and Sufficient Supply of Goods

Common complaints included frequent delays in receiving ration items, particularly rice and pulses. Authorities should implement stricter oversight of fair price shops to guarantee a consistent supply and alleviate distress for families reliant on these provisions.

4. Improved Grievance Resolution System

Some respondents revealed that they were unaware of whom to approach when faced with issues such as under-weighing or requests for extra payments. Establishing a local grievance resolution center and prominently displaying complaint contact information at ration shops could facilitate resolution.

5. Enhanced Infrastructure and Record Management at Ration Shops

In certain areas, inadequate infrastructure, irregular shop hours, and manual record keeping resulted in confusion and delays. Digitizing the process, implementing biometric verification, and providing printed receipts would bolster accountability and reduce instances of fraud.

6. Focused Support for Vulnerable Populations

Widows, senior citizens, single mothers, and daily wage workers reported challenges in obtaining rations due to mobility or documentation barriers. Special measures such as home delivery in exceptional circumstances or simplified paperwork should be considered for these individuals.

7. Training and Development of Ration Dealers

Providing training for fair price shop owners and employees on ethical conduct, technology usage, and customer interaction would foster a more responsive and respectful atmosphere for beneficiaries.

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Appendix

Informed Consent

I, Romit Terang, a student of the Department of Social Work, Mahapurusha Srimanta Sankaradeva Viswavidyalaya, Guwahati Unit, am conducting a research study as part of my dissertation titled "A study on the Public Distribution system, especially on Ration Card and its impact on challenges to access essential commodities with reference to Bakaliaghat, KarbiAnglong", under the supervision of Ms. Rajlakhi Baruah, Assistant Professor, Department of Social Work, MSSV, Guwahati Unit. I assure you that the information you provide during this interview will be kept strictly confidential and will be used solely for academic and research purposes. Your identity will not be disclosed in any part of the study, and your responses will be treated with the utmost respect and care. Your participation is voluntary, and you are free to withdraw at any time without any negative consequences. I sincerely request your cooperation and valuable input in answering the following set of questions, which will greatly contribute to the understanding and improvement of the ration distribution system in the region. Thank you for your time and support.

Interview Schedule

- 1. Can you tell me about your experience with the ration card system?
- 2. How did you first find out about the free ration distribution?
- 3. In what ways has the ration card system affected your households?
- 4. Has it helped reduce your household expenses?
- 5. Do you feel it has improved your family's availability of food?
- 6. How often do you use your ration card?
- 7. What items do you usually receive with it?
- 8. Are the supplies regular and sufficient?
- 9. How is the quality of the ration items you receive?
- 10. "Are you satisfied with the quality? Why or why not?
- 11. How does the quality compare to items from the market?
- 12. Can you describe any difficulties you or your family have faced while collecting ration from the shop?
- 13. Are you satisfied with the service at your ration shop?
- 14. Have you ever faced any issues with biometric authentication?
- 15. Are there times when the ration shop is out of stock?

- 16. Do you feel the quality of food grains you receive is less than what you expect to?
- 17. What do you usually do if you are unable to get ration in a particular month?