

National Food Security Act 2013- It's Issues, Challenges and Implications



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Abstract

The National Food Security Act 2013 (NFSA) is an initiative to remove food insecurity and malnutrition by ensuring physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food for all the people and at all time to meet their dietary needs to live a active and healthy life. The primary objective of the bill is to provide subsidized food grains for up to 75% of rural population and up to 50% of urban population to alleviate chronic hunger, malnutrition and poverty from India. But there are a lot of apprehensions regarding its different areas of concern, financial and operational feasibility, challenges in the process of implementation and implications. In the light of above backdrop this paper seeks to critically study the NFSA with respect to its issues, challenges and implications. Owing to the nature of study descriptive research methodology has been applied. The study traced several contentious issues and challenges like removal of demand-supply mismatch, reform in PDS, promotion of organic farming, effective governance. MSP for the food grains, fixation of responsibilities, transparency in administrative set up, provision for compensating volatility in production etc which need attention of the policy maker otherwise they will not only create hindrances in the process of implementation of the Act but also hinder its success. Further this paper revealed several key implications of the Act like inflation in the open market, shortage of labour in the economy, cost of subsidy to the government exchequer etc. Finally the study suggested that proper formulation of government policies and its implementation with see-through system can help in achieving food security for the citizens of India suggestions which need to be incorporated in the said Act before it comes into force to yield the desired outcomes.

Keywords: National Food Security Act, Poverty, Issues, Challenges, Implications.

Introduction

India is one of the highly recognized countries globally for fast growing economy among the developing countries. It has made remarkable development in all respect critical to well being of a nation. But Poverty, hunger, unemployment and food insecurity which are threat to human development are still in existence. Though there is considerable decline in poverty level in terms of percentage, the poverty in absolute term is very wide. India has the dubious distinction of being placed at the top of the bar for malnourished children and at the bottom of the bar for health indicators even after sixty seven years of independence. The causes of food insecurity can be attributable to various factors like unavailability of food, poor purchasing capacity, illiteracy, unemployment, overcrowding, poor environmental conditions, gender bias, lack of intersectional coordination, lack of political will, lack of poorly monitored nutritional programmes and inadequate public food distribution system. The National Food Security Act 2013 has a noble objective of providing adequate quantity and quality at affordable prices with the objective of reducing poverty and hunger. But to what extent the proposed Act will be successful is an area of concern for government, policymakers, researchers, academicians etc as there are several issues, operational and financial challenges and implications concerning the said Act.

Objective of the Study

1. To have a thorough understanding of the concept of Food Security.
2. To critically analyze the issues concerning National Food Security Act 2013.
3. To discuss the challenges in the process of implementation of the said act.

4. To highlight its implications on various aspect of the economy.

Relevance of the Study

The National food security bill passed in 2013 to ensure food and nutritional security in human life cycle approach, by ensuring adequate quantity and quality food at affordable prices to people to live a live with dignity. The success of the project depends on various factors like cost of the project, areas of concern and issues and challenges likely to be faced in the process of implementations etc. so this study seeks to shade light on those areas.

Scope of the Study

The research design chosen for the study is descriptive research study. The scope of the study includes an in-depth analysis of the food national security act 2013 and different related articles to gather more insights into its issues, challenges and implications on the different socioeconomic aspect of the country. As act is yet to be implemented the real consequences can't be predicted with utmost accuracy. So the findings of this paper are the possible outcomes which are likely to be resulted from the implementation of the act.

Review of Literature

This section of the paper is a sincere effort to analyze the available literature on national food security Act to have conceptual clarity on the aspects already examined by various authors.

There are a limited number of literatures highlighting the different aspects of the food security bill 2013. Some of the literatures are reviewed as follows:

Vala V.G. & Gujarati H.S. (2014) in their research paper had shown the negative financial and economic impact of implementing National Food Security Act. The higher food subsidy allocation will reduce the growth rate and increase the inflation as well as fiscal deficit in the coming years. To tackle such situation, Government may apply other means to achieve food security instead to implementation of National Food Security Act.

Sinha D. (2013) in her research paper has reviewed that the cost of implementing National Food Security Bill will be intolerable financial burden for a country. Many state governments have already been spending a lot of additional funds from their own budget to expand the PDS budget. NFSB does not include any specific provisions for decentralized procurement; this is another area where work is needed. Eligibility criteria, delivery mechanisms and account ability measures have all to be put in place.

Kumar U. and Chatterjee B. (2012) has suggested that the National Food Security Act, in its present form, cannot be called an expected Act on "food security". But to lead the country toward attaining the goal of universal food security some amendments in the Bill need to be incorporated. The act should have explicit provisions for decentralized procurement, storage and distribution of food grains through institutions of local governance. Also by adding provisions with respect to climate change, soil health and a built-in mechanism for monitoring the progress on key elements.

Saxena N.C. (2007) in his review article had traced out that to achieve poverty reduction changing the design of the sponsored schemes (subsidies) alone is not enough. In addition greater efforts are needed to build the capacity of administration and improve governance.

Upadhyay R.P. and Palanivel C. (2011) had opined that the causes of existing food insecurity in India is due to unavailability of food, poor purchasing capacity, illiteracy, unemployment, overcrowding, poor environmental conditions, gender biasness, lack of intersectoral co-ordination, lack of political will, poorly monitored nutritional programmes and inadequate public food distribution system. To achieve food agriculture and rural development along with promoting women empowerment, ensuring sustainable employment and improving environmental conditions (water, sanitation and hygiene) need to be given top priority.

Singh, S. P. (2013) concluded that for effectiveness of the NFSB the supply side bottlenecks must be removed by raising investment in agricultural infrastructure, research and development, human capital, roads, markets, storage and processing along with support to organic farming and reform in tenancy and lease laws.

Gulati Ashok et. al. (2012) analyzed the data of NSSO survey and revealed that there is 40.4% leakage in current PDS system. They have also found that for bringing reform in PDS, the primary issue such as identifying eligible beneficiaries, removal of bogus ration cards and provide choice of FPS to the beneficiary to procure food grains etc are required to be taken care of.

From the above literature it is clear that there are many issues, concerns and challenges in the National Food Security Act. So our attempts are directed to have a discussion on those issues of the NFSA.

Research Methodology

The research paper is an attempt of exploratory research, based on the secondary data sourced from journals, magazines, articles, government portals and media reports.

Looking into requirements of the objectives of the study the research design employed for the study is of descriptive type. Keeping in view of the set objectives, this research design was adopted to have greater accuracy and in depth analysis of the research study.

Our study may suffer from the problem of mismatch between its finding and reality which will be felt after implementation of the Act.

What Is Food Security?

Sustainable food security involves strengthening the livelihood security of all members within a household by ensuring both physical and economic access to balanced diet including the needed micronutrients, safe drinking water, and environmental sanitation, basic health care and primary education. The food should originate from efficient and environmentally benign production technologies that conserve and enhance the natural

resource base of crops, farm animals, forestry and inland and marine fisheries.

But the concept of food security has been defined differently by different agencies working in this direction.

The International Covenant on Economic and Social Rights (1966) sought to ensure "an adequate supply of world supply in relation to need" to achieve food security.

The World Food Summit of 1996 defined food security as "when all people at all times have access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life".

World Bank defines food security as "Access by all people at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life."

In 1983, the concept of food security has been defined by Food and Agriculture Organization as:

(a) The ultimate objective of world food security should be to ensure that all people at all times have both physical and economic access to the basic food they need.

(b) Food security should have three specific aims: namely, ensuring production of adequate food supplies; maximizing stability in the flow of supplies; and securing access to available supplies on the part of those who need them.

The Rome Declaration on World Food Security defines access to food as "physical and economic access, at all times, to sufficient, safe and nutritious food for people to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life."

In 1974, the Universal Declaration on Eradication of Hunger and Malnutrition enunciated that "every man woman and child has an inalienable right to be free from hunger

In ILO World Employment Conference (1976), importance was given to assuring access to food by the hungry poor by moving the concept of food security out from a purely agricultural sector concern into the broader arena of poverty and development problems.

The UN Declaration of Human Rights (1948) included the right to an adequate standard of living including food.

The Planning Commission of India also defined food security as a situation where everyone has access, at all times, to food needed for an active and healthy life.

From the above definition we can conclude that there are four dimension of the food security as

1. Food availability: The availability of sufficient quantities of food of appropriate quality at all the time.
2. Food access: Economic Access by individuals to adequate foods for a nutritious diet. It means the food must be available at affordable prices.
3. Food Utilization: Utilization of food through adequate diet, clean water, sanitation and health care to reach a state of nutritional well-being. It emphasizes on all physiological needs of the

people. This brings out the importance of non-food inputs in food security.

4. Stability: To remove food insecurity, the household or individual must have access to adequate food at all times. They should not be any risk of losing access to food due to sudden shocks like seasonal food insecurity, natural disaster, climate change etc. Therefore concept of stability can refer to both the availability and access dimensions of food security.

National Food Security Act 2013

In line with the above definitions, the food security According to National food security Act 2013 mans "An Act to provide for food and nutritional security in human life cycle approach, by ensuring adequate quantity and quality food at affordable prices to people to live a live with dignity and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto.

Salient Features of the National Food Security Act

1. Subsidized food grains for up to 75% of rural population and up to 50% of urban population.
2. Beneficiaries divided into priority and general categories.
3. 5 kg of food grains per month at Rs.3, Rs.2, and Rs.1 per kg. for rice, wheat and coarse grains respectively.
4. Not less than 3 kg. of grain per person per month for general household at prices not exceeding half the minimum support price (MSP) for wheat and coarse grains and not exceeding half the derived MSP of rice.
5. Nutritional support for children and lactating mothers. Monthly allowance of Rs. 1,000 over six months for lactating mothers.
6. One free meal every day for the destitute.
7. Affordable meals at community kitchens for the homeless.
8. Two free meals a day for up to three months for the disaster-affected.
9. Food Security Allowance by cash transfer in case of non-supply of food grains.
10. Reforms for doorstep delivery of food grains.
11. Eligible households to be identified by the States/UTs.

The policy makers are of the strong opinion that the program will bring the followings benefits to the targeted beneficiaries of our nation in following ways:

1. This will substantially reduce hunger.
2. This will provide required nutrition to the targeted beneficiaries.
3. This will eliminate poverty.
4. It will make provision for adequate quantity of food grain.
5. Provision for quality food grain at affordable prices.

Issues Concerning The Food Security Act

There are some issues which needs to be addressed while implementing the NFSA 2013

1. Targeted public distribution system needs to be renovated through use of information and communication technology to bring transparency in the PDS system.

2. To meet the quantity and quality standard of the food grain production, there a need for development in the agricultural sector for which government support in this regard is highly essential.
3. The interest of the Farmers needs to be highly protected by the fixation of minimum support price for agricultural outputs that they will get fair value for their output. This is having the effect of reducing poverty of the farmers.
4. There is a change in the dietary pattern of the people from cereals items to non cereal items like livestock and horticultural products. So food security should not be confined to food grains only.
5. Effective governance at the Gram Panchayat level is required to remove the bottlenecks of corruption through administrative intervention, accountability, transparency and grievance redressal system and to ensure that the benefits reached the targeted beneficiaries.
6. The Act does not have exit clause only issue prices are supposed to be revised after three years. This will be difficult to withdraw the scheme even after hunger and malnutrition are completely eradicated. It is because when somebody enjoy the benefits, withdrawing of such benefits are subject to protest.
7. Implementation of the Act may create demand-supply mismatch of cereals in the economy. Because there is a possibility that the small and marginal farmers shift to non-cereal production as their demand for cereal items may be met from NFSA.
8. The act ensures providing quality food to the target beneficiary but in the present era of chemicalization of agriculture quality food is a myth. So promoting organic farming is highly desirable not only for providing quality food but also for preserving Water quality and soil fertility.
9. Diversion of land and water resources from agricultural to non-agricultural use, due to industrialization and urbanization, will have serious impact on the food security of the nation.
10. In India always there is volatility in the food production due to unexpected weather fluctuations. To adjust such volatility India may have to import food grains from international markets. The cost of import may paralyze our food security.
11. The Act has a provision that in case of non availability of food grains cash payment will be made directly to the account of the beneficiaries. So the noble objective of providing food security will be defeated.

Challenges in The Implementation of Food Security Act

The act is subject face a numbers of challenges in course of its implementation. Such as

1. Several political and socio-economic dilemmas in the identification of deserving beneficiaries.
2. Huge cost to the government exchequer on account of subsidized food.

3. Weakness in the current public distribution system. Planning commission estimated that about 45-55% of food grain does not reach the targeted beneficiaries. As a result to what extent the Act will be successful in removing food insecurity of the targeted people is a matter of question.
4. Volatility in the food grain production due to unexpected shocks like natural disaster, climate change, seasonal food scarcity etc which through huddles in providing adequate food grain.

Implications Of The Food Security Act

The NFSA is expected to have the following impacts

1. The procurement of rice, wheat and millets for this programme by the government will create a scarcity in open market as result it will leads to food grain inflation.
2. The existing public distribution suffers from logistic issue of picking from the source, storage and onward transportations coupled with leakages on account of pilferage, rooting of grains and logistic inefficiencies will require additional procurement of food grains which will also bring additional cost burden for the government.
3. The cost of implementing the food security plan will put pressure on the fiscal status of the country.
4. The act has made a provision for providing 5 k.g of coarse grain per person per month to eradicate malnutrition but as per ICMR guidelines 16 k.g for adults and 7 k.g for children is required. So there is a lot of apprehension regarding how the Act will deal with the malnutrition issues.
5. There will be shortage of workers in the economy as the NFSA demotivate the workers to work as their food requirement will be met from the Targeted public distribution system.

Discussion and Conclusion

India is one of the emerging economies in the world, but facing food insecurity and malnutrition problem even after sixty seven years of independence. NFSA is the world's largest experiment to feed millions. The Act has a laudable objective of eradicating extreme hunger and malnutrition problem from India. But there are many contentious issues which needs sincere attention of the policy makers to them right before the Act is implemented. The Act is also supposed face various operational and financial challenges in its implementation phase. So we can conclude that the NFSA is a very good initiative at this situation but the intended result can be well accomplished if due care is taken to set the challenges and issues right.

The study has suggested some measures which can be incorporated by the policy maker to implement the NFSB effectively to achieve the noble objective of food and nutritional security.

1. Implementing measures to improve agricultural productivity and food storage capacity.
2. Ensuring food availability and accessibility to below poverty line candidates.

3. Promoting crop diversification and household gardening.
4. Establishing food grain banks.
5. Improving purchasing power through employment generating schemes.
6. Community participation and intersectoral Coordination.
7. Community awareness of the proposed programme through IEC activities and social marketing.
8. Monitoring and timely evaluation of nutritional Programmes to know the pace of success and to incorporate modifications if required.
9. Promoting Organic farming to increase farm productivity, repair decades of environmental damage and knit small farm families into more sustainable distribution networks leading to improved food security.

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