

Our Demand: Food Security for All

The UPA Government plans to enact a National Food Security Act to give 25 kgs of food grains to each BPL household at Rs.3/- per kg. This is being done when our country is one of the world's fastest growing economies, but also has the highest number of malnourished children in the world. Today we have 360 billionaires, but we also have 93% of our work force is in the unorganized sector, with no security of employment. Wage levels are as low as Rs.25-30 per day, but food prices have been spiraling uncontrollably for the past months, making nourishing food out of reach for most people. Our largest employment sector is agriculture with 60 % of our population dependent on it. However, this sector is in grave crisis. Food availability per capita is declining; farmers are committing suicide or leaving agriculture. To make matters worse 278 districts have been struck by the worst drought in years.

It is in the above context that the Right to Food Campaign¹ demands a much broader based Right to Food Act (RTF Act), rather than a limited National Food Security Act. It demands an Act that deals with at least some of the causes of hunger and provides each and every resident of this country with food entitlements. The government must ensure that no man, woman or child sleeps hungry or is malnourished.

Our Demands

1. Enact a National Food Security Act Immediately:-

In the context of the drought, spiraling food prices and persistent and wide spread hunger, we demand immediate enactment of a Right to Food Act.

2. No Dilution of Supreme Court Orders:

The Right to Food Act must ensure that, at the minimum, legal entitlement and other enabling orders issued by the Supreme Court on the Right to Food are not diluted in any way by the Act.

3. Special Protection for Excluded and Vulnerable Groups and in Disasters

- a) Special protection must be extended to vulnerable groups such as the elderly, disabled, ailing people, single women headed or child headed households, destitute people, bonded labourers, primitive tribe groups, de-notified tribes, urban homeless and street children etc.

¹ The "Right to Food Campaign" is an informal network of organisations and individuals committed to the realisation of the right to food in India. We consider that everyone has a fundamental right to be free from hunger and under nutrition. Realising this right requires not only equitable, decentralised and sustainable food systems, but also entitlements relating to livelihood security such as the right to work, land reform and social security. We consider that the primary responsibility for guaranteeing these entitlements rests with the state. Lack of financial resources cannot be accepted as an excuse for abdicating this responsibility. In the present context, where people's basic needs are not a political priority, state intervention itself depends on effective popular organisation. We are committed to fostering this process through all democratic means.

- b) All such persons and households must receive Antodaya cards and PDS items at half the prices of the general population;
- c) All such persons and households must get additional entitlements such as access to cooked meals, admission for children to residential schools, double quota of all entitlements, 1 quintal of free food grains etc.
- d) Government must evolve special policies for the food security of migrant workers and urban destitute.
- e) Government must take special measures in all emergencies and disasters (natural and man made) and in starvation and chronic hunger.

4. Follow a “Food First” Policy: Incentivize Domestic Food Production and Consumption to Revitalise Agriculture

- a) Consumption and production of domestic food must receive primacy, rather than export and import of food items.
- b) The first call on all natural resources, including land and water, must be for food.
- c) Government must put a moratorium on the use of genetically modified organisms in agriculture and in Government food programs.
- d) The Government must give higher priority to nutritious millets rather than to wheat and rice.
- e) The Government must fix remunerative prices for food items so that farmers find it viable to produce food.
- f) While calculating such support prices, levels of wages of farmers and agricultural workers used must ensure a decent, living wage for them.
- g) Government must stop all speculation and futures trading in food items.
- h) Government must eliminate the entry of corporate interests (including contract farming) and private contractors in food production, the food market and nutrition-related schemes.
- i) Governments must not enter into any partnerships with the private sector where there is a conflict of interests.
- j) Government must ensure that procurement, storage and distribution of food items are decentralized.
- k) Government must ensure access to safe drinking water and sanitation for all.

5. Universalize the Public Distribution System

- a) Every resident of this country must be covered by the Public Distribution System (PDS).

- b) Each adult must be entitled to 14 kgs of cereals per month, along with 1.5 kg of pulses and 800 grams of cooking oil.
- c) Cereals must include nutritious millets and be priced at Rs.2 per kg, pulses at Rs.20 and cooking oil at Rs 35
- d) The Act must provide for mandatory reforms such as de-privatisation of PDS shops, preferably to women's groups, with sufficient capital and commissions for new owners; direct door step delivery of food items to the PDS shop; and computerisation, along with other measures for transparency.

6. Put in Place an Effective Grievance Redressal System

- a) The grievance redressal system must include fines and penalties for wrong doers and compensation for the wronged.
- b) It must include both criminal and civil action, and Gram Nyayalayas must also have jurisdiction over violations of the Act.
- c) It must give the powers to file complaints to the Ward / Gram Sabhas and to similar bodies of local self governance.
- d) Independent Commissioners at the National and State level must be appointed along with grievance redressal officers at block and district level.
- e) All food entitlement programs must have strong in-built transparency mechanisms, and mandatory requirements of social audit, with accountability being fixed at all levels.

7. Affirmative action towards people who are socially discriminated

- a) All food related documents, including ration cards must be issued in the name of women.
- b) At least 50% of jobs for cooks and helpers must be for Dalits, Adivasis and Muslims.
- c) Priority must be given for the location of aganwaris and ration shops in Dalit, Adivasi and Muslim hamlets.
- d) The Act must ensure a decent living wage for all functionaries under the schemes in this Act.

8. Immediate Action-

To meet the food security challenges in this period of scarcity and drought.

- a) Every adult should get employment as per famine code. NREGA works should be implemented in drought stricken regions as per famine code norms. After the commencement of NREGA, public works need to be converged with NREGA, rather than creating a separate machinery and set of rules for relief works.
- b) Wages should be increased by 20 % of minimum wage.
- c) Task overall should be reduced keeping in mind the old, infirm, etc.
- d) Artisans should get work other than manual work.
- e) Ban on children at worksites.
- f) Expansion of AAY to all PTG's, disabled, aged, and other vulnerable groups. Total coverage should be ensured.
- g) Entitlement of PDS should be raised by 50%.
- h) Double up entitlement in MDMS and ICDS. Children in ICDS centers should be given two meals.
- i) Emergency feeding centers for old and disabled, destitute like T.N. and Orissa.
- j) Out of school children should get MDM.
- k) MDM should continue during vacations.

Starvation Deaths.

- l) Collectors should visit the place where reported. Collector should enforce protocol prepared by commissioners for assuring such families.
- m) Drinking Water should reach by tankers to all hamlets, particularly Dalits and tribal's. Water storage containers should also be provided.
- n) **Fodder-** Fodder through depots and camps be provided to all cattle and livestock. Goats and camels are addressed too.
- o) Food stocks at every panchayat level to give free food to the hungry and those who cannot buy
- p) The same drill be repeated in floods, cyclone affected areas and chronic pockets of severe malnutrition.
- q) **Redressal-** All complaints relating to non-compliance of schemes be taken up within 48 hours of them being filed and responsibilities be fixed at block and panchayat levels.

