



National Food Security Act - Related Issues

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ABSTRACT

National Food Security act is the biggest ever food security program in the history of world for distributing highly subsidized food by any Government through a right based approach. This food security program is also important when we know that half of our country's children under five year are classed as chronically malnourished and more than one third of Indians aged 15-49 are undernourished. Under such situation National Food Security Act 2013 has very important role to play. It is also known as Right to food act which was passed and signed in to law in Sept. 2013. This paper will throw light on various issues and challenges related to implementation of food security act.

KEYWORDS

Human beings cannot survive without food. In India if a person steal some food or other articles to get food is an offence and such activities are punishable under the law. If a person is sentenced for committing such offence he is provided food, shelter, clothes in prison. Now here question arises that should society encourage such offences or it should provide food to human beings as a right to life?

The whole issue is interpreted as a right to life by supreme court and has made it a part of basic structure of constitution. The National food security bill was passed by both the houses of parliament and was given a nod by the president on Sept. 12, 2013, and now become an act. This is the largest food security program in the world. The aim of this is to address the issues of food insecurity and inequality in access of food across different parts of our country. Under this act beneficiaries are able to purchase 5 kg per eligible person per month of cereal at the subsidized price i.e. rice at Rs. 3 per kg, wheat at Rs. 2 per kg and coarse grain Rs. 1 per kg. pregnant women and lactating mothers are entitled to a nutritious take home ration of 600 calories and maternity benefit of at least Rs. 6000 for six months. Children of 6 month to 14 years are to receive free hot meals or take home ration. On the whole it include Mid-day meal scheme, Integrated child development scheme and public distribution system. The mid-day meal and integrated child development service schemes are universal in nature where as P.D.S will reach 2/3rd of population i.e. 75% in rural areas and 50% in urban areas.

India currently has the largest number of undernourished people in the world in spite of the fact that there has been an impressive economic progress with achievements in domain of agriculture contributing significantly. However, food self sufficiency does not automatically reflect food security for the entire population at all the time. To be effective, food security needs to manifest in all its dimensions, covering all regions and all economic strata of society.

When we talk about making the food available, it is not enough for food stuffs to be physically available. They also have to satisfy the following.

1. Satisfy the dietary needs
2. It must be safe i.e free from toxic elements.
3. It must be of good quality.
4. It must be culturally acceptable.

Issues and Challenges Ahead:-

For proper implementation of this act, states are required a national strategy to ensure food security for all. There are fol-

lowing challenges in the way of proper implementation of this act.

Production of Food:-

After remaining food deficit country for about two decades after independence, India became a food surplus state. Our country now produce enough food to feed all its people. If there is increase in hunger in some parts of India, it is because of short term natural events like drought etc. India no longer suffer through large scale famines as it has in the past. Per capita availability of food grains has also increased from 436gm per day in 2008 so 463gm per day in 2011. The per capita availability of cereals alone increased from 334 gms to 422gms. On the other hand availability of pulses has declined deeply from 61 gm per day to 33 gm per day, which shows that India has succeeded in terms of cereals, but has failed to increase production of pulses to fulfill the needs of growing population.

Nutrition:-

The per capita calories intake for rural population decline from 2364K per day in 1987-88 to 2030 K per day in 1999-2000. These both were below the norms of 2400 calories in rural areas. However there is controversy over the minimum calories.

However beside this according to world development indicator shows that 46% of the child population in India suffer from malnutrition. The average protein content of Indian diet is only 59gm per day, per capita availability of milk was 48 kg in 1960 has gone to 83kg in 2003-04. But till now 60% of mothers are malnourished. According to census of 2001 only 36% of households had access to safe drinking water. These problems must be tackled at priority basis.

A related issue is efficiency of food grain procurement, transportation and distribution chain via central pool by the Food Corporation of India. Steps should be taken to reduce wastage of food

Maintaining Buffer Stock:-

Maintaining buffer stock is another major problem. In fact additional procurement, storage and distribution by FCI under NFSA would require a rail head connection and availability of wagons with Indian railways. So there is need to enhance investment in agricultural infrastructure.

Corruption:-

The next challenge is to stop corruption and leakage. It is necessary to ensure proper monitoring under NFSA at last step distribution point in states. The use of fake ration cards

in these shops should be checked. In some states like Tamil Nadu and Kerala Computerization of data has been done by using new technologies to check the use of fake ration cards. This must be followed in other parts of country.

Poverty:-

Poverty is a social Phenomenon in which a section of the society is unable to fulfill even its basic needs of life. In 1993-94 there was 320 million population under the poverty line, which is decline to 300 Million in 2004-05. Data released by Planning Commission in 2007 show that during 2004-05 people below poverty line are 27.5% against 36% during 1993-94. So poverty is another obstacle in the way of proper implementation of this act.

Another long terms challenge is of qualitative improvement in food absorption, especially for women and children by creating synergies between public health, sanitation, education and agriculture interventions. A strategy has to identify local convergence between the centrally sponsored mid-day meal scheme, the total sanitation campaign, national rural health mission and integrated child development program. All these programmes has to be covered and achieved through effective public and private partnership in states at the grass root level.

Accessibility of food:-

India has made significant progress in reducing problem of hunger. N.S.S. data shows that less than 10% of people suffer from hunger. But in poor states like Bihar and Orissa the percentage of people suffering from hunger is higher. In India there are no famines since independence. The last one was the Bengal famine of 1943. Country's food stocks has increased more than 65 million in recent years and yet hunger and malnutrition continuous in country. Half of women and 70% of children suffer from anemia. So Mahatma Gandhi's dream "hunger free India" is far away. A section of society sleep hungry, despite that our godowns are overflowing with huge stock of food grains. All this indicate that just availability of food does not provide food security.

Public Distribution System (PDS):-

The main purpose of PDS in India was to act as price support program for consumers during period of food shortage in 1960's. And PDS become subject of debate in 2001 as people in one part of India died of starvation while near about 50 million tones of food grain was rotting in FCI godowns. A two tier card system was introduced in order to represent a difference between above and below poverty line card holders. These categories are "Above Poverty Line" (APL), below poverty line (BPL) and "Antodaya Anna Yojana" (AAY) Cards. A house hold with annual income Rs. 17000 was regarded as being APL household, a house hold having income between 12000-17000 was considered as BPL and AAY were the poorest of the poor house hold. NFSA centers and targeted public distribution system. So under this system a more targeted approach is adopted.

But there are chances of errors in targeting and exclusions, with many eligible household missing out and many cards allocated to the wrong categories this happen with daily wage earners, who were kept out of the target groups because of their income levels but could be food insecure household. Similarly many poor farmers have been issued BPL Cards but they do not need full quota of subsidized grain. So there are several issues with TPDS and regarding quantity, variety and price of subsidized food grains.

Financial Issues:-

The estimated financial assistance likely to flow to states and U.T.'s would annually stand Rs. 4341 crore after the centre shares the costs. A present, the estimated burden on states is around 8500 crore. According to the decision, the union govt. will share the expenditure up to 50% in case of general states and 75% in case of 13 special category states and U.T.'s. The total cost may increase to 1,57701 crore in 2015-16. This act also involve new financial implications in addition to food sub-

sidy. This includes setting up and running of state food commissions and district Grievance redressal offices, expenditure on transportation of food grains and cash benefits to pregnant and lactating mothers. These costs still may be an under estimate since they do not include many other expenditures e.g. cost of establishment of fair price shops, setting up of vigilance committees etc.

Adequate food must be available to everyone. Infants young children, elder people, physically and mentally disabled, people with medical problems etc. need to be identified as deserving special attention. So adequate food must be accessible in ways that are sustainable. In other words availability and accessibility of food far long time must be ensured. Because sufficient and adequate food is pre-condition to growth and development.

As there are many challenges in implementation of food security act. But we have to achieve the goal of "hunger free India", because survival without food is not possible, and lack of food for human beings would also create problems of maintaining law and order.

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