

BRITTLENESS OF FOOD PROTECTION IN INDIA IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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ABSTRACT

India is a developing country having 2nd highest population in the world. Even after 66 years of its independence, Country is facing a serious issue of poverty and underfeeding. The Government of India has introduced many welfare schemes for which huge subsidies are provided under various bills, acts or laws. The implementation of National Food Security Act (NFSA) will be done through the existing Public Distribution System (PDS) with certain modifications. When we look at the history of PDS in India it has lot of issues in terms of proper governance.

Key words: India,

INTRODUCTION

The governance issues in the existing system may be resolved by reducing the leakage in PDS and improving the scientific storage facility. The concern of food security and poverty may be resolved by implementing the better governance in the existing system without additional burden of food subsidy by NFSA. If government strengthens the policies of employment opportunities and better education, people will be benefited indirectly from it and the issue of food security may be resolved by itself.

The National Food Security Act – 2013 with respect to policy framing, current distribution system reveals that food security is the concern for India but food security act is not the only solution. The current National Food Security Act requires to be made more specific and clear about many provisions. Looking to the current status of the act, authors observed that the government may find difficulties in achieving food security. Proper Formulation of government policies and its implementation with transparent system can help in achieving food security for the citizens of India. It offers the opportunity to strengthen national solidarity in the fight to end hunger, malnutrition and poverty. Falling water tables, eroding soils and rising temperatures make it difficult to feed growing populations. As a result, control of arable land and water resources is moving to center stage in the global struggle for food security.

Challenges and Way Ahead

There is a compelling need to operationalise the concept of nutrition security which implies physical, economic and social access to balanced diet, clean drinking water, safe environment, and health care. Ensuring food security alone will aid in reducing hunger but will not eliminate malnutrition or impact nutrition status largely if other components such as safe drinking water and health care are also not envisaged.

Here some challenges to consider:

Falling water tables

In India some 190 million people are being fed with grain produced by over pumping groundwater. For China, the number is 130 million. Aquifer depletion now threatens harvests in the big three grain producers, China, India and the United States that together produce half of the world's grain. The question is not whether water shortages will affect future harvests in these countries, but rather when they will do so.

More food less days

In Nigeria, 27% of families experience foodless days. In India, it is 24%; in Peru, 14%. The world is in transition from an era dominated by surpluses to one defined by scarcity. Not eating at all on some days is how the world's poorest are coping with the doubling of world grain prices since 2006. But even as we face new constraints on future production, the world population is growing by 80 million people each year.

Slowing irrigation

Water supply is now the principal constraint on efforts to expand world food production. During the last half of the 20th century, the world's irrigated area expanded from some 250 million acres in 1950 to roughly 700 million in 2000. This near tripling of world irrigation within 50 years was historically unique. Since then, the growth in irrigation has come to a near standstill, expanding only 10% between 2000 and 2010.

Increasing soil erosion

Nearly a third of the world's cropland is losing topsoil faster than new soil is forming. This reduces the land's inherent fertility. Future food production is also threatened by soil erosion. The thin layer of topsoil that covers the earth's land surface was formed over long stretches of geological time as new soil formation exceeded the natural rate of erosion. Sometime within the last century, the situation was reversed as soil erosion began to exceed new soil form. Now, nearly a third of the world's cropland is now losing topsoil faster than new soil is forming. Soil that was formed on a geological time scale is being lost on a human time scale. Peak soil is now history.

Climate changes

The generation of farmers now on the land is the first to face manmade climate change. Agriculture as it exists today developed over 11,000 years of rather remarkable climate stability. It has evolved to maximize production within that climate system. Now, suddenly, the climate is changing. With each passing year, the agricultural system is more and more out of sync with the climate system.

Implementing measures to improve agricultural productivity and food storage

The government policy needs to adopt an integrated policy framework to facilitate the increased use of irrigation and newer farming techniques. The measures should focus mainly on rationale distribution of cultivable land, improving the size of the farms and providing security to the tenant cultivators apart from providing the farmers with improved technology for cultivation and improved inputs like irrigation facilities, availability of better quality seeds, fertilizers and credits at lower interest rates. One main reason why food is not distributed equitably is that a significant amount is wasted.

It would be useful to adopt strategies for food storage which have been implemented successfully in other countries. For example, China has an excellent system of grain storage education and research. The country has invested in building advanced storage facilities that are armored with modern equipments. India can take professional help from the China in order to improve the quality of food storing facilities so that the food grains that are wasted and spoiled could be used to satisfy the hunger of those people who really need it.

Ensuring food availability and accessibility to below poverty line (BPL) candidates

It is essential to ensure availability of food grains to the common people at an affordable price. This can be done by more accurate targeting of the BPL population so that they get food at substantially low price. There is a problem associated with the BPL listing. There is a debate about the exact number of people falling under this category. The estimates of the government are around 30 per cent of the population. The Planning Commission (under the Government of India) has now recommended a 37 per cent cut off based on the Tendulkar Committee report. Besides helping out the BPL population, there should be a provision for subsidy on the sale of food grains to above poverty line (APL) customers too. Also, all restrictions on food grains regarding inter-State movement, stocking, exports and trade financing should be removed. This will reduce the food prices and increase affordability. The Public Distribution System must be made transparent and reliable.