

Introduction
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Introduction

Food is arguably the most basic need of man and as such, having food security is a fundamental goal by all nations. Ensuring that people are protected from hunger that is often the consequence of poverty or drought is therefore one of the major ambitions of most governments. While developed nations can boast of having the capability to adequately cater for the food needs of their people, most developing nations do not possess this capacity. India which is regarded as one of the world's fastest growing economies is one of the nations which lack the capability to adequately satisfy the food needs of her population due to flaws in the government social system. This plight is made especially apparent by Yardley's article which highlights the high malnutrition levels among Indian children. In this essay I shall give a brief summary of the article "India Asks, Should Food Be a Right for the Poor?" by Yardley Jim.

I shall then proceed to give my opinion of the essay all the while relying on authoritative data sources to reinforce my claims.

Brief Summary

The author Yardley begins by describing the situation in a dilapidated Indian district hospital which attends to scores of malnutrition children. The major cause of this malnutrition is blamed on the lack of availability of government subsidized food by the very poor people who rely on it. Yardley (2010) asserts that in light of the fact that India has approximately 421million people living in poverty, the issue of food insecurity presents a huge responsibility to the government.

The article then confirms that the Indian National congress Party which currently holds office has a huge support base among the poor and as such, the government has a huge obligation to this people. Owing to the inefficiency in the current food distribution, radical systems such as handing out of food coupons and cash are being considered. However, the article notes that this is a controversial proposal that has split the governing party with some preferring the handing out of free food rations. Despite the lack of a unified approach for dealing with the problem, the article reveals that the Indian government is in agreement that the current system is flawed and better ways for letting the poor access government aid should be devised. Yardley reveals that the issue of food problems is not new to Indians and he points out that it was not until the Green Revolution of 1960 that India tackled its food shortage issues. However, for all this progress, poverty and hunger still remain apparent in the country. This is mostly attributed to corruption and inefficiency which continues to plague the food system over the last five decades.

To reinforce the claims for corruption in the system, the article reveals that in the course of this year, officials charged with overseeing state child programs were arrested on allegations of corruption. Food that has been earmarked for assisting the poor of India also finds its way to the open market by being diverted by corrupt officials. In addition to the low earning power that the rural population of India has, the article attributes a further increase in poverty to the traditional customs of paying of " bride price" before a wedding which results in some people taking loans and thus plunging into debts.

The article reveals that the government gives food booklets to the poor to help them buy food at subsidized government stores. However, these results in another social ill which involves moneylenders taking the food booklets as collateral for money lend to the poor. The unscrupulous moneylenders then use the food booklets to buy grains at government subsidized stores at rock bottom prices and later resell it for profit.

A new innovation which revolves around the new national identity system is seen as the ultimate solution since it will enable the government to give direct benefits to the needy. In conclusion, Yardley (2010) laments that the debate on the most effective way to ensure that food reaches the hungry in India is taking long and the people who are in need continue to suffer in the meanwhile.

Discussion

India has for many years relied on social assistance schemes since the 1950s to cater for the basic needs of its poorest (Subbarao, Braithwaite & Jalan, 2000).

However, Yardley (2010) highlights the fact that this social assistance schemes are not functioning as well as they should be therefore leading to widespread suffering of the people who are meant to be protected by these programs. The main points that are articulated in the article are that there is rampant hunger among the poor in India and that government aid does not reach the needy in an effective manner. A BBC (2010) report indicates that up to 40% of the population is in need of government subsidized foods. This has been blamed by the sharp rise in food prices that has been experienced

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in the country resulting in inflation of commodity prices in a period of few months.

A disturbing fact is that majority of this 40% hail from the rural areas. Bird et al (2001) note that while India had an earlier success in reducing rural poverty, the country has stalled in its efforts and rural poverty remains rampant despite the economy growth experienced by the country. However, it is not only the lack of development projects in the rural areas that results in extreme poverty but also traditions such as bride price and the wedding ceremony which contribute significantly to the rise of poverty in India. Moav and Neeman (2008) reveal that according to survey data from South India, the marriage ceremony (inclusive of dowry price) is the costliest event in the life of an Indian family and it often drives parents or relatives to severe debt thus increasing poverty. It is therefore evident that this practice is not helpful to the overall wellbeing of the Indian population. The articles claim that the payment of bride price results in families going into debts therefore rings true and as the author suggests, discarding such practices can positively impact on poverty eradication effort. Another contentious issue that is raised in the article is on the best way to ensure that government aid can best assist the people.

While pro-market advocates propose direct measures such as food coupons, social advocates favor the issuing of rations albeit in a more efficient manner. In my opinion, issuing of coupons would not be the best way to go about solving the issue since food coupons are even more prone to abuse than the current food distribution system. Subbarao, Braithwaite, and Jalan (2000) concur with this sentiment by noting that in one implementation of <https://assignbuster.com/introduction-considered-however-the-article-notes-that/>

food coupons in Zambia (in the African Continent), counterfeiting of the coupons was so large-scale that the system collapsed. In addition to this, it is highly conceivable that the poor farmers who trade in their food booklets for money would do the same with even more ease with the coupons therefore reducing the effectiveness of the program in tackling malnutrition in the country. This rising food insecurity and malnutrition in India are bound to have a negative impact on the developmental plans of the country. It is for this reason that the government is keen to ensure that the problem is effectively dealt with.

Bird et al. (2001) suggests that only by taking up measures to ensure that food management policies are in place and government assistance is not misused through corruption or inefficiency can chronic poverty and hunger in rural areas be alleviated.

Conclusion

The food security of a nation is the cornerstone of the development efforts of the nation. This paper set out to discuss the issue of poverty in India and in particular the problems that are facing government efforts to combat this crisis.

From the discussions presented herein, it is evident that while government program inefficiency is responsible for some of the problems, local customs such as dowry prices and elaborate wedding ceremonies also add to the problem. While some people propose a coupon system to overhaul the old system which is deemed to be slow and inefficient, this paper demonstrates that the coupon system would be prone to more abuses therefore making it

unhelpful to the poor. Implementing of changes to the current systems so as to ensure that transparency and accountability is integrated into the process would therefore be the best method to overcome the current problems.

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