

## **Food Security: Some Pertinent Issues**

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### **I. Introduction**

Food is central to human survival, cultural identity and sustainable livelihood. Therefore, development activities, whatever the approach is, are fundamentally an impetus towards the termination of hunger which would thereafter be triggered to overall development. Hunger blockades one from all kinds of development, both physical and mental. Food security is therefore the key to all kinds of development- revelation of resource, enhancement of human quality, and emancipation of mankind. At the turn of this century, after having achieved and developed so high a civilisation, still 800 million suffer from chronic under-nutrition because they do not have access to minimum food levels (Franciscans 1996, Yaounde Declaration 1996, Hunger 1997). 40,000 people die each day of hunger and 35,000 children die each day from malnutrition (Franciscans, 1996). Sub-Saharan Africa alone is estimated to have more than 235 million people who suffer from chronic hunger and under nutrition (The Earth Time, 1996).

Concepts have been constructed with corresponding application in formulating plans and programmes but the world is still waiting to achieve food security. There were limitations of the actions undertaken by the states, societies and multilateral organisations to solve the world hunger problem (Yaounde Declaration, 1996). And the limitation could be a methodical constraint of never approaching the problem of food security as a direct and concrete programme (except in case of emergency food supply), though almost every programme has indirectly contributed to eliminate food insecurity. In most cases, the goal of achieving food security has been set on an wider spectrum of structural adjustment and macro policy and strategy interventions, and thus the food security concern at community and household level, remained mostly unpronounced.

Realising the need to consider community and household as the point of departure both in terms of strategy adopted and practical need to understand and illuminate the problem on the ground where people are victimised, currently programmes taken by various development

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organisations in various parts of the poor countries, is aimed at elimination of hunger and poverty by addressing people at the community and household levels.

## **II. Importance of food security**

Access to adequate and sufficient food is a fundamental right to all citizens and a condition of sovereignty going beyond the logic of economic policies or political contingencies (FAG, 1996). The focus on food security must be on people, not on measures. Food security may be relative when understood and viewed from individuals subjective horizon, but food insecurity is absolute as a unified person is undeniably hungry. Yet food security can be understood as having different dimensions. The World Bank defines food security as being "Access by all people at all the times to enough food for active, healthy life". This definition implies three dimensions to food security- availability, access and stability and various levels of aggregation, i.e. global, national, household and individual (FAO, 1995). First two levels, global and national, are encored in macro socio-economic and political ground while household and individual food security, though effected by macro structural interventions, may better be addressed from micro perspective - as who produces food, how it is produced, procured, preserved and finally how food is distributed and consumed. The very issue of food management at community and household levels logically encompasses the gender perspective, which again at a wider perspective is attached to culture and power issues. Food habit, pattern of consumption, perception about different food and reservation of taste etc. is also an important factor to be taken in consideration. Food habit does refer to ttle system of knowledge and attitude of a particular group, household or individual towards food. This emphasises the need for people-derived, people-led and people-managed systems of food production and distribution and consumption. Therefore food security must be compatible with social, cultural and gender equity, in the access and distribution of food at all levels (FAG, 1996).

## **III. Different dimensions of food security**

Hunger is a social evil which destroys individual hope, impairs physical and mental development, which breaks up families and undermines communities. Therefore, in its broader dimensions, the essence of food security is to seek economic justice for those who are food insecure, that is, those who do not have access at all times to enough food to lead active, healthy lives.

The World Bank definition of food security, while unveiling different dimensions of food insecurity, fingers out two different kinds of food insecurity - chronic and transitory. Chronic food insecurity is a continuously inadequate diet caused by the inability to acquire food or to produce their own. Transitory food insecurity in food price, food production, or household incomes (EC-NGO Liaison committee Report, 1994).

Whatever the dimension of food insecurity is, it is true that in poor household lack of enough food is a regular phenomenon, and once touched by temporary food insecurity; a poor household loses its fragile line of food procurement and as a result gets trapped into chronic food insecurity.

#### **IV. Food security and the development partners**

Of the 800 million people who are food insecure today, the largest number of chronically undernourished people live in Asia and Africa. Hunger remains especially severe in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. In some countries GNP is increasing and eventually national food production and food procurement has increased too. But, sadly, this macro development failed to have spread its impact over the silent majority of poor household. Actually national food self-sufficiency can not be seen as guarantee for the poorer section of the society (DCA Report, 1996), for food security, growth is essential but not sufficient condition (Bangladesh Planning Commission, 1989). The problem of hunger has not been primarily one of production, but mainly one of distribution between countries, regions and income groups, between the sexes and within households (Streeten, 1997). Severely food insecure groups include landless laborers both in rural and urban areas, farmers on marginal lands, pastoralists with restricted grazing areas, and among them women and children are the last to have enough and adequate access to food. Victims of natural calamities (flood, draught, cyclone etc.) and man-made calamities (civil war, armed conflicts etc.) who often turn out to be internal and cross-country refugees are often food-insecure. These are the people with whom development partners, NGOs with their emergency relief and development programmes have been working with to help in their survival and to improve living condition. Interventions aiming at food security of these poverty-stricken people might best serve purpose if they are addressed at the community and household levels.