FOOD SECURITY POLICIES IN INDIA

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Introduction

Despite its astonishing economic growth during the last 20 years, India still suffers from extended food insecurity. It’s the country with the majority of hungry people, accounting for about a quarter of the hungry population of the world. Per capita availability as well as consumption of foodgrains in India has declined since 1996; the percentage of underweight children has remained stagnant between 1998 and 2006; and the calorie consumption of the bottom half of the population has been consistently declining since 1987.

This report is an analysis of the major initiatives by the government and the civil society to tackle the issue.

Section 1 is a primer on hunger, on what is understood under this term, and how it afflicts the Indian subcontinent.

Section 2 is focused on the governmental schemes: the logic behind them, how they work, and their major flaws.

Section 3 is about the Right to Food campaign and how it influenced hunger policies in the country.
1. Hunger in India

Overt hunger and chronic hunger
When measuring the nutritional condition of the poor people, there is a distinction between two types of hunger: the first one is labeled overt hunger, and is the simple non availability of 2 square meals a day, resulting in the physical urge to eat. This kind of hunger afflicts most people during the monsoons, between June and September, especially in certain regions. In the last 26 years there seems to have been a drastic decline in the self-reported cases of overt hunger, namely from 16% to just 1.9%; though it’s difficult to understand how this can be coupled with the declining calories intake reported throughout the population. How can people be less hungry eating less?

First of all, there is a problem with the question posed. Asking for the availability of 2 square meals a day implies a common definition of what exactly a square meal is, but there is no such standard, so the results are affected by the huge subjectivity not only across different persons, but also across different regions of the country.

Second, the respondent may have little awareness of the quantity of food consumed by the rest of the household. And if he has, there’s the possibility that out of pride and dignity the answers he gives are false. The surveyors have experienced shame and reluctance on the part of the head of the households to publicly admit their incapacity to provide for their families. This may result in over-reporting on the number of meals consumed.

As a matter of fact, other surveys show more cases (7% compared to 1.9%), with big differences among districts, pointing out that monitoring should probably be made at district level.

Nevertheless, the last two decades have surely seen a decline of some magnitude in the cases of overt hunger and starvation.

The second type of hunger, chronic hunger, occurs when the body is so used to receive less food than necessary that it stops asking for more altogether. This kind is much more diffuse, and not less perilous: malnutrition is the cause of an incredible number of diseases and disabilities. It is also less perceived, since it doesn’t have a physical manifestation as strong as raw hunger; instead, it is revealed through indicators and qualitative surveys about nutritional habits.

The existence of this second type suggests that to really address the issue of malnutrition, one needs to measure dietary diversity (quality and balance), rather than just the consumption of food staples.

And the problem of subjectivity in the answers requires the use of objective indicators in measuring undernourishment, such as weight (short-term indicator), height (long-term), Body Mass Index, calorie consumption, the proportion of malnourished children, child mortality and so on.

The magnitude of hunger: some data
According to the most recent survey about food issues in India, for about 29% of the households access to food is somewhat inadequate, and for another 7.5% it is highly inadequate.

The calorie intake of the poorest quartile continues to be 30 to 50 percent less than the calorie intake of the top quartile, revealing incredibly sharp inequalities across the population.

Worse, the daily calorie consumption of the bottom 25 per cent of the population has decreased from 1,683 kilocalories in 1987-88 to 1,624 kilocalories in 2004-05.

These figures should be judged against a national norm of 2,400 and 2,100 kilocalories/day for rural and urban areas (the difference being attributed to the lower rates of physical activity in the urban areas) fixed by the Planning Commission, through a ‘Task Force on Projection of Minimum
Needs and Effective Consumption Demand’, on the basis of a systematic study of nutritional requirements.

At the national level, official poverty lines for the base year 1973-74 were expressed as monthly per capita consumption expenditure of Rs 49 in rural areas and Rs 57 in urban areas, which corresponded to the amount needed to consume the minimum calories. In 2005, updating prices with the methodology used by the Planning Commission, the poverty line was Rs 328 and Rs 454 respectively.

In the recent years, though, the needs of the population became heavily diversified (as explained below), so these quantities have to be modified to take account of such changes: to maintain calorie requirements, the norms should have been Rs 565 in rural areas and Rs 628 in urban ones. The proportion of people living below the official poverty line declined from 56% in 1973-74 to 35% in 1993-94, and further to 28% in 2004-05, whereas there has been no decline in the number of people consuming less calories than the norm. The set of food insecure in India is larger than the set of poor in India.

This declining pattern for consumption can be attributed to the lack of purchasing power and the contraction of effective demand by the poor, who are forced to spend a greater part of their limited incomes on non-food items like transport, fuel and light, health, and education, which in a fast-pace developing society have become as essential as food.

The occurrence of this decline in food intake in spite of the high economic growth can mean different things: in the top quartile, where it was sharper, it might be a good sign, since it could reveal a change in the population’s habits towards a healthier lifestyle, but in the bottom quartile it is definitely bad news, showing an unequal distribution of the benefits of development, skewed towards the richer classes.

A brief analysis of the quartiles in the population reveals indeed a big difference in absolute calories consumption between quartiles, as well as in qualitative composition of nourishment (the bottom quartile depends on cereals for 78% of calories, compared to 58% of top). Overall, there has been a decline in consumption of proteins and carbohydrates; it seems that only fat is consumed more.

Focusing on the hungry tile of the population, a study of the International Food Policy Research Institute assesses that those consuming less than 2200 kcal can be divided in 3 groups:

- Subjacent hungry: those consuming more than 1,800 but fewer than 2,200 kcal a day
- Medial hungry: those consuming more than 1,600 but fewer than 1,800 kcal a day
- Ultra hungry: those consuming less than 1,600 kcal a day

The results for India reported that 58% people in India suffered from hunger in 1999, of which 17.4% per cent were classified as ultra hungry. Ten years later, there are still more than 200 million hungry people in the country, and the proportion of the ultra-hungry has remained quite stable.

There are seasonal as well as geographical variations in the intensity of hunger: for example, populations in tribal regions are usually worse off. Also, gender and age count: up to 50% of Indian women are anaemic and suffer from maternal undernourishment.

All considered, the groups who suffer more are: persons with disabilities or stigmatizing illnesses such as leprosy or HIV/AIDS, the elderly and young who lack family support, and single women. Looking at social and employment factors, hunger is most relevant among scheduled caste and tribes, manual scavengers, beggars, sex workers, landless labourers and artisans. Also, persons displaced by natural disasters or development projects often find themselves afflicted by food shortages.

These people are frequently forced to resort to foraging and begging, debt bondage and low end highly underpaid work; they are condemned to self denial; and usually have to sacrifice other needs like medicine or children’s education, thus transferring their misery to the next generation.
The lack of purchasing power at the basis of hunger issues stems mainly from insufficient jobs and wages. For example, unemployment among agricultural labour households has sharply increased from 9.5% in 1993-94 to 15.3% in 2004-05, explaining in part the impossibility of many household to maintain or raise food consumption. These figures also point out that the economic growth of India, although very high, isn’t fast enough to cover for the population growth, and that it relies on capital intensive productions where few jobs are created. Wages tend to be low because of a cruel vicious circle: hunger usually leads to low output, and hence poor wages. Hunger is thus both cause and effect of poverty.

The sudden and sharp rise in the prices of rice and wheat of the recent years has also challenged the possibility of the poor to purchase enough food: incentive to biofuels in the Western world, rising demand for grains in the developing countries, and speculative behaviour on the stock market have all been factors underlying this dangerous tendency.

**MDG Objective**

The Millennium Development Goals set by the UN call for halving of hunger and poverty between 1990 and 2015. Assuming constant norms of 2400/2100 kcalories for India, this would mean bringing down the headcount index of calorie deficiency from 62.2 per cent in 1990 to 31.1 per cent in 2015.

India will hardly achieve this objective, since the main problem standing in the way is that in the first 15 years the index has actually increased: from 62.2% to 75.8% in 2005.

During this span of time, also protein consumption dropped, and there has been an increase in the population below minimum protein consumption. These outcomes are mainly due to insufficient purchasing power.

**GHI**

The Global Hunger Index (GHI) was designed by the International Food Policy Research Institute based on three dimensions of hunger: lack of economic access to food, shortfalls in the nutritional status of children, and child mortality. It is a tool to compare the relative ranking of countries in tackling the hunger issue, as well as to measure the intensity of the problem in each nation.

The GHI for India was 23 per cent in 2008, which placed the country in the category of nations where hunger was ‘alarming’, and corresponds to rank 66 out of the 88 developing countries studied. These results show a poorer performance (that is, more hunger) than many Sub-Saharan African countries with a lower GDP, revealing that the fast development of India didn’t bring diffuse welfare to the population yet, but came instead almost solely to the advantage of the richer quartiles.

The main variable behind this result is the surprisingly high proportion of underweight children, which remained virtually unchanged between 1998-99 and 2005-06.

The high child malnutrition rate in India (and, actually, in the entire South Asia) is caused by many factors: first, Indian women’s nutrition, feeding and caring practices for young children are inadequate.

Second, many unscientific traditional practices still continue, such as delaying breastfeeding after birth, or not recurring exclusively to it for the first five months, along with irregular and insufficient complementary feeding between 6 months to two years of age.

Lastly, a poor supply of welfare services by the government (such as immunization, access to medical care, priority to primary health) contributes to the stagnating situation.

The critical status of Indian children is well described by the data: about 2.1 million deaths occur annually in the under-5 year-old population. Seven out of every 10 of these are due to diarrhoea, pneumonia, measles, or malnutrition, which all are healable diseases and conditions.

The reversal of the present situation and the spreading of welfare across the whole population of India require a well-funded and resolute strategy of food distribution, job creation and
infrastructure improvement, with a particular focus on nutrition and education of the children. The economic development won’t be real until its benefits reach the poor.

2. Governmental Schemes for Food Security

2.1 The rationale of the governmental schemes

The Government of India has started a variety of programmes to address the problem of hunger in the society, with the aim of guaranteeing a basic nutrition to the whole population and therefore break the vicious circle of hunger and poverty. The rationale behind these schemes is to provide a continued assistance throughout all stages of life, beginning even before birth: the sequence of the measures is explained below and depicted in the following figure:

When a woman gets pregnant, she receives food through the Integrated Child Development Service (ICDS), which uses the system of the Anganwadi Centers to ensure adequate nutrition both to her, since she need to rest and stay out of work, and to the child she carries during the development phases of the foetus.
When the mother is approaching delivery, if she is recognized to be Below the Poverty Line (BPL), another programme activates: the National Maternity Benefit Scheme (NMBS), which had, at least in the beginning, the objective to guarantee enough nutrition to the women in the 8-12 weeks preceding the birth of their children. Though, in the last years the element of food security was progressively dropped, and the focus was set on ensuring a safe, institutional delivery, preventing this way all the problems tied to non-hospitalized births.

Once the child is born, he also falls under the ICDS scheme: the aim is to guarantee adequate nutrition of the child, first indirectly during the lactating phase by providing food to the mother, and later directly, until he reaches schooling age (6 years). Also other finalities are pursued, like early immunization of the children and pre-school instruction.

Once a child grows up and reaches age 6, he is covered under the Mid-Day Meal Scheme (MDMS), which has basically two objectives: to give him both sufficient nutrition and elementary instruction, so that he stays healthy, while developing at the same time the skills that will allow him to ensure himself a livelihood in the future.

During the adolescence, the ICDS grants food security to girls, probably to strengthen their bodies in prevision of their possible future motherhood. However, the scarce participation of young girls to the scheme, as well as the absence of any measure for boys, creates a big gap in governmental assistance at this stage of life: between age 11 and 18, food security is not directly guaranteed through a programme. The most effective way to overcome this deficiency would be the extension of the MDMS to middle and high schools, this way also achieving a better instruction level of the population.

When the youngster becomes an adult, if he is part of a rural household, he is entitled by the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) to 100 workdays a year at minimum wage, assuring the basic means of subsistence to him and his family. To those who fall below the poverty line, the Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS) provides foodgrains at affordable prices, while particularly disadvantaged people get even better prices through the Antodaya Anna Yojana (AY).

At this point, the adult either ages, becoming old, or he prematurely dies: in both cases, a governmental scheme under the National Social Assistance Program (NSAP) will provide him or his family with the means to live on. The National Old Age Pension Scheme (NOAPS) is conceived to ensure living conditions for old people, while the Annapurna addresses those who are entitled to a pension under the NOAPS but don’t receive it (due to a number of reasons discussed below), integrating the first programme. The National Family Benefit Scheme (NFBS) is practically a life insurance which covers BPL households struck by the death of their breadwinner.

All the schemes belong to two categories: food-based or money-based. The former are distinguished by the material distribution of food to the beneficiaries, while the latter support food security through a provision in cash.
2.2 Integrated Child Development Services

Objective:
The Integrated Child Development Services scheme stems out of the necessity of fighting undernourishment and malnutrition among the most vulnerable group of the population, namely the children between 0-6 years.
Data from the National Nutrition Monitoring Bureau in 2006–2007 shows that there is a deficit of over 500 calorie in the intakes of 1–3 years old and about 700 calorie among the 3–6 years old, a figure that calls for an immediate response.
Started more than 30 years ago in a few blocks, the ICDS is now applied at national level, and it’s the only plan which targets children in those age groups. It is divided into 3 branches: the Supplementary Nutrition Programme (SNP), which addresses children and pregnant/lactating women, the Kishori Shakti Yojana (KSY) and the Nutrition Programme for Adolescent Girls (NPAG) which are aimed at girls in the age group 11-18 (19 in NPAG). The KSY is universally applied, while NPAG is conceived for underweight adolescents.
The main purpose of the ICDS scheme is the distribution of supplementary nutritious food to children, adolescent girls, and pregnant and lactating women in all rural habitations and urban slums. The mission is accomplished through a net of structures called Anganwadi Centers (AWC), which have been or are being built in practically every village and slum: in these buildings, along with the distribution of food, a basic pre-school instruction for children also takes place, getting them used to going to school and preparing them for 1st grade. Medical referral, immunizations, growth monitoring and health education are further tasks of the Anganwadis.
The ambition of the programme is to erase malnutrition of the children in the whole country, since the lack of a correct nourishment doesn’t just affect their current health, but also has recognized far-reaching impacts, for example impaired cognitive and social development, poor school performance and reduced productivity in later life, resulting in a threat to the social and economic development of India. Besides, malnutrition also exposes the infants to preventable disabilities, especially sight- and hearing-related ones.
The application of the programme to pregnant and lactating women is therefore understood not only as a help to the imminent and recent mothers, but particularly as a way to preserve the health of the children even before they are born and in the stage where their nourishment should exclusively be accomplished by breastfeeding.
The programme also covers adolescent women, with the purpose of providing them with adequate nourishment in the years preceding a possible pregnancy, in order to reduce health risks for themselves and for their kids.
The scheme also contains special measures for children suffering from more severe forms of malnutrition, who get a special food ration to make them quickly regain weight.

Dispositions:
The updated instructions of the Supreme Court led to following requirements to be met in every State/Union Territory:
Each child up to six years of age has to get a food supply with 600 calories and 12-15 grams of protein (in form of take home ration if <3 years, otherwise hot cooked meal and morning snack);
- Each adolescent girl has to get 600 calories and 18-20 grams of protein;
- Each pregnant woman and each nursing mother has to get 600 calories and 18-20 grams of protein;
- Each malnourished child has to get 800 calories and 20-25 grams of protein;
- There shall be a disbursement centre in every settlement

The following table shows how the Supreme Court, in one of its verdicts upon the Right to Food case, revised the nutritional norms in 2009, doubling the expenditure and significantly raising the quantity and quality of meals served; it decided to ultimately ban the hiring of contractors for the provision of food, too, in the hope to put a stop to the widespread corruption that has afflicted the scheme in the past years.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Children below 3 years and Children below 3-6 years</th>
<th>Old Norm</th>
<th>Revised Norm</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rate per beneficiary (Rs.)</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calories (cal)</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protein (g)</td>
<td>8-10</td>
<td>12-15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Underweight Children                                |
|-----------------------------------------------------|----------|--------------|
| Rate per beneficiary (Rs.)                         | 2.70     | 6.00         |
| Calories (cal)                                      | 600      | 800          |
| Protein (g)                                         | 20       | 20-25        |

| Pregnant & Lactating Mothers                        |
|-----------------------------------------------------|----------|--------------|
| Rate per beneficiary (Rs.)                         | 2.30     | 5.00         |
| Calories (cal)                                      | 500      | 600          |
| Protein (g)                                         | 20-25    | 18-20        |

The Anganwadi Centers
The local Anganwadi Center, where the food is distributed, is the cornerstone of the ICDS programme. It is operated by an Anganwadi worker (AWW), assisted by an Anganwadi helper or sahayika.

The AWW is of crucial importance for the success of the programme, since it’s responsible for the pre-school instruction of the children, for the cooking and provision of food, for the health and nutritional instruction of the mothers (teaching them how to feed their children properly during the different stages of their growth, for example using iodized salt to prevent blindness), for the home visits and for the provision of every other related service, as shown in the table below.
Funding:
The ICDS is since 2005-2006 funded jointly by the Central Government and the States in a 50:50 ratio. This was established to ensure that the provision of supplementary nutrition, which was once entirely paid by the States, is in compliance with the requirements set in the scheme. In the year 2009-2010, the North-Eastern States will switch to a 90:10 ratio, with the Central Government carrying almost the whole costs.

Results and Problems:
Performance
As bitterly recognized by the Supreme Court Commissioner in his seventh report in 2007, malnourished children dropped only from 47% in 1998-99 to 45.9% in 2006, indicating a substantial failure of the program.
A major problem was represented by the fact that only 35.5% of the eligible children were reached by the scheme (leaving out about 10 crore kids), along with barely 25% of pregnant and lactating women, and a depressing 2.3% of adolescent girls (without considering leakages). Also, it is not infrequent that the food granted to the women in form of take home rations is pooled between the whole family, diverting this way the resources from the purpose of the scheme. The immunization rate rose only 2%, an unsatisfactory result after 7 years of application, due to an insufficient coordination between the Anganwadis and the public health structures. Of the children who reached the AWC, most were older than three, by which point malnutrition has already set in.

**Effectiveness**
The effectiveness of the scheme on those who received the treatment was analyzed by Commissioner Saxena: his conclusions are that the Anganwadis make a critical difference. Children without access to an AWC are more undernourished than those in areas covered by a center operational for more than five years. “The only variable that is highly significant and has a positive impact on nutritional status is if the child received early childcare at the AWC. Maharashtra (50 per cent), West Bengal (39 per cent), and Chhattisgarh (37 per cent) reported the highest percentage of children receiving early childcare/preschool. These states are among the top five performers in reducing under-nutrition. This strengthens the argument for focusing on these services”, he writes.

**Universality**
The main reason behind these poor results is that throughout the country only 56.6% of the necessary Anganwadis had been established by 2007 (less than 40% in some States), making it impossible to fulfill the task. These figures led the Commissioner to recommend the building of other 5.6 lakhs Anganwadis in addition to the existing 8.4, to reach a total of 14 lakhs by December 2008. This number was calculated to be the minimum required to effectively pursue the universalization of the service and reach every child.

As of 31.03.2009, the Ministry of Women and Child Development has sanctioned 13.5 lakh AWCs, of which 10.4 lakh already are fully operational; although it didn’t respect the deadline set by the Commissioner, this is still a heartwarming result, since the operationalization stage has proven to be one of the best performing parts of the scheme, with very high rates of success throughout the whole country. The objective is almost met.

**Anganwadi Workers**
Despite the crucial role played by the AWW, the load of their work, and the fact that almost all AWW are literate and experienced, they are modestly paid, and they also suffer under diverse kind of inefficiencies: on September 2009, the Anganwadi Workers and Helpers' Union staged a protest against the Government which had denied them their wage for almost 6 months. Their requests comprised also a number of other issues, like retirement plans, and preference in filling up vacant jobs as primary school teachers and ICDS supervisors.

Another key problem of the scheme is that it doesn’t focus enough on children younger than two: a suggested solution consists in hiring two AWW in every Anganwadi Center, so that one can specialize in children belonging to the age group 0-3 (which are the most difficult to reach). This idea is particularly advocated by AWW themselves, which would be glad to share the fatigue and responsibilities of the daily work at the center, along with the visits and other activities, with someone else. Since the outcome of the scheme ultimately depends on them, it would be recommendable to listen to their requests and advices.
Expenditure and funding
Economic figures for 2007 show that in the implementation of ICDS there has been much lower per-capita expenditure than as ordered by the Supreme Court: 1.27 Rs instead of 2 Rs. This gap on SNP per beneficiary per day could mean one or more of the following:

- the actual number of beneficiaries is lower than what is being reported by official statistics,
- the quality of food being supplied is poor,
- there are gaps in the supply of food, it is not being supplied regularly everyday.

In the same year, it is shown that around 24% of the financial allocation set ready by the GoI and the State wasn’t spent.

The Commissioner calculated in 2007 a shortfall in funds of 71.3%, by confronting the allocation of the GoI and the States with the amount required to universalize the SNP, a total of 9829.17 crores. Updating the calculation with the new per-capita expenditure requirements set by the Supreme Court, that amount is now the double, 19657.24 crores. The allocation of the GoI on SNP for 2009-2010 must therefore be sensibly higher than in the previous years, or else the scheme will take a long step backwards with respect to universalization.

Exclusion
Another deficiency in the ICDS has been the difficulty of reaching Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes, which in many cases don’t have AWCs in their territories and hamlets. Research has also shown that some of the most vulnerable groups within the project area of the Anganwadi are socially excluded and therefore not included in the Anganwadi survey. These include socially ostracized dalit, adivasi, disabled children and other minorities. These “invisibilised” groups are some of the most needy, and yet they are cut out of governmental schemes. In particular a large number of children with disabilities has been left out, and therefore it’s extremely rare to see them in Anganwadis.

Also those who live on the streets and in urban non-recognized slums, as well as the children of migrant labourers, belong to these “outcasts”, since they lack the documentation to apply for the services of the AWC. Since 70% of India’s slum children are malnourished, compared to the national average of 46%, it is particularly alarming that they don’t have access to the ICDS structures. In fact, just 10% of the Anganwadis are in urban areas, although one-third of the poor are urban dwellers; only 40% of the centers have a cooking space, and about just the half have utensils.

Furthermore, 40% per cent of urban slums are excluded from ICDS because they are illegal or unauthorized.

Contractors and Ready-To-Eat meals
In some areas there has still been use of contractors, although the ban of 2004 by the Supreme Court; but the latest judgment in 2009 has reinforced this principle, so it is now expected that this practice will end. The main reason behind this ban is the wide recognition that centralized provisions are more prone to corruption, whereas local purchases, facilitated via Self-Help Groups, seem to be more efficient.

In the last year there has been an active debate of whether the AWC should serve ready-to-eat snacks and fortified biscuits or hot cooked meals. Reports show that RTE mixes like India Mix, supplied by the World Food Programme, ended up as cattle feed after it was rejected by children. The Focus Survey of six states showed that RTE had more health complaints because of poor quality, not to mention that packaged food tended to be taken home and shared with the rest of the family whenever possible.
This had not deterred states from continuing to supply these snacks, but with the Supreme Court ruling out contractors and the Planning Commission taking position for hot meals, that battle is over: distribution of cooked food has proven to be nutritionally better, as well as having other advantages like education on what a proper meal consists of.

**Physical Infrastructure**

Resulting from the Commissioner’s report of 2007, only about 46% of the AWCs were running from pucca buildings and 21% from semi-pucca buildings, while 15% were running from kutcha buildings and more than 9% from open space. Further, the survey data reveals that more than 45% of the Anganwadis have no toilet facility and only 39% of them reported availability of hand-pumps.

The condition that the ICDS programme is run through well-constructed, long lasting structures with all the basic facilities is not trivial: the infrastructure is itself a factor of success of the scheme. For example, a building with a poorly working kitchen will hardly provide the food correctly, mining the outcomes of the service.

**Recommendations:**

- Continue the expansion of the AWCs until there is one in every village or hamlet
- Reach the areas where SC/ST live
- Reach all the slums, also the unauthorized ones
- Strengthen the cooperation with the health department to improve immunization healthcare services
- Hire two workers for every AWC, with one specializing on the 0-3 years age group, and improve their contractual conditions
- Ensure allocation of enough funds to cover the universality of the programme, and increase the offtakes
- Build pucca structures for the AWCs and equip them with the utensils needed
2.3 National Maternity Benefit Scheme (and Janani Suraksha Yojana)

Objective:
The National Maternity Benefit Scheme, merged in 2005 with another scheme of the National Rural Health Mission, Janani Suraksha Yojana, is a plan of assistance to BPL women who are close to delivery. Originally, the plan was thought to ensure food security to the beneficiaries, granting 500 Rs to pregnant BPL women (for a maximum of 2 births) in a period ranging 8-12 weeks before delivery. The aim was to guarantee that the soon-to-be mothers didn’t have to work to get food in the last weeks of pregnancy and those immediately following, so they could spend their time resting and caring for the child. Also, the scheme would benefit the newborn children, who would avoid complications in pre-birth development due to undernourishment of the mother. Since its start in 1995, the programme has experienced great modifications which spurred a debate of what objectives it should pursue. When it was merged with JSY, it caused a great confusion, since all the focus was kept on the objective of the latter (antenatal care, delivery assistance, post partum assistance) while the original purpose of food security was almost dropped. After several debates, the Supreme Court has established new guidelines which are listed below.

Dispositions:
Under NMBS, every BPL woman, irrespective of age and number of children, is entitled to receive Rs 500 when being 8-12 weeks from delivery. Under JSY, every woman which applies for an institutional delivery is granted an additional amount of money, up to 7 days before delivery.

Funding:
The scheme is 100% funded by the Central Government. States/UT have the faculty of making their own contribution if they wish to give more money to the beneficiaries.

Results and Problems:
Performance
The Commissioner calculated the numerical ceiling of 57.5 lakhs beneficiaries as the annual target for NMBS. However, the number of beneficiaries under JSY, as reported by the Government of India, in the year 2005–2006 was as low as 5.7 lakhs and in 2006–2007 was only 26.2 lakhs: respectively, 10% and 44.2% of the target. There was indeed a significant improvement from one year to another, but the results are still unsatisfactory. In particular, analyzing the application of the scheme in every State, huge differences emerge. Except in a few ones (Andhra Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Assam,
Orissa and Mizoram), the performance is extremely poor. For example, Delhi has given the benefit of NMBS to only 20 women in 2006–2007, while in Chandigarh the number of beneficiaries is 0. Responsible for this inefficiency are primarily low allocations, underutilization of funds, long delays and procedural complications in receiving the benefit, and confusion about the requirements to be eligible for the scheme.

**Effectiveness**
It was pointed out that the amount of money granted, 500 Rs, is completely inadequate. Considering that a woman would have to stay away from work for at least three months (to ensure exclusive breastfeeding) or even for six unless crèche facilities are provided at the workplace, this amount is neither enough to compensate her for the loss of the wage nor enough to help her access additional nutrition during pregnancy and lactation. Therefore, the objectives of giving the women time to rest during pregnancy and time to care for their baby after the birth can’t be achieved, jeopardizing the effectiveness of the scheme.

**Conflict of Aims**
The objectives of the JSY are reducing maternal and infant mortality through increased delivery at health institutions, while the focus of the NMBS was provision of maternity benefits for food security. This substantial diversity in the purpose of the schemes has given rise to a series of conflicts around the programme: the objective of food security was initially dropped, focusing only on the incentives for institutional delivery. After some struggles between the Supreme Court and the GoI, it was decided that the food security item could not be put aside without explicit permission of the court, and the scheme was further expanded by abolishing limitations on age and number of births.

Still, the GoI makes no effort to apply the benefits to home-delivering women, on the contrary it casts misleading advertising on the programme. It has already been publicly admitted that the only reason the benefit is given also to home-delivering mothers are the Court Orders. This conflict has created much confusion in the possible beneficiaries, and in fact figures show that the women having home deliveries frequently don’t request the benefits. Even some functionaries at the ground level still deny them cash assistance.

**Funding**
There is a twofold problem with the funding of the programme: first, the Government doesn’t allocate all the money necessary to cover all possible beneficiaries. Just to cover the NMBS expenses, an amount of Rs. 296.3 crore would be required, while the amount allocated under JSY for the year 2006–2007 was only Rs. 261.4 crore, and this was supposed to cover both the benefits under NMBS and JSY.

Second, the States are not using all the money allocated by the GoI. The tables below show the data for some of them.

As a result, the scheme is heavily underimplemented.
Awareness
The NMBS scheme has always been poorly publicized. As a result, many women do not know eligibility criteria, benefits, and implementing agency of the scheme. It was also found that in many cases women were not getting the correct amount they were entitled to, and they also reported inconvenience in getting money related to JSY. The corruption seems to be less in areas where the payment is made by cheque.

Beaurocracy
The insistence to show a BPL certificate towards women who had home deliveries created delays and impediments that resulted in less beneficiaries receiving the money.

Diversion of the money
It was found that although many women reported that the cash was being used for food and medicine, it was often the husbands, brothers or fathers who took it.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State/UTs</th>
<th>Required Funds to cover reported beneficiaries* (assuming they were ALL paid the ENTIRE amount according to the JSY guidelines)</th>
<th>Funds released in 2006–2007</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assam</td>
<td>2492.2</td>
<td>1300.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bihar</td>
<td>1227.8</td>
<td>610.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chattisgarh</td>
<td>648.7</td>
<td>513.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madhya Pradesh</td>
<td>5582.9</td>
<td>4261.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orissa</td>
<td>2499.1</td>
<td>1600.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rajasthan</td>
<td>4955.9</td>
<td>4085</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uttarakhand</td>
<td>98.3</td>
<td>79.56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expenditure Reported by States</th>
<th>% of required funds allocated</th>
<th>% of required funds utilised</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1331.32</td>
<td>52.2</td>
<td>53.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>190.00</td>
<td>49.7</td>
<td>15.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>516.55</td>
<td>79.1</td>
<td>79.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2482.00</td>
<td>76.3</td>
<td>44.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1571.31</td>
<td>64.0</td>
<td>62.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3056.35</td>
<td>82.4</td>
<td>61.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56.06</td>
<td>80.9</td>
<td>57.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Recommendations:
- The granted amount should be raised drastically, if not to Rs.6000 then at least to Rs. 1600
- The programme has to reach a much larger number of women, through an adequate publicity
- The information given must be correct, and point out that also women who choose home delivery are entitled to the transfers
- The objective of delivering the money must have priority over compliance with bureaucratic rules, and payment by cheque should be preferred
2.4 Mid Day Meal Scheme

Objectives:
The aim of the Mid Day Meal Scheme is twofold: first, to ensure the necessary nutrition to every child in the age 6-10, and second, to give them also primary school instruction. A special focus is placed on children living in drought affected areas, guaranteeing them adequate support during the summer vacations.
So the Mid Day Meal isn’t just a programme to enforce the right to food, but is also meant somehow to lure children to come to school, creating the basis for their future livelihood.

Dispositions:
Every child in Government and Government-aided primary and upper school and all schools run by a State Government, UT Administration, or with Government money by a Local Body or Non-Governmental organisation, in every part of the country, shall receive a cooked food ration with a minimum content of 450 calories and 12g of protein containing the necessary micronutrients (like iron or folic acid). Also, every child is entitled to 100gr of grains per schoolday. At least once every 6 months, de-worming tablets are given to the students.
The transportation costs shall be fully reimbursed.
The cooks should be chosen giving priority to dalits, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

Funding:
The biggest part of the scheme is financed by the Central Government, which provides the 100 gr of grains and covers 1.50 Rs per child of cooking costs.
The States cover the remaining 0.50 Rs per child. In the North-Eastern States the proportion is 1.80Rs to 0.20Rs.

Results and Problems:
Performance
In 2007, only 76.8% of the available grains was lifted, indicating that either there is no full coverage and someone is not getting the meal, or the children are getting a smaller per-capita amount than it should be.
A calculation based on offtakes of grains shows that only 65.8% of the children could have been covered, or 82.2% assuming an 80% school attendance rate.
On the other way round, assuming that everyone is receiving his ration, everyone is getting only 65.8gr each instead of 100.
A report by the Comptroller and Auditor General of India states that there are huge irregularities in the number of children receiving the meal, with very high figures in some areas in contrast to very low ones in others. Since these findings were substantially different from those of other surveys, it is probable that some schools are guilty of false reporting, pointing to a possible diversion of MDMS funds.
The analysis of the cooking costs shows they are mismatched with respect to the utilization of grains: when they are higher, there is probably a misuse of funds, while where they are lower,
there could be some irregularity in the cash flow to the schools, or maybe the food is not prepared correctly (if not prepared at all).
The utilization of State funds is quite satisfactory compared to other schemes: practically every State uses at least a 75% of the allocated money.
The positive discrimination of cooks has been successful in some parts of the country, with high rates of SC/ST cooks appointed (for example, about 2/3 in Bihar).

**Effectiveness**
Some field studies show that, in fact, the MDMS is having a positive impact on primary school enrolment.
Without any data collected by the Ministry yet, though, it’s impossible to make an assessment of the scheme impact on nutrition and education.

**Infrastructure**
A major problem that has dampened the effectiveness of the programme is the absence of kitchen sheds, a threat to the quality of the food served. In almost every State, less than the half of the schools report to have an own kitchen, and many do not even have cooking utensils, a fact that casts questions about how the meal is actually served in those places without the necessary equipment.
The lack of infrastructure is clearly a major problem to be solved if the scheme is desired to perform well.

**Quality**
In many structures, variety of the menu and hygiene have been a problem, with little fruit and vegetables serving and some cases of children falling ill after they had their meal.

**Administration**
Throughout the country, problems of irregular supplies, inadequate monitoring, incomplete reimbursement of fuel or transport costs, low and delayed remuneration of cooks and helpers, etc. have been found in the studies. Teachers also complain about too much of their time being wasted in the preparation and monitoring of the meals.
The monitoring and inspection system of the scheme wasn’t developed enough to consent an objective and complete evaluation of the performance, and must be therefore redesigned.

**Frauds**
A variety of frauds regarding MDMS have been uncovered in the recent years: from the simple theft of grain trucks through corruption of State officials, to the exaggeration of student attendance rates by the teachers to get additional food rations to siphon off. Particularly this last scam has been the most frequent, being reported throughout the whole country by the CAG.
**Recommendations:**

- The MDMS should be expanded to cover all children, also those not enrolled in school (this way reaching also the child labourers and street children, who are in fact the most needy), and to cover upper schools, filling the gap in food assistance in the age span 11-18.
- The MDMS should cover also disadvantaged categories (for example destitute and disabled people).
- The provision for cooking cost should be increased to 3 Rs/child from the current 2, so that a nutritious and filling meal is served to every kid. Also, this amount should be periodically updated with inflation.
- MDM should be linked with nutritional education activities, so that the children learn the importance of a good nutrition.
- The variety of the meals must be such that an adequate amount of fruit, vegetables, vitamins etc. is assured.
- Every school serving mid-day meals must be equipped with necessary infrastructure, such as kitchen sheds and cooking utensils.
- Positive discrimination in appointing cooks must be enforced in those States which still haven’t accomplished the order, and episodes of discrimination against Dalit children or cooks must be properly sanctioned.
- To avoid frauds, community participation in monitoring of the scheme must be strengthened.
- Some healthcare services (immunization, deworming…) should be integrated in the scheme.
2.5 National Rural Employment Guarantee Act

Objectives:
The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act is a plan to ensure a sustainable livelihood to the rural population of India. It aims to provide a minimum number of workdays, at the minimum wage, to one member of every rural household of the country, so that they have the means to feed their families (and this is the reason why it belongs to the “right to food” projects). Notice that it is an Act, not a scheme, so the Government is obliged to apply it and fulfill its objectives, and is legally responsible for the failure of one of its parts. It is probably the most ambitious of the governmental schemes, since it tries to eradicate poverty and hunger and at the same time construct the modern infrastructure that the country needs to complete its development. The plan is designed to address particularly certain categories of people, for example landless labourers, who wouldn’t have any means of subsistence in lean and distress seasons. A further objective of the Act is to put a stop to migration from rural areas to big cities, whose main cause is the lack of jobs in the countryside.

Dispositions:
The NREGA guarantees 100 days of work every year, and 7 hours a day, at the minimum wage to all adults who asks for a job, with the limit of one per household. The job has to be assigned within maximum 15 days from the request, through the emission of a job card, or else the State has to pay an unemployment allowance until the applicant starts to work. The worksite must be equipped with basic facilities and it has to be no more than 5 km away from the worker’s house. Payments have to be done weekly. The Government also issued a list of works to be done in order of priority: at the first places are water-related interventions like conservation and harvesting, drought proofing, irrigation facilities and so on, followed by land development and connectivity. The use of contractors is forbidden, and there are some dispositions about transparency and social accountability that require participation of the community to the design and monitoring of the works.

Funding:
The Central Government carries the cost towards the payment of wage, 3/4 of material cost and some percentage of administrative cost. State Governments meet the cost of unemployment allowance, 1/4 of material cost and administrative cost of the State council. Since the State Governments pay the unemployment allowance, they are heavily incentivized to offer employment to workers. The following chart depicts the flow of funds and the beaurocratic structure of the scheme:
Results and Problems:

Performance
In general, only 40% of those entitled to receive a job through NREGA applied for it, but almost 100% of the applicants got it, showing that though participation is low, at least the assignment system works quite well.

The data reveals that the majority of the jobs are given to women and people from Scheduled Castes and Schedule Tribes, meaning that the targeting was a success and the scheme is reaching the people who most need it.

On the other hand, the number of workdays granted is usually much less than 100, with an average of only 33 across the country.

In numbers, 3.81cr people registered, 2.12cr demanded a job, and 2.1cr received it, but only 0.22cr got 100 days.

Effectiveness
The low number of workdays assigned casts doubts about the ability of the people employed to reach sustainable livelihood. Until the Act is implemented at full regime, it won’t have enough impact on the rural living conditions.
**Priority subversion**

Figures show that about 66% of works have been on water conservation/harvesting and road connectivity. The former is the top priority of the work list, so it’s not a surprise to see that it accounts for 1/3 of the projects, but the latter is actually almost at the bottom of it, so it is quite puzzling to see that it was so heavily pursued at the detriment of other works, like irrigation facilities. The reason behind it is probably the relative simplicity in building roads compared to more sophisticated works like building irrigation facilities, which require a technical assistance that has not always been set up.

**Minimum wages**

In some States, no employment guarantee council has been established, so it is impossible to actually monitor the regularity of the payments, while in others the minimum wage is clearly too low. Also, in many States payments were made with substantial delay, or not on a weekly basis.

**Bank payments and delays**

Since the payment of NREGA wages is made through banks, making it more difficult for corrupt functionaries to siphon the money off the programme, the workers often receive their wages with some delay, a fact that can cause many troubles to their families. It has been pointed out that the reason behind these delays could be the sabotage of NREGA by the functionaries, as retaliation for the stricter bank-backed payment system.

**Unemployment allowance**

The unemployment allowances were mostly not paid because records were not kept. To overcome this deficiency, Employment Guarantee Assistants have to be hired, and maybe the GoI should share a part of the costs.

**Job cards assignment**

During the process of registration and assignment of the Job Cards, there emerged problems in definition of “household” (that was meant to define the nuclear family), leading to the denial of jobs to some applicants. Also cases of discrimination towards women, dalits and disabled people were signaled. Sometimes an illegal fee was charged when delivering application forms, or these documents were sold in markets: both forms of fraud to speculate on the lack of information. In half of the cases, no photos were attached to the JCs.

At Gram Panchayat level, it was reported by the CAG that in almost 20% of the villages the introductory Gram Sabha and the door-to-door survey, required to make possible applicants aware of the plan, were not made.

**Administration and beaurocracy**

In several States and districts, the Employment Guarantee Commission, as well as the Program Officers, technical/administrative assistants and panels of engineers, were not appointed, rules and time frames were not formulated, monitoring bodies and technical resource support groups at GP level were not constituted, and there is a substantial shortage in administrative staff, undermining the ability to successfully and comprehensively implement the scheme. Even the CEGC has delayed its annual reports in the first years. These deficiencies had practical consequences like the absence of muster rolls in many worksites, making it impossible to find out who had worked there and for how much time.
Planning
In several districts, perspective plans were either not prepared, revisited or made properly, leading to the absence of a shelf of projects which could fulfill a possible sudden increase in the demand of jobs, and revealing the lack of a long term development perspective at the local level.
Necessary works were often not identified and the plans were missing basic information (like the size of the assets, or the desired outcomes).
Also, in 1/5 of the GPs the planning meetings were not advertised, leading to a lack of participation which ultimately causes low transparency and accountability.

Works
Low wage areas were often not identified, thus it was impossible to assign priority to certain parts of the districts.
In some cases, unique identity numbers were not given to works, creating this way the risk of overlapping of infrastructures.
The wage-material ratio of 60:40 not always respected, particularly in Tripura where some projects had a ratio of even 10:90.
Other reported problems were the non-obtaining of administrative approval in advance, lack of worksite facilities (sometimes even drinking water!), delays in the provision of jobs.
Overall, only a small number of GPs was able to take up all works proposed in the annual plan, a figure that explains the impossibility of granting 100 days of work to all the beneficiaries of the scheme. The magnitude of these shortfalls ranged from 1% to 97%.

Recommendations:
- The appointing of skilled administrative and technical staff is of crucial importance to the outcome of the Act, so it should be top priority to overcome the deficiencies of the system, especially in planning and realization of the works
- Especially PO’s must be appointed, and they shouldn’t already have responsibilities as BDO’s, so they can dedicate full time to the job
- The programme must be publicized enough to attract more people, especially at GP level through Gram Sabhas and door-to-door surveys
- The Guarantee Councils shall make sure that the payments respect the minimum wage requirement as well as the correct timing
- Social audit must be regularly conducted through the active participation of the village communities
2.6 Targeted Public Distribution System

Objective:
The Targeted Public Distribution System is an instrument to subsidize food consumption among the poor population, in order to ensure that everyone can afford basic nourishment everyday. The scheme is implemented through a network of 4 lakhs “fair price shops”, in which the people who possess a ration card can acquire food at discounted prices. Originally the plan was meant for the whole population, but after the reform of 1997 the focus was set on families below the poverty line, which receive now a different card with a stronger subsidy. APL families still receive a subsidy, because an abrupt withdrawal of the service was considered undesirable.

Dispositions:
BPL card holders should receive 35kg of food grain at subsidized price.
The price for BPL is 50% of the price for APL.
APL price was set to match the economic costs, eliminating the subsidy, but since it was not updated, inflation has reestablished it.

Funding:
The TPDS is entirely funded by the Central Government.

Results and Problems:
Performance
As stated by the Planning Commission, through TPDS the Government spends 3.65Rs to transfer 1Re to the poor. Being it a targeting institution, it’s physiological that the amount spent exceeds by some degree the amount received by the beneficiaries, but such proportions reveal an extraordinary inefficiency of the system.
Also, over 57% of the subsidized grains does not reach the targeted group, and about one third of it is siphoned off the supply chain: the majority of the resources are thus stolen, depriving many BPL families of their right.
Further, many errors of inclusion or exclusion have been reported, and only about a quarter of the Fair Price Shops is actually viable (that means, the return of capital is equal or higher than 12%).

Effectiveness
Data shows that in the last decade the calories intake of the bottom quarter of the population has dropped instead of rising. This measurement is a beacon of how the inefficiencies of the TPDS undermined its effectiveness in relieving hunger among the BPL population.

BPL definition
The first problem with the TPDS concerns the definition of who is Below Poverty Line. Currently the PL is set to 368 and 560 Rs/month, for rural and urban population respectively: it’s the income calculated to acquire a food amount equal to 2400 calories and 2100 calories. As already
mentioned in this report, a common critique to this approach is that it doesn’t take all the non-
food needs of the people into account, like housing and fuel prices.
Furthermore, the actual limit covers only 20% of the population, a too low segment: taking BPL
and APL families together, the TPDS serves this way only 36% of the population.
The BPL index should also be periodically updated to account for inflation, which hits poor
people before anyone else.

**Leakages and corruption**
The main reason behind the ineffectiveness of the TPDS scheme is the widespread corruption
throughout the system, which causes massive leakages and diversions: everyday food is stolen
from the supply chain and sold on the black market, where also ration cards are traded. In 2005, it
was found that the majority of the grains get diverted, and only about 40% gets to the poor.
In many cases, the price charged in FPS is inflated, with excesses from 10 to 14%.
Here is a ranking of the States by intensity of the leakages:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abnormal Leakage (More than 75%)</th>
<th>Very High Leakage (50%-75%)</th>
<th>High Leakage (25%-50%)</th>
<th>Low Leakage (Less than 25%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Haryana, Madhya Pradesh &amp; Uttar Pradesh</td>
<td>Assam, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka, Maharashtra &amp; Rajasthan</td>
<td>Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Orissa, Tamil Nadu &amp; West Bengal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Errors of inclusion/exclusion**
A fundamental reason for the high diversions in the system is big inclusion errors, occurring
when APL families are entitled with a BPL card. In the States of Andhra Pradesh (36%),
Himachal Pradesh (20%), Karnataka (42%), Kerala (21%) and Tamil Nadu (50%), the proportion of subsidized grains received by APL households is unacceptably
large, undermining the very reason of the TPDS.
Similarly, there are also numerous exclusion errors: daily wage earners, for example, are kept out
of the TPDS because they earn enough to be APL, but in fact they are potentially food insecure.

**Offtakes**
Since the beneficiaries have to buy the whole monthly ration, offtakes are low since the poorest
usually can’t afford to spend so much in advance. A solution would consist in allowing sale of
weekly endowment.
**FPS viability**
Around 3 out of 4 Fair Price Shops earn less than 12% of return on capital, making them unprofitable for the owners and thus endangering the good functioning of the TPDS. A series of proposals to make the FPS viable are: rationalizing of licenses to ensure handling of 122 tons of grains per year to every FPS, imposing a uniformly fixed margin at 2-3% of economic cost, reducing the price for APL households to induce them to lift grains from the PDS, housing FPS in public buildings.

**Economic cost**
In many cases it was reported that the price set by FPS at economic cost was higher than the price of foodgrains on the market. It is therefore a priority to make the system more efficient and lower the cost of the distribution.

**Universalization vs targeting**
The reform of 1997, which transformed the Public Distribution System focusing it on the BPL population, was pushed forward because of the perceived urban bias of the former system. Shrinking the beneficiaries would make the PDS more efficient while making sure that the food reached those who needed it most. After more than a decade, there’s debate about whether the system should be re-universalized, both to reach the hungry who are left out and to put an end to the black market for ration cards. Actually, the move towards a targeted distribution system has increased the offtakes of the poor, revealing that the TPDS works better for destitute citizens.

**Recommendations:**
- The beneficiaries of the scheme should be doubled, from 36% to 72% of the population
- There should be periodic revisions of the Poverty Line and of the subsidized prices to account for inflation and other changes in the socioeconomic environment
- The sale of ration cards on the black market should be avoided, through a system of unique identification (photo printed on the card, matching with other documents) or through some incentive to keep the original cards (like voucher lotteries)
- To minimize leakages, the Panchayat Raj Institutions should be actively engaged in identification of beneficiaries and grains delivery
- FPS must be made financially viable
2.7 Antyodaya Anna Yojana

Objective:
Antyodaya Anna Yojana is a programme conceived to enhance food security in destitute and particularly disadvantaged households. The beneficiaries receive an Antyodaya card which entitles them to 35kg of highly subsidized grains at FPS shops. The discount is considerably higher compared to the subsidy received with simple TPDS cards, since the programme addresses the poorest of the poor.

Dispositions:
An Antyodaya card is assigned to: aged, infirm, disabled, destitute men and women, pregnant and lactating women, widows and other single women with no regular support, old persons (aged 60 or above) with no regular support and no assured means of subsistence; households with a disabled adult and no assured means of subsistence; households where no adult member can work. The price of foodgrains under the scheme are 2Rs/kg for wheat and 3Rs/kg for rice.

Funding:
The scheme is entirely funded by the Central Government.

Results and Problems:
Performance
Except for few States, the distribution of the cards has been largely successful, reaching usually more than 80% of the sanctioned beneficiaries. The problem lies in the identification of the entitled families: figures show that only 4.6% of the poorest quintile has Antyodaya cards, whereas 100% of them should have one.

Effectiveness
As for the TPDS, the drop in calorie intake of the poorest quartile of the population doesn’t speak in favour of the effectiveness of the scheme.

Bogus cards and black market
The main problem associated with AAY is the presence of a large number of bogus cards as well as an active black market where these, along with the real ones, are sold. Therefore, a large quantity of grains is diverted to people who don’t need such a strong subsidy.

Outliers
Another challenge of the programme now is reaching the urban homeless population, along with slum dwellers and migrants, who don’t get their cards even though their living conditions are among the hardest.
**Recommendations:**
- Review the criteria for eligibility in urban areas to include those who are cut out of the scheme but would need it
- To contrast the phenomenon of the bogus cards, an electronic database of the beneficiaries should be established, coupled with random checks at the FPS
- Against the voucher’s black market, the same measures recommended for the TPDS should be taken
2.8 National Old Age Pension Scheme

Objective:
The National Old Age Pension Scheme has the purpose to assign a retirement pension to old poor people: it is today the only pension plan for unorganized workers. The aim is to ensure food security to a segment of the population who cannot work anymore, inevitably depending on someone else for its livelihood.

Dispositions:
Every destitute BPL person older than 65 years is entitled to a pension of 200Rs per month. The States should participate with an equal amount.

Funding:
The Central Government pays 200Rs pro beneficiary, while States/UT should pay other 200. The complete administration of the programme is assigned to the States since 2003.

Results and Problems:
Performance
Before the reform of 1997, the NOAPS transfers were given by formula only to the half of the eligible population. As a matter of fact, the number of beneficiaries was calculated as follows: Population * poverty rate * share of the population over 65 * 0.5
Since there was no reason to cut out of the scheme half of those who need it, and especially with no mechanisms that ensured that at least the reached half was the poorest one, the programme was extended to all old poor people in 2007.

Effectiveness
Without any data since the universalization of the scheme, the effectiveness of the NOAPS in tackling hunger among old people cannot be established yet. A starting point for comparison can be the fact that, in 2006, 65% of the old aged population depended on someone else for their livelihood.

Diversions
In a door-to-door survey, it emerged than in many cases the beneficiary of the pension was untraceable or dead, while other people were using the money (for example grandchildren, but also persons completely unrelated to the pensioners).
Also, the States are not always spending the money received from the GoI in the NOAPS, diverting it to other purposes.

Inflation updating
The original plan assigned 75Rs/month to every beneficiary. It took more than 10 years to update the amount to 200Rs, taking account of the inflation: adjustments should be made more frequently, to avoid losses of purchasing power that could severely impoverish the targeted population.

Disbursement procedure
In many districts, old people are expected to go to the block office to retire their pension, but this can be many miles away. Also, they have to withdraw it on a precise day, which is not always communicated in advance.
**Recommendations:**
- A door-to-door delivery system would both ensure that the pensions get to the right people and lift the beneficiaries from the effort of reaching the block office on the right day.
- The GoI should enforce a better monitoring of the States to avoid that the money received from the center is spent on other programmes.
- The GoI should watch for sudden high inflation in alimentary goods, and eventually increase the pensions.
2.9 Annapurna

Objective:
The Annapurna scheme was designed to give food security to those old people who have the criteria for being eligible under NOAPS, but don’t get the money from the scheme. Since the NOAPS has been universalized in 2007, this scheme is under revision, and could be abandoned in some years. The scheme will be rediscussed in 2012 after 10 years of application, and only then its future will be decided.

Dispositions:
Under the Annapurna, 10kg of grains are transferred monthly to old destitute people who are eligible for NOAPS but don’t get the pension.

Funding:
Since 2003, the scheme was completely transferred to State level.

Results and Problems:
Performance
In 2007, the Annapurna Programme reached about 20% of the people eligible at NOAPS criteria, so less than the half of the potential beneficiaries got the endowment of grains.

Inability to spend
The offtake of the scheme dropped from 88% to 54% in 4 years, since the allocation was doubled in 2006, but the spending didn’t increase.

Recommendations:
- Since the universalization of the NOAPS, the Annapurna scheme should be either abandoned (and the funds utilized to reinforce the pensions) or targeted to particularly disadvantaged aged people (like single women or disabled elders)
2.10 National Family Benefit Scheme

Objective:
The National Family Benefit Scheme is practically a life insurance for poor families, with the aim of providing relief to the households who suffer the death of a primary breadwinner and suddenly find themselves without the means to buy food.

Dispositions:
The Scheme provides for 10,000 Rs. to be paid in cash to the family in case of the breadwinner’s death. This payment is made after inquiring the surviving head of the bereaved household, and within 4 weeks from the death.

Funding:
The scheme was transferred to the State Governments along with the others belonging to the National Social Assistance Programme (that is, NOAPS and Annapurna).

Results and Problems:
Performance
Like the NOAPS, also in the NFBS the beneficiaries are half of the eligible people by formula. In this case, it is assumed that only half of the deaths in the targeted families regard the breadwinner, a claim that should be verified, since people who work usually take more risks. In the end, only 30% of the eligible beneficiaries get the money.
In some States no beneficiaries have been reported, probably because the scheme is State-financed so there might be some regions not willing to spend on it.

Effectiveness
It has been argued that 10,000 Rs isn’t a sufficient amount to compensate for the loss of a primary breadwinner: the Supreme Court Commissioner has suggested increasing the payment up to 25,000 Rs.

Death certificates
In case of death outside the local area, beneficiaries had to face a lot of problems in obtaining a death certificate. This created a lot of problems specifically in case of migrant labour. Alternatives should be evolved to save the beneficiaries from harassment on the score.

Delays
The bureaucratic procedure created unnecessary delays in the payment of the benefit.

Recommendations:
- Revise the administrative procedures to overcome technical problems in delivering the money or identifying beneficiaries
- Increase the benefit to a reasonable amount
2.11 National Food Security Mission

The National Food Security Mission was started in 2007 after it was recognized that the current path of grains production wasn’t fast enough to cover for the increase in the population, leading straight to shortage of food at aggregate level. The projections are shown in the figure below:

![Graph showing projections for food production, requirement, and population from 2001-02 to 2016-17](image)

The major objective of this scheme is to increase production and productivity of wheat, rice and pulses on a sustainable basis, so to preserve the food security of the country. It is accomplished mainly by diffusion of new technologies as well as modern farm managing practices.

The NFSM is entirely funded by the Central Government, and is divided into three branches: Rice, Wheat, and Pulses, each one specialized in the type of crop after which it’s named.

The quantitative objective of the scheme is increasing the production of rice by 10 million tons, wheat by 8 million tons and pulses by 2 million tons by 2011-12. A side-effect of the policy should be the creation of more job opportunities for the rural households.

In 2010 there will be a mid-term evaluation at National level of the NFSM by an independent agency, reporting on the performance and the shortcomings of the programme, and suggesting changes to be made to overcome the deficiencies.

In the same year, also an Impact Evaluation Study at National level will be performed, to verify the increase in productivity of rice, wheat and pulses cultivation, as well as other factors like increased farmer’s income.

It is worth noting that the success of the mission is of crucial importance, since if the country is suddenly not able to produce enough food for everyone, all the other relief schemes either collapse (for example, if there is not enough food for the mid-day meals) or are useless (getting a job through the NREGA doesn’t help much if there is no food to buy).
2.12 National Horticulture Mission

The National Horticulture Mission is a centrally sponsored scheme launched in 2005 to enhance production of every horticultural product (fruits, vegetables, flowers, plantation crops, spices, medicinal aromatic plants).

The NHM aims to provide holistic growth of the sector, spreading technology, providing assistance to the farmers through regionally-differentiated strategies and creating employment opportunities in the agricultural sector; the ultimate objective is further improve food security by assuring a sufficient variety of nutrient crops in each area.

The scheme is complementary to the NFSM: instead of focusing on the quantity of food produced, with the purpose of growing enough for everyone, the NHM specializes on the quality and variety of nutrition and on the preservation of local crops. Every plant, with the exception of coconut (falling under a separate policy), is covered under the scheme: the farmers who request assistance will receive a variety of services for the improvement of their main cultivation, for example the building of water sources for irrigation.

2.13 National Food Security Act

The National Food Security Act is a proposal by the UPA Government, still under construction, to further reinforce the nutritional status of poor families.

As far as it is known by now, the Act will legally bind the Indian State to provide 25kg per month of foodgrains for 3Rs per kg to all BPL families of the country. The fact of being mandatory is what separates this measures from all other similar schemes like TPDS or AAY.

Along with the Act, the methodology for identifying those families and the Poverty Line itself will be revamped, and a new survey will be conducted to find out the number of beneficiaries. Critics point out that the Act will probably suffer from all the classic deficiencies that the other schemes have, like targeting problems, leakages during delivery and so on, but the Government seems confident that it will work better.
3. The Right to Food Campaign

The Right to Food Campaign is a civil society informal network of organizations and individuals focused on the right to nutrition and sustainable livelihood, which aims to influence the Government into implementing effective policies against hunger in India. It is a largely decentralized network, with a small secretariat performing some facilitating tasks like website maintenance, while the majority of the actions stem from local initiative. The activities of the RFC comprise public hearings, rallies, dharnas, padyatras, conventions, action-oriented research, media advocacy, and lobbying of Members of Parliament.

The RFC has born after a petition of the People's Union for Civil Liberties (Rajasthan) to the Supreme Court where it was requested that the country’s food stocks should be used without delay to protect people from hunger and starvation. The petition gave rise to a public interest litigation known as "PUCL vs Union of India and others (Writ Petition [Civil] No. 196 of 2001)", commonly referred to as the PUCL case.

To support the petition, a vast constellation of NGOs and individuals have been mobilized, giving rise to the Right to Food Campaign.

The PUCL case and the RFC have already sparked numerous consequences: among their requests, for example, were the establishing of a National Employment Guarantee Act, of universal mid-day meals in primary schools and ICDS services for children under six, reform of the public distribution system, and social security arrangements for those who are not able to work. As we have seen before in this report, these demands have given rise to numerous governmental schemes, after indication of the Supreme Court. The importance of these results in changing the national patterns of poverty and hunger has put the RFC in the center of the food security policies.

The next step in the campaign is the Right to Food Act, a proposal of some essential requirements that the forthcoming National Food Security Act should contain: among them are the re-universalization of the PDS (along with increased quantity of subsidized grains), expansion of policies for destitute households (like Antyodaya), removal of the upper limit of 100 days per person in the NREGA, consolidation of all entitlements created by recent Supreme Court orders (e.g. cooked mid-day meals in primary schools and universalization of ICDS), support for effective breastfeeding (including maternity entitlements and crèches), safeguards against the invasion of corporate interests in food policy, and elimination of all social discrimination in food-related matters.

A particular focus is set on the request to create new entitlements for those who are excluded from the existing schemes: child workers, the elderly and the infirm in need of daily care, migrant workers and their families, bonded labour families, the homeless, and the urban poor.

Special measures are also invoked for the populations falling victim to natural and human-made disasters or displacement.

The long term objectives of the RFC are the recognition of the “right to food” as a directly following from the “right to life” enshrined in Article 21 of the Indian Constitution, and the achievement of universal food security for the Indian population.
Conclusion

Under the solicitation of the Right to Food Campaign and the Supreme Court, the Government of India has started numerous schemes to eradicate hunger in its many aspects during the different stages of the life of Indian citizens.
All these programmes suffer from inefficiencies, leakages, corruption, which undermine their effectiveness; also, some parts of the population needing food assistance are cut out of the governmental policies, for example the boys in the age span 11-18. Many recommendations to improve the single interventions have been collected and listed, as well as the problems still waiting for a solution.
Since 2007, at the basis of food policies lies the NFSM, whose purpose is to ensure that the food produced by the country is enough for its whole population.
Although the number and scope of governmental interventions, a substantial share of the Indians still suffers from some type of hunger; it seems that many more years of implementation, monitoring, correction and innovation of such programmes are required to finally drag the country out of this pit.
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