Case Study on Food Sovereignty

Introduction

Millennium Development Goal 1 - halving poverty and hunger by the year 2015 - means halving the percentage of people who suffer as a result of hunger, specifically children and other vulnerable groups who have inadequate dietary energy consumption or are underweight. Rapid progress on nutrition is a prerequisite for the MDGs in general, including those on universal primary education, gender equality, and child and maternal mortality. At this time a quarter of all children are undernourished. This increases their chance of death, undermines their potential to learn in school and reduces their capacity to earn a living. Simultaneously, there is a rapidly growing global epidemic of overweight and obesity, with over 2 billion adults expected to be overweight or obese by 2015, and therefore increasingly susceptible to earlier onset of diabetes, heart disease and certain cancers.

The case studies: ‘Erosion of food sovereignty and impact on nutritional status in India’ and ‘Challenges to food sovereignty and the risks to human health in the Pacific Islands’ illustrate the complex and dynamic global food and nutrition crisis. These studies contain both descriptive, quantitative data as well as material gathered from key informants, including affected citizens. They are stark reminders of the urgency of the ‘double burden of nutrition’ and clear and distressing explications of its national and global social, economic and political contexts. They underline the fact that this human crisis cannot be addressed without confronting and changing its social determinants.

The India case study demonstrates, *inter alia*, the paradox of national food sufficiency and simultaneous widespread hunger and undernutrition. While food is available within the country it is clear that access to this food is dangerously limited for a very significant proportion of the population as a result of trade policies often...
influenced by a global environment inimical to national food sovereignty, and international advice that promotes current economic orthodoxy; both of these policy thrusts have resulted in large stockpiles of food, but at the same time high food prices, unaffordable agricultural input costs and fuel (for farming and cooking).

The Pacific study demonstrates clearly how national food sovereignty and nutrition security have been undermined by the promotion of ‘free’ trade in the region, resulting in the Pacific Islands (along with an ever-increasing number of other countries) becoming a net food importer. This has resulted in a decline in national food production and a rapid change from a more traditional and healthier diet to one that is obesogenic, consisting largely of fatty meat and ultra-processed, packaged foods. The Pacific Islands now have the dubious distinction of leading the world in the already high and growing prevalence of obesity and attendant non-communicable diseases.

While these two case studies cannot claim to be representative of the whole spectrum of global nutrition and food security, they do illustrate the extremes of the (ill) health effects of the macro-economic and political dispensation of the past three decades that has resulted in unprecedented creation of aggregate wealth, but also in sharp and increasing inequalities between North and South and rich and poor. Declining food sovereignty and poor nutritional status, the greatest contributor to the global burden of disease, is one critical manifestation of this situation. Urgent action is needed to address it.
Challenges to food sovereignty and the risks to human health: The Pacific Islands

Sharon Friel¹, Anne-Marie Thow² and Jagjit Plahe³

¹National Centre for Epidemiology and Population Health, The Australian National University, email: sharon.friel@anu.edu.au
²Menzies Centre for Health Policy, University of Sydney
³Department of Management, Monash University

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Introduction

Recent research in the Pacific Islands found that globalisation has affected local food sovereignty, particularly participation in decision-making; prioritising local agriculture to feed local people; and access to land, seeds and water. This erosion of food sovereignty has been linked to poorer availability, accessibility and affordability of healthy foods, more unhealthy diets and high levels of food insecurity and chronic diseases.

Food sovereignty is understood as a precondition to food security, and has been defined as “the right of each nation to maintain and develop its own capacity to produce its basic foods respecting cultural and productive diversity”. The term food sovereignty has evolved over time to include health concerns, some aspects of trade, and participation in food policy decision making, and to explicitly reject food systems in which decisions are made solely by corporate entities and others removed from local food systems. The Nyeleni Declaration states: "Food sovereignty includes the right to food – the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through socially just and ecologically sensitive methods. It entails peoples’ right to participate in decision making and define their own food, agriculture, livestock and fisheries systems.”

The Pacific Islands comprise 22 countries and territories, encompassing tens of thousands of islands and atolls spread across the largest ocean in the world. There are approximately 10 million people living on the islands in the Pacific Ocean. Not an insignificant number. However, the Pacific Island countries and territories (PICTs) are often missing in global reports and policy decision-making processes relating to food security and diet-related health. This is partly due to a lack of data, which if interpreted incorrectly could be taken to mean no problem and hence no action required.
In this paper we describe how key global processes and governance arrangements have affected food sovereignty in the Pacific Islands, and the implications of this for food security, nutrition and population health. The paper begins by describing the food security, nutrition and health situation across the Pacific. The next section of the paper describes the pathways via which globalisation can affect local diet and health, with a particular emphasis on food sovereignty impacts. The final part of the paper describes how the processes of globalisation have played out for consumers, farmers and policy makers in the Pacific Islands, and highlights local responses to counter the negative impacts on food sovereignty and food security.

**Food, Nutrition and Health across the Pacific**

Food and nutrition security is a major issue for many PICTs, with the co-existence of hunger, micro-nutrient deficiencies and the some of the world’s highest rates of obesity and non-communicable diseases.\(^6\)\(^-\)\(^8\)

Pacific Islands’ integration into the global economy has substantially affected the food environment and dietary intake. Prior to 1900s, Pacific Island nations had very little contact with the outside world. With colonization, the opening of these economies was rapid – with both increased trade in goods and much more exposure to other cultures.\(^9\)\(^-\)\(^10\) Further global economic integration occurred post-World War II, with six Pacific Island countries now being members of the World Trade Organization (WTO): Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu. Accompanying this economic integration has been a steady deterioration in traditional food systems and decline in the production of traditional crops.\(^11\)

This initiated an ongoing shift in dietary patterns that is associated with a high chronic disease risk,\(^7\)\(^-\)\(^12\) namely:

- reduced consumption of starchy roots and fruits (such as breadfruit and taro) as staple foods,
- increased consumption of refined cereals (such as white rice and flour),
- increased consumption of meat and oils, and
- increased consumption of processed and packaged foods.

Almost 2.5 million people are now reported as being overweight or obese. The prevalence of obesity ranges from approximately 12 to 20% (Kiribati, Papua New Guinea, Tuvalu & Vanuatu), through 40-50% in Cook Islands, French Polynesia, New Caledonia and Samoa, to 80% in Nauru. Countries such as Nauru have among the highest levels of type II diabetes in the world.\(^\text{[13]}\)

At the same time, paradoxically, the prevalence of underweight has been estimated to range from 10% in the Cook Islands to 15% the Federated State of Micronesia. Where there are data for stunting, the figures are very worrying: 24% for Nauru, 43% for Papua New Guinea, and 33%, 10% and 20% for the Solomon Islands, Tuvalu and Vanuatu respectively. Approximately 1 million children were reportedly vitamin and mineral deficient in 2008.\(^\text{[13]}\)

**The demise of food sovereignty: Conceptualising the wider determinants of food and nutrition insecurity**

Sen’s notion of having the freedom to lead a life we have reason to value\(^\text{[14]}\) can be applied to the right to food and food sovereignty – having the freedom to produce, access and consume a nutritious diet. Hunger, malnutrition, food insecurity and the associated health outcomes are not equally distributed across social groups or indeed nations in the Pacific, suggesting that not all people have such freedoms.

**Freedoms and empowerment – the core of food sovereignty**

Most modern societies are hierarchical, with economic, social and other health producing resources including food, distributed unequally. Pursuit of food and nutrition security recognises the need to redress the unequal distribution of these resources. This relates to empowerment of individuals, communities, and whole countries. Empowerment operates along three interconnected dimensions: material,
psychosocial, and political. People need the basic material requisites for a decent life, they need to have control over their lives, and they need voice and participation in decision-making processes – together, the essence of food sovereignty.

**The wider determinants of empowerment, food sovereignty and food security**

The characteristics of modern global society – especially economic priorities and processes, and social conditions – underlie the problem of empowerment, food sovereignty and food and nutrition insecurity. The policies that generate and distribute political power, income, goods and services, at all levels, also shape how people live, what they eat and ultimately their health.

The economic trajectory, particularly since the 1980s, has markedly increased global interconnectedness and interdependence. While facilitating greater mobility of technology, knowledge and people, the attendant gains in power, income, goods and services have been uneven. Economic development has contributed to longer life expectancy and better nutrition in most countries. However almost 1 billion people continue to be hungry.\(^{15}\) There is evidence that the structural adjustment policies introduced in the early 1980s by the International Monetary Fund and in the Pacific by the Asian Development Bank, diverted government resources away from health and sustainable agricultural development.\(^{16}\) The means of and control over the production of food is shifting from the farmers in the South to big agri-food businesses and transnational retail companies based mainly in the North, removing power from local producers, consumers and in many instances policy-makers. This is seen through food price speculation, land grabs and the longer-standing issues of liberalised trade and foreign direct investment.\(^{17,18}\) Excess consumption of nutrient-poor energy-dense highly processed foods has accompanied food trade liberalisation, the escalation of foreign direct investment by (especially) transnational food corporations, and the rapid spread of supermarkets.\(^{19-22}\)
It would be remiss not to mention environmental degradation when talking about issues of food sovereignty and security. In creating a global marketplace that depends upon ever-increasing volumes of production, consumption and long-distance transport of goods, the same economic trajectory has led to increasing over-exploitation of finite natural resources, energy scarcity, and to overloading natural environmental systems. As the temperature of the planet rises there are, and will be, more frequent and severe floods, droughts, rising sea-levels, ocean warming, storms, and heat waves. This human-induced climate change plus other forms of environmental degradation is affecting the food system, contributing to impaired quantity, quality and affordability of food in many countries. Countries in the tropics and sub-tropics, are at greatest risk of climate-related impacts on food yields. Rural livelihoods are vulnerable to climate change with subsequent impact on social and health conditions. The evidence highlights that high levels of hunger are generally found in those countries and regions where access and property rights to land, water, and energy are limited or contested.

Environmental degradation, including climate change will increasingly exacerbate food and nutrition insecurity issues globally and especially in the Pacific. Already, climate change has adversely affected food security in Pacific Island countries, through reducing both subsistence and commercial agricultural and marine production. As a result, climate change is likely to continue to increase local food prices, exacerbating an already heavy reliance on imported and processed foods. This also contributes to the loss of local harvesting, production and cultural knowledge and creates uncertainty around food supply. As such, Pacific populations are at additional risk of malnutrition. Failure of global processes to reach decisions on climate change mitigation and inadequate adaptation strategies means that food sovereignty will continue to be jeopardised in this region by globally induced degradation of natural resources.

The accumulating international evidence highlights that there are structural issues that affect the availability, affordability and acceptability of food, which, along with everyday living and working conditions ultimately affect what people eat. Ensuring
the right to food and food security means improving food sovereignty by dealing with matters of governance; national economic priorities; trade arrangements; market deregulation and foreign direct investment; fiscal policy, climate change mitigation and adaptation policy and the degree to which policies, systems and processes are inclusionary. Addressing these structural factors not only empowers individuals and communities but also empowers national government and other key public sector institutions. For example, good global governance and regulatory frameworks can create national policy space thereby enabling government to introduce policies that tackle corporate pressures such as irresponsible food marketing. \(^{36}\)

**The effect of eroded food sovereignty on Pacific Island consumers, farmers and policy makers**

In this section, we examine the effects of globalisation for food sovereignty in the Pacific from three different perspectives. First, we consider the effect on farmers. Processes of globalisation have changed their decision-making regarding production by affecting access to inputs, consumer/market demand, and policy incentives for production. Second, we consider the effect on consumers, in terms of both their participation in the food supply and their access to healthy food and nutritional status. Finally, we consider policy makers, whose control over food and agriculture policy space have arguably been reduced with increased trade, aid, investment and international agreements.

*Farmers: access to inputs for production, changing markets and demand, policy incentives for production*

Traditional agricultural practices in PICTs are strongly community- and village-based, and focused on root crop production \(^{10}\) \(^{37}\). With globalisation, farmers have faced significant incentives to relinquish traditional practices and engage in export-oriented agriculture.
Changed incentives for production date back to colonization, as communal and informal agricultural production are not compatible with modern concepts of economic development. Farmers were encouraged and supported to produce cash crops such as sugar, copra and cocoa, which significantly reduced traditional food production. More recently, the opening of markets and the dumping of goods such as cheap fatty meats has further undermined domestic agriculture and contributed to import dependency. In turn, this has led to policies to increase exports to maintain the balance of payments. This focus on export oriented agriculture has both reduced production of traditional crops and increased intensive production of cash crops and other unsustainable agricultural practices. The cash crops produced are far more vulnerable to pests and natural disasters. For example, the challenges faced by the squash industry in Tonga – which was recommended by international agencies to support export development – include price fluctuations, weather and pests, and reveal the vulnerability of dependence on a single export crop. High production of squash has also resulted in environmental pollution.

The Agreements of the WTO have moved control over the right to food and food security to the global market. Under the Agreement on Agriculture (AoA) WTO members are required to reduce tariffs in the agri-food sector, reduce export support and reduce domestic subsidies. Under the Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPs) Agreement members are obliged to commodify plants and plant genetic matter by allowing for the patentability of life forms.

Policies of export promotion and import liberalization have a direct effect on food availability. For example, the historical experience of Fiji and Samoa demonstrates that economic liberalization is associated with decreased availability of starchy staple foods and increased availability of non-traditional cereals during periods of liberalization (Figure 1). More recently, the opening of markets and the dumping of goods such as cheap fatty meats has further undermined domestic agriculture and contributed to import dependency, and high levels of consumption of these foods.
In contrast, policies of import substitution (which include investment in agriculture and protection of markets through measures such as tariffs) have been associated with increased availability of traditional crops. Similarly, with currency devaluation in Papua New Guinea during the 1980s, the price of locally grown staples such as sweet potato became much more competitive as the price of imported food rose. Increased production and consumption of domestically produced staple crops occurred rapidly, suggesting that farmers were more than willing and able to return to domestic crops once the incentives changed.

Food imports are not only a key concern for food availability but importantly for accessibility. From the early 1980s the dependence on imported rice and bread has increased dramatically in countries such as Fiji (Coyne 2000, 1). Dependence on imported food staples will increase under WTO accession agreements in countries such as Vanuatu and Samoa. The Chamber of Commerce in Vanuatu which supports local businesses in the country, stressed the need for investment in training local farmers, in food storage facilities as well as food processing plants. The Chamber also emphasised the need to improve the bargaining power of local farmers through developing strong cooperatives. The Chamber expressed strong concerns about increasing dependency on imported food staples both because of the recent surge in the prices of these products, but also because of the negative impacts they have had and continue to have on the health of local people (personal communication, August 2012).
Figure 1: Availability (quantity and calories) of cereals and root crops in Fiji, 1962–2003.

The Consumer Council of Fiji (CCF) has very strongly argued for right of small island nations to retain control over the agri-food sector under WTO Agreements, which include provisions to reduce agricultural support and protection. According to Premila Kumar (CEO, CCF), there is no guarantee that free trade policies will lead to food security:

‘Fiji is a maritime zone divided by oceans. The population of Fiji is about one million people, half urban, half rural. How can you have competition with one million people? If you go to any of the islands, there is just one canteen. How can you compete? [Free trade] is not practical in a real sense. We cannot behave like the United States, Australia, New Zealand or any developed
Similarly, in the face of soaring global food prices, agriculture experts in Fiji highlighted the need to invest in processing traditional foods for local consumption. For example, flour from locally grown breadfruit and root crops could easily be used to make food such as chapattis. This they argued, would reduce Fiji’s dependency on imported wheat. Such dependence has had a very negative effect on the landless squatter communities in the urban areas such as Suva, which have suffered from food insecurity as a result of the increase in food prices (personal communication, February 2012).

Processes of globalisation in Pacific Island nations have also affected farmers’ and fishers’ access to inputs, including land, seeds, and water. Many countries sell their fishing rights to international corporations and other countries, due to limited investment capacity. In Micronesia and Fiji, this has contributed to fewer opportunities for local access to fish stocks and other marine resources – and also contributed to unhealthy diets due to reduced consumption of fresh fish \(^{47,48}\).

The shift away from the traditional agriculture to export oriented agriculture described above has also included some erosion of traditional land tenure, although in most countries a significant proportion of land is still held customarily, which has helped limit extreme poverty and hunger in the region \(^{49}\). The need to protect land rights however is widely understood in the Pacific Islands (Box 1).
Box 1: Improving community control over land use and food production in Fiji

The NGO CETEL assists communities to negotiate with developers in Fiji and draws up legal agreements with better terms and conditions for community members. According to CETEL, the Native Land Trust Board of Fiji is quite weak and land owners have little power to negotiate with developers. The NGO has assisted communities to negotiate deals where for example community members can continue to grow food on part of the land and are also able to supply fresh organic food to the hotels. Such agreements help generate much needed cash for communities that lease their land to developers (personal communication, February 2012).

Consumers: participation in food policy decisions, food price and accessibility, food culture

With globalisation in PICTs, significant changes to food culture have been externally imposed, affecting consumers’ control in shaping their food environment. Surveys reveal that consumers prefer traditional foods, but choose to consume imported products due to perceived status, convenience (particularly with changes in working patterns) and variety \[50, 51\]. Early on in the globalisation process, Western attitudes and education regarding food – particularly western nutritionists’ dislike of ‘uncivilised’ staple crops – conferred a high status to imported foods \[52\]. Other observers noted a ‘demonstration effect’ during the 20th century, through expatriate preferences and food advertising, that also gave high status to imported foods and led to increased consumption of refined cereals and processed foods \[38, 53\]. However, with concerted community investment it is possible to change food culture to support healthy traditional food consumption (Box 2).

Box 2: Improving the community perception of traditional foods: effective community level intervention in Pohnpei

In 2006, the Let’s Go Local campaign commenced in Pohnpei (in the Federated States of Micronesia), where consumption of imported foods had replaced traditional healthy foods and the diabetes prevalence was 43% \[54\]. The campaign
used a wide range of strategies, including policy change, education and community intervention to educate consumers about the benefits of consuming traditional foods. The intervention led to significant dietary improvements, as well as to positive changes in attitudes towards local food.

Globalisation has also contributed to constraining consumers’ ability to choose healthier – in this context more traditional foods. Liberalisation and integration into the global economy have resulted in cheap imports and a shift to a cash economy, which have changed consumers’ relationship with their food environment: imported, less healthy foods became affordable and accessible. Most countries in the Pacific are highly import dependent; the percentage of imports compared to food expenditure ranges from 36 percent in Kiribati to 84 percent in Palau. Many countries experience dumping of low quality agricultural products from Western countries, which limits consumers’ access to healthy foods. Gewertz and Errington have documented the Pacific trade in lamb and mutton flaps, which is one example of a dumped commodity, that is generally unacceptable for consumption in its countries of origin, being integrated into the food system in lower income countries due to its extremely low price.

Trade and the cash economy have also supported urbanization, due to changing employment opportunities, which has reduced participation in agriculture (particularly subsistence agriculture). Some of the negative aspects of transitioning to an urban environment are the reduced land available for planting, limits to space for traditional food storage and cooking methods (such as earth ovens), and also difficulties in transporting perishable root crops to urban communities. In Fiji, this transition to the cash economy and introduction of imported foods has been a key contributor to poor diets and rising rates of chronic disease. The impact of the recent food price crisis in Pacific Island nations revealed the vulnerability of the domestic food supply and the limited options for consumers in achieving food security and healthy diets, due to this sustained dependence on imports and low investment in agricultural production.
Integration into the global economy has also reduced consumer participation in food-related policy making, a key component of food sovereignty. In many countries, the global food and agriculture industry, other countries and international agencies can have a greater influence on policy decisions than local consumers \(^1\). During Vanuatu’s WTO accession, civil society groups revealed that there was no forum for popular participation; even elected members of parliament were left out of complex negotiations which were mostly held in Geneva where bigger countries had most power and control. An NGO was involved in making the 500-plus page accession document available to parliamentarians. This document detailed all the commitments that Vanuatu, a state of 200,000 people, was required to make in order to join the WTO. Most of the accession commitments were demanded by much bigger countries such as Australia, New Zealand and those in the European Union (personal communication, August, 2011).

Similarly, in Tonga the non-participatory nature of the government (monarchy) meant that most consumers had no input into the significant concessions that were made to enable WTO accession at the behest of the countries in the WTO Working Party \(^64\). The tariff reductions, low bound tariff rates and limited capacity to support domestic agriculture that were part of Tonga’s commitment will have major implications for the relative prices of imported and domestically produced foods; they may also further reduce availability of domestically produced foods \(^64\).

**Policy makers: capacity for intervention using measures to restrict trade and support domestic agriculture**

Integration into the global economy and dependence on aid for development has also affected food sovereignty in Pacific Island nations through reducing policy space for intervention to improve the food supply and pursue nutrition and diet-related health goals. A critical area of policy for food security and healthy diets is traditional local agriculture. While a return to full subsistence farming is unrealistic, policy makers have identified a need to support local production as the core of the food system and to improve the capacity of farmers and fishermen, including in
developing sustainable farming methods (65). In practice, governments have found this challenging due to international support and pressure to develop extractive industries and export crops (1). The focus of international aid and development priorities remains firmly on export oriented agriculture to raise national incomes, despite a demonstrated lack of effectiveness in reducing income inequities within countries and growing concerns about the harmful impacts on domestic social and health outcomes (66).

For example, as part of accession to the WTO in 2011, Vanuatu agreed to reduce agricultural tariffs and subsidies by a much bigger percentage when compared to other WTO members (personal communication, August 2012). Discussion with civil society groups revealed that Vanuatu’s negotiating power during the WTO accession process was very weak resulting in Vanuatu acceding to the WTO under far more onerous terms when compared to much larger countries, despite the fact that there was large civil society opposition to the terms of accession (1). This opposition will be much stronger in relation to bilateral and regional free trade agreements which are currently being negotiated. However, there are signs that PICTs are carefully considering their accession in some economic agreements, and have retained the ability to reject agreements that do not support their economic interests (Box 3).

Box 3: Taking a pro-development stand in trade agreement negotiations

For the past ten years, the European Union has been negotiating a free trade agreement (FTA) with countries in the African Caribbean (ACP) bloc. The negotiations were supposed to be completed by 2008, but have been slow and protracted. Only two out of the fifteen Pacific Island countries in the ACP bloc agreed to be part of the formal negotiations: Fiji and Papua New Guinea. The rest of the countries in the Pacific have concluded that an FTA will not be in their economic interest and have chosen not to be party to an FTA. The Pacific Island countries want a strong pro-development agreement with the EU and remain steadfast in their resolve to achieve a more balanced agreement which
is less focused on technicalities and more on the genuine needs of the small island nations.

A further constraint on food sovereignty is the effect of entering into international economic agreements on policy makers’ ability to implement policy to improve the healthfulness of the food environment. For example, Samoa’s accession to the WTO in 2011 resulted in the removal of a four-year ban on turkey tail imports (67). During negotiations, members of the working party had raised concerns regarding the ban due to its focus on just a single food to address the complex condition of NCDs, which have several causes, particularly in the context of the availability of other high-fat food (68). However, this overlooks the role of the ban in removing a highly fatty meat product from the market, which was significantly cheaper than other meats. To the Samoan government, turkey tails were being ‘dumped’ on their market, creating an incentive for consumers to consume the cheap unhealthy product, and also reducing the competitiveness of local meat producers (69). In Fiji, positive policy action was achieved through collaboration between the Ministers of Health and Commerce (Box 4)

Box 4: Joined up policy making in Fiji: a counter to harmful food trade policy

However, Fiji’s non-discriminatory ban on mutton and lamb flap sales (another fatty meat imported in large quantities) was implemented after Fiji became a WTO member (69). This ban was a joint initiative by the Ministers of Health and Commerce, in response to both rising diet-related chronic disease rates (strongly associated with saturated fat intake) and concern about the dumping of these cheap meat cuts on local agricultural production. The ban was accompanied by a health promotion campaign aimed at increasing consumer awareness of the health consequences of consuming high-fat meats. This ban had a significant effect on the food supply – it resulted in significant reductions in imports of mutton flaps – and was strongly supported by consumers, who perceived these cheap meat imports as very unhealthy and ‘unfit for human consumption’ (59).
According to Premila Kumar (head of Consumer Council Fiji), as trade barriers are dismantled, Pacific Island governments need to very carefully consider the implications of these trade agreements on people, the environment, and the system as a whole. Kumar notes

‘Yes, we need investment, but we need sound investment. Yes, we need trade agreements so we can trade better, but again we need a cautious, precautionary approach. More work needs to be done: establishment of institutions that can watch, correct, and highlight so that corrective measures can be taken to improve the systems and processes at regional and national level. This is crucial. Trade agreements should come along with other systems and processes. It’s not just one-way traffic’ (personal communication, February 2012).

**Strengthening capacity for food policy and diet-related health in the Pacific**

This paper has identified diverse challenges to food sovereignty at the consumer, farmer and policy maker level. We have also identified four key areas for investment to improve food sovereignty and diet-related health in the Pacific:

i. Investment in domestic/traditional agriculture, including by international aid for development agencies, aimed at strengthening infrastructure and markets. An example of this is presented by Thow&Priyadarshi [70].

ii. Investment in processing and preservation technologies for traditional foods to improve access and convenience of healthy safe food options.

iii. Community education and support programs for traditional food cultures (similar to the “Let’s go local” program implemented in Pohnpei that is mentioned above).

iv. Technical support for policy makers involved in trade negotiations to help ensure social, nutrition and health goals are integrated adequately into trade agreements, and for staff from local civil society groups that are representing consumers and farmers, to enable a diversity of paradigms and ways of working to be included in global and national food-related policy. It
is important for this technical support to come from a variety of sources, including from those who have a critical approach to the dominant view promoting liberalisation, given the power differentials observed between parties in trade and other sectoral negotiations.
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Erosion of food sovereignty and impact on nutritional status: Case study of India

Susana Barria¹, Amit Sengupta²

¹Susana Barria, Research associate, Peoples’ Health Movement. email:sus.barria@gmail.com

²Amit Sengupta, Associate global co-ordinator, Peoples’ Health Movement
Erosion of food sovereignty and impact on nutritional status: Case study of India

Background
The world food crisis is evidenced by the existence of a billion hungry people and two billion overweight or obese people in the world. According to the FAO, in the period 2010-12, 217 million people, or 17.5 percent of the Indian population was undernourished (suffering from chronic hunger). Official national data is even more worrying. According to the National Family Health Survey 2005-2006 (NFHS-3), almost half of children under five years of age (48 percent) were stunted (low height due to sustained under-nutrition) and wasting (associated with recent starvation or disease) affected 20 percent of children under five years of age. In 2010, with an under-5 mortality rate of 63 per thousand, 1.696 million children died under 5 years of age (UNICEF, 2012).

According to the NFHS-3, 36% of women and 34% of men between 15 and 49 years were too thin (Body Mass Index below 18.5). Simultaneously, overweight/obesity, diabetes and cardiovascular diseases in Indians are occurring in epidemic proportions (Shatrugna, 2012b). This ‘double burden’ of malnutrition is in part explained by the fact that short, lean children without adequate muscle mass put on weight more rapidly during adulthood when exposed to calorie-rich foods. Research also shows that this weight increase happens due to fat accumulation and not through increase in muscle mass (Shatrugna, 2012b).

Deficiencies are multiple. 70% of children aged between 6 months and 5 years in India are anaemic (NFHS-3). More than half of women (55 percent) and almost one-quarter of men (24 percent) are anaemic (NFHS-3). Another study found vitamin A deficiency (subclinical) in 62% of children between 1 and 5 years of age.

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2 Chronic hunger weakens the immune system and makes people extremely vulnerable to diseases. It shows up as malnutrition, illness and reduced life expectancy.
3 Veena Shatrugna, personal interview, 17 January 2013
These signs of multiple deficiencies are likely to be due to inadequate food intake.⁴

Concurrently, there is a large and increasing proportion of the population which does not have adequate food intake. The percentage of population able to access the nutrition norms in calories (2400 and 2100 calories a day in rural and urban areas)⁵ has declined for the past two decades (see table below).⁶

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1: Calorie intake based on expenditure group</th>
<th>Rural</th>
<th>Urban</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Levels of calorie intake per day</td>
<td>2400</td>
<td>2100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of persons below specified levels, 2004-05</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>64.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of persons below specified levels, 1993-94</td>
<td>74.5</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of persons below specified levels, 1983</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>58.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Utsa Patnaik, Theorizing food security and poverty in the era of economic reforms, 2005, table 9

Patnaik states that “rural persons spending less on food than what would allow them to reach the nutrition norm [of 2400 calories], rose from 74.5% in 1993-94 to an all-time high of nearly 87% by 2004-05. Rural persons unable to access 2,200 calories per day, rose from 58.5% to 69.5% while those below the very low 1,800 calories per day level, registered a rise from 20% to 25% indicating increasing poverty depth” (Patnaik 2010c). Using a different methodology, Dreze and Deaton

⁴ Veena Shatrugna, personal interview, 17 January 2013
⁵ Using the census data projected to 1982, the population was divided into 16 groups defined by age, sex and activity, with energy intake varying from 300 calories for children below 1 year to 3600 calories for a young man doing heavy work. The average was derived on the basis of this profile, and came to 2435 and 2095 calories per person, rural and urban, rounded down to 2400 and 2100 calories per person (Utsa Patnaik, Neoliberalism and rural poverty, 2007, page 3136)
⁶ Indian NSS data gives data on households use of physical quantities of foods (from which the calories intakes can be derived applying the standard table of calories per kilograms of different foods). These physical quantities of foods are valued and aggregated to give the food expenditure. This is added to data of other spending to give the household total expenditure. Households are then classified in 12 categories based on their monthly per capita expenditure, MPCE. Using these two sets of data, Utsa Patnaik calculates the percentage of population having a monthly expenditure that allows specific levels of calories intakes.
also calculate the population under the 2400 calories per day norm, and find a similar figure of 79.8% of the rural population for 2004-05 (Dealton and Dreze 2009).\(^7\)

Further, the proportion of urban persons unable to access the official nutrition norm of 2,100 calories has risen substantially between 1993-94 and 2004-05, from 57% to 64.5% (Patnaik 2010c). Regarding the perceived adequacy of food, in urban areas, households in the \textit{casual labour} category had the highest percentage of household \textit{not getting food every day} relative to other households (NSSO 2007a). Households in the \textit{agricultural labour} category in rural India and households and in the \textit{casual labour} category in urban India had lower levels of consumption of animal products (milk and milk products, eggs, meat and fish) (NSSO 2007b).

**Causes of the erosion of food sovereignty**

Economists argue that the reason for the decline in access to adequate food is linked to the deflation of expenditures on food, especially in rural areas, where a bulk of India’s population still lives (in 2010 the rural population was 70% of the total population) (See Patnaik 2005, Swaminathan 2002). Paradoxically, there has been a steep increase in food stocks, beginning from the 1990s, while there is a decrease in per-capita food grains consumption (Patnaik 1996b, Patnaik 2003b).\(^8\)

Experience around the world shows that as per capita income increases, the demand for food grains increases.\(^9\) However, in India, despite the increase in per capita income (reflected in the GDP growth rate which has been higher than

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\(^7\) The NSS data provides number of calories consumed over the last 30 days for each household. This is then used to calculate a per day per capita calorie intake. This methodology does not link calorie intake with expenditure group. It is more accurate in terms of exact number of people below the consumption cut off line, but it is de-linked from the economic situation of the household (defined by its expenditure group).

\(^8\) Availability or absorption is calculated by adjusting the net foodgrain output by adding imports, subtracting and adjusting for changes in stocks. This available foodgrain are then used for direct consumption as food and indirect consumption as animal feed and industrial products.

\(^9\) Data from the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) shows that the more diversification to “superior foods” (such as animal products) there is with rising incomes, the higher is the demand for cereals. This is because cereal demand includes feed grains embodied in animal products. Consequently, while direct consumption will decrease slightly, indirect consumption will increase more sharply.
population growth rate for more than two decades) the real availability of food grains has decreased over the past decades. Thus, while food grain stocks held by government agencies have piled up, these stocks are not adequately distributed to those who have compromised access.

In India, per-capita food grain availability increased slowly from the 1970s to the late 1980s, with the highest average availability in the period 1989-90 to 1991-92 at 485 grams per capita a day. This was followed by a downward trend in the decade of the 1990s and 2000s (Patnaik 1996b, Patnaik 2003b). The average daily net per capita availability of food grain in 2008 was a dismal 436 grams (PIB, 14 August 2012), which is less than the 440 grams available in 1955-58. This level is below the 2007 average of 499 grams a day per capita (182 kg a year) for the least developed countries taken as a group (Patniak, 2010). The consumption of pulses (an important source of proteins for many poor Indians) has declined even more precipitously, from 70 gms. per capita in 1955-58 to around 35 gms. in 2005-08 (The Hindu, 29 October 2011).

However, despite abysmally low availability of food grains, food stocks have also increased tremendously. In consequence, imports have not increased and, on the
contrary, India has become a net exporter of foodgrains, although inconsistently (Department of Food and Public Distribution, 2011).\textsuperscript{10}

As per recent government data, India produced 257.44 million tonnes of food grains during 2011-12, or close to 186 kg per capita, a slight increase over the 2008 numbers (PIB, 24 December 2012). However, against a buffer norm of 21 million tonnes (i.e. the minimum buffer required to be stocked to take care of emergencies), the Food Corporation of India had a stock of more than 66.5 million tonnes (as on 1 October 2012). According to data from Directorate General of Foreign Trade, around 7.73 million tonnes of rice and 3.59 million tonnes of wheat were exported from September 2011 to October 2012 (PIB, 24 December 2012).

Therefore, economists such as Utsa Patnaik argue that the fall in per capita absorption is due to a decline in incomes and purchasing power for a major part of the population, and is a symptom of a general rural distress, combined with acute distress in specific regions.\textsuperscript{11} The fundamental cause of the rural distress is depression of rural incomes, linked fairly clearly to cuts in government expenditure on rural development since the 1990s (see later). Acute rural distress is apparent from the recurrent and widespread incidence of farmers’ suicides. Farmer’s suicides amounted to over a quarter of a million between 1995 and 2010 (The Hindu, 29 October 2011), to which 14,027 deaths were added in 2011 (The Hindu, 3 July 2012).

**Rural development expenditure**

There has been a sharp decline in public planned rural development expenditure (which includes agriculture, rural development, irrigation and flood control, special area programs and village and small scale industry) which are vital for maintaining rural productivity and employment (and sustain wage levels). The share of rural


\textsuperscript{11} Utsa Patnaik, personal interview, 24 December 2012
development expenditure in total budget expenditure has declined from 21.06% in 2008-09 to only 16.18% in the budget estimate for 2010-11. In 2010-11, the share of rural development expenditure as a percentage of GDP is only 2.59%, compared to 14.5% in the late 1980s and close to 12% in the early 1990s (see table below).

**Rural development expenditure as a percentage of GDP**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1985-90</td>
<td>14.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991-92</td>
<td>11.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993-94</td>
<td>12.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995-96</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997-98</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000-01</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010-11</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Several economists link this decline with the policies recommended by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) (See Chandrasekhar, 2010, Biraj Patnaik, 2010, Utsa Patnaik, 2010b, Devinder Sharma 2010). While these institutions do not specifically tell governments to cut back particular expenditures, studies show that countries implementing structural adjustment programs tend to implement similar policies, including restraint on central government expenditure. Reforms of the financial sector in India also include curtailment of central bank credit to the government, which curtails government expenditure (Chandrasekhar, 2010).

The World Bank articulates that public expenditure crowds out private investment. Its page on Agriculture in South Asia about India states that “bold action from

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12 Large scale economic reforms in India were initiated in July 1991 as a response to the external debt and foreign exchange crisis. This represented an acceleration of a process that had started in the 1980s and which constituted a departure from the post independence model of planned development. While not formally termed as a structural adjustment programme dictated by IFIs, the neoliberal economic reforms that continue till date had most or all of the characteristics of SAPs that were implemented in large parts of Latin America and Africa.
policymakers will be required to shift away from the existing subsidy-based regime that is no longer sustainable.

As a result of the neglect of rural development by the government (and the lack of private investment), the growth rate of foodgrain output decelerated from an average of 2.7% in the 1980s, to 2.2% in the 1990s and 1.9% in the 2000s. (The Hindu, 13 December 2012). The impacts of the reduction of rural development expenditure are even more acute on rural incomes. Incomes have gone down by a much larger extent and unemployment and under-employment in rural areas has risen. The growth rate of employment in rural India was an abysmal 0.58 percent in the period 1993-94 to 1999-00, far below the rate of growth of rural population. One can safely infer a substantial increase in the rural unemployment rate. This has also curtailed the purchasing power of the rural population, and especially of the rural poor.

**Growth rate of population and employment (in percent)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Employment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Urban</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983 to 1993-94</td>
<td>2.10</td>
<td>2.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987-88 to 1993-94</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993-94 to 1999-00</td>
<td>1.93</td>
<td>1.51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Utsa Patnaik, Agrarian crisis and distress in rural India, 2003

Simultaneously, several policies have reduced farmers’ incomes by increasing the cost of farming. M Raghavan finds that the cost of cultivation has registered a spectacular increase since the 1990s and that the expenses on inputs have ratcheted up the average costs of cultivation (Raghavan, 2008). The analysis is based on the costs of cultivation of wheat from 1970-71 to 2004-05, in 5 states that constitute 80% of area and 85% of the volume of wheat output. Among inputs,

he finds that, while labour charges are the larger share of input costs, their share in the total operational costs has decreased. Irrigation, fertilisers, cost of credit and seeds stand out as major charges (despite the fact that farmers rely on exchange of seeds for 80% of their seeds needs).

The study also concludes that, in response to the increased cost of cultivation “there has been a steep decline in the labour hours applied in cultivation as also stagnation in casual wages.” In other world, the impacts of the increased cost of cultivation afflict not only the cultivating households but also the entire agriculture dependent population, including agricultural workers (Raghavan, 2008).

![Costs of cultivation of weath (in Rs/hectar)](chart)

Source: Raghavan 2008

**Electricity privatisation**

Rain-fed agriculture accounts for around 56% of the total cropped area, 77% in the case of pulses, 66% for oilseeds and 45% for cereals (The Hindu, 13 December 2012). In 1999-2000, less than one-third of the total irrigated area was irrigated through canal irrigation and almost 60% was through private wells (NSSO 2005). There is a high dependence on water pumps for irrigation, which requires electricity. Therefore, access and cost of electricity has a strong influence on the cost of producing agricultural products and the income generated for farmers.
The electricity sector is structured around publicly owned, state level electricity boards (SEBs). By the 1980s many SEBs were in deep financial crisis and on the verge of bankruptcy with mounting losses and unsustainable debt on the one hand, and increasing power shortages on the other. The central issue was of poor and inefficient governance, management and regulatory practices (D’Sa et al, 1999). In the 1990s, the World Bank started giving loans for restructuring the electricity sector. After 1994, the World Bank extended support only to those states that agreed to market-oriented reforms, including privatisation. The reforms focused on increasing investment and moving towards financial viability through a private led model. (Sreekumar et al, 2010). The Asian Development Bank provided loans on the same lines. There was no option for alternative policies addressing the basic issues of management and governance.

These loans started with Orissa (1996), which was then used as a model for the other states. However, financial viability was not achieved for most utilities and the intended privatisation did not solve the core issue of poor governance (Sreekumar N, 2010). It was argued that vulnerable sectors (including the agriculture sector) would benefit through increased investment that would improve services after the financial viability of the sector improved. This, however, did not take place. What did take place is the removal of cross-subsidies to vulnerable sectors. Consequently, prices have soared, impacting the rural and urban poor and small and marginal farmers disproportionately. The price of electricity to farmers (agricultural rates) has grown by 97.5% in the period from 2007-08 to 2011-12. This is while the price of electricity across consumer categories has increased by 23.8% (Business Standard, 11 December 2012).

**Fertilisers and seeds**

India’s fertilizer requirement rose by 70% between 1998-99 and 2008-09, but production went up by only 11%, while imports rose by 236%. Public Sector Units, or government owned companies, were involved in the production of fertilizers. However their role has been curtailed drastically since the 1990s, fuelled by the
push for a market-oriented approach to agriculture. As a result the fertilizer subsidy bill increased from Rs. 113.87 billion in 1998-99 to Rs. 966.03 billion in 2008-09 (subsidies for imported fertilizers rose from 3% to 47%). This has meant that taxpayer’s money is now being used to pay exorbitant prices for fertilizers procured from the international market, while domestic production has faltered. (Times of India, 6 August 2011)

International agencies such as the World Bank have also facilitated the privatization of the seed sector -- a strong cause of the increase in the price of seeds to farmers (Jafri, 2010). In 1988, the World Bank supported National Seed Corporation (NSC) focused on making the Indian seed sector more market responsive. It promoted the increase in the proportion of marketed seeds as opposed to exchanged seeds and increased the role of private players including seeds corporations. Jafri points to the link between the increased role of seeds corporations and the higher cost to farmers (Jafri 2010).

**Rural institutional credit**

With increasing dependence on inputs, which have to be purchased from the market, credit requirement of farmers have increased simultaneously. However, access to rural and agricultural credit has worsened since the start of financial reforms in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The institutional framework for agricultural credit has been debilitated and the rural branches of commercial banks have seen a progressive decline since the early 1990s. This trend has been facilitated by the Reserve Bank of India’s (RBI) policy promoting closure of rural branches on grounds of unavailability of resources and lack of profitability (Satish 2007).

As a result of directed credit programmes (including a 40% mandatory requirements for lending to sectors which were identified as *priority sectors*, including agriculture), institutional lending to small and marginal farmers increased substantially in the 1970s and 1980s. In 1991, the share of moneylenders in rural credit was less than 25%, down from an average of 75% in 1951-61 (Shah 2007).
In the period of 1974-75 to 1979-80 the rate of growth of credit to agriculture was more than 20%. However, reforms in credit policy meant that the basis of allocation of credit moved away from the needs of the priority sectors to profitability. Between 1980-81 and 1989-90, the rate of growth of credit to agriculture came down to 8.7% and from 1990-91 to 1999-2000 it came down to 1.8% (Chandrasekhar, 2010). In 2006-07, small and marginal farmers which comprise the large majority of all farmers’ households (84%) got 75% of their credit requirements from money lenders and informal sources (Alternative economic survey, 2007).

The reforms in credit policy were heavily influenced by the Basel process, as well as the World Bank support to the national financial liberalisation process. Starting from 1992-93, the RBI published circulars to commercial banks based on the Basel Committee on Banking Supervision recommendations, thereby drastically curtailing the priority sector lending system.

**Price volatility and depreciation**

As part of the reforms tied to the loan provided by the IMF to bail India out of the 1991 financial crisis, wide ranging changes were made in India’s agricultural trade policy. Imports tariffs were reduced or removed. Further, in 1997, the World Bank articulated the need for further trade liberalisation and deregulation. In 1994, India had signed the series of agreements creating the World Trade Organisation. The WTO Agreement on Agriculture provided for further reduction in import tariffs and the removal of all quantitative restrictions. The World Bank’s Country Assistance Strategy for 2005-08 for India lists reducing average import tariffs and phasing out of tariff exemption, specific tariffs and anti-dumping duties as ‘priorities’ (World Bank, 2004). Earlier, the IMF-WB loan had the conditionality attached that agriculture be diversified. This resulted in a shift in production from staple food crops to cash crops, i.e. from crops oriented towards the domestic market, to crops oriented towards the export market. In 10 years, 8 million hectares of food-growing
land were converted to exportable crops (Patnaik 2005). The crops that saw rapid expansion were cotton, soyabean and sugarcane.

With the liberalisation of agricultural trade, the switch over to cash crops has exposed farmers to price volatility. In addition, the prices of primary commodities, despite a high volatility, tend to depreciate overtime. While global primary prices were rising up to 1996, thereafter, they declined steeply. Cereals, cotton, sugar and jute prices declined by 40% to 50%, while the prices of some edible oils, including soyabean, declined by up to 80% between 1995 and 2001 (Patnaik 2005). By 2003, the price of coffee to the grower was only around 25% of the prevailing price in 1999, and the price of tea and pepper only around 33% (Patnaik 2005). Patnaik notes that “farmers did not benefit [from the shift to cash crops] since their exposure to steeply falling global primary prices from mid-decade [of the 1990s] has plunged them into spiralling farm debt and insolvency” (Patnaik 2005) as they had to take large loans for shifting cultivation and engage in input-intensive farming. In addition to the issues of livelihoods and sustainability of small and marginal farmers, there are concerns related to the increase dependence on imports for staple foods (see box below).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Destroying oilseed production</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| The Oilseed Technology Mission saw oilseed production grow from 11 million tonnes in 1986-87 to 22 million tonnes in 1994-95, resulting in India becoming almost self-sufficient in oilseeds and edible oils (Sharma, 2005). Under pressure from the World Bank, India liberalised edible oil imports in 1994-95 and import tariffs were progressively reduced. For instance, while the import tariff of palm oil was 65% in 1994, it reached 15% in July 1998. Tariffs of edible oils were further reduced in the 2000s (Goswami, 2010).

On account of these reforms, India imported 1.75 million tonnes of edible oils in 1996-97. In 2004-05, the figure climbed to 4.63 million tonnes and cost US$ 3.2 billion (Sharma, 2005). As a result, in 2006, India was the world’s largest importer |
of edible oils with imports comprising almost 63% of its requirement (Goswani, 2010).

The Government’s food schemes
Ensuring access to food has been a crucial aspect of public policy in India since Independence. There are a few critical programs that have been the cornerstone of the government of India’s food security system, such as the Public Distribution System (PDS), the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS), and the Mid-day Meal Scheme (MDM), However, they have all suffered from budgetary constraints’ especially in recent years. The ICDS provides six essential services to all children under 6 years, namely supplementary nutrition, health check-up, immunisation, non-formal pre-school education, referral services, and nutrition and health education. However, the funds allocated to the scheme are not commensurate with the services that are included in the programme. In the 2011-12 government budget, 0.12% of GDP was allocated to this scheme. The Mid-day Meal Scheme, which requires the government to provide cooked meals to all children in government or government assisted schools on working days, was introduced in 2005. Its budgetary allocation in 2007-08 was 0.13% of GDP, in 2011-12 it had fallen to 0.12% of GDP.

Public Distribution System
The Public Distribution System (PDS) was established in 1965 as part of a national food policy. It distributes subsidised staple foods and commodities, such as wheat, rice, sugar, and kerosene, through a network of public distribution shops. The Food Corporation of India, a Government-owned corporation, procures and maintains the PDS, which is the most important food security instrument in terms of both coverage and public expenditure.14

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14 According to certain estimates, it has a network of more than 46.2 million shops, distributing annually goods for more than Rs. 300,000 million to about 160 million families (Ahluwalia, 2004).
Following strong criticism by the World Bank and IMF of both universal subsidies and the level of food subsidies, the Government of India shifted from a principle of universal coverage to a principle of targeting in the PDS, accompanied by changes in entitlements and prices (see table below).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Entitlement of grain under PDS (in kg)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>per person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Swaminathan 2002

As part of the introduction of a targeted system, in 1996, the GoI introduced the distinction between below poverty line (BPL) and above poverty line (APL) populations. A study of the actual procedures for excluding households from the BPL category in the western state of Maharashtra concluded that the procedures were “faulty, arbitrary, undertaken by persons without appropriate training, and cannot be relied upon as measure of poverty among rural households” (Swaminathan and Mishra 2001). It is estimated that 50% of the poor are left out from the BPL lists (RtFC, 2011) (See box below).

Exclusion from the Public distribution System in Bihar, India

Rita is from Bihar, she lives in Karma, in the District of Gaya. She works as a labourer in road making, digging or as an agricultural worker. Her work is irregular. She is landless, owns no house, only has a room where she lives with her husband and two children. They are dalits (the so called ‘lower’ castes). Her husband is also a labourer. One child is 2 years old, the girl is 10 months old.

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They don’t have a ration card. They are neither BPL nor APL on the government records. They cannot access grains, sugar, oil or kerosene from the public distribution shops and have to buy from the open market. The survive on only one meal a day, usually taken at night. When they get their wage, they first buy rice, then wheat flour, vegetable oil and if they can, pulses. Firewood is not easily accessible and there is no forest around, so if they can’t get wood, they won’t eat that night. They also have to keep some money aside in case a child is sick. In general, they do not eat every third day.

From the ICDS they can get food for the 2 years old, but it is very irregular, maybe 2 or 3 times a week. The only nutrition her 10 months old baby receives is from her breast milk -- she can’t afford anything more.

Sibia is from Bahachati, also in the Gaya district in Bihar. She is an agricultural worker. As an agricultural worker she sows, cuts rice. She has no ration card, no land, and no access to government schemes. She is old and works slowly, so she is paid in grains. She receives 3 kg of rice against one day of work (The legal minimum wage for unskilled work in the agricultural sector is Rs 145 a day).

Shila is also from Bahachati. They live in the same slum. She and her husband are also agricultural workers and labourers. With one day of work, she can afford 2 days of food. Rice, spices, vegetables, and sometimes pulses. In the slum where they live, only half of the people have a ration card. They were told that they could not get it because they were illiterate.

Note: Gaya is one of the thirty-eight districts of Bihar, in the south of the State. According to the 2011 census Gaya district has a population of 4,379,383. The district has a population density of 880 inhabitants per square kilometer (2,300 /sq mi). Its population grew by 26.08% over the decade 2001-2011 and the literacy rate is 66.35%. The proportion of children under 5 years which are underweight in Bihar is above 50%, anemia is prevalent for 78%, the highest rate in the country. More than 40% of women in Bihar are too thin and more than 60% are anemic (NHFS-3).
It has been argued that the three major components of the policy of targetting, i.e. the exclusion of the majority from the BPL category, restrictions on quantities that can be purchased as well as higher prices for eligible BPL households, and steep price increases for APL households are responsible for the decline in foodgrain outflows through the PDS (Swaminathan 2002). The quantity of foodgrain distributed declined from 20.8 million tonnes in 1991 to 8.7 million tonnes in 2001 (see table below). In the same period, foodgrain stocks held by the government increased from 22.3 tonnes to 61.7 tonnes. Thus, while on one hand much less grain is being distributed through the PDS, on the other hand, huge stocks of grain are piling up.

**Government procurement, distribution and stocks of food grain**
(in million tonnes)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Procurement (PT)</th>
<th>Public distribution (PD)</th>
<th>Net addition to stocks (PT-PD)</th>
<th>Stocks as of July</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>19.6</td>
<td>20.8</td>
<td>-1.2</td>
<td>22.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>17.9</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>-0.9</td>
<td>15.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>28.0</td>
<td>16.4</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>24.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>26.0</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>30.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>22.6</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>35.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>19.8</td>
<td>18.3</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>27.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>23.6</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>22.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>26.3</td>
<td>18.4</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>28.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>30.8</td>
<td>17.0</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>33.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>35.5</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>23.4</td>
<td>42.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001*</td>
<td>31.8</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>23.1</td>
<td>61.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absolute Change 1991-01</td>
<td>+14.6</td>
<td>-10.2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+39.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Swaminathan 2002

This policy change was implemented despite the fact that economists have warned of the dangers of replacing the earlier universal system of public distribution of food (where all citizens were eligible) to a targeted system (where only specific categories who are designated as poor are eligible). (See Swaminathan, 2002,
Despite a consistent criticism from several quarters, the targeting of beneficiaries has not been reversed (RtFC, 2011, The Hindu, 28 Aug 2012).

More recently, there has been a proposal to replace the distribution of food by transfers of cash. The World Bank was part of the few international agencies that advocated food stamps, or a form of currency, instead of actual foods as a method to fight hunger (Radhakrishna 1997). However, cash transfers have come to the fore as a policy option more strongly in the late part of the 2000s. In India, United Nations Development Program (UNDP) has been instrumental in bringing cash transfers onto the table as a policy option. In 2009, UNDP organised a seminar in Delhi under the title “Addressing urban poverty: Relevance of Conditional Cash Transfers”, in which similar policies implemented across the world were discussed, including the key role played by the World Bank in financing those projects, or the base line studies for their design (UNDP, 2009). In India, UNDP has funded two pilot projects, in Delhi and Madya Pradesh.

There are several criticisms of to this proposal, including the threat that women’s control over food resources within the household will be reduced because cash can be spent on non-food items (Biraj Patnaik, 2010). Experts also point to the fact that cash transfer schemes do and can work in situations where they are an additional part of a scheme, not where they substitute for existing schemes. However, the Indian government is interested in introducing cash transfers as substitutes for existing schemes, again, in order to reduce the government expenditure on subsidies (Ghosh 2013). In addition, cash transfers that allow poor people to buy

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16 M Swaminathan writes, "from the perspective of food security as a basic human right, the principle of universal coverage is both attractive and legitimate" (Swaminathan 2002)Swaminathan adds that even from the perspective of effectively reaching the vulnerable or nutritionally insecure population, universal coverage is superior to targeting based on any indicator, as targeting involves errors of wrong exclusion. She argues that considering the importance of not excluding the needy, the large size of the vulnerable population and the difficulty in identifying the nutritionally insecure population, universal coverage is a better policy option (Swminathan 2002).

17 Dipa Sinha, Right to Food Campaign, personal interview, 14 December 2012

18 The delhi pilot was a case of cash transfer given as an additional scheme, as the 6000 families covered were poor but did not have any type of ration card, despite deserving them. Jayati Ghosh, economist, personal interview, 29 December 2012
foods and other essential commodities in private shops will be much less effective in periods of rising prices of such goods (Ghosh 2011).

**Integrated Child Development Scheme and Mid-day Meal Scheme**

Taking into account the spread and level of malnutrition in the country, and the failure to improve these indicators, in 2001, the Supreme Court issued an order that the 6 services provided by ICDS are universal entitlements. However, despite the order, the World Bank is still advocating for this universal scheme to be turned into a targeted scheme applicable only to ‘eligible’ beneficiaries. (Biraj Patnaik, 2010).

In addition, there are discussions to replace cooked meals by fortified and reinforced foods, in the cases of both the Mid-day meals scheme and ICDS. In a 2006 report on the ICDS, the World Bank articulates a targeted, micronutrient-based strategy of food fortification (Gragnolati et al, 2006). It has emphasised this approach in India, along with agencies such as USAID.

However, activists with the Right to Food Campaign, who have criticised the micronutrient-based proposal, complain that they are being asked to prove that local foods are nutritious. They point to a system of intellectual hegemony where research produced from a specific standpoint is presented as the only acceptable and existing evidence.19

**People’s responses**

**Right to Food Campaign**20

The Right to Food Campaign (RtFC) began with a writ petition submitted to the Supreme Court in April 2001 by the People’s Union for Civil Liberties, Rajasthan. The petition argued that the right to food is a fundamental right of all citizens. This petition led to a prolonged Public interest litigation (PIL) for which Supreme Court

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19 Dipa Sinha, Right to Food Campaign, personal interview, 14 December 2012
hearings have been held at regular intervals, and significant ‘interim orders’ have been issued.21

A landmark ‘interim order’ was pronounced in November 2001, which declared eight key food and poverty alleviation schemes as entitlements, including PDS, ICDS and MDM. The RtFC focused on a campaign to ensure the implementation of this interim order. However, it soon became clear that the legal process would not go very far on its own and the Campaign moved its activities and interventions from the Court rooms to the streets (Dreze, undated). This motivated the effort to build a larger public campaign for the Right to Food.

In June 2004, several national networks convened the first national convention of RtFC, held in Bhopal, and a Steering Group was formed, which include 12 national networks, including those representing women, dalits, adivasis22, agricultural workers, health activists, and human rights activists.

Since, then the meaning of Right to Food has been broadened, from the perspective of different segments in the campaign and in an effort to reach out to other networks. Therefore the understanding of the RtFC of the Right to Food was informed by the importance of natural resources for adivasis communities, of dignity for workers engaged in manual scavenging, the relevance of the Minimum support price for farmers and gender based discrimination, among others. Issues of self-reliance were also raised from different perspectives. 23

At the next national convention, in Badu, Kolkata, in November 2005, the debate went forward. While broadening the perspective of the campaign was a first step, the next question was how to address the different needs of different segments of the campaign. From Food security, that recognises that the government has a role to play, the demands of the RtFC moved towards Food sovereignty which implies

21 PUCL vs Union of India and Others, Writ Petition [Civil] 196 of 2001
22 Adivasi is an umbrella term for the indigenous populations of India.
23 Sachin Kuma, personal interview, 14 December 2014
that people are the ones that have to control and manage their resources, and they therefore need enough independence from the state. This evolution in the thinking of the campaign was facilitated by the discussions created by the diversity of perspectives included in the core of the movement.\textsuperscript{24}

\textbf{Agro-ecology}

The concept of agro-ecology and its practice incorporates the production of food in an environmentally sustainable manner, fighting poverty, offering fair prices to peasants, access to land, respecting crop diversity and regulating agribusiness and is being increasingly adopted by peasant movements across the world not only as a way out of an entrenched agrarian crisis but also the looming climate crisis. In India, peasant networks such as the South Indian Coordination Committee of Farmers Movements (SICCFM) and All India Kisan Sabha (AIKS) are actively engaged in practical programmes to scale up the adoption of natural farming under agro-ecology principles.

At the heart of agro-ecology is the small scale farmer who typically owns less than 2 hectares of land. It uses ecological concepts and principles for the design and management of sustainable agricultural systems in which natural, locally-available resources for soil fertility and biological control are privileged over costly external inputs such as chemical fertilizers and pesticides (Altieri 1995). Agro-ecology also works in a circular system that emphasises recycling and reusing of natural resources, reduces food waste and has sustainable water and waste management systems.

One of the agro-ecology farming methods being increasingly adopted is the ‘zero budget farming’ technique that has been popularised by Subhash Palekar, a farmer from the western Indian state of Maharashtra. Palekar encourages seed autonomy or community seed banks, self made farm inputs, reduced dependence on farm workers and the market. What Palekar means by ‘zero budget farming’ is not that

\textsuperscript{24} Sachin Kuma, personal interview, 14 December 2014
the total cost of production is zero but that the cost of production of the main crop will be compensated by the income of intercrops. He emphasises the vital importance of adopting multiple cropping patterns where economic returns from the short duration intercrops will come as soon as three months from the date of sowing.

Mass organisations such as the All India Kisan Sabha (AIKS) have experimented successfully with methods such as the System of Rice Intensification (SRI) in the north-eastern state of Tripura and the southern state of Kerala leading to substantial production increases. SRIs key principles imply using organic composts, retaining soil moisture, mechanical wedding (rather than spraying herbicides).
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5. Vijoo Krishnan, All India Kisan Sabha (AIKS), 18 December 2012
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