

Our Demand: Food Security For All

(Rally for the Right to Food, 26 November 2009)

The United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government's plan to enact a "National Food Security Act" which would entitle each BPL household to a monthly ration of 25 kgs of foodgrains at Rs 3/kg is meaningless in the face of spiraling prices, drought and deepening hunger, much of which has been caused by the economic policies of the present and past governments. The Right to Food Campaign¹ rejects the UPA's proposed National Food Security Act and demands immediate guarantees on access to safe and adequate food. We call for the immediate reversal of all policies that are creating and exacerbating hunger. We also demand a much broader based Food Entitlements Act that deals with at least some of the causes of hunger and provides each and every resident of this country with food entitlements. We further demand that the Government of India incorporates the Right to Food Campaign's working draft of the Food Entitlements Bill in its own draft bill. The Government must ensure that no man, woman or child sleeps hungry or is malnourished.

Our Demands

1. **Enact a Food Entitlements Act:** Drought should not be used as an excuse to put on hold the process of enactment of a comprehensive Food Entitlements Act that ensures long term food security for all. This process must include a transparent and thorough national consultative process on the Act.
2. **Universalize the Public Distribution System**
 - Every resident of this country must be covered by the PDS.
 - Each adult must be entitled to 14 kgs of cereals per month, along with 1.5 kg of pulses and 800 gms of cooking oil.
 - Cereals must include nutritious millets on a priority basis.
 - Cereals must be priced at Rs. 2/kg, pulses at Rs. 20/kg and cooking oil at Rs 35/kg.
 - Decentralise the procurement, storage and distribution of food .
 - Ration cards must be issued in the name of the female head of the household.
3. **Special protection including pensions, Antyodaya Cards and cooked meals for excluded and vulnerable groups and in disasters**
 - Special protection to vulnerable groups such as the elderly, disabled, female-headed or child-headed households, destitute people, "primitive" and de-notified tribes, urban destitute, etc.
 - Antyodaya cards which entitle them to PDS items at half the prices of the general population.
 - Additional entitlements such as access to cooked meals, admission for children to residential schools, double quota of all entitlements, 1 quintal of free food grains etc for them.

¹ The "Right to Food Campaign" is an informal network of organisations and individuals committed to the realisation of the right to food in India. We consider that everyone has a fundamental right to be free from hunger and under nutrition. Realising this right requires not only equitable, decentralised and sustainable food systems, but also entitlements relating to livelihood security such as the right to work, land reform and social security. We consider that the primary responsibility for guaranteeing these entitlements rests with the state. Lack of financial resources cannot be accepted as an excuse for abdicating this responsibility. In the present context, where people's basic needs are not a political priority, state intervention itself depends on effective popular organisation. We are committed to fostering this process through all democratic means. (Foundation statement of the Right to Food Campaign.)

- Pensions at half the statutory minimum wages for the elderly and disabled (ie at an average of around Rs 1300 per month at the current rate).
- Special food security policies for migrant workers to allow access to entitlements anywhere in the country and for the urban destitute.
- Special measures in all emergencies (including starvation and chronic hunger) and natural and man-made disasters.

4. No dilution of Supreme Court orders

The Food Entitlements Act must ensure that legal entitlements and other enabling orders issued by the Supreme Court on the right to food are not diluted in any way.

5. Affirmative action towards people who are socially discriminated

- At least 50% of jobs for cooks and helpers must be for Dalits, Adivasis and members of the minority community.
- Priority to Dalit, Adivasi and minority community hamlets in the location of aganwadis and ration shops.

6. Put in place an effective grievance redressal system

- Fines and criminal penalties for wrong-doers and compensation for the wronged.
- Strong in-built transparency mechanisms, and mandatory social audits.
- Accountability must be fixed at all levels.

7. Protect food sovereignty and farmers' rights; follow a "Food First" policy

- Stop forcible diversion of land, water and forests from food production. The first call on all natural resources must be for food.
- No export of food till malnutrition is eradicated.
- Protect Indian farmers by ensuring no food imports except temporarily during shortages.
- Fix remunerative prices for food items so that farmers find it viable to produce food.
- Eliminate the entry of corporate interests and private contractors in food production, the food market, regulatory bodies, and nutrition-related schemes.
- Immediate moratorium on genetically modified (GM) seeds, GM food imports, and use of GM food in government food schemes.
- Ensure access to safe drinking water and sanitation for all.

8. Immediate action on hunger, drought and starvation

- Every adult should get employment on demand. NREGA works should be implemented in drought stricken regions without a cap on the number of days. After the commencement of NREGA, public works need to be converged with NREGA, rather than creating a separate machinery and set of rules for relief works.
- Wages should be fixed at 20% above the state's statutory minimum wage. The current wage freeze must be immediately lifted.
- Raise PDS entitlements by 50%.
- Immediate supply of food, water and fodder to alleviate hunger and suffering in the 278 drought and cyclone affected districts.
- Mid-Day Meals to all out of school children and MDM should continue during vacations.
- Ensure full coverage under Antyodaya of all primitive tribal groups, disabled, aged, and other vulnerable groups.
- Government must immediately redress of complaints of violation of Right to Food orders and NREGA.

Essential Food Entitlements

All households: Universal PDS with 14 kgs of foodgrain (including millets) at Rs 2/kg per adult, 1.5 kg dal at Rs 20/kg and 800 gms cooking oil at Rs 35/kg per month.

Antyodaya households: Double the PDS quotas at half the PDS prices.

Migrants to freely access entitlements anywhere in the country.

Elderly and disabled to get pensions at half the prevailing minimum wages.

Children aged 0-6 months: Support (to their mothers) for exclusive breastfeeding through assistance at birth, counseling, maternity entitlements and crèche facilities at the work place.

Children aged 6 months-3 years: Nutritious take-home rations based on local foods, delivered every week through the local Anganwadi.

Children 3-6 years: Nutritious cooked meal and food supplements to be made available at the local Anganwadi.

Children aged 6-14 years: Nutritious cooked midday meal provided in all government schools up to Class 8.

Pregnant and nursing women: Nutritious take-home rations based on local foods, provided through the local anganwadi; basic maternal health services.

STOP SUBSIDISING CORPORATE PROFITS WITH OUR PUBLIC FUNDS. USE THESE FUNDS TO GIVE US GUARANTEES OF SAFE AND ADEQUATE FOOD AND WORK!