

“CHALLENGES TO INDIA’S NATIONAL FOOD SECURITY ACT”

Dr.M.Madhumathi

Associate professor

Maharani women’s arts, commerce and Management college

Bangaluru

ABSTRACT:-

“The need for achieving food security is felt significantly in the recent years due to enormous pressure from the ever-increasing population in India. Owing to the change in preferences in crop production techniques over a period of time, several new challenges draw attention to food security. This article discusses various challenges to food security in India. Critical analysis is made on challenges like climate change, mismatch between water demand and availability and agricultural crop pricing and insurance and new trends in globalization. The financial implications like domestic subsidy on food, transparency in procurement and distribution of food, mitigating corruption, reaching the intended beneficiaries, impact of the Act on inflation and other macroeconomic indicators etc raises many questions over its successful implementation in India.”

Keywords:- Achieving, security, felt, significantly, enormous, pressure, globalization.

INTRODUCTION

The foreword of The Global Hunger Index published by International Food Policy Research Institute, Washington DC begin with the quote- “The dogs of hunger are not dead; some are sleeping, others are biting”. Unsurprisingly, the issue of hunger and food insecurity arising out of poverty or otherwise continues to concern the policy makers, administrators, social researchers and the academia, especially in the third world countries. India has been quite successful in ensuring ample availability of food in the country. But making food available is only one aspect of food security, though an important one. Economic access to food and its absorption by people for better nourishment are other important aspects of food security.

The fundamental right to food can be seen in the following Articles of the Indian Constitution.

1. Article 21 of our Constitution provides that ‘No person shall be deprived of his life or personal liberty except according to the procedure established by law. The key term deprivation of living which at many places referred to as right to life can correlate with the manipulation of right to food under the National Food Security Act (NFSA).
2. Article 39(a) ensures the right to an adequate means of livelihood to all people of the country.
3. Article 47 emphasizes the duty of the state to raise the nutritional standards and living standards of its people.

Thus, these articles and the conditions they created reiterated the need of the National Food Security Act (NFSA).

SIGNIFICANCE:

Despite buoyant economic growth in recent years, around one-third of India’s population (400 million people) still lives below the poverty line (Anon., 2010). According to the survey by United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) on Multi Dimensional Poverty Index, India is ranked at 75 among 109 countries. Summary of India’s rank in the surveys is in the table given below.

Table 1: Summary of India’s Rank in Different Surveys at the Global Level

| Sl.No | Index | Rank | Agency/year |
|-------|---|--------------|-------------|
| 1 | Human Development Index 136/186 UNDP, 2010 | 13 | |
| 2 | Global Hunger Index | 67/81 IFPRI, | 2011 |
| 3 | Multi Dimensional Poverty Index 75/109 UNDP, 2010 | | |
| 4 | Food Insecurity Index 66/105 DuPont chemicals, 2012 | | |

In all the Indices mentioned above, the performance of India is very poor compared to many of its neighbouring countries and African countries. India has been pursuing various social welfare measures including the Public Distribution System (PDS) in 1974 and the Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS) since December, 2000. But, the progress made by the country in

alleviating poverty and hunger is less than impressive. Hence, the right based legislation was conceived to ensure the legal entitlement to minimum food for its citizens.

Objectives:

- 1.To find out the challenges/issues with respect to NFSA
- 2.To provide suggestive measures of NFSA

Research Methodology:

Research Design: In view of the objectives of the study listed above, exploratory research design has been adopted. Exploratory research is one, which largely interprets the already available information, and it lays particular emphasis on analysis and interpretation of the existing and available information and it makes use of secondary data.

Sources of data: The study is based on secondary data. The data has been collected from various other reports like magazines, journals, published books and official websites. These are also referred to for the present study.

Tools of analysis: The data collected for the study is analyzed logically and meaningfully to arrive at meaningful conclusions.

Meaning of Food Security

‘Food Security’ as a concept has continuously evolved over the last few decades. Food security as defined in the 1974 World Food Summit underlines this: “*availability at all times of adequate world food supplies of basic foodstuffs to sustain a steady expansion of food consumption and to offset fluctuations in production and prices*”. Following the success of the Green Revolution, which helped to increase food production (food availability) but did not result in substantial reductions in poverty and levels of malnutrition, it was recognized that ‘*availability*’ does not assure ‘*accesses*’. In 1983, FAO expanded its concept of food security to include both ‘*physical and economic access*’ to food supply: “*ensuring that all people at all times have both physical and economic access to the basic food that they need*”.

The National Food Security Bill (NFSB)

Salient features

New Delhi: The National Food Security Bill, 2013 passed by the parliament and received President's assent on 10th September 2013 gives right to subsidized food grain to 67 percent of India's 1.2 billion people and provides for penalty for non-compliance by public servants.

- a. Seventy five percent of rural and 50 percent of the urban population entitled to five kg food grains per month at Rs 3, Rs 2. Re 1 per kg for rice, wheat and coarse grains, respectively.
- b. The work of identification of eligible households has been left to the states.
- c. Pregnant women and lactating mothers entitled to nutritious meals and maternity benefit of at least Rs 6,000 for six months.
- d. The central government will provide funds to states in case of short supply of food grain.
- e. The current food grain allocation of the states will be protected by the central government.
- f. The state governments will provide food security allowance to the beneficiaries in case of non-supply of food grain.
- g. Public distribution system to be reformed.
- h. The eldest woman in the household, 18 years or above will be the head of the household for the issue of the ration card.
- i. There will be state and district level redress mechanisms.

Laws and Schemes available relating to food security:

There are 6 major legislation and 15 schemes in India. Those are,

A. Acts:

- i. Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006.
- ii. Infant Milk Substitutes, Feeding Bottles and Infant foods Act, 1992.
- iii. National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005.
- iv. Prevention of Food Adulteration Act, 1954
- v. Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993.
- vi. National Food Security Act (NFSA) 2013. This Act provides barrier free right to food to the Indian Citizen.

B. Schemes:

- i. Annapurna Schemes 200-01.
- ii. Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY).

- iii. Applied Nutritional Programme (ANP).
- iv. Emergency Feeding Programme, 2001.
- v. Integrated Child Development Services and Schemes (ICDS) 1975.
- vi. Mid Day Meal Scheme, 1995.
- vii. National Food Security Mission, 2007.
- viii. National Maternity Benefits Schemes.
- ix. National Nutritional Policy (NNP).
- x. Public Food Distribution Scheme (PPS).
- xi. Sampoorna Grameen Rozgar Yojana (SGRY).
- xii. Schemes for supply of Food Grains of SC/ST/OBC/Hostels/Welfare Institution 2002-03.
- xiii. Targeted Public Distribution Schemes (TPDS).
- xiv. Village Grain Bank Schemes.
- xv. Wheat Based Nutrition Programme (WBNP).

CONSTRAINTS IN IMPLEMENTING THE NFS ACT

The challenges and constraints are many in implementing the Act. This looks particularly daunting when we see it in the background of our struggling economy, political and bureaucratic environment, will of the executives and awareness among the people to get benefitted from the Act. Some of the serious issues that have the potential to act as hurdles in implementing the NFS Act are discussed below.

1. Cost of Meeting the Food Requirement

The Act once implemented is expected to cost Rs 124,000 crore on the Government exchequer. This cost includes the cost of subsidy on food grains and its distribution. However, the miscellaneous expenditure to set up the administrative and bureaucratic structures like Central and State Food Commissions, vigilance committees etc cost still more and managing such a huge cost for the three years is an immediate and major challenge in front of the Government. According to the estimates of Commission for Agriculture Costs and Prices, the total outflow from the Government would be Rs. 682,163 crore (Gulati Ashok, 2013). This total cost comprises of Rs. 450,383 crore on food subsidy and Rs. 231,780 crore on other expenditure.

2. Challenge of Mitigating Corruption.

The issue of corruption has become an almost certain and single most major concern in every welfare measures initiated by the Government. Though, the rationale and spirit of several welfare schemes is not questioned, their way of implementation and yielding desired results is always doubted. In this environment of lack of probity, the successful operation of the ambitious NFS Act hangs in balance.

3. Apathy of Other Ministries and Departments about Social Welfare Measures.

Other ministries within the Government have been skeptical and lukewarm on most occasions. One example is the Ministry of railways, which transport nearly 90 per cent of the food grains of public distribution, does not bother to give any priority to the food transportation. The Wagons used to transport coal, chemical fertilizers and other hazardous things are used again to transport food grains rendering those unsuitable for consumption by human beings. Even many state Governments were not willing to be part of the Act and to quote from the Tamil Nadu's request to keep it out of the purview of the NFS Act.

4. Inadequate Storage Infrastructure.

The Food Corporation of India has the responsibility of ensuring proper storage of the grains after procurement. However, there are major issues concerned with the storage capacity and the way the food grains are stored by the Food Corporation of India. The table below shows the existing storage capacity and the shortage faced by the Food Corporation of India (FCI) over the years from 2008 to present year. At present, the FCI stores more than twice the storage capacity available with it. This is one major reason causing their wastage infested by fungus, rodents and subjecting for pilferage.

Table2: Existing Storage Capacity and the Shortage Faced by the FCI

| Year | Foodgrain Stock | Storage Capacity | Shortage |
|------|-----------------|------------------|----------|
| 2008 | 29.88 | 23.89 | 5.99 |
| 2009 | 41.94 | 25.27 | 16.67 |
| 2010 | 46.87 | 28.83 | 18.04 |
| 2011 | 54.13 | 31.61 | 22.52 |
| 2012 | 66.78 | 33.6 | 33.18 |

Figures in million tonnes

There is also a significant distortion between the buffer stock norms and the actual grains stored by the FCI. The food grain procurement must also continue as it is seen as a measure to ensure minimum returns to the farmers growing the food grains. The storage infrastructure even available with FCI itself is matter of concern as there is wide regional disparity from Northern region to the other regions of the country.

5. Identification of Beneficiaries.

The problem of identification of beneficiaries is two dimensional as both the Type 1 and Type 2 errors of noninclusion of eligible households and inclusion of non eligible households defeats the idea of giving the food grains to unprivileged and the most needy.

6. Wastage of Food Grains in FCI and Other.

The quantum of food grains being wasted at FCI because of improper storage and unscientific management is a major challenge in making the NFS Act successful. Continuity in fresh procurement, regular intervals after the harvesting season, continuous off take of the food grains from the FCI godowns are the important tools to avoid huge losses at the storage point.

7. Insufficient Anganwadis and Their Status

The benefits of Anganwadis are not reaching many children in the country. The spread of coverage of anganwadis in some states is especially poor. In such cases, how the benefits of the Act will percolate to the children and pregnant woman is to be seen as a challenge. On this front, the establishment of anganwadis to reach the unreached is to be taken on priority. Moreover, the condition of the existing anganwadis is far from comfortable. It is a critical issue because, the children are most susceptible to infection emanating out of unhygienic conditions.

8. Food during Crisis

Even though, the trend of food grain procurement has been on rise over the years, it is not mentioned as from where the food grains will be purchased during crisis. The severe drought as happened in 2002-03 can pose serious challenge in food procurement.

9. New trends in globalization.

Though globalization undoubtedly brought several positive changes like technology development and transfer, faster communication and transport and higher growth in the services sector, it has also resulted in challenges like more volatility in the financial markets and severe

competition among the entrepreneurs and growth inequity among various sections of the society. One of the consequences of globalization in India is the openness in trade. Thus, the rich have access to initiate global ventures where the poor would restrict themselves to localized works. As the protective policies are discouraged in post globalized world, the poor have little opportunity to compete with the rich leading to inequality and these concerns to food security in India.

10. Agricultural pricing and crop insurance issues.

The farmers in India face severe problem in marketing their crop produce after harvest due to lack of remunerative prices for the end-products. Natural hazards like floods and droughts occur frequently in India challenging crop productivity and food security. Hence the farmers must be provided with comprehensive crop insurance policy so that in the event of unforeseen climatic aberrations like cyclones and floods, they would be provided with compensation.

11. 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.

12. Mismatch between water demand and availability

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. Gross water demand for all users in India is expected to grow up from 750 BCM in 2000 to 1027 BCM by 2025. The gross water demand by irrigation sector alone is estimated to be 730 BCM by 2025. The total water received annually in India is about 4400 km, from precipitation and inflowing rivers which originate outside the country. India is projected to have the largest absolute increase in water withdrawals between 1995 and 2020. Total annual renewable freshwater available in India has been assessed as 2085 BCM. Per capita water availability in India is expected to go below the water scarce threshold level of 1700 m within the next two decades (projected to decrease to 1500 m³ by 2025 with wide inter-basin variations). Hence, the mismatch between the expanding

demand for and supply of water emerging and spreading steadily over space and time will have serious implications for meeting the food production growth targets and food security in India.

13. Rupee lost against the Dollar

The national food security Act, once implemented is expected to have wide spread implications on various sectors of economy and more prominently on primary sector. Though, the impact of the NFS Act over a long period is yet to be studied, the immediate jerk reaction of market after the Bill was introduced in Parliament underscores the significance it holds over the Government policy matters. From the introduction of food Bill in the Loksabha to its final enactment, the share market was on crash mode and the rupee lost heavily against the dollar sliding from little above Rs 60/- US \$ to nearly Rs 69/- US \$

SUGGESTIONS FOR EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ACT

In spite of Government's initiative to make the Act yield results, depending upon the discussions above following suggestions are recommended for effective implementation of the NFS Act.

1. Adoption of More Scientific and Safe Methods in Food Storage by FCI, SFC

The food storage by the FCI and State Food Corporation (SFC) needs to keep in time with the progress achieved in science to store the food grains to protect from infestation from insects, fungus and rodents. The adequate measures to stop pilferage and ensure accountable off take at the time of transportation to state Governments must be given due importance.

2. FCI Should Take Measures to Move Food Grains through Road Transport in Addition to the Railways

Though, it is unavoidable to use the network of railways to transport the food grains, it is important to make best use of other means of road and waterways according to the situation and demands.

3. Transparent Exclusion Criteria.

This is the most important measure that State Governments are supposed to initiate without any delay. This is the only practical and workable solution to ensure that, the eligible will only get the food grains and the ineligible people are excluded from the purview of the Act

4. Ensuring Proper Functioning of Anganwadi Centers.

Since, child nutrition is the bigger challenge than it appears, due importance must be given to establishing anganwadis in places where they are not working and also taking required measures to ensure their proper functioning. The maternal health care and providing maternal benefits as

envisaged in the Act must be looked after by the implementing agencies. The Vigilance committees must respond to the people's complaints and grievances without any lapse of time.

5. The Nutrition to Lactating Mothers and Children to be Specified on Qualitative Terms Based on Scientific Assessment.

This suggestion was made by the United Nation's Children Fund (UNICEF) while making observations on the draft version of the Bill. The UNICEF says that, children at different ages require different kind of food varying in proteins, vitamins and minerals and accordingly there must be an effort to prepare concentrated food as needed by the children's physiology. In the context of the discussion on the Food Security Act, the words of Dr M. S. Swaminathan hold special significance for agriculturists and for democratic approach of implementing the Act. **This Bill would succeed or fail depending upon the** production of the necessary quantities of wheat, rice or **nutri-millets**. Our farmers can be legitimately regarded as the guardians of the food security system in our country. Unfortunately farmer do not find place in this Bill. At least in State Food Commission, there should be one women and one male farmer. Subsequently, a farmer member was included in the State Food Commission which is a welcome step in giving voice to the farming community in the issues related to him.

Conclusion

Overall, it may be concluded that food security in India can be achieved by paying higher attention to issues such as climate change, integrated water management, agricultural pricing and crop insurance. The impact of globalization in the form of SEZs and other factors has been both positive and negative in terms of agricultural prosperity and there is a strong need to regulate the policies related to globalization for reducing its negative effects on food security in India. It is important that, India with more than 1.2 billion will get its long due status of a leader at the global level. But, the hunger and malnutrition affecting more than one third of citizens will not bode well for its ambitions. An African quote is apt to mention in this context. ***"Anybody's Hunger is Everybody's Shame"***. Dream of India becoming a global superpower can be achieved not before all its citizens hunger is addressed. National Food Security Act – though delayed, is a giant step in that direction.

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