

## Nutritional Insecurity in India

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### Abstract

Nutritional security is a condition when people at all times, are having physical, social and economic access to sufficient, healthy and nutritious food that meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life (Ramaswamy, 2017). The number of people (FAO, 2021) affected by hunger worldwide under the shadow of Covid-19 pandemic increased in the year 2020. In addition, after remaining virtually unchanged from the year 2014-2019, the number of undernourished people climbed from 8.4 % to 9.9 % in the year 2020. Out of the total undernourished people of 768 million in 2020 in the world, 418 million live in Asia, 282 million in Africa, 60 million in Latin America and Caribbean. In recent years, due to the COVID-19 pandemic nearly 4.1 million Indians have lost their jobs which results in purchasing less food, substituting nutritious food with less nutritious alternatives and decrease in the number of meals eaten on a day-to-day basis. The pandemic could further intensify the existing problem of malnutrition among women and children. This study uses secondary sources and it highlights the initiatives the government undertook to overcome the nutritional insecurities and the challenges faced in the country in relation to food insecurity.

Keywords: **Nutritional Insecurity, Pandemic, Food Insecurity, PDS etc**

### I. Introduction

Food insecurity and malnutrition are perceived as a violation of human rights. The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1966 defined and formalised the right to food as a basic human right. National Institute of Agricultural Extension Management mentioned that the pre-requisite for an active, healthy and decent life is if people can meet their nutritional

requirements on a regular basis, avail and use adequate and safe food with the respective energy, protein, vitamin and mineral content.

According to Dr. Francesco Branca (2019), the main cause of death and disease in the world is due to malnutrition. He also stated that the government needs to have policies that make healthy food more available and affordable. It is estimated that 1.9 billion adults are overweight or obese and 462 million are underweight and 52 million children under the age of five are suffering from wasting, which is low weight for height.

There were around 809.9 million people undernourished globally (Jose et.al.). Out of this, there were 194.4 million undernourished people (24%) in India during the year 2016-18. In addition, there were around 36 million (30.9%) stunted children under the age of five in the same year and around 25.2 million (50.9%) of the world's wasted children (FAO, WHO, UNICEF, 2019) were there in the country.

As per the report of NABARD Research Study-9, India will account for 33% of the world's stunted children under five years of age and 21% of the world's wasted children by 2030 if no stringent action are taken.

Nutritional security is a condition when people at all times, are having physical, social and economic access to sufficient, healthy and nutritious food that meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life (Ramaswamy, 2017). Achieving nutritional security in case of burgeoning population like India not only demands an approach to produce food sustainably but also producing it in a smarter way; dealing with food waste; and promoting improved nutritional outcome.

The number of people (FAO, 2021) affected by hunger worldwide under the shadow of Covid-19 pandemic increased in the year 2020. In addition, after remaining virtually unchanged from the year 2014-2019, the number of undernourished people climbed from 8.4 % to 9.9 % in the year 2020. Out of the total undernourished people of 768 million in 2020 in

the world, 418 million live in Asia, 282 million in Africa, 60 million in Latin America and Caribbean.

The high cost of healthy diet combined with persistent high level of income inequality puts healthy diet out of touch to around 3 billion people approximately especially the poor in every region of the world in the year 2019.

II. **Objective of the study:** The paper tries to highlight the status of nutritional insecurity in the country.

### III. Review of Literature

Tarozzi (2003) in his study on the Indian public distribution system as provider of food security: evidence from child nutrition in Andhra Pradesh stated the main goal of PDS is to provide security to poor households but corruption, inefficiencies, and limited scope are believed to prevent the PDS from fulfilling its goal.

Suryanarayana and Silva (2007) in their study on “Is targeting the poor a penalty on the food insecure? Poverty and food insecurity in India” reveal that India has made progress in reducing malnutrition in the food security dimension as a result of a comprehensive development strategy that includes food, education, and health.

Chandran(2009) highlighted in his study on nutritional status of pre-school children: a socio economic study of rural areas of Kasagod district in Kerala observed that the nutritional status of the mother, availability of medical facilities, employment status of a mother, employment status of the father, economic status and education of the mother have a significant influence on the nutritional condition of a child.

Kumari (n.d) observed in her study on impact of household food insecurity on health and nutritional status of a family of Patna that majority of the respondents has the knowledge of nutritional food but more than 50% have procured cheaper quality of food.

Mishra and Narayana (2010) in their study on Undernutrition in India: Dimensions and Correlates revealed that households having higher number of dependents and large households size are having higher prevalence of calorie deficiency. They said that irrespective of number of dependents, the small size households have an advantage in having better calorie intake.

Ray and Ray (2011) revealed that the problem on the food front is managing the surplus. The authors also pointed out that availability of food grains is not a sufficient condition to ensure food security to the poor as they do not have adequate means to secure their access to food. They also stated that the capacity of the poor to purchase food can be ensured in two ways, which are to either raise the level of incomes of the poor or to supply food grains to the poor at subsidized prices.

Gonmei (2018) in his study on nutrition and health status of elderly in slums of new Delhi showed that perception of health and quality of life is poor among the slums households. Dietary intake of elderly in slums is inadequate for both micro and macro nutrients and they were posed to low healthcare services due to their economic conditions.

Malnutrition and poverty are interlinked which creates a vicious cycle that fuels each other. Financial limitations are faced with people living in poverty, this causes them to have a lack of access to safe sufficient and nutritious food (Siddiqui et.al., 2020).

IV. **Research Methodology:** This paper uses secondary sources.

## V. Discussion

### *The Challenge*

Food security in India faces many challenges, some of the main challenges faced are; climate change, lack of access to remote areas, corruption and wastage. Climate change

makes farming difficult due to the high temperature and unreliable rainfall; it not only impacts crops but also livestock and fisheries. Reduced income, eroded livelihoods, trade disruption and negative health effects are all possible social and economic implications. Food insecurity also rises due to the corruption in the country, the grains received are diverted to open market so that they can get a better margin and the poor-quality grains are sold at ration shops. Lastly, the Food Corporation of India (FCI) buys food in bulk but has insufficient storage space, due to this good food is left out in the sun to rot which is either spoiled or eaten by rats. According to the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, between the financial year 2011-12 to 2016-17. 61,824 tonnes of food grains were damaged in godowns of the FCI (Kumar, 2017).

Out of 195 million people undernourished, India has a quarter of the global hunger burden. Nearly 47 million or 4 out of 10 children in India are not meeting their full human potential because of chronic undernutrition or stunting. Since stunting has several consequences such as diminished learning capacity, poor school performance, reduced earnings and increased risk of chronic disease, the matters has its serious implications. (UN, n.d)

Dhamijia et.al., (2022) mentioned that India recorded the highest child wasting rate in the world, at 17.3% during the year 2018-2020. In addition, 34.7 % of children under the age of five are affected by stunting in India. Besides, one in every three children being malnourished, malnutrition is considered as the predominant risk factor for deaths in under-five children, accounting for 68.2% of the total deaths in this age group.

### ***The Economic Cost of Nutritional Insecurity***

There is a huge economic cost to hunger and malnutrition – interms of loss of cognitive ability, schooling and labour productivity. Deolalikar (2012) estimated that malnutrition may be costing the Indian economy the equivalent of 4-5% of its GDP. He also mentioned that the prevalence of child malnutrition in India has remained stubbornly highly even after nearly a half century of respectable agricultural productivity growth and two decades of post reform economic growth and prosperity in the country.

***Government initiatives to combat malnutrition***

The Government of India has made many initiatives in regards to food security. The Food Corporation of India (FCI) is a scheme that was established in 1965 and the purpose of the scheme is to procure, store, and distribute food grains and it has played a major role in the food security of India.

One of the most successful food security systems in India is the Public Distribution System (PDS). The PDS scheme was first initiated during the second world war on 14<sup>th</sup> January 1945 and the current form followed now was launched on June 1947. It is a system of management in which food grains are distributed at affordable prices. The government later formed the Agriculture Prices Commission and the FCI to improve domestic procurement and storage of food grains in response to food shortages that occurred during the 1960s. Major commodities being distributed include rice, wheat, sugar and kerosene. Both the central government and state governments jointly operate PDS. The central government through FCI is in charge of procuring, storing, transporting, and allocating food grains in bulk to the state government, while the state government is responsible for distributing the food grains to ration shops and fair price shops (FPSs) as well as supervising the FPS.

There has been a significant increase in food grain production in India. In 1950-51 the food grain production was 50 million tonnes and in 2014-15 it increased to about 250 million tonnes which indicates a five-fold increase in production. India has also become a net food exporter. The Government launched programmes such as National Food Security Mission, Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana (RKVY), Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana etc. to double farmers' income by 2022. Over the last two decades, the government has taken significant steps to combat malnutrition, including the introduction of mid-day meals in schools, anganwadi systems to provide rations to pregnant and lactating mothers, and subsidised grain through public distribution system for those living below the poverty line. The National Food Security Act (NFSA) of 2013, which makes food access a legal right, strives to ensure food and nutrition security for the disadvantaged through its associated schemes and programmes.

The NFSA is a Parliamentary Act, aimed at supplying approximately two-thirds of India's 120 crore population with subsidized food grains. It was signed into law on 12 September 2013, retroactive to 5 July 2013.

The NFSA transforms the Government of India's current food security programmes into legal entitlements. It encompasses the Midday Meal Scheme, the System of Integrated Child Development Services and the System of Public Distribution. In addition, maternity entitlements are recognised in NFSA. The Midday Meal Scheme and the Integrated Child Development Services Scheme are universal, whilst the PDS will cover approximately two thirds of the population which is 75 percent in rural areas and 50 percent in urban areas.

### ***Malnutrition and Poverty***

There is a vital relationship that exists between malnutrition and poverty. Poverty generates insecure and unsuitable environments, which might worsen the hunger problem. People who live in poverty frequently suffer financial constraints, which make it difficult for them to obtain safe, sufficient, and nutritious meals. Food insecurity hinder people's ability to obtain the amount of food required to meet their bodily calorie requirements, and without enough calories, an individual may not be able to build up enough energy or strength to carry out daily activities, which also affects their earning capacity and productivity (Siddiqui et.al.).

Micronutrient deficiency, also known as "hidden hunger," is a major cause of malnutrition. Micronutrient deficits can affect people of all ages and socioeconomic backgrounds. In low- and middle-income nations, iron, folate, vitamin A, iodine, and zinc deficits are among the most prevalent and pervasive micronutrient deficiencies in women and children, and many of these micronutrient deficiencies co-exist. Micronutrient deficits must be taken into account when assessing the link between malnutrition and poverty. Deficiencies in macro- and micronutrients can lead to delayed mental and physical development, recurring infections, and growth retardation; micro-nutrient deficiencies may also result in adverse birth outcomes including low birth weight babies. Low birth weight in babies can contribute to the vicious cycle of malnutrition since maternal nutrition status, particularly maternal

height, has been shown to be inversely related to offspring mortality, underweight, and stunting in infancy and childhood (Black, R.E. et.al).

### ***Failures to combat nutritional insecurities***

In recent years, due to the COVID-19 pandemic nearly 4.1 million Indians have lost their jobs which results in purchasing less food, substituting nutritious food with less nutritious alternatives and decrease in the number of meals eaten on a day-to-day basis. The pandemic could further intensify the existing problem of malnutrition among women and children.

Furthermore, pregnant women and new mothers are made prone to infections and diseases due to the shortage of fruits, vegetables, meat, fish, eggs, etc. which could potentially compromise their nutrient supply. Lower nutrient supply accelerates undernutrition and lowers immunity.

Healthy diets are out of reach for about 3 billion people, mainly the poor, in every region of the world in 2019, due to the high expense of healthy meals combined with persistently high levels of income disparity.

This number is marginally lower than in 2017, but because to the COVID-19 pandemic, it is expected to rise in most regions in 2020. Because the hidden costs of these diets are lower than those of current consumption patterns, shifting to healthy diets that include sustainability considerations can help to reduce health and climate change costs by 2030 (SOFI, 2021).

### **Conclusion**

Although India is taking a step forward in increasing the food grain production it still lacks in the management of the product. The FCI having limited storage space would buy food grains in bulk which results in good food being left out in the sun to rot. 61,824 tonnes of food grains were damaged in FCI godowns between the financial year 2011-12 to 2016-17. The implementation of FCI and PDS has helped the country in overcoming the nutritional



insecurity. Furthermore, the NFSA ensures the distribution of subsidized food grains to the population. Despite several initiatives taken by the government overcome the nutritional insecurities, there are many challenges that still exists.

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