

## Decoding Food Security in Kerala

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**Abstract:** *Food security in Kerala, a state in southwestern India, is a complex and multifaceted issue influenced by various factors. Kerala has made significant progress in several socio-economic indicators, but challenges related to food security persist. Addressing food security in Kerala requires a comprehensive approach that encompasses agricultural reforms, sustainable development, climate resilience, social safety nets, and nutritional awareness. Policymakers need to work towards enhancing the state's self-sufficiency in food production while also ensuring equitable access to nutritious food for all residents.*

**Keywords:** *Food Security – Kerala – Supplyco – Kudumbasree – Hunger free Kerala*

### Introduction

Food security as defined by the UN's Committee on World Food Security, is said to exist when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life. The four pillars of food security are availability, access, utilisation and stability. The nutritional dimension is integral to the concept of food security. In order to achieve the concept of 'zero hunger' the UNO declared its aim to end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture as a Sustainable Development Goal. In line with the UNO declaration, the Government of Kerala has announced a scheme for a hunger free State.<sup>1</sup>

The number of undernourished people in the world has increased to an estimated 815 million in 2016, according to a report published jointly by the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) of the United Nations. Out of this 520 million live in Asian countries. The incidence of poverty in India is estimated at 264.9 million in 2011-12. Further, the calorie and protein intake of a large number of people in India, especially in rural areas, is far below the normal level. As per the State of Food Insecurity in the World 2015 (FAO), India has the second highest number of undernourished people at 194.6 million which is around 15.2 percent of the world's total undernourished population. In order to reduce the incidence of poverty and to attain food security, Government of India enacted the National Food

Security Act 2013 to ensure the subsidised availability of food grain to approximately two thirds of India's 1.2 billion people.<sup>2</sup>

Kerala is a State with a deficit in food production. Of the total requirements of food grain, only 15 per cent is being produced in the State. In case of vegetables, the State heavily relies on its neighbouring States. There is a strong correlation between stability in agricultural production and food security. Therefore, along with the provision of food subsidies, stability in agricultural production and strengthening of supply chain management needs to be addressed in order to ensure food security. Although Kerala is a highly progressive State in terms of education, healthcare facilities and awareness among beneficiaries, nutritional security of the most vulnerable is extremely critical to fulfil the vision of a hunger-free Kerala. The various schemes run by the State towards poverty alleviation along with the central government schemes such as Public Distribution System, Integrated Child Development Schemes and Mid Day Meal which approach food security through a life cycle approach, need further strengthening, integration, modernisation and monitoring. One of the main objectives of the 13th Five Year Plan is to make Kerala a hunger-free State by supplying meals at nominal prices to the needy (Box 2.1). The activities of Haritha Keralam, one of the four pillars of the Navakerala mission are directly linked with food security.<sup>3</sup>

### **Hunger Free Kerala**

The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development were adopted by world leaders in September 2015. The SDG focuses on ensuring food and nutrition security through five well defined targets to be achieved by 2030 - ending hunger and ensuring access for all, safe, nutritious and sufficient food all year round; end all forms of malnutrition; double agricultural productivity and incomes of small-scale farm producers; ensuring sustainable food production systems; and maintaining the genetic diversity of seeds, cultivated plants and farmed and domesticated animals.<sup>4</sup>

The Zero Hunger Framework through its 2030 agenda aims to end hunger and malnutrition in all forms and in all parts of the country by 2030. Kerala has initiated measures to end hunger in all its form in the State by 2030. The Government has started a scheme to provide one free meal a day for the needy. In 2017-18, the scheme has been proposed to be implemented in two selected districts as a pilot project with the help of Kudumbasree units and other voluntary organizations/non-government organizations, who have prior field experience. In line with the State Government policy, several Local Self Government units have directly initiated the scheme to cater the needy.

**National Food Security Act, 2013**

The National Food Security Act, 2013 (also Right to Food Act) is an Act passed by the Parliament of India which aims to provide subsidised food grain to approximately two thirds of India's 1.2 billion people. Up to 75 per cent of the rural population and 50 per cent of the urban population will be covered under TPDS, with an uniform entitlement of 5 kg per person per month. However, since Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) households constitute the poorest of the poor, and are presently entitled to 35 kg per household per month, entitlement of existing AAY households will be protected at 35 kg per household per month. Since National Food Security Act (NFSA) started in Kerala with effect from November 2016, the present government has been provided an allocation of 117 crore in the Annual Plan 2017-18 to implement various components under NFSA. Supply Chain Management and installation of e-POS machines will be completed by December 2017.<sup>5</sup>

**National Food Security Act – Kerala Scenario**

The National Food Security Act, 2013 is an Act of the Parliament of India which aims to provide subsidised food grains to approximately two thirds of India's 1.2 billion people. It was signed into law on 12 September 2013, retroactive to 5 July 2013. Government of Kerala started NFSA implementation in the State with effect from November 1, 2016. Under the NFSA, End to End computerization of the entire chain of the Public Distribution System has been planned with the objectives of reducing leakages, improving targeting and reducing the economic cost of distribution. It also involves introduction of electronic point of sale (e-pos) at the ARD, supply chain management from the FCI to the ARD level, biometric authentication for retail and wholesale transactions, providing decision support systems in a GIS based graphic interface to ensure an effective, responsive, transparent, efficient and corruption free PDS. The department in collaboration with NIC and other partners plan to complete the implementation of End to End computerization of PDS components in 2017-2018. Supplyco has been entrusted with the implementation of the door step delivery of rationed articles under PDS in Kerala.<sup>6</sup>

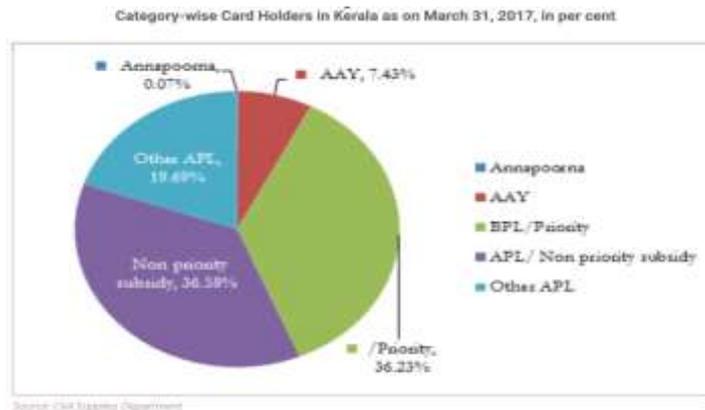
Keeping in line with the NFSA, the Government of Kerala took measures to identify eligible households. In Kerala, the process of renewal of existing ration cards coincided with the statutory provisions of the NFSA. As mandated in the NFSA, "priority" and "non-priority" ration cards will replace the BPL and APL cards respectively. The NFSA has fixed a ceiling cap on the rural and urban population to be included in the priority list as 75 per cent and 50 per cent respectively. However, based on this, if Kerala had initiated taluk-wise

ranking, a lot of eligible poor households would have been denied subsidised ration and other benefits. State wise ranking of the beneficiaries was conducted. This was initiated by the new Government in Kerala and hence there was a delay in the ration card renewal process. Full-fledged NFSA operations including installation of E-PoS machines in ARDs, fitting of GIS in the vehicles transporting food grains etc. are expected to be in full swing from January 2018 onwards.

### **Distribution of Ration Cards**

In pursuance of the Essential Commodities Act 1955 enacted by Government of India, the Public Distribution System(PDS)was started in the State on 1st July 1965. In a State with a high deficit in the production of food grain, PDS has great relevance and importance. The timely lifting of commodities allocated from the Central pool and ensuring the effective distribution of the same through 14,335 ration shops is a major responsibility of the PDS. Kerala made pioneering achievements in the implementation of a Universal Rationing System.

The number of ration cardholders in the State decreased from 83.14 lakh in 2015-16 to 80.24 lakh in 2016-17. Out of the 80.24 lakh ration cards, 35.08 lakh cards come under NFSA and 45.16 lakh comes under non-NFSA. The NFSA section includes 5.96 lakh AAY cards, 5726 Annapoorna card holders and 29.07 lakh priority cards. The non-NFSA section includes 29.35 lakh non priority subsidy group and 15.80 lakh non priority group. The entire PDS has undergone a major transformation consequent to the implementation of NFSA 2013. In Kerala four types ration cards with different colour codes for households came into existence. The yellow colour code represents the AAY card, the Priority card comes in pink colour, the non-priority subsidy card is blue in colour and the white colour cards are the non-priority ones (Figure 2.7). In addition to this, there are 6044 ration permits for institutions. The permits were issued to institutions/organisations which work in the area of humanitarian aid and charity. They get food grain at subsidised rates.<sup>7</sup>



The Government of Kerala published a draft priority list of 1.54 crore members from 35.03 lakh households in the State, who will be covered under NFSA subsidies. From the remaining 1.87 crore members in the State, covering 45.16 lakh households, 1.21 crore members from 29.35 lakh households come under non priority- subsidies (State Subsidy). Details of the number of card holders and quantity of food grain available to each category are given in Table 2.5 and category wise card holders and subsidy amount spent by Government of Kerala for distribution of food grain during 2016-17.<sup>8</sup>

Table 2.5 Category-wise Distribution Details of Food Grains under NFSA

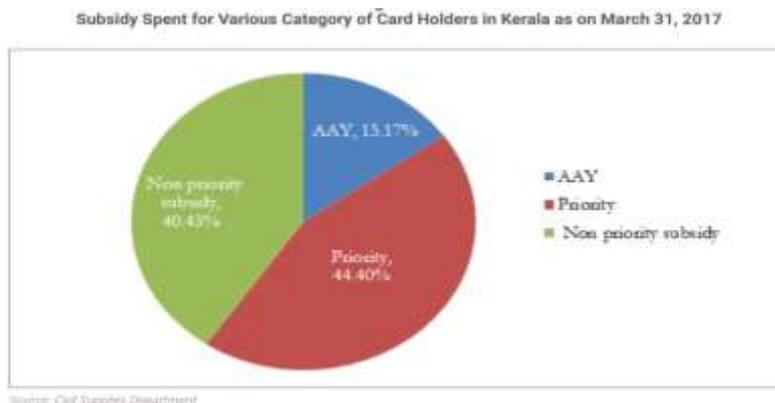
Sl. No.	Category	No. of Ration Cards	Rice	Wheat	Fortified Atta
1	AAY	595,800	28 Kg/Month (free of Cost)	7 Kg Month (free of cost)	
2	Priority	2,906,709	4 Kg/Member/Month (free of cost)	1 Kg/Member/Month (free of cost)	
3	Non Priority (Subsidy)	2,935,436	2 Kg/Member/Month (@ ₹ 2.00/Kg)		1 Kg/Month (@ ₹15.00/Kg)
4	Non Priority (Non Subsidy)	1,580,085	₹8.90/Kg as per the availability of Stock	₹6.70/Kg as per the availability of Stock	2 Kg/Month (@ ₹15.00/Kg)
5	Annapoorna	5,726	10 Kg/month (@ free of cost)		

Source: Civil Supplies Department 2017

### Subsidy by Government of Kerala for Various Card holders

In 2016-17, out of a total subsidy of 48,163.87 lakh spent for various categories of card holders, 7,305.21 lakh was spent for AAY card holders, (15.17 per cent), 21,384.76 lakh

for priority card holders (44.40 per cent) and 19,472.72 lakh (40.43 per cent) for non-priority subsidy cardholders.



During 2016-17 rice allotment to APL cardholders was 4.05 lakh MT and BPL card holders 4.29 lakh MT. In 2017-18, upto August 31, 2017, 2.14 lakh tonnes of rice and 0.53 lakh tonnes of wheat was distributed to AAY and ANP. At the same time, 1.37 lakh tonnes of rice and 0.12 lakh tonnes of wheat was distributed to the non-NFSA group.<sup>9</sup>

### **Anthyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) and Annapoorna Scheme (ANP)**

Under this scheme 35 kg of rice per month are provided to the poorest of the poor families under NFSA and this has been implemented in the State since 25-12-2001. There are 5.96 lakh Anthyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) card holders in 2016-17 as compared to 5.82 lakh in 2015-16. In 2016-17, the allotment of rice under AAY was 230,022 MT. Government of India supplies food grain under AAY to the State @ 3/kg and the State Government in turn provides it to the beneficiaries free of cost.

The Annapoorna scheme provides 10 Kg of rice per month free of cost to destitute people aged 65 years and above who are not in receipt of any of the pensions from the government. The targeted number of beneficiaries approved by the Government of India is 44,980. But the number of beneficiaries identified in the State is decreasing periodically, this figure was 23,322 in 2015-16 and as on March 31, 2017, it is 5,726.<sup>10</sup>

### **Central Allotment of Sugar and Kerosene**

The Government of India had dispensed with the scheme of issue of sugar through PDS w.e.f March 1, 2017. During Onam, 1 Kg sugar per card was given to all card holders @ 22/Kg in 2017-18 by State Government. As on August 31, 2017, 2718.78 MT of sugar has been distributed. In 2016-17, 123,632.16 MT of sugar was distributed against 53,664 MT in 2015-16. There was an increase in distribution by 130.38 percent in 2016-17. Allotment of

kerosene to Kerala decreased by 26.04 percent in 2016-17. The allotment was 84,628.45 KL in 2016-17 as against 114,422 KL in 2015-16. Up to August 31, 2017, 22,571.81 KL Kerosene has been distributed in the State.<sup>11</sup>

### **District-wise Distribution of Food Grain**

During 2016-17, the offtake of NFSA rice was highest in Malappuram district with 12 per cent followed by Thrissur district with 11.3 per cent of the total of 438,279.3 MT. Whereas in the case of NFSA wheat, Thrissur had the higher offtake of 11.3 per cent followed by Malappuram with 10.9 per cent. The least share of NFSA rice and wheat was for Wayanad district with 2 per cent each. In the case of non-NFSA rice, Thiruvananthapuram district had the higher offtake of 13.29 per cent followed by Malappuram with 12 per cent. In the case of non-NFSA wheat, Thiruvananthapuram has the highest offtake of 11.65 per cent followed by Ernakulam with 11.60 per cent. The least share of non-NFSA rice was to Pathanamthitta (2.06 per cent) and least share of wheat was to Wayanad (2.24 per cent).<sup>12</sup>

### **Kerala State Civil Supplies Corporation (Supplyco)**

Kerala has one of the best Public Distribution System (PDS) networks in India. The Kerala State Civil Supplies Corporation forms the second line of the PDS and is instrumental in stabilising the prices of essential commodities in the State. It was set up in 1974 to provide food security to the State. Kerala, being a consumer oriented State, the control of undue rises in prices is not possible without a powerful public distribution system that intervenes in the open market effectively throughout the year. The system ensures the distribution of essential items through fair price shops and Supplyco outlets to every person in the State. Supplyco (Kerala State Civil Supplies Corporation) is mandated to control the prices of 13 essential commodities by distributing it at subsidised prices through its 1,406 stores spread across the State.<sup>13</sup>

Supplyco has its headquarters in Kochi and operates through 5 regional offices, 56 depots and 1100 plus retail outlets. Its remit includes retailing of Fast Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) at lower prices, conducting special fairs in order to check undue rises in prices during festival seasons, retailing of medicines through State-run medical stores, procurement of paddy, processing and distribution of wheat and its products, acting as a dealer of petroleum products like kerosene, petrol, diesel and LPG and also acting as a nodal agency in implementing the programmes of the Government of India in the State such as starting of Micro Biology Lab and Food Processing Units. In 2016-17, 8 Maveli stores, 10

super markets, 1 Peoples Bazaar and four medical stores were opened by the Civil Supplies Corporation. The sales turnover of the corporation increased from 2,223 crore in 2010-11 to 3,857 cores in 2015-16. As on April 1, 2017, the number of FCI sub depots was 21; number of whole sale shops was 140 and the number of retail shops was 11,572.<sup>14</sup>

### **Legal Metrology**

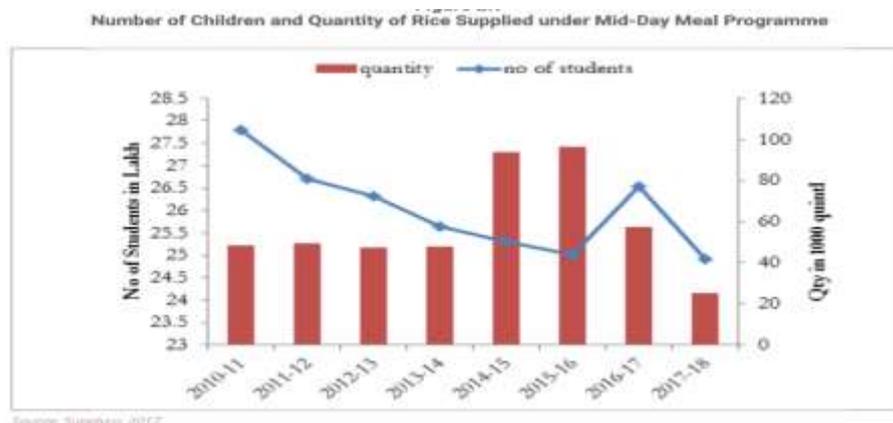
The role of the Legal Metrology Department is increasing day by day. The major function of the Legal Metrology Department is to ensure a public guarantee from the point of view of security and accuracy of the weights and measurements. Educating more than 3.34 crore people, particularly those in rural areas where consumers are more susceptible to exploitation, on various subject matters pertaining to consumers' interest being dealt with by different Departments, is a herculean task. In order to achieve this, the Legal Metrology Department works to implement the provisions of the Legal Metrology Act. The Act is aimed at ensuring the accuracy and standards of weights and measures, and regulating trade and commerce in weights, measures and other goods which are sold or distributed by weight, measure or numbers. In 2016-17, the department conducted several verifications and registered 26,021 cases and imposed a penalty of 71 lakh.<sup>15</sup>

### **Mid-day Meal Programme**

The Mid-day Meal Programme in schools is implemented in the State with the financial support of the State government as well as Central assistance. The programme was introduced in 1995 by the Ministry of Human Resources Development, Government of India, to provide nutritional support to primary school going children and to boost universalisation of primary education by increasing enrolment, retention and attendance.<sup>16</sup>

Supplyco is entrusted with the responsibility of providing commodities to the Mid-Day Meal Programme in the State. The required quantity of rice is taken from the Food Corporation of India (FCI). During 2016-17, FCI supplied 57,494 tonnes of rice and, 12,333.5 tonnes of special rice benefiting 26.55 lakh children. It can be seen that even though number of children benefitting from this programme increased from 25.02 lakh in 2015-16 to, 26.55 lakh in 2016-17, the supply of rice decreased to 57,494 ton in 2016-17 from 96458 tonnes in 2015-16. There has been a slight decrease in the supply of special rice too during the above period. During 2017-18, as on 31.08.2017, the corporation supplied 250674.1 tonnes of rice and 124,545.95 tonnes of special rice. There has been no distribution of pulses

from 2013-14 onwards. The number of children benefiting from the Mid-Day Meal Programme and quantity of rice supplied to the children is given in the figure below.<sup>17</sup>



## Conclusion

In conclusion, the issue of food security in Kerala is a dynamic and intricate challenge that demands holistic and adaptive solutions. While the state has made commendable strides in various socio-economic spheres, persistent factors such as land fragmentation, reliance on imports, and the vulnerability to climate change continue to shape the food security landscape. The effectiveness of the Public Distribution System (PDS) and social welfare programs, such as the Midday Meal Scheme and Antyodaya Anna Yojana, remains crucial in addressing immediate nutritional needs. Additionally, the empowerment of women and the focus on sustainable agricultural practices are pivotal components of any comprehensive strategy. Kerala's food security is not solely a matter of production but also hinges on the nutritional quality of consumed food. The shift in dietary patterns towards processed and calorie-dense foods poses health challenges that necessitate education and awareness programs. Furthermore, the state's vulnerability to climate change and natural disasters underscores the importance of building resilience in the agricultural sector and exploring innovative approaches.

As Kerala grapples with these challenges, it is imperative for policymakers to consider the interconnected nature of food security, acknowledging the links between agriculture, climate, employment, and social dynamics. Strengthening local agricultural practices, investing in climate-resilient technologies, and promoting sustainable and diversified farming methods can contribute to increased self-sufficiency. In essence, the pursuit of food security in Kerala requires a multifaceted approach that integrates traditional wisdom with modern solutions. It involves not only boosting production but also addressing socio-economic inequalities, promoting nutritional awareness, and building resilience against

external shocks. As the state navigates the complexities of the modern food system, a concerted effort from government bodies, civil society, and communities is essential to ensure a future where every Keralite has access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food, thereby fostering the well-being and prosperity of the entire state.

## Notes and References

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