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## Securing The Right To Food In India: Issues And Challenges

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### Abstract:

The fundamental idea behind food security is to guarantee that everyone has access to essential foods for an active and healthy life at all times. It is defined by the food's stability, accessibility, use, and availability. The UN has set "Zero Hunger" as the second Sustainable Development Goal for 2030. India has a serious hunger level and is ranked 107th out of 121 nations in the 2022 Global Hunger Index. "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" is the stated goal of the 2013 National Food Security Act (NFSA) of India. The eastern Indian state of Odisha has frequently made news in the past because of incidences of starvation and hunger that result in deaths from starvation. Although the state has made significant progress in addressing the issue, it is more severe in the western regions of the state, where the frequency of these instances is particularly high. In light of this, the current empirical study—which aims to concentrate on the Act's implementation in an underdeveloped district in the Indian state of Odisha—is extremely important.

Keywords: Food Security, NFSA, Odisha, PDS, Nutrition, Ration Card

### Introduction

Throughout the world, hunger and food insecurity are major causes of war and instability. The slogan "food is peace" is frequently used to draw attention to the mutually reinforcing nature of hunger and violence. Thus, it is imperative that attention be paid to food security and nutrition access as crucial components of social cohesiveness and peace. The World Food Program was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2020, during a time when the pandemic was causing disruptions to livelihoods, supply systems, and economies worldwide. The citation of the award notably emphasized the role that food plays in preventing and resolving conflicts.

Zero hunger is one of SDG 2's objectives, and India is a signatory to the pledge. Out of the 17 goals, SDG-2 is the most important and multifaceted objective, with the biggest potential to speed up the development of human capital as well as state economic growth and the fulfillment of every person's fundamental rights and needs, such as food.

The Global Food Security Index (GFSI) evaluates and ranks 113 different countries using a total of 68 parameters, including the cost, accessibility, and quality of a nation's food supply as well as sustainability and adaptability. According to the 2022 Global Food Security Index, the world's increasing volatility has caused the food system to deteriorate over time. Worldwide, affordability scores have fallen precipitously. Food security is still under threat from climate change on several fronts.

The 11th edition of the Global Food Security Index (GFSI) exposes a weak global food system that is unprepared for shocks such as the conflict in Ukraine and the extreme heat of the summer. According to a study by Economist Impact with support from Corteva Agriscience, the global food environment is still getting worse due to low investment and rising volatility. Not only are conflict and harsh weather to blame for the growing prices of food but our food system's troubling trend of decreasing resilience is also reflected in the rising global hunger and food prices. In addition, stalled progress is a result of fluctuating agricultural output, low funding for agricultural R&D, a lack of natural resources, growing inequality, and unstable

The GFSI demonstrates that governments are ill-prepared for the unavoidable rise in extremeweather events, such as the catastrophic flooding in Pakistan and the heat waves that swept over Europe and North America this summer. There is a global shortage of irrigation systems and water management strategies that can mitigate the consequences of climate change.

Investment in agricultural R&D to increase yields and sustainably improve production is declining in an era of limited natural resources, while soil and land management techniques are still inadequate.

"Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life," according to the World Food Summit definition of food security in 1996. According to this concept, there are three main components of food security: universal food availability, universal access to food, and individual food absorption that results in a healthy diet.

### **Food security and India**

India's economy is growing at a rapid pace, making it the fifth largest in the world. However, a sizable portion of its populace experiences starvation and malnourishment. According to the most recent data, India's inflation rate is approximately 6% overall, but it is closer to 10% for food products. According to the Global Hunger Index (2020), malnutrition causes wasting in over 25% of India's under-five population. Pregnant women and nursing mothers commonly consume inadequate amounts of protein in their diets. These are important issues pertaining to maternal and child health and gender equality that emphasize the need to recognize the interconnectedness of hunger, deprivation, and entitlement (Sen, 1981) and to comprehend food security and insecurity as a complex sociopolitical phenomenon (Vir, 2016).

Against this backdrop, this paper tries

To examine the status of the implementation of the National Food Security Act (NFSA) in the Indian state of Odisha, particularly in the backward district of Nuapada.

1. To examine how far the supportive system of PDS improves the food security status of the people of the peripheral Nuapada District across different social groups.
2. To identify the bottlenecks in achieving the objectives of the NFSA in the study area.
3. To suggest better ways of implementing the Act.

### **India's Journey From the Green Revolution to the Right to Food: An Overview**

India endured severe food shortages in the 1960s and was forced to rely on US assistance through the Public Law (P.L.) 480 Scheme. India then requested additional assistance from foreign organizations. Through the joint efforts of the Indian International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) and the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT), the Philippines, Taiwan, and the USA provided India with high-yield types of seeds, notably IR8 rice (Modgal, 2016). Various extension services, the growth of fertilizer and seed businesses, and numerous other initiatives were part of the new attempts to increase agricultural productivity. These initiatives enhanced India's food production, and by the middle of the 1960s, the success story was dubbed the "Green Revolution." India's agricultural output surpassed 200 million tonnes by 1997, four times the amount produced in 1947, the year the country gained independence.

Since India's independence, food production self-sufficiency has been a top priority for policy, as evidenced by the Government of India's successive Five-Year Plans. Following the import of high-yielding seeds from overseas, the government initiated a number of initiatives aimed at producing high-quality seeds that would be appropriate for every region of the subcontinent. But in order to sustain increased productivity over time, high-yielding seed varieties require adequate irrigation as well as other input requirements. Water for irrigation and other inputs generated new constraints as demands on India's agricultural productivity expanded (Singh and Singh, 2018). The Indian government began liberalizing the nation's economic laws in 1991. Though food production declined as a result of cropland loss to industry, mining, urbanization, and agricultural land alienation, this was a huge boost to business and industry. The productivity of agriculture began to decline in the years 1996–2006. There was a rise in the proportion of Indians living in poverty despite a decline in the growth rate of agriculture (Thivet, 2013).

The Indian government implemented the Minimum Support Price (MSP) to protect farmers from sudden drops in crop prices. A number of programs, including the National Food Security Mission, the Horticulture Policy, the Bharat Nirman Scheme, and others, were later developed to address additional facets of food security. The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), the Public Distribution System (PDS), the Mid-Day Meal Scheme, the Fair Price Scheme, and the ration card system are just a few of the specific food security initiatives that were implemented. After being introduced in late 2011, the National Food Security Bill was referred to the Standing

Committee on Food, Consumer Affairs, and Public Distribution. The Committee's recommendations, which addressed topics like cash transfers, beneficiary classification, and cost-sharing between the federal and state governments, were made public in January 2013. In March 2013, a new version of the bill was presented to Parliament, granting 67% of the population, 75% of the rural population, and 50% of the urban population legal access to subsidized grains under the PDS (Thivet, 2013). In August 2013, the Lok Sabha approved the Food Security Bill. The production of grain, which was approximately 253 million metric tons in 2015, is not the only factor that will determine the success of this policy's implementation. Another factor is the availability of a nutritionally balanced diet that includes a range of foods such as milk products, vegetables, fruits, pulses, and other foods (Modgal, 2016).

### **National Food Security Act: Background**

India has made rapid economic progress over the past three decades, yet malnutrition is still a problem there. The distribution of food, rather than its increased production or availability, is the primary issue facing India's food crisis today. For a great number of Indian low-income households, the issue is the availability of food. Although Article 47 of the Directive Principles of State Policy declares that it is the state's responsibility to "raise the level of nutrition and standard of living and to improve public health," the right to food is not recognized as one of the Fundamental Rights in the Indian Constitution. According to the Supreme Court's interpretation of Article 21's Fundamental Right to Life, having access to enough food is a necessary part of living a life with dignity. In addition, the Supreme Court has extended its jurisdiction to eradicate hunger and undernutrition nationwide since 2001 in response to a PIL filed by the People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL) on inadequate food relief in six states affected by the drought. To date, the court has issued over 40 interim orders directing the federal and state governments to effectively implement existing food and nutrition-related schemes. But a persistent push by civil society for a rights-based perspective on food—known as the Right to Food movement—resulted in the Indian Parliament passing the National Food Security Act (NFSA) in 2013.

According to the Government of India (2013), the National Food Security Act (NFSA) seeks to "provide food with nutritional security in the human life cycle approach by ensuring access to an adequate quantity of quality food at affordable prices for people to live life with dignity." In order to provide food security for all citizens at all stages of life, it does this by expanding coverage, or the number of eligible beneficiaries, and enhancing the execution of current social programs (the human life cycle method). These include school lunches through the midday meal MDM program, child nutrition through the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), subsidized food grain distribution through the Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS), and maternity benefits like the Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY), formerly known as the Indira Gandhi Matritva Sahyog Yojana or Motherhood Support Program. The ICDS and MDM programs guarantee that all children between the ages of six months and fourteen years receive a free meal at their Anganwadi (childcare center) or school, while the PMMVY offers maternity benefits of Rs 5,000 to all women for their first birth. Under the NFSA, the TPDS offers food grains to almost 813.4

million Indians at significantly reduced prices. Given that the NFSA transforms all four welfare benefits into entitlements, the government must legally supply the funding necessary to carry out these programs.

Three and a half years after the Act's enactment, on November 1, 2016, all Indian states and Union Territories had either completed or commenced the NFSA's implementation. September 30, 2015, was the deadline for putting the National Food Security Act of 2013 into effect.

### **The National Food Security Act: Analysis of its Different Provisions**

The National Food Security Act (NFSA) builds on three current programs—school meals through the MDM scheme, subsidized food through the PDS, and maternal and child nutrition through the ICDS—and introduces a maternity benefit for all pregnant women in an effort to ensure food and nutritional security. The objective of the NFSA is to enhance the execution of nutrition-related interventions in India and expand coverage by transforming the current programs into legally recognized entitlements.

#### **Maternity benefits**

All pregnant and nursing mothers are entitled, under Section 4 of the NFSA, to a maternity benefit of "not less than rupees six thousand" as well as a complimentary meal at their Anganwadi (government-run childcare centre) for the duration of their pregnancy and for six months following delivery. Prior to the NFSA's passage, all women could receive free meals at Anganwadis, but only those who qualified for the Indira Gandhi Matritva Sahyog Yojana (IGMSY) could receive maternity benefits. Under this scheme, women could receive up to Rs 4,000 in partial wage compensation for time lost from work due to childbirth and childcare. But just 52 of India's 640 districts implemented IGMSY, and it was only available for the first two live births. Although the NFSA required the government to raise the maternity bonus under IGMSY to Rs 6,000 per live birth in 2013, only 52 districts were covered (Falcao and Khanuja, 2016). In 2017, the government renamed the IGMSY and expanded it to all Indian districts under the name Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY). But only the first child was eligible for the reward.

#### **Nutrition of children**

According to Section 5 of the NFSA, every child between the ages of six months and fourteen years is entitled to a daily, free, age-appropriate meal. Through the ICDS program, children six months to six years old receive this meal at their Anganwadi, and through the MDM program, children six to fourteen years old receive it at their school.

#### **Subsidized food grain**

The foundation of the NFSA is the Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS), which supplies food grains at subsidized prices to over 800 million people. The majority of the NFSA's provisions seek to improve the implementation of the subsidized food distribution system and raise food security by means of TPDS reforms that emphasize coverage expansion and enhancement. The TPDS overtook the Revamped Public Distribution System (RPDS) in 1997. While the TPDS evaluated income (household poverty) to

identify people eligible for food subsidies, the RPDS targeted areas that were hilly, rural, tribal, and prone to drought. Prior to the NFSA, households classified as "below the poverty line (BPL)" were given 25–35 kg of food grain at a subsidised rate under the TPDS. Over time, the TPDS has been associated with corruption in the majority of states (Bhattacharya et al., 2017; Drèze and Khera, 2015a). This is because there has been a lot of food grain diversion, or the sale of subsidized food grain from the TPDS on the open market, and poor targeting, or the mistaken exclusion of impoverished households and inclusion of non-poor households. Khera (2011) estimates the trends in TPDS grain diversion at the state level using data from the National Sample Surveys (NSS) conducted between 1999 and 2008. She divides the states into three groups based on these estimates: (a) "functioning" (Pakistan, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Uttarakhand, and Tamil Nadu); (b) "reviving" (Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Uttar Pradesh, and Uttar Pradesh); and (c) "languishing" (Assam, Bihar, Gujarat, Haryana, Jharkhand, Punjab, Rajasthan, and West Bengal). States that maintained a monthly per capita purchase of food grains of more than one kilogram over the study period were classified as "functioning." States that saw a decrease in per capita food grain purchases below one kilogram per month at the start of the study period but an increase to above one kilogram per month at the conclusion were labeled as "reviving." States classified as "languishing" were those where, during the course of the study period, the per capita purchase of food grains remained over 1 kilogram per month. In the last ten years, a number of studies have emphasized the effectiveness of state-level TPDS reforms in low-income states, including Bihar (Drèze et al., 2015), Odisha (Aggarwal, 2015), and Chhattisgarh (Puri, 2012). Many of these lessons from the revived states are incorporated into the NFSA.

### **Increased coverage of the TPDS**

The NFSA's Section 3(2) expands TPDS coverage to 75% of rural and 50% of urban populations. Compared to the TPDS's pre-NFSA coverage, which was restricted to households below the poverty line (BPL), this is a significant increase. In 2014–2015, a person earning Rs 47 per day in urban areas and Rs 32 per day in rural areas was regarded as living below the poverty line, according to a report prepared for the Planning Commission (Rangarajan, 2014). Therefore, about 29.5% of Indians fell under the BPL category. It is significant to remember that many states and UTs had increased TPDS coverage prior to the NFSA's passage by creating a "state-BPL" category for low-income households that did not fit the BPL "cut-off" set by the federal government (Karat, 2011). For instance, in 2012, the central government was subsidizing TPDS food grain to just 1.3 million people in Chhattisgarh (Puri, 2012). In order to provide the TPDS with coverage for an extra 1.9 million households (who are not deemed BPL by the federal government), the state government established a category known as "state-BPL." By combining the Above Poverty Line (APL) and BPL categories into a single "priority" category and keeping the Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) category, the NFSA also reduces the number of beneficiary categories from three under the pre-NFSA TPDS to two categories. In an effort to provide extra food subsidies to the "poorest of poor" households, the AAY category was created in 2000. Putting the APL and BPL categories together was a big change to the PDS because the APL category's large amount of food grain diversion was a big problem with the old TPDS (Drèze and Khera, 2015b).

## **Uniform entitlement of 5 kilograms of food grain per person**

Every member of a priority household is eligible to receive 5 kilograms of rice per person per month from the TPDS under Section 3(1) of the NFSA. Regardless of the number of people living in each household, every BPL household received 25 kilograms of food grain during the pre-NFSA era. The NFSA offers entitlements "per person" as opposed to "per household," which takes into account variations in the number of people living in each household. For AAY households, who continue to receive 35 kg of food grain per household, the NFSA preserves pre-NFSA rights. Given that many AAY households have fewer than seven individuals, this clause guarantees that AAY households will not have their pre-NFSA benefits reduced.

## **Reduction in prices of food grain**

The central government established "Central Issue Prices (CIP)" for subsidized food grains supplied through the TPDS during the pre-NFSA era. For rice, wheat, and coarse grains, the rates were Rs 5.65, 4.15, and 3 per kilogram, respectively. To further lower prices, several state governments did, however, offer state subsidies (Chhattisgarh, for instance, lowered the price of TPDS rice from Rs 5.65/kg to Rs 3/kg in 2007 and Rs 2/kg in 2012). For the first three years following the Act's enactment, all qualifying households are entitled to food grains at subsidized prices not to exceed Rs 3, 2, and 1 per kilogram for rice, wheat, and coarse grains, respectively, as per Schedule I of the NFSA. The central government may then establish prices, but they must not go over the minimum support prices for each of the three cereals.

## **Identification of eligible households by state governments**

Sections 10(1a) and 1b of the NFSA require state governments to determine whether households fall into the priority groups and would be eligible for AAY within a year of the Act's enactment. The public is given access to the list of qualifying households after they have been identified. This provision fixes the common mistakes in including and excluding people that happened with the pre-NFSA TPDS. It does this by using the BPL survey from 2002 for rural areas and the BPL survey from 2007 for urban areas. As we already said, some states made their TPDS available to non-BPL households through state subsidies.

## **Reforms of the TPDS**

The NFSA prioritizes enhancing "last-mile" delivery to boost the efficacy of the TPDS in addition to expanding coverage, lowering costs, and simplifying entitlements. The federal and state governments are tasked with "progressively undertaking necessary reforms of the TPDS," according to Section 12 of the NFSA. These include the distribution of food grains via "doorstep delivery" from warehouses to TPDS fair price shops (FPSs); the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) to computerize the TPDS from beginning to end; record transparency; the transfer of management of FPSs from private owners to public entities like women's cooperatives; the diversification of commodities distributed (selling cooking oil and pulses at the FPS); the use of Aadhaar, a unique biometric ID, for beneficiary identification; and the

introduction of programs like cash transfers and food coupons. Food grain is delivered to TPDS stores by "doorstep delivery," which entails moving it from central government warehouses. This took the place of FPS supervisors handling food grain transportation, which frequently led to grain diversion (Puri, 2012).

The NFSA also establishes grievance redress mechanisms to oversee the implementation of the law, provides a food security allowance to be paid in the event that food entitlements are not provided, and mandates that the federal government finance state governments' efforts to move food grains within their borders. These NFSA provisions seek to enhance the TPDS's effectiveness by enhancing targeting, expanding coverage, and lowering corruption.

### **The National Food Security Act 2013: A Rights-based Approach to Food Entitlements**

Rights are merely goals to be realized at some unspecified future time in the absence of a constitutional guarantee (Drèze, 2004). However, the Indian State went above the merely aspirational political will and commitment by defining the Right to Food a basic right, making the rights practically justiciable.

The emphasis on a "lifecycle approach" to food security (Ministry of Law and Justice, 2013) reveals the second facet of a rights-based approach: it recognizes that vulnerable groups should receive policies and entitlements that help them realize their human right to food at every stage of life. The Act incorporates the concepts of well-being, dignity, and respect—all of which academics have advocated for in various ways in the rights discourse—through the use of the term "live a life with dignity" (Sen, 2005; see also Nussbaum, 2003).

Thirdly, the Act states that there is a "right to receive food security allowance in certain cases" and designates "priority households" as those belonging to vulnerable groups, including the elderly, the disabled, poor single women, and children (Ministry of Law and Justice, 2013: 2- 4). The Act includes specific provisions aimed at reducing malnutrition in early children and providing nutritional support to breastfeeding mothers and pregnant women. The NFSA includes specific provisions for guaranteeing food security for disadvantaged communities in mountainous and tribal areas. These specific allowances for priority households show that legislators' political will and dedication were focused on reducing hunger by strengthening the capacities of the underprivileged and vulnerable populations.

Fourthly, by announcing that women above the age of 18 will be considered the "head of the household for the issue of ration cards," the NFSA has opened a new avenue that goes against long-standing gender norms in Indian society (Ministry of Law and Justice, 2013: 5). Moreover, until a woman reaches the age of 18, a male head of the family may be present in situations where she is under 18 years old. This is a historic decision in the Indian context, where prior policies assumed men to be the head of the family due to prevailing cultural norms. It is also a significant step towards women's emancipation. Fifth, the Act's use of rights-based terminology places the major duty-bearing obligation on



the government at all levels to secure food and nutritional security, rather than only acting as a provider (Ministry of Law and Justice, 2013: 8–10).

The establishment of grievance redressal channels, such as helplines for individuals, in addition to the appointment of nodal officers at panchayat levels to connect individuals with their particular duty-bearers, constitutes the sixth rights-based feature of the NFSA. The NFSA has provisions for the appointment of a District Grievance Redressal Officer (DGRO) as well as for independent agencies to perform periodic social audit procedures. The Act outlines punitive measures for duty-bearers, including a fine of Rs 5,000 if a public servant or authority on any complaint is found guilty of failing to provide appropriate relief, as recommended by the DGRO (Ministry of Law and Justice, 2013: 11). This is a step towards ensuring accountability and transparency at the district level. In Section 32 of Chapter XIII (ibid.), the NFSA (2013) suggests that "the State Government may" implement further entitlement programs, if and when needed, to reduce poverty and hunger.

Thus, one could claim that the NFSA is rights-based, as was previously discussed. For a comprehensive assessment of the NFSA's efficacy, states' readiness to operationalize the different food supplies must be taken into account in order for it to have a significant influence.

A system that has come to be associated with corruption is being transformed by the implementation of NFSA and a number of TPDS reforms that were carried out both before and as a result of NFSA. Numerous evaluations of its execution have revealed improvements in foodgrain transportation, a rise in the purchase-entitlement ratio (PER), a decrease in exclusion mistakes, and an increase in the coverage of eligible beneficiaries. States and unions (UTs) that have enacted reforms like foodgrain delivery to households, computerization of the entire procurement, transportation, and distribution process, streamlining eligibility requirements, and enhancing grievance redress procedures are experiencing greater food security and political success.

In light of this, the purpose of this article is to empirically investigate the situation of the National Food Security Act's implementation in Odisha, a state in eastern India. It's important to keep in mind that hunger and malnutrition do not go away just because there is an act. In order to fully assess the efficacy of the NFSA, states' readiness to operationalize the various food provisions must be taken into account.

### **Methodology of the Study:**

This study examines how the National Food Security Act is being implemented empirically and evaluates it. Both primary and secondary sources of data were used in the investigation. The field study collected primary data from five blocks in the Nuapada District of Odisha. Primary data was collected by selecting the blocks, panchayats, wards, and samples of rural homes using a multi-stage systematic random sampling technique. The Simple Random Sampling Method was used to select the 400 total respondents (80 from each block). A pre- designed survey was distributed to the recipients.

Furthermore, the beneficiaries participated in focused group discussions and interviews. In addition to the beneficiaries, interviews with members of civil society, local elected officials, and administrative officials from the Panchayati Raj institutions—such as sarpanches, ward members, and gram sevaks—were conducted. Primary data were gathered from a variety of government documents, including Economic Survey reports, the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD), the Food Corporation of India (FCI), the State Civil Supplies Corporation, the Planning Board of Odisha State, and Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution, the Ministry of Food Processing Industries, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), and the Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers' Welfare, Planning Commission and Niti Aayog reports, annual budgets of the Union and the State, and so forth. Books, journals, newspaper articles, and online sources are examples of secondary sources.

### **Review of Implementation of NFSA in Nuapada District of Odisha**

In Odisha, one in three people live in poverty. Despite a plethora of government initiatives, welfare programs, and handouts, 29.35 percent (pc) of the State's population lives in multidimensional poverty. In terms of the percentage of the people living in poverty, Odisha ranks in the top 10 states according to the NITI Aayog's National Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) 2021 report. In contrast to prior years, when poverty was solely associated with food insecurity, the NITI report has documented the many and simultaneous deprivations that households experience.

Three equally weighted dimensions—health, education, and standard of living—were taken into account for calculating the MPI. Due to the fact that over half of the districts' poverty index scores are higher than the state average, these numbers are concerning. There is an agrarian and forest economy in the Nuapada district. The majority of people are reliant on agriculture and forests. They have no other means of obtaining fulfilling work, thus they exist in a subsistence economy. In the Odisha district of Nuapada, there are a lot of vulnerable and impoverished individuals.

### **Analysis from the Field Data**

During the field study, it was found that about 99% of people had received their Ration Cards. The field study reveals that most of the sample beneficiaries of TPDS belong to all the castes and belong to middle and young age groups; they are illiterate and/ or have completed primary and upper primary education. The demographic features of the respondents reveal that the average size of the family is 05. Analysis indicates that people of all castes have access to PDS in the district. The decision to issue ration cards in the name of female members of the households is a positive major towards the process of empowerment of women.

The local self-governing institutions, i.e., the Panchayats have facilitated the receipt of ration cards by the people. It took about a month to get the ration card. Very few people who faced problems in getting the ration cards pointed out reasons such as lack of awareness, no relevant document, official apathy, panchayat leaders demanding bribes, and also due to the lack of universal nature of the whole provision.

## **Ration Material Related**

Most of the time, Panchayats are in charge of managing the Fair Price Shops. The beneficiaries get the entitled commodities, such as rice and wheat, and they are satisfied with the quality, but as far as quantity is concerned, they are very dissatisfied because the quantity is not adequate to meet their requirements. At the time of the transaction in fair price shops, the documents show the household name, Transaction ID, Price of commodities, date, and month.

The fair price shop maintains the register, which one needs to sign at the time of collection of commodities from the FPS. This helps in maintaining transparency in the whole process.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the beneficiaries received their ration materials, which helped them greatly to sustain themselves, which was a laudable thing as there was a lot of suffering due to the lockdown and severe restrictions on livelihood activities.

They get their rations regularly. The quantity assured is maintained. A large percentage of beneficiaries get their ration promptly.

## **Anganwadi Centres**

Anganwadi in Hindi means "courtyard shelter" in English. It is a type of rural childcare center in India. The Indian government started it in 1975 as a part of the Integrated Child Development Services program to fight child hunger and malnutrition. The Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) Scheme, now renamed Anganwadi Services, has the objectives of improving the nutritional and health status of children in the age group 0–6 years, laying the foundation for proper psychological, physical, and social development of the child, and reducing the incidence of mortality, morbidity, malnutrition, and school dropout.

All the villages that were surveyed for carrying out our research have Anganwadi centers. 92% of respondents agreed that the Anganwadi centers take care to identify the malnourished children and provide them with meals to meet their nutritional needs. 97% of the people interviewed expressed satisfaction with the cooked meals provided at the Anganwadi centers.

## **Survey relating to pregnant women**

97% of the surveyed people concurred that pregnant women and lactating mothers get nutritional meals at the Anganwadi centers. The women also received maternity benefits as specified in the Act. 98% of the women agreed that the Food Security provisions have helped women and their children get proper nutrition.

## **Survey Relating to School Children**

From the survey, it was known that 97% of the children are getting nutritious meals through the mid-day meal scheme. The children are satisfied with the quality and quantity of meals provided in their schools. The positive outcomes of the mid-day meal scheme include a reduction in school dropouts, an increase in

school enrolment, help in the proper growth of the students, and lessen the economic burden of parents to feed their children nutritious food.

### **Going beyond Foodgrains: Pulses in the PDS**

Although TPDS provides a significant portion of India's population with food grains (wheat and rice), its capacity to guarantee nutritional security in addition to food security has frequently been questioned. Many states and UTs have implemented subsidised pulses in TPDS over the last ten years in order to offer a high-protein source. Pulses are a valuable source of protein and add variety to the nutritional profile of TPDS products, which are mostly composed of carbs. The NFSA does not include any provisions for the distribution of pulses, despite encouraging the distribution of millets (along with rice and wheat). It does, however, recommend that governments broaden the range of commodities offered by TPDS (GOI 2013). Farmers and recipients of the pulses that the states and UTs distribute under the TPDS program stand to gain. The latter can diversify their crops and boost agricultural incomes, while the former will gain from the nutritious content of pulses. Given that pulse prices have risen significantly in recent years, it would be advantageous for TPDS recipients to be able to acquire these at reduced costs.

### **Concluding Observations and Suggestions**

The persistent agricultural crisis poses a threat to long-term food security. In addition to endangering the nation's overall food security and the availability of food on a macroscale for the expanding population, this crisis would also affect the food security of numerous marginal and small farmers who have given up on agriculture due to economic hardship or have been forced to work as agricultural labourers after being evicted from their land or denied access to forest resources. The Act makes no mention of the problem of access. Its main points center on food access, availability, and entitlement. Income makes it possible to purchase food from the PDS or the market. The only ways to earn money are through stable employment and goodpay. This presents a significant barrier in a jobless growth economy.

The Food Security Policies are primarily dependent on community involvement to be modified in response to actual conditions, guarantee food sovereignty to the recipients, control private traders in the purchase, storage, and distribution of food grains, increase funding for agriculture, and take the required steps to boost output. These characteristics—legitimacy, accountability, competence, consensus-building, equality and inclusivity, observance of the law and protection of human rights, etc.—ensure democratic governance of food security policy. In order to ensure that the target group(s) are not just recipients of food grains supplied by government agencies, but also have access to sufficient quantities and quality of food, democratic governance is acknowledged as one of the key strategies of food security policies. For the program to be successful, people-centered governance must be used in its design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation.

Despite the fact that the NFSA's implementation hastened the attainment of food security, there remains a serious deficiency in research and development in the agricultural and related industries, and there is

flagrant mishandling of food grains from farm to table. With its NFSA program, India has the largest network of food security programs globally. Nevertheless, a number of administrative and financial challenges have arisen throughout its implementation, and successful execution is required to ensure that the program's benefits reach all residents who depend on food security. Without access to clean fuel for cooking, potable water, hygienic conditions, and good health—all of which are included in the NFSA, the Sustainable Development Goals, and previous Millennium Development Goals—it is impossible to achieve food security. Since food security safety nets and entitlements are the cornerstone of social cohesion and peace, sustainable development goals can only be realized with full implementation of the NFSA and the principle of "leaving no one behind."

### **Suggestions for better Food Security:**

**Enhanced Outreach and Awareness Programs:** Hold wide-ranging awareness campaigns in rural regions to inform people about the PDS and their entitlements under the NFSA. To disseminate awareness about the PDS and its advantages, make use of grassroots organizations, self-help groups, and local community leaders.

### **Strengthening PDS Infrastructure:**

Invest in enhancing transportation and storage infrastructure to guarantee the prompt supply of food grains to isolated rural communities. Provide fair-price shops (FPS) with sufficient inventory and working infrastructure in each town.

Make use of technological tools like GPS monitoring to keep an eye on the distribution process and guarantee transparency.

### **Identification of Beneficiaries:**

By carrying out routine surveys and maintaining beneficiary lists, you can make sure that eligible beneficiaries are accurately identified and included under the NFSA. To prevent exclusion errors and guarantee that food assistance reaches the most vulnerable households, implement clear and accountable mechanisms.

### **Universalization of PDS:**

Think about making the PDS universal to reach a greater number of people, particularly in rural areas where food insecurity is a common occurrence. Update beneficiary lists frequently by conducting surveys to eliminate duplicate or ineligible beneficiaries. This can lessen exclusion errors and help reach out to more people who are in need.

### **Enhanced Quality Control:**

To guarantee the nutritional value and quality of food grains supplied through the PDS, strict quality control procedures should be put in place. Problems like spoilage and contamination can be avoided with routine food grain testing and monitoring.

### **Diversification of Food Items:**

Add nutrient-dense goods like edible oils, pulses, and fortified foods to the assortment of food items supplied by the PDS. Better dietary diversity and nutritional results may result from this, especially for vulnerable populations like children and expectant mothers.

### **Strengthening Last-Mile Delivery:**

Enhance the PDS's distribution network and logistics to guarantee the prompt and effective delivery of food grains to rural communities. This could entail improving last-mile connectivity to isolated villages, transit networks, and storage facilities.

### **Community Participation and Monitoring:**

Promote community involvement in the observation and management of PDS activities by forming Village Food and Nutrition Committees (VFNCs) or comparable local organizations. Involving communities can aid in finding gaps and resolving problems locally.

### **Capacity Building and Training:**

To enhance the knowledge and abilities of PDS employees in managing and running the PDS, offer training and capacity-building programs to fair-price shop owners, government employees, and frontline staff.

### **Integration with Other Welfare Schemes:**

To improve the overall impact on food security, poverty reduction, and nutrition, integrate the PDS with other social welfare programs like the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) and the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS).

### **Monitoring and Evaluation:**

Provide effective monitoring and assessment systems to gauge the effectiveness and influence of PDS in rural Odisha. For continuous improvement, regular reviews and assessments can assist in identifying obstacles, tracking advancement, and guiding evidence-based policy decisions.

Through the implementation of these measures, rural Odisha can enhance its efforts towards food security under the NFSA 2013, guaranteeing disadvantaged and vulnerable communities access to a sufficient and

nourishing diet for their development and well-being.

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