
UNIT 9 FOOD SECURITY

Structure

9.1 Introduction

Aims and Objectives

9.2 Food Security and its Significance

9.3 Food security and Hunger

9.4 Food Security and Malnutrition

9.5 Food Security and Global concerns

9.6 Food Security- Measures and Their Impact

9.7 Food Security-Future Perspectives

9.8 Summary

9.9 Terminal Questions

Suggested Readings

9.1 INTRODUCTION

Food security refers to the ensuring of food for all. It is the most important step to eradicate absolute mass poverty and lay a foundation for growth and development of a society. The goal of food security becomes difficult to achieve in a country like India where poverty is vast and population is still growing. But there is no alternative to ensure food security for the entire population. Food security demands adequate food production and distribution. This needs political will that will prioritize human development and create a favourable environment that will enhance sustainable development. The unpalatable fact here is that while on the one hand, such environment aids mass production of food, on the other hand, ruthless exploitation of land wherein topsoil gets eroded, water gets exhausted and soil loses its fertility, such an environment, subsequently, loses its productive capacity.

The environment is further damaged, degraded, and destroyed by unplanned vast industrialisation and massive use of industrial products like automobiles and industrial machinery, both calling for a very high intensity of energy and other resource use. All these point out to the need for a balance among population, food needs and environment. Food security must be consistent with and conducive to such a balance.

India is yet to achieve this as its mass population and poverty keep large sections so poor as to be unable to buy food at the prevailing market rates. If India is to achieve its goal of development with equity, social inclusion, and social justice, food security must be ensured for its population at all costs.

Aims and Objectives

This Unit would enable you to:

- explain the concept and meaning of food security

- analyse the relationship between food security and malnutrition
- identify the important ways to deal with food security and
- discuss India's future perspectives in this area.

9.2 FOOD SECURITY AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE

“God who is unnamable and unfathomable by human understanding, and it means God of the poor, God appearing in the hearts of the poor....For the poor the economic is the spiritual. You cannot make any other appeal to those starving millions. It will fall flat on them. But you take food to them and they will regard you as their God. They are incapable of any other thought....According to me the economic constitution of India and, for the matter of that, the world should be such that no one under it should suffer from want of food and clothing. In other words, everybody should be able to get sufficient work to enable him to make two ends meet.”

Mahatma Gandhi

Food security refers to access for people, especially poor who are below poverty line, to adequate food necessary for a normal life. Food security is a social concept dealing with community needs. Adequate food means sufficient quantity of nourishment that a person in normal circumstances is required to consume according to food science experts. According to the Planning Commission, a person needs a minimum of a daily calorie intake of 2400 in rural areas and 2100 in urban areas. According to the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), a person needs a minimum of 2000 calories per day.

In terms of quality the food must be reasonably nutritious that enables a person sustain and develop his physical and mental faculties and personality. Therefore the food must include pulses, edible oils, milk products, egg, meat, and some fruits and vegetables. These together will give the required nutrients like carbohydrates, proteins, fats, mineral and vitamins necessary for healthy growth. If people do not get the required diet they are deprived of nourishment which may adversely affect their capabilities affecting their growth and development.

Food security also means that people, especially poor, have the ability to pay in terms of purchasing power needed for purchasing the required quantity and quality of food in terms of nutrients. This ensures that the human resource in the society get what is needed for a normal life and can be expected to contribute towards promoting economic growth and development of the society. Food security ensures that in the society every one gets the minimum required food and nutrients for a productive life and therefore can contribute to the progress of the society.

The absence of food security can have disastrous consequences for the deprived people and the society. It becomes a stigma if a significant section of the population is unable to participate in the development process of the society. When adequate nutrients are not available in one's food, it impairs one's ability to work. Stunted growth, weak eyes etc deprive them of the ability to pursue a good employment career. Such malnutrition also reduces the immunity or resistance to diseases, often affecting adversely the whole lifetime. Inadequate food and nutrition add to hunger and keep people weak, underdeveloped and inefficient. Infants and women are especially vulnerable in terms of food insecurity.

At a collective level, people deprived of food remain unemployed or face a very poor quality of employment with low wages which leads to waste of human resources. Further, such dependent population constitutes a burden on the economy and society as they have to be provided with food and again they may have to be offered public assistance when they become sick or invalid. On the whole a society with a significant section deprived of food security, make development meaningless as it results in an unbalanced development where the rich get richer and poor degenerate into more acute poverty. The absence of food security retards a society's development while adequate security releases productive human resources for nation-building.

9.3 FOOD SECURITY, POVERTY AND HUNGER

Food security in India in terms of poverty and hunger presents a very unsatisfactory picture. The higher the level of poverty, the lower would be the purchasing power of the poor people. One recent survey of the National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO) (61st Round, 2004-05) brings out that poverty has declined. According to the Planning Commission, the percentages of rural, urban and total population below poverty line were 37.3%, 32.4% and 36% in 1993-94 and these percentages fell to 28.3%, 25.7% and 27.5% respectively in 2004-05 (61st Round of NSSO). But still the absolute number of poor remains highly significant.

According to the same NSSO survey (61st Round), in rural areas 28.3% population was below poverty line amounting to about 221 million. In urban areas 25.7% of the urban population amounting to 81 million was below poverty line. Both rural and urban areas together had 27.5% of the total population amounting to 302 million (Poverty line assumed as per capita monthly expenditure Rs.356/- in rural and Rs.538.6 in urban areas (Survey on Uniform Recall Period (URP) basis). It shows that over 300 million in the Indian population would suffer from hunger and deprivation but for the assistance received from the various employment, poverty eradication and other programmes of the governments at central and state levels. The actual population suffering from food insecurity may be much higher as even people marginally above poverty line get affected by food insecurity.

9.3.1 Impact of Globalisation Policies

The NSSO's 61st Round has highlighted the fact that the population below poverty line is still high and the absolute number of over 300 million is also a large number. The policies of Liberalization, Privatization and Globalization (LPG) were intended to unleash the potential of India and its entrepreneurs who were demanding a framework of economic freedom and entrepreneurial opportunities which would raise all round growth in the country and the trickle down effects of these policies will help in reducing poverty levels significantly and substantially in the country.

A study undertaken by Dev and Ravi (2007) analysing in depth of the NSSO data of the above 61st Round and earlier data has brought out the fact that globalisation policies failed to make a significant impact on poverty. The following table (Table 1) gives the details:

Table 1: Absolute no of poor & very poor in India & % change in poverty (on URP basis)

	1983(Mn)	1993-94(Mn)	2004-05(Mn)	Change in-> 1983-94	Poverty % 1993-2005
Rural					
Poor	252.0	247.2	231.2	-0.81	-0.73
VeryPoor	140.6	102.0	76.7	-0.97	-0.52
Urban					
Poor	72.3	77.4	83.3	-0.92	-0.59
Very Poor	38.4	38.0	38.4	-0.61	-0.36
All India					
Poor	324.3	324.6	315.5	-0.85	-0.70
Very Poor	179.0	140.0	115.1	-0.88	-0.48

Source: Dev & Ravi (2007), Quoted in Ruddar Datt (2007). Compiled from Tables 3&4

(Poor refers to those below poverty line. Very poor refers to those below 75% of the poverty line).

It is obvious from the above table that the percentage fall is in all categories, both in rural and urban areas, but the fall is less during the post-reform (globalization) period 1994-05. Also absolute poverty among poor has increased in urban areas while it has remained static among very poor. It may be concluded that food security problem is still a gigantic task.

9.3.3 Hunger

Governments, both at the centre and states, have been taking serious and strong measures to promote food security, by making food available at cheaper rates, by promoting employment, and through poverty eradication programmes. There have been some improvements in eliminating starvation and reducing calorie deficiency. But the problem of ‘mass hunger’ in the country has not disappeared.

This year Global Hunger Index (GHI) for India highlights this fact. Among the ranking of 84 countries – developing and transitional - India has been ranked 65th, a very poor ranking indeed. India’s rank indicates ‘alarming’ poverty situation. India ranks poorer than its neighbouring countries like China (rank 5); Sri Lanka (35); Nepal (55); and Pakistan (58). It is also behind; South Africa (14); Thailand (22); and Indonesia (35). India’s position is worse than that of several poorer African and Central Asian countries like Turkmenistan (11), Gabon (13), Botswana (31); Burkina Faso (57); and Sudan (53) (a country with no stable government for about 50 years!) It is clear that India has to go a long way to conquer the ‘Hunger’ and ‘Starvation’ and ensure food security to its population.

The International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), in its study ‘Millions Fed’, has given credit to India for some good innovations like zero-tillage farming and developing milk network. But it says that still India has the world’s largest number of hungry people – more than 200 million food insecure people. In this regard its rank is 66 in a list of 88 countries.

9.4 FOOD SECURITY AND MALNUTRITION

Food security is not only a matter of quantity of food but also of quality in terms of nutrients. In India the availability of nutrients in a poor man's food is very scanty. According to Prof. Hanumantha Rao, in India, 'food security' unfortunately has become synonymous with 'food grain security'.

The following table (Table 2) gives the per capita per day net availability of cereals and pulses:

Table 2: Per capita net availability per day (gms)

Year	Cereals	Pulses	Total
1951	334.2	60.7	394.9
1961	399.7	69.0	468.7
1971	417.6	51.2	468.8
1981	417.3	37.5	454.8
1991	468.5	41.6	510.1
2001	386.2	30.0	416.2
2005	390.9	31.5	422.4

Source: Economic Survey February, 2008 Table 1.17 p-A-22

The table above reveals that even in case of cereals, the availability has been stagnant hovering around 400 grams per day (except in 1991 when it was 468.5 grams). In case of pulses which is the source of protein, the consumption has been falling over a period of time from 60.7 gms in 1951 to 31.5 gms in 2005.

Not only are the nutrients inadequate in poor persons' food in India but also the general standard of living of the poor masses is also poor in comparison to other countries. For example in 1995, the annual per capita grains used in India was 200 kgs while the same was 300 kgs in China (50% more) and in the USA it was 800 kgs. Similarly in case of milk, the per capita annual milk consumption in India was 34 kgs compared to 288 kgs in the USA. In case of several nutrients like poultry, there is hardly any consumption by India's poor. Thus nutrients in India are poor both in quantity and quality.

9.4.1 Global Hunger Index

The Global Hunger Index 2009 highlights the fact of India's poor nutritional performance. 21% of the Indian population was undernourished (Between 2003 and 2005); 43.5% of Indian children under the age of five were underweight (between 2002 and 2007) and under five years age infant mortality rate in 2007 was 7.2% for India.

Surveys of the National Nutritional Monitoring Bureau and the National Family Health Survey unambiguously suggest that incidence of malnutrition is extremely serious. In 2000-01 about half the children and one third of adults were undernourished. What is more worrisome is the fact that except for two states, Kerala and Tamil Nadu, there has not been any improvement in this regard. In some states such as Madhya Pradesh and Orissa the situation has worsened (Vyas, 2005). In other words we have to make special efforts to raise nutritional security and improve nutrition especially for pregnant and lactating mothers and small children.

9.5 FOOD SECURITY AND GLOBAL CONCERNS

Brown Lester R, author of 'Tough Choices' (1996) has argued that just as ideological conflict was the defining issue in the previous era that has just ended, the defining issue in the emerging era will be food scarcity. This will be the challenge that the world will have to face.

9.5.1 Rising Demand and Instability in Supply and Prices

Globally the demand for food is rising fast, especially in China and India, which pushes up global demand significantly. These countries are also experiencing rapid and steady economic growth which raises the income and purchasing power resulting in a higher demand for better quality commodities. At the same time population has also been growing in countries like India creating additional demand for food. On the other side, supply is often affected by failure of monsoon, frequent droughts, floods etc., which create instability in supply. With rising demand and fluctuation in supply, prices too rise and fluctuate creating uncertainties. India has been experiencing inflation intermittently.

Lester Brown has explained the debate in this area of demand, supply and prices. He points out that both the World Bank and the FAO were projecting a bright future of food surplus and declining prices in 1970s and 1980s. According to Brown, such projections lead to serious underinvestment in agriculture and family planning. It is true that in China, in mid-1970s and under their modernisation programmes, which commenced around 1978, there was a large increase in food production and China felt it would never have to import food grains other than the seeds. But in 1994 prices rose sharply forcing China to import massively and overnight China became world's second largest importer of food grains after Japan. And thus China with 1.2 billion population, with rising incomes and moving up the food chain can create a massive demand for massive imports, pushing up the world food prices. Brown feels that only now we are realising that the world is facing food shortage and rising food prices.

On grounds of equity at a global level, there is a welfare need to raise the consumption both in quantity and quality of food in developing countries where at present consumption levels are poor and grossly inadequate. The following table (Table 3) gives annual per capita food consumption:

Tabel 3: Annual per capita grain use and consumption of livestock in select

Country	Grains	Beef	Pork	Poultry	Milk	Egg
USA	800	45	31	46	288	174
Italy	400	26	33	19	197	158
China	300	4	30	6	5	196
India	200	1	0.4	1	34	Less than 30

Source: Lester R Brown (1996), p.49

The above table reveals the gap in consumption and quality of food items between developed countries like the USA and Italy on the one hand and developing countries like China and India on the other. Economically apart from rising demand due to rising incomes in developing countries, there will also be rise in demand due to the process of

the developing countries trying to catch up with the living standards of developed countries.

There is also a need for expanding world food production and for equitable consumption for which global efforts are needed. For example, while the need for raising the purchasing power of the poor is recognised, it is also necessary to recognise the need to help poor countries financially. Fortunately international measures are emerging. For example, the World Bank created a \$1.2 billion Rapid Financing Facility and supports the Global Food Response Programme to speed up assistance to the neediest countries. This is a part of the bank's 'New Deal' on Global Food Policy for short/medium/long term responses including for programmes like safety nets like school feeding and Food for Work Programmes. Similarly, the World Trade Organization (WTO) also provides flexibilities to developing countries in addressing food security including domestic policy initiatives.

9.5.2 Food Security and Environment

Food security and environment are closely related and impact each other. Food production is already affected by climatic changes. At the same time reckless and repeated use of land in countries with large population and rising demand like in India and China can erode the soil fertility making the land barren. Further water consumption may create shortage and water crisis. This can have a chain reaction affecting forests, flora and fauna. On the other side, environment may be abused by unplanned industrialisation. There may be excessive deforestation. There may be excessive addition of Carbon-dioxide (CO₂) in the environment and release of chloro-floro-carbon (CFCs). Temperatures may rise and the ozone layer may begin to deplete. And these can result in climatic changes that affect production of food grains and other food products. There can also be monsoon failures at some places creating droughts and excessive monsoon creating floods at some places. Such climatic changes may also have seasonal changes affecting living. A balanced development with an environmentally sustainable economy satisfies the food requirements.

9.6 MEASURES AND THEIR IMPACT

Measures for food security in India have been extensive though their impact has been mixed. Some measures are long term measures and these measures have multi-purpose aims which include facilitating availability of food for the poor and promoting their welfare. Managing population growth has been one such measure. Large population creates large responsibility and large problems. Many of India's core problems like poverty, unemployment and food security are accentuated by the population pressure. Simultaneously, strong measures taken, such as those during the emergency period of 1975-77 to control population growth had met with stiff resistance and disapproval among masses. So governments in India now pursue the goal through education, persuasion and provision of incentives for achieving the goals of population control and also paying attention to raise the quality of population through the policy of 'family welfare planning'. The impact can be termed as modest in this field. However this is a long term approach and the impact will be realised only over a long period.

Similarly, measures are needed to eradicate poverty, reduce unemployment and improve education and skills. Various employment and poverty eradication schemes like the IRDP, Swarna Jayanthi Gram Swarojgar Yojana and Swarna Jayanthi Shahari Rojgar Yojana aim at raising income and purchasing power of people and help in improving food security.

An important measure to deal with the problem has been the attempt to increase food production through better agricultural methods and use of higher level of technology which was ushered in the Green Revolution. Significant increase in the production of wheat and rice were achieved but not much progress could be made in other areas. Improvements made in the food grain production helped the country to become self-sufficient in food doing away with imports. But the problem of ensuring food to poor remains and is being tackled by special measures which are discussed below. Ecological preservation and environmental promotion is also a long-term measure emphasised by the experts. Optimum use of flora and fauna in land and fisheries in sea can help in preserving ecology and environment and retain sustainability and food security.

9.6.2 Three Important Measures

Three important measures are needed to protect vulnerable sections of the poor below and above the poverty line, women and children and deal with their food security and widen their physical wellbeing. We examine these measures below:

9.6.2.1 The Public Distribution System

A well organized public distribution system- (PDS) is perhaps the most important direct measure to help poor in getting food. It ensures equitable distribution of food articles and protects poor from high prices and provides the required minimum of food. In India PDS has been expanded over time to provide not only food grains but also other essential commodities like sugar and kerosene. Food grains are procured and made available by the Food Corporation of India, set up in 1965. About 150 million families are covered under the PDS which provides goods worth Rs.30000/- crores annually and is termed as perhaps the largest distribution network in the world. This system takes care of meeting the demand; the instability in supply; the availability; and price stability aspects.

But the operation of the PDS suffered from a number of flaws. Leakages due to corruption have led to diversion of food grains to the open market and not all the poor benefited. The distribution of the commodities over the country was also uneven, with the Southern states getting higher quantities compared to their share of population below poverty line and reverse was the position in the Northern states, especially in Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh. The system has also been imposing on the government an enormous burden of food subsidies. The food subsidy which in 1980-81 was a modest Rs. 662/- crores, rose to Rs.2850/0 crores in 1991-92 and then to a whopping Rs.23828/- crores in 2006-07. This rising food subsidy contrasted with a reduced off-take in relation to allocation making the system less effective and productive. The system is urban-biased which makes it inequitable for the rural areas and has also become inefficient due to high cost of procurement, storage and distribution; it resulted in higher prices when large quantities are procured leaving less for the open market.

Attempts have been made in India to revamp the system and raise its efficiency. The system has been making efforts to reach the targeted poor under the 'Targeted Public Distribution System' introduced in mid-1997 under which the below poverty line families can buy at lower prices than the above poverty line families. But this has made the latter families to resort to open market and so the prices had to be later reduced. Though the PDS has been a direct, well meaning, and equitable system for all poor, ensuring food security for all poor has been a difficult task. Many development economists argue for a universalized PDS.

9.6.2.2 Integrated Child Development Services

This is a scheme sponsored by the central government but contributed and coordinated by both the central and state governments. At the central level, the scheme is under the Ministry of Human Resource Development (HRD). State governments provide funds for supplementary nutrition. The scheme was launched in 1975 and is considered to be one of the largest and comprehensive intervention programmes in the world offering several services to pregnant women, lactating mothers and children up to the age of six years. It provides the targeted sections, supplementary feeding providing nutrition; immunisation; public health check-up; referral services (for attention of experts); education, health and nutrition to adult women; and non-formal pre-school education to children between the ages of three to six years. The scheme provides food security including nutritional security and health security and has been expanding its coverage of women and children. During December 2007, the coverage had extended to 62.9 million children and 13.2 million pregnant mothers. However the scheme does not cover all poor or all children. Jean Dreze has recommended the universalisation of the scheme covering all children, on four grounds:

- a) Legal- The Supreme Court Order of 28th November 2001 says that extension of ICDS to all children, pregnant women and lactating mothers is mandatory.
- b) Political- The Government of India in its 'National Common Minimum Programme' has included this demand.
- c) Economic- Expenditure on the development of children is an investment benefiting all, over a period of time, and,
- d) Equity- Provision ICDS to all children would promote social equity over a period of time.

9.6.2.3 Mid-day Meals Scheme

In 1982, the Tamil Nadu government introduced a scheme of Free Noon Meals Scheme which became very popular and effective. Nutrition to children improved and there was also a fall in the infant mortality rate. Inspired by its success, the central government introduced the MDMS in 1995 with the purpose of

- a) improving children's attendance in the school,
- b) reducing dropouts from the schools, and,
- c) Providing nutritious food to children of primary section of aided schools.

It is considered to be the largest school nutritional programme in the world. The Scheme has been further improved with proposals for the construction of kitchen-cum-stores. It has been well received except in some states like Uttar Pradesh where the implementation has been poor.

9.6.2.4 NREGA 2006

The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act/Scheme became effective in February 2006. It has now become the government's flagship scheme and is being renamed after Mahatma Gandhi (MG-NREGS). It was initially introduced in most backward states of India but now covers all rural areas in the country. It provides a guarantee of some

income to have some food security. The Sampoorna Grameen Rojgar Yojana and the National Food for Works Programme (NFFWP) have been merged into this scheme.

The scheme was inspired by the success of the Maharashtra Employment Guarantee Scheme introduced in Maharashtra in 1972-73 providing employment guarantees to rural poor. Though there were criticisms of leakages, corruption and lack of productive assets creation, yet it was hailed internationally as an effective welfare and income guarantee programme. Thus it attracted the attention of the central government and the result is the NREGA/S. It seeks to provide 100 days of guaranteed unskilled wage employment to each rural household that seeks employment under the scheme. It has been expanding its eligible activities. Earlier only manual work was available but now covers the artisans like masons, potters etc. There has to be a 'verifiable permanent asset' which rules out corruption in the forged muster rolls by culprits to pocket money in the name of rural jobs. In future, road and house construction for the below poverty line poor are likely to become eligible. This scheme is bound to go a long way in creating food security in rural areas. The system of social auditing which is a continuous, open and transparent process can help this and other such measures from corruption.

9.7 FOOD SECURITY AND FUTURE PERSPECTIVES

The above analysis highlights the need to attend to several aspects of demand and supply of food and food prices. The aim is to ensure that there is no starvation and all poor people get the minimum required food with required nutrients. This calls for special efforts to meet the needs of people below the poverty line and even those poor who are only marginally higher than those below poverty line.

Toward this end the government has passed a legislation ensuring food security titled 'National Food Security Act' (NFSA). This is a direct, comprehensive and universal legislation applicable to the poor who are below the poverty line, to all schedule castes and tribes and women headed household in the whole country. The changes that are needed towards this direction are discussed as following:

9.7.1 Managing Demand, Supply and Prices

Managing the future food security system poses a number of challenges. These are considered and suggestions are attempted.

- 1) It is necessary to ensure effective demand that reflects the nutrition requirements and efficiency needs of poor people. The norms fixed by the Planning Commission of a minimum of daily calories intake of 2400 per person in rural areas and 2100 in urban areas must be considered while framing policies for poor people.
- 2) It is necessary to meet the shifts in demand for different articles especially wheat and rice. More grains supply is needed in festival seasons.
- 3) The most difficult challenge is to help poor earn adequate purchasing power to buy food so that they can make choices in the purchase of goods. There are a number of community development projects, poverty eradication programmes, and employment generation schemes which bestow purchasing power on poor who take part in any of these schemes. There are also 'Food for Work' programmes where they get food grains instead of cash payments. The MGNREGS now covers the whole of rural India. Though there is no such scheme in urban areas, there are other special

schemes for the poor. In addition to wage employment programmes, self-employment ventures, and micro entrepreneurship programmes are available for artisans and other craftsmen.

- 4) Promoting a safety net for the poor is necessary in the form of Subsidy. Resultantly, the poor may get food grains at a cheaper rate or government may give farmers inputs like fertilizers at cheaper rates thus subsidising the sale of grains. In India, there is a strong criticism that large subsidy allocation is fiscally unsustainable in the long run. This subsidy would still go up if the National Food Security Act is implemented. Such high subsidies are also against the Agreement on Agriculture of the World Trade Organisation. It is also pointed out that in fertilizer subsidies the better-off farmers benefit. All these facts bring out the significance of managing the subsidies very effectively and keeping it as low as possible.
- 5) It is necessary to strengthen organisations of poor small farmers, consumers and other stakeholders by appropriate capacity-building to deal with issues that arise in a market-oriented environment. Cooperatives of farmers and consumer associations can bargain for better prices. Such transactions eliminate middlemen or reduce their roles thus benefitting both producers and consumers and optimising the supply and demand. The government organisations or NGOs can help in capacity-building among the poor.
- 6) Adequate investment in agriculture and rural development is necessary. So far, attention was focused more on industry, business, trade and services, and the investment in agriculture was neglected. Africa and South Asia failed to invest in rural economy and accounted for 75% of the world hunger. Investment in rural development should cover agricultural production as well as non-farm employment and micro-entrepreneurship that will generate income in rural areas for the poor and enable them to participate in the development process.
- 7) Developed countries continue to protect and support their agriculture and made it an important agenda in the WTO negotiations. With the use of high technology, and other inputs they produce more than the demand in their domestic markets. But instead responding to the needs of developing countries for food security for their poor, it is pointed out that they use their surplus to feed animals. Such 'feeding half the world's food grains to animals, indicates a sad state of affairs'. International cooperation and agreement is needed to persuade developed countries to help poor and hungry in developing countries thus making global efforts to ensure food security.
- 8) Diversion from food production must be avoided where there is still mass hunger in several developing countries. There are cases of conversion of maize crop to bio-fuel production. 'Oxfam predicts that bio-fuel targets could create a 600 million additional hungry people by 2025. In 2008, the U.S. was scheduled to divert 1/3 rd maize crops to bio-fuel production'. This is considered to be a breach of rights to food under UN Declaration of Human Rights. Attention may be paid to productivity and diversification that can lead to lower prices, larger supply, and a wider basket of agricultural goods satisfying not only the demands of poor but also the needs of international trade and business.
- 9) Attempts are on to promote genetically modified crops but such a solution can be highly controversial as they may adversely affect production of food supply for the poor.

- 10) Food security issue need not be bogged down in ideological controversies. Under globalisation 'a market-oriented approach' is advocated whereas food security or food sovereignty approach demands due consideration to the needs of poor. In the market-led approach, attention shifts to mass production of standard varieties leading to a loss of bio-diversity and often leads to a deterioration of the conditions of rural poor. There needs to be balance between market-oriented approach and the solution of food security of poor.
- 11) In case of India, there has been a shift from 'ship to mouth' to 'food surplus and exports'. Though it is a remarkable achievement, it appears to be at the cost of the food security demands of a vast section of the poor. The need is to satisfy the food security demands of poor and then go for export markets; the goal should be 'food and livelihood security first' and 'market and trade' later.
- 12) Adequate attention to research is necessary, to locate region where food security is needed to be intensified, so that it can be targeted accurately. The Institute of Human Development (IHD) and the World Food Programme (WFP) have brought out a series of food security atlases for eight states- Jharkhand, Orissa, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Bihar, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh – which analyse the dimensions of food security at the sub-state or district level. Each of the atlases calculate six different indices pertaining to, food security outcome; food availability; access to food; food absorption; food security and public intervention. The purpose is to identify regions and districts within the state that require priority attention in ensuring food security. These atlases are useful for analysis, action and advocacy for reducing the incidence of hunger in the entire rural India.
- 13) The PDS/TPDS, the ICDS and the MDMS must be broad-based and universal to the extent possible and needed. The central government stated that 'strengthening the PDS would mean adequate supplies, reasonable subsidies, and efficient delivery of subsidized food'. For this purpose 'Haryana and Chandigarh will introduce on a pilot basis a smart card based delivery system to deliver food grains. This measure will also help in raising the off-take. Such innovative approach should be sought and discovered to make the PDS a 'least-cost-most-efficient' system. Similarly, the budget 2009-10 of the central government has stated that the ICDS will be universalised by March 2012 and all services under the ICDS will be extended to cover every child under the age of six years. The MDMS must be extended to all schools accommodating very poor and disadvantaged children.
- 14) Due attention must be paid to food, ecology and environment. While growing food, its ecological and environmental consequences must be analysed and provided for, so that ecology remains balanced and environment remains enriched. Great care must be taken in case of renewable resources. For example 'fishing' carried out excessively can exhaust the fish population and replenishment may not take place. Similarly rigorous environmental control and restoration of flora and fauna can help in preserving natural climate conducive to food production.
- 15) Water resource needs high attention. India needs to conserve harvest rain water. Water productivity should be maximised. Whenever monsoon has been deficient (as it is in 2009) food production has been adversely affected resulting in inflation. Prices of not only food grains but also of vegetables and other agricultural commodities become significantly costly.

- 16) Land reforms in India have not been satisfactory. If judiciously planned and surplus land is distributed to landless they can motivate first generation farmers to work hard to raise land productivity resulting in greater agricultural production.
- 17) The need is to control population growth and concentrate on raising the quality of population in terms of education, training, skills and capacity-building that can help in increasing food production and relieving pressure on demand for food. But this needs sustained efforts.

9.7.2 National Food Security Act

There has been a persistent demand in the country that food security, especially for poor, must become a right and entitlement. The government of India has enacted a Food Security Act to ensure food security for the poor. A national public debate and consultation process for this was taken. This Act proposes that every family below poverty line will be entitled by law to 25 kgs of rice or wheat per month at Rs. 3 per kg. The scheme is expected to cover 65.2 million families below the poverty line. The Act is considered complementary to the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act which assures employment in rural areas, giving the rural poor the purchasing power to buy food sold under the food security Act. But some of the concerns need to be addressed, discussed as below.

- 1) It is unclear as to how many beneficiaries will be there. It is said that the Act will cover about six crore families below the poverty line. It is estimated that if below poverty line families and beneficiaries of similar schemes are added, 25 million tonnes of wheat or rice may be needed. But if above the poverty line who are poor are also added then 50 million tonnes of these grains may be needed, which will be a tall order.
- 2) The delivery mechanism, it appears will be the PDS (TPDS) mechanism. But the system is corrupt and poorly administered. Is it advisable to rely on such a mechanism?
- 3) The financial implications are quite high. If only below the poverty line families are covered, the subsidy bill will be Rs.30000/- crores. If both below and above poverty line families are to be covered, the bill may rise to Rs.60000/- crores. This may rise further if the minimum support price is raised further. Is such high bill sustainable?
- 4) Food security is not just a provision of rice or wheat but an extension of minimum nutrition requirements. Will it be feasible?

To overcome the above problems and face the challenges, some suggestions are given below:

- 1) Initially the Act included both rural and poor urban areas. In the long-term measure, various poverty eradication and employment schemes must be made available to the poor so that they will have the purchasing power to buy the food grains from the PDS. Poor must also be trained, skilled and made capable.
- 2) The procurement and distribution may be left to state governments. This arrangement would keep the subsidy bill at a comparatively lower level for the central government.
- 3) Before the Act is implemented, the PDS must be made efficient and corruption must be tackled.

- 4) The management, procurement prices, investment etc. must be considered in advance for the effective implementation of the Act.
- 5) The state governments need to consult and coordinate with the central government to procure and distribute food grains.
- 6) Gram panchayats should be involved to remove bogus cards.
- 7) As regards nutritious food, the PDS sells/distributes several essential commodities; subsequently, the required nutritious items may be added.

9.8 SUMMARY

Food security refers to the provision of basic food requirements for all. It refers to ensuring minimum food requirements to the poor and disadvantaged sections of the society at subsidised or concessional rates. Food security ensures the welfare of the poor and is therefore highly valuable from the point of view of equity and social justice. It is necessary for helping in raising the standard of living, efficiency and productivity levels in the country. In India food security is needed because large sections of the society live below the poverty line. Apart from non-availability of minimum required food, the quality of food in terms of nutrients is also poor. The Government of India has been taking several measures to ensure food security like providing minimum purchasing power in the hands of poor, special schemes to make food available at subsidised rates for the poor, MNREGS, PDS, ICDS, and MDMS. Measures are also on to protect environment and improve the distribution of food. The Government of India has embarked on the process of passing the National Food Security Act that could confer social benefits on India's poor, enabling them to participate and contribute to the development of the Indian society, thus fulfilling the Gandhian hopes of a contended society.

9.9 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. What is food security? Bring out its significance for India.
2. Examining poverty, argue the case for food security for India.
3. Discuss the future scenario in the area of Food Security in the light of the proposed National Food Security Act.

SUGGESTED READINGS

Brown Lester R., *Tough Choices* (Facing the challenge of Food Security), W.W.Norton & Co., New York, 1996

Datt, Rudder., *Slower Poverty Reduction but Increasing Inequality*, *Mainstream*, June 15-21, 2007

Dreze Jeane, and Amartya Sen., *Hunger and Public Action*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1993

Government of India (2007, 2008) *Economic Survey*, Ministry of Finance, New Delhi

Government of India (2008-09; 2009-10) *Union Budgets*, Ministry of Finance, New Delhi

Hanumantha Rao., Food Grain Supplies – Cause, & Policy Implications, *In Indian Economy Since independence*, (ed) Uma Kapila, Academic Foundation, New Delhi

Joshi, P.K., Is a Food Security Act Doable?, *Economic Times*, 10th June ,2009.

Kumbhar, Sitaram., From Employment Guarantee to National Food Security, *Mainstream*, June 19-25, 2009

Misra, S.K, and Puri, V.K., *Indian Economy – Its Development Experience*, Himalaya Pub., Mumbai, 2008

Prabhu, R.K, and Rao, U.R., *The Mind of Mahatma Gandhi*, Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 1967

Vyas, V.S., ‘Food Security in India’- in *Economic Developments in India*, (Ed) Uma & Raj Kapila, Academic Foundation, New Delhi, 2005

World Bank (2009) WB helping in Mitigating Food Crisis, *WB Weekly Update*, January 26, Hindustan Times 18-6-09, 15-10-09, 8-11-09