

Food Security in India: Challenges and Suggestions

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ABSTRACT

Food availability is a necessary condition for food security. India is more or less self-sufficient in cereals but deficit in pulses and oilseeds. Due to changes in consumption patterns, demand for fruits, vegetables, dairy, meat, poultry, and fisheries has been increasing. There is need to increase crop diversification and improve allied activities. It may be noted that the slowdown in agriculture growth could be attributed to structural factors on the supply side, such as public investment, credit, technology, land and water management, etc., rather than globalization and trade reforms per se. Access to food can be increased through employment due to growth in labour intensive sectors and/or through social protection programmes. This research paper examines some of the challenges in food security in India and provides suggestions to strengthening the same.

Keywords: Food security, availability, access, challenges, economy.

I. INTRODUCTION

“If agriculture goes wrong, nothing else will have a chance to go right. Agriculture is the backbone of the livelihood security system of nearly 700 million in the country and we need to build our food security on the foundation of home grown food”. M.S. Swaminathan 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. There have been many emerging issues in the context of food security in India in the last two decades. These are: (i) economic liberalization in the 1990s and its impact on agriculture and food security; (ii) establishment of WTO: particularly the Agreement on Agriculture (AoA) under it; (iii) challenges of climate change; crisis of the three Fs, viz., food prices, fuel prices, and financial crisis; (iv) the phenomenon of hunger amidst plenty, i.e., accumulation of stocks in the early years of this decade and in 2008-09 along with high levels of poverty; (v) introduction of targeting in the Public Distribution System (PDS) for the first time in the 1990s; (vi) ‘Right to Food’ campaign for improving food security in the country and the Supreme Court Orders on mid-day meal schemes; (vii) proposal for National Food Security Law (Right to Food); and (viii) monitorable targets under the Tenth and Eleventh Five Year Plans similar to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) on poverty and women and child nutrition. These developments in the last two decades have provided both opportunities and challenges for food and nutrition security of the country. It is, by now, well known that the question of food security has a number of dimensions that extend beyond the production, availability, and demand for food. There has been a paradigmatic shift in the concept of food security over a period of time.

II. METHODOLOGY

The present paper is based on the secondary data collected from the secondary source i.e. published literature on the subject concern. Descriptive and analytical method has been applied in the entire research study.

III. OBJECTIVES OF RESEARCH

The specific objectives of this research paper are:

- (i) To understand the features of food security act.
- (ii) To examine the challenges in food security in India.
- (iii) To provide valid suggestions to strengthen food security in the country.

IV. FOOD SECURITY IN INDIA

Definition- In FAO report food security is defined as a “situation that exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life”.

In the Indian context, the underpinnings for food security of the people can be found in the Constitution, though there is no explicit provision on right to food. The fundamental right to life enshrined in Article 21 of the Constitution has been interpreted by the Supreme Court and National Human Rights Commission to include right to live with human dignity, which includes the right to food and other basic necessities. Under Directive Principles of State Policy, it is provided under Article 47 that the State shall regard raising the level of nutrition and the standard of living of its people and the improvement of public health as among its primary duties. Providing food security has been focus of the Government's planning and policy. Food security means availability of sufficient foodgrains to meet the domestic demand as well as access, at the individual level, to adequate quantities of food at affordable prices. Attainment of self-sufficiency in foodgrains production at the national level has been one of the major achievements of the country. In order to address the issue of food security at the household level, Government is implementing the Targeted Public Distribution System under which subsidised foodgrains is provided to eligible households.

To further strengthen the efforts to address the food security of the people, the Government has enacted the National Food Security Act, 2013. It marks a paradigm shift in approach to food security – from ‘welfare’ to “rights based approach”. The Act legally entitles upto 75% of the rural population and 50% of the urban population to receive subsidised foodgrains under Targeted Public Distribution System. About two thirds of the population therefore will be covered under the Act to receive highly subsidised foodgrains. There is a special focus in the Act on nutritional support to pregnant women and lactating mothers and children upto 14 years of age by entitling them to nutritious meals. Pregnant women will also be entitled to receive cash maternity benefit of Rs. 6,000 in order to partly compensate her for the wage loss during the period of pregnancy and also to supplement nutrition. Keeping in view the important role that women play in ensuring food security of the family, the Act contains an important provision for women empowerment by giving status of head of the household to the eldest woman of the household, for the purpose of issuing of ration cards.

Salient features of the Act:

(i) **Coverage and entitlement under Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS):** Upto 75% of the rural population and 50% of the urban population will be covered under TPDS, with uniform entitlement of 5 kg per person per month. However, since Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) households constitute poorest of the poor, and are presently entitled to 35 kg per household per month, entitlement of existing AAY households will be protected at 35 kg per household per month.

(ii) **State-wise coverage:** Corresponding to the all India coverage of 75% and 50% in the rural and urban areas respectively, State-wise coverage will be determined by the Central Government. State-wise coverage has been determined by the Planning Commission on the basis of 2011-12 NSSO Household Consumption Expenditure Survey data.

(iii) **Subsidised prices under TPDS and their revision:** Foodgrains under TPDS will be made available at subsidised prices of Rs. 3/2/1 per kg for rice, wheat and coarse grains for a period of three years from the date of commencement of the Act. Thereafter prices will be suitably linked to Minimum Support Price (MSP).

(iv) In case, any State's allocation under the proposed legislation is lower than their current allocation, it will be protected upto the level of average off take during last three years under normal TPDS, at prices to be determined by the Central Government. Existing prices for APL households i.e. Rs. 6.10 per kg for wheat and Rs 8.30 per kg for rice has been determined as issue prices for the additional allocation to protect the average off take.

(v) **Identification of Households:** Within the coverage under TPDS determined for each State, the work of identification of eligible households is to be done by States/UTs.

(vi) **Nutritional Support to women and children:** Pregnant women and lactating mothers and children in the age group of 6 months to 14 years will be entitled to meals as per prescribed nutritional norms under Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) and Mid-Day Meal (MDM) schemes. Higher nutritional norms have been prescribed for malnourished children upto 6 years of age.

(vii) **Maternity Benefit:** Pregnant women and lactating mothers will also be entitled receive maternity benefit of not less than Rs. 6,000 as per scheme to be formulated by the Central overnment.

(viii) **Women Empowerment:** Eldest woman of the household of age 18 years or above will be the head of the household for the purpose of issuing of ration cards.

(ix) **Grievance Redressal Mechanism:** Grievance redressal mechanism at the District and State levels. States will have the flexibility to use the existing machinery or set up separate mechanism.

(x) **Cost of intra-State transportation & handling of foodgrains and FPS Dealers' margin:** Central Government will provide assistance to States in meeting the expenditure incurred by them on transportation of foodgrains within the State, its handling and FPS dealers' margin as per norms to be devised for this purpose.

(xi) **Transparency and Accountability:** Provisions have been made for disclosure of records relating to PDS, social audits and setting up of Vigilance Committees in order to ensure transparency and accountability.

(xii) **Food Security Allowance:** Provision for food security allowance to entitled beneficiaries in case of non-supply of entitled foodgrains or meals.

(xiii) **Penalty:** Provision for penalty on public servant or authority, to be imposed by the State Food Commission, in case of failure to comply with the relief recommended by the District Grievance Redressal Officer.

Based on the provisions of the Act, the requirement of foodgrains for TPDS and other welfare schemes is estimated to be 614.4 lakh tons. The estimated food subsidy for implementation of the Act at 2014-15 costs, is about Rs. 1,31,086 crore, which implies additionality of about 27,000 crores due to implementation of NFSA.

The National Food Security Act, 2013 provided for a period of one year after the commencement of the Act, i.e. upto 04.07.2014, for identification of eligible households for receiving subsidized foodgrains under Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS). So far, 11 States/UTs viz., Haryana, Rajasthan, Delhi, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Karnataka, Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra, Chandigarh, Madhya Pradesh and Bihar have informed their readiness to implement the Act. Accordingly, foodgrains under the Act have been allotted to them. In remaining 25 States/UTs, allocation under existing TPDS is continuing. As identification of eligible households had not been done and implementation of the Act was yet to start in these States/UTs on completion of one year period provided in the Act, time period for identification of eligible households and completion of other preparatory measure for implementation of the Act had to be extended first by three months and then again by six months i.e. upto first week of April, 2015. Level of preparedness in 25 States/UTs where the Act is yet to be implemented varies across States/UTs. Besides identification of eligible households to be covered, preparedness would also include necessary strengthening of TPDS so as to ensure effective and timely delivery of entitlements under the Act. Aspects which need focused attention of State Governments and UT Administration relate to beneficiary identification in a fair and transparent manner so as to avoid errors on inclusion and exclusion, delivery of foodgrains upto door-steps of fair price shops computerisation of TPDS operations, strengthening of the mechanism of Vigilance Committees at various levels and effective grievance redressal mechanism. Such reforms measures are crucial to ensure a leakage and diversion free PDS and also to ensure that no needy person is denied benefits.

V. CHALLENGES TO FOOD SECURITY IN INDIA

The challenges India faces to meet its food security are as follows-

- Productivity increase of Indian agriculture using high yielding seeds and modern technology.
- Changes in food consumption pattern due to changes in dietary habits of the population
- Malnutrition in India, especially in children to be reduced to zero.
- Development of supply chains of high value to cover the last recipient in time.
- Food security is a right and it is pre-requisite to enjoy other rights available to an individual.
- Hunger and poverty must be reduced to ensure food security for all beneficiaries.
- More investment in agriculture is needed within and outside India.
- Government neglect of agriculture is reflected in the suicide of the farmer.
- Research on new challenges that farmer's face like climate change, droughts and floods.

VI. SUGGESTIONS FOR ENSURING FOOD SECURITY IN INDIA

Professor M.S. Swaminathan has suggested the measures to ensure food security to all as below-

- Revisiting international trade rules, in order to promote a "food security oriented" trading system.
- Creating a better market information system, inclusive on the level of stocks, to help restore confidence in international markets.
- Tightening up speculation on the futures market to avoid price manipulations.
- Reducing food waste and post-harvest losses and ensuring food safety.

- Increasing investment in ever-green agriculture and in agricultural research.
- Giving greater attention to the net income of smallholder farmers.

CONCLUSION

October 16 is World Food Day. It offers the opportunity to strengthen national and international solidarity in the fight to end hunger, malnutrition and poverty. Falling water tables, eroding soils and rising temperatures make it difficult to feed growing populations. As a result, control of arable land and water resources is moving to centre stage in the global struggle for food security. At present, the biggest challenge is not only improving the productivity of agriculture, but also making the food grains accessible to the poor and needy. In such a situation, the Food Security Act would be an opportunity for India to assume full responsibility of food safety of its citizens.

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