

TOWARDS A FOOD SECURE INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Malnutrition is nothing new for many Indians. According to the International Food Policy Research Institute's 2011 Global Hunger Index, the upshot of this perennial problem is that about 60 million children in India are underweight and malnourished, while 21 percent of the population as a whole general is malnourished. Unfortunately, this problem is unlikely to change anytime soon, with the recent introduction of the National Food Security Bill threatening to continue market inefficiencies in food supply and extend the problem of malnutrition far into the future.

On a more positive note, India is expected to remain self-sufficient in the production of food staples until at least 2025. However, inefficiencies in the downstream segments of the food supply chain are still rampant, and threaten to undermine self-sufficiency and perpetuate malnutrition. For example, inefficiency in the tomato business, according to the editor of the Wall Street 20 percent of tomatoes rotting in transit, while the price for consumers is marked up by as much as 60 percent. Food security both at the national and household levels has been the focus of agricultural development in India ever since the mid-sixties when import dependence for cereals had gone upto 16 per cent and the country faced severe drought continuously for two years. The new approach intended at maximising the production of cereals and involved building a foundation of food security on three key elements, namely, provision of an improved agricultural technology package for the farmers, delivery of modern farm inputs, technical know-how and institutional credit to the farmer. For achieving these objectives, several policy instruments were used that influenced the production potential.

Ever since independence in 1947, agricultural development policies in India have aimed at reducing hunger, food insecurity, malnourishment and poverty at a rapid rate. Keeping this overarching goal in mind, the emphasis which was initially on keeping food prices low, shifted to macro food security and subsequently to household and individual food security. Later, the food security of vulnerable, sustainable use of natural resources, and equity between rural and urban or farm and non-farm population became the issues of dominant discourse related to agricultural development. Several new initiatives have been taken during the last few years to tackle the situation and to bring back farmers' confidence in farming in general and cereal production in particular. Indices for economic and social status are composite indicators of the economic and social well-being at the community, state and national levels. These social indicators are used to monitor the social system and help in the identification of problem areas that need policy planning and require intervention to alter the course of social change.

If the existing trends in high population growth, low agricultural development, wide disparities in income, huge environmental degradation, and high incidence poverty continues, India's food, agriculture, environment, and quality of human life will be seriously threatened in the coming years. Poverty and malnutrition are likely to remain as major problems. Pressure to produce more food from less land, use of more natural resources, enormous growth in the population and unequal distribution of income will harm the environment in the years to come.

KEYWORDS: Food Security, Education, Integrated Nutrition Management, Targeted Programmes