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Subject III

Food and Nutrition Security: Accomplishments and Challenges

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The central and state governments implement various developmental programmes to improve availability and accessibility of food to different sections of society. But, the effective reach of benefits from these programmes remains a major concern. In spite of achieving self-sufficiency in food production and implementing large network of public distribution system for supply of subsidised foodgrains, the prevalence of malnourishment and anaemia among children and women has not declined over time. It was supposed that the governance issues related to agricultural and food based interventions need to be discussed to design better strategies for improving the effectiveness of these programmes. Out of 41 papers accepted for discussion, 14 papers were presented in the conference. The participants raised and deliberated various issues following the presentations of different papers. The group had active participation and lively discussion on governance problems of agricultural developmental programmes and food security programmes. The participants also discussed data and methodological issues related to indicators of food and nutritional security. The issues deliberated in the technical session are outlined below.

1. There were concerns expressed on the declining profitability of the cultivation of foodgrains over time. The group opined that researchers should be careful in the use of appropriate costs and prices while computing profitability of crop cultivation. It was also discussed that the minimum support price is an insurance price, which need not to be related to the movement in the wholesale price of commodities. It was stated that rice and wheat markets in India are well integrated and hence recent increase in domestic prices has benefitted the producers.
2. It was discussed that changes in cropping pattern were in line with the changes in the human consumption basket. Therefore, if the adequate level of nutrients can be obtained from the consumption of non-cereals like fruits, vegetables and animal based products, changes in cropping pattern may not be a cause of great concern. This was also supported by the findings, even

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though they were region specific, that nutrient intake was higher for highly crop diversified households than low diversified households in the mountainous state of Jammu and Kashmir. However, care should be taken to ensure the food and nutritional security of poor people in the wake of persistent volatility in the prices of non-cereal items. Further, since cereals still constitute a major source of calorie intake, the existing safety net mechanism like public distribution system needs to be strengthened.

3. Decline in area under coarse cereals (also called as nutri-cereals) is well recognised. However, due to rising health consciousness among consumers, the processed products of these commodities are increasingly being used. Further, group participants expressed that there is also increasing demand for industrial use of these commodities. Therefore, these developments have positive implications for accelerating growth in the production of coarse cereals in the country. However, technological breakthrough to increase the yield and remunerative prices to raise profitability in cultivation are necessary to motivate the farmers to continue to grow these crops.
4. Impact of recently introduced government interventions among others, on improving the production of foodgrains and on revival of overall agricultural growth since 2006-07 is not yet clear. While discussing the contribution of National Food Security Mission (NFSM) on production of pulses in Maharashtra, the group felt that rise in yield of pulses could be attributed to NFSM in conjunction with other favourable factors like normal rainfall. The methodological sophistication is required to separate out the contribution of such interventions to overall agricultural growth and to the production of commodities targeted under the programmes.
5. The current public distribution system in most states in India is distraught with problems of identification of beneficiaries and diversion of foodgrains. Hence, the effectiveness of reach of food subsidy to the poor remains a major concern. In this context, the group discussed that unique identification numbers (Aadhar) issued by the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) holds a promise in better service delivery of the government developmental programmes through effective monitoring and continuous feedback in the decision-making process. The group participants also expressed that the proposed National Food Security Bill will help to improve the efficiency of the public distribution system and may not create additional burden on the foodgrains procurement system.
6. The maintenance of food stocks is essential for the operation of PDS through which foodgrains are distributed to poor people at subsidised rates. The

group participants expressed concerns over inefficiency in the management of food stock due to lack of proper storage system and therefore the maintenance of large stocks is turning out to be very expensive. However, it emerged from a detailed discussion that storage of high food stocks is necessary to mitigate any adverse situation in the country, but it was emphasised that efficiency in the food stock management needs to be improved. The government should also take timely decisions on exports and imports for managing excess procurement or deficit production in the country. Further, it was pointed out that attempts are being made by the government to reduce overall wastage or avoidable loss of various commodities through enhancing scientific storage capacity.

7. The group strongly emphasised that India should maintain a high degree of self-sufficiency in food production. It is for the reason that dependence on the world market to meet domestic foodgrains requirement will be costly because of India's large size of grains requirements, slow decision making process on imports and exports of agricultural products, uncertainties prevailing in the world economy and problems of adverse climatic conditions in the major grain producing countries.