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India's Evergreen Revolution

"You are not Atlas carrying the world on your shoulder. It is good to remember that the planet is carrying you." - Dr. Vandana Shiva

Pratibha Singh*[1]

[1] Eine Welt Netzwerk Thüringen e. V. Jena, Germany

* Corresponding author: *pratibha.997@gmail.com* | +49 (0)3641 22 49 953

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Abstract

Global food security is one of the most pressing challenges the world is facing today. In an era dominated by fast-paced technological and digital progress in the agricultural landscape, famines still break loose and continue unabated in certain parts of the world. The recent hunger crisis that erupted in the Horn of Africa only further reaffirms this claim. The problem of hunger and malnourishment extends beyond the frontiers of Africa. Despite its economic achievements, India hosts the world's largest number of undernourished and malnourished people. Using India as a case study, this article attempts to situate hunger and food insecurity in a multidimensional context, which is not only triggered by natural factors (e.g. climate change and natural disasters) but also stems from structural inequality existing in the domestic and global order. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) outlined in the Agenda 2030 stress achieving zero hunger and enumerate further sub-goals to serve as blueprints for its execution. Against this background of hunger and food security, India is analysed for its capacity and performance in achieving the target of zero hunger. Additionally, this paper seeks to assess the extent to which sustainable goals are sufficient in the battle towards eliminating hunger by taking into account India's position in the global order.

Introduction

Achieving Zero Hunger: Sustainable Development Goal 2

In the following, the components of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 2 are given (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2016):

> 2.1 By 2030, end hunger and ensure access by all people, in particular the poor and people in vulnerable situations, including infants, to safe, nutritious and sufficient food all year round
>
> 2.2 By 2030, end all forms of malnutrition, including achieving, by 2025, the internationally agreed targets on stunting and wasting in children less than 5 years of age, and address the nutritional needs of adolescent girls, pregnant and lactating women and older persons
>
> 2.3 By 2030, double the agricultural productivity and incomes of small-scale food producers, in particular women, indigenous peoples, family farmers, pastoralists and fishers, including through secure and equal access to land, other productive resources and inputs, knowledge, financial services, markets and opportunities for value addition and non-farm employment
>
> 2.4 By 2030, ensure sustainable food production systems and implement resilient agricultural practices that increase productivity and production, that help maintain ecosystems, that strengthen capacity for adaptation to climate change, extreme weather, drought, flooding and other disasters and that progressively improve land and soil quality
>
> 2.5 By 2020, maintain the genetic diversity of seeds, cultivated plants and farmed and domesticated animals and their related wild species, including

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through soundly managed and diversified seed and plant banks at the national, regional and international levels, and promote access to and fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the utilization of genetic resources and associated traditional knowledge, as internationally agreed

2.a Increase investment, including through enhanced international cooperation, in rural infrastructure, agricultural research and extension services, technology development and plant and livestock gene banks in order to enhance agricultural productive capacity in developing countries, in particular least developed countries

2.b Correct and prevent trade restrictions and distortions in world agricultural markets, including through the parallel elimination of all forms of agricultural export subsidies and all export measures with equivalent effect, in accordance with the mandate of the Doha Development Round

2.c Adopt measures to ensure the proper functioning of food commodity markets and their derivatives and facilitate timely access to market information, including on food reserves, in order to help limit extreme food price volatility

Contextualising Hunger and Food Security

Ensuring global food security is not only a basic fundamental right, but one of the core foundational blocks vital to achieving SDGs outlined in the Agenda 2030 (Mihalache-O'Keef & Li, 2011). Centre stage in the roadmap to reaching sustainable development goals is SDG 2, achieving zero hunger. As outlined above, SDG 2 enumerates several sub-goals, which hint towards an integrated and multi-sectoral approach that encompasses socio-economic, political and cultural dimensions. The sub-goals are considerable steps towards an intersectional approach, drawing linkages between poverty, livelihood, health, and productivity in order to achieve food security. Achieving zero hunger is imperative and could act as a springboard to achieving other sustainable development goals as well such as health, gender empowerment and education.

However, food security is one of the gravest challenges facing the world today. As stated in the Food and Agriculture Association's (FAO, 2006) Food Security Policy brief, "of particular concern are hunger hotspots, marked by the widespread persistence and prevalence of food insecurity, especially in protracted crises" (p.2). In 2006, food emergencies requiring outside aid were present in twenty-five countries in Africa, eleven in Asia and the Near East, two in Latin America and one in Europe (FAO, 2006).

According to the Global Food Security Index, India ranks 75 amongst 113 countries in terms of food security and hence remains burdened with the highest number of undernourished and malnourished people in the world. Global estimates from the years 2014-16 reveal that 281 million people in the Southern Asian region suffer from hunger and malnutrition and, hence, this region carries the highest hunger burden in the world. The number of people with reduced access to food is estimated to rise to 2 billion by the end of 2050. In Asia alone, the number of people vulnerable to hunger is shockingly high, at 511.7 million (United Nations, n.d.)

The large-scale hunger and malnourishment prevalent in India elucidate the colossal figures stemming from Asia (Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO),2016). India's performance in improving food security, infant mortality rates and stunting and malnourishment for children has been worse than some severely impoverished countries (United Nations & Research and Information System for Developing Countries, 2016). The criteria to identify food security, however, are not limited to the ones outlined above.

Identifying hunger criteria is crucial to its eradication. For example, Burchi et al. (2011) bring into light the aspect of "hidden hunger," which renders visible the lack of micronutrients in food-related aid programs which can bear long-term consequences on the physical and mental health of an individual. Phalkey et al. (2015) argue that "micronutrient deficiencies lower immunity and increase the risk of acquiring an infectious disease which in turn intensifies the problem of undernutrition, thus creating a vicious circle" (p. 2). The problem of hidden hunger is often ignored or rather less understood. This lack of understanding and research trickles into development programs catered towards eradicating hunger but failing to address the aspect of "hidden hunger." For example, food fortification programs have also come under criticism for adding nutrients to food in the "post processing period and not already integrating in the agriculture sector." (Burchi et al., 2011, p.364).

For a largely agricultural economy like India, it is pertinent to bring to the fore the issue of climate change that acts as a double burden for farmers who are already food insecure due to global price fluctuations as well as erratic weather patterns. Brown and Funk (2004) have established a range of factors that point towards food security as one of the gravest concerns under climate change. Brown and Funk (2008) predict "warming in Indian Ocean and an increasingly 'El-Nino like' climate

could reduce main-season precipitation across parts of Americas, Africa and Asia" (p. 580). These changing weather patterns also spell impending agricultural crisis for farmers. However reducing farmer's problems only to climate change would be doing a disservice to the role of food security. The key to agricultural crisis is rooted in removing international trade distortions and improving farmer support by extending technological know-how and creating a financial safety net. As has already been underlined above, eradication of hunger involves a holistic approach; one that is rooted in people's political, social and economic empowerment.

India in the Global Arena

Before narrowing the focus on India, it is important to zoom out and observe India's position in the global order, the role of globalisation, and international trade regulations and their impact on hunger.

International Trade in the Era of Globalisation

Analysing international political economy in the realm of globalisation is imperative to deciphering the power relations amidst countries existing within a closely knit system comprised of global financial institutions, multinational corporations, state institutions and the international social justice movements . The international order created by global financial institutions plays in favour of developed and financially powerful nations that dictate trade policies for developing countries, often putting the poor and vulnerable at risk of hunger and poverty. According to Krishnan and Subramaniam (2014), "these include providing heavy subsidies for production in rich countries, lowering trade barriers in developing nations for food commodity exports from developed countries, and pressuring poor countries into exporting crops" (p.105). The national governments in developing nations have to respond to the neoliberal forces in a global order by exerting more pressure on domestic natural resources otherwise viable to country's development There is an urgent need to recognise the surplus side of food as well as well as the unsustainable food consumption in developed countries, which is largely responsible for shrinking the rights of subsistence agriculture in the Global South (otherwise a valuable source for food security).

Mihalache-O'Keef and Li (2011) underline the impact of foreign direct investment in agriculture in countries like India. Modernisation theorists claim that foreign direct investment brings benefits to developing countries by equalising wages, development and prices between developing and industrialised countries. Dependency theorists, on the contrary, argue that foreign direct investment potentially destroys local markets and human capital in developing countries through unequal trade exchange. Primary sector foreign direct investment "hinders the type of rural development the FAO and UNCTAD recommend for alleviating hunger…Foreign investors in agriculture often expand by buying land from small farmers, preventing them from subsistence activities and forcing them to rely solely on wages too low for good nutrition" (Mihalache-O'Keef & Li, 2011, p.77). Foreign direct investment in the tertiary sector can lead to intensive migration to urban slums for jobs, further adding to the hunger burden and depriving farmers of the right to subsistence agriculture which otherwise could be a reliable source for their food production.

Although India hosts a large population of underfed and malnourished people, it is not immune to international pressures. The road to food security for India is not an easy one because it implies intervening in domestic food policies and foregoing international trade commitments, a step often met with resistance (Narayan, 2015). Formalisation of the 2013 National Food Security Act, one of the largest and most ambitious food security programs in the world, was a milestone for eradicating hunger in India. It proposed granting minimum support prices to farmers in addition to distribution of food grains at subsidized prices. Although the World Trade Organisation exerted pressure to stall this initiative, "Right to Food Campaign initiated in India played a major role in its actualization…The WTO has rules that regulate minimum support prices given to farmers. Sometimes these rules are resisted by local and national level social movements," like India's Right to Food Campaign (Krishnan & Subramanian, 2014, p. 107). Interestingly, Lindberg (1994) has observed mushrooming of small-scale farmer movements in India against a highly commercial agricultural economy since the beginning of 1970s. Hence it becomes pertinent to analyse the intersection between state and global institutions and local, national and international social movements to understand the terrain of food security.

Pingali (2007) notes, "FAO's study on Agriculture towards the year 2015/30 indicates that the trends in international trade of foodstuffs, which have seen developing countries from net exporters to net importers of food commodities, are expected to continue in the future" (p. 286). The FAO has found that an increase in food production for export in host countries can fuel a sharp decline in food and nutritional access for poor farmers who scarcely reap benefits from agricultural export, but are dependent on the same market for food access. Since 1965, researchers have revealed the damaging impact of trade and food aid on local food production in India, which has relatively decreased native production of domestic wheat. The devastating impact of subsidies, especially in low income countries, has sabotaged their

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food production capacity (Mittal & Krishnan, 1997).

Nutritional Content and Westernisation of Food Patterns

Aspects such as nutritional content and calorie intake are seldom highlighted while drafting measures for eradicating hunger. According to Guyomard et al. (2012) food waste is enormous since less than half of farmer-produced calories are utilised for human consumption due to lapses prevalent in the distribution system. It might be worthwhile to highlight this inconsistency and check into the cracks and fissures that exist in the food availability system to eliminate such deficiencies. Another factor that might be worth looking into is the Westernisation of food patterns that has sparked an ever-widening gap between producers and consumers.

Owing to rapidly increasing urbanization and a burgeoning middle class, Pingali (2007) has observed a dramatic shift in Asia towards Western diets, one that is increasingly diversified and commercialised. Asia has embarked on an irreversible track from traditional staple food diets towards diets including vegetables, oils and fats, dairy and meat products. The fast-paced transition to Western consumption patterns without sufficient infrastructural and research support is shrinking livelihood access for small farmers and harming soil quality. Arrival of new players such as multi-national corporations, food processers and the retail sector, who are blind to ground realities such as land rights and societal structures such as the caste system, have hit small farmers dependent on traditional agricultural systems (Guyomard et al., 2012).
Farmer Suicides in India

In a highly-acclaimed documentary Nero's Guests (Vehkalahti & Bhatia, 2005), Sainath, a renowned Indian journalist who has extensively covered farmer suicides, highlights the coercive agricultural policies and power wielded by state and international institutions that are inconsistent with sustainable means of crop production and increasingly drive small farmers out of work. Farming is largely becoming a unfeasible activity.

While around 60% of India's population is engaged in agricultural production, 50% of agricultural households are reeling in debt (Jitendra, 2014). The changing face of agriculture in India, along with farmer's incapability to keep pace with new trends, has prompted a sharp increase in farmer suicides in recent years. In other words, the recent technological innovations and commercialisation of agriculture has rendered the ancient methods of agriculture obsolete, which has further narrowed options for those who were entirely dependent on agriculture. Intensifying production of feed crops to support the vast increase in meat consumption has exerted significant pressure on food crop production for domestic consumption (Mohanty, 2005).

India Within

According to FAO (2014), India's performance in improving the hunger situation in the past two decades has been only marginal. Although food imports and domestic agricultural production has increased considerably, India has been unsuccessful in achieving food security. India remains one of the largest contributors to global levels of undernutrition. Due to tremendous challenges lying in the way to food security, it is worth taking into account India's financial and infrastructural preparedness to achieving SDGs outlined in Agenda 2030. A shortage of USD 8.5 trillion has been detected over a period of fifteen years required to achieve the mentioned goals. It remains to be seen whether India will fare well in achieving food security despite these resource shortages.
Land Degradation

Extensive soil erosion in India is a direct threat to agricultural productivity (United Nations, 2015). Increasing land degradation is a cause of worry considering a large portion of the Indian population still relies on agriculture for their livelihoods. Moreover, agricultural production is dominated by increased usage of chemical fertilisers extending over a long period of time that is not only harmful for the environment but in the long run, renders the land non-productive. Heavy metal and nitrate accumulation due to chemical fertilisers can lead to soil salinization (Savci, 2012). According to research conducted by the Indian Council of Agricultural Research in 2010, around 120 million hectares, almost equivalent to one third of India's land, is degraded (Vasudeva, 2015) Water and waste mismanagement, including the exponential increase in agrochemicals, is further degrading soil quality in India. Overuse of pesticides, coupled with their cheap and easy access, has magnified pest resistance, which initiates a vicious cycle of pesticide usage that leads to intensive soil degradation (Shetty, 2004).

Mohanty (2005) relates former British colonial practices with their long-term impact on land productivity and crop production. British colonial times witnessed large-scale cash crop production in India to support the then ongoing industrial revolution in Great Britain. Simultaneously, this practice strengthened the hands of powerful higher caste groups in India, who exercised influence and control over land reforms and agricultural produce. Continuation of such practices has decreased the rights of lower castes, thus magnifying the extent of their des-

peration and problems. Drawing such linkages between the colonial past and the present challenges not only helps understand the issue of land degradation, but might provide answers to building future resilience.

Food Availability and Distribution

Many millions of India's children are forced to spend much of their day on carrying water instead of going to school.
Source: Balazs Gardi and Photo Credits Balazs Gardi (via flickr)

Regional differences often crop up in food distribution and availability mechanisms. The National Food Security Act, touted as the world's largest and most ambitious food security program, was introduced in 2013 to improve food security and distribution for the poorest of the poor in India. Not only did this scheme attempt to provide the food grains at subsidised prices for two thirds of India's population, but it also focussed on the nutritional status of women and children. Kulkarni (2010) highlights the lapses in the National Food Security Act and further underlines the myopic view that has long clouded the spectrum of food security. It fails to identify the target population and ignores qualitative aspects of food consumption that cover a broad spectrum between nutrition and calorie intake. Apart from such intrinsic problems, the public distribution system is subject to regional and social disparities.

According to the recent research conducted by Technology and Action for Rural Development (TARA, 2015), India has achieved success in creating rice and wheat surpluses; however, the food access and distribution system remains weak. The public distribution system is characterized by massive leakages and is rife with corruption in which a huge share of the food supply trickles down to middlemen (Krishnan & Subramaniam, 2014). Moreover it increases open market prices due to large purchases, thereby reducing purchasing power and food access for the poor (Dev, 2000). According to the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (2011), lapses occur within the agricultural marketing, which results in losses in the supply chain of 18 to 25%. Cash transfers have an inadequate impact when markets are underdeveloped and prone to price fluctuations (Kishore et al., 2014). Another less acknowledged but important aspect to note is that existing discrimination towards lower caste, ethnic or minority groups might further exclude them from food safety net programs (Kishore et al., 2015).

Lack of stable agricultural productivity stems from inadequate resources and market support provided to famers. Rising debts and lower incomes are primary characteristics of a neo-liberal world order where middle and lower income farmers find themselves sandwiched between aspirations and unfulfilled desires. While certain states in India have merely reduced the problem of hunger to crop failures, others have attributed the problem to loopholes that exist in agricultural productivity and marketing strategy. Due to a lack of technical knowledge and expertise, a large share of farmers have not been able to maintain pace with the ever-changing face of agricultural innovation (Mohanty, 2005).

Lack of calorie and nutrition supplements in food programs

Meenakshi (2016) outlines the "triple burden of malnutrition" in India, which encapsulates undernutrition, micronutrient deficiency and overnutrition issues. Lack of food security could lead to serious consequences in the health arena. Food security extends beyond quantity of food provided and should address nutrients needs. It is often directly equated to energy requirements, while nutritional requirements receive limited attention. Nutritional programs in India have weak implementation mechanisms. Regional differences have also been observed in addressing undernutrition, where states like Bihar and Uttar Pradesh have seen little improvement compared to Haryana and Maharashtra. According to the National Sample Survey Organisation, calorie intake for the poorest section of the population sums up to only 30 to 50% of that compared to the top quartile

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of the Indian population, even though the poorest section need higher calorie intake given that they frequently engage in manual labour (Saxena, n.d.). Due to high prices in the public distribution system, people tend to opt for tastier but less nutritious foods available in the market (Basu & Das, 2014). Cooking oil and pulses were not included in the public distribution system and the cash coupons could not compete with the inflated food prices. This is where food quality intake and diet diversification can play a central role in addressing the issue of hidden hunger.

Photo credit: Adam Cohn (via flickr)

Slums, Mumbai

Gender-neutral or Gender-blind Approaches

Undernourished mothers tend to give birth to underweight children and malnourishment can also be transmitted to future generations (Meenakshi, 2016). Around one third to one fifth of children in India, predominantly in rural areas, are malnourished (Meenakshi, 2016) India lags behind Sub-Saharan countries in child nutritional status and child mortality rates (Narayan, 2015). Undernutrition has been observed largely amidst children whose mothers fall under a body mass index of 18.5 (United Nations, n.d.). Therefore, it might be essential to analyse the position of women, both in the household and society, to explore the crucial link between mother's health and its impact on children.

Oxfam India has supported research investigating the crucial link between nutritional status of families and women's empowerment (Dev & Sharma, 2010). Lack of maternal care can exert harmful consequences on child development. The number of Indian women suffering from anaemia between the age of 15 and 49 years is staggeringly high. More than half of women in this age group are estimated to be affected. Stunted growth has been observed among children under the age group of five and "around 48 per cent have low height for age and 42.5 per cent have low weight for age" (TARA, 2015, p.54). According to the Government of India, in 2009, "every three out of four children in India [were] anaemic and every second new born [had] reduced learning capacity due to iodine deficiency" (Dev & Sharma, 2010, p.22).

Distorted agricultural and food policies blind towards gender aspects can also be harmful towards women and children since the benefits often trickle down to male heads of households (Mittal & Krishna, 1997). Women are frequently also the worst hit in agriculture (Krishnaraj, 2006). Although women control almost all aspects of farm work, which includes sowing, weeding, planting and harvesting, they still struggle to be recognised as farmers. Gender discrimination runs deep on various levels: denial of land ownership and recognition of women as farmers has its roots in the dominant patriarchal framework in Indian society. (Singh & Lal, 2013). Diminishing access to sustainable livelihoods in the rural hinterlands of India has spurred outmigration of men to urban shores in search of jobs, which has further sparked an increase in the number of female-headed households. In a country where women are still struggling to be recognised as farmers and qualify as beneficiaries for farmer support, the sole burden of eking out an income to support the household has proven to be a major challenge.

Impact of Climate Change and Natural Disasters on Food security

The relationship between climate change and food security is complex, though very crucial in understanding and solving food crisis. The impacts of climate change and natural disasters have raised formidable challenges for India's food security. Frequent droughts and prevalent water scarcity in large parts of India could lead to severe crisis, especially for regions highly dependent on groundwater irrigation. Recurrent natural disasters and erratic weather patterns could further erode livelihoods and pose a threat to farmers' access to food. The impact of climate change-induced health problems is well doc-

umented (Chakrabbarty, 2016).

Way Forward

Achieving food security involves a holistic approach and is rooted in ensuring social, economic and environmental security and resilience. It requires a robust improvement in poverty reduction and health access. Enhancing human capabilities through social protection schemes can significantly contribute towards eradicating hunger (FAO, 2015b; 2016). For example, social protection efforts should improve purchasing power of the population through empowerment-generating schemes such as Mahatma Gandhi Rural Employment Guarantee scheme and Integrated Rural Development Program. Simultaneously, increased investments in research and infrastructure can spur innovative, resilient and sustainable growth in agriculture and food security.

Trade and Food Security

The relationship between food security and trade reforms is rather complex. To better evaluate food security outcomes in a highly-integrated global market, it is imperative to assert that "international trade is neither a threat nor a panacea" (FAO, 2015a, p. 26). Therefore, its drastic impact on local markets and livelihoods should be incorporated in policymaking instruments in order to protect small farmers from falling into the hunger trap. A rather unfair competition exists between developing countries and those who dictate world market prices. While import subsidies are instrumental in reducing the price for consumers in food importing countries, they cause a significant problem for farmers who produce for export (FAO, 2016). Therefore international competition for domestic agriculture is a daunting challenge that must be addressed.

A Dalit woman inspects a millet plant on a bio-diverse farm in southern India.
Source: ucanews, Shawn Sebastian, Medak India February 25, 2016) (Photo Credits to D. Tejaswi)

Supporting the Urban Food Basket

Urban agriculture is being considered a viable source to ensure food security at the community level. India hosts around 93 million slum dwellers and cities continue to swell due to urban sprawl. Prevalent hunger and food crisis in rural hinterlands will continue to trigger migration to urban areas (Ward, 2013). Although slums continue to be perceived as illegal settlements, deprived of basic amenities such as paved roads, sewage treatment, hospitals and schools, urban agriculture in these areas could extend food security to urban slum dwellers. Simultaneously, slum upgradation could be a significant driver to sustainable development and a secure future by keeping livelihood and food security central (Awasthi, 2013). For example, in Cuttack, slum dwellers have resorted to organic farming for personal nourishment and sell the surplus in local markets. Similarly, some areas in Mumbai's biggest slum, Dharavi, have been converted into community gardens. However, governments fail to notice the significant contribution made by urban famers as they remain under constant threat of displacement given the constant pressures of modernisation and infrastructure development. However promising, creating viable spaces for urban agriculture within crammed settlements remains a challenge (Redwood-Martinez, n.d.).

Gender Sensitivity in Food and Agricultural Policies

Women's empowerment and access to livelihoods and financial security can yield significant gains in improving mal- and undernourishment in India. The strong position and decision-making power of women in the household and society can spell positive outcomes for India's food security. Grappling with challenges to eradicate hunger, India however continues to inspire the world with is effort towards the improvement of food security. The United Nations has honoured Vandana Shiva, a dedicated activist who has made significant contributions towards improving crop diversity in India. She initiated "Diverse Women for Diversity," a global movement to accentuate the key role women play in maintaining a healthy food system and biodiversity (United Nations, 2016).

Developing Climate Change and Disaster Resilience

Another looming threat for global food security is climate change, requiring a new and innovative system

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that is based on resilience and better preparedness to cope with natural calamities (Brown & Funk, 2008). While climate change and resource shortages make small farmers vulnerable to crop failures, erratic weather patterns pose a big threat to sustainable agriculture (TARA, 2015). Adaptation to climate-resilient agriculture might involve some inexpensive measures that range from switching existing varieties to shifting crop periods; however, such transitions might also involve major investments and financial support. It is therefore essential to initiate a multisectoral approach that which involves government, the scientific community, and international organisations to work towards improving climate resilience in agriculture (Lobell et al., 2008).

Facilitating New Technologies and Training Programs for Farmers

Education and training programs focusing on proper use of pesticides to avoid overuse and misuse are imperative to control pest resistance and soil degradation in the long run. Organic methods of food production as well as group farming for marginal and small farmers could be beneficial in reducing farmers' burden (Shetty, 2004). Reclaiming wastelands through eco-friendly techniques and training programs can facilitate the transition. Crop diversification is a means to explore other alternatives such as legumes and vegetables to supplement protein intake (Upadhyay & Palanivel, 2011).

Road to Self Sufficiency

As Swaminathan has rightly outlined, what India needs now is an "evergreen revolution" (Bose, 2007). The problem of hunger is often equated to food shortfalls that can solely be mended with intensive crop production. For example, India is still reeling under the socioeconomic and ecological consequences that followed the Green Revolution (Mittal & Krishna, 1997). It is time to stop importing readymade solutions and consolidate local resources and skills to enhance food security. Achievement of food security should involve a healthy mix of improving technical competence coupled with stable food and agricultural policies as well as good governance to ensure stronger implementation (Bose, 2007). Reducing regional disparities, cross learning and knowledge sharing can also go a long way in improving food security.

If India is to achieve its target, it has to ensure strong implementation mechanisms in food distribution, gender-sensitive food policies, political will and improving intersectoral coordination between the concerned ministries (e.g., Ministry of Women and Child Development, Ministry of Health and family Welfare, Ministry of Agriculture and Ministry of Finance). For a diverse and vast country like India, need-based regional analysis and response is pertinent to improve food access. For example, different strategies such as cash coupons, food stamps, or in-kind food assistance might be key for different regions (Kishore et al., 2014). Anti-poverty programmes, including controlling food price inflation, should be coupled with improved health facilities in order to strengthen food security (Dev, 2000). As Fidel Castro, former President of Cuba, rightly said, "Hunger is the offspring of injustice and the unequal distribution of wealth in this world. What kind of magical solutions are we going to provide so that in 20 years from now there will be 400 million instead of 800 million starving people?...Let the truth prevail and not hypocrisy and deceit" (Mittal & Krishnan, 1997, p. 204). This statement has withstood the test of time and remains relevant today. If disparities within the national and international framework remain unaddressed, hunger and food insecurity will continue to manifest in certain parts of the world, including India, thus impeding the progress of sustainable development.

Conflict of Interests

The author hereby declares that there is no conflict of interests.

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