

INDIA'S PATH TO FOOD SECURITY: POLICIES, PROGRAMS, AND CONSTITUTIONAL SAFEGUARDS

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Abstract

India's approach to food security has changed throughout the years, moulded by a special confluence of political governance, agricultural development, and economic reforms. In order to guarantee millions of citizens have access to affordable food, several crucial policies are made like the National Food Security Act (NFSA), the Public Distribution System (PDS), and agricultural subsidies. Strong laws, focused initiatives, and constitutional protections have all contributed to India's progress toward achieving food security by guaranteeing that the country's enormous population has access to enough food that is both nourishing and sufficient. With an emphasis on important government programs including the Public Distribution System (PDS), the National Food Security Act (NFSA), and different agricultural assistance measures, this article examines the development of food security in India. Furthermore, it explores the constitutional provisions that uphold the state's duty to end poverty and malnutrition, such as Article 21's right to food. Moreover it examines the triumphs and problems in India's continuous efforts to guarantee sustainable food security for all inhabitants, especially in rural and marginalized groups, by looking at how these policies and initiatives intersect with socio-economic issues. It also considers how to improve food security going forward in light of population expansion, climate change, and demands from the world economy. This article offers insight into the formulation of India's food security policy and the wider implications for fair access to food in the face of domestic and international problems by fusing economic and political viewpoints.

Key Words-Food security, political governance, public distribution system, income inequality.

Introduction

Adequate access to nutritious food is essential for human health and well-being. However, attaining food security has become a grave concern due to increasing population and climate change vulnerabilities. Ensuring all citizens have access to adequate, nutritious, and affordable food has been a priority for successive Indian governments. Both climatic and non-climatic factors are crucial in determining food security (Mahali, Paramanik, & Pradhan, 2021). As the nation grapples with economic growth, agricultural challenges, and social inequality, food security policies have evolved to address these multifaceted issues.

Understanding Food Security and Food Insecurity

Food security is the state in which all people, at all times, have physical, social, and economic access to enough, safe, and nutritious food that satisfies their dietary needs and food

preferences for an active and healthy life. Food insecurity is the state in which people have limited access to safe and healthy food (George & McKay, 2019). India has a multifaceted approach to food security, combining political and economic operations to guarantee food stability, availability, and accessibility. The National Food Security Act (NFSA) of 2013 and the Public Distribution System (PDS), are of the nation's major initiatives, and is made to give subsidized food grains to disadvantaged groups. Nonetheless, there is still much disagreement over these programs' efficacy to combat hunger, their effects on fiscal health, and their long-term viability.

India's quest for food security has been a complex and dynamic process, influenced by a range of national policies, focused initiatives, and constitutional protections. The Indian government has always prioritized ensuring that every citizen has access to enough food that is safe, nourishing, and sufficient due to its large population. In order to combat hunger and malnutrition, a number of programs and initiatives have been crucial over the years, including the Public Distribution System (PDS), the National Food Security Act (NFSA), and the Mid-Day Meal Program and the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS). Furthermore, as stated in Article 21 of the Indian Constitution, food security is not only a question of policy but also a basic right, highlighting the importance of the Right to Food as an extension of the Right to Life. India still has a lot of problems in spite of these efforts, like widespread malnutrition, especially among vulnerable populations. The intricate relationship between climate change, agricultural production, and economic inequality makes the nation's food security situation even more challenging.

Food security in India

Even if the rate of food insecurity worldwide has declined overall, a sizable portion of the population still lives in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. The majority of impacted countries are usually characterized by high rates of poverty and sickness and mortality linked to dietary inadequacies. Many Indians have not profited from the economic progress despite the country's tremendous growth in the last 20 years, and they still face severe food insecurity, hunger, and a high rate of malnutrition and undernourishment (George & McKay, 2019). We could say that India is experiencing a "nutritional emergency" given that 74% of under-three children are officially declared anaemic, 50% of them suffer from moderate to severe malnourishment, 87% of our pregnant women are anaemic, and there are numerous starvation deaths nationwide (Jain & Shah, 2005).

Table-1 Global Hunger Index Scores (2020- 2021)

Country	Rank	2000	2008	2015	2021
Afghanistan	103	49.6	36.5	30.4	28.3
Nepal	76	37.2	29.0	21.3	19.1
Vietnam	63	26.1	20.1	14.5	13.6
South Africa	60	18.0	16.8	13.3	12.9
Thailand	53	18.7	12.2	9.4	11.7
Philippines	68	25.0	19.1	18.3	16.8
Sri Lanka	65	21.7	17.6	17.1	16

India	101	38.4	35.5	29.2	27.5
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Source: Global hunger Index report 2021.

The table presents the Global Hunger Index (GHI) scores for several countries, showing how their hunger levels have changed from 2000 to 2021, ranked by their 2021 GHI scores. GHI measures hunger by considering factors like undernourishment, child wasting, stunting, and mortality, with lower scores reflecting better food security. The Global Hunger Index (GHI) measures hunger levels across countries, with lower scores indicating less hunger. In the 2021 GHI rankings, Afghanistan, showing a significant reduction in hunger, from a high score of 49.6 in 2000 to 28.3 in 2021. India, ranked 101st, has also seen a gradual improvement from 38.4 in 2000 to 27.5 in 2021, though it still faces high levels of hunger. Nepal, ranked 76th, reduced its GHI score substantially from 37.2 in 2000 to 19.1 by 2021, reflecting major progress. Vietnam and South Africa, ranked 63rd and 60th respectively, have made continuous improvements, with Vietnam reducing its score from 26.1 to 13.6 and South Africa from 18.0 to 12.9. Thailand (ranked 53rd) shows slight fluctuation with a low score of 9.4 in 2015 but rising to 11.7 in 2021. The Philippines and Sri Lanka, ranked 68th and 65th, have made modest progress, with their GHI scores declining over time to 16.8 and 16 by 2021, respectively. Overall, all countries show improvements, but the pace and magnitude of hunger reduction vary widely.

Challenges of food Insecurity in India

One of the main reasons for food insecurity crisis at global level is the diversion of agricultural lands that were used for cultivating maize and wheat to bio-fuel and medicinal plants in the United States and other European, Asian and African countries. Because of tightening supply and rapid expansion in demand, freshwater is expected to emerge as a key constraint to future agricultural growth and food security. The reasons behind food insecurity and hunger in India are many. Some research indicates that high rates of migration from rural to urban areas may play a vital role, as evidenced by the concentration of economic gains in urban areas, and the significant changes to the contribution of the agriculture sector to GDP.

Uneven weather patterns and a rise in droughts are main result of climate change which contributes to food insecurity. These factors are to blame for the uneven growth and production of food stocks. Even in years of record-breaking production, farmers were left with extremely poor net returns due to the unfavourable prices of staple commodities like wheat and rice. Newcomers are reluctant to enter this field because of this (P. S. Brahmanand, et al., 2013). Due to the low prices for the final products, Indian farmers have a difficult time marketing their harvested crops. Globalization has undoubtedly resulted in a number of positive changes, such as faster communication and transportation, increased growth in the services sector, and technological development and transfer. However, it has also brought about a number of challenges, including increased financial market volatility, fierce competition among entrepreneurs, and growth inequality among different societal segments. The openness of trade is one of the effects of globalization in India. As a result, the wealthy can start international businesses whereas the underprivileged can only do regional projects. With their limited arable land and strong reliance on agriculture, nations like India are expected to be particularly hard hit by the effects of climate change. India's surface

temperature has grown by 0.3 °C, or 0.08 °C each decade, over the previous 40 years (1969-2005). Climate change has been linked to an increase in the frequency of natural disasters such as heat waves, cyclones, floods, and droughts in recent years (Sengupta D, et., al 2006). Extreme weather events have the potential to sharply reduce agricultural productivity, which exacerbates the issues of food insecurity and rural poverty (Birthal, et., al 2014). Food availability, access, supply stability, and price instability are all impacted by climate change, which will have an impact on food security. India's population is expected to surpass 1.7 billion people by 2065, meaning a greater and more varied demand for food. The direct physiological effects of temperature rise, fluctuating rainfall, and rising carbon dioxide on plant growth, development, and yield (Agarwal, 2003). Additionally, India's stagnant performance in both GHI and GFSI ranking points to the deep-rooted challenges in its food security landscape.

Table 2- Global Food Security Index (GFSI) ranking (2020-2021)

Sl.No.	Country	Rank(2020)	Score(2020)	Rank(2021)	Score(2021)
1	Ireland	2	83.8	1	84
2	United Kingdom	6	78.5	3	81
3	Switzerland	10	77.7	5	80.4
4	Canada	12	77.2	7	79.8
5	United States of America	11	77.5	9	79.1
6	Germany	13	77	11	78.7
7	China	39	69.3	34	71.3
8	Malaysia	43	67.9	39	70.1
9	Mexico	45	66.2	46	66.9
10	India	71	56.2	71	57.2

Source: Global Food Security Index Report-2021

In the Global Food Security Index (GFSI) for 2020 and 2021, India's position remained unchanged at 71st, reflecting stagnation in its progress compared to other nations. Despite a slight increase in its score from 56.2 to 57.2, India did not experience any significant advancement in its ranking, highlighting the persistent challenges in improving food security. In contrast, countries like Ireland, which rose to the top position in 2021 from second place in 2020, showed consistent improvement with an increase in its score from 83.8 to 84. The United Kingdom made notable progress, climbing from 6th to 3rd as its score improved significantly from 78.5 to 81, while Switzerland leaped from 10th to 5th, increasing its score from 77.7 to 80.4. Canada also moved up the ranks from 12th to 7th, with its score improving from 77.2 to 79.8, and the United States showed similar progress, advancing from 11th to 9th. Germany's ranking also improved modestly, moving from 13th to 11th with a score increase from 77 to 78.7. Even countries like China, Malaysia, and Mexico demonstrated progress, with China rising from 39th to 34th and Malaysia from 43rd to 39th, driven by score increases of around two points each, while Mexico slightly improved its score but slipped in rank from 45th to 46th. India's stagnation in both rank and score is particularly striking when compared to the dynamic progress made by countries of various sizes and economic backgrounds. While nations like China, which shares demographic and developmental

similarities with India, improved notably in both rank and score, India's inability to move up the GFSI rankings suggests that it faces more deep-rooted challenges related to food affordability, availability, and quality. This lack of upward momentum indicates the need for more targeted interventions and reforms to address the food security issues that continue to hold India back on the global stage.

Government Schemes, Policies and programmes to strengthen food security in India

To combat food insecurity, the Indian government has implemented various policies schemes and programmes.

Public Distribution System- The public distribution system is one type of program used in India's present food security system to ensure food security (Thampi, 2017). The public distribution system (PDS) is a food security program that is in charge of giving basic food and non-food items at affordable rates to the economically disadvantaged segments of society through government-sponsored stores located all across the nation. PDS was run in conjunction with state governments and was founded under the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food, and Public Distribution (Ghabru, Devi, & Rathod, 2017). The British government established India's first organized public distribution system of cereals in Bombay and Calcutta during World War II, which is when the history of PDS began. The rationing system was discontinued after the end of World War II, but it was reinstated in 1950 as a result of inflationary pressures in the economy following independence (Pal B, 2011). PDS was redesigned in 1992 since it was largely focused on urban regions and was not reaching a wide audience. The system, which covered 1752 blocks of the nation's hilly, tribal, desert, and drought-prone regions, later became known as the Revamped Public Distribution System (RPDS). The system was redesigned, however it was unable to serve the intended benefit. As a result, it was changed into the Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS) in 1997, where households were categorized as Above Poverty Line (APL) and Below Poverty Line (BPL).

‘Antyodaya Anna yojana’ (AAY) - India began implementing the "Antyodaya Anna yojana" (AAY) at the end of 2000. The Plan is based on the idea of "Antyodaya," which Mahatma Gandhi developed after reading "Unto this last" by John Ruskin (Patil, 2012). In addition to ensuring "food security," this program aims to end hunger in India and reform and enhance the Public Distribution System to better serve the nation's poorest citizens in both rural and urban areas (Chinnadurai R, 2014). The families covered by this system received individual ration cards called "Antyodaya Ration Cards," which let them to purchase wheat for rupees two per kilogram, rice for rupees three per kilogram, and sugar through the ration shops for rupees 18.50 per kilogram. Thirty-five kilograms of rice would be sent to the beneficiary home each month. The government selected beneficiaries for this program from both urban and rural slum areas. These included elderly pensioners, small and marginal farmers, physically disabled people, impoverished widows, and rural artisans or craftsmen. Families in rural areas earning up to Rs. 15,000 annually were also included. Under Antyodaya Anna Yojana, families earning up to Rs. 15,000 annually, slum dwellers, daily wage earners such as rickshaw pullers, porters, fruit and vegetable vendors on pavements,

domestic workers, construction workers, widows or disabled individuals who are the head of families aged 60 years or older and have no means of support, and other types of earners such as snake charmers, rag pickers, and cobblers are also eligible to receive benefits in urban areas (Goswami, 2021).

Food Corporation of India- The Food Corporation of India is the main vehicle used by the Indian government to implement its food security program. The FCI is the primary system in place to guarantee price support to farmers, provide the poorest people with food subsidies, and acquire commodities for the buffer stock (Mc Corrison & Mac Laren, 2016). The Food Corporation Act of 1964 allowed the Indian government to create the Food Corporation of India in 1965 (Mallory & Baylis, 2012). With its national headquarters located in New Delhi, FCI has five zonal offices, twenty-five regional offices, and sixteen 3 divisional offices. More than 2000 Depots operate under FCI. It has a manpower of 20851 employees (As on 31 March 2020) (Rani & Kaur, 2021).

The National Food Security Ordinance (NFSO) - On July 5, 2013, the National Food Security Ordinance (NFSO) of 2013 was promulgated, and on September 10, 2013, the National Food Security Act (NFSA) was enacted (Saini & Gulati, 2015). The Act has the potential to yield large benefits, particularly in rural areas where access to food for the impoverished translates into increased labour efficiency, productivity, and decreased health care costs as well as decreased migration to urban areas (Sengupta & Mukhopadhyay, 2016).

Integrated Child Development Services and Mid-Day Meal Schemes: After birth, toddlerhood, and preschool, school age, usually referred to as middle childhood (6–10 years of age), is the fourth developmental stage of a person's life (Behrman RE, et.,al 2008). Additionally, the school years serve as a period of adequate nutritional reserve preparation for the fast growth and development that occurs during adolescence. The largest school-based nutritional program began on August 15, 1995, and is called the National Programme for Nutritional Support to Primary Education, or the Mid-Day Meal (MDM) Programme in India (Jayalakshmi & Jissa, 2017). Kerala's school nutrition program was first introduced in 1960, and as of 1995, it was a part of the MDM Program, which was funded by the central government. The goals of this program are to reduce hunger in the classroom, raise student enrolment and retention rates, improve the nutritional quality of upper and lower primary schoolchildren (first to eighth standards), foster social integration, and instil healthy eating habits in kids (Government of India., 2010).

SABLA Scheme, 2010 The goal of the SABLA program is to empower girls between the ages of 11 and 18 by improving their nutritional and health conditions and teaching them about life skills, nutrition, and health. SABLA is a government of India program that is sponsored centrally and was launched on April 1, 2011, under the Ministry of Women and Child Development. The Kishori Shakti Yojana was superseded by the SABLA initiative. This program's goal was to raise the nutritional and health status of girls between the ages of 11 and 18 so they could develop their business and home-based skills and advance their

overall development, which includes raising their awareness of family welfare, nutrition, personal hygiene, and nutrition programs for adolescent girls (Rajpurohit, et., al 2019).

National Nutrition Mission (NNM) or POSHAN Abhiyaan, With the motto "Sahi Poshan Desh Roshan," Hon. Prime Minister of India Shri Narendra Modi launched the National Nutrition Mission (NNM), also known as POSHAN Abhiyaan, on March 8, 2018, as an ambitious flagship program to improve nutritional outcomes for children, lactating mothers, and pregnant women. The fiscal funding of the Center is also split as follows: 60:40 goes to the States, 90:10 to the Northeast and the Himalayan States, and 100% goes to the Union Territories (UTs) (Pooja, 2021).

One Nation One Ration Card, 2019: The 2011 Census data clearly shows how much internal migration there is in India. According to this data, 37 percent of India's entire population, or 45.36 crore people, are migrants. Cities are significant migratory destinations, and internal movement is a necessary component of development. Without migration and migrant workers, cities would not be able to contribute as much to India's GDP. The government gives internal migrants extremely little consideration, despite their contribution to progress. The main purpose of this initiative is to ensure no migrant is deprived of food due to the inaccessibility of food grains from PDS shops (Rajput, 2019).

Constitutional Foundations of the Right to Food in India

In India, the right to eat is guaranteed by the constitution. The Indian Supreme Court ruled in *PUCL v. Union of India* (2001) that, in accordance with Article 21 of the Indian Constitution, the right to food is a component of the fundamental right to life. This ruling was the result of the Supreme Court's interpretation of Article 21 in a number of decisions during the 1980s and 1990s, which gave rise to a wider right to "live with dignity" in addition to protection against the taking of life without cause. As a result, the Central and State governments of India have a duty to uphold the right of citizens to food. This rendered a number of Directive Principles of State Policy acceptable and within the purview of Article 21, despite the fact that Article 37 of the Indian Constitution declares that they "shall not be enforceable by any court." India won its independence from the British in 1947, but it took the Constituent Assembly more than two years to establish a republican constitution in 1950. The right to food is directly related to a handful of the DPSPs. Article 39(a) says "The State shall... direct its policy towards securing that the citizen, men and women equally, have the right to an adequate means of livelihood,". Additionally, Article 47 states that "among its primary duties shall be the raising of the level of nutrition and the standard of living of its people as well as the improvement of public health."

Conclusion

In conclusion, while India has made significant strides in its journey towards ensuring food security through various policies, programs, and constitutional safeguards, the problem persists, as reflected in global indices like the Global Food Security Index (GFSI) and the Global Hunger Index (GHI). Despite being home to one of the world's largest food distribution systems, the country continues to grapple with challenges of inefficiency,

malnutrition, and inequitable access to food. The GFSI consistently highlights India's low rankings in food affordability, quality, and safety, while the GHI points to alarming levels of wasting, stunting, and under nutrition, underscoring the gap between policy intent and on-ground reality. Factors such as poverty, regional disparities, climate change, and agricultural inefficiencies further exacerbate the situation. The constitutional recognition of the right to food, supported by landmark initiatives like the National Food Security Act, represents a vital legal and moral commitment, but the nation still faces an uphill task in translating these commitments into tangible outcomes. To truly secure its path to food security, India must address systemic inefficiencies, strengthen its agricultural sector, and ensure equitable access to nutritious food for all its citizens. Only through comprehensive reforms and effective implementation can the country hope to climb global rankings and fulfil its constitutional promise of a hunger-free India.

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