

# FOOD SECURITY AND ITS CHALLENGE IN INDIA

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## INTRODUCTION

Currently, millions of people around the world suffer from hunger and malnutrition. In 2007, the United Nations (UN) estimated about 850 million people worldwide who suffer from malnutrition. It also estimated that African and Asian continents have 799 million undernourished people, most of them living in developing countries. The main cause of this problem is food insecurity. India has over 120 million people and the second most populous country in the world. To feed this population farmers are working very hard for centuries.

Well, we have achieved self-sufficiency in food production; the majority of the Indian population does not get enough food or balanced food. Due to the increase in average cereal production per capita consumption of cereals is satisfactory, but there is a decrease in consumption per capita pulse. Production and consumption of fruits and vegetables is relatively low. Until now, specific efforts are not been taken to improve the production and distribution of vegetables at an affordable cost in both urban and rural areas. Food insecurity is a condition, where very less food is available for the household member. In such situation, the food intake of household members is reduced and their normal eating pattern is disrupted because the household lacked money and other resources for food. The paper is written with an objective to discuss food security measures with reference to recent national food security act, its challenges, benefits, limitations and to give suggestions to ensure food security in India.

## DEFINITIONS

1. According to the Organization for Food and Agriculture (FAO) of the United Nations, food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for active living and healthy life.

2. According to the European Crop Protection Association, food security often refers to food availability and an individual's access to food. A person can be considered "food secure" if they do not live in hunger or fear of starvation. In addition to hunger and starvation, food security can also refer to the availability of a sufficient nutrition to ensure a healthy diet, avoiding the health impacts of malnutrition.

3. According to the Department of Agriculture of the United States, "Food insecurity is a situation of limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods or limited or uncertain ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways."

### Objectives of paper

1. To study food safety measures taken in India.
2. To anticipate the challenges of food insecurity in India.
3. To discuss limitations and propose measures to reduce food insecurity in India.

## ELEMENTS OF FOOD SECURITY

### 1. Food Availability:

Food availability is meant by the physical existence of food either from own production or from the market. At the national level, food availability derives from the combination of domestic food stocks, commercial food imports, food aid and domestic food production. Per capita availability of the food grains in India, in the year 1951 was 144.1 kg. After 56 years i.e. in 2015 per capita availability of food grains went up by just 18 kg.

## 2. Access to food:

It is ensured that all households and all individuals within those households have sufficient resources to obtain appropriate food for a nutritious diet. It depends on the level of household resources (capital, labor and knowledge), food prices and the existence of social safety net. Therefore, adequate access to food can be obtained without being self sufficient in food production. More importantly, it is the ability of households to generate sufficient revenue, which, with its own production, can be used to meet food needs. For example, India today has more than 30 million tonnes of wheat and rice in government warehouses, yet poverty-induced hunger affects over 200 million people.

## 3. Use and utilization of food:

Use requires not only an adequate diet, but also a healthy physical environment, including availability of adequate drinking water and sanitation (to prevent disease) and an understanding of proper health care, food preparation and storage processes. In addition, the ability of health care, behavior and practices are equally important. According to UNESCAP (2006) 148 million people who struggle daily to get drinking water live in rural India.

## 4. Stability of food security:

Stability refers to the time dimension of food security. A distinction can be made between chronic food insecurity (permanent) and transitory food insecurity (temporary).

## FOOD SECURITY IN INDIA

Government of India has taken several steps to increase productivity of agriculture. These include schemes like; Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana (RKVY), National Food Security Mission (NFSM), Development and Strengthening of Infrastructure facilities for Production and Distribution of Quality Seed, National Horticulture Mission (NHM), Rainfed Area Development Programme (RADP), Integrated Scheme of Oilseeds, Pulses, Oil Palm and Maize (ISOPOM), Gramin Bhandaran Yojana etc. In addition, Government has also improved the availability of farm credit; implemented debt waiver; introduced better crop insurance schemes; increased Minimum Support Price (MSP), improved marketing infrastructure, etc. Further in order to provide food security to the people by ensuring availability of food at affordable prices, Government has enacted National Food Security Act, recently. The National Food Security Act is a historic initiative for ensuring food and nutritional security to the people. It gives right to the people to receive adequate quantity of food grains at affordable prices.

## CHALLENGES OF FOOD SECURITY:

The challenges India faces to meet its food security are-

- ✚ Productivity increase of Indian agriculture using high yielding seeds and modern technology.
- ✚ Changes in food consumption pattern due to changes in dietary habits of the population
- ✚ Malnutrition in India, especially in children to be reduced to zero.
- ✚ Development of supply chains of high value to cover the last recipient in time.
- ✚ Food security is a right and it is pre-requisite to enjoy other rights available to an individual.
- ✚ Hunger and poverty must be reduced to ensure food security for all beneficiaries.

- ✚ More investment in agriculture is needed within and outside India.
- ✚ Government neglect of agriculture is reflected in the suicide of the farmer.
- ✚ Research on new challenges that farmer's face like climate change, droughts and floods.

## BENEFITS OF NFSA

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The Government of India has recently passed National Food Security Act, 2013, which would offer following benefits.

- ✚ NFSA has kept the poor as its top priority.
- ✚ Food security Act will help plug 30% leakage in PDS.
- ✚ Food security Act is a chance for India to take full responsibility of food security of its citizens.
- ✚ The legislation will provide highly subsidized food to two third of the country's population.
- ✚ An opportunity to ensure that no child is malnourished in the country.
- ✚ States are asked to identify the beneficiaries of the food scheme.
- ✚ Loopholes under PDS scheme would be taken care of in the Food Security act.
- ✚ Food security Act is a historic achievement for everyone.
- ✚ It is beginning of the fight to eradicate poverty and malnutrition in the country.

## CRITICISM OF THE NFSA

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NFSA is criticized by stakeholders as below -

- ✚ It is an incomplete law of food security without provisions for the construction of infrastructure.
- ✚ The targeted approach NFSA excludes marginalized and may lead to corruption.
- ✚ Centre only wants to move the burden of Food Security Act to states.
- ✚ Law on Food Security would be a failure if it does not take care of the interests of farmers.
- ✚ Law on Food Safety does not have universal application, and is unclear on certain aspects.
- ✚ Food security Act has inherent flaws and deficiencies, since it fails to address both calorific and nutritional security of the poor.
- ✚ The task of obtaining, storage, transport, delivery is with the bureaucrat and not with the elected.

## SUGGESTIONS

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Following suggestions are offered for the success of food security programme.

- ✚ There is a need to improve the PDS and plug leakage for success of National Food Security Act.
- ✚ Along with rice, wheat and coarse grains, the government must provide salt, edible oil and pulses at reasonable prices, especially for people from backward communities.
- ✚ Food Security Bill should give flexibility to states on how to distribute food grains to the actual beneficiaries.
- ✚ The very poor people should not be charged even Rs.3 per kg, but offered free food.
- ✚ The Centre and the State will have to work hand in hand for the success of Food Safety programme.

- ✦ Unless and until, the Panchayats and Municipalities are given more powers the Food Safety Act will not deliver with the desired results.
- ✦ Although there are some flaws in the law, it can be improved, based on experience, after its application.
- ✦ To address the problems related to food insecurity and malnutrition, good co-ordination.

## CONCLUSION

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Cereal production in India increased and the country has become the world's largest producers of cereals like rice and wheat. However, the levels of hunger and malnutrition remain high. At present, the biggest challenge is not only improving the productivity of agriculture, but also making the food grains accessible to the poor and needy. In such a situation, the Food Security Act would be an opportunity for India to assume full responsibility of food safety of its citizens.

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