

**Minutes of the meeting on the PDS
held on 30th October 2008
at the chambers of the Chief Secretary, Vidhana Soudha
Between 5.30PM and 8PM**

Members present:

1. Sri Sudhakar Rao, Chief Secretary
2. Sri K.M. Shivakumar, Principal Secretary, FCS&CA
3. Smt. Lakshmi Venkatachalam, Principal Secretary, Planning
4. Sri K. Shivaram, Commissioner, FCS&CA
5. Sri Azizuddin Hafeez, Deputy Director, FCS&CA
6. Sri Boregowda, Commissioner, Karnataka Slum Clearance Board
7. Smt. Sudha, Project Coordinator, Centre for Advocacy and Research (CFAR)
8. Sri K.C. Venkatesh , Right to Food Campaign-Karnataka &Trustee, Paraspara
9. Smt. B. Mamatha, Right to Food Campaign-Karnataka
10. Smt. Kathyayini Chamaraj, Executive Trustee, CIVIC
11. Sri M.P. Harish Kumar, Programme Coordinator, CIVIC

Background to the meeting:

CFAR (Centre for Advocacy and Research) is a non-profit organization committed to advocacy on the rights of marginalized populations. This includes urban and rural poor, HIV positive people, people with disability, women in sex work, sexual minorities.

Formally established in 1998, CFAR has over the last decade and a half built a rich resource of primary evidence from the field, testimonies from the community, field-based surveys and documentation of best practices around empowerment of marginal communities. CFAR's attempt has been to empower the less privileged sections of society and enable them to work in partnership with all concerned stakeholders and institutions responsible for administering their basic entitlements and rights.

CIVIC Bangalore is also a not-for-profit NGO working in Bangalore since 1992 to realize the implementation of the 74th Constitutional Amendment in its true spirit. It is also working through a network of NGOs to empower the urban poor on using Right to Information to access their basic rights. CIVIC has been working on the issue of the PDS in Bangalore with the urban poor extensively, coordinating with the department in conducting grievance redressal melas in slum areas and has conducted a survey on efficiency/effectiveness of PDS system in four wards.

Several city and state-level consultations and public hearings have been organized by CFAR, CIVIC and Right to Food Campaign– Karnataka with the support of the following:

- Officials of the FCS&CA department, Mr. Shivappa, then Addl. Commissioner, Mr. Hafeez, Dy. Director (Hqs.), and all the Bangalore city zonal Deputy Directors.
- The national advisor to the Supreme Court-appointed Commissioners in the Right to Food case, Mr. Biraj Patnaik
- The state advisor to the Supreme Court-appointed Commissioners in the Right to Food case, Sri S. R. Hiremath
- Conveners of the State-wide Right to Food Campaign – Karnataka, Mr. Praveen, Mr. Roopa Naik and NGOs affiliated to it.
- Members of NGO Forum of Bangalore City working with the urban poor
- Members of All-India Democratic Women’s Association (AIDWA), Stree Jagruthi Samiti, trade unions, consumer rights activists, academicians and concerned citizens

The workshops discussed grievances of slum-dwellers, survey findings of CIVIC and CFAR in a few wards of Bangalore city, and the challenges faced by the people and the PDS system in the background of the Supreme Court orders in the Right to Food case. The members ultimately came up with a “Citizens’ Charter” incorporating suggestions/requests to improve the system.

A request was made to the Chief Secretary for an opportunity to present the survey findings and suggestions. The Chief Secretary responded to the request and provided us an opportunity to make a formal presentation on the issue on 30th October, 2008

The organizations herewith record their gratitude and appreciation for the speedy manner in which an appointment was given, the patient and undisturbed hearing that was given to the presentation and the constructive discussion that took place with all concerned officials, lasting for more than two hours.

Presentation/Discussion/Decisions:

The field-level findings were briefly presented and discussions were broadly based on policy matters and governance issues affecting the PDS system. The following decisions were taken.

Sl. No.	Discussion point	Discussion	Decision
Policy issues			
1.	Income criteria for selection of the BPL families are illogical.	The income criteria of Rs.12,000 and Rs.17,000 per year per family for identifying BPL families in rural and urban areas respectively are too low. This works out to about Rs. 47 per day per household or Rs. 10 per person in Bangalore city on which no one can survive. It also means that a family has to earn about half the prescribed minimum wage of Rs. 84 (which itself is less than subsistence wage) to qualify as BPL. Strictly, all those earning less than the minimum wage should be considered as BPL.	The Chief Secretary would consider and look into the issue.

		The Principal Secretary, FCS&CA said that the issues of minimum wage and setting of BPL level were different and could not be looked at together.	
2.	Current proxy criteria are exclusionary; they need to be inclusive.	Many true BPL families are left out of the system. The present set of proxy indicators is exclusionary. Positive and inclusive criteria need to be used. In Delhi, spatial vulnerability, i.e., living in an under-privileged area, social vulnerability, such as woman-headed household, and occupational vulnerability, such as rag-picking, daily and casual wage-labour, etc., are the criteria being used to identify the poor.	The Chief Secretary would consider and look into the issue
3.	Planning Commission % of poor in Karnataka differs from state figures	The Planning Commission has set 31 lakh households as cut-off figure for the number of BPL families in Karnataka, which runs counter to the number of BPL families identified by the department, which is close to 82 lakhs. There is a need to advocate with the Planning Commission to let States decide on the number of poor as per the findings of their door-to-door surveys. The identification and announcement of BPL families could all be done transparently in formal platforms such as Gram/Ward Sabhas. The Principal Secretary, FCS&CA, stated that there are vested interests at work trying to increase the numbers of BPL cards at the expense of the government and this needs to be curbed.	The Chief Secretary to look into this.
4.	Need for universalizing the PDS	There is a need to universalize the PDS so that the poor get self-selected as in the NREGA. The cost of trying to identify who is genuinely poor and who is not and trying to prevent misuse is itself large. In TN it is universal and State governments in AP and TN are providing a subsidy of more than Rs. 2,000 crores for the PDS. Karnataka is currently giving only Rs. 800 crore and this could be raised to the level of other Southern states. This is necessary considering the high levels of malnutrition in the State. Secretary, Planning, said that self-selection by the poor was being tried out in many places. But running community feeding centers where anyone could go and eat could be another option.	The Chief Secretary would consider this.
5.	Need for single database on BPL to be commonly shared by all departments	There are multiple schemes for the BPL with different departments. Various departments conduct separate surveys to identify BPL, which is a waste of public funds. Each dept. has different sets of criteria for identifying BPL and different lists of identified families. There is a need for having a single	The Chief Secretary would consider and look into the issue.

		survey, a single set of criteria and a common data-base of BPL families to be shared by all the departments, including the FCS&CA. There is a need for a single unified card with all the data which can be used for different schemes of different departments.	
6.	Need for Urban Poverty Alleviation (UPA) Authority in the Urban Development Department and UPA Cell in ULBs	<p>There is a multiplicity of government departments and organizations dealing with the urban poor issues and hence difficulty in ensuring coordination.</p> <p>There is a need to bring all urban poverty alleviation schemes and programmes under a single umbrella. In fact, the guidelines of SJSRY require an Urban Poverty Alleviation Authority to be set up within the Urban Development Department at Secretariat level and an Urban Poverty Alleviation Cell in ULBs to bring the issue into focus and ensure coordination.</p>	The Chief Secretary to look into the possibility of creating these.
7.	Lack of decentralized institutional mechanism in urban areas to monitor PDS and need for devolving food security as a function of ULBs.	While monitoring PDS is a function of the PRIs and there is a food security committee at GP levels in the rural areas, there is none at the municipal or ward level in the urban areas. Ensuring food security is, in fact, not even one of the functions of municipalities. There is a need to devolve functions related to fulfillment of basic needs of citizens, such as PDS, to ULBs, and set up institutions at ward level to ensure food security in urban areas.	The Chief Secretary requested the Principal Secretary to see how this lacuna could be addressed in the urban areas.
8.	Financial unviability of the private PDS shops	<p>It was found during the survey that running a shop by the book is highly unprofitable and hence the shop-owner is forced to engage in malpractices.</p> <p>The Principal Secretary pointed out that 11,000 out of 21,000 shops are government-owned. FCI-run shops are doing well. He also brought to notice that all the shops in Tamil Nadu are government-owned, which are doing very well.</p> <p>Principal Secretary, Planning, stated that there was a need to rationalize the number of shops and perhaps reduce them to one per ward to make them viable. More than that, the shops needed to be bigger and adopt better retail practices.</p> <p>Other officials stated that currently there is one shop for about 400 cards and reducing the number may result in longer queues, and greater inconvenience to citizens, etc.</p>	The Chief Secretary opined that the state could consider taking over the system and will look into the matter.

Governance Issues			
9.	Citizens' Charter info to be made available to every household and suo motu information of FCS&CA dept. under Section 4.1.b of RTI to be in public domain	<p>Currently people are unaware of their entitlements under the FCS&CA Citizens' Charter. There is also severe lack of information on the members of the vigilance committees and their functioning and about the grievance redressal programmes conducted at district-levels on alternate Saturdays. There is a need to provide information pamphlets on the Citizens' Charter - the schemes, criteria, procedures, entitlements, grievance redressal mechanisms and ways to access them – to all the one crore twenty five lakh households in Karnataka. The information pamphlets could be placed in each shop for everyone to access. Alternatively, the Information Department could be asked to do this along with a mass media campaign.</p> <p>The Commissioner, FCS&CA, opined that officials were always forthcoming with information and there was no need for citizens to resort to the use of RTI to get information.</p>	The department has initiated a helpline 729 to help the common man. It would take necessary steps to place all the required information in the public domain.
10.	Selection of vigilance committee members	Currently, the PDS shop-owner is mostly selecting the members of the vigilance committee from among persons who are likely to favour him in various ways. It would be better to identify the members at a grama sabha meeting in rural areas. A mechanism for a similar process in urban areas needs to be evolved.	The Principal Secretary to look into the possibility of evolving this system.
11.	Display board at the Fair Price Shops (FPS)	It is observed that crucial information like the list of vigilance committee members, name and phone number of the Food Inspector, Supreme Court rulings which are to be mandatory displayed at every shop, government school and ward/GP office was found missing in most of the shops.	The Chief Secretary and the department officials have asked CIVIC and CFAR to develop a model display board. The department would issue a circular instructing all the shops to display this board.
12.	Irregular opening of shops and distribution of grain in FPS	During the survey it was found that most of the distribution happens in the second half of every month. Some said kerosene is distributed at 3 AM. Some shops were found closed all the time. Some customers said shops open only once or twice in a month causing long queues/waiting period. Also, when citizens have money at the beginning of the month, there is no	The department shall take all necessary steps to keep the shops open as per the rules. It was also suggested by the officials to register complaints

		<p>grain in the shop, and when there is grain, they do not have money to buy it. This also goes against the Supreme Court ruling that everyone must get a chance to buy in at least six installments.</p> <p>Officials opined that the cost of 20 KG of grain was about Rs. 60 only and this amount was easily affordable even at the end of the month by the poor.</p>	<p>against the shops that were found closed on days other than Tuesdays.</p>
13.	Providing ration cards to migrant labourers	<p>The Principal Secretary, FCS&CA, observed that large numbers of migrant labourers are left out of the system, especially in cities like Bangalore. He pointed out that they are mostly engaged in construction work and can be found close/around big construction sites. There is a need to evolve a system of ration cards for migrants.</p>	<p>The Commissioner will take necessary steps to design this system and issue the same to migrants.</p>
14.	Fertile land not to be diverted for SEZs and other purposes. Land bank of wastelands to be created for this.	<p>Fertile land, often yielding two or more crops is being diverted for SEZs, roads or other industrial purposes when the per capita production and consumption of food grains is already going down in the country threatening food security. A land bank of wastelands should be created and earmarked for such non-agricultural purposes as is being done in some other States.</p>	<p>Chief Secretary to look into this possibility.</p>
15.	Child-headed households	<p>It was brought to the notice of the officers that when parents migrate, there are often child-headed households in rural areas. Such households may not be having a ration card as children cannot be given a ration card in their names. Even if they try to use their parents' card, they are often denied food grains when they approach the PDS shop, because either the parents are asked for or their names are not in the list if they are below twelve years.</p> <p>Officials opined that it was mostly children who fetched grains from ration shops and there should not be any problem in providing grain to them on their parents' cards.</p>	<p>The department will take necessary action to include and provide foodgrains to child-headed homes and children won't be denied ration.</p>
16.	Catering to local specific food needs	<p>It was suggested that since it would be difficult to change food habits native to places like north and south Karnataka, food grains of choice in those places could be made available.</p> <p>The Commissioner pointed that the process has already started with small scale procurement of Ragi and Maize.</p>	<p>The department will further the process.</p>

Reports submitted

CFAR submitted to the officials present:

- A Report of the State-Level Consultation on PDS held on 30th August 2008 and an executive summary on the same.
- A Report of the Public Hearing on PDS held on 31.05.2008 at Basappana Katte, and
- A letter requesting distribution of ration cards to those left out in Bangalore City (submitted earlier to Mr. Harsh Mander, Delhi and Additional Commissioner to the Food and Civil Supplies Department, Karnataka)