



DAILY EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

TOPIC

**PROPOSED NFSA AMENDMENT 2026: WHY
ANTYODAYA ENTITLEMENTS MATTER**

www.nextias.com

PROPOSED NFSA AMENDMENT 2026: WHY ANTYODAYA ENTITLEMENTS MATTER?

Context

- A proposed amendment to the **National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013** aims to cut **Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY)** benefits from 35 kg per household to 7 kg per person (subject to a 35-kg household ceiling). There are worries about reducing help to small, disadvantaged households.

Food Security in India & Its Legal Position

- Food security covers **availability, access, cost and nutritional adequacy** of food.
 - ♦ In India, the **Public Distribution System (PDS)** remains a key instrument of social protection.
- The **NFSA, 2013** transformed food subsidies from a largely welfare-based approach into a **rights-based entitlement**.
- It covers up to 75% of the rural and 50% of the urban population, providing **5 kg of foodgrains per person per month to Priority Households**, while AAY households retain **35 kg per household per month**.

Constitutional Dimension

- The Constitution of India does not expressly recognise a fundamental right to food.
- The Supreme Court of India has read it into **Article 21 (right to life)**, particularly through the PUC v. Union of India right-to-food proceedings.
- **Articles 39(b) and 47** further support equitable distribution of resources and improvement of nutrition and public health.

Key Provisions of the NFSA

- The Act provides:
 - ♦ Foodgrain entitlements based on rights thru TPDS;
 - ♦ Special protection to the poorest of the impoverished – the **Antyodaya Households**;
 - ♦ Nutritional support for pregnant women, lactating mothers and children;
 - ♦ Maternity benefits and grievance-redress mechanisms;
 - ♦ Social audits, openness and vigilance committees, greater accountability;
- The **Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY)** was announced in the year 2000 with an objective to give better food security to the poorest of the poor, including the impoverished persons and households without earning members.

Key Features of the Proposed Amendment, 2026

- The **proposed change** would remove the **existing 35 kg household entitlement** of AAY families and **introduce 7 kg per person** with a ceiling of **35 kg per household**.
- Consequently:
 - ♦ Households with **five or more members** would experience little or no change. There would be big cuts for smaller households.
 - ♦ The **Household Consumption Expenditure Survey (HCES) 2023-24** said an estimated 53% of AAY households have less than five individuals.
 - ♦ A single-member AAY household would receive only **7 kg instead of 35 kg**, an **80% reduction**.

- Women living alone, elderly couples, widows and persons with disabilities could therefore be disproportionately affected.

Why Does the Proposed Change Matter?

- The central issue is that **AAY is not merely a food-distribution scheme; it is a targeted social-protection mechanism.**
- Small households often have no earning members and other sources of income.
 - ♦ Thus, the monthly ration is an **economic resource** that can be used, swapped or sold in an effort to satisfy other vital demands.
- Equalisation of per capita entitlement within the AAY category may defeat the entire purpose of having a **separate category for the most disadvantaged.**
- Moreover, the proposed saving is small in comparison to India's total foodgrain inventories. When entitlements of the poorest households are reduced mainly for minor fiscal or foodgrain savings, the topic of **distributive justice** is raised.

Key Issues & Concerns

- **Vulnerability of small households:** The AAY is meant to specifically safeguard households with little earning capacity. A per capita formula would work to their detriment.
- **Gendered impact:** Women living alone, especially widows may be disproportionately affected due to low income, illiteracy and social vulnerability.
- **Inclusion-exclusion errors:** AAY lists are typically outdated and may not represent changing family conditions appropriately.
- **Equity versus Equality:** Equity or equality. Treating different households equally can result in inequitable outcomes.
 - ♦ The **idea of substantive equality** means greater protection for greater deprivation.
- **Nutrition concerns:** Foodgrain security alone does not ensure nutritional security, thus the requirement for pulses, edible oil and dietary diversification.

Related Efforts & Initiatives

- **Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY)** which currently gives free food grains to NFSA beneficiaries;
- **One Nation One Ration Card (ONORC)** which makes benefits portable for migrants;
- **Digitisation and ePoS systems** in PDS and nutritional interventions like POSHAN Abhiyaan, PM POSHAN and ICDS
 - ♦ These have made food security more robust in India.

Way Forward: Reform & Strengthen AAY

- Instead of cutting AAY payouts, the government should:
 - ♦ Transparent periodic identification to **update AAY lists;**
 - ♦ Correct inclusion and exclusion errors without arbitrary cancellation of old cards;

- ♦ Cover all the poor homes under AAY;
- ♦ Increase the number of AAY cards;
- ♦ Maintain the **35kg entitlement** for vulnerable small households;
- ♦ Add **pulses, edible oil** for nutritional security;
- ♦ Strengthening social audits, grievance redressal and people's participation;
- ♦ Create inclusion, not exclusion, use digital Aadhaar and technology to improve delivery; and
- ♦ Check entitlements regularly against **food prices, inflation and nutritional requirements.**

Daily Mains Practice Question

[Q] Discuss the significance of Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) under the National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013 and examine the key challenges in its implementation and suggest measures to make it more inclusive and effective.

Source: IE

■■■■

