Mains Practice Question

Q. One Nation One Ration Card scheme is the panacea for India's migrant population. Critically examine. (250 Words)

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Approach

- Introduce by writing the One Nation One Ration Card scheme and its objectives.
- Write the benefits emanating from the scheme.
- Discuss the issues with the implementation of the scheme.
- Conclude suitably.

Introduction

One Nation One Ration Card (ONORC) scheme was started as an inter-State portability of ration cards in 2019. It allows the migratory **National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013** beneficiaries to lift their entitled quota of **food grains from any Fair Price Shop (FPS)** of their choice anywhere in the country.

This can be done by using the existing ration card with Aadhaar based authentication.

Body

Benefits Emanating from ONORC

- **Transparency:** It will bring more transparency and efficiency in the distribution of foodgrains.
- **Identification:** It will improve the mechanism to identify fake/duplicate ration cards. It seeks to provide universal access to PDS food grains for migrant workers.
- **Food Security:** The scheme will **ensure food security of migrant labourers** who move to other states to seek better job opportunities.
- **Achieving SDG:** This will help achieve the target set under SDG 2: Ending hunger by 2030.

    - Also, it will address the poor state of hunger in India, as highlighted by the **Global Hunger Index**, where India has been ranked 102 out of 117 countries.
- **Empowering Consumers:** ONORC will also give the beneficiaries the opportunity to opt for the dealer of their choice. If any dealer misbehaves or misallocates, the beneficiary can switch to another FPS shop instantly.
- **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.

Issues with the implementation of the scheme

- **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 Card, thereby depriving them of food security.
  - **Logistical Issues:** An FPS receives the monthly quota of products strictly in accordance with the number of people assigned to it.
    - The ONORC can 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.
  - **Lack of Data:** There is no exact data **on the mobility of poor households migrating to work,** locating intra- and inter-state destinations and sectors employing the workers.
  - **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.

Way Forward

- **Social auditing** must be made mandatory to measure the performance of ONORC.
- **NFSA** defines food security as nutritional security.

  - Therefore, portability of **Integrated Child Development Services, Mid-Day Meals, immunisation, health care** and other facilities for poor migrant households can't be neglected and should be made portable.
- In the longer run, the **PDS system may be replaced by a fool-proof food coupon system or direct benefit transfer,** targeting the poor, 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

The current migrant crisis should be seen as an opportunity to develop a national migration policy addressing the challenges faced by migrant workers productivity, living conditions and social security.

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