



Right to Food Campaign

(Secretariat)

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Dear

Seeking legislative action on India's alarming levels of hunger and undernutrition

The Right to Food Campaign is a network of organisations and individuals committed to the realization of right to food in India. The Campaign would like to draw your attention to the alarming levels of hunger and undernutrition in India and request discussion and action on these issues in the Parliament.

Amongst the 119 countries included in the 2017 Global Hunger Index, India stood at the unenviable position of 100. The country's nutrition indicators are no better. For every 1,000 live births in 2015-16, 41 infants died below the age of one year. The same year, 38.4 per cent of the children below five years of age were stunted (as compared to 34 per cent in sub-Saharan Africa). The body mass index of about a fifth of India's adult population is less than normal. 53 per cent of women and 58.5 per cent of children are anaemic. Across the country, 45000 women die during child birth every year.

Some important legislative measures have been taken to reduce India's alarming levels of hunger and undernutrition. One of the most important in this regard is the National Food Security Act 2013 (NFSA), which entitles support in the form of subsidized foodgrains, cooked meals and maternity entitlements in cash. The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act 2005 (NREGA) is expected to provide some economic security to rural households and ward off hunger. However, the poor implementation of these legislations, the agrarian crisis and situation of critical under-unemployment has perpetuated food insecurity.

We request you to initiate a discussion on the widespread hunger and undernutrition in the country and legislative action for the following:

Strict implementation of the National Food Security Act

The implementation of the Act leaves much to be desired. Many poor households are excluded from ration card lists, names of many people are missing from their household's ration card, disruptions in Anganwadi services and midday meals are not uncommon and most pregnant women do not receive maternity entitlements.

- Every eligible family that has been excluded must be given compensatory foodgrains or 'food security allowance' as mandated in the NFSA with retrospective effect.
- Given the widespread violations of NFSA, there is an urgent need to activate the grievance redress mechanisms of the Act. Transparency and accountability provisions of the Act also need to be strictly implemented to minimize transgressions of the legislation.
- The Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana introduced in 2017 provides a maternity entitlement of only Rs 5,000 – that too only for the first live birth and with several conditionalities. The scheme needs to be modified to provide pregnant women a minimum maternity entitlement amount of Rs 6,000 – as entitled by NFSA – for all children and without any conditionalities.

Expansion of National Food Security Act entitlements

The National Food Security Act needs to be amended to ensure:

- Universalization of the Public Distribution System.
- Mandatory inclusion of nutritious items such as pulses and edible oil at subsidized rates.
- Mandatory inclusion of food stuff such as eggs, fruits and milk in the school and Anganwadi Centre meals.
- Putting in place a mechanism for the implementation and monitoring of schedule III of the Act (provisions for advancing food security).
- Annual updating of population figures which form the basis of coverage of schemes under the Act.

Strict implementation of the Nation Rural Employment Guarantee Act

The employment guarantee act entitles 100 days of work to all rural households. Over the past five years, the average employment was only 46 days per employed household (about 15 days per rural household). Most NREGA workers receive their wages with delays – many do not receive payment at all. For most states the NREGA wage rate is grossly unremunerative, even less than the minimum wage rate in 17 states. There is an urgent need to ensure strict implementation of the Act and increase the real NREGA wage rate.

Ending the mandatory integration of welfare with Aadhaar

Till the Supreme Court gives the final judgement in the Aadhaar case, the government must immediately end the mandatory Aadhaar seeding and monthly biometric authentication for all entitlements.

Discontinuation of mandatory cash for food subsidy pilots

Given the unsuccessful experience of cash for food subsidy pilots in Puducherry, Chandigarh, Dadra and Nagar Haveli, Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand, and the widespread discontent amongst the ration cardholders of these areas, all such experiments need to be discontinued with immediate effect. If at all necessary, people in such pilots should be given a choice between food and cash.

Relief and rehabilitation for families affected by starvation deaths

At least 14 persons have died of starvation across three states in a span of five months – from September 2017 to January 2018. Criminal proceedings need to be initiated against officials and functionaries whose lapses have resulted in these deaths. The surviving members of such families need to be compensated with jobs, pensions and admission in residential schools for the orphaned children.

Increase in social spending

The union budget for 2018-19 betrays the government's lack of commitment to address the structural causes of hunger or ensure adequate coverage of social support programmes. There is a reduction in the budgets for maternity entitlements, the National Crèche Scheme and other subsidies for food security. The increase in the budget for midday meals and the National Social Assistance Programme are negligible. The promise of Minimum Support Price of 50 per cent over costs is not reflected by higher allocations in the budget. The government needs to be prevailed upon for an adequate increase in social spending.

We hope you will consider these demands and take the required action. For further information, please contact Dipa Sinha (9650434777) or Aysha (9716048979) or write at rtfcindia@gmail.com.

Sincerely,

On behalf of the right to food campaign