

A SWOT Analysis of the Food Security System in India

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, we are showing that famines and mass hunger deaths were no longer a problem in independent India. This was owing to an increase in agricultural productivity as a result of the focus placed on agriculture, particularly cereal production, since the first Five Year Plan. We currently produce 105 million tonnes of rice and 94 million tonnes of wheat each year, which is sufficient to meet the needs of our enormous population while also successfully regulating the country's Public Distribution System. Food grains are distributed at subsidised rates to various strata of society under the PDS.

Keywords— SWOT Analysis, Security, MDG

I. INTRODUCTION

According to the World Food Summit and FAO, “food security exists when all the people at all times have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary and food preference for an active life.” Food security on the one hand, is related to socio-economic development and on the other, to environment and human rights. Rising food prices have political implications too. A rise in food prices is not only related to hunger and malnutrition, but results in rising expenditure on acquiring health services also. There are many studies which have established a relationship between poor health and low levels of education.

The 1st Millennium Development Goal, established by U.N. in the 2000 A.D. included the notion of reducing the percentage of the people victimised by hunger by half by 2025. With regards to this serious problem, it was estimated that with MDG, a considerable success was achieved by the developing countries. The number of undernourished population of the world was about a billion during the early 90s, this figure was brought down to 515.5 million. It has been noticed that there was considerable regional variability in the achievement of MDG among the developing countries. In the case of South Asian countries, the progress has been observed at a lower rate to meet the international hunger targets. There is a considerable numerical strength of the weaker political and security system in the developing countries that has attained the global dimension during the last three decades and therefore deserves urgent attention.

II. THE BRITISH PERIOD:

Historic past indicates that agriculture has been the backbone of the Indian economy; as over 50 percent of the Indian population is still engaged in agriculture and allied activities and since the British period this sector has been beset by numerous problematic areas (Bhaskar, Majumdar 2004). The dissatisfaction against British rule led to revolts by the peasantry class. In the Deccan riots during 1875–1879, the peasantry class which comprised of the farmers of the districts of Pune, Satara and Ahmednagar, had revolted against the British rule because of a steady rise of agrarian distress which resulted from inadequate agricultural prices, cumbersome taxation by the government and the local leaders. In addition to this, an indifferent attitude of political leaders towards the peasantry class that upheld the establishment with their hard working labour also led to revolts. The leaders like *Pazhasshi Raja* of Kerala also revolted against the discriminatory behaviour of the East India Company, for dictating the prices and the merchants with whom the trade was being carried. This resulted in a perpetual war between the East India Company and the Raja, between 1793 and 1805.

India also suffered numerous droughts and famines due to which millions of people lost their lives.. The Great Bengal Famine of the years (1769–1770) resulted in a loss of 10 million lives (596 D.P.K. Pillay and T.K. Manoj Kumar). Some other famines occurred in the periods between 1788-1794, 1860- 1861, 1876–1878 and millions of people lost their lives. The famines in Bengal which occurred between 1943- 1944 also took the lives of millions of people - the main reason was the non availability of food as agricultural produce was being sent to meet the food grain needs of British soldiers who were engaged in the second world war. (Mukharzee, Ayesha, 2018). The loss of lives due to starvation was unique in the British period as earlier history never witnessed such a phenomenon. India was an exporter of items like textile, jewels, luxury items, spices and India's share in world foreign trade was 24 percent before the Britishers arrived in India. It was reduced to only 2 percent in 1947.

Independent India has overcome the problems of famines and mass deaths due to starvation. This happened due to a rise in agricultural production because of the importance given to agriculture, mainly to the production of cereals right from the first Five Year Plan. Presently, we are producing 105 million tons of rice and

94 million tons of wheat annually, which is enough to meet the needs of our large population and effectively regulate the Public Distribution System in the country. Under PDS food grains are provided to different strata of society at subsidised rates.

The main focus of this paper is to highlight the salient features of the PDS system so that it may ensure the 'food security' for all, and also to address the problems faced by this system. First part of the paper deals with the emergence of the PDS, its evolution into a Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS) and its incorporation under the National Food Security Act (NFSA), which confers the 'Right to food' on all the citizens. Subsequent sections of the paper will focus on the problematic areas highlighted by the PDS in the country.

II. THE EMERGENCE OF THE PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM, ITS EVOLUTION INTO A TARGETED PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM (TPDS) IN INDIA

The Public Distribution System was first initiated as a system for managing food scarcity in the 1940s, PDS evolved into a system for distributing the food grains at subsidised rates and became a significant part of the policy of the government for ensuring food security to the masses. PDS managed and procured the food from the farmers at remunerative prices, distributed food grains to people, especially to the poor segment of society at subsidised rates. This system included maintaining the buffers stock of food grains for food security and regulating the prices. This PDS is supplementary in nature as it aims at satisfying the partial need of foodgrains of a household. The Central and State governments jointly manage the system through the Food Corporation of India (FCI) which was established in 1964 under Food Corporation Act, 1964. FCI procures, transports, stores, and allocates the food grains (Narayan, Sudha, 2015). FCI aimed at achieving objectives of the 'Food Policy' which are as follows:

- (1) Supporting the operation of an effective price of the Minimum Support Price (MSP) to safeguard the interests of the farmers;
- (2) Distribution of food grains at subsidised rate to the people; belonging to different sections of the society.
- (3) Maintaining a sufficient buffer stock of food grains to ensure 'Food Security' at national level.

The FCI has its regional and zonal distributional offices which are located throughout the country. This system has ended the exploitation of farmers at the hands of the middle man as the government declares the Minimum Support Price (MSP) for different food crops every year for supporting the farmers. MSP is based on the availability of quantum of each crop. FCI procures food grain from farmers on MSP on behalf of the government and then transports to

the depots located throughout India, in the 24 regions of FCI, for issuing to the state governments. The Government of India decides the subsidised selling price and the food grains are distributed, through the fair shops to the ration card holders which are issued by the civil supply department of the state governments. The state governments have the responsibility of operating the system. The commodities which are distributed under the PDS include wheat, rice, and coarse grains like *Jowar* and *Bajra*. Some states distribute the cash crops also like sugar, pulses, edible oils, etc. (Ritika, Khera, 2011).

The food distribution system should be made more efficient in order to make food security more effective. The entire system must attain the position of Total Quality Management (TQM). It is therefore imperative to have a look at the periodic SWOT Analysis of the system. The SWOT Analysis in terms of its Strength, Weaknesses, Opportunity and Threat is examined as follows:

Strength

The strength of the concept of 'Food security' lies within the framework of the attributes with 'Food-utilisation', 'Food Access' and 'Food availability' for the people belonging to different strata of society. The food utilisation consists of the characteristics of nutrition value, social value and food safety. 'Food accessibility' deals with affordability, allocation of food according to preferences. 'Food Availability' is the strength of production, distribution and exchange of food items in terms of commodity and regional distribution. All these aspects of strength are flexible in accordance with prevailing local conditions. Food security also includes consumers' choice motives, health concerns etc and social environment which include culture and social norms. It is characterised with a consumer's environment, including economic incentives, information and availability. Apart from this, some characteristics relate to the food chain; attributed with regulatory environment and standards, input and output prices, customer preference and market structure.

It is also necessary to have a periodic review of the list of criteria that an ideal food security system measurement should be satisfactory. Subsequently, "there should be benchmark existing indicators and system of measurement against these criteria as a way of identifying their relative strength, so that a framework for improving food security measurement through a mingling of extension coordination and innovation" (Modgal, Suresh C, 2016).

Keeping these pounds in view, the Union government launched the Targeted Public Distribution System in 1997 with a focus on the poor. It required the States to formulate and implement the ways for the identification of the poor for implementation of a targeted food distribution system. Professor D.T. Lakdawala's expert group devised the methodology to identify the poor. This helped the division of the whole population into BPL "Below Poverty Line" (BPL) and

the 'Above Poverty Line' (APL) categories. The maximum income limit for the BPL families was kept at minimum income and changing the criteria from time to time is covered under the 'Food Security' Act. It is the strength of the system that has paved the way for regulating the food supply for the people belonging to different strata of society in the rural and urban areas of the country. Another strength is that the PDS system works in accordance with prevailing local conditions in the rural and urban areas of the developing country like India. The National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013 (also, the Right to Food Act) included the Midday Meal Scheme in schools and the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) also.

Weakness

Weakness of the 'Food Security' in the operating system was initially confined to low agricultural production and the inadequate availability of food grains from the farmers, but the problems now are quite different. There is perpetual frustration among the farmers resulting into suicides by the farmers, a steady rise in the prices of necessary commodities, and low returns for the farmers. (Mishra, Prachi 2013).

It has been observed that frequent suicides by the farmers continue to make the news. Although the government has taken several preventive and curative measures to help agriculture and farmers, still suicides by the farmers is making news. Some other problems include growing water scarcity, climatic change and the ecological hazards due to the application of the chemical fertilisers and pesticides. Some alternative agricultural methods should be used to solve these problems. These may include integrated pest management, organic farming, and crop diversification, use of biofertilizers and effective water and land management, etc.

The Government of India has implemented some other welfare schemes and supplies subsidised food for Mid-Day Meal (MDM) programmes for the schools, and the programmes of the Department of Women and Child Development, the SC/ST hostels, for natural calamity victims etc. FCI and the state government have to bear the cost of food grains for these consumptions. Hence, it is obvious that the weakness of food security has been highlighted in terms of implementation of the 'Food-security' Act in accordance with prevailing local conditions. It deserves an urgent attention towards addressing different problematic areas of 'Food Security'.

Opportunity

The above discussion makes it clear that heavy subsidies and poor implementation of 'Public Distribution System' have given rise to some opportunities to ensure food security for the people. In order to compensate for the rising social cost and subsidised supply of grain for the welfare oriented projects, the PPP model can be adopted to reduce the burden on the public exchequer. The system can be further improved by determining the state-wise total eligible house-holds for ration under the PHH (Priority

Households) and the AAY categories. Secondly, The quantity, price, distribution and procurement of food grains should be fixed; Thirdly, the burden of the cost of transporting foodgrains to godowns and between the states should be shared. Fourthly, the states should increase the storage capacity and ensure computerisation of the records. In addition, there are some steps which are also being taken for increasing the opportunity to get the desired results. All these preventive steps are as follows:

(I) The food grains from the Food Corporation of India *Godowns* should be lifted and storage capacity should be increased to ensure movement in different states and transportation and distribution to beneficiaries.

(ii) Beneficiaries should be identified and the beneficiary list should be updated for issuing the ration cards.

(iii) The Govt. should establish institutions for redressing the grievance, social audit and Vigilance.

These can be some of the steps by which the effectiveness of the 'Food Security' system can be strengthened.

Threats

Numerous threats have been identified for 'Food security'. Firstly, the large number and high growth of population growth has been one of major threats to the 'Food security' as Mathus concluded that food grains rise arithmetically while population grows geometrically. This poses a threat to 'Food Security' as the gap between the size of population and availability of food grains increases with time. Closely associated with this problem, the steady growing population has given rise to higher levels of demand for food. There are some other threats too, like the disappearance of the variety of agricultural species, scarcity of water and decrease in the availability of land due to increase in demand of land for houses, highways, soil erosion etc. These have given rise to losses of additional food opportunity.

Various studies show that the PDS list is full of errors, as 60 percent of the lists give a fallacious picture. Another major problem which is a threat to 'Food Security' is the leakage of subsidised food grain into the open market.

So the SWOT Analysis of 'Food Security' highlights different problematic areas of 'Food security' in India. This is one of the significant programmes that follows the principle of growth with justice for the people. In this context, the strength of 'Food-security' gives some landmark achievements for the country, although its functioning is weak. . Act in accordance with prevailing local conditions. On the opportunity fronts, there is a good scope of improvement in the implementing process of 'Food security' Act but the success of our efforts towards its improvement will be successful, only if we can eliminate the threat. (M.Raghwan, 2016).

III. CONCLUSION

The SWOT Analysis of 'Food Security' in terms of its Strength, Weakness, Opportunity and Threat on the functioning of 'Food security Act.' different regions of the country have highlighted different problematic areas of execution of 'Food security' Act. in accordance with prevailing local conditions. The FCI and the network of PDS systems have been playing a vital role in executing the 'Food-security Act.', but it is marred by some weaknesses. The opportunities indicate that there is an ample scope to improve its functioning. There are some threats also which are posed by the growing population with increasing demand for food, corruption in FCI and in the execution of the PDS system because of which we have fallen short in achieving the desired results of the 'Food-Security Act'. The SWOT Analysis shows that for ensuring sustainable 'Food-security' for all, a periodic review in terms of its implementation and accordingly making necessary changes in food policy is a must.

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