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The Poor's Food Insecurity in India

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Abstract

This paper probes into food insecurity that the poor across the country are burdened with. Food-insecure people are those individuals whose food in-take constantly falls below the minimum calorie (energy) requirements. The availability of food grains through the PDS is examined, followed by an investigation of the poor's accessibility to the food grains that policy promises to make available for them. By citing various findings and comments by experts, the severity of the food insecurity is emphasized. The paper covers issues like: (1) Ration Cards (the inadequacy of the food provision programme is delved into); (2) PDS Coverage (the debate between the universalization of and the targeting of the PDS is deliberated upon); (3) Accessibility (the food coupons / stamp as an integral part of the PDS is reviewed); and (4) Systemic (the various logistical and policy shortcomings of the PDS per se are investigated). Given the current neo-liberal orientation of the country's policies, this paper then reviews the inclusive development potential of the food security programme to empower the poor, while building collateral capacity.

1. Introduction

Food security, at the macro level, is a function of the availability of food in the economy as well as the accessibility that the citizens have to the food thus provided. Food availability is primarily a function of agricultural productivity, the quantity that is available for domestic consumption and the economy's storage capacity. Accessibility to this food, on the other hand, is chiefly influenced by the real income of the people, which in turn depends on the nominal income, the general price level of food and the network of outlets or access points that have been established by the concerned authorities. The absence of food availability and / or accessibility causes 'food insecurity' in the economy.

The fall-outs of food insecurity are mal-nourishment, unhealthy and hunger-ravaged people and in the extreme case, starvation deaths. Today, technological advancements in all sectors, including agriculture, have practically negated the Malthusian natural checks. Hence, any country endowed with natural assets needed for agricultural and other agro-related activities should be free of food insecurity; but in current times the contrary has been consistently occurring in India and alarmingly with increasing severity.

In the light of India's neo-liberal urban-centric policy orientation, this paper broadly investigates the correlation between the food security agenda and poverty-severity, the accrual of the food security to the poor and the consequent building of collateral capacities among them. It also examines the following issues:

- Food insecurity in democratic India, an acknowledged growing economy.
- Socio-economic-politico factors that cause and perpetuate food insecurity.
- Feasibility of the food security programme in mitigating this challenge.

The primary data for this study were obtained through personal interviews conducted in Mumbai. As food insecurity is faced primarily and involuntarily by the poor, the 25

randomly chosen economically disadvantaged interviewees were construction-workers, cart-pullers, street-hawkers, rag-pickers, domestic workers, and security guards. The secondary sources included pertinent books and papers from relevant journals along with article write-ups from several newspapers and magazines. A few of the numerous petitions filed by the NGO '*Ghar Bachao – Ghar Banao Andolan*' (GBGA) were also referred to.

After conceptualizing this problem, the paper traces the evolution of India's Public Distribution System (PDS), with primary focus on the Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS) and the *Antyodaya Anna Yojana* (AAY). In the following two sections the availability and accessibility of food in the country are respectively analyzed. Prior to winding up with conclusive comments, the paper puts forth possible solutions to improve the delivery mechanism of the PDS.

2. Conceptualizing Food Insecurity

'Food security' exists when there is timely access to affordable food to meet the basic nourishment of the body. A society is said to be 'food secure' when there is access to adequate food by all for an active and healthy life (Krishnaraj, 2005). Therefore, food-insecure people are those individuals whose food intake constantly falls below the minimum calorie requirements. This is due to a lack of purchasing power and / or no timely access to food materials. In fact, 'hungry people most often are illiterate, unhealthy and without political power' (Praeger, 1985); they are individuals languishing at the bottom rung of the income ladder and so for them the food larder is always nearly empty. In India, like across the globe, an enumeration of the poor is invariably the list of the food insecure individuals in the country.

3. Historical Review of Food Security Measures in India

Recurring food shortages and extreme income inequalities has forced the Government of India to constantly intervene in the sphere of food access (Ray, 1998). It did so by indirectly transferring income to the poor through food subsidies and dual pricing of essential commodities. The public distribution of essential commodities in India has been in operation since the early 1900s. The government of independent India persisted with the PDS as '(it) is one way of transferring resources and providing the economically weaker sections of society with a minimum level of consumption' (Sharieff, 1999). The PDS, which is the spear-head of the Indian food security program, is centrally sponsored but implemented by the State / UT administrative machinery. While the Central Government provides food grains through the Food Corporation of India (FCI), the State governments formulate and implement arrangements for identifying the poor, issuing ration cards and ensuring the distribution of food grains in a

transparent manner through the network of 'around 4.89 lakh fair price shops (FPSs)' (Planning Commission, 2008).

Through the 1970s, the spurt in food grain production (mainly wheat, on account of the Green Revolution), caused policy-makers to extend the PDS to tribal blocks and areas having a high incidence of poverty. Till 1992, the PDS was a general entitlement scheme for all consumers. This led to an inadequate pro-poor focus and so caused the food security measures to by-pass the poor. To overcome this flaw, in June 1992, the 'Revamped Public Distribution System' (RPDS) was launched in 1775 blocks in the far-flung, hilly, remote and inaccessible areas of the country.

In June 1997, the focus of the food security policy shifted from 'all in poor areas' to 'poor in all areas'; hence, the RPDS was transformed into the TPDS. This format of the PDS aims at benefiting about six crore poor households by giving them a fixed entitlement of food-grains at subsidized prices. To ensure that the poorest of the poor have access to the PDS, the AAY was launched in December 2000 so as to reach out to about a crore of such families. Under this scheme, food grains are provided to this target section at Rs 2 per kg for wheat and Rs 3 per kg for rice and the scale of issue has been increased to 35 kgs per family per month. In 2003-04, another 50 lakh BPL households headed by widows or terminally ill persons or disabled persons or persons aged 60 years or more with no assured means of subsistence or societal support, were included in the AAY. By 2005-06, an aggregate of about 2.5 crore poor households were brought under this scheme. But the number of beneficiaries has not increased since then. This freeze on the number of beneficiaries is worrisome on two counts: 1) the Tendulkar Committee (2009) has estimated that currently about 8.5 crore households (37.2 % of total population) live BPL in India and the current food security beneficiaries amount to far less than Tendulkar's estimation. 2) India is 'home to the largest number of hunger people in the world – 233 million, compared with 183 million in Sub-Saharan Africa and 119 million in China' (Isaak, 2007).

4. Food Grains Availability for the PDS

Using Tendulkar's BPL estimates and the AAY's scale of issue, the quantum of food grains needed annually for securing the poor's food intake is about 36 million tons (8.5 crore BPL households x 35 kg per month x 12 months). However, the current allocation of subsidized food grains is: 10 million tons for AAY households, 17 million tons for non-AAY BPL households, about 5 million tons for welfare schemes (including the mid-day meal programme) and nearly 20 million tons is provided for APL households. There is, thus, a supply deficiency of about 9 million tons of food grains for the very poor (i.e., AAY and non-AAY BPL households). Radhakrishna and Ray (2005) point out that only 20 % of the poorest households can be helped through

the PDS cereals (one wonders what would be the plight of the other 80% of the poorest households). It is such shortages in supply that cause and perpetuate food insecurity.

Using Tendulkar's poverty approximation of 8.5 crore BPL households and the average food grain price of Rs 3.2 per kg for BPL households, the food subsidy offered to a BPL household works out to be Rs 16.8 per kg of food grains and an annual total support of Rs 7060 (Khenka, 2010). This amount is in tune with the current subsidy support of Rs 60000 crore given to the FCI for procuring food grains. Dreze (2010) draws attention to a tentative calculation which suggests that a comprehensive Food Security Act may annually cost the National Exchequer about a lakh crore rupees, which is about 1.5 per cent of India's Gross Domestic Product. It can be surmised that the finances required for overcoming India's food insecurity is not so humungous as to be beyond our fiscal capability.

Utsa Patnaik (2005) points out that Indian policy administrators and planners have blatantly ignored even the least standards of caloric intake prescribed for calculating poverty thresholds. This has been done to fudge poverty figures to show to the world that the poverty levels are rapidly falling in India. In 1999-2000, for instance, the price adjusted poverty line was Rs. 328 per month per rural person. By this count, the proportion of poor people in Indian villages had impressively fallen to 27 per cent from 37 per cent in 1993-94. However, given the current food inflationary status, a monthly expenditure of Rs. 328 could enable a person to access at best 1890 calories a day – a shortfall of 500 calories below the modest minimal norm (of 2300 calories) which was fixed nearly three decades earlier. In India, Tendulkar's poverty line criterion will hence forth be used to measure poverty. But, this new criterion is based on an intake of only 1800 calories. Hence, the poor will now become nutritionally even more insecure.

5. Food Grains Accessibility Through the PDS

Policy has apparently made food available to the poor and so 'for those at risk of hunger, the PDS (is) a lifeline' (Dreze, 2010). However, the question to be asked is 'Can the poor access this food as their right or as their need for survival?'. If access to food is a right, then the supply of food would be adequate and timely. In case of the needs-based approach, the food supply would be sporadic and insufficient, thereby making the poor dependent on those in power. A rights-based approach would ensure that stocks of food grains are always available. But in the case of the needs-based approach, until and unless the need is perceived by those in control, the required amount of food grains would not be supplied. That it has taken the Government of India nearly 63 years to make access to food a right shows that, to date, the food security measures were formulated and executed on a needs-based approach. Hence, various schemes meant for the poor are non-functional due to lack of supply stocks through the PDS

(Special Correspondent, 2006). Again, estimations of the number of poor, through questionable poverty line standards cause the problem of food insecurity to persist.

The ration shops are the main outlets for the PDS. However, most of these shops are often in the hands of corrupt dealers, who make money by selling PDS grain in the open market (Dreze, 2010). According to the Maharashtra State Human Rights Commission the ration shops pick up grains for distribution among the poorest of the poor, but these shops end up pilfering from these stocks for profiteering (ENS, 2006). A report of the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution (Editorial, 2007) states that in the period 2004-2007, Rs 31585.98 crore worth of wheat and rice meant for the poorest of the poor was siphoned off from the PDS. In 2006, Rs 11336.98 crore worth of PDS food grain found its way into the market illegally. Every year, India's poor are cheated of 53.3 % and 39 % of wheat and rice respectively earmarked for them.

Democratically elected governments have consistently allowed the PDS to slip into 'a state of advanced decay' (Sainath, 1996). Therefore the benefits of the PDS are neither enjoyed solely by the poor nor mainly by the poor. 'As on 1st March 2000, against a total ceiling of 6.52 crore BPL households, more than 8 crore BPL ration cards have been issued' (Planning Commission, 2008). Recently, of the 88000 bogus ration cards detected in 27 of Orissa's 30 districts between November 2009 and January 2010, 68000 belonged to BPL category and 9877 were under the AAY scheme (Mishra, 2010). Again, in June 2010 the Madhya Pradesh government admitted that 11.28 lakh fake ration cards bled the PDS in the state (Milind, 2010). As per the PDS (Control) Order, 2001, the State Government has to get the lists of BPL and AAY families reviewed every year for the deletion of ineligible families and the inclusion of eligible families. The Audit Report (2006) on the Government of Maharashtra points out that this task was not diligently carried out, and cites the case of the E-ward of Mumbai where the ration cards were not reviewed in 505 shops out of 978 shops in 2005. Those interviewed for this study, confirmed this dismal state of the food security for the poor. 40% of those interviewed had BPL ration cards, but nearly all of them reported that accessing the PDS is an onerous task and so they prefer getting a bulk of their food grains from the open market, in spite of the prices being much higher.

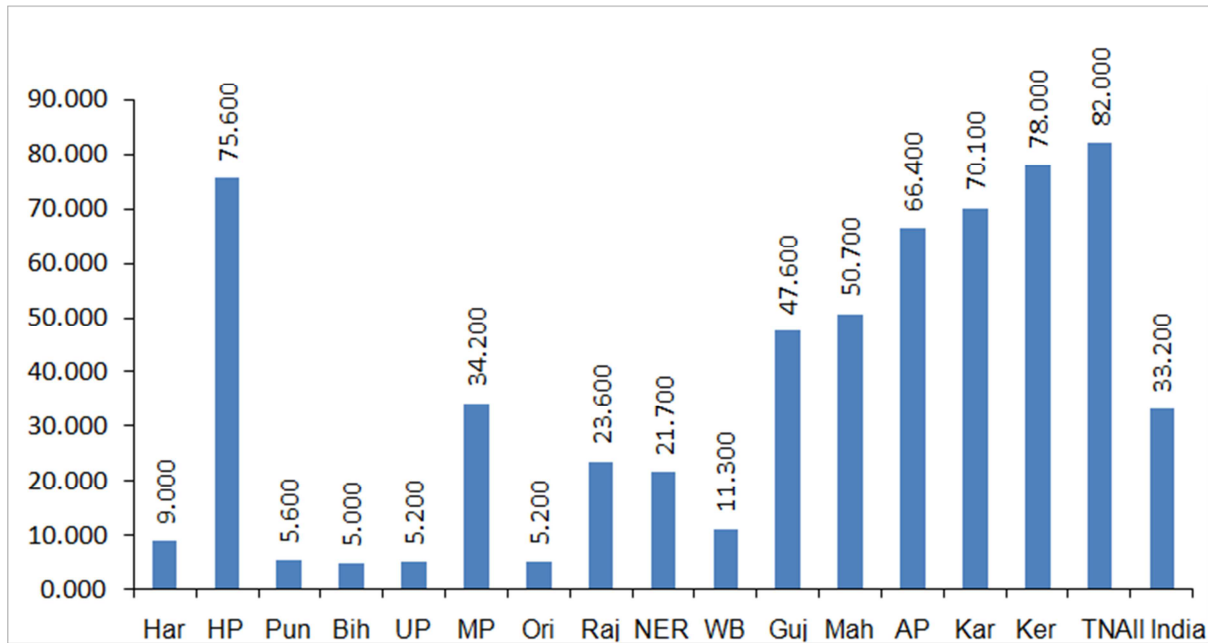
A Planning Commission study shows that only 42 % of the subsidized food grains issued from the central pool reach the poor. Nationally representative information on the actual size, location and extent of use of the PDS was brought out for the first time in the India Human Development Report (1999). It shows that the percentage of households using the PDS in the poorer states is low and in the better-off states it is high (refer Figure 1). This is symptomatic of a systemic break down in the food mechanism in the backward states; hence, people are forced to migrate out of these states in search of both work and food security.

In Mumbai, where food insecurity is not restricted to a few slums, there are cases where homeless people have received

AAY ration cards, but are unable to get kerosene and sugar from the PDS outlets. This is due to a government's fiat that the homeless would receive food grains if and only if a surplus exists in the BPL food grain quota.

As per the Supreme Court's observations, ration cards are meant to create entitlements to subsidized food for the poor. In spite of such a guideline, the marginalized and their ration cards are treated with disdain. 'Many of the poor receive insignificant amounts of subsidy and so depend on the market to access supplies' (Ramaswami et al, 2002). Again, the poor are either denied a card or the card they possess is

considered to be ineligible for accessing PDS food grains. In Table 1, the data of the distribution of cardholders among the poor and non-poor for Maharashtra and India have been culled out from the 61st Round of the NSSO conducted in 2004-05. It reveals that not only is a substantial percentage of the poor out of the PDS ambit (19.1 % on an All-India basis, without ration cards) but also a significant size of the non-poor usurps the benefits that are meant for the very poor. 59.8% of the total BPL / AAY cards are with 20.7 % non-poor households. This substantiates the accusation that the PDS has been appropriated by the non-poor.



Source: India Human Development Report, 1999

Figure 1. Percentage of households using the PDS in States

Table 1. Distribution of Cardholders Among Poor and Non-Poor

	% poor having no ration card	% poor having BPL / AAY card	% BPL / AAY cards with non-poor	% non-poor having BPL / APL cards
Maharashtra	19.2	39.9	51.1	18.4
India	19.1	36.0	59.8	20.7

Source: Eleventh Five Year Plan 2007-2012, Vol II, Social Sector.

Civil society has been working towards bettering the PDS with respect to the urban poor, but to little avail. On 4th May 2005, Shri N.C. Saxena (of the GBGA), on behalf of slum-dweller/CS/05/Maha, complained to the then Chief Secretary, Government of Maharashtra, that after slum houses were demolished, the ration cards of those who lost their houses were cancelled. To date, no action has been initiated to rectify this unjust deed. In its petition (dated 6th February 2007) to Shri Sunil Tatkare, Minister for Food and Civil Supplies, Government of Maharashtra, the National Alliance of People's Movements (NAPM) had brought to his notice that the prices charged from ration card holders for kerosene are higher than that stipulated by the government – people then were supposed to pay Rs 9 per litre but they were forced to pay Rs 12 per litre. It also pointed out that since kerosene

supplied for the PDS was being diverted into the open market (at Rs 25 per litre) the genuine ration card holders were denied this commodity even at the premium that they had to pay. In spite of repeated reminders the government has done nothing to right this wrong and the poor continue to be exploited through the very programmes that are supposed to enhance their welfare.

6. Suggestions to Improve the Overall Food Security Measures

To reduce food insecurity among the poor, it is imperative that the following issues are addressed:

6.1. Ration Card Issues

The problematic issues associated with ration cards vis-à-vis the urban poor can be mitigated if the following suggestions of the GBGA are implemented:

1. Families residing near *nallahs*, on footpaths, at the footsteps of hills and in inhabitable conditions, destitute families, *naka* workers and the like, should be given BPL ration cards, through the mediation of local NGOs. Such intervention by civil society would guarantee fairness and transparency in the whole process.
2. Unorganized workers or destitutes who cannot afford to reside in one place due to irregular employment and are in constant search of livelihood, or are evicted, should be issued 'Roaming Ration Cards'. Keeping tabs on the transactions carried out by such cards is possible if the public services' records are computerized.
3. Since in the urban areas the AAY / BPL number of beneficiaries per FPS is low, the resultant lack of commercial scales dissuades FPSs owners from entering such activities. Therefore 'Roaming Vehicles' should be scheduled to supply food grains to the beneficiaries near their residences.
4. Unorganized workers and urban homeless people should be given permanent BPL / AAY ration cards. Temporary or ad hoc ration cards should be avoided as they are treated scornfully by FPS owners and this does not reduce the food vulnerability of the poor.
5. Currently, slum dwellers who desire to acquire ration cards are required to produce a certificate of original domicile along with some documents related to their present residence. As the former certificate needs the poor to travel back to their place of origin, it increases their economic burdens - apart from the bribe money that they would have to pay for getting the said certificate issued, they have to forego the earnings of a few days and also incur the travel costs. This discourages them from acquiring ration cards. Therefore, the poor should not be burdened by bureaucratic processes while they try to get a ration card.
6. Spot inspections, by food officials, for certification of families who have applied for ration cards, should not be carried out during the day, as these daily wage earners are then out at work. On account of their non-availability at their residences at the time of the inspection, they are not issued ration cards and so they remain food insecure households. The concerned authorities should ensure such inspections are undertaken in the evenings after the workers have returned home. Mander (2010) draws attention to the fact that 'the selection of urban poor families based on local enquiries is often done by corrupt officials of the notorious food department.... The procedures effectively rule out those who are most needy in any city, because of their constantly contested citizenship.'

6.2. The Coverage Issues

The current food security issue being debated is whether the PDS operations should be universal or target-based. In case of a universal PDS, every economically disadvantaged Indian would have access to the government food security measures while in case of the targeted PDS, cheaper grains would be available to only those officially identified as 'BPL'.

Critics of the universal PDS maintain that though it is non-discriminatory, it is not feasible on account of the mammoth quantum of food grains required (about 92 to 93 million tons of wheat and rice). Assuming a 3:2 ratio between rice and wheat, the maximum requirement will be 55 million tons of rice and 38 million tons of wheat every year. The critics also point out that 'if the central pool takes away such large amounts of wheat and rice, the net available in the private market will be very small and speculative traders could have a field day' (Nandakumar, 2010). Again, they fear that 'the political economy of universalization would lead to the setting up of a permanent lobby within the government for keeping the procurement prices for food grains low, thereby further disincentivizing producers' (Editorial, 2010).

On the other hand, the detractors of the TPDS opine that although it is feasible, it is unreliable, divisive and prone to fallacies. The 'exclusion errors' can be enormous. In 2005, the Programme Evaluation Organization's Study estimated that TPDS covers only 57 % of BPL families (Planning Commission, 2008). According to National Sample Survey Organization's data, in 2004-05, almost half of the rural BPL households did not have a BPL ration card. Similar findings have emerged from the National Family Health Survey data. Utsa Patnaik (2006) points out that targeting the food security has added to the institutional denial of affordable food grains to the poor, not only owing to mistakes of wrong exclusion from the set of the officially poor, but also owing to the gross official underestimation of the number in poverty. Targeting assumes that only some of the poor (in some parts of the country) are food-insecure, while all the other poor (in the other parts of the country) are food-secure. Sainath (2010) avers that targeting 'leads us to pit poor against poor and to see people in the APL category as the enemies of those who are BPL ... and that we take grains from one to give to the other'.

This paper supports a universal PDS as it is convinced that enough of food grains for all can be made available, if only our country's natural endowment is optimally utilized. Currently, inadequate fiscal and legislative support has been enervating Indian agriculture. 'Under the Structural Adjustment Programme, farmers have increasingly abandoned traditional food crops' (Chossudovsky, 1997) and have shifted to cash crop production. Subsequent to this, changes have emerged in the land ownership patterns as many farmers have no choice but to become labourers and so migrants. Targeting the PDS, 'seems to equate hunger with geography' (Sainath, 2010). This would mean that the food policy is oblivious of the millions of hungry mouths (especially the poor migrant labourers) in the non-targeted

parts of the country. A universal PDS is in consonance with the letter, spirit and wisdom of the Indian Constitution's Directive Principles of State Policy and so it is indisputably an important step towards the eradication of food insecurity of a massive multitude.

6.3. The Access Issues

Currently, deliberations are on to determine if the poor's access to publicly distributed food should be directly through food grains or indirectly through food stamps / coupons. This writer advocates the indirect route on the following counts:

1. The BPL consumers would be given the choice to buy from any outlet, as and when the family needs the food grains. Again, BPL households could also buy meritoriously as per the quality of the food grain. The private owners could encash the food stamp / coupon at the nearest authorized post office or bank.
2. It would de-monopolize FCI's control on the food grain supply and thus compel it to improve its operational modalities. By being forced to procure and dispense in a competitive milieu, the FCI will have to ensure that it functions efficiently and humanely to improve the welfare of the poor.
3. Food stamps / coupons could be merged into the wages paid through the Public Works Department (PWD). This would curtail the mal-practices in this sphere. Again, having independent access to food grains would improve the nutritional and health status of the poor workers.
4. The value of the food stamp / coupons can be indexed to the food inflation rate prevailing in the economy. This would ensure that the poor have the requisite purchasing power to adequately feed themselves. For the food stamps / coupons system to operate effectively, the government should:
 - Ensure that even private food outlets service BPL households.
 - Encourage private food outlets to take on the additional burden of encashing the food stamps / coupons.
 - Build confidence in BPL households so that they approach private food outlets.
 - Clamp down heavily on the misuse or abuse of the food stamps / coupons.
 - Be vigilant against intrusion of counterfeit stamps / coupons into the system.

6.4. Systemic Issues

The present operational procedures in the PDS that make food access burdensome for the poor should be revisited:

1. The criterion used for issuing ration cards is that the applicant must possess a registered residential address. This means that many of the poor, who are homeless, are left out of the scheme. The suggestions made in Section 5 of this paper could be used to overcome this problem.

2. As consumer's quotas are sold in lump sum of 35 kgs of food grains within a limited time period, the workers on daily wages cannot afford to buy their rightful entitlements. The Supreme Court of India (2010) has suggested that the PDS be kept open for the entire month to facilitate the poor to buy food in installments (as per their needs), as they may not have the capacity to buy 35 kgs of food grains at once.
3. The Supreme Court (2010) has pointed out that a PDS cardholder gets 35 kgs of food grains if there is one member in his family or ten. This means that the food access is not sensitive to the family-size and so food insecurity persists in large-sized families. The Supreme Court of India has suggested that the distribution should be in proportion to the number of family members.
4. Being influenced by the neo-liberal ideology, the Planning Commission desires that the poor should be made to pay for some part of the food grains that they receive. Alagh Yoginder (2010) warns that if even an iota of market elements is included in the delivery of food to the very poor, it would frighten them away. Therefore the very low prices that are charged for the BPL / AAY ration card holders should continue.
5. For an effective implementation of the Right to Food Act, it is necessary that the responsibility of the distribution of food be taken off the FCI and brought into the open market space. This would ensure that food grains are not allowed to stack up but would constantly move into the market place – however, this must be subject to government's monitoring.
6. Finally, the distribution operations should be freed of bureaucratic and ministerial control, so that there is a free flow of food grains as per the people's requirements without any red-tape delays and / or political exigencies holding sway.

7. Closing Remarks

In conclusion, this paper makes the following submissions:

- Swamina than (2000) points out that empowerment is possible only when state policy is made subject to the needs of the marginalized and not vice-versa. The food security policies in India, unfortunately, do not follow this tenet since it provides food to the poor not as their right but merely for their survival. The current Right to Food Act, prepared by an Empowered Group of Ministers, restricts food availability for BPL households to 25 kgs of food grain (at an unspecified price) as against their existing entitlements of 35 kg of food grains.
- Inclusive development is not a natural outcome of this programme as its content and delivery mechanisms and execution are not in sync with the plight of the poor. The unjust instances cited throughout the paper with respect to the iniquitous access to food bears testimony to this claim. There is a general agreement that poorer people and poorer regions are benefiting little from the costly

operations of the PDS (Ray, 1998).

- Government and private operators tweak the operations of the PDS to profiteer (politically and/ or economically). The availability of food grains for the PDS is given secondary importance over private interests. Consider this: as a part of its grain-based liquor policy, the government of Maharashtra will be diverting 13 % of its cereal production (in the form of jowar, corn and bajra) for grain-based liquor production; thereby, creating scarcity of food grains in the market. Since jowar, corn and bajra form a major part of the diet of the poor, such food shortages will adversely affect the poor (Tiwale, 2010).
- Generating capabilities through entitlements is beyond this programme, since its delivery mechanisms improve significantly only when regular food problems assume crisis proportions, in order to avoid media attention (locally, nationally and globally). Therefore, collateral capacity building of the food security policy is practically zero. The slip-ups in the Mid Day Meal Scheme is fast turning this programme into a sham. The programme is losing its capacity to encourage parents to send their children to schools. Recall, the ghastly tragedy in Chhapra, Bihar, where 22 children lost their lives after they consumed a government - provided school meal. (Editorial, July, 2013)

Misgovernance on the food security front is bound to exist as long as food access is not made one of the primary drivers of development. With the poverty alleviation measures being more breached than practiced, the danger that the Right to Food would suffer the same fate looms large. To prevent this right from losing its development edge, 'the Act's capacity to launch a new movement' (Dreze, 2010) to fight hunger and malnutrition should be allowed to flourish through appropriate community participation and empowerment. 'At the Bali WTO meet, for India, the most important item on the agenda was to ensure that its current PDS as well as the new food security programme under the National Food Security Act(NFSA) would not have to be curtailed if the food subsidy breached the ceilings decreed by the WTO's 1994 Agreement on Agriculture(AoA) (Editorial, December, 2013). The Supreme Court of India, just three days prior to India's 63rd Independence Day, told the government of India, 'Don't allow food grains to be wasted, give it away to the hungry population' (Express, 2010). This admonition captures both the plight of as well as the foresight needed by the food security policy in India.

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