

A Study on Managing Food Insecurity and Poverty in India

Jayarama krishnan .A

MBA, Department of Management Studies
Bharath Institute of Science and Technology,
Selaipur, Chennai, Tamil Nadu 600 073
Bharath Institute of Higher Education and Research

ABSTRACT

National Policy makers and development practitioners who are the very important person for developing investment strategies to promote economic growth find many challenges in the changing face of agriculture in the twenty first century. In addition to its essential role in food security, agricultural development is now seen as a vital and high impact source of poverty reduction. This article highlights the food consumption and malnutrition issues in a brief manner. One child dies every five second from hunger-related causes. Further the report evidenced that number of undernourished people has increased for every year. During the year 1995–1997 and 2000–2002 are 194.7 and 213.7 million respectively. The rapid increasing of hunger and undernourished people are due to government negligence of providing proper social security provision for the poor people and it fail to identify the real poverty people by measuring unique methodology. Further it highlights the farmer suicide related issues. At least 17,368 Indian farmers killed themselves in 2009, the worst figure for farm suicides in six years, according to data of the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB). This is an increase of 1,172 over the 2008 count of 16,196. It brings the total farm suicides since 1997 to 2,16,500. The paper concludes that globally there is enough food for all and mismanagement is the main problem for food insecurity.

1. INTRODUCTION

India accounts for 16.7 per cent of the world's food consumers. India's size in terms of food consumers is many times larger than the average size of the rest of the countries, except China. Improving food security ought to be an issue of great importance for a country like India where one-third of the population is estimated to be absolutely poor and one-half of children malnourished in one way or another. There has been much debate of the effects of economic reforms on living standards in India during the 1990s. One of the main reasons for the prevalence of food insecurity in India is the demand deflation that has been brought about by falling agrarian incomes over the past decade.

However, while much of this discussion has centered on movements in the poverty and inequality magnitudes, less attention has been paid to the changes in the pattern of Food consumption during this period. Food security is a complex sustainable development issue, linked to health through malnutrition, but also to sustainable economic development, environment, and trade. There is enough food in the world to feed everyone adequately, the problem is distribution. Three out of four poor people in the developing countries are living in rural areas. Most rely directly or indirectly on agriculture for their livelihoods. One of the main reasons for the prevalence of food insecurity in India is the demand deflation that has been brought about by falling agrarian incomes over the past decade.

2. DEFINITION OF FOOD SECURITY

The **World Food Summit** of 1996 defined food security as “when all people at all times have access to sufficient, safe, nutritious food to maintain a healthy and active life”. **World Bank** defines food security as “Access by all people at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life”. **The Rome Declaration on World Food Security** defines access to food as “physical and economic access, at all times, to sufficient, safe and nutritious food for people to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.” Similarly, the **Planning Commission of India** also defined food security as a situation where everyone has access, at all times, to food needed for an active and healthy life.

HUNGER AND POVERTY

Hunger is defined as a craving and urgent need for food, an uneasy sensation occasioned by the lack of food and a weakened condition brought about by prolonged lack of food. About 25,000 people die every day of hunger or hunger-related causes, according to the United Nations. Yet there is plenty of food in the world for everyone. The problem is that hungry people are trapped in severe poverty. They lack the money to buy enough food to nourish them. Being constantly malnourished, they become weaker and often sick. This makes them increasingly less able to work, which then makes them even poorer and hungrier. UNICEF estimated that in the year 2000 in India about 24,20,000 children died before they attained they 1 billion are hungry and undernourished. All this is happening when 60 million tons of food grains make up buffer stock and it is rotting in the godowns of Food Corporation of India. The data evidenced that over 9 million people die worldwide each year because of hunger and malnutrition, 5 million are children. Approximately 1.2 billion people suffer from hunger (deficiency of calories and protein). Some 2 to 3.5 billion people have micronutrient deficiency. Yet, some 1.2 billion suffer from obesity (excess of fats and salt, often accompanied by deficiency of vitamins and minerals); India has been ranked 67, way below neighboring countries like China and Pakistan, in a new global hunger index by the International Food Policy Research Institute. People are hungry not due to lack of availability of food, but because people do not have the ability to purchase food and because distribution of food is not equitable.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To study the concept of food security and poverty reduction.
- To analyze the reasons for food insecurity and poverty.
- To evaluate the changes in the food consumption and malnutrition in India.
- To identify the negligence of agriculture and farmer's suicide.

FOOD SECURITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

The concept of the right to food is not new. The right to food has been formally recognized since the adoption of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. Nevertheless in a time of plenty, an estimated 800 million people, primarily in developing countries, are undernourished and food insecure. More disturbingly, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations reports that the number of undernourished people in developing countries is no longer falling rather, it is climbing. The international community has identified the reduction of poverty and hunger as one of the overarching goals for development policy in the new millennium.

A further recommitment to the right to adequate food came in 1999 from the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, in the text of the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, seeks to clarify the substance of the right to adequate food, stating that the right is realized “when every man, woman, and child, alone or in community with others, physical and economic access at all times to adequate food or means for its procurement.” This implies the “availability of food in a quantity and quality sufficient to satisfy the dietary needs of individuals, free from adverse substances, and acceptable within a given culture” and the “accessibility of such food in ways that are sustainable and that do not interfere with the enjoyment of other human rights”. The right to food is about freedom from hunger. This can be interpreted in two different ways, associated with different analysis of the term hunger”. In a narrow sense, hunger refers to the pangs of an empty stomach. Correspondingly, the right to food can be understood as the right to have two square meals a day throughout the year. In a broader sense, hunger refers to under-nutrition. The right to food linked to a wide range of entitlements, not only to food itself but also to other requirements of good environment such as clean water, healthcare, and even elementary education.

The government has made an attempt to create hunger free state through public action program in the sense of state action. Such state action in the form of PDS, TPDS, school feeding, supplementary food, food for work, midday meal scheme and Annapoorna scheme, etc, An extensive awareness generation program can help people in knowing their rights and privileges, but the government fails to do the same in a progressive way. Article 25(1) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that “ Everyone has the right to standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and his family including food, clothing, housing, medical care and necessary social services”. Viewed from human rights perspective, right to food can also be understood as a fundamental right.

CHANGES IN THE FOOD CONSUMPTION AND MALNUTRITION IN INDIA

The World Bank reports that global food prices increased 83% over the last three years and the FAO cites a 45% increase in their world food price index during just the past nine months. The Economist’s comparable index stands at its highest point since it was originally formulated in 1845. As of March 2008, average world wheat prices were 130% above their level a year earlier, soy prices were 87% higher, rice had climbed 74%, and maize was up 31%. The result of this unusually high rate of inflation has had a direct bearing on the poverty status of the country as the incidence of poverty is intimately related to the change in food prices due to the fact that food constitutes a considerable portion of the expenditure of the poor. The key issues of food price increase are the changes in food expenditure and nutritional status of the children. Hunger and malnutrition remain as the most devastating problems facing the majority of the world’s poor. No one can doubt the seriousness of the problem, which afflicts millions of human beings. One in five people in the developing world was considered to be chronically undernourished. About 192 million children suffered from protein-energy malnutrition. And over two billion experienced micro-nutrient deficiencies. It is clear that Indians are consuming fewer calories than developed countries as well as developing countries. The concept of the poverty line, as applied in the developing countries including India, is firmly based on the idea of a minimum calorie requirement. Eating industrially grown foods actually means eating fossil fuels, eating less nutrition and more calories, falling ill more frequently, suffering from degenerative diseases, spewing greenhouse gases and dying young. FAO’s 2005 annual report highlight that hunger, malnutrition and poverty are intricately interlinked. Poverty is now generally regarded as the root cause of hunger and malnutrition. Hunger and malnutrition kill more people every year than AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis combined. More people die

silently from hunger than in wars. And malnutrition often leads to disease, devastating the lives of hungry poor people. Some 150 million children under the age of five in the developing countries are affected by chronic protein-energy malnutrition. One child dies every five second from hunger-related causes. Further the report evidenced that number of undernourished people has increased for every year. During the year 1995–1997 and 2000–2002 are 194.7 and 213.7 million respectively.

The rapid increasing of hunger and undernourished people are due to government negligence of providing proper social security provision for the poor people and it fail to identify the real poverty people by measuring unique methodology. The government could not follow a standard or unique method to fix minimum calorie requirement for the BPL people. The government official claims that poverty ratio is declined during the post economic reform period. But in reality, Prof. Tendulkar committee identify the poverty has been rising under reforms in both rural and urban areas, with the rural situation worsening more. By 2004-05 nearly two-thirds of urban persons were in poverty, unable to spend enough to obtain even a modest nutrition standard of 2100 calories energy daily while the rural population similarly was not able to afford the official rural nutrition norm of 2400 calories and the poverty had reached 87 percent, the highest ever in three decades. Since some people think 2400 calories is too high for a rural norm even though it is the official norm, we can consider also 2200 calories: 70 percent of rural persons were unable to reach this level compared to 59 percent in 1993-04, so poverty whatever the norm applied, has risen sharply. The official Planning Commission's poverty estimates using the same consumption spending data however were very low, only 28.3 per cent rural and 25.7 per cent urban in 2004-05.

The public was not informed that the Commission had quietly abandoned its own declared nutrition norms long ago in actual practice, and its low poverty estimates were possible only by taking such unrealistically low poverty lines that the nutritional level it permitted by 2004-5 was only 1820 calories rural and 1795 calories urban, far below its own stated norms. So it is an indeed that government should give social security for the poor by means of assure to provide minimum calorie level.

NEGLIGENCE OF AGRICULTURE AND FARMER'S SUICIDE

Investment in agriculture has declined: In the 1950s, investment in agriculture was 19% of total investments and has declined steadily to touch 8.5% in the 2000s. The growth rate of investments in agriculture has declined in 2000s when total investment in the economy has increased. From the various report it is evidenced that food inflation as a major structural and policy issue. The decline in agriculture sector has been happening over decades and the impact on prices is being felt now because of rising incomes. In the absence of risk mitigation strategies the farmer is at the receiving end under duress some farmers end up committing suicide. Due to the bad light and frustration in the agricultural business the farmers be likely to commit suicide rather than living with heavy debt.

At least 17,368 Indian farmers killed themselves in 2009, the worst figure for farm suicides in six years, according to data of the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB). This is an increase of 1,172 over the 2008 count of 16,196. It brings the total farm suicides since 1997 to 2,16,500. The share of the Big 5 States, or „suicide belt' Maharashtra, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh in 2009 remained very high at 10,765, or around 62 per cent of the total, though falling nearly five percentage points from 2008. Maharashtra remained the worst State for farm suicides for the tenth successive year, reporting 2,872. Though that is a fall of 930, it is still 590 more than in Karnataka, second worst, which logged 2,282 farm suicides.²³ Through this data it is analyzed that from 2003-2009 1,02,628 farmers took their

lives at an average of 17,105 a year. This means, on average, around 47 farmers or almost one every 30 minutes killed themselves each day between 2004 and 2009. Government of Maharashtra report reveals the major reason for farmer suicide in India is mainly due to Indebtedness –93 %, Economic downfall – 74 %, Conflict in Family – 55 %, Crop failure – 41%, Dent in Social Status- 36%, Daughter's/Sister's marriage – 34 %, Addiction- 28%, Health problems – 21 %, Most of the suicides were because of combination of more than one factor. In most of the studies, indebtedness is one factor linked with farmers suicides. This co-exists with other risk factors such as decline in economic status, crop failure, dent in social position and the inability to meet social obligations. Further, various risk factors can reinforce each other.

INVESTMENT IN THE AGRICULTURAL SECTOR

From 17.3% on an average during the decade 1970 to 1980, to 11.6% during the next decade and has averaged only 9% during 1990 to 1994. Though nominal public investments in agriculture have tended to rise year after year, in real terms, these have tended to diminish in absolute magnitude since the beginning of 1980s. At 1980-81 constant prices, public investment in agriculture plunged to Rs. 1200 crores in 1991-92 from close to Rs. 1800 crores in 1979-80. The expenditure on agriculture and allied services is declining. The total spending, both plan and non-plan, under the heads agriculture, irrigation and rural development in the Central Budget (including fertilizer subsidy) has been cut from 1.99% of GDP in 1989-90 to 1.46% in 1995-96. In 1996-97 this was placed at 1.45%, but the actual spending under these heads in 1996-97 was only 1.32% of GDP. For 1997-98 this has been budgeted at only 1.29 percent of GDP.

Public investment in agriculture is the responsibility of the States, but the existing data shows that many States have neglected investment in infrastructure for agriculture. There are many rural infrastructure projects, which have started out but are lying incomplete for want of resources. The total net transfer from the Centre to States has also reached a new low. This was over 6 percent of GDP in 1990-91 and had fallen steadily to 4.7 percent in 1995-96. It slightly increased to 4.8 percent in 1996-97 and is budgeted to decline to only 4.3 percent in 1997-98. Agriculture being a State subject, the overall public expenditure on agriculture is dependent on the resources available to the States and this share has been reduced, not increased. The role of government must evolve so that those activities which it still does are performed with the greatest effectiveness, in terms of meeting the needs of the agricultural sector. Public investment will have a leading role to play, in the form of infrastructure as well as necessary research and development in farm technologies. Spread of infrastructure in power, transport, communication, storage and processing sectors are important. There is an emerging need to step up public investment to implement land reforms and employment prospects of rural labour. The productive base of the farm sector also need to be enlarged through direct public investments in irrigation schemes, soil and water conservation works, land reclamation, construction of regulated market structures for farm produce etc. Public investments need to be stepped up in regions which although relatively backward have a high potential for agricultural growth.

The current population of India is approximately 1.2 billion, about three-quarters of which is engaged in food and agricultural production. Most of these people receive meager food, no modern education and other necessities of life. On the other hand, the wealth that they generate by being in agriculture is being spent on mainly the development of new infrastructure, armed forces, luxury goods, entertainment and to serve other corporate interests. Ironically, the most fundamental need which is being neglected concerns the safety and security of food supply for

all the inhabitants of India. It is causing serious health problems to the poor and prosperous alike.

4. CONCLUSION

The high prevalence of under nutrition has serious impacts on both quality of life and economic growth. Hunger and poverty are still predominantly rural phenomena and are likely to remain so for the next decade at least. Some 75 per cent of the hungry poor live and work in rural areas. FAO's Projections suggest that over 60 per cent will continue to do so in 2025. Through This article concluded that nutritional status was affected by a wide range of factors but stressed that poverty is the root cause of malnutrition in the trilogy of food, health and care issues. Nutritional well-being was influenced by the nutrient content of foods consumed in relation to requirements, which in turn, was determined by a range of factors. Stability of food availability was a cornerstone of nutritional well-being, and food safety and quality had an important influence on nutrition. Various infections had a major impact on nutritional status. The interaction of infection and inadequate food consumption led to what was called the malnutrition infection complex. Poorly nourished persons were more susceptible to many infections. It is necessary to improve environmental health conditions to break this complex. And improved health services could also contribute to improved nutritional well-being. Care and sound feeding practices were another essential element of good health and nutrition. Good nutrition prolonged a healthy life. And sound nutritional status was essential to good health, which was the key to socio-economic development. Nutrition was an investment for human development and the aim of development was to improve the human condition. If this fundamental connection were kept in mind, difficult matters of direction, priority and resource allocation will be made clear. The guiding principle was that nutrition is the key to health, long life and investment of human resources.

The food price hike is a worldwide issue and a concern for all poor countries where the poor spend a large share of their expenditure on food. Through this study it emphasis that the rising food price has had a deteriorating nutritional outcome, especially for children, has been through the adjustment mechanism where the poor have had to narrow down the diversification of their food basket, by excluding certain items and substituting with cheaper options. Income generates or social safety net program aiming at improving household food security of the poor may include energy dense and nutritious foods in place of money as wage. This could improve the nutritional status of those beneficiary households.

The right to food is not about charity, but about ensuring that all people have the capacity to feed themselves in dignity. These initiatives would coerce the government towards greater flexibility for adapting schemes to local requirements. In this alliance and partnerships at local level one must bring in local self-government institutions, which would ensure effective implementation of public provisioning In order to overcome farmer suicides the government should ensure that the formal banking system in the rural areas covers all the credit requirements of farmers and others, and that the coverage of the formal financial system is extended to all rural households. Government can set up a Distress Fund that will provide support to banks in chronically drought prone areas, and permit some debt relief to cultivators in extreme distress. Promotion of relevant public research in agriculture, particularly dry land agriculture, for the development of drought and disease resistant seeds of cereals and pulses. Government should increase public expenditure on rural development.

5. REFERENCE

- [1] Shabd S. Acharya (2006):National Food Policies Impacting on Food Security: The Experience of a Large Populated Country –India, Institute of Development Studies, Jaipur,p.3.
- [2] K P Kannan, S Mahendra Dev, Alakh Narain Sharma(2006):Concerns on Food Security, Economic and Political Weekly November 4, 2000,p.3919.
- [3] Sujoy Chakravarty, Sejal A Dand (2006): Food Insecurity in Gujarat A Study of Two Rural Populations, Economic and Political Weekly June 3, 2006,p2248.
- [4] Maithreyi Krishnaraj, Food Security: How and For Whom, Economic and Political Weekly June 18, 2005.
- [5] D. John Shaw(2007): World Food Security- A History Since 1945, Palgrave Macmillan,p308.
- [6] Manish K Jha (2002): Hunger and Starvation Deaths Call for Public Action, Economic and Political Weekly, December 28, 2002,p5159.
- [7] Dreze, J., & Khera, R. (2013). Rural Poverty and the Public Distribution System. Economic and Political Weekly, 48(45-46), 55-60.
- [8] Grusky , D. B., & Kanbur, R. (2006). Poverty and Inequality. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- [9] Heckman, J., Ichimura, H., & Todd, P. (1997). Characterizing selection bias using experimental data. Econometrica, 66, 1017-1099.
- [10] Dandekar, V.M. (1996). Population, poverty and employment. The Indian Economy - Vol. II. Sage Publications, New Delhi.