

FOOD SECURITY IN INDIA

WHAT IS FOOD SECURITY?

Food security means availability, accessibility and affordability of food to all people at all times. The poor households are more vulnerable to food insecurity whenever there is a problem of production or distribution of food crops. Food security depends on the Public Distribution System (PDS), Government vigilance and action at times when this security is threatened.

Food security has following dimensions:

- (a) Availability of food means food production within the country, food imports and the previous years stock stored in government granaries.
- (b) Accessibility means food is within reach of every person.
- (c) Affordability implies that an individual has enough money to buy sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet one's dietary needs.

Need to Know?

Thus, food security is ensured in a country only if (1) enough food is available for all the persons (2) all persons have the capacity to buy food of acceptable quality and (3) there is no barrier on access to food.

WHY FOOD SECURITY?

1. **Over Population:** The population of India is increasing at a very fast rate. The population of India has increased from 361 million in 1951 to 1027 million in 2001.
2. **Reduction in net sown area under cereals:** There has been a gradual shift from cultivation of food crops to cultivation of fruits, vegetables, oilseeds and other cash crops, which also act as industrial raw materials. This has led to the reduction in net sown area under cereals, millets and pulses.
3. **Hoarding and black marketing:** There is a continuous tendency on the part of traders in India to hoard foodgrains and to accentuate the shortage of foodgrains in order to push up the prices for reaping extraordinary profit.
4. **Reduction of land under cultivation:** The use of more and more land for construction of factories, warehouses and shelters has reduced the land under cultivation and new fertile land for farming is no longer available.
5. **Corrupt administrative practices:** The government has imposed various measures like price controls, rationing, zoning, surprise checks etc. But as the administrative machinery in India is totally corrupt, these measures fail to reap any benefit to the general masses of the country.
6. **Natural Calamities:** Natural calamities like earthquake, drought, flood, tsunami, famine etc. can also adversely affect the food security of the country.

How is food security affected during a calamity?

Due to a natural calamity, say drought, total production of foodgrains decreases. It creates a shortage of food in the affected areas. Due to shortage of food, the prices go up. At the high prices, some people cannot afford to buy food. If such calamity happens in a very wide spread area or is stretched over a longer time period, it may cause a situation of starvation. A massive starvation might take a turn of famine.

A Famine is characterised by wide spread deaths due to starvation and epidemics caused by forced use of contaminated water or decaying food and loss of body resistance due to weakening from starvation.

WHO ARE FOOD INSECURE?

Although a large section of people suffer from food and nutrition insecurity in India, the worst affected groups are landless people with little or no land to depend upon, traditional artisans, providers of traditional services, petty selfemployed workers and destitutes including beggars.

In the urban areas, the food insecure families are those whose working members are generally employed in ill-paid occupations and casual labour market. These workers are largely engaged in seasonal activities and are paid very low wages that just ensure bare survival.

The social composition along with the inability to buy food also plays a role in food insecurity. The SCs, STs and some sections of the OBCs (lower castes among them) who have either poor land-base or very low land productivity are prone to food insecurity. The people affected by natural disasters, who have to migrate to other areas in search of work, are also among the most food insecure people. A high incidence of malnutrition prevails among women. This is a matter of serious concern as it puts even the unborn baby at the risk of malnutrition. A large proportion of pregnant and nursing mothers and children under the age of 5 years constitute an important segment of the food insecure population.

The food insecure people are disproportionately large in some regions of the country, such as economically backward states with high incidence of poverty, tribal and remote areas, regions more prone to natural disasters etc. In fact, the states of Uttar Pradesh (eastern and south-eastern parts), Bihar, Jharkhand, Orissa, West Bengal, Chattisgarh, parts of Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra account for largest number of food insecure people in the country.

Hunger is another aspect indicating food insecurity. Hunger is not just an expression of poverty, it brings about poverty. The attainment of food security therefore involves eliminating current hunger and reducing the risks of future hunger.

Hunger has chronic and seasonal dimensions. Chronic hunger is a consequence of diets persistently inadequate in terms of quantity and/or quality. Poor people suffer from chronic hunger because of their very low income and in turn inability to buy food even for survival.

Seasonal hunger is related to cycles of food growing and harvesting. This is prevalent in rural areas because of the seasonal nature of agricultural activities and in urban areas because of the casual labour, e.g., there is less work for casual construction labour during the rainy season. This type of hunger exists when a person is unable to get work for the entire year.



Central Foodgrains (Wheat + Rice) Stock and Minimum Buffer Norm (Million Tonnes)

India is aiming at self-sufficiency in foodgrains since independence:

After Independence, Indian policy makers adopted all measures to achieve self-sufficiency in food grains. India adopted a new strategy in agriculture, which resulted in the 'Green Revolution' especially in the production of wheat and rice.

Since the advent of the Green Revolution in the early-'70s, the country has avoided famine even during adverse weather conditions.

Impact of Green Revolution:

- (i) The success of Green Revolution has made India self sufficient in food grains.
- (ii) Because of Green Revolution there was an increase in the production of wheat and rice.
- (iii) The highest rate of growth was achieved in Punjab and Haryana.
- (iv) Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh recorded significant increase in rice yield.
- (v) The increase in the production of foodgrains helped the Government to build buffer stock.
- (vi) This buffer stock led to food security.

Name of scheme	Year of Introduction	Coverage target group	Latest volume	Issue price (Rs per kg.)
PDS	Up to 1992	Universal	–	W-2.34 R-2.89
RPDS	1992	Backward blocks	20 kg of food grains	W-2.80 R-3.77
TPDS	1997	Poor and non-poor	35 kg of food grains	BPL – W-2.50 R-3.50 APL-W-4.50 R-7.00
AAY	2000	Poorest of the poor	35 kg of food grains	W-2.00 R-3.00
APS	2000	Indigent senior citizens	10 kg of food grains	Free

Some Important Features of PDS**FOOD SECURITY IN INDIA**

India has become self-sufficient in foodgrains during the last thirty years because of a variety of crops grown all over the country. The availability of foodgrains (even in adverse weather conditions or otherwise) at the country level has further been ensured with a carefully designed food security system by the government. This system has two components: (a) buffer stock and (b) public distribution system.

1. **What is Buffer Stock?** Buffer Stock is the stock of foodgrains, namely wheat and rice procured by the government through Food Corporation of India (FCI). The FCI purchases wheat and rice from the farmers in states where there is surplus production. The farmers are paid a pre-announced price for their crops. This price is called Minimum Support Price. The MSP is declared by the government every year before the sowing season to provide incentives to the farmers for raising the production of these crops. The purchased foodgrains are stored in granaries.

This is done to distribute foodgrains in the deficit areas and among the poorer strata of society at a price lower than the market price also known as Issue Price. This also helps resolve the problem of shortage of food during adverse weather conditions or during the periods of calamity.

2. **What is Public Distribution system?** The food procured by the FCI is distributed through government regulated ration shops among the poorer section of the society. This is called the public distribution system (PDS). Ration shops are now present in most localities, villages, towns and cities. There are about 4.6 lakh ration shops all over the country. Ration shops also known as Fair Price Shops keep stock of foodgrains, sugar, kerosene oil for cooking. These items are sold to people at a price lower than the market price. Any family with a ration card* can buy a stipulated amount of these items (e.g. 35 kg of grains, 5 litres of kerosene, 5 kgs of sugar etc.) every month from the nearby ration shop.

There are three kinds of ration cards:

- (a) Antyodaya cards for the poorest of the poor;
- (b) BPL cards for those below poverty line; and
- (c) APL cards for all others.

History of Rationing in India: The Introduction of Rationing in India dates back to the 1940s against the backdrop of the Bengal Famine. The rationing system was revived in the wake of an acute food shortage during the 1960s, prior to the Green Revolution. In the wake of high incidence of poverty levels, as reported by NSSO in the mid-1970s, three important food intervention programmes were introduced.

- (i) Public Distribution System for Foodgrains (in existence earlier but strengthened thereafter).
- (ii) Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) introduced in 1975 on an experimental basis.
- (iii) Food for work programme introduced in 1977-78.
- (iv) At present, there are several Poverty Alleviation Programmes (PAPs), mostly in rural areas, which have an explicit food component also. While some of the programmes such as PDS, mid-day meals etc. are exclusively food security programmes, most of the PAPs also enhance food security.

Need to Know?

National Food for Work Programme

National Food for Work Programme was launched on November 14, 2004 in 150 most backward districts of the country with the objective of intensifying the generation of supplementary wage employment. The programme is open to all rural poor who are in need of wage employment and desire to do manual unskilled work. It is implemented as a 100 per cent centrally sponsored scheme and the foodgrains are provided to States free of cost. The Collector is the nodal officer at the district level and has the overall responsibility of planning, implementation, coordination, monitoring and supervision. For 2004-05, Rs 2,020 crore have been allocated for the programme in addition to 20 lakh tonnes of foodgrains.

Current Status of Public Distribution System: In the beginning the coverage of PDS was universal with no discrimination between the poor and non-poor.

Further, in 2000, two special schemes were launched viz., Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) and the Annapurna Scheme (APS) with special target groups of 'poorest of the poor' and 'indigent senior citizens', respectively. The functioning of these two schemes was linked with the existing network of the PDS.

The PDS has proved to be the most effective instrument of government policy over the years in stabilising prices and making food available to consumers at affordable prices. It has been instrumental in averting widespread hunger and famine by supplying food from surplus regions of the country to the deficit ones. In addition, the prices have been under revision in favour of poor households in general. The system, including the minimum support price and procurement has contributed to an increase in food grain production and provided income security to farmers in certain regions.

Problems Associated with Public Distribution System:

- (i) There is a general consensus that high level of buffer stocks of foodgrains is very undesirable and can be wasteful. The storage of massive food stocks has been responsible for high carrying costs, in addition to wastage and deterioration in grain quality.
- (ii) The increased food grains procurement at enhanced MSP is the result of the pressure exerted by leading foodgrain producing states, such as Punjab, Haryana and Andhra Pradesh.
- (iii) PDS dealers are sometimes found resorting to malpractices like diverting the grains to open market to get better margin, selling poor quality grains at ration shops, irregular opening of the shops, etc.

Need to Know?**Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY)**

AAY was launched in December 2000. Under the scheme one crore of the poorest among the BPL families covered under the targeted public distribution system were identified. Poor families were identified by the respective state rural development departments through a Below Poverty Line (BPL) survey. Twenty five kilograms of foodgrains were made available to each eligible family at a highly subsidised+ rate of Rs 2 per kg for wheat and Rs 3 per kg for rice. This quantity has been enhanced from 25 to 35 kgs with effect from April 2002. The scheme has been further expanded twice by additional 50 lakh BPL families in June 2003 and in August 2004. With this increase, 2 crore families have been covered under the AAY.

ROLE OF COOPERATIVES IN FOOD SECURITY

The cooperatives are also playing an important role in food security in India especially in the southern and western parts of the country. The cooperative societies set up shops to sell low priced goods to poor people. For example, out of all fair price shops running in Tamil Nadu, around 94 per cent are being run by the cooperatives. In Delhi, Mother Dairy is making strides in provision of milk and vegetables to the consumers at controlled rate decided by Government of Delhi. Amul is another success story of cooperatives in milk and milk products from Gujarat. It has brought about the White Revolution in the country.

In Maharashtra, Academy of Development Science (ADS) has facilitated a network of NGOs for setting up grain banks in different regions. ADS organises training and capacity building programmes on food security for NGOs. Grain Banks are now slowly taking shape in different parts of Maharashtra. ADS efforts to set up Grain Banks, to facilitate replication through other NGOs and to influence the Government's policy on food security are thus paying rich dividends. The ADS Grain Bank programme is acknowledged as a successful and innovative food security intervention.

CONCLUSION OF THE CHAPTER

Food security of a nation is ensured if all of its citizens have enough nutritious food available, all persons have the capacity to buy food of acceptable quality and there is no barrier on access to food. The people living below the poverty line might be food insecure all the time while better off people might also turn food insecure due to calamity or disaster. Although a large section of people suffer from food and nutrition insecurity in India, the worst affected groups are landless or land poor households in rural areas and people employed in ill paid occupations and casual labourers engaged in seasonal activities in the urban areas. The food insecure people are disproportionately large in some regions of the country, such as economically backward states with high incidence of poverty, tribal and remote areas, regions more prone to natural disasters etc. To ensure availability of food to all sections of the society the Indian government carefully designed food security system, which is composed of two components: (a) buffer stock and (b) public distribution system. In addition to PDS, various poverty alleviation programmes were also started which comprised a component of food security. Some of these programmes are: Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS); Food-for-Work (FFW); Mid-Day Meals; Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) etc. In addition to the role of the government in ensuring food security, there are various cooperatives and NGOs also working intensively towards this direction.