



Right to Food Campaign

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Right to Food Campaign's Position on "One Nation, One Ration"

What is One Nation, One Ration?

The One Nation, One Ration (ONOR) scheme has been on the agenda of the central government for some time now. Under this scheme it is [envisaged](#) that by March 2021, a person who holds a ration card under the National Food Security Act (NFSA), can access his/her monthly food ration entitlement from any fair price shop (FPS) in the country. Currently, foodgrain entitlements under the NFSA can be accessed only from the FPS to which the card is linked. The ONOR scheme is said to bring in portability which can be particularly advantageous for migrant workers. They are currently unable to access their NFSA entitlements even if they have a ration card because the card they have is linked to their home address.

Why One Nation, One Ration will not ensure universal food security?

The ONOR scheme is not the panacea for all problems with access to rations as portrayed by the Food Minister. The main problem with the food ration entitlements under NFSA (and the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana) remains that these are available to only those who currently hold a ration card. According to the NFSA on an average 67% of the population is to be covered with these cards. But currently, only 60% of the population has a ration card under the NFSA as population estimates that the Government of India uses to allot ration cards are from 2011. The government has not accounted for the population increase since. Further, as has been the experience of targeting in welfare schemes, there continue to be exclusion errors, where many food insecure people are left out from the PDS. This is especially true after the roll out of NFSA in urban areas where the eligibility criteria for a ration card are not clearly defined and there exists a large (floating) population without the necessary documents for residence verification and so on.

The ONOR schemes also has several implementation issues. It is dependent on Aadhaar-based biometric authentication, which will only work if every ration card in the country is seeded with Aadhaar and if every FPS uses the e-POS system. There is widespread [evidence](#) of exclusion from legal entitlements in this system due to issues such as failure of fingerprint matching, non-functioning of the e-POS machine and poor internet connectivity. There are also a number of issues related to data safety with Aadhaar.

Other concerns with ONOR are more specific to the scheme. First, given that PDS entitlements vary from state to state, what items – and in what quantity and at what prices – will be provided to migrant workers? Suppose a family from Chhattisgarh entitled to 7 kg of grain per person and 2 kg of pulses per household migrates to Delhi, where each household is entitled to only 5 kg of grain per person. Once it migrates, will it get the entitlement of Chhattisgarh or Delhi? Second, if ration cardholders can access their food quotas from anywhere in the country, the number of transactions at any given FPS will be uncertain. This will pose a serious challenge, as shops with an unexpectedly high number of transactions in a month is likely to run out of its food stocks even before supplying the month's quota to all those households who normally purchase from it. Third, for families that have members in multiple locations, there is an apprehension that even if one member takes part of the ration quota, the FPS dealer will show purchase of the full quota and siphon off the balance.

So, what should be done?

It is good that the government has finally taken note of the need for portability of social security entitlements. However, it needs to proceed with more caution. There should first be intra-state experiments with portability of PDS entitlements. This will provide a chance to learn about the logistical challenges that such a delivery mechanism poses – for stocking of FPS, operationalization of grievance redress, and other aspects of PDS implementation. Only based on the experience of such experiments should the government decide on expanding portability of PDS entitlements across the country. Also, instead of an Aadhaar-based technology, it should consider simpler and more reliable technologies such as contactless smart cards. Any hasty restructuring of the PDS can cause widespread disruptions in people's access to food security, especially of the most vulnerable.

One Nation, One Ration should mean that everyone in the nation gets ration. The government must immediately universalize the PDS and also provide nutritious items such as pulses and oil in every state. Also, community kitchens must operate in urban areas at all times to provide migrant workers and others with hot and nutritious meals at affordable prices.