



FOOD SECURITY  
AS A PUBLIC POLICY CONCERN IN INDIA  
AMIDST THE 2030 AGENDA:  
A HISTORICAL TRAJECTORY

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*Abstract:* The paper provides a historical perspective to understand food security at the global level and in the Indian context. It explores how food security in India evolved into a significant public policy concern through the implementation of the National Food Security Act (2013) and other key policy measures. When examining India's policy focus on food security, a shift has occurred from primarily concentrating on the overall national availability of grains to a more nuanced emphasis on household and individual-level nutrition security. This shift is thoroughly examined in the study. As for methodology, it is primarily descriptive in nature and involves secondary data analysis. The paper follows a systematic literature review to gain insights into food security as a key policy concern, examining it through the lens of the Agenda 2030 achievement. The paper also seeks to comprehend the breadth of literature and research related to global food security, with a specific focus on India. The study firmly argues that the success of the 2030 Agenda hinges on its implementation and the reach of the final beneficiary. Ensuring the availability, accessibility, affordability, and optimal nutritional utilization of resources is critical to achieving this success. This outcome is inherently linked to India's capacity to garner support for both the established goals and the appropriate methods of execution.

*Keywords:* Covid-19, deprivation, food security, sustainable development goals, vulnerability.

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## INTRODUCTION

Food Security as a concept began to assume salience in the 1970s coinciding with global discussions surrounding food crisis. The notion of food security took shape during the inaugural World Food Conference held in 1974. In the last two decades the ongoing crisis of food prices coupled with the gradual decline of global food security has driven endeavors to enact substantial reforms aimed at ensuring food security (Margulis 2013). Undoubtedly, disruptions in the supply chains of major food-producing nations combined with the heightened demand for essential food items from developing countries have led to a rise in global food prices since 2011. The escalated prices of food commodities consequently exerted a detrimental influence on individual's capacity to obtain these commodities subsequently undermining food security. This impact is particularly pronounced for the vast population of individuals who are economically and socially disadvantaged and who already contend with issues of hunger and food insecurity (Raj et al. 2022). As such, food insecurity can be conceptualized as a circumstance in which individuals “live with hunger and fear starvation” (FAO 2006: 1).

Similarly, “food insecurity exists whenever the availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods or the ability to acquire acceptable foods is limited or uncertain” (Anderson 1990: 1560). Those unable to afford the increased food prices are compelled to consume low-calorie, nutrient-deficient foods. Consequently, mortality rates from starvation and infectious diseases could potentially rise (Villaruel et al. 2016). Hence, ensuring food security remains a significant challenge in the pursuit of achieving zero hunger by 2030. This challenge has been further exacerbated by the unprecedented Covid-19 pandemic and its far-reaching social, political and economic ramifications. According to the World Food Programme (WFP), the Covid-19 pandemic has drastically escalated the number of people facing acute food insecurity in the years 2020–2021. Reports indicate that as of 2021, 828 million people worldwide experienced hunger, marking an increase of approximately 180



million individuals since the onset of the 2030 Agenda. Moreover, nearly one-third of the global population, approximately 2.31 billion people encountered moderate to severe food insecurity in 2021. This figure represents an increment of about 350 million people compared to 2019, the year preceding the emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic (FAO 2022: 129). In the countries where the World Bank operates a staggering 272 million people are already at risk of becoming acutely food insecure (The World Bank 2021: 1). It is, therefore, evident that the lingering effects of the Covid-19 pandemic and their ensuing consequences continue to impede progress towards achieving SDG 2 by 2030 (FAO 2022). Moreover, the recent Russia-Ukraine conflict has further disrupted global food supply chains giving rise to the most extensive global food crisis since the Second World War (United Nations 2023).

However, even prior to the Covid-19 pandemic global efforts to alleviate hunger were progressing sluggishly. According to the latest trajectory of the 2020 Global Hunger Index (GHI), “37 countries appear unlikely to achieve even a lower hunger status by 2030”. Hunger is currently more pervasive in numerous countries compared to 2012 owing to conflicts, poverty, inequality, poor health, and climate change” (Grebmer 2020: 3). The UN report, titled *The Sustainable Development Goals Report* (2017), reveals that 767 million people live on less than 1.90 US dollar a day, highlighting the urgent need to ensure access to food for the 793 million people grappling with hunger and malnutrition. With reference to India, the country received a score of 29.1 on the Global Hunger Index (GHI) 2022, placing India in the “serious” category for hunger among 121 other countries (GHI 2022). According to the Global Food Security Index (The Economist Group 2022), undernutrition prevails at a rate of 16.3% with 33.4% of children in India being underweight, 33.9% stunted, and 3.8% obese. Consequently, the United Nations (UN) has stated that “food insecurity is a serious threat to public health and social sustainability”. This challenge is set to intensify due to the projected global population reaching nearly 10 billion by 2050” (United Nations 2019).



## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This paper delves into the historical trajectory of food security as a policy priority worldwide alongside an exploration of the diverse food security measures currently being implemented in India. The study is primarily descriptive in nature relying on secondary data analysis. In this vein, the paper seeks to comprehend the breadth of the literature and research concerning global food security with a particular emphasis on the situation in India. The paper followed a systematic literature review methodology to comprehend food security's significance as a pivotal policy concern and its alignment with the achievements envisioned in Agenda 2030. The study began by reviewing various theoretical and empirical research papers enabling a historical contextualization of the emergence of food security. For robust data support, various resources were utilized including reports from the World Bank, United Nations, the Food and Agricultural Organisation, National Sample Survey (NSS) and the documents of the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD), among others. These reports not only furnished factual data but also facilitated an in-depth understanding of the historical trajectory and diverse food security measures adopted in India.

Thus, the study rigorously reviewed pertinent articles and documents focusing on hunger, food security, and the Agenda 2030 Sustainable Developmental Goals (SDGs). In the first place, it reviewed the literature on food security thereby furnishing a historical backdrop to the evolution of this concept. Subsequently, the paper proceeds with an exploration of food security's role as a public policy concern in India accompanied by a concise discussion of the assorted food security measures that have been put into practice within the country. The latter segment of the paper is dedicated to scrutinizing the interconnection between food security and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) outlined in Agenda 2030.

Few of the key limitations of the study are: *a*) no primary data or surveys were used; *b*) it confined to the historical progression of global and Indian food security, analysis of its eleva-



tion to a critical public policy concern via the National Food Security Act and other key policy measures, and exploration of the interrelation between food security and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of Agenda 2030; *c*) only central government programmes for food subsidies have been considered.

## ANALYSING FOOD SECURITY THROUGH HISTORICAL TRAJECTORY

The definition of food security emerged in the 1970s initially focusing on ensuring a stable supply of food grains for individuals in developing nations during both normal and poor harvests (Anderson 1985; George 1994). However, beginning in the 1990s ensuring food security gained greater prominence on a global scale within the policymaking of numerous countries. During this period, the definition of food security expanded to encompass not only food availability but also considerations of food safety and nutritional adequacy (Maxwell 1996; see also fig. 1). It is now understood that the overarching goal of food security extends beyond simply ensuring the presence of food grains; it aims to ensure that all individuals, especially vulnerable groups, have uninterrupted access to food grains throughout the year (Bhalla 1993). Achieving food security necessitates maintaining consistent and sufficient food supply while simultaneously enabling every segment of the population to acquire and derive nutritional value from it (Scanlan 2003). In essence, food security can be succinctly defined as the physical, social, and economic access to adequate, healthy, and nutritious food (Patel, Nagar 2016).

*First phase: 1945-1970 (establishment of United Nations, FAO, WFP, surpluses)*

The first phase spanning 1945-1970, commenced with the establishment of the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) in 1945. This phase marked the emergence of food aid. The main objective of the FAO is “to collect, analyse, interpret,



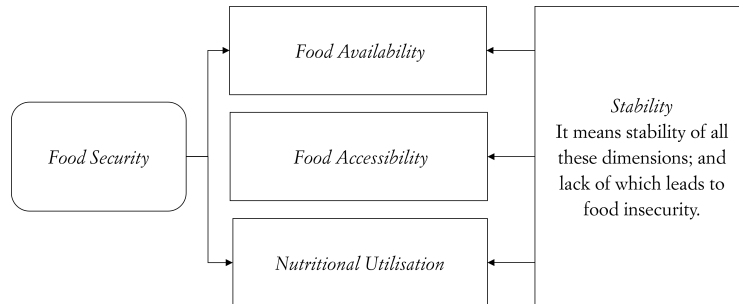


Fig. 1. *Components of Food Security.*

and disseminate information relating to nutrition, food, and agriculture” (FAO 2006). The FAO organized the World Food Survey in 1946 to assess the status of food supplies for the entire population around the world with enough energy, or macronutrients (calories). In 1952, the FAO instituted an advisory Committee on Commodity Problems (CCP) to investigate the feasibility of establishing an emergency food reserve that could be made immediately available to countries facing famine. The CCP has developed key regulations to monitor food commodity distribution. On October 27, 1960, the United Nations General Assembly passed a resolution allocating food surplus to nations grappling with food shortages (Shaw 2007). Besides, The World Food Programme (WFP) was established in 1961 as well, with the primary responsibility of “responding to emergencies” (WFP 2009). The FAO distinguished between chronic malnutrition and famines while relating food shortages and famines to hunger and food insecurity (FAO 2014: 33). If we look at in India, the late 1960s green revolution was a historic watershed moment that completely transformed the country’s food security situation. It tripled food grain production over the next four decades, cutting food insecurity and poverty rates by more than half. This was accomplished despite the fact that the population nearly doubled during that time. On a larger scale, the country achieved its admirable goal of becoming a food-sufficient nation (Ittyerah 2013).

Tab. 1. *Statistics on international students attending Indian universities*

S.No	Time Period	Episode
1.	1945-1970	Establishment of UN, FAO, Surpluses
2.	1970-1990	Food Crisis
3.	1990-2005	Golden Years of Food Security
4.	2005-2010	Hunger Free India by 2007 and Food price hike during 2007-2008
5.	2010-2015	NFSA, 2013; and MDGs by 2015
6.	2015 and beyond	UN Agenda for Zero Hunger under SDGs by 2030

*Source:* Compiled by the authors.

### *Second phase: 1970-90 (food crisis)*

The second phase, spanning the 1970s to the 1990s was marked by a global food crisis (Maxwell 1991; see also tab. 1). While the 1950s and 1960s witnessed a surplus in food production, the years 1972-73 experienced a severe scarcity of food commodities. This period saw a substantial surge in food prices and notable lapses in the distribution of emergency food aid. The year 1973, in particular, witnessed a significant upswing in import demand from socialist countries. The decline in cereal production and the escalating prices of petroleum had cascading effects on fertilizer costs and cereal transportation. Climatic conditions further amplified these challenges, rendering imports more costly for developing (Gerlach 2015). The dire circumstances resulted in an estimated half a million deaths. Many individuals endured hunger and malnutrition, leading to compromised health and reduced productivity (Shaw 2007). In response to this crisis, both developing and developed nations called for an international conference to evaluate the global food situation. The World Food Conference convened in 1974 aiming to address the global food crisis and implement suitable strategies. During this conference, the World Food Council endorsed an International Undertaking on World Food Security recognizing that “food security” was a shared concern among all nations. This conference introduced a food supply-based definition of food security: “availability at all times of adequate world food supplies of basic foodstuffs to sustain a steady expansion of food consumption



and to offset fluctuations in production and prices” (Simon 2012).

When juxtaposing the time frame of 1972-1974 with to the first phase of the 1950s-60s, the global food predicament takes on a distinct perspective. The preceding phase, encompassing the 1950s and 1960s primarily revolved around the inter-country transfer of food through trade (Geier 1995). The core objective of this period was to bolster the food production foundations of developing nations accentuating their self-sufficiency (FAO 2006, paragraph 2). Particularly, Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, and other low-income countries were notably affected by economic reforms, natural calamities, and other contributing factors (Singer 1997). Evidence highlights a dramatic increase in the number of chronically undernourished people in Sub-Saharan Africa during the years 1970-91 (Gerlach 2015). Even within the countries that experienced the Green Revolution, environmental constraints emerged as obstacles to food production, consequently exerting an adverse impact on food security (Zarges 1997). During this time, the World Bank’s policy study *Poverty and Hunger* added a new dimension to the food security debate, which is still relevant today for a broader understanding of food security.

### *Third phase: from 1990s and beyond*

The third phase, spanning from the 1990s to the 2000s, was characterized by a series of international conferences culminating in the UN Millennium Summit 2000. This phase concentrated on enhancing food availability and accessibility for impoverished populations (see fig. 1). Consequently, starting from the 1990s the definition of food security has expanded to encompass terms such as malnutrition, undernutrition and micronutrient deficiencies. The discourse on food security during the 1992 International Conference on Nutrition in Rome underscored that “each individual has the right to access nutritionally adequate and safe food and that ample food exists globally for everyone with inequitable access being the primary challenge”. A pivotal advancement took place in 1996 at the FAO-hosted World Food Summit held in Rome, which was regarded as a significant stride towards





achieving food security (Simon 2012: 20). The focus on food production and nutrition security contributed to notable progress. As a consequence, the period from 1990s to 2005 earned the moniker “Golden Age of Food Security” (FAO 2006, cited in Simon 2012: 20; see also tab. 1). However, food prices experienced a remarkable surge in 2007-2008 an event dubbed the “Silent Tsunami” by the World Food Programme. This escalation in food prices can be attributed to various factors, including “diminished food reserves and droughts, trading speculations and the depreciation of the US dollar, increased utilization of grains for feedstock and biofuel production, and shifts in consumption patterns within emerging economies (Uraguchi 2010: 450).

In recent times, different targets have been set by governments and international organisations to achieve the goal of zero hunger in different time periods at the national and global level. The targets are: *a*) Hunger-Free India by 2007 in India; *b*) Millennium Development Goals 2015 at the global level; *c*) UN Agenda for 2030 at the global level. All these initiatives share the common aim of mitigating hunger and malnutrition, as well as ensuring equitable access to food for vulnerable population. The initial goal, “Hunger-Free India by 2007” was introduced during a significant conference called the “National Food Security Summit” held in New Delhi in February 2004, organized by the MS Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF) and the UN World Food Programme (Narayanan 2015). These endeavors contributed to a noteworthy decrease in global hunger and poverty. As per the UNDP MDG Report (2015), it is documented that global poverty and hunger levels have substantially declined shrinking from 1.9 billion in 1990 to 836 million in 2015. A significant portion of this progress has been attributed to the period since the year 2000.

## FOOD SECURITY AS A POLICY CONCERN

India has a complex history intertwined with hunger, food insecurity, and famines (Dreze, Sen 2013). Yet, since its emergence as an independent democratic nation, India has consistently prioritized food security at the central and state levels (Raj et al. 2022; see also fig. 2). Notably, post-independence India



has achieved a remarkable level of self-sufficiency in food grains. After grappling with severe food deficits for more than two decades following its liberation India transitioned into producing enough food grains on a national scale to attain self-sufficiency. Additionally, India has formulated numerous policy initiatives aligned with the global concern for food security. Simon (2017) emphasizes that food security hinges on three fundamental factors: availability, accessibility, and affordability. Availability pertains to food production; accessibility is related to the distribution of food grains; and affordability entails the capacity of economically disadvantaged populations to purchase food within their income limitations. While underscoring the significance of the state and civil society, Dev and Sharma (2010) assert that a constructive synergy among the three principle entities (state, market, and civil society) is crucial to ensure food security and alleviate poverty. These three entities also bear the responsibility of proactively managing food commodity prices and averting price fluctuations. This approach guarantees access to food for marginalized groups and concurrently, minimizes inefficiencies in the public distribution system. Guided by these three parameters, the targeted Public Distribution System, the translation of the “Right to Food” into legal entitlements and the implementation of the National Food Security Act are pivotal strides towards securing the nation’s food supply (Ittyerah 2013). These initiatives have transformed from being mere welfare provisions to fundamental rights (Ghosh, 2016). To comprehensively grasp the landscape, it is imperative to acquire a fundamental understanding of the diverse food security schemes and programs introduced by the Government of India. These initiatives (see fig. 2) are designed to ensure access to food for impoverished and vulnerable segments of the population, both through direct and indirect means.

### *Food based transfer programmes*

Food-based transfer programmes encompass direct food distribution initiatives involving allocation of food grains or prepared meals. The objective is to ensure impoverished individuals’ access to essential food items, achieved through diverse



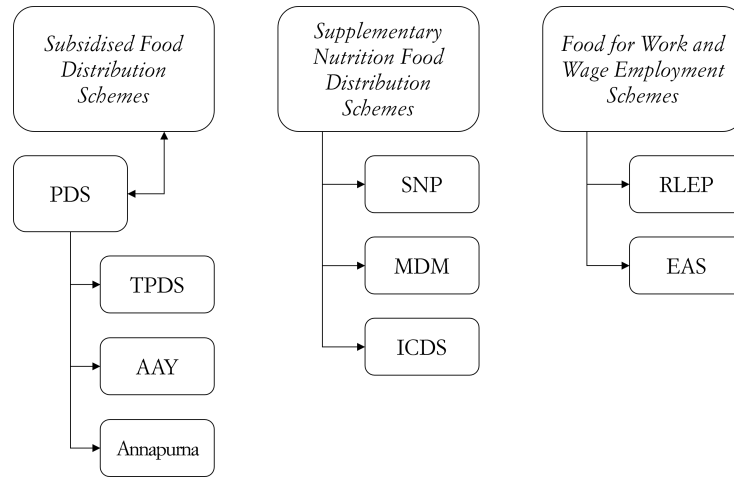


Fig. 2. Some of the Food Security Schemes and Related Programmes in India.

mechanisms or institutions. Notable among these schemes are The Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY), the Annapurna Scheme (APS), the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), the Mid-Day Meal Scheme (MDMS) and so on (Devindrappa, Gurubasappa 2014). These schemes have been extensively introduced and executed in India as part of the Public Distribution System (PDS).

### *Public Distribution System*

The PDS is a rationing mechanism that seeks to provide poor individuals and households with specified quantities of selected commodities at subsidised prices (Swaminathan 2010). In particular, it distributes various food items at subsidised prices to the poor and underprivileged through fair price shops (FPS). PDS is one of the key food distribution mechanisms initiated by the Indian government with the larger goal of universalizing food access. It also aimed to maintain a minimum level of nutrition for the population that could not afford to buy food from the market. In fact, owing to the involvement of international markets, which regularly

affected domestic prices, and controlling the price volatility of food items has been very important since the 1990s. In unstable markets, the poor's purchasing power was further reduced as a result of these circumstances. In addition, given the overwhelming problem of poverty and malnutrition, ensuring affordable food access remains a priority (Swaminathan 2003). PDS was renamed Revamped Public Distribution System in June 1992. Because PDS was criticized for being urban-biased, it aimed to target isolated regions such as mountainous, isolated, inaccessible, and rural areas. They received food grains at the lowest prices (Gupta, Saxena 2014). This was further replaced by Targeted Public Distribution System.

### *Targeted Public Distribution System*

Besides, facing criticism for urban bias the RPDS also failed to effectively reach impoverished individuals, particularly those belonging to lower castes and adivasi communities. In response, the Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS) was launched in 1997 with the aim of assisting people living below the poverty line (Ittyerah 2013). In essence, the primary eligibility criterion became the income levels of the people, and households were selected as beneficiaries based on this criterion. Utilizing the income poverty line, household were categorized as poor or non-poor, determining their eligibility for program benefits (Swaminathan 2003). Food items were distributed at subsidized prices to low-income households through a network of Fair Price Shops. These essential food commodities, including rice and wheat were procured from farmers, traders and rice millers at government-set prices. Following the procurement, the food was transported to the ration shops. Beneficiaries then purchased food grains according to their entitlements at subsidized rates from these shops (Gupta, Saxena 2014). As implied by its name, the program aimed at providing 20 kg of grains per month to 60 million low-income families (Rajagopalan 2010).

The PDS has faced criticism from numerous scholars due to its malfunctioning. For example, Indrakanth (1997) discusses the various levels and types of leakages within the public distribution system: “a) leakages may occur right at the godown



level, preventing food from reaching the village or town; *b*) leakage may occur at the village/town level". Although food grains might reach the village, the FPS dealer could divert a portion of the allocated quota to the market possibly in collusion with higher authorities; *c*) leakages may also occur at the household level. Cardholders might purchase from the ration shop but sell items in the open market at higher prices" (Indrakanth 1997: 999). These three levels of leakage occur with the involvement of the ration shop dealer.

### *Antyodaya Anna Yojana*

To enhance the focus on the neediest individuals within the TPDS, the Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) was launched in 2000 targeting approximately 10 million of the poorest families (Kumar 2010). This central government initiative exclusively caters to the most disadvantaged individuals by providing 25 kg per family. Later, starting from the year 2002 this was increased to 35 kg of rice each month at a fixed rate of Rs. 3/- a kg for rice and Rs. 2/- a kg for wheat (Chinnadurai 2014). In the second expansion of AAY, different groups of people – such as landless agriculture labourers, marginal farmers, and rural artisans – were included. The scheme also encompassed families led by widows or terminally ill/disabled persons and people who are aged 60 and above (Chinnadurai 2014). The concerned state governments undertook the responsibility of identifying the Antyodaya families with the objective of issuing ration cards to these families (Kumar 2010). However, several states encountered difficulties in implementing the programme. For instance, there were errors in the inclusion and exclusion of beneficiaries as well as in the distribution of benefits. A study on the implementation of the AAY scheme in Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, and Jharkhand revealed instances of political influence or local power structures leading to the inclusion of individuals under the APL category even when they were not eligible for the scheme. Moreover, issues with forged cards in the names of deceased family members or displaced families were also identified. Consequently, the study highlighted inclusion and exclusion errors (Chinnadurai 2014).

*Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) Scheme*

The Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) scheme was also launched with the goal of promoting maternal and child health. This scheme has been launched not only in India but throughout the Third World. It was introduced as part of the National Policy for Children in 1975 (Kapil 2002; Ghosh 2016). In India, the ICDS scheme has been established through Anganwadi service centres for which the Government of India provides funding. These centers are overseen by the local governments of their respective states ensuring their proper functioning (Grebmer et al., 2022). ICDS aims to provide the six major services: *a*) supplementary nutrition; *b*) immunisation; *c*) health check-up; *d*) referral services; *e*) pre-school non-formal education, and *f*) nutrition and health education (Kent 2012). Regarding pre-school non-formal education, the emphasis is on children in the age group of 3-6 years. In addition to that health and nutrition education is provided to women in the age group of 15-45 years. Importantly, utmost priority is given to the most vulnerable children below the age of three. To support this, various training programmes have been conducted to enhance the capacity of caregivers in providing effective early childhood care (Ittyerah 2013).

In terms of program implementation, the primary responsibility lies with the Department of Women & Child Development of the Government of India (GoI) and the nodal departments in the States. The ICDS is considered one of the key welfare schemes initiated by the GoI, and it has gained strong political support. A significant aspect of the scheme is its assurance of nutritional safety for children and lactating women who belong to economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Notably, the scheme has succeeded in reaching even the remotest areas due to its nationwide coverage (Kapil 2002). However, it is concerning that India's child mortality rate is relatively high on a global scale. In 2010, India accounted for about 1.69 million child deaths, which comprised 22% of the world's total of 7.61 million child deaths that year (Kent 2012).

### *Mid-Day Meal Scheme*

To combat malnutrition, particularly among children, the GoI launched a landmark mid-day meal programme in 1995. This initiative serves as a significant food distribution mechanism with the goal of providing nutritious meals to schoolchildren, covering one-third of their daily calorie requirements, and enhancing school attendance (Kent 2012). Its primary objective is to ameliorate the nutritional status of underprivileged children, consequently positively impacting their school enrollment ratios. The Mid-Day Meal Schemes (MDMS) is an integral component of the National Programme of Nutritional Support to Primary Education (NP-NSPE), largely implemented by the School Management (Raj et al. 2022).

The Central Government revised the programme in 2004, expanding its scope to provide cooked, nutritious mid-day meals to children in both primary and secondary schools. Ensuring a mechanism for quality evaluation is also of paramount importance (Sharma 2015). During the 2010-2011 school year, the scheme catered to 71.8 million children in primary schools and 33.6 million children in upper primary schools. However, children's coverage in certain Indian states, such as Bihar (43%), Uttar Pradesh (57%), and Jharkhand (58%) is lower than the national average of 72% (Brahmanand et al. 2013). The program has had some success in improving children's attendance in primary and secondary schools, as well as in mitigating hunger and malnutrition. Yet, it must still meet its projected targets. Despite being in operation for over 20 years, concerns have been raised about its overall effectiveness (Simon 2017).

### *National Food Security Act (NSFA) 2013*

Although the issue of 'food security' at the household level has long been addressed by the government through mechanisms like the Public Distribution System and the Targeted Public Distribution System, the enactment of the National Food Security Act (NFSA) 2013 on July 5, 2013 marks a paradigm shift in the approach to food security, transitioning from



a welfare-based model to a rights-based one. This Act legally entitles up to 75% of the rural population and 50% of the urban population to food grain subsidies through the Targeted Public Distribution System. As a result, the Act covers nearly two-thirds of the population, providing them with heavily subsidized food grains. Moreover, as a step towards women's empowerment the Act mandates that the eldest woman in the household aged 18 or older be recognized as the head of the household for issuing ration cards ([www.nfsa.gov.in](http://www.nfsa.gov.in)). The Act also focuses on providing nutritional assistance to women and children. Pregnant and lactating women are entitled to free nutritious food under the Mid-Day Meal (MDM) and Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) schemes. The initiation and implementation of the National Food Security Act (NFSA) in 2013 are widely believed to be crucial steps for strengthening right to food movement in India. Reviewing the history of food security concerns, we can observe that food security has been identified as a top priority at both the central and state levels in India since its inception as an independent, democratic nation. However, allegations of corruption and inefficiency coupled with policy changes since the 1990s, have left many goals unachieved, and sufficient production has not directly translated into food security for all (Saxena 2013).

This Act enables people to live with dignity and offers affordable food and nutritional security. In terms of grain distribution at subsidized rates, the Act covers 75% of the rural population and 50% of the urban population. Furthermore, according to the Act, households in the targeted general category, which includes 22% of urban households and 44% of rural households, are entitled to 5 kg of grain per person per month at a price that does not exceed 50% of the Minimum Support Price (MSP) (George, McKay 2019). Thus, the NFSA represents the most recent effort in India's long history to address food insecurity. These efforts range from more general programmes like the Mid-Day Meal Scheme (MDMS), which has been providing meals to 300 million children every day since 2005, to more focused initiatives such as the complete overhaul of the agricultural system during the 1960s Green Revolution (Banik 2016).





The act aims to provide legal entitlement to every person belonging to priority households upholding their constitutional rights to minimum food security. However, the implementation of the NFSA (2013) has received significant criticism. It is argued that national food security is critically dependent on its ability to ensure sufficient food stocks are available to meet domestic needs at all times, whether through imports or domestic food production. Therefore, it's crucial to evaluate the policies implemented to ensure adequate food availability to meet domestic demand (Ittyerah 2013). To comprehend the current scenario of the NFSA's implementation in India, it is evident that the NFSA's primary focus is on addressing the challenge of hunger. However, it neglects the equally important issue of undernutrition and its eradication. Providing food alone would not be sufficient to eliminate undernutrition. It is argued that the composition of the suggested rice, wheat, and food grains may not provide adequate nutrition and thus the Act overlooks dietary concerns (Shallen 2016). The state of malnutrition and its consequences can be linked to budgetary provisions aimed at addressing this problem. Even the United Nations (2023) emphasizes that, apart from adequate calorie intake, proper nutrition has other dimensions that require attention. Moreover, the Act does not offer consumers the choice of consuming different cereal grains even though consumption preferences vary by region (Shallen 2016). Regarding beneficiary identification, the Act does not specify the method for selecting beneficiaries or categorizing the poor into BPL and APL categories (Raj et al. 2022). Despite the NFSA of 2013 aiming to achieve food security through a public distribution system and a comprehensive children's development program, it has not yet succeeded in preventing malnutrition and ensuring food security and stability as it is expected.

## FOOD SECURITY AND THE AGENDA 2030

At the global level, 193 countries adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in September 2015. The 2030 Agenda aims to guide the world onto a "sustainable and resilient path, in which no one will be left behind". It is recognized



that the 2030 Agenda holds universal appeal by focusing on comprehensive development for all countries. Particularly, it aims to address the unfinished agenda of the MDGs. The UN Report, titled *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (2015), acknowledges that eradicating extreme poverty is the primary global challenge and an essential prerequisite for achieving sustainable development. To this end, the Agenda 2030 commits all countries and stakeholders to focus on “People”, “Planet”, “Prosperity”, “Peace” and “Partnership”, working towards achieving its 17 goals and 169 targets. These goals and targets are designed to balance economic, social and environmental development, while also striving to uphold the human rights of all individuals (UN Report of Sustainable Development Goals 2017).

Specifically, SDG 2, which focuses on eradicating hunger, achieving food security, and improving nutrition, stands as one of the 17 SDGs that must be achieved under this Agenda. SDG 2 recognizes the interlinkages among promoting gender equality, ending rural poverty and ensuring healthy lifestyles (United Nations 2023). The SDG 2 explicitly states that by 2030, hunger should be eliminated and everyone should have access to sufficient safe, nutritious food throughout the year, particularly the poor and those in vulnerable situations such as infants (United Nations 2019). Although the United Nations has established the 2030 Agenda, its success is measured by how effectively it is implemented until it reaches the final beneficiaries, ensuring availability, accessibility, affordability, and optimal nutritional utilisation (see fig. 1). This outcome is dependent on India’s ability to gather support for both the goals and the appropriate implementation methods (Committee on World Food Security 2017).

However, the UN report titled *The Sustainable Development Goals Report* (2017) reviewed the success and challenges of the 17 goals in the second year of implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It argues that progress in implementing the 17 goals has been unsatisfactory in many developing countries with progress being slower than required to meet the targets by 2030. For instance, during the Covid-19 lockdowns, many countries considered the food and agriculture



sectors “essential” exempting them from lockdown restrictions. This enabled food value chains to continue operating and supplying food even during severe lockdowns. Nevertheless, a significant challenge to maintaining food supply in various countries, including most African nations was transportation shortages. According to the United Nations (2023), despite some progress in the fight against hunger over the last 15 years, more than 790 million people still lack regular access to adequate food. If current trends persist, the 2030 target of achieving zero hunger will be significantly missed.

## CONCLUSION

We are now just six years away from the SDG target year of 2030. However, with each passing year many of the SDG targets seem to be moving further out of reach, while the time remaining until 2030 grows shorter. Many FAO reports suggest that there are efforts to make progress towards SDG 2. However, the present study argues that beyond food availability, equitable distribution of available food with nutritional balance is also equally important. The study emphasizes that increasing food production is inadequate to ensure food security; it must be coupled with food affordability and accessibility (see fig. 1). Thus, the ongoing challenge faced by poor families in society revolves around the affordability and accessibility of available and nutritious food. It is also taken in consideration that a country’s food security is assured when ample nutritious food is accessible to all citizens, when everyone can afford food of adequate quality and when there are no barriers to obtaining food. However, despite ensuring sufficient amount of available food, India continues to grapple with significant food insecurity at the grassroots level. It is argued that the problem persists despite the government’s implementation of numerous schemes, including NFSA, 2013. It is observed that both the program’s design and execution are the key challenges in addressing food insecurity. Consequently, the current need is for policy reforms to shift towards more efficient public service delivery mechanisms. Particularly, at the macro level ensuring sustainable food security in India necessitates a policy that integrates issues such



as inequality and food diversity. Besides, improved governance is also acknowledged to be crucial for the effective operation of food-based programmes. At the implementing agency level, appropriate institutions are required for the better implementation of food security schemes.

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