



Food security in India: Problem and prospectus

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Abstract

Ensuring food and nutrition security is a challenge for India given its huge population and high level of poverty and malnutrition. 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. The malnutrition problem is much broader than that of access to food. 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.

Keywords: food security, food corporation of India (FCI), India, malnutrition, public distribution system (PDS)

Introduction

During the last few decades the total food production in India has increased at a much faster pace than the population. The Green Revolution Started in the late 1967-68 was a noteworthy watershed resulting in phenomenal increase in the production of agricultural crops especially in food grains that has changed the food security situation in India. Wheat crop among the food grains drew maximum benefit from Green Revolution which tripled the wheat production over the next three or four decades while the production of cereals doubled in this period and consequently reduced by over 50 per cent both food insecurity and poverty in the country. Food is considered among basic amenities essential for the sustenance and growth of an individual. It has three dimensions (a) food availability- total food production including imports and buffer stocks maintained in government granaries like FCI. (b) Food accessibility- food should be made available or should be in reach of each and every person (c) food affordability an individual should have enough amount of money to purchase proper, safe, healthy and nutritious food to meet his dietary needs. In India, food security is embodied under Directive principle of State Policy (DPSP) as exemplified in the Constitution of India, 1950. Article 47 states, "The state shall regard the raising of the level of nutrition and the standard of living of its people and the improvement of public health as among its primary duties and, in particular, the state shall endeavour to bring about prohibition of the consumption except for medical purposes of intoxicating drinks and of drugs which are injurious to health". The Government and its policies play a major role in ensuring Food security. These policies contain employment generation schemes, social

protection programmes, vocational training programmes, National Security Bill, etc. Role of other intermediaries like NGOs, civil societies, private sector and international organisation has let to effectiveness in Food security programme. Due to inflation the cost of food item is increasing day by day, leading to hard ship by making them unaffordable for poverty traumatized people in India. In addition to these hardships the short supply of pulses and edible oils forces the government to import them.

Objectives of Study

The paper has following objectives

- To discuss the Food Security in India Meaning, Definition and necessity and National Security Act, 2013.
- To study the various Challenges and prospectus Food Security in India.

Methodology

The present study is conceptual survey with exploratory cum descriptive in nature. It is based on the analysis of secondary data. The secondary data is availed from various journals, internet, and books.

Meaning

Food Security is the ability to assure, on a long term basis, that the system provides the total population access to a timely, reliable and nutritionally adequate supply of food. Food security is a flexible concept as reflected in the many attempts at definition in research and policy usage. Food security as a concept originated only in the mid-1970s, in the discussions of international food problems at a time of global

food crisis. The initial focus of attention was primarily on food supply problems - of assuring the availability and to some degree the price stability of basic foodstuffs at the international and national level. That supply-side, international and institutional set of concerns reflected the changing organization of the global food economy that had precipitated the crisis. A process of international negotiation followed, leading to the World Food Conference of 1974, and a new set of institutional arrangements covering information, resources for promoting food security and forums for dialogue on policy issues.

“Food security, at the individual, household, national, regional and global levels [is achieved] when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life”.

Food security has three components, viz., availability, access, and absorption (nutrition). The three are interconnected. Many studies have shown that improvement in nutrition is important, even for increase in productivity of workers. Thus, food security has intrinsic (for its own sake) as well as instrumental (for increasing productivity) value.

‘Food Security’ and its Necessity

‘Food security is necessary in a country to meet any situation, especially during natural calamities. Let us Look at the following points:

- The poor people, who are below the poverty line, do not have enough food most of the time.
- Sometimes even people above the property line do not have enough food when some natural disasters like earthquake, drought, floods, or tsunami occur.

Food Accessibility in India

In the words of Amartya Sen, the Indian philosopher, economist and Nobel laureate, “What really matters with the food is not the overall supply but, individual access.” Food access refers to the affordability in terms of individual’s capability to purchase food and to availability of food through safety nets of distribution. Food security requires the poor to have adequate purchasing power. Food- based interventions such as Public Distribution System (PDS), Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS), and Mid-day Meal Scheme (MDM) were introduced by the Government of India to meet the basic needs of the most vulnerable section of the country.

- **Access to PDS:** Public distribution system (PDS) is one of the instruments for ensuring household level food security. National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO) has been collecting information on purchases of rice, wheat, sugar, and kerosene from fair price shops.
- **Targeted Public Distribution System:** In order to ensure minimum availability of food grains to the vulnerable section of the country, the government launched this scheme in 1997, under this scheme, under this scheme, a quantity of 72 lakhs tonnes of food grains were availed at the rate of 10 kg per family per month.
- **Midday Meal Scheme:** Introduced in the schools, for enhancing enrolment retention and attendance for further

enhanced the nutrition improvement among students since 1995.

- **Antyodaya Ann Yojana:** This contemplates identification of poorest of the poor people and food grains at the rate of Rs. 2 per kg.

National Food Security Act, 2013

It was signed into law on 12 September 2013, retroactive to 5 July 2013. The National Food Security Act, 2013 (NFSA 2013) converts into legal entitlements for existing food security programmes of the Government of India. It includes the Midday Meal Scheme, Integrated Child Development Services scheme and the Public Distribution System. Further, the NFSA 2013 recognizes maternity entitlements. The Midday Meal Scheme and the Integrated Child Development Services Scheme are universal in nature whereas the PDS will reach about two thirds of the population (75% in rural areas and 50% in urban areas). This past year brought to the forefront key issues concerning food management, centred mainly on the proposed NFSB. The NFSA envisions a comprehensive legislative framework for protecting an individual's right to food, furthering the vision expressed in the Constitution of India. It is conceived as a system of interventions following a life-cycle approach, whereby at every stage of an individual's life, a safety net would be provided by the state to ensure food security. This brought into its fold a whole range of interventions that had already been converted to entitlements by the Supreme Court in the Right to Food Case (Peoples' Union of Civil Liberties, Rajasthan vs. Government of India): child nutrition programmes, maternity benefits, social security pensions and other entitlements that would further food security. Relative to the original intent, over time, the Bill became substantially restricted in its scope and vision, reflecting various pressures from the government, and much of the debate has concentrated disproportionately on the PDS. This law aims to provide subsidised food grains to approximately two thirds of India's 1.2 billion people. Under the provisions of the bill, beneficiaries are to be able to purchase 5 kg per eligible person per month of 75 per cent of rural and 50 per cent of the urban population are entitled for 3 years from enactment to 5 kg food grains per month at Rs.3, Rs.2, Rs.1 per kg for rice, wheat and coarse grains (millet), respectively.

Salient features

- Coverage and entitlement under Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS): Up to 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 in 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.
- State-wise coverage: Corresponding to the all India coverage of 75% and 50% in the rural and urban areas, State-wise coverage will be determined by the Central Government. Planning Commission has determined the State-wise coverage by using the NSS Household Consumption Survey data for 201-12.

- Subsidised prices under TPDS and their revision: Food grains 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). In case, any State's allocation under the Act is lower than their current allocation, it will be protected up to the level of average off take under normal TPDS during last three years, 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 during last three years.
- 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. 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 up to 6 years of age.
- Maternity Benefit: Pregnant women and lactating mothers will also be entitled to receive maternity benefit of not less than Rs.6, 000.
- Women Empowerment: Eldest woman of the household of age 18 years or above to be the head of the household for the purpose of issuing of ration cards.
- 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.
- Cost of intra-State transportation & handling of food grains and FPS Dealers' margin: Central Government will provide assistance to States in meeting the expenditure incurred by them on transportation of food grains within the State, its handling and FPS dealers' margin as per norms to be devised for this purpose.
- 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.
- Food Security Allowance: Provision for food security allowance to entitled beneficiaries in case of non-supply of entitled food grains or meals.
- 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.

Challenges of Food Security

The crux of India's food problem today pertains not so much on increasing food availability or production but with the distribution of food. This is not to suggest that the challenges associated with ensuring food availability in sustainable ways is not a policy concern, but rather, in terms of the immediacy of challenges, ensuring food access would appear to score over concerns over food availability. For example, despite flagging growth rates in the agricultural sector relative to targets, India has seen impressive growth in food grain

production in recent years. The National Food Security Mission has played a key role in augmenting production in cereals and pulses. Much of this has come from yield increases in the eastern regions in the country where the Green Revolution did not take place. At the same time, there has also been a strong and continuing trend for diversification into non-cereal and high-value commodities such as dairy, fruits and vegetables, which implies the possibility of higher quality diets. The imperative that the challenge of food security derives also from recent evidence from India and elsewhere suggests that income growth might not always translate fully or quickly enough to improvements in the health nutritional status of children, implying that this issue needs attention (Haddad *et al.* 2002; Block *et al.* 2012; Coffey *et al.* 2014). This weak link between income growth and nutritional outcomes implied that food security in the sense defined earlier would require special attention of policy-makers and cannot be presumed to follow as a consequence of growth. The challenges India faces to meet its food security are as follows:

- **Seasonal Fluctuations:** Seasonal fluctuation is expected to affect agricultural land use and production due to less availability of water for irrigation and other factors. There is climate change in India due to rising temperature and extreme events on the food production systems which impacts agricultural growth adversely. Various reports indicate that seasonal fluctuation would result in further intensification of temporal and spatial variation in the availability of water and extreme events of flood and drought. There is a strong need to address changes in institution and resource accessibility to tackle the climate induced natural hazards.
- **Public Health:** The state of public health services is far from satisfactory. These suffer from significant regional, social disparities, and gender disparities reflecting low levels of health indicators, which have hardly improved over the years. The quality of delivery systems is very poor. There has also been significant privatization of health services that are unaffordable and expensive, impacting very adversely on the poor who are as a result forced to compromise other essential expenditures such as on food and education. The low standards of health, hygiene, safe drinking water and sanitation play a very adverse role by inhibiting the absorption of essential nutrients by children who are sick and ailing. There is thus a crying need for larger investments in public healthcare and its radical improvement.
- **Imbalance in water demand and supply:** There is a vast temporal and spatial variation in rainfall and water availability in the country. Majority of water is available during monsoon period and that too, through few spell of intense rainfall. The average rainfall in India is 1170mm. The demand for water for various purposes is increasing due to population growth, industrialisation and urbanization. Presently agriculture sector is using about 83% of water resources, but due to demand from other sector availability may decline to 68% in 2050. Hence, mismatch between demand and supply of water.
- **Division of Land:** Fragmentation of land is widespread in India and it is believed that fragmented nature of land

holding plays a major role in explaining low levels of agricultural productivity. Increasing population has led to reduction in availability of land over the decades. There has been increase in putting agriculture land into non agriculture uses to accommodate developmental activities leading to land fragmentation and low productivity. Therefore there is a need for shift in land use and cropping pattern.

- **Lack of quality of Agricultural product:** The challenge confronting the seed sector is to make available quality seeds having good genetic potential at an affordable price and across the country to the farmers to enable them harvest maximum yield in the given agro climatic conditions.
- **The Non-Farm Sector:** With a very large proportion of the workers engaged in and dependent on agriculture, the scope of further expansion of livelihoods based on agriculture alone is limited. There is thus a need to expend the rural non-farm sector to provide greater earning opportunities for those confined to agriculture. Food processing and other services such as storage, transport and marketing need to be encouraged through higher outlays and investments in rural non-farm infrastructure.

Conclusion

Something like the “State of global food insecurity” analysis has to be undertaken. Since food insecurity is about risks and uncertainty, the formal analysis should include both chronic sub-nutrition and transitory, acute insecurity that reflects economic and food system volatility. It must be noted that all the three terms are interrelated. Availability and access to food can increase the nutrition level among households. It is seen that there has been a significant decline in the level of hunger among poor’s; there has also been a significant lowering of the households below poverty line. Access to food can be increased through employment due to growth in labour intensive sector. The problem of malnutrition is much border than that of access of food. The crux of India’s food problem pertains not so much on increasing food availability but with the distribution of food.

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