



Food Security in India during Covid-19 Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

This research paper examines the food security in India. Legion of unpleasant incidents were witnessed by us during Covid-19 pandemic that put some questions in our mind regarding food security in our country. As large numbers of people returning to their home places asserted that they do not fear of Covid-19 but hunger. It clearly indicates that they were not getting food which is essential for life to live. Some poignant incidents of death on the road and on the platform during Covid-19 compel us to think of food security in our country. It is no doubt the storehouses of food in our country are full. The Governments doll out food to the weaker sections of the society through various schemes which is discussed in brief in this research article. Do these schemes attain the set goals of hunger free India? This is a question of pondering over. This article sheds light on the present scenario of schemes proposed and implemented in our country. It also highlights the benefits of these schemes and drawbacks in benefiting the concerned weaker, underprivileged and marginalized sections of the country.

KEY WORDS

Food security, India, Pandemic, Covid-19, Poor People.

INTRODUCTION

Food is essential for an active and healthy life of human beings. There will be no life without food. It is the right of every human being to get food. A human being must be in a position to have access to food. Otherwise it is a duty of the

Government to save the life of human being by providing food facilities. Our country, India, is facing quite paradoxical situation regarding food security. There is a plenty of food and higher level of undernourishment at the same time which intensifies the question of food security.

The Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) concerning food security states that it emerges when people at all times have physical economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs. It is a broad concept and extends beyond the production, availability and demand for food. Covid-19 Pandemic forced the Government to lockdown the states. As a result the crisis of hunger or food has appeared before the common masses of the states due to the issue of unemployment and full lockdown.

The Government of India provides the food security to all the citizens of India by providing it through various measures. The common masses of the country approximately 80 crore getting 5 kg of rice or wheat per month since April 2020 can be viewed in that sense. Food is as essential for living as air is for breathing, but food security means something more than getting. There is a need of '3A' consisting availability, accessibility and affordability to one and all.

- (a) **Availability:** It refers to the stock available in Government granaries which includes food imports from various countries, food production in the country, and the earlier food stocks.
- (b) **Accessibility:** The food items must be available to all the needy at ease and on time.
- (c) **Affordability:** It implies the purchasing power of an individual. One must have money to buy sufficient and nutritious food items to meet one's dietary needs.

It is known fact that below poverty line population is financially weaker section and it is either don't have purchasing power of two meals a day or if it has purchasing power of two time meals then other essentials of life are beyond their reach. There is a population in our country which is in disaster situation and natural calamity like flood, tsunami, draught and earthquake, etc. faces food insecurity. To help this population in difficult time, the Government included food security in its Good Governance Index (GGI). This index includes fifteen points like health, education, employment, transfer information, public-private relationship, food security, women empowerment, transportation, rule of law, etc.

The NFS Act 2013 (National Food Security) seems to be legalised in existing food security schemes of the Government. The NFS Act (2013) also recognizes maternity entitlements. It offers free cereals to new born children and pregnant women.³ Various schemes are part of this such as Public Distribution System, Mid-day meal and Integrated Child Development Services.

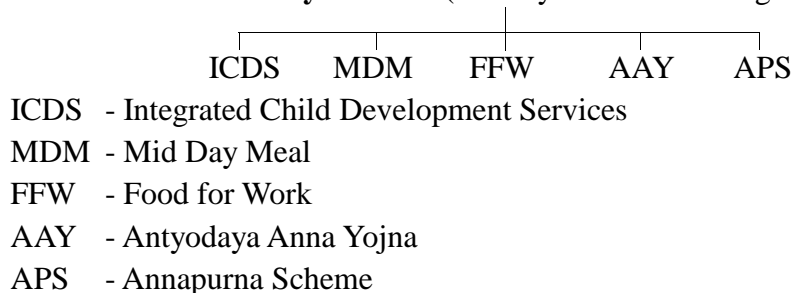
The Government record shows over Rs. 1500 Billion has been allocated as food subsidies under the Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS) in the year 2017-18.⁴ According to NFS Act, every family below the poverty line (BPL) in rural as well as urban areas will be entitled by law to 25 kg of rice for Rs. 2 and wheat per month at Rs.3 per kg. Apart from this an overarching obligation to protect everyone from hunger as well as to promote sustainable and equitable food production essential provisions of the Acts include:

- (a) A universal PDS (providing at least 35 kg. grain to a family).
- (b) Antyodaya Programme is expanded to include weaker and destitute households.
- (c) The Supreme Court ordered recently the consolidations of all schemes like cooked Mid-Day Meals in schools (primary) and universalisation of ICDS).⁵

The general view is that at the very least the Right to Food Act has to build on four major types of interventions including nutrition schemes for children and other vulnerable groups. (e.g., Pensions schemes, Antyodaya Anna Yojna, etc.)

Amartya Sen, the Nobel laureate for economics, added a new dimension to food security and emphasized the “access” to food through what he called entitlements and combination of what one can produce, exchange in the market along with state or other socially provided supplies.⁶ To ensure of availing food to all, the Government planned food security system. There are various NGO’s working intensively towards this direction and to understand it very clearly and easily needs to go through the following chart.

Food Security in India (Poverty Alleviation Programmes)



In India the Dept. of Food and Public Distribution is responsible for the management of the food security of the country. The primary objective of the policy is to guarantee food security by following schemes or programmes.

The NFS Act provides for coverage of up to 75% of the rural population and up to 50% of urban population for receiving subsidized food grains under TPDS, thus covering about 2/3 of the population. This coverage for receiving highly subsidized food grains is under two categories: households covered under the AAY and APS schemes. These schemes focus on supply food security to the poorest section of the society. Such households are entitled under the NFS Act to receive 35 kg of grains per households per month at Rs. 1/2/3 per kg for coarse grains wheat / rice. The Act has some provisions for grievance redress at various level such as the district and state. Separate provisions have been made for ensuring transparency and accountability with UIDAI. The Mid-Day Meal Scheme is put into practice by the Ministry of HRD (Now Ministry of Education). The scheme covers student of primary and middle classes in the Government schools. Food grains are supplied free of cost at 100 grams per child per school day.

Food Security in India during Covid-19

Different sections of the society have suffered to a great extent during Covid-19 Pandemic due to sudden lockdown of the states. The lockdown no doubt was essential step to save the nation at the outbreak of this pandemic. The efficient management was required to handle the unpleasant situation due to this lockdown. Now in India, 80 crores people are getting 5 kg of wheat or rice, free per month since April 2020 under Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojna (PMGKAY) and it has been extended up to November 2020.⁷ 1 kg of Chana Dal (gram) is being distributed free to more than 16 crore family per month since April 2020. This scheme too has been extended up to November 2020. Food security and adequate nutrition are determined by a number of factors that can be grouped as:

- (a) The food availability,
- (b) Economic access to food and
- (c) The way in which food is used (including interactions between diet and disease).

Agriculture Sector’s contribution in Food Security

Agriculture is of direct importance in at least the first two categories. It has indirect effects (especially through income) on the third. Agriculture’s contribution to food security can be framed by two key criteria:

1. Increasing the facilities of availing food at prices the poor can afford.
2. Providing jobs and incomes that will give poor people the means to access food.

We need to understand the more about food availability and agriculture's role in ensuring economic access to food. A strategy for food security based largely on self sufficiency in food production has the advantage of promoting both productivity and purchasing power among small peasants and agricultural labourers. To realize this purpose, deployment of new and latest research and technologies available globally has become imperative. In all, the agricultural research role and education remains as the foundation for primary and secondary product in agro-sector.

Krishonnati Yojna (2018)

Union Cabinet passed the approval on 02 May 2018 for the umbrella scheme. The umbrella scheme comprises 11 schemes/missions. It aims to develop the agriculture and allied sectors. It concentrates on increasing the farmer's income by enhancing production. The schemes that are part of the umbrella schemes are:

1. Integrated Scheme on Agricultural Cooperation.
2. National Food Security Mission.
3. Mission for Integrated Development of Horticulture.
4. Sub-Mission on Agriculture Mechanization (SMAM).

The schemes will be continued with an expected expenditure of Rs. 33269 crore for three financial years, from 2017 to 2020.

Role of Government in Food Security

- a. Promoting domestic production to meet the demands of growing population.
- b. Providing minimum support prices for procurement and storage of food grains.
- c. Preserve buffer stocks. It helps to deal with the price hike of food grains during the time of shortages.
- d. Operating a PDS by biometric devices and UID (Aadhar Card).

Currently the food security system and price policy consist of three instruments: procurement prices/ minimum support prices (MSP), buffer stocks and PDS. MSP and Procurement Price Policy for agricultural commodities seek to ensure remunerative prices to growers for their product with a vision to encouraging higher investment. A strategy for food security based largely on self-sufficiency in food production has the advantage of promoting both productivity and purchasing power among small peasants and agricultural labourers. In general, policies for getting better household food security should include⁸:

- A. Development strategies and macro-economic policies that would create conditions for growth with equity,
- B. Accelerating growth in the food and agricultural sectors which provide direct sources of food and income with which to buy food,
- C. Improving access to land and other natural resources,
- D. Increasing employment opportunities.

The difficulty in Food Security

Developing countries will be more affected by Global Warming and Climate Change because they depend more on climate - sensitive sectors like agriculture, forestry or fishing. Under an enhanced greenhouse condition, the variability of Monsoon is projected to increase resulting in recurring droughts

or flood. Agriculture sector in India is vulnerable to climate change. Higher temperatures tend to reduce crop yields and favour weed (useless plant). There is a need to work on this aspect.

Govt. of India approved a new central sector scheme- Kisan Sampada Yojna in 2017 with an outlay of Rs. 6,000 crores for the period 2016-2020. It is related for Agro-Marine Processing and Development of Agro-Processing clusters.¹⁰ India is associated with a number of international agencies working in the field of goods related matters. These include SAARC Food Bank, World Food Programme, Food and Agricultural Organisation, International Sugar Organisation and International Grains Council, etc.

CONCLUSION

In our country, food availability and food security for the poor is less reliable. Their population right now is 1.3 billion. It is estimated that their population will increase to 1.5 billion in 2030.¹¹ We need to understand much more about food availability and agriculture's contribution and its role in ensuring economic access to food. In situation of natural disasters, the issue of food security assumes larger number of people. They are living in poverty; suffer from lack of food security most of the time as they are not able to buy food even for survival. In such situations the concerned agencies and departments should work sincerely for the benefits of weaker and poor sections of the society.

The Government has formed a sound food security system by buffer stock and PDS. So therefore, we must use our food in proper way without wasting. It should be remembered that a lot of people of our country are dying due to crisis of food. We should save for us as well as for others. As our father of nation, Mahatma Gandhi stated, "Earth provides enough so satisfy everyman's need, but not everyman's greed." Food security will help to end the hunger which is the second goal (Zero Hunger) of Sustainable Development Goals 2030.

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