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CONSULTATION ON NATIONAL FOOD SECURITY BILL 2011

Report

Session I- Inaugural Session

Welcome Note: Shri Thomas Sangma, MP

Chair: Dr. M.S. Swaminathan, MP

Inaugural Address: Prof K.V. Thomas, Union Minister for Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution

Keynote Speaker: Ms. Barbara Ekwall, Director, FAO, Rome

Discussions by:

Shri Pinaki Mishra, MP

Shri P. Rajeev, MP

Shri P.D. Rai, MP

Shri Kanji Bhai Patel, MP

Dr. M S Swaminathan, MP

He chaired the session and flagged certain important issues in context of the NFSB 2011. He said that one of the first duties envisaged by Mahatma Gandhi for independent India was to ensure freedom from hunger to its population. 1960s had been a time of great humiliation for the country as India was forced to acquire food grains from outside. He expressed his hope for this Bill which was being spearheaded by KV Thomas who approached the Bill with a life cycle approach ascertaining coverage from conception to cremation.

The following issues were flagged as necessary for upholding the spirit of the bill. *Firstly*, he emphasized that the produce has to be home grown and the availability of food in the market could only be ensured by the farmers. The farmers are real custodians of the Food Security Bill (Hereinafter referred as 'FSB'). The bill however

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does not mention about the farmers and this oversight needs to be corrected. *Secondly*, that the primary focus of the bill was economic access to food while the other important issues, which have a direct impact on people's health standards, such as absorption and nutrition, and micro and macro level issues related to drinking water, hygiene and sanitation are not taken into account. The Bill lacks an enabling provision that would make the government legally bound to make it accessible to its citizens. The economic development model pursued and its consequent drive to higher consumption levels is increasing the threat of mining induced impoverishment among a large section of the society. *Thirdly*, the bill has a targeted focus by classifying priority households and general households. Given the past experience of the states like Kerala and Tamil Nadu that are doing comparatively well in terms of nutrition levels and have near universal systems, the focus ought to be on universal PDS.

Furthermore, the bill also does not mention about the people suffering from chronic illnesses like HIV/AIDs, TB and leprosy (which has made a comeback in the recent times) where the nutritional requirements of the patients are more specific and much higher. Destitute and senior citizens have also been left out in the bill.

It was noted that the Bill mentions about the provision of 'cash for the purpose' which could be detrimental in light of the numerous instances of corruption where cash payments have been resorted to.

Among the positive features of the Bill he recounted the aspect of recognition of women as the head and custodian of household food security and the provision of their names on the household entitlement cards. He said that the country has to emulate from the successful models primarily based on cooperative societies which has worked in specific states like Chattisgarh, Tamil Nadu and Kerala.

He recommended the incorporation and addressal of the following :

1. Both the State Food Commission and the Central Food Commission should take into account the good practices of the farmers.
2. A 'National Commission On Farmers' should be established to determine on how to introduce issues related to food and nutrition security which also ought to be a pan political commission and not merely a bureaucratic body. This commission will have to cross across parties and serve as a political oversight body which would deter corruption. It should be headed by the Prime Minister and chief ministers from states that were doing well in the PDS as well as those that were not doing so well should also be included so that there could be an exchange of information and good practices.

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He concluded that NFSB 2011 marks a historic event and transition that has the potential of fulfilling Gandhi's unfinished dreams of seeing the nation free from the clutches of hunger and malnutrition.

Prof. KV Thomas, Union Minister for Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution

In his inaugural address, Prof. Thomas put forth certain key points for discussion in the country after 4th June 2009 when the President of India had announced in the joint sessions of the Parliament that people living below the poverty line in the country would be provided 25 kg of food grains at a subsidised rate of Rs. 3 per kg for rice, Rs. 2 per kg for wheat and Rs. 1 for millet.

He recounted some of the questions that came up when he had presented FSB in the Parliament few months ago. A prominent one was related to whether the government has taken adequate measures for a fruitful discussion on the Bill. His answer was in affirmative. They began by communicating this announcement to every central and state department and inviting suggestions from them and various stakeholders, government agencies, as well as civil society groups. Taking into account various suggestions given by different NGOs, NSA, and Prof Swaminathan, a draft was formulated in 2011 which was entrusted to the PM who then formed a group EGON which met nine times for discussion. The points emerging from here were taken into account and the final draft was formulated which then got approved by the Law Ministry and EGON, and was finally placed in the Parliament.

Some of the salient features of the Bill were:

1. Bill made the government legally bound to ensure that all citizens got their entitlements of 7 kg per person per month in the BPL category.
2. Another point of departure from the existing system was the focus on life cycle approach and the emphasis on the nutrition of children, pregnant woman, lactating women. Children in the age group of three months to 8th standard were to be provided food and nutrition.
3. The Bill in its present form prioritised minimum 75% rural and 46% urban population. The minimum was mentioned because the intent was to get flexibility in prioritising and take a much more liberal view than the assessment of BPL by Planning Commission. The points that needed further addition were related to destitute and older people as well as those suffering from chronic illness.

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The focus in the present Bill was also to ensure adequate nutritional value of the food by having it cooked in *Aanganwadis*. This was also a response to reactions in the Parliament which pointed out that this could give a leeway to MNCs to bring in packaged food.

He also mentioned that although the Bill was not suggesting the replacement of grains by cash but such provision has to be made for extreme situations like impending or ongoing war where the procurement of food grains could not be guaranteed. Here mothers were identified as the head of the household. Drawing from his experiences of being a part of the fishermen community he recalled how in the earlier Ministry he had been involved in a project to construct the houses for the fishermen community. A later survey of the area revealed that almost 90% of houses which were given in the name of the male member were sold off. This was an event which induced them to change the entitlement holding to the name of the female of the house. However, states like Kerala and some in North East objected to this idea. They cited the case of the Panchayati Raj leadership in Kerala which is at present in need of reservation for men. He emphasized that the Bill would not be a burden on Indian exchequer. At present the TPDS system is based on 93-94 prices and 2001 census amounted to 88,000 crores with which the subsidy component would be 900 crores even in the absence of the Bill. The new Bill would increase the investment by about 1,12,000 crores which could be easily borne by a country like ours where petroleum and fertilizer subsidies alone far exceeded this amount.

On the question of whether there is enough food grains for the coming years he said that 2040 projections for the country showed that there would be enough food grains for distribution as well as private trade and exports. However greater investment in agriculture and involvement of young and educated people in agriculture is required for these to realise in a sustained manner.

He said that agricultural produce was not so much about scarcity but lack of adequate and efficient technology for storage and transportation systems. In this he mentioned the schemes of RKVY and NABARD which have allotted 4000 crores for having storage mechanisms. The other problem was related to the pilferage in the TPDS itself.

These were some of the challenges before the country but they could be surmounted and one need to especially take into account the fact that India was among the few countries which has a functioning PDS.

The Bill was not a political issue to be taken up by specific governments, but a humanitarian issue that was the responsibility of every party and politician given that even after 60 years of independence more than 30% of the population continued to

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suffer from hunger and malnutrition. He was confident that the Bill was going to be supported by all the political parties and all state governments. Discussions and deliberations were underway and strategies would be formulated to take into account the suggestions including those of Dr. Swaminathan's National Security Missions. He emphasized that his Ministry was not in haste and was prepared to take into board all suggestions and recommendations that were reasonable, good and practical.

Ms. Barbara Ekwall, FAO, Rome

In her keynote address Barbara Ekwall emphasized the need to focus on the needs and rights of human beings while talking about the issues related to human rights. FAO as an organisation, although normally associated with more technical issues, is also engaged on issues related to human rights. With the crisis of 2008-09 and the rise in food prices, FAO has realised that hunger was a fundamental human right arising mainly from failure of governance. There were more than 1 billion people in the world whose rights were not being realised. She also mentioned that there were hidden numbers behind malnutrition of people who looked healthy but did not have enough nutrition and the fact that obesity was very often found to be linked to poverty and wrong food. She invoked the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights committed to by 160 State Parties which enshrined:

1. The right of everyone to an adequate standard of living, including adequate food
2. The fundamental right of everyone to be free from hunger

In the event of natural disasters it was the obligation of different countries to ask for international assistance and also for the international community to respond to. The obligations of the state was also to respect and strengthen but not harm the existing access to food and to create an enabling environment where people could be empowered to feed themselves by their own means with dignity. This was sought to be done through policies and legislations. The direct provisioning of food was seen to be a matter of last resort wherein all the others have failed. The covenant also focussed on budgetary allocation for food and nutrition security issues related to discrimination. The human rights approach to the right to food complimented the food security approach and helped to ensure accountability.

She stated the PANTHER principles which provided a frame of response to the question of hunger as a governance variable. PANTHER stood as an acronym for Participation, Accountability, Non-discrimination, Transparency, Human dignity, Empowerment and Rule of Law.

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She then recounted the findings of a study of 122 economies that faced economic downturns to show that 4% decline in per capita GDP has increased infant mortality rate by 2%. The declining GDP would affect female children five times more adversely than male children of the same age. She stated that ensuring right to food was a constitutional mandate of FAO since 1965. The other food security related conferences were also held from time to time like World Food Summits in the years 1996, 2002, 2009 and the Millennium Declaration 2000, Outcome MDG Review 2010.

The Right to Food Guidelines, a consensus document adopted by FAO Council in November 2004, covered 19 policy areas and seven practical steps:

- ❖ Identification of hungry people
- ❖ Assessment
- ❖ Strategy
- ❖ Institutions
- ❖ Legal framework
- ❖ Monitoring
- ❖ Recourse

She then shared the experience of Brazil Framework Law (2006) the objectives of which clearly state the definitions, principles and actions which seek to guarantee the human right to adequate food. The PANTHER intimately inform the framework law. As a result, Brazil zero hunger programme has been able to make considerable improvements in the nutritional status of vulnerable groups and empower them. This also had an impact on the economic development in rural areas. It was able to lift 40 million people out of poverty and is reflected in the governance and increased efficiency of social laws. The figures were put up in websites which facilitated monitoring.

She further stated that strong political will and political leadership was required to realise the right to freedom from hunger, and the governments of different countries and the CSO have an extremely important role to play in this. The CSO in particular gave voice to the voiceless and they monitor the situation and have the capacity to mobilise people and important ally of the government in this endeavour. Awareness building, legislations, proper allocation of resources and advocacy were important areas of focus. The campaign for right to food has the potential to provide the

The National Consultation on the National Food Security Bill, 2011

Venue: Deputy Chairman Hall,
Constitution Club, New Delhi
22-23 March 2012, 9.30-5 pm

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opportunity to do things differently and to make right choices and with respect to agricultural practices and models. It also brought to light questions regarding who is participating in production and who is deciding on what to produce and for whom. It was essential to evaluate not only the cost of programs but also absence of action and cost of hunger. Hunger was a structural crisis which is not about production but about the way society was organised. This gave hope as this was something that could be changed. And from right to food perspective the people who are hungry are not the problem but a vital part of the solution.

She concluded with Gandhi's Talisman, which has been an important inspiration: *"Recall the face of the poorest and the weakest man whom you may have seen, and ask yourself, if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use to him. Will he gain anything by it? Will it restore him to have control over his own life and destiny?"*

Questions	Discussions
	<p>1. The discussions in the centre focussed on whether the growth in GDP could serve as a measure of welfare.</p> <p>2. The need to focus more on the female children of families in adverse and vulnerable economic conditions.</p> <p>There was no easy correlation between economic growth and well-being. The recent NSSO data showed that the rise in income of the households was accompanied by a considerable decline in the employment rates of women. So, in a way it has been disempowering.</p>
<p>Barbara Ekwall</p>	<p>Q: You talked of instances where the growth of country falling by 4% has led to an increase in mortality of girl children to 2%. How would you respond to the question that some sections of the CSO would pose that growth itself is the problem? Do you have some correlation between fast levels of growth and increasing rates of growth?</p> <p>A: In the example it showed a decline. Greater attention is needed to be relegated to those families where baby girl is concerned and to stress the value of the girl child and to nullify the assumption that greater attention to the girl child meant lesser to the baby boy. Education was also important in this regard. Economic growth by itself does not guarantee betterment of peoples' situation. Brazil has chosen the model of economic growth with gini coefficient where it has seen positive outcomes. But the divergence between the rich and the poor has increased globally. In Switzerland too (where she comes from) the problem of distribution existed but was not recognised as such.</p>

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N C Saxena	There is no simple correlation. The poor may gain or lose with growth. A woman who is earning money is in a way becoming more dependent. The recent NSSO data shows a decline in the number of women seeking employment in absolute numbers. While some of this could be related to the increase in enrolment of girl children in the age group of 15-19 into high schools, it also reflected the loss of empowerment and women's ability to earn and be independent as the income of the family has increased. In another care the consumption of food grains of poorest has not seen any increase despite the fact that the poor work harder. The other factor that emerged was the expenses related to schooling which strained the poor more. Health expenses were also a major source of burden. As a result, hunger has increased and most of the times people were not even aware of the malnutrition. So, the rise in income does not necessarily translate into empowerment.
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Session II: Nutrition Security and Children's Right to Food under the NFSB

Chair: **Smt. Shanta Sinha**, Chairperson, National Commission for Protection of Child Rights

Panel:

Prof N.C. Saxena

Shri M.B. Rajesh, MP

Smt. Shanta Sinha, Chairperson, National Commission for Protection of Child Rights

Smt. Shanta Sinha mentioned that the issue of hunger and malnutrition of children across ages was a pertinent one and she was glad that the FSB has certain dedicated sections that focused on the issue and it was also a good opportunity to add many more. However, the bill did not mention any provision for midday meal for children below six years of age. It was important not to leave out this section of children and to ensure that they did not remain hungry. She suggested the following:

1. The Act should have a schedule of norms and standards for Aanganwadi set-up and workers as the institutional framework remained ambiguous. It was also essential to integrate into the Bill the legislations or orders of SC on right to food that give entitlements to children.

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2. The norms, standards and training of teachers with respect to imparting the right to education needs to be spelt out and the provision of drinking water, sanitation, subject wise teacher, boundary work also needs to have a clear plan.
3. There was severe malnutrition among children and women with chronic diseases and this was relegated to the purview of health department and midday meals were provided through the Aanganwadi. So there was a need to ensure that care of children and their rights to health care and nutrition was not fragmented or compromised.
4. There was also a need for decentralization of the design implementation of Right to Education. Greater involvement of the local authorities and Gram Panchayat was essential to the functioning of the system as it was at this level that development of the children could be effectively tracked.
5. This was crucial especially in a situation where the central government took around one and a half years to sanction a demand for an Aanganwadi worker. This effectively meant loss of access to food for a child who grew in that period of absence. In this regard a highly centralized plan was not the solution. The components of Supreme Court order which make it mandatory for the provision of Aanganwadi on the basis of demand within 90 days should be made part of the Act.
6. Delay in supply and quality of food also need to have accountability mechanisms. In many places food provisions came for three months and there is no provision for storage. Lack of roads and small habitation cannot be an excuse for not making these services available and ways have to be forged in such situations.
7. The Bill did not mention about children with disabilities, sick children who were unable to visit the Aanganwadi, homeless children, children with chronic illness like HIV, TB, leukemia, and others who have nutritional requirements. The economic development model pursued and its consequent drive to higher consumption levels is increasing the threat of mining
8. Induced impoverishment among a large section of the society to be special double ration for these children. Homeless and street children, many of whom are not in schools and have no family support, must have an all meal programme and their right to food has to be mandated by law. The Bill only talks of children upto 15 years. But many children including boys are anemic in the 14-18 year age group. So the provision The economic development model pursued and its

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9. There should be no conditionalities for maternity benefits as is evidenced in the case of institutional delivery wherein the benefit is conditional upon institutional birth. There was no justification for depriving a child born at home. Also, the withdrawal of benefits in case of more than two children was not acceptable.
10. The provision of crèche on demand has to be ensured. Many trade unions and informal sectors have been discussing and raising the demand for crèches and this demand should also find a place in the law.
11. The Food Commission is not enough for ensuring the accountability. The National Commission for Child has its system of grievance redressal and the NCPDR has been engaged in monitoring the right to education.
12. There was a need to list the legal entitlements of the child and clearly define who will be held responsible for each of these entitlements mentioned in the act.

The main issues that she highlighted were:

1. Decentralization of schemes related to children.
2. Flexibility in the allocated budget.
3. Conversation across ministries as no right or entitlement of the child could be implemented by one ministry alone.

Dr. N C Saxena, Member NAC

Dr. Saxena began with reference to a great deal of research that pointed towards the criticality of nutrition in the development of cognitive facilities in very young children, just as it was equally important for the overall development of the older children. There is need to concentrate on these groups. He expressed that the problem of malnutrition was caused by a large number of factors of which the lack of food played only a small part. Cultural practices related to food, whether breast feeding which needs to be done during the first six month after birth, hygiene, and quality of life were important contributory factors. Thus, it was obvious that the solution also has to be multidimensional. But it was unfortunate that at the state and district level there was no recognition of any of these as if hunger, starvation or the problems of malnutrition did not exist at all. At the Aanganwadi centres out of 200 children if you asked about malnutrition they would probably show one or two children at the most and if you prod further you would be told that they have been given orders “from above” to say nothing of nutrition. Civil society should examine the answer given by

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ministers on these issues. Absence of proper data, non-recognition of the problem and the data given by the state appears as though the state in India was similar to that of Denmark, Switzerland or Sweden. The goal of the MDG was to reduce malnutrition by half in the period 1998 to 2006 but there has hardly been any decline. The problem was most acute in Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, Eastern India and it was relatively less in states of Kerala and Mizoram.

He also brought to notice the Hungama Report of 2011 that looked at the state of malnourished and stunted children in 100 districts and those that fared well were districts in Himachal Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Kerala. In the rest of the districts the situation was dismal. This was despite the fact that the number of *Aaganwadi* centres have increased and the honorariums are revised; calorie norms have changed and budget has also increased. According to the report, in these 100 districts although there was data on immunization, but health referral and growth monitoring was done in less than 20% of the centres. The number of underweight children showed a lot of variation. The problem is caused not so much because of food but because of the cultural practices like early marriage, poor status of women, apart from general factors like hygiene, sanitation, referral services, drinking water, high incidence of preventable diseases like malaria and diarrhea where children were not given water,. He emphasized that the problem of malnutrition has nothing to do with per capita income or GDP. The ICDS did not focus on these issues. It focused only on children of 3-5 years of age, while the younger children did not get any care as they don't come to the centre. There is a need to have a new programme which shifts attention from the centre to the household.

Further, the quality of food was bad and culturally insensitive for the practices of the region where it was being given. There were innumerable instances where the children did not find the food palatable which often ended up becoming fodder. He said that there are design flaws with little emphasis on these limitations in the past three years. He also emphasized that the care for pregnant and lactating women and the adolescent girls were not adequately addressed in the *Aaganwadi*. Many of these *Aaganwadis* were being run in rented or donated rooms in upper class neighborhoods which made it difficult for people, esp. for Dalits, to access it.

He also pointed out the absence of community participation in running of *Aaganwadi* centres. He gave the instance of Thailand which faced a considerable problem of malnutrition in late 50-60s which they were able to successfully bring down from 50% to 25% and eventually to 15%-12%. The workers went to every village and find out the elderly woman who was consulted by other women for advice and suggestions. The woman so identified, was appointed by the government which then invested in her training and encouraged inter village competitions every month to gauge their improvement.

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There should be transparency in the system and the way of running the programme needs to be changed. There was too much of data and information but no real work has been done. It has been observed that Aanganwadi worker has to keep about 18 registers. Many a times, they were told to make the entries in pencil which could be eventually manipulated and concocted.

The National Family Health Survey (NFHS) data showed a decline from 53% to 47% in the number of malnourished children. The Aanganwadi reports showed a decline from 13% to 8% and only 4% children were shown as severely underweight. The gap between reported data and evaluated data has been increasing over time. He recounted having conversations with the IAS officers and asking them why they did not report the actual data. He has been told that reporting was a 'high risk and low reward' work that nobody was desirous of undertaking. So, there was a need to correct these limitations and make the state governments accountable. He also brought to focus ICDS in Gorkahpur where NHRC survey showed that although most of the budget fund was used, the calorific value was only 100 as opposed to 500 and it was further used only for cattle food. Rather than having locally prepared food that was culturally acceptable the state government tries to ensure adequate nutrition on the basis of labels. But most of the times the certificates were invalid which has also resulted in huge corruption.

In the evaluation of ICDS by the government of Bihar, it was found that a large number of vacancies were not filled and there was no regularity in the reception of funds which furthered corruption.

In the evaluation of West Bengal and Uttar Pradesh, it was also found that dalit children were not allowed in the houses of upper caste people who rented it for Aanganwadi services. While the data on the number of women and children in ICDS enrollment may be high, the attendance was far from adequate.

In Madhya Pradesh large number of rehabilitation centres has been set up where combining health with nutrition appeared to give good results. He cited Tamil Nadu as an example where we can find good institution The economic development model pursued and its consequent drive to higher consumption levels is increasing the threat of mining induced impoverishment among a large section of the society, with good infrastructure for good medical care and sanitation. In Himachal Pradesh the practice of AW centres was also functioning quite well. This would also help in ensuring the sense of worth and commitment of the Aanganwadi workers. The Food Security Bill under consideration has just one clause on the issue of younger children.

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He said that food alone was not enough and there has to be large number of changes. The ICDS has to be revamped and the health ministry should to be involved in the issue. There was also a need to ensure flexible food provision and we should learn from Thailand experience about how to encourage community participation and building of sanitation facilities through Panchayat. There is a need to change the behaviour of people, and their cultural practice. In the health rehabilitation centres the progress needs to be evaluated every year.

MB Rajesh, MP

M B Rajesh congratulated and thanked the organisers for holding the national convention on FSA. He said that the national consultation was being held in the background of the debates about key estimates of the central government. Few days back there was uproar over the recent poverty estimates of the Planning Commission on hunger and malnutrition. According to the NFHS 47% of children in the age group of 0-3 are severely undernourished. The survey reveals that the percentage of undernourished children has remained unchanged since 1998. There have also been shocking reports of widespread malnutrition and deaths of children from various states like Karnataka, and Rajasthan. At the same time a newspaper report of a survey of school going children showed that the height and weight of children in the higher income group showed considerable dissimilarities with that of the children of the same age from lower income groups. It was obvious that height and weight were related to nutritional levels and the difference was an indication of malnutrition level.

He stated that he was critical of the targeted system that FSA was continuing with. He said that the demand should be for universal PDS. Secondly FSA must be completely delinked from the central poverty estimates which were becoming more unreliable and dubious. Further, the proposed act did not ensure right of the state governments to decide on the deficits which could have an adverse effect in many of the existing and well functioning PDS in different states. The reason for relatively less malnutrition in states like Kerala and Tamil Nadu was that the PDS was near universal and it was working effectively. The present bill restricted the ability and the scope of state governments to continue functioning with the present public distribution system. Thirdly, it is not enough just to have grains in the PDS but it is also necessary to make them available at subsidized rates.

The midday meal schemes and ICDS should be incorporated in the food security. Midday meal scheme covered only children going to schools whereas a vast majority of children were out of school. The scheme ought to be reformed such that out of school children were also given benefits. He called for a substantial increase in the provision for ICDS so that universalization and allocation is enhanced.

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Finally, with regards to the resources for ensuring FS and universalized PDS the argument that was always put forward is government does not have enough resources. But he said that it was a question of political will as the resources are there but it was a matter of how and for what purpose they were being allotted and utilized. The reality of food subsidy was that it is just around 1% of the GDP. There was a need for the government to decide on their priorities. He said that this was lesser than what many other developing countries were investing and quoted a study where it was noted that the government may actually end up saving as per this ACT. It was a situation where the subsidies to the rich were ever increasing and tax concessions and exemptions amount to 529 thousand crores while the entire subsidy was only 1.6% of GDP. These tax exemptions to corporations amounted to around 5% of the GDP as the food subsidy benefited crores of people.

Discussion

The first set of questions was addressed to Mr. N C Saxena.

1. *You talked of the design issues. How do we get people to listen and act on them?*

There has been a remarkable progress in the states of Assam and Orrisa where there have been larger reductions than national average NFHS 1 and 3. There are also instances of positive experience of Brazil and Thailand. One can put pressure on the government only by writing in new-papers and journals, and persuading the MPs. The fact that government does not recognize these issues is important and work has to be done in this front. This is also partly due to the lack of involvement of the civil society. We do not visit *Aanganwadi* Centres and put pressure on state governments. There are also numbers of cases of good practices in the states of Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Chattisgarh which should be taken into account. NFHS 3 and 4 have shown a slight decline but this was not due to any concerted effort of state governments and these have not been sustained over time. The design flaw in the ICDS is crucial and even in the state like Tamil Nadu the urban workers did not visit children who did not come to *Aanganwadi* and of late there was privatization of child care taking place where 15-20 women got together and hired someone in the locality to take care of the children.

2. *What role do political factors play in determining the functioning of a system, like, what is the difference between Kerala and other state governments?*

In the present PDS the interstate distribution is in favor of richer states. There is much more allocation in cases of Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Jammu and Kashmir and Delhi and this practice has been going on for last 10-15 years. The bill is saying that this should

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reverse. It should go down for the states like Kerala and go up for states like Bihar. This was being opposed by the state governments who see this as an infringement of their power. The universal 35 kg for all cannot be done. I suggested universalization of the PDS in 150 poorest districts. The suggestion of universalization of the PDS in 150 poorest districts was not taken into consideration. Reducing the quota of richer state is not pragmatic.

3. Is there any news about what is happening in PM's council?

The PM's council has met only once since its formation in 2007. You will find that the issues which I have raised do not find a mention in the Council's discussions. There should be strategies to publicize and expand the programmes for which sustained media campaign is also needed. The expansion was still pending and under discussion in Planning Commission. The proposal is to increase the number of ICDS work in 150 centres and to focus on the younger age group and media awareness.

4. How should these discrepancies be restricted and ensure more efficient and transparent functioning?

Evaluate the Aagnwadi centres once in two years. There have to be linkages with the NRHM and SSA and pressure has to be put in states governments to link performance with funds. There was a need to approve an oversight mechanism. Bihar has accepted that their figures were incorrect and have sought to correct it.

This is a discussion on the betterment of quality of health of the children but there is a lot of pesticide in the food that they consume. There is also a need to see what kind of food they are getting and if the quality is good. If you look at the overall picture of food consumption the share of food has declined from 70% to 50%. The food being handed out is not culturally palatable. In Rajasthan children came with polythene bags, collected the food and took it home to feed the cattle. So, even though the food was nutritious they were not used to the kind of food.

Session III: PDS Reforms

Chair: Prof Ashok Shukla

Shri Prakash Javadekar, MP

Ashok Shukla, State Election Commissioner, UP

Ashok Shukla recounted the experience of transforming a non-functional PDS in Chattisgarh to a functioning one with the help of technology and community involvement. He talked about the agenda of reforms that were necessary to make this

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success and refrained from going into the debate of whether there is a need for targeted or Universal PDS. But instead he focused on the reforms which were necessary to make the PDS successful. He said that there were several states in the country where PDS continued to work fairly well and those should be taken as learning experiences.

For example in Chattisgarh, for reengineering one of the first steps was to computerize the whole process. There was a need to control leakages and diversion otherwise the whole subsidy would be deflected from people to the corrupted. Better internal management of the process and greater transparency was required for efficient functioning of the system.

There is also a need to understand that fair price shops are not profit making shops but in essence they sell products at less than market price. Secondly, there should be a plan for better services for the clients irrespective of the targets. The basic costs of rent, service person, infrastructure needs to be taken into account to make fair price shops viable. This cannot be a private sector enterprise as there has to be the involvement of Gram Panchayat, cooperatives, SHGs and the commissions which should be calculated and indexed to consumer price index. Door step delivery provision advance food grain and payment on sales system worked very well in Chattisgarh. Stock for the month, like the case where companies give their products and come to collect the price after the sale, saves on working capital and interest. It is an interest subsidy which also provides some capital.

Advance stocking for monsoon, rational allocations based on number of ration cards in each FPS, monitoring quality and quantity of ration sold to the beneficiaries, and a good public grievance management system is also very important. Better service to public could only be provided through constant evaluation and monitoring.

While talking about the leakages and diversion he said that the existence of fake ration cards was a reality and there was no information in the public domain about the actual numbers of ration cards or its sale. There was also no community monitoring and these were the main reasons for diversion.

He suggested that the solution in Chattisgarh was to create a centralized ration card database which helped in screening and eliminating 2.25 million fake ration cards. The centralized printing of bar coded ration cards, their distribution in public camps and community monitoring ensured transparency and accountability. In every village/ward special public functions were held to distribute the ration cards by the representatives.

Through centralized database the information was made available on the website in Hindi where the name and card number of every villager was available thereby

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confirming the authenticity of a person. The availability of this information in public domain helped to make the system more transparent and accountable. The second important step was to computerize the movement of the goods. Door step delivery system was put in place based on demand and the trucks transported the goods to fair price shops. The actual allocations were fed into the computer system and delivery order was issued.

There have been cases of rice-recycling and rice-leakage where truck was loaded for a particular destination ended up going to another place where it was sold in the market. NYCU drivers of truck were advised to carry cell-phones with cameras where every cell-phone was connected to the nearest GPRS tower. Wherever the commodity was unloaded the drivers were instructed to take pictures or mms of the truck number and managers. He emphasized that technology was merely a tool in the objective to prevent corruption. There was also a need to provide interest free loans to the self help groups. The public grievance management system was also set up where a call centre with toll free number functioned for 12 hours a day for lodging complaints. Giving the data of 4 years back he stated that 2569 complaints have been lodged and 2205 complaints inquiries have been completed. Numerous FIRs have also been filed which helped to take swift and decisive action and made the defaulters wary. The essential commodity act was one of the strictest acts which authorized the government to seize any vehicle which shows suspicious behaviour while carrying ration commodities. The citizen service website- Jan Bhagidari- was also set up for registering client complaints. This has worked like RTI and there was proactive sharing of information to all the citizens (cg.nic.in/citizen).

This also provided an interesting facility for community monitoring where concerned citizens were asked to register their cell phone number for individual fair price shops. When the delivery order was issued, a particular server would send automated sms of the dispatch-truck number and the quantity of grains to be delivered to the nearby shop. This facility was made available to any citizen and therefore shop owner or the bureaucracy has nothing to do with the system. He talked of the instance where he asked Nand Kumar, the then food secretary, to register for the service and he continued to receive the alerts even after many years. He said that for the system to succeed information technology and people should be brought closer. The total cost was around 23 crores with recurring cost of 3 crores in PDS and paddy procurement. This model of Chattisgarh won several awards.

Prakash Javadekar, MP

Chattisgarh experience appears to be very user friendly with very little cost involved. There were numerous other issues related to the NFSB like whether it would deliver

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what it sought to, whether there should be universal or targeted PDS, issues of leakages and corruption etc. He said that the nutrition security is not only with wheat and grain only and recounted an instance where in the midday meal scheme khichri and laddoo were provided which has considerably improved the health status and many families came out of the malnutrition cycle. He said that there were a lot of processes involved before the Bill came to parliament as it was a very high cost bill where it was argued that the investment must fulfill the real purpose of nutrition security. In his opinion one should push for nutritional security and universal PDS. He also congratulated the Chattisgarh model which has sustained over the last 7 years which means that a real systemic change has taken place. It was an inspiring care which assured real hope.

Discussions:

1. *Will the BJP push for an amendment on the Bill?*

It is too premature to comment on that and we have yet to see the recommendations of Standing Committee and the reaction of the government.

2. *The presentation talked of using information technology to ensure the implementation of various schemes but it does not ensure access to basic services like internet connection and mobile phone. How can it be scaled to the rest of the country?*

The use of information technology is required only when you want to participate in the monitoring. None of it is required for accessing the PDS services. The system merely helps the community to monitor. In terms of scaling it to the rest of the country there is a need to spread the word around and force the government to come forward and develop their own systems.

3. *I have heard from one of the members of the Planning Commission that Chattisgarh was able to revive its PDS because of the natural resources and it did not have to dig into fair price. How far is this true?*

Of the most favorable factor in Chattisgarh was its paddy production. In terms of PDS the state government was taking huge risk especially when the allocation was far less for the state. Since the requirement was more, the state government decided to pay 700 crores from its own pocket. So production helped in that sense.

4. *There is a lot of push for reform and for Aadhar card. Do you think it is desirable or feasible?*

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When you are saying that the last mile is the most important you are implying that the beneficiary is trying to cheat. There are a lot of other leakages and corruption none of which can be taken care by the use of Aadhar card. Technology is merely a tool and in Chattisgarh to empower people by enabling them to launch their complaints.

5. *What is your view on cash transfer?*

When you give money for a certain thing the premise is that it will be used for something that is intended but the fact is it can also be used for anything and we may never know about it. There can be corruption in cash transfer also as is evidenced in schemes like the MNREGA and others.

6. *Is there any other programme where the idea has been followed?*

There have been talks that food related schemes like midday meal scheme or the ICDS have been merged.

7. *What happens when it is targeted?*

This is a systems approach where one cannot afford to extend to everybody. We think of a scheme which is self targeted like NREGA. We need to discuss the ways that would make it feasible, universal and self-targeted. There have been examples like Tamil Nadu where the rich have given up. So, methods can be devised but its progress depends on the amount of time and effort which is put in.

Session IV: Targeting and Food Security

Chair: Dr. A.K. Shivkumar, Member, NAC

Dr. Ram Chandra Dome, Member, Standing Committee on Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution

A.K. Shivkumar, Member NAC

He said that it is essential to remember that there is still problem of hunger and extreme levels of malnutrition in the country. Basic education, food and health must be treated as basic human rights. The question often arose in terms of where money was going to come from in implementing universal PDS as well as the cost of inaction. Money is important but the cost of inaction and food insecurity is also significant. When they started elementary education in NAC they were quite idealistic about its universal coverage, same quantity and same price. After several months, it was thought that why the poor should not get a little more. UID makes it an individual entitlement which was not acceptable to many. That led them to think of differential

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entitlement where the poorest would be entitled a bit more. Second was the pricing issue for the differential quantity. 40 thousand crore was allocated for NREGA. But at the end of the day it was reduced to 22 thousand crores and slashing and the reworking the numbers was an extremely frustrating exercise. The NAC plan was reflected in government food plan where there was priority sector, general sector and the excluded. The three categories were not required as excluded category and the rest would have sufficed. Ministry of Agriculture is conservative with regard to food quantity. Only 10% of the rural population was to be excluded and they had actually hiked the poorest categories to almost 46% which was 2-3 times more than antodaya population. They felt that with UID all the problems would be solved. But the real problem was that of financial requirements and issue like food production and availability. To ensure 40 million tons was a challenge. So overall it was a question of either giving up or continuing in such changed circumstances.

The solution for a way out of targeting was to do away with general and priority artificial divide. Instead, just exclude certain proportion of the population, i.e., 25% of rural and 50% of urban population. The rest of the population will get 5 kg per person. The new formulation is fairly simple and easy to administer, that is, to give 25 kg per household at Rs. 3 for rice, Rs. 2 for wheat and Rs.1 for millet. This also marks the change away from poverty line. The antodaya households are also protected from the loss of entitlements. Both NAC and the Government's proposal are not universal in nature. NAC argued for 10% exclusion. So the problem still persists although the second proposal is superior to the one that is being tabled in the Standing Committee.

Dr. Ramachandra Dome, MP

Dr. Ramachandra Dome represented a rural constituency Bolpur in West Bengal. He was also part of the Standing Committee which was dealing with this Bill. He said that National Food Security Bill 2011 was made for giving universal food security to the hungry people in our country. Though the bill was of a noble nature it was also the most controversial as this is the first time when the government of India is going to give our people food security through legislation. The bill in effect does not give security to all vulnerable groups as it follows the targeted approach. So basically, the detailed clauses of articles of this bill need not be deliberated here. From 2002 NDA government started this targeted system. The rationale for targeting the BPL list is fraudulent as till date various committees like Saxena committee, Tendulkar committee, Jeonag Committee could not come up with a concrete idea about BPL. The former economist Arjun Sengupta showed that about 77% of our population depended on a meager Rs 20 daily in our country. But the government has remained elusive on the issue of poverty and has refused to accept the report of the Committee. Poverty is a big problem in our country which the government was trying to exclude

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by a small size in the bracket of BPL client and the format of the present Bill continued to reflect this aspect.

As per the view of Shiv Kumar, targeting is fraudulent and principally the bill should be recast in a rational background taking into account the real situation of the country. His party (CPI) was for the universalisation of PDS but this enactment of statutory legislation dismantles the idea of universal public distribution. There are many faults and all these things should be rectified.

Discussion:

- 1. Out of 15 MPs who were supposed to be a part of this consultation we have had 4. This reflects the seriousness towards this Bill. The public has not been informed that they would be excluded when the change was made from universal to targeted PDS. How will it be ensured that BPL is not going to come into picture 10-15 years down the line? Second the two broader categories have been targeted- priority and general. Who will be where and how is that going to be established?*

The sensitive issue is to scientifically bracket the BPL population. So far no single or multiple criteria can be used to scientifically ascertain the true BPL line. So the main objective is the non-exclusion of the vulnerable and in that way targeted approach is not only wrong in principle but also not practical. Therefore, we have to press for universalization of food security.

Earlier there was partial food security and the richer section didn't use this opportunity. PDS should be revamped and the network should be expanded to achieve the true target and exclusion of the richer section. Instead of 'upto 75%' it should be 'at least 75%' and 'at least 50%' so there is at least a space to extend. It should also be provided to 'not less than' 47% of rural and 26% of urban population.

- 2. Lot of progressive programmes have come out in recent years. What is the agenda of Congress in 2014 and what is the role of NAC in it?*

Any proposal on the role of NAC has a huge financial tag attached to it. For example, to solve the problem for the homeless it should be proposed that government should take land and then give free accommodation, food, electricity, old age pension and take care of them, the estimate comes to Rs 95000 crores. This is the recommendation but funding issues need to be thought about.

Food security also depends on food production. In the backdrop of neo-liberal era it is essential to take care of natural resources which have been looted in the last tenure of

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this government. About 10.7 lakh crores have been looted as per the estimates by CAG. In term of food security land reforms has a role to play important role. If land is not given to the farmers and tillers then it will not lead to food security of the country.

We are now saying 25 kg per household but there is Supreme Court ruling which says 35 days and the ICDS is going back on SC ruling. Many of the states have not done anything. Even in the case of elementary education also it is not happening as we did not want the same thing to happen again. As far as resources are concerned the government seems to have enough to build walls but the prominent sector is getting less. There is a need to identify richness line.

3. *Was there any study comparing the potential benefits of universal coverage vs. current national state level policy?*

No such thing was done. For a lot of these questions it is more of a moral and ethical position. One cannot do a cost benefit analysis as it cannot be justified for economic benefits. We also need to see the consequences of so much hunger and lack of education. On a similar question related to RSVY not many of us are in the favour of insurance as it is always a hazard. Targeted health care will be a disaster. US is a prime example of it.

Sanjiv Suman of Business today has been raising a lot of issues like Vodafone where, retrospective arrangement was made where money would be harvested in social sectors. There is no evidence that increase in revenue collection got harvested into social sectors. Internationally right now Oxfam is going into buy-in advocacy against land grabs which might spike food inflation and food insecurity. Faith based economics versus evidence based economics is the issue and there should be some research around, for example, what happened to tax waivers, SEZs and other kind of retrospective amendment linked to revenue collection, food and nutrition programmes, and social programmes. The data shows that tax collection has not increased. These are political issues which a group of economists cannot resolve alone. It is a fact that public pressure is limited and public debate is the only way to fight.

DAY II

Concluding Session

Chair: Dr. N. J. Kurian, Former Advisor, Planning Commission

Panel: Shri Mani Shankar Iyer MP, Dr. Prabha Thakur MP, Dr. EMS. Natchiyappan MP, Mr. Naveen Parkash IAS, Joint Secretary, MoFPD, Mr. Biraj

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Patnaik, Principle Advisor, SC Commissioners Office, Mr. Nikhil Dey, MKSS, Ms. Biraj Swain, Oxfam, Ms. Barbara Ekwall, FAO, Rome, Ms. Anurada Talwar

Mani Shankar Iyer: MP

Mani Shankar Aiyer focused on the absence of Panchayati Raj in the bill. He emphasized on the importance of the role of institutions at grass root level. The bureaucratic focus of the bill has to be changed to a more people friendly approach. He has raised the role of the grass roots institutions in the delivery of food in the Parliament. He was told that the Bill has a section addressing this issue in Chapter 12 of FSB. But it fell very short of the requirements in terms of rules and regulations as well as imparting powers and identification of beneficiaries. He said that in a situation where only 40% of grain reaches consumers there was a need to ensure proper transportation and storage facilities. The important focus was also on the last mile delivery. Chapter 12 left it entirely to state governments to get the duties done by notification and not by law which was violation of the constitutional provisions. Any section officer could change the notification and deny people their entitlements. There was a need to bring chapter 12 in conformation with the constitution. The Bill made it possible to replace the elected bodies like the Panchayats with BDO or TSO which were bureaucratic town planning authorities. He said that an activity map should be laid out with regard to the functions of three tier system and list down the tasks for Gram Sabha, Gram Panchayat, Zila Parishad, Intermediate Municipalities and the District Planning Committee. It should be ensured that the work should be taken care of at Panchayati Raj and not 'sarpanch raj'. All women representatives should be statutorily the members of food security as it would ensure greater responsibility and greater monitoring. The language of the bill has to be made more understandable and more accessible to people, and the bill has to be more flexible in terms of inclusion in the future.

Prabha Thakure, MP

She said that the Food Security Bill was a subject close to Mrs. Sonia Gandhi as she is supportive of the poor. The main issue related to food security was quality and quantity. She also emphasized that the grains should be locally produced and distributed. Even though the schemes are of central government, monitoring and accountability mechanisms were given to the state governments. In MNREGA now people were able to get minimum wage of Rs 120. The present Bill would resolve the issue of malnutrition. There was also a need for water security bill as water was the first priority. She said that it was only the UPA government that has been able to think of the Bill.

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Nikhil Dey,

He confined his comments to the grievance redressal transparency mechanism. The bill is pending in the Standing Committee at present. Its objective was also to make sure that the FSB and GRTM do not go in variance.

Chapter 9 of the bill talks about setting up a district grievance redressal officer appointed by the government. But his powers and mechanisms are not clear. It is also not clear whether he will have an independent capacity to function. There have been suggestions for an internal mechanism but the appointment of Ombudsman in MNREGA was more or less ad hoc and without much power. The DGRO appears to be another such exercise. There was a need to check how these institutions were going to be organised; to ensure that the Commission is given the power and; should be held accountable as well. The second chapter does not have any mention of accountability. The standards for transparency should be nationally laid down clearly.

NREGA is only statutory but has the potential to create tensions in the centre-state relations. There was a need for people based mechanism which took into account the question of vigilance committees, and also to give greater thought and time to the Bill. The component of facilitation of information and grievance needs to be strengthened so that local body could sort things out at the district level and integrate this with the state structure. The Panchayat could crucially hold accountable and responsible the grievance redress officer.

As of now, the state and national commission deals with both entitlement and legislation and it is not clear who is to be held responsible. In Andhra Pradesh the rule of automatic compensation has been passed in NREGA. The obligations of the state and centre needs to be clearly stated and the methods of enforcement should be clearly laid down.

Mr. Naveen Prakash, Joint Secretary, Food Ministry

He said that there was a need to ensure proper procurement facilities and minimum support prices to the farmers. There was also a need to encourage local production as that would cut down the procurement costs as in the present times most of the surplus came from few states while consumption is spread. There was a need for a functioning and efficient supply chain. Also, decentralized procurement where states are encouraged to take on the full responsibility should be encouraged. There is, at present, a scheme to rejuvenate agriculture in the eastern part of the country and states like Chattisgarh and Orissa were now emerging as surplus states whereas in the past it was predominantly Punjab and Haryana.

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Provisions for adequate storage facilities are also required. 15 million tonnes storage capacity is being created under what is called the private entrepreneurs guarantee scheme which would give a boost to the procurement operations. In private sector lot of new funding is available now for the creation of storage. Steps independent of the bill were also being taken and as of now the overall storage capacity is 6.5 million in the country. These were some positive developments. The government is taking the entire responsibility.

Discussions:

- 1. Is there any data on how much you are incurring cost wise for procurement transport and other subsidy expenses per kilo of the material?*

The cost includes taxes, vat or market development tax, storage movement cost and administrative cost. The all inclusive price came to Rs.20 for one kg of rice and Rs 16 for a kg of wheat. 30% of the economic cost goes to storage transportation and carrying cost.

Anuradha Talwar

She began by saying that linking the issues of price and minimum support price would lead to depression of MSP. She said that it provided the motivation for government to depress the prices. It was agriculture that was supporting development and farmers have to bear the cost of it as this bill was giving it a legal sanction. The NFSB 2011 does not mention about farmers, production and procurement process. All these have been put into the schedule.

The bill has given an opportunity for revitalizing the agriculture. The Bill could have guaranteed the MSP and procurement within the Act. There was also a need to decentralize procurement, set up mandis in all states, and provision for proper storage facilities. This infrastructure could have been guaranteed through the act.

Chair: Food security can really be effective if procurement and storage facilities are taken care of. Thousands of crores have been sanctioned for eastern India for agriculture. States like Punjab and Haryana became surplus states because of adequate procurement and storage facilities. In pockets of Bihar where there is surplus there are no procurement facilities. This is mainly due to some distorted policies which should be corrected by the Bill.

There is no direct linkage between MSP and issue prices. There are also no targets in procurement and there is a need to reach to the areas where prices are depressed and farmers cannot sell their produce. Procurement should be done through co-operatives

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and SHGs for which commissions were given. For example, West Bengal is a DCP state (decentralized procurement). Thus, technological intervention would minimize leakages considerably.

Dr. E.M.S. Nachiyappan, MP

He also said that it was essential to ensure local production and procurement. There should be a separate law in form of third schedule to define the role of state government. NFSB was to motivate agriculturalists and assure them that it will be procured. There should be separate focus regarding the assurance of MSP. The system should be made more intelligible to the greater number of people so that the costs could be realized.

Ms. Biraj Swain

She stressed on the importance of public awareness taking into board the real beneficiaries to build solidarity. The need of the hour was to work on plural policy strategy for eradication of hunger and right to food. Connectivity is a serious issue which is being under-prioritized. There is a need for hard hitting research to find out where the malaise lies.

One issue that is not mentioned in the bill is food price inflation. The government has pared it down with whole sale price index by 133%. 70% of Indian farmers are net food buyers which is a serious issue as the middlemen are gaining in this process. There is a need for generating greater public awareness.

Chair: The Canadian Carter commission has fixed a simple index for BPL to determine if the household spends more than 50% of its income on three items- food, transport and housing. A similar index with some changes could also be constructed in the case of India.

Biraj Patnaik

One of the important factors during the discussion was the fact that the Minister was open to suggestions and recommendations. There were suggestions for integrating the Bill with other schemes and programmes of the government. There are also issues related to the decentralization and involvement of Panchayats and local institutions in the implementation of the bill which were discussed.

Barabara Ekwall

Barbara Ekwall said that the discussions focused on human right aspect of food security where human rights framework worked to sustaining and respecting people's

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existing food practices and the Bill under discussion was a move towards greater empowerment of people. The discussion mainly focused on the federal relations of centre and states with regard to formulation and implementation of the Bill, decentralization and the role of self-governance.

She said that the Bill was extremely important in the context of India. Her discussion also focused on children as to whether they would go to school, work and have fulfilling and healthy lives. There was also a need to ensure that there should be surplus to fulfill all the requirements and to work for food and nutrition security.

Discussion:

In the context where one is discussing about the right to food security through human rights perspective, there is also a need to respect people's existing food systems. The discussion on food security often gets relegated to grains and there was also the need to look at other sources.

I) Recommendations at National Consultation on NFSB

1) MS Swaminathan, MP

A) Issues Highlighted:

- *firstly* the bill needs to look into the contribution of farmers who could only ensure that the food should be home grown and available in the market.
- *Secondly*, government is not legally bound to provide food services to the people.
- *Thirdly*, the focus should be on universal PDS instead of targeted focus in particular states.
- *Fourthly*, the bill has left out the cases where people have more nutritional requirements like people with diseases, old and destitute etc.
- *Fifthly*, the provision of 'cash on purpose' should not be taken into consideration.

B) Recommendations Made:

- *firstly*, both the State Food Commission and the Central Food Commission should take into account the good practices of the farmers.

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- *Secondly*, there should be a national commission on farmers which should not be merely a bureaucratic body but it ought to be a pan political commission in nature. It should be headed by the Prime Minister and should include the chief ministers from states.

2) **Prof. KV Thomas, MoS**

A) Recommendations

- the focus of the present Bill was also to ensure adequate nutritional value of the food;
- the provision of replacement of grains by cash had to be considered for extreme situations like impending or ongoing war where the procurement of food grains could not be guaranteed;
- there should greater investment in agriculture and involvement of young and educated people in agriculture is required to ensure food security in the coming years.

3) **Ms. Barbara Ekwall, FAO, Rome**

A) Highlighted Issues:

- Hunger is an important human right and there are millions of people in the world whose rights are not being realised.

B) Recommendation

- Strong political will and leadership is required to realise the right to freedom from hunger strike.

4) **Prof. Shanta Sinha, NCPCR**

A) Recommendation

- The bill should mention the provision of midday meal for the children below the age of six;
- Integrate the Supreme Court rulings into the bill;
- care should be taken that care of children and their rights to health care and nutrition are not compromised;

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- there is a need for decentralized RTE with greater participation of local authorities and Gram Panchayats;
- there should be accountability mechanism for the delay in food supply; there should be no conditions on maternity benefits;
- the legal entitlements of the child needs to be clearly defined and authorities should be held accountable in case of breach of these entitlements.

5) Dr. N C Saxena, NAC

A) Recommendations

- The ICDS has to be revamped and the health ministry should to be involved in the issue.
- Transparency in the system and the manner of running of the programme requires change.

6) Mr. MB Rajesh, MP

A) Recommendations

- There should be a demand for Universal PDS instead of targeted PDS.
- FSA must be completely delinked from the central poverty estimates which were becoming more unreliable and dubious.
- Implementing food security bill is a questing of political will as the resources are there. It is only the matter of how and for what purpose they were being allotted and utilized.

7) Ashok Shukla, State Election Commissioner, UP

A) Recommendations

- Better internal management of the process and greater transparency was required for efficient functioning of the system.
- There is also a need to create a centralized ration card database.

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- The centralized printing of bar coded ration cards, their distribution in public camps and community monitoring would ensure transparency and accountability.

II) General Recommendations

- There should be a push for nutritional security and universal PDS.
- There is a need to make the system more feasible, universal and self-targeted.
- The bill does not give security to all vulnerable groups since it follows targeted approach.
- The bill should take into account the real situations of the country as there is no effective way to ascertain BPL population. So, targeted approach to PDS would not work.
- PDS should be revamped and the network should be expanded to achieve the true target by excluding the richer section
- The bureaucratic nature of the bill has to be changed to more people friendly approach
- an activity map should be laid out with regard to the functions of three tier system and list down the tasks for Gram Sabha, Gram Panchayat, Zila Parishad, Intermediate Municipalities and the District Planning Committee
- All women representatives should be statutorily the members of food security as it would ensure greater responsibility and greater monitoring
- Even though the schemes are of central government, monitoring and accountability mechanisms should be given to the state governments
- The component of facilitation of information and grievance needs to be strengthened so that local body could sort things out at the district level and integrate this with the state structure
- The bill has given an opportunity for revitalizing the agriculture
- There was also a need to decentralize procurement, set up mandis in all states, and set up provision for proper storage facilities
- There should be a separate law in form of third schedule to define the role of state government on NFSB as well as separate focus regarding the assurance of MSP
- The issue of price inflation is not mentioned in the bill.

The National Consultation on the National Food Security Bill, 2011

Venue: Deputy Chairman Hall,
Constitution Club, New Delhi
22-23 March 2012, 9.30-5 pm

*Organized by Centre for Legislative Research and Advocacy; In Partnership with: Oxfam
India, Office of the Commissioners to the Supreme Court on the Right to Food
Parliamentarians' Group on MDGs*