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STATE LEVEL FOOD VIGILANCE NON OFFICIAL MEMBERS NEED TO BE PAID TA DA "EQUIVALENT TO SECRETARY" FOR MEETINGS AND INSPECTIONS



By: M.S.Yatnatti: Editor and Video Journalist Bengaluru: Reportedly Not paying salaries and allowances perks TA DA for meetings and inspections leads to suspected corruption and dereliction in duties .Demands have been made to Mr Zameer Ahmad Minister for food to issue government order to pay members of state level food vigilance committee who are public servants salary and allowances perks TA DA for meetings and inspections and provide sufficient administrative and technical and support staff and provide Government accommodation and government vehicle as equivalent to that of secretary to the Government of Karnataka as these non-official members need to implement NFSA and listen people grievances and solve them and visit every district and monitor the all government schemes under NFSA and this vigilance committee is not a enterprise or public limited company to treat them as commercial directors . Karnataka government has reportedly nominated five non official persons for state level food vigilance committee and four non-officials from zone levels as per the rules and one from NGO totaling 10 members .But these members are reportedly not remunerated and given perks though budgetary provisions are made for it. They should also get equivalent salaries and allowances as that of MLA or secretary to the Government as they get salary.

Section 29 of the NFSA, 2013 provides for State Governments to set up VCs at the State, District, Block and FPS levels comprising of such persons as may be prescribed by them, giving due representation to the local authorities, SCs, STs, women, destitute or persons with disability in these Committees. Section 29 of Act further prescribes the functions to be performed by the VCs, namely, regular supervision of implementation of all the schemes under NFSA including TPDS, informing the District Grievance Redressal Officer (DGRO) in writing of any violation of the provision of the Act as well as of malpractices or misappropriation of funds found by it. These provisions are expected to further strengthen the institution of VCs and ensure an effective role for them in the distribution system.

Coverage and entitlement under Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS) : Upto 75% of the rural population and 50% of the urban population will be covered under TPDS, with uniform entitlement of 5 kg per person per month. However, since Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) households constitute poorest of the poor, and are presently entitled to 35 kg per household per month, entitlement of existing AAY households will be protected at 35 kg per household per month..State-wise coverage : Corresponding to the all India coverage of 75% and 50% in the rural and urban areas, State-wise coverage will be determined by the Central Government. Planning Commission has determined the State-wise coverage by using the NSS Household Consumption Survey data for 2011-12. Subsidised prices under TPDS and their revision : Foodgrains under TPDS will be made available at subsidised prices of Rs. 3/2/1 per kg for rice, wheat and coarse grains for a period of three years from the date of commencement of the Act. Thereafter prices will be suitably linked to Minimum Support Price (MSP).In case, any State's allocation under the Act is lower than their current allocation, it will be protected upto the level of average offtake under normal TPDS during last three years, at prices to be determined by the Central Government. Existing prices for APL households i.e. Rs. 6.10 per kg for wheat and Rs 8.30 per kg for rice has been determined as issue prices for the additional allocation to protect the average off take during last three years.

Given that leakages in PDS reportedly range from 40 to 50 percent, and in some states reportedly go as high as 60 to 70 percent, GoI should defer implementation of NFSA in states that have not done end to end computerization; have not put the list of beneficiaries online for anyone to verify, and have not set up vigilance committees to check pilferage from PDS. Karnataka government has reportedly nominated five persons for state level food vigilance committee .The State Government with an aim to monitor the distribution of the essential commodities that are being distributed through the Public Distribution System (PDS) and thereby to ensure the participation of the Public in monitoring of PDS, has constituted vigilance committees. State level has been constituted by nominating five unofficial members with host o official members and public representatives which will under the chairmanship of Hon' ble Minister for Food, Civil supplies and Consumer Protection.

High Level Committee (HCL) on restructuring of Food Corporation of India (FCI) has submitted its report to the Government. It was submitted by Shri Shanta Kumar, Chairman of the Committee to the Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi 21-01-2015 . The HCL was set up by the Government on 20th August, 2014.The major issue before the Committee was how to make the entire food grain management system more efficient by reorienting the role of FCI in MSP operations, procurement, storage and distribution of grains under Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS).The Committee had wide consultations with several Chief Ministers, Food Secretaries and other stakeholders in various States. Suggestions from public were invited through various newspapers also. Executive Summary of the report is as follows- Backdrop: Government of India (GoI) set up a High Level Committee (HLC) in August 2014 with Shri Shanta Kumar as the Chairman, six members and a special invitee to suggest restructuring or unbundling of FCI with a view to improve its operational efficiency and financial management. GoI also asked HLC to suggest measures for overall improvement in management of foodgrains by FCI; to suggest reorienting the role and functions of FCI in MSP operations, storage and distribution of foodgrains and food security systems of the country; and to suggest cost effective models for storage and movement of grains and integration of supply chain of foodgrains in the country. The HLC had wide consultations with various stakeholders in its several meetings in different parts of the country. It also invited comments through advertisements in newspapers and electronic media. HLC would like to gratefully acknowledge that it has benefitted immensely from this consultative process, and many of its recommendations are based on very intensive discussions with stakeholders. In order to conceive reorienting the role of FCI and its consequent restructuring, one has to revisit the basic objectives with which FCI was created, and what was the background of food situation at that time.

It is against that backdrop, one has to see how far FCI has achieved its objectives, what the current situation on foodgrain front, what are the new challenges with regard to food security, and how best these challenges can be met with a reoriented or restructured institution like FCI.FCI was set up in 1965 (under the Food Corporation Act, 1964) against the backdrop of major shortage of grains, especially wheat, in the country. Imports of wheat under PL- 480 were as high as 6-7 MMT, when country's wheat production hovered around 10-12 MMT, and country did not have enough foreign exchange to buy that much quantity of wheat from global markets. Self-sufficiency in grains was the most pressing objective, and keeping that in mind high yielding seeds of wheat were imported from Mexico. Agricultural Prices Commission was created in 1965 to recommend remunerative prices to farmers, and FCI was mandated with three basic objectives: (1) to provide effective price support to farmers; (2) to procure and supply grains to PDS for distributing subsidized staples to economically vulnerable sections of society; and (3) keep a strategic reserve to stabilize markets for basic foodgrains. How far FCI has achieved these objectives and how far the nation has moved on food security front? The NSSO's (70th round) data for 2012-13 reveals that of all the paddy farmers who reported sale of paddy during July-December 2012, only 13.5 percent farmers sold it to any procurement agency (during January-June 2013, this ratio for paddy farmers is only 10 percent), and in case of wheat farmers (January-June, 2013), only 16.2 percent farmers sold to any procurement agency. Together, they account for only 6 percent of total farmers in the country, who have gained from selling wheat and paddy directly to any procurement agency. That diversions of grains from PDS amounted to 46.7 percent in 2011-12 (based on calculations of offtake from central pool and NSSO's (68th round) consumption data from PDS); and that country had hugely surplus grain stocks, much above the buffer stock norms, even when cereal inflation was hovering between 8-12 percent in the last few years. This situation existed even after exporting more than 42 MMT of cereals during 2012-13 and 2013-14 combined, which India has presumably never done in its recorded history. What all this indicates is that India has moved far away from the shortages of 1960s, into surpluses of cereals in post-2010 period, but somehow the food management system, of which FCI is an integral part, has not been able to deliver on its objectives very efficiently. The benefits of procurement have not gone to larger number of farmers beyond a few states, and leakages in TPDS remain unacceptably high. Needless to say, this necessitates a re-look at the very role and functions of FCI within the ambit of overall food management systems, and concerns of food security.

Major Recommendations of HLC: Below is a summary of major recommendations of HLC keeping in mind how procurement benefits can reach larger number of farmers; how PDS system can be re-oriented to give better deal to economically vulnerable consumers at a lower cost and in a financially sustainable manner; and finally how stocking and movement operations can be made more efficient and cost effective in not only feeding PDS but also in stabilizing grain markets. On PDS and NFSA related issues: HLC recommends that GoI has a second look at NFSA, its commitments and implementation. Given that leakages in PDS range from 40 to 50 percent, and in some states go as high as 60 to 70 percent, GoI should defer implementation of NFSA in states that have not done end to end computerization; have not put the list of beneficiaries online for anyone to verify, and have not set up vigilance committees to check pilferage from PDS. HLC also recommends to have a relook at the current coverage of 67 percent of population; priority households getting only 5 kgs/person as allocation; and central issue prices being frozen for three years at Rs 3/2/1/kg for rice/wheat/coarse cereals respectively. HLC's examination of these issue reveals that 67 percent coverage of population is on much higher side, and should be brought down to around 40 percent, which will comfortably cover BPL families and some even above that; 5kg grain per person to priority households is actually making BPL households worse off, who used to get 7kg/person under the TPDS. So, HLC recommends that they be given 7kg/person. On central issue prices, HLC recommends while Antyodaya households can be given grains at Rs 3/2/1/kg for the time being, but pricing for priority households must be linked to MSP, say 50 percent of MSP. Else, HLC feels that this NFSA will put undue financial burden on the exchequer, and investments in agriculture and food space may suffer. HLC would recommend greater investments in agriculture in stabilizing production and building efficient value chains to help the poor as well as farmers. HLC recommends that targeted beneficiaries under NFSA or TPDS are given 6 months ration immediately after the procurement season ends. This will save the consumers from various hassles of monthly arrivals at FPS and also save on the storage costs of agencies. Consumers can be given well designed bins at highly subsidized rates to keep the rations safely in their homes. HLC recommends gradual introduction of cash transfers in PDS, starting with large cities with more than 1 million population; extending it to grain surplus states, and then giving option to deficit states to opt for cash or physical grain distribution. This will be much more cost effective way to help the poor, without much distortion in the production basket, and in line with best international practices. HLC's calculations reveal that it can save the exchequer more than Rs 30,000 crores annually, and still giving better deal to consumers. Cash transfers can be indexed with overall price level to protect the amount of real income transfers, given in the name of lady of the house, and routed through Prime Minister's Jan-Dhan Yojana (PMJDY) and dovetailing Aadhaar and Unique Identification (UID) number. This will empower the consumers, plug high leakages in PDS, save resources, and it can be rolled out over the next 2-3 years. On stocking and movement related issues:HLC recommends that FCI should outsource its stocking operations to various agencies such as Central Warehousing Corporation, State Warehousing Corporation, Private Sector under Private Entrepreneur Guarantee (PEG) scheme, and even state governments that are building silos through private sector on state lands (as in Madhya Pradesh). It should be done on competitive bidding basis, inviting various stakeholders and creating competition to bring down costs of storage. India needs more bulk handling facilities than it currently has. Many of FCI's old conventional storages that have existed for long number of years can be converted to silos with the help of private sector and other stocking agencies. Better mechanization is needed in all silos as well as conventional storages.Covered and plinth (CAP) storage should be gradually phased out with no grain stocks remaining in CAP for more than 3 months. Silo bag technology and conventional storages where ever possible should replace CAP. Movement of grains needs to be gradually containerized which will help reduce transit losses, and have faster turn-around-time by having more mechanized facilities at railway sidings. HLC recommends total end to end computerization of the entire food management system, starting from procurement from farmers, to stocking, movement and finally distribution through TPDS. It can be done on real time basis, and some states have done a commendable job on computerizing the procurement operations. But its dovetailing with movement and distribution in TPDS has been a weak link, and that is where much of the diversions take place.



The National Food Security Act, 2013 (NFSA) has been notified on 10.9.2013. National Food Security Act, 2013 (NFSA) provides 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 and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto. The Act is being implemented in all the States/Union Territories (UTs) and covers 81.35 crore persons, constituting two - third of the population, who get foodgrains at highly subsidized rates. This coverage has been delinked from poverty estimates. The coverage, entitlements of foodgrains, etc. under the NFSA, 2013 have undergone change as compared to those under the existing TPDS referred above. NFSA, 2013 inter alia provides for coverage of upto 75% of the rural population and upto 50% of the urban population at the all India level under TPDS. Under the NFSA, 2013, the priority households are entitled to receive foodgrains @ 5 kg per person per month at the issue prices of Rs. 3.00, Rs.2.00 and Rs. 1.00 kg for rice, wheat and coarse grains respectively. The AAY households to receive 35 kg of foodgrains per household per month at the same subsidized price. Vigilance Committees (VCs) have been in existence since the inception of the rationing system. The Central Government has been requesting the State Governments from time to time to activate these Committees for monitoring of PDS and reconstitute them, if not done so, by associating members from amongst the card holders and consumer activists as well as Members of Parliament. In the Model Citizens' Charter, issued in November, 1997, constitution of VCs by the State Governments at the level of Panchayat /Ward, Taluk, District and State/UT was emphasised. In the guidelines issued in June 1999 for the Involvement of the Panchayati Raj Institutions in the implementation of TPDS, it was mentioned that the Gram Panchayat/Gram Sabha should be encouraged to form FPS committees. The main functions of VCs are to ensure smooth functioning of PDS and redressal of problems related with it. The Government has also issued instructions to States/UTs to constitute VCs at FPS/Panchayat, Block, District and the State/UT level drawing members from the Government, social organisations, consumer organization and local bodies to periodically review the functioning of the schemes/FPS under PDS. Instructions have also been issued to all the States/UTs to involve Sarpanch, Pradhan, Pramukh, and Food Minister/Food Secretaries as the Chairmen of the VCs at village/FPS, block, districts and State level respectively. Despite the instructions taken up with the States from time to time, it is still felt that lot of work needs to be done by the States for making the VCs effective on ground to address the problems in the system. The PDS (C) Order, 2001 notified on 31.08.2001 provides for the holding of the meeting of the VCs at the State, District, Block and FPS level by the State Government at least on quarterly basis. The Date and periodicity of the meeting to be notified by the State Governments. In order to further strengthen the provisions of the VCs, the setting of the Committees has been brought under the provisions of the National Food Security Act, 2013. The provisions have been more elaborated in the new TPDS (Control) Order, 2015 notified on 20.03.2015. The Targeted Public Distribution System (Control) Order, 2015 has been notified on 20.03.2015 in supersession of the PDS (C) Order, 2001 under section 3 of the Essential Commodities Act, 1955 and in consonance with the NFSA, 2013. The TPDS (C) Order, 2015 prescribes various provisions on the VCs for supervision and monitoring of the TPDS by the State Government. These are: Clause 2(p) of the Order defines the VC as a committee constituted to regularly supervise the functioning of TPDS in the State; Clause 11 (4) provides that the State Government shall set up VCs for the TPDS at the State, District, Block and FPS levels as per NFSA's provisions to perform functions as specified in the said Act. Clause 11 (5) provides that the meetings of the VCs shall be held at least once every quarter at all levels and the date and periodicity of the meeting shall be notified by the State Governments and given wide publicity. Clause 11(7) provides that the number of meetings held by the VCs shall be displayed on the State web portal and the action taken on issues discussed in meetings of VCs shall be reviewed in the next meeting. Clause 7(4) provides that the designated authority shall ensure that one copy of the allocation order made to the FPS is delivered to the local authority, VCs, and any other body nominated by the State Government for monitoring the functioning of the FPS. Clause 8(5) provides that the monthly certificate shall be given by the FPS owner and two or more persons as may be authorised by the State Government such as head of the local authority, Executive Officer, Secretary of the local authority, members from the VCs, women's self help group among others. Identification of Households : Within the coverage under TPDS determined for each State, the work of identification of eligible households is to be done by States/UTs. Nutritional Support to women and children : Pregnant women and lactating mothers and children in the age group of 6 months to 14 years will be entitled to meals as per prescribed nutritional norms under Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) and Mid-Day Meal (MDM) schemes. Higher nutritional norms have been prescribed for malnourished children upto 6 years of age. Maternity Benefit : regnant women and lactating mothers will also be entitled to receive maternity benefit of not less than Rs. 6,000. Women Empowerment : Eldest woman of the household of age 18 years or above to be the head of the household for the purpose of issuing of ration cards. Grievance Redressal Mechanism : Grievance redressal mechanism at the District and State levels. States will have the flexibility to use the existing machinery or set up separate mechanism. Cost of intra-State transportation & handling of foodgrains and FPS Dealers' margin : 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. Transparency and Accountability : Provisions have been made for disclosure of records relating to PDS, social audits and setting up of Vigilance Committees in order to ensure transparency and accountability. Food Security Allowance : Provision for food security allowance to entitled beneficiaries in case of non-supply of entitled foodgrains or meals. Penalty : Provision for penalty on public servant or authority, to be imposed by the State Food Commission, in case of failure to comply with the relief recommended by the District Grievance Redressal Officer.

Conclusion: Citizens can force every PA to create information every day strictly as per the system and procedure as per listed Acts and rules regulations listed under 4(1) (a) (b) (c) every day and that can be cross checked by applicant by asking reasons under 4(1) (d) by the affected person and copy of the same can be given to any applicant under 2(f) of RTI Act. Promote transparency and accountability in the working of every public authority. Policy on Prevention, Detection, and Remediation of Fraud and Corruption by government is must and a major element of good governance is the control of corruption. For that reason, controlling corruption has been a key indicator. Good governance is a keystone of government.

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