

Towards hunger-free India: Count down to 2007*

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“The sacred mission of a ‘Hunger-Free India’ needs the cooperative efforts of the Central and State Governments, local self-government bodies, non-governmental organizations, international agencies and above all, our citizens. We can indeed banish hunger from our country in a short time. Let us resolve today to make this mission substantially successful by 2007, which will mark the sixtieth anniversary of our independence”.

—Atal Bihari Vajpayee

while releasing the Food Insecurity Atlas of Rural India on 24 April 2001

The challenge

The quantitative and qualitative dimensions of the challenge of achieving a hunger-free India are daunting. The incidence of poverty, endemic hunger, communicable diseases, infant and maternal mortality rates, low birth weight children, stunting and illiteracy is high. There are, however, many examples where progress in the elimination of poverty-induced hunger has been rapid because of a symphony approach in dealing with the multi-dimensional problem of hunger and malnutrition. Successful experiences in the elimination of hunger and poverty have shown that synergy between political will and action and strategic partnerships can help local communities to achieve seemingly impossible tasks. Such ‘messages and methods of hope’ should therefore be documented and spread widely, since they not only inspire confidence that the goal of a hunger-free India can be achieved, but will also help to build the self-confidence of all engaged in the mission of overcoming under- and malnutrition.

*The data contained in the Food Insecurity Atlases of rural and urban India prepared by the M. S. Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF) and the UN World Food Programme (WFP) have helped to understand and identify the steps needed to achieve the goal of a hunger-free India by 2007. These steps were discussed at a Consultation convened by MSSRF, WFP and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) at New Delhi from 4–5 April 2003. The major components of ‘Agenda 2007: Hunger-free India’ recommended by the participants are described.

Basic approach: Food with human dignity

Food with human dignity should be the basic approach. The poor should not be subjected to a patronage approach but should be treated as partners in achieving the aim of ensuring that every child, woman and man in the country has an opportunity for a productive and healthy life. The right to adequate food and clean drinking water should be regarded as a basic human right.

Thrust of the Tenth Five Year Plan (2002–2007)

The Tenth Five Year Plan has shifted the emphasis from food security at the household level to nutrition security at the level of each individual. Emphasis has been placed on employment, education, health and nutrition, which are all-important for poverty eradication and hunger elimination. The inter-sectoral nature of chronic hunger has been recognized. By shifting the attention to individuals, the strategies adopted will be based on the principle of *social inclusion* and will help to foster a life cycle approach in nutrition interventions. For example, pregnant women will need special attention, since maternal and foetal under-nutrition leads to the birth of babies characterized by a weight of less than 2.5 kg at the time of delivery. Such low birth weight (LBW) children suffer several handicaps in later life and may not be able to express their innate genetic potential for mental and physical development. Such inequity at birth is inexcusable since we are now entering a knowledge-based economy. Similarly, old and infirm persons need special

attention. Thanks to advances in preventive and curative medicine, we are now adding years to life. However, we should pay equal attention to adding life to years through nutrition and health care. We should recognize that we are now entering a new chapter in human longevity. There is therefore need for a proper match between nutrition requirements and nutrition support at different stages in the life of an individual.

Hunger is the extreme manifestation of poverty, since the poor spend a high proportion of their earning on food. The elimination of hunger is thus the first requisite for eradicating poverty. Without adequate nutrition, the energy needed for higher work output will not exist in malnourished individuals.

Guiding principles for converting goals into accomplishments

Decentralization

The desired goal can be achieved speedily and surely only if a decentralized approach to implementation is adopted. ‘Think, plan and act locally and support at the state and national levels’ should be the motto. Elected local bodies, together with the concerned Departments of Government (health, education, women and child welfare, rural and tribal development, etc.) should prepare microlevel action plans. They should form a local level ‘Alliance for a healthy and productive life for all’. The one million elected women members of local bodies can be empowered to spearhead the freedom from hunger movement, since they are more aware of the problems of nutrition and drinking water. Decentralization will enhance accountability, reduce trans-

action costs and remove corruption in delivery systems.

Life-cycle approach

For ensuring nutrition security at the level of each individual, a life-cycle approach is necessary so that the nutrition needs of an individual can be met from birth to death. Special programmes for adolescent girls, pregnant women, nursing mothers, infants (0–2 years) and old infirm persons should continue. What is needed is the horizontal integration of numerous vertically structured programmes. Such a functional integration will help to create a symphony at the level of each village/town/city to ensure that all links in the food availability–access–absorption chain function at a high level of efficiency and effectiveness. Management tools and not additional monetary support will be needed to bring about at the field level such convergence and synergy among ongoing programmes.

Food for Work as the vehicle

In keeping with the basic approach, of food provision with human dignity, it was agreed by all participants that Food for Work (FFW) was the best existing vehicle of delivery. Effectiveness of the FFW programme could be ensured through two approaches. One is that of fine-tuning, i.e. ensuring that FFW is made available during the peak hunger season, which varies across agro-climatic regions. The other major change required is to broaden the scope of the programme to ensure wider coverage, suitability to pregnant and lactating women, the old and weak and to help embark on achieving the stated nutrition targets in a mission mode.

It is suggested that FFW be broadened in scope to include community work related to cooking and serving of mid-day meals, door-to-door delivery of nutritional supplements, polio-drops, vitamin A and iron tablets, etc. maintenance of anganwadi centres, school buildings, food banks, village drinking water systems, cleanliness of the village, school kitchen gardens, fuel plantations, village forests and other community assets. This would ensure that even those handicapped by age, pregnancy or poor health

could participate in the programme and earn their food with dignity and with no adverse physical impacts.

Priority could be given to the employment of women in the most food-insecure districts. Identification of projects could be left to the gram panchayats. Monitoring of community work could be carried out by the school teacher or anganwadi worker. A brief ‘on the job’ training/awareness module would prepare this hunger-elimination task force for their new semi-skilled assignments. This would also ensure the availability of a semi-skilled work force within the village, which could be involved in the implementation of existing and new schemes of the central and state governments.

Information, education and communication

There is need for launching a *nutritional literacy movement* to spread awareness of the adverse consequences of malnutrition-induced intellectual and physical dwarfism among children. The *nutritional literacy movement* should include issues relating to food safety, *codex alimentarius* standards, sanitary and phyto-sanitary measures, etc. Mass media, particularly those in the public sector like Doordarshan and All India Radio can play a very important role in making the hunger-free India movement a success. Community radio stations, giving location-specific information, should be encouraged to assist other mass media in spreading messages of hope. It will be useful to set up Media Resource Centres for a Hunger-free India. Such centres can provide credible and timely information to the print, audio, video and new (i.e. internet) media.

Household entitlement card

It will be useful to provide every family with an entitlement card, giving information on the various government projects which they can access. The information may be disaggregated by gender, age, religion, caste and class, and precise addresses of contact persons and offices may be given. Such information will enable everyone to make the best use of their entitlements. A single step of this kind will help enormously to ensure the effective utilization of all the schemes of central and state governments and bilateral and multilateral donors.

Capacity building

Since a decentralized approach involving the empowerment of over three million women and men members of local bodies holds the key to the success of this national movement for food and clean drinking water for all, it is essential that a national consortium of Agricultural, Rural and Womens’ Universities as well as government and non-governmental training and research institutions is formed for undertaking capacity building in areas such as management, communication and organizational skills with reference to the implementation of the hunger-free area programme. The capacity-building programmes can be organized on a ‘Trainers’ Training model’, in order to achieve a multiplier effect.

Asset building and community development

The poor are poor because they have no assets like land, livestock or fish pond. They often are illiterate and lack proper dwelling. They survive on wage employment, which particularly in the case of women, does not reach the level of even the prescribed minimum wage. A massive effort is needed to help them to shift from unskilled to skilled work through training in market-driven skills. The on-going micro-finance led self-help revolution will be the speediest way to help them to rise above the poverty level. This will call for establishing effective forward and backward linkages, particularly with technology sources and markets. Insurance and Venture Capital support should also be available to micro-enterprises. We have now an opportunity to leapfrog in achieving our goal of enabling everyone to earn his/her daily bread.

Initiation of a National Food for Social Capital Programme

The social capital of a country is the product of interaction between the human capital and the cultural, political, economic, nutritional and natural environments. Human and social capitals constitute the most precious wealth of a nation. Mahatma Gandhi and Vinobha Bhave advocated the principles of *antyo-daya* and *sarvodaya* for achieving high social synergy and capital. A society committed to building its social capital

will try to promote programmes which represent a 'win-win' situation for all, thereby avoiding winners and losers and the consequent social conflict and disruption. During the last few years, the Government of India as well as some state governments have initiated many programmes like Sampoorna Gramin Rozgar Yojana, Annapoorna, Antyodaya Anna Yojana, Universal Noon-meal Programme for School Children, etc. It is now clear that our farmers will produce more if we can enhance consumption and thereby opportunities for assured and remunerative marketing. Therefore, the initiation of a National Food Guarantee Scheme will help to ensure that all who are hungry today due to lack of livelihood opportunities or other constraints are able to have food for a productive life. Such a National Food Guarantee Scheme can serve as an umbrella for all ongoing projects like those mentioned earlier. In addition, it can provide food grains for initiating a Nagarpalika Rozgar Yojana as well as for a wide variety of social support initiatives like Food for Health (TB, HIV/AIDS, Malaria, etc.), food for those employed in ICDS, Nutritious Noon Meal and other similar projects. In other words, food can become a powerful currency for achieving the goal of a hunger-free India. Using food as a currency has twin advantages, namely, there could be greater off-take of food grains from farmers, thereby providing them with an incentive to produce more, and secondly for meeting the immediate needs of the poor, destitutes, migrant labour and all who are undernourished today.

The Urban Food Insecurity Atlas released by the President in October 2002 clearly brings out the urgent need for attending to the hunger problems of the bottom 10% of the poor (ultra-poor) in towns and cities. Therefore, the setting up of an umbrella programme combining the principles of the Employment Guarantee Scheme of Maharashtra and of various Food for Work Programmes under a National Food for Social Capital Programme will be timely. This could serve as a hub of a series of activities. It can start with a total allocation of 15–20 million tonnes of food grains during 2003–04. Such a block grant of food grains can be managed by a Malnutrition-free India Trust, headed by the Deputy Chairman of the Union Planning Commission. The Trust can sanction

small projects to meet specific local requirements as well as to fill gaps in the ongoing programmes. At least 5 million tonnes of grain should be available to support local level Community Food Banks in 'hunger and hydrologic hot spot' areas and specific programmes designed to improve maternal and foetal nutrition as well as to provide nutrition support to those affected by TB, leprosy and other diseases. Such a Food Guarantee Initiative will be psychologically an important index of the capability of Indian farmers on the one hand and the political commitment to achieve Prime Minister's goal of a hunger-free India by 15 August 2007 on the other. Such a programme could be announced by the Prime Minister in his address to the nation on 15 August 2003.

Monitoring and evaluation

This could be done at various levels starting with Gram Sabha and Citizens Groups (like the Right to Food Group) and government agencies and research institutions. An effective and transparent monitoring system will also help to ensure the implementation of the directives of the Supreme Court of India.

Consultative Group for Freedom from Hunger

Both at the national and state levels multi-stakeholder consultative groups for 'Agenda 2007: Hunger-free India' could be organized, comprising representatives of the concerned Government of India ministries and departments, professional experts, National Commission for Women, civil society organizations, business and industry, mass media and bilateral and multilateral donors, with the Union Planning Commission serving as the nodal agency for such a consultative group. Such a group would help to foster strategic partnerships as well as synergy among political leaders, professionals and peoples' organizations.

Standing Committee of the National Development Council

A Standing Committee of NDC could be set up for monitoring progress and ensuring the success of Agenda 2007. The NDC Committee chaired by the Prime Minister could include Chief Ministers of

states where there is widespread under- and malnutrition as well as of food-secure states, so that there could be lateral sharing of experiences among states. Such a Standing Committee could provide the political guidance and support needed for implementing this important programme.

Immediate action during 2003–04

Besides the announcement of the 20 million tonnes Food for Social Capital programme and the setting up of a Malnutrition-free India Trust by the Prime Minister on 15 August 2003, immediate action needs to be taken to end poverty-induced chronic hunger and the transient hunger caused by drought and natural calamities through a series of Community Food, Fodder and Feed Banks. Such banks may be established in all the 'hunger hot spots' of the country. CFBs managed by local Self-help Groups preferably of women, would save considerable transaction and transport costs. They will also help to widen the food security basket through the inclusion of local grains like millets, pulses, oilseeds and tubers. It will also be advisable to reclassify coarse cereals as 'nutritious grains' in order to underline their desirable nutritive properties.

No time to relax on the food production front

While the alleviation of hunger by improving access to income and balanced diets and safe drinking water should receive high priority, there is no time to relax on the food production front. We need to bring about productivity, quality (including food safety), profitability and sustainability revolutions in farming based on a Farming Systems Approach. There is an urgent need for enhancement of investment in agriculture and rural infrastructure development. There is also need for conferring on small producers the power of scale through cooperatives, self-help groups and other socially viable methods of group endeavour both at the production and post-harvest phases of farming. Our spectacular progress in the dairy sector is largely through such management innovations. There is need for a movement for trade and quality literacy including an understanding of sanitary

and phytosanitary measures and *codex alimentarius* standards. There is also need for launching a Jal Swaraj and Water Literacy Movement. Above all, there is need for a paradigm shift from jobless to job-led growth in order to ensure that every poor person is enabled to earn his or her daily bread.

In a predominantly rural and agricultural country like India, agricultural progress (i.e. crop and animal husbandry, fisheries, forestry and agro-forestry and agro-processing) will be the most effective social safety net against hunger and poverty. Hence, the ongoing fatigue of the green revolution in wheat, rice and

other major crops should be converted into an evergreen revolution designed to promote productivity improvement in perpetuity without associated ecological harm. Agricultural and rural development, if given adequate and appropriate attention, will help the country to take to the path of job-led economic growth.

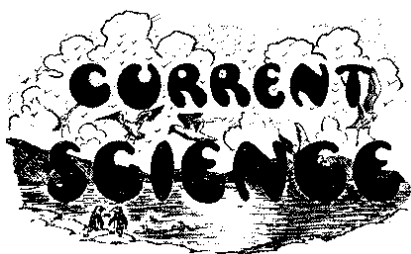
Our substantial grain and foreign exchange reserves and the three million elected women and men members of local bodies have provided us with an uncommon opportunity for launching a frontal attack on hunger and poverty. It will be a tragedy if we do not act, when we are in a position to act.

To conclude, the 'Agenda 2007: Hunger-Free Area Programme' should keep in mind the following advice of Gandhiji given before his death.

'Forget the past. Remember every day dawns for us from the moment we wake up. Let us all, every one, wake up now'.

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FROM THE ARCHIVES



Vol. X] JULY 1941 [NO. 7

Research Workers and the Patent System*

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The first question which arises before the mind of a person who has made an invention is whether it is desirable for him to protect it by means of a patent. Presuming that the inventor can take out a patent for his invention, this question can be considered either from the standpoint of an inventor who from purely altruistic motives wants to make his invention freely available to the public so that they may enjoy its full benefits, or from the point of view of an inventor who has the motive of enjoying as many of the benefits of his invention as possible. To decide whether it will be worth the inventor's while to take out a patent

in order to achieve either of the two above-mentioned objects, a thorough estimate of the assets and liabilities which will accrue to the inventor by taking out a patent for his invention must be made.

Before trying to analyse what will be on the credit and the debit sides if a person takes out a patent, it will not be out of place here to refer to a few misconceptions about the patent system, which are prevalent in the minds of many people.

There is a class of people who seem to think that a patent is akin to a certificate of merit whereby the utility claimed for the inventions is endorsed by the Government. This is not so. By the grant of the Patent rights, the Patent Office does not in any way vouch for all that is expounded or claimed by the patentee.

Another misconception is, that by possessing a patent a person would be able to manufacture an article by a slight alteration of a manufactured article based on an existing patent, so that the new article produced embodies all the essential features of the old one in addition to slight variations in non-essential details. This also is not true, as a later patent can in no circumstances prejudice the rights of an earlier patentee.

Now, a patent is a privilege or a right conferred by the Government by which the patentee can enjoy the exclusive right of working the patented invention, or authorising others to do so, as long as the patent right is in force. This right, how-

ever, is conferred on him subject to the condition that he makes a complete disclosure of his invention so that after the termination of the patent, the public would be able to make a free use of his invention. Other conditions which are imposed on him are, that he would not exercise his patent injuriously to the public, or in restraint of trade, or for illegal or immoral purposes, and that he would continue to pay an annual fee to keep the patent in force for the period for which the patent has been granted.

Let us now examine how an inventor who decides to take out a patent for his invention benefits himself under the Patent System. As already pointed out, a patent gives an inventor the right whereby he can enjoy the exclusive privilege of working his invention. Hence, with a patent for an invention in his possession, even the most impecunious inventor can approach a financier on terms of equality and arrive at a satisfactory financial agreement with him with regard to the exploitation of his invention. The prospect of a monopoly will also induce the financier to undertake the exploitation of the invention. Hence there is no danger of any useful inventions going waste or of their being exploited by others without an adequate and equitable reward. This will facilitate the progress of negotiations between inventors and manufacturers for the purpose of commercially developing the inventions to their mutual benefit.

*The views contained in this article reflect the views of the author only and do not represent those of the Government and should not be taken as committing the Government in any way.