

**The Proposed National Food Security Act**  
**Will it secure India against growing hunger and malnutrition?**

UPA – 2 promised a Food Security Act ensuring ‘FOOD SECURITY FOR ALL’.

The recommendations of the Empowered Group of Ministers (EGoM) for the Bill were very narrow focusing only on rice and wheat for BPL populations.

The NAC’s recommendations as well are a far cry from the comprehensive approach required to truly ensure food security for all. The NAC’s approach focusing on entitlements to specific groups is narrow and piecemeal and fails provide an alternate vision

We have a situation where our domestic food production systems are in jeopardy and also a major part of our population that produces this food is living in poverty. Any Act that wants to guarantee food security for all must address the present crisis in agriculture, as well as ensure access for everyone i.e. production, procurement and distribution issues must be looked at together.

**The Current Situation**

- Agriculture is in decline with an annual average growth rate of 2.3% in the period 2002-07, which is about half the annual average growth rate in the period 1992-97 (4.3%).
- Food procurement by the government depends on just four to five states in the country.
- The major part of our work force (55%) is employed in agriculture, but produces only 17% of our GDP.
- More than 2 lakh Indian farmers have committed suicide so far.

*The act must ensure that sufficient food is produced to feed our entire population and that production takes place all over the country with farmers finding agriculture a remunerative occupation*

Food must be seen as a universal right, and we must have a universal Public Distribution System (PDS). The Targeted PDS has excluded many poor from the net of receiving subsidised foodgrains. For example, NSS data shows that about 50% of poor rural households did not have a BPL card in 2004-5 (rising to 80% in states like Bihar and Jharkhand). On the other hand, in Tamil Nadu, that has a well-functioning ‘Universal’ PDS, everyone gets not only grain but also 10 other commodities.

**For a universal PDS we require:** (realistically considering 80% offtake at equal prices and individual entitlements according to ICMR recommendations)

- 60% of country’s current cereal production, 80% of current pulse production and 75% of our current domestic edible oil production.
- Funds required: Rs. 1,43,520 crores (going by 80% realistic offtake and ICMR norms – approx. 50kg of food grains per family)
- 2% of GDP

*If there is increased procurement, and at fair prices, and therefore farmers have an assured market, production of food crops is likely to increase, and agriculture is likely to flourish. Currently only 25.8% of the net production of food grains are procured. Only 18.9% of the net available food grains are distributed through the PDS (2008 provisional figures provided in ESI 2009-10).*

## **A Comprehensive National Food Security Act must therefore ensure the following:**

### **Universal and Effective PDS**

- A universal Public Distribution System providing at least 14 kgs of grain (including millets) per adult per month as well as 1.5 kgs of pulses and 800 gms of oil, with comparable quantities for children(as per ICMR recommendation).
- Reforms in the PDS including de-privatization of PDS shops
- This food must be procured domestically in a decentralized manner, at remunerative support prices that ensure good living standards for farmers and agricultural workers

### **Special Focus on Children and Vulnerable**

- Universalisation with quality of the ICDS, crèches for young children, universal and unconditional maternity entitlements and cooked mid day meals for school children.
- Special food entitlements (including an expanded Antyodaya programme and decent old age pensions) for vulnerable groups like single women, old, dalits, Tribals, disabled, Transgender, landless and marginal farmers, daily wagers, slum dwellers, migrants etc.).

### **Safeguards against any Violations**

- Safeguards against cash transfers replacing food transfers under any nutrition-related scheme
- No use of technology for identification purpose which can violate the civil liberties and human rights of the people.
- Strong accountability and grievance redressal provisions, including mandatory penalties for any violation of the Act and compensation for those whose entitlements have been denied.

### **Food Sovereignty and Livelihood Security**

- The first call on natural resources must be for sustainable and equitable food production, with protection against forcible diversion of land, water and forests away from food production
- Protection of food sovereignty and elimination of the entry of corporate interests and private contractors in food production, distribution and governance, including an immediate moratorium on genetically modified (GM) seeds, GM food imports, and use of GM food in government food schemes

### *Some Food and Nutrition Facts*

- One Indian child dies of hunger related causes every minute.
- More than 2 lakh Indian farmers have committed suicide so far.
- Cereal availability has declined from 478 gms per capita per day in 1990s to 436 gms per capita per day in 2008, depriving each person in our country of about 50 gms of cereals per day.
- Pulse availability has halved since Independence from about 70 gms per capita per day in the late '50's to less than 35 gms per capita per day in the last five years.
- For the poorest parts of the country and the poorer sections, where coarse grains were a major source of food, in the same period when rice and wheat availability declined by 21% and 13% respectively, the availability of coarse cereals declined by almost one third (33%).
- More than 60 Million tonnes of grain are lying idle in FCI godowns– which is more than one quintal per BPL family.
- NSS data shows that about 50% of poor rural households did not have a BPL card in 2004-5 (rising to 80% in states like Bihar and Jharkhand).
- In Bihar, 90% of rural BPL households do not get grain from Public Distribution System (PDS), whereas in Tamil Nadu, that has well-functioning 'Universal' PDS, everyone gets not only grain but also 10 other commodities.
- The tax foregone (waived) by the Central Govt on Corporate Income Tax, Personal Income Tax, Excise and Customs was Rs.5,02,299 crores in 2009-10. *This is about 11 times our current food subsidy bill.*In Customs duties foregone, the exemptions for diamonds, gold and jewellery alone were as high as Rs 39,769 crores!
- The central government spends about twice as much on defense (2.2% of GDP) as on health (approx. 1%) and food security (1.2%)