

FOOD SECURITY IN INDIA: GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES, CHALLENGES AND POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS

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ABSTRACT

The availability, accessibility, use, and stability of food are characteristics of food security, which is a global concept that aims to ensure that everyone has access to the necessities for an active and healthy life. Though the Indian Constitution does not have any explicit provision regarding right to food, the fundamental right to life enshrined in Article 21 of the Constitution may be interpreted to include right to live with human dignity, which may include the right to food and other basic necessities. The National Food Security Act (NFSA) 2013, which was passed on July 5, 2013, represents a shift in the way that the government approaches food security from a welfare-based approach to a rights-based approach, even though the government has been continuously addressing the issue of "food security" at the household for a long time through the Public Distribution System and the Targeted Public Distribution System. 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. In order to receive highly subsidized food grains, nearly two thirds of the population are covered under the Act. The main concerns about food security in India are summarized in this paper, which emphasizes the complexity and diverse character of the issue. It highlights government initiatives and programs like the Public Distribution System (PDS) and the National Food Security Act (NFSA) that are meant to address food security. It also explores the agricultural industry, looking at issues with productivity, rural-urban inequality, and price instability that affect food security. The paper highlights the necessity for a comprehensive strategy that takes into account nutrition, distribution, agriculture, and poverty alleviation. The quest for long-term food security in India is highlighted in the conclusion by highlighting the significance of sustainable agricultural methods and climate change adaptation.

KEYWORDS: Food Security, Social Security, NFSA,

INTRODUCTION

In India, both the governing body and the citizens of the nation have placed a high priority on ensuring food security. The right to food and other essentials is acknowledged by the Indian government as a fundamental human right. These rights are protected by a number of laws, regulations, and programmes that are designed to guarantee that each and every Indian person has a means of obtaining enough food and nourishment, safe drinking water, and other necessities. The National Food Security Act (NFSA), which intends to offer subsidized food grains to a considerable portion of the population through the Public Distribution System (PDS), was implemented by the Indian government in 2013 as one of the key efforts it has made towards tackling the problem at hand (NFSA (INDIA), 2023). The NFSA is a historic piece of legislation that was approved in 2013 and intends to give subsidized food grains to a significant portion of the population. It provides legal entitlements to food grains that are subsidized under the Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS), which ensures the people's access to food security (Umali-Deininger & Sur, 2007). The principal

beneficiaries of this legislation are those with priority households and households participating in the Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) (NFSA (INDIA), 2023). Improvements in food security, nutrition and access for school-age children and expectant and nursing women have also been made possible through programmes like the Mid-Day Meal Scheme and Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) (Umali-Deininger & Sur, 2007). However, issues like PDS leaks and corruption, starvation in disadvantaged groups, and changes in agricultural production still exist. The PDS can be made more effective by technological and transparent policies and measures, environmentally friendly and sustainable agriculture can be promoted, nutrition awareness can be raised, and specific and targeted initiatives and programmes to prevent malnutrition may be put in place. In order to guarantee that no one goes hungry in the country, food security in India must be attained via ongoing commitment, successful execution, and a diverse strategy.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

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- The paper tries to understand the idea of the fundamental right to life enshrined in Article 21 of the Constitution that may be interpreted to include right to live with human dignity, which may include the right to food and other basic necessities.

- The fundamental issues with food security in India are outlined in this paper, which highlights the complexity and diversity of the problem.

- It aims to draw attention to and evaluate government efforts and programmes that are intended to promote food security, such as the Public Distribution System (PDS) and the National Food Security Act (NFSA).

- In addition, it seeks to investigate the agricultural sector, examining concerns with productivity, rural-urban disparity, and price volatility that impact food security.

- The paper emphasises the need for a thorough plan that considers agriculture, distribution, nutrition, and eradicating poverty.

FOOD SECURITY AND THE ARTICLE 21 OF INDIAN CONSTITUTION

The fundamental right to life guaranteed by Article 21 of the Indian Constitution may be read to encompass the right to live with human dignity, which may include the right to food and other basic requirements. Despite the absence of a specific provision in the Indian Constitution addressing the right to food, this interpretation is permissible. The right to food is not mentioned as a basic right in the Indian Constitution. It does, however, acknowledge Article 21's basic right to life. According to Article 21 of the Indian Constitution, "No person shall be deprived of his life or personal liberty except according to the procedure established by law (legislative department, 2023)." According to the Indian judiciary, one of the most important and comprehensive basic rights is described in Article 21 of the Indian Constitution (legislative department, 2023). It has been used to defend a variety of liberties that are essential to living with respect and well-being. This means that despite the right to food not being specifically mentioned in the Constitution, it is covered by the fundamental right to life in Article 21. This further means that having access to food and various other fundamental requirements is necessary for living a life of dignity, and any denial of these needs may be viewed as an infringement and violation of a person's right to life.

In numerous important rulings of the Indian Supreme Court, the idea of the "right to live with human dignity" has played a key role (Srivastava, 2018). The right to basic needs including food, housing, clothes, and healthcare has been recognized by courts as part of the right to life (Srivastava, 2018). The state is required to guarantee that its people have access to these essentials. The policies, decisions and actions of the national government have been significantly influenced by

the interpreted version of Article 21 (Srivastava, 2018). The government is required to take proactive measures to guarantee that its population has a means of obtaining adequate nourishment via food and other basic essentials required for living a dignified life (Srivastava, 2018). Additionally, it gives citizens and civil society organizations a legal foundation on which to protest government actions or inactions that deprive people of these necessities.

This understanding of the right to life and human dignity serves as the foundation for many social welfare programmes in India, including the National Food Security Act (NFSA) and many poverty reduction programmes (Srivastava, 2018). These initiatives seek to provide the fundamental needs of underprivileged communities, including food, housing, and other requirements. Although this interpretation of Article 21 of the Indian Constitution is important, it also presents difficulties in terms of application and enforcement, especially for disadvantaged and marginalized people who frequently encounter obstacles in obtaining these rights. As a result, it may be said that although the Indian Constitution does not expressly mention the right to food, Article 21 of the Constitution gives the right to life a broad meaning that includes the right to live with dignity. Therefore it can be concluded that this interpretation has played a significant role in the development of India's social welfare programmes and provides support for the argument that all people have a fundamental right to access to food and other basic requirements.

UNDERSTANDING THE PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM (PDS) AND THE NATIONAL FOOD SECURITY ACT (NFSA)

In India, the National Food Security Act (NFSA) and the Public Distribution System (PDS) are two connected programmes designed to provide food security for the populace.

The Public Distribution System PDS: The PDS is funded by the government programme that was established in the 1950s with the main objective of providing vulnerable, disadvantaged and economically deprived people with basic food commodities, mostly grains like rice and wheat, at reduced costs (Chakraborty & Sarmah, 2019). In addition to other things, the PDS normally includes rice, wheat, sugar, and paraffin, however, the precise commodities and products may vary by state. The government identifies those who qualify for assistance, such as families who fall below the poverty line (BPL) and Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) households (Chakraborty & Sarmah, 2019). Food grains are provided to these households at prices that are far below market rates. A nationwide system of Fair Price Shops (FPS) provides consumers with food grains and other goods (Chakraborty & Sarmah, 2019). Despite being controlled and managed by private persons or organisations, some stores are subject to government

regulation and funding. Despite the reality that the policy is at work, the system as a whole has flaws of its own. The PDS has struggled with problems including leaks, commodity theft, corruption, and ineffective beneficiary targeting, which frequently led to intended recipients not getting their benefits.

National Food Security Act (NFSA): In order to establish a legislative framework for food security in India, the National Food Security Act (NFSA) was passed in 2013 (Puri, 2022). Ensuring that everyone never goes hungry or starving throughout the nation is its main objective. By dividing recipients into Priority Households and AAY households, the NFSA broadens the scope of the food grains that are subsidized (Puri, 2022). AAY households receive 35 kilogrammes of food grains per month, compared to five kilogrammes per person every month for Priority Households. Under the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) and the Mid-Day Meal Scheme, the Act also allows for the delivery of nourishing meals to children and pregnant and nursing mother (Puri, 2022)s. Transparency, reliability, as well as effectiveness, are three key areas where NFSA is working to improve the PDS. In order to stop leaks and enhance targeting, it establishes procedures for the use of technology.

In terms of subsidised food grains, the NFSA hopes to reach up to 75% of the rural and 50% of the urban populations (Puri, 2022).

PDS and NFSA's relationship: The PDS serves as the means of distribution channel that ensures the NFSA's goals are achieved. The NFSA expands on the current PDS and changes it by establishing a legal framework, boosting the entitlements and privileges of the people, and implementing policies that increase effectiveness and openness. Together, they make up a thorough plan to solve India's food security issues.

In conclusion, the National Food Security Act (NFSA) is a landmark law enacted to provide a legal framework for food security, expand coverage, and enhance the effectiveness of the PDS. In India, the Public Distribution System (PDS) has long served as the distribution system for subsidised food grains. Both programmes are crucial to ensure that basic food supplies are distributed to the nation's economically and socially needy citizens.

FOOD SECURITY IN INDIA- THE POLITICAL ASPECT

Food security has been considered a major as well as politically relevant problem in India for a number of decades. It has been the primary objective and focus of government programmes, and it can be said that political decisions as well as electoral choices have played a critical part in developing the nation's approach to providing food security for its population.

- **Historical Context:** Since India's independence in 1947, food security has been a political hot-

button issue throughout the country. The governing bodies and leaders of the nation were deeply affected by the Bengal Famine of 1943, which claimed millions of lives and inspired a determination to avert food shortages and starvation (Saxena, 2018).

- **Green Revolution:** In the 1960s and 1970s, India's political elite sponsored the Green Revolution, which sought to raise the production of agriculture by embracing contemporary farming and agricultural practices, high-yield crop types, and increasing the use of fertilizers and pesticides. Food output in the nation was greatly increased by this governmental commitment and financial support for agriculture (Saxena, 2018).

- **The Public Distribution System (PDS),** a government-run programme for food distribution, has served as a crucial political instrument for maintaining food security (George & McKay, 2019). Delivering and providing subsidised food grains to certain communities has been a common tactic used by political parties to acquire support and electoral advantage.

- **National Food Security Act (NFSA):** The National Food Security Act (NFSA), passed in 2013 while the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) was in power, was a significant piece of legislation that ensured subsidised food grains to a significant portion of the population. Wide support was shown for the political action, which was made in an effort to combat hunger and malnutrition.

- **Mid-Day Meal Scheme:** The Mid-Day Meal Scheme, which offers free lunches to schoolchildren, is an additional widely supported governmental initiative with dual objectives of eliminating hunger and boosting academic performance (Candel, 2014). This initiative is frequently emphasised by political parties during elections.

- **Political talks:** Both at the federal and state levels, food security has been the topic of political conversations, debates and disputes. Discussions frequently centre on topics like the breadth of food subsidies, the effectiveness of the PDS, and the sufficiency of social safety nets.

- **Farmer Welfare:** Agricultural policies, such as minimum support prices (MSPs) for crops, directly affect the production of food and agricultural related and farmer livelihoods. Political judgements and discussions are involved with these policies.

Despite widespread political backing, execution, leaks, and targeted concerns have been criticized in relation to food security initiatives. These issues have occasionally been used by opposition parties to criticize the performance of the current administration.

Political wrangling has surrounded India's stance on international trade accords, particularly those pertaining to agriculture. The government's choices on imports, exports, and

subsidies may have a significant impact on the availability of food. Social movements and organizations from civil society have been essential in influencing the political conversation on food security, promoting the rights of marginalized groups, and holding the government responsible.

In conclusion, food security in the nation of India is not only a political problem that affects public discourse and opinion and political and electoral campaigns but also a highly policy-related one. In order to solve the complex issues surrounding food security and guarantee that all individuals have a means of getting sufficient and nutrient-rich food, political and governmental will and commitment as well as action are crucial.

THE FUNDAMENTAL ISSUES OF FOOD SECURITY IN INDIA

There are a number of underlying problems with food security in India, which continue to hamper attempts to guarantee that all individuals have the opportunity to consume sufficient and nourishing food. This can be understood and analyzed via different ways.

- India still has high rates of poverty and disparities in income and wealth, which causes uneven availability and access to food and basic living conditions (Brahmanand et al., 2013). A great deal of individuals, especially in rural regions and among marginalized populations, the lack the monetary resources and logistical means to routinely buy nourishing meals.

- Low productivity and insufficient yields, outmoded farming and agricultural methods, and reliance on the monsoons are problems for India's agricultural economy. These elements may result in uneven food production and fluctuating food costs.

- A number of problems, including leaks, diversion, and corruption, plague the Public Distribution System (PDS), which is intended to deliver subsidized food grains (Brahmanand et al., 2013). This indicates that the advantages of food security policies could not successfully reach the intended recipients.

- In spite of several government initiatives, malnutrition is still a serious issue in India. Both malnutrition (stunting, wasting, and underweight) and over nutrition (obesity and associated health problems) fall under this category.

- Traditional food production methods may be disrupted by immigration and migration from rural to urban areas, which might lead to problems with food security in both the source and destination regions (Choithani, 2017).

- Throughout the supply chain, from manufacture and distribution to consumption, substantial volumes of food are wasted (Pillay & Kumar, 2018). Issues with food security are exacerbated by this inefficiency.

- India may be subject to global price changes and supply disruptions as a result of its integration into the world food market (Pillay & Kumar, 2018).

- During economic downturns or crises, poor communities may be in danger of food insecurity due to inadequate social safety nets and jobless assistance systems.

- Food security is at risk from climate change because it may result in unexpected weather patterns, crop failures, and breaks in the food supply chain (Pillay & Kumar, 2018). Particularly impacted are communities that are vulnerable in agriculture.

- Many individuals lack knowledge about and instruction about adequate nutrition, especially in rural regions. Poor dietary decisions and insufficient nourishment may result from this.

In order to deal with these underlying problems, a holistic strategy must be used, one that prioritizes improving nourishment educational and medical facilities as well as the system of distribution, lowering income disparities and poverty, and encouraging agricultural production that is environmentally friendly. Additionally, it demands the use of climate-resilient farming techniques and efforts to cut down on food waste. To address these issues and improve food security for all, the Indian government and different stakeholders are still developing plans and policies.

FUTURE PROSPECTS AND SOLUTIONS

The task of increasing food security in India is complicated and varied and calls for a combination of structural reforms, investments, and policies. Here are some potential changes that may be made to improve India's food security:

- **Boost Agricultural Productivity:** Crop yields may be increased by promoting cutting-edge agricultural practices like precision agriculture and organic farming. Investing in the creation of high-yielding, climatically resilient agricultural types would also be advantageous. Providing farmers with timely access to high-quality seeds, fertilizers, and pesticides and encouraging sustainable water management practices to meet difficulties with water shortages may be a beneficial development.

- **Diversify Agriculture:** Agriculture diversification can help to lessen dependency on a small number of basic crops. Farmers' nutrition and income will increase if high-value agricultural and horticultural production is encouraged.

- **Irrigation and Water Management:** To alleviate the issue of water shortage, expanded infrastructure for irrigation and the encouragement of efficient water-management practices can be utilized. Another constructive step is to promote the use of crops that can withstand drought and the collection of rainwater.

- **Rural Infrastructure Development:** Construction of rural infrastructure, such as roads, storage spaces, and market connections, will assist in lowering losses following harvesting and enhancing market accessibility.

- **Support Smallholder Farmers:** By giving smallholder farmers access to training, extension services, and financing as well as by adopting crop insurance programmes to lessen the risks associated with farming, we can improve the economic security of those involved in food production.

- **Strengthen the Public Distribution System (PDS):** By modernizing the PDS, you may decrease leaks, increase transparency, as well as enhance targeting. The proper delivery of food grains to the target recipients should also be taken into account.

- **Nutrition Education and Awareness:** Launching statewide campaigns to increase understanding of the value of a balanced diet and adequate nutrition, as well as the incorporation of nutrition education into school curriculum, can help to encourage good eating habits.

- **Social Safety Nets:** To support disadvantaged people amid economic crises, social safety net programmes, such as monetary transfers and assistance with food programmes, should be strengthened and expanded. This would make a significant difference in India's food security.

- **Women's Empowerment:** Encouraging women to work in agriculture and giving them access to resources and decision-making authority is another step in the right direction towards guaranteeing food security. A successful outcome will result from supporting programmes that financially strengthen women since they are essential to family food production and nutrition.

- **Climate Resilience:** Creating climate-resilient farming methods to adjust to shifting weather patterns, reducing the effects of climate change on food production, and investing in weather forecasting and early warning systems will help assist farmers in making knowledgeable choices about crop and food production.

- **Government Accountability:** Improving accountability procedures can aid in reducing fraud and waste in food distribution and subsidy schemes. To make sure food security efforts are having the desired effects, frequent audits and assessments should be conducted.

- **Research and Innovation:** Developing sustainable and affordable solutions for enhancing food security, such as novel methods of food processing or value addition in agriculture, may be accomplished through investing in research and innovation. One illustration is how India funds the research at its many agricultural institutions, like Birsa Agricultural University in Jharkhand, for food security endeavours.

- **International cooperation:** Sharing best practices and addressing regional food security concerns will be

made possible by cooperation with international organizations and surrounding nations.

A comprehensive strategy combining these techniques, as well as transparency and accountability of the government, is required to improve food security in India. It necessitates the active and forefront participation of government, civic society as a whole, the business and commercial community, and local communities in order to achieve the common aim of ensuring that all individuals have a means of getting enough healthy and nutritious food and the malnourishment is over from within the territory of India.

CONCLUSION

The Indian government's dedication to ensuring and guaranteeing that its population have access to needs like food, clean water, healthcare, education, and housing is reflected in the programmes and policies that are described in this paper. The efforts focus on the fact that, despite the stark economic disparities among its population, the Indian government is making a valiant effort to end malnutrition in India. Although improvements in access to basic necessities have been achieved, there are still difficulties in ensuring that all people, particularly those in disadvantaged and marginalized groups, have full access to these rights. The government is still working to resolve these issues and broaden the scope of its social welfare initiatives.

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