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AGING AND FOOD SECURITY IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

The crucial task of guaranteeing food security holds immense significance for a nation such as India, wherein it is estimated that over one-third of the populace resides below the poverty threshold as defined by the state. As societies age and the number of elderly individuals grows, it becomes increasingly important to address the specific needs and rights of this vulnerable population. One crucial aspect of ensuring the well-being of older adults is recognizing that the right to health includes adequate food security for them. Food security for elders encompasses more than just having access to sustenance. It means ensuring that older adults have consistent access to safe, nutritious, and culturally appropriate food that meets their dietary requirements. Many seniors face unique challenges that may hinder their ability to maintain food security, such as limited mobility, fixed incomes, health issues, and social isolation. Ensuring food security for the elderly is not only a moral imperative but also a practical necessity for several reasons. This paper attempts to study the food security measures required for elderly persons in India.

Keywords: Food security, aging population, right to food, dignity, health care.

Health and Well-being: Proper nutrition is vital for the physical and mental health of older adults. Nutrient-rich diets can help prevent or manage chronic health conditions, boost immunity, and enhance overall well-being, contributing to a higher quality of life in later years. **Independence and Dignity:** Access to adequate food allows older adults to maintain their independence and dignity. When seniors have reliable access to nutritious meals, they can continue living in their own homes and communities, fostering a sense of autonomy and self-sufficiency². **Reduced Healthcare Costs:** By ensuring that older adults have proper nutrition, the risk of malnutrition-related health complications decreases. This can lead to a reduction in healthcare costs associated with hospitalizations, medical treatments, and long-term care services. **Social Inclusion:** Food security programs for elders can serve as platforms for social

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² Jhumki Kundu, Food security to elderly population, Springer link, 2022

interaction, reducing feelings of loneliness and isolation. Meals provided in group settings or through community initiatives can foster a sense of belonging and connectedness among seniors. Human Rights: Recognizing food security as an essential component of the right to health for elders aligns with international human rights principles. Governments and societies have a responsibility to protect and uphold the rights of all individuals, including the elderly. In light of the demographic transition, it is evident that the elderly population within the country is experiencing a notable surge in growth. According to available data, the elderly population in India witnessed a significant increase from 104 million in 2011. Projections indicate that this trend is expected to continue, with estimations suggesting that the elderly population in India will triple to reach 323 million by the year 2050³. It is widely recognised within the scientific community that individuals in advanced age are more susceptible to malnutrition. This susceptibility arises from a combination of physiological and functional alterations that naturally occur as part of the ageing process. Additionally, the lack of sufficient financial resources and limited access to food further exacerbate this issue. The presence of medical concerns, encompassing both communicable and non-communicable diseases, adds a layer of complexity to the situation at hand. The interrelationship between malnutrition and morbidity is characterised by a cyclical pattern, wherein each factor exacerbates the other.

The nutrition and health requirements of the elderly population are frequently overlooked, both within community settings and institutional environments. The focus of many nutritional intervention programmes tends to be primarily on infants, young children, adolescents, and pregnant and lactating mothers, with comparatively less attention given to the elderly population. The implementation of nutritional interventions has the potential to significantly impact the prevention of degenerative conditions within the elderly population, ultimately leading to an enhancement in their overall quality of life⁴.

The fundamental concept of food security, as articulated during the International Conference on Nutrition in 1992, entails the comprehensive availability, accessibility, and affordability of adequate, safe, and nourishing food that caters to the dietary requirements and preferences of individuals, thereby enabling them to lead a healthy and productive life. Food security is a multifaceted concept encompassing various dimensions, such as the availability and

³ International Institute for Population Sciences, The Longitudinal Ageing Study in India, <https://www.iipsindia.ac.in/lasi>

⁴ Longitudinal Ageing Study in India, 2017–18 – Wave 1” is publicly available and can be obtained from <https://g2aging.org/>.

accessibility of food, the equitable distribution of food resources, the stability and reliability of food supply, and the utilisation of food to meet nutritional needs. Various demographic groups, such as women, particularly those who are low-income and pregnant or lactating, individuals affected by conflict, individuals who are ill, migrant workers, low-income urban residents, the elderly population, and children under the age of five, exhibit heightened vulnerability and necessitate specific interventions to safeguard their access to sufficient and nutritious food. The multifaceted nature of factors contributing to an individual's experience of food insecurity necessitates a comprehensive understanding of the underlying causes. Poverty emerges as an unequivocal determinant, as it engenders a dearth of resources necessary for the acquisition or procurement of sustenance. However, it is important to note that poverty is a complex issue with multiple underlying factors that contribute to its existence. The ultimate consequence manifests as a widespread prevalence of food insecurity across the world, primarily stemming from the intricate interplay between poverty and various interconnected socioeconomic and political challenges. India, as a nation, has undertaken a diverse range of initiatives aimed at enhancing food security, setting it apart from other countries. Significant advancements have been achieved in addressing the issue of temporary food insecurity through a strategic focus on enhancing self reliance in food grain production, procurement, and public distribution.

This approach encompasses various initiatives such as food-for-work employment programmes, among others. The concept of food security has undergone a significant transformation, wherein the traditional emphasis on the availability and stability of food has shifted towards a more nuanced focus on household food insecurity. As a result, the evaluation of input metrics, such as energy intake, has given rise to the utilisation of output indicators, including anthropometric measures and clinical manifestations of malnutrition. The Government of India has implemented several initiatives to address the issue of food security among the impoverished population. These initiatives include the Public Distribution System (PDS), Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS), Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY), Annapurna Scheme, Mid-day Meals scheme (MDM), Indian National Food Security Act, 2013 (INFSA), and the Right to Food Act. Each of these programmes serves a crucial role in ensuring that the underprivileged individuals in India have access to an adequate and reliable food supply.

The Indian National Food Security Act, enacted on September 12, 2013, with retrospective effect from July 5, 2013, is a significant legislative measure. Notwithstanding notable

advancements in poverty alleviation, a substantial segment of India's populace continues to grapple with enduring food insecurity. At the national level, the presence of increasing reserves of food grains would suggest a potential resolution to the issue of food insecurity. However, it is important to note that a significant number of individuals in India continue to face the challenge of food insecurity and undernutrition, with estimates reaching into the millions. The primary constraint lies not within the availability of food, but rather within the efficiency and effectiveness of its distribution mechanisms.

THE CONCEPT OF RIGHT TO FOOD

Food is a fundamental right that pertains to the availability, accessibility, and utilisation of food by individuals and communities. It encompasses the ability of people to obtain sufficient, safe, and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and preferences for an active and healthy life. The primary objective of numerous developing nations is to guarantee food security for their respective populations. The Malthusian prognosis of famine, once widely accepted, has been refuted by the application of science and technology. However, it is important to note that many developing countries, including India, still struggle to achieve the desired goal of increasing the supply of food grains to meet the minimum levels required⁵.

The early 1980s witnessed the emergence of various dimensions in the concern for food security. The success of the green revolution has yielded significant advancements in food production and accessibility across numerous nations. Notably, during the 1980s, there was a substantial surge in food availability. Until the early 1970s, the prevailing notion of food security revolved around the assurance of sufficient food grain availability at the national level. The 1974 World Food Conference placed significant emphasis on the stability of food supplies, in addition to their overall availability, as a crucial factor in addressing global food security concerns. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that the Conference exhibited a limited focus on the issue of insufficient effective demand, which is undeniably a significant global concern in the realm of food security. During the 1990s, there was a notable emphasis on addressing not only the issue of food access but also poverty alleviation and the significance of women's involvement in the realm of development. Efforts were undertaken to effectively address the issue of hunger and malnutrition with the aim of complete eradication or substantial reduction

⁵ Anderson, S. A. (1990). Core indicators of nutritional state for difficult-to-sample populations. *The Journal of Nutrition*, 120(suppl_11), 1555–1600.
https://doi.org/10.1093/jn/120.suppl_11.1555

in a timely manner. The evolution of the concept of food security can be observed over a certain period of time. The concept of food security, as initially formulated by the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) in 1983, posits that individuals should have continuous access to sufficient quantities of nutritious food, both in terms of physical availability and economic means. The World Bank has redefined this concept as the provision of sufficient food to ensure an active and healthy life for all individuals, without any restrictions on access. According to research, the fundamental components necessary for sustenance can be identified as the presence of nourishment and the capacity to obtain it⁶.

The concept of food security garnered significant attention and scrutiny in various conferences and high-level meetings organised by the United Nations during the 1990s. The conference on 'Environment and Development', which took place in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 1992, placed significant emphasis on the imperative of guaranteeing food security across all levels, as outlined in Agenda 21. The World Food Summit, convened in 1996, identified the reduction of hunger as a significant objective to be accomplished by 2015. However, it has become evident that attaining this goal poses considerable challenges. The Joint Conference on Nutrition, organised by the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) and the World Trade Organisation (WTO), took place in Rome in 1992. During this conference, a significant declaration was made, emphasising the global community's responsibility to address the pressing issues of hunger and malnutrition. The declaration stated that in a world abundant with knowledge and resources, the persistence of these afflictions is deemed unacceptable. Furthermore, it acknowledged that every individual possesses the fundamental entitlement to access nutritionally adequate and safe food. The World Conference on Human Rights, held in Vienna in 1993, emphasised the imperative of guaranteeing universal access to the fundamental entitlement of the "Right to Food."

The International Conference on Population and Development, which took place in Cairo in 1994, brought attention to the interconnection between population growth and food production. It emphasised the necessity of developing worldwide strategies to meet the continuously increasing demands for food. The World Summit on Social Development, which took place in Copenhagen in 1995, demonstrated a resolute dedication to addressing the issue of hunger by placing a significant emphasis on the eradication of poverty. The Fourth World Conference on

⁶ Arranhado, S. G. (2021). Food insecurity in older adults: much more than food - understanding it before taking action. *MOJ Gerontology & Geriatrics*, 6(1), 32–36. <https://doi.org/10.15406/mojgg.2021.06.0026>

Women, which took place in Beijing in 1995, garnered significant global attention as it shed light on the pivotal role that women play in the realm of food production⁷.

The World Food Summit, convened in Rome in 1996, occurred amidst a backdrop of mounting global apprehension regarding the sluggish growth of food production on a worldwide scale and the concurrent expansion of the global population. This summit served as a catalyst for reinvigorating efforts to address the critical matter of food security, effectively directing attention towards the multifaceted challenges surrounding food-related concerns. The concept of addressing poverty in India by ensuring sufficient calorie consumption was initially put forth by Prof. V. M. Dandekar and N. Rath in the year 1971. Efforts aimed at poverty reduction persisted in the subsequent years through the implementation of diverse targeted and non-targeted programmes by both Central and State Governments. A notable change in policy emphasis occurred with regards to household food security, wherein the measurement of per capita or unit consumer food energy intake was adopted as a key indicator.

In contemporary times, it has become customary to employ a methodological approach wherein the estimation of food insecure households is conducted by means of juxtaposing their calorie consumption against established benchmarks that delineate the requisite dietary norms. Both the Central and State governments have successfully implemented a diverse array of nutrition intervention programmes aimed at attaining food security at the household level. PDS is a government-operated mechanism that facilitates the distribution of essential food items, including food grains and sugar, to the general public. These items are made available at prices that are regulated and set by the authorities. The distribution process takes place through designated fair price shops, which serve as the primary outlets for the provision of these commodities to the consumers. Various food-for-work and wage employment programmes, such as the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Schemes (MGNREGS), have been implemented to address the socio-economic needs of individuals. These programmes involve compensating participants, either partially or entirely, with food grains as a form of payment. Food and nutrition security can be conceptualised as integral components of livelihood security, encompassing fundamental necessities and essential elements for sustenance and survival within households. Food-insecure households are faced with the

⁷ Bengle, R., Sinnett, S., Johnson, T., Johnson, M. A., Brown, A., & Lee, J. S. (2010). Food insecurity is associated with cost-related medication non-adherence in community-dwelling, low-income older adults in Georgia. *Journal of Nutrition for the Elderly*, 29(2), 170–191. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01639361003772400>

complex task of managing various demands, encompassing both immediate consumption needs and the necessity to ensure future food production capabilities. Livelihood security, or the assurance of having access to sufficient means of subsistence, emerges as a viable approach to address the aforementioned issue. The three aforementioned actions, namely livelihood promotion, livelihood protection, and livelihood provisioning, are of paramount importance in the facilitation of sustainable livelihoods and, consequently, the attainment of food security. Another potential strategy for addressing food security involves the direct targeting of women and children. The implementation of mid-day meal programmes targeting school-going children and the provision of supplementary nutrition for children and women are key strategies employed to address this issue. As previously indicated, the notion of food security has experienced significant transformations in recent times⁸. The reliability of food security was traditionally assessed through the availability and stable supply of food, a perspective that held significant importance in the food policies of developing nations until the 1970s. During this period, achieving self-sufficiency in food production was a primary objective. Despite India's successful efforts in achieving self-sufficiency through enhanced food production and improved resilience to annual output fluctuations, the persistent issue of chronic household food insecurity remains unresolved. The need for a different strategy prompted a shift in perspective, leading to a renewed emphasis on evaluating food security through the lens of household-level food energy intake. This approach is currently recognised as the prevailing method for assessing food security.

RIGHT TO FOOD - A FUNDAMENTAL RIGHT

The right to food is a fundamental human right and an essential component of the right to life guaranteed by Article 21 of the Indian Constitution. It recognizes every citizen's right to be free from hunger and malnutrition. The Constitution of India, through various provisions and judicial interpretations, strives to ensure that adequate and nutritious food is accessible to all its citizens. The Article 21 which provides for Right to Life has been interpreted by the judiciary to include the right to food in the case of People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL) vs. Union of India⁹. The Supreme Court has held that the right to life includes the right to live with human dignity, and access to adequate food is a vital aspect of a dignified life. Even the Directive Principles of State Policy particularly Article 47, emphasize the state's duty to raise

⁸ Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment, Schemes for The Welfare of Senior Citizens Posted On: 16 MAR 2022 2:03PM by PIB Delhi <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1806506>

⁹ AIR 1997 SC 568 85

the level of nutrition and the standard of living of its citizens and improve public health. Article 39(a) also directs the state to secure the right to an adequate means of livelihood. The national and global events and issues that have significantly influenced the discourse on food security in the last two decades were

- (i) Economic liberalization in the 1990s and its impact on agriculture and food security: During the 1990s, many countries, especially developing nations, embraced economic liberalization policies, which aimed to open up markets, promote free trade, and attract foreign investments. However, these policies had varying effects on agriculture and food security. While some regions experienced growth and increased agricultural productivity, others faced challenges due to market fluctuations, uneven development, and competition from imports, impacting the availability and affordability of food for vulnerable populations.
- (ii) Establishment of the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the Agreement on Agriculture (AoA): The formation of the WTO in 1995 introduced global trade rules, including the Agreement on Agriculture (AoA). The AoA aimed to liberalize agricultural trade, but its implementation had mixed consequences for food security. Developing countries expressed concerns about the impact of trade liberalization on their domestic agricultural sectors and food security, as they faced difficulties in competing with heavily subsidized agricultural products from developed countries.
- (iii) Challenges posed by climate change and the crises of the three Fs: The growing challenges of climate change, along with the crises of food prices, fuel prices, and financial instability, have had significant implications for food security. Climate change-related events, such as extreme weather patterns and natural disasters, have disrupted food production and supply chains. Meanwhile, fluctuations in food and fuel prices, combined with financial crises, have made it difficult for vulnerable populations to access and afford adequate nutrition.
- (iv) The phenomenon of hunger amidst plenty: Paradoxically, in some regions, there have been instances of food surplus coexisting with high levels of poverty and hunger. This phenomenon was observed in the early years of the decade, where food stocks were accumulated, but large segments of the population still suffered from food insecurity and poverty in 2008-09¹⁰.

¹⁰ Gro Harlem Brundtland, *Fifty Years of Synergy between Health and Rights, Health and Human Rights*, Vol. 3, No. 2, Fiftieth Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1998), pp. 21-25, The President and Fellows of Harvard College, on behalf of Harvard School of Public Health/François-Xavier Bagnoud Center for Health, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4065295>.

- (v) Introduction of targeted beneficiaries in the Public Distribution System (PDS): In the 1990s, many countries, including India, introduced the concept of targeted beneficiaries in the Public Distribution System (PDS). This approach aimed to focus food subsidies on the most vulnerable sections of the population. However, it also brought challenges in identifying and reaching the intended beneficiaries effectively.
- (vi) The 'Right to Food' campaign and the Supreme Court's orders on mid-day meal schemes: The 'Right to Food' campaign gained prominence as a civil society movement advocating for improved food security in the country. Alongside this, the Indian Supreme Court issued orders to implement mid-day meal schemes in schools, which aimed to address child malnutrition and increase access to nutritious food for school-going children.
- (vii) Proposal for a National Food Security Law (Right to Food): To address food security comprehensively, there were proposals to enact a National Food Security Law (Right to Food) in India. This proposed legislation sought to provide a legal framework to ensure the availability of food at affordable prices to all citizens, particularly the most vulnerable sections of society.
- (viii) Monitorable targets under the Tenth and Eleventh Five Year Plans similar to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs): Similar to the global Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the Tenth and Eleventh Five Year Plans in India included specific and measurable targets related to poverty reduction and improvements in women and child nutrition. These goals aimed to focus efforts on enhancing food security and nutrition outcomes.

The aforementioned advancements have given rise to a multitude of possibilities as well as obstacles in relation to the sustenance and nutritional well-being of the nation. The multifaceted nature of the food security issue has been widely acknowledged, encompassing various dimensions that surpass the realms of food production, availability, and demand. The recognition and consideration of diverse viewpoints have precipitated a transformative shift in the understanding of food security, prompting a re-evaluation of its focal points. This evolution has seen a departure from a primary focus on the availability and stability of food supply, towards a greater emphasis on the issue of household food insecurity. Consequently, the evaluation of input variables, such as energy intake, has paved the way for a more outcome focused methodology that incorporates output indicators, such as anthropometric measures and clinical manifestations of malnutrition.

THE ELDERLY POPULATION AND THEIR RIGHT TO FOOD

As the global population continues to age, there is a growing concern regarding the ability of older individuals to access and maintain adequate nutrition. Food security is one of the most pivotal demographic trends that warrants significant attention is the phenomenon of ageing. This trend signifies a gradual rise in the proportion of elderly individuals within the population of a given country or region as time progresses. In the context of the developed world, it is noteworthy to observe that the phenomenon of ageing has commenced at an earlier stage due to notable shifts in both fertility and mortality patterns. In contrast, it is worth noting that in developing countries, particularly in India, the phenomenon known as the 'demographic dividend' will remain a dominant force in shaping demographics for the foreseeable future. However, it is important to acknowledge that the process of population ageing has already commenced in these regions and has yet to receive adequate attention. The impending change is poised to have a discernible effect on fiscal policies, as the process of ageing carries significant economic ramifications in various domains. These include labour supply, consumption patterns, investments, cross-border capital flows, fiscal balances, and private saving. It is widely acknowledged among researchers that the process of ageing has a significant impact on various aspects of economic performance, including output growth, employment rates, and overall economic welfare. The observed phenomenon of an increasing dependency ratio suggests a corresponding rise in the proportion of elderly individuals within the overall population relative to the working-age population. As a result, it can be inferred that the long term sustainability of the economy in supporting the elderly population would diminish. In nations where the provisions for public pension expand, there is a corresponding decrease in the necessity for private savings, investment, and wealth accumulation. The observed trend has significant implications, namely the exacerbation of fiscal pressures due to the necessity of increased government expenditure on social security, healthcare, and various welfare programmes specifically designed for the elderly population. The declining proportion of the productive labour force in the population would result in a concomitant decrease in tax collection. Hence, it is imperative that Indian policymakers take into account the need for adequate preparations to address the escalating pensionary burden resulting from the upward trend in life expectancy¹¹. The elderly population in India is experiencing a significant increase in numbers at an accelerated rate. According to estimates from 2011, the population was

¹¹ FAO, Ifad, & WFP. (2015). The State of Food Insecurity in the World 2015.

recorded at approximately 104 million individuals. Projections indicate that this figure is expected to increase significantly, reaching a projected population of 200 million by the year 2030. According to our research findings, it is projected that the proportion of elderly individuals within the overall population will experience a notable rise from 8.6 percent in 2011 to 12.4 percent in 2026. The socio-economic profile of the ageing population will undeniably impact their overall quality of life. The present state of India's elderly population, however, indicates that a significant proportion of individuals within this demographic encounter various forms of deprivation. According to Prasad (2011), there exists variation in the nature and extent of deprivation across different states, sectors, and gender. In the majority of instances, it has been observed that women tend to experience greater levels of disadvantage in comparison to men across various domains, such as education, participation in paid employment, access to resources, and autonomy. This phenomenon renders them increasingly susceptible to potential risks or harm. Moreover, it has been observed that females exhibit a tendency to experience a longer lifespan compared to males. This disparity in life expectancy between genders is accompanied by distinct healthcare requirements, thereby influencing their economic standing within the household unit they reside in. The phenomenon persists wherein elderly women maintain a state of reliance upon the male individuals within their familial units. The phenomenon of social isolation and loneliness has been observed to be commonly experienced among individuals in their advanced years. In the Indian context, it has been a longstanding cultural norm to uphold reverence and provide support to the elderly within familial structures. However, it is worth noting that this paradigm Meeting the 2015 international hunger targets: taking stock of uneven progress is undergoing a transformation in recent times. The disintegration of the joint family system is observed as a consequence of economic growth and the subsequent social transformation. One notable outcome resulting from this alteration is the heightened seclusion experienced by the elderly population, particularly in urban areas of India, as observed by Dak and Sharma in their study conducted in 1987¹². As the average human lifespan continues to extend, policymakers are faced with the imperative task of ensuring that the elderly population, who now have a longer life expectancy, are able to maintain a sense of security, dignity, and productivity throughout their extended years. The Integrated Programme for Older Persons (IPOP) was established in 1992 with the primary aim of enhancing the overall well-being of elderly individuals. This initiative focuses on addressing their fundamental needs, including housing, nutrition, healthcare, and recreational activities, in order to enhance their

¹² Giridhar, G., Sathyanarayana, K. M., Kumar, S., James, K. S., & Alam, M. Population ageing in India. Cambridge University Press (2014).

quality of life. The National Policy on Older Persons (NPOP) was officially declared in January 1999 with the primary objective of reiterating the government's unwavering dedication to safeguarding the overall welfare of the elderly population. The policy outlines a comprehensive approach to address the needs of older individuals, encompassing various aspects such as financial and food security, healthcare, shelter, and other essential requirements. It aims to provide government assistance in these areas, ensuring the well-being and enhancing the overall quality of life for older persons. Additionally, the policy emphasises the provision of necessary services that can contribute to the improvement of their lives¹³. The draught National Policy for Senior Citizens comprehensively addresses a range of critical areas, including housing, productive ageing, multigenerational bonding, healthcare, and various other schemes. The finalisation and adoption of the aforementioned matter by the government are still pending. The Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007, is a legislative measure that imposes a set of responsibilities and obligations upon the heirs with regards to the provision of care and support to the elderly population. An inter ministerial committee on older persons has been established to specifically address the various issues related to the process of ageing. Several government ministries, including the Railways, Rural Development, and Finance, have implemented specific policies aimed at providing special concessions to the elderly population. Furthermore, it is worth noting that a number of financial initiatives implemented by the government with the aim of providing support to the elderly population have primarily targeted households classified as Below Poverty Line (BPL).

THE NATIONAL FOOD SECURITY ACT, 2013

The National Food Security Act, 2013, commonly referred to as the Right to Food Act, is a crucial piece of legislation enacted by the Indian Parliament to ensure food security for the population of India. The Act aims to provide subsidized food grains to a significant portion of the country's population, which constitutes around two-thirds of its vast population of 1.33 billion people. To achieve food security in India, the Act employs three main instruments within the food management system and food pricing policy: Public Distribution System (PDS): The Public Distribution System is a nationwide network that plays a vital role in the distribution of essential food grains to the eligible population at affordable prices. Under the National Food Security Act, the PDS is intended to reach eligible beneficiaries, which include priority households and Antyodaya Anna Yojana households, among others. These eligible

¹³ Giridhar, G., Sathyanarayana, K. M., Kumar, S., James, K. S., & Alam, M. Population ageing in India. Cambridge University Press (2014).

households are entitled to receive specific quantities of food grains (such as rice, wheat, and coarse grains) at subsidized rates through Fair Price Shops (FPS) or ration shops. The PDS ensures that food reaches vulnerable sections of society, such as those living below the poverty line, and helps prevent hunger and malnutrition. Buffer Stock Maintenance: Buffer stock maintenance is a strategic measure employed by the government to ensure the availability of food grains during periods of low production or emergencies. Under this mechanism, the government procures food grains from farmers at the Minimum Support Price (MSP) to build up reserves or buffer stocks. These stocks act as a cushion to stabilize food prices in the market and prevent extreme price fluctuations during times of shortages or crises. In times of food scarcity, the government can release food grains from the buffer stock to meet the increased demand and ensure that essential food items are available at reasonable prices. Minimum Support Pricing (MSP) for Purchases: The Minimum Support Price (MSP) is the minimum price at which the government agrees to purchase certain agricultural commodities from farmers. The MSP is set by the government based on the recommendations of the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP). By providing MSP, the government aims to support farmers and ensure that they receive a fair price for their produce. This also incentivizes farmers to produce adequate quantities of essential food grains, thereby promoting food security in the country.

CONCLUSION

It is pertinent to note that more than 70% of the Indian elderly live in rural areas. The lack of awareness bars poor elders from benefiting from the government schemes and policies. Therefore, the responsibility is imposed on the local governments to give 10kg free food grains per person per month for those who have no other options such as pensions under the National social assistance program. It also provides for monthly financial assistance to elders. There are even ration shops giving dal, rice, sugar, oil for minimum price.

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