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FOOD SECURITY IN INDIA & ROLE OF PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM



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Introduction :-

Food and Agriculture organisation (Fao 1983) defined food security as “ensuring that all people at all times have both physical and economic access to basic food they need” food security as access by all people at all time to enough food for an active, healthy life. food security involves physical availability of food to the entire population in a country. people have enough purchasing power so that they can acquire the food they need for healthy life. the food available should be adequate in quality as well as quantity to meet nutritional requirements. the concept of food security necessitates that timely, reliable and nutritionally adequate supply of food, should be available on a long - term basis. This implies that a nation has to ensure the growth rate in India. food supply so that it takes care of the increase in population as also the increase in demand resulting from increase in the income of the people. From this point of view, the following stages of food security may be visualised.

1. The most basic need from the point of view of human survival is to make an adequate quantity of cereals available to all. 2. We may think of food security as the adequate availability of cereals and pulses. 3. Food security should include cereals, pulses, milk and milk products. 4. Food security should include cereals, pulses, milk and milk products, vegetables and fruits, fish, egg and meat.

The Indian planners, right from the beginning realised the need to attain self sufficiency in foodgrains as one of the important goals of plan-

ning. The Government realised that food surplus countries used, their food surplus as a weapon to force food deficit countries to submit to their dictates

The ninth five year plan (1997-2002) states “one of the first efforts of the country was the build up a food security system to ensure that the threat of famine no longer stalks the country.... the fact that the country has not witnessed famines and acute starvation on a massive scale in the last five decades is the most eloquent testimony for the success of these efforts.” Progress on foodgrain front reveals the following. @ Between 1950-51 and 2001-02, 2005-06 and 2008-09, foodgrains production had increased from 61 million tonnes to 215 millions tonnes. The production of foodgrain however declined to 184 millions tonnes in 2008-09.

Tenth plan and food security :- Tenth year plan has attention to the change in consumption pattern that have taken place in the post green revolution period. It states - “Between 1972-73 and 1993-94 the food basket has become much more diversified with the share of cereals seeing a dramatic decline of ten percentage points in most regions. At the same time consumption of milk and meat products as well as vegetables and fruits has increased. such changes are a natural outcome of economic development. The main components of the food security system are the following :-

1. Promoting domestic production to meet the demands of the growing population as also to reduce under nutrition quite a large section of the population. 2. Providing minimum support price for

procurement and storage of food items. 3. Operating a public distribution system and 4. Maintaining buffer stocks so as to take care of natural calamities resulting in temporary shortages of food and to act as a countervailing mechanism against traders and businessmen who try to push up price, especially during periods of shortage of food. Within cereals the share of the two superior cereals rice and wheat which was only 53% in 1950-51 had improved to 78% in 2001-02. During the same period the share of coarse cereals had declined from 30% to 18%. This indicates a substitution by the weaker sections in favour of rice and wheat as against coarse cereals consumed earlier.

Role of Public Distribution System :-

Public distribution system as an important measure in tackling the food problem of the country. The sale of food items through the fair price shops affects the living levels of a mass number of people. As one with a positive role in development the importance of PDS was recognized as far back as the first plan (1951-56) the efforts at capital formation it was stated, produce money incomes immediately. But the consumer food items through the PDS helps to bridge this time gap. More importantly as the food items constitute a major proportion of the consumption of workers, PDS helps in supplying wage goods at prices lower than the market prices. The PDS provides a non-inflationary way to development. This role of PDS goes well with the development strategy implied in the Lewis model. In this model, agriculture sector plays a key role in the development of an economy by supplying cheap food and cheap labour. The PDS is also helpful in reducing the distress caused by the very low incomes of the poor, especially those who are destitute with very little employment. The PDS through the supply of foodgrains at cheap rates, provides, so to say a means of security to the poor. It is also very helpful for those poor families where forward of adequate employment opportunities, only one or a few members find work. The PDS is of great help in ensuring that the vulnerable section

of population are not adversely affected by the ongoing structural changes in the economy initiated in the middle of 1991. PDS can also supplement government efforts to protect the poor from the adverse consequences of the economic reforms. PDS more responsive to the needs of the poor a target public distribution system has been introduced since June 1997. This system has a dual price system, heavily subsidised rates for families below the poverty line (BPL) and somewhat less subsidised rates for families above the poverty line (APL). The main purpose of the public distribution system in India was to act as a price support programme for the consumer during the periods of food shortage of the 1960s. The basic aim was to provide essential commodities such as rice, wheat, sugar, edible oil, soft coke and kerosene at subsidised prices.

The World Bank report mentions "In poorer states such as Bihar, Orissa and Madhya Pradesh the off take was substantially lower than central auction partly due to the narrow difference between the central issue price and open market price and partly because of weak fiscal capacity of these states to finance any additional subsidy lowering of issue prices.

Suggestions for ideal PDS :-

In order to remove the weakness of the PDS as also to make it more useful for the poor of the country. It is necessary to reorient the system. Towards this end, the following suggestions can be made. The first important step in improving is to enlarge its coverage so as to include all the poor in all the regions. In fact the central aim of this system should be to provide a security net for the poor only. The items to be distributed through the PDS should also be increased to cover all the essential items needed for physical existence. These two changes will necessitate expansion of the infrastructure for efficient functioning of the PDS. It is also important that PDS should achieve its objective of an equitable distribution of essential foods fully and at the least cost to the society. It will require the establishment of a nexus between production, pro-

Year	Populations (Millions)	Net Productions	Net Availability	Net imports	Pulse Net Availability (millions tonnes)
1950-51	363	40.1	44.3	4.1	8
1960-61	443	60.9	64.6	3.5	11.1
1970-71	551	84.5	84	2	10.3
1980-81	689	104.1	104.8	0.5	9.4
1990-91	852	141.9	145.7	-0.6	12.9
2000-01	1033	162.5	145.6	-4.5	11.3
2002-03	1068	142.7	158.7	-7.1	11.4

Per Capital Net Availability per day (gram)

Cereals	Pulse	Total
334.2	60.7	394.9
399.7	69	468.7
417.6	51.2	468.8
468.5	41.6	510.1
366.2	30	416.2
407.1	29.1	436.3

curement, transportaion, storage and distribution of the selected commodities. While an expanded and an efficient PDS as outline above, will be of great help to the poor to buy a consumption bundle that is normally defined, one which ensures the well being of the poor. such a consumption basket would include goods that meat the existential needs of the

poor as also those which promotes their welfare. This also requires fixation of prices which make all these goods within the easy reach of the poor who have very low income. The PDS if improved as suggested above can be a powerful policy. instrument in providing a much desired safety net to the poor of the country.

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