


CLRA Policy Brief for Parliamentarians

Call to Action: Hunger, Under-nutrition and Food Security in India

Introduction

In the last 15 years, India has successfully embraced economic reforms, which has led to GDP growth of 9%. However, the continuing problem of persistent hunger, under nutrition and food insecurity demands urgent attention from policy makers so as to improve and save the lives of millions of people.

The hard facts

- Per capita availability of food grains has drastically decreased from 495 grams per capita per day (1989) to 422 grams per capita per day (2005).

Cereal intake of the economically poor (bottom 30% of the population) continues to be disproportionately low compared to the cereal intake of the economically better off (top 30% of the population).

The cereal intake of the economically poor has continued to decrease: In 1993 cereal intake was 12kg per month and by 2005 it had fallen to 11.3 kg.

Unemployment among agricultural labour households has sharply increased from 9.5% in 1993-94 to 15.3% in 2004-05 (Planning Commission 2006).

Between 1998 and 2006 there was virtually no change in the statistic that 47% per cent of children (0-3 years old) were underweight.

More than 50% of women and 75% of children in India are anemic (no decline in eight years).

A pregnant Indian woman gains only 5kg, whereas the world average gain is 10kg. This is a leading cause of babies being dangerously underweight, and high infant and mother mortality rates.

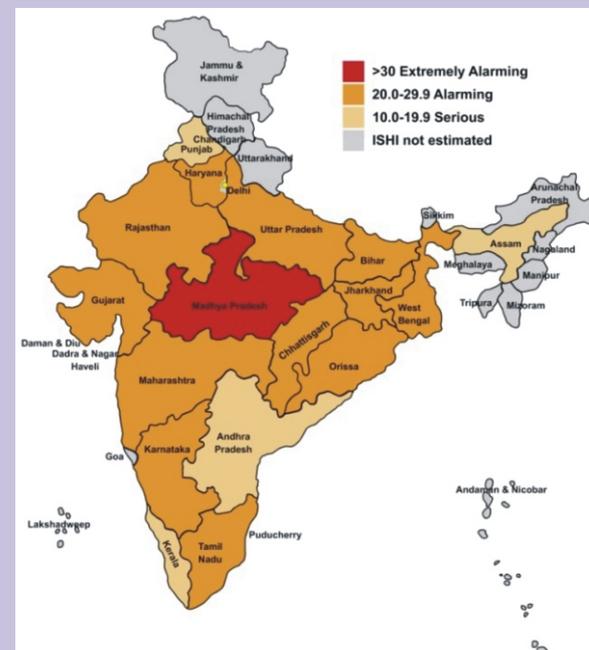
In short, all indicators point to the hard fact that endemic hunger continues to afflict a large proportion of the Indian population.

Internationally, India is suffering from alarming hunger, ranking 66 out of the 88 developing countries studied (IFPRI, 2008). India, as part of the world community, has pledged to halve hunger by 2015, as stated in Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 1, but the present trends show that this target is unlikely to be met.

The current global meltdown in the financial and equity markets is being felt in developing countries at the macro level with a potentially negative impact on agriculture and food security. The falling grain prices

and liquidity problems may cause lower investment in agriculture, shrinkage in crop area and reduced harvest in the major exporting countries. This could result in record high food prices next year. The sub prime meltdown in the equity market, intensification of the bio-fuel programme leading to use of food for fuel and consequent rise in food prices, with an increasing corporate monopoly over the farm sector and willful distortion in global farm trade have collectively endangered food security. However, the global financial crisis should not be used as an excuse for inaction in the worsening battle against wrenching hunger across the developing world. The world now has the responsibility of fulfilling the MDGs by lifting nearly one billion people out of poverty. This is the time to think of an alternative model of development, as the self-regulating market has clearly failed

Hunger map of India (IFPRI)



CLRA presents this policy brief to parliamentarians and other policy makers, to examine the hunger, under-nutrition and food security situation prevailing in India. It advances the need to undertake effective policy measures to ensure adequate food and nutrition security at the household level, particularly for the marginalized groups.

Hunger in India

Considering, the rapid rise in the GDP, in the last two decades, India is likely to slip behind the first MDG of cutting the proportion of hungry people by half.

There are essentially two types of hunger (Gopaldas 2006):

Overt hunger/self reported hunger: The need to fill the belly every few hours, or whereby people judge their own ability to fulfill the physiological urge to satisfy their hunger.

Chronic/endemic hunger: When the human body gets used to having less food than necessary for healthy development, and after a while the body does not even demand more food.

Objective indicators to measure hunger:

Calorie consumption: The planning commission constituted a task force on projection of minimum needs and effective consumption demand which on the basis of a systematic study of nutritional requirements recommended (GOI, 1979) a national norm of 2400 kilocalories (kcal) per day and 2100 kcal per day for rural and urban area.

The Global Hunger Index uses three equally weighted indicators:

- Proportion of people who are food energy deficient (FAO estimates)
- Proportion of children under the age of five who are underweight (WHO estimate)
- Under five mortality rate (UNICEF estimate)

Body Mass Index: A widely used measure of nutritional status is a combination of weight and height measurements known as the Body Mass Index.

Food consumption at both the micro (what are Indian people eating) and macro (how much food is India producing) levels can be used to measure hunger levels.

Underlying causes of hunger in India

Falling per capita food production (especially in the last ten years), as shown in Figure 3.

Increasing share of surplus states and large farmers in food production, resulting in export of artificial surplus reducing availability of food grains.

Increasing inequality, with marginal increase in the per capita expenditure of the population's economically poor. From their meager income, the poor are forced to spend more on medicines, education, transport, fuel, etc., which reduces the share of their expenditure on food.

Poor access of the lower income population to expensive foods such as pulses, vegetables, oils, fruits, and meat products, which provide essential proteins, fats and micro nutrients.

Low status of women in Indian society, their early marriage, low weight at pregnancy and illiteracy leading to low weight of new born babies.

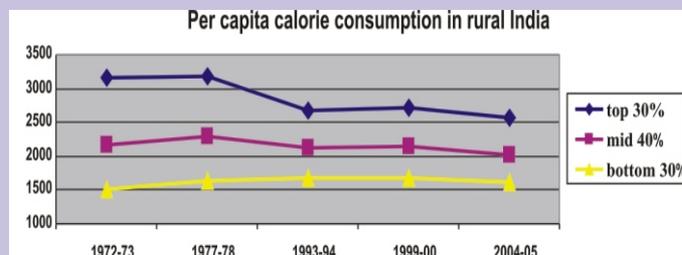
Poor children practices, such as not immediately cultivating the habit of regular breastfeeding after

birth, irregular and insufficient complementary feeding afterwards and lack of disposal of child excreta.

Poor supply of government services such as immunization, access to medical care, and lack of priority to primary health care in government programmes.

Major food related programmes such as PDS and ICDS are plagued by corruption, leakages, and errors in selection, procedural delays, poor allocations and little accountability.

Figure 1: Time trends in average per capita energy intake by expenditure class



NSSO data indicates that the calorie intake of the economically poor continues to be 30 to 50 per cent less than the calorie intake of the economically better off of the population, despite the poor needing more calories because of harder manual work. Whereas the economically better off in India consumed 2564 kcal per day in 2004-05; the economically poor consumed only 1607 kcal per day, which must be interpreted as a sign of distress and hunger. NSSO data also highlights that there is a higher reliance of the poor on cereal based calories because of lack of access to fruits, vegetables and meat products. These figures should be judged against a national norm of 2400 and 2100 calories per day for rural and urban areas fixed by GOI in 1979. A similar downward trend is observed for cereal consumption too. As the relative price of food items has remained stable over the past twenty years, declining consumption can be attributed to the lack of purchasing power and contraction of effective demand by the poor, who are forced to spend a greater part of their limited incomes on non-food items like transport, fuel, health, and education, which have become as essential as food.

Poverty and food security

The national level official poverty lines for the base year (1973-74) were expressed as monthly per capita consumption expenditure of Rs. 49 in rural areas and Rs. 57 in urban areas, which correspond to a basket of goods and services that satisfy the calorie norms of the per capita daily requirement of 2400 kcal in rural areas and 2100 kcal in urban areas.

The existing types of poverty programmes may not be enough to tackle hunger and food insecurity. Important food security issues are often left out of poverty programmes, such as the stability of food consumption, dietary diversity, and food absorption and utilization.

Some common features of poverty in India:

Poverty is concentrated in the poorer states such as Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Jharkhand, which account for 27 per cent of the country's population but 30 per cent of India's poor lived there in 1973-74, which increased to 41 per cent by 2005.

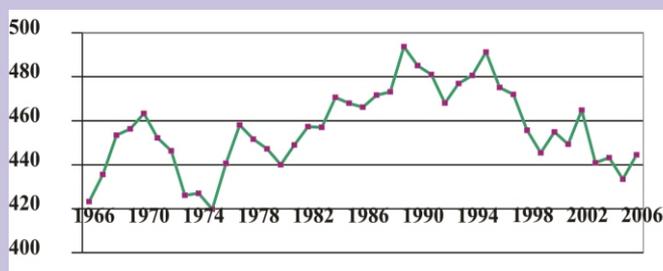
Three quarters of the poor live in rural areas and depend on agriculture.

There has been hardly any decline in poverty for the scheduled tribe households: almost half of them continue to be below the poverty line. Although poverty amongst Scheduled Castes has declined from 46 to 37 per cent during 1993-2004 (Planning Commission 2008), the caste systems confines those from lower castes to a limited number of poorly paid, often socially stigmatized occupational niches from which there is no escape.

Many states, in the northern and western parts of the country, are characterized by long standing and deeply entrenched social inequalities associated with gender.

Poverty is connected with vulnerability and shocks, compounded by general uncertainty with respect to livelihood and life.

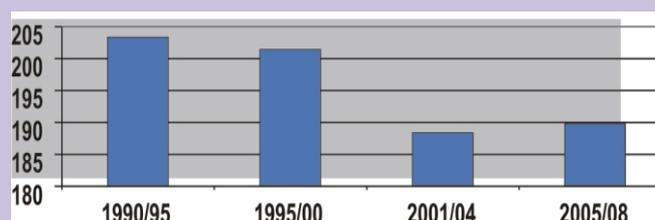
Figure 2: Per capita food grain availability per day in grams



At the macro level, food grain availability in India is calculated as 87.5 per cent of the gross production (the rest is estimated as requirement for seeds, farm animal feed and waste) plus net imports, minus changes in government stocks. Assuming no net change in private stocks, this can be taken as a good proxy for overall food grain consumption in the country. During the last fifty years before independence, Food grain availability declined from 545 grams to 407 grams per head per day.

Considering five year averages, India witnessed a rise in the food grain availability per head from 416 grams during 1950-55 to 485 grams by 1989-91. However since then, there has been a slide to a low of 445 gram per head per day by 2006, a level not seen since the drought years of 1970s (Based on Economic Survey, GOI, 2007-08).

Figure 3: Annual per capita production of food grains (average of five years)



Despite the fact that the growth of food grain production in the period 1989-2004 was lower than the increase in population during the same period, the government procurement of cereals increased, suggesting a decline in the consumption of poor people's purchasing power. This may have happened because of the structural imbalances like a high Minimum Support Price (MSP), rising capital intensity, lack of land reforms, failure of poverty alleviation programmes, and no new technological breakthrough in agriculture. It could also be due to production problems in less endowed regions, like erratic rainfall, soil erosion and water run-off, lack of access to credit and markets, and poor communications, which led to a dangerous situation of huge surplus in FCI go downs during 2000-03 coupled with widespread hunger (Based on Economic Survey, GOI, 2007-08).

The falling availability and increase in government procurement reflects a contraction of effective demand, as the poor are forced to spend a greater part of their incomes on transport, health, and education. In other words, non-food items have become more "essential" than food in a particular sense. This argument is supported by empirical evidence from various sample

Table 1: Trends in cereal consumption across expenditure groups (kg per month)

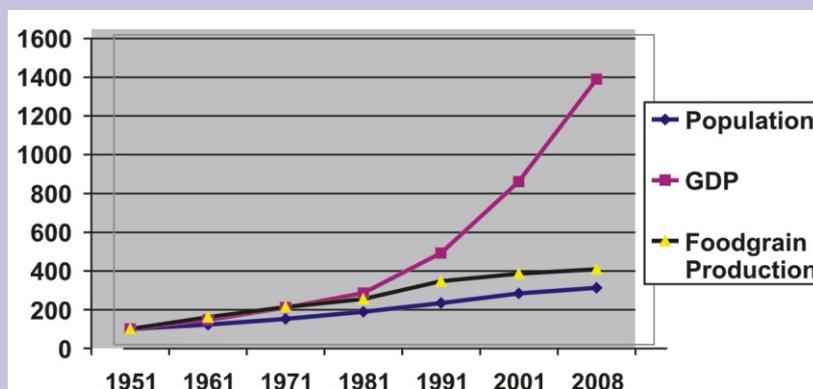
RURAL	Per centile				
	lowest 5 per cent	5 per cent-10 per cent	40 per cent-50 per cent	90 per cent- 95 per cent	95 per cent-100 per cent
1993-94	9.68	11.29	13.33	14.98	15.78
1999-00	9.78	11.15	12.89	13.73	14.19
2004-05	9.88	10.87	12.16	12.77	13.50
URBAN	Per centile				
	lowest 5 per cent	5 per cent-10 per cent	40 per cent-50 per cent	90 per cent- 95 per cent	95 per cent-100 per cent
1993-94	8.91	10.11	10.99	10.19	10.29
1999-00	8.99	10.15	10.80	9.94	9.72
2004-05	9.25	10.04	10.25	9.50	9.10

Source: NSSO 2007, 61st Round Report

surveys, as between 1972-73 and 2004-05 the proportion of food in total consumer expenditure has fallen from 73 per cent to 55 per cent in rural areas and from 64 per cent to 42 per cent in urban areas (Based on Economic Survey, GOI, 2007-08).

Thus, due to a lack of growth in agriculture after the mid-1990s, there has been an employment decline, income decline, and hence, a fall in aggregate demand by the rural poor. Normally when there is a fall in per capita output and government stocks are depleted, net imports take place in order to maintain availability per head at an unchanged level; but precisely the opposite happened in India during 1999-2004. Despite falling per capita output, there were both rising net exports as well as huge additions to stocks year after year. This was a highly abnormal situation never seen before in independent India: it reflects the unprecedented magnitude of

Figure 4: Decennial growth of index of population, GDP and foodgrain production (Year 1951=100)



continuous demand-deflation of food grains, especially in the rural sector since 1996. (Based on Economic Survey, GOI, 2007-08)

Figure 4 illustrates that despite India's GDP being on the rise, the production per capita of food grains is declining. While in the short and medium term, there might be a surplus of cereals in the country, primarily due to lack of purchasing power, these prospects are likely to diminish in the years to come (Mittal 2008; Chand 2007).

Demand projections in general, are estimated on the basis of assumptions about the base year demand, population, expenditure elasticity and economic growth. Assuming that the GDP grows by 8 per cent for the next twenty years, the total cereal demand projected for 2011 and 2026 is 188 million tonnes (mt) and 274 mt, whereas production in 2006-07 was 202 mt. Thus, India may be running a surplus in the short run, but is likely to fall short of the demand in the long run. This situation is even more alarming for edible oil, sugarcane and pulses.

To meet the future food requirements, India will have to either increase agricultural production, or depend on imports. To avoid large scale imports, policy must focus towards productivity enhancement in agriculture, through public investment in irrigation, development of roads, power and technology.

Unfortunately, the trend so far has been disappointing. After recording unprecedented growth of 4.7 per cent a year during the period of the Eight Five Year Plan (1992-1997), growth of the agriculture and allied sectors decelerated to 2.1 per cent during the Ninth Five Year Plan (1997-2002). It further dipped to 1 per cent during the tenth Five Year Plan (2002-2007), against the targeted growth of 4 per cent per annum.

India's low average wheat and rice yields, compared with other major world producers suggest that there is significant scope for further boosting yields and output. Rice yields are among the lowest for major producers and wheat yields remain near the world (and US) average despite the fact that a relatively high share – about 87 per cent – of Indian wheat area is irrigated. Although roughly 90 per cent of wheat area and 75 per cent of rice area is already planted to High Yield Varieties (HYVs), average wheat yields in major states remain about 25 per cent lower than levels achieved in experiment stations, while rice yields are about 50 per cent lower (Jha et al 2007). Increasing the yields would however require new policies.

Analysis of major programmes and policy options

Agricultural production

In the last fifteen years, the agricultural scene in India has four features that distinguish it from the earlier Green Revolution Phase (1970-85).

First, the policy approach to agriculture in the 1990s has been to secure an increase in production through subsidies on inputs such as power, water, and fertilizer, and by increasing the minimum support price rather than through building new capital assets in irrigation, power and rural infrastructure.

This has shifted the production base from low cost regions to high cost ones, causing an increase in the cost of production, **regional imbalances** and an increase in the burden of storage and transport of food grains.

Second, the intensity of private capital is increasing for all classes of farmers, but at a faster pace in green revolution areas and for larger farmers. For large

farmers in commercialized regions, proportion of output sold has increased at a much slower rate than the proportion of monetized inputs, including hired labour. The implication of this is a **resource squeeze** in agriculture leading to indebtedness.

Third, the proportion of total bank credit earmarked for agriculture has fallen. Institutional credit has been scarce for the agricultural sector, rather significantly in the 1990s and in this decade. A more palpable cause is the professional reluctance of banks to operate in rural areas.

Lastly, groundwater, as opposed to surface and subsoil water, has become the main source of irrigation. Due to this, nearly 30 per cent of the blocks in the country are presently classified as semi critical, critical or overexploited, as groundwater use exceeds the rate of groundwater recharge.

Thus, the built in biases of the green revolution strategy now stand exposed.

Agricultural labour and wage employment programmes

The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA), which in principle gives, every person who is willing to work the statutory right to 100 days of guaranteed wage labour at minimum wages per family, is legally open to all destitute people.

The legal guarantee of 100 days wages under the NREGA implementation of this project left at least Rs. 650 crore unspent.

A great number of them are not given job cards, those who have jobs are given 12-14 days work.

The NREGA suffers from lapses in implementation and monitoring.

With falling agricultural growth rates and increasing capital intensity, the growth rate of employment has lagged, (Lanjouw and Murgai 2008). Unemployment among agricultural labour households has sharply increased from 9.5 per cent in 1993-94 to 15.3 per cent in 2004-05. Overtime, there has been a secular decline in employment elasticity in agriculture (Bhalla and Hazell 2003). What is of significance is the predominance of women among rural workers and their larger numbers as subsidiary and casual workers.

According to a recent press note released by the Ministry of Programme Implementation and statistics on 'Employment and Unemployment situation in India: 2005-06', among people aged 15 years and above in the rural area, only 5 per cent got public works, 7 per cent sought but did not get public works.

Public Distribution System

With a network of more than 4 lakh Fair Price Shops claiming to annually distribute commodities worth more

than Rs. 15000 crore to about 16 crore families, the PDS in India is perhaps the largest distribution network of its type in the world. These shops distribute a total of 35 kg of wheat and rice to about 6.5 crore. BPL families pay Rs. 4.2 per kg for wheat and Rs. 5.6 per kg for rice. Another 2.5 crore poorest families get Rs. 35 per kg of food grains at a highly subsidized rate of Rs. 2 per kg for wheat and Rs. 3 per kg for rice.

In addition, there are welfare schemes such as hot cooked midday meals for school going children, and supplementary nutrition for pre-school children. It is significant that the allocation of the poorer states such as UP, Bihar and Assam, have more than doubled since 1997, yet due to poor off take by the states and even poorer delivery by the FPS to BPL families, the scheme has not made any impact on the nutrition levels in these states.

The Planning Commission (2008) has concluded that 'PDS seems to have failed in serving the objective of making food grains available to the poor. If it had been successful, the average consumption levels of cereals should not have fallen - as it has consistently over the last two decades'.

The problems associated with the PDS are summarized below:

Large errors of exclusion of BPL families and inclusion of above poverty line families

Prevalence of ghost BPL/AAY cards in the custody of FPS dealers

Diversion of subsidized grains to unintended beneficiaries

Low quality of food grains

A larger number of homeless and poor living in unauthorized colonies in urban areas have been denied ration cards and are thus unable to avail the PDS, despite being Indian citizens.

The present procedure for selection of BPL beneficiaries is opaque, bureaucratic and does not involve gram sabhas. The basis on which village wise cap on the maximum number of entitled beneficiaries is fixed, is not clear and not well defined.

Weak monitoring, lack of transparency and inadequate accountability of officials implementing the scheme.

Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS)

The ICDS, the main outlet for public spending on child nutrition, has been in existence since 1975. It operates through centres in villages, called *anganwadi*, where local workers provide nutrition and health services. While the government provides salaries for the *anganwadi* staff, state governments are responsible for procuring food for supplemental nutrition feeding.

In 1993, the country evolved National Nutrition Goals for the year 2000. These included reduction by one half of severe and moderate malnutrition among young children; reducing the incidence of low birth weight below 10 per cent; eliminating blindness due to vitamin A deficiency; reducing iron deficiency anemia in pregnant women to 25 per cent; reducing iodine deficiency disorders to 10 per cent; producing 25 crore tonnes of food grains and improving household food security through poverty alleviation programmes.

However, these goals were not well disseminated, with the result that failure to achieve them did not attract criticism either in the legislatures or in the press.

Despite a three fold increase in its budget by GOI in the last five years the ICDS is reaching only 12.5 per cent of children in the age group 6 months to 6 years.

As the centre is likely to be located in the richer part of the village, it may be unable to reach vulnerable children in poorer households and lower castes and those living in remote areas.

The programme targets children mostly above the age of three when malnutrition has already set in. It does not focus on the critical age group of children under three years, the age window during which health and nutrition interventions can have the most effect.

Finally, the ICDS faces substantial operational challenges, such as the lack of monitoring and evaluation.

Mid-Day Meal Scheme (MDMS)

The MDMS provides a free cooked meal to every child in classes' I-V of government, government aided and local body schools. This is a primarily centrally assisted scheme with the state governments contributing partially towards the cooking costs.

Under the MDMS, the Government of India provides free food grains while the cooking costs are shared with the state governments.

In 2005-2006, only 76.8 per cent of the grain allocated for the midday meal scheme was actually taken by the state governments.

The quality of the midday meal was compromised in the sense that the quantity of food given to children was not enough and the midday meal was not provided on all working days.

The Supreme Court Commissioners have made the following recommendations in their Seventh Report submitted in 2008:

Currently, the midday meal is provided only to children who are attending schools, whereas the most vulnerable children in the school going age are out of schools working as child labour, street children etc. The midday meal should be expanded to cover all children in the school going age, irrespective of whether they are enrolled in school. The location of the meal served can continue to be the school; this might further encourage those out of school to join schools.

The provision for cooking costs under the midday meals should be increased to Rs. 3 per child per day (not including food grains costs) from the current Rs. 2 per child per day in order to be able to provide a nutritious and filling meal to children. Furthermore, this norm should be inflation-linked, in the sense that it is constantly reviewed based on the price indices.

Midday meals should be linked with nutrition education and related educational activities. State governments should be encouraged to adapt their textbooks for this purpose, as the NCERT has already done for some textbooks. Nutritious items such as eggs and green leafy vegetables should be provided regularly.

Proper infrastructure for midday meals should be mandatory, including cooking sheds, storage space, drinking water, ventilation, and utensils.

Serious action should be taken in the event of any form of social discrimination in midday meals, such as discrimination against Dalit children or Dalit cooks.

Priority should be given to disadvantaged communities (especially Dalits and Adivasis) in the appointing of cooks and helpers. All cooks and helpers should be paid no less than the statutory minimum wage.

Community participation in the monitoring of midday meals should be strengthened, particularly to prevent corruption and ensure quality.

Midday meals should be integrated with school health services, including immunization, deworming, growth monitoring, health checkups, and micro nutrient supplementation.

The effects of policy lapses can be traced amongst tribals, destitutes, women and children:

Tribals

Tribal groups are the worst sufferers from malnutrition and hunger. They live in agriculturally depressed areas, remote from roads, and the reach of administration and government programmes is weakest there.

The following are the persistent problems which have largely remained unattended to:

Land alienation

Indebtedness

Government monopoly over Non Timber Forest Products (NTFPs)

Ineffective implementation of Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act of 1996 for Schedule V areas.

Involuntary displacement due to development projects and lack of proper rehabilitation.

Shifting cultivation.

Apart from policy failures listed above, tribals have also suffered because of the poor quality of governance. Programme implementation has deteriorated everywhere in India, but more so in tribal areas. Whereas government servants are reluctant to work, and are mostly absent from their official duties it is a pity that massive vacancies still exist in tribal regions, in the face of acute educated unemployment in the country.

Supreme Court intervention

In April 2001, the Peoples' Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL), a human rights organization, filed a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) in the Supreme Court of India arguing that the right to food is a fundamental right of all Indian citizens, and demanded that the country's gigantic food stocks (about 5 crore tonnes of grain at that time) should be used without delay to prevent hunger and starvation.

The Supreme Court has passed orders directing the Indian Government to:

Introduce hot cooked midday meals in all primary schools

Provide 35kgs of grain per month at highly subsidized prices to 1.5 crore destitute households under the Antyodaya (AAY) component of the PDS

Double the resource allocations for Sampoorna Grameen Rozgar Yojana (India's largest rural employment programme at that time, now superseded by the Employment Guarantee Act)

Universalize the ICDS by increasing the number of centres from 6 lakh to 14 lakh

Identify SC and ST hamlets/habitations for new ICDS centers on a priority basis

The Supreme Court appointed two commissioners, Dr. N.C. Saxena and Harsh Mander (both former IAS officers), for the purpose of monitoring the implementation of the interim orders. The commissioners present periodic reports to the Supreme Court, which typically deal with the implementation of the Supreme Court orders.

Destitute

Government programmes are also woefully inadequate to address destitution; in fact, they tend to be blind to or in denial of the fact that large numbers of people lack even the elementary means and power to survive with dignity. The government needs to act, not after there is an emergency like a drought or flood, not even after people die of starvation, but proactively before people slip into destitution, and fail to access the nutritious and culturally appropriate food they require to lead healthy lives.

One feature which is common to public policy relating to the dispossessed groups is the fact that for almost all, there is very little authentic official data about their numbers and lists. This is known as 'invisibilisation'; with the state failing to recognise the needs and even the existence of these powerless people.

Children

According to the National Family Health Survey, The proportion of underweight children remained virtually unchanged between 1998-99 and 2005-06 (47 per cent for age group 0-3 years). These are appalling figures placing India among the most undernourished countries in the world.

Clearly, the government's communication efforts in changing age old practices are not working well, and critical public health messages are simply not reaching families with children. Also, factors relating to poor supply of government services, such as immunization, access to medical care, and lack of priority assigned to primary health care in government programmes, partially explain the conditions of malnutrition faced by the children of India today.

Women

The implication of women's malnutrition for human development are multiple and cumulative. The discriminatory practices associated with the rigid social norms and the excessive demands made on the time and energies of women join hands with the usual determinants in blighting women's nutrition. However, one of the usual determinants, namely poverty, seems equally important: not only is poverty one of the basic causes of malnutrition, but also malnutrition is considered to be both an outcome and a manifestation of poverty.

Thus, it is important to ensure equity in women's rights to land, property, capital assets, wages and livelihood opportunities that would undoubtedly impact positively on the issue, but underlying the deep inequity in women's access to nutrition is her own unquestioning acceptance of her status as an unequal member of the family and society. Eventually, gender empowerment alone is likely to be the key to the resolution of the hunger challenge amongst women in India (Ramachandran 2007).

In the ultimate analysis, Economic growth alone is insufficient to bring about significant reductions in the prevalence of malnourishment among children, or increase in the food intake of the poor. Without a major shakeup in policy and an improvement in the effectiveness of its implementation, the attainment of the MDGs by India in this regard looks uncertain.

Thus, in the light of the above constraints, the following ***Policy Recommendations*** are made:

Revamp small holder agriculture. The most important intervention that is needed is greater investment in irrigation, power and roads in poorer regions. Especially, in Central and Eastern India, where the concentration of poverty is increasing.

Launch watershed development programmes in uplands, where most tribes live. This would increase the net sown area and crop intensity generating more opportunities for wage employment and also improves the productivity of Common Property Resources (CPRs) improving access to more fodder, fuel wood, water and NTFPs.

Start a drive to **plant fruit trees on degraded forests** and homestead lands that belong to or have been allotted to the poor, making poor people's diet nutritious and also diversifying their livelihoods.

Create more job opportunities by undertaking massive public works in districts with low agricultural productivity. Monitor the inclusion of old people, especially widows among the wage workers, extending work guarantee to 150 days.

Provide **separate ration cards as well as NREGA job cards** to all single women, regardless of whether they live alone, with dependents, or in their natal or husbands home. Likewise for aged, infirm and disabled people who may or may not live with able bodied caregivers.

Improve the skills of the poor for market oriented jobs, so that they are absorbed in the sunrise industries such as hospitality, security, health and construction.

Improve the distribution of subsidized food grains to the poor through the Public Distribution System (PDS). This would require a correct listing of BPL families, by launching a drive in collaboration with civil society to cover the poorest sections.

Restructure ICDS (Integrated Child Development Services). The focus of ICDS should be health and nutrition education, encouraging women to breastfeed, providing two hot meals to children aged 3 to 6 years; and weaning foods to children below 3 years, and to all adolescent girls, establishing ICDS centres on priority within a year in all primitive tribal group (PTG) and discriminated scheduled caste settlements, and involving the locals as ICDS staff.

Prepare a comprehensive list every two years of all destitute people needing free or subsidized cooked food, by opening up midday meals and community kitchens.

Thus, India needs to **increase its focus on targeted investments** in nutrition programmes, clinics, disease control, irrigation, rural electrification, rural roads, and other basic investments, especially in rural India, where the current budgetary allocations are inadequate. This however, requires improving the governance, productivity and accountability of government machinery.

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* This policy brief is based on the policy paper written by Dr. N C Saxena titled: Hunger, Under-nutrition and Food Security in India. The full paper is available from CLRA on request.

‡ The author, a former Secretary to Planning Commission of India, is the Commissioner appointed by the Supreme Court of India to monitor and report the implementation of Centrally Sponsored Schemes (PDS, Mid-Day Meals, ICDS, National Old age Pension Scheme, National Family Benefit Scheme, National Maternity Benefit Scheme, Antyodaya, Annapurna and SGRY).

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