

## Food Self-Sufficiency and Food Security at the National and Local Level In India.

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**Abstract:** The Indian planners, right from the beginning, realized the need to attain self-sufficiency in food grains as one of the important goals of planning. The government realized that food surplus countries used their food-surplus as a weapon to force food deficit countries to submit to their dictates. Food security implies access by all people at all times to sufficient of food to lead an active and healthy life. P.V. Srinivasan states that food security requires not just adequate supply of food at the aggregate level but also enough purchasing capacity with the individual/household to demand adequate levels of food. The Ninth Plan discussed the problem of food security at national and at the household level. The Planning Commission states: “An approach to national food security, which relies largely on domestic production of food needed for consumption as well as for building buffer stocks, can be described as a strategy of self-sufficiency.” This strategy emphasized the extension of irrigation facilities and later in the sixties adopted seed-water-fertilizer technology popularly known as Green Revolution. As a consequence of

these concerted efforts, India was able to avert famines and acute food scarcities, yet it has not been able to provide food “needed for an active and healthy life” to its population. At the household level, food security implies having physical and economic access to food articles that are adequate in terms of quantity, quality and affordability. This raises the question of prices of food articles and the purchasing power in the hand of population. To help the poor sections, the government introduced the Public Distribution System (PDS) and adopted dual price mechanism. At the PDS outlet, the issue price of food articles was kept lower than the market price to enable the poor to purchase subsidized food, but due to political pressure, the government adopted a universal PDS, rather than a targeted PDS focused on the poor.

**Keywords:** Food problem, Food Policy, Nutritional Problem, Food Management, Public distribution system, Mid-Day Meal Scheme.

**Introduction:** The concept of food security indicates access of food to all people at all times of the country. World Development Report (1986) defined food security as “access by all people at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life.” Moreover, Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO,1983) defined food security in terms of “ensuring that all people at all times have both physical and economic

access to basic food they need.” Thus, the term food security means a food system which provides access to a timely, reliable and nutritionally adequate food supply.

Food security involves mainly four points-1) physical availability of food to entire population, 2) enough purchasing power in the hands of the people to buy food, 3) maintaining adequate quantity and quality of food to meet the nutritional requirements and 4) maintaining timely, reliable and nutritionally adequate supply of food on long term basis.

India has been facing food crisis since long period of time. In India, the problem of hunger is increasing throughout the country. Although various measures and policies are adopted by the government in reducing the problem of hunger in India, the problem is increasing steadily.

The latest report of the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) brought out in February, 2009 states that more than 230 million people of India are undernourished, which is highest for any country in the world. Malnutrition accounts for nearly 50 per cent of our child-deaths. Moreover, 43 per cent of children under five years of age in India are underweight. This figure is among the highest in the world and is much higher than the global average of 25 per cent and which is even higher than the sub-Saharan Africa figure of 28 percent.

The report stated that more than 70 per cent of children under five years suffer from anaemic with 80 percent of them having no access to vitamin supplements. This report further states that the proportion of anaemic children has increased by 6 per cent in the last six years.

Although every states in India claim that they have given top priority to child care and mothers health improvement programmes in their planning on which several hundred crore of rupees are directed to medical and dietary health schemes, but the problem of hunger and lifeline deficiency still remains acute in these states. The report further reveals that the fear of further spread of malnutrition arises on account of the state of food insecurity in rural India on the one hand and also due to rising global food prices on the other.

**Methodology:** The study is of descriptive type based on both primary and secondary sources. The facts are collected from number of published and unpublished books, records, reports and journals of government, internet surfing etc. For primary studies some blocks of Hojai districts were selected. From these blocks some Panchayats have been selected. From each Panchayat certain households have been selected on random basis. Since food security issue mostly concerns the poor rural households, BPL rural households were deliberately selected for the study. Beside focus group discussion (FGD) has been resorted to with a view to have in-depth information about the state of food security. The

FGDs were coordinated by the key informants who included knowledgeable persons from the villages and government officials.

### **Objectives:**

- .To increase domestic production of food so as to meet the increasing demand from growing size of population.
- .To reduce under-nutrition among a large section of population and to raise the nutrition level.
- .To provide minimum support prices for procurement and storage of food items.
- .To operate public distribution system more effectively in the rural areas.
- .To maintain buffer stocks in sufficient quantity for taking care the situation arising out of natural calamities resulting in temporary shortages in food supply.
- .To raise the employment opportunities in the rural areas and to provide the cheap credit facilities for poor households for self employment.
- .To stabilize supply of food and its prices for accessing food by all people of the country.

**Food Problem:** India had to face a serious food crisis at the time of independence. The government of India made some provisions to meet the food deficiency in the short run.

- .Extension of the rationing system to cover both urban and rural areas.
- .Import of food grains to make easy the situation.
- .Introduction of subsidy for the distribution of imported food grains.

During the First Plan period, the country experienced a series of good harvests leading to an improvement in the food supply situation, curtailment of imports and a consequent fall in the prices of food grains. But the situation was short-lived because whatever improvement in food grains was achieved that was mainly due to better climatic conditions and timely arrival of monsoons.

Initially, Assam was a surplus State in respect of food production during the pre-independence period. With the huge growing rate of population, the increasing rate of food grains has failed to keep pace with it leading to a fall in per capita availability of food. The state maintained near self-sufficiency level in food supply until 1960's. Thus, the state started to face the problem of food deficit continuously and the quantum of deficit has reached to such an extent in recent years that it is estimated to be more than 30 percent of the self-sufficiency level .<sup>1</sup>

Food Requirement-‘Food Production and Shortfall in Assam’ (In Lakh Tonnes)

Year	Total annual requirement of food in Assam	Total annual net production of food grains in Assam	Total annual deficit of net food grains in Assam
1950-51	12.31	12.9	-0.59
1956-57	14.86	15.9	-1.04
1960-61	15.15	15.7	-0.55
1970-71	20.48	17.6	2.97
1980-81	27.90	23.7	4.20
1990-91	31.23	31.12	0.11
1998-99	38.62	34.39	4.23

Sources: Economic Survey, Assam, 1998-99

**Food Policy:** During the planning period, the government of India adopted various measures to tackle the food security problem at different times. Neither the free market mechanism nor the full control was adopted by the Indian government rather a compromise solution consisting of partial control, food procurement, public distribution system, import of food grains etc. has been followed to tackle the food problem of the country. The main policies adopted by the government of India are

- 1) Measures to increase output.
- 2) Measures to improve the distribution system
- 3) Import of food grain
- 4) Price incentives to agricultural producers

Though the government of India has adopted number of measures to increase the agricultural output such as the application of HYV seeds, fertilizers, pesticides etc. all these are very much restricted to some particular states like Punjab, Haryana and Western Uttar Pradesh. Moreover, land reforms in India could not yield much result in raising the agricultural production and productivity in the country.

The public distribution system in India suffers from some serious defects. It is very much restricted to wheat and rice. It remained restricted to urban areas for a considerable period. The coverage of PDS is still inadequate as it fails to cover all those persons living below the poverty line.

Thus, the food problem in India cannot be tackled on food front alone. Instead efforts should be undertaken to control the growth of population in order to solve the food problem of the country permanently.<sup>2</sup>

**Nutritional Problem:** During the last 50 years, there has been substantial reduction in moderate and sever under-nutrition in children and some improvements in nutritional status of all segments of population all over the country.

Milder forms of chronic energy deficiency still persists in many parts of the district Hojai; serious malnutrition and even widespread starvation among children and the aged group has become common in tribal belts, essentially because there is no purchasing power.

Under- nutrition is a problem among the pregnant lactating women; one-third of the new-born babies still weigh less than 2.5 kg. at birth; problem of Vitamin-A deficiency exists which may result in blindness in certain cases; universal access to iodized salt has not been achieved and there has not been marked reduction in iodine disorders; no decline in prevalence of anemia and its health consequences due to iron-deficiency.<sup>3</sup>

**Food Management:** The main objectives of food management are procurement of food grains from farmers at remunerative prices, distribution of food grains to consumers, particularly the vulnerable sections of society at affordable prices and maintenance of food buffers for food security and price stability. The Minimum support price (MSP) and central issue price (CIP) are the major instruments of the government for food security and price stability. The main agency which undertakes procurement, distribution and storage of food grains is the Food Corporation of India (FCI), procurement at MSP is open-ended, while distribution is governed by the scale of allocation and its off take by the beneficiaries. The off take of food grains is primary under the targeted public distribution system (TPDS).

**Buffer stock:** Maintaining a buffer stock is an important constituent of the government's food policy, as agriculture in India still remains dependent on the vagaries of nature. The buffer stock provides the basic and most flexible instrument for moderating short-term efforts of supply or production shortfalls.<sup>4</sup>

**Public Distribution System:** The basic objective of the public distribution system (PDS) in India is to provide essential consumer goods at cheap and subsidized prices to the consumers so as to insulate them from the impact of rising prices of these commodities and maintain the minimum nutritional status of our population. To run this system, the government purchases a part of the marketable surplus with traders, millers and producers at procurement prices. The grains mainly wheat and rice thus procured, is used for distribution to the consumers through a network of ration, fair price shops and for building up buffer stocks.<sup>5</sup>

**Working of PDS:** The PDS for essential commodities is an important measure to promote food security in the district, Hojai. Four essential commodities are distributed through the PDS that are run by licensed dealers for targeted beneficiaries. The PDS runs three schemes.

.BPL- It is supported to provide BPL families with 35kg. of food grains per month.

.Antyodaya- It is meant to provide the extremely poor families with 35 kg. of food grains per month; 21 kg. of rice at the rate of Rs. 2kg. and 14 kg. of wheat at the rate of Rs. 3kg. and

.Annapurna Scheme- it provides homeless senior citizens with 6 kg. of wheat and 4 kg. of rice free of cost.

**Mid-Day Meal Scheme:** The National Programme of Nutritional Support to Primary education is known as the Mid-Day Meal Scheme (MDMS). It is an important intervention in elementary education sector to address two of the pressing problems for majority of children in Assam, viz., hunger and education. The objective of the scheme is to encourage children, belonging to disadvantaged sections, to attend school regularly and improve their nutritional status. This scheme presently covers all children studying in Class 1-8 in all schools, supported under Sarva Siksha Abhiyan (SSA), including Madrasas and Maqtabs. The overall position regarding the coverage of the scheme is indicated for the period 2008-2009 to 2013-14. In 2008-2009, the coverage of MDMS at primary level was 58.2 percent, which increased to 67.0 percent in 2013-2014. Similarly, the coverage of MDMS at upper primary level was 53.4 percent in 2008-2009 and it is 67.0 percent in 2013-14. Thus, the coverage of MDMS at both the levels have increased in recent years, although there was shrinkage in coverage in some intervening years.<sup>6</sup>

**Findings of the study:** Food insecurity continues to be the reality of Hojai district. Though the district claims to have achieved some success in fight against poverty, the food security situation continues to be worrisome. The district has unsatisfactory status on all three dimensions of food security viz. availability, access and absorption.

Growth rate of agricultural output in the district is not satisfactory. The area under irrigation has stagnated over the years. This leads to insufficient availability of food in the district.

As far as access to food is concern, it is dependent on factors like income, wage rates, employment, entitlement, migration, literacy among women, income generating activities of women and age of the person. Income of the persons and households of the district have been found to be increasing over the years, which gives them better access to food. Wage rates have increased but they have not kept pace

with the rising prices of food grains. This leaves the people of this region food insecure. Those who have PDS entitlements are a little more food secure, as they get subsidized food from fair price shops. However, those who lack such entitlement or are not included in the PDS, have to purchase food from the market which is getting costlier by the year.

**Suggestions:** Spurt in agricultural production is needed. Among agricultural products which form the staple of the local diet rice and wheat should be given more acreage. The government must provide agricultural inputs like HYV seeds, fertilizers at a concessional rate to increase farm yield and ensure higher income for the farmers. Emphasis must be laid on increasing dairy output. Per capita availability of milk in the study area is low across the ages, which is not good from the nutritional point of view. Farmers must be provided loans to increase dairy output. They should be trained to adopt modern dairying technique to significantly increase dairy output.

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