

Food Security

India attained self-sufficiency in food by late 1980s, though food security still evades the country. Food security means making food available at affordable prices at all times, to all, without interruptions. Though India's GDP growth has been impressive and the agricultural production has also increased over the past few decades, hunger and starvation still persist among the poorer sections of the population.

State of Hunger & Malnutrition: As per the latest State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2019 report of the FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization) (United Nations), the state of hunger and malnutrition in India is very worrisome —

- 14.5 per cent of population is under-nourished (that is 19.44 crore).
- 51.4 per cent of women in reproductive age (15-49 years age group) are anaemic.
- 37.9 per cent of the children aged under five are stunted (too short for their age).
- 20.8 per cent of children under five suffer from wasting (meaning their weight is too low for their height).

India is ranked 102 out of 117 countries in the latest Global Hunger Index-2019.

As per it, India is suffering from a serious hunger problem. Some India-specific findings of the report are as given below—

- Ranked below Pakistan (94), Bangladesh (88), Nepal (73) and Sri Lanka (66).
- 9.6 per cent of children (6-23 months of age) are given a minimum acceptable diet.
- The highest child stunting rate (37.9 per cent) against global average of 20.8 per cent.
- Under five mortality has improved.

Two important things need attention regarding India's food security—

- (i) Around 23 per cent of India's population is BPL and a greater portion (one conservative estimate suggests that 75 per cent of their household income is spent on food).
- (ii) There is a strong correlation between stability in agricultural production and food security. Volatility in agricultural production impacts food supplies and can result in spikes in food prices, which adversely affect the lowest income groups of the population.

Therefore, along with provision of food subsidy, stability in agricultural commodity prices is essential for making the poorer sections food secure. It means, in the direction of assuring food security, India needs to tackle mainly two hurdles—

- (i) Enhancing its food production: If food (i.e., food grains) is to be supplied to all today India will face deficit of around 30 million tonnes of food grains. This shows the food insecurity dimension of India.
- (ii) Strengthening supply chain: Managing the issues like storage, transportation, proper retailing and integrating the segmented agrimarkets into a national agrimarket.

Due to high level of undernourishment and volatility in agricultural prices, India has one of the largest numbers of food schemes in the World to ensure food security–

- (i) There is entitlement feeding programmes like the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS – covers all Children under six, pregnant and lactating mothers)
- (ii) Mid-Day Meal Schemes (MDMS)
- (iii) Food subsidy programmes like the Targeted Public Distribution System (through which the National Food Security Act is being implemented)
- (iv) Annapurna (10 kg of free food grain for destitute poor)
- (v) Employment Programmes like Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (100 days of employment at minimum wages) to ensure food security.

Till the vulnerable population is not enabled with the market-linked purchasing capacity, these programmes will be relevant in ensuring food security in the country. There is a need to run these schemes with utmost focus of the beneficiaries.