



RESEARCH ARTICLE

National Food Security Act of India and its impact after a decade of enactment and the way ahead

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Food Security Act 2013, also known as National Food Security Act of India or the Right to Food Act, is an Act of Indian Parliament which aims to provide subsidized food grains to approximately two thirds of the country's population

Justification: India continues to lag in terms of hunger (in Global Hunger Index), food security (in Global Food Security Index) and self-sufficiency in agricultural produce (Oxfam's Food Availability Index), despite changing policies and economic growth.

Policy recommendation: having more funding from the Governments (Central and State), involvement of private entities as Public Private Partnership, involving NGO's and NPO's and focusing on self-sufficiency in agricultural produce possibly by subsidized insurances for crops. Moto should be "produce more and produce right, feed more and feed right, fund more and fund right."

Introduction

Food Security Act 2013, also known as National Food Security Act (NFSA) of India or the Right to Food Act, is an Act of Indian Parliament which aims to provide subsidized food grains to approximately two thirds of the country's population. It was signed into law on 12 September 2013, retroactive to 5 July 2013.¹

Target Audience

This policy paper is directed towards drawing the attention of the Government of India, and the different State Governments of India.

Methodology

In this paper, we pull out all the published data and indices published on open-source websites and analyze the impact of NFSA and the options to mitigate the deficiencies in this act.

Literature Review

CURRENT INDIAN SCENARIO

India has been continuously fighting for the Food Security. In 2022, the Global Food Security Index ranked India at 68th out of the 113 major countries in terms of food security.² In the year 2022, India was ranked 107 of 121 in the Global Hunger index.³ Per the UN (United Nations), there are approximately 0.2 billion undernourished people in India. Chronic undernourishment accounts for about 43% of Indian children.⁴ There is a well-planned internal grievance redressal mechanism established like call centers, complaint drop boxes and appointment of grievance redressal officers.

According to Global Nutrition report⁵ in 2021, India is way off target for achieving the three of the global maternal, infant, and young children nutrition (MIYCN) targets to tackle the long-term complications of being undernourished like stunting, wasting, anemia, low birth weight, breastfeeding, and childhood obesity.

Per The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World report⁶ released in 2020 and its interpretation

presented by the United Nations organization showed an increment in food insecurity prevalence by 3.8 percentage in between the years 2014-2019 in India. There were 62 million more Indian people living with food insecurity when compared to 2014.

Now Indian Government says they are self-sufficient in terms of agricultural produce⁷, however, India is stood at 97th place in Oxfam's food availability index⁸. So, while Indian Government is more focused on reducing the fiscal deficit by increasing the exports including the agricultural produce, but it is still unable to feed its own population.

DEFICIENCIES OF NFSA

This was a great act when it was first enacted with foodgrains that were initially made available at substantially lower prices as described above for the first three years after the Act got passed in the parliament, however, after that prices were pegged to the Minimum Support Price (MSP), which led to a substantial increase in price which became unsustainable for lower socio-economic status (SES) families considering as per the World Food Program (WFP) report⁹ in 2023 showed that about 21% of population in India lived on less than USD 1.90 per day and 1/4th of world's undernourished people live in India.

In certain states like Karnataka, there were pre-existing policies like Anna Bhagya Scheme¹⁰, where the entitlements for subsidized food grains were much higher, so, it was tough call for these states to implement this new scheme and it led to a fight between state and central governments with supreme court getting involved and Karnataka was allowed to re-introduce the Anna Bhagya scheme again in 2023.

WORLD SCENARIO

Afghanistan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Yemen, Syria, Somalia, Haiti, and Sudan are the countries facing severe hunger.¹¹

The short-term solutions of providing emergency food assistance and long-term projects like agricultural training for farmers are being done by the UN, but

the target of hunger free world is still a long way to go.

STAKEHOLDERS

The stakeholders here are the Government of India, the State Government, the Non-Government Organizations (NGO's), the PDS, the Non-Profit Organizations (NPO's) and Private companies.

So, the State Government and Central Government will need to add more funds to tackle this problem, which will affect their budget in the short run, but the Governments will save more amount from the expenses on lesser need for providing for the free healthcare when this subset of population will get sick.

The private entities as a part of corporate social responsibility can obligate some funding while work together with the Government as a public private partnership model along with NGO's and NPO's, they will share the financial burden and in addition provide the technical expertise for better agricultural produce. When the population grows and in the long run, when there is no food insecurity, they will spend more which in turn will yield profit for the private players.

MEDIA

Media in India is biased and often seen focusing on unimportant agendas or news around the India or the world. Most of the time the media houses are owned by big companies which are funding the elections and hence the media houses noticeably question the Government lesser for policies, policy failures and policy changes.

But once the new policy which we recommend is implemented, we could use media campaigns and highlight the benefits and in addition utilize the media for educating the farmers of various ways to increase yield and enlighten the lower SES to about their rights per the new policy.

Policy Recommendation

More funding is needed to meet the needs of growing population of India and to tackle pandemic-

induced nutritional loss. We need to manage data better, need to manage resources better, have more accountability in the PDS, educating about nutrition, and tailoring our policies to the specific needs of different states of India. So, perhaps a public private partnership model may be the way forward. So, maybe corporate social responsibility on the end of Private players, some funding from NGO's may be utilized for better planning, educating the farmers to increase the yield of the crops, and devising a mechanism based on the farmer's earning from linked to Aadhar (Indian version of SSN) and then providing the benefits based on the socio-economic status. Forming a committee (which should include a physician, a public health specialist, public policy specialist, a nutritionist, a legal expert and others as determined) and letting them decide the benefits which every farmer is entitled to, based on socio-economic status.

Also focusing more on feeding India's own population rather than reducing the fiscal deficit from exporting agricultural produce may be the way forward for the next few years. One thing that can be considered is utilizing artificial rain¹² to irrigate the agricultural land which will reduce the dependence on nature and using the concept of insurance of crops which is partly covered by the subsidies from the Government or other eligible entities (Private players covering a part of the premium as a part of corporate social responsibility), as uninsured small scale farmers are prone to suicides if they don't have enough produce to cover their loans which usually happens in case of natural calamities like floods, drought, corruption in handling prices while selling the produce in the market and the State Governments end up fudging the data.¹³

Conclusion

Focusing on more funding from various sources (Central Government, State Government, Private Entities, NGO's, NPO's and others) and working efficiently with these stake holders; forming a committee to provide high level recommendations for funding the farmers based on their SES status and

ensuring that food insecurity can end in the world's most populous country.

So, in the end I would like to say, our motto should be - "produce more and produce right, feed more and feed right, fund more and fund right."

Disclaimer:

The views expressed in this article are authors' own and not necessarily those of the U.S. Government or US Department of State or Bureau of Medical Services.

Conflict of Interest:

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