

Food Security in India

Meaning of Food Security

Food security is when people are able to afford and secure sufficient quantities of nutritious food for their family. Food security in India is essential for the poor. Food security is required in the country because more than a quarter of the Indian population is living below the poverty line.

In 1983, the Food and Agricultural Organisation defined food security as 'ensuring that all people at all times have both physical and economic access to the basic food they need. The three dimensions of food security:

- Availability of food: The country should produce sufficient food for satisfying the needs and requirements of every citizen.
- Accessibility of food: All the people should have easy accessibility to food.
- Affordability of food: Every person should have enough money to buy sufficient and quality food for the family.



Who are Food-insecure?

If a group of people are deprived of adequate food to meet their minimum dietary needs, then such a group of people can be considered food-insecure people. Poor people are more vulnerable to food insecurity because of their poor purchasing power. Thus, the food-insecure people do not have enough access to quality food.

If the agricultural land is not fertile in a particular region, then the availability of food grains is likely to be inadequate in that region. If the government fails to increase the supply of food grains in that region at a reasonable price, then the accessibility of food grains will be affected.

Further, agriculture in India hugely depends on rainfall. In cases of failure of rainfall, many areas suffer from famines resulting in the untimely deaths of many people because of starvation and epidemic diseases. Kalahandi and Kshipur in Odisha have been suffering from famines since many years. The Indian states which have a large number of food-insecure people are the eastern and southern parts of Uttar Pradesh, Odisha, Jharkhand, Bihar, Chhattisgarh and parts of Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra.

The incidence of food-insecurity in rural areas is higher among landless labourers, petty self-employed workers, small artisans engaged in some traditional crafts and street beggars. Similarly, the incidence of food-insecurity in urban areas is higher among ill-paid casual workers and poor people residing in slum areas.

Hunger is another dimension of food insecurity. It is a condition in which people do not get enough food to provide the nutrients for an active life. It has chronic and seasonal dimensions. Chronic hunger is a consequence of diets persistently inadequate in quantity or quality. Poor people suffer from this type of hunger because of their very low income. For example, the income of landless labourers is too low to buy sufficient food. This type of hunger exists when a person is incapable of buying food even for survival. On

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

Food Security Measures

Various steps taken by the government to solve the food problem:

Increasing Food Supplies

- Technological improvements such as enhancing irrigation facilities, using of high-yielding variety of seeds and supply of chemical fertilisers at subsidised prices.
- Institutional measures such as land reforms, providing cheap credit to farmers through institutional credit agencies and ensuring a fair price of their products.
- National Food Security Mission (NFSM) has been launched by the Department of Agriculture and Cooperation, Ministry of Agriculture, in 2007 to increase the availability of food grains such as rice, wheat and pulses in India. It has made a significant impact as reflected in the increase in the production of rice (99.2 MT) and wheat (80.6 MT) in 2008–09.

Food Management

- Three main objectives of food management in India:
 - Procurement of food grains from farmers at remunerative prices
 - Distribution of food grains to the vulnerable section of society at affordable prices
 - Maintenance of food buffers for food security and price stability
- Components of the Food Security System
 - Buffer stock: Buffer stock is a sufficient stock of food grains. Wheat and rice are the main food grains procured by the government through the Food Corporation of India (FCI) as they are consumed by a large number of citizens. The FCI procures food grains from farmers in the states of surplus production. This is done not only to provide incentives to the farmers by purchasing their food grains but also to store the surplus food in granaries. This buffer stock helps in the distribution of food grains at minimum prices to the poor and to the people during the time of floods and droughts.
 - Minimum support price (MSP) is the pre-announced price declared by the government at which it is willing to purchase crops directly from the farmers, if the crop price falls below the MSP. Every year, farmers are paid by the government before the sowing season. This is done to provide incentives to the farmers for raising the production of these crops.
 - Buffer stocks are maintained by the Central Government for the following purposes:
 - To issue food grains to deficit areas and among the poorer strata of society at a price lower than the market price. This price is called the issue price.
 - To overcome the problem of food shortages during the time of adverse weather.
 - To meet the required minimum buffer stocks for food security.

- **Public Distribution System:** Food purchased by the FCI is distributed among the poor sections of society in a controlled way through ration shops. This system is known as the Public Distribution System. The ration or fair price shops sell food grains and other essential commodities to the poor people at prices lower than the market rates. Regulated shops which distribute the food grains procured by the government at a lower price than the market price are known as fair price shops or ration shops. These food grains are distributed only among the poorer sections of society. The objectives of the Public Distribution System are to ensure food security and poverty alleviation by making essential commodities, especially food grains, available at affordable and uniform prices to consumers. It provides employment to a large number of people and supplies food grains at subsidised rates to poor people.
 - The Revamped Public Distribution System (RPDS) was introduced in 1992 in 1700 blocks in the country. The scheme aimed at the provision of food grains in the remote and backward areas of the country.
 - The Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS) was launched in 1997 with the policy of providing food grains to all the poor sections of people in different areas. Under this system, a different price policy was adopted for poor and non-poor people.
 - The Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) was introduced in 2000. About ten million of the poorest people were identified and highly subsidised food grains were provided to them at highly subsidised prices.
 - The Annapurna Scheme (APS) was introduced in 2000 for the poorest of poor and destitute senior citizens. Through this scheme, it was decided to provide 10 kg of food grains to poor families per month free of cost.
- **Food subsidy:** A subsidy is a payment which the government makes to a producer to supplement the market price of a commodity. The difference between the issue price and the economic cost of food grains is reimbursed to the FCI. This difference is called a food subsidy. In the Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) scheme, 25 kg of food grains were made available to each eligible family at a subsidised rate of Rs 2 per kg for wheat and Rs 3 per kg for rice. It has been further expanded to cover two crore families.



Controlling Demand

To control demand, the government undertook certain measures such as

- Extended the coverage of rationing
- Checked the rising demand for food
- Encouraged family planning devices
- Wholesale and retail traders in food grains maintained the minimum stock for normal trading

Reducing Poverty

The government has initiated certain measures to benefit the poor. In the process of economic growth, resources are transferred to the poor (such as distribution of surplus land), concessional loans for productive activities are granted to improve the standard of living of the poor and special anti-poverty programmes have been implemented such as

- Rural Employment Generation Programme, 1995
- Prime Minister Rozgar Yojana, 1993
- Swarna Jayanti Shahri Rozgar Yojana, 1997
- Swarna Jayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana, 1999
- Sampoorna Gramin Rozgar Yojana, 2001
- National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, 2005

Special Nutrition Programmes

Availability of food in adequate quantity and quality is the main component of the food security scheme. The government initiated many programmes such as the mid-day meal scheme for school children, special nutrition programme for nursing women and applied nutrition programme for spreading the awareness of balanced diet.



Drawbacks of the Public Distribution System

- Limited benefits to the poor: The main drawback of PDS is that it is not able to reach the poor effectively. For the distribution of essential goods via the PDS, one must have a ration card to consume essential items. Hence, migrated workers, who do not have residential evidence, do not get the ration card and are left out of the loop of PDS. Many poor families are not covered under the PDS scheme.
- Urban bias: More than 85% of the total quantity consumed under PDS is in the urban areas and the PDS in the rural areas accounts for less than 75% of the total quantity consumed. Thus, even though PDS appears even-handed for all sections of society, there is failure in achieving its target of helping the poor.
- Regional disparities in distribution: People in vulnerable areas were not able to receive any facilities of PDS because of weak infrastructure and low purchasing power. Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu, the four southern states, account for 49% of the total PDS off take of food grains in India. In contrast, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh, the four northern states, account for only 10% of the total PDS off take of food grains in India.

Role of Co-operatives in Food Security in India

- They are providing food security in the country, especially in the southern and western parts.
- They are setting up shops to sell low-priced goods to poor people. For example, in Tamil Nadu, out of all fair price shops, about 94% are being run by co-operatives.
- It has brought about the White Revolution in the country. Example: Amul selling milk and milk products.
- In Maharashtra, a co-operative called the Academy of Development Studies (ADS) has facilitated a network of NGOs for establishing grain banks in different regions.
- It has organised training and capacity building programmes on food security for NGOs. This is done to set up grain banks to facilitate replication through other NGOs and to influence the government's policy on food security.

