



## Some Issues on Food Security in India

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**Abstract:** India has designed and implemented a very wide range of programmes to enhance food security and has also succeeded to a remarkable extent however severe challenges remain on several fronts. As passed by the Parliament, Government has notified the National Food Security Act, 2013 on 10th September, 2013 with the objective to provide for food and nutritional security in human life cycle approach, by ensuring access to adequate quantity of quality food at affordable prices to people to live a life with dignity. The Act provides for coverage of upto 75% of the rural population and upto 50% of the urban population for receiving subsidized foodgrains under Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS), thus covering about two-thirds of the population. The eligible persons will be entitled to receive 5 Kgs of foodgrains per person per month at subsidised prices of Rs. 3/2/1 per Kg for rice/wheat/coarse grains.

**Key words** poverty, food Security, Public Distribution System

**Introduction:** Food security has been a major developmental objective in India since the beginning of planning. Concepts of food security have evolved in the last thirty years to reflect changes in official policy thinking (Clay, 2002<sup>1</sup>; Heidhues et al, 2004<sup>2</sup>). The term first originated in the mid-1970s, when the World Food Conference (1974) defined food security in terms of food supply - assuring the availability and price stability of basic foodstuffs at the international and national level: "Availability at all times of adequate world food supplies of basic foodstuffs to sustain a steady expansion of food consumption and to offset fluctuations in production and prices<sup>3</sup>". This widely accepted definition points to the following dimensions of food security: Food availability: The availability of sufficient quantities of food of appropriate quality, supplied through domestic production or imports (including food aid).

**Food access:** Access by individuals to adequate resources (entitlements) for acquiring appropriate foods for a

nutritious diet. Entitlements are defined as the set of all commodity bundles over which a person can establish command given the legal, political, economic and social arrangements of the community in which they live (including traditional rights such as access to common resources).

**Utilization:** Utilization of food through adequate diet, clean water, sanitation and health care to reach a state of nutritional well-being where all physiological needs are met. This brings out the importance of non-food inputs in food security.

**Stability:** To be food secure, a population, household or individual must have access to adequate food at all times. They should not risk losing access to food as a consequence of sudden shocks (e.g. an economic or climatic crisis) or cyclical events (e.g. seasonal food insecurity). The concept of stability can therefore refer to both the availability and access dimensions of food security.

More recently, the ethical and human rights dimension of food security

has come into focus. The Right to Food is not a new concept, and was first recognized in the UN Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. In 1996, the formal adoption of the Right to Adequate Food marked a milestone achievement by World Food Summit delegates. It pointed the way towards the possibility of a rights based approach to food security. 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 (McClain-Nhlapo, 2004)<sup>4</sup>.

**Why food security:**

Why food security? The poorest section of the society might be food insecure the poverty line might also be food insecure when the country faces a national disaster/calamity like earthquake, drought, flood, tsunami , widespread failure of crops causing famine , etc (figure-1).

Figure: Drought and food security



**Policy Priorities for Food Security:** FAO Policy Priorities for Food Security FAO's 'twin-track approach' for fighting hunger combines sustainable agricultural and rural development with targeted programmes for enhancing direct access to food for the most needy. As outlined in Table 1, the first track addresses recovery measures for establishing resilient food systems.

Factors that affect food system resilience include the structure of the food

economy as a whole, as well as its components such as agricultural production, technology, the diversification of food processing, markets and consumption. Track 2 assesses the options for providing support to vulnerable groups. Vulnerability analysis offers a forward looking way of understanding food security dynamics, calling for explicit attention to risk and the options for managing it.

**Figure 1: FAO Policy Priorities for Food Security<sup>5</sup>**



Twin Track Approach	Availability	Access and Utilization	Stability
<b>Rural Development/ productivity enhancement</b>	Enhancing food supply to the most vulnerable	Re-establishing rural institutions	Diversifying agriculture and employment
	Improving rural food production especially by small-scale farmers	Enhancing access to assets	Monitoring food security and vulnerability
	Investing in rural infrastructure	Ensuring access to land	Dealing with the structural causes of food insecurity
	Investing in rural markets	Reviving rural financial systems	Reintegrating refugees and displaced people
	Revitalization of livestock Sector	Strengthening the labour market	Developing risk analysis and management
	Resource rehabilitation and conservation	Mechanisms to ensure safe food	Reviving access to credit system and savings mechanisms
	Enhancing income and other entitlements to food	Social rehabilitation programmes	Re-establishing social safety nets
<b>Direct and Immediate Access to Food</b>	Food Aid	Transfers: Food/Cash based	Monitoring immediate vulnerability and intervention impact Peace-building efforts
	Seed/input relief	Asset redistribution	Peace-building efforts
	Restocking livestock capital	Social rehabilitation programmes	
	Enabling Market Revival	Nutrition intervention programmes	



### **Food security in India:**

India has designed and implemented a very wide range of programmes to enhance food security and has also succeeded to a remarkable extent however severe challenges remain on several fronts. As passed by the Parliament, Government has notified the National Food Security Act, 2013 on 10th September, 2013 with the objective to provide for food and nutritional security in human life cycle approach, by ensuring access to adequate quantity of quality food at affordable prices to people to live a life with dignity. The Act provides for coverage of upto 75% of the rural population and upto 50% of the urban population for receiving subsidized foodgrains under Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS), thus covering about two-thirds of the population. The eligible persons will be entitled to receive 5 Kgs of foodgrains per person per month at subsidised prices of Rs. 3/2/1 per Kg for rice/wheat/coarse grains. The existing Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) households, which constitute the poorest of the poor, will continue to receive 35 Kgs of foodgrains per household per month.

1. Provide food grains to 67% of the population (approx 800 million) at highly subsidized rates.
2. There will be fixed quota per state of grains allotted. Onus is on the respective states to decide the beneficiaries. This can lead to wide regional disparities as a person not eligible for such great benefits in one state may be eligible in other state.

The Act also has a special focus on the nutritional support to women and children. Besides meal to pregnant women and lactating mothers during pregnancy and six months after the child birth, such women will also be entitled to receive maternity benefit of not less than Rs. 6,000. Children upto 14 years of age will be entitled to nutritious meals as per the prescribed nutritional standards. In case of non-supply of entitled foodgrains or meals, the beneficiaries will receive food security allowance. The Act also contains provisions for setting up of grievance redressal mechanism at the District and State levels. Separate provisions have also been made in the Act for ensuring transparency and accountability.

As said above, Food security has been a major developmental objective in India since the beginning of planning. India achieved self-sufficiency in food grains in the 1970's and has sustained it since then. But the achievement of food grain security at the national level did not percolate down to households and the level of chronic food insecurity is still high.

### **Food Security Bill talking about<sup>6</sup>-**

3. Grains amount to 5 Kg / per person / per month has to be allotted.
4. Women will be made head of the family according to this scheme. This is very positive step.
5. Special maternity benefits: Free Meal for every pregnant and lactating mothers (during pregnancy and 6 months after child birth).Also, allowance of Rs.6000 will be given in installments as maternity benefits.



6. Special privileges for children under different age groups like free meals etc

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

Table 2: Per Capita Dietary Energy Supply and Prevalence of Under Nutrition in Total Population.

Year Dietary	Energy Supply (Kcal/day)	Undernourishment in the Total Population (%)
1990-92	2370	25
1995-97	2450	21
2002-2004	2470	20
2006-2008*	2550	20

Source: Anil Chandy Ittyerah, (2013), Food Security in India: Issues and Suggestions for Effectiveness, Theme Paper for the 57th Members' Annual Conference, The Status and Trends in Food Production and Availability.

National self-sufficiency in food grain has been a major achievement in post-Independence India. Having remained a severely food deficit economy over two decades after Independence, India managed to achieve self-sufficiency in

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 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<sup>7</sup>.

Notwithstanding the achievement of macro level food security and the discernable improvement in per capita consumption, the country is still home to a-fifth of the world's undernourished population. This given situation has been ascribed to high and increasing population pressure with nearly 16 million people being added annually to the already large population exceeding 1.2 billion. This situation of hunger and malnutrition is also equally on account of serious problems related to the distribution and economic access to food, which adversely affect household and individual level food insecurities



limited extent in times of extreme emergencies such as droughts and serious crop failure. Food grain production in the country registered a steady increase over two decades from only 50 million tonnes in 1950-51 to 244.5 million tonnes in 2010-11. The growth rate in food grain has been about 2.5 percent per annum during the post-Independence period. Moreover the production of oilseeds, sugarcane, fruits, vegetables and milk has also increased significantly. A closer look at the experience in the last two decades however indicates a tapering off or decline in both production and yields. It has been observed<sup>8</sup> that during the period 1996-2008 as compared to the years 1986-97, the growth rate in food grain production declined very sharply from nearly 3 percent to around 0.93 percent. Moreover the growth in production was much less than the growth in population in the latter period, having a serious impact on per capita availability. The growth rate of yields in food grain also declined from 3.21 percent to 1.04 percent.

#### **Per Capita Availability of Food Grains**

Sustainable development results from efficient institutions and thus the stress on development funding must now increasingly focus on development outcomes and the effectiveness of public service delivery. The indicators of hunger among marginalized groups and of 300 million poor must be improved. This not only requires additional resources but also more effective policies and a strong delivery system. The pre-independence period witnessed a rapid decline in per capita availability of food grains from about 545 gm per day to a level as low as 407 gm per day. This was largely on account of the policies of the colonial

government. However on the basis of five year averages India witnessed a significant rise in net availability from a level of 416 gm per day in 1950-55 to a level of 485 gm per day during the period 1989-91 (Patnaik, 2004)<sup>9</sup>. However since the early 1990s there has been a significant fall in food grain availability to a level of 445 gm per day by the year 2006-07 (Saxena N.C., 2011)<sup>10</sup>. In recent years, there has been a shift in policy focus towards household level food security and per capita food energy intake is taken as a measure of food security. The government has been implementing a wide range of nutrition intervention programmes for achieving food security at the household and individual levels. The Public Distribution System (PDS) supplies food items, such as food grains and sugar, at administered prices through fair price shops. There have been a range of food-for-work and other wage employment programmes. Another approach adopted by the government is to target women and children directly; this includes mid-day meal programme for school going children and supplementary nutrition programme for children and women.

**Conclusion:** India has designed and implemented a very wide range of programmes to enhance food security and has also succeeded to a remarkable extent however severe challenges remain on several fronts. However, the major problem is with the proper design and implementation of policies and programmes. There is in particular the urgent need to address governance issues specially those related to effective and efficient public service delivery systems. Governance needs to conform closely to the socio-economic environment and appropriate institutions are needed to



improve the governance system. A people-centric and rights-based approach has shown remarkable results in the case of rural employment. It has brought about increasing transparency and accountability among those responsible for the implementation of MGNREGA. A similar approach is being visualized for Food Security and though the National Food Security Act would burden the State and strain its exchequer it is a move in the right direction. The Act is

likely to bring about a much higher level of commitment on the part of the states to meet their statutory obligations regarding food security and bringing about reform efforts on several fronts related to the food system. These reforms are necessary for India's rapid growth and development free of social and economic instability in the years ahead.





Table 3: Net Availability of Cereals, Pulses, Edible Oils, Vanaspati and Sugar

Year	Per Capita net availability per day (grams)			Edible Oil (Kg)	Vanaspati (Kg)	Sugar (Nov.-Oct.) (Kg)
	Cereals	Pulses	Total Food grain			
1951	334.2	60.7	394.9	2.5*	0.7*	5.0*
1961	399.7	69.0	468.7	3.2	0.8	4.8
1971	417.6	51.2	468.8	3.5	1.0	7.4
1981	417.3	37.5	454.8	3.8	1.2	7.3
1990	435.3	41.1	476.4	5.3	1.1	12.3
1991	468.5	41.6	510.1	5.5	1.0	12.7
1992	434.5	34.3	468.8	5.4	1.0	13.0
1993	427.9	36.2	464.1	5.8	1.0	13.7
1994	434.0	37.2	471.2	6.1	1.0	12.5
1995	457.6	37.8	495.4	6.3	1.0	13.2
1996	442.5	32.7	475.2	7.0	1.0	14.1
1997	466.0	37.1	503.1	8.0	1.0	14.6
1998	414.2	32.8	447.0	6.2	1.0	14.5
1999	429.2	36.5	465.7	8.5	1.3	14.9
2000	422.7	31.8	454.4	9.0	1.4	15.6
2001	386.2	30.0	416.2	8.2	1.3	15.8
2002	458.1	35.4	494.1	8.8	1.4	16.0
2003	408.5	29.1	437.6	7.2	1.4	16.3
2004	426.9	35.8	462.7	9.9	1.2	16.8
2005	390.9	31.5	422.4	10.2	1.1	15.5
2006	412.8	32.5	445.3	10.6	1.1	16.3
2007	407.4	35.5	442.8	11.1	1.2	16.8
2008	394.2	41.8	436.0	11.4	1.2	17.8
2009	407.4	37.0	444.0	12.7	1.3	18.8
2010	401.7	35.4	437.1	13.3	1.1	17.9
2011(P)	423.5	39.4	462.9	13.6	1.0	17.0

Sources: *Economic Survey 2008-2009*, and 2012-13, Government of India.

Note: \*Pertains to the year 1955-56

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