

**FOOD SECURITY VIZ-A-VIZ FOOD SAFETY IN DEVELOPING
COUNTRIES- AN INDIAN ASPECT**

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ABSTRACT

India is a country of diversity, very rich in agriculture and natural resources, where agriculture has been the main occupation of the masses. The food grain production in India during 2011-12, has been at all time record level of 259.32 million tonnes (GOI 2012-13), which is supposed to be more than sufficient to feed 1.21 billion population of the country, but it is ironically and unfortunately true, that despite the huge stock of food grains available with the Food Corporation of India, (henceforth known as FCI) stray cases of hunger deaths are still being reported in the country.

Notwithstanding mentions in the Constitution, the hunger and poverty in the country goes unabated. The State has not been able to provide food to all, at affordable cost. Here, food means basic agriculture produces, like-wheat, rice, pulses and sugar. All these are important for a human being, because at least two full diets are required to satisfy the biological need of food, or hunger. The huge population base and lack of sufficient domestic production of foodgrain in the past, and import of foodgrain from other countries (before the green revolution), lack of purchasing power, geographical discontinuity and difference in supply and demand of food grains in the country, required special efforts by the central and state governments to create food security net.

For this purpose, Central Government allocates a huge amount in the form of food subsidy. Central Government has made a provision of Rs.90,000crores, for food subsidy for 2012-13.

It is very huge amount of food subsidy to be provided to vulnerable group of the society, but the studies show that only 56 per cent to 58.5 per cent of the total food subsidy (i.e. Centre and State) reaches the PDS consumers(Planning Commission 2002-07). A major part of the subsidy is lost in the process of administering it.

Key words - Cash subsidy, Transfer of Cash subsidy, Food Security,

Introduction:

India is a country of diversity, and very rich in agriculture and natural resources. In spite of these prosperity, its huge population base created a big gap between total food production and number of lives to feed. This imbalance promoted the migration of people from one place to other place. The places where migrated people gathered at large, developed more civic facilities, and known as urban areas. Other areas are known as rural areas. The migrating trend from rural areas to urban areas, further created a pressure on the supply side of the food grains. People got better job opportunities which increased their income with which they may easily afford to buy food grains from open market. Whereas other section of the society which are economically weaker, has to struggle for two meals in a day. At this stage government had to draft a plan for procurement, storage and distribution of food grain which is known as Public Distribution System. Initially, PDS was introduced in urban arrears, but very soon it was extended to almost all parts of the country. In June, 1992 The Revamped Public Distribution System (RPDS) was launched, with a view to strengthen the existing PDS. Till, 1997, commodities under PDS were accessible to all, who was holding a Ration Card. This system was known as Universal PDS, but in 1997 Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS) was introduced under the joint responsibility of Central government and the State governments. TPDS is more focused on the poor beneficiaries of PDS and provides subsidised food, and various schemes were introduced for the benefits of the poor. At present most of the states in India are following TPDS, but some states are still following universal PDS.

Objective of the Study:

To study the reach of Food Security among vulnerable groups of the society, and their preference of Cash over Food:

vulnerable section of civilized society, who require support from government, in terms of employment, food, shelter, health, education etc. The migrants, face certain challenges in the changed environment, because they have to struggle a lot for very small and petty issues.

Data and methodology:

Primary data have been collected from 200 respondents, through pre-designed interview schedule having composition of closed ended and open ended questions.

Secondary data have been collected through various sources including books, journals, internet etc.

Findings and Recommendations:

During the study, total two hundred respondents were interviewed, out of which 110 were male respondents and 90 were female respondents. All respondents were within age group of 30years to 50years. All together ten questions were asked from the respondents, the details of questions along with response and analysis, are as follows:

“Does any adult member of your household have a bank or post office account?”

98% respondents were found to have a bank account or post-office account in the name of self or any other adult member of the family. The objective of this question was to explore the reach of banking services to the vulnerable groups.

“How far (in km) is the bank or post office from your house?”

Out of total respondents, 40% respondents told less than one kilometer, 53% respondents told between one kilometer and five kilometer, and 7% respondents told five kilometers and above. This question was asked to estimate the density of bank or post office premises in the area.

“How much do you have to spend to reach the bank/post office, per round trip?”

Out of total respondents, who were having a bank or post-office account, approximate 41% had to spend less than fifty rupees, 54% between fifty and one hundred rupees, and 5% had to spend

more than one hundred rupees reach the bank/post office, per round trip. The objective of this question was to ascertain the direct cost involved to avail cash subsidy facility.

“How long does it take you to reach the bank or post office per round trip?”

Out of total respondents, who were having a bank or post-office account, approximate 95% respondents used to take less than one hour, and 5% respondents used to take more than one hour to reach the bank or post office per round trip. The objective of this question was to ascertain the indirect cost involved to avail cash subsidy facility, because the respondent would have to suspend his /her wage earning activities for that much time, which will result into less earning for the day.

“Has it ever happened that you have had to make more than one trip to withdraw money from the bank/post office?”

Out of total respondents, who were having a bank or post-office account, approximate 92% respondents did not make more than one trip, where as 5% respondents had to make more than one trip to withdraw money from the bank/post office. The objective of this question to ascertain incremental or additional cost (if any) to be incurred by the respondent to avail cash subsidy facility.

“How would you describe the attitude of the bank/post office officials: helpful, indifferent or unhelpful?”

Out of total respondents, who were having a bank or post-office account, approximate 72% found the attitude of the bank/post office officials helpful, 21% found indifferent and 7% found unhelpful. The motive of this question was to understand the level of comfort of respondents while dealing with bank/post office officials.

“Suppose that instead of giving you food rations through the PDS every month, the government deposits amount of subsidy every month in your bank account and closes the Ration shops / outlets, would you accept it?”

Out of total respondents, 40% said Yes, they would accept that, and 60% did not accept that. Surprisingly, 90% of respondents who accepted it, were male, and only 10% were female, and 68% of the respondents who did not accept were female and only 38% were male. The objective

behind this question was to understand the preference of cash transfer of subsidy over subsidized food.

"Do you know that Government of India has proposed to transfer cash subsidy directly to your bank account?"

Out of total respondents, 76% said Yes, and 24% told No. Out of respondents who told Yes, 72% were male and 38% were female. All respondents who told No, were female. The objective of this question was to understand the level of awareness of initiative taken by Government regarding transfer of subsidy directly to Bank account.

Other than above discussed questions two open ended questions were asked where the respondents were requested to express their view in support of cash subsidy, means why they would like cash subsidy, or why they did not like it. There was a common opinion among the respondents, specially female respondents that cash may not be used as a substitute of food and cash may not compensate the rapidly increasing food inflation. When they were asked to give any suggestion for improving food security, most of the respondents were of the opinion to provide food in the form of sealed pack, at fixed and regular interval of time to the vulnerable group with minimum formalities.

Limitation and further scope of the Study:

The study could explore the cash subsidy aspect of food security. There may be so many other views like, identification of beneficiaries, errors in identification, central state government functions and co-ordinations for successful execution of the food security programme, the leakage (if any) etc. could not be covered. These matters have been left for further studies, to be done in the same area of interest.

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