

ABSTRACT

AN EVALUATION BY THE BENEFICIARIES OF THE QUALITY OF SERVICE PROVIDED BY THE JAMAICA FOOD STAMP PROGRAMME (JFSP) : *THE CASE OF ST. CATHERINE AND ST. MARY*

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The JFSP, which is administered by the Social Security division of the Ministry of Labour and Social Security provides financially needy households with benefits in the form of food coupons. These are used to purchase specified food items, from participating retailers island wide. To access the benefits, beneficiaries must meet certain eligibility criteria.

The main objective of this research is to obtain and analyse survey information gathered from beneficiaries to assess the quality of service delivery provided by the Jamaica Food Stamp Program. All respondents for the survey were drawn from the parishes of St. Catherine and St. Mary. These parishes were chosen based on their present poverty status in relation to other parishes and the percentage of the Food Stamp benefit they receive. It was felt, that St. Mary, being the poorest parish and with St. Catherine having the second lowest number of households in poverty it would be interesting to look at any differences in opinions from beneficiaries in those two parishes. The sample of active beneficiaries included 617 respondents representing a ± 4 per cent level of precision. A sample of inactive beneficiaries were also interviewed. For the inactive sample, 169 respondents representing 10 percent of the inactive population in St. Mary were targeted.

The data from the survey revealed that the programme is targeting the poor as 90.0 per cent of those interviewed belonged to the expected target group. The quality of services provided by pay-masters are rated by beneficiaries as very satisfactory and nearly all beneficiaries indicated that they adhere to purchase restrictions when they use the benefits. Generally, most beneficiaries rated the FSP as a good programme.

Despite these positives however, the active respondent beneficiaries indicated that they were dissatisfied with several aspects of the programme. They found the level of benefits inadequate and the amount of waiting time to collect stamps unacceptable. For the inactive beneficiaries, it was found that some persons who are actually listed as "inactive" are actually in receipt of food stamps. Additionally, a significant 42.7 per cent who were never informed that their application was successful never collected the benefit after they were registered. They expressed a need for improve communication channels to inform beneficiaries of the status of their application. This would minimize the high level of inactivity.

Based on the findings, it is recommended that policy considerations be taken to address the existing problems affecting communication at the various levels of the food stamp programme. Efforts should be made to update the existing inaccurate inactive list at the Electronic Data Processing Unit with local offices playing a crucial role in this process.

The findings of this research will be important to inform policies which will speak to the future direction of the programme.

Keywords: Sharon Almena Malcolm McDonald; Beneficiaries Perception of the Jamaica Food Stamp Program.