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INDIAN FOOD SECURITY SCENARIO AND ACCESS TO NUTRITIONAL FOOD FOR ALL (ESPECIALLY WOMEN AND CHILDREN) - VISION 2030 PRAGMATISM

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ABSTRACT

Today, India is not only self-sufficient in food production but also has substantial food reserve, still there are widespread hunger, chronic malnutrition and starvation deaths. Under nutrition is a problem among pregnant and lactating mothers, new-born and children calls for serious consideration as it results in irreversible cumulative growth and development deficits, impairing adult productivity later. Abiding to international commitment and national exigencies, Right to food and nutritional security is now statutorily recognized under the National Food Security Act, 2013 as any other economic and social right. Various programmes and schemes launched from time to time in ensuring food security are based on three dimensions – availability, access and absorption. India has many nutrition intervention programmes under different government ministries which include ICDS, MDMS, SABLA, special nutrition programme. Hunger is attributed to chronic food insecurity and even today policy makers attempt to find solutions to the problem of hunger and malnutrition in food security. Eradicating poverty and hunger are among the goals of the Millennium Development Goals as well as the recent Sustainable Development Goals (SDG-2) – vision 2030 Agenda adopted by UN Member States in 2015. Unfortunately, India ranks 103rd among 119 countries in the Global Hunger Index which describes India's hunger condition as 'serious'. The present study attempts to appraise and analyze the food and nutritional security efforts for all and especially to women and children, thereby remediate and identify the possibility of attaining Sustainable Development Goals (vision 2030) which India should not fail.

Keywords: Food security, Right to food, malnutrition, Sustainable Development Goals (SDG-2), Global Hunger Index, Nutrition Strategy etc.

“The first essential component of social justice is adequate food for all mankind” – Norman Borlaug

INTRODUCTION

Today, India is not only self-sufficient in food production but also has substantial food reserve still there are widespread hunger, chronic malnutrition and starvation deaths. Since, Independence massive governmental programmes and schemes relating to food security, employment and social welfare were established to eradicate hunger and malnutrition and some of

the programmes appear to be innovative and unique in the world. However, it appears that policies and programmes relating to food security concentrated only on enhancing agricultural production, but ignored household level food security and individual capabilities to acquire sufficient food.

The right to food, like any other economic and social right, has been recognized only in the recent times, and its specific nature, moral or legal, individual or collective, absolute or conditional right is still under discussion. The measures taken by the government were designed to ensure and stabilize food production, storage and distribution but did not recognize rights of either farmers or citizens. Moreover, milder forms of chronic energy deficiency still persists in many parts of the country, serious malnutrition and even widespread starvation among children and the aged among tribal belts mainly because of no purchasing power. Under nutrition is a problem among – pregnant and lactating women, new-born (low birth weight <2.5kgs), Vitamin A deficiency, universal access to iodised salt not achieved, anemia due to iron deficiency).

In pursuance of the constitutional and the international conventions, providing food security has been focus of the Government's planning and policy. The nutritional status of the population, and especially women and children, also needs to be improved to enhance quality of human resource of the country. The National Food Security Act, 2013 marks a paradigm shift in addressing the problem of food security from the current welfare approach to a right based approach. Besides expanding coverage of the Targeted Public Distribution System the legislation aims to confer legal rights on eligible beneficiaries to receive entitled quantities of food grains at highly subsidized prices. It will also confer rights on women and children to receive meal free of charge.

TACKLING HUNGER, MALNUTRITION AND RIGHT TO FOOD:

Hunger and malnutrition is not a new affliction and they have been persistent features of human history. There are two types of hunger, namely, explicit hunger and chronic or endemic hunger. Explicit hunger – is largely self-reported and is due to non-availability of sufficient food. This type of hunger is measured by asking people about availability of two square meals a day. Method often adopted is to question on the ground of subjectivity and the nature of the respondent. Chronic/endemic hunger – manifests itself in a lower intake of essential calories, proteins, fats and micronutrients resulting in under development of body and mind. This kind of hunger occurs when human body gets used to having less food than necessary for healthy development leading to malnutrition. This type of hidden hunger can be measured by using objective indicators such as calorie consumption, body-mass index, stunting and lack of sufficient variety of food intake.

Nutrition: Human nutrition can be defined as the science of food and how it is related to health. It involves the processes where all people (all living organisms) receive and process the nutrients essential for life. Nutrients themselves are defined as the chemical compounds from food that are found in a person's diet such as carbohydrates, fats, minerals, proteins, vitamins and water. Nutrients are essential for life, they play a variety of vital life roles such as in the provision of energy, the promotion of growth and development and the regulation of bodily processes.

International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) developed a composite index on hunger called Global Hunger Index (GHI) – which captures three dimensions of hunger – access to food, shortfalls in nutritional status of children and child mortality. As per 2011 estimate of IFPRI there are 230 million Indians who go hungry every day, 21 per cent of its population is undernourished, nearly 44 per cent of its children below five years of age are underweight and 7 per cent of them are dying before reaching 5 years of age. Hunger is thus both a cause and effect of poverty. Hunger is attributed to chronic food insecurity and even today policy makers attempt to find solutions to the problem of hunger and malnutrition in food security.

The advent of welfare state and the need to prevent social unrest institutionalized State control over food production and distribution as policy goals of the State without emphasizing individual right to food. The roots of modern concept of right to food can be traced to the compulsions of democratic politics and international law and politics rather than in domestic law. These developments appear to be the basis for looking at the right to food from at least three different perspectives especially in India. Firstly, from the jurisprudential point of view when we look at the right to food as a moral or social right Secondly, one can develop such a right by referring to international declarations and conventions starting with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Thirdly, from the perspective of the Indian Constitution, especially as the Directive Principles of State Policy and fundamental rights.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights and International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, to which India is a signatory, also cast responsibilities on all State parties to recognize the right of everyone to adequate food. Eradicating extreme poverty and hunger is one of the goals under the Millennium Development Goals of the United Nations.

MEANING OF FOOD SECURITY:

FAO in its 'The State of Food Insecurity, 2001' Report, defined Food Security as: 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. World Development Report (1986) - as 'access by all people at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life'. Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO, 1983) - 'ensuring that all people at all times have both physical and economic access to basic food they need. Staatz (1990) - 'the ability to assure, on a long-term basis, that the food system provides the total population access to a timely, reliable and nutritionally adequate supply of food'

Points from the definition:

1. Food security involves adequate physical availability of food to the entire population in a country
2. People have enough purchasing power so that they can acquire the food they need
3. For healthy life, the food available should be adequate in quality as well as quantity to meet nutritional requirements
4. A nation may acquire self-sufficiency in food (at a point of time) but the concept of food security necessitates that, timely, reliable and nutritionally adequate supply of food (should be available on long-term basis)

Stages of food security for a developing country: Stage 1: to make an adequate quantity of cereals available to all; Stage 2: adequate availability of cereals and pulses; Stage 3: to include cereals, pulses, milk and milk products; Stage 4: to include cereals, pulses, milk and milk products, vegetables and fruits, fish, eggs and meat.

RIGHT TO FOOD AND INDIAN CONSTITUTION:

The right to life guaranteed under Article 21 of the Constitution was initially interpreted in a very narrow, literal and restrictive sense to mean a protection against arbitrary deprivation of life. Later judges of Supreme Court (Post-emergency era) took an expansive view of life and liberty to include in the meaning of the right to life every aspect that made life meaningful, worthwhile. Further

the court stated that 'the right to life is guaranteed in any civilized society that would take within its sweep the right to food'¹.

Article 47 of DPSP imposes an obligation on State: The State shall regard the raising of level of nutrition and the standard of living of its people and the improvement of public health as among its primary duties and, in particular. Certain DPSPs such as right to an adequate means of livelihood,² right to work, education and public assistance in cases of unemployment, older age, sickness and disablement and in other cases of underserved want,³ living wages for workers and the principles relating to the duty of the State to secure a social order for the promotion of welfare are tough to be sufficient to ensure the right to food.

FOOD SECURITY IN INDIA - POLICIES AND PROGRAMMES:

The central thrust of food policy both at national levels and international levels is achieving food security for all, and food security is achieved 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 - (FAO). However, several steps have been taken by both the Central and State Governments establishing food security through strengthening the food and nutrition safety nets for the economically and socially under privileged sections of society.

The central thrusts of food security are availability of food, access to food, and absorption of food in the body. To achieve the above three components of food security massive programmes were initiated by successive government since independence. Initially, food security policies and programmes concentrated on increasing food production at national level (green revolution) and on effective distribution of some basic food items through PDS. (Green revolution helped in raising food grains productivity but lacked in distribution). Studies by economists indicated that the PDS benefits were not reaching the poor and therefore, it was revamped during 1997 in the form of Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS). Later, to ensure food security (covering all three dimensions) - mainly availability, access and absorption, various programmes and schemes were launched from time to time.

Those programmes can be broadly classified into four categories (list is not exhaustive but illustrative):

- First, entitlement feeding programmes through ICDS Scheme and MDMS. (ICDS scheme, 1975 - community based child development programme - holistic development of child of age 6yrs, expectant and nursing mothers and adolescent girls - provides for package of services comprising supplementary nutrition, immunization, health checkups, re-school education, nutritional and health education)
- Second, food subsidy programmes such as TDPS including Antyodaya and Annapurna Yojanas.⁴
- Third, employment programmes under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005, Sampoorna Grameen Rozgar Yojana, National Food for Work Programme and the like.
- Fourth, social security programmes such as National Maternity Benefit Scheme,⁵ National Old-Age Pension Scheme⁶ and National Family Benefit Scheme.⁷

¹Shantistar Builders v. Narayan Khimalal Totame, AIR 1990 SC 630

² Constitution of India: Article 39

³ Constitution of India: Article 41

⁴ Poorest of the poor holding special yellow ration cards are given 25kg of food grains per family per month at the rate of Rs. 2 per kg for wheat and Rs. 3 for rice through PDS system

⁵ Under the scheme a BPL woman is paid Rs. 500 at the first two births

In 2016, the government launched a number of programmes to remove bottlenecks for greater agricultural productivity especially in rain-fed areas to double farmers' income by 2022. They include – the National Food Security Mission, Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana (RKVY), the Integrated Schemes on Oil Seeds, Pulses, Palm oil and Maize (ISOPOM), Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana, the e-marketplace as well as a massive irrigation and soil and water harvesting programme to increase the country's gross irrigated area⁸.

India has many nutrition intervention programmes under different government ministries. Programmes functioning under the National Nutrition Mission are ICDS, SABLA, Special Nutrition Programme, Balwadi Nutrition Programme, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan under which the Mid-Day Meals Scheme (MDMS) comes and Tamil Nadu Integrated Nutrition Programme.

Nutrition Strategy⁹:

Over the years, various government initiatives have been launched which seek to improve the nutrition status in the country. These include the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), the National Health Mission (NHM), and the Janani Suraksha Yojana, among others. The strategy notes that despite improvements over the years, concerns regarding malnutrition have persisted. NITI Aayog has released the National Nutrition Strategy, 2017 which has decentralized approach, aiming to strengthen the ownership of Panchayati Raj institutions and urban local bodies over nutrition initiatives. *Reduction of Undernutrition* - The strategy aims to reduce all forms of undernutrition by 2030, with a focus on the most vulnerable and critical age groups. It also aims to assist in achieving the targets under the Sustainable Development Goals¹⁰ related to nutrition and health. *Healthcare and Nutrition among Children* - the strategy proposes to launch interventions with a focus on improving healthcare and nutrition among children under the age of three years. These interventions will include: i) promotion of breast -feeding for the first six months after birth, ii) universal access to infant and young child care (including ICDS and creches), iii) enhanced care, patient referrals, and management of severely undernourished and sick children, and iv) micronutrient supplements and bi-annual de-worming for young children.

National Nutrition Mission¹¹: The government launched National Nutrition Mission (NNM) in March 2018 to tackle the problems of under-nutrition, low birth weight and stunting, with a budget of Rs. 9,046 crore for a period of three years. The mission, commencing 2017-18, has a target to reduce under-nutrition and low birth weight by 2 per cent each year. It will strive to achieve reduction in stunting from 38.4 per cent as per the National Family Health Survey to 4-25 per cent by 2022.

INDIAN JUDICIARY ON FOOD SECURITY:

The Post Emergency judicial activism inspired the judges of the appellate judiciary, particularly Supreme Court, to develop new kind of sensitivity to the cause of the poor, the bonded labourers, wage earners and various other weaker sections of society. The judicial sensibility is amply

⁶ Destitute, widows and disabled were provided with a monthly pension of Rs. 75 by the CG and States can also contribute

⁷ Under the scheme a BPL family loosing their primary breadwinner is paid a lump sum amount of Rs. 10,000/-

⁸<<https://in.one.un.org/un-priority-areas-in-india/nutrition-and-food-security/>> accessed on 01.07.19

⁹ *Current Affairs*, Civil Services Chronicle, June 2018, Pg: 94

¹⁰**Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):** At the Sustainable Development Summit on 25th September 2015, UN Member States adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which includes a set of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to end poverty, hunger and food security, fight inequality and injustice, and tackle climate change and so on by 2030.

¹¹ *Human Nutrition*, Civil Services Chronicle, April 2019, Pg: 121

reflected in some notable decisions such as: *Azad Rikshaw Pullers Union v. State of Punjab*¹² (Rikshaw Pullers Case), *People's Union for Democratic Rights v. Union of India*¹³ (Asiad Workers case), *Olga Tellis v. Bombay Municipal Corporation*¹⁴ (Pavement Dweller's case), *Kishen Pattnayak v. State of Orissa* (Kalahandi Food Petitions) and host of other cases.

Ultimately, India demonstrated a commitment to ensuring food security and to realizing the right to food with the help of activist judiciary assisted by informed citizens, lawyers, journalists and social activists. In the landmark Right to Food Case – *People's Union for Civil Liberties (PDS matters) v. Union of India* – the SC through a series of interim orders directly addressed food security in the Indian context by explicitly establishing a constitutional right to food in India.

THE RIGHT TO FOOD CASE:

People's Union for Civil Liberties (PDS matters) v. Union of India¹⁵

Issue: The issue raised in the writ was whether the right to life under Article 21 of the Constitution includes the right to food and whether this right to food implies that the State has a duty to provide food to people who are affected by drought and not in a position to acquire food.

Background: At the time of filing the writ petition, the State of Rajasthan was severely affected by third successive year of drought and the incidents of acute hunger and starvation deaths were reported from many places. At the same time it was estimated that almost half of the State's rural population lived below poverty line and policy mandated employment relief and subsidized food was not provided to the poor. Government's failure to adequately address hunger and malnutrition was particularly egregious in the light of surplus food in the warehouses of the State. The petitioners on behalf of the hapless victims of the drought filed a PIL before the Court.)

Petitioner's Argument & Prayer: The petitioner argued that the State has such a duty, that the right to life did include a right to food, and that the State and Central Governments were therefore duty-bound to start relief works and distribute grains.

Further, the petitioner requested the court to issue a writ of mandamus or any other appropriate order to direct

- 1) The State and Central Governments to enforce Famine Code
- 2) The Government of India and the Food Corporation of India to release surplus food grains lying in storage for the relief to drought affected areas and
- 3) All respondents to revisit the PDS and 'frame a fresh scheme of public distribution for scientific and reasonable distribution of grains.

Response: In response to the petition, several interim orders were passed to define gradually and with increasing detail India's constitutional right to food. The Court through its series of interim orders gradually defined the right to food in terms of what policies are required of the State and Central Governments in order for them to adequately fulfill their constitutional obligation under Article 21 of the Constitution.

The two major contributions of the Right to Food case are: Firstly, the emergence of the right to food campaign for advocating a right to food before the court and for ensuring government implementation of the right to food through social activism. Secondly, the Supreme Court created a commission to advise the Supreme Court to explicate the right to food and to protect, monitor and

¹² AIR 1981 SC14

¹³ (1982) 2 SCC 494

¹⁴ AIR 1986 SC 180

¹⁵ (2013) 2 SCC 688

implement its orders relating to the right to food. However, the interim orders of the case, the work of the commission, and the work of the right to food campaign have borne fruits in the development of national food security legislation that would codify the entitlements set forth in the Right to Food case.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE FOOD SECURITY ACT, 2013¹⁶:

Scheme of the National Food Security Act, 2013		
Chapter	Section	Provision
I	1-2	Preliminary
II	3-7	Provisions for Food Security
III	8	Food Security Allowance
IV	9-11	Identification of Eligible Household
V	12	Reforms in Targeted Public Distribution System
VI	13	Women Empowerment
VII	14-21	Grievance Redressal Mechanism
VIII	22-23	Obligations of Central Government for Food Security
IX	24	Obligations of State Government for Food Security
X	25-26	Obligations of Local Authorities
XI	27-29	Transparency and Accountability
XII	30-31	Provisions for Advance Food Security
XIII	32-45	Miscellaneous
Schedules		
Schedule I	Subsidised Prices under Targeted Public Distribution System	
Schedule II	Nutritional Standards	
Schedule III	Provisions for Advancing Food Security	
Schedule IV	State-wise Allocation of Food grains	

- The objective of the Food Security Act is to provide for food and nutritional security in human life cycle approach, by ensuring access to adequate quantity of quality food at affordable prices to people to live a life with dignity and for matters connected herewith or incidental thereto;
- To entitle every person belonging to priority households, to receive every month from the State Government, under the Targeted Public Distribution System, five kilograms of food grains per person per month, at subsidized prices specified in Schedule I. The households covered under Antyodaya Anna Yojana shall be entitled to receive thirty five kilograms of food grains per household per month at the prices specified in Schedule I;

¹⁶ Act 20 of 2013

- To entitle every pregnant woman and lactating mother to meal, free of charge, during pregnancy and six months after child birth, through the local anganwadi¹⁷, so as to meet the nutritional standards specified in Schedule II; and to provide to such women maternity benefit of not less than six thousand in such installments as may be prescribed by the Central Government;
- To entitle every child up to the age of fourteen years age – i) appropriate meal, free of charge, through the local anganwadi so as to meet the nutritional standards specified in Schedule II in case of children in the age group of six months to six years; and ii) one mid day meal, free of charge, everyday, except on school holidays, in all schools, to children up to class VIII or within the age group of six to fourteen years, whichever is applicable, so as to meet the nutritional standards specified in Schedule II;
- The Act requires the State Government to identify and provide meals through the local anganwadi, free of charge, to children who suffer from malnutrition, so as to meet the nutritional standards specified in Schedule II; and implement schemes covering entitlements of women and children in accordance with the guidelines, including cost sharing, between the Central Government and the State Government in such manner as may be prescribed by the Central Government;
- To entitle persons under Chapter II to receive such food security allowance from the concerned State Government to be paid to each person, in case of non-supply of the entitled quantities of food grains or meals, within the time and manner prescribed by the Central Government;
- To provide subsidized food grains under the Targeted Public distribution System to specified percentage of rural and urban population, at the all India level and empower the Central Government to determine the State-wise percentage coverage;
- To enable the State Government to prescribe guidelines for identification of priority households, for the purposes of their entitlement and the households to be covered under the Antyodaya Anna Yojana, in accordance with guidelines applicable to the scheme;
- To progressively undertake necessary reforms by the Central and State Governments in the TPDS;
- To treat the eldest woman who is not less than eighteen years of age, in every eligible household, to be head of the household for the purpose of issue of ration cards;
- To impose obligation upon the State Governments to put in place an internal grievance redressal mechanism (such as call centres, help lines, designation of nodal officers etc) for expeditious and effective redressal of grievances of the aggrieved persons in matters relating to distribution of entitled food grains or meals under Chapter II;
- To make provision for State Food Commission to be constituted by the State Government for the purpose of monitoring and review of implementation of the Act;
- To impose obligation upon the Central Government to ensure regular supply of food grains for persons belonging to eligible households and allocate the required quantity of food grains to the State Governments under the Targeted Public Distribution System at prices specified in Schedule I of the Act;

¹⁷ S. 2(I) - 'anganwadi' means a child care and development centre set up under the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) Scheme of the Central Government to render services covered under the National Food Security Act, 2013, Section 4, clause (a) of sub-section (I) of Section 5 and Section 6.

- To make provision for implementation and monitoring by the State Government of the schemes of various Ministries and Departments of the central Government in accordance with guidelines issued by the Central Government for each scheme and make the local authorities responsible, for the proper implementation of the proposed legislation in their respective areas;
- To conduct or cause to be conducted by every local authority or any other authority or body as may be functioning of fair price shops, TPDS and other welfare schemes, and cause to publicize its findings and take necessary action, in such manner as may be prescribed by the State Government;
- To impose penalty upon any public servant or authority found guilty, by the State Commission at the time of deciding any complaint or appeal, of failing to provide the relief recommended by the District Grievance Redressal Office, without reasonable cause, or willfully ignoring such recommendation, not exceeding five thousand rupees after giving an opportunity of being heard;

Nutritional Support to Women and Children under the National Food Security Act, 2013:

Nutritional support to pregnant women and lactating mothers (Section 4): Subject to such schemes as may be framed by the Central Government, every pregnant woman and lactating mother shall be entitled to – a) meal, free of charge, during pregnancy and six months after the child birth, through the local anganwadi, so as to meet the nutritional standards specified in Schedule I and b) maternity benefit of not less than rupees six thousand, in such installments as may be prescribed by the Central Government.

Nutritional support to children (Section 5) : Subject to the provisions containing clause (b), every child up to the age of fourteen years shall have the following entitlements for his nutritional needs, namely: a) in the case of children in the age group of six months to six years, age appropriate meal, free of charge, through the local anganwadi with the nutritional standards specified in Schedule II (Provided that for the children below the age of six months, exclusive breast feeding shall be promoted); b) in the case of children, up to Class VIII or within the age group of six to fourteen years, whichever is applicable, one mid-day meal, free of charge, everyday, except on school holidays, in all schools run by local bodies, Government and Government aided schools, so as to meet the nutritional standards specified in Schedule II.

Prevention and management of child malnutrition (Section 6): the State Government shall, through the local anganwadi, identify and provide meals, free of charge, to children who suffer from malnutrition, so as to meet the nutritional standards specified in Schedule II.

FOOD SECURITY LAPSES IN INDIA:

Food security means availability of sufficient food grains to meet the domestic demand as well as access, at the individual level, to adequate quantities of food at affordable prices. Ensuring food security of the people, however, continues to be a challenge. In any organized society, right to live as a human being is not ensured by meeting only the animal needs of man. Right to live guarantee in any civilized society implies the right to food, water, decent environment, education, medical care and shelter. These are the basic human rights known to any civilized society¹⁸. Right to freedom from malnutrition¹⁹, in this context the Supreme Court directed the government to implement the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) Scheme. In spite of the efforts to comply international conventions, constitutional mandates, national policies and programmes, food security laws, new

¹⁸ Chameli Singh v. State of U.P., AIR 1996 SC 1051

¹⁹ People's Union for Civil Liberties v. Union of India, (2004) 12 SCC 108

National Nutritional Mission, the Nutrition Strategy, Sustainable Development Goals and the like, which provide a strong policy framework for protecting, supporting and promoting nutrition interventions – especially during periods of greatest vulnerability for children and women, still India has high levels of maternal and child undernutrition and is still lagging behind in attaining satisfactory food security for all. Following connote some of the instances and reasons for inadequacy of food security in India:

- The recent *Global Hunger Index*²⁰ by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) ranks India at 103rd among 119 countries describing India's hunger situation as "serious". This shows that the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG-2) to end hunger by 2030 is but a far reality to be achieved by India. The index is a tool that measures the tracks hunger globally, by region and by country. The index is measured using four parameters – undernourished population (1/3rd weight), child wasting (1/6th weight), child stunting (1/6th weight) and infant mortality rate (1/3rd weight).
- The Government of India in the year 2017-18 allocated Rs. 16,745 crore and Rs. 10,000 crore respectively, for the ICDS and MDMS. Each year, the coverage of the ICDS increases with the opening of new centres, but the budget allocated remains the same. In the case of MDMS, there is also persistent decline in the allocation too²¹.
- The policies and programmes relating to food security concentrated only on enhancing agricultural production, but ignored household level food security and individual capabilities to acquire sufficient food.
- There are wide disparities in nutrition status across States, districts, blocks and different community groups, and with district/blocks with very high levels of maternal and child undernutrition and related mortality.
- Faulty PDS system, corrupt practices of the PDS dealers, inadequate storage facility and wastage.
- Deaths resulting from starvation are usually attributed to diseases or medical conditions – which are, ironically manifestations of chronic hunger.
- Related issues like the lack of sanitation which leaves people susceptible to diarrhea, affecting the body's ability to absorb nutrients need to be addressed as well.
- The low status of women in the society makes matter worse. Uneducated, undernourished mothers give birth to malnourished babies, leaving themselves and their wards vulnerable to hunger.
- It is important for the National Food Security Act not only to introduce penal provisions that will make the bureaucracy more accountable but also establish a protocol that will identify the real cause behind deaths that result from starvation.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Nutrition is central to the achievement of other National and Global Sustainable Development Goals. The focus of Sustainable Development Goals – 2 (SDG-2) is on ending hunger, achieving food security and improving nutrition and promoting sustainable agriculture among other goals. SDG-2 targets comprehensively deals with issues of food production, distribution and access as well as nutrition of people of all age group, gender, social categories, supported by sustainable

²⁰ *Reports and Indices*, Civil Services Chronicle, April 2019, Pg: 159

²¹ <<https://indiacr.in/nutrition-programs-functioning-india/>> accessed on 01.07.19

agriculture. “End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture”²².

The concept of nutrition security implies physical, economic and social access to balanced diet, clean drinking water, safe environment and health care. It is alarming to note that recently, IFPRI ranks India at 103rd among 119 countries describing India’s hunger situation as “Serious” and thereby ending hunger by 2030 SDG-2 becomes less practicable. However, accepting that there is a problem is the first step to finding a cure.

India has to remediate the current situation and there is an immediate and dire need for a life cycle approach as highlighted by the Nutrition Strategy which includes synergizing health, nutrition, care and maternity protection interventions. This calls for preventive early action in the most vulnerable period – prenatal, at birth, neonatal period, early infancy so as to address vicious cycle of undernutrition, disease, infections, related mortality and risks of maternal and young child survival and development. The holistic continuum of care across the life cycle includes – a) Life cycle stage – adolescent, pregnancy, child birth, neonate, infant and young child, b) nature of care – preventive, promotive, curative and rehabilitative, c) site for care – family, creche, AWC, health centre and referral hospital, d) range of interventions – synergizing health, nutrition, care and maternity protection.

Further the Nutrition Strategy envisages operational guidelines developed by national or State Nutrition Missions which include nutrition centric planning, community mobilization, training & capacity development, service delivery, communication and changing care behaviours, innovation and gap filling flexi funds, providing incentives for performance and awards, ICT enabled monitoring, research and evaluation etc. In order to significantly reduce child undernutrition at an aggregate level at a faster pace and for more inclusive development, it is important to focus interventions for such districts/blocks and community groups with high levels of child undernutrition.

Other areas to be simultaneously addressed are improving agricultural productivity, accessibility to BPL household, improving the purchasing power through employment generation schemes, crop diversification and sustainable agriculture, community awareness programme, monitoring and tracking mechanism, community participation and intervention programme (include SHGs and Panchayats), enhancement of budget, convergence of multi-sectoral intervention (Ministry of Women and Child Development, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation, Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution, Ministry of Food Processing Industries, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Rural Development, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Ministry of Panchayati Raj, Ministry of Youth Affairs, Ministry of Tribal Affairs and so on). The above highlights the emergent need to establish Nutrition as centre stage in the National Development Agenda and rejuvenate the food security and nutrition challenge in India and attain the vision “Kuposhan Mukh Bharat” (Free from malnutrition, across the life cycle) and SDG-2.

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²² Motto of SDG-2

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