

COVID-19 and Food Security in India

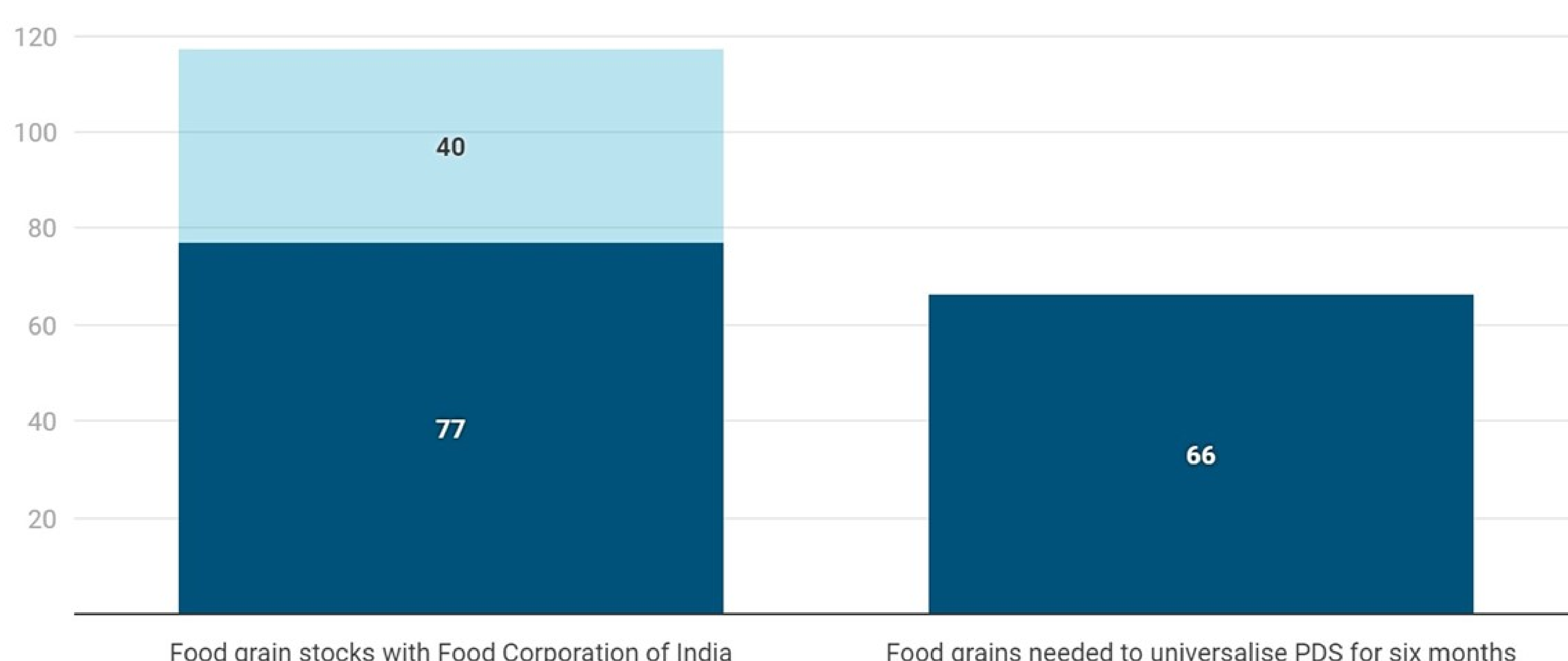
Melisha Charles

Research Assistant
Summer 2020

Collaboration with
Dr. Matias Margulis

India has the food grain stock to universalise PDS for at least six months

Currently held To be procured during upcoming Rabi season



The estimate of food grains needed to universalise PDS is based on the assumption of 10 kilograms of grains to be distributed every month to an estimated 1100 million people (for illustration)

Chart: The Wire • Source: Ministry of Consumer affairs, food and public distribution • [Get the data](#) • Created with [Datawrapper](#)

How is COVID Affecting Access to Food among Poor Households in India?

As of September 7th, 2020 - India's coronavirus infections had passed 4.2 million, making India the country with the **second-highest number of coronavirus cases in the world**.

The ongoing pandemic is a **reminder of the entrenched vulnerabilities** that define the lives of a substantial section of the Indian population. Reports of hunger deaths of migrants stranded between cities where they work and their villages sparked considerable outrage.

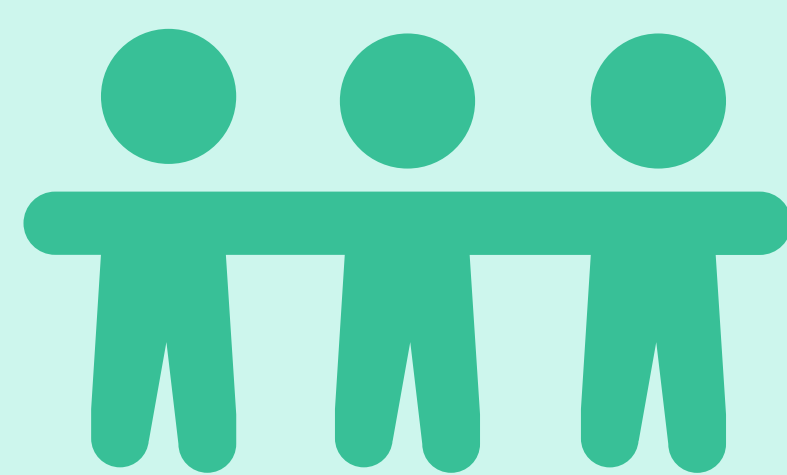
By conservative estimates, at least **189 deaths took place due to hunger, exhaustion while walking back home, and suicide**, since the first lockdown was declared in March until September.

Indian public health experts claim that, "in a country that may see its 400 million people working in the informal economy fall into even deeper poverty due to the lockdown, more will die of hunger than the virus."

India's Public Distribution System

This universal scheme was converted into a targeted public distribution system (TPDS) in 1997 and the beneficiaries were categorised into households below the poverty line (BPL); and households above the poverty line (APL).

Main Findings



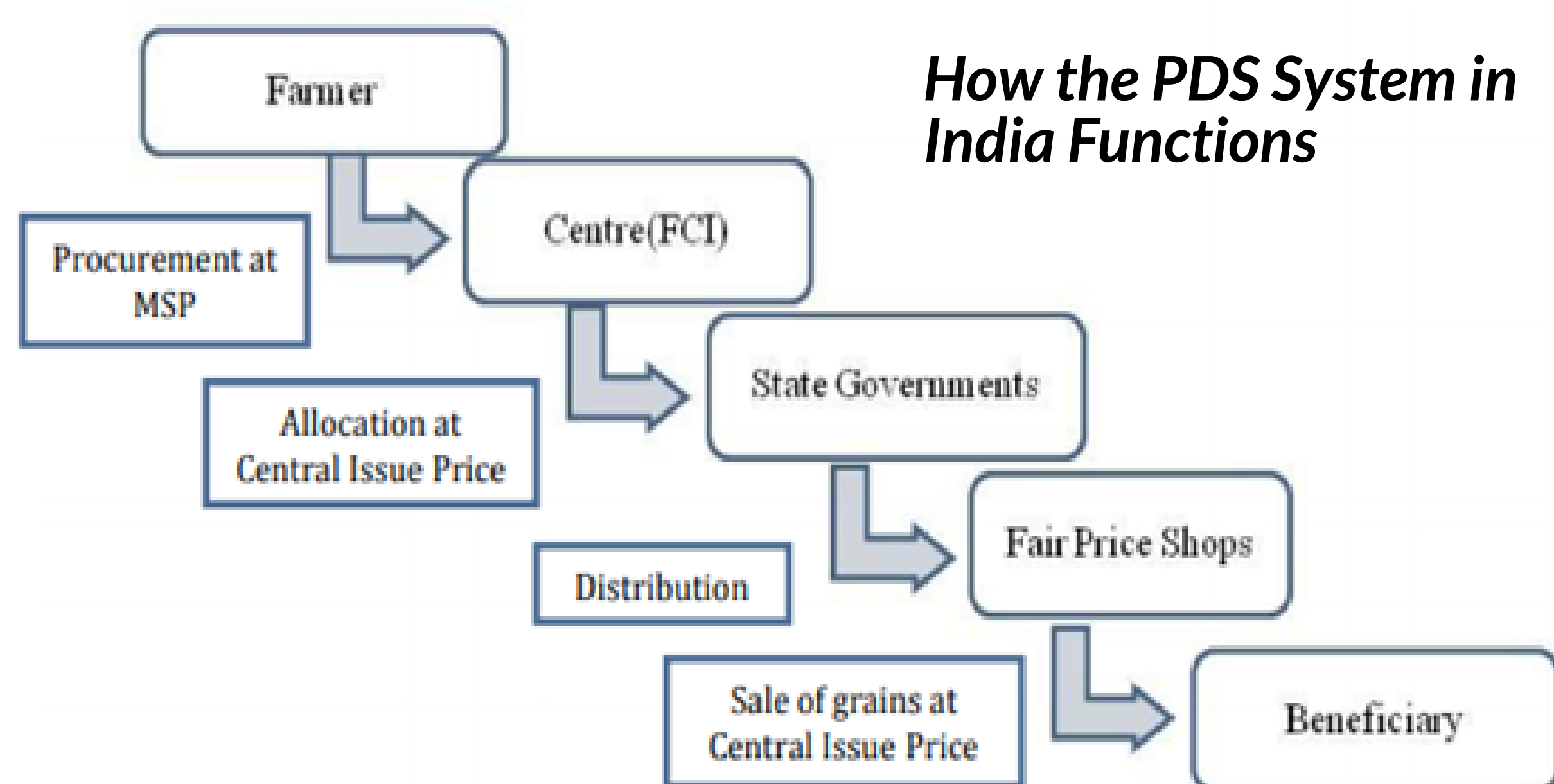
The pandemic, coupled with a prolonged lockdown have left a large number of labourers jobless. Now, more than ever, a large number of people in the country are extremely reliant on India's largest food security mechanism.



Corruption at the ground level, bureaucracy and ineffective implementation have exacerbated the problem.

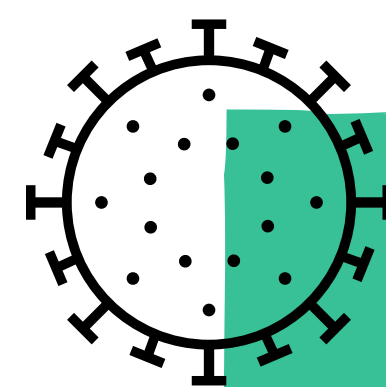


Despite the increase in food security schemes, challenges in the successful implementation of the Food Security Act 2013, persist. An example of this is the exclusion of people deserving of social welfare benefits due to a lack of satisfactory documentation.

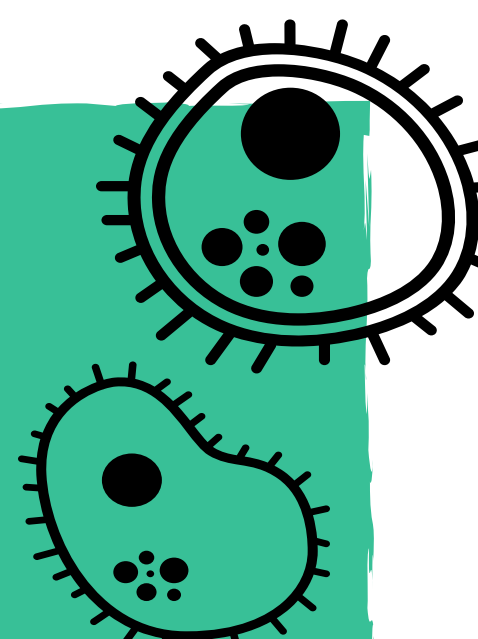


As per reports, based on government released data, around 144.5 million people who are eligible for grains under the PMGKIP **did not receive their entitlement for the month of May**, and 64.4 million ration card holders were yet to receive the grains that they should have received in April.

Experts are confident that current food stocks are sufficient for the entire nation's needs for at least the next year, and have suggested that the government issue temporary ration cards with minimal checks and universalise the public distribution system in rural areas and urban slums across the country.



Covid-19 Impact



The **hurried lockdown**, which did not heed the emotional needs of vulnerable communities who sought the security and comfort of home, is telling, not only of **the lack of foresight of Indian policy makers** and an impaired policy implementation process, but also of the **inherent disconnect between policy makers and vulnerable populations**.

It is time for the country to re-examine its approach towards social welfare policy design as well as its implementation.

Only by adopting a **more inclusive and empathetic approach towards perceiving** the need of social welfare can India alleviate the suffering of the vulnerable sections of the population.