

## NEED FOR CONVERGENCE OF MNREGA AND FOOD SECURITY ACT TO TACKLE NATURAL DISASTERS IN INDIA

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### **Abstract:**

Independent studies and research indicates that NREGA has aided in enhancement of agricultural productivity through water harvesting, checkdams, groundwater recharging, improve moisture content, check in soil erosion, and micro-irrigation, stemming of distress mitigation, increased access to markets and services through rural connectivity works, supplementing household incomes, increase in women work force participation ratios and regeneration of natural resources. MGNREGA is yielding better results compared to earlier poverty eradication programmes. To meet any natural calamities, MGNREGA will be a good mechanism to counter it properly restoring sustainability of environment and providing livelihood to the natural disasters victims people in different areas .During occurrence of any natural disasters food insecurity arises among the people. To tackle this challenge, both the Food Security Act and MGNREGA must be converged, to provide social security to the people of any natural disaster prone areas of our country.

**Key words:-** MGNREGA,FOOD SECURITY ACT,PDS, *UNDP*, *NATURAL CALAMITIES*.

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**Introduction:-**

**“It is a bad plan that admits of no modification”**

**“Syrus”**

After the rural job guarantee programme, the government is now focusing on an ambitious National Food Security Act aimed at drawing more people into the Food Security net it has made a strong pitch for providing 35kg of grains at Rs 3 per kg every month to the poor of the country. The rural job scheme and the information Act were conceived and piloted by the National Advisory council (NAC). The draft right to food (Guarantee of safety and Security) Act enshrines freedom from hunger and malnutrition as a fundamental right. It provides for and asserts the physical, economic and social right of all citizens to have access to safe and nutritious food, consistent with an adequate diet necessary to lead an active and healthy life with dignity. But different Natural Disasters give gifts of food insecurity, unemployment, malnutrition ruined environment, Collapse Roads, bridges and other construction, loss of livelihood, loss of pastoral economy etc. to the victims. No doubt food security Act is boon to them. Some of the salient features of the draft law are:

- ❖ Besides families living below the poverty line (BPL), a wide variety of other beneficiary will also be provided 35kg of cereal every month at Rs. 3 kg.
- ❖ The list includes households headed by single women those suffering from leprosy, HIV and mental illness, bonded labour, destitute dependent on alms for survival for 20 days a month, landless agricultural workers and self employed artisans.
- ❖ Other suggested beneficiaries are “occasionally vulnerable” rag pickers, construction works, street vendors, rickshaw pullers, domestic workers and those already covered by the Antyodaya Anna Yojana.
- ❖ A national survey will be conducted every five years to identify recipients who will be issued photo ID cards in consultation with local bodies.

- ❖ Senior Citizens, Single Women and physically challenged persons can eat at integrated child development scheme centers or during midday meals at schools.
- ❖ Families affected by natural calamities and communal violence will also get 35kg of cereal at Rs. 3.
- ❖ Double food quota (70kg) for (BPL) households that have children below 6 years of age, adolescent girls, pregnant woman and lactating mothers.

### **Need of Focus based approach:-**

The draft law explains way to implement the scheme and prescribes penalties for flawed delivery, while the state has to ensure uninterrupted supply of food grains through the public distribution system (PDS). Vigil on distribution will be through quality meetings between shop owners and representative of local bodies who will be involved in the selection of the shop owner.

States will have to computerize their PDS within 2 years of the law and they “shall provide a toll free number and a website where consumers can register their complaints. All complaints will be addressed 39 days of receipt and records of the same shall be made available in the public domain including the internet” says the draft.

A commissioner will be appointed in each state to monitor the scheme, suggest changes in it, and investigate scarcities and award penalties to public servants for failures. The penalties could be a fine of gross salary of one month up to five years of negligence or imprisonment of 6 months to 5 years in case of deaths or serious morbidity.

The central Govt. is to earmark over Rs. 50,000 cr for the right to food programme. Though details of the programmes rollout are yet to be firmed up, the Govt. does not foresee any major hurdles in implementing the scheme. Keeping in mind substantial layoffs in select sectors in the wake of the global economic crisis the Govt. is expected to expand the scope of the programme to

include sectors such as textiles as well as large sections of agricultural labour impacted by volatilities in the food sector.

Under the public distribution system (PDS), the BPL category excludes large sections of the poor, excluding 52% of agricultural labour households. At present, food stocks with the Govt. are upward of 50 million tones, more than twice the storage capacity of the food corporation of India on the back of high rice procurement (30.65 million tons) and a record wheat buy cover 24.7 million tons.

The need for subsidized food grain for a wider section of people is also reflected in increased off take. While the off take in the Antyodaya System is around 90% showing people's desperate need for cheap food grain the off take for BPL families increased from 7.367 million tons to 22.845 mt in 2005 – 06, out of an allocation of 27.32 mt.

As far as above the poverty line (APL) families is concerned, the off take is much lower, people do not need the grain but because for several years, there was not much differences in the APL price and the market price.

For the first time, the onus of identification and, more crucially, delivery of grain to consumer's world be pinned on Panchayats in rural areas and local govt. in urban areas, entailing never before accountability on records of allocation and off take of grain. A seamless marriage of current realities and provisions on the proposed legislation would also mean smoothing out existing wrinkles in food grain availability and accessibility.

Against this, the total number of household that have been issued either a BPL or AAY card by state government is 106.7 million. The state govt. is currently doing this by providing additional subsidies from their own budgets. In Andhra Pradesh, Tamilnadu, Karnataka and Odisha for instance it is all most universal, with around 80% of population covered under the subsidized food scheme. Any attempt restricts the number beneficiaries to the present official poverty estimates (which are known to be flawed) well, therefore, lead to a

reduction in the number of beneficiaries to almost half the existing number. Further an Act should at least guarantee as much as is already being given.

While the estimate of poverty is one issue of contention is also unresolved. The problems with both these are well known and have been officially acknowledged with two expert committees working on resolving these. The first committee headed by Suresh Tendulkar has been set up to examine the issue of estimation of poverty used by the planning commission and the second led by N.C Saxsena has been set up by the ministry of rural development to identify a suitable procedure for identification of BPL households.

Providing subsidized grains is only one aspect of a food security Act. Such an Act should also address other issues such as malnutrition especially among children and women, and social vulnerabilities due to barriers of age, caste, gender and disabilities. Exciting schemes such as the Midday Meal scheme or the Anganwadi programme for children under 6yrs, adolescent girls, pregnant and lactating mother should also be brought into the ambit of the Act with strengthened universal entitlements. Such an Act has the potential to ensure that no person in the country sleeps hungry and this must be realized.

The successful implementation of the MNREGA and the right to information Act indicates that the climate is conducive for a far-reaching, rights, based legislation to eliminate hunger and deprivation. The Supreme Court rulings in the case **peoples' union for civil liberties vrs. Union of India & others**, reinforce the view that the rights to food are basic to achieving the right to life enshrined in article 21 of the constitution. Earlier in the case **kishan pattanaik v.state of Orissa A.I.R1989 sc 677** which is the first case in India before hon'ble SC to draw attention about the starvation death and lack of food due to occurrence of natural calamities in Orissa is note worthy and torch bearer petition for formulation of these legislations. The national commission on farmers (NFC) worked out a comprehensive medium- term strategy for food and

nutrition security in the country in order to move towards the goal of universal food security overtime. The NFC held consultations all over India on the pathways to a nutrition secure India and submitted its report on out 4, 2006.

By definition, food security involves every individual gaining physical, economic, social and environmental access to a balanced diet that includes the necessary macro and micro nutrients, safe drinking water, sanitation, environmental hygiene, primary health care and education so as to lead a healthy and productive life. The food should originate from efficient and environmentally benign production technologies that conserve and enhance the natural resource base of crops farm animals, forestry, in land, and marine fisheries. Such a holistic definition requires concurrent attention to the following aspects too.

Food availability is a function of home production and food access is a function of livelihood opportunities and purchasing power. As early as in 1859, a famine commission appointed by the colonial govt. said: **“Indian famines are not famines of food, but of work; where there is work there is money and where there is money, there is food”**, this is why Mahatma Gandhi said in 1946 at Noakhali. To a people famishing and idle, the only acceptable from in which God can dare appear is work and promise of food as wages.

The utilization of food in the body will depend on non-food factors such as safe drinking water, environmental hygiene, and primary healthcare and access to toilets. Therefore, while developing legislation for food security, food and non-food factors will have to be considered together on the following lines.

The govt. has initiated programs to increase food production, such as the Rastriya Krishi Vikash Yojana, the food security Mission and the national Horticulture Mission etc. Food availability should relate to macro and micro nutrients. In addition to protein calorie under nutrition, there is severe micronutrient malnutrition; as for example of iron, iodine vitamin A, vitamin

B12 and zinc, leading to hidden hunger. The National Horticulture Mission provides an opportunity to introduce horticultural remedies to nutritional maladies. All that is needed is mainstreaming the nutritional dimension is designing the horticultural program in each agro-climatic area.

The other areas which will need attention are: widening the food basket by including local grain varieties like ragi, jowar and millets in the public distribution system; the promotion of community gene; seed, food and water banks in each village and the establishment of community kitchens modeled on the Indira Gandhi Community Kitchen organized years ago in Puna. These are particularly effective in combating malnutrition in urban areas. The widening of the food basket by including millets, legumes and tubers, which have greater tolerance to adverse conditions, is important in the context of climate change.

The UPA Govt. has said 25 kg of rice or wheat would be provided each month economically under privileged families at Rs 3 a kg with the beginning of the NREGA the minimum purchase power for food security is being created in families living below the poverty line. By adopting the support price policy recommended by the NCF that is total cost of production plus 50 p.c. as has been done in the case of wheat this year, the purchasing power of small and marginal farmers can be improved. Universalisation of the PDS is an idea whose time has come, since there are adequate grain stocks.

With such a holistic approach chronic, hidden and transient hunger can be addressed in a cost effective and meaningful manner. To provide political oversight and to foster a past political approach in matters relating to food security the NCF recommended the establishment of a National Food Security and sovereignty board under the chairmanship of prime Minister and with member drawn from different political parties, union Ministers and Chief

Ministers. Such a political support and oversight body should become an integral part of the legislation.

The NREGA came into force in 2006 now covers all of our rural India. It has generated over 450 cr person days of employment, a major share going to women and SC and ST families. Over Rs 35,000/- cr has been paid as wages. The properties of the work to be undertaken include watershed management and conservation drought proofing, flood protection, land development, minor irrigation and rural connectivity. Such work is important to strengthen the ecological security programme. A major weakness has been the absence of effective technical guidance and support from agricultural and rural development institutions. The union Ministry of Rural development has taken steps to achieve convergence of brain or brawn, by enlisting the support of ministries and Departments. Such convergence of expertise for sustainable development will help to enhance farm productivity without causing ecological harm.

What is now needed is a convergence for human development at NREGA sites. India occupied the 132<sup>nd</sup> position among 179 countries in the UNDP's Human Development Index. That position may worsen. NREGA workers represent some of the most economically and socially underprivileged sections. Mostly, these workers are undernourished with poor opportunities for health care. Hence there is need to bring about a convergence of child care, nutrition health (rural Health Mission) and education program at NREGA sites. Education can be imparted in the evenings using the joyful learning techniques available in computer aided literacy programs. Such convergence in sustainable development along with convergence in human development will be creditable.

There is also a need to raise the self esteem of NREGA workers, making them feel proud the fact that they are engaged in checking eco-destruction. Due recognition could be given to the NREGA groups that have



done outstanding work in water harvesting, watershed development and soil health care with “Environment Savior Awards” this will help spread awareness of the critical role NREGA workers play. To begin with there could be 10 awards covering distinct agro. Climatic zones each worth 10 lakhs. Since these will be group awards, the money could be divided among the workers depending on how long they have worked. The NREGA will then help to improve both food security and human development index. There are uncommon opportunities to erase India’s image as the land of the poor, hungry and illiterate. To utilize an important requirement is a change in the mind set from patronage to partnership and from undervaluing the human resource to considering our youthful population as our greatest asset.

**Conclusion:**

The Act NREGA gives importance to agriculture, irrigation. Additionally to meet this huge employment demand, after loss of livelihood, it advocates productive use of the forestry sector for livelihood generation. The act attempts to unlock the potential of the rural poor to contribute to the reconstruction of their environment, Vis-à-vis of protection for nine preferred areas to protect from the natural calamities. To achieve this, it has laid emphasis on creation of productive assets in rural areas. Out of nine preferred areas of works under the MGNREGA, Seven focuses on water and soil conservation. The MGNREGA is probably the world’s largest ecological security and food security law which can be successfully strengthened, if the food security act will be converged with this then negative impact of any natural disaster seen in different areas of our country in different times can be successfully tackled for our sustenance of lives, livelihoods, growth and development.

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