

Chapter 5

Nutritional Security of Marginalised Groups in the Context of COVID–19: A Discourse

Sridevi Gummadi

University of Hyderabad, India

Balaji Patturi

University of Hyderabad, India

Priya Shanmugam

Mount Carmel College, India

ABSTRACT

Malnutrition in all its forms has become the leading cause of poor health and death worldwide. The 2020 Global Nutrition Report stresses that the need to address malnutrition in all its forms by tackling injustices in food and health systems is now more urgent than ever. Over 820 million people went to bed hungry even before the COVID-19 pandemic, of which 110 million people were living in acute food insecurity. According to the World Food Programme, 135 million suffer from acute hunger largely due to man-made conflicts, climate change, and economic downturns. The COVID-19 pandemic could now double that number, putting an additional 130 million (total 265 million) people at risk of suffering acute hunger by the end of 2020. India is ranked 102 out of 117 countries the lowest in South Asia. Surprisingly Bangladesh, Nepal, and Pakistan are performing better in terms of GHI. In this chapter, the authors analyse the nutritional security of marginalised groups in Andhra Pradesh and Telangna State.

INTRODUCTION

The food security has been an ongoing issue with every incumbent Indian government. Despite celebrated committees having given reports on this issue even before this unprecedented pandemic, the paradigm of leaving everything to market and declining role of centre and state in social sector expenditure and primary sector prevailed. The desertion and obliviousness of conditions of the migrant labour who are vastly marginalised, neglect of public health and welfare of the vulnerable sections of the people raising questions on the role of central and state governments. The entire country dismayed after the spread of covid-19 to the public but the pandemic induced hourly decisioned lockdown by the central government has made people especially vulnerable; migrant workers suffer into absolute immiseration, they have no bargaining power in a technological advanced country with abundant trade unions, they could have bargained for higher wages but that was not possible in India so they just suffered immiseration.

With the disruption of the food supply chains nationwide in the coming year, the non-availability of food coupled with the lack of purchasing power will lead to *extensive hunger*. Difficulty in maintaining food production, restrictions on trade and limitations on labour mobility can lead to lower farm incomes and food shortages, adding another layer of complexity to fight back against Covid-19. Across the country, huge number of workers who have been migrated, who are working locally, farmers, fishermen, sellers, ragpickers, and the deprived were facing extreme distress and also food shortage, because their livelihoods have been disrupted by the unprecedented lockdown. The exceptional hardship faced by migrant workers since the outbreak of virus might result in fear trauma. Starvation and hardship of migrant workers have created further an unprecedented humanitarian crisis, as millions of households with dwindling savings have no way to access food and other basic necessities in the near future.

India having huge population of marginalised community who are engaged in migrant working informal sector has not foreseen the consequences of their plight at a time like the current pandemic situation. In the light of aforementioned understanding, following sections in the paper details with non-nutritional facets of the marginalised groups in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh states, and covid-19's impact on their lives and also the vital issue of their food security.

CONTEXT

The Global Hunger Index 2022 ranked India at 107 out of 121 nations and it fared only better than Afghanistan at 109 whereas its neighboring countries improved better viz. Pakistan at 99, Nepal at 81, Bangladesh at 84 and Sri Lanka 64. It has been found that from 2016-20, 17.3% of children in India are wasted while 34.7% of children under five are stunted and from 2019 data, it suggests that 3.4% of children die before turning five years old. The report identified conflict, climate change, and COVID-19 as the reasons for any progress that has been made against hunger in recent years. Particularly covid-19 pandemic, which has shaken the world throughout for two years i.e., 2020 and 2021, has made us to learn how vulnerable we are to global disruption and the associated health and economic concerns (Chatterjee et. al., 2021).

On a national scale, high prevalence of poverty and inequality in access to nutritious food are found among particular communities in rural and urban areas, poverty and malnutrition rates are high and urban areas are among the new epicenters of poverty and hunger. While food production and the market are vital dimensions vastly debated in literature, there is mere understanding on how food reaches

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