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IMPORTANCE OF FOOD SECURITY IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

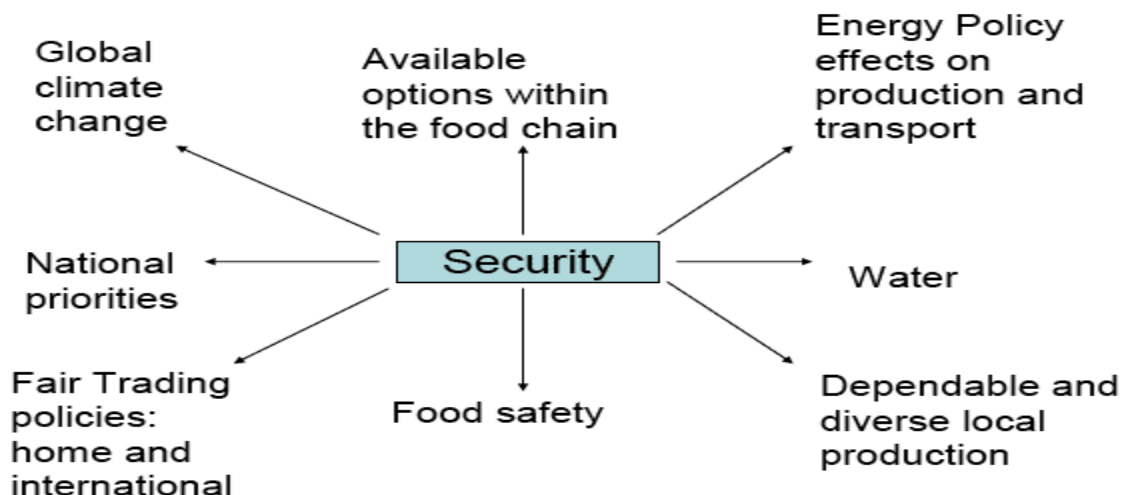
It's essential for living like air and water. It is more than getting two square meals. It has three dimensions- 1) Food availability i.e. total food production in the country plus the imported food plus buffer stocks maintained in govt. granaries like FCI in previous years. 2) Food accessibility i.e. food should be within the reach of every person. 3) Food affordability i.e. an individual should have enough money to buy proper, safe and nutritious food to meet his dietary needs. Just as you and your family need sufficient, safe and nutritious food, likewise, each and every citizen has a right to get food. Just think of poverty-stricken, it is very hard for them to get two square meals a day. Somehow they manage by eating through dustbins or loungers carried on by some charitable or religious institutions or even they resort to beg. You would not believe that in tribal areas, people are forced to eat wild plants. Those who are unemployed, they can also be food insecure. If some natural calamity happens like BENGAL FAMINE IN 1943(it killed thirty lac people in the Bengal province), flood in Bihar, tsunami in southern parts, earthquake in Gujarat, food shortage can arise and less supply and high demand hike the prices. it is also a case of food insecurity. 1.02 billion People in India are suffering from hunger and hence, malnutrition. India holds 2nd rank in the world of the number of children suffering from malnutrition. Those who have a meager income, and if inflation occurs, then they also have to make some adjustments in food. Or it may happen that sometimes, they eat and sometime don't. Food security will be helpful if enough food is available for all the persons, there is no barrier to access of food and all persons have the capacity to buy food of acceptable quality.

KEYWORDS: *Food Security, Food poverty, Availability. Economy, India.*

INTRODUCTION

Food security is an important factor that guarantees human security, and is one of the seven pillars of the United Nation's (UN) Development Program's original concept of human security, along with economic, health, environmental, personal, community, and political security. The notion of food security is as old as humanity, as the establishment of human communities always depended on access to food. However, in order to incorporate different elements, this concept has continuously undergone significant changes through time. The roots of concern about food security can be traced back to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by UN which recognized that "everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food". Therefore, food security has existed in international development literature since the 1940s. Later in 1970s, the operational concept of right to food was introduced by Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) as food security. The World Food Conference (1974) defined food security as 'Availability at all times of adequate world food supplies of basic foodstuff to sustain a steady expansion of food consumption and to offset fluctuations in production and prices'. According to this definition, unavailability of food is the only reason behind food insecurity. However, in reality, nations have enough food in terms of availability, yet there are countries in the world, regions within countries, villages within regions, households within villages and individuals within household that are not able to meet their food needs. Therefore, this definition reflects a paradoxical situation i.e. individual food insecurity in a food secure nation where the term food security was only focused on the volume and stability of national and world food supplies. "Food security [is] a situation that exists 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". Ensuring food security ought to be an issue of great importance for a country like India where more than one-third of the population is estimated to be absolutely poor and one-half of all children malnourished in one way or another. It is, by now, well known that the question of food security has a number of dimensions that extend beyond the production, availability, and demand for food. There has been a paradigmatic shift in the concept of food security, from food availability and stability to household food insecurity, and from assessment of input measures like energy intake to output indicators such as anthropometric measures and clinical signs of malnutrition.

According to Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life. Food security has three components, viz., availability, access, and absorption (nutrition). The three are interconnected. Many studies have shown that improvement in nutrition is important, even for increase in productivity of workers. Thus, food security has intrinsic (for its own sake) as well as instrumental (for increasing productivity) value. Food security means availability, accessibility and affordability of food to all people at all times. The poor households are more vulnerable to food insecurity whenever there is a problem of production or distribution of food crops. Food security depends on the Public Distribution System (PDS) and government vigilance and action at times, when this security is threatened. Food is something that gives you the energy to function and keeps you alive.. But food security means something more than getting two square meals.



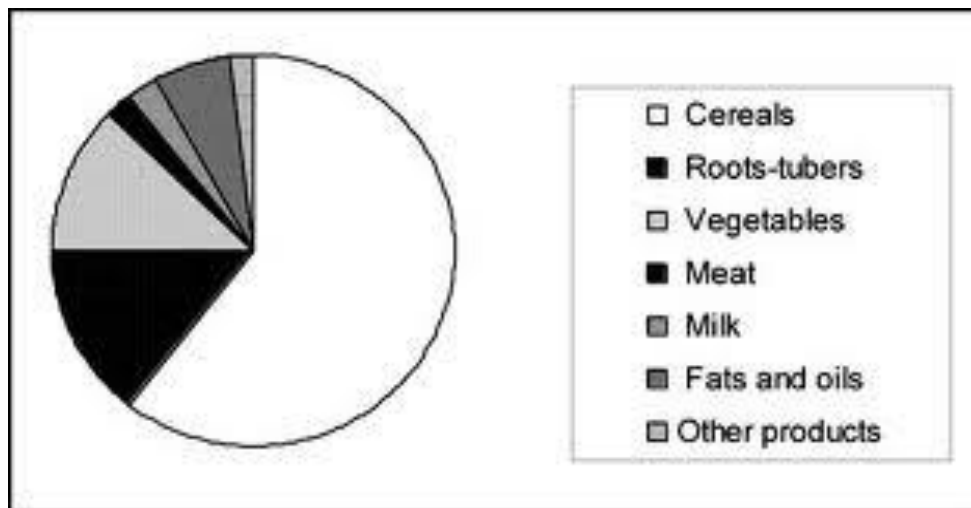
Availability of food

Food security at the national level refers mainly to availability in the country of sufficient stocks of food to meet domestic demand, either through domestic supply or through imports. Here we look at the performance and policies with regard to availability of food.

Performance Attainment of self sufficiency in food grains at the national level is one of the country's major achievements in the post-independence period. After remaining a food deficit country for about two decades after independence, India became largely self-sufficient in food grain production at the macro level. There have hardly been any food grain imports after the mid-1970s. Food grain production in the country increased from about 50 million tons in 1950-51 to around 233.9 million tons in 2008-09. The growth rate of food grains has been around 2.5 per cent per annum between 1951 and 2006-07. The production of oilseeds, cotton, sugarcane, fruits, vegetables, and milk has also increased appreciably.

Reasons for Decline in Food Production The performance of the overall agriculture sector and the factors responsible for the slowdown provide an explanation for the decline in the growth of food production. It may be noted that food grains, pulses, oilseeds, sugar, fruits and vegetables, poultry, dairy, meat, fish, etc.

Per Capita Availability of Food grains The net availability of food grains is estimated at 87.5 per cent of gross production. In order to obtain the figure for net availability of food grains, figures for requirement for seeds, farm animal feed, and waste are deducted from gross production and net imports are added, apart from adjustments for changes in government stocks. Here we are assuming that there is no net change in private stocks. Per capita net availability of food grains increased by about 10 per cent over the last 52 years, between 1961 and 2012.

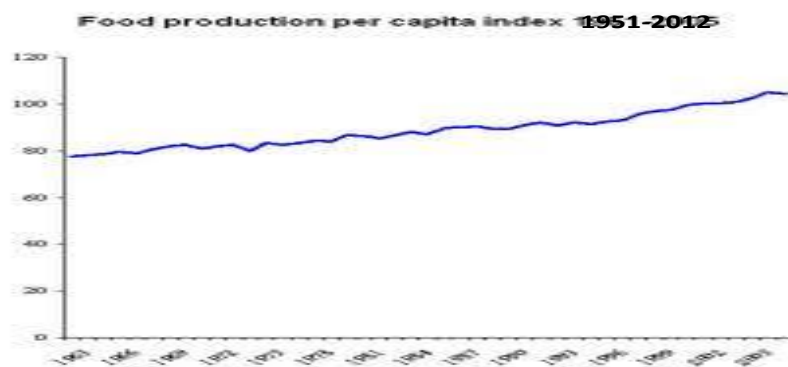


Climate change

Food security is severely influenced by climate change. The changing climate will influence the food grain production in different ways. For example, the temporal and spatial variations in precipitation including rainfall may result in deficit moisture stress, i.e. drought or excess moisture stress condition, i.e. flooding. Similarly, extreme high or low temperatures result in variations in the length of crop growing season. These factors would also affect the crop productivity and farm net income and hence climate resilient agricultural practices have to be promoted. This is applicable to all the nations, including India. Understanding the impact of climate change on Indian agriculture is quite complex as several factors are involved in this phenomenon. For example, the negative effect of global warming on crop productivity in India may be compensated by carbon fertilization to some extent. Several researchers conducted studies on the interrelationship between climate change and food security in relation to impacts of climate change on crop productivity, food production and socio-economic aspects. Climate change in the recent years has resulted in higher frequency of floods and droughts, making the objective of attaining food security very complex. Hence, the future research efforts related to management aspects of tackling vulnerability caused by natural hazards must consider the social, economic and geo-political constraints. Enhancing the resilience of human systems to cope with extreme climatic stresses should become the main objective. There is a strong need to address changes in institutions and resource accessibility to tackle the climate-induced natural hazards¹⁴. Overall, the agricultural practices have to be reoriented which would provide better climate resilience and enhanced net farm income. The capacity of people to cope with climate change and its related edaphic changes varies from one region to another in India¹⁵. The study also suggested that an integrated approach is highly essential to address the food insecurity concerns. On the basis of specific problems faced by the farmers, the approach should be different. For example, in the western IGP, food systems are most vulnerable to problems such as excessive irrigation coupled with rising water tables and soil salinity, whereas in the eastern IGP, problems such as rising sea level and increased risk of flooding are generally witnessed and farmers have little capacity to tackle them. Hence, it can be stated that food security can be achieved by tackling the specific challenges related to climate change in diversified regions.

Production

The challenge of food grain production is generation of sufficient number of new varieties of field crops with threshold potential in changing climate scenario. Several varieties of rice and wheat were released, but still exists a gap between the yield obtained through these genotypes and their field level performance. One of the main issues might be the genetic potential exploitation has attained saturation according to the climatic and edaphic conditions that existed in India. For some crops like rice, the hybrid varieties developed resulted in yield jump but the magnitude has not been achieved like the scenario in China. The poor harvest index of pulses and oil seeds also remains a challenge to the plant breeding programs. In some of the problematic soils, the varieties with full yield potential in normal situation cannot fit well resulting in poor crop productivity. This situation has to be corrected by employing modern biotechnology techniques. In several regions of India, farmers are not able to get information about the availability of new and improved varieties and some are not having access to quality seeds of these varieties, resulting in lesser yields. This situation has to be corrected by developing a national-level network to monitor and coordinate the activities with the various State Government and Central Government functionaries working in the area of crop production.



CONCLUSION

The above discussion shows that policy making and implementation have failed miserably in respect of tackling the crisis of mass under-nutrition. A consistent set of policies in the mid-1960s regarding production, storage and distribution had been introduced to address the problem of food insecurity. These policies had some success, especially in respect of accelerating the production of food grain and in respect of ensuring a period of low and stable prices for cereals. But with the introduction of economic liberalization in 1991, policies to address food security have been weakened, and have had a very damaging impact on consumption and nutrition. At present, the situation is even more serious with the galloping high rate of inflation. The period of economic liberalization has seen a relentless setback to some of our major programs of food security. Three key objectives of economic reforms – and these are stated explicitly in many

policy documents, including the annual Economic Surveys -- have been to reduce food subsidies, to leave distribution to the market and to undermine food policy intervention and subsidies to the 'poorest of the poor'. As a matter of fact, the absolute and relative size of the food subsidy has reduced gradually. Between 2002-03 and 2010-012, the food subsidy bill of the Government of India shrunk in absolute nominal and real terms. As a share of GDP, food subsidies fell from 0.99 per cent in 2002-03 to 0.6 per cent in 2010-012. One of the key instruments of food policy in India has been the public distribution system (PDS). It has been found that the policy of narrow targeting introduced as part of liberalization has failed to address the problem of chronic hunger. Therefore, the Targeted PDS has led to the large-scale exclusion of genuinely needy persons from the PDS. It has affected the functioning and economic viability of the PDS network adversely and led to a collapse of the delivery system. It has failed to achieve the objective of price stabilization through the transfer of cereals from surplus to deficit regions of the country. It is believed to be true that given the balance between grain supply and demand, the persistence of regions of surplus and deficit grain production in the country, the underdeveloped nature of food grain markets in parts of the country, and under nutrition on a mass scale, there is still need for price stabilization nationally. The PDS plays a major role in this objective by ensuring access to certain minimum quantities of grain throughout the country and in all seasons at uniform prices. This goal is best achieved by reverting to a system of allocations of grain at uniform issue prices with universal coverage. At the same time, recognizing differences in needs and problems across states, States may be given greater flexibility in designing their food security systems, including in the use of the grain allocated for the PDS. Enlighten politics is necessary to improve the delivery systems of the government. Transparency and accountability in the functioning of the states should be followed by social audit.

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