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"ENSURING FOOD SECURITY IN INDIA: CHALLENGES, POLICIES, AND THE WAY FORWARD"

AUTHORED BY – SONAM & SANSKRITI RANA

ABSTRACT

Food security has been a pressing concern in India, where a significant portion of the population struggles with hunger and malnutrition. The enactment of the National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013, represents a legislative effort to address these challenges by providing subsidized food grains to approximately two-thirds of the population. The law seeks to ensure access to adequate nutrition, particularly for marginalized communities, by legally entitling beneficiaries to food under the Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS), Mid-Day Meal Scheme, and Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS). The Act also recognizes maternity benefits and nutritional support for pregnant and lactating women. Despite its ambitious scope, the implementation of the NFSA faces several challenges, including inefficiencies in food distribution, leakages in the supply chain, and inadequate infrastructure. Additionally, concerns regarding financial sustainability and state-level variations in execution impact the law's effectiveness. Nevertheless, the NFSA remains a landmark step in India's fight against hunger, aiming to transform food security from a policy aspiration into a legal right. Strengthening the implementation framework through improved logistics, technology-driven monitoring, and community participation can enhance its efficacy. The law represents a shift towards a rights-based approach to food security, reinforcing the government's commitment to eradicating hunger and malnutrition. As India progresses toward achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 2 (Zero Hunger), the NFSA serves as a crucial instrument in ensuring food justice and social welfare.

Keywords: Food security, National Food Security Act, hunger, malnutrition, public distribution system, nutrition policy, India.

INTRODUCTION

Food security is a fundamental human right and a critical component of national development. In a country like India, where hunger and malnutrition persist despite economic growth, ensuring access to adequate food has been a key policy concern. The concept of food security extends beyond mere availability of food to encompass accessibility, affordability, and nutritional adequacy. The World Food Summit of 1996¹ defined food security as a condition where "all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life." Given India's vast population and socio-economic disparities, achieving comprehensive food security remains a formidable challenge. Recognizing the urgency of addressing hunger, the Indian government introduced the National Food Security Act (NFSA) in 2013. This legislation aims to provide subsidized food grains to approximately 67% of the population, including 75% of rural households and 50% of urban households, through the Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS).² The Act also incorporates key welfare schemes such as the Mid-Day Meal Scheme (MDMS) for school children and the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) for pregnant and lactating women, infants, and young children. By making food security a legal entitlement, the NFSA represents a shift from a welfare-based approach to a rights-based framework, reinforcing the state's obligation to ensure food and nutrition for all. A significant portion of India's population depends on agriculture for employment, yet farmers themselves often suffer from food insecurity due to erratic monsoons, declining soil fertility, and market fluctuations. The NFSA, while addressing immediate concerns of hunger, does not sufficiently tackle the long-term sustainability of food production. This raises concerns about whether food security can be maintained without parallel reforms in agriculture, rural employment, and climate resilience. Despite its challenges, the NFSA remains one of the most ambitious food security programs in the world. It aligns with India's commitment to international frameworks such as the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)³, particularly Goal 2, which aims to end hunger, achieve food security, and improve nutrition by 2030. The law also builds upon India's past experiences with food distribution schemes, attempting to create a more robust and legally enforceable system. However, the effectiveness of the Act depends on

¹ Shaw, D. J. (2007). World food summit, 1996. In *World food security: A history since 1945* (pp. 347-360). London: Palgrave Macmillan UK.

² Vir, S. C. Public Distribution System: Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS) and the National Food Security Act (NFSA). In *Child, Adolescent and Woman Nutrition in India* (pp. 623-664). Routledge.

³ Bexell, M., & Jönsson, K. (2017, January). Responsibility and the United Nations' sustainable development goals. In *Forum for development studies* (Vol. 44, No. 1, pp. 13-29). Routledge.

continuous policy reforms, better implementation strategies, and technological interventions such as biometric authentication and digital tracking to prevent leakages. This research paper examines the impact of the NFSA on food security in India, analyzing its effectiveness, challenges, and potential improvements. It explores the historical context of food security policies in India, evaluates the law's implementation at the state and national levels, and discusses alternative strategies to enhance food distribution and nutritional outcomes. By critically assessing the strengths and limitations of the NFSA, this study aims to contribute to the broader discourse on food security and social welfare in India.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Food security has been a longstanding concern in India, shaped by the country's colonial past, post-independence policies, and evolving economic strategies. Historically, food shortages and famines were recurrent issues during British rule, with some of the most devastating famines, such as the Bengal Famine of 1943, causing mass starvation. The colonial administration's policies, including exploitative land revenue systems and inadequate relief measures, exacerbated food insecurity, leaving millions vulnerable to hunger and malnutrition. After gaining independence in 1947, India faced severe food scarcity due to low agricultural productivity, population growth, and inadequate infrastructure. The government took immediate steps to address these issues through a combination of policy measures. In the 1950s and 1960s, food shortages prompted the introduction of rationing systems and food imports under the Public Distribution System (PDS). However, reliance on food imports, particularly under the PL-480 program with the United States, highlighted India's vulnerability and the need for self-sufficiency in food production. The Green Revolution of the late 1960s marked a turning point in India's food security efforts.⁴ With the introduction of high-yield variety (HYV) seeds⁵, chemical fertilizers, and modern irrigation techniques, agricultural productivity increased significantly. As a result, India transformed from a food-deficient country to a self-sufficient one, reducing dependence on imports and stabilizing food availability. The Green Revolution, however, also led to regional disparities, environmental concerns, and a focus on cereal production at the expense of nutritional diversity.

⁴ Subramanian, K. (2015). *Revisiting the Green Revolution: Irrigation and food production in twentieth-century India* (Doctoral dissertation, King's College London).

⁵ Prabhakar, A. C., & Brar, G. P. (2024). Green Revolution, Agricultural Performance with Sustainability and Bio-diversity: Special Reference to India. *International Journal of Economic Performance*, 7(1), 281-318.

Despite increased food production, food insecurity persisted due to unequal distribution and poverty. The PDS, initially a universal program, was restructured in 1997 into the Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS) to provide subsidized food grains to below-poverty-line households. However, inefficiencies, corruption, and leakages in the system limited its effectiveness. Recognizing the need for a more structured approach, the government introduced various nutrition-based schemes, including the Mid-Day Meal Scheme (MDMS) in 1995⁶ and the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) in 1975⁷, aimed at improving child nutrition and maternal health. The growing demand for a rights-based approach to food security led to the enactment of the National Food Security Act (NFSA) in 2013. Drawing from existing welfare schemes, the NFSA sought to provide legal entitlements to food and nutrition, ensuring broader coverage and accountability. This legislation represents a culmination of decades of policy evolution, reflecting India's commitment to addressing hunger and malnutrition through legislative action.

FOOD SECURITY AS BASIC HUMAN RIGHT

Food security is not merely a policy objective but a fundamental human right essential for dignity, survival, and overall well-being. The right to food is enshrined in various international human rights instruments, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) of 1948⁸, which recognizes the right to an adequate standard of living, including food. Similarly, the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) of 1966 explicitly acknowledges the right to adequate food and obligates governments to take necessary steps to ensure food security for their populations.⁹ As a signatory to these international agreements, India has a legal and moral responsibility to guarantee access to adequate food for all its citizens. The right to food is inextricably linked to the broader concept of human rights, including the right to life, health, and equality. In India, the Constitution does not explicitly mention food security as a fundamental right, but Article 21 guarantees the right to life, which has been interpreted by the judiciary to include the right to live with dignity. The Supreme Court of India, in several landmark judgments, has reinforced the right to food as an essential aspect of the right to life. For example, in the *People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL) v.*

⁶ Sahai, C. S. (2014). Mid-day meal scheme: Achievements and challenges. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention*, 3(10), 6-9.

⁷ Kapil, U. (2002). Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) scheme: a program for holistic development of children in India. *The Indian Journal of Pediatrics*, 69, 597-601.

⁸ Assembly, U. G. (1948). Universal declaration of human rights. *UN General Assembly*, 302(2), 14-25.

⁹ Ferguson, R. (2017). The Human Right to Adequate Food and Corresponding Obligations. In *The Right to Food and the World Trade Organization's Rules on Agriculture* (pp. 98-138). Brill Nijhoff.

Union of India case (2001), the Supreme Court directed the government to ensure that food grains meant for welfare schemes reach the intended beneficiaries, emphasizing the state's obligation to prevent hunger and starvation. Recognizing food security as a legal right, rather than a discretionary welfare measure, is a critical step toward ensuring accountability and long-term policy commitment. The enactment of the National Food Security Act (NFSA) in 2013 was a landmark move in this direction. The NFSA provides legal entitlements to food and nutrition for a significant portion of the population, making access to subsidized food grains a justiciable right. By including provisions for the Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS), Mid-Day Meal Scheme (MDMS), and Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS),¹⁰ the Act aims to provide food security to vulnerable sections of society, including children, pregnant and lactating women, and low-income households. However, despite these legal safeguards, millions in India continue to suffer from food insecurity and malnutrition. According to the Global Hunger Index (GHI), India ranks poorly in terms of child wasting, stunting, and undernourishment. The persistence of hunger in a country that produces surplus food highlights systemic failures in food distribution, economic inequality, and governance inefficiencies. While the NFSA guarantees food access, its effectiveness is hindered by corruption, leakages in the supply chain, and exclusion errors in beneficiary identification. Ensuring food security as a fundamental right requires robust implementation mechanisms, better monitoring systems, and grievance redressal frameworks to prevent violations of this right. Furthermore, food security is not just about food availability but also about nutrition and sustainability. The right to food must include access to diverse, safe, and nutritious food that meets dietary needs. India's heavy reliance on cereals due to the Green Revolution has led to deficiencies in essential nutrients such as proteins, vitamins, and minerals. Addressing food security from a rights-based perspective necessitates policies that promote agricultural diversity, improve rural livelihoods, and integrate nutritional awareness into food programs. Climate change also poses a significant challenge to food security. Erratic weather patterns, soil degradation, and water shortages threaten agricultural production, disproportionately affecting small farmers and marginalized communities. Protecting the right to food requires long-term strategies that ensure resilience against climate shocks, such as sustainable farming practices, climate-adaptive crops, and improved storage infrastructure. In conclusion, food security is a basic human right that must be protected through legal frameworks, effective governance, and sustainable policies. The NFSA represents a significant step in recognizing this right, but its success depends on

¹⁰ Kapil, U. (2002). Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) scheme: a program for holistic development of children in India. *The Indian Journal of Pediatrics*, 69, 597-601.

overcoming implementation challenges and addressing broader issues of poverty, inequality, and agricultural sustainability. As India moves forward, a stronger commitment to ensuring food justice, backed by accountability and policy innovation, is essential to upholding the fundamental right to food for all.

CONSTITUTIONAL PERSPECTIVE

Food security, as a fundamental human right, finds implicit recognition within the constitutional framework of India. Although the Indian Constitution does not explicitly mention the right to food as a fundamental right, it has been interpreted by the judiciary as an essential part of the **right to life under Article 21**. Additionally, **Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSP)** provide a strong foundation for state obligations toward ensuring food security, nutrition, and social welfare. Through various landmark judgments, the Supreme Court of India has reinforced the right to food as a constitutional entitlement, compelling the government to take proactive measures against hunger and malnutrition.

1. Right to Life (Article 21) and Judicial Interpretation

Article 21 of the Constitution of India states: *"No person shall be deprived of his life or personal liberty except according to the procedure established by law."* The Supreme Court has interpreted this provision broadly, expanding its scope to include the right to live with dignity, which encompasses access to food, nutrition, and freedom from hunger. A significant case in this regard is **People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL) v. Union of India (2001)** (Writ Petition (Civil) No. 196 of 2001). In this landmark public interest litigation (PIL), the petitioners argued that despite India having surplus food grains, millions were suffering from hunger and starvation due to government inefficiency. The Supreme Court ruled that the right to food is inherent in **Article 21** and directed the government to properly implement food-related schemes such as the Public Distribution System (PDS), Mid-Day Meal Scheme (MDMS), and Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS). This case played a crucial role in shaping India's food security policies and led to the eventual enactment of the **National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013**.

2. Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSP) and State Obligation

Although **DPSPs are not enforceable by law**, they serve as guiding principles for governance, emphasizing the state's duty to ensure social justice and economic welfare. Several articles in **Part IV of the Constitution** emphasize food security and nutrition¹¹:

¹¹ Ayala, A., & Meier, B. M. (2017). A human rights approach to the health implications of food and nutrition insecurity. *Public Health Reviews*, 38, 1-22.

- **Article 39(a):** Directs the state to ensure that citizens have an adequate means of livelihood.
- **Article 39(e) & (f):** Mandates the state to protect the health and well-being of workers and children.
- **Article 41:** Calls upon the state to secure the right to work, education, and public assistance, which indirectly relates to food security.
- **Article 47:** Explicitly directs the state to **raise the level of nutrition and improve public health**, making it a constitutional obligation to ensure food availability and nutritional well-being.

These provisions reflect the constitutional commitment to eradicating hunger and ensuring the well-being of citizens through legislative and policy measures.

3. National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013 – A Constitutional Perspective

The enactment of the **National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013**, was a significant legislative step to transform food security into a legally enforceable right. The NFSA aligns with constitutional principles by ensuring access to subsidized food grains for **67% of India's population**. It provides entitlements under the **Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS)**¹² and guarantees food and nutrition support to vulnerable groups, including children and pregnant women. The NFSA strengthens **Article 21** by making food security a legal right and reinforcing **Article 47**, which directs the state to improve public health and nutrition. The Act also integrates pre-existing food security schemes such as the **Mid-Day Meal Scheme (MDMS)** and **Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS)** into a rights-based framework.¹³

4. Supreme Court Directives on Food Security

Apart from the **PUCL case (2001)**, other significant cases have reinforced the constitutional obligation toward food security:

- **Chameli Singh v. State of Uttar Pradesh (1996) [AIR 1996 SC 1051]:** The Supreme Court held that the right to shelter includes the right to food and clean water, as these are essential for a life of dignity under **Article 21**.
- **Francis Coralie Mullin v. The Administrator, Union Territory of Delhi (1981) [AIR 1981 SC 746]:** The Court emphasized that the right to life includes the right to live with dignity, which extends to adequate nutrition and basic necessities.

¹² Spicer, J. (2021). *Feeding the people: deliberative democracy and the politics of India's national food security policy* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Sussex).

¹³ Kumar, S. S. (2018). *Prof. Dr. Regina Birner* (Doctoral dissertation, Universität Hohenheim).

These judicial precedents underscore the evolving interpretation of the **right to life**, linking it to the right to food and nutrition.

5. Fundamental Rights vs. DPSP – The Balance of Justiciability

A key debate in constitutional law is the **enforceability of fundamental rights versus directive principles**. While **fundamental rights (Part III)** are legally enforceable, **DPSPs (Part IV)** are not. However, courts have increasingly used DPSPs to interpret and expand fundamental rights. The **right to food**, though not explicitly mentioned in **Part III**, has been read into **Article 21** through judicial activism.

The **PUCL case (2001)** is a prime example where the Court bridged the gap between **DPSPs and enforceable rights**, compelling the government to implement welfare schemes as a constitutional obligation. This approach strengthens **Article 47**, making state responsibility toward food security more accountable.

6. Challenges in Implementing the Right to Food

Despite a strong constitutional and legal framework, several challenges hinder effective food security implementation in India:

- **Leakages in the Public Distribution System (PDS):** Corruption and inefficiencies result in the diversion of food grains, preventing intended beneficiaries from accessing their entitlements.
- **Exclusion Errors:** Many eligible households are left out due to flaws in the identification process under the Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS).
- **State-Level Variations:** Implementation of food security laws varies across states, leading to inconsistencies in coverage and impact.
- **Nutritional Security vs. Caloric Security:** While the NFSA ensures access to food grains, it does not fully address the issue of balanced nutrition. High levels of malnutrition persist despite food availability.¹⁴

THE NATIONAL FOOD SECURITY ACT 2013

The **National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013**, also known as the **Right to Food Act**, is one of India's most ambitious social welfare legislations aimed at ensuring food security for a significant portion of the population. The Act provides legal entitlements to subsidized food grains, covering approximately **67% of India's population—75% in rural areas and 50% in urban areas**. Enacted to address widespread hunger and malnutrition, the NFSA represents

¹⁴ Saini, S., & Gulati, A. (2015). *The National Food Security Act (NFSA) 2013: Challenges, buffer stocking and the way forward* (No. 297). Working Paper.

a shift from a welfare-based approach to a **rights-based framework**¹⁵, making food security a legally enforceable obligation of the state.

1. Objectives of the NFSA

The primary objective of the NFSA is to ensure that every citizen has access to **adequate, nutritious, and affordable food**. The Act seeks to:

- **Guarantee food security as a legal right**, reinforcing the right to life under **Article 21 of the Constitution**.
- **Eliminate hunger and malnutrition**, particularly among vulnerable groups such as women, children, and economically disadvantaged families.
- **Provide a structured and transparent food distribution system**, reducing corruption and inefficiencies in the Public Distribution System (PDS).¹⁶
- **Ensure food security for future generations** by integrating various government nutrition and welfare schemes into a single legal framework.

2. Key Features of the NFSA

The NFSA provides a multi-tier approach to food security through **three major entitlements**:

A. Public Distribution System (PDS) and Subsidized Food Grains

- Under the NFSA, **75% of rural and 50% of urban populations** are entitled to subsidized food grains through the **Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS)**.
- Identified households receive **5 kg of food grains per person per month** at the following subsidized rates:
 - **Rice** – ₹3 per kg
 - **Wheat** – ₹2 per kg
 - **Coarse grains** – ₹1 per kg
- The Act recognizes **Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY)** households, comprising the poorest of the poor, who are entitled to **35 kg of food grains per household per month**.

B. Nutritional Support for Women and Children

The NFSA integrates and strengthens existing welfare programs to provide additional nutrition support:

- **Mid-Day Meal Scheme (MDMS)**: Provides free cooked meals to **school-going children (6-14 years)** in government and government-aided schools.¹⁷

¹⁵ Sandhu, A. (2014). National Food Security Act, 2013 and food security outcomes in India. *Vision*, 18(4), 365-370.

¹⁶ George, N. A., & McKay, F. H. (2019). The public distribution system and food security in India. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 16(17), 3221.

¹⁷ Sharma, R. (2015). Mid-day meal scheme in India: the road ahead. *Dev Country Stud*, 5(11).

- **Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS):** Ensures supplementary nutrition for **children under six years of age**, pregnant women, and lactating mothers through Anganwadi centers.
- **Maternity Benefit of ₹6,000:** Pregnant and lactating mothers receive financial assistance under the **Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY)** for improved maternal health and nutrition.

C. Food Security Allowance

- In case of non-supply of food grains, beneficiaries are entitled to **compensation in the form of food security allowance** to ensure they do not suffer due to supply chain failures.

3. Implementation and Challenges of the NFSA

While the NFSA aims to address hunger and malnutrition, its implementation has faced multiple **challenges**, including inefficiencies in food distribution, corruption, and exclusion errors.

A. Leakages in the Public Distribution System (PDS)

One of the biggest challenges is **corruption and diversion of food grains** meant for beneficiaries. Studies have shown that a **significant percentage of food grains** do not reach the intended recipients due to middlemen and black-market activities.

B. Identification of Beneficiaries

- The NFSA uses **Socio-Economic Caste Census (SECC) data** to identify eligible households, but errors in classification often lead to **exclusion of deserving families and inclusion of ineligible beneficiaries**.¹⁸
- Many poor households, particularly migrants and informal workers, lack proper documentation to avail of their entitlements.

C. State-Level Variations

- The **implementation of the NFSA varies across states**, leading to disparities in food security. While states like **Tamil Nadu and Chhattisgarh** have efficiently implemented the Act, others struggle with delays and inefficiencies.¹⁹
- Some states have introduced additional measures, such as **universal PDS in Tamil Nadu and digital ration cards in West Bengal**, to improve access.

D. Storage and Distribution Infrastructure

¹⁸ Vir, S. C. Public Distribution System: Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS) and the National Food Security Act (NFSA). In *Child, Adolescent and Woman Nutrition in India* (pp. 623-664). Routledge.

¹⁹ Saini, S., & Gulati, A. (2015). *The National Food Security Act (NFSA) 2013: Challenges, buffer stocking and the way forward* (No. 297). Working Paper.

- A **lack of proper storage facilities** results in **wastage of food grains**, particularly in rural areas.
- **Transport and logistics issues** lead to delays in food grain distribution, impacting timely access to food.

4. Legal and Judicial Support for NFSA

The Supreme Court has played a crucial role in strengthening the right to food through various judgments. Some landmark cases include:

- **People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL) v. Union of India (2001)**: The Court declared the **right to food as part of Article 21** and directed the government to implement food security schemes effectively.
- **Swaraj Abhiyan v. Union of India (2016)**: The Court criticized the government's failure to provide food grains to drought-affected areas and directed states to ensure effective implementation of NFSA provisions.
- **Kishen Pattnayak v. State of Orissa (1989)**: Highlighted **state accountability in preventing starvation deaths**, reinforcing the constitutional duty to provide food security.²⁰

5. Reforms and Recommendations

To improve the effectiveness of the NFSA, several reforms and policy measures are necessary:

A. Strengthening PDS through Digitalization

- **Biometric authentication using Aadhaar** can reduce corruption and ensure food reaches the intended beneficiaries.
- Many states have already implemented **e-POS (electronic Point of Sale) systems** to track food grain distribution in real-time.²¹

B. Expanding the Scope of Food Security

- The NFSA primarily focuses on **cereal distribution** but does not adequately address **nutritional security**.²²
- Policies should promote **diversified diets** with pulses, vegetables, and fortified foods to combat malnutrition.

C. Addressing Climate and Agricultural Sustainability

²⁰ Banik, D. (2010). Governing a giant: The limits of judicial activism on hunger in India. *Journal of Asian Public Policy*, 3(3), 263-280.

²¹ Dheera, K. R. IMPACT OF IMPLEMENTATION OF E-POS MACHINES IN RATION SHOPS–A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK.

²² Saini, S., & Gulati, A. (2015). *The National Food Security Act (NFSA) 2013: Challenges, buffer stocking and the way forward* (No. 297). Working Paper.

- Food security is linked to **agricultural productivity**, which faces risks from **climate change, declining soil fertility, and water scarcity**.
- The government must support **sustainable farming practices**, including organic farming and drought-resistant crops, to ensure long-term food security.

D. Ensuring Universal Coverage

- Many experts argue that **universal PDS**, rather than a targeted system, would be more effective in reducing exclusion errors.
- Tamil Nadu's **universal PDS model** has been successful in ensuring equitable access to food for all households.

CONCLUSION

Conclusion

Food security is a fundamental human right and a crucial aspect of national development, ensuring that all individuals have access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food. The **National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013**, has been a significant legislative step in India's efforts to combat hunger and malnutrition. By entitling nearly **67% of the population** to subsidized food grains, the NFSA has strengthened the legal framework for food security and reinforced the state's obligation to provide food as a right rather than a welfare measure. Achieving comprehensive food security in India requires addressing issues of **distribution inefficiencies, malnutrition, economic disparities, and climate change-related threats** to agriculture. Post-independence, the Indian government prioritized food security through **agricultural reforms, procurement policies, and the Public Distribution System (PDS)**. The **Green Revolution in the 1960s** played a crucial role in achieving self-sufficiency in food production, reducing dependence on food imports. However, despite increased production, equitable food distribution remained a challenge, prompting the introduction of **Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS) in 1997** and later the **NFSA in 2013**. These policy interventions have significantly contributed to reducing hunger and improving food access, yet concerns remain regarding the effectiveness of implementation and the need for broader nutritional security. From a constitutional perspective, food security is linked to the **right to life under Article 21 of the Indian Constitution**, which has been interpreted by courts to include the right to live with dignity, encompassing access to adequate food and nutrition. The **Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSP), particularly Articles 39(a), 41, and 47**, mandate the state to work towards ensuring adequate means of livelihood, improving nutrition levels, and enhancing public health. Judicial activism has further strengthened the legal framework for

food security, with landmark cases such as **People’s Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL) v. Union of India (2001)** establishing the right to food as a fundamental right. The Supreme Court, in this case, directed governments to improve food distribution mechanisms and ensure that no individual dies of hunger. Similarly, in **Swaraj Abhiyan v. Union of India (2016)**, the Court emphasized the need for effective food security measures in drought-affected regions. These legal precedents have reinforced the state’s responsibility to uphold food security and ensure the efficient implementation of food-related welfare programs. Food security is also recognized as a **global human right**, with international treaties and agreements emphasizing the importance of access to adequate food. The **Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), 1948**, and the **International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), 1966**, recognize the right to food as part of the broader right to an adequate standard of living. India’s commitment to international frameworks, including the **United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 2 – Zero Hunger**, underscores the importance of food security in national policy planning. While significant progress has been made, challenges such as **poverty, economic inequality, and environmental degradation** continue to hinder efforts to eliminate hunger completely. The **implementation of food security programs** in India faces multiple challenges. **Leakages and corruption in the Public Distribution System (PDS)** have long been a concern, leading to the diversion of food grains meant for beneficiaries to the black market. While technological interventions such as **Aadhaar-based authentication and e-POS (electronic Point of Sale) systems** have improved efficiency, many deserving families still face **exclusion errors** due to flawed beneficiary identification processes. The **One Nation One Ration Card (ONORC) scheme**, which allows beneficiaries to access food rations from any part of the country, is a positive step toward addressing migration-related exclusion. Expanding the **Mid-Day Meal Scheme and Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS)** to include more **nutrient-rich foods** will help combat malnutrition. Additionally, **public awareness campaigns** can empower people to demand their legal entitlements and report inefficiencies in food distribution systems. The **right to food is not just a policy goal but a constitutional and human right**, requiring a **multi-sectoral approach that prioritizes accessibility, affordability, and adequacy of food for all**. The NFSA has laid a strong foundation, but a **holistic strategy encompassing better distribution mechanisms, sustainable farming, nutritional awareness, and social protection measures** is essential to **achieve the goal of Zero Hunger**. By addressing these challenges through **legal reforms, policy innovations, and community participation**, India can build a future where **food security is not a privilege but a guaranteed right for every citizen**.