

**Research Article****FOOD SECURITY IN TELANGANA – ISSUES AND CHALLENGES****Nimmanagoti Ramulu**

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Food security means all people at all times have economic and physical access to food for dietary needs and healthy life. Ensuring food security for all is a challenge at the global level. Developing nations need help with food security. Developing countries like India are facing a severe challenge in ensuring food security. Various international and national factors contribute to food security. Global factors such as climate change affect agriculture production and productivity. Rising temperatures, increasing greenhouse gas emissions, erratic rainfall, and increasing flood and drought events affect food security adversely. The government felt the need to distribute fine rice through ration shops as coarse rice was falling into the hands of middlemen. The Chief Minister claimed that Congress always strived to provide food security to the poor. He pointed out that for the first time in the country, ration shops were introduced in 1957 by Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. He said it was Congress leader Sonia Gandhi who brought the Right to Food Act to satiate the hunger of the poor. Chief Minister of Telangana State claimed that it was in 1982-83, then Chief Minister of united Andhra Pradesh, Kotla Vijaya Bhaskara Reddy, proposed to provide rice for Rs 1.90 a kg, but after the change of government, N. T. Rama Rao launched a Rs 2 a kg rice scheme. Currently, free coarse rice is being supplied to white ration card holders, but they are not consuming it and selling it to rice millers for Rs 10 a kg. The rice millers are recycling the rice and selling it for Rs 50 a kg to earn crores. As per the new Act, TPDS covers about 82 percentage of total State's population. District wise distribution of Food Security Cards (FSCs) reveals that highest number of cards were issued in Rangareddy District (about 11.8 lakh cards were issued covering 39.3 lakh population). About 11 lakh FSCs were issued in Karimnagar covering 31.7 lakh persons. In Mahabubnagar District 10.7 lakh cards were issued covering 36.4 persons. Least number of cards were issued in Nizamabad (6.3 lakh), followed by Khammam (7.3).

**Keywords:** Food security, Food Security Cards (FSCs), Telangana**1. Introduction**

Food security is a multifaceted and challenging issue and is not confined to some area or group, i.e., locality, income, education, and demography. The food availability at the global level is adequate; however, nearly one billion people chronically need more food. This size equals sixteen Percent of the world population. At the worldwide level, sixty Percent of hungry people are women, and more than five million children are undernourished. The highest number of food-insecure people globally belongs to Asia.

The problem of food security and nutrition in India is grave. In 2019-21, 17.8 percent of the population was undernourished. The government of India distributes food through the public distribution system (PDS), Midday Meal (MDM), Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS),

and National Food Security Act (NFSA). This indicates the need for more purchasing power to buy food. The food subsidy budget is increasing.

The public distribution system is the prime source of food distribution in India. The enactment of the National Food Security Act in 2013 was India's most significant food distribution step. Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana (PMGKAY) is India's most extensive food distribution system. Under PMGKAY, the government of India provides food security to 810 million people annually. The financial outlay of this scheme in 2023-24 was Rs 11.8 lakh crore (Economic Survey, 2023-24).

**Table 1: Status of Food Security and Nutrition in India (in Percent)**

SI No	Parameter	Size
1	Undernourishment in 2019-21	17.8
2	Stunting among children under 5 in 2020	30.9
3	Wasting among children under 5 in 2020	17.8
4	Anaemia among women aged 15 to 49 years in 2019	53.1
5	People unable to afford a healthy diet in 2020	70.6
6	Urban population living in slum areas in 2018	35.2

**Source: FAO, 2023**

NSSO consumption expenditure survey 2022- 23 data indicates that in Rural India, 48 percent of Monthly Per Capita Consumption Expenditure (MPCE) is being spent on food items. In urban areas, 37.7 percent of MPCE is being spent on food items. In 1999-2000, this percentage was 59.4 for rural areas and 48.6 percent in urban areas. The share of cereal in MPCE was 12.35 in 1999-2000, which was reduced to 4.49 percent in 2022- 23 in urban areas and 22.16 to 6.10 percent in rural areas.

Sixty-four percent of children aged from five to fifty-nine months are anemic. Fifty-four and forty-five Percent of pregnant and non-pregnant women were anemic in 2019-21 in the age group 15-49 years, respectively. In the age group of fifteen to nineteen years and fifteen to forty-nine years, 56.5 and 53.8 percent, respectively, women were anemic in 2019-21 in India. The NSHS-5 mentioned above data indicates the poor malnutrition situation in India.

Global Hunger Index (GHI) published by Welt Hunger Hilfe and Concern Worldwide, Bonn/Doblin annually globally. The Index does not use the definition of hunger given by the Food and Agriculture Organisation. It counts the undernourished population to represent hunger. The indicators used in calculating GHI have a biased weight structure. Several indicators unrelated to hunger have a high degree of positive association among them and do not represent the entire population, indicating the Index is biased. Weight structure and calculation of some indexes based on arithmetic mean do not comply with the ideal Index's time and factor reversal properties. The Index was calculated based on the wrong data. Global Hunger Index indicates that India lies in the 'serious' hunger category. This Index put India on 105 ranks out of 127 countries in 2024.

Global Food Security Index (GFSI) incorporates the issue of affordability, availability, quality safety, sustainability, and adaptation aspects of food security. Affordability means the ability to buy food items, the effect of price change on food availability, and government intervention during price shocks. The availability aspect incorporates food production, risk to supply shocks, food distribution, and research efforts to increase food production. The quality and safety aspect includes the average food nutrition quality and safety of food. Sustainability

and adaptation aspects of food security include the elements of the country's exposure to the effects of climate change, natural resource risk, and adaptability. In the Global Food Security Index (GFSI), India secured 68 ranks out of 113 countries with a score of 58.9 out of 100 in 2022, an improvement of 5.1 since 2012.

## **2.Objectives of the Study**

1. To identify key challenges affecting food security in the state.
2. To evaluate the role of government schemes and policies.
3. To assess the food security and sustainable development goals.
4. To assess the Implementation of the Food Security Act in Telangana.

## **3.Methodology**

The secondary data were gathered from records and reports from newspapers, Government Reports: National Food Security Act (NFSA), Telangana State Statistical Abstracts, Agriculture Department reports, etc.

## **4.Food Security and Sustainable Development Goals**

Food security is part of Sustainable Development goals. Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 2.0 spells "End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture" up to 2030. Food security affects all aspects of life. Other SDGs are only possible to achieve when dealing with the lack of food security. SDG 1.0 is about ending poverty, primarily related to food security. SDG 3.0 is associated with a healthy life for all age groups; food availability at all times at affordable prices is also related to this goal. SDG 4.0 describes the opportunity for education and lifelong learning. With proper food security, education, and lifelong learning goals are achievable.

The provision of Mid-Day Meals in school indicates the inter linkage between food security and learning outcomes. SDG 5.0 is related to gender equality and women empowerment, which has one component of food insecurity. SDG 6.0 is related to water and sanitation. Water resource management is deeply related to agriculture and food production. SDG 7.0 is related to energy security. The increasing role of agriculture and food grain production in energy security establishes the role of food security and energy security. SDG 8.0 is related to sustainable economic growth, and employment is strongly associated with agriculture and food grain production, which are linked to various vital links, especially in developing countries like India.

SDG 9.0 is about infrastructure, industrialisation, and innovation. The rural economy is primarily dependent on agriculture. The productivity growth in the agriculture sector paves the path of industrialisation via labour force shifting from the primary industry to the secondary sector. Higher growth in the agriculture sector makes the agriculture-industry linkages better. SDG 10.0 talks about reducing inequality within countries and inter-countries. A large proportion of the population without sufficient food can be considered a significant cause of low income, earnings, and asset base. SDG 11.0 speaks about sustainable, safe, and inclusive settlements. The income level of the people plays a significant role in fulfilling this goal. The income and employment of a large population in rural areas depend upon agriculture production and proper food security. SDG 12.0 is about sustainable consumption and production patterns. Sustainable consumption is related to sustainable food production. Soil degradation and greenhouse gas emissions are related to inefficient and productive agriculture practices. SDG 13.0 is related to combat climate change and its impact. Agriculture, food production, water, and availability are closely related to climate change. Changes in precipitation, distribution, and temperature increase profoundly impact food production and security. SDG 14.0 is about conserving and sustainable use of the oceans, seas, and marine resources. This part of the earth affects aquaculture production and food security. SDG 15.0 is about the sustainability of the ecosystem and the preservation of forests, soil, and biodiversity. Ecosystem preservation, better soil quality, and biodiversity are indispensable to better

agriculture and food production. SDG 16.0 concerns peaceful society, social justice, and inclusive institution development. War affects food security, as in the case of the Ukraine-Russia war. Inclusive institutions have a positive effect on economic growth. It also has a crucial impact on food management policies. SDG 17.0 is about global partnership for sustainable development. The problem of food security is a worldwide issue, and dealing with this international partnership is essential. These 17 SDGs not only affect food security but are affected by food security. We can explain these SDGs with the help of food security at the global level.

As per the provisions of the National Food Security Act, 2013 (NFSA), the Department allocates foodgrains to all States/UTs for distribution to the identified ration card holders by them (including Telangana) under the Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) and Priority Household (PHH) categories of the Act only. The NFSA is operational in a uniform manner in all States/UTs, and there is no Below Poverty Line (BPL) category under the Act. At present, total 191.62 Lakh NFSA beneficiaries identified by State Government of Telangana (i.e. 15.29 Lakh AAY and 176.33 Lakh PHH beneficiaries). The information of foodgrains supplied to NFSA beneficiaries has been conveyed by the State Government of Telangana.

Consequent to bifurcation and formation of Telangana State, the Beneficiaries were identified for issue of Food Security Cards covering all priority groups with an objective to provide subsidized food grains and other Essential Commodities to the Eligible households under implementation of the National Food Security Act, 2013.

The income limit for the eligibility of the BPL families (priority households) has been increased for rural areas to Rs.1.50 lakhs and to Rs.2 lakhs in urban areas. The ceiling on holding of land has also been increased to 3.5 acres of wet land and 7.5 acres of dry land. However it was specified that income on land will be taken as criteria for issue of BPL cards.

The entire data of all the persons identified for Food Security Cards has been digitized, seeded with Aadhaar numbers, Aadhaar authenticated and maintained in Public Domain.

The seeding of Aadhaar through ePDS is helping the department to remove duplicates and cards in the name of non-existing/dead/migrated persons. The National Informatics Center has also provided security measures to keep the information strictly and confidentially.

### **5. Implementation of the Food Security Act in Telangana:**

The Food Security Act mandates the State to supply 5 kg of rice per head without any ceiling on the monthly drawal by a household at Rs. 3 a kg. It also restricts the eligibility criteria on those households with three-room houses and those having 5 acres dry or 2 acres wetland in addition to the income limit. However, in order to increase the coverage of the people availing TPDS, Government of Telangana constituted a Cabinet Sub-Committee on Civil Supplies, under the Chairmanship of Hon'ble Minister for Finance and Civil Supplies. Based on the Committee's recommendations, income limit has been enhanced for rural areas to Rs. 1.50 lakhs and to Rs.2 lakhs in urban areas. The ceiling on holding of land has also been increased to 3.5 acres of wet land and 7.5 acres of dry land.

### **6. Issues for Food Security in Telangana State**

Telangana has emerged as a role model in the country for ensuring food security for the poor, both in terms of the number of beneficiaries and quantity of fine rice (Sanna Biyyam) distributed, said Deputy Chief Minister. He added that ration cards are being issued not only to the poorest but also to economically backward middle-class families.

Addressing a public gathering organised at Bonakal mandal centre in Madhira constituency in the district on Monday during the distribution of new ration cards, the Deputy CM said, "Out of the 1.15 crore families in the State, 93 lakh families have been issued ration cards, and they are receiving subsidized fine rice under the public government's welfare programmes. Each individual in a family is being provided 6 kg of fine rice per month — a record in the history of India," he said.

Deputy Chief Minister mentioned that many newly married couples, and others who waited for over ten years for inclusion of names, additions and changes in ration cards, had been left disappointed during the previous regime. “But now, the long wait has finally ended. He proudly announced that in Madhira constituency alone, 13,767 new beneficiaries are being issued ration cards in a single day — a matter of great satisfaction,” he said.

The Deputy Chief Minister also emphasised that the government is not only focusing on welfare schemes but also implementing large-scale development programmes. Welfare and development are moving forward like the two wheels of a chariot, Deputy Chief Minister said. The Deputy CM revealed that the Roads & Buildings department has taken up ₹20,000 crore worth of road development works across the State. To provide world-class education to students, Young India Residential Schools are being established and made accessible, he added.

### **7.Ration Card Disruptions & Inclusion Gaps**

The central government flagged around 90,000 inactive ration cards, signaling that many eligible beneficiaries are either not accessing or are irregularly utilizing their Public Distribution System (PDS) benefits. In response, Telangana has initiated a verification drive to improve inclusion and transparency.

Historically, over 20 lakh ration cards were cancelled in recent years, while new issuances remain limited—leaving many without access to subsidized food.

#### **Digital Exclusion via Faulty Algorithmic Profiling**

The Samagra Vedika system, used to assess welfare eligibility, has wrongly excluded many; for instance, a widow was denied subsidized food after the system erroneously flagged her late husband as a car owner. Between 2014 and 2019, more than 1.86 million food security cards were cancelled and over 142,000 new applications rejected, often without proper notice or recourse.

### **8.Mid-Day Meal & Hostel Nutrition Challenges**

Funding delays are disrupting the provision of nutritious meals in residential schools and hostels. Self-Help Groups (SHGs) are going 4–6 months without payment, forcing them to reduce portions, compromise on quality, or even pool from personal resources. Many hostels are not following the governments prescribed “common diet menu.”

Similar systemic shortcomings plague the existing midday meal scheme in schools: delayed funding (3–12 months), poor meal hygiene, use of substandard ingredients, and food-poisoning incidents have all been reported.

### **9.Nutritional Quality Deficits**

Telangana’s rural residents increasingly rely on cheap carbohydrates and processed or sugary packaged foods, contributing to rising obesity even in rural areas. Access to protein and micronutrient-rich options remains limited.

Experts highlight the underutilization of millets in the PDS, despite their nutritional value and suitability for semi-arid farming, calling for their inclusion to enhance dietary quality and resilience.

### **10.Irrigation & Agricultural Infrastructure Gaps**

Food security is inherently tied to agricultural productivity, which hinges on reliable irrigation. However, tenant farmers—who form a substantial portion of the farming community—lack legal recognition and are excluded from many schemes. They demand revival of the Land Licensed Cultivators Act, 2011, as well as identity cards, access to loans, procurement, and insurance. It’s argued that over 75% of farmer suicides involve tenant farmers.

While not directly food security, weaknesses in agricultural investment and water infrastructure directly affect food production and access.

### **11.Challenges Affecting Food Security in Telangana State**

### **Digitization Errors & Exclusion from Subsidy Programs**

The Samagra Vedika algorithmic profiling system used by Telangana has unintentionally resulted in incorrect exclusions from food subsidy programs. One notable instance involved a widow who was refused benefits after the algorithm mistook her for a car owner.

Many probably eligible families were impacted by the 1.86 million food security cards that were canceled and the thousands of applications that were abruptly denied between 2014 and 2019.

### **12.PDS Distribution: Quality & Accessibility**

Poor grain quality, erratic distribution, and the frequent unavailability of allotted commodities were among the problems identified in a study of Telangana's Public Distribution System (PDS).

Similar difficulties, such as problems with beneficiary identification, inefficient storage, and leaks, are indicated by broader national-level assessments. They show systemic vulnerabilities, but they are not unique to Telangana.

### **13.Ration Card Issuance & Coverage Gaps**

The government has begun verification to make sure the rightful beneficiaries are included after thousands of ration cards were recently marked as inactive due to beneficiaries not regularly collecting their entitlements.

In recent years, more than 20 lakh ration cards have been cancelled, and hardly any new applications have been handled. There are now large gaps in the coverage of food subsidies as a result of card cancellations and the delayed issuance of new ones.

### **14.Decline in Vegetable Cultivation & Nutrition Gaps**

Expansion of paddy, oil-palm, and ethanol crop cultivation—alongside urbanization—has dramatically reduced vegetable farming, especially in peri-urban zones supplying Hyderabad.

This has resulted in a massive vegetable deficit estimated at 18.29 lakh million tonnes. Many residents consume less than the ICMR's recommended levels, particularly leafy vegetables.

### **15.Agricultural Structural & Environmental Issues**

From 17% of GSDP in 2022–2023 to 15.8% in 2023–2024, agriculture's share of Telangana's economy is decreasing, indicating significant structural limitations. Diversification is hampered and resilience is diminished by fragmented landholdings, monsoon dependence, and an emphasis on water-intensive crops like paddy.

#### **Mid-Day Meal (MDM) Program Weaknesses**

Self-Help Groups (SHGs) in charge of midday meal management have been forced to make quality compromises due to insufficient rates and delays in releasing funds (up to three to twelve months), which has resulted in food poisoning and student absenteeism.

Meals have reportedly been rejected by students because of their poor flavor and lack of variety. Since central kitchens have fallen short of expectations, many people choose to skip meals or bring food from home.

### **16.Malnutrition & Lack of Nutritious Alternatives**

Although Telangana's food policies are effective in terms of quantity, they might not be diverse enough in terms of nutrients. Integrating nutrient-dense grains like millets is urgently needed, especially in regions with high rates of malnutrition.

### **17.Conclusion**

Food Security is a complex and multi-aspect problem. End of hunger is Sustainable Development Problem 2.0. It was decided to eliminate the problem of hunger up to 2030. Other sustainable Development Goals are related to food security. With food security, achieving other sustainable development goals is more accessible. The problem of food security in India has multiple aspects. Food production is higher than the requirement. Per capita pulse availability is reducing. The problem of hunger and malnutrition is serious in India. Millets could be the food security solution, but millet production suffers various issues. The vast amount of food waste

indicates that reducing food waste may significantly reduce food insecurity in India. Climate change is another problem in achieving food security. Climate change adversely affects the productivity and production of food grains. Reducing cultivable land in India is another way to increase food production and availability in India. India's present food security system depends on huge public subsidized food security programs. Reducing the area under millet harms food security, farmers' income, and environmental sustainability.

Reducing food waste and encouraging millet's role in food security can play a crucial role in food security in India. An increase in millet production can improve the food basket. Climate change has a less damaging effect on millet production. The government of India's food subsidy program needs to be more economically sustainable. An increase in productivity is the only solution for achieving food security in India as it is far below that of other developed countries and far below its potential productivity. The price incentive mechanism is a possible solution to raise pulse production and make food healthier in India. The government needs to intervene to ensure food security significantly because achieving food security in other SDGs is challenging.

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**Citation:** Nimmanagoti Ramulu 2025. "FOOD SECURITY IN TELANGANA – ISSUES AND CHALLENGES". *International Journal of Academic Research*, 12(3): 70-76.

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