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“Development on the margin”

Scarcity in the Midst of Piling Food Stock: A Case Study of India

ITISHREE PATTNAIK

Gujarat Institute of Development Research, Gujarat Institute of Development Research, India

Abstract

Indian economy in the present scenario witnesses a paradoxical situation where high food inflation is combined with increasing central pool of food stock. Wide range of policies *viz.* Public Distribution System (PDS) for BPL, food for work programme and programme for targeted women and children by mid-day-meal, fails to address the problem of marginalised section of society, which is evident from the fact that nearly 231 million people remained chronically under nourished. In contrast there was increase in the procurement of cereals in the government account: January 2010 the actual stock of rice and wheat was 474 lakh tonnes compared to 357 lakh tonnes in January 2009. Despite the Supreme Court's order to distribute the grains and the 'Right to Food Bill' the government still unable to resolve the cruel contradiction of overflowing granaries and widespread hunger. Consequentially the achievement of food security at the national level does not percolate down to the household level. In this context the study seeks to assess the economic consequences of food inflation (on consumption, income, wage, employment pattern, indebtedness, additional work burden on women, children and aged people) across states and communities in India. It also aims at analysing in what extent the rising food inflation and national agricultural strategies contribute to food insecurity in terms of both production and access to food across different segments of the population (small land holders, landless and the women) and across different regions (a primary survey undertook in Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh). A total of 200 samples were collected by using the 'Stratified Random Sampling Method'. The study indicates that (1) The surveyed households in Madhya Pradesh are more food insecure compared to Gujarat; (2) Landless households are more likely to suffer from hunger since nearly three-quarters of landless households suffer from hunger as compared to nearly one half of land owner households; (3) The households cope with the food inflation by declining consumption of traditional cereals; (4) Considering the small impact the PDS has for many households, it is perhaps necessary to rethink about the system.

Keywords: Agriculture, food security, India, marginalized community, public distribution system