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One Nation One Ration Card Scheme

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This article is based on “**Easing access to entitlements**” which was published in The Indian Express on 15/07/2021. It talks about the benefits and challenges associated with the One Nation One Ration Card scheme (ONORC).

Covid-19 pandemic has created a dilemma of lives vs livelihood for almost every sector of the economy. However, the migrant workers are one the most vulnerable sections of the society, which got impacted by the pandemic.

Food and income security is the main concern of the jobless migrants after the two deadly waves of Covid-19 pandemic.

In order to tackle the problem of food security, the government of India introduced the **One Nation One Ration Card scheme (ONORC)**. ONORC allows a beneficiary to access his food entitlements from anywhere in India irrespective of the place where the ration card is registered.

Status of ONORC Scheme

- Presently, thirty-two States and Union territories have already completed the formalities of the scheme, which include linking beneficiaries' ration cards with their **Aadhaar** numbers and installing e-Point of Sale (e-POS) machines in each FPS.
- The full mobility of food subsidy under the **National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013** relies on digitisation of the public distribution system (PDS), a network of over 5,00,000 fair-price shops (FPS).

This would be ensured on the basis of Aadhaar authentication and validated data.

- The Integrated Management of **Public Distribution System** (IMPDS) portal records all purchases made under ONORC.

Benefits of ONORC

- **Enabling Right To Food:** Previously, ration cardholders can avail their entitlement of subsidised food grains under the National Food Security Act, only from the designated Fair price shop (FPS) within the concerned state.
 - However, if a beneficiary were to shift to another state, he/she would need to apply for a new ration card in the second state.
 - Thus, ONORC envisages removing the geographical hindrance to social justice and enabling the right to food.
- **Supporting One-Third of Population:** Nearly, 37% of the population is that of migrant labourers. The scheme is therefore important for anyone who is going to move from one place to the other.
- **Reducing Leakages:** The ONORC can reduce leakages, because the fundamental prerequisite of this scheme is deduplication.
 - This will ensure that the same person does not figure as a beneficiary in two different locations of the country.
 - Further, the scheme is linked with Aadhaar and biometrics, this removes most possibilities of corruption.
- **Reducing Social Discrimination:** ONORC will be particularly beneficial for women and other disadvantaged groups, given how social identity (caste, class and gender) and other contextual factors (including power relations) provide a strong backdrop in accessing PDS.

Associated Challenges

- **Exclusion Error:** The digitisation of this PDS process, through Aadhaar-linked ration cards and smart cards, has been pushed in an effort to reduce leakages. However, there has been a rise of exclusion errors in post-Aadhaar seeding.

There are many sections of society who still don't have Aadhar Cards, thereby depriving them of food security.
- **Domicile-Based Social Sector Schemes:** Not only PDS, most of the anti-poverty, rural employment, welfare and food security schemes were historically based on domicile-based access and restricted people to access government social security, welfare and food entitlements at their place of origin.
- **Disrupting Supplies At FPS:** An FPS receives the monthly quota of products strictly in accordance with the number of people assigned to it.

The ONORC, when fully operational, would disrupt this practice, as some FPSs may have to cater to more numbers of cards even as others cater to less, owing to migration of people.

Way Forward

- **Opening up Alternate Delivery Centres:** If emergencies continue to hamper uptake at ration shops, alternate delivery channels can be considered for delivering food grains to vulnerable groups.

- **Focusing on Nutritional Security:** Food security should be seen from a broader framework of nutritional security. Therefore, ONORC must allow the portability of Integrated Child Development Services, Mid-Day Meals, immunisation, health care and other facilities.
- **Replacing PDS With Food Coupons:** In the longer run, the PDS system may be replaced by a fool-proof food coupon system or direct benefit transfer.
Wherein, a Below Poverty Line family can buy rice, pulses, sugar and oil from any Kirana store at the market price, by either paying fully through the coupon or by cash.

Conclusion

ONORC is the far-reaching reform of the public distribution ecosystem since the Food Security Act. It will provide food security to jobless migrants and will help achieve the target set under SDG 2: Ending hunger by 2030.

Drishti Mains Question

One Nation One Ration Card scheme is the far-reaching reform of the public distribution ecosystem since the Food Security Act. Discuss.
