

Social Inclusiveness of National Food Security Bill: Issues and Concerns

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The National Food Security Bill (NFSB) came at a point when nutrition based deprivation of not only poor, but also majority of the marginalised communities, especially the SCs is at peril. The main thrust of the bill is built on the existing ICDS, MDM and PDS programmes, however, the existing macro level data and literature clearly shows that nutrition level of children has not improved much in the last two decades. Especially, under nutrition is high among certain social groups such as SCs and STs. But there is no specific mention in the NFSB on addressing the concerns of the marginalised communities. This paper examines the existing utilisation gaps among SC and ST, using the available NFHS and NSSO data. This paper also studies the caste based discrimination in utilising the ICDS, MDM and PDS programmes and proposes measure to bring in social inclusiveness in the NFSB.

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1. Background

The issue of food security has so much priority concern in India that a bill was made to pass in the parliament in 2013 to ensure food entitlement to its citizens. The concern is relevant for the reason that more than one-fifth of its population was poor in 2011-12. In fact, poverty ratio increases substantially if compared with the international standard of two dollars. In addition to this, about half of the children below six years of age are undernourished with wide variation across states in 2005-06. These alarming figures rationalize the efforts of the then Government in bringing the bill to ensure food security in India (Gulati A. et. al., 2012). The Public Distribution System (PDS) has the major responsibility to supply subsidised food. A number of studies have critically examined the efficiency and efficacy of the same. However, subsidised food supply depends on the production and procurement of the food grains. While looking at the production of the food grains, it is observed that food grain production increased from 196.8 million tonnes to 264.4 million tonnes during 2000-01 to 2013-14 (BE) at the rate of 2 per cent per annum. Even the production of rice and wheat has increased from 85 to 106.3 million tonnes at the rate of 1.82 per cent and 69.7 to 95.8 tonnes at the rate of 2.65 per cent per annum, respectively during the same period (Gol, 2014). Similarly the procurement of cereals has been increasing from 19.3 per cent to 29.8 per cent during 2000-01 to 2012-13 (Sinha, 2013). Since the production and procurement are not the concern for food supply, we are left with the distribution problem and its discussion.

With major changes in the economic policy in 1991, universal PDS has been made target based. The studies have shown a number of problems even related to the