Right To Food Security And Poverty In India: An Analysis

Dr. Samir Bhadury
Assistant Professor Department of Law Rajiv Gandhi University, Arunachal Pradesh.

Abstract

Providing food security in India is a most important subject where one third of its population is likely to be absolutely poor. Poverty is a sign of food uncertainty. It has pursued mankind since times immemorial. The consequences of poverty are experienced by whole over the world. The perception of Food Security is multi-dimensional. Food security will be exists when all the people access to sufficient food for their livelihood. Right to food security is a challenge for India due to it’s over population and high level of poverty. It is the governments’ responsibility to mitigate poverty through providing food security. Although, the central and state governments in India have introduced many poverty alleviating programmes. This paper examines the Right to food Act and other legislations and policies. Also examine the issues, challenges regarding food security in terms of availability and status of poverty in India. The present paper attempts to explain issues related to food security in India and recommend some ways to achieve the actual goal regarding food security in India.

Key Words: Food Security, poverty, Legislation, Policies.

Introduction

Ensuring food security ought to be an issue of great importance for a country like India where more than one-third of the population is estimated to be absolutely poor and one-half of all children malnourished in one way or another.

As per the ILO statement” working poverty has continued to decrease, but at a slower pace than before the crisis. There are still some 870 million workers living with their families on less than US $ 2 per person per day, of which nearly 400 million are living in extreme poverty. A further 660 million workers are living just above the poverty line and are at high risk of falling back.
Poverty is not an economic phenomenon alone; it is a social phenomenon too. The world has well experienced with the consequences of poverty such as hunger, humiliation, unrest, deprivation of liberty, discrimination etc. To define Poverty is not an easy task. Poverty, in general, is defined as lack of consumption of food resulted from low income. It is, in fact, complex and multidimensional aspect.²

Lalita kumary opined that ‘Poverty is a socio-economic phenomenon in which a section of society is unable to fulfil even its basic necessities of life. The minimum needs are food, clothing, housing, education and other basic minimum human needs. Humanity faces pains and miseries if it does not attain a subsistence level of such needs. It is generally agreed in this country that only who fail to reach a certain minimum consumption standard should be regarded as poor.’³

‘Food security’ includes both physical as well as economic access to food. The term accessibility here includes both availability and affordability. The World Food Summit of 1996 defined food security as existing “when all people at all times have access to sufficient, safe, nutritious, food to maintain a healthy and active life”.³ The WHO depicts food security consists of three dimension viz. ‘food availability’, ‘food access’ and “food use”. Remarkably, The food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) added a fourth dimension i.e. “the stability of the first three dimensions of food security over time”⁴. Thus food security is multidimensional concept.⁵

**Status of Food Security in India: An Overview**

The green revolution initiated in the late 1960s was a historic watershed that transformed the food security situation in India. It tripled food grain production over the next three or four decades and consequently reduced by over 50 percent both the levels of food insecurity and poverty in the country, this was achieved in spite of the increase in population during the period, which almost doubled. The country succeeded in the laudable task of becoming a food self sufficient nation, at least at the macro level. The per capita dietary energy supply increased significantly from 2370 kcal/day in the early 1990s to about 2440 kcal/day in 2001-03 and to 2550 kcal/day in 2006-08. The prevalence of undernourishment in the total population also decreased from 25 to 20 per cent during the period of 1990 to 2000, and as many as 58 million individuals were estimated to have come out of the poverty trap. The absolute number of poor persons came down from 317 million to 259 million with other livelihood indicators such as the literacy rate and longevity increasing substantially. The life expectancy at birth for males and females respectively, in 2005-06 was 63

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² B. Ramachandra, N. Venkata Narayana, Poverty versus Food Security in India - file:///C:/Users/HP/Desktop/Right%20to%20Food/A0530106.pdf
and 66 years respectively as compared to that in 1986-91, which was as low as 58 and 59 years for males and females respectively. (Agricultural Statistics at a Glance; 2007).

In 1983, FAO analysis focused on food accessibility, primarily to a definition based on the equilibrium between the demand and supply side of food security. In 1986, the highly influential World Bank report on Poverty and Hunger (World Bank, 1986) focused on temporal dynamics of food insecurity. This was complemented by Sen’s Theory of Famine which highlighted the consequence of personal rights on food access i.e. production, labour, trade and transfer based resources. The widely accepted World Food Summit (1996) definition reinforces the multidimensional concept food security and includes food access, availability, food use and stability. Currently over 40 countries have the right to food enshrined in their constitution and FAO estimates that the right to food could be judicial in some 54 countries.⁶

The concept of Food security is centred around two sub-concepts; food availability and food title. The former refers to supply of food available at various levels i.e. local, national or international. The latter refers to the capability of an individual or household to obtain food⁷. The main prerequisites or dimensions of food security are as follows:

**Food availability**: The physical availability of food refers to adequate quantities of food, supplied through native production or imports. It refers to the ‘supply side’ of food security.

**Food Accessibility**: It refers to access by individual to adequate resources (entitlements) for acquiring appropriate food for a nutritious and balance diet.

**Food Utilisation/use**: Utilisation in general understood as the way the body makes the most of various nutrients in the food through balance diet, clean water, hygiene, sanitation and health care.

**Food Stability**: To be food secure, an individual, household or population must have access to adequate food at all times⁸

India’s journey to ensure Food security, it is still in a pathetic state. India food security status situation remains to rank as “alarming” according to the International Food Policy Research Institute’s Global Hunger Index, 2020. It ranks 101 of the 116 countries in the world.

India’s GHI score has decreased from a GHI score of 38.8 points (considered alarming) in 2000 to a GHI score of 27.5 (considered serious) in 2021. The overall scenario has progressed in India since

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⁷ Padmini Prasad and Avani Pratap ,Article on Food security in India: key issues and strategies, Bihar Economic Journal, Volume 3, Number 1, August 2014,ISSN : 22308970.

2000 but the areas of concern like nutrition remain. But the proportion of undernourished in the population and the under-five mortality is in lower levels. India’s child stunting has decreased from 54.2% (1998-99) to 34.7% (2016-18), though still considered high compared to global levels. India has the highest child wasting rate of all countries covered in the GHI, which is 17.3% (it was 17.1% in 1998-99).

Schemes of Food availability and accessibility in India:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scheme</th>
<th>Year introduced</th>
<th>Coverage target group</th>
<th>Latest volume</th>
<th>Issue price (Rs per Kg)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public distribution system (PDS)</td>
<td>up to 1992</td>
<td>universal</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Wheat: 2.34, Rice: 2.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revamped Public Distribution System (RPDS)</td>
<td>1992</td>
<td>Backward blocks</td>
<td>20 kg of food grains.</td>
<td>Wheat: 2.80, Rice: 3.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antyodaya Anna Yojana</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>poorest of the poor</td>
<td>35 kg of food grains.</td>
<td>Wheat: 2.00, Rice: 3.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

https://www.clearias.com/global-hunger-index/

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Food_security_in_India#:~:text=Also%20called%20the%20Right.retroactive%20to%205%20July%202013.
Annapurna Scheme  | 2000  | Indigent senior citizens | 10 kg of food grains. | free

National Food Security Act, 2013  | 2013  | Priority households | 5 kg per person per month. | Wheat: 2.00
| | | | Rice: 3.00
| | | | coarse: 1.00
| | | | grains

All these schemes are implemented by the government for supplying food grains at subsidized rate to the poor households, ensuring accessibility and vulnerability. In addition to these schemes the government has launched several schemes such as National Food for Work Programme (NFWP), National Rural Employment Programme (NREP), Sampoorna Grameen Rozgar Yojna (SGRY) and Legal initiative like Right to food under National Food Security Act, 2013 to ensure accessibility of food.11

**National Food Security Act, 2013: Problems and Prospects**

The National food security act aims at assured economic and social access to adequate food, for all person in the country, at all times is a set of core entitlements within a universal right to food and nutrition provided to be enjoyed and progressively expanded until universal access to adequate nutrition is achieved.12 It follows a life cycle of human being from pregnancy to old age. Under the provision of the bill the beneficiaries are able to purchase 5 kg per eligible person per month of cereals i.e. Rice Rs. 3 per kg, wheat Rs. 2 per kg and coarse grains Rs. 1 per kg.

salient feature of this act are as follows:

- 75% Rural population and 50% of the urban population are entitled for three years from enactment to 5 kg food grains per month at Rs.3, Rs. 2 and Rs. 1per kg of rice, wheat and coarse grain respectively.

- The states are responsible for determining eligibility.

- Pregnant women and lactating mothers are entitled to a nutritious “take home ration” of 600 calories and a maternity benefit of at least Rs. 6000 for six months.

11 Shaleen Jain, Food Security in India: Problems and Prospect

12 Vijay vir singh, National food security Act: A step towards food security in India?, Bihar Economic Journal, Volume 3, Number 1, August 2014, ISSN : 22308970.
• Children 6 months to 14 years old age are to receive free hot meals.

• The Act promotes women empowerment.

• The central government will provide funds to state in case of short supplies of food grains.

• The current food grain allocation of the states will be protected by central government for at least six months.

• The state government will provide a food security allowance to the beneficiaries in case of non-supply of food grains.

• The public distribution system is to be reformed.

  • Women empowerment: decisions like considering eldest women in a family as the head of the family, giving preference to women or their self-help groups for issuing license of new FPS, etc. will help in empowering women of the country.
  • States are free to further subsidies the food grains or extend the limits of coverage of the population.

**Problems to Implement NFSA:**

Food availability is not that reliable in India. The challenge to produce more and more for the growing population is becoming increasingly hard for a country of its size and economic growth. Since the land in India is a shrinking resource for agriculture, the production rate for agriculture needs to be higher per unit of land and irrigation water. Over 60% of the Indian population depend on agriculture for their daily meals. India produces around 100 million tonnes of rice every year. Accessing food in India can be considered as not as easy as in Australia. It is really hard to get your hands on fresh fruit and vegetables. While there might be enough food for the whole population of India, many families and especially children in India don't have access to food because of financial problems. Thus, this is the cause of millions of malnourished children around India. The cultural knowledge in India allows them to have a very nutritional and balanced diet. Nearly the whole of the Indian population has rice at least once a day which allows them to have carbohydrates in their system. Since India is most commonly known for producing and exporting rice to other countries, their lifestyle will be mainly dominated by rice.

**Suggestions for implementation of NFSA**

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13 Swaminathan, M.S.; Bhavani, R.V. (2013). "Food production & availability - Essential prerequisites for sustainable food security". The Indian Journal of Medical Research. 138

822 [http://www.webology.org](http://www.webology.org)
We propose the following suggestions or actions that need to be considered for successful implementation of NFSA:

- Flexible and proportionate coverage for entitlement of rural and urban population based on the trend of urbanization over the period.

- Scientific identification of priority households with a target of zero exclusion error, and formation of a task force for identification and coverage of destitute and downtrodden people.

- Unique identification of target beneficiaries with information technology support.

- End to end computerization of the PDS to impart transparency and effectiveness in the functioning of entire PDS.

- Agricultural and biotechnological interventions are essential for sustainable increase in production of food grains and for improving quality with advanced post-harvest technology. Government supported research initiatives by the institutions/organizations like Central Food Technological Research Institute, Rashtriya Chemicals and Fertilizers, National Seeds Corporations, Indian Agricultural Research Institute and other agricultural universities can play a prominent role in increasing the productivity of agriculture sector.

- Standardizing the purchase mechanism of the food grains by leveraging the decentralized procurements with the objective of lowering the procurement overhead and incidental expenses.

- Augmentation of storage capacity by developing silos, cold storage chain and indigenous methods of storage of food grains. Promoting the initiatives for development of for efficient and economically viable storage solutions, using advance technology.

- The national policy for handling, storage and transportation of food grains has to be integrated with the training and education on waste reduction programs to control the wastage of food grains in storage and handling. A team of experts, practitioners and academia (in particular, technology and management). The governments have to make proper strategies for increasing the supply of food grains in the market rather than in fair price shops where food grains are provided at highly subsidizes rates. If the governments continue it for a long period it will become big financial burden to the governments.

2. RBI’s quantitative measures are not suitable for low income countries because the increasing inflation is being occurred not due to more purchasing power. This is being occurred due to unmatched supply of goods with the demand. RBI’s measures are suppressing the demand. It doesn’t mean control inflation because it squeezing the purchasing power of especially poor
people. Hence it is better to increase supply of food grains. Not only that, food grains must be at accessible rates.

3. It is however, to eradicate poverty which is a reflection of food insecurity the governments have to concentrate on the programmes that enhancing peoples’ purchasing capacity in long period rather than continuing welfare programmes which make the people lazy in addition to take those measures which increases the availability of food grains in the market as well as to the individuals.

4. The governments should plug up the leakages like corruption for making the programmes effective.

5. Complete irrigation projects as early as possible.

6. Governments should take necessary measures for increasing public and private investment in Agriculture.

7. Concentrate investment on short term gestations.

8. Government should take necessary measure to encourage farmers to implement modern technology in Agricultural farming

9. Governments should take necessary measure for restoration and conservation of water, soil fertility,

10. Encourage farmers to use hazardless genetically modified seed.

schools) can prepare a broad framework to guide the program.

Conclusion

In its brief introduction this paper highlights the widely accepted definition of food security. The concept of Food security is centred around two sub-concepts; food availability and food title. The former refers to supply of food available at various levels i.e. local, national or international. The latter refers to the capability of an individual or household to obtain food. Thus the performance, challenges and policies in food security in India have been examined in terms of availability, accessibility and utilization.

India has many policies and programmes. However food insecurity and malnutrition continues to be high. The problem is with both design and implementation of the programme. The focus of reforms can now be shifted to more efficient delivery systems of public services. It has been recognised that better governance is necessary for effective functioning of food based programmes. Social mobilisation, community participation and decentralisation based approach are necessary in this context. Appropriate institution are needed for better implementation of this policies. In nutshell, despite ensuring ample availability of food, existence of food insecurity at the micro-level in the country has remained a formidable challenge for India.
All employment generated programmes that have been provided by central and state governments, are also food security programmes too. Though some bottlenecks are there in those programmes, they can mitigate poverty and food insecurity. But they should be made effective through plugging the bottlenecks.

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10. }India Food Security Conundrum – National council of applied economic Research retrieved from nfsm.gov.in/.../2%20India%20food%20security%20conundrum.docx

12. Food Security Act 2013