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NATIONAL FOOD SECURITY ACT

Jasmine Jha

ABSTRACT

One of the major groundbreaking policy introduced in India has been National Food Security Act. It was necessary to introduce this policy because India was suffering from very high level of poverty. In the year 2011-12 the percentage of total population below poverty line was 21.9 per cent. It was low in comparison to the past years but was still a pretty high number. This meant that for a huge quantity of people attaining even basic necessity was day to day struggle. Therefore a fountain effect was introduced in the form of National Food Security Bill in 2011. This was later accepted and became National Food Security Act in 2013. The act states that “to provide for food and nutritional security in human life cycle



approach, by ensuring access to adequate quantity of quality food at affordable prices to people to live a life with dignity and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto.”

In this paper we analyse this act and study its advantages and disadvantages or if it's harming or improving the Indian economy?

KEYWORDS: policy , National Food Security , human life cycle approach.

INTRODUCTION:

The state of having reliable access to a sufficient quantity of affordable and nutritious food is called

food security. This term was coined in the year 1974 at World Food Conference. The conference emphasized over state level security. Later on this was extended to individual level security in the year 1996 at World Food Summit. In India the National Advisory Council (NAC) submitted its proposals on Draft National Food Security Bill in Jan-Feb 2011. The National Food Security Act (NFSA) is defined as, “public provisioning of food and related measures, to enable assured economic and social access to adequate food with dignity, for all persons in

the country, at all times, in pursuance of their fundamental rights to be free from hunger, malnutrition and other deprivations associate with the lack of food and related matters.”

The NAC recommended the shifting from household food entitlements to individual food entitlements. The arguments in favour of it were that per capita entitlements are fairer and per capita entitlements would do away with the need for a precise definition and identification of “households”.

This Bill was introduced in Lok Sabha on 22nd December 2011. It had coverage of 75 per cent rural and 50 per cent urban population. It planned on subsidizing food grains under the Targeted Public Distribution System and the Bill was submitted to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Food, Consumer Affairs and Public Distribution for

further examination. This led to the evolution of the National Food Security Act.

OBJECTIVE

- Understand and analyse National Food Security Act in India.

METHODOLOGY

This paper is based on theoretical approach. Data has been collected from different journals, Department of Food and Public Distribution, etc.

NATIONAL FOOD SECURITY ACT

This Act was signed in 12th September 2013. It stated “to provide for food and nutritional security in human life cycle approach, by ensuring access to adequate quantity of quality food at affordable prices to people to live a life with dignity and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto.” It included all of India.

This Act was necessary at that time because India was improving on the basis of poverty and all but it was still lagging when it came to worrying about the basic necessities. This was the time when the government had already shifted its approach from trickle down effect to fountain effect. Food being the most basic of the necessity and provision of food will improve the nutritional level of the country, which in turn will improve our demography and labourers with better health will use their full potential. The idea suggested by Prof. Amartya Sen in his Capability Theory might have been the major drive towards this Act. The other positives are improved health will push the labourers to their full potential which in turn will increase their income and will lead the country to the doors of development.

Percentage and Number of Poor Estimated by Tendulkar method, using Mixed Reference Period (MRP) (poverty ratio in %)

Year	Rural	Urban	Total
1993-94	50.1	31.8	45.3
2004-05	41.8	25.7	37.2
2011-12	25.7	13.7	21.9

Press note on Poverty estimates, 2011-12. Government of India Planning Commission, July 2013.

The above table shows that the annual average decline in percentage points per annum from 1993-94 to 2004-05, in rural sector was 0.75 in urban was 0.55 and in total was 0.74. From 2004-05 to 2011-12 it was 2.32, 1.69 and 2.18 respectively. It states that even though poverty had declined it was still not low enough and therefore to improve the situation more National Food Security Act put into force.

Features of NFSA

The features of the national food security act are given below:

- 2/3 of rural population and 1/2 of urban population for subsidised grains under TPDS.
- Entitlements to 5kgs of rice, wheat and coarse cereals a month at Rs.3, Rs.2 and Rs.1 per kg.
- The price for providing food grains will be initially valid for 3 years from the date of commencement of the Act.
- Entitlement under the Act has been reduced from 7kgs to 5kgs but no change in entitlement for 3.42 crore of “poorest of poor” families under the “Antyodaya Anna Yojana” which remains at 35kg per household per month.
- State Governments shall identify the eligible households under the Act within a period not exceeding 365 days, after the commencement of the Act.
- Below 6 months of age: exclusive breastfeeding shall be promoted.
- Age 6months – 6 years: age appropriate meal, free of charge, through the local anganwadi.
- Age 6-14 years: one free mid-day meal shall be provided every day in all schools run by local bodies, government and government aided schools up to Class VIII.

- Every pregnant and lactating mother is entitled to a free meal at the local anganwadi as well as maternity benefits of Rs.6000 in installments.
- Creation of State Food Commissions.
- In case of non-supply of the entitled quantities of food grains or meals to entitled persons under the Act, such persons shall be entitled to receive food security allowance from the concerned State government.

These features included a vast section of the poor population and people in need. If followed properly it could have led to an improvement of a majority of people in need.

IMPACT IN INDIA

This Act had a tremendous impact in India. It was a mixture of both positive and negative impacts. Let us begin with the positive impacts. Jean Dreze said this Act led to investment in human capital. This is so because an improvement in the nutritional level of the poor will make them more capable and might make them more potential to provide the country with improved and useful demography. This would make the country's population more productive instead of a burden on its economy. The other important factors are that right to food was made into a proper law. This Act helped in women empowerment and reduction of malnutrition. This increased the purchasing power of the poor, which in turn affected the economy in many other ways like developed the market for other goods and services and the saved income was used in other necessary places which helped the economy push itself towards the road to development. Last but not the least is that this method made use of existing machinery like Anganwaadi and Public Distribution System, etc.

With the positives there exists the negative aspect as well. There is a Claus called force Majeure clause. It states that "the Central Government, or the State Governments, shall not be liable for any claim by persons belonging to the priority households or general households or other groups entitled under this Act for loss/damage/compensation, arising out of failure of supply is due to conditions such as war, flood, drought, fire, cyclone, earthquake or any act of God." The other factors are that this Act follows a Centralised model. It discourages State Level initiatives. The Centralised procurement has been found to be unsustainable. Consolidation of existing ineffective food security is complex. There is no clear road map for benefits to 'general households'. It has a cereal centric approach and has missed the opportunity to promote the income approach to food security.

NFSA has a potential to do much better. So much so better that in a few years we might not depend on it itself. This can only be possible if the drawbacks of the act are taken care of. That is reduction in corruption which exists in this system for e.g. black marketing of the food grains. Increase in decentralization might lead to better procurement and distribution system. Improvement of infrastructure that will also improve the procurement and distribution plus better warehousing will also improve on the storage of food grains either by improving or increasing their infrastructure or privatizing it. This will reduce wastage of food grains. The increase in surplus due to the reason stated above can be properly used during deficit time or otherwise can be exported.

The other step government is trying to implement is by linking Adhaar card to the distribution process. This will make pointing out poorest of the poor easier for the government. Increasing food type in NFSA, diversifying will help improving the system for all.

CONCLUSION

National Food Security Act has played an important role in India. It has become a lifeline for the country. It has been integrated in everyone's daily life that we all depend on it too much now and are not ready to give up on it. The other reason that we are still stuck with this act is due to the disadvantages caused by it. As mentioned in this paper if the drawbacks and hurdles in the implementation of this is removed then we will have a better result and this Act can lead to subsidiary or complementary growth in other sectors for e.g. agriculture and indirectly related sectors.

For this to happen we need to focus on removal of corruption and black market of ration. The government needs to improve infrastructure which will lead development of roads and will increase accessibility to isolated areas, etc. This will not just improve on the direct effect of the act but also lead to development in

other sectors too like infrastructure, agriculture, etc.

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