

# **North East Zone Consultation On the National Food Security Bill**

4th-5th January 2012

Guwahati (Assam)

**Jointly Organized by**

**Wada Na Todo Abhiyan**

**Oxfam India**

**Food and Water Security Coalition, India**

IN ASSOCIATION WITH

**SHANTI SADHANA ASHRAM**

GUWAHATI – 29, ASSAM

# INTRODUCTION TO FOOD SECURITY AND FOOD SECURITY BILL



## FOOD SECURITY:

Food Security means access by all people at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life. Food security includes at a minimum: 1) Ready availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods, and 2) An assured ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways. Food security refers to the availability of food and one's access to it. A household is considered food-secure when its occupants do not live in hunger or fear of starvation.

Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.

## FOOD SECURITY BILL:

The '**Food Security Bill**' is a bill passed by the government which is meant to give legal entitlement of cheaper food grains to about 63.5% of Indian population. This ideally should manifest in growth of Indian human capital, productive work force and skilled labor and long term growth of the economy. These people will work more efficiently, spend more and thus will domestically drive the Indian economy.

## **CRITICISMS:**

What Mahatma Gandhi said of the role of food in a human being's life in a 1946 speech at Noakhali, now in India, remains the most powerful expression of the importance of making access to food a basic human right. Gandhiji also wanted that the pathway to ending hunger should involve opportunities for everyone to earn their daily bread, since the process of ending hunger should not lead to the erosion of human dignity. Unfortunately, this message was forgotten after Independence, and government departments started referring to those being provided any form of social support as “beneficiaries.”

The government tabled the National Food Security Bill after a long and fractious internal debate, and amidst clamored from the corporate media about the 'unaffordable' costs of providing food to the millions who need it. There has been a systematic, well-orchestrated campaign to depict the bill as an irresponsible way of doling out largesse, as a recklessly wasteful measure, and as a logistical nightmare, with a price tag so high it could break the back of the Indian economy!

However, contrary to wild claims about the bill's price tag, ranging from Rs 1 to 4 lakh crore, the likely cost will not exceed Rs 27,000 crore, in addition to the existing Rs 67,000-crore food subsidy.

The addition works out to a minuscule 0.3 percent of India's GDP, and less than 2 percent of the revenue, exceeding Rs 5.5 lakh crores, which the government annually forgoes in subsidies, tax write-offs and duty exemptions for businesses.

The amount is about half of what was written off last year via customs duty exemptions for diamond and gold alone.

## **BACKGROUND:**

Livelihood Thematic Action Group of Wada Na Todo Abhiyan along with Food and Water Security Coalition India and Oxfam India, are attempting to bring CSOs, various campaigns, academicians and experts on food related issues to hold in-depth discussions on the National Food Security Bill. In June 2009, the Government of India announced for a comprehensive legislation to be enacted as "The National Food Security Act" which will focus on the right to food. Currently the bill has been introduced in the Lok Sabha. The Bill has been drafted without any wider consultation with important stakeholders and suffers from a number of shortcomings including minimal reach, reduced entitlements, lack of commitment to vulnerable groups, and intends to do away with double subsidy provided on the TDPS by various states, to name a few. We hope that the discussions will lead to a common understanding so that a collective civil society force can emerge for advocacy with government. To take this process forward, multi-stakeholder Regional Consultations across five zones as well as one National Consultation (involving academics, scientists, political persons) in New Delhi is being organized. Each Regional consultation was day and a half long with a participation of 50-60 people and had been organized by local partner organizations of WNTA.

- ✓ **East Zone: Patna** (Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Orissa and Chattisgarh) on 30th -31st January, 2012
- ✓ **West Zone: Ahmedabad** (Rajasthan, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra) on 7th - 8th February, 2012
- ✓ **South Zone: Anantpur** (Karnataka, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu) On 17 th - 18th February, 2012
- ✓ **North Zone: Dehradun** (HP, J&K, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana and Uttarakhand) on 1st and 2nd March, 2012
- ✓ **North East: Guwahati**, (Assam, Meghalaya, Manipur, Nagaland, Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh and Tripura ) on 4th -5th March, 2012
- ❖ **NATIONAL CONSULTATION NEW DELHI ON 20TH -21ST MARCH 2012**



## **PURPOSE OF CONSULTATIONS:**

The purpose of organizing these consultations is to get various actors from different backgrounds to discuss/critique the proposed Food Security Bill in detail, and to develop a Charter of Demand which will be used as an advocacy tool for the government and policy makers.

## **OBJECTIVES:**

- Educate, sensitize, motivate and mobilize people at large.
- Develop and publish critiques of the food security bill. The consultations will also have special sessions which will specially focus on the following chapters of the bill in order to ensure Last Mile Delivery and Citizens' Engagement:
  - Chapter II: Provisions of Food Security
  - Chapter IV: Persons Living in Starvation
  - Chapter IX: Grievance Redressal Mechanisms and
  - Chapter XIII: Transparency and Accountability
- Develop a Charter of Demands (with sharp and prioritized Recommendations)
- Advocacy with Government and other policy makers in the interest of Common people.

## **NORTH EAST ZONE CONSULTATION:**



The Last in the series of regional consultations on 'National Food Security Bill' was held in Guwahati at 'Santi Sadhana Ashram' located in Basistha on the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> of March 2012.



The consultation was meant to bring together various civil societies voices- activists, grassroots workers, academics as well as political representatives in an attempt to hold in depth discussions on the provisions listed under the proposed National Food Security Bill, soon to be tabled in the parliament. By bringing together perspectives of

various stakeholders - the Dalits, women, farmers and religious minorities, to name a few, the North - East zone consultation brought together NGOs, academics and other socially engaged individuals and groups from Assam, Meghalaya, Manipur, Nagaland, Tripura, Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh.

### **IMPORTANCE OF FOOD AND SECURITY BILL:**

- India is still home to the largest number of under nourished and malnourished children, women and men in any country. The number of people going to bed partially hungry now is more than the entire population of India in 1947.
- The Planning Commission's submission before the Supreme Court on the amount of money needed per day per person in urban and rural India to meet needs in the areas of nutrition, education and health care was Rs.35 a day in urban India, and Rs.26 in rural India.
- The proposed National Food Security Bill, 2011 with Human Life-cycle Approach can erase India's image as the land of the malnourished.
- To make food-for-all a legal right, it is necessary to adopt a Universal Public Distribution System (PDS) with common but differentiated entitlements with reference to the cost and quantity of food grain. The draft Bill adopts the nomenclature suggested by the National Advisory Council (NAC) and divides the population into priority, that is, those who need adequate social support, and general, that is, those who can afford to pay a higher price for food grain.
- During 2010-11, India's farmers produced 86 million tones of wheat, 95 million tones of rice and 42 million tones of nutri-cereals. The production of nutri-cereals, grown in dry farming areas, will go up if procurement and consumption go up. Thus, the addition of this food grain will help strengthen food grain availability and nutrition security.
- The National Food Security Bill, 2011, provides the last chance to launch a frontal attack on poverty-induced hunger and to realize Mahatma Gandhi's desire that the God of Bread should be present in every home and hut in India. We should not miss this opportunity.

Day 1: 4<sup>th</sup> March, 2012



### INAUGURAL SESSION:

Renowned Social activist from Assam and receiver of the prestigious 'Rajiv Gandhi National Sadbhavana Award' from the Government of India Shri Hembhai (Mr. Hem Dutta), Honorable Shri Anil K Singh, Secretary General of the South Asian Network for Social & Agricultural Development (SANSAD), India, Honorable Chairperson, Dr Y.L.Karn, Vice Chairman, National Integration Council, Assam Branch & Honorable Director, Food & Civil Govt. Of Assam Shri R.K.Mazumdar Kindled the Symbolic Light.



It was then followed by Prayer by Ashramites.

A Self introduction Round was conducted so that everyone gets familiar with other participants and share ideas on Food Security Bill without any hesitation.

### WELCOME & INTRODUCTORY SPEECH BY SHRI HEMBHAI DUTTA, SECRETARY, SSA:

Shri Hembhai welcomed everybody and thanked everyone for coming from different far off places of North East and India in a very short note of time.



He said the Young people must start taking responsibility and start providing leadership for a better tomorrow because more than half of the nation's population is under 30 years of age. He said that like our fingers there is an inequality in the society but in that inequality also there is equality. If one finger is 3 inch then the one other is either 3 inch or 4 inches. The other finger is not 8 or 10 inches. In a similar way in the society also there is equality in inequality. We can never expect or get a perfect equality in the society but we should try to minimize the inequality in the society with our humble and noble efforts. Here comes the role of 'Food Security Bill'. He said if a strong and meaningful bill is passed and if implemented correctly it will make millions of people happy and it will help in creating a society where everyone will flourish. He further added that in India millions of children are not going to school or are dropouts.

Just yesterday a new school was inaugurated in a nearby locality in which if a parent wants to send their children then they have to spend 30 thousand rupees per month which is very high.

In India every year thousands of poor farmers Suicide every year .This situation can become more problematic in future if no hard measures are being taken by the Indian and state governments, because percentage increase in suicides among farmer is much above the average general suicide rate.

The major reason behind these suicides by farmers is believed to be crop failure and increasing debts. From last number of continuous years, agriculture segment in India is not able to show any impressive growth and in future also chances of any growth are very less. However, vast farmer pollution of India totally depends on this sector and any negative move in this segment can ruin their all dreams.

Our government needs to provide more financial and modernization help to the farmers so that they can also again start making profits from their agriculture business. However, on the other hand most of the government look blind on this tragedy and according to them situation is still under control.

Today, India may have achieved leading position in IT or other industries but agriculture is one segment which has helped India when it needed this help most. Even today, large majority of Indian population is engaged in farming, therefore, some immediate steps are required to avert situation from becoming worse.

The condition of farmers in India is horrible. Only hand counted of them can make it big, the remaining swerve between starving and earning just enough to take care of today's needs and a little saving for tomorrow. In India people like farmers who work very hard are getting poorer and corrupt people and mafias are getting rich day by day which is creating a inequality in society.

In Jagiroad due to the poisonous wastes from the Paper Mill the soil has got polluted and farmers are facing problems upto 15 kms stretch from the site of the factory.

Shri Hembhai finally welcomed Honorable **Shri Anil K Singh** ji and thanked him for coming far away from New Delhi and handed over the mic to him.



**SHRI ANIL KUMAR SINGH:**



Honorable Shri Anil K Singh, Secretary General of the South Asian Network for Social & Agricultural Development (SANSAD), India welcomed all the participants to the meeting. He then provided a brief context of the National Food Security Bill.

The Food Security Bill which is considered to be the world's largest scheme, targets 67 per cent coverage of our population is going to influence the livelihood of people but at the same time he added that the Food Security Bill in its present form suffered from various inadequacies.

We are depended on those who supply. He said that we tend to give more importance to those who wear dress nicely but most people don't importance to a farmer nor do they like to marry their son / daughter.

One major reason behind this is that they think farmers are poor and it is true that most farmers are poor in India cause there is no good return from farming. But then why big companies like Reliance Industries' (RIL) are planning at acquire over 2,000 acres for its contract farming venture in Karnataka? The company is also looking at entering into

contract farming operations in Haryana and Maharashtra. RIL's plan entails acquiring 10-acres in all the 175 talukas in Karnataka and a similar holding in each of the 27 districts. It is learnt that RIL has recruited a vast number of agriculture graduates for this project. If Farming is not at all profitable such big companies would have never had stepped into this sector. They have stepped into this sector because they have seen profit in this sector.

The main obstruction between the ideas of agriculture farms is most probably the lack of faith on each other and the law. They must be afraid that the crop will be usurped by the members with stronger muscle power, a thing which is pretty common in rural India.

To improve the condition of Indian farmers they will have to be given strong protection of law. And that will have to be maintained. I personally believe if that thing is done, it will solve a huge amount of problem. As we are agriculture based country so Government should give more emphasize on Agriculture and Agricultural practices. In India today child malnutrition is prevalent at 43 percent. The prevalence of stunting among under-5s in India is between 48% and 57% Under nutrition is found mostly in rural areas and is concentrated in a relatively small number of districts and villages with 10 percent of villages and districts accounting for 27–28 percent of all underweight children. Undernutrition includes both protein-energy malnutrition and micronutrient deficiencies. Undernourishment not only affects physical appearance and energy levels, but also directly affects many aspects of the children's mental functions, growth and development which have adverse effects on children's ability to learn and process information and grow into adults that are able to be productive and contributing members of society. Undernourishment also impairs immune function leaving them more susceptible to infection. Children with infections are more susceptible to malnutrition and the cycle of poverty and malnutrition continues. Child malnutrition is responsible for 22 percent of India's burden of disease.



He highlighted some of the key provisions listed in the proposed bill like :

- Lack of emphasis on pulses, oil, sugar and other essential food supply under the Bill in its present form.
- Though many promises have been made in the National Food Security bill but its operational structure is not well defined, thus leaving a large margin for misinterpretations once the bill comes to life.
- Provision of 7 kgs of food grains per person for 'Priority Households' and 3 kgs for the 'General Households', was an amount that was inadequate to meet the nutritional needs of people. This 7 Kgs Per month amount needed to be revised to 14 KGs per month.
- The prominence given to Aganwadis as food supplying units, specially for women and children, unmindful of the fact that in many places Aganwadis have failed to perform even their current roles well and many parts of the country still have limited access to these center.
- Malnourishment is a serious concern for the country where 48% children below the age of 5 are found to be undernourished. 42.5% children below 5 years were underweight; 70% children below 5 were anemic and 52% women also suffered from anemia. Thus it is important that the Bill also addresses the nutritional needs of people by including protein rich diets of pulses, meat, fish, milk, ghee and so on for it to be a holistic intervention.
- Insuring good infrastructure for storage was also an important factor and one that must be recognized by the Bill. Currently, the states are able to lift only about 2/3rd of the grains from central godowns because of lack of adequate storage facilities. This must be rectified in the light of building sustainable efforts to ensure food security in the country.
- Grabbing fertile agricultural land for industries and other large development projects must be stopped. Only barren lands must be transferred for industrialization and other related activities.
- Only 'Daliya' and 'Kichadi' cannot provide enough nutrients to a human body. Micronutrient deficiencies are also a widespread problem in India. So Healthy food should be given for proper growth and health.

- Anil Singh felt that instead of the government focusing its resources on other activities like building roads (25 kms. of national highways is being built every day as per Central government's claim), attention needed to be given to constructing food grain godowns, improving the linkages between farmers and agricultural markets and overhauling the distribution system as well.

The prevalence of micronutrient deficiencies varies in different states, More than 75 percent of preschool children suffer from iron deficiency anemia (IDA) and 57 percent of preschool children have sub-clinical Vitamin A deficiency (VAD). Iodine deficiency is endemic in 85 percent of districts, mostly due to the lack of iodized salt that is common in the developed world. Progress in reducing the prevalence of micronutrient deficiencies in India has been slow. The prevalence of different micronutrient deficiencies varies widely across states. Most growth retardation occurs by the age of two, and most damage is irreversible.

He felt that the quoting country's deteriorating GDP as an excuse for not universalizing the National Food Security Bill was a fallacy. The current expenditure on the Public Distribution System was much more as compared to what the Universal application of the National Food Security bill would entail. He felt that not Even 0.3% of the GDP would actually be expended on the proposed National Food Security bill to make it universal, and thus the government's contrary claims in Defense of a targeted approach were baseless. While on the one hand, the huge corporate subsidy in the country was never a matter for reconsideration for the Government, on the other hand, it was trying to wash its hand off its duty to ensure Every man's right to good quality, nutritious food. He noted that the National Food Security bill was too narrow in its approach. The Bill in its current form overlooked the diversity of food types and culinary cultures in India, giving preference to only one kind of food type- rice and wheat Consumption. Safe, clean drinking water, sanitation and access to good quality health care, and creation of a conducive environment where there were equal opportunities for all, were also important corollaries to make the National Food Security bill a success in real terms.

Mr. Y.L.Karn:



Honorable Chairperson, **Dr Y.L.Karn**, Vice Chairman, National Integration Council, Assam Branch said that the present Food Security Bill has many loopholes in it and needs to be revised soon and there should be no conditions apply in the Bill.

He said the Last paragraph in the Preamble is misleading. He said we are a democratic country and government has to listen the voices of the general masses. Like others Mr. Karn Ji also emphasized on the Awareness factor and said awareness campaigns and programs should be conducted. He said without proper awareness the general masses won't be able to come to know that such a bill exists. He also said that in the Preamble the government has talked about nutrition but in the bill there is no talk about nutrition. Karn Ji emphasized on using modern technologies in agriculture. He further said that we should pressurize government to collect tax. He also said that nutritional food should be included in the bill

**Dr Y.L.Karn** wrapped up the session by concluding that much thought needs to be given to issues of food sovereignty, diversity, and distribution and quality consumption.

## 2<sup>nd</sup> session

R.K. MAJUMDAR:



Honorable **Director, Food and Civil Govt. Of Assam Shri R.K.Mazumdar** Emphasized on the present Public distribution system.

- Generally, the consumers get inferior food grains in ration shops.
- Deceitful dealers replace good supplies received from the F.C.I (Food Corporation of India) with inferior stock.
- Many retail shopkeepers have large number of bogus cards to sell food grains in the open market.
- Many FPS dealers resort to malpractice since they acquire less salary.
- Despite the PDS, India accounts for over 400 million poor and hungry people. Numerous malpractices make safe and nutritious food inaccessible and unaffordable to many poor.

**To improve the current system of the PDS, the following suggestions are furnished for:**

- Vigilance squad should be strengthened to detect corruption, which is an added expenditure for taxpayers.
- Personnel-in-charge of the department should be chosen locally.
- Margin of profit should be increased for honest business, in which case the market system is more apt anyway.
- F.C.I. and other prominent agencies should provide quality food grains for distribution, which is a tall order for an agency that has no real incentive to do so.
- Frequent checks & raids should be conducted to eliminate bogus and duplicate cards, which is again an added expenditure and not fool proof.
- The Civil supplies Corporation should open more Fair Price shops in rural areas.
- The Fair Price dealers seldom display rate chart and quantity available in the block-boards in front of the shop. This should be enforced.

Several schemes have augmented the number of people aided by PDS, but the number is still extremely low. Poor supervision of FPS and lack of accountability have spurred a number of middlemen who consume a good proportion of the stock meant for the poor. There is also no clarity as to which families should be included in the BPL list and which excluded. This results in the genuinely poor being excluded whilst the ineligible get several cards.

The stock assigned to a single family cannot be bought in installments. This is one of the biggest barriers to the efficient functioning of PDS in India. Many BPL families are not able to acquire ration cards either because they are seasonal migrant workers or because they live in unauthorized colonies. A lot of families also mortgage their ration cards for money.

He also gave a brief overview of Production in Assam in the year 2011 and addressed the problem of shortage of warehouses in Assam.

He also explained the food security bill in brief.

Though the storage capacity has increased at a CAGR of 6.7% during the last decade, the irony remains that around 20-30% of the total food grain harvest is wasted due to lack of availability of storage capacity, regional imbalance in warehouses, lack of adequate scientific storage and inefficient logistic management in the country. Albeit, with adequate storage capacity in place, a normal handling loss of around 5-7% is expected to continue.

Two things need to be addressed at this stage, 1) to build additional storage capacity and 2) upgrade the existing state owned warehouses. Most of the warehouses owned by state agencies are over 15-20 years old and hence the same needs upgradation to contain wastage levels.

He further added the issue of women empowerment in India. The fact that the Bill also made it mandatory for women to be considered 'Head of Households' was a step towards women empowerment. A woman needs to be physically healthy so that she is able to take challenges of equality. The most common explanation of 'women's empowerment' is the ability to exercise full control over one's actions. Some sections of women becoming increasingly self-conscious of their discrimination in several areas of family and public life. They are also in a position to mobilize themselves on issues that can affect their overall position. Most of the women work in agricultural sector either as workers, in household farms or as waged workers. Yet it is precisely livelihood in

agriculture that has tended to become more volatile and insecure in recent years and women cultivators have therefore been negatively affected. The government's policies for alleviating poverty have failed to produce any desirable results, as women do not receive appropriate wages for their labor. There is also significant amount of unpaid or non-marketed labor within the household. The increase in gender disparity in wages in the urban areas is also quite marked as it results from the employment of women in different and lower paying activities. They are exploited at various levels. They should be provided with proper wages and work at par with men so that their status can be elevated in society.

Empowerment would not hold any meaning unless they are made strong, alert and aware of their equal status in the society. Policies should be framed to bring them into the mainstream of society. Empowerment would become more relevant if women are educated, better informed and can take rational decisions. But it is sadly lacking in a majority of women especially in the rural areas. They have unequal access to basic health resources and lack adequate counseling. The result is an increasing risk of unwanted and early pregnancies, HIV infection and other sexually transmitted diseases. The greatest challenge is to recognize the obstacles that stand in the way of their right to good health. To be useful to the family, community and the society, women must be provided with health care facilities. Expenditure on food subsidy and better provisions for public distribution services directly affects the lives of women and girl children in terms of adequate nutrition.

He also suggested that the moment of Food can be done through rivers and other channels. He also emphasized on the awareness factor i.e. the bill should be made aware to the general masses through mass advertisement through proper channels and mediums.



## **MR. BHASKAR BARUA:**

**Rtd. IAS Officer Shri Bhaskar Barua Ji** emphasized on the following points:

➤ **Ability to purchase the food.**

The subsidized price of food should be such that all general masses including those who are BPL can purchase the food.

➤ **Appropriateness of the food**

The Food Given Should be Appropriate. Food Which Suits the People are not suited for the people of Rajasthan. And the Food given to the people of Rajasthan is not suitable to the people staying in Hills of North East India.

➤ **Quality of the food**

There should be a certain standard in the quality of food given. 'Quality' of food being distributed under the proposed National Food Security bill must be monitored closely for it to actually benefit the common man.

➤ **Malnutrition**

The World Bank estimates that India is ranked 2nd in the world of the number of children suffering from malnutrition, after Bangladesh, where 47% of the children exhibit a degree of malnutrition. The prevalence of underweight children in India is among the highest in the world, and is nearly double that of Sub-Saharan Africa with dire consequences for mobility, mortality, productivity and economic growth. The UN estimates that 2.1 million Indian children die before reaching the age of 5 every year – four every minute – mostly from preventable illnesses such as diarrhea, typhoid, malaria, measles and pneumonia. Every day, 1,000 Indian children die because of diarrhea alone.

The 2011 Global Hunger Index (GHI) Report ranked India 15th, amongst leading countries with hunger situation. It also places India amongst the three countries where the GHI between 1996 and 2011 went up from 22.9 to 23.7, while 78 out of the 81 developing countries studied, including Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Vietnam, Kenya, Nigeria, Myanmar, Uganda, Zimbabwe and Malawi, succeeded



in improving hunger condition. So it's high time that we tackle the problem of Malnutrition in India.

➤ Dependence on other states

A lot of food items come to North Eastern States of India from other states of India like Punjab, Haryana, Delhi, Rajasthan etc. In case of Emergencies the seven sisters has to face problems like price hike and shortage of commodities. Even the it results in high prices.

➤ Unmatched biodiversity of Assam

The Biodiversity of Assam, a state in North-East India, makes it a biological hotspot with many rare and endemic plant species. The government should take advantage of this Biodiversity to a greater level. The state of Assam experiences plenty of rainfall and possesses a fertile land which is extremely advantageous for cropping. This has led to the flourishing growth in food crops and staples in Assam agriculture.

➤ Emphases on the items which can be grown nicely in Assam

Among fruit crops, Assam has oranges and other citrus fruit, bananas, guavas, pineapples and mangoes. There are extensive plans to expand the cultivation of these fruit products and market them to bring greater benefits to the farmers. Rice is the main food crop in Assam agriculture as it is the main diet in the state too. Those who are engaged in the agricultural department of Assam fully concentrate on cultivating rice as it falls under their main priority. Other food crops cultivated in Assam agriculture include jute, sugarcane, fruits, tea, pulses, coconut, potatoes and cotton. More than 50 percent of the total population of the state is involved in agricultural activities in Assam.

➤ Good harvesting practices

Mr. Barua also emphasized on the importance of good harvesting practices.

➤ Good storage practices

He also said that its high time that good warehouses should be built in different parts of the states.

**Mr. C.K.Das Retd. IAS Officer**



**Rtd. IAS Officer Shri C.K.Das** talked about the effects of 'Food and Security Bill' and its responsibility on Agriculture of North East. Mr. Das said that the poor delivery leads to rise in cost which affects the BPL people esp. in Assam. Sugar kerosene prices are high due to poor transportation costs and outdated storage system. We should feel free to discuss our complains, send sms, post cards to the concern person who involve in bankruptcy. Mr. Das also said that the Location of godowns should be appropriate and if not then it becomes the source of corruption. The Public transportation system should be sincere on deliver goods on time. He said that there should be greater

emphasize on the Knowledge of human rights. Human rights as the name say the rights which belong to human life. In today's world everyone should know their rights and duties so that they can live happy and also do not harm any other human as same rights are with another human as well. He further added that there should be honesty in business dealings. Adulteration should be avoided to improve the quality of food. Lastly he emphasized on the power of Power of RTI and hope that govt will the 'Food and Security Bill' very effective in the near future. He also gave importance on publishing of mobile numbers of the concerned officers to the general public. Consumer courts should be set up at more places. He said that the calorific requirement varies from person to person. Persons from lower levels like a farmer need more calories because he works very hard. In general, eating a wide variety of fresh, whole (unprocessed), foods has proven favorable for one's health compared to monotonous diets based on processed foods. In particular, the consumption of whole-plant foods slows digestion and allows better absorption, and a more favorable balance of essential nutrients per Calorie, resulting in better management of cell growth, maintenance, and mitosis (cell division), as well as better regulation of appetite and blood sugar. He also added that the diversion of Bramputra River by china and said that India is facing with severe challenges brought by reduced water resources and a severe drought that has affected a large portion of the country, China has started to consider diverting water from the Brahmaputra River, the watercourse that originates upstream from southwestern Tibet. There is also a move to explore possibilities of building dams Tibet. This is a serious matter of concern.

## **OPEN DISCUSSION SESSION:**



One question was raised that – so much Rice is produced but where it goes? 2 lakh MT of rice is delivered to the state of Assam but we are not able to utilize it properly.



Malnutrition can be used as a measure of food insecurity and it has the most impact on those living with HIV / AIDS. An individual whose body is already compromised with HIV has an immune system even less effective at defending against infections when the body is malnourished. Anti-retroviral drugs are now being distributed to people in these areas but when given to those who are undernourished, the medicine's effectiveness is decreased and toxicity is increased. Malnutrition accelerates the onset of the disease and give rise to repeated illnesses because of their weakened immune systems. Consequently, HIV and malnutrition provide a cyclic form of feedback for each other, with worsening conditions of malnutrition being linked to a more rapid onset of HIV. Mr Dibjyoti Saikia discussed the 'Awareness Issue' and gave a very good insight in this regard to the present situation.



Day 2 : 5<sup>th</sup> March, 2012

### 3<sup>rd</sup> session

Honorable Chairperson, Dr Y.L.Karn, Vice Chairman, National Integration Council, Assam Branch and Honorable Shri Anil K Singh, Secretary General of the South Asian Network for Social & Agricultural Development (SANSAD), India made a open discussion about the various points which were discussed in the session 1 and session 2 and conducted a group discussion and at last a summery was made based on all the discussed points discussed and group discussion which were as follows:

#### Summary of the main points discussed:



- Installation of Vigilant Committees and use of ICT to create transparency and accountability in the system were also appreciable.
- Currently the growth in population/per year is marginally more as compared to the growth in food grain production. Population of the country is growing at 1.76% per year as compared to food grain production which is increasing at 1.58% per year. Thus it is crucial for the government to pay more attention to increasing yield and introduce agrarian reforms if

the rate of India's food grain production can be at par with its population growth.

- Government's claim of lack of finances to support a universal National Food Security Bill can also be refuted. As per CBGA's estimates, universalization or 100% coverage under the National Food Security Bill would cost the government rupees one lakh eighty four thousand crores. Currently, through its other schemes like the PDS, government is already spending rupees sixty three thousand crores on food security. Thus this additional gap that universal application of the Bill would amount to an extra investment of rupees one lakh twenty four thousand crores. Though this gap may seem too large to bridge, the fact was also that the government was unable to collect certain taxes such as customs duty, sales tax, excise duty etc, an amount costing more than five crore rupees annually. Thus, if the government was able to claim even 1/4th of what this amount, the gap in food security estimates could easily be addressed.
- It is crucial that at least 4% of the GDP is reserved for the agricultural sector for us to ensure long term food security of the country in the real sense of the word.
- There was also the need to increase agricultural storage facilities at the regional, state and national level as well.
- Need to strengthen the role of village panchayats in food distribution process must be emphasized in the Bill.
- Focus on the food sovereignty aspect of the Bill. The Bill must provide clear guidelines vise a vise procurement of grains from farmers, fixing of Minimum support Prices in time and provide encouragement to agrarian reforms.

- Cultural and regional food diversity must be kept in mind in implementation of the Bill.
- Given the fact that the agricultural sector is one of the most neglected in the country and there is a high increase in the number of farmers are rushing to the cities in search of paid Employment, this bill should be made in such a way that it stops this situation and help farms to continue with farming and gain more profit.
- The Bill must be universal in spirit. The division of populations in to BPL/APL categories to have basic access to food was a limiting factor in the Bill.
- Participation of marginal populations must be strengthened in the panchayats as well. Redressal mechanisms must be localized so that communities can have easy access in airing their grievances.
- The Bill also needs to talk about significant issues related to food security, like water security for farmers.
- Government though high on security and defense budgets, never spared a thought for meaningful investment in the agricultural sector- the very backbone of the Indian economy. Diverting land for industries meant that even in peripheries of major cities like Guwahati, farmers were forced to give up their traditional livelihoods and look for other options. Indiscriminate corporatization of the agricultural sector had forced the farmers to buy manure and seeds at expensive prices, doubling the cost of agricultural production in the bargain. Given lack of appropriate and timely support prices, proper marketing and distribution networks and other social insurance schemes for the agricultural sector, farmers were being driven to the verge of suicide not just in Assam, but all over the country. Thus it was important for

farmers to assert their right over production for the governments to realize their true worth.

- Intensive use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides also led to contamination of water sources and the land becoming unproductive over a period of time. Thus innovations in agriculture also need to be thought about in a more sustainable manner. He felt that if there was a political will, it was possible to reap positive changes.
- One must learn from a small country like Thailand, which is today a chief exporter of rice all over the world. Unfortunately, he felt that India had adopted the American model of growth where less than 4% people were directly involved in agriculture and its allied activities. For India to solve its present agricultural crisis, it is important that the government formulate policies that are pro-farmers like promoting organic farming instead of the inorganic, cash crop centric approach to agriculture. Organic farming implied less investment and better yields over a period of time and would thus prove beneficial to farmers who were today buried under huge debts.
- For the urban poor, the situation was even worse as they had no clean drinking water or proper sanitation facilities at hand. For the Bill to be impactful, it must espouse a rights-based, universal approach.
- Marketing and distribution channels also need attention as a way of incentivizing agrarian production and farmers, in the long run.
- Must encourage organic farming as a way of creating sustainable food security measures in the country.
- Food Security and HIV/ AIDS: We need to have special focus on people with HIV/AIDS under the National Food Security Bill. Social stigma and shame,



coupled with negligible health care facilities added to their deteriorating condition, he felt. The Bill must make space for various marginal voices like the one of HIV/AIDS afflicted to people or with disabilities for it to be a comprehensive tool of social legislation.

- Diversion of fertile land for industries must be stopped. Only unproductive land should be claimed for industrialization or other development purposes.
- The Bill must have strong penalty clauses for defaulters/ corrupt agencies and individuals as constant leakages in the PDS system had rendered ineffective scheme almost useless in many parts of the country. Thus the Bill must propose strong measures to check the increasing corruption in the food process in its various stages.
- India's present crisis and state of malnutrition in the country it is important to read the National Food Security Bill in a holistic manner so that India can adopt sustainable, ecologically friendly approach to providing food security to its citizens.
- Key Recommendations of North East Zone Consultation Crucial to adopt a rights-based approach to the Right to Food Bill and thus frame its terminology accordingly, as that of a fundamental right of people of India.
- Emphasis the need to make the Bill universally applicable, covering all vulnerable sections of the population. Prioritize the need for agrarian reform and make it incumbent on the governments to focus/ invest on increasing/improving agricultural production, procurement and distribution networks.
- One must ensure that the Schedule is made a part of the main body of the Bill so that governments can be made accountable to it, and it does not remain at the level of mere political 'intention'. Diversion of fertile land for

industrialization and large development projects must be stopped. Only barren, unproductive land must be allocated for industrial and related projects. The Bill must specify this. Demand that at least 4% of the Gross Domestic Product must be reserved for agrarian reforms. Inclusion of pulses, oil, sugar and essential food items in the Bill, rather than merely rice, wheat and coarse grains. Ensure that in the implementation of the Bill, the most marginal and vulnerable groups like the disabled, sex workers etc. are also its beneficiaries. Therefore themed for a strong implementing model must be to be addressed in the Bill. Merely focusing on Anganwadis or other ICDS agencies as distribution networks might not be enough.

- Currently, the operational aspects of the Bill seem weak and must be elaborated upon in the main body of the Bill itself to avoid misreading of it at a later stage. Awareness generation must be made an integral part of the Bill for people to understand its true import and implication.

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