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Decentralization Community



Food and Nutrition Security Community



Solution Exchange for Decentralization Community **Solution Exchange for the Food & Nutrition Security Community** **E-Discussion Summary**

Discussion Topic: Food Security for Vulnerable Groups through Panchayats

Compiled by Alok Srivastava and Gopi N. Ghosh, Resource Persons and Hemant Joshi and T.N. Anuradha, Research Associates

Issue Date: 10 October 2007

**From [Rajwant Sandhu](#), Ministry of Panchayati Raj, New Delhi
Posted 24 August 2007**

Dear Friends,

I work as Additional Secretary in the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, Government of India. The Ministry is, among other subjects, concerned with the role of panchayati raj institutions in delivery of services, especially in the social sector. Since Panchayats work so closely with communities, they have a major role in effectively promoting availability of food for the rural population.

We have recently come across a [newspaper article](#) (Size: 582 KB) titled 'Is Bengal heading for another great famine?' owing its source to a prominent NGO based in New Delhi. This article refers to the findings of a National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO) [study](#) (Size: 2.04 MB) titled "Perceived Adequacy of Food Consumption in Indian Households - 2004-05". The NSSO study concludes that there are households in surveyed states that do not get sufficient food for 1 to 3 months of the year. Some of these households are even reported to be *only half fed throughout the year*. The study also indicates that in urban areas there is not much variation in households with inadequate access to food over the year as this is estimated to remain at 2 households per thousand in months of July-November and March-June. It is only in the period

December-February that inadequacy of food availability rises to 3 to 4 households per thousand in urban areas. For rural households, there is a much higher variation ranging between 5 to 15 households per thousand and the period of real deprivation extends from November to May, i.e. for more than half the year.

The NSSO study does not make any direct mention of the functioning of the Public Distribution System (PDS) as no assessment appears to have been made regarding the same. However, the study uses ration card type possessed by the household to analyse food adequacy. A very high percentage among *Antyodaya* cardholders believe they are not getting enough food for some months of the year followed by Below Poverty Line (BPL) cardholders. The situation for those households that do not possess any ration card is not much better. The study does not examine the functioning of the PDS system or link it with inadequate availability of food. However, this could be a contributory factor, along with lack of purchasing power, particularly during months when agricultural operations are limited, and persons looking for work are not able to get it.

Usually State Departments of Food and Civil Supplies manage the Public Distribution System (PDS) and run Fair Price Shops through a host of agencies – cooperatives, individuals, SHGs, Mahila Mandals, Panchayats etc. At the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, we want to examine in the context of this newspaper article and the NSSO study the suitability of Panchayats as an appropriate agency for providing food security to the vulnerable sectors and the role of the Panchayats visa-a-vis the PDS.

We, therefore, seek insights from members on:

- Experiences from different states where any role has been currently assigned to the community, through CBOs such as self-help groups, mahila mandals, yuva mandals, etc., to enhance food security for the vulnerable groups?
- How can Panchayats play a greater role in ensuring food security at the community level?
- What are some ways in which the Government machinery can ensure more efficient distribution of essential food items, including the running and/or management of Public Distribution System (PDS) through Panchayats, or otherwise?

Responses received, with thanks, from

1. [Jos Chathukulam & K Gireesan](#), Centre for Rural Management, Kottayam
2. [Mrinal Kanti Dasgupta](#), Viswa Bharati Santiniketan, Bolpur ([Response 1](#); [Response 2](#); [Response 3](#); [Response 4](#))
3. [K. Rajasekharan](#), Kerala Institute of Local Administration, Thrissur
4. [S.K. Samanta](#), Bidhan Chandra Krishi Viswavidyalaya, Kalyani (West Bengal)
5. [K.V. Peter](#), Kerala Agricultural University, Thrissur ([Response 1](#); [Response 2](#))
6. [Kamala Krishnaswamy](#), National Institute of Nutrition, Hyderabad
7. [Basanta Kumar Kar](#), CARE India, New Delhi
8. [Nira Ramachandran](#), UNICEF, New Delhi – *New!*
9. [Vijay Sardana](#), CITA, New Delhi – *New!*
10. [Surendra Kumar Yadav](#), National Institute of Health & Family Welfare, New Delhi – *New!*
11. [Sanjay Jain](#), Santek Consultants Pvt Ltd, New Delhi – *New!*
12. [Pritam K. Nanda](#), CARE India, Visakhapatnam
13. [V. Kurian Baby](#), Socio Economic Unit Foundation, Thrissur
14. [Wim Polman](#), FAO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, Bangkok, Thailand ([Response 1](#); [Response 2](#))
15. [Venkatrao Ghorpade](#), SHIRDI Foundation, Bangalore

16. [Puran Singh Yadav](#), Development and Panchayats Department, Haryana
 17. [Arun Kumar Aggarwal](#), School of Public Health, PGIMER, Chandigarh – *New!*
 18. Bibhu Prasad Mohanty, Hunger Solution, Koraput ([Response 1](#); [Response 2](#)) – *New!*
 19. [P.K.Thampan](#), Peekay Tree Crops Development Foundation, Kochi – *New!*
 20. [Pradeep Chaturvedi](#), Consultant, New Delhi
 21. [Kiran Kulkarni](#), Institute of Rural Credit and Entrepreneurship Development, Sangli
 22. [Kris Dev](#), Life Line to Business, Chennai
 23. [Leela Kumari P.](#), Institute of Management in Government, Thiruvananthapuram
 24. [Sibaji Adak](#), Department of Panchayat and Rural Development, Pursurah, District Hooghly
 25. Srinivas Rao, ITC Limited, Secunderabad ([Response 1](#); [Response 2](#))
 26. [Latha Bhaskar](#), Independent Consultant, Thiruvananthapuram
 27. [B.P. Syamroy](#), Development and Planning Department, Government of West Bengal, Kolkata
 28. [Sujoy Chaudhary](#), GOAL India, Kolkata
 29. [Maroti A. Upare](#), Independent Consultant, Mumbai
 30. [Pradip Pradhan](#), The Humanity, Puri
 31. [R.S.Mathur](#), UNICEF, Lucknow
 32. [Amalendu Ghosh](#), Municipal Service Commission, Kolkata
 33. [Neelkanth Mishra](#), Oxfam GB, Lucknow
 34. [V.A.Vasudevaraju](#), Indian Institute of Community Development, Puducherry
 35. [Rupa Mukerji](#), Intercooperation, Hyderabad
 36. [Bidyut Mohanty](#), Institute of Social Sciences, New Delhi
 37. [T.P. Trivedi](#) b, ICAR, New Delhi
 38. [Toms K Thomas](#), ESAF, Thrissur
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[Summary of Responses](#)
[Comparative Experiences](#)
[Related Resources](#)
[Responses in Full](#)

Summary of Responses

The discussion centred on the issue of food security of the poor and vulnerable sections of the rural population, the role currently assigned to community based organizations (CBOs) such as self help groups, mahila mandals, yuva mandals etc. and panchayats to enhance food security to these sections. It also sought to explore ways in which the government machinery can ensure a more efficient distribution of essential food items, including the running and/or management of Public Distribution System (PDS) by panchayats.

Factors Affecting Food Security

Respondents were of the view that inflation is affecting food security of the poor more adversely and that the per capita availability of foodgrains to the poor is actually coming down. They also opined that the concept of maximum retail price (MRP) for foodgrains has nullified the concept of seasonality, and villagers end up paying a high price throughout the year. They agreed that periods of food insufficiency – ranging from one month to as much as ten months - exist in most villages, and it is mostly marginal farmers (than the landless) who experience its effect more because they are tied to their land and cannot migrate in search of employment, and

consequently food. Respondents cited several factors that affect food security in a community: supply of foodgrains, purchasing power, and access to market, price and social capital/safety nets that support the vulnerable in hunger. [Involvement of local communities/NGOs](#) in monitoring price, quantity and leakage helped improve situation. Members felt that ownership and management of PDS in public or private hands was not that critical as compared to an effective regulatory system to ensure fair transactions through a community vigilance scheme. Another important factor is that government programmes like food for work are not available when needed most, because starvation period usually coincides with monsoons when construction work stops.

PRIs' Role in Food Security

Members generally agreed that panchayats could, if properly empowered and enabled, contribute towards food security by operationalizing (i) targeted safety nets like effectively implemented employment guarantee programmes; (ii) livelihood support programmes for the destitute and the vulnerable; and (iii) community vigilance that is truly participatory. They pointed out that just as panchayats have contributed to literacy drives, health and hygiene education, sanitation and drinking water supply programmes, they could perform useful role in ensuring food security too. They cited the example of panchayats in [Chhattisgarh](#) to have provided good nutritional security. This programme involved special mandates for organizing special gram sabhas, and community volunteers called *Mitanins* (chosen by panchayats) mobilizing health and nutrition support services and behavioral change. PRIs could design programmes that improve access of poor to food markets and audit of PDS and food markets against distortions and leakage with greater stakeholder participation. Members stressed on the need for focusing on equitable distribution - 'food justice'- besides production of food items.

Respondents cited 'Anti Poverty Sub Plan' prepared by Government of Kerala during the 10th Five Year Plan, as part of the Kerala Development Plan. Several Gram Panchayats undertook [Asraya Project](#) – a multifocal project for the destitute under the [Kudumbasree Mission](#), and members underlined the [experience](#) gained in many GPs in Asraya Project about the suitability of panchayats as providers of food security to vulnerable groups with the help of some professional support. They also mentioned about a [study](#) that showed that PRIs could reasonably address the food security in acute poverty zones (such as tribal areas). PRIs could also target deprivation and hunger within the households, especially women, destitute by introducing food stamps. Members highlighted that identification of the right person for providing food security is critical. They cited the Success Case Replication ([SCR](#)) methodology of the FAO as an instrument for strengthening monitoring distribution systems through panchayats. Members also underlined the efficacy of [Grain Bank Scheme](#) for providing food security through panchayats, wherein panchayats could trade its surplus foodgrains with other panchayats. Another idea presented was of panchayats developing themselves as economic entities – e.g. as SEZs for crops like basmati, alphonso mangoes etc.

Involving Panchayats in making PDS Efficient

Members noted that PDS only supplements the food requirements of rural households and the distance of PDS outlet is a major factor in accessing it. Leakage of foodgrains from the off take intended for Antyodaya and BPL cardholders being a serious issue, members were of the view that the government has to keep corrupt people out of the PDS. They noted that panchayats could engage in oversight and supervision, so that they could keep an eye on the stock, availability of materials, have access to records for verification etc. by revising rules for operating PDS to enable panchayats to provide infrastructure to the PDS outlets for better ownership feeling. Senior level schoolchildren could engage in cross checking of stocks, distribution and opening of outlets by the panchayats and the community could play a role in monitoring through Nigrani Samities and Gram Sabhas. Citing experience from **West Bengal** members agreed that the SHGs, yuva and mahila mandals have done valuable development-related work and could be

involved in exercising vigilance. Members presented another idea regarding organization of cooperatives on Anand-pattern with a committed administrator at the helm who, with the aid of technical experts, could run the PDS or getting [CBOs](#) to run the PDS.

Suggestions

As a first step towards giving panchayats a role in food security and running of PDS, members suggested studying and documentation of their contributions in literacy, health care, sanitation, provision of drinking water for lessons regarding peoples' participation for planning, execution, financing, supervision/oversight and audit. They suggested adoption of practices like [Community Kitchens](#), and proposed that [Ministry of Panchayati Raj](#) could try out some pilots of community kitchens with the aid of PRIs and CBOs, wherein the kitchens for the vulnerable groups could operate through government subsidy and support.

Discussants also provided concrete suggestions about improving the [PDS](#), and active involvement of the panchayats:

- Prohibition of private dealers; supplying foodgrains to panchayats for distribution. If panchayats are unable to raise finances for purchasing foodgrains, they could at least select proper dealers.
- Take up the scheme of running PDS with PRI's help on a pilot basis, as in [Maharashtra](#) and study the regional and state-specific variations in food security.
- Bring greater transparency in functioning of PDS; make panchayats responsible for bringing in accountability in PDS through vigilance (by Panchayats and Food and Supplies Department) and harsh action against malpractices. Have a mechanism where community could file complaints regarding PDS with panchayats, and take exemplary action against errant dealers on valid complaints by panchayats.
- Delink food security from the issue of Minimum Support Price to farmers in the [current form of PDS](#); government could do multiple sourcing of foodgrains from cheapest source.
- Panchayats could establish [links with programmes/schemes](#) like [NREGS](#), Swarnajayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana and Hariyali for food security and take interest in adopting this approach, and identify beneficiaries correctly having a unique citizen identification process to ensure proper distribution of resources.
- PRIs, Community level workers and CBOs could play important role in issues like intra household disparity and ration dilution. Members mentioned about [CARE's approach](#) in **Chhattisgarh** of tackling food and nutrition security through inter and intra household, community and systems level interventions.
- Panchayats could be encouraged to adopt an action plan to organize food production drive on a continuing basis, giving emphasis to production of protective crops.

Noting that there are issues connected with giving panchayats additional responsibilities without [adequate capacities](#), members stressed for their regular capacity development to administer and implement schemes such as PDS. Members finally asserted that the real food security would come out of increased agricultural productivity and consequently raised rural incomes, made possible through enhanced returns from agriculture. Interesting experiences recounted by them are given in the next section.

Comparative Experiences

Kerala

Asraya Project Provides Food Security to Destitutes (from [Jos Chathukulam and K. Gireesan](#), CRM, Kottayam and [K. Rajasekharan](#), KILA, Thrissur)

Under the Kudumbasree Mission, [Asraya Project](#) – a multi focal project for destitutes provides basic needs and addresses vulnerability issues. Food Security has been a major concern of the destitutes and it was managed successfully under the project. Panchayats provided ample space for a synergy with CBOs and NGOs and generally destitutes, who are outside the traditional 'social security and welfare schemes' without any patronage benefited immensely.

Panchayats could Address Issues of Food Security in Poverty Zones through NREGS (from [Jos Chathukulam and K. Gireesan](#), CRM, Kottayam)

In 21 GPs across 4 districts, panchayats have been found suitable for providing food security to vulnerable groups provided they can get professional support. Studies in these districts indicate that the implementation of NREGA by the PRIs, particularly in tribal areas, could reasonable address the issues of food security in prime poverty zones of Kerala.

Identification of Correct Beneficiaries for Food Security in Nedumbassery GP for coverage under Asraya Project (from [Sibaji Adak](#), Panchayat and Rural Development Department, Kolkata)

There were 3681 BPL families in the Nedumbassery GP in the initial stage. A survey team, constituted by the GP, comprising college students, women and panchayat representatives initially identified 946 families as vulnerable based on a 9 point criteria. After intensive scrutiny a sub committee reviewed the findings and finally identified 156 families to provide food security. This led to identification of correct beneficiaries which is critical for success of programme.

Chhattisgarh

Special Focus on Nutrition Security brings Positive Results (from [Basanta Kumar Kar and Pritam K. Nanda](#), CARE India)

Chhattisgarh integrated the agenda of nutrition security in Gram Sabha with the help of CARE. The political mandate helped in creating a conducive environment, home visits by Mitanins and ANMs and AWWs provided special health and nutrition services to women and children. Special Gram Sabhas and Vigilance Committees helped in monitoring. All this resulted in lowering of infant mortality and reduction in malnutrition in the newly formed state.

Maharashtra

Grain Banks bring Food Security to Vulnerable Groups in Sangli District (from [Kiran Kulkarni](#), IRCED, Sangli)

The Grain Bank programme started in Atpadi Taluka of Sangli District has allowed for creation of a foodgrain reserve in the Gram Panchayat that can be used to provide food security to the poorest people in the panchayat. This has also resulted in eradication of poverty in this area to a large extent. See [more](#)

Meghalaya and Haryana – *New!*

Panchayats to have Necessary Capacity before taking up Fresh Responsibilities (from [Sanjay Jain](#), Santek Consultants, New Delhi and [Arun Kumar Aggarwal](#), PGIMER, Chandigarh)

The experiences of NREGS' implementation in Meghalaya, and formation of in-village communities in Haryana point towards a basic weakness of panchayats/district councils in operationalising such schemes without adequate capacities. As result, it is difficult to control malpractices and leakages in view of weak accountability mechanisms. In Haryana, enlightened Sarpanch went to the extent of suggesting that no powers should be given to panchayats.

Several States – *New!*

Study brings out Important Issues in Food Security in Rural Areas (from [Nira Ramachandran](#), UNICEF, New Delhi)

A [participatory rural survey](#) in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Orissa brought out the seasonal nature of food insufficiency, ranging from 1 month to 10 months, and the fact that marginal farmers suffer from greater insecurity than the landless, as they can't migrate with ease, being tied to their lands. The study also showed that government programmes with works-linked food are not available during monsoons, the most critical months vis-à-vis starvation and hunger.

Nepal

Success Case Replication (SCR) Methodology works in Local Conditions (from [Wim Polman](#), FAO, Bangkok)

The SCR methodology first establishes a set of criteria based upon local conditions, local initiatives and local success. This makes it embedded in local culture and milieu. This approach, followed in poorest zones of Nepal, focusing on agricultural cooperatives with members from ex bonded labour, women, indigenous women, and small farmers has been quite successful and can be applied *mutatis mutandis* to panchayats in ensuring food security and managing the PDS.

Related Resources

Recommended Documentation

From [Rajwant Sandhu](#), Ministry of Panchayati Raj, New Delhi

Is Bengal Heading for another Great Famine, by D. Bandyopadhyay, newspaper article, April 2007

<http://www.solutionexchange-un.net.in/decn/cr/res07082301.pdf> (Size: 582 KB)

On the basis of the NSSO study the author infers that a large number of households in the rural areas suffer from food insecurity

Extract of Report "Perceived Adequacy of Food Consumption in Indian Households 2004-05"; National Sample Survey Organization, New Delhi; February 2007

<http://www.solutionexchange-un.net.in/decn/cr/res07082302.pdf> (Size: 2.04 MB)

Based on 61st round of NSS (July 2004-June 2005), it gives a picture of food inadequacy for the full year and indicates the subjective perception of population about food security

Interventions and Actions with PRI and CBOs in Chhattisgarh for achieving Food and Nutritional Security (from [Basanta K. Kar](#) and [Pritam K Nanda](#), CARE India)

Unpublished Paper, CARE India

<http://www.solutionexchange-un.net.in/decn/cr/res30080701.pdf> (Size: 33 KB)

Gives details of targeting inter- and intra-household disparities in nutritional security at the panchayat level and of Nigrani Samitis at Gram Panchayat level

Poverty Eradication through Community Grain Banks (from [Kiran Kulkarni](#), Institute of Rural Credit and Entrepreneurship Development, Sangli)

Article; by Kiran Kulkarni; Institute of Rural Credit and Entrepreneurship Development, Sangli

<http://www.solutionexchange-un.net.in/decn/cr/res06090701.pdf> (Size: 47 KB)

Gives evolution and mechanics of Grain Bank Movement in District Sangli, showing that community could save foodgrains collectively and utilise it in time of need

Seasonal Hunger - Implications for Food and Nutrition Security (from [Nira Ramachandran](#), UNICEF, New Delhi) – **New!**

Paper; by Nira Ramachandran, then Consultant, WFP

www.wfp.org/in/website/events/countdown_2007/nira_ramachandran.PDF

Discusses seasonal dimensions of rural poverty and hunger in rural areas that extends beyond farmers and agricultural labour or those directly dependent on the land

New scheme to stop PDS pilferage, A Pilot Scheme in Maharashtra for Increased Role of PRIs in PDS, by Poorest Areas Civil Society (PACS) Programme (from [Sanjay Jain](#), Santeek Consultants, New Delhi) – **New!**

<http://www.empowerpoor.com/relatednews.asp?report=561>

A pilot project in Nashik district to deliver foodgrains at the consumer's doorstep; through collection of money by local revenue officers and distribution before the gram sabha

From [Alok Srivastava](#), Resource Person

Role of Panchayati Raj Institutions in PDS, Department of Food & Public Distribution

<http://fcamin.nic.in/dfpd/EventDetails.asp?EventId=22&Section=PDS&ParentID=0&Parent=1&check=0>

Details the role of panchayats in monitoring, vigilance, identification and targeting of BPL beneficiaries through PDS from the website of the Ministry of Food & Consumer Affairs

Welfare Schemes under the Department of Food and Public Distribution, Department of Food and Public Distribution, Government of India

http://fcamin.nic.in/dfpd/EventListing.asp?Section=Welfare%20Schemes&id_pk=8&ParentID=0

The document details various government schemes launched for ensuring food security among the population, especially the vulnerable sections

Intensive Interventions for Sustainable Food Security, World Food Programme (WFP), New Delhi

http://www.wfp.org/in/intensive_intervention%5Cintensive_interventions.htm

Details approach of WFP, promoting decentralization and participation in planning, implementation and monitoring of food assistance programmes through panchayats

Indian Experience on Household Food and Nutrition Security

By N.P. Nawani, Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific Publications, FAO-UN, Bangkok, 1994

<http://www.fao.org/docrep/X0172E/X0172E00.htm>

Report of the regional expert consultation on the Indian Experience on Household Food and Nutrition Security held in Bangkok, Thailand from 8-11 August 1994

Food Security in India: Policy Challenges and Responses

Paper; by Debashis Chakraborty; Rajiv Gandhi Institute of Contemporary Studies, New Delhi; February 2005

www.chathamhouse.org.uk/publications/papers/download/id/248/file/3884_india_food_security.pdf (Size: 586 KB)

Briefs food security and distribution schemes of the government by enunciating existing gaps and outlines policy recommendations for addressing these persistent gaps

Food security in India

News story in The Hindu online edition, Jan 10, 2002

<http://www.hindu.com/thehindu/biz/2002/01/10/stories/2002011000440200.htm>

Focus on accelerated foodgrains production on a sustainable basis and free trade in grains could help create massive employment and reduce poverty in rural areas

Food Security in India

Paper; by John Farrington and N.C. Saxena

http://www.odi.org.uk/publications/working_papers/wp231/wp231_annex1_India.pdf (Size: 60 KB)

Talks of policy options to bring food security to rural poor, especially the most vulnerable sections, and assesses how various schemes providing food security have fared

Civil Society Engagement and India's Public Distribution System: Lessons from the Rationing Kruti Samiti in Mumbai,

Paper; by Rob Jenkins and Anne Marie Goetz, October 2002; prepared and presented at the 'Making Services Work for Poor People' World Development Report 2003/04 Workshop, Oxford, 4-5 November 2002

http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTWDR2004/Resources/22489_jenkinsgoetzWDR.pdf (Size: 220 KB)

Examines the potential for civil society organizations representing poorer client groups to contribute towards improved performance in India's PDS

Public Support for Food Security : The Public Distribution System in India, edited by N. Krishnaji and T.N. Krishnan. New Delhi, 2000

Available from: Vedams eBooks (P) Ltd., Vardhaman Charve Plaza IV, Building # 9, K.P Block, Pitampura, New Delhi 110 034, Fax: 011-27310613; e-mail: vedams@vedamsbooks.com; <https://www.vedamsbooks.com/no16605.htm>

Reviews experience with PDS, addresses questions about its working and associated policies; and the success of PDS in Kerala and AP as well as its failure in some states

The Public Distribution System in India: Counting the poor from making the poor count, by Ahmed Tritah, GREMAQ, Université des Sciences Sociales, Toulouse, France, July 7, 2003

<http://www.uib.es/congres/econschool/papers/tritah.pdf> (Size: 554 KB)

Paper investigates the effect of food subsidies on food security and poverty in India, propose a new poverty measure, integrating the food content of poverty lines

Looking for Answers to the Food Security Problem: India under Current Compulsions

By Nilabja Ghosh and Basudeb Guha-Khasnobis, Research Paper No. 2006/123, United Nations University-WIDER, Finland, October 2006

www.wider.unu.edu/publications/rps/rps2006/rp2006-123.pdf (Size: 322 KB)

Reviews strategies and instruments that impinge on household food insecurity in India, alongside existing government programmes that have targeted food insecure households

Operational Guidelines of NREGS

Ministry of Rural Development

http://nrega.nic.in/Nrega_guidelines.pdf (Size: 565 KB)

Chapter 3 of the Guidelines provide for preparation of the Perspective Plan and Annual Plan for the district in respect of NREGS

Recommended Organizations and Programmes

National Sample Survey Organization, New Delhi (from [Rajwant Sandhu](#), Ministry of Panchayati Raj, New Delhi)

http://mospi.nic.in/nssso_test1.htm

Carries out socio-economic surveys, undertakes field work for surveys, sample checks on area enumeration and crop estimation surveys, and collection of price data from rural/urban sectors.

CARE India (from [Basant Kar](#) and [Pritam K. Nanda](#), CARE India)

<http://www.careindia.org/>

CARE works hand in hand with vulnerable families, especially with women and girls, to help them access their rights.

Kudumbasree, Kerala State Poverty Eradication Mission. Thiruvananthapuram (from [Jos Chathukulam](#) and [K Gireesan](#), CRM, Kottayam)

<http://www.kudumbashree.org/>

To eradicate poverty through community action led by local governments, through organization of poor for combining self-help with convergence of services and resources

Asraya (DIRM-Destitute Identification Rehabilitation & Monitoring Programme), Government of Kerala (from [Jos Chathukulam K. Gireesan](#), CRM, Kottayam and [Sibaji Adak](#), Department of Panchayat and Rural Development, Pursurah, District Hooghly)

<http://www.kudumbashree.org/>

A comprehensive project to address various deprivations faced by destitutes such as lack of food, health problems including chronic illness, treatment for deadly diseases, etc.

Community Kitchen (from [Latha Bhaskar](#), Independent Consultant, Thiruvananthapuram)

<http://www.rlek.org/comkitchen.html>

The concept introduced by RLEK in collaboration with Hindustan Petroleum has proved successful in breaking caste-barrier as women from all castes enjoy equal access

Loka Kalyan Parishad (LKP), Kolkata (from [Amalendu Ghosh](#), Municipal Service Commission, Kolkata)

28/8, Library Road, Kalighat, Kolkata- 700026, Email: lkp@lkp.org.in , Phone: 033-55390345

LKP is a voluntary organization that works on institution building of Panchayati Raj to make it more open, participatory and pro-poor self -government unit

From [Alok Srivastava](#), Resource Person

Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution, Government of India, New Delhi

<http://fcamin.nic.in/>

The Department of Food & Public Distribution has twin objectives of ensuring remunerative rates for our farmers and supply of food grains at reasonable prices to the consumers through the public distribution system

Food Corporation of India, New Delhi

<http://fciweb.nic.in/>

Provides remunerative prices to farmers, makes food grains available at reasonable prices, particularly to vulnerable sections and ensures food security through buffer stocks

Public Distribution System

http://fcamin.nic.in/dfpd/EventListing.asp?Section=PDS&id_pk=1&ParentID=0

PDS distributes essential commodities (wheat, rice, sugar and kerosene) to a large number of people through a network of FPS on a recurring basis

Ministry of Panchayat Raj, Government of India, New Delhi

A Wing, Ground Floor, Krishi Bhawan, New Delhi 110001; Tel: 23744903; Fax: 23747931;
<http://www.panchayat.nic.in>

Nodal ministry for promoting Panchayati Raj Institutions and operates the Backward Regions Grant Fund scheme for development of backward areas in the country

National Rural Employment Guarantee Act 2005

<http://nrega.nic.in/rajaswa.pdf> (Size: 5.29 MB)

The Act provides for enhancement of livelihood security of the households in rural areas by providing 100 days guaranteed employment in every financial year

Recommended Portals and Information Bases

Food Security, MS Swaminathan Research Foundation, Chennai

<http://www.mssrf.org/fs/index.htm>

The website provides links to the initiatives of the Foundation and relevant resource material on food security

Related Past Consolidated Replies

'Food Security through Panchayats', Solution Exchange, UN, New Delhi

Query from K. Rajaraman, Civil Supplies & Consumer Protection Department, Chennai (Advice; Comparative Experiences). Cross-posted with the Decentralization Community. Issued 10 January 2006

<http://www.solutionexchange-un.net.in/decn/cr/cr-se-decn-food-07010601.pdf> (Size: 150 KB)

Attempts to explore possible strategies for involving PRIs in food security administration, and models/best practices in these areas.

'Improving Food Security Systems', Solution Exchange, UN, New Delhi

Query from Kamal Gandhi, Delhi University, New Delhi (Advice). Issued 31 December 2006

<http://www.solutionexchange-un.net.in/food/cr/cr-se-food-31120601.pdf> (Size: 232 KB)

Discusses ways to ensure efficient food safety systems, points out critical areas of intervention, suggesting appropriate regulations/laws, and prevalent standards.

'Ensuring Food Security for Agricultural Workers, Solution Exchange, UN, New Delhi

Query from Bonani Dhar, Consultant, ADB, New Delhi (Comparative Experiences). Issued 27 October 2005

<http://www.solutionexchange-un.net.in/food/cr/cr-se-food-26100501.pdf> (Size: 104 KB)

Examines efforts/approaches to ensure food security for wage agricultural workers and families, in addition to the existing PDS and Food and Employment Guarantee Schemes.

Responses in Full

[Dr. Jos Chathukulam & Dr. K Gireesan](#), Centre for Rural Management (CRM), Kottayam

The issues highlighted by Mrs. Rajwant Sandhu on provision of food security to vulnerable groups in rural areas have great relevance in the post-73rd Constitutional Amendment Act era in our country. She has certainly raised three pertinent queries on the subject for wider deliberations. In this context, we would like to join the discussion primarily from the angle of first two queries.

During the 10th Five Year Plan, the Government of Kerala initiated a unique strategy to address the issues of poverty in general and the livelihood issues, particularly food security of the vulnerable sections. An 'Anti-Poverty Sub-Plan' was incorporated in the Kerala Development Programme, a redesignated version of People's Plan Campaign (PPC) of 9th Plan. Several Gram Panchayats (GP) initiated 'Asraya Project' – a multi-focal project for the destitutes, with the help of 'Kudumbasree Mission. It is the poverty eradication mission initiated under the Local Government Department, Government of Kerala. GPs prepared the project proposals in a participatory and transparent manner for the selection of beneficiaries, listing their needs and priorities and addressed their vulnerability issues. Food security was the major concern of the destitutes, and it was properly managed during the project. Panchayats provided ample space in the project for a synergy with Community Based Organisations and NGOs. Generally, destitutes lie outside the traditional 'social security and welfare schemes', and without any patronage.

We are engaged in an action research for strengthening and supporting Panchayat Raj system in 21 GPs from 4 Districts in Kerala with the support of SDC-CapDeck for the last three years. As a research-based NGO, we also got a chance to associate with the Asraya project. During the period, we have provided four types of professional support to the Panchayats in the project administration, as per the demand from the field. (i) Preparation of a scientific project proposal after the data was gathered by the Kudumbasree units; (ii) Undertaking a field survey of the prospective beneficiaries; (iii) Carrying out a re-validation of the tentative beneficiary list available with the GP; and (iv) Review of progress in number of GPs on a comparative framework.

Our experience in 21 GPs of Kerala and the general impressions of Asraya Project from several Panchayats in the State reiterates the suitability of PRI as the appropriate agency for providing food security to the vulnerable groups in the rural areas. No doubt, Panchayats can effectively address the issues of food security provided they are able to get the required professional support as per the situation. In addition, one of our current studies indicates that the implementation of National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) by the PRIs, very particularly in the tribal settings, could reasonably address the issues of food security in the prime poverty zones of Kerala.

[Mrinal Kanti Dasgupta](#), Viswa Bharati Santiniketan, Bolpur (Response 1)

I am giving a preliminary reaction to the issues raised by Mrs. Sandhu regarding food security for the very poor:

- In the rural areas providing food should mean producing food.
- The best way is to act in cooperatives, than by contract or in capitalist way unless it is unavoidable at some places. Fortunately these people go to more fertile areas.
- The poorest marginalised people live in marginal uninhabitable areas, such as in and around forests, flood-prone and other disaster prone areas in urban and rural areas. They should live on forests if they can enrich the forests, carry out afforestation programmes, and also help themselves.
- Unless they are brought closer to the more developed parts, it is difficult to provide relief and development avoids them
- They can put together their resources, and can take government khas lands or those of absentee landlords, and go for farming.
- Landless (zero land or minimum land) farming is a possibility.
- Organised into cooperatives they can be given ideas by educated people without land. These people's NGOs or SHGs may operate to organise them.

This much for the moment.

K Rajasekharan, Kerala Institute of Local Administration, Thrissur

In Kerala, CBOs /Women organizations /Youth organizations/such groups are not assigned with any responsibility in ensuring the food security, in local government system. Even Kerala society expects that they exist for *public actions* which may indirectly lead to food security of the poor.

In Kerala, every local government formulates an **Anti-Poverty Sub-plan** to deal with poverty of Below Poverty Line people so as to improve their living conditions and to enable them to have food security. Within the Anti- Poverty Sub plan, we have a **Destitute Project** called 'Ashraya', focusing on food, health care, house sites, housing, water, education, social deprivation etc. of the destitutes. Through *Integrated Child Development Scheme* run by the local governments, we provide nutrition to children, adolescent girls and pregnant/child bearing mothers.

In order to have food security, we need to focus on not only production of food items but also on equitable distribution- 'food justice'- of those items. As well, we need to look at the 'food sovereignty' that provides autonomy to farmers / peasants to determine their choice of food or cultivation without even the indirect interference of the market forces in those issues. So the Panchayats, through its agricultural development projects and District Planning process should attempt to change the agricultural policies, with the aim of bringing in food security. The district plan preparation is an excellent mechanism which provides ample choice for the District Planning Committees to evolve development policies in the form of priorities for the district.

In Kerala, in order to increase production and sustainability, we are going to follow integrated watershed management approach for agriculture in which the linkage between water, soil and biomass will be engineered fruitfully. As well, *Local Economic Development* will be a key theme for local governments focusing on petty production in all possible ways including that of Kudumbashree units. These are some of the attempts, in our state, to address the issue of food security.

In order to make the PDS efficient, the government should show commitment and courage to keep away corrupt political executives and officials from power positions in the department. Panchayats should be given supervisory power over the PDS units so as to enable them to know the stock, check the availability of materials, have access to records for verification etc to bring in more transparency and to reduce corruption. Panchayats should be allowed to provide infrastructure for the PDS units too so that they will have an ownership attitude towards them.

S.K. Samanta, Bidhan Chandra Krishi Viswavidyalaya, Kalyani (West Bengal)

I appreciate the issue raised by Mrs. Sandhu. At the same time I also communicate through this forum that the aspects that have been raised are very complex and widely varying across the village, subdivisions and so on. However it is very clear that self-help groups, mahila mandals, yuva mandals etc. are really doing a marvellous job in different corners of West Bengal. Many people claim that the development that they are bringing is entirely their achievement. I differ on that point. It is only demand-led development that can sustain and survive in the community.

These bodies represent a class of people who have never tasted government systems either through jobs or any other involvement. The success is huge when there are leaders who are also an integral part of the sharing of profit in it. When the leadership of such activities is controlled by politicians, there is much damage. I can cite an example of Farmers' School or Farmers Club

establishment by a nationalised bank. The local MLA or MP organises the first meeting in rural areas, initiating 100 or more clubs and shares the initial contribution. Rest of the work is on paper. Even I know that to prove that an organization is a farmers' club, a prominent shop's banner was changed at a place immediately after the meeting was conducted in a hotel. Thereafter funds were released and the banner has since been removed. It is the other-bitter side of the development path although the system has no defect except our honesty. So many experiences are there, since the people of SHG are really source of training & learning instead of training them.

Regarding the second point regarding the role of Panchayats, first we must adopt that Pradhans should have a minimum educational qualification and no gender bias. Our democratic system prevents it from happening. Now a days the philosophy of might is right rules. Secondly, state leaders are to be refined and tuned for sustainable development in Panchayats. They acrually do not know the local situation, but they do not forget to dictate from faraway headquarters of their parent political party. It is major cause of damage. Enough fund is being mobilised through the Panchayats, progress is also there but not upto the extent of fund released. Then what happens?

Regarding PDS, panchayats can provide the safest system but rules have to be revised and activities are to be transparent before all and sundry, so that there is defense against vandalism and fraud in a natural way. Involvement of school children of higher classes of that locality for cross checking may be useful.

[K.V. Peter](#), Kerala Agricultural University, Thrissur (response 1)

Food security is only next to nutritional security and livelihood security. Access to a nutritional diet is vital which mandates purchasing power to the vulnerable group. Purchasing power comes from empowerment through knowledge, skill and microfinance. Gandhiji visualised a Panchayath free from politics which divides local community. Participation of vulnerable in local election process is going down. In fact low voting percentage leads to governance of majority by minority. Membership in local Panchayat has become a means of income rather than service to community. There are exceptions to the above statement where local Panchayats have contributed to literacy drive, establishment of nutritional gardens in available space, health and hygiene education, waste utilization, rainwater harvesting, kinder gardens, primary health care centres, public TV kiosks, well cared pay and use latrines, drinking water supply etc. It will be useful if these Panchayaths are studied and documented for peoples' participation from planning stage, execution, financing, supervisory and ultimately peoples' auditing. One such Panchayath is Kumbalangi in Cochin which is declared as a model tourist centre.

[Mrinal Kanti Dasgupta](#), Viswa Bharati Santiniketan, Bolpur (Response 2)

This Project [Kudumbasree Project] has been praised as a right approach to poverty alleviation. The Government of India has also taken the cue too. Insofar as action research is concerned it's OK. Any poverty alleviation/marginal people development programme has to involve every one - in cities and villages - and beyond those who are just above this line, who tend to revert back to their original situation.

[Kamala Krishnaswamy](#), National Institute of Nutrition, Hyderabad

I think organisation of cooperatives on the lines of Anand dairy will help the rural people. You need to have more Dr. Kurien's to work on these lines to make successful cooperatives for all produces. It will be very useful for perishables. I am sure a committed administrator can do wonders by organising the groups and streamlining the activities with technical help from scientists.

Basanta Kumar Kar, CARE India, New Delhi

I would suggest a focus discussion on food security vis a vis nutrition security. The recent data on NFHS III showing largest number of malnourished children of the globe in India and malnutrition status (Grade I to Grade IV) in any Anganwari Centre ranging from 40-80% calls for a focus discussion and prioritise our attention on areas of nutrition.

Working in food, livelihoods and nutrition security programs in various states and in scale I suggest a deliberation on the issues of nutrition security as follows:

1. Does Food security ensure nutrition security? The experience across the globe shows malnutrition/nutrition status is complete within 18 months of the birth which is largely due to feeding practices. This feeding practices has component of Breast Feeding and Appropriate Complementary Feeding. Although we can not deny the impact of larger poverty, hunger and food stress on nutrition insecurity still we can not agree fully that child hood malnutrition is fully dependent on food insecurity in today's context when each household is covered with some safety net program.

2. Can there be a technical solution to the nutrition security issue as the issues relating to the feeding practices, management of sepsis and newborn health largely dependent upon addressing the issues of exclusion, gender and strengthening the governance system.

On above backdrop the role of PRI, CBOs and other social capital comes. And in a newly formed state like Chhattisgarh role of these institutions and stakeholders showed significant RESULT. Some of our experience is as follows:

A) Since 2002 Chhattisgarh could integrate the agenda of nutrition in Gramsabha with the support of Care. And this political mandate was useful in creating enabling environment, women and public taking discussing and deciding issues of nutrition, home visit, support on ANC etc and shifting from a typical agenda of brick and mortar, sand and clay. The state Government in many districts initiated the Special Gramsabhas on nutrition.

B) Community volunteers called Mitaniin chosen at hamlet level by PRI could provide health and nutrition support and tried to support behaviour change and address exclusion.

C) Community level monitoring : The community level monitoring through Nigrani Samittee and Gramsabhas could address some issues of public accountability and transparency.

D) Involvement of traditional healers: With the support and sanction of PRI and other village groups the traditional healers were involved in various campaigns for supporting referral and becoming depot holders for family planning services. This was to address the age old myths and misconceptions.

E) Change Agent Becoming Change Leaders : Through this campaign during first PRI election in the state almost 10,000 Change Agent(members from Mahila mandals, Mitanins, community volunteers) got elected into PRI bodies and influenced to change agenda in favour of women and nutrition. This got nominated for India Innovation Award.

F) Bahu Sas Pati Sameelan and Samanwaya MELA: This unique social program was completed done through PRI members and provided a platform for better governance and synergy with atleast three departments as Health, PRI and W&CD where people from the most left out pockets directly interfaced and asked questions on poor services and supplies.

G) Nutrition and Health Days (NHD): This was one of the best practices that Care mainstreamed where in a single day of the month (Tuesday in Chhatisgarh) AWW, ANM, people from Panchayat and Mahila mandals used to be at AWC in the village and avail services like supplementary nutrition,ANC, counselling on birth preparedness and safe delivery. This used to happen almost in 80% of the AWCs.

H) As there were issues of intrahousehold disparity and ration dilution the role of community, family members and PRI combinely assumes significance.

And all these small community level and PRI level efforts could pay lot of dividend and various forms of evaluation suggest that reduction in Malnutrition and Infant mortality in this newly formed state was better in comparison to other states.

Nira Ramachandran, UNICEF, New Delhi

It is heartening to note that the Government is looking into the issue of seasonal food insecurity, particularly in rural areas. In this context, I would like to share some findings from a participatory rural survey carried out in 12 tribal villages from four states- Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh (MP), Chhattisgarh and Orissa in November 2001. Although it was conducted six years ago, not much change is likely to have taken place in these areas. The survey was conducted for a WFP-FAO sponsored project on the proposed Foodgrain Banks in tribal areas.

Some of the significant findings from the survey were:

- Periods of food insufficiency exist in all villages and it ranges from one month (Mandawa village in MP) to as much as 10 months of the year (Podeng, Orissa).
- Periods of starvation or acute food distress range from 2 months (Kabri village of MP) to as long as four months (All sample villages of Chhattisgarh).
- The timing of the starvation period varies with geographical location- April-July in Chhattisgarh, July-Sept in Orissa and July-Aug in MP and Aug in Rajasthan.
- Although food shortages are almost chronic in some parts of Orissa (Rayagada district), the period of actual starvation is shorter than in other states because of access to wild foods from the forest to supplement the diet.
- In most areas, both marginal farmers and the landless suffer from food insecurity, but in some cases, as in MP, marginal farmers, who are tied to their land and cannot migrate in search of employment, suffer more severe food distress than the landless.
- In extremely poor villages (Podeng in Orissa and Maal in Rajasthan), even after harvest the landless and marginal farmers can afford only two meals a day, which reduces to a single meal during the monsoons.
- While the PDS is relied upon by tribal villagers in all the states, it only supplements the food requirements of the household.

- In villages where the Fair Price Shop is located at a distance of more than 3 kms, it is not accessed by the villagers.
- Other government programmes like food for work are not available, when needed most, as the starvation period usually coincides with the monsoons, when construction work comes to a stop.
- The respondents' own assessment of their monthly foodgrain requirement ranged from 15-30 kilos per household.
- It was also stated in one village that if a coarse grain like *mandua* were provided in lieu of fine grains, the requirement would reduce to 12 kilograms as against the 18 kilos (in case of rice).

A paper based on the findings of the survey was presented at a Consultation entitled "Towards Hunger Free India – Countdown from 2007" held at New Delhi in April 2003, and subsequently published in Swaminathan, M.S. and P. Medrano (ed) (2004), Towards Hunger Free India: From Vision to Action, East West Books, Madras. The full text of the paper can be accessed at: www.wfp.org.in/website/events/countdown_2007/nira_ramachandran.PDF

I hope that this will be of use to you in your effort to eliminate hunger.

Vijay Sardana, CITA, New Delhi

I thank Mrs. Rajwant Sandhu for raising this vital issue. The fact is that many of the rural districts that are away from cities are fast reaching a famine like situation. There is a serious problem of inflation in most of the places and food is becoming unaffordable. The price of food is rising faster than the rise in income. Food security for these people is at risk.

On the other hand, the claim of Government that food production is growing needs to be seen from the per capita availability perspective and that is definitely dipping down all these years. Pulses, oil seeds, wheat production on a per capita basis in the country are declining. Milk production is largely stagnant. I feel, that we are fast heading towards a rice crisis in the country now.

The prices of fruit and vegetable is rising at rapid rate due to a peculiar situation. I feel that the practice of maximum retail price (MRP) in retailing has nullified the concept of seasonality. Farmers are paid low price in season and consumers have to pay same round the year, multiplied by inflation factor.

I see Panchayats as playing the following key roles towards devising suitable solutions in the scenario.

- Panchayats should make local plans and identify food needs of their population and try to produce same or more amount of food calories in the region. The surplus food can be traded with other panchayats, either in the form of food itself or other non-food items. While doing this planning animal population and their feed requirements also needs to be accounted for.
- There must be a plan to preserve biomass, which is not fit for human consumption but may be useful for other by-product industry.
- Panchayats must develop themselves as economic entity. Some Panchayats can develop themselves as Special Economic Zones (SEZs) for some of their crops like Alphonso, Basmati, etc.
- Panchayats must set the agenda for political parties and ask their MPs and MLAs, to provide them with quarterly reports of their works and achievements for the region. There must be review of the public representatives and their work at panchayat level based on some

objective parameters - like road length, number of telephones, investment in schools and hospitals, number of teachers, doctors and health staff, veterinary doctors, increase in foodgrain productivity/availability in the area. The bottom line is to have accountability systems in place.

We have extensively worked in the agri-food sector and we are willing to offer our expertise, if need be.

Surendra Kumar Yadav, National Institute of Health & Family Welfare, New Delhi

PRI may be one of the effective mechanisms to provide information to the community, which I feel is essential for the proper functioning of the Public Distribution System (PDS). Panchayats are better aware of the needy people and usually hold records for the Below Poverty Line (BPL) cardholders. It has been observed that many a times, the food meant for the PDS is illegally routed to shopkeepers and other people who are not eligible beneficiaries. There must be a mechanism that any Panchayat member may inform such practices to a designated officer so that suitable action can be taken. The identity of informer must be kept secret and oral complaints should be accepted.

Sanjay Jain, Santek Consultants Pvt Ltd, New Delhi

The issue that you have raised, and the ideas therein are really thought provoking. One is extremely delighted that people in the Government are really concerned on the issue and are keen to invite suggestions from the public. In fact, in the last 17 years that I have been personally involved in undertaking research studies, evaluations and impact studies, I have realized that development is not at all uniform in any of the developing country I have visited so far. Not only the pace of development varies from region to region within the country but it also varies within those regions. Hence, most of the surveys and studies that are conducted, and which inadvertently / generally have small sample sizes, do not give the true picture many a times. While sometimes such surveys and studies only show the tip of the iceberg, at other times it may enlarge some other dimensions to being out of real proportion. Hence, I am not at all surprised at the findings of the NSSO and other organizations that are claiming that some people still do go without square meals a day or one meal a day varying as per the time of the year. This is obvious because the varying seasons affect the availability as well as commissioning of daily wage labour and many other semi-permanent occupations. It is extremely important to note that the variation may be much more prominent as one moves away from developed cities or towns and even road heads.

I have just come back after a very long trip to Mizoram (three weeks), where I was visiting in connection with the Evaluation of the NREGA, being implemented in the two remotest districts of the state. The results of this study came as a shock to us. We had heard of pilferages and leakages - but what we saw in these two districts can only be believed when one actually sees it personally. The fundamentals of NREGA are based on the participatory approach and full active involvement of the Panchayats, Gram Sabha, etc. In case of these two districts in Mizoram, since they have autonomous councils hence it is the Village Council which is responsible for the implementation of the NREGA. I can narrate umpteen examples on the first hand experiences on what actually is happening at the ground level in the villages. But, I think one can at least come to one common conclusion and this pertains to the capacity of the panchayats to implement and plan the various developmental programmes and other such issues. One is certainly not doubting or trying to say that rural people or the panchayats are incompetent. I can't help narrating two

incidences of my Mizoram trip - the first - in one of the villages while inspecting the records of the NREGA I found that in one of the job cards the following details were filled :

Duration of Employment 1 August 2007 to 23 August 2007

No. of Days provided employment - 10 days

Total Amount paid - Rs. 1820/-

Signatures of the Authorised Signatory: Signed by the Administrative Assistant / concerned official on the respective village

When I visited this village on the 9th August 2007 and enquired from the Village Council President (VCP) as to how this has happened, he stated that this job card was filled by the office of the BDO and he was asked to fill the same details on all the remaining job cards (about 200) and send to him for signature. All the job cards were lying in the house of this VCP. On asking him whether he knew what the VCP was likely to do; he showed his ignorance and said that if he did not fill this then they may not get any work from the office of the BDO. In the same manner, he was asked to fill all the muster rolls. The point I am trying to make is that maybe this particular VCP did not even know what he was doing (although the chances are bleak), but the *Pradhans* (Panchayat Presidents) are subject to intense pressure from many quarters many a time. In some villages, I found that the certain VCPs were giving work only to certain sections of people and not giving to others. In some cases while money is being paid to some, it is not being paid to others regularly. NREGA is an Act; hence, one can talk of at least of some accountability (although examples of the guilty being taken to task may be very few). However, most of the other schemes and programmes do not have such accountability clauses. Hence, many things happen in the village purely on what the *Pradhans* fancy, and the results would be more or less based on the competence of this *Pradhan* or his secretary. Therefore, the big question is the capacity and the ability of the panchayats to administer and implement. For sure, I believe that a lot of work needs to be done in terms of capacity building of the panchayats, and the task does not end by giving training for one or two or three years because fresh elections in panchayats bring lot of new faces who are completely ignorant or untrained. I firmly believe that any programme which is given to the panchayats needs to be backed up with regular and adequate training and monitoring.

Still your idea is extremely good and noble about exploring the possibility of handing over the reins of the PDS to the Panchayats. The issues I am raising are:

- Whether the panchayats would be able to implement this in an effective and sincere manner,
- What mechanism would be required to ensure proper implementation,
- What checks and balances would be required for ensuring the proper implementation,
- How much is the will of the panchayats for taking this responsibility.

Apart from this another big issue is whether the answers to these questions would be same for all parts of our country. To this my answer is certainly no. It would vary grossly from state to state and possibly within the state too - especially in the larger states. Hence, one has to be cautious when one is thinking of the entire country for such a major policy decision.

However, this should not at all be a deterrent in initiating this change, but it would be better if without waiting for this discussion for long time, at least one district or some blocks are taken up on a sample basis, wherein the responsibility is handed over to the panchayats and the progress is assessed for one or two years. We not only come to know the pitfalls but also get enlightened about the appropriateness of the process or model adopted. If it works out then you may like to replicate it in other districts, if it doesn't then one can make another effort by making mid-term corrections based on the lessons learnt. However, it would be better that continuous monitoring of these districts is done and records of this monitoring maintained - if then these records are

presented on this forum, then many of us can contribute much more significantly on solutions of the problems based on our experience.

As far as my information goes, some states, such as Maharashtra have also taken up such mode of implementation on trial / pilot basis. One can also request them to share their experiences.

Members may like to visit <http://www.empowerpoor.com/relatednews.asp?report=561> for ready reference to a pilot scheme with increased role of the Panchayats in PDS, being proposed for District Nashik, Maharashtra.

Pritam K Nanda, CARE India, Visakhapatnam

I am with CARE India and work towards furthering various social development initiatives in Chhattisgarh and Andhra Pradesh. I have particularly worked on food and nutrition security issues all this while. We, at CARE, have approached the issue from three different angles-

- Inter and Intra-household level - Basically addressing the intra-household disparities in food availability and ensuring nutritional sufficiency for the vulnerable sections of the society. Alongside, we focused on reducing gender disparities in the availability of food to the girl child and women inside the household
- At the Community level- Ensuring the participation and ownership of the community groups and Panchayats towards implementation and monitoring of all nutrition and food security programmes in the village
- At the Systems level - Advocating for a comprehensive sector level approach to managing food and nutrition security issues. Besides, we called for repositioning of the PDS and projecting it as a system that provides comprehensive nutrition security services to the population, and not just the food and essential supplies. We also demanded the renaming of the 'Food and Civil Supplies' department to 'Food and Nutrition Security' department, to help refocus all efforts towards ensuring nutrition security.

I am enclosing a [paper](#) (Size: 33 KB), which further illustrates our experiences of working in this CARE project in Chhattisgarh. This is part of a full paper that I can also share with the group, if the members so wish.

V. Kurian Baby, Socio Economic Unit Foundation, Thrissur

As I see it, food security at the community level depends largely on-

- (a) supply-availability
- (b) purchasing power
- (c) access to market
- (d) price and
- (e) the social capital/safety nets that support the vulnerable in hunger.

In my view, the role of Panchayats in contributing towards food security is in operationalizing-

- (i) targeted safety nets like effectively implemented employment guarantee programmes;
- (ii) livelihood support programmes for the destitute and the vulnerable and
- (iii) community vigilance that is truly participatory.

From my own experiences, the cereal off take in areas covered under Antyodaya and BPL cardholders is generally reported to be consistently high, while the households are characterized by hunger and poor nutritional status. A large share of the heavily subsidized household items

under targeted PDS is leaking, with out reaching the target group. I have seen that the involvement of local communities/NGOs in monitoring price, quantity and leakage has helped to improve the situation. The issue regarding the ownership and management of the PDS network in public/or private hands apparently will not lead to significant change. In my view, the key is-how the network is regulated to ensure fair deal in transactions and how the community vigilance is set into place.

The PRIs can better design programmes that improve the access of the poor to food markets and audit PDS and food markets against distortions and leakage with greater stakeholder participation (vigilance networks institutionally anchored with PRIs). Another area of great food security support would be in targeting deprivation and hunger with in the household (there are 'deprived' people even in rich households), especially women /destitute focused programmes; like food stamps in hunger prone areas during lean periods.

Wim Polman, FAO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, Bangkok, Thailand
(Response 1)

This topic is very important to The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), which is involved in food security issues as UN Technical Agency in the world. A world, where over 500 million people are suffering from food insecurity, most of them in rural areas.

Taking into account the many different conditions for success/failure in the NREG schemes through Panchayats covering all of India; it would call for a system approach that FAO has applied in promotion of village level enterprises by farmers for employment generation in 8 Asian countries (excluding India)

The Success Case Replication methodology (SCR) first established a set of criteria based upon local conditions, local initiatives and local success. This makes it embedded in local culture, local language and local realities. Then meetings are organized to bring together success case leaders and members of Panchayats and leaders from relevant successful local associations e.g. cooperatives, women groups, tribal associations etc. At the meetings, participants discuss constraints and solutions and make an assessment of errors made and lessons learnt. This results in the emergence of own unique local/regional model which can be replicated on same scale or upscaled. By doing this thoroughly, local strengths are optimized, local ownership is guaranteed and transparency is enhanced. All this will eventually lead to capacity enhancement of the Panchayat representatives.

At this moment the SCR approach is implemented in poorest zones of Nepal, focusing on agricultural cooperatives with members from ex bonded labor, women, indigenous women groups and small farmers, in the hills and *terrai* (foothills) region of the country. A video and two training manuals are also being produced in Nepali and English, covering the entire process.

The SCR approach is very flexible and could be an instrument not only for strengthening and expansion of locally successful initiatives through Panchayats but also for monitoring other government distribution schemes.

Venkatrao Ghorpade, SHIRDI Foundation, Bangalore

Today, Panchayates already have enough scope and freedom to effectively participate in any government related programmes that are implemented to provide food security to the common man at the village level.

Unfortunately, the Panchayats are not quite serious in making a visible impact in this direction.

For example, the NREG scheme is one such programme where there is lot of misuse of funds in providing assured employment for 100 days with daily wages payable being Rs. 74/-. We find that the Govt. machinery is hand in glove with the local body representatives to produce false muster rolls to show inflated figures for employment; machineries are used to carry out works in place of manual labour etc. There cannot be a better and more focused opportunity for Panchayat members to participate in such programmes to ensure food security to the vulnerable Groups.

Secondly, the Panchayats today can effectively associate themselves with the PDS and Fair Price Shops that are functioning in their respective GPs to ensure that there are no leakages of Govt. supplied food grains, and the common man gets the right quantity at the right price for supplies made through these Fair Price Shops.

The real food security can come when the agricultural productivity in the villages goes up substantially, and the per capita income proportionately also goes up giving the common man enough freedom to ensure food security for himself and his family.

Puran Singh Yadav, Development and Panchayats Department, Haryana

NREGS provides legal right/ guarantee to every rural family, which is willing to do manual unskilled work, to demand 100 days employment per year. I feel that the success/ failures of the scheme mainly depend on the local delivery mechanism. If the local administration is willing to make it a success, I am sure, it succeeds and there are numerous success stories throughout the country. The administrative unpreparedness has led to setbacks in some of the cases as well. However, for failures the NREGS cannot be blamed. In my view, the scheme is worth creating food security for the poor.

Wim Polman, from FAO, Thailand, has made out a case for replication of the SCR approach in other parts of the World. Undoubtedly, the approach is good and calls for empowering the poor and providing them food security. But, I also feel that there are large number of such schemes already implemented by various central ministries and state Governments in India like Swarnajayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY), which aims at setting up of micro enterprises based on the local potential. Another scheme Hariyali also aims to optimize the use of natural resources based on the local indigenous technology and people's collective action. There are numerous other schemes, which are based on the same methodology.

Therefore, in my opinion, in place of launching of a new scheme, we in India need to consolidate and strengthen the existing schemes and reap the optimum results. Efforts should be made to avoid the duplicity of schemes and also to bring them under one umbrella. We should try to create area specific innovations we know that initiatives propagated in different settings may not create the same impact in other countries.

Finally, I feel that we have a lot of scope to strengthen Panchayati Raj by clearly defining the duties of all the three tiers and building their capacity through regular and quality training programmes as also helping them to better perform their duties. Panchayati Raj Institutions, in my opinion, are the best alternative for providing food security to the millions.

Arun Kumar Aggarwal, School of Public Health, PGIMER, Chandigarh

I agree with Dr Sanjay Jain's experiences about role of PRIs. I have recently set-up one small project where-in village committees have been formulated in one area of Haryana. I was shocked to learn the views of a learned Sarpanch in the area. He expressed his strong opinion that no powers should be given to Panchayats. He told that there is gross mis-utilization of the funds given to them. When persuaded to suggest possible solution- he suggested that all payments should be done by cheque to the beneficiaries. Secondly, for payments pertaining to the civil or such work in the villages, government should spend some more money for proper documentation- in terms of taking photographs before and after the work.

Focusing on the current problem, I believe that PRIs may be given supervisory and monitoring role. Current system should not be radically changed. There should be a system wherein community can file complaints with local PRIs- who should take corrective actions thereon. Similarly, PRIs should make independent supervisory visits to ensure quality products are delivered to the needful. I also feel that it is highly unrealistic to expect too much from PRIs in terms of their performance; without any proper education, training and experience. Capacity building of the Panchayat functionaries is necessary that will come mostly through the process of supportive supervision.

Bibhu Prasad Mohanty, Hunger Solution, Koraput (response 1)

It is a fact that there have been many attempts to address hunger issues through a number of social security schemes. National, State and local governments have been very active to achieve the goal of making India 'hunger free'.

We tried to improve the production as well as the foodgrain distribution systems. Government introduced a number of schemes to achieve food security to the most vulnerable sections. Unfortunately, we are now facing serious problems in agriculture sector- low yield of agriculture products, youth losing interest in farm sector, unavailability of good seeds and severe environment degradation issues. The Public Distribution System (PDS) is constrained to effectively serve the needy population. I feel that our systems of distribution are so complex for poor and illiterate population that it has restricted access to this most needy section of the society.

We can avert the situation by the intervention of Panchayats. We can restrict misuse of our money at the village level. Locally produced materials should go to our public or market distribution system ensuring a good market, better nutrition and good economic gains for the people. Second, our policies should aim and be focused at small and marginal farmers development, because their number is too high. Third, there has been serious flaws in physicians administering packet baby food in rural areas. They should emphasize more on locally available nutritious food materials, and these kinds of information dissemination initiatives can be handled very well by the Panchayats.

P.K.Thampan, Peekay Tree Crops Development Foundation, Kochi

Village Panchayats must be made responsible for addressing the food security of vulnerable groups. Each Panchayat should adopt an action plan to organize a food production drive on a continuing basis with priority for the production of protective food crops. In the Panchayat Wards, the respective members should motivate all the farm-households to join in the campaign for producing food articles from every available farmstead. The emphasis should be on integrated agriculture involving both arable crops and animal components. The success or otherwise of a

Panchayat should be assessed based on the efforts made for widening the food supply position locally. The Village Panchayats should have a major role in strengthening the PDS. The local Panchayat should be made responsible for overseeing the functioning of the PDS within its area of operation.

Pradeep Chaturvedi, Consultant, New Delhi

This is a nice piece of information that Mr. Wim Polman has provided. Can Mr. Polman please name the eight countries that he has mentioned? Is this project over or is it going on?

Wim Polman, FAO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, Bangkok, Thailand
(Response 2)

The countries where the SCR methodology was field tested with different degrees of success were: Mongolia, The Philippines, Thailand, Laos, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Vietnam and Bhutan. Many years later I came to know that the Bank for Agriculture and Cooperatives (BAAC), one of the largest cooperative bank in Thailand, works with SCR as a nation wide approach among farmers, who took loans from the bank and which resulted in substantial risk reduction in debt repayment. The ILO applied it in Cambodia to assist disabled farmers. In Vietnam, provincial governors applied it in 3 provinces; and FAO is applying it today in Nepal.

I feel that the SCR method can be adapted to any of the government-supported programs. As an example, I think, we can apply it to creating exemplars of successful bio fuel development at community level, resulting into reduction in food insecurity and poverty.

SCR needs local information, intensive local survey by knowledgeable people and informal approach to adapt to quite different situations, yet in its application can reach out to thousands of people and larger geographical entities. I feel the short introduction I made on SCR needs clarification. SCR is a completely neutral training methodology for capacity building, which does not replace any existing training and can be applied in all sectors and programs of governance and or economic development.

SCR starts with development of a set of tools to identify, fully understand and describe success in the local language and with a clear description of criteria and learning process to be adopted towards achieving success. For schemes to be implemented at panchayat level SCR will serve as the most simple and smart local planners tool. After set up of the key SCR components; the "where, what, how, who and do's and don'ts" the SCR training can start up by successful Panchayat representatives as trainers (facilitated by core SCR training experts only in the first phase, after that local replication can go on for Panchayats that are motivated to replicate the success model.

Every time SCR training moves to a new area State/region, we may need an update in identification of local success factors to see if there are important local differences. This may result in an adapted SCR model for training. It takes some 6-12 months to develop the first SCR training method for a selected area, based upon identification of successful Panchayats in a specific region/State, "A region specific SCR training model" will emerge as an end product, which can be applied by peers for replication of SCR training in the entire area.

I feel that SCR replication for successful implementation of government schemes at panchayat level could benefit from current experiences in the National Institute of Rural Development (NIRD). FAO has also developed a 'Handbook for Trainers on Participatory Local Development',

which can be downloaded from <ftp://ftp.fao.org/docrep/fao/007/AE536e/AE536E00.pdf> (Size: 772 KB). I feel this could be a very productive resource in the context of the topic discussed.

Kiran Kulkarni, Institute of Rural Credit and Entrepreneurship Development, Sangli

I am attaching an [article](#) entitled 'Poverty Eradication through Community Grain Banks', which presents an account of the evolution and mechanics of a Grain Bank movement in the villages of draught prone area of Atpadi Talluka in District Sangli, Maharashtra. Government of Maharashtra adopted a similar program in 1994. In my article, I have tried to demonstrate from experience that poverty can be eradicated at village level by implementing the Grain Bank programme. I believe that the idea and the design propagated here could be implemented in any village.

We see the programme as an ideal strategy for-

- Reducing indebtedness
- Checking migration
- Supporting collectivism of resources
- Ensuring village level food security
- Improving sustainability
- Alleviating poverty

I am sure that the article provides a fair idea on the Grain Bank programme, which according to me, would be an ideal mechanism for ensuring food security through the Panchayats.

Kris Dev, Life Line to Business, Chennai

Congratulations to Mr. Pritam on his post and the paper forwarded by him. Can he please share the complete paper too? With regard to food and nutrition security and improving the effectiveness of the PDS, I feel, what is lacking are proper systems of citizen empowerment. In the absence of a citizen ID, database on health, food and nutrition requirements, how can we ensure proper distribution of resources? There can be no accountability. Every activity should start with unique citizen identification process and creation of complete citizen database. Once this is done, the next requirement of planning and budgeting for the proposed intervention can be done. Multi Purpose Biometric Smart Cards cum Bank Debit Cards are currently being introduced in Bihar that could form the basis for such a citizen database system.

Secondly, in my opinion, there are no dearth of ideas, schemes and on the ground success stories. What is lacking though is an overall system to streamline the entire poverty alleviation program. The leakages in the system are too many and too vast to be tracked in the existing methodology. In my opinion, what we need is a transparent system of administering holistic poverty alleviation programs.

Leela Kumari P. , Institute of Management in Government, Thiruvananthapuram

I fully agree with the views of Shri. Yadav and the facts, which he has pointed out to in his post. In India, central ministries have implemented a lot of anti poverty programmes in the past. The results of evaluation studies have shown varying results. I feel, one of the main problems in Kerala that we have seen in this context, is duplication of schemes and emergence of parallel agencies.

In the case of NREG scheme, I feel that, the women are benefiting well. The experiences of pilot project have shown that the women are being empowered as they get more access and control over the resources through this programme. I feel, that the community based organizations at panchayat level need to be promoted and empowered for achieving effectiveness in systems as that of the PDS.

Sibaji Adak, Department of Panchayat and Rural Development, Pursurah, District Hooghly

I want to share an experience I had from "Ashraya" project in Kerala, which aims at eradication of destitution. One of the components of this programme is food security. Recently, we visited Kerala. Nedumbassery was one of Gram Panchayat where Ashraya was piloted. Nedumbassery had 3681 BPL families in the initial stage. When this GP planned to address problem of destitution within its area, a survey team was constituted comprising college students, women and representatives from the Panchayat. They initially identified 946 families as vulnerable based on a 9 point score criteria. Then they made a massive scrutiny; analyzed the situation again and formed a sub-committee to re-look at the findings. Finally, they arrived at a figure of 156 families. All these 156 families were not able to get two meals per day.

I mentioned this incidence in full because, according to my belief, identification of right person for the right programme is the most important step. My point is that, eagerness for entering into any beneficiary list leads to several anomalies in proper administration of the government programmes as the PDS. The selection of beneficiary should get the highest priority thus. Unfortunately, due to various reasons, this gets the least attention.

Srinivas Rao, ITC Limited, Secunderabad (response 1)

I would tend to agree with Mr. Venkatrao Ghorpade. The real food security would come out of increased rural incomes. This is possible through enhanced returns from agriculture (better yields, reducing cost of inputs, better price discovery, better marketing; in fact the whole value chain). Just increased agriculture production is not enough, though it is critical. This could be also be from better quality seeds / hybrids, better soil and moisture conservation (community wells, stop / check dams, plugging sprinklers etc), and by adopting new package of practices and customized solutions.

Market linkages are critical to ensure that market driven production takes place and the farmer get "fair" prices for his/her produce. Enhanced rural incomes would also result from higher returns from milk yields and crossbred livestock. Scaling up of rural micro credit and micro enterprise through SHGs will also contribute to higher incomes.

Though the Government has tried numerous models in the past, an integrated and sustainable model still eludes us. In the private sector, groups as ITC's e-choupal are trying to promote an inclusive business model with the use of ICT. With innovatively managed public-private partnerships, there is a possibility for similar models to be promoted elsewhere. Furthermore if Panchayats can be brought in as a partner, there would a good grassroots level integration and buy-in among the community (some pilots can be tried out to check the efficacy of the same).

Latha Bhaskar, Independent Consultant, Thiruvananthapuram

While attempting to find solutions to the three pertinent questions raised by Mrs. Rajwant Sandhu, I would like to invite the attention of all members to the model of "**Community Kitchens**" practiced in various global communities.

A **Community Kitchen** involves a group of like-minded individuals coming together on a regular basis to socialize and cook before enjoying delicious, affordable and nutritious meals with friends. Many kitchens buy and cook in bulk to allow the production of many meals at low cost. Participants can then take meals home to enjoy on subsequent days. The participants have ownership over their kitchen and direct how they would like their kitchen to run. Group members have ownership. For example, they decide when to cook, what to cook, who will do the shopping and different cooking tasks. They will cook enough portions of that recipe for the whole group and any family members. Any suitable place like an existing kitchen, school, neighbourhood house, service club etc can be utilized for the cooking purpose.

Each cooking session is preceded by a planning session where participants get together over tea/coffee to plan their recipes. This involves doing a budget to ensure they can afford the recipes they have selected. The vision of Community Kitchens is that each group will eventually be self-sufficient with a facilitator ensuring things run smoothly. The facilitator may be a member of the group, a worker or a volunteer who comes in to the group with the specific purpose of helping out. For this to be possible, participation from everyone in the group is the key. In Uttarakhand, we have a similar trial of a Community Kitchen model facilitated by RLEK kitchens, fuelled by LPG cylinders in collaboration with the Hindustan Petroleum. Read details in the link <http://www.rlek.org/comkitchen.html>

I believe that while seeking solutions in providing food security to vulnerable groups with the support of **Panchayati Raj Institutions and community-based organizations**, we can try out this **Community Kitchen model**, with suitable modifications. Ministry of Panchayati Raj can try out a few pilot models to work out the detailed modalities. Community Kitchens for vulnerable groups should operate with government subsidy and support, while the beneficiaries run them with complete transparency. Public distribution systems can be linked to such community kitchens to distribute essential food items, trials to establish community kitchen gardens etc can be tried out as joint ventures.

Such ideas need not be restricted to BPL class alone. Through appropriate publicity campaigns, residential communities of above poverty line groups too can try out such group cooking in community kitchens, which will then be a huge time and resource saving effort. It will also promote more social interactions and cohesion as well.

B.P. Syam Roy, Development and Planning Department, Government of West Bengal, Kolkata

I regret that I am late in responding to the issue. For improving the food security through PDS my comments are the following:

1. MR Dealer centred PDS system is linked with inbuilt limitation of this delivery system.
2. Since viable alternative is difficult to be institutionalized, the existing system needs to be reformed. The following could be some options:
 - a) Instead of Panchayats in generic term, Gram Panchayat may be empowered only by the Food & Supplies Department of the State Government for this job including selection of MR dealers.

- b) A model activity mapping relating to this assigned job may be circulated.
- c) One MR dealer per G.P. to start with – may be increased thereafter.
- d) MR dealers would not be allowed to keep ration cards of the customers (primary source of all leakages) – instant dismissal of MR dealership if detected.
- e) Working hours of the MR shops to be made customer friendly – linking it with off time available for wage earners and also as per decision of the Gram Panchayat.
- f) MR articles to be given in the form of packets of 1/2/3/4 Kg. of food grains to facilitate correct weightage and to purchase according to the buying position of the customers.
- g) Introduce flexibility to purchase MR articles at least twice in a week.
- h) MR dealers may be required to send fortnightly report of lifting of such stocks to the respective Gram Panchayat.
- i) Gram Panchayat is to publish the report in its notice board – and follow it up, if required, at the Gram Panchayat meeting only.
- j) List of Annapurna and Antyodaya programme beneficiaries to be prominently displayed at the Gram Panchayat office.
- k) A CBO run fair price could be trialed on a pilot basis in backward pockets as a supplementary initiative.
- l) Price of all MR articles to be clearly displayed in regional language in the fair price shop.
- m) A panel of CBO, as a part of social audit, need to take up monitoring role not only of lifting but also why some of the Annapurna and Antyodaya beneficiaries could not lift them in a particular period.
- n) Such findings need to be shared with Gram Panchayats and District Collectors.
- o) Special vigilance from the month of November to May might require to be put in place.
- p) District Collector to submit annual report to the District Planning Committee and also to the Food & Supplies Department on PDS at the beginning of the new financial year.

Sujoy Chaudhary, GOAL India, Kolkata

My apologies for coming in so late into the discussion. Having gone through the ideas and suggestions put up by many contributors, I feel that we have missed a crucial aspect of the PDS, the system which is primarily responsible for ensuring that the poor and the very poor are food secure.

The issue of food security for the very poor is not about whether the PDS is operational and that the poor has access to the system. The very poor are required to purchase rice, sugar, kerosene etc paying cash, and cash is something that the very poor do not have. So while he/she is eligible to avail the benefits of the PDS, he/she does not have the cash/out-of-pocket money to purchase the goods. The practice that is usually adopted by this section of the poor is to give away their ration cards to better off people in their villages. These people then purchase from the PDS and either consume/sell the items in the market while providing the actual cardholder a part of the items procured from the PDS at a slightly higher rate on credit. This is typical of most poor families , who do not have the cash but have to keep their ration cards utilized.

In my view, this is something that needs urgent and priority attention.

Bibhu Prasad Mohanty, Hunger Solution, Koraput (response 2)

I went through the excellent article provided by Mr Kiran Kulkarni on his poverty reduction experience through community grain banks. I wish to add some more things to it. It will be nice if you add seed banks with focus on crop security. A fusion of seed and grain banks will definitely take care of livelihood security in your operational area. In case of seed banks, you may consider to promote or encourage seeds of crop varieties, which are of desired characters, environment friendly, healthy and nutritious in all the aspects and require minimal external inputs.

Maroti A. Upare, Independent Consultant, Mumbai

It may be interesting to look into results of World Bank assisted `Karnataka Community Based Tank Management Project`. In this project GP tanks are taken for development by forming small tank users groups. They involve all stakeholders of tank including farmers, women, fishermen and landless workers. Maintenance of tanks is done by tank users group. The resources are mobilized by charging rent for irrigation, fishing etc. The results are very encouraging. Similar projects are being taken in Andhra Pradesh, Orissa, West Bengal and Tamilnadu. I feel, this approach may provide solution for Mrs. Sandhu's query.

Pradip Pradhan, The Humanity, Puri

Let me share the experience about implementation of PDS in Orissa. The System of Store Agent and appointment of dealer (they are political appointees) for sale of PDS items has caused a collapse in the PDS delivery system. In practice the implementation of the entire PDS system is guided by the Store Agent. The Gram Panchayats in Western Orissa have been given the responsibility for distribution of PDS whereas it is distributed by dealers in coastal Orissa. The Gram Panchayats in West Orissa are acting the agent of Store Agent for distribution of PDS. In coastal Orissa the beneficiaries do not prefer to purchase the rice as it is old stock, rotten and not edible. There is neither any monitoring nor transparency in the PDS. Many civil supply officials are hand in glove with the Store Agent in the black marketing of essential food items. The following steps can be taken up for proper management of PDS:

- a. Complete withdrawal of Store Agent System
 - b. PDS item like rice can be locally procured, not from far states like Punjab
 - c. An administrative mechanism can be developed for direct supply of PDS from godown/depot of the Civil Supply Department to Gram Panchayat.
 - d. GP outlet should be kept open through out the month so that the people can purchase it at any time.
 - e. Utmost transparency needs to be maintained. and Social Audit needs to be conducted every two months.
 - f. Stringent action needs to be taken against the person or the officials responsible for hoarding or black marketing of PDS items.
 - g. Vigilance Cell of Department of Panchayati Raj and Food and Civil Supplies needs to be activated to make the enquiry into any allegation immediately and accordingly action can be taken within 15 days.
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R.S.Mathur, UNICEF, Lucknow

This has reference to the issues, very succinctly, raised by Mrs. Rajwant Sandhu on Food Security.

I would like to share some of my experiences as a former Secretary, Government of India, Ministry of Food and Consumer Affairs.

The system that had been operated by the GOI for a long time to address the issue of Food Security was actually an attempt to address several problems including the one of ensuring a Minimum Support Price to the Farmers. This, as also some operating inefficiencies, jacked up the Economic Cost of Foodgrains to such an extent as to be unaffordable for many BPL Families even after adding the subsidy element. Thus there was the irony of the poor families in places like Kalahandi, that produced foodgrains in abundance not having access to even subsidized BPL Food due to lack of affordability. There was a time when FCI godowns were overflowing with stocks and yet there were pockets in the country where people did not have access to Food.

The Panchayats can play a role in ensuring Food Security provide they have sufficient funds to buy Foodgrains procured by Government, which is going to be difficult in most cases. For starters, I think the issue of Food security should be delinked from the mechanism to ensure MSP (which is always on the higher side) and Government should source foodgrains for meeting the needs of Food Security separately from the cheapest source. Since the Panchayats are very closely involved in the NREGS, it should not be difficult to establish a link between this programme and Food Security. Multiple-sourcing of foodgrains for this purpose, as also decentralised procurement should help in reducing the cost.

Amalendu Ghosh, Municipal Service Commission, Kolkata

Ms. Rajwant Sandhu 's query on food and nutritional security for vulnerable groups has, predictably, evoked quite an interesting discussion, throwing up many thought provoking ideas and several worth emulating experiences.

In my view, the responsibility of ensuring food security for those who need it should rest primarily on the PRIs in general and Gram Panchayats in particular, not of course suggesting that the state or the union governments will have nothing to do in the matter. When I say this, I know there are many, who for good reasons are quite skeptical about the capability or motivation of the PRIs to shoulder such a responsibility.

I take this opportunity to highlight some good work done by a few Gram Panchayats (GPs) in West Bengal, albeit on a small scale. The concerned GPs with the help of the Gram Unnayan Samitis (GUS-a committee, headed by the member representing the Sansad -- each constituency of the GP is called Gram Sansad), first identified the vulnerable families which were not assured of income in the lean period and needed such support, and the woman members of those families were encouraged to form Self help Groups (SHGs).

After initial period of stabilization, these Groups were given seeds for growing vegetables in the vacant lands surrounding their households, public lands like roadsides, banks of the canals etc. Vegetables thus grown were consumed by them that provided nutritional support and surplus was sold in the local market that generated some income hitherto unknown to these women. This gave them confidence to take up economic activities in a larger scale. At this stage, the GPs provided assistance for taking up income generating activities by raising saplings, strip plantations, animal husbandry, fisheries etc. More importantly, the GPs enabled them to take up seasonal contract farming in the Rabi season, by mediating with landlords whose lands remained fallow during that period. This proved to be profitable for both the SHG members as well as the

landowners. Good quantity of wheat, pulses, oilseeds, vegetables etc. were produced by them, a good part of which they could sell in the market. Now, with the sale proceeds, these Groups had some funds of their own with which they could procure paddy and store them for use in the lean period. Many of them stored their foodgrains in their own grain banks (dharma gola as they call it). They could draw their share of paddy in the lean period that is Aug/Sept. and again replenish the stock with some additional quantity during harvesting time, thereby raising their stock for the next year.

This has been done in about 21 GPs under 4 Blocks in 4 districts. About 15000 families mobilized in 1471 SHGs (within a period of about four years) have so far been benefited, for besides other things, they could meet their requirement of food grains for the major part of about 12 weeks of the lean period of the year. This is a commendable achievement, though in a small scale. Many other GPs are now interested in trying this out in their areas.

It is worth noting here that the GP's support has been limited to awareness generation and providing seeds, manures etc. on loan, which have been fully refunded in kind by the Groups. The idea of the whole initiative was given to the PRIs, along with some material inputs, expert advice and IEC materials by the Loka Kalyan Parishad, an NGO (lkp@lkp.org.in) working in the food security and allied fields.

[Neelkanth Mishra](#), Oxfam GB, Lucknow

I would like to share my experience on NREGS through community based organizations and Panchayats in response to the discussion initiated by Mrs. Sandhu.

"Achrumata Machwara Sangathan" (A fisher folks forum in Tikamgrah district, Madhya Pradesh) developed cost estimation and detailed technical design for pond repairing and it was shared with the Panchayat. In response to this, more than 40 ponds were repaired and deepening was done. It has ensured better implementation of NREGS, Local people got wage labour that enhanced their food grain purchasing capacity. In addition, the local fisher folk group members keep a vigilant eye on food grain arrival and distribution through the PDS. It is visible in Kakauni village of Tikamgarh. The moment truckload arrives at PDS shop; some of the people from *Sangathan* arrive and help in unloading of food materials, they also take note of the stock and inform local villagers about arrival of food materials. This system is helping in proper distribution of food stock through PDS and a sense of collective responsibility amongst the community is growing.

Through this example, I want to emphasize on how community based groups whether of fisher folks, youth or women can play an extremely significant role in proper implementation of food related social security schemes at village level. Therefore, I propose developing /strengthening local community members group as a monitoring unit; for proper implementation of not only PDS but also all, the social security measures at community level.

My specific suggestions in this regard would include:

1. Organizing / developing community based organizations for collective monitoring of all social security schemes.
2. Procurement of local food stuff (rice/wheat etc) instead of being dependent on purchases from other state.
3. Developing Block level food storage facilities, which should be directly linked with the FCI.
4. Proper transportation costs should be reimbursed to PDS shop owners/ or in difficult areas transportation should be arranged by district officials.

5. PDS centers should be somehow linked with Food for Work and NREGS kind of programmes, and food ration to laborers should be provided on the site.

V.A.Vasudevaraju, Indian Institute of Community Development, Puducherry

Food grains, vegetables etc are produced by both men and women. But food is prepared and served only by women in all homes which belong to the vulnerable sections. Hence management of food supply should be left to women in villages who know better the needs of the community in their area. Management of food supply by others during the past sixty years has only compounded problems. Hence, in my view, running of all ration shops under PDS in all states have to be reserved for women groups including SHGs, *Mahila Mandals*.

A question may be raised whether the women groups have the capacity to run the ration shops under PDS. I would say, the answer is ' yes, they have it'. In 1991 when I was Secretary to government, in charge of Women & Child Development in Puducherry, the DWCRA women groups existing there were without any income generating activities. I took steps to entrust supply of nutrition requirements of Anganwadis, Balwadis, hostels and homes by DWCRA women groups at the same rate the supermarket of the cooperative sold the goods, bidding good-bye to the tender system. This made the DWCRA women groups to become active and they performed this task at short notice in a remarkable manner. No financial assistance or loan was provided. They managed it by themselves. The recent West Bengal experience also proves that women have the capacity to perform in the area of food security.

I propose that every village panchayat should be informed by the Civil Supplies Department of the State, the quantity of food grains released to the ration shops in the village and date of its release. This will enable the village panchayat to monitor arrival of supplies at the ration shop. The Ministry of Civil Supplies has to ensure this flow of information to village panchayats. In the absence of monitoring by the village panchayats supplies to ration shops do not even reach the villages in many of the cases. Hence, the best solution that I see is monitoring by village panchayats and running of ration shops under PDS by women groups in villages and none else.

Srinivas Rao, ITC, Secunderabad (response 2)

ITC had entered into PPP arrangement (including with the Panchayati Raj Department) for an integrated horticultural intervention in Uttarakhand, from fresh produce to value addition of the entire chain and by working with farmers directly (similar to the e-choupal model) through the PRI. Though we have commenced our activities and are sourcing fresh produce for some time now, the issue that comes to mind is; what is the motivation for PRIs to support such initiatives? How do we engage them in a holistic manner, which becomes a win-win model for both?

Mrinal Kanti Dasgupta, Visva Bharati Santiniketan, Bolpur (response 3)

In the context of the discussion, reducing marginal population somehow and increasing their productive efficiency; ensuring full and productive employment are surely important. Government wastelands are being productively used in certain areas through NGOs, providing labour to the vulnerable and ensuring that they have an increased purchasing capacity. But, this needs to spread as a movement. Marginal people living dangerously in forests, river islands, coastal-cyclone prone areas, drought, and flood prone areas need to be especially brought closer to relief sources and under government/NGO umbrella.

I also feel that, no economic scheme can provide for needs of the burgeoning population once the population grows out of bounds of the carrying capacity; in terms of economics, ecology, environment, technology and managerial ability.

Rupa Mukerji, Intercooperation, Hyderabad

I would fully agree with Mr. V.A.Vasudevaraju. In our work in tribal dominated districts of Orissa we find that ration cards are hypothecated to the money lenders cutting one of the last threads of households to their entitlements, and putting at risk basic food security. Awareness of the extent of such practices and solidarity with the destitute within their community will empower the women's groups and may lead to some changes in systems of exploitation that have continued for decades.

Bidyut Mohanty, Institute of Social Sciences, New Delhi

The issues raised by Sujoy are very important. In fact the PDS didn't work in Kashipur, Koraput during the rainy season partly because the tribals lacked the purchasing power secondly the ration shops didn't function well. As a result, the tribals ate *ruggi* and mango seeds. In addition, the tube wells were all defunct and they drank water from the polluted streams. Hence the old disease cholera which has been eradicated from most part of the world reappeared in the region and people died in large number!

T.P. Trivedi, ICAR, New Delhi

Self help group of farm women and unemployed youth should be involved to win-win situation not only targeting replicated institutions. We should identify specialist not generalist for improvement in the life of masses.

K.V. Peter, Kerala Agricultural University, Thrissur (response 2)

People's participation in food production, value addition and marketing would be welcome and desirable. Members of village panchayats, self help groups, co-operative societies, neighbourhood groups, local activists etc. can all play a role. Commodity based societies did a notable service in rubber, cocoa, banana and even paddy. With awareness for value added products there is a silent revolution happening in horticultural crops. Kerala Council for Vegetables and fruits initially started with The Netherlands' help has now established itself as a viable unit. Social account studies are to be conducted to minimise derelictions and maximise net income to producer farmers.

Toms K Thomas, ESAF, Thrissur

I think the local governments like panchayats should have a very important role in ensuring food security. This requires considerable planning on the food requirements and assessment of the possible production. An appropriate system to monitor food demand and supply should also facilitate exploring alternative markets for the farmers. I also agree with some of the suggestions like putting PDS in to the responsibility of the panchayats. Rural urban transfer

taxing of agri-products also is advisable to ensure that the food products exported from rural localities are better prices and appropriate measures are taken to ensure local food demand is met. How so ever the state and national government should be made responsible along with the panchayats in ensuring food security for the mass. It seems like most of the problems of the poor are displaced to local governments, while urban ones are catered by services of both state and national government. In case of rural area people's participation, cost recovery all these issues would come up before starting any development activity. Local government should complement with community initiatives which would ensure larger inclusion.

Mrinal Kanti Dasgupta, Viswa Bharati Santiniketan, Bolpur (response 4)

Relief is a short-term measure although necessary. Organising cooperativism is midterm until the poor become self-confident and self-propelling without props, and a leadership generates from among them. Their education is important to an extent so long they have honesty, sincerity and industry to help the society. The long-term perspective is to reduce the poor by a population that has not been revised, although so promised by 1975. Governments do not have the political will. No Government can have enough funds!

Charity, grant, soft loan from private sources, foreign missions have a tendency to end up in cuts among the organizers.

Many thanks to all who contributed to this query!

If you have further information to share on this topic, please send it to Solution Exchange for the Decentralization Community in India at se-decn@solutionexchange-un.net.in or Solution Exchange for the Food and Nutrition Community in India at se-food@solutionexchange-un.net.in with the subject heading "Re: [se-decn][se-food] DISCUSSION: Food Security for Vulnerable Groups through Panchayats. Additional Reply."

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