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Food Security and Sustainable Rural Development: The Chhattisgarh Experience

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Abstract

India's food security policy has a laudable objective to ensure availability of food grains to the common people at an affordable price and it has enabled the poor to have access to food. The policy has focused essentially on growth in agriculture and the objective of providing adequate food through proper distribution challenge lies with the public distribution system (PDS). Chhattisgarh state has also taken an important step in this regard by becoming the first state to enact the State Food Security Act. And it has been analyzed that the objective of food security can be easily achieved by adopting the process of sustainable rural development. The present paper deals with the subject matter of Food security and sustainable rural development and is based on secondary data.

Keywords: Agriculture, Food security, Public Distribution System, State Food Security Act, Sustainable rural development

Introduction: All human beings have a right to live with dignity with at least two decent meals a day. Right to Food and Right to be free from hunger are the human rights which are protected under various international human rights. The right to food as a human right is a relatively recent invention. It was included, of course, in Article 25(1) of the 1948 Universal Declaration on Human Rights¹, the core document that launched the movement towards international human rights at universal level, and in subsequent treaties such as Article II of 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights² or the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child³. But for almost fifty years, the right to food was practically dormant. It was seen as of little practical significance. At best, it had a symbolic value, adding legal weight to the deeply held ethical conviction that it was wrong not to support poor people's ability to have access to food.

¹ G.A. Res. 217 A (III), U.N. Doc. A/810, at 71 (1948)

² Adopted on 16 December 1966, G.A. Res. 2200(XXII), U.N. GAOR, 21st sess., Supp. No. 16, U.S. Doc. A/6316 (1966), 993 UNTS 3 (see Article 11).

³ Adopted on 20 November 1989, A/RES/44/25, 20 November 1989) (1577 UNTS 3). Articles 24, para. 2, c) and 27 para. 3 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child also impose on States parties an explicit obligation to combat child malnutrition.

“The right to adequate food is realized when every man, woman and child, alone or in community with others, has the physical and economic access at all times to adequate food or means for its procurement.”

– General Comment 12 (CESCR)

In 1974, the first World Food Summit had narrowly defined “food security” in terms of food supply. The World Food Summit of 1996 defined food security as existing “when all people at all times have access to sufficient, safe, nutritious food to maintain a healthy and active life”. Commonly, the concept of food security is defined as including both physical and economic access to food that meets people's dietary needs as well as their food preferences for active and healthy life⁴. Right to Food of indigenous people is implicit in the ILO convention of No. 169 which is approved by 17 countries. Food security is a complex sustainable development issue, linked to health through malnutrition, but also to sustainable economic development, environment, and trade. Arranging and giving an adequate food became a key instrument for the Governments in the fight to achieve food security. Approximately 20 countries in the world have incorporated Right to Food in their national laws including India.

Right to Food: The right to food, and its variations, is a human right protecting the right for people to feed themselves in dignity, implying that sufficient food is available, that people have the means to access it, and that it adequately meets the individual's dietary needs. The right to food protects the right of all human beings to be free from hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition. The right is derived from the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

The right to food, and the measures that must be taken, are laid out quite clearly in article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, social and cultural rights. Paragraph 1 calls on States to “recognize the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate food... and the continuous improvement of living conditions”. Paragraph 2 is more precise, as it demands that States guarantee the fundamental right of everyone to be free from hunger, and asks them to take “individually and through international co-operation, the measures, including specific programmes, which are needed : (a) to improve methods of production, conservation and distribution of food by making full use of technical and scientific knowledge, by disseminating knowledge of the principles of nutrition and by developing or reforming agrarian systems in such a way as to achieve the most efficient development and utilization of natural resources; (b) taking into account the problems of both food-importing and food exporting countries, to ensure an equitable distribution of world food supplies in relation to need”. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), 1989, goes beyond hunger and addresses the issue of child nutrition. The right to food is implicitly recognized in such provisions as the right to life, the right to health and the right to economic, social and cultural development, which are

⁴ <http://www.who.int/trade/glossary/story028/en/>

expressly recognized under the Constitution of India. The right to food is inseparably linked to the dignity of human beings and is therefore essential for the enjoyment and fulfillment of such other rights as health, education, work and political participation.

Food security and sustainable rural development in India: Attaining food security is a matter of prime importance for India because food security confirms Right to Food. Food security is ensured by continuous and adequate supply of food and all the persons having capacity to buy food of quality. India's food security system is one of the largest in the world⁵ and development and growth in Indian agriculture has helped to increase food production and its availability. Increased availability of food is a crucial and essential condition for achieving food security.

Agriculture is the backbone of Indian economy especially India's rural economy. India is still popularly known for possessing rural character. Development of rural economy in an imperative as it confirms growth of agricultural productivity so as to ensure regular supply of food. Rural development is also leads to improvement the quality of life and economic well-being of people living in rural area. The Government of India has taken necessary steps by providing employment opportunities to rural population and giving them a source of income to gain the capacity and sufficient means to buy the adequate quantity of food. Rural development also facilitates and provides adequacies of rural infrastructure like roads, transport, electricity, marketing infrastructure, storage facilities (both warehouse and cold storages), and other post-harvest facilities. Long-term food security goal can only be attained if there is sustainable agriculture and sustainable rural development. A sustainable farming system is a system in which the natural resources are managed so that potential yield and the stock of natural resources do not decline over time. Sustainable rural development means improving quality of life for rural poor by developing capabilities and capacities that promote community participation, health, education, food security and sustainable economic growth and hence enabling the people to achieve their full potential. Sustainable rural development leads to strengthens of rural infrastructure to support adequate food supply. Agriculture is the centre to sustained rural development and increasing food production in sustained way is important to enhance food productivity. Improvement in farm productivity is one of the measures to achieve the objective of food security and it helps reducing poverty and hunger. The idea of sustainable rural development also benefits in eliminating poverty by providing employment opportunities and developing rural infrastructure. Adequate supply of food is a key determinant of adequate nutrition and helps in attaining good health. Improvement in farm productivity and getting proper returns of the productivity helps the farmers to generate income which helps in educating their children.

The National Food Security Act 2013 was signed into law on September 12, 2013 with the objectives of ensuring food security and alleviating chronic hunger and poverty in India. The Act mentioned that the objectives of food security and continuous availability of food

⁵ <http://planningcommission.gov.in/plans/mta/midterm/english-pdf/chapter-05.pdf>
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will be done by public distribution system where the state-run Food Corporation of India will distribute subsidized grains through a nationwide network of fair price shops. Hence there is a relationship between Right to Food, food security and sustainable rural development. Most all the Indian states are on the path of maintaining the above relationship.

Food security and sustainable rural development in Chhattisgarh: National food security law guarantees a very cheap food to up to 70% of India's 1.2 billion people. Chhattisgarh state was the first to pass the Act on December 21 2012⁶ and implement it and it has been praised for reducing the amount of grains lost through pilferage and through corrupt practices. In an emailed interview with Wall Street Journal Hon'ble Chief Minister of the state Dr.Raman Singh stated that the State Food Security law has benefited almost 90% of population⁷. The law covers 55% of households of land less laboures, small and marginal farmers, construction workers, those in unban informal sector workers, one in four families with particularly vulnerable members specially those who are terminally ill or physically challenged. The Act has also entitlement for children, pregnant and lactating mothers, people living with hunger, destitute, homeless. In the light of provisions of state food law passed the state mad budget provisions for Rs 17 billion for the FY 2013-14. To avoid the leakages in Public Distribution System the state de-privatized the ration shops by shifting the management of PDS outlets from private licensees to community based organizations such as gram Panchayats, female self-help groups and co-operative societies. To make the ration shops financially viable the government has increase the commission paid to ration-shops owners from Rs 8 to Rs 45 for 100 kilograms of food. The Government even adopted computerized ration cards. With efficient efficiency of earning high growth rate growth, the state has already registered high growth in agriculture this high growth in agriculture productivity helps in aiding the objective of food security. According to a report by Assocham Economic Research Bureau(AERB) to perk up agricultural productivity more, the government should ensure providing top quality seeds through credit linked subsidy scheme, proper management of water resources, promoting organized farming, proper infrastructure for warehouses etc. The biggest advantage with the Chhattisgarh government is that it has the infrastructure in place to secure food for all in the state. Computerisation has helped put the public distribution system in Chhattisgarh on the right track. With smart cards, the beneficiary can purchase ration from any outlet that has resulted in ending the monopoly of any particular shop. The shopkeepers are bound to maintain the stock by avoiding leakages to attract the customers. The Chhattisgarh government has taken a big step towards food security

⁶ http://www.gktoday.in/quiz-questions/first-state-in-india-to-pass-a-food-security-act-is-___/

⁷ <http://blogs.wsj.com/indiarealtime/2013/08/12/how-chhattisgarhs-food-security-law-works/>

Hence the state government is required to pay more attention towards adoption of sustainable rural development. The food entitlement under the Act per month per household includes⁸:-

- 35 kg food grains (Rs 1/- kg to AAY, rest all Rs 2/-kg)
- 2 kg iodized salt
- 3 liters kerosene
- 1.3 kg sugar
- 1 kg gram

Following the idea off sustainable agriculture to safe guard the future of food security the farmers of the state have started using Bio-Fertilizers. Proper training has been delivered to farmers and the farmers have learned the fact that the quality of the land degrades by the use of chemical fertilizers which results in diminishing returns to land. The farmers and the people in rural areas of the state have been made capable to buy the adequate quantity of food through proper PDS system by providing them employment opportunities through the rural development programmes of Pradhanmantri Gram Sadak Yojna and MGNREGA. Greening rural development is essential for ensuring the environmental sustainability of economic growth. Greening rural development will contribute to inclusive growth by enabling the target growth rate of agriculture of 4 percent, which is important due to agriculture's multiplier effects and due to the continued dependence of 58 percent of India's rural population for livelihoods on agriculture and regenerating common land and water bodies, which offer sustenance to the rural poor through provisioning of goods and ecosystem services

Sustainable rural development program of the state has also improved the status of rural infrastructure and agricultural infrastructure and hence provides the rural economy the base for proper quantity and quality of food supply. Under the Food security law of the state, the measures taken by the state in the areas of sustainable rural development and hence ensured proper availability of food to a mass population, overcoming the problem of hunger and overcoming the problem of malnutrition.

Conclusion: The state of Chhattisgarh has already taken a major step in following the ideals of Right to Food and promoting and promising food security to a major section of people. And to keep the promise of Food security the state have also taken prominent and effective steps in improving the PDS, filling up the leakages in the system, improving the agricultural productivity, improving the conditions of the farmers, providing proper rural and agricultural infrastructure. But the state still needs to focus on the following areas to improve the productivity of food security. The suggestions are as follows:-

- Educate more farmers because education helps in improving farm efficiency and technology adoption. It helps in upgrading their skills and entrepreneurial ability and technologies required for productivity growth.

⁸ <http://mrunal.org/2012/12/polity-chhattisgarh-food-security-bill-2012-salient-features.html>

- There should be proper improvement in soil testing services, development of improved fertilizer supply and distribution systems and development of physical and institutional infrastructure.
- Adoption of improved management of irrigation water is essential in enhancing production and productivity, food security, poverty alleviation.
- The yield of major crops and livestock commodities must be increased.
- Support for risk management and safety nets must be provided to the farmers.

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