

Household Food Security with BPL ration card holders - Issues and Challenges in Karnataka

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Abstract

India holds a historical tradition where its economy was highly influenced by agriculture and animal husbandry for sustenance and livelihood, but the current scenario paints a different picture. Today, India is limiting its agricultural resources from land, plant varieties, and other biological resources focusing more on improvising the non-agricultural establishments in and around the rural and forest areas. This causes a grave need to focus on the food security issue where the Right to Food is a guaranteed Human Right and Fundamental Right as interpreted under Article 21 of The Constitution of India and International Conventions. While the availability of food to all people is one concern, the food produced going to waste is another concern in combating food insecurity. A major section of India's population still lives below the poverty line (BPL). Undernourishment and hunger deaths hold attention and priority in the Indian political system. The Right to Food is a Union's concern. If one looks at the India State Hunger index specifically in the state of Karnataka, it is an alarming concern as it stands at 23.73. This research paper aims to spotlight the key issues and challenges of combating malnutrition and household food security among BPL ration card holders in Karnataka, where 61.33 percent reside in rural areas and 38.67 percent in urban areas. The research paper also proposes to focus on analyzing the lacunae and the need for the administration to foster household food security in concernment to human rights and public health. As 'poverty breeds poverty,' Household Food Security is an effort to combat poverty.

Keywords: Food security, Human Rights, Food insecurity, Right to Food, Household Food Security, Below Poverty Line

Introduction:

Food and a healthy diet are fundamental human requirements, and eradicating extreme poverty and hunger is a United Nations (UN) Millennium Development Goal (MDG).³ UN Sustainable

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³ UN, "2013: MDG Acceleration and Beyond 2015"

<https://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/bkgd.shtml#:~:text=The%20Millennium%20Development%20Goals%20set,environmental%20sustainability%20%E2%80%94%20can%20be%20measured.> Last Visited: Jan 30th, 2023.

Development Goals 2030⁴ has initiated steps as well as approaches to focus on the food insecurity issues faced worldwide, and India is no exception. Article 21 of The Constitution of India⁵ had been interpreted as the right to food as a fundamental right and the human right to live life with dignity, while Article 39(a)⁶ and Article 47⁷ focus on raising the level of nutrition for sustenance to meet the daily nutritional requirements of every citizen.

Food Security measures the availability of food, its physical and economic accessibility, and acceptability by all people. to all people. It assures food safety and provides optimal nutrition to all people at all times as a human rights concern. The Human Rights approach to combat food security focuses on the people's life and liberty irrespective of any human being's economic status.⁸ Dating back to the 1940s post World War II, with famine in some parts of Europe, the FAO wanted to attain "*freedom from want about food and agriculture*" and a secured sufficient supply of food for every human being. In the late 1950s and 1960s FAO focused predominantly on increasing the productivity and marketing of the major staples, wheat, and rice.⁹

Food security at the household level depends on purchasing power and income. Small and marginal farmers are obliged to sell a portion of their crop in order to pay for needs like utensils, clothing, health care, education, and social responsibilities since land reforms have failed to shift excess land from landowners to landless laborers. The government offers subsidies for irrigation and fertilizers, loans for farming, and minimum support prices for foodgrains, pulses, oilseeds, and cash crops; however, 25% of Indians experience food insecurity and undernourishment because of insufficient MSPs and discrimination against women, children, the elderly, the disabled, widows, and wives of non-earning males.

Another nutritional component of household food security is absorption, which is related to underweight children, stunted development, illnesses brought on by malnutrition, and illness that causes early mortality.

⁴ UN, "*The 17 Goals- Sustainable Development Goals 2030*", (2015). <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>. Last Visited: Jan 30, 2023.

⁵ INDIA CONST. art. 21.

⁶ INDIA CONST. art. 39(a).

⁷ INDIA CONST. art. 47.

⁸ FAO, Committee on World food security, 2012

⁹ Jacob Darwin Hamblin, "*The Vulnerability of Nations: Food Security in the Aftermath of World War II*", (2012) GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT: A JRNAL. OF TRANSDISCIPLINARY HISTORY. 5(10):42-65. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/305299080_The_Vulnerability_of_Nations_Food_Security_in_the_Aftermath_of_World_War_II. Last Visited: Jan 30, 2023.

Positive trends are with the influences of the Indian judiciary on the advancements of food security in combating and addressing eradicating hunger of those who fall below the poverty lines. India did play an extensive role in producing surplus food through the Green and White Revolution in a situation post-Independence when India had to import food grains from the USA and other developed countries due to an acute shortage. India is constantly working on the slogan “*Jai Jawan and Jai Kisan*” since its inception by former Prime Minister Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri,¹⁰ but the hunger rate is higher in India compared to other countries.¹¹

Although the most visible indicator of hunger is a lack of food intake, undernutrition and stunting make our population vulnerable to diseases and death. Mortality is the most severe symptom of ongoing hunger and malnutrition. Malnutrition in women during pregnancy results in foetal malnutrition and low-birth babies. While childhood malnutrition will hamper their education. Increasing dropout rates, poor performance in classes, and frequent absenteeism would be a threat and have a significant impact on the next generation’s public health.¹²

Global Hunger Index:

The International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) developed the Global Hunger Index (GHI) in 2006¹³ to quantify three interconnected dimensions of hunger: inadequate consumption, child underweight, and child mortality and monitor progress in the fight against hunger and facilitating widespread discourse on its causes and effects. The index has been a successful campaigning tool that has raised awareness of national and global hunger in policy talks, especially in developing countries. Particularly, for nations like India, the ranking 107th of countries based on their index scores has been an effective method for bringing attention to hunger.

The Global Hunger Index and the India State Hunger Index have the same fundamental metrics. These variables include the proportion of people who don't consume enough calories, the proportion of overweight children under the age of five, and the mortality rate for children

¹⁰ Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare, "*Achieving Aatmanirbharta in Agriculture*", Press Information Bureau, <https://pib.gov.in/FeaturesDeatils.aspx?NoteId=151185&ModuleId%20=%202>. Last Visited: Jan 30, 2023.

¹¹ *Id.* 7.

¹² Ramakrishnan, U, "*Nutrition and low birth weight: from research to practice*", THE AMERICAN JRNL. OF CLINICAL NUTRITION, 79(1), 17-21. (2004).

¹³ IFPRI, "*The Challenge of Hunger*" 2006, <https://www.globalhungerindex.org/pdf/en/2006.pdf>. Last Visited: Jan 30, 2023.

under five, which is the proportion of children who are born alive but die before they reach the age of five.¹⁴

One of the key initiatives in India to combat poverty is the Public Distribution System (PDS). This programme is extremely beneficial to the underprivileged in India. There are still a lot of individuals who are living in poverty. In India, the PDS has significantly improved household food security; before guaranteeing that everyone has access to food and nutrition, concentrating on establishing food security for all houses can be a better focus. Unemployment and a lack of assets are the root causes of poverty because poverty breeds poverty, which is at the heart of efforts to combat poverty in every state of India.

Even though the central government has focused on hunger and undernourishment, India's states are crucial to implementing development initiatives. By dissecting the hunger index at the state level, it is possible to raise awareness of the levels of hunger in the states and the variations among them. The Central government is continuously trying to cope with the hunger index by providing different ration cards, an official document provided by the relevant state governments is a ration card. Using the card, qualified households can purchase food grains at discounted prices under the National Food Security Act (NFSA) through the Public Distribution Systems at Fair Price Shops.¹⁵

Public Distribution System in Karnataka:

70 million people are living in Karnataka¹⁶, of which 13 million, or slightly more than one-fifth, are impoverished and below the poverty line. The state has continuously sought to reduce poverty since 1994, however, after 2005, this effort slowed down. After 2005, Karnataka's development, which was primarily influenced by services and significant improvement in

¹⁴ PURNIMA MENON ET AL., INDIA STATE HUNGER INDEX - COMPARISONS OF HUNGER ACROSS STATES (2008)

¹⁵ Karnataka Evaluation Authority, "*Evaluation of National Food Security Mission Scheme in Karnataka*", 2017 <https://kmea.karnataka.gov.in/storage/pdf-files/Reports%20and%20other%20docs/NFSM%20Eng.pdf>. Last Visited Feb. 12, 2023

¹⁶ Karnataka Population | Sex Ratio | Literacy <https://www.census2011.co.in/census/state/karnataka.html#:~:text=Total%20population%20of%20Karnataka%20as,are%2030%2C966%2C657%20and%2030%2C128%2C640%20respectively>. Last Visited: Jan 30, 2023.

better access to drinking water, electricity, sanitation, and cooking fuel, lagged-behind consumption inequality in the country.¹⁷

The Karnataka Essential Commodities Public Distribution System (Control) Order 2016 establishes a minimum number of ration cards at each site to protect the financial sustainability of fair-pricing businesses in rural and urban regions. Additionally, nine mobile FPS are run by the Karnataka Food and Civil Supplies Corporation in the hilly areas of Dakshina Kannada, Kodagu, Raichur, Mysore, and Chamarajanagar. There are now 19938 FPSs operating in the State as of November 2020.

The state of Karnataka declared a farmer-centric agricultural policy in its budget for 2006–2007 intending to boost agricultural growth by utilizing the "*Pancha Sutra*" concept.¹⁸

The Pancha Sutra's five components are:

1. The protection of natural resources, with an emphasis on water and micro irrigation,
2. The enhancement of soil health,
3. The prompt delivery of financial assistance and other inputs to farmers,
4. To reduce the "Lab to Land" technology transmission distance, and
5. To include post-harvest processing in the production process.

In 2013, the Karnataka government launched the Anna Bhagya Yojana Scheme, a redesigned food distribution scheme, while the Indian government passed the National Food Security Act (NFSA) as a part of the targeted PDS. The scheme's primary goals are to eradicate hunger in Karnataka and provide underprivileged households with reliable access to food. The PDS unlike other states distributes rice, wheat, and kerosene oil through the Fair Price Shops (FPS) in Karnataka, where the distribution of sugar in FPS had been discontinued effect from April 2017. The State government of Karnataka tries to combat malnutrition by eradicating poverty under the Antyodaya Anna Yojana focusing on the Below Poverty Line segments of people.

¹⁷ The World Bank, "*Karnataka - Poverty, growth, and inequality*", <https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/document-detail/479831504091412309/Karnataka-poverty-growth-and-inequality#:~:text=Karnataka%20is%20home%20to%2061,reduction%20slowed%20down%20after%202005>. Last Visited: Jan 30, 2023.

¹⁸ Karnataka Evaluation Authority, "*Evaluation of National Food Security Mission Scheme in Karnataka*", 2017 <https://kmea.karnataka.gov.in/storage/pdf-files/Reports%20and%20other%20docs/NFSM%20Eng.pdf>. Last Visited Feb. 12, 2023.

In Karnataka, BPL households are currently those with a yearly income of less than Rs. 17000 in urban areas and Rs. 12000 in rural areas. Like other states, fair-price stores gave BPL, Above-Poverty Line (APL), and Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) recipients access to rice, wheat, sugar, and kerosene; the most recent data is shown for the years 2008 to 2015.

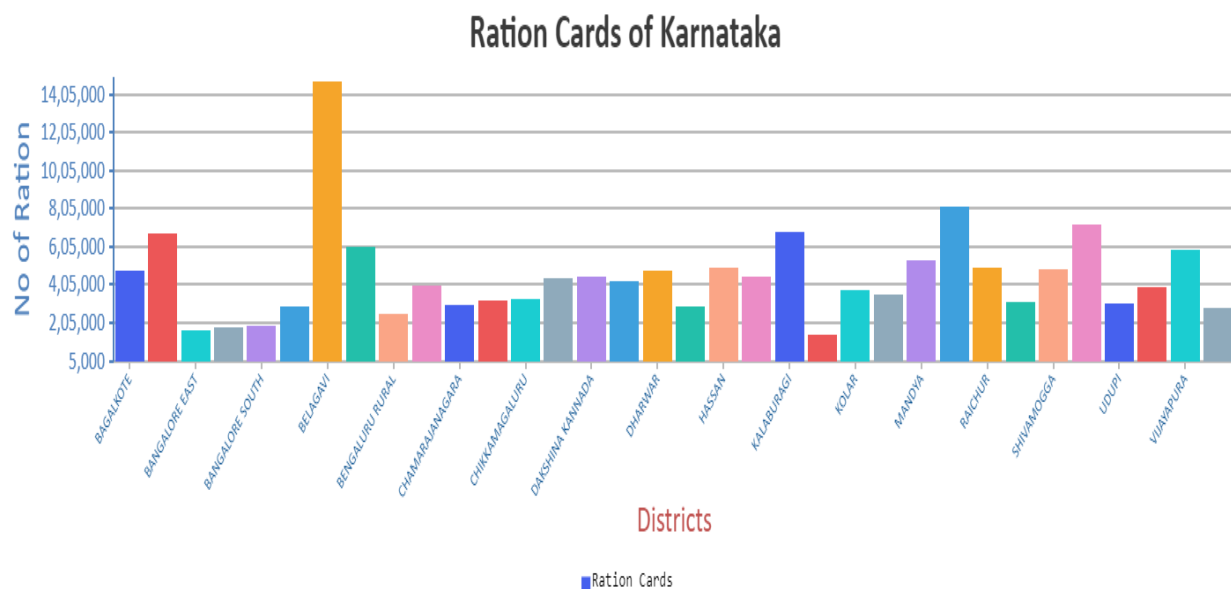
Currently, the Below Poverty Line (BPL) ration card is no longer issued in India, instead only Priority Household (PHH) ration card and Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) ration cards are issued under the National Food Security Act of 2013, in India.

Figure: 1 – TOTAL NUMBER OF RATION CARDS IN KARNATAKA as of date: Feb.18, 2023¹⁹

Total Cards	1,52,03,082
AAY Cards	10,90,854
PHH Cards	1,17,08,381
NPHH Cards	24,03,847

Source: Ration Card, Food, Civil Supplies & Consumer Affairs Department

Figure: 2 DISTRIBUTION OF RATION CARDS IN KARNATAKA as of date Feb.18, 2023.



Source: Ration Card, Food, Civil Supplies & Consumer Affairs Department - National Informatics Centre, Karnataka

¹⁹ Ration Card, Food, Civil Supplies & Consumer Affairs Department, <https://ahara1.kar.nic.in/FoodAnalytics/Home/RationCard> . Last Visited: Feb. 18, 2023.

Figure 1 and figure 2, data from Food, Civil Supplies & Consumer Affairs Department give us the status of the ration card holders in the state of Karnataka.

According to NFSA laws and the NFSA food grain allotment, food supplies are provided to Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) and Priority Household (PHH) families' houses. However, the State Government does provide a complimentary distribution of food grains. This initiative was one of the ambitious ones, providing food grains at low prices and with increased subsidies to the underprivileged. Additionally, the impoverished citizens of Karnataka have benefited more from this programme.²⁰ Fair-priced businesses supply food in compliance with the NFSA's requirements for quantity and quality. There are several ration card types covered by the NFSA, including:

i. Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY):

The state governments identify poor households that receive AAY ration cards for those with unstable income. People who fall under this group include the unemployed, women, and the elderly. 35 kg of food grains can be given to each cardholder's family each month. Rice, wheat, and coarse grains are provided to them at a discounted price of Rs. 3 per kg, Rs. 2, and Rs. 1, respectively.

ii. Priority Household (PHH):

PHH applies to families that are not qualified for AAY. The state governments choose priority home families for the Targeted Public Distribution System based on their exclusive and inclusive criteria (TPDS). PHH cardholders are entitled to 5 kg of food grains per month. Foodgrains can be purchased for a discounted price of Rs. 3 per kg for rice, Rs. 2 per kg for wheat, and Rs. 1 per kg for coarse grains cardholders.

The Karnataka state government also initiated Schemes to foster food security in the rural, and urban areas and below-poverty-line card holders. The Padithara Khatari Scheme programme was modified in 2018 to ensure that food grains are accessible at the beginning of the month and during the whole month. According to the strategy, Fair Price Shops must begin distributing PDS products on January 1st. The Fair Price Shops will be open every day between

²⁰ Government of India, Department of Food & Public Distribution, "*Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY)*". <https://dfpd.gov.in/pds-aay.htm>. Last Visited Feb 11, 2023.

7:00 AM and 12:00 PM and 4:00 PM and 8:00 PM, and on the first of the month, they will be closed (Except every Tuesday and State Government holidays).

Household Food Security issues in Karnataka:

The targeted PDS of the Central government in Karnataka provides food assistance to up to 4.28 crore people in about 1.19 households under the National Food Securities Act. Karnataka has the Integrated Management of PDS with a “*One Nation, One Ration Card System*” where inter-state portability services would then be made available to migratory workers from other states.²¹

Key issues in Household food security are:

i. Unavailability of BPL ration cards:

More than 1.6 lakhs eligible Karnataka citizens who are below the poverty line and were unable to obtain their ration cards in a timely way were not covered by the state's health insurance programme, Ayushman Bharat - Arogya Karokya (ABArK). Another issue amongst Household Food Security in BPL card holders is fraudulent and illegitimate BPL cards being obtained in Karnataka. Even though the authorities try to weed out and cancel more than 3 Lakhs bogus BPL cards which indirectly denied their free health care and medical aid of the State Government.²²

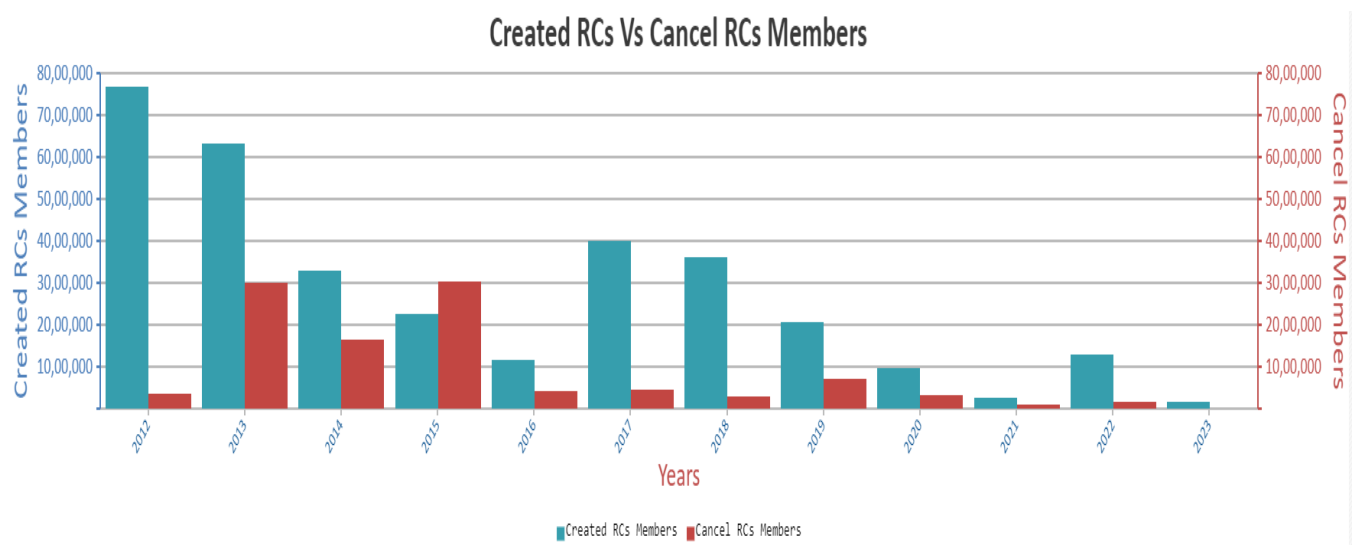
Food and Civil Service Department's data showed that eligible beneficiaries are denied their BPL ration cards due to ineligible people acquiring BPL ration cards. The Food and Civil Services Department is trying to work on the issues and proposed to issue BPL ration cards after scrutiny. This indirectly affects the food intake and nutritional well-being of the below-poverty-line people in Karnataka.²³

²¹ LiveMint "*One nation, one ration card' scheme: 5 more states join the initiative*", 01 May 2020, 05:02 PM IST. <https://www.livemint.com/news/india/-one-nation-one-ration-card-scheme-5-more-states-join-the-initiative-11588331166781.html>. Last Visited Feb 12, 2023.

²² Times of India, "*Karnataka: 1.6 lakh waiting for ration cards for two years, miss health insurance*", Pearl D'souza / TNN / Nov 17, 2022, 08:30 IST. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/bengaluru/karnataka-1-6-lakh-waiting-for-ration-cards-for-two-years-miss-health-insurance/articleshow/95568853.cms> Last Visited Feb 13, 2023.

²³ The New Indian Express, "*Over 91k ration cards cancelled, dept cuts out wealthy, landholders*", 02nd July 2021 06:38 AM. <https://www.newindianexpress.com/cities/bengaluru/2021/jul/02/over-91k-ration-cards-cancelleddept-cuts-out-wealthy-landholders-2324297.html>. Last Visited Feb 12, 2023.

Karnataka State Food, Civil Supplies & Consumer Affairs Department has also initiated the cancellation of the ration cards that are obtained in illegal ways and for those who are well-settled with adequate resources for their sustenance. This is one way of a positive implementation but at times the real needy are at stake who would have to wait for their ration cards from the state government. Figure: 3 below would show the data on the ration cards that are created and cancelled by the Karnataka State Government as on Feb.18, 2023²⁴.



Source: *National Informatics Centre, Karnataka*

ii. Household food security in rural areas:

In rural areas the families that have access to irrigation systems also do horticulture. In rainfed areas, the principal crops are ragi, jowar, and horse gram; Nigerian, castor, and cowpea are examples of secondary crops. The cultivators have access to land via either ownership or lease. As a result, they can directly acquire food through sharecropping, rent in kind, their farm production, or a combination of all three. The non-cultivators must labour to support themselves or own and operate successful non-agricultural enterprises. Even though the food security in rural areas is comparatively better than the urban BPL ration card holders for food

²⁴ Food, Civil Supplies & Consumer Affairs Department, <https://ahara1.kar.nic.in/FoodAnalytics/Home/ActiveVSCancelRCsMember> Last Visited Feb.18, 2023.

and nutrition, marginal farmers must rely on the free market, which would affect their consumption levels based on their income and the market price of the food.²⁵

iii. Reduction of Food loss and food wastage can improve the nutritional status:

Food waste rots in landfills, where it produces methane, a greenhouse gas that accelerates climate change and creates health hazards. Many agrochemicals are used to promote better growth and bigger yields, and many petrochemicals are used for tillage and transportation even though the production of food nowadays requires a lot of work. Municipal Solid Waste generated in Karnataka is estimated at 0.57 tonnes per day, reducing the same is the need of the hour concern. Food wastage has a direct impact on the economy and environment, as it requires more land, labour, capital, and organization to produce food.²⁶ Food loss and food wastage can be reduced to a great extent by opening food banks in nearby below-poverty-line areas with proper storage facilities for the benefit of the needy. State government and the public can initiate the donation of surplus production of food rather than going to the landfill as waste can be distributed to the needy and poor for a very minimal to free of cost to enhance their nutritional needs from public health and humanitarian perspectives.

Conclusion and Recommendations:

Despite doing considerably better than certain North Indian states and their South Indian neighbours, not everyone in Karnataka has reaped the benefits of affluence. The disparity between the districts in the south and Karnataka is widening, according to the most recent information from the National Multidimensional Poverty Index. They emphasized the need for additional financing and attention in undeveloped areas. Karnataka stands fourth place among the five in the South, despite improvements in several categories during the preceding five years.²⁷

²⁵ Ananth S. Panth, "Social Networks and Food Security in Rural Karnataka", ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL WEEKLY, Vol. 32, No. 15 (Apr. 12-18, 1997), pp. 756-758. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4405280> . Last Visited Feb. 12, 2023.

²⁶ Deccan Herald, "Food waste harms climate, drains natural resources." Jul 07 2019, 00:24 ist. <https://www.deccanherald.com/specials/insight/food-waste-harms-climate-drains-natural-resources-745550.html> Last Visited Feb.12, 2023

²⁷ New Indian Express, "Karnataka stands last in South in poverty index: Report", Dated: Dec. 6, 2021. <https://www.newindianexpress.com/states/karnataka/2021/dec/06/karnataka-stands-last-in-south-in-poverty-index-report-2392306.html>. Last visited: Jan 30, 2023.

The government must concentrate on the precise population, their access to food, and the conditions of those who live in poverty (BPL). At the same time, the state government and the people who are not poor should not receive the benefits that are meant for the needy and the poverty line. By enhancing interstate transit and stockpiling, food prices can be decreased, and accessibility can be increased. Corruption must be eradicated, and the Public Distribution System (PDS) should be made transparent.

The Government holds responsibility for balancing food security amongst the poorest of the poor, the initiatives and policies still mandate an effective implementation strategy for the betterment of social welfare. Along with the Government initiatives, the public also holds equal responsibility and should contribute towards providing food and nutrition and ensuring food security to all the sectors of people from public health to humanitarian needs of the BPL ration card holders of Karnataka and all other parts of India.

Recommendations:

- i. All cardholders must be made aware of their rights. Ration cards ought to be governed by definite rules.
- ii. For better storage of food grains, the State Government must construct more storage facilities so that goods may be kept there for a long time.
- iii. Vigilance committees should conduct periodic raids on FPSs.
- iv. Social media platforms can raise awareness, motivate illiterate people, and explain the advantages of PDS.
- v. The Karnataka government needs to make sure that PDS exclusively benefits the most vulnerable members of society.
- vi. Governmental and non-governmental entities can organize a campaign that involves all stakeholders and educate the general population on the socio-economic and environmental impact of food waste which can otherwise be uplifting the nutritional and other needs of the below-poverty line households to eradicate poverty in not just Karnataka but from India.