

FOOD SECURITY IN THE FRAMEWORK OF ECONOMIC POLICIES

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Food security in Asia and Pacific has been generally viewed as consisting generally of two important components, viz., availability and access. The former concern the ability, particularly of developing countries in the region to provide enough food for their ever-increasing population. The latter, on the other hand, relates to the ability of the population to obtain food necessary for a healthy life economically and nutritionally.'

In terms of production, many of the participating countries have benefited much from the new agricultural technology introduced in 1960s, which led to significant growth in yields in 1970s and 1980s. The increase in farm productivity coupled with the expansion of arable land in some cases resulted in record level of production enabling a number of developing countries to become virtually self-sufficient in the major staple foods such as rice and wheat, particularly in terms of average per capita availability of cereals. Needless to say, the growth in food production contributed significantly to improved nutritional status of the people in the countries.

Despite good progress in food production in the last decade, however, under nutrition still affects a great number of people in the region. This situation has led many to believe that accessibility to adequate and safe food is perhaps of greater concern when one speaks of ensuring food security in the region.

Therefore, food security can be defined as stable food availability at the national, regional and household levels. Thus defined, food security implies a situation where everyone has access, at all time, to the food needed for an activity and healthy life. Self-sufficiency is usually advocated as a means of achieving food security in a country of India 's size. This is because the world foodgrain market is small compared to India's domestic production

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and any decision by India to import foodgrain may lead to drastic variation in prices in the international foodgrain market.

The concept of food security broadly aims at removing the imbalance between the demand and supply of food. Food security would have different connotations in times of natural calamities like floods and scarcities, meaning thereby that there will be a difference in emphasis, approaches and priorities. Although, availability of foodgrains is a necessary condition for food security it is by no means a sufficient condition as the poor, who are not vulnerable to food security.

Food Security : A Conceptual Framework and Preview.

During the past three decades, the focus of food security research has evolved from an examination of concepts such as nutrition, food production and price policies to an examination of household at micro level and at macro level (national level). The literature in this area is extensive, including among others, Gittinger Leslie and Hoisington (1987), Hollist and Tullis (1987), Valdes and Konandreas (1981) and Bingman (1982). In the 1960's, research in food security measures focused on expanding agricultural production and supply. The variability in food supplies in the early 1970's resulted due to shift in research emphasis on buffer stocks, balance of payment stabilizers, trade policies and food aid programmes (Philips & Taylor, 1990). As mentioned by Parikh and Tims (1989) tracing the history of food security concept reveals an interesting process of changes in perception regarding the world food problem and food policy.

In fact, the history of Food Security research shows two distinct waves. The first was simulated by the world food crises of 1972-74, which peaked in the early 1980's (Clay 1981). The second was catalyzed by the African famines of 1984/85, which gathered momentum through the late 1980's. It started not as a concept primarily defined at the international level with reference to stable world market conditions and stable prices. Logically, it was then extended to the national level as the disturbances in world markets were traced to supply and demand instability both through national causes and as a consequence of national and international agricultural and food

policies. Finally, the concept was extended to the individual and household levels and to the objective of security access for all to adequate amounts of nutrition.

The Concept of Food Security :

The 1981, at the height of the first wave of interest in Food Security clay (1981) argued that Food Security is a problem most often conceptualized as a macro phenomenon particularly as deviations from the trend in aggregate consumption. The World Bank defines food security as *"access by all people at all times to enough food for an active and healthy life"*. Its essential elements are availability of food and ability to acquire it. The European union defines Food Security as *"the absence of hunger and malnutrition"*. Maxwell (1989) proposed a wider concept arguing that *"a country and people are food secure when their food system operates efficiently in such a way as to remove the fear that there will not be enough to eat"*. Smith (1990) defined it *"as the availability and affordability of food, mainly grains, to meet consumption needs of people in all countries"*. However, there are two kinds of food insecurity: Chronic and Transitory. Chronic Food insecurity is a continuously inadequate diet caused by the inability to acquire food, where as transitory food insecurity is a temporary decline in household's access to enough food (World Bank, 1980).

The concept of Food Security could also be considered in long-run and short run horizons. In the long run Food Security depends on a country's economy to generate and distribute purchasing power sufficient to adequately feed all its citizens from domestic production or by imports. Whereas, Food Security in the short run is concerned with how nations, either individually or collectively, cope with inadequate availability or access to food (Smith, 1990). The lack of Food Security may result from transit shocks that threaten the supply or distribution of food. These shocks may originates from inside the country due to natural calamities and others, and may originates from outside, if a country is heavily depends on imports. These shocks themselves may have nothing to do directly with food, but may compete for scarce foreign exchange in a country's import budget (Kennedy and Nightingale, 1989).

Different approaches to Food Security concepts may have three common themes. Firstly, they focus on access to food rather than on supply. Food Security is therefore, concerned not just with the level and variability of food production but also with causes and dimensions of lack of entitlement with the effectiveness of the distribution system. The second theme pays more attention to variability as well as to trends that is variability in food production, food prices, food imports or ability to acquire food. The third theme is the broad mandate of Food Security implicit in most definitions, encompassing production, marketing and consumption issues ranging across levels of analysis from the household to the national and international economy (Maxwell, 1990).

Factors Affecting the Food Security of Specific Country

Important demand side factors affecting food security include

- a. Population growth
- b. Income growth and distribution
- c. Export revenues and indebtedness (related to domestic and foreign monetary policies).

On the supply side, the important factors which affect food security at the national level includes

- a. Weather
- b. Production and production growth rates (depending on application of technology)
- c. Policy incentives to produce food for domestic needs (as influenced by world prices, internal pricing policy, adequacy of internal infrastructure to support marketing).
- d. Stock Behaviour
- e. Availability of imports (food policies of major exporters, foreign constraints, review and dependency level), Smith (1990)

Food Security in India

The food production was lesser than the actual requirement; India has faced a problem of food shortage. Ever since independence, may be due to different reasons. Government has imported foodgrain, leading to hoarding of commodities in turn artificial scarcity led to increase in prices. This made the nation to take steps to increase food production. It was also necessary to streamline the supply of foodgrain and other essential commodities to ensure their supply at reasonable prices. Therefore, Essential Commodities Act 1955 was brought out in force. Under this Act, the central and state government were empowered to take all the necessary steps to ensure the distribution of food grains and other essential commodities.

Essential of India's Food Policy

An approach to national food security, which relies essentially on domestic production of needed food for consumption as well as for building buffer stock, could possibly described as a strategy of self-sufficiency. However, strategy for food security should not preclude trade in food may be an essential part of the food economy, with planned exports and imports of different items based on the principles of comparative advantage.

Self-sufficiency in production of foodgrains is often seen as a necessary condition towards attaining food security of a commodity. First, the world food market is narrow as compared to India's domestic production and consumption. For instance, size of the international rice market is comparatively large at 110 –120 mts, India produces about 76 mts of wheat, 90 mts of rice. Under such situation large scale imports of say 10 per cent of its requirements can make India vulnerable to sharp rises in World Prices of foodgrains. Secondly, the strategy of self-sufficiency in food sub-serves the goals of national security. Thirdly, of as 70 per cent of the population is depending on agriculture directly or indirectly for their livelihood. Therefore, the essential elements of India's food policy also broadly coincide with the three specific aspects viz.,

- a. attaining desirable levels of food production
- b. ensuring access to food supplies on the part of those who need it and
- c. increasing the stability of food supplies through the mechanism of buffer stocking

Indian agriculture has come a long way from subsistence farming at the time of independence to commercial agriculture, and is transforming itself very systematically to exploit opportunities opened up in world markets. Last year, India witnessed a record foodgrain production of 208 mts, which is almost a five-fold increase over the output of 51 mts. at the time of independence. The country has come a long way since the fateful drought years of mid 1960's when survival depended on shiploads of food aid. Thanks to the green revolution, which helped India to be self-sufficient in foodgrains.

Public Distribution Systems

Rationing was first introduced to India in 1939 in Bombay. In 1943 the first foodgrain policy committee recommended continuation of rationing due to the fall of Myanmar, which was a major supplier of rice and the great Bengal famine in the preceding year. Immediately after independence rationing was abolished and only to be reintroduced in 1950, as shortages led to high prices. The rationing system introduced due to scarcity of food during this period evolved into the present day PDS in the mid-1960's as a part of the strategy to boost agricultural production and is characterized by near self-sufficiency in foodgrain production, holding of huge buffer stocks and rapid expansion of network of distribution outlets (fair price shops). Today with a network of 0.44 million retails outlets distributing annually commodities worth more than Rs.150 billion to about 160 million families, the Indian PDS is perhaps the largest distribution network in the world. The system is designed to help both the producers and consumers of foodgrains by linking procurement to support prices and ensuring their distribution along with other essential commodities at affordable prices throughout the country. PDS continues to be a major instrument of Government's economic policy for ensuring food security for the poor. Therefore, the importance of an effective PDS that

ensures availability of food at affordable prices at household level for the poor can hardly be over-emphasized. PDS provides an outlet for off loading the foodgrains procured from surplus areas to deficit areas.

Epilogue

Buffer stocks of foodgrains helped trade over the drought year 1979/80 and 1987/88 comfortably despite the unabated growth of population (about 1.7% per annum), foodgrain output kept ahead (about 2.3 per cent per annum), diversification of agriculture into commercial and high value crops has put India on the world map. Presently, India is the largest producer of fruits and second largest producer of vegetables in the globe. In Milk production the country ranks first in the world.

The achievement of the past should not be cause for complacency. Many more people remain undernourished despite all our advances and in the 21st century food needs be met. Indian agriculture has now entered the post-green revolution stage of development and other concerns must necessary be integrated into future development strategies.

As per the nutritional norms, the per capita requirement of foodgrains worked at to be 198.19 kg per person per annum, with the attainment of self-sufficiency in foodgrains production, what is need to be attended is the efficiency in distribution, channeling of foodgrains systems. In an opened up economy, it becomes more vital to ensure food security of a nation as the economy depends on the healthy population. As the food security either at macro or at micro level has to be the ultimate goal and objective of any economic system. Thus what is important is to ensure that in the process of economic growth and development, the economic policies be oriented towards the creation and the maintenance of food security for all individuals. By achieving this noble objective, the capabilities, efficiencies and potentials of every individual would be improved and enriched this would not materialize unless the basic food requirements and nutritional standards of the people be met on a priority basis.

Foodgrain Area, Production and Productivity

Year	Area (Million hectares)	Production (Million tones)	Productivity (Kg./ha.)
1950-51	97.3	50.8	522
1960-61	115.6	82.0	710
1970-71	124.3	108.4	872
1980-81	126.3	129.6	1023
1990-91	127.8	176.4	1380
1997-98	123.8	192.3	1552
1998-99	129.6	203.5	1571
1999-2000	123.1	208.9	1697

Source: Economic Survey 2000 - 01

Foodgrains Production

(Million Tonnes)

Year	1996-97	1997-98	1998-99	1999-2000	2000-2001
Rice	81.7	82.5	86.0	89.5	86.8
Wheat	69.4	66.3	71.3	75.6	70.0
Coarse Cereals	34.1	30.4	31.2	30.6	29.9
Pulses	14.2	13.0	14.9	13.4	12.3
Foodgrains	199.4	192.2	203.4	208.1	199.0
Kharif	103.9	101.6	102.8	104.9	102.7
Rabi	95.5	90.7	100.7	104.0	96.3

Source: Economic Survey 2000 - 01

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