

FOOD SECURITY IN INDIAN SOCIETY: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

Kewal Krishan, Ph. D.

Assistant Professor, PSR Government College Baijnath, District Kangra, HP

Email: drkknath@gmail.com

Abstract

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. Food security has evolved over a period of time. As a concept, food security originated in the mid-1970s, in the wake of global food crisis. The initial focus of attention was assuring the availability and to some degree the price stability of basic foodstuffs at the international and national level. This was then broadened to incorporate the demand side of food security in early eighties. During the nineties issues such food safety, nutrition, dietary needs and food preferences were also considered important ingredients of food security in India and all over the world. In FAO report on „The State of Food Insecurity, 2001“, 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 in India.

Keywords: Food Security, Indian Society, Constitutional Provisions, availability of food.



Scholarly Research Journal's is licensed Based on a work at www.srjis.com

Introduction

Today, on the threshold of 75 momentous years of Independence, the nation is justifiably proud of its myriad achievements. Among these is the remarkable success in eliminating widespread famines and the impressive increases in food production. Nonetheless, there is a long road to be travelled before the vision of a truly food secure India is achieved. The Government of India has also been encouraging voluntary action to mobilize the rural people. Several initiatives of the non-government organizations in the last two decades have had significant impact on the development. NGOs such as BAIF Development Research Foundation are promoting sustainable livelihood through dairy husbandry, water resource management, wastelands development and various income generation activities in

several states. Farmers in several states have established cooperatives for processing sugarcane, oil-seeds, milk, fruits and vegetables. With professional management and application of modern technologies, these organizations have brought economic stability and eliminated exploitation by intermediary traders. To strengthen people's organisations, Self Help Groups (SHGs), comprising of poor families has been promoted under the Ninth Five Year Plan (1997-2002). It is only the people's initiatives and involvement which can sustain the development. The government and political power have the will to support people's movement and this should promote sustainable rural development in India. As the world's leading humanitarian agency and the food aid arm of the United Nations, the World Food Programme (WFP) has been privileged to work with the Government of India in its efforts to eliminate hunger and ensure food security to the poor. Although its assistance is small compared to the scale of the Government's own programmes, yet with its international outreach, and the experience gained globally, the WFP has a special niche in complementing and sharpening government efforts to eliminate hunger. Recent years have seen the economy booming and growth rates have been among the highest in the world. The flip side, however, is that one in every five Indians suffers from overt or covert hunger. "Hunger," as stated by Amartya Sen and Jean Dreze, is "intolerable in the modern world" in a way it could not have been in the past, because it is "so unnecessary and unwarranted." India is a poignant example of how food sufficiency at the aggregate level has not translated into food security at the household level. A staggeringly large number of undernourished — about 214 million people — are chronically food insecure. Many more, varying about 40 million, are exposed to natural disasters. About 50 per cent of children (mostly tribal and rural) are undernourished and stunted, 23 per cent have a low birth weight and 68 out of 1000 die before the age of one year. There is a high prevalence of anaemia and other micronutrient deficiencies. The challenge before the WFP is to help the country attain the critical Millennium Development Goal on eradicating hunger. The Draft Approach Paper to the Planning Commission's Eleventh Five-Year Plan articulates a "vision of growth that will be much more broad-based and inclusive." These priorities of the Government match the WFP's own goals and will guide future initiatives. As part of the U.N. system, the WFP also works within the U.N. Development Assistance Framework to achieve synergy and, at the same time, avoid costly duplication of efforts. The WFP complements the Government of India's mid-day meal scheme in some districts with a mid-morning snack that is fortified with vitamins and

minerals and enhances learning by children, many of whom go to school on an empty stomach. This has proved to be an effective means to increase enrolment and retention, especially that of young girls. With increasing degradation of resources, the livelihoods of poor tribal communities are under threat. In collaboration with the International Fund for Agricultural Development, the WFP assists food-for-work activities in tribal development programmes undertaken by Governments in select States. This has led to empowerment of tribal communities and sustainable use of natural resources. In addition to the core programmes, the WFP has proposed significant capacity-building initiatives that relate to food fortification, grain banks, and strengthening of the Government's food-based programmes. The Ending Child Hunger and Undernutrition Initiative is an alliance between UNICEF and the WFP at the global level as well as in India that holds great promise. The WFP takes pride in the analytical rigour it has imparted to the conceptualisation of food security. The Food Insecurity Atlases, prepared in collaboration with the M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation, were a landmark. Extending the earlier work to the regional and district levels, the WFP proposes to prepare, in partnership with the Government, food insecurity atlases for several States. The future beckons, As India surges ahead to take its rightful place in the comity of nations, we in the WFP look forward to the coming years with renewed faith and optimism and a firm belief that hunger and undernourishment can be banished.

Performance In Access To Food And Nutrition

At the individual level, food security means that all members of the society have access to the food they need, either from their own production, from the market and/or from the government's transfer mechanism. In order to achieve food security it is also important that the poor have sufficient means to purchase food. Poor people cannot afford to purchase the food they need at market prices, and therefore, social protection programmes are needed. Adequate purchasing power for the poor to buy food can be ensured in two ways. One is to have an employment intensive pattern of growth which can provide remunerative work to the poor and enhance their power to purchase food. Another way is to increase incomes and subsidize food through social protection programmes like PDS and employment programmes. Even if there is availability as well as access to food, there is no guarantee of adequate absorption or nutrition, especially since, nutrition depends on many other factors such as the condition of pregnant women, breast feeding, health 13 factors, hygiene, drinking water, sanitation, etc.

Performance In Access To Food

Hunger, India has made significant progress in reducing the problem of hunger. Estimates of hunger (two square meals a day) based on self-perception from NSS data show that the proportion of households suffering from hunger declined from 17.3 per cent in 1983 to 2.5 per cent in 2004-05. This percentage is the highest (11.1 per cent) in West Bengal followed by Orissa (5.9 per cent) and Assam (5 per cent) in 2004-05. But, there are problems with this indicator as it is too subjective one of the major achievements of India in terms of food is avoidance of famines since independence. The last famine in India was the Bengal Famine of 1943. However, chronic poverty is still high in the country. This is because of lack of economic access (purchasing power) to food. Food Insecurity at the Household Level: Poverty Ratios The expenditure on food (calorie intake) with some allowance for non-food expenditure is generally used as a basis for determining the poverty line. Thus, the incidence of poverty in a region may give some indication of the extent to which food is accessible to households. The official estimates show that income poverty declined from 55 per cent in the early 1970s to 28 per cent in 2004-05. Although there has been progress in this regard still more than 300 million are below poverty line. Apart from other factors, increase in inequality seems to have slowed down the rate of reduction of poverty in the post-reform period. However, changes in two sub-periods of post reform period are interesting. The extent of decline of poverty in the second period (1999-2005) seems to be higher than that in the first period (1993-2000) of the post-reform period. This result is surprising, given that the second period witnessed the lowest growth in agriculture. Factors such as low relative food prices, higher growth in employment, particularly in the non-farm sector, might have been responsible for a higher rate of reduction in poverty during the 1999- 2005 period. This needs to be further investigated. However, there are three unambiguous conclusions. These are: (i) there is no evidence of higher rate of decline in poverty in the post-reform period compared to the pre-reform period.

Issues And Policies On Access To Food And Nutrition

Access to food at the household level and nutrition are inter-related. As mentioned above, access to food depends on increase in purchasing power due to increase in employment and social protection programmes. On the other hand, factors determining the levels of malnutrition are far more varied than those of access to food. Income Growth and Poverty Low income growth is one of the reasons for low access to food and malnutrition.

With increase in income and employment access to food can be improved. As mentioned above, the cross-section data across countries showed that the percentage decline in malnutrition is roughly half the rate at which GNP per capita grows. Thus, economic growth alone cannot reduce malnutrition. For example, in India, GDP growth was 6 to 7 per cent per annum during 1992-93 to 2005-06 and 9 per cent in the last four years. However, child malnutrition declined from 52 per cent to 46 per cent at the rate of 0.5 percentage points per annum. In fact, the per cent of underweight children in India declined only one percentage point from 47 per cent in 1998-99 to 46 per cent in 2005-06 in spite of high economic growth. This dissociation between GDP growth and changes in the status of malnutrition is due to a distribution problem, as the wealth created is unequally shared. Income poverty is another reason for lower access to food and malnutrition. Access to food can be improved with reduction in income poverty, but studies have shown that malnutrition exists even after eradication of poverty. For example, income poverty in India is 26 per cent while child malnutrition is 46 per cent. The data for India and South Asia show that malnutrition levels are surprisingly high even in rich income quintiles. Thus, reduction in malnutrition is going to be a bigger challenge than income growth and reduction in poverty. This, however, does not mean that income growth cannot have an impact in terms of reducing malnutrition. As shown in Table 18, under nutrition for the lowest and highest wealth categories respectively was 56.6 per cent and 19.7 per cent in 2005-06. It shows that with increase in wealth (proxy for income) under nutrition can be reduced. One can say that income growth is necessary but not sufficient for reduction in malnutrition, as other factors are also important.

Nutrition Programmes

ICDS: The Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), launched in 1975, aims at the holistic development of children up to six years of age with a special focus on children up to two years, besides expectant and nursing mothers. This is done through a package of six services: health check-ups, immunization, referral services, supplementary feeding, non-formal pre-school education, and advice on health and nutrition. In spite of its expansion in the last three decades, the impact on child nutrition and protecting the rights of the children is quite limited. The ICDS, which has been in existence for over three decades, was intended to address the problem of child and maternal malnutrition, but has clearly had limited impact. Child malnutrition has barely declined at all in a decade and a half, anaemia among women and children has actually risen and a third of all adult women were undernourished at the end

of 1990s and also in 2005–06. The scheme has also had limited coverage. Therefore, the answers are increasing coverage to ensure rapid universalization; changing the design; and planning the implementation in sufficient detail that the objectives are not vitiated by the design of implementation (GoI, 2008). First, the ICDS has to be universalized. Second, the current scheme does not focus on children between 0 and 3 years. In fact, this 31 window of opportunity never returns in the lifetime of the child. A child malnourished during 0–3 years will be marred physically and mentally for life. The design of the scheme has to address this problem frontally.

Right To Food Campaign

The Right to Food Campaign argues that “any statute enacted ought to, at the very minimum, protect existing legal entitlements created by the Supreme Court orders passed in PUCV Versus UOI currently pending in the Supreme Court, and preferably go beyond”. According to the draft prepared by this campaign, the Food Entitlements Act, 2009 should be: “an Act to ensure dignified economic and social access to adequate food and other requirements of good nutrition for all residents of the country, at all times, in pursuance of their fundamental right to be free from hunger, malnutrition and other deprivations associated with the lack of food.”

Mid-Day Meal Scheme

The mid-day meal scheme (MDMS) has been revised and universalized at the primary level from 1 September 2004. Recently, the MDMS has been extended to Upper Primary School from 1 October 2007. MDMS was supposed to cover about 18 crore children by 2008–09. There are problems with MDMS with r India has government programmes such as TPDS including AAY, nutrition programmes like mid-day meals, ICDS, etc. to improve food and nutrition security. NREGS and self-employment programmes can also increase access to food and nutrition. Social protection programmes in India have helped in improving incomes as well as I providing protection to the population, especially to the poor, from shocks in the economy. However, there are lots of gaps and inefficiencies in the social protection programmes. Under National Food Security Law, the government wants to provide 25 kilograms of rice and wheat at Rs.3/kg to BPL families. This is too narrow an approach for Right to Food. The Right to F Campaign has specified several other points, apart from universal PDS, to be included under the Food Entitlements Act.

Mnrega

By now it is well recognized that rural works programmes (RWPs) have become important instruments in the strategies for alleviating poverty and hunger in many developing countries. Enacting the Mahatma Gandhi National Employment Guarantee Act is one of the key electoral promises of the ruling coalition at the Centre under the Common Minimum Programme (CMP). The Bill was passed by the Parliament in August 2005 and became Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005 (MNREGA). This is a step towards legal enforcement of the Right to Work, as an aspect of the fundamental right to live with dignity. NREGA was notified in September, 2005 with the aim to enhance livelihood security in rural areas by providing at least 100 days of guaranteed wage employment in a financial year to every household. The primary objective is employment creation. The auxiliary objective is regenerating a natural resource base and creating productive assets. The third, a process objective, is to strengthen grass root democracy by infusing transparency and accountability in governance. It is the first time that a rights-based approach for employment has been introduced throughout India. This is the largest ever public 34 employment programme visualized in human history. One of the most important requisites for this programme is transparency and accountability. Gram Sabhas conduct social audits of all works taken up within Gram Panchayat. Social audit includes scrutinizing and verifying the authenticity of all records and procedures of the programme and expenditure. Social audit of all works in the Gram Panchayat area is conducted by the Gram Sabha. The performance of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MNREGS) is uneven. The problems and challenges in areas where it is unable to deliver are the following: (i) awareness problems among workers; (ii) implementation and administration problems; (iii) monitoring and evaluation problems; and (iv) lack of professionals and capacity building at various levels, particularly at the panchayat level. However, most evaluations -- official and non-official -- show that implementation in the case of MNREGS has been more effective than for any of its predecessor schemes. In particular, the leakages have been reduced significantly in many places. A significant increase in the agricultural wage is clearly indicative of the scheme's success. In some places migration has reduced, providing much needed relief during the financial crisis, with the urban poor returning to rural areas.

Right To Food And National Food Security Act

The Presidential address to Parliament in 2009 indicates that implementation of the National Food Security Act will provide a statutory basis for a framework³⁵ which assures food security for all. According to this proposed law, every family below the poverty line in rural as well as urban areas will be entitled by law, to 25 kilograms of rice or wheat per month at Rs. 3 per kilogram. It is felt that the statutory guarantee to food with fixed entitlements to the poor would be an important step in the direction of ensuring food and nutritional security of the country. Although the ongoing ‘targeted public distribution system’ (TPDS) is supposed to provide subsidized food grains to the BPL population, the legislative measure may lead to better accountability by making the PDS system more responsive in reaching out to the targeted population. Since the announcement of the proposed food security law, several people have raised a number of policy level and operational issues that need to be addressed while extending food guarantee to the citizens through a statutory mandate. Issues under the Proposed Right to Food Issues under PDS: There has been a serious debate on the question: should the PDS be targeted or universal? The advantage of universal PDS is that targeting errors can be minimized, particularly the exclusion error (exclusion of poor). Also, a right generally implies applicability to the entire population of the nation. The second issue is who should be covered under BPL and gets ration cards? According to Planning Commission estimates, there are 6.52 crore households below the poverty line (based on 1993-94 poverty estimates and population estimates for 2000 from the Registrar General of India (RGI)). However, actual cards issued by states number around 10.68 crore (in some states, nearly the entire population has been issued BPL cards!). The demand of states is that all the 10.68 crore card holders should be included in the BPL list under the Right to Food Act. This would have serious financial implications in terms of food subsidy. The N. C. Saxena committee on BPL population thinks that 50 per cent of the nation’s population should be covered under BPL. Need for Comprehensive Food Entitlement Act: The proposed national food security law is too narrow. The Right to Food campaign demands a comprehensive ‘Food Entitlements Act’ that goes beyond the narrow promise of supplying food grains to BPL population. “Aside from an overarching obligation to protect everyone from hunger, as well as to promote sustainable and equitable food production, essential provisions of the proposed Act include: a universal public distribution system (providing at least 35 kgs of grain per family); special food entitlements for destitute

households (including an expanded Antyodaya Programme); consolidation of all entitlements created by recent Supreme Court Orders (e.g. cooked mid-day meals in primary schools and universalization of ICDS); support for effective breastfeeding (including maternity entitlements and crèches); safeguards against the invasion of corporate interests in food policy; and elimination of all social discrimination in food related matters. Further, the Act must include strong accountability and grievance redressal provisions, including mandatory penalties for any violation of the Act and compensation for those whose entitlements have been denied”.

Conclusion

In this paper it has examined the performance, challenges, and policies in food security in terms of availability, access, and absorption or nutrition. It may be noted that all three are inter-related. For example, availability and access to food can increase nutrition among the households. Food availability is a necessary condition for food security. India is more or less self sufficient in cereals but deficit in pulses and oil seeds. Due to changes in consumption patterns, demand for fruits, vegetables, dairy, meat, poultry, and 39 fishery products has been increasing. There is a 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. There are six deficits in Indian agriculture. These are: (i) investment, credit, and infrastructure deficit; (ii) land and water management deficit; (iii) research and extension (technology) deficit; (iv) market deficit; (v) diversification deficit; and (vi) institutions deficit. Reforms are needed to reduce these deficits in order to achieve the following goals of agriculture: (i) 4 per cent growth in agriculture; (ii) equity in terms of higher growth in lagging regions, small and marginal farmers, and women; and (iii) sustainability. Access to food can be increased through employment due to growth in labour intensive sectors and/or through social protection programmes. Finally, the ‘rights approach’ plays an important role in improving implementation of development programmes.

References

- Bansil, P.C. (2000), “Demand for Food Grain by 2020 A.D.”, National Seminar on Food Security in India: The Emerging Challenges in the Context of Economic Liberalisation”, March 25-27, Hyderabad.
- Govt. of India (2007), “Economic Survey 2011”, Ministry of Finance, New Delhi,
- MSSRF (2004), “Food Insecurity Atlas of Rural India”, Bangalore.
- Copyright © 2018, Scholarly Research Journal for Interdisciplinary Studies*

- Shaban, Abdul (2006), “Capacity Building Project on Food Safety and Quality Control of Drugs: State Report - Rajasthan”, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Deonar,
- Chand, Ramesh 2007a : Demand for Food grains, Economic and Political Weekly. Economic Surve, 2009 – 10: Finance Ministry, GOI.
- Gopaldas, Tara 2006 : The Problem of hidden Hunger and Possible Interventions, Economic and Political Weekly.
- Dev, S.Mahendra (2003), “Right to Food in India” Working Paper no. 50, Centre for Economic and Social Studies, Hyderabad.
- Radhakrishna, R (2002), “Food and Nutrition Security”, in K.Parikh and R Radhakrishna (eds), India Development Report 2002, Oxford University Press., New Delhi
- Rao, C.H.H. (2005), Agriculture, Food Security, Poverty and Environment, Oxford University Press, New Delhi.
- Sen, Amartya (2001), “Many Faces of Gender Equality”, Front Line, 27 October – 9 November, Vol. 18, Issue 22
- Swaminathan, M. (2000), Weakening Welfare: The Public Distribution of Food in India, Left Word Books, New Delhi