UNIT 6: FOOD SECURITY AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM IN INDIA

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6.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- derive the meaning and concept of food security
- analyse the status and severity of food insecurity, malnutrition and hunger in India
- discuss the working of the largest food safety net.i.e. Public Distribution System (PDS).
- comprehend on the drawbacks and failure of PDS and to find out dynamic strategies for wider coverage and implementation of PDS and
- discuss the recently announced largest PDS reform- NFSA, 2013

and its features that aims to reduce poverty and hunger and to ensure basic right of food for all people for a decent life.

6.2 INTRODUCTION

Indian economy is characterized as a developing economy. Poverty among the people is a basic characteristic of the economy. Eradication of extreme poverty and hunger is a major challenge facing by the Indian economy as well as the global economy. As per estimate of Global Food Security Index, 2016(GFSI,2016) globally 800 million people -just over one in nine people -remain hungry . One third of world's hungry live in India and every year Indians have to die of hunger. The poor and vulnerable groups are unable to consume required meal for nutrious diet and productive life which is a basic need for survival. These group of people remain food insecure and unable to lead an active life . In this unit we will discuss the multidimensional and complex problem of food security and the system (i.e. Public Distribution System) that Government follows to ensure food security to the people.

6.3 CONCEPT OF FOOD SECURITY

Consumption of enough healthy food is a basic human right. When an individual or group of individuals are unable to consume basic foods for energy and nutrients to maintain a healthy and productive life then they are termed as food insecure. The most acceptable definition of food security was given by World Food Summit of Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) held in 1996. FAO states "Food Security exist when all people, at all times have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preference for a healthy and active life " . The group of people who are mainly food insecure belongs to people employed in ill-paid occupations, casual labourers, landless people, petty self-employed, workers and destitute including beggars, the people affected by natural disasters and most importantly the Women and Children.

6.3.1 Prevalence of Malnutrition and Hunger

Hunger and food insecurity affects the living condition of the people by destroying their physical and mental health. Food security cannot be achieved without nutrition security. In general the most widely used indicator of nutrition is dietary energy orintake of calorie per person per day. The National Sample Survey (NSS) use 2700 kcal as standard norm of calorie intake per person per day to be food secure. During 66th round NSS, average dietary energy intake per person per day was 2147 kcal for rural India and 2123 Kcal for urban India, indicates the existence of rural and urban food insecurity in the country.

Food Insecurity results undernourishment and malnutrition among the people. The number of undernourished people is highest in India.

According to FAO estimates in "The State of Food Insecurity in the world ,2015" report 15.2 percent of Indian population is undernourished and 194.6 million people go hungry every day. The problem is more severe among women and children. 48 percent of women between 15 to 49 years of age are anemic whose Body Mass Index(BMI) is less than 18.5. The low health status of women have detrimental effect on child health status. It results low birth weight(<2.5kg) to the child. Low birth weight hampers the proper physical and mental growth of the children and thereby their overall cognitive development.

India is ranked 111th out of 125 countries in Global Hunger Index score of 2023. India experiences a severe level of hunger, scoring 28.7 on the 2023 Global Hunger Index. This represents a significant improvement over its 2008 and 2000 GHI ratings of 35.5 and 38.4, respectively, all of which were deemed concerning, and a minor improvement over its 2015 GHI score of 29.2, which was also deemed problematic. Additionally, India had the most child wasting rate in the report (18.7 percent), along with the highest rates of child

stunting (35.5 percent), undernourishment (16.6 percent), and under-five mortality (3.1 percent) from the study.



LET US KNOW

Chronic Hunger: Inadequate diet for longer time

Seasonal Hunger: When a person unable to get food entire year .

If such calamity happens in a very wide spread area or is stretched over a longer time period, it may cause a situation of starvation.

A massive starvation might take a turn of famine. For example the Bengal famine of 1943-44 was a major famine in the Bengal province in British India during world war II, claiming the lives of at least three and half million people.

6.3.2 Dimensions of Food Security

The prevailing situation of malnutrition and hunger indicates that India is in serious condition of food security. With increasing demand for growing population the problem will become more serious in near future. It is, therefore, necessary to analyse properly the different dimensions of food security so that effective policy can be adopted. Broadly speaking there are four dimensions of food security.

- **Food Availability:** The availability of enough quality food is the key component of food security. It may be through domestic agricultural production or through import. In 1960s, India adopted Green Revolution as an initiative to increase agricultural production and to become self sufficient. Use of High Yielding Variety (HYV) seeds, irrigation, fertiliser and modern technology has increased production of agricultural output, specially wheat and rice. However green revolution results increase agricultural productivity of the states like Punjab, Haryana, Western Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh. Some states like Bihar, Orissa and North Eastern states were not able to enjoy the

benefits of green revolution. According to UN statistics, with a projected population of 1.43 billion as in April, 2023, India is expected to surpass China as world's most populous country. There is need of more comprehensive strategy and agricultural research to increase quality and quantity of diversified agricultural food so that growing demand can be fulfilled.

- **Food Access:** Another most important dimension of food security is accessibility of food i.e. the purchasing power of the individuals for nutritious food. The income of the individual or the household must be enough to purchase adequate amount of nutritious food. Employment and income generation increases the purchasing power of the individuals. Social and economic empowerment of women is also important for their nutrition and health status as well as of other family members. Economic empowerment of women leads to income generation and thereby increases purchasing power and helps to reduce malnutrition of the children and the family.
- **Utilisation:** Along with adequate quantity and quality of food items, some non-food components like clean drinking water, proper sanitation and health care practices are essential to reach a secured food and nutrition level. Proper utilisation of clean drinking water and sanitation reduces health risk of common diseases like diarrhea, cholera, malaria, fluorosis, arsenicosis , trachoma, intestinal worms, typhoid etc. Better health care practices like exclusive breastfeeding up to six month, timely introduction of complementary foods, minimum dietary diversity, consumption of iron rich complementary foods, Vitamin A supplementation, full vaccination and safe disposal of stool of the child etc. are essential for better utilisation of nutrition intervention.
- **Stability:** All time availability and accessibility of adequate nutritious food is another most important dimension food security. It requires stable food supply and accessibility by the individual

and households. There should not be seasonal food insecurity due to natural calamities like flood, drought, earthquake and economic and cyclical fluctuations like price rise. Stable supply and accessibility of nutritious food controls seasonal hunger and malnutrition. The problem of food security has quantitative as well as qualitative aspects. Availability and accessibility of adequate amount of nutritious food is essential to maintain a desired food security level. To tackle both qualitative and quantitative aspects, the Government of India has relied on the following three food based safety nets:

a. Public Distribution System (PDS)

b. Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) and

c. Mid -Day Meals(MDM) Programme

PDS is the largest network initiated by the government and have remarkable impact on poverty although lot of debates going on over the years. Moreover, the employment generation programmes has been initiated by the Government of India to increase the purchasing power of the individuals.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: State whether the following statements are True (T) or False (F)

i) Food Security is a basic human right. (T/F)

ii) Food security can be achieved without nutrition security. (T/F)

iii) Green Revolution is an initiative to increase agricultural production.(T/F)

Q 2: Who are mainly Food Insecure? (Answer in about 40 words).

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Q 3: Differentiate Seasonal hunger and Chronic Hunger. (Answer in about 50 words)

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6.4 PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM

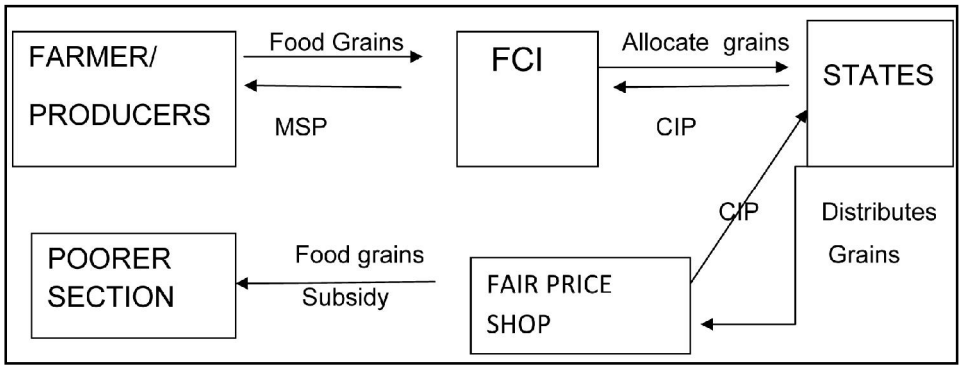
As stated earlier PDS is the largest food based safety net introduced by the Government of India. The basic objective of PDS in India is to provide essential consumer goods to the consumers at cheaper and subsidized prices so that they are able to maintain the minimum standard of food security and nutrition status. The major items distributed under the network of PDS in India have been rice, wheat or Atta, sugar and kerosene. The Food Corporation of India (FCI), established in 1965, is the major agency to run the network of PDS. FCI procures foodgrains from the farmers or producers at Minimum Support Price (MSP).

MSP is fixed by the Govt. of India(before crop sowing) to protect the producers or farmers against excessive fall in price during bumper production years. It is a support to the farmers and producers that their product would be definitely sold out without loss. FCI maintains the ***buffer stock*** of the procured foodgrains at their warehouses. It is the central Issue Price(CPI) at which FCI allocate these food grains to the state governments. State governments hold the responsibility for distributing the same to the consumers through the established network of regulated ration shops or Fair Price Shops (FPSs). State governments are also responsible for operational responsibilities including allocation and identification of families below poverty line, issue of ration cards, supervision and monitoring the functioning of FPSs.

The PDS was a general entitlement scheme till 1992. In June 1992, the Revamped Public Distribution System (RPDS) was launched to strengthen the PDS by emphasizing poorer section of the society living in hilly, remote and inaccessible areas. Special focus was given to the poorer

section of the society with coordination of state governments. Area specific programmes were initiated like Drought Prone Area Programme (DPAP), Integrated Tribal Development Projects (ITDP), Desert Development Programme (DDP) and Programme for certain Designated Hill Areas (DHA).

Figure 6.1: Working of PDS



After five years of RPDS, in June 1997, the Government of India introduced the Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS) with a view to identify the poor people and to distribute food items in a transparent and accountable manner at the fair price shop level. The beneficiaries categorised as: (a) Below Poverty Line (BPL), and (b) Above Poverty Line (APL).

It is the responsibility of the state government to identify the poor beneficiaries (people falling in BPL category) with the help of Gram Panchayats and Gram Sabha in rural areas and Nagar Palikas in urban areas.

The reforming of PDS was not able to remove the problem of poverty and hunger in the country as the poorest of the poor section of the society sleeps without two square meals a day. In order to make TPDS more focused and targeted towards this section of the society, the Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) was launched in December 2000. The identified Antyodaya families are entitled to 35 kg of rice of food grain per family per month from 1st April 2002.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: Why was FCI established? When it was established? (Answer in about 30 words).

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Q 5: Define MSP and CIP. (Answer in about 40 words)

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Q 6: What are the different types of ration cards issued under PDS? (Answer in about 30 words)

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6.5 FOOD SECURITY ACT, 2013

As a reform measure of the PDS and to ensure fundamental right of food and nutrition security ,the National Advisory Council (NAC) submitted its proposals on Draft National Food Security Bill in January-February 2011 and it was signed in to a law on September 12,2013. The National Food Security Act (NFSA),2013 aims to "To provide for food and nutritional security in human life cycle approach, by ensuring access to adequate quantity of quality food at affordable prices to people to live a life with dignity". The salient features of NFSA,2013 are as follows -

- **Coverage and Entitlement:** The Act aims to cover up to 70 percent of the rural population and 50 percent of the urban population. Under TPDS, the household will be entitled with 5kg of rice, wheat and coarse grain at Rs. 3,Rs.2 and Rs. 1 respectively per person per month. However, the entitlement of existing AAY households will be protected at 35 kg per household per month. The beneficiaries will be identified by States/UTs based on the criterion set by the central government.
- **Revision of Subsidised Prices:** The price of food grains Under TPDS will remain same for the initial three years of commencement of the Act. Thereafter, the central government will change these prices in relation to Minimum Support Price(MSP).
- **Nutritional Support to Women and Children:** The NFSA,2013 aims

to support health and Nutritional status of women and children through the enhancement of Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) and Mid Day Meal(MDM) Scheme. The local Anganwadi will take the responsibility to provide free meal to the children in the age group of 6 months to 6 years. The students up to class VIII are entitling to free mid -day meal in the government schools. Pregnant and lactating mothers are entitling to free meal at the local Anganwadi during pregnancy and up to 6 months after child birth. They will also be entitled to receive maternity benefit of not less than Rs. 6000.

- **Women Empowerment:** To serve the purpose of women empowerment the Act decides to issue ration card to the eldest woman of the household of age 18 years or above considering her as the head of the household.
- **Grievance Redress Mechanism:** Any grievances regarding the implementation and corruption or manipulation of the Act can be put at the Grievance Redress Mechanism at the District and State levels. States will have the flexibility to use the existing machinery or set up separate mechanism.
- **Transportation cost assistance to States:** Central Government will provide assistance to States in meeting the expenditure incurred by them on transportation of foodgrains within the State, its handling and FPS dealers' margin as per norms to be devised for this purpose.
- **Food Security Allowance:** The concerned state government has to made provision for food security allowance to entitled beneficiaries in case of non-supply of entitled foodgrains or meals.
- **Provision of State Food Commission:** The State Food Commission will monitor and evaluate the implementation of the Act, give advice to the state governments and their agencies and enquire in to violation of entitlements.
- **Penalty:** The State Food Commission will impose penalty on public servant or authority in case of failure to comply with the relief recommended by the District Grievance Redress Officer.

The NFSA,2013 is an important step towards the right to food and to bring it within the framework of legally mandated entitlements.

6.6 IMPACT OF PDS ON POVERTY

6.6.1 Food Subsidy under PDS

The main objective of PDS is to provide essential consumer goods such as rice, wheat, sugar, edible oil and Kerosene at subsidized prices and thereby to maintain a secured food security level. It is an instrument of price stabilization and acts as a force against the exploitation of traders or retailers to acquire more profit through artificial food shortage.

There has been a continuous increase in public expenditure of the government on PDS. Food subsidy as proportion of total government's expenditure, on an average during the period of 2000-01 to 2019-20 was 4.0 percent. The food subsidy component of central government rose from Rs. 650 crores in 1980-81 (at current prices) to Rs. 242834 crore in 2021-22 (Table 6.1).

Table 6.1: Central Government Expenditure on Food Subsidy

Year	Expenditure (In Rs Crores) (At current prices)	Year	Expenditure (In Rs Crores) (At current prices)
1980-81	650	2016-17	134834
1990-91	2450	2017-18	145338
2000-01	12010	2018-19	101327
2005-06	23071	2019-20	108688
2010-11	63844	2020-21*	115570
2015-16	124119	2021-22*	242834

*Budgeted. Source: Datt, G. & Mahajan, A. (2016). *Datt and Sundharam's Indian Economy; PRS Legislative Research, 2021. Union Budget 2021-22 Analysis*

Further, available data also indicate that during the period 2001 to 2020, on an average, annual procurement of food grains was 57.11 million tons, while of this, 40.03 million tons were distributed under the PDS. Thus, food grain distributed under PDS accounted for 19.07 percent of net availability of foodgrains. Data indicates that net availability and procurement have increased

continuously. Distribution of food grain shows that there is more need to focus on the proper distribution so that wastage of the food grain can be avoided and needy people get timely and right quantity of food grains.

6.6.2 Incentive to the Farmers through Minimum Support Price

The poor farmers productions are protected by the government at the beginning of the sowing season by providing minimum support price (MSP) to their produce on the basis of the recommendations of the commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP). It supports the farmers from distress sales and induce them to make capital investment for the improvement of their farm. MSPs are currently announced for 24 commodities including seven cereals (paddy, wheat, barley, jowar, bajra, maize and ragi); five pulses (gram, arhar/tur, moong, urad and lentil); eight oil seeds, copra, raw jute, raw cotton and Virginia Flu Cured (VFC) tobacco. However the farmers are aware about MSP on wheat and paddy only which is a factor of changing cropping pattern towards these crops only. There is need of more awareness among the farmers about the prevailing MSP for different foodgrains to encourage a more diversified cropping pattern and to maintain nutrition security of the poor. The MSPs for wheat and paddy fixed by the department of Agriculture and Cooperation on the recommendation of the CACP in the recent times since 2013-14 has been shown in Table 6.2.

Table 6.2: MSPs for Wheat and Paddy

Year	MSP on Wheat	MSP for Paddy	
		Common	Grade A
2013-14	1350	1310	1345
2014-15	1400	1360	1400
2015-16	1450	1410	1450
2016-17	1525	1470	1510
2017-18	1625	1550	1590
2018-19	1735	1750	1770
2019-20	1840	1815	1835
2020-21	1925	1868	1888
2021-22	1975	1940	1960
2022-23	2015	2040	2060

Source: Website of Department of Food and Public Distribution; Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Govt. of India

6.7 LIMITATIONS OF PDS

The PDS as a largest food safety net has not been able to attain its objective of eradicating poverty and hunger in the country. The problem of hunger still exist in many areas of India.

- **Unscientific Storage and Wastage:** There are three storage agencies-FCI, Central Warehousing Corporation and State warehousing Corporations. The storage capacity could be either owned by these agencies or be hired from private owners. The grain is stored either in covered godowns, or silos or in uncovered godowns called covered and plinth (CAP). The storage capacity here is the grand total storage capacity of all the three agencies-hired/owned and covered/CAP. Storage capacity with FCI is largest and it is increasing reasonably. But capacity under covered and plinth is increasing faster than covered ones. CAP is unscientific and results quality deterioration, pilferage and theft at substantially higher rate.
- **Insufficient Storage:** The storage capacity of PDS foodgrains is

insufficient also. There is a wide gap between the required and existing storage capacity. The 11th five year plan has identified a gap of 16mt of storage capacity of foodgrains that needed to be created.

- **Excess Buffer Stock:** Under 'open ended procurement' government can't decide quantity it wants to buy. How much ever grains are offered by farmers to government, has to purchase. It results excess stocks than buffer norms which is always undesirable and wasteful. The storage of massive food stock has been responsible for high carrying costs, in addition to wastage and deterioration in grain quality. It also creates shortage of foodgrains in open market and food inflation.
- **Burden of Food Subsidy:** Ever increasing subsidy in PDS foodgrains has put a severe fiscal burden on the government. From Rs.650 crore in 1980-81 ,food subsidy rose to Rs.134834 crore in 2016-17 and further to Rs. 242834 crore in 2021-22. Food subsidy is the difference between the issue price and economic cost. The government has been reducing issue price to supply cheapest food grains to the poor. On the other hand, increasing MSP and storage cost results higher economic cost. The result is the hike in food subsidy and severe fiscal burden on the government.
- **MSP and Cropping Pattern:** Increasing MSP, on the one hand, leads to a burden on the government and on the other hand distorts the cropping pattern of the country. The farmers are more inclined to cultivate rice and wheat due to its increasing MSP. However, the consumption pattern has been changing towards non cereal foods, but no such corresponding growth in production. As a result there is demand supply mismatch and increased market price and higher cost of living of the people.
- **Problem of Identification:** The identification of BPL and APL families are based on income level of the households which is quite difficult to estimate in actual rate due to irregularity of income of the people working in informal and unorganized sectors. The deserving households most of the time excluded and it creates high exclusion errors. Moreover it becomes difficult to distinguish between BPL and AAY families and arise systematic inclusion error. Inclusion of non-poor with PDS ration card

creates high inclusion error.

The process of identification of APL and BPL families are carried out by Gram Panchayats and Gram Sabha. Political pressure and corruption of Gram Panchayats and Gram Sabha aggravates the problem of exclusion and inclusion error. Thus given the problem of conceptual as well as at operational level vulnerable population are unable to grab the benefits of PDS.

- **Malpractices by PDS Dealer:** The malpractices on the part of PDS dealers like diverting the grains to open market to get better margin, selling poor quality grains at ration shops, irregular opening of the shops etc. deteriorating the effective implementation of PDS and thereby unable to solve the problem of food and nutrition security in the country.
- **Lower Incentive to purchase to from PDS Shops:** The price differential between issue prices for APL families and the open market prices had considerably narrowed down. The low income families just above APL have to pay almost equal to open market rates. It lowers their incentives to buy from fair price shops. The average consumption of PDS grain at the all India level is very low. It also declines the profit of the fair price shop owner and creates a question of viability of fair price shops.

6.8 SUGGESTIVE MEASURES

There are lots of structural and implementation problem of PDS, but still it remains the best form of food security for the poor. To make the system more vibrant and effective and for full realization of its potentials, the PDS need reform. Some important reform measures are as follows.

- Identification of beneficiaries should be taken considering "exclusion approach". Instead of identifying the poor, it would be effective to identify the rich who are kept out and the rest are covered. It will increase coverage under rural areas.
- The error of inclusion of non-poor in PDS can be minimized by providing entitlements through employment generation programmes like

Jawahauar Rozgar Yojana (JRY) or Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA).

- The state government should issue food stamps or coupons to the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) so that they can distribute then to the poor. This would reduce the problem of diversion and leakages.
- Proper estimation of buffer stock requirements and storage capacity of the warehouses is essential to minimize and control the wastage of foodgrains that are to be allocated under PDS.
- Efficient management and regular monitoring can improve the functioning of the fair price shops removing inefficiency and corruption.



6.9 LET US SUM UP

- The government of India has been different measures to ensure the basic right of food security to the people.
- The PDS having lots of drawbacks are unable to ensure food security to the poor.
- The NFSA,2013 is an important step towards the right to food and to bring it within the framework of legally mandated entitlements.
- Different studies have shown that the risk of leakages and identification of beneficiaries problem still exist in NFSA, 2013.
- To ensure food security to the poor with wide coverage of PDS, it would be more appropriate to emphasize strategies, which reduce poverty and generate employment opportunities.



6.10 FURTHER READING

1) Datt, G and Mahajan, A. (2016). *Datt & Sundharam's Indian Economy.* New Delhi: S. Chand & Co.
2) Misra, S.K. & Puri, V.K. (2018). *Indian Economy.* New Delhi: Himalya Publishing House.
3) Sen, A. K. (1983). *Poverty and Famines: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation.* New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

6.11 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: (i) True (ii) False (iii) True

Ans to Q No 2: The group of people who are mainly food insecure belongs to people employed in ill-paid occupations, casual labourers, landless people, petty self-employed, workers and destitute including beggars, the people affected by natural disasters and most importantly the Women and Children.

Ans to Q No 3: Hunger and poverty is persistent in a food insecure economy. According to FAO estimates in "The State of Food Insecurity in the world, 2015" report 15.2 percent of Indian population is undernourished and 194.6 million people go hungry every day". Huger may be of two types- Seasonal Hunger and Chronic Hunger.

Seasonal Hunger is related to the cycles of food security and insecurity. Seasonal hunger is a type of hunger when a person doesn't get proper food neither in terms of quantity nor in terms of quality for some time during the year. On the other hand, Chronic Hunger is a consequence of diets persistently inadequate in terms of quantity and/ or quality. Poorer sections of the society suffer from chronic hunger because of their very low income and in turn inability to buy food even for their survival .

Ans to Q No 4. The Food Corporation of India(FCI) is the major agency to run the network of PDS . FCI procures foodgrains, specially wheat and rice from the farmers immediately after the harvesting of these crops. The stocks of these grains are released through the Fair Price Shop to distribute among the poorer section of the society. FCI was established in the year 1965.

Ans to Q No 5. Minimum Support Price is the price fixed by the Govt. of India (before crop sowing) to protect the producer-farmers against excessive fall in price during bumper production years. The issue price is the one at which goods are released from FCI. The difference between MSP and CIP is known as Subsidy.

Ans to Q No 6: Ration cards issued under PDS are of three types-

(i) Below Poverty Line (BPL)

(ii) Above Poverty Line (APL)

(iii) Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY)

6.12 MODEL QUESTIONS

Short Questions (Answer each question in about 150 words)

Q 1: Discuss the problem of food security in India.

Q 2: Write a short note on the working of PDS in India.

Q 3: Explain the salient features of NFSA,2013

Q 4: Write short notes

a) Minimum Support Price

b) TPDS

c) Hunger and Malnutrition

Essay-type Questions (Answer each question in about 300-500 words)

Q 1: What is Food Security? Discuss different dimensions of food security.

Q 2: Illustrate the working of PDS. Discuss its limitations and suggest some important strategies for its improvement.

Q 3: "PDS is the largest food based safety net introduced by the Government of India"

Evaluate this statement considering the impact of PDS on poverty in India.

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