FOOD SECURITY: CHALLENGES AND ISSUES IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT:

Food security in India has to be understood as a distress phenomenon, as with marginal increase in their incomes over time they are forced to cut down on their food consumption to meet other pressing demands of health and education that were not considered important in the past. High economic growth rates have failed to improve food security in India leaving the country facing a crisis in its rural economy. If food security is a complex objective, pursued with others (shelter, safety, health, self-esteem), in a world where individual households face diverse, complex and different livelihood opportunities, what role can policy possibly play? Can governments ever know enough to act? This paper is focused on the several foods security issues prevalent in the Indian scenario. Data are taken from relevant sources to analyse the gravity of the food security issues in India. It also covered the several development programmes taken up by the Indian government to counter various food security issues including several schemes and yojanas.

KEYWORDS: Food security, Act, Poor in India, NREGA, food security bill.
INTRODUCTION: Food security refers to the availability of food and one's access to it. A household is considered food-secure when its occupants do not live in hunger or fear of starvation. According to the World Resources Institute, global per capita food production has been increasing substantially for the past several decades. In 2006, MSNBC reported that globally, the number of people who are overweight has surpassed the number who is undernourished - the world had more than one billion people who were overweight, and an estimated 800 million who were undernourished. According to a 2004 article from the BBC, China, the world's most populous country, is suffering from an obesity epidemic. In India, the second-most populous country in the world, 30 million people have been added to the ranks of the hungry since the mid-1990s and 46% of children are underweight.

In developing countries, often 70% or more of the population lives in rural areas. In that context, agricultural development among smallholder farmers and landless people provides a livelihood for people allowing them the opportunity to stay in their communities. In many areas of the world, land ownership is not available, thus, people who want or need to farm to make a living have little incentive to improve the land.

Two commonly used definitions of food security come from the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA):

- Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.
- Food security for a household means access by all members at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life. Food security includes at a minimum (1) the ready availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods, and (2) an assured ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways (that is, without resorting to emergency food supplies, scavenging, stealing, or other coping strategies). (USDA)

Those who are around the poverty line, this has to be understood as a distress phenomenon, as with marginal increase in their incomes over time they are forced to cut down on their food consumption to meet other pressing demands of health and education that were not considered important in the past. India's malnutrition figures are not coming down despite a number of government programmes, says a new report released by World Food Programme. The research points out the need for a revamped public distribution system and greater public investment to address the wants of rural population.

OBJECTIVES: The main objective of this study is to analyze the various issues prevalent in India relating to Food Security. The other objectives are:
- To study the various challenges faced by during the implementation of Food Security in India.
- To analyze the various issues relating to the Global Food Crisis.
- To study the various Food Schemes in India.

FOOD SECURITY ISSUES IN INDIA: 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. Over 225 million Indians remain chronically under nourished. In 2000-01, about half of the rural children below five years of age suffered from malnutrition and 40% of adults suffered from chronic energy deficiency. Such a high level of wasting away of human resources should be a cause for concern.

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.

High economic growth rates have failed to improve food security in India leaving the country facing a crisis in its rural economy, warns the latest report released by the World Food Programme and the M S Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF). According to the GOI Economic Survey, foodgrain production in India has declined from 208 kg per annum per capita in 1996-97 to 186 kg only in 2009-10, a decline of 11 per cent. Despite reduced production, India has been exporting on an average 7 million tonnes of cereals per annum, causing availability to decline further by 15 per cent from 510 gms per day per capita in 1991 to 436 gms in 2008.

Launched in the Indian capital on February 20, 2009, State of Food Insecurity in Rural Indiatries to give a broad indicative picture of the level of food insecurity in different states of the country and the operation of the nutrition safety net programmes. The report says that the number of undernourished people is rising, reversing gains made in the 1990s. Slowing growth in food production, rising unemployment and declining purchasing power of the poor in India are combining to weaken the rural economy.

**FOOD SECURITY CHALLENGES IN INDIA:** The most important challenge is to increase the energy intake of the bottom 30% of the population and at the same time facilitate diet diversification to meet micronutrient deficiency. The food gap can be met from the existing foodgrain stocks in the medium term and by increasing their purchasing power in the long run through increasing job opportunities. The micronutrient deficiency can be rectified through supplementary nutrition and supply of fortified food. There is also a need to improve the efficiency of the various food schemes initiated by the government and make it more available and free of corruption and urban bias.

However for those who are around the poverty line, this has to be understood as a distress phenomenon, as with marginal increase in their incomes over time they are forced to cut down on their food consumption to meet other pressing demands of health and education that were not considered important in the past. Food is still needed, but not demanded for lack of money. Endemic hunger continues to afflict a large proportion of Indian population. Internationally, India is shown to be suffering from alarming hunger, ranking 66 out of the 88 developing countries studied by IFPRI in 2008. India as part of the world community has pledged to halve hunger by 2015, as stated in the Millennium Development Goal 1, but the present trends show that this target is unlikely to be met.
India is a poignant example of how food sufficiency at the aggregate level has not translated into food security at the household level. The revised thrust of the World Food Programme will be to bring the hungry, malnourished, and vulnerable within the ambit of human development.

Today, on the threshold of 60 momentous years of Independence, the nation is justifiably proud of its myriad achievements. Among these is the remarkable success in eliminating widespread famines and the impressive increases in food production. Nonetheless, there is a long road to be travelled before the vision of a truly food secure India is achieved. As the world's leading humanitarian agency and the food aid arm of the United Nations, the World Food Programme (WFP) has been privileged to work with the Government of India in its efforts to eliminate hunger and ensure food security to the poor. Although its assistance is small compared to the scale of the Government's own programmes, yet with its international outreach, and the experience gained globally, the WFP has a special niche in complementing and sharpening government efforts to eliminate hunger.

Recent years have seen the economy booming and growth rates have been among the highest in the world. The flip side, however, is that one in every five Indians suffers from overt or covert hunger. "Hunger," as stated by Amartya Sen and Jean Dreze, is "intolerable in the modern world" in a way it could not have been in the past, because it is "so unnecessary and unwarranted." India is a poignant example of how food sufficiency at the aggregate level has not translated into food security at the household level. A staggeringly large number of undernourished — about 214 million people — is chronically food insecure. Many more, varying about 40 million, are exposed to natural disasters. About 50 per cent of children (mostly tribal and rural) are undernourished and stunted, 23 per cent have a low birth weight and 68 out of 1000 die before the age of one year. There is a high prevalence of anaemia and other micronutrient deficiencies.

The challenge before the WFP is to help the country attain the critical Millennium Development Goal on eradicating hunger. The Draft Approach Paper to the Planning Commission's Eleventh Five-Year Plan articulates a "vision of growth that will be much more broad-based and inclusive." These priorities of the Government match the WFP's own goals and will guide future initiatives. As part of the U.N. system, the WFP also works within the U.N. Development Assistance Framework to achieve synergy and, at the same time, avoid costly duplication of efforts.

Committed to the vision of a hunger-free India, the WFP set itself twin goals. The first is to be a catalyst for change in the country's effort to reduce vulnerability and eliminate food insecurity. The second is to leverage policy and resources to demonstrate models that provide immediate and longer-term food security in the most food insecure areas.

The WFP seeks to achieve its strategic objectives through three major initiatives. The first is the support it extends to the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS). India is home to the largest number of children in the world. But what distinguishes India is not the numbers but what has been called its "silent emergency": astonishingly high child malnutrition rates. As part of its assistance to the ICDS, the WFP has successfully piloted Indiamix — a nutritious fortified food — widely recognised as an innovative nutrition intervention.
Secondly, the WFP complements the Government of India's mid-day meal scheme in some districts with a mid-morning snack that is fortified with vitamins and minerals and enhances learning by children, many of whom go to school on an empty stomach. This has proved to be an effective means to increase enrolment and retention, especially that of young girls.

With increasing degradation of resources, the livelihoods of poor tribal communities are under threat. In collaboration with the International Fund for Agricultural Development, the WFP assists food-for-work activities in tribal development programmes undertaken by Governments in select States. This has led to empowerment of tribal communities and sustainable use of natural resources.

In addition to the core programmes, the WFP has proposed significant capacity-building initiatives that relate to food fortification, grain banks, and strengthening of the Government's food-based programmes. The Ending Child Hunger and Undernutrition Initiative is an alliance between UNICEF and the WFP at the global level as well as in India that holds great promise.

The WFP takes pride in the analytical rigour it has imparted to the conceptualisation of food security. The Food Insecurity Atlases, prepared in collaboration with the M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation, were a landmark. Extending the earlier work to the regional and district levels, the WFP proposes to prepare, in partnership with the Government, food insecurity atlases for several States.

The future beckons! As India surges ahead to take its rightful place in the comity of nations, we in the WFP look forward to the coming years with renewed faith and optimism and a firm belief that hunger and undernourishment can be banished.

The revised thrust of the WFP endeavours will be to bring the hungry, malnourished, and vulnerable within the ambit of human development, to change the course of their destiny and unleash their potential through opening a new world of opportunities.

THE GLOBAL FOOD CRISIS: The global financial crisis drew international attention away from the food crisis, but this continues to fester and even grow. When the global food crisis first hit international headlines in 2008, international bureaucrats referred to the current problems in the world food situation as “a silent tsunami”, but the truth is that it was not a sudden and unexpected crisis: the signs have been around for some time now and it could easily have been seen to be coming. Even so, its impact has been powerful and already quite devastating, as food shortages and high prices of food have adversely affected billions of people, especially the poor in the developing world.

It is also very much a man-made crisis, resulting not so much from ineluctable forces of global supply and demand as from the market-oriented and liberalising policies adopted by choice or compulsion in almost all countries. These policies have either neglected agriculture or allowed shifts in global prices to determine both cropping patterns and the viability of farming, and also generated greater possibilities of speculative activity in food items. Cultivators in developing countries have been ravaged by the fearsome combination of exposure to import competition from highly subsidised agriculture in developed countries, removal of domestic protection of inputs and reduced access to institutional credit - to the
point that even the global increase in agricultural prices after 2002 did not compensate sufficiently to alleviate the pervasive agrarian crisis in much of the developing world.

It is also clear that the global food crisis is not something that can be treated as discrete and separate from the global financial crisis. On the contrary it has been intimately connected with it, particularly through the impact of financial speculation on world trade prices of food.

This is not to deny the undoubted role of other real economy factors in affecting the global food situation. While demand-supply imbalances have been touted as reasons, this is largely unjustified given that there has been hardly any change in the world demand for food in the past three years. In particular, the claim that food grain prices have soared because of more demand from China and India as their GDP increases, is completely invalid, since both aggregate and per capita consumption of grain have actually fallen in both countries. Supply factors have been – and are likely to continue to be – more significant. These include the short-run effects of diversion of both acreage and food crop output for biofuel production, as well as more medium term factors such as rising costs of inputs, falling productivity because of soil depletion, inadequate public investment in agricultural research and extension, and the impact of climate changes that have affected harvests in different ways.

Two policy factors affecting global food supply require special note. The first is the biofuel factor: the impact of both oil prices and government policies in the US, Europe, Brazil and elsewhere that have promoted biofuels as an alternative to petroleum. This has led to significant shifts in acreage to the cultivation of crops that can produce biofuels, and diversion of such output to fuel production. For example, in 2007 the US diverted more than 30 per cent of its maize production, Brazil used half of its sugar cane production and the European Union used the greater part of its vegetable oil seeds production as well as imported vegetable oils, to make biofuel. In addition to diverting corn output into non-food use, this has also reduced acreage for other crops and has naturally reduced the available land for producing food.

The irony is that biofuels do not even fulfil the promises of ensuring energy security or retarding the pace of global warming. Ethanol production is extremely energy-intensive, so it does not really lead to any energy saving. Even in the most ‘efficient’ producer of ethanol – Brazil - where sugar cane rather than corn is used to produce ethanol, it has been argued that the push for such production has led to large-scale deforestation of the Amazon, thereby further intensifying the problems of global warming. Indeed, recent scientific research suggests that the diversion of land to growing bio-fuel crops can produce an enormous ‘CO₂ debt’ from the use of machinery and fertilisers, the release of carbon from the soil and the loss of CO₂ sequestration by trees and other plants that have been cleared for cultivation (Beddington 2008). Yet, as long as government subsidies remain in the US and elsewhere, and world oil prices remain high, bio-fuel production is likely to continue to be encouraged despite the evident problems. And it will continue to have negative effects on global food production and availability.

The second factor is the policy neglect of agriculture over the past two decades, the impact of which is finally being felt. The prolonged agrarian crisis in many parts of the developing world has been largely a policy-determined crisis. Inappropriate policies have several aspects, but they all result from the basic neo-liberal open market-oriented framework that has governed economic policy making in most countries over the past two decades. One major
element has been the lack of public investment in agriculture and in agricultural research. This has been associated with low to poor yield increases, especially in tropical agriculture, and falling productivity of land. Greater trade openness and market orientation of farmers have led to shifts in acreage from traditional food crops that were typically better suited to the ecological conditions and the knowledge and resources of farmers, to cash crops that have increasingly relied on purchased inputs.

But at the same time, both public provision of different inputs for cultivation and government regulation of private input provision have been progressively reduced, leaving farmers to the mercy of large seed and fertiliser companies, input dealers. As a result, prices for seeds, fertilisers and pesticides have increased quite sharply. There have also been attempts in most developing countries to reduce subsidies to farmers in the form of lower power and water prices, thus adding to cultivation costs. Costs of cultivation have been further increased in most developing countries by the growing difficulties that farmers have in accessing institutional credit, because financial liberalisation has moved away from policies of directed credit and provided other more profitable (if less productive) opportunities for financial investment. So many farmers are forced to opt for much more expensive informal credit networks that have added to their costs.

In addition, there is the impact of recent climate change, which has caused poor harvests in different ways ranging from droughts in Canada and Australia to excessive rain in parts of the US. Scientists are projecting that warmer and earlier growing seasons will increase crop susceptibility to pests and viruses, which are expected to proliferate as a direct result of rising temperatures. Some more arid regions are already more drought-prone and in danger of desertification. The rapid melting of glaciers in Asia is of huge consequence to China and India, where important rivers such the Yangtze, Yellow and Ganges are fed by such glaciers. This will deprive the hinterland of much-needed irrigation water for wheat and rice crops during dry seasons. This is of global significance since China and India together produce more than half the world’s wheat and rice. Once again, official policy has been tardy in considering such problems, much less in addressing them.

The lack of attention to relevant agricultural research and extension by public bodies has denied farmers access to necessary knowledge. It has also been associated with other problems such as the excessive use of ground water in cultivation; inadequate attention to preserving or regenerating land and soil quality; the over-use of chemical inputs that have long run implications for both safety and productivity. Similarly, the ecological implications of both pollution and climate change, including desertification and loss of cultivable land, are issues that have been highlighted by analysts but largely ignored by policy makers in most countries. Reversing these processes is possible, and of course essential. But it will take time, and also will require not only substantial public investment but also major changes in the orientation and understanding of policy makers.

All this mean that the number of hungry people actually increased for the world as a whole, and particularly for certain developing regions. Far from halving, or even decreasing, the number of malnourished people globally increased by more than 50 million between the early 1990s and mid-2000s.

This was entirely because of increasing hunger in the developing world, as the numbers declined in developed countries. East and Southeast Asia also showed good performance in
terms of falling numbers of malnourished people, but such numbers increased quite sharply in South Asia (by 50 million) and Sub-Saharan Africa (by 44 million). The surprise is that the growing prevalence of hunger and food insecurity was associated with relatively high GDP growth in several regions, such as India and countries in Latin America. The contrast with East and Southeast Asia is a stark one, and points to the role of public policy in ensuring that aggregate income growth translates into better provision of basic needs such as food for the general population.

### Number of undernourished people (millions)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>1990-92</th>
<th>2004-06</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>World</td>
<td>872.9</td>
<td>857.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing countries</td>
<td>825.2</td>
<td>845.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Asia</td>
<td>286.1</td>
<td>136.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Asia</td>
<td>136.3</td>
<td>84.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southeast Asia</td>
<td>105.7</td>
<td>60.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oceania</td>
<td>45.8</td>
<td>168.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Asia</td>
<td>44.9</td>
<td>52.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-Saharan Africa</td>
<td>212.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Africa</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin America &amp; Caribbean</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### State Hunger Index, 2007

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Prevalence of calorie undernourishment (%)</th>
<th>Proportion of underweight children &lt; 5 years (%)</th>
<th>Under-five mortality rate (%)</th>
<th>Hunger Index Score</th>
<th>Hunger Index Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Punjab</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>24.6</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>13.63</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kerala</td>
<td>28.6</td>
<td>22.7</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>17.63</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andhra Pradesh</td>
<td>19.6</td>
<td>32.7</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>19.53</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assam</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>36.4</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>19.83</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haryana</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>39.7</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>20.00</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamil Nadu</td>
<td>29.1</td>
<td>30.0</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>20.87</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rajasthan</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>40.4</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>20.97</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Bengal</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>38.5</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>20.97</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uttar Pradesh</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>42.3</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>22.13</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maharashtra</td>
<td>27.0</td>
<td>36.7</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>22.80</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karnataka</td>
<td>28.1</td>
<td>37.6</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>23.73</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The table gives some idea of the variation among major states and also shows how India is places as a whole in relation to other Asian countries. It is evident that India’s performance with respect to hunger is abysmal particularly in relation to other large developing countries like China, but even in comparison to the rest of South Asia, with only Bangladesh having a higher value of the index. Indeed, India’s index value is close to that of Zimbabwe, a country which is in the throes of severe hyperinflation and collapse of domestic food markets. Within India, some of the supposedly richest states with most rapid recent growth of GDP, such as Maharashtra, Karnataka and Gujarat, perform very poorly on the hunger index, clearly much worse than Kerala but even worse than Assam. West Bengal is close to the middle among the major states, and slightly below the national average in terms of the hunger index, which means that it is an important policy concern also within this state.

**FOOD SCHEMES IN INDIA :** India has the largest food schemes in the World
- Entitlement Feeding Programmes
  - ICDS (All Children under six, Pregnant and lactating mother)
  - MDMS (All Primary School children)
- Food Subsidy Programmes
  - Targeted Public Distribution System (35 kgs/ month of subsidised food grains
  - Annapurna (10 kgs of free food grain for destitute poor)
  - Employment Programmes
  - National Rural Employment Scheme (100 days of employment at minimum wages)
  - Social Safety Net Programmes
  - National Old Age Pension Scheme (Monthly pension to BPL)
  - National Family Benefit Scheme (Compensation in case of death of bread winner to BPL families)

**CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS:** Food insecurity and hunger is caused by a large number of factors and hence solutions too have to be multi-sectoral in nature. First, revamp small holder agriculture. Because of stagnating growth in agriculture after the mid-1990s there has been employment decline, income decline and hence a fall in aggregate demand by the rural poor. The most important intervention that is needed is greater investment in
irrigation, power, and roads in the poorer regions. It is essential to realize the potential for production surpluses in Central and Eastern India where the concentration of poverty is increasing.

Second, launch massive watershed development programmes in central India, where most tribes live. In a successful watershed programme the poor benefit in three ways. First, as the net sown area and crop intensity increases more opportunities for wage employment are created, which may also increase the wage rate besides the number of days of employment. Second, increased water availability and reduced soil erosion increases production on small and marginal farmers’ lands. And last, the higher productivity of Common Property Resources improves access of the poor to more fodder, fuelwood, water and NTFPs. NREGA assets should be monitored for at least five years to establish their links with drought proofing and enhanced availability of water.

Third, start a drive to plant fruit trees on degraded forests and homestead lands that belong to or have been allotted to the poor. This will not only make the poor people’s diet more nutritious, but will also diversify their livelihoods and reduce seasonal vulnerability.

Fourth, create more job opportunities by undertaking massive public works in districts with low agricultural productivity. The upper limit of work guarantee of 100 days per worker should be enhanced to 150 days through an amendment in the Rules in the poorest 200 districts.

Fifth, improve the skills of the poor for market oriented jobs, so that they are absorbed in the sunrise industries such as hospitality, security, health, and construction.

Sixth, launch a drive in collaboration with civil society to cover the poorest, as a large number of homeless and poor living in unauthorised colonies in urban areas have been denied ration cards, and are thus not able to avail of PDS, on the ground that they do not have an address! In Rangpur Pahadi, a slum area just two kms away from Vasant Kunj (Delhi), people living since 1990 have not been given even voter ID or any ration card. Thus their very existence is denied by the Delhi Government!

Seventh, give shops to panchayats, women’s self-help groups, or to those who already have a shop so that it remains open on all days. Making it obligatory for dealers to sell non-cereal items will ensure better communication between the dealer and the card holders.

Eighth, prepare a comprehensive list every two years of all destitutes needing free or subsidized cooked food. Open up mid-day meals kitchen to these old, destitutes and hungry in the village. This is already being done in Tamil Nadu, and its replication in other states should be funded by the GOI. Establish community kitchens across cities and urban settlements to provide inexpensive, subsidised nutritious cooked meals near urban homeless and migrant labour settlements.

Last, India requires a significant increase of targeted investments in nutrition programmes, clinics, disease control, irrigation, rural electrification, rural roads, and other basic investments, especially in rural India, where the current budgetary allocations are inadequate. Higher public investments in these areas need to be accompanied by systemic reforms that will overhaul the present system of service delivery, including issues of control and
oversight. Outlays should not be considered as an end in itself. Delivery of food based schemes requires increasing financial resources, but more importantly the quality of public expenditures in these areas. This in turn requires improving the governance, productivity and accountability of government machinery.

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