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Food security: The gaffes of the past and the options for the future

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ABSTRACT

India has been in the throes of a lively debate on food security. There have been calls for a 'second green revolution' in the country. However, there is a need to take a look at the food security policies pursued so far to draw appropriate lessons from their implementation. An examination of these policies, including the 'First Green Revolution' shows that these policies themselves have contributed in no small measure towards undermining the food security of the country. There is a need to learn from this experience rather than blindly extending them to other parts of the country.

Keywords: Food security, Food grains, Green revolution, India

INTRODUCTION

As the difficulties in ensuring food for the people have increased over the past decade, anxious calls for a 'second green revolution' (SGR) have gained stridency.[1-5] It leaves an impression that everything else possible under the sun to resolve the worsening crisis in food security has already been done. The crucial question however is – is present crisis of food security inevitable in the dearth of further technological advancement or is it the result of the policies pursued by the governments over the years? Answering this calls for a scrutiny of trends and issues related to food security in India.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF THE PAPER

According to FAO food security is said to exist when "all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life".[6] As per this definition there are four aspects of food security – food availability, food access and food utilization; the fourth aspect is the stability of the first three aspects in perpetuity. Accordingly, policies directed at ensuring food security ought to be designed to impact favorably on all these aspects.

This paper is organized in two parts. The first part examines the impact of government's policies, especially since the beginning of the neoliberal economic reforms, on the aforementioned aspects of food security with the purpose of judging whether they have succeeded in ensuring even minimal dietary requirements of the people. We have examined the following trends – the per capita yearly net food grain output and availability in India before and after independence, variation in food grain stocks in the country over the years, trends in food grain exports, trends in rural and urban poverty and the impact of targeting in the Public Distribution System, trends in financial outlay for the rural sector and last but not the least the consequences that have followed the fabled First Green Revolution (FGR). The logical sequence drawn here from should enable us to decipher the real causes of food insecurity and thereby the possible solutions.

PER CAPITA YEARLY NET FOOD GRAIN OUTPUT AND AVAILABILITY IN INDIA

By now, the facts regarding net per capita food output and availability in the country as obtaining in the available literature on the subject have

adequately settled that food grains available for per capita consumption in the country has been declining over the years. In fact, the highest per capita food grain output and availability in the country was observed in the period 1897-1902 at 201.1 and 199 kg respectively.[7]This achievement was inspite of the British exporting 475 thousand tons of food grain from India during this period. After 1947, the highest triennial average per capita availability of food grains was reached in 1990-91 at 176.6 kg i.e. on the anvil of the neo-liberal economic reforms. Since the beginning of the economic reforms, there has been a halting slide down the slope. According to the figures available from indiastat.com, at the beginning of the new millennium, even as the government committed itself to achieving the Millennium Development Goal of banishing extreme poverty and hunger from the country, the net per capita yearly food grain availability touched 151.9 kg in 2001; equivalent to the levels seen in early fifties. Average food grain availability in the first decade of the 21st century has been 162.6 kg, equal to the average availability in the sixties, which was a decade of perpetual food crisis. Again these figures are only availability and not actual consumption, for indeed there has been a growing divergence between availability and the purchasing power of the people which has been falling over the years.

Only to bring out the gravity of the situation it may be reminded that even the Famine Commission appointed by the British administration in 1880 held the per capita yearly availability of 200 kg of foodgrains to be the minimum required for staving off famines.[8]

Alongside declining foodgrains production, the agricultural sector has been starved of investments. Investment in agriculture and allied services (at current prices) as a percentage of GDP (at factor cost at current prices) declined from 0.6 % in 1990-91 to 0.4 % in 2000-01 and was only 0.5 % in 2009–10 (calculations based on figures in tables 1 and 107 in Handbook of Statistics of Indian Economy, Reserve Bank of India, 2011-12), whereas the agriculture's contribution to India's GDP has been much higher; varying from more than 50% during the first five year plan period to about one fifth during the eleventh plan period. Besides, agriculture forms a firm foundation for growth in other sectors of the economy. The share of public sector in capital formation (such as expansion in the irrigation systems, seed production and research and development facilities etc.) in agriculture, declined from 33% at the beginning of 1990s to mere 24.2 % in 2000-01 and 17.1% in 2009-10. The Gross Capital Formation in agriculture as a proportion of overall GDP (at factor cost at current prices) has stagnated to around 2.5 to 3 % between 2004-05 and 2009-10.[9] These statistics show that agriculture is receiving back just a tiny proportion of what it has contributed to the country's growth. Such nihilism in government policy towards agriculture is inexplicable in a country where more than 50 % of the work force is still engaged in agriculture and allied sectors. The ensuing crisis in agriculture is reflected in the unprecedented rise in farm suicides. During the period of economic reforms more than two lakh (.2 million) farmers have taken their lives under duress[10] – a protracted human tragedy that is little talked of either in the media or among policy circles.

HUNGRY MASSES AND THE BURGEONING FOOD GRAIN STOCKS

Figure 1 shows the situation of buffer stocks of food grain from 1982 till 2008. The situation of the food stocks has in general been good even as the people perpetually consumed food grains at much below the poverty line level. Beginning from 1998 there is a sharp increase in the stocks which peaks at close to 60 million tones around 2002-2003, while the per capita food grain availability during this period dipped from 173.5 kg per year in 1996-98 to 162.6 kg per year in 1999-01 before recovering to a level of 169.7 kg per year in 2002-04 (calculations based on figures available from indiastat.com). In fact 2003 was one of the worst drought years in recent memory with per capita food grain availability of only 159.7 kg.

There have been attempts by the government to explain this through bunkum theories of 'diversification of diets' and 'voluntary choice' of the people to move away from consumption of foodgrains.[11] The simple fact of the matter however has been the inability of the people to buy enough food and the government's lack of willingness to

provide cheap food to many who required it. For a more detailed discussion on the subject people may refer to Patnaik, 2005.[12]

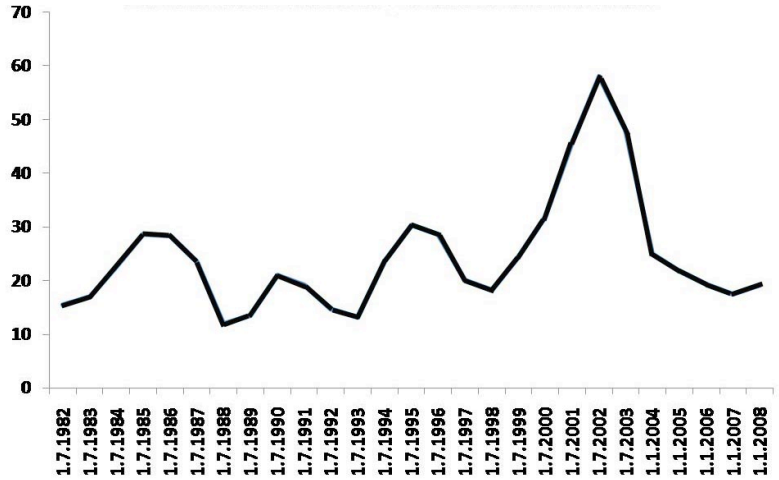


Figure 1 Buffer Stock of Foodgrains (Central and State Governments) in India (01.07.1982 to 01.01.2008) in million tons

Source: Indiastat.com: Buffer stock of food grains

CONTINUING EXPORTS OF FOOD GRAINS

A tendency has been visible to privilege trade in food over using it to satiate people's hunger. As is evident from **Figure 2** food grain exports picked up during the reform years beginning from 1994-95 and reached their peak in 2003– the drought year that was particularly harsh on hunger front.

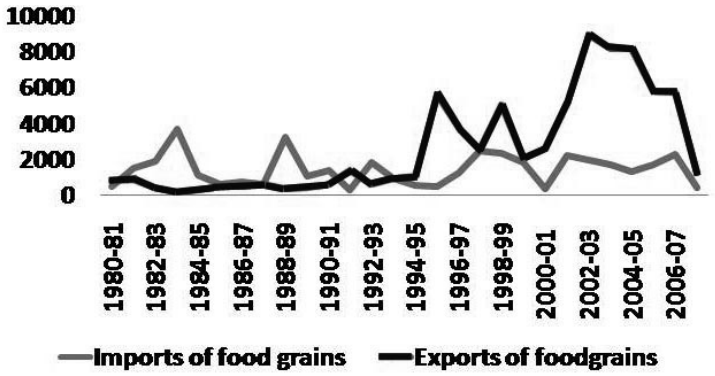


Figure 2 Export and import of Food grains from India in thousand tones. (1980-1981 to 2007-2008)

Source: Data based on which this graph was drawn is available from indiastat.com

There has even been export of pulses, a food grain that has been among the biggest loser in 'green revolution' driven expansion in acreage of High Yielding Varieties of wheat and rice. The saddest part of the food grain export is that the government chose to heavily subsidize the exports rather than make it available to the poor who went hungry. [13 - 15]

INCREASING POVERTY AND THE DECLINING DEMAND FOR FOOD GRAINS

We have already indicated the relationship between rising food grain stocks and the decline in people's

purchasing power due to phenomenal increase in poverty during the years of neo-liberal reforms. The increasing levels of poverty in India during the period of neo-liberal reforms have been attested to by a number of academics and government committees.[16-19] By the time of 61st NSSO round, 87% of the rural population was living below poverty line calculated by direct method[1] of taking the MPCE (monthly per capita expenditure) class that afforded a calorie consumption of 2400 kcal.[20] The corresponding figure for urban poverty was 64.5% by 2004-05.[21]

[1]Direct method of poverty line estimation entails reading directly from the various NSSO rounds data the MPCE class that is able to afford consumption of 2400 and 2100 calories per day in the rural and the urban areas respectively. As opposed to this indirect method entails deriving the new poverty line by adjusting the original direct poverty line deciphered initially in 1973-74 (NSSO 28th round) with price indices for the agricultural laborers and the urban unorganized sector workers to derive the poverty lines for the rural and the urban areas respectively. The later however does not give a correct estimate of the rise in poverty line for a variety of reasons such as increasing monetization of the economy, especially the rural economy and progressive reduction in access to the common property resources for the poor, which has meant that the non-formal sources (i.e. without having to purchase) of arranging food and other utilities of life with which the poor could support themselves have decreased over the years and they are increasingly having to directly purchase their necessities including food. This means that while earlier prices of commodities were only partially relevant in fulfilling the daily needs of life for the poor; their relevance has progressively increased over the years with the poor having to directly purchase a larger share of their needs. This reality is not adequately captured in adjusting poverty lines with price indices.

For further discussion on the topic one may refer to the following works of Utsa Patnaik – 'Poverty and Neoliberalism in India', 'Trends in Urban Poverty under Economic Reforms: 1993-94 to 2004-05' and 'Neoliberalism and Rural Poverty in India.'

The consequences of this are borne out by the report on the State Hunger Indices of selected Indian states. The report states that "All 17 states have India State Hunger Index (ISHI) scores that are significantly worse than the 'low' and 'moderate' hunger categories. Twelve of the 17 states fall into the 'alarming' category, and one —Madhya Pradesh, falls into the 'extremely alarming' category. Punjab, the state with the best hunger score at 13.6, falls in the serious category of hunger index".[22]

IMPACT OF TARGETING IN PDS

In 1998 the government of India resorted to targeting in the Public Distribution System (TPDS) with the objective of directing the food subsidies only to the poor. One crucial objective of the TPDS was to keep the "budgetary food subsidies under control to the desired extent".[23]

In all talk of 'mounting food subsidy bill'; the need for 'fiscal prudence' or diversion of wasteful food subsidies to 'productivity enhancing investments', what is deliberately not mentioned is the meager proportion of subsidies compared to country's GDP.

It can be seen from Figure 3 that India's food subsidy bill has consistently been much below 1% of the GDP for better part; it touched a maximum of around 1% of GDP only in three years – 2002-03, 2003-04 and 2004-05. Moreover, in proportionate terms the food subsidy bill has actually increased after introduction of targeting in 1997. These figures belie the claims of 'huge subsidy bill' and distortion of 'fiscal health'; neither has targeting improved the efficiency of subsidies in providing relief to the poor. A much clearer, albeit subtly put, intent behind targeting is to gradually phase out food subsidies to prepare ground for opening up food procurement, storage, distribution and retail to private sector. This cannot be done in one go for obvious political reasons, hence the intermediary stage of targeting.

It is interesting to note that among those asking for universal PDS today is the Parliamentary Left which promptly shifted to targeted PDS in 1997 in all the states ruled by it – Kerala, Tripura and West Bengal.

This was so even when so to say 'non-progressive' rulers of neighboring Tamil Nadu chose to revert back to universal PDS under public pressure. It is a tribute to the people of the state that PDS system in Tamil Nadu is among the best in the country.[24]

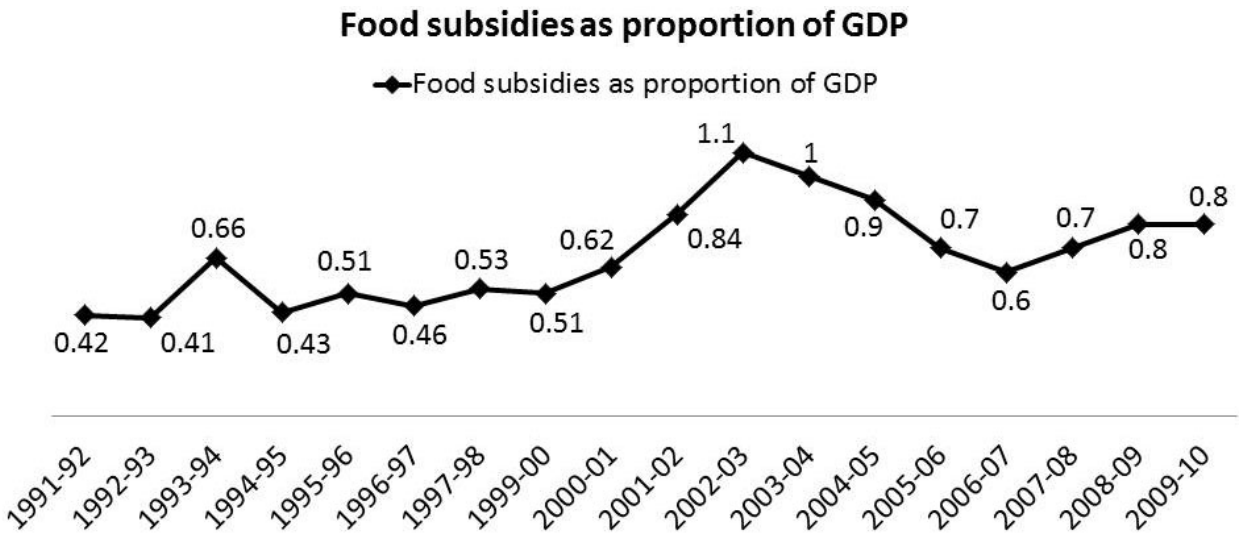


Figure 3 Trends in Central food subsidy bill as a proportion of GDP

Source: To make the figure, figures for GDP have been taken from Table 1: Macro-economic aggregates (at current prices) in 'Handbook of Statistics of Indian Economy, 2010. Figures for food subsidies have been acquired from the table on Food and Fertilizer Subsidies in India (1976 – 2010), available from indiastat.com on 29th July 2011.

Note: Components of food subsidies comprise: Acquisition costs (these include cost of grains, statutory taxes, storage and interest charges etc. at acquisition stage.) – Sales realization, Distribution costs, and Carryover charges paid to state agencies. Distribution costs include: Freight Charges, Handling Charges, Storage and Interest Charges, Transit and Storage Shortages and Administrative Overheads. (Source: Table on Major Components of Food Subsidy in India (1999-2000 to 2003-04.), available from indiastat.com.)

Industry has been swift in its follow through of the government's overtures. The Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry came up with a report on the restructuring of PDS that calls upon the government to privatize the procurement, storage and distribution of food. FICCI released its report on 23rd May 2010 and on 26th May 2010 in the first meeting of the newly constituted 'Prime Minister's Council on Trade and Industry', the Prime Minister, Dr Manmohan Singh requested the captains of Indian industry to "to reach out to the rural economy and help the government on food security and affirmative action".[25] These developments give rise to serious doubts over the government's commitment to strengthening social security measures to alleviate the food insecurity of the people.

JUST HOW MUCH OF PRIORITY HAS AGRICULTURE BEEN?

We have already pointed out above to the neglect and stagnation that bedevils Indian agriculture; here we wish to elaborate just a little more on this.

Country's political leadership often resorts to rhetoric like - 'India's development is the development of her villages' or that 'India lives in its villages'; however, this has failed to make a dent in the more concrete development policies pursued by the political leadership. "Nehru's vision of 'modern India' was anchored around heavy investment in industrial production in centrally located urban centers".[26] In a country where more than 80 % of the people lived in villages and derived their income primarily from agriculture and allied activities, the first five year plan devoted only 32.1% of the outlay for Rural Development (which for the purpose of this paper

includes 'Agriculture and Community Development, Irrigation and Flood Control'). Same trend continued subsequently. Table 1 clearly shows that in proportional terms this outlay got further constricted over the subsequent Five Year Plans. In fact it can be seen from Table 2 that rural development expenditures have remained consistently below 1 percent of GDP throughout the 1990s and 2000, with this dipping to as low as .48 percent in 2004-05. For a country where 70 percent of the population lives in rural areas this is indeed remarkable. As a proportion of the total budget it has barely managed to hover around 10 percent.

Table 1 Decline in outlay for Public Development Expenditures in Rural Areas in different plan periods (As percentage of GDP)

Five Year Plan	1st Plan (1951–56)	2nd Plan (1956-61)	3rd Plan (1961-66)	4th Plan (1969-74)	5th Plan (1974-79)	6th Plan (1980-85)
Rural development expenditure (RDE)	Rs 758 crores (32.1%)	Rs 950 crores (20%)	Rs 1718 crores (23%)	Rs 3815 crores (23.9%)	Rs 7616 crores (20.4%)	Rs 23218.8 crores (22.5%)
Five Year Plan	**7th Plan (1985-90)**	**8th Plan (1992-97)**	**9th Plan (1997-02)**	**10th Plan (2002-07)**	**11th Plan (2007-12)**	
Rural development expenditure	Rs 44629 crores (18.8%)	Rs 89418 crores (20.6%)	Rs 172568 crores (20.1%)	Rs 284176 crores (18.7%)	Rs 647776 crores (17.8%)	

Source: Figures for GDP at Factor cost are from Table 1, Handbook of statistics of Indian Economy, Reserve Bank of India, 2011-12. For RDE outlay from 1st Five Year Plan to the 5th Plan was obtained from Plan documents available from Planning Commission of India website at http://planningcommission.nic.in/plans/planrel/fiveyr/welcome.html on 31st August 2013. For 6th to the 11th Plan the figures for RDE were calculated from Table 2.5 to Table 2.10 in the Economic Survey 2011-12.
Note: RDE includes expenditure on Agriculture & Community Development/allied sectors, Irrigation and Flood control. Figures in parenthesis are percent of the total Plan outlay.

Table 2 Rural Development Expenditures through the decade of 2000s.

Year	1996-97	1998-99	2000-01	2002-03	2004-05	2006-07	2008-09	2010-11	2011-12
GDP (Rs in crores)*	1301788	1668739	1991982	2338200	2971464	3953276	5303567	7157412	8232652
RDE** as % of GDP	.73	.74	.6	.52	.48	.66	.65	.95	.86
Total budget***	87086	105187	117334	144038	163720	254041	375485	534484	592457
RDE as % of budget	10.9	11.8	10.2	8.4	8.8	10.3	9.1	13	11.9

**GDP at factor cost at current prices, **RDE = Rural Development – includes Agriculture and Allied activities, Rural Development schemes, Irrigation and Flood Control.*
*Note: Figures for GDP are from Table 1, Handbook of statistics of Indian Economy, Reserve Bank of India, 2011-12. ***Total outlay and allocation for Rural Development Expenditures were obtained from the 'sector wise outlay' in budgets of respective years available from the Ministry of Finance website.*

While it is true that, there are non-industrialized developing countries with even less proportion of their national budgets devoted to the development of their agriculture sector, as for example in Africa, but it need be borne in mind that neglect of rural and agricultural development in a country of India's size and population can have potentially destabilizing impact on food security not only in India but also in other countries dependent on imports of food to feed their populations. If India imports food, the quantities involved are invariably so huge that international

prices of foodgrains become unaffordable for smaller countries.

Between 2000-01 and 2006-07 only about a fourth of the total cropped area in the country is sown more than once.[27] If the average duration of one crop is taken to be 4 months, then nearly 3/4th of our total cropped land goes waste for nearly 8 months in a year and the main reason for such colossal waste of India's arable land mass is the lack of irrigation which stood at only 31.41 % (net area under irrigation by all sources) of the total cropped area in 2006-07.[28] This amounts to an increase of just 1 % since 2000-01.

It is really remarkable that while the multilateral donor agencies like the World Bank and the IMF have proactively advocated withdrawal of subsidies for agriculture in developing countries, subsidies for agriculture in the OECD countries remain much higher. Compared to many developed countries where agriculture is a much smaller sector of the economy, the government support that agriculture receives in India is woeful. Figure 4 gives a comparison of the subsidies given to agriculture between the countries as a proportion of agricultural GDP, which is the lowest in case of India.

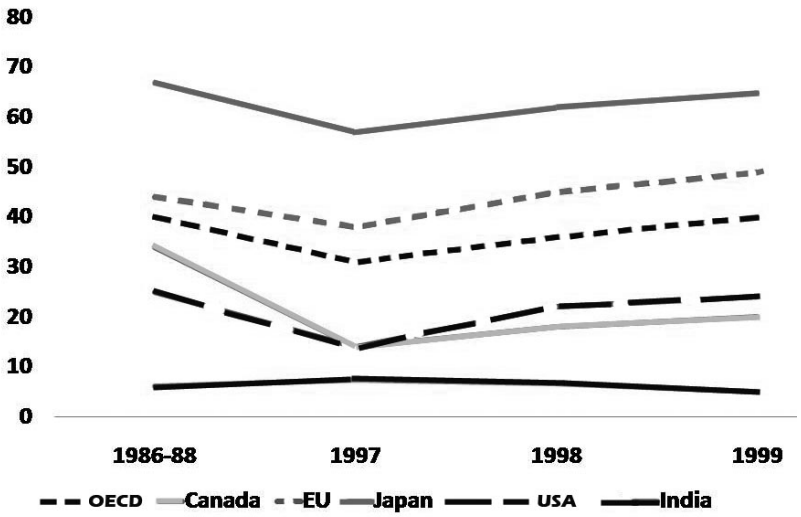


Figure 4 Agricultural Subsidy in Selected Countries and India {Base Year (1986-1988)} (1997 to 1999) as percentage of agricultural GDP

Source: Based on data available from Indiastat.com.

Low investment in agriculture and rural development is coupled with the number of people dependent on agriculture increasing all through since independence. Table 3 gives decadal trends in employment in agriculture since 1951 census. With productivity in agriculture declining, this increase in labor force dependent on agriculture means concentration of unproductive labor in agriculture which directly feeds into the vicious cycle of poverty in rural India and thereby undermining the food security of the people.

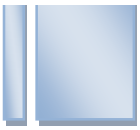


Table 3 Employment in agriculture sector in millions

Agricultural workers / year	1951	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001	2011
Cultivators	69.9	99.6	78.2	92.5	110.7	127.3	118.7
Agricultural laborers	27.3	31.5	47.5	55.5	74.6	106.8	144.3
Total	97.2	131.1	125.7	148.0	185.3	234.1	263.0

Source: Swati Dhoot (2006): National Agriculture Policy – A Critical Evaluation, Briefing Paper is published by CUTS Centre for International Trade, Economics & Environment.[29] Note: The corresponding figures for 2011 census have not been released yet; however, a 2009-10 survey with smaller sample size shows that the share of agriculture in total employment has come down to 45.5 % of total employment from 52.1 in 2001 census (GOI, 2010).[30] Figures for 2011 are from the corresponding census.

However, there are further ominous signs; for the first time since independence the number of cultivators decreased in 2011. It is ominous because this first time decrease has come about because of prevalent agrarian distress in the country that forced the cultivators to give up agriculture even as the picture on employment front is not very rosy in other sectors of the economy either.

GREEN REVOLUTION; A PANACEA OR A PANDORA'S BOX

An entire generation in India has come up being fed on the folklore of India having become self-sufficient in food due to the 'green revolution' unleashed by the leadership of the Congress party. And yet within the same generation we are now hearing that the 'green revolution' has run out of steam. The very areas to which 'green revolution' was largely limited – i.e. Punjab, Haryana and Western Uttar Pradesh are now witnessing declining output in foodgrains Dutta, 2012).[31,32] It is being increasingly acknowledged that cereal based, input intensive mono-crop farming model has already led to deterioration in soil quality, depletion of water table and other ecological consequences, and as such is no more sustainable.[32]

Food systems are supposed to last for generations, but here we are confronted with a situation where ithas run out of steam within a generation. Even at its peak "in Punjab (including Haryana)-the throbbing heart-land of the 'Green Revolution'-the percentage of the rural population below the minimum level of living nearly quadrupled between 1960-61 and 1967-68".[32] In as much as the impact of technology is mediated through the existing social, political and economic structures of inequity and power; there remains a possibility of technology having quite the opposite of its anticipated effect; in case of 'green revolution' that of increasing rather than decreasing poverty. With respect to the First Green Revolution (FGR) of the 1960s and the 70s this possibility has been attested to by a number of authors.[26,34,35,36,37] Even when green revolution percolated to smaller farms, the proportional gains for them were minimal compared those of the richer farmers.[38] FGR led to considerable inter-regional disparities which need to be accounted for in its final assessment.[39]

It had led to the creation of a class of rich peasants who monopolized the resources pumped into 'green revolution' areas and led on to cement the social, economic and political power structure in the rural society in alliance with the urban based bourgeoisie and political class.

In the realm of production, supported by a system of both supply and demand side incentives it led to vast expansion in the acreage under wheat and paddy. This was to the accompaniment of shrinking crop area devoted to coarse grains (**Figure 5**) and decline of coarse cereals in the diets in different parts of the country.

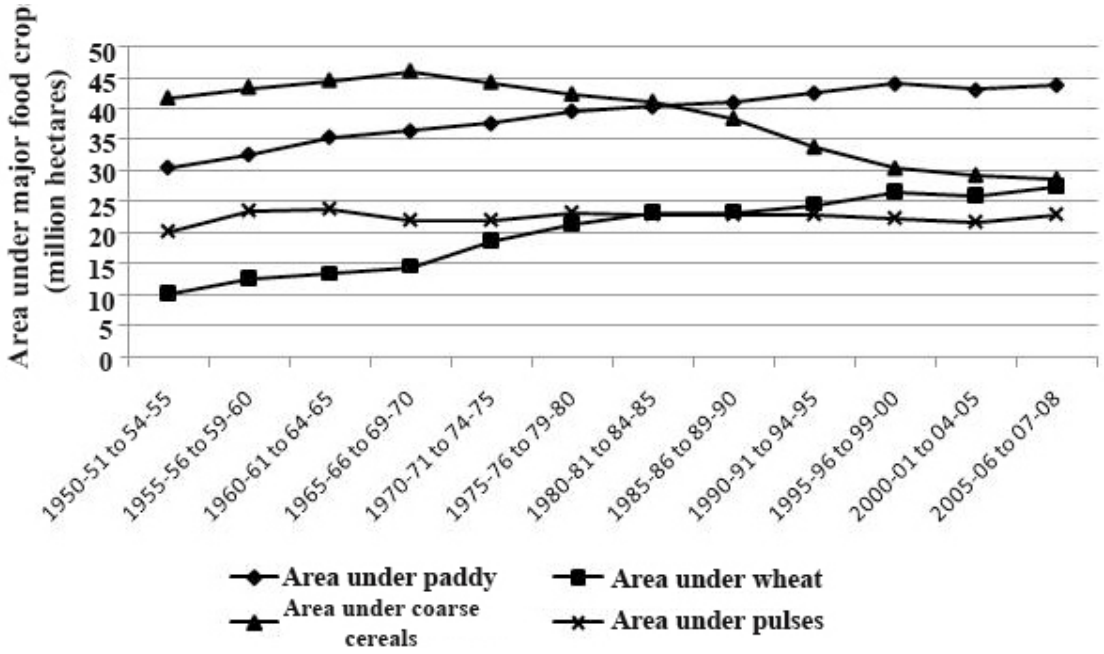


Figure 5 Changes in area under different food crops since 1950s

Source: Based on calculations made from figures in Table 1.12: Area under principle crops – All India, Data Bank on Agriculture & Allied Sectors, Planning Commission, Government of India. Available from http://planningcommission.nic.in/sectors/agri_html/selagri/T%201.12.xls on 13th June, 2013.

The single most important lesson of FGR is that while on one hand it was the story of high yields of wheat and paddy monoculture in a limited region of the country (Haryana, Punjab and Western Uttar Pradesh), on the other hand it is also the story of neglect of agriculture and the livestock economy in the rain fed areas of the country which constitute about 68% of the arable area. The approach paper to the Twelfth Five Year Plan in a way admits this by acknowledging that of the total subsidy on irrigation, fuel and fertilizer, the rainfed areas have been receiving only about 6 to 8 percent.[40]

Figure 6 shows the trends in the production of major food crops in the country. While production of rice and wheat has registered considerable increase that of coarse cereals registered only a marginal increase and the production of pulses has remained virtually stagnant. The coarse cereals are now being rediscovered as 'nutri-cereals.' Given the fact that these cereals are less input intensive and can be grown with relative ease in arid and semi-arid areas, it would have done a world of good to India's food security if an appropriate growth model for agriculture in rainfed areas that privileged these cereals was promoted instead of projecting the GR growth model as the one size fits all solution for India's food security.

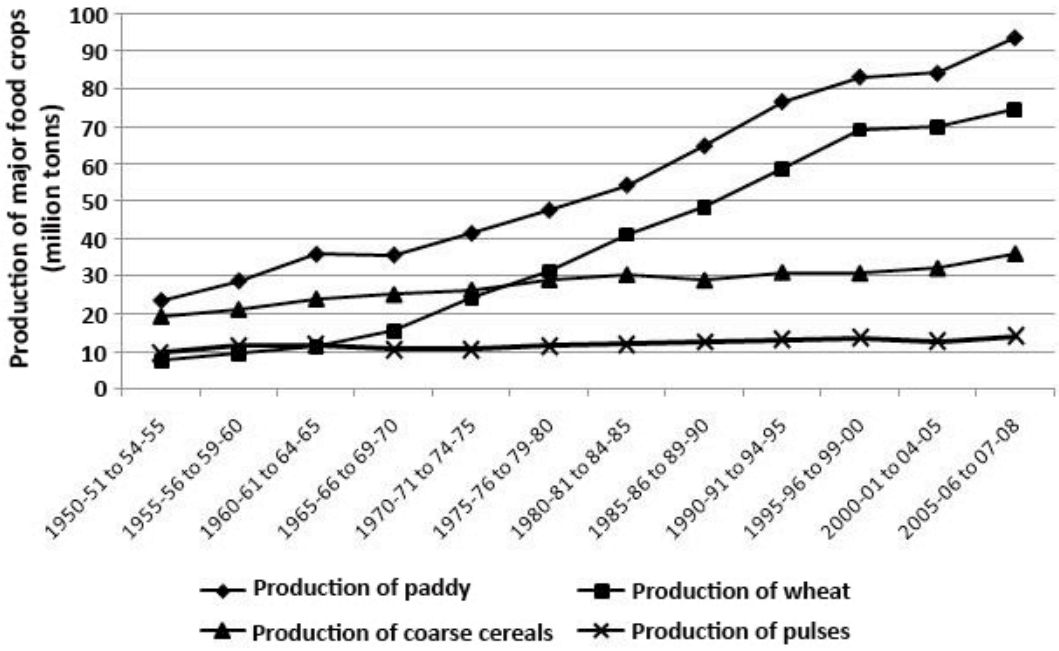


Figure 6 Trends in production of principal food crops

Source: Based on calculations made from figures in Table 1.11: Production of major crops – All India, Data Bank on Agriculture & Allied Sectors, Planning Commission, Government of India. Available from http://planningcommission.nic.in/sectors/agri_html/selagri/T%201.11.xls on 13th June, 2013.

Unfortunately, the planners seldom take into account the insidious and less tangible costs involved in the introduction of a technology. Water table depletion, soil degradation, loss of biodiversity and environmental costs are only some of the insidious costs associated with FGR technologies that are being acknowledged now. However, what is not acknowledged upfront is the long term impact that FGR has had on the diets of the people.

Besides diminishing the consumption of 'nutritious cereals' (the erstwhile coarse cereals) FGR may also have been responsible for reducing protein consumption in the diets of most Indian families. Pulses are the most common source of proteins in Indian diets. Between 1950-51 and 2005, while the country's population increased three times, the production of pulses barely increased one and a half times. Between the same period the production of 'nutri-cereals' (coarse cereals) increased only two times. This thereby indicates a net decline in consumption of pulses and 'nutri-cereals' in the diets of an average Indian family. In contrast to thisthe production of rice and wheat in the referred period increased by four and ten times respectively.

Higher yield of the hybrid varieties of wheat and rice in the presence of irrigation and high fertilizer inputs has been only one of the factors in giving high yields of these crops. More than this an incentive structure comprising of public investments made available in certain irrigated regions of the country, setting of agricultural prices, considerable fertilizer subsidy, using Public Distribution System to generate massive demand for rice, wheat and sugar, and tying up of agricultural credit with adoption of specific varieties of wheat and rice were some of the more important structures deployed to make FGR a success.[40]

FGR thus created a model of agricultural growth that has so imbued the agriculture policy establishment as to make it inimical to the alternative strategies for agricultural growth suited for non-FGR areas of the country. [40] Tragedy of the situation is that inspite of the consequences of the FGR technologies showing up; the refrain continues to be – 'Extend the Green Revolution to eastern India' or as already

noted above – 'the second Green Revolution' which are nothing but efforts to extend the prevailing model of agricultural development to the rain-fed areas.[41] The need clearly is for developing sustainable agriculture in line with the requirements of regional agro-ecology. The potential for agricultural growth thus remains untapped in much of the country.

The FGR revolution strategy stood in negation of the fact that "backwardness of Indian agrarian systems is not simply a result of low productivity but also due to factors like caste, patriarchy etc. that prevail to deepen exploitation and inequality. Hence, technological frontiers as well as social barriers have combined to result in the continuance of agrarian backwardness and poverty".[40] Keeping this cardinal truth in mind a meaningful agrarian change can only be consummated through a change in both the forces of production (technology, skilled human resources) as also a change in production relations.

Though not by way of acknowledgement by the country's planners, a profound requiem to the FGR is being written in the villages of India, that too in the very heart of 'green revolution'.Driven by agrarian distress, a non-descript village, Harkishanpura in the Bhatinda district of the food bowl of the country – Punjab, attracted much attention for itself by passing a dramatic resolution in the 'Village Panchayat' (Village Council) to put itself up for sale in 2001. Similarly placed BhuttalKalan and BhuttalKhurd in the Sangrur district of Punjab followed suit - up to 80 percent of the villages being mortgaged to private money lenders and commission agents.[42]

In July 2005, the 150 year old Malsinghwala village in Mansa district of Punjab put itself up for sale. "Lack of food, water, loss of soilfertility, incidence of diseases, deaths, hugedebts, poverty and indifference of the concernedauthorities" are said to be the reasons. 50 percent of the agricultural land in the village has been left barren. As per the statement of a villager – "Earlier, when we had water, wehad enough to eat. Now we are totally finishedand are ready to leave the village".[43]

Elsewhere, outside Punjab the condition is all the more pathetic. Unable to pay their mounting debts, the residents of Chingapur village in Yeotmal region of the state of Maharashtra decided to sell off their kidneys in 2005 and invited the then President of the country, Dr A P J Abdul Kalam and the Prime Minister, Dr Manmohan Singh to preside over a 'Human Market' organized for sale.[42]

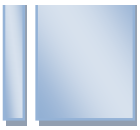
Nothing exemplifies the nihilism of the establishment towards this deeply entrenched agrarian distress better than the following statement of the country's Prime Minister. Commenting on the situation of a debt ridden farmer in a Bollywood film, who migrated to the city, he said – "There is no such thing as a free lunch..... The only way we can raise our heads above poverty is for more people to be taken out of agriculture".[44]

CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

The foregoing discussion on the food policies that have been pursued by the governments over the years, especially since the beginning of the neoliberal economic reforms clearly show that many of these policies have had a role in undermining the food security of the country both in the short and the longer term. The few positive steps like assuring the minimum support prices for various crops have also been used selectively to largely enhance the production of the green revolution crops overlooking the desirability of such crops for the vast rain fed areas of the country. Given the present grim situation on food security and nutrition front in the country it would be reasonable to expect that the policy makers revisit these policies to draw appropriate lessons for future policy.

However, there seems to be an assumption of infallibility on part of the food policy establishment. In the seeming absence of any visible efforts to learn from the mistakes of the past one gets an impression that probably the prevailing thinking is that this is about the best that could be achieved under the circumstances. The only lessons that seem to have been learnt are directed at gradually withdrawing the few concessions that had been granted to the poor and the vulnerable.

It is least surprising then that what is being offered as a solution in the name of 'Second Green Revolution'



is more of the same that has been done in the past; and as the things stand today, the SGR holds the promise of being an even bigger Pandora's Box than the FGR. Some of the other measures like 'going hunting for farmland in Africa' are out-rightly regressive and abominable.

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