

## Food Security: Indian Perspective

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In India we are leaving with a lot of paradoxes. After green revolution, at the one hand lot of crops & agricultural food, grains have produced and on the other hand starvation took place. A large no of people have ended their lives due to starvation, especially in Bidharbha, Chattrishghar and in other places. So, the fact is that unless citizens have enough food at affordable prices, they can't survive. We have Public Distribution System (PDS), but due to corrupt practices in many places, people cannot receive the fruits of this system. As a result, starvation and suicide occurs. Farmers are committing suicide for not been able to paying back the loans.

The issue of Food security, climate change, and environmental problems are all closely related to each other. Our economy is agro-based economy. So here, agricultural sector plays a pivotal role. Draft National Food Security Bill was introduced 2 years ago. The Supreme Court of India has declared right to food as a fundamental right to life. Since independence, series of measures have been taken by the Govt. However, the number of undernourished persons have increased from 210 million in 1992 to 252 million in 2004-06. India is about half of the worlds' undernourished children. India's position is deteriorating day by day. Government of India fixed a quantity of 35 kg. of food grain per head per month for the people staying below poverty line. Actual determination of the poor people is very confusing. Different institutions ( National & International) in different time introduces various measures to determine the extent of poverty and to find out the no of poor people. According to World Bank standard the people whose earnings are \$1.25 per day are included in the group of **Extremely poor** and the group of people whose earnings are \$2 per day are counted as **Moderately poor**. In India it is assumed that 50% people are lying under poverty line ( N.C. Saksena committee report ). According to Tendulkar committee report, 42 % of people in our country are lying under the poverty line. After so many years of study, it has not been decided that how many persons are lying below the poverty line actually. According to the Planning Commission, in Rural area , people whose earnings are <Rs. 750 per month & in urban area < Rs. 870 per month are lying below the poverty line. There is not a big difference among the condition of the people who lies below the poverty line or just above the poverty line.

### How to measure the Food Security ?

There are two common indicators are available to measure poverty line.

**1) Subjective indicator:** In case of this indicator, to know the extent of poverty a question is set by the NSSO ( National Sample Survey Organization ) :-- “ Do you get two square meals ”?

According to Oxford dictionary, the meaning of two square meals is :-- Substantial managing meal. This measure is not so suitable as majority of the poor do not have the access of substantantial food that can give them their required calorific value in the two half of a day. So,

by this procedure, the surveyor even can get a proper reply from the respondent because the concept is not very clear among the common people.

**2) Objective indicator:** In this method the main measuring tools are calories consumed per day, height, weight, body mass. Participants who take part in this survey questioner procedure cannot change any information about themselves. This method has transparency as compared to the subjective method and has consistency.

There are many international measures for measuring poverty and hunger. One of such measure is called GALLUP. Here the main question, which is asked to the respondent, is “Do you or any member of your family has ever got hungry”? or “ Has you or any member of your family have money to buy food”? In India, this method is used to some extent. By using and applying this method, problem of food insecurity can be solved to some extent, because it has been found from the survey that food insecurity problem is reducing to some extent. However, this measure, also have some loopholes, so it cannot be said that it is fully acceptable measure. It is very important to emphasise on the objective measures. Economists are presently using this objective methodology. It is very important to change the behavioral pattern of the society, so that the distribution pattern can ensure parity among all section of the population and everyone in our society get the chance of equal access of resources. It is very necessary to construct the appropriate concept of a poverty line. According to the Tendulkar committee, it is said that 800 calorie of food intake is a standard measure for computing the concept of poverty line i.e. this amount of calorific value is enough for the existence of a human being, below which it is treated as poor people or undernourished. In today’s civilized society it has been seen that almost everywhere, increasing no of uses of technology has reduced the labour work hour and the no of labours. With the increasing level of modern technology usage, manual labour work is decreasing day by day and energy application and use is increasing simultaneously, at a rapid rate. As an effect of the present trend, manual work is decreasing, employment is decreasing, and livelihood and the security of life have been hampered. Therefore, there is a need of further detailed study and measurement to solve this burning problem. In our system, for a good Food security measurement the procedure starts with - **Procurement, storage, distribution** among the retail shops and **delivery** to the end users. In our county, because of the existence of a faulty and misleading Public Distribution System, the people who are suffering from acute poverty are not always getting the food that is their right. Still in our country, the existence of malnourished children is 46%, which is a very depressing scenario as compared to some less developed, poor Latin American countries. If there is no proper health, education, or food facility for the poor, then atleast some amount of cash may be given to these helpless people, so that they can live. This process of giving cash to the needy poor people is followed in some Latin American countries like Mexico, Argentina etc. However, here also comes the big question that is from where this amount will come and what will be the amount of help to each people or family? The answer of the question remains unsolved, until date.

According to some experts with different line of thought, two separate things are being tried to be achieved is to actually get them to have better nutrition. The priorities of most poor people

are not always necessarily better nutrition. They may be interested in through the PDS. One is to increase the general standard of living of the people and the other cellophanes, better tasting food, etc. Therefore, if you give them some amount of subsidized or free grains, they may just buy less grain from the market. They will not necessarily end up eating more. Indeed, it might even be that they will eat less. The idea that nutrition can be improved by dumping grain on people ignores all the evidence that we have on nutrition. Then there is the second question. Is this a good way to redistribute? This is a harder question. By giving rice at Rs. 2 instead of Rs 12 or Rs. 15 a kilo, we are changing their level of total earnings, but the real income of people can be increased in many other ways. We can them cash, we can give pension, you can give them housing There are all kinds of ways in which you can make people better off, and we should be thinking about which one is better.

People who want to continue PDS are saying that if people are given cash, then the men in the family will take all the cash and run away, but if the families are given food, the men cannot do that. That is actually not true.

If we give them food, they may stop buying food and the men – if they are so inclined –will drink up the cash thus released. If the desire to spend more on food is not there, a scheme like PDS can only do so much.

On the other hand, it is extremely difficult to maintain control over PDS. Food has to be bought in one place, it has to be transported to another place, make sure that it has reached the right place. The logistic of the entire system are horrendous. If we imagine the various options of giving cash, they will probably be logistically much easier to manage. They may be subject to different kinds of fraud that we have not thought about as of now and we definitely need to figure out the right way to do it. However, the proposition that all food will necessarily end up feeding hungry people and all cash will be used in drinking seems a real stretch.

To trace the developments in the drafting of the proposed legislation, concerted efforts were initiated when People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL) petitioned before the Supreme Court in 2001 foregrounding the right to food as an essential component of right to life, which is provided under Article 21 of the Indian Constitution. The petition initially highlighted two specific aspects of state negligence, i.e. 1) the breakdown of the public distribution system (PDS), 2) the inadequacy of drought relief works; over time, the scope has widened.

The United Progressive Alliance Government [UPA-I] has initiated some efforts towards fulfilling its election promise of ensuring right to food for all; the proposed National Food Security Act seems to have moved up in the priority list of the Union Government over the last few months. UPA's sense of urgency for tackling the problem of hunger and food insecurity in the country has offered a lot of hope. However, its perspective on how this deep-rooted problem can be addressed is something that has raised serious concerns. In 2008, the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) had ranked India 66th in Global Hunger Index for 88 countries. In 2010, India had slipped to 67th position among 84 countries. At a time when the government is now planning to bring out a National Food Security Bill, which aims at granting differential legal entitlement of food grains to nearly 800 million people through a reformed PDS network. It is

time to ask whether the proposed bill will mean anything for the poor and hungry. How can we ensure that hunger is removed by relying on the same PDS system that has failed to deliver in the past 40 years? Hunger needs more than PDS ration, and that is where we are failing to focus on.

Unless we remove, the structural causes that exacerbate hunger, and most of these relate to agriculture and management of natural resources, India would not be able to make any significant difference in reducing hunger. We need policies that ensure food for all for all times to come. This is what constitutes inclusive growth. A hungry population is a great economic loss resulting from the inability of the manpower to undertake economic activities.

There is a lack of political will. The prime focus for reducing the hunger and poverty should be the increase in level of production and the postproduction. Distribution must be equitable and the price must be such that everyone can afford it. For living in a proper , healthy way, it is not enough that everyone get the food. The right way is that food intake must be at such level that give each and every one proper calorific value and nutrition level. Because of which malnutrition will disappear and the death incidents due to lack of food will also be ended. For ensuring a food security, throughout the nation, an Agro- Ecology based Framework is to be formulated. It may not be corporate friendly, but can be helpful for the small and marginal farmers. Agro – Ecology based economy deals with locally produced goods, which can be recycled easily. By using this process, rural people and poor farmers can be able to make foods in their homes easily by locally available ingredients and fuel collection cost will be reduced by using local eco friendly resources. The farmers can ensure their food security by adapting this process and the whole community will be benefitted because of this system. In the present context it, is very urgent to construct the concept of a proper poverty line. The debate on the proposed National Food Security Bill provides us an excellent opportunity to recast the economic map of India in such a way that makes hunger history.

Sometimes Cooperative farming, planting trees near the roadside, beside ponds-- jointly by the poor people, can help them to enhance their property & also give them food security. They can eat the fruits of the trees, and can also sell them and earn money by this way. They can use the various parts of the tree as fuel. By following this way their fuel collection time will be saved. Farmers or the poor people who are suffering due to less income can also assure their food security by cultivating in their own land. In the rural schools, mid day meal system gives the day's meal to the poor children. By this way, students can be attracted towards school education. Students can also plant trees inside the school premises and the teachers and the parents can help them. Through adapting this scheme, communities' food security can be ensured. The poorest farmers, who have even no land of themselves, can hire the other comparatively richer person's land and cultivate in that land. After ending of the cropping season, they can ensure substantial earnings for themselves & their family, by selling some part of their output (food grains) in the market. Remaining food can be used in two ways, among which one can be preserved for their family consumption and the surplus crops can be given to the landowner or according to the contract, the farmers can share their earnings with the landowner. By the above-mentioned way, a small or marginal farmer can enhance their distress situation and can be able to ensure their food security. The poor people, old people, can easily

cultivate some food grains like Mushroom and even children can take active part in Mushroom cultivation, because no extra expertise or no extra land is needed for this cultivation. Mushroom cultivation can take place inside the room also. Some times in rural areas many family can form groups among themselves, and if ponds of the local area is given as lease by the local authority, then local people can take the ponds in their own right or grip by making their own group. By following this way, rural poor people can take part in fish cultivation by themselves. They can collect equally the fishes, sell them in markets and their cash earning can increase by this way. The users of the pond can take the fish and can eat by cooking. There is another way i.e., by learning the technique of hybrid birth procedure, they can be able to speed up the number of the fish birth by themselves. In this way, they can increase and establish their property right, which ensure the food security of the people & prevent malnourishment among their future generation.

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