



**Food and Nutrition Security
Community**



The Food and Nutrition Security Community Consolidated Reply

Query: Addressing Food Security of Slum Dwellers, Consultant, New Delhi (Experiences)

Compiled by [Gopi N Ghosh](#), Resource Person; additional research provided by [Bidisha Pillai](#) and [Shavika Gupta](#), Research Associates
23 March 2006

Original Query: Dr Sushma Sharma, Nutritionist, New Delhi Posted: 11 March 2006

I am Dr. Sushma Sharma a Public Health Nutritionist and Consultant in New Delhi.

Almost all modern societies going through the transition from an agrarian economy to an industrial one end up creating slums as a process of urbanization. India's first national Census on Slums done in 2001, estimated the urban slum population to be about 40.3 million - who are also considered to be the core urban poor. Hoping for better livelihoods, the migrated population only moves from one level of poverty to another- exacerbating their hunger, misery and health hazards in an alien urban set up.

Government tries to address these issues through a set of programmes - the important one being the Public Distribution System (PDS). There are many inter-related problems - economic, social, and systemic - that prevent the PDS from providing effective and comprehensive support to the food insecurity situations of people living in these urban slums.

I would like to learn from the members of the community their experiences in trying out appropriate strategies to improve the household food and nutrition security of these people either by -

- improving the efficiency of the public food distribution systems, or
- enhancing food security through some other programmes

It would also be nice to learn if anyone has addressed the special needs of the vulnerable groups (like preschool children, adolescent girls, women and elderly, the homeless and the destitute) amongst the urban slum dwellers.

Responses were received, with thanks, from:

1 [Ravichandran](#), Scandent Solutions Corporations, Chennai

- 2 [Deepthi Harkar](#), ICRISAT, Hyderabad
- 3 [K V Peter](#), Kerala Agricultural University, Thrissur
- 4 [Amita Joseph](#), BCF India, New Delhi
- 5 [Tusharkanti Dey](#), All India Institute of Hygiene And Public Health, Calcutta
- 6 [Bansi L. Kaul](#), Society for Popularisation of Science, Jammu
- 7 [Gopi Ghosh](#), FAO, New Delhi
- 8 [Shambhu Ghatak](#), JNU, New Delhi

Further Contributions are welcome!

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Summary of Responses

The question on improving food security of slum dwellers elicited encouraging responses both in terms of experiences of food provision to combat such insecurity, as also highlighting certain essential underlying factors. The process of urbanization - essentially a push (rural poverty) and pull (lure of urban opportunities) phenomenon - ends up creating slums and thereby, aggravating hunger and a host of other problems. Members pointed out that in case of food security, , availability, affordability, access to and utilization of food were the key concerns for those living in urban slums.

Some of the factors influencing food insecurity of slum dwellers, as identified by members, were low wages, lack of occupational skills, poor health, and inadequate access to capital, limiting the poor to jobs that were insecure, temporary, and casual. Members' inputs along with additional research highlighted the fact, that although the PDS could have been effectively used to address such food insecurity, various systemic problems like mis-targetting, increased operational costs, leakages, mismanagement and market distortion- among others, had impeded the successful implementation of PDS.

On **improving the efficiency of the PDS**, members opined, that having better supply chain management may help resolve the issues of wastage of surplus foodgrains and storage. Proper identification of most vulnerable people was also crucial. A member focused on the need for reframing the food grain list of PDS by introducing coarse grains to improve nutritional security, respect traditional food needs and preferences and, ensure food sovereignty.

Research brought out the experience of the [Rationing Kruti Samiti](#) in Maharashtra, a consumer vigilance movement that aims to address and rectify contentious issues of food procurement and distribution within the PDS in urban slum communities, by providing specific ways to improve efficiency of PDS. Consumers were made aware of how the state food distribution system works, and organized to bring about reform in the areas of transparent access to a ration card, better grains, and local availability.

Members stressed on the fact that several **targeted income or food programmes** could be undertaken **to enhance food security of slum dwellers**. A member gave an example of a [food distribution programme](#), reaching out to the urban homeless, using public donations. Members touched upon undertaking [food for work programmes](#) or [food stamp programmes](#) as ways of ensuring food security.

An important point raised by members was encouraging urban or peri urban food production activities. Such urban production, they opined, often undertaken by women, could complement household incomes and food security in addition to improving the quality of urban diets. One successful example, provided by a member was the [peri urban agricultural production](#) in Hyderabad.

In addition to food distribution programmes, members strongly recommended that the **fundamental causes of food insecurity** in urban slums **needed to be recognized and addressed** - the key being the availability of urban livelihood options for migrants. Members suggested that programmes could be designed to improve the skill sets, create a secure and higher paying job market, guarantee minimum wage days and provide credit for capital formation and self employment for the urban poor.

Members highlighted the importance of creating adequate rural job opportunities that could stem the problem of urban migration itself. All such interventions could be undertaken in a collaborative and unified manner, members suggested, with active participation from the government, private sector and civil society organizations for greater impact, wider reach and comprehensive coverage - especially, private-public partnership could be made more effective and task oriented.

Members reinforced the fact that in the long run, food security may be achieved by tackling the wider issues of poverty, livelihood and education, apart from effective and responsive public food aid and distribution systems to secure sustainable food security for the urban poor.

Comparative Experiences

Delhi

Aana Dan (from [Amita Joseph](#), BCF India, New Delhi)

A food security program for the homeless was initiated with the vision of providing subsidized food of nutritional value to at least 10000 of the city's shelter less everyday throughout the winter season. In its 30 days of running, the campaign catered to 16,907 beneficiaries. See [BCF](#) below for more.

Hyderabad

Urban and Peri-Urban Agriculture (from [K V Peter](#), Kerala Agricultural University, Thrissur)

The three main UPA activities in Hyderabad are: fodder and vegetable production, urban forestry and dairy/milk production as sources of livelihood for the urban poor. Fodder and vegetable production contributes significantly the food security of the people. In dairy producer households, 25% of the milk produced is retained for household consumption and 75% is sold. See [Resource Centre on Urban Agriculture](#) below for more.

Maharashtra

Rationing Kruti Samiti (from [Bidisha Pillai](#), Research Associate)

RKS is a federation of consumers and citizen-based organizations to assert people's right to food. Consumers are made aware of how the state food distribution system works, and mobilized around reforming three key aspects: transparent access to a ration card, better grains, and local availability. Resultantly, procedures and rules for issuing new ration cards have been clearly documented, and access is quicker, decentralized, and transparent. See [RKS](#) below for more.

from [Gopi Ghosh](#), FAO, New Delhi

Andhra Pradesh

Food Stamp Programme

A food coupon system for distribution of rice and kerosene through PDS was introduced. The system allowed food stamps to be redeemed at the Food Price Shops used by the poor consumer. Introduction of coupon system resulted in reduction of number of cards by approximately 8 lakh, which were with ineligible families. See [Food Stamps](#) below for more.

International

Sri Lanka

Food Stamp Programme

Sri Lanka was one the first developing countries to introduce a well-designed food stamp program, at the end of 1979. By 1989, about 50% of the population was participating in the program. Eligible people were selected on the basis of family income (SR\$300 or US \$ 20 dollars, in 1979, when the program started). However, program operations were affected firstly due to rapid erosion of stamp values. See [Food Stamps](#) below for more.

Related Resources

Recommended Documentation

Golden Quadrilateral – Projects, Government of India (from [Ravichandran](#), Scandent Solutions Corporations, Chennai)

<http://www.nhai.org/gqimplementation.htm>

Provides the status of GOI's project to develop national highway infrastructure having significant bearing on the distribution of food and thereby food security among people.

Food Security Programme, Business and Community Foundation, New Delhi (from [Amita Joseph](#), BCF India, New Delhi)

<http://www.bcfindia.org/food%20project%20progress.html>

BCF initiated a group to work on a Food Security Programme for and by the homeless, by raising funds to provide food to the homeless during winters.

Addressing Food Security of Slum Dwellers (from [Shambhu Ghatak](#), JNU, New Delhi)

<http://www.solutionexchange-un.net.in/food/cr/res23030601.pdf>

The paper provides information about slums in Delhi and on government programmes addressing social, economic and health issues for slum dwellers.

From [Gopi Ghosh](#), FAO, New Delhi

National Food for Work Programme, Ministry of Rural Development, GoI

<http://rural.nic.in/nffwpguidelines.htm>

Cash and food grains are being provided under the programme to generate additional supplementary wage employment and thereby food security, currently in rural areas only.

Food Stamps: A Model for India, Centre For Civil Society, November 10, 2004

http://www.ccsindia.org/policy/soc/articles/food_stamp.pdf

Showcases how food stamps can ensure food security to the poor. Provides comparative country experiences from Jamaica, Sri Lanka, Mexico and Andhra Pradesh.

Community Kitchens

<http://web.uvic.ca/bcics/research/commKitchens/world.htm>

Cites experiences from around the world in using the concept of community kitchens to provide food security and fight hunger and malnutrition for the poor.

Achieving Urban Food and Nutrition Security In The Developing World, IFPRI, August 2000

<http://www.ifpri.org/2020/focus/focus03/focus03.pdf> (file type .PDF, 495 kb)

A compilation of briefs, which look at the issues of urban growth, food production, migration, employment etc. as factors that can contribute to achieving urban food security.

From Bidisha Pillai, Research Associate

Food Insecurity Atlas of Urban India, MSSRF and WFP, October 2002

<http://www.mssrf.org/fs/atlas/urban.htm>

<http://www.hinduonnet.com/fline/fl2001/stories/20030117007307500.htm>

Highlights the public distribution system and unemployment as factors that influence food security in urban areas and could be addressed through food for work programmes.

Civil Society Engagement and India's Public Distribution System: Lessons from the Rationing Kruti Samiti in Mumbai by Rob Jenkins, Birkbeck College, University of London and Anne Marie Goetz Institute of Development Studies University of Sussex, Paper presented at World Development Report Workshop, November 2002.

http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTWDR2004/Resources/22489_jenkinsgoetzWDR.pdf (224 KB)

The paper examines the potential for civil society organizations representing poorer client groups (like slum dwellers) to contribute to improved performance in India's PDS.

Food Security in India: Policy challenges and responses, Debashis Chakraborty, Asia Programme Briefing Paper, February 2005, Chatham House

<http://www.chathamhouse.org.uk/pdf/research/asia/India%20food%20security.pdf>

The author explores the PDS, Food for work Programme, Mid Day Meal Scheme, the Employment Guarantee act as possible means to combat food insecurity in India.

The urban poor and household food security: Concepts, evidence and case studies, UNICEF Urban Examples, vol.19, Nov. 1994.

http://www.fao.org/documents/show_cdr.asp?url_file=/DOCREP/x0262e/x0262e17.htm

Gives two of the experiences in documented efforts to understand and resolve the food and nutrition security of urban slum dwellers in seven cities.

Procurement, Distribution and Public Works: PDS, FFW & EGS, by S. Mahendra Dev, CESS, Hyderabad

http://www.ifpri.org/training/material/foodsecurity/sai_dev.ppt (File Type, .PPT, 134KB)

Examines the market reforms needed for achieving efficient, cost effective and sustainable food management systems providing options for improving the efficiency of the PDS.

Community Operated Food Banks: An Analysis, by Anupriya Singhal, Centre for Civil Society, Internship Papers 2002

http://www.ccsindia.org/Intern2002_23_community_foodbanks.pdf (file type .PDF, 44KB)

The paper analyses the concept of community food grain banks that was suggested by Prof M S Swaminathan as an alternative to the Public Distribution system (PDS).

India's Public Distribution System. A National and International Perspective, R. Radhakrishna and K. Subbarao, World Bank - Discussion Paper Number 380, November 1997.
http://wdsbeta.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/IW3P/IB/1997/11/01/000009265_3971229180939/Rendered/PDF/multi_page.pdf (8.19MB)

This paper estimates the gains and costs of PDS, assesses the Indian government's recent moves towards a better targeted PDS, and considers various options for reform.

Tenth Plan- Urban Development (from Shavika Gupta, Research Associate)

Planning Commission, Government of India, 2002-2007
http://planningcommission.nic.in/plans/planrel/fiveyr/10th/volume2/v2_ch6_1.pdf

Gives the governments plans for urban development, specifically slums and squatter colonies for improving their infrastructure, economic status, health and also food security.

Recommended Organizations

from [Tusharkanti Dey](#), All India Institute of Hygiene And Public Health, Calcutta

West Bengal Voluntary Health Association

<http://www.wbvha.org/projects.htm>

The WBVHA works with urban slum communities in the areas of health,, food and nutrition security, HIV/ AIDS prevention and disaster preparedness among others.

Child In Need Institute, Kolkata

<http://www.cini-india.org/asha.asp>

CINI ASHA concentrates its efforts on food and nutrition security, education, health, protection and growth of children in urban and rural settings.

Emergency Food Security Network, Ahmedabad (from Bidisha Pillai, Research Associate)

<http://www.emergencyfoodsecuritynetwork.net/whatsnew.htm>

EFSN has experience in addressing food security during disasters. Has also conducted a city-level assessment and consultation on the same area in Bhuj.

Recommended Websites

Resource Centre on Urban Agriculture & Food Security Foundation (from [K.V.Peter](#), Kerala Agricultural University, Thrissur)

<http://www.ruaf.org/taxonomy/term/32>

<http://www.ruaf.org/node/507>

Provides resources on urban agriculture and food production in cities as ways to combat urban food insecurity, including an interesting case study from Hyderabad.

From [Gopi Ghosh](#), FAO, New Delhi

Food for the Cities, FAO

<http://www.fao.org/fcit/insec.asp>

The site gives resources and documents related to urban food security and nutrition drawing upon a range of inter-related issues like food production, distribution etc.

International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) Web site - Gender and Household Food Security

<http://www.ifad.org/gender/approach/hfs/index.htm>

IFAD has initiated many project activities designed to improve household food security (HFS) and the nutritional status of individuals through increasing income-earning opportunities.

Food and Nutrition Technical Assistance (from Bidisha Pillai, Research Associate)

<http://www.fantaproject.org/focus/foodsecurity.shtml>

Provides a host of publications on ways to improve household food security featuring information on availability, accessibility and utilization of food in rural and urban settings.

Responses in Full

Ravichandran, Scandent Solutions Corporations, Chennai

Public Distribution System (PDS) can be more effective if we have a better "Supply Chain Management", It may sound crazy - but I think we are having enough surplus and we just don't know who needs it? And how to preserve the food for the needy?

Some of our food wastage's are more than the consumption volume of some developed countries. Either we are not able to preserve or we don't know who needs it?

For example, if you ask a milk man who is spilling away his milk, why he can't store his milk and sell it the next day? His reply may be that the cost of storage is much higher than the profit he gets by selling the milk.

Some of the infrastructure programs by Govt are doing wonders: such as the Golden Quadrilateral project. It has improved the supply of eggs from Namakal to Northern India!!

When I was flying to Newyork - I saw an article of an organization which helps the poor over there (Providing Food). Their Job is to collect the surplus and distribute to needy.

We need a better Supply Chain Management System in place to make our PDS more effective.

Deepthi Harkar, ICRISAT, Hyderabad

This is a good point raised by you.

As a nutritionist, I think that Food sovereignty is now required than just food security. Though we have achieved self sufficiency in food production, we still have continuous reports of severe malnutrition. The quality and quantity of grain in the PDS reaching the poor are both questioned, and many times poor do not have purchasing power to buy even that sold in PDS.

The PDS system is mainly based on wheat and rice distribution. But people who migrate to cities are mostly from these resource poor dryland areas. It was never in dryland areas, these were considered as staples. Millets and pulses were very much in the diets of people. Even today, the poor in SAT(semi arid tropics) prefer millets and not rice and wheat. Due to Green Revolution, the production of rice and wheat has increased drastically and filled in the godowns, which made

it optionless to introduce them in the food distribution system. But due to this the coarse grains are not receiving the attention they require. In fact, we very well know that the coarse grains are more nutritious than rice and wheat. Even the government subsidies are given to rice and wheat and there is always a cool eye on policies to dryland farming which make the development of dryland areas a neglected priority.

I think it is high time now and the government should now think of reframing the distribution list of PDS and introduce more of coarse grains which can better address food security of people from dryland areas who migrate to cities. It will not only reduce the calorie deficiencies but also taking care of micronutrient malnutrition.

K V Peter, Kerala Agricultural University, Thrissur

About 60% of cultivable area in India is rainfed. The Green revolution covered irrigated areas and as such, millets and pulses got unattended. There has to be people's hue and cry for a Millet and Pulses movement. It is said correctly that nutritional sovereignty is more important than nutritional security.

The whole problem of migration has also to be looked at comprehensively. Why people migrate? Adequate rural job opportunities could stem the problem of migration and creation of slum. Man needs any productive avocation to engage, earn enough to purchase basic elements to fulfill his needs and to insure him from present and future calamities.

Generation of employment is thus the core issue. Let us create an atmosphere for farm based and rural and peri-urban production units. Rural farm wage in China is equivalent of Rs 40 sufficient to meet basic needs of these people. Let us create a healthy and contented rural and peri-urban work force.

Distribution of charity may not be the solution - though interim support to distressed people is essential to prevent endemic hunger and malnutrition. The state has to ensure that nobody dies of hunger.

Amita Joseph, BCF India, New Delhi

We think that the urban homeless are the most vulnerable. Business Community Foundation (BCF) tried a modest effort in reaching out - where over a 30 day period we were able to serve one Khichdi meal to about 16,000 people with public donations. Please look at our website <http://www.bcfindia.org/introduction.html>

The people who have been doing this consistently and wonderfully is The Bhai Dayal Chand Trust - a number of families who have come together and put in ten percent of their income into cooking a meal served to about 10,000 persons for over five to six years. No publicity, no NGO, no plea for funding - just quietly doing *seva*. In addition last winter they buried all the unclaimed bodies with full rites and dignity.

One of the finest examples that is keeping the most vulnerable alive in a city - the people who serve the city and subsidise our lives!!!!

Tusharkanti Dey, All India Institute of Hygiene and Public Health, Calcutta

I think the difference lies in our attitude. In stead of looking this ever burgeoning urban population as a great liability to great enormous human resources would help us to address the problem from a different angle. Some of the solutions may be

1. Making arrangements for skill augmentation/up gradation to this vast number of unskilled/semiskilled urban slum dwellers.
2. Guarantying minimum wage days program for them like their village brethren.
3. Taking program for self enlightenment and emancipation for the urban slum dwellers
4. Introducing a health program catering their special needs.
5. Creating job markets for them.

There are many organisations who are working in these areas. We can share their experiences. Notable amongst them in Calcutta and surrounding areas are Child in Need Institute (CINI) and West Bengal Voluntary Health Organisation.

Bansi L. Kaul, Society for Popularisation of Science, Jammu

The example set by BCF is worth emulating by others who can afford. It is indeed the moral responsibility of the "haves" to look after the "have nots" in a civil society. Having said so, I feel, however, that feeding the poor is not a solution in the long term. It is bounden duty of all of us and the Govt. to seek solution to the problem of hunger on a permanent basis. Our people must be able to earn own living and feed their families. For that we have to create job opportunities both in the rural and urban areas. This is indeed a Herculean task and the industrialists and business community must come forward in a big way.

Also, coarse grain usage in the SAT areas needs encouragement and restriction in supply of wheat and rice can help in this direction. PDS should come to the rescue only if there is shortage of coarse grains due to drought conditions. Dry land farming is the main source of food in major parts of the country due to non-availability of irrigation facilities and we can not afford to ignore this sector.

We have to create conditions where our masses both rural and urban feel a part of the process of development and contentment.

Gopi Ghosh, FAO, New Delhi

When rural people migrate to cities it is also a shift of poverty, food insecurity and malnutrition from rural to urban areas. In the cities they live in dire conditions as there is wide fluctuation in income, the environment is alien and hostile, the PDS not extensively operating/ hungry is not covered due to their non-recognition (no home), and livelihood opportunities are uncertain and limited. Moreover slum dwelling leads to a multiplicity of problems in sanitation and health (diseases due to congestion, pollution, contamination, adulteration, sewage, filth), unsafe drinking water etc. Identifying & targeting vulnerable groups are tedious, as they are temporary migrant /displaced/ out rooted population. Thus the homeless, the diseased & the destitutes, the widows, the physically disabled and the mentally challenged, the uncared old people, the street children, and in general the children and women become the most vulnerable to food insecurity. The low income groups amongst the socially disadvantaged groups, such as, tribals, landless, SC/STs, marginalized communities, unskilled migrant labourers bear the brunt the most.

As poverty is a primary cause of hunger and malnutrition- and also the consequence (indeed a vicious cycle) livelihood access , creation of economic opportunities through resource ownership, jobs, education, health care would be critical for long term resolution of urban hunger. Training and skill formation of these people are important to expand their income earning capacities, as also the provision of credit - thru Self help groups- specially for the women's and other group on way to self-employment.

Identification of most vulnerable people is the key for immediate intervention - by knowing who these people are and why they are there where they are. As hunger cannot be postponed, prompt intervention for immediate food availability is essential. PDS, food stamps, FFW, grain banks, Community kitchen, food distribution to the most needy are required to be done urgently.

It is not government's job alone. All actors are to be in action - Civil Society /NGO /media - all have important roles to play - as an actor - in policy advocacy as also to act as watchdog to prevent mismanagement of the available food resources and malfunctioning of the Public Distribution System as also to block exploitation / subjugation of one group over others.

FAO site Urban Food security and nutrition talks about a whole set of inter-related issues - called Food for the Cities. Please see - <http://www.fao.org/fcit/insec.asp>
Let me also cite this document - Achieving urban food and nutrition security in the developing world to have an overview of the issues available at this link.
<http://www.ifpri.org/2020/focus/focus03/focus03.pdf>

Shambhu Ghatak, JNU, New Delhi

I would like to share with you a note on Delhi Slums ([attached](#)), which might be of help in this discussion on "Addressing Food Security of Slum Dwellers".

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 Food and Nutrition Security Community in India at se-food@solutionexchange-un.net.in with the subject reading 'Re: [se-food] Query: Addressing Food Security of Slum Dwellers, Consultant, New Delhi (Experiences). Additional Reply.'

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