

## **IT'S ABOUT FOOD, NUTRITION AND LIVELIHOOD SECURITY**

### **Farmers' Cooperation, Technological Upgrading And Favourable Public Policies Can Help India Deal With The Pandemic**

The current national lockdown to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the problems of food, nutrition and livelihood security confronting a large number of rural people, in particular, migrants to cities. While some measures have been announced, such as provision of additional rice or wheat, some pulses and oil free of cost, as well as ₹1,000 cash for the purchase of other essential commodities through the Public Distribution System (PDS), we need to understand the different dimensions of food security in a holistic manner in order to address this problem in its totality.

The first is the availability of food in the market, and this is seen as a function of production. Fortunately, thanks to the Green Revolution, today we have enough food in the market and in government godowns. This is a great accomplishment by Indian farmers who converted a "ship to mouth" situation to a "right to food" commitment. Yet we cannot take farmers' contributions in terms of sustaining production for granted. While some special exemptions have been given to the agricultural sector, farmers are confronted at the moment with labour shortages, many of the inputs, including seeds, are expensive or unavailable, marketing arrangements including supply chains are not fully functional, pricing is not remunerative, and public procurement is also not adequate. There is no room for complacency, as in the absence of demand, the lack of storage or value addition facilities, especially for perishable commodities, we do not yet know exactly what the impact of the current pandemic will be on the kharif sowing and food availability in the future.

#### **Widen the food basket**

The second dimension is the access to food, which is a function of purchasing power, as unless you are a farmer and grow your own food, others have to buy it. Fortunately, the government, through the National Food Security Act (NFSA) and the PDS, has assured some additional food to every individual during this crisis. This should be further strengthened and the food basket widened by including millets, pulses and oil. Steps should also be taken to avoid hidden hunger caused by the deficiency of micronutrients in the diet. In light of the closure of schools and anganwadi centres, and the consequent disruptions in the provision of midday meals or other nutritional inputs, it is important to pay attention to the life cycle approach advocated in the NFSA, particularly the first thousand days in a child's life, when the cognitive abilities of the child are shaped. We may otherwise see negative effects on nutritional security in the medium to longer term.

Food security and access to nutritious, good quality food is also contingent on job security. Today, a lot of people employed both on farms and in the non-farm sector are without jobs. If job security is threatened, then so is food and nutrition security. We have to ensure people do not lose their jobs, and one way of doing this will be to ensure value addition to primary products. One example of such value addition is the Rice Biopark in Myanmar, wherein the straw, bran, and the entire biomass are utilised. This would of course mean some attention to and investment in new technologies that can contribute to biomass utilisation. The Amul model provides a good example from the dairy sector of improved incomes to milk producers through value addition. Similar attention needs to be given to the horticulture sector on a priority basis. Women farmers are at the forefront of horticulture and special attention needs to be given to both their technological and economic empowerment during this crisis.

### Work under MGNREGA

A second pathway to livelihood security for small and marginal farmers and landless households, and women within them, is strengthening the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA). The definition of a worker in MGNREGA has so far been applied only to unskilled, manual work, and not to skilled jobs in agriculture and allied activities. Given the lack of jobs and incomes during the COVID-19 crisis, it is imperative to expand the definition of work in MGNREGA to cover skilled work related to farmers and their farming activities. This is particularly important for women farmers and workers, who should not just be given tasks of carrying stones or digging mud. Apart from farming, they engage in a range of essential care tasks, including caring for children, the elderly and sick people. These tasks, often invisible, need to be recognised as work and supported with appropriate education, including on nutrition.

### Focus on non-food factors

The third dimension of food security is absorption of food in the body or its utilisation, which is dependent importantly on sanitation, drinking water and other non-food factors, including public health services. Ensuring that these services are functional depends on the capacities of the local panchayats and their coordination with other local bodies. The lack of adequate clean water in particular has come to the fore in both rural areas and urban slums in the context of COVID-19, where one of the key measures for stopping transmission relates to frequent hand-washing.

If we can ensure food availability, food access and food absorption, then we have a fairly robust system of food and nutrition security. All the above dimensions are, however, now threatened by the novel coronavirus, as discussed earlier. It is very critical to highlight the linkages between agriculture, nutrition and health. While the PDS may be able to meet calorie needs, the inability to harvest, transport and market perishable fruits and vegetables at remunerative prices during the current crisis, has not just deprived farmers of incomes and livelihoods, but consumers too are deprived of micronutrients in their diets. Farmers making losses, and agriculture moving from being job-led to jobless, raise questions about the sustainability of the production cycle. At the same time, this can have long-term consequences on nutrition and health security.

India avoided what could have been a big famine in the 1960s through the help of technology and public policy, which actively worked with and supported farmers to achieve significant increases in yield. Today's problems are not as daunting. Through a combination of farmers' cooperation, technological upgrading and favourable public policies in procurement, pricing and distribution, we can deal with the fallouts of the pandemic. We hope that this pandemic will help recognise the contribution of our farmers.

### Meanings of Difficult Words:

1. **nutrition** (noun) – the process in which necessary food is received/obtained by the living things to grow and be healthy.
2. **livelihood** (noun) – means of making a living with the basic necessities (food, water, shelter and clothing); means of support, subsistence, source of income.
3. **highlight** (verb) – underline, underscore, emphasize, call attention to.
4. **confront** (verb) – deal with, tackle, address, face up to.
5. **provision** (noun) – providing, supplying, distribution.
6. **Public Distribution System (PDS)** (noun) – The Public Distribution System (PDS) in the country facilitates the supply of food grains and distribution of essential commodities to a large number of poor people through a

- network of Fair Price Shops at a subsidized price on a recurring basis.
7. **dimension** (noun) – aspect, feature, element.
  8. **holistic** (adjective) – relating to an integrated approach that takes care of the “whole thing”, instead of certain parts in it.
  9. **address** (verb) – tackle, deal with, attend to, try to sort out.
  10. **totality** (noun) – entirety, wholeness, fullness.
  11. **green revolution** (noun) – it was the result of a sequence of scientific breakthroughs and development activities (in 1930s-1960s) that successfully increased food production.
  12. **accomplishment** (noun) – achievement, performance, attainment, feat.
  13. **“ship to mouth” situation** (noun) – a situation in which (food) products come to the consumer (people) by importing them from the foreign countries, instead of producing them sufficiently in one country.
  14. **“right to food” commitment** (noun) – it implies the right to food at appropriate nutritional levels and the quantum of relief to those in distress must meet those levels in order to ensure that this right is actually secured and does not remain a theoretical concept.
  15. **take someone for granted** (phrase) – fail to appreciate someone without knowing his/her true value.
  16. **sustain** (verb) – continue, carry on, keep up, maintain.
  17. **exemption** (noun) – exclusion, relief, exception.
  18. **supply chain** (noun) – a network between a company and its suppliers to produce and distribute a specific product to the final buyer.
  19. **remunerative** (adjective) – profitable, lucrative, rewarding/gainful.
  20. **procurement** (noun) – collection, acquiring, purchase.
  21. **no room** (noun) – no scope (for something to happen).
  22. **complacency** (noun) – carelessness, laxity, laziness; smug; self-satisfaction, self-approval.
  23. **value addition** (noun) – it refers to increasing the economic value of a commodity through particular production processes, (e.g., organic produce). It can also be described as the process that transforms the raw agricultural product into something new through packaging, processing and other processes that change a product from its original raw form (e.g., Peanut Brittle, Burfi/Barfi, Chikki).
  24. **perishable** (adjective) – easily spoilt, biodegradable; relating to items likely to decay quickly, especially foods.
  25. **kharif crops/sowing** (noun) – monsoon crops; seeds sowing in the beginning (Jun) of the monsoon and harvesting at the end of the season (Oct) in the South Asia.
  26. **rabi crops/sowing** (noun) – winter crops; seeds sowing in the beginning (Nov) of the winter and harvesting at the end of the season (Apr) in the South Asia.
  27. **food basket** (noun) – it is also called the farmer’s basket, is a customized basket of local agricultural products for daily individual consumption.
  28. **purchasing power** (noun) – the ability to buy something (goods/services).
  29. **hidden hunger** (noun) – a lack of vitamins and minerals. Hidden hunger occurs when the quality of food people eat does not meet their nutrient requirements, so the food is deficient in micronutrients such as the vitamins and minerals that they need for their growth and development. (Courtesy: **WHO**).
  30. **deficiency** (noun) – shortage, insufficiency, undersupply/absence.
  31. **micronutrient** (noun) – minerals and vitamins are called micro nutrients since

- they are needed by our body in small (trace) amounts.
32. **in light of** (phrase) – in view of, considering, taking into account, keeping in mind.
  33. **anganwadi** (noun) – a type of rural child care centre in India.
  34. **consequent** (adjective) – subsequent, following, resultant, ensuing.
  35. **disruption** (noun) – disturbance, disarrangement, interruption.
  36. **pay attention** (phrase) – listen/heed, attend, concentrate on.
  37. **advocate** (verb) – support, promote, champion/ espouse.
  38. **cognitive** (adjective) – mental, intellectual, inner, rational.
  39. **nutritious** (adjective) – wholesome, healthy, nourishing.
  40. **contingent on** (adjective) – dependent on, conditional.
  41. **straw** (noun) – dried stalks of grain (used particularly as fodder).
  42. **bran** (noun) – the outer skin/layer of grain (separated & removed when making flour).
  43. **biomass** (noun) – the plant where electricity (& other forms of energy) generated using a renewable and sustainable source of energy (organic matter/materials).
  44. **utilisation** (noun) – an effective use of something.
  45. **horticulture** (noun) – gardening, cultivation of plants, agriculture.
  46. **at/in the forefront** (phrase) – be in a leading position in an important activity that is trying to achieve something.
  47. **economic empowerment** (noun) – the capacity of women and men to participate in, contribute to and benefit from growth processes in ways that recognise the value of their contributions, respect their dignity and make it possible to negotiate a fairer
  48. distribution of the benefits of growth. Economic empowerment increases women's access to economic resources and opportunities including jobs, financial services, property and other productive assets, skills development and market information.
  49. **household** (noun) – family, house.
  50. **so far** (phrase) – until now, up to the present, up to this point.
  51. **unskilled** (adjective) – unqualified, unschooled uneducated, untaught.
  52. **imperative** (adjective) – vitally important, crucial/critical, essential.
  53. **invisible** (adjective) – unnoticeable, indistinguishable, indiscernible.
  54. **sanitation** (noun) – it generally refers to the provision of facilities and services for the safe disposal of human urine and faeces (Courtesy: **WHO**).
  55. **come to the fore** (phrase) – to become visible.
  56. **context** (noun) – circumstances, conditions, situation.
  57. **robust** (adjective) – strong, powerful.
  58. **harvest** (verb) – to gather a ripe crop from the fields.
  59. **deprive of** (verb) – dispossess, strip of, deny, prevent from having.
  60. **sustainability** (noun) – maintainability of something at a certain rate/level.
  61. **consequence** (noun) – outcome, result, ramification, repercussion.
  62. **famine** (noun) – food shortage; scarcity of food.
  63. **yield** (noun) – a measurement of the amount of agricultural production harvested (yield of a crop) per unit of land area.
  64. **daunting** (adjective) – intimidating, challenging, disconcerting/unsettling.
  65. **fallout** (noun) – adverse results; after-effects, repercussions.

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