Food Security in India: Challenges and Initiatives

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Abstract

India has reached the point of food production self-sufficiency; however, 195 million people continue to suffer from undernourishment and this results in the country being 105th among 127 countries in the Global Hunger Index 2024. In India, food and nutritional insecurity remain central in spite of significant developments in the agricultural production and economic growth. Despite the fact that India transformed into a key food exporter in the present times and is no longer a food-deficient nation as it used to be in the 1960s, there are issues of hunger, malnutrition, and unequal distribution. This paper will look at the issues of food and nutritional security, review the literature available and highlight policy interventions and directions. Government interventions, such as the National Food Security Act (NFSA), Poshan Abhiyaan, Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS) and Mid-day meal scheme along with current issues of micronutrient deficiencies, climate change, and unequal access are also examined in this paper. In this work, there is a comprehensive literature review with tables. The use of secondary data sources such as the FAO, NFHS, Global Hunger Index and government sources.

Keywords

Food security, Nutrition, Hunger, India.

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Introduction

Food security can be defined as a condition where everyone at any given moment, has physical, economic and social access to sufficient, wholesome, and safe food to meet the dietary needs of an active and healthy lifestyle. Nutritional security extends this idea to include adequate intake of nutrients for vitality. With a huge population of India, geographical inequality, poverty, and vulnerability to climate, food and nutritional security delivery has become a challenging undertaking. The achievement of this objective has been difficult because of climate change, economic instability and accelerated urbanization. Food security goes beyond agricultural issues in the Home Science which involves complex matters related to resource management, familial socio-economic wellbeing and nutrition. Food security encompasses availability, accessibility and affordability of safe and nutritious food, and nutrition security encompasses balanced diets that are above the caloric adequacy. India is a trifecta of malnutrition, undernutrition, nutritional deficiencies and also the increasing obesity.

Dimensions of Food Security in India

1. **Availability:** India manufactures excess cereals and has shortages of pulses and oilseeds.
2. **Access:** The entry is hampered by poverty, inequality, and regional disparities.
3. **Utilization:** Malnutrition is aggravated by poor sanitation and healthcare.
4. **Stability:** Climate change and market volatility are threats to long-term stability.

Nutritional Security

The concept of nutrition security needs balanced nutrition, sufficient amounts of micronutrients and safe food. India faces:

- **Malnutrition of children in terms** of proteins and energy.
- **Micro deficiencies** (iron, vitamin A, iodine).
- **Coexistence of malnutrition:** the opposing malnutrition and the obesity.

Table 1: Nutritional Indicators in India (NFHS-5)

Indicator	Prevalence (%)
Stunting (children <5)	35.5
Wasting (children <5)	19.3
Underweight (children <5)	32.1
Anemia (women 15–49)	57.0
Anemia (children 6–59 months)	67.1

Source: NFHS-5 (2019–21).

Aims and Methodology

Primary objectives of the current research are to highlight the multidimensional issues of food and nutritional security and their socio-economic development consequences. The other objective of this paper is to examine government efforts such as the National Food Security Act (NFSA), Poshan Abhiyaan, and Mid-Day Meal Scheme, Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS), and some of the endemic issues such as micronutrient deficiencies, climate change, and unequal access. In this study, a detailed literature review is provided with the use of tables. Secondary data from FAO, NFHS Global Hunger Index and government reports were used.

Literature Review:

Historical Context: India's Green Revolution in the 1960s transformed food production, ensuring self-sufficiency in cereals. Persistent Malnutrition: Despite progress, India ranks poorly in the Global Hunger Index (105th out of 124 countries in 2024). The missing middle in agri-food value chains is a topic that is discussed in a large body of literature. Smallholder farmers are usually neglected by large-scale processors because of the high transaction costs but small farmers are not able to process their own products. According to **Vorley et al.** (2007), MSEs fill this gap by collecting produce from small farmers, and processing it for local markets. This intermediation plays an important role in ensuring Availability. **Kaur (2025)** emphasizes India's contradiction of being a food exporter and ranking 105th out of 124 nations in the Global Hunger Index, categorizing it as "serious." The country is at a serious stage of hunger which is caused by poverty and malnutrition although the production is excessive. **FAO SOFI Report** (2025): India has the highest number of wasted children under five globally. **NABARD (2022)** identifies the necessity of having a sound agri-food system, which is oriented towards sustainable agriculture, rural development, and institutional innovations to achieve food and nutritional security. According to **ICRIER (Vision 2030),** the determinants of nutritional security are women's education, sanitation and the variety of food and therefore emphasises the significance of specific interventions to decrease malnutrition. The research is always consistent in proving that the Mid-Day Meal Scheme, Public Distribution System (PDS) and Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) have become more accessible but with difficulties of leakage, quality, and coverage. A study has suggested the two sides of the coin of malnutrition the co-existence of undernutrition and the rising cases of obesity due to the change of diet. Methodological differences in the measurement of food insecurity have been found in studies, but they all point to the prevalence of undernutrition and hidden hunger.

The importance of Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), Public Distribution System (PDS) and National Food Security Act (NFSA) in reducing food insecurity is emphasized in the literature. McKay et al. (2023): The systematic review indicates that there is a methodological inconsistency in measuring food insecurity in India. KPMG Report (2025): 19.46 crore undernourished people living in chronic conditions; multi-stakeholder strategies are required. PIB (2024): With excess foodgrain stocks, TPDS and welfare schemes are guaranteed to be supplied. Government Schemes Report (2025): NFSA has digitized ration cards improving the targeting but nutrition outcomes remain inhomogeneous. According to Basheer et al. (2023), the nutritional policies in India are still cereal-based because of the Green Revolution. SOFI Report (2025): A decrease in undernourishment, though India is the country with the largest number of wasted children under five. Free Press Journal (2025): Nutrition security is the most challenging experience that India faces amid economic growth. India Spend (2025) reports that climate change disrupts pulses, millets, and oilseeds, worsening nutrition insecurity.

Challenges:

1. Food Safety Risks: The informal MSEs have no access to clean water and sanitation facilities and therefore there is a risk of contamination. This is a direct menace to the Utilization pillar of food security.
2. Lack of Economies of Scale: High unit costs can make processed goods from MSEs more expensive than mass-produced industrial alternatives.
3. Technology Gap: The use of manual labour and old technology constrains productivity and standardisation.
4. Regulatory Hurdles: strict food safety regulations (such as FSSAI in India or FDA in the US) tend to target large-scale manufacturing facilities, and a home-based business can hardly comply with it.
5. Regional disparities in food access and nutrition outcomes.
6. Climate change is impacting agriculture and food systems
7. Inefficiencies in PDS and leakages.
8. Dietary transition toward processed foods.
9. Persistent malnutrition: 35% of children under the age of five are stunted.
10. Malnutrition in the form of micronutrients: Iron, Vitamin A and Iodine are still alarming.
11. Food imbalance: The excessive use of cereal products, ignoring of protein-containing foods.
12. Causes of implementation gaps: PDS leakages and inefficiency during monitoring.

Initiatives:

- Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS): Computerized ration cards, enhanced accountability.
- Mid-Day Meal Scheme: To provide Nutritional support for children in schools.
- Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS): Nutrition supplementation of both children and mothers.
- National Food Security Mission (NFSM): Increases the output of rice, wheat, pulses, and oilseeds.
- National Food Security Act (2013): Legal access to subsidized food grains. Provides free subsidized grains to the people, to around 67 percent of the population.
- Poshan Abhiyaan (2018): Aims at reducing stunting, wasting, undernutrition, anemia, and low birth weight.
- Agricultural reforms: Specialize in crop varieties, farming resilient to climate and better supply chains.
- Nutrition-sensitive programs: Interconnecting agriculture and nutrition outcomes, biofortified crops, and empowering women.

Summing Up:

The increasing production levels have been characterized by the development of India towards food and nutritional security, which has been driven forward by disparities in access and use. Social safety nets, increased dietary diversity, empowering women and implementing climate-resistant practices are pillars to sustainable solutions. To meet the objectives of the Vision 2030, a multidisciplinary approach of agriculture, health and education is paramount. Food production is not the only challenge in ensuring proper nutrition and food in India, there should be fair access to various safe and nutritious foods. Sustainable Development Goal 2: Zero Hunger requires policy reforms, technological solutions and involvement of communities. India has changed to food surplus to a food deficit, but nutrition insecurity still exists. Addressing this requires:

- Food diversification (millets, pulses, vegetables).
- Enhancing agriculture that is sensitive to nutrition.
- Addressing food systems climate change.
- Enhancing scheme monitoring and evaluation.

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