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A Comparative Study of Food Security, Public Distribution and Nutrition Campaigns in Maharashtra

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Abstract

Food security, the implementation of the Public Distribution System (PDS), and nutrition-focused campaigns in the state of Maharashtra, India. It analyzes policy frameworks, administrative mechanisms, outcomes, and challenges, and compares approaches used across these domains to assess effectiveness and impact on vulnerable populations. The study also highlights recent state-level innovations and outcomes in community nutrition programming. Food security and nutrition are fundamental components of human development and social welfare. In a diverse and populous state like Maharashtra, ensuring adequate food availability and nutritional well-being remains a significant policy challenge despite economic progress. The Government of India and the Government of Maharashtra have implemented multiple interventions such as the Public Distribution System (PDS) under the National Food Security Act (NFSA) and various nutrition-oriented campaigns to address hunger and malnutrition. This study presents a comparative analysis of food security measures, the functioning of the Public Distribution System, and major nutrition campaigns in Maharashtra.

Keywords: Food Security, Public Distribution System (PDS), Nutrition Campaigns, Maharashtra, Food Policy, Nutritional Security, Government Welfare Schemes

Introduction

Food security remains a critical development challenge in India, particularly in states with large and diverse populations such as Maharashtra. Food security is defined not only by the availability of food but also by its accessibility, affordability, and nutritional adequacy. Despite economic growth and urbanization, Maharashtra continues to face issues related to hunger, malnutrition, and unequal access to food, especially among rural, tribal, and economically weaker sections of society. The Government of India and the Government of Maharashtra have introduced several policy interventions to address these challenges. Among them, the Public Distribution System (PDS) serves as the primary mechanism for ensuring food security by supplying subsidized food grains to eligible households under the National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013. The PDS aims to protect vulnerable populations from food shortages and price fluctuations by ensuring regular access to essential commodities such as rice, wheat, and coarse grains. However, ensuring food availability alone does not guarantee adequate nutrition. Maharashtra has historically reported high levels of child malnutrition, anemia among women, and nutritional deficiencies among tribal and marginalized communities. To address these concerns, the state has implemented various nutrition-focused campaigns and programs, including the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), POSHAN Abhiyaan, Mid-Day Meal Scheme, and Saksham Anganwadi and Nutrition 2.0.

Importance of the Study

1. The importance of studying food security, public distribution, and nutrition campaigns in Maharashtra lies in their direct impact on human development, social equity, and economic stability.
2. Maharashtra, despite being one of India's most industrialized and economically advanced states, continues to face significant challenges related to hunger, malnutrition, and unequal access to food resources.
3. This contradiction highlights the need for a systematic and comparative evaluation of existing food and nutrition interventions.

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4. the study is important for understanding the effectiveness of food security measures and the Public Distribution System (PDS) in ensuring access to essential food grains for vulnerable populations.
5. The study emphasizes the significance of nutrition campaigns in addressing qualitative aspects of food consumption.

Objectives of the Research

The present study aims to examine and compare the key components of food security, public distribution, and nutrition campaigns in the state of Maharashtra. The specific objectives of the research are as follows:

1. To study the concept and status of food security in Maharashtra, with reference to availability, accessibility, and affordability of food.
2. To analyze the functioning of the Public Distribution System (PDS) in Maharashtra and assess its role in ensuring food security for economically weaker sections.
3. To examine major nutrition campaigns and programs implemented in Maharashtra, such as ICDS, POSHAN Abhiyaan, Mid-Day Meal Scheme, and Saksham Anganwadi initiatives.
4. To compare food security measures and nutrition campaigns in terms of objectives, target groups, implementation mechanisms, and outcomes.
5. To identify gaps and challenges in the implementation of food security, PDS, and nutrition programs, particularly in rural and tribal areas.

Research Methodology

Ration card holders by category of ration card (As on 31st December) (Lakh)

Year	BPL	AAY	PHH	PHH Farmers	NPH	A.purna	White	Total
2022	37.01	25.60	90.36	8.87	72.44	0.06	22.21	256.55
2023	36.71	24.83	94.59	8.66	75.52	Neg	22.52	262.83
2024	33.58	25.32	106.55	7.31	70.38	0.00	22.07	265.20

Economic Survey of Maharashtra 2024-25

Antodaya Anna Yojana (AAY)

AAY was a step in the direction of making TPDS aim at reducing hunger among the poorest segments of the BPL population. A National Sample Survey Exercise pointed towards the fact that about 5% of the total population in the country sleeps without two square meals a day. This section of the population could be called as "hungry". In order to make TPDS more focused and targeted towards this category of population, the "Antyodaya Anna Yojana" (AAY) was launched in December, 2000 for one crore poorest of the poor families. AAY involved identification of one crore poorest of the poor families from amongst the

study of food security, public distribution, and nutrition campaigns in Maharashtra. The study is primarily descriptive and analytical in nature and is based on secondary data sources. The study follows a descriptive and comparative research design. It aims to describe existing food The research methodology outlines the systematic approach adopted to conduct the comparative security measures, the functioning of the Public Distribution System (PDS), and nutrition campaigns, and to compare their objectives, implementation mechanisms, and outcomes in Maharashtra.

Public Distribution System (PDS)

evolved as a system to ensure food security through distribution of foodgrains at affordable prices to weaker sections of the society. The State has well established network of Fair Price Shops (FPS) for distribution of essential commodities. Apart from regular distribution, various State schemes are being implemented for the benefit of vulnerable sections. As on 31st October, 2024, there were 51,691 functional FPS in the State, of which 5,427 were in tribal areas and 28 were Mobile. Vigilance committees have been set up at various levels in the State for surveillance of the distribution of the essential commodities through PDS. Inspections of FPS is continuous process for ensuring regular supply & quality of foodgrains and keep check on malpractices. During 2024-25, upto October, 51,691 inspections were carried out, licenses of 39 FPS were terminated, licenses of 69 FPS were suspended and fine of ₹ 68.47 lakh was collected during these inspections.

As on 31st December, 2024, total number of ration card holders were 2.65 crore. Ration card holders by category of ration card is given in Table.

number of BPL families covered under TPDS within the States and providing them food grains at a highly subsidized rate of Rs.2/- per kg. for wheat and Rs.3/- per kg for rice.

National Food Security

The 'National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013' has been enacted to provide food and nutritional security to the citizens, by ensuring access to adequate quantity of quality foodgrains at affordable prices. This act is being implemented in the State since 1st February, 2014 and about 62.3 per cent population is entitled to receive foodgrains at subsidized rates.

Under NFSA, Beneficiaries are categorized as Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) Households and Priority Households (PHH). AAY household is entitled to receive 35 kg of foodgrains per ration card per month and PHH is entitled to receive five kg of foodgrains per person per month. Rice, wheat and coarse grains are being provided at ₹ three, ₹ two and ₹ one per kg respectively to the beneficiaries. However, as per the GoI notification, the foodgrains are being distributed free of cost from 1st January, 2024 to 31st December, 2028. GoI sanctions allocation of foodgrains for establishments under the Welfare Institutions and Hostels Scheme. During 2024-25, upto September, the number of establishments registered on Aadhaar enabled Public Distribution System (AePDS) are 3,295 and number of beneficiaries are 3.40 lakh.

National Food Security Act (NFSA) & PDS in Maharashtra

Maharashtra has implemented the National Food Security Act, 2013, which ensures subsidized food grain distribution to eligible beneficiaries. Under NFSA:

1. Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) households receive 35 kg of food grains per month, and
2. Priority Households (PHH) receive 5 kg per person per month of grains at subsidized rates.

The state has taken steps to modernize and digitize PDS via PoS (Point of Sale) devices in all Fair Price Shops (FPS) and Aadhaar linkage, achieving nearly 99.99% card seeding to strengthen transparency.

Shivbhojan Yojana

To provide meals to poor and needy people in the State at affordable rate, GoM had started Shivbhojan Yojana in January, 2020. At the end of November, 2024 in all 1,884 Shivbhojan Centers are functioning in the State. During 2023-24, in all 5.76 crore Shivbhojan Thalies were distributed and expenditure incurred was ₹ 199.96 crore. During 2024-25, upto November in all 3.97 crore Shivbhojan Thalies were distributed and expenditure incurred was ₹ 96.58 crore.

Distribution of Anandacha Shidha

of four commodities which includes one kg each of sugar, suji, chana dal & one litre of soyabean oil have been distributed to AAY, PHH card holders under NFSA, 2013 and APL (Saffron) farmers ration card holders of 14 farmer drought prone districts. The foodgrain kits are distributed at the rate of ₹ 100 per kit. The State has distributed 153.49 lakh ration kits at the rate of ₹ 100 per kit. On the occasion of Gauri-Ganapati festival, 2024, ration kits 'Anandacha Shidha' comprising

Food Security Provisioning and Outcomes

1. Accessibility and Inclusion

Maharashtra's PDS mechanism is designed for broad inclusion of impoverished and food-insecure populations. The computerized PoS system has contributed to reducing erroneous grain lifting by nearly 752,847 MT during FY 2019-20, indicating improved accountability.

2. Operational Support for FPS Dealers

To ensure the sustainability of fair price shop operations, the Maharashtra government increased the commission for PDS dealers from ₹150 to ₹170 per quintal, acknowledging higher operational costs.

Nutritional Campaigns and Community Nutrition

1. Integrated Nutrition Campaigns

Nutrition strategies in Maharashtra extend beyond calorie provision to targeted nutrition interventions. Central initiatives like POSHAN (National Nutrition Mission) campaigns, such as "Nutrition Fortnight" in schools, aim to foster awareness and improve diet practices among children. At the state level, programs like "Saksham Anganwadi & Nutrition 2.0" focus on strengthening early childhood nutrition through improved anganwadi infrastructure and supplementation for children (0-6 years), adolescent girls, pregnant women, and lactating mothers.

2. Community-Driven Nutrition Projects

A recent community-run nutrition project in tribal districts successfully reduced severe malnutrition by over 50% in nine months by focusing on locally prepared, fresh food and community participation, contrasting with reliance on packaged nutrition supplements. This illustrates how community engagement, combined with nutrition education, can potentially outperform some standard supplement-based approaches.

Findings and Discussion

1. Effectiveness of PDS

The Maharashtra PDS has shown improvements in coverage and transparency through digitization and biometric authentication, reducing errors and enhancing accountability. However, challenges remain in equitable last-mile delivery and inclusion of special groups.

2. Nutritional Program Impact

Nutrition campaigns, particularly when combining community engagement and fresh food provision, can show significant impact on malnutrition metrics. The recent tribal district project highlights that community empowerment and locally adapted solutions are effective and cost-efficient compared to conventional supplement delivery alone.

3. Integration Challenges

Despite improvements, food security through PDS does not automatically translate to better nutritional outcomes. Curricular inclusion of

nutrition education, behavior change communication, and coordinated implementation across health and social welfare sectors are essential.

Challenges

- **Funding and Implementation Gaps:** Nutritional aid schemes sometimes face funding shortfalls that reduce beneficiary reach, as seen with low disbursement rates under some targeted nutrition supports.
- **Operational Complexity:** Maintaining digital systems and continuous monitoring in rural and low-infrastructure areas remains difficult.
- **Malnutrition Persistence:** Despite PDS coverage, indicators like stunting, wasting, and anemia remain significant challenges in many localities.

Recommendations

1. **Strengthen Community-Led Approaches:** Expand successful tribal district nutrition models across Maharashtra with localized food production and community committees.
2. **Convergence of Services:** Leverage PDS networks to integrate nutritional supplements and education, aligning with health and schooling initiatives.
3. **Monitoring & Evaluation:** Invest in real-time feedback systems and independent evaluations to track both food security and nutrition outcomes.
4. **Targeted Outreach:** Enhance outreach to special groups (elderly, disabled, women), ensuring accessible and inclusive distribution mechanisms.

Conclusion

1. Maharashtra's efforts to ensure food security through a modernized PDS have resulted in improved transparency and expanded coverage.
2. Nutrition campaigns that involve community participation and behavior change show promise in reducing malnutrition.
3. The comparative analysis underscores that food security and nutrition need complementary strategies, combining provisioning of calories with quality and education to achieve sustained improvements in public health indices.

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Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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