



Food Security: From a Global to Indian Perspective

KEYWORDS

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ABSTRACT Assuring food to all human beings of the world is a magnacarta for human civilization and history. Food is linked to life, longevity and sustainability. It is considered a criminal offence to deny food to any creature of Mother Nature on planet earth, it is an essential condition for human rights, and all citizens of the world are entitled to the basic tenet of life food. An attempt has been made in the paper to analyse threats and opportunities before India while implementing Food Security Programme in a global context. A research enquiry has also been made to establish a linkage between Food security programmes, with reference to a pilot survey conducted in a large village in Assam with regard to food subsidy and food security.

The years 1970s witnessed biggest famines in Ethiopia and in 1973 in Bangladesh and in other African nations. That has raised a global concern for inter-related components of demand for food and supply of food. The global order for food, witnessed surplus food in developed world and deficit of food in some other less developed countries (LDCs); it resulted in weak distribution mechanism of food owing to territorial mismatch of demand and supply of food; giving rise to the complexity of distribution of food grains; cereals. The problem assumed further criticality owing to prices assigned to the food grains; and further the purchasing ability of the citizens of the various countries their affordability to procure the bare minimum essential quantum of food, calories needed to a sustainable level adequate enough to lead a decent and dignified human life. The aforesaid problems focused on food scarcity for some in some geographical territory of the globe; and the conscience of the governance to ensure food security, food justices, food delivery mechanism in a free, fair, reasonable environment with equitable distributive justice at fair and reasonable price. From aforesaid, discussion we can deduce the following issues at the crossroads of food security.

- Food accessibility consisting of supply side issues, production and stock through trade or aid.
- Food availability: Supply side.
- Food affordability: Demand side.
- Prevailing price one can pay for the food.
- Distributive justice with equity.

The United States department of agriculture (USDA) has described the term food security as: Food security household means access by all members at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life. Food security includes at a minimum

- The ready availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods, and
- An assured ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways that is without resorting to emergency food supplies, scavenging, stealing or other coping strategies.

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines three facets of food security: food availability, food access, and food use. Food availability is having available sufficient quantities of food on a consistent basis. Food access is having sufficient resources, both economic and physical, to obtain appropriate foods for a nutritious diet. Food use is the appropriate use based on knowledge of basic nutrition and care, as well as adequate water and sanitation. The UNO's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) adds a fourth facet when it said: Food security exists 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 world Food conference of 1974 emphasised on increasing food production in food-deficit countries and on creating a coordinated system of national and international grain reserves.

Statement of the problem:

According to the UN Millennium Development Goal Trade Facilitation (MDG) report 2014 India is home to the largest number of poor with 1/3rd of the world's 1.2 billion extreme poor living here. It also had the highest number of under five deaths in the world in 2012, with 1.4 million children dying before reaching their 5th birthday. According to report almost 60% defecate in open residue in India which also accounted for 17% of global maternal deaths.

South Asia, of which India is the largest and most populous country has fared worse than other, Asian region in most of the parameters. However, the region had done well in school enrollment. Considering the magnitude of the problem of poverty, child mortality, maternal deaths, infant death, a research enquiry on food security cannot be over emphasized in Indian context with a commitment of providing food to bare necessity of life to 1.25 billion mankind inhabit in this land.

Objectives of the study:

The present research enquiry has been undertaken with the following objectives.

- To analyse threats and opportunities before India while implementing Food Security Programme in a global context.

- To establish a linkage between Food security programmes, with reference to a pilot survey conducted in a large village in Assam with regard to food subsidy and food security.

Methodology:

The present researchers undertook a field survey in a village Amsoi in Morigaon District in Assam during the month of August and September 2014. It was done on a house to house enumeration in select location which was decided upon conveniently by the researchers. The household in the village were selected according to their proximity and easy accessibility by way of surface road condition. There are around 1500 household found in the village as per the record of Panchayat kept in office of the President of Gaon Panchayat of the village on the date of our enquiry from 5th August 2014. 10% of the total households i.e. around 150 were brought within the purview of direct interaction in order to elicit information regarding food subsidy, food distribution mechanism.

Opposition from Global leader on India’s Food Security:

One or two developed nations wants greater access to India’s market simpler rules of engagement, and a stronger intellectual protection regime, pleading for rule based rule. We recall in 1980’s the USA imposed voluntary export restriction (VER’s) to curb export from a rapidly growing Japan.

The WTO’s position said excessive stock piling artificially affects global food price. The opposition to a cap on stock piling is not based on the aim providing subsidies to the poor or helping marginal farmers. The objectives are about skewed world food prices and about the pricing mechanism.

On buying of food at support prices from farmers, more than 50% of the population, stock it and supply it to the poor at low prices. The WTO rules say that these subsidies cannot cross 10% of the value of food output. We contest it to be not a fair proposition because the pricing is calculated at rates set in 1986-88, which artificially lower the food subsidy ceiling. India cannot agree to such term. (The Telegraph, Aug 2014)

Execution in India:

Under this mandate the India Food Security Act, (IFSA) 2013 primarily touches upon food distribution, food production and resilience which were linked to food justice. There is no point in giving merely right to food, if it cannot be delivered effectively. It proposes to cover 75pc and 50pc, respectively, of rural and urban populations, with an entitlement of 5 kg per person per month of food grain at issue prices of Rs. 2 and Rs. 3 per kg for wheat and rice respectively. The food subsidy cost under IFSA is estimated at Rs. 1, 24,502 crore for 2013-14, and total food grain requirement is estimated at 61.2 million tones. There will be increment like in subsidy in the following years.

Year	Rs (in Crore)
2011-12	72,823
2012-13	85000
2013-14	92000
2014-15(estimated)	1,15,000

This domestic commitment has given rise to contest is a WTO’s Ninth Ministerial conference in Bali on December 5-6, 2013 on the ground that it violates the Peace clause of WTO. The Food Security Act 2013 may fall under market distorting subsidy since it will require government to procure at market price and sell it at below market price to two-third of India’s population. The member nations have to ensure that stocks procured under food security programmes do not distort trade. The peace clause will allow India to subsidize foodgrains for the poor as a welfare measure over and above the ten percent ceiling on farm subsidy. The WTO summit in Bali on Dec, 5-6, 2013, the new agreement allows India to stock foodgrains for distribution to its poor and has also ensured that the clause cannot be challenged in any arbitration forum by member nations, That was possible after the agreement on public stockholding of foodgrains breaching the 10% (percent) subsidy limit was crafted without tying it down to a four year.

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Table: Food Subsidy granted by Government

Source: The Telegraph Dated: 25-10-2014

India has informed the UN General Assembly in October 2014 that developing countries must have the freedom to use food reserves to feed the poor without the threat of sanction or any stern action from WTO. Food security is in consonance with Millennium Development Goal 2008 and is central to the pursuit poverty eradication and sustainable development. Perhaps a solution on the problem of food security can be found out by making changes in WTO rules and India has committed to its consent in WTO Bali Declaration in Dec 2013. While urgency has been shown at WTO Geneva Negotiation in October 2013 as a carry forward to the trade facilitation committed in Bali Declaration but the same urgency has not been shown in respect of food security. There is need for maintaining an overall balance even in a limited package where Bali outcome were negotiated as a package and not in isolation. Developing countries including India must have the freedom to use food reserves to feed their poor without the threat of sanction.

Findings of the Field Survey:

- In course our field survey we come across the household having their own land and cultivate the land. On account of shortage of liquidity at their disposal they borrow money from Village Money lenders in order to procure fertilizers, manures and seeds during the sowing season with a tough condition as follows:

That the principal amount generally ranging Rs 1000/- per borrower in the village on an average, which will be repaid in cash.

That the interest part is decided not in cash but it will repaid in the form of kind that is one mounds Paddy equivalent to 40kg for a term of period till the total principal amount is cleared of or settled. This perpetuates the vicious cycle of rural indebtedness and that in true sense can never be settled. The money lenders are also not interest-

ed in total liquidation of debt of the farmer because they want to perpetuate interest obligation of the borrower and thereby derive paddy as per contractual rate on a regular basis.

- Of the 65% of the landless labourer/marginal farmer of the village under our survey, it has been reported to us during our field survey in the month of Sept 2014 that 10% of the 1500 household i.e. around 150 do not enjoy self sufficiency in domestic food grain consumption. Obviously they are dependent on supply of food coming from outside agencies.
- As a close participant observer among the landless cultivator cum wage earners from cultivation by the present researchers during 5th September to 20th September 2014, we have come across the prevalence of demonetization of economy in our study area. Under this environment the large land holders holding land size as high as 10 bighas per household. Some are having more than 25 bighas of land but they do not have liquid cash in their hand. They suffer from the liquidity crunch. As a result all the payments are made not in cash but in kind i.e. in the shape of paddy. The landless cultivators also suffer from shortage of liquidity as they are earning their income out of paddy which for around 1300 families out of 2500 is more or less in terms of meeting their foodgrain consumption at home. Strongly at the same time they encounter difficulties in meeting their other household expenditure for shelter, grocery items, clothing, family health care, children education even at primary level. Demonetization appears to have played a role of vicious cycle of poverty. When the household under observation enjoy the food grain but do not have liquid cash to meet urgent domestic expenditure and other consumption requirement.
- Some Marginal farmers are holding land ranging from 3 to 5 bighas, they are treated as Marginal Farmers while supplement their livelihood all throughout the year. They are wage based worker or landless cultivator on sharing cropping basis which is locally called "Aadhi"
- Shortage of liquidity creates a propensity for borrowing from professional money lenders, neighborhood household and other village money lenders at an exorbitant rate of interest. This perpetuates the vicious cycle of poverty making us to go back to the concept of egg before the hen and vice versa.
- It has been reported by the respondent of the village that they are not in a position to derive substantial benefit out of (PDS). Although the villages under our survey have got approved Ration Shops but the supply of food grains under PDS at a subsidised rate is not adequate nor is it regular. This has been made the people unhappy about distribution mechanism of food grains.
- On our enquiry the respondents in the village especially marginal farmers have reported that they have not heard about food subsidy nor do they derive any benefit out of it. However the secretary and presidents of the Gaon Panchayat are aware about the scheme but the benefit under the scheme could not percolate down to the household till date.

This state of affair has been made us to recommend that direct cash transfer (DCT) through a bank account un-

der direct centrally administered poverty alleviation programme would ameliorate the magnitude of rural poverty. Besides the (DCT) would also serve dual purpose by ensuring the financial inclusion bringing cash benefit in the account of the household and at the same time enhance domestic liquidity. This enables the nation to attain inclusive growth with justice and equity.

The budgetary provision made for DCT in the Union Budget entails the deployment of fiscal resources from tax payers' money to ensure social goal by striving to remove regional economic disparities, interstate as well as intra state, inter regional economic discrepancies. The Indian Parliament perhaps would not mind to appropriate tax payers' fiscal resources for greater socio economic development. When the nation honestly pursues this resource allocation, it would then only ensure inclusive growth.

Current focus is on providing food security to all and the 40% increase in the supply of subsidized grain under the food security law. From the experience of the study area it is gathered that the foodgrain provided under the Food Security Act was too less. Hence, monthly entitlement of 5 kg foodgrain per person be increased to 7kg.

According to an estimate the average economic cost of grain was about Rs 25000 per ton apart from expenditure of storage, advance cost of delivering to 81 crore people. The food security law aims to give over 61 million tons of wheat, Rice and Coarse grains priced between Rs1 and Rs 3 per kg to 81 crore people (Economic Times, Sep2014)

If the nation fails to provide security for food grains and allow the people to come out of poverty level, the food crisis, the starvation deaths and eventual economic disparity that will outbreak perhaps the magnitude would no longer be lower than the world war. Hence, insertion of peace clause in Bali Summit declaration is a step in the right direction to save the human lives. We come across the co-existence of very rich and sat the same time the people starving for food in this country. Hence present research enquiry in select pockets is pertinent.

Conclusion:

India shall have to go slow while negotiating with member nation in WTO summit because she has to protect her interest while penetrating into global market with Indian products without antagonizing the other trading partners. India should try to comply with the time frame 2017 agreed upon to classify its position on food subsidy.

While on the other hand, another clause called Trade Facilitation (TF) which is about simpler speedier and more reliable border processes, making it easier goods and services to cross international border. This is not a concession but a step to boost their domestic economies. Our research experience shows that (TF) will create jobs by reducing the unit cost of production. For example Chili 5 million dollar custom reform translated into annual saving of \$12 million to business. In Peru customs revenue more than tripled following trade facilitation reforms (Economic Times, Nov 2013)

The TFA Trade aim simplifying custom procedure increasing transparency and reducing transaction cost is published by US and other developed nation as they seek to improve their declining economies through an unhindered international trade by way of a uniform and easy procedure and customs.

The study conducted by present researcher in a small village in Morigaon district may be symbolizing representation of similar situation in other parts of the country. We feel that the shortcomings of the existing PDS system can be overcome by an efficient administration of food security Act because in that case the households would be able to derive maximum supply of foodgrains at required quantity at a regular periodic intervals.

We therefore recommend that the government agency / institution of self governance like Panchayat should have taken initiative to educate the household and the landless labourer about the food subsidy, food security, its benefits and their right to avail the benefit. Some printed materials, booklets may be published and distributed in local language to the household, land owners, cultivators and workers whom the scheme targets. Unless we penetrate in to the target group of beneficiary and yield the benefit in tangible shape by way of foodgrains in their hands, the aim of achieving inclusive growth remain unfulfilled.

The Panchayat members may be brought within training programme to give them a firsthand exposure to the scheme, the manner of its administration and the benefit percolated down to them. This is not only an essential but substantial condition to achieve financial outreach combined with social welfare distributive justice and equity.

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