



Right to Food Campaign

(Secretariat)

24, Block A, Adhchini, Sarvodaya Enclave, New Delhi – 110017, India

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Janta Parliament Demand for Universal Food Entitlements after the Pandemic

India has the world's largest undernourished population. Forty percent of Indians also do not have a National Food Security Act (NFSA, 2013) ration cards. Other provisions of the law have also been violated during the pandemic. School and anganwadi children across India have not been uniformly provided dry rations or cooked meals. Maternity entitlements for pregnant and lactating mothers have been virtually stalled during the lockdown.

World over, many countries have moved to virtual Parliament sessions to continue its functions and keep a check on the executive. But in India, even controversial policy decisions by the government have escaped any legislative scrutiny or representative accountability. Therefore, several civil society organisation networks and peoples' movements, have organised an online [Janta Parliament](#) from 16th August to 21st August to discuss urgent COVID-19 pandemic related policy measures. Overall the online programme over 6 days will cover 11 thematic sessions from health to civil liberties. In this context, the special session on Food Security and Nutrition was organised by the Right to Food Campaign on 17th August from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

For the entire 3 hours, Annie Raja of the NFIW was the Presiding Officer. The online session had a series of speakers including economists, veteran activists, intellectuals, academics and grassroot workers from Jammu to Telangana and Gujarat to Assam. Pre-recorded video testimonies from villages across India on the situation of food insecurity were also shown with the intent that Parliament too should hear people's voices and issues.

The session began with Gangaram Paikra, the co-convenor of the Right to Food Campaign in his opening remarks said, "people are going through situations of increased hunger and migration due to unplanned lockdown. Ration has failed to reach to people in both rural and urban areas. Anganwadi centers should be re-opened immediately, community kitchens should be set up and nutritious food should be distributed."

Social activist Harsh Mander poignantly remarked that in the midst of the pandemic, “*ration kagaz mein hai thali mein nahi*” (people’s rations are only on paper, not on their plates.) He also said that, “the present crisis is not because of Coronavirus but because of the decisions made by the government in past and present”.

Fr Jothi from West Bengal reflected a national concern when he emphasised that by not providing midday meals and integrated child development scheme (ICDS) nutrition to children during the pandemic, the government “has stolen from the rightful share of” children’s and mother’s rightful entitlements.

Rachana Mudraboyina, echoed the plight of all vulnerable communities during the pandemic that, “The transgender community do not have aadhar card or bank accounts and therefore no ration card or eligibility for any monetary benefits. All transpersons should get ration cards, right to buy property, assistance in opening bank accounts”.

Economist Jean Drèze was emphatic that the solution for this malady included, “Universalisation and inclusion of nutritious food items in the public distribution system (PDS).” He also emphasised that “poor people do not have any say at all in these policies for the moment and that is why it is so important for the Parliament to start functioning, because it gives at least a limited possibility of people to be heard if only through their representatives .”

Parliamentarian Ameer Yagnik from the Indian National Congress who attended the session, “The malnutrition in the country was already high and post lockdown children would be pushed to further hunger and malnutrition.” She also reassured that she will definitely take these issues and suggestions forward in Parliament as soon as it resumes and also request for a short duration discussion on food security in light of the pandemic.

The framework on PDS and Nutrition was presented by Reetika Khera (IIT Delhi) and the speakers included Rupesh (RTFC Bihar), Sunita (RTFC UP and Sahyog India), Upasana Behar (MPLSSM and RTFC), Dheeraj (Bashin Nahin Ration Do Muhim, Jammu), Sharda Gopal (RTFC Karnataka), Balram (RTFC Jharkhand), Mukta Shrivastav (Anna Adhikar Abhiyan, Maharashtra), Biplab (BGVS), Amrita Johri (Anna Adhikar Abhiyan, Delhi).

The segment on vulnerable communities and their struggle for food security, included Sunil Kumar Aledia (National Forum for Homeless Housing Rights) and Rachana Mudraboyina,

(Transgender network) along with representatives of networks of differently-abled persons and sex workers through pre-recorded videos.

The priority demands on Children's and Maternity entitlements were put forth by Devika Singh (Mobile Creches) and Dipa Sinha (Ambedkar University), and the speakers from across India included Fr Jothi (RTFC West Bengal), Nesar Khan (RTFC Rajasthan), Sangeeta (RTFC Chhattisgarh), Tarulatta (RTFC Gujarat), Chakradhar (RTFC AP), O.P Bhuraita (BGVS Himachal Pradesh) and Bidyut Mohanty (RTFC Odisha).

There was more than 99 percent voting in favour of all the 7 resolutions which were voted on:

- Universalisation of PDS with pulses and oil without mandatory Aadhaar or Ration cards
- Comprehensive Nutrition including Eggs and Fruits to all children under ICDS and MDM
- Unconditional and Universal Maternity Entitlements without any Restrictions
- Free Community Kitchens for Homeless and Migrants
- Community Kitchens and Relief in Flood and Cyclone Affected Areas
- Make provision of anganwadi and supplementary nutrition an essential service
- Ration card for all vulnerable populations including trans people

The entire session was live streamed on the Right to Food Campaign facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/righttofood/videos/351541345850770> and Janta Parliament website <http://jantaparliament.wordpress.com/>

For any queries, please feel free to speak to the session anchor Swati Narayan (+91 8433590294) or at the RTFC Secretariat Gaurav (+91 88004 13893) and Nawasha (+91 88605 33725).