



Food security in India: Issues and challenges

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Abstract

Food Security is one of the major challenges confronting the world today. Food security, along with poverty eradication and ecological conservation, is one of the most significant elements of the millennium development goals. The thought of food security is delineated as that take account of both physical and economic admittance to food that congregate people's dietary needs as well as their food predilection. The World Food Conference 1974 resolved that the food security ensures adequate supplies and availability. Food security has become a significant issue across the world predominantly in developing countries like India. The Purpose of this paper is to analyse and emphasize the policies, issues and challenges for the food security in India.

Keywords: food security, foodstuffs, nutritious food, PDS, household, MDM, MSP

Introduction

The definition of food security has evolved over a period of time as a concept, food security originated in the mid-1970s, in make a 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 a report of International Food Policy Research Institute's Global Hunger Index, 2011, has declared India's 67th rank of the 81 countries of the world with the worst food security status and 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 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 the primary duties. Providing food security has been focus of the Government's planning and policy. Food security mean availability of sufficient food grains 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 food grains 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 subsidized food grains is provided to eligible households.

The 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 up to 75% of the rural population and 50% of the urban population to receive subsidized food grains under Targeted Public Distribution System. About two thirds of the population therefore will be covered under the Act to receive highly subsidized food grains. There is a special focus in the Act on nutritional support to regnant women and lactating mothers and children up to 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 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

- 1. 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, since Antyodayas 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.
- 2. 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.

3. **Subsidised prices under TPDS and their revision:** Food grains under TPDS will be made available at subsidized prices of Rs. 3/2/1 per kg for rice, wheat and coarse grains of a period of three years from the date of commencement of the Act. Thereafter prices will be suitably linked to Minimum Support Price (MSP).
4. In case, any State's allocation under the proposed legislation is lower than their current allocation, it will be protected up to 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. 830 per kg for rice has been determined as issue prices for the additional allocation to protect the average off take.
5. **Identification of Households:** Within the covering under TPDS determined for each State, the work of identification of eligible households is to be done by States/UTs.
6. **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 up to 6 years of age.
7. **Maternity Benefit:** Pregnant women and lactating mothers will also be entitled received maternity benefit of not less than Rs. 6,000 as per scheme to be formulated by the Central Government.
8. **Women Empowerment:** Eldest women of the household of age 18 years or above will be the head of the household for the purpose of issuing of ration cards.
9. **Grievance Redressal Mechanism:** Grievance redressal mechanism at the District and State levels. States will have the flexibility to sue the existing machinery or set up separate mechanism.
10. **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.
11. **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.
12. **Food Security Allowance:** Provision for food security allowance to entitled beneficiaries in case of non-supply of entitled food grains or meals.
13. **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 food grains 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. up to 04.07.2014, for identification of eligible households for receiving subsidized food grains 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, food grains under the Act have been allotted to them. In remaining 25 States/UTs, allocation under existing TPDS is continuing.

As identification of eligible household 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. up to 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 household 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 relates to beneficiary identification in a fair and transparent manner so as to avoid errors on inclusion and exclusion, delivery of food grains up to door-steps of fair price shops computerization of TPDS operations, strengthening of the mechanism of Vigilance Committees at various levels and effective grievance redressal mechanism. Such forms measures are crucial to ensure a leakage and diversion free PDS and also to ensure that no needy person is denied benefits.

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