

FOOD SECURITY ACT, 2013: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR THE BACKWARD STATES IN INDIA

*Biplab Dhak **

ABSTRACT

Food security is said to be existed when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life. This by any indicator, be it malnutrition, be it hunger index or level of anaemia, does not exist in India. Surprisingly, this situation remains unchanged even after India being claimed to be food sufficient. In this context and having record of inefficient public distribution system as a means to distribute food to poor people, the likely to be reformed system under the food security Act, 2013, brings hopes as well as scepticism towards securing food in India. This paper discusses both opportunities as well as challenges towards ensuring food security through the Act. While the Act is expected to bring down the errors of exclusion and inclusion in the beneficiary list of PDS, and gives a window of opportunity to enhance women empowerment through giving right to women, challenges remain how to repair the broken delivery mechanism, and more importantly how to finance cost for implementing the programme aiming to provide subsidised food to 67 per cent of population. Challenges seem to be deeper for backward States due to their more dreadful distribution system, weaker administration, empty treasury, and unfavourable demographic structure. The additional cost that a State has to bear for many schemes financed by Central-State partnership, will be burdensome for any State in general and for an underdeveloped State in particular. Furthermore, this paper argues that the provision of supplying food will have partial impact on food security if one goes by the definition of food security since the programme will function against the preferred food items. As evidence suggests, cereals are no more among preferred foodgrains which are substituted by high valued food items containing protein, fat etc. Therefore, the much needed effort would be, increasing purchasing power than solely supplying foodgrains and some nutritional supplements towards ensuring food security in India.

* Assistant Professor, Division of Economics, A N Sinha Institute of Social Studies, Patna - 800 001, Bihar,
Email: biplab36@gmail.com

Introduction

Food security is said to have existed when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life (FAO, 2009), could not be ensured in India till very recently. India is home to about 25 per cent of the world's hungry poor (FAO 2009). The level of malnutrition is also found to be very severe, particularly among children and women. Around 40 per cent of children and 36 per cent of women are found to be underweight (NFHS, 2005-06).

This prevalence of food insecurity exists surprisingly despite India's attainment of self-sufficiency in foodgrains. The production of foodgrains increased from 51 million tonnes in 1950-51 to 108.4 million tonnes in 1970-71 and touched 257 million tonnes in 2011-12. India also possess huge buffer stock of 80.5 million tonnes in 2012 against the stock norms of 31.9 million tonnes in the central pool. While bumper yield partly helped making buffer stocks, other reasons include higher Minimum Support Price (MSP) for procuring foodgrains, and declining demand for cereals against increasing demand for high valued food such as proteins, fats, fruits etc. Particularly, high valued foods are increasingly being demanded by a section of people who have become richer and whose taste and preferences have undergone changes following the era of liberalisation (Saxena, 2011).

A large section of population are strikingly marginalised and strive for any kind of food. Even their marginalisation has gone deeper and per capita availability of food grains has gone down over time (Planning Commission, 2006). Furthermore, there has been a sustained decline in per

capita calorie and protein consumption during the past 25 years (Deaton and Dreze 2008) and the decline has been much steeper for people who fall Below the Poverty Line (BPL) as defined by the Planning Commission of India (Patnaik 2007) during the same period.

There have been various policies and programmes undertaken in India at various times and again aiming to ensure food security. The most important among all programmes has been the Public Distribution System (PDS) for delivering subsidised foodgrains to poor people. Initially it started in urban area and later extended to rural area covering all households. In 1997, it is reintroduced as targeted public distribution system to deliver subsidised foodgrains to those who are in need instead of all. But this system failed to achieve the targeted vision due to mainly errors in inclusion and exclusion of households in the targeted group (Hirway 2003; Khera 2008; Mahamallik and Sahu 2011) and corruption in the PDS (Himanshu and Sen 2011; Khera 2011a, Khera 2011b).

As time and again programmes addressing food security have undergone changes, a recent change has come in through bringing food security Act, 2013. The Act, hereafter mentioned, primarily will be addressing minimisation of errors in exclusion and inclusion by increasing the coverage under TPDS (proposed to be covered 67 per cent of households), and providing nutritional support through cooked meal with nutritional supplements to children, pregnant and lactating mothers.

With the above backdrop, this paper aims to address opportunities and challenges following the implementation of the Act, particularly, focusing on backward States.

State of Food Insecurity

It has been a hard task to measure even though the definition of food security has been conceptualised. None of the indicators used to understand the status of food insecurity is found unique. Indicators which are mostly used include 'self-perceived food insecurity'; 'hunger index' based on calorie intake and level of malnourishment, which are presented here to understand the present status as well as changing pattern of food insecurity and its inter-State variation.

The changing pattern of self-perceived food insecurity based on National

Sample Survey Office (NSSO) data is presented in Figure 1. It can be seen that there has been sharp decline in the level of hunger from 139 to 8 per 1000 households in India. This sharp decline has also been consistent across States in India with varying degree (Table 1). The level of food insecurity has been greater among the States in West Bengal, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, Assam and Bihar. These States consistently remain among top five food-insecure States over the periods. This is an expected trend as literature suggests and it is known that the magnitude of food insecurity also varies seasonally in which it peaks in the summer months (Mehta and Shah, 2001).

Figure 1: Trend in Perceived Food Insecurity by Place of Residence in India

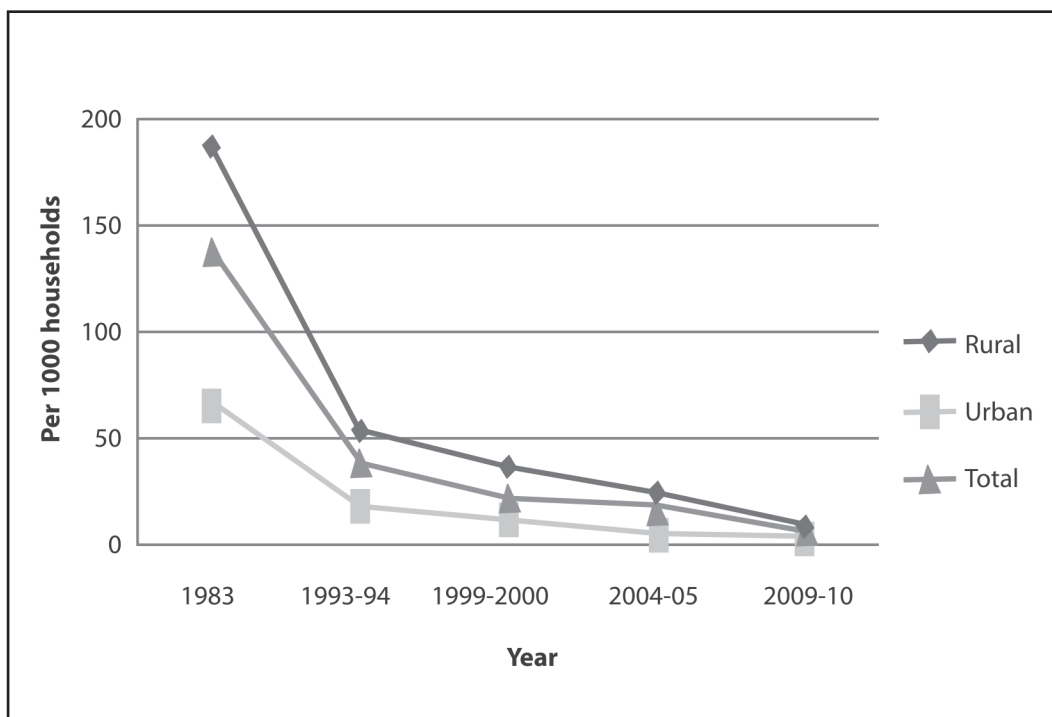


Table 1: Perceived Food Insecurity (per 1000 households) by States in India, NSSO

States	93-94	1999-2000	2004-05	2009-10
Andhra Pradesh	26.76	14.34	4.95	3.71
Assam	81.74	59.94	53.01	12.83
Bihar	62.09	53.87	31.06	17.10
Chhattisgarh	-	-	18.86	6.03
Gujarat	19.87	7.11	1.09	1.99
Haryana	7.20	12.19	0.76	3.15
Jharkhand	-	-	1.39	2.92
Karnataka	27.38	5.70	2.56	0.50
Kerala	77.90	23.77	22.40	5.00
MP	23.19	24.28	2.05	15.71
Maharashtra	28.81	11.95	6.51	2.51
Odisha	128.98	67.48	51.82	32.41
Punjab	1.49	1.53	5.97	2.00
Rajasthan	12.43	2.00	0.68	1.25
TN	26.93	5.49	2.50	0.50
UP	29.73	17.37	16.32	4.94
WB	99.60	69.45	81.86	31.66
India	40.60	23.65	18.66	8.10

Source: NSSO 1993-94, 1999-00, 2004-05, 2009-10.

Nevertheless, this self-perceived measure of food insecurity has been subject to many criticisms. An expert group (Gol 1993) cites that this measure is not free from subjectivity, the concept of two square meal not only varies from person to person but

also from place to place. Further, the expert group doubts on relying upon responses received from male household head who would not be aware of quantity and content of meal left for female members in the household.

Table 2: Hunger Index and its Components by States in India

States	% of under-nourishment	% of low weight among children <5 years	Under-five mortality rate (per 1000)	India State Hunger Index score	Rank
Punjab	11.1	24.6	5.2	13.64	1
Kerala	28.6	22.7	1.6	17.66	2
Andhra Pradesh	19.6	32.7	6.3	19.54	3
Assam	14.6	36.4	8.5	19.85	4
Haryana	15.1	39.7	5.2	20.01	5
Tamil Nadu	29.1	30	3.5	20.88	6
Rajasthan	14	40.4	8.5	20.99	7
WB	18.5	38.5	5.9	21	8
UP	14.5	42.3	9.6	22.17	9
Maharashtra	27	36.7	4.7	22.81	10
Karnataka	28.1	37.6	5.5	23.74	11
Odisha	21.4	40.9	9.1	23.79	12
Gujarat	23.3	44.7	6.1	24.69	13
Chhattisgarh	23.3	47.6	9	26.65	14
Bihar	17.3	56.1	8.5	27.3	15
Jharkhand	19.6	57.1	9.3	28.01	16
MP	23.7	59.8	9.4	30.9	17
India	20	42.5	7.1	23.31	

Source: Menon et al, 2009.

Subsequently, outcome measures in terms of malnutrition, child mortality rates etc., are argued to be better measure of food insecurity than the availability of food and self-perceived food insecurity (Martorell and Ho, 1984). Based on outcome measure, a composite index-Global Hunger Index (GHI) - has also been developed by International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) aiming

to monitor programmes pertaining to reduce hunger and poverty. The index was calculated taking averages of proportion of undernourished population, prevalence of underweight children below age five and proportion of children dying before the age of five. The score calculated in 2009 depicts an alarming picture for India with the rank of 65 out of 121 countries scoring 23.9

(Grebmer et al. 2009). The state of hunger is even found more severe for some States when looked into the India State Hunger Index (ISHI), generated for 17 major States in India (Menon et al. 2009). While the level of hunger remains high in many States in India, relatively worse condition appears for Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, Bihar and Chhattisgarh with hunger score more than 25. Similar kind of picture is also found for under-five mortality rate as well as proportion of malnourishment. The India State Hunger indicators are presented in Table 2.

Underlying Factors Behind Food Insecurity

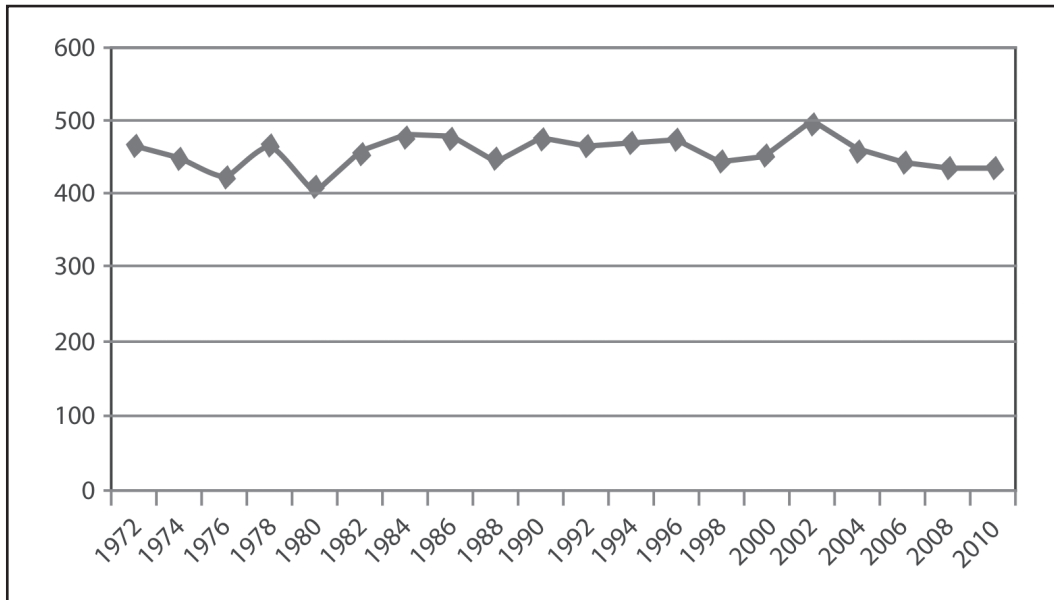
After observing acute state of persistent food insecurity in India in general and among backward States in particular, this section outlines some of the important factors behind the present state of food insecurity.

Agricultural Production and Availability:

Since Independence agricultural production in India increased considerably. Attaining self-sufficiency in foodgrains is considered to be one of the country's major achievements in the post-Independence period. The production of foodgrains increased from 51 million tonnes in 1950 to 257 million tonnes in 2011-12. Production of rice increased from 20.6 million tonnes in 1950-51 to 104.3 million tonnes in 2011-12 which accounts for almost five-fold increase since 1950-51. Similarly, wheat production increased from 6.5 million tonnes in 1950-51 to 93.9 million tonnes in 2011-12. Nevertheless, the increase of per capita availability of foodgrains has

not been impressive. Although it increased from 394.9 gms per day in 1951 to 438.6 grams per day in 2010, the recent trend has not been impressive. A declining trend in the per capita availability of foodgrains is observed, in particular in the post-reform period. It declined from 485 grams in 1989-91 to 438.6 in 2010 grams per head per day. The trend of per capita per day availability of foodgrains has been presented in Figure 2.

The declining trend in per capita availability of food has had deeper negative impact upon poorer section of population. It seems they have been severely marginalised as far as consumption of cereal is concerned. In what can be seen based on NSSO consumption expenditure data, there has been consistently around 20 per cent less cereal consumption at any time point among bottom 10 per cent of population as compared to top 10 per cent of population. Although, there has been decline in the intake among richer group and it remained unchanged among poorer group since 1990s, reasons are suggested separate for these two sections of population. While the decline for the upper section is attributed to the diversification of food, changing taste and preference for high valued food (Mittal 2008), poorer section of population are forced to consume lesser amounts of cereals despite their higher manual work requiring more energy. Poor people are forced to squeeze their food budget for meeting minimum requirement of non-food expenditure (Sen, 2005; Saxeena 2011; Mander, 2008).

Figure 2: Per Capita Per Day Availability of Foodgrains (Grams) in India

Source: Ministry of Finance, 2013.

Table 3: Trends in Cereal Consumption Across Expenditure Groups (per kg)

Rural		Percentile			
	Lowest 5%	5%-10%	40%-50%	90%-95%	95%-100%
1993-94	9.68	11.29	13.33	14.98	15.78
1999-2000	9.78	11.15	12.89	13.73	14.19
2004-05	9.88	10.87	12.16	12.77	13.50
Urban		Percentile			
	Lowest 5%	5%-10%	40%-50%	90%-95%	95%-100%
1993-94	8.91	10.11	10.99	10.19	10.29
1999-2000	8.99	10.15	10.80	9.94	9.72
2004-05	9.25	10.04	10.28	9.50	9.10

Source: NSSO (2007).

Ineffective Government Support Programmes: There have been a number of programmes initiated by Government of India (GoI) to reduce malnutrition, child mortality, or in general, ensuring food security. Including various measures under the reproductive and child health programme, major programmes happen to be Public Distribution System (PDS) and Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS).

PDS is said to have existed before Independence in India, and was initially intended to protect consumers from food shortages and producers from price fluctuations (Dev and Suryanarayana, 1991). It was originally started in few urban centres, but was extended in the 1980s as a measure of food security and poverty alleviation. Eventually, this programme started targeting selected people both in rural and urban areas under the Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS) in 1997. Under this system, households are categorised into APL, BPL, or Antyodaya (introduced in 2001) cards aiming to support targeted families with providing foodgrains at subsidised rate. Antyodaya cards, which enjoy a larger subsidy than BPL households, are meant for the "poorest of the poor". In addition, there are other schemes such as 'mid-day meal' to provide cooked food to school children, ICDS for providing nutritional supplements to pre-school children, pregnant and lactating mothers. These schemes are jointly managed by Central and State governments. The Centre is responsible for procurement of food, storage, transportation and allocation; the States are responsible for the distribution through fair price shops as well as for identification of families below poverty line (BPL), issuing cards, supervision and monitoring.

These government support programmes have been inefficient as far as distribution of food and effectiveness in securing food is concerned. Huge leakages of foodgrains and

corruption have been usual character with the PDS. While Food Corporation of India (FCI) procured 80.5 million tonnes of rice and wheat on 1 July against the buffer stock norm of 31.9 million tonnes as on 1 July of each year, millions of tonnes went waste due to lack of storage facilities. Further, leakages of foodgrains have been paramount in the PDS. As estimated based on NSSO data, there has been around 40 per cent leakages of total foodgrains offtake in 2009-11. In 2009-10, 25.3 million tonnes was received by the people under PDS while the offtake by States was 42.4 million tonnes. An estimate based on NSSO data by Khera (2011) across States, presented in Table 3, also shows similar kind of picture of huge diversion of foodgrains from the PDS. Interestingly, the magnitude of leakage and poor quality of foodgrains delivered is inversely related with the development of a State. PDS reportedly functions better in relatively developed States like Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh as compared to backward States like Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, and Jharkhand. Similar types of performance pattern are also observed for ICDS. The utilisation has been worse among backward States as compared to developed States (NFHS 3, 2005-6). Particularly, UP and Bihar lagged behind the national average in terms of percentage of children and mothers receiving any kind of services from ICDS centre.

Salient Features of the 'National Food Security Act, 2013'

The main objective of the Act is "to provide food and nutritional security in human life cycle approach, by ensuring access to adequate quantity of quality food at affordable prices to people to live a life with dignity and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto". The provision under the Act entails providing five kilograms of foodgrains per person per month at subsidised price to priority households which will cover 67 per

cent of population in India, it would be identified by State government as per the guidelines given by Central Government. Further, children aged up to 6 years, pregnant

women and lactating mothers will be provided with cooked meal through anganwadi centre. The details of entitlement, price structure and financial obligation are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Provisions for Food Security Entitlement, Price Structure and Financial Obligation

Target group	Entitlement	Price	Financial Obligation	
			Centre	State
Households under ' <i>Antyodaya Anna Yojana</i> '	35 kilograms of foodgrains per household per month	₹ 3 per kg for rice, and ₹ 2 per kg for wheat, ₹ 1 per kg for coarse grains	Yes	No
Priority households under NFSB	5 kilograms of food-grains per person per month	₹ 3 per kg for rice, and ₹ 2 per kg for wheat, ₹ 1 per kg for coarse grains	Yes	No
Pregnant woman/ Lactating Mother	1. Take home ration during pregnancy and six months after child birth 2. Maternity benefit of ₹ 1000 per month for a period of six months	Free	Yes	Yes
Children (6 months-3 yrs)	Take home ration	Free	Yes	Yes
Children (3 to 6 years)	Morning snack and hot cooked meal	Free	Yes	Yes
Children (6 years-14 yrs)	One mid-day meal, every day, except on school holidays	Free	Yes	Yes
Any children who suffer from malnutrition	Meals	Free	Yes	Yes

Source: Composed from Food Security Act, 2013.

The Act and Food Security: Opportunities

With the backdrop of nature and underlying causes of food insecurity, the Act carries many opportunities towards reducing food insecurity. Some of those important opportunities are outlined as follows;

Reduction of Errors of Exclusion and Inclusion of Households in the Beneficiary List: The ambitious target of covering 67 per cent of households (75 per cent in rural and 50 per cent in urban areas) under the TPDS is likely to reduce the errors of inclusion and exclusion of households in the beneficiary list. Particularly, backward States where percentage of beneficiaries might touch near 80 to be benefited owing to higher proportion of rural population and poverty ratio. Since TPDS in majority of States covers only those people who fall below the poverty line, many deserving households remain excluded from the list of beneficiaries. These households fail to enter the list competing against socio-economically richer and politically powerful households. In this process, the type I error i.e. poor households but not included into the list of target households amounted huge in all States but with greater magnitude among backward States (Khera 2011; Himansu 2011). Therefore, wider coverage of TPDS would help in reducing the type I error or including those into the beneficiaries list who actually deserve to be included.

Improving Nutritional Status Through Direct Targeting Women and Children: While malnutrition is considered to be the important indicator of food insecurity and the prevalence remains higher amongst children and women, the provision of direct targeting to these groups is likely to pay dividend. Nutritional security to pregnant and lactating women is not only important for their own health but equally important for their children. A healthy mother only can expectedly deliver a healthy child. Therefore, it is a great opportunity to

improving health of mother as well as child through the supply of cooked food by maintaining nutritional standard. And the positive results can be apprehended through the success story of ICDS and mid-day meal programme where implemented properly. These schemes have been effective from increasing school attendance to better child nutrition and to remunerative employment for rural women and the erosion of caste barriers too (Dreze, 2013).

Ensuring Food Security Through Enhancing Women Empowerment: The most important is that the Act provides a window of opportunity for securing food through enhancing women empowerment. As per the Act, the eldest woman who is not less than eighteen years of old, in the eligible household, shall be the head of the household in the ration card. This criterion would for sure boost up women empowerment. There has been growing realisation across the globe that women's empowerment is the single most important factor for achieving any developmental goal. Promotions of gender equality and women's empowerment have been discussed in many forums of policy making agencies. The Millennium Development Goals also reiterate the same; out of eight goals one goal directly targets promotion of gender equality and women empowerment. Various studies have documented influences of women empowerment on various socio-demographic outcomes. It is known that women's empowerment helps improving their health and use of reproductive health care (Basu 1992; Bhatia and Cleland 1995); and, lowers infant and child mortality (Murthi, Guio, and Dreze 1995; Das Gupta 1990; Shiva Kumar, 1995).

Enhancing women's empowerment is more urgent in the context of India where patriarchal kinship and economic systems limit women's status, where gender discrimination against females prevail in sharing food, accessing quality health care, education etc.

Women in India, owing to discrimination, experience disadvantage with regard to health and any kind of well-being; education and employment opportunities are much lower for Indian females as compared to their male counterparts.

Therefore, in a country like India with gender bias against women, girl children are so distinct, women headed households, mostly widowed and single women are excluded from the list of TPDS, establishing women empowerment is an important and essential task towards achieving household food security. And this is expected to be enhanced through giving right or priority to subsidised food in TPDS to women.

The Act and Food Security: Challenges

However, challenges are paramount as far as implementation of the Act is concerned. Based on existing nature of food insecurity, PDS delivery mechanisms, variant socio-demographic characteristics of Indian States, and provisions under the Act, following important challenges are outlined before effective implementation of the Act so as to achieve food security.

Strengthening Delivery Mechanism: The most serious challenge would be strengthening delivery mechanism. The present delivery mechanism of PDS which has many flaws with aspects of leakages, improper vigilance and right grievance addressing mechanism, would stand in the way of successful implementation of the Act. Further, the sudden imposition of per capita food entitlements replacing the existing household entitlements is likely to be very disruptive. Although there are many provisions put in the Act reforming PDS through placing strong surveillance and grievance addressing mechanism by creating State commission, it will be a challenging task to execute in practice. Perhaps, expansion of PDS is required along with reforms within the existing infrastructure and that would be very

challenging for underdeveloped States given the relatively weaker existing delivery mechanism than the developed States. Further, it would be difficult for any backward State to bear additional costs owing to required greater PDS coverage, given the higher proportion of rural population and poverty ratio as compared to developed States. It would lead to huge administrative cost, costs for arranging storage facilities, as well as cost for distribution through fair price shop. And it has to be kept in mind that the average administrative cost would be greater among backward States given the worse existing administrative systems and delivery mechanism than any developed States.

Adverse Demographic Structure and Increased Financial Burden for Backward States:

Further, challenges would be in meeting financial burden for schemes which would be financed jointly by State and Central government and that would be more severe for underdeveloped States like Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, Odisha etc. As per the Act, while subsidised food would be provided by Central Government, expenditure for mid-day meal, cooked meal to pregnant and lactating women etc., will have to be borne by the respective State governments. According to the Act, any State government has to buy from Central pool at the minimum support price. Further, a State government needs to give maternity benefit of not less than ₹ 6000. At the outset, all these would put additional financial burden to all the States but it would be remarkably greater among backward States given the adverse demographic structure. As can be seen in Table 5, the proportion of 0-6 age group population, percentage of currently married and breast feeding women are markedly greater in a backward State as compared to a developed State. That adverse demographic structure would be requiring backward States to feed, providing nutritional and pregnancy benefits to additional number of children, lactating and pregnant women.

Table 5: Demographic Characteristics by States in India

States	% of 0-6 population to total population	% of currently pregnant women	% of currently breast-feeding women
Andhra Pradesh	10.21	3.0	12.9
Assam	14.47	5.0	23.2
Bihar	17.90	9.4	30.0
Chhattisgarh	14.03	5.2	24.0
Gujarat	12.41	5.0	15.9
Haryana	13.01	5.5	18.3
Jharkhand	15.89	7.7	28.0
Karnataka	11.21	4.5	13.4
Kerala	9.95	4.2	12.3
MP	14.53	6.0	22.3
Maharashtra	11.43	4.0	15.4
Odisha	12.00	4.0	21.6
Punjab	10.62	3.7	12.8
Rajasthan	15.31	5.6	22.2
TN	9.56	3.1	8.2
UP	14.90	6.7	26.7
WB	11.07	4.0	22.4
India	13.12	4.9	18.9

Source: Census 2011, NFHS-3.

Dual Option of Food and Cash Delivery: In India, introduction of direct cash transfer has become a debatable issue whether it should be implemented to curb corruption in the PDS. While, it seems, direct cash transfer would reduce corruption given the present nature of it, the lack of infrastructure for implementing direct cash transfer appears to be major hurdle apart from its other implications like tracking inflation, diversion of cash to other non-food items etc. There are, however, some pilot projects initiated for understanding the viability of direct cash transfer in India and also there are few success stories in other countries like Brazil, Philippines, Mexico etc. For example, in Brazil, the Bolsa Familia, a conditional cash transfer

introduced in 2003 has been successful in securing food; 82.4 per cent beneficiaries reported eating better and the prevalence of stunting in children was 29 per cent lower compared to non-Bolsa families (Gulati et al., 2012). Nevertheless, the problem lies with the dual option of delivery of cash and food. This dual option of food and cash seems to be coming on the way before smooth functioning of the Act. This not only will create confusion, it will add extra financial burden with respect to infrastructural development for cash transfer.

Increasing Agricultural Production: As discussed earlier, Indian agriculture has witnessed a significant increase in the level

of production and achieved self-sufficiency in foodgrains in the post-Independence period. The production of foodgrains increased from 51 million tonnes in 1950-51 to 108.4 million tonnes in 1970-71 and touched 257 million tonnes in 2011-12. However, the growth has been much lower with 2.9 per cent than the targeted 4 per cent during 1991-92 to 2011-12. The average growth rate of foodgrain production declined from 2.2 per cent in 1990s to 1.8 per cent in 2000s. Similarly, growth rate of yield of foodgrains declined from 2.4 per cent in 1990s to only 1.3 per cent in 2000s.

Indian agriculture is characterised with volatility in food production due to exogenous shocks related to weather, instability in international markets needs to be checked to meet the additional requirement of foodgrains which amounts to estimated 25 million tonnes (Gulati et al. 2012). Presently, India has reaped a bumper harvest in 2011-12 and has procured a record 34.9 million tonnes of rice in 2011-12 and 38.1 million tonnes of wheat in 2012-13. But, to sustain these levels of procurement, additional agricultural investment in irrigation, power, fertilisers, seeds and technology to increase production would be required towards implementing the food security Act.

Conclusion

This paper first outlines the state of food insecurity in India and its variation across States using multiple indicators of food insecurity before examining the 'Food Security Act 2013', passed very recently in the Parliament as a driver to securing food in India. India, ever after possessing excess buffer-stocks of foodgrains and millions of tonnes of wastages of foodgrains, experiences severe food insecurity. The state of food insecurity is marked by many

indicators, be it perceived food insecurity, or malnutrition, or hunger index with wide variation across States. Food insecurity is more acute among States which are socio-economically backward like Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, and Jharkhand as compared to relatively developed States like Haryana, Tamil Nadu, Punjab, Andhra Pradesh etc.

Among various reasons, declining trend of per capita availability of foodgrains and failure of government programmes meant for distributing subsidised food, nutritional supplements and cooked meals are found important as far as present state of food insecurity is concerned. Public distribution system has been very inefficient due to numerous flaws including corruption, leakages, and errors of identifying actually deserving households for government support programmes. And interestingly, the magnitude of corruption and errors of inclusion and exclusion into the beneficiary list have been remarkably greater among backward States. Starting with government's failure to uplift entitled amount of foodgrains from the central pool, inefficient delivery mechanism, improper monitoring and lack of maintaining quality foodgrains have been more acute among backward States as compared to advanced States.

In the backdrop of existent severe food insecurity, the recent 'Food Security Act, 2013', passed in the Parliament, brings some light of hope towards securing food through *"providing food and nutritional security in human life cycle approach, by ensuring access to adequate quantity of quality food at affordable prices to people to live a life with dignity"* as a right instead of mere entitlement to food. And the Act seems to carry some underlying opportunities to securing food by extending TPDS to 67 per

cent of population, empowering women through giving special right to them in the PDS, and directly targeting women and children those who are discriminated in the society and experience worse health condition. What can be expected, extension of TPDS would minimise the errors of exclusion and inclusion into the list of beneficiaries where very often socio-economically deprived people could not compete against their richer counterparts to get their name entered. Further, when women in India are known to have been discriminated in the intra-household resource allocation in terms of food, accessing quality medicine etc., and experience relatively worse health status as compared to male counterparts, giving special right through making head of the household in ration card is expected to bring dividend and help securing food not only to women but also their children and other household members. And this endeavour would definitely get accentuated with the provision of direct targeting of women and children with nutritional supplement.

However, challenges are paramount and it seems there are several aspects which may retard effective implementation of programmes under the Act. The main challenges seem to be strengthening administrative functioning and restoring the broken PDS. It is likely that the sudden imposition of per capita food entitlements replacing the existing household entitlements is likely to be very disruptive. Although, there have been many provisions under the Act about reforming PDS through placing strong surveillance and grievance addressing mechanism, it will be a challenging task in practice to execute. It would be more challenging for a backward State given its relatively weaker administration and defunct PDS as

compared to developed States. Further, the Act would generate huge financial burden to all States in general and to underdeveloped States in particular for not only cost with respect to administration and distribution, but also for financing schemes which are to be financed jointly by Centre and State. Given the adverse demographic structure in terms of greater proportion of 0-6 age group children, currently pregnant and breast feeding women, backward States would be requiring additional amount of funds to run schemes with respect to food security.

Challenges seem to be more acute and that may demean opportunities to reduce food insecurity. The main lacuna seems to be giving equal weight before setting equal issue price for subsidised foodgrains ignoring unequal state of food insecurity, administrative capacity, strength of public delivery mechanisms and demographic structures across all States in India. These not only would put mere unfair extra amount of financial burden to backward States, but also it will be near impossible for these States to implement and reap fruit of the Act. Therefore, the need of the hour would be giving appropriate weight before setting issue price by the Central government for allocating foodgrains so as to make implementation cost affordable to all States. Further, Central government must address strengthening delivery and grievance redressal system before implementing the Act to realise improving food security. At last, it can be said that the cereal based approach would never reach the defined food security as it is perhaps no more among the preferred food items. Therefore, the much needed effort would be, increasing purchasing power than solely supplying cereals to ensure food security in India.

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