



Addressing Exclusion Errors in Aadhaar

What is the issue?

\n\n

\n

- There was considerable euphoria when Aadhaar was envisioned as it was imagined as an effective mechanism to quell leakages considerably.
- But two major concerns with Aadhaar have emerged over time - security of biometrics and authentication failures.
- The later tends to affect the most vulnerable dearly and this article has dealt specifically with authentication failures in PDS.

\n

\n\n

What are the contours of the problem?

\n\n

\n

- It was thought that Aadhaar (like any new technology) would be experimented first in urban areas where the connectivity and demography was suitable.
- Such a start would have helped in detecting implementation and transitional flaws with lesser pain and also made troubleshooting easier.
- After considerable such trials, the scheme could've been expanded to elsewhere.
- Contrarily, Aadhaar Assisted Biometric Authentication (AABA) was piloted in Jharkhand, which has a large tribal population and poor connectivity.
- Inevitably, there have been multiple reports of authentication failures, which has adversely affected the most vulnerable segments of the population.

- \n
- As these are the people who have the greatest need for subsidised food, Aadhaar has defeated its primary purpose - ensure proper PDS delivery.
- \n

\n\n

How has UIDAI responded?

\n\n

- \n
- Official data hasn't been disclosed, but it has been estimated that the exclusion errors were as high as 20% in PDS if biometric authentication was required.
- \n
- While this is shocking, the response of the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) to such reports is blanket denial.
- \n
- UIDAI maintains that it only provides a platform and Aadhaar applications (such as PDS) are within the domain of the respective ministries.
- \n
- But this does not abdicate UIDAI of responsibility, as the contribution of authentication failures is a significantly high.
- \n
- The limits of technology, whether in terms of the failure to authenticate biometrics or the absence of connectivity, should not hurt the poor.
- \n
- Presently, multiple announcements have been made for using virtual IDs to secure greater privacy and the use of facial biometrics to reduce errors.
- \n
- While the willingness to improve the technology is laudable, for the immediate need, UIDAI must talk with ministries to redesign priority areas like PDS.
- \n

\n\n

What was Madhya Pradesh government's design?

\n\n

- \n
- The current PDS design places PDS dealer in charge of making biometrics work for each beneficiary every month.
- \n
- As this has proven to be strenuous, the Madhya Pradesh government devised a scheme where the biometric authentication would be done only

once a year.

\n

- Under this scheme, the authentication is secured by agencies unrelated to the PDS department.

\n

- Once authenticated, households are to be given coupons for the next 1 year, which can be exchanged for buying goods from the PDS.

\n

- The coupons were bar coded to prevent duplication and misuse, which helped in minimising the exclusion error.

\n

- But the MP government lost its nerve on the eve of its implementation, and scrapped it in entirety.

\n

\n\n

What is the way ahead?

\n\n

\n

- Considering the appealing logic, it would be good for center and the UIDAI must take up the MP government's scheme to avoid exclusion errors.

\n

- While weeding out identity fraud is important, they are creating a far more serious problem of exclusion errors which can cost lives (due to starvation).

\n

- Also, smart cards that can be swiped like credit cards rather than the more sophisticated biometric authentication can be considered.

\n

- All of this still the possibility where the dealer just lies to an ignorant customer that authentication has failed, while it hasn't.

\n

- This will give him access to quantities that he can dispose off in the open market.

\n

- Contrarily, MP's coupon scheme will in fact prevent even this as the merchandise has to be provided to secure the distributed coupons.

\n

- A technology is only as good as the judiciousness with which it is used, and hence the Aadhaar needs to be curtailed from reaching menacing proportions.

\n

\n\n

\n\n

Source: Indian Express

\n\n

\n\n

\n



IAS PARLIAMENT

Information is Empowering

A Shankar IAS Academy Initiative