



**INDIAN INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY GUWAHATI
SHORT ABSTRACT OF THESIS**

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SHORT ABSTRACT

The poverty literature in India shows that the eastern region comprising Assam, Bihar, Odisha, and West Bengal have had the lowest growth rate in average per capita consumption expenditure and decline in poverty ratios since the 1990s. Direct and indirect estimates of poverty show rural Assam as being one of the poorest states of India (36.4 per cent and 87.5 per cent respectively in 2003-04). The official head count ratio of poverty for Assam stagnated in the period of 1990s and increased in the 2000s. The latest poverty estimates for the period of 2004-05 to 2009-10 shows poverty ratio in Assam to have increased by almost four percentage points (NSSO 61st and 66th rounds). The share of food expenditure in total household expenditure of rural Assam is very high (66 percent in 2004-05 and 64.4 per cent in 2009-10). Health outcome indicators such as maternal mortality (300 per one lakh live birth in 2013) and infant mortality are also one of the highest in Assam (54 per 1000 live birth in 2013). This thesis studies the three major components of National Food Security Act in India – targeted public distribution system (TPDS), Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) and mid-day meal (MDM) programme. The major thrust of this thesis is to look at the contribution of food based welfare programmes to household level food security.

Unlike many other Indian states, Government of Assam does not maintain a state buffer of foodgrains for public distribution system (PDS). Neither does it provide a state subsidy to the end consumers. Different state issue prices are specified for regions falling under plain, riverine and hill areas. Within these region categories, different state issue prices apply based upon the geographical distance from the Gram Panchayat Samabay Samiti (GPSS) to fair price shop (FPS). This difference in SIP is to cover the costs of transportation of the FPS dealers. Consequently, the prices charged from the end consumers also differ. Studies have shown that such different sets of prices charged from consumers led to information distortion and exclusion at the household level.

Field survey data on food based welfare programmes was collected from Chaudhurirchar revenue village of Dhubri district and Kumargaon revenue village of Jorhat district. The staple food consumed by households in both villages was rice and locally available seasonal vegetables. Both villages were affected by recurrent floods and soil erosion. Proportion of households having access to home grown food throughout the year was therefore very less. Consequently dependence on food based welfare programmes was high in both villages. In Chaudhurirchar households were found to possess BPL, AAY and MMASY cards. None of the households possessed APL Cards. During the period of survey, the MMASY cards had already become obsolete due to discontinuation of the scheme. In Kumargaon village, all four kinds of cards were possessed by the households however MMASY was no longer in use.

The most striking finding from the field study was the large amount of leakages of PDS foodgrains at the FPS level. The incidence of leakages was comparatively higher in Chaudhurirchar village than in Kumargaon. None of the respondents in the former reported utilizing their legal entitlement. The households in Chaudhurirchar village did not receive their entitled subsidy. In Kumargaon the legal quantity entitlements were more or less available to the households. The price charged from the end consumer was however much higher than the SIP in both the villages. Exclusion error estimates based on landholdings and occupation categories were found to be very high in both villages.

Pooled regression showed that households possessing operational land holdings, with higher MPCE and those accessing TPDS through BPL card entitlements are facing less foodgrains consumption deviation from the norm. In other words they are relatively more food secure than rest of the households. The ICDS and MDM programmes in both villages were found to be fully utilized in both the study villages. Lack of basic infrastructure and irregularity of funds were major problem areas. Overall the dependence and demand for food based welfare programmes in the study villages are extremely high.