

Date: 28.05.09

To
The Commissioner
Food, Civil Supplies & Consumer Affairs
8, Cunningham Road
Bangalore - 560058

Dear Sir,

Sub: Our suggestions regarding awareness creation on PDS and formation of fresh Vigilance Committees for PDS shops

The Public Distribution System is a very meaningful programme of the Indian Government. It ensures the right to food security of all BPL families and poorer sections. However, CIVIC has been sharing some challenges plaguing the system, and also some suggested solutions, with your department over the past year.

As we all know, the only way to solve the problem of poor services to the public is to enable effective public participation. The Vigilance Committee is one avenue for the beneficiaries of the PDS to participate in its functioning. We understand that an announcement has been made for re-constituting the Vigilance Committees in the month of May for a period of one year. We wish to suggest that a democratic and transparent process needs to be followed in the formation of these committees. Otherwise, this could result in the improper functioning and deactivation of the committees.

1 Awareness creation on PDS and formation of Vigilance Committees

There should be a massive awareness building exercise on the PDS and the vigilance committees before initiating the process of formation of these committees so that people are aware of their rights under the PDS and the duties and functioning of these committees. We suggest the following measures:

- **Grahakara Jagruthi Maasa:** One month in the year, before the formation of the vigilance committees, should be celebrated as “Grahakara Jagruthi Maasa” to educate the public through electronic and print media on the rights of every cardholder under the PDS and the duties and functions of the vigilance committees, the dates and functioning of the Adalaths, etc. **The Commissioner can appear on every TV and radio channel in half-hour discussions, along with civil society organizations that have worked on PDS.**
- **IEC material:** Citizen-friendly booklets in FAQ format may be prepared with complete information on the functioning of the PDS. (Sample provided herewith

- by C-FAR). These may be distributed to each vigilance committee after their formation. Leaflets, for distribution to every card-holder, summarizing the salient points of the PDS also need to be printed.
- **Announcement of awareness workshops:** During the Grahakara Jagruthi Maasa, and well before the date for the formation of the vigilance committees, announcements should be made in all electronic and print media that workshops will be held, of all card-holders of every PDS shop across the State, to inform card-holders about the functioning of the PDS and vigilance committees and to select the vigilance committee members. (If not possible to do for every shop, ward-wise or zone-wise meetings could be thought of.)
 - **Individual notices:** The PDS shop-owner should announce the date, time and venue of the awareness workshop by pasting a notice at his shop. Individual leaflets should also be distributed to every card-holder, giving notice of the date, time and venue of the meeting. **Proof of having distributed the leaflets to every card-holder may be obtained by taking signatures of the card-holders in a register for having received the leaflet.**
 - **Content of the workshop:** At the workshop, Grahakara Hakkugalu, the functioning of the PDS, the entitlements of card-holders, roles and responsibilities of Vigilance Committees and details of monthly Adalaths at the district level should be conveyed. **Resource persons for conducting the workshops can be drawn from civil society organizations working on the PDS.**
 - **Location of the meeting:** The shop-level meeting can be held at a suitable location, such as a government school, near each shop. If being conducted at the ward or zonal level, it may be conducted at the ward or zonal office, a community hall or any other suitable location..
 - **Selection of the Vigilance Committee members:** At the end of the meeting, Vigilance Committee members could be selected from among the card-holders by a process of nomination and vote, or lottery or hand vote. Alternatively, **applications can be called for earlier from card-holders willing to serve on the vigilance committees and names chosen by the participants at the meeting, or picked through lottery, at the end of the meeting.**
 - **Regular monthly meetings of VCs:** A regular day every month could be fixed for the Vigilance Committee meetings for each shop at the meeting.
 - **Participation of civil society:** Local NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations) could also be invited for the meetings.

2 Composition of Vigilance Committees

The composition of Vigilance Committees is presently based on certain categories. But it is felt that it needs to be on the basis of type of cardholders, such as:

	Current	Suggested
SC/ST -	1/1	1/1 (1 BPL & 1 Anthyodaya/Annapoorna)
OBC -	2	2 (1 BPL & 1 Anthyodaya /Annapoorna)
Gen -	1	1 (APL)
Elected representative	1	1 ward committee member of area (we suggest non-inclusion of elected representative)
SHG	1	1
NGO	0	1

Except for the ward committee member of the area, all other members could be women – as it is invariably their responsibility to get the ration from the shop.

3 Activities of Vigilance Committees

- Fix a specific day and place for the Vigilance Committee meeting every month for each shop, to coincide as far as possible with the visit of the Food Inspector to that shop.
- The Food Inspector should be available at the meeting, as far as possible, to take note of grievances and provide answers/remedies on the spot.
- Notice of the meeting should be affixed one week earlier at every PDS shop.
- Vigilance Committees should call for grievances (as far as possible) in writing before the meeting.
- Some time should be set apart for oral representations by card-holders also during the meeting.
- The minutes of the Vigilance Committee meeting should be recorded and the book kept open for scrutiny at the PDS shop by any card-holder.
- If any malpractices by the shop-owner come to light, the Vigilance Committee should have power to fine him and also recommend cancellation of his license.
- Vigilance Committees should have power to suggest issuance of a new ration card to anyone found eligible, or cancellation, if found to be ineligible.
- Problems unresolved by the Food Inspector should be escalated to the District Grievance Redressal Committee by the Vigilance Committee.
- Vigilance Committees should provide quarterly or six-monthly report to card-holders on their activities at a mandatory meeting of all card-holders.
- Card-holders should have the power to remove, by majority hand vote, any vigilance committee member who does not attend three consecutive meetings or is found abusing the system, or in whom they have no confidence.

We hope you will respond to us on the acceptance /non-acceptance of these suggestions.

Yours sincerely,

Project Coordinator for PDS
CIVIC

Programme Coordinator
C-FAR