

Improving Food and Nutrition Security in West Bengal: Examining the Case of Public Private Partnership

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Abstract

Although India has made significant strides towards improving the food and nutritional status of its citizens over last one-and-a-half decades through a large number of programmes and legislative provisions, the progress still remains a matter of serious concern. This is more so when it comes to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG2 in this case) by 2030. Various national and international agencies put India among poor performing nations in terms of food and nutritional achievements. The wide spread disparities across different Indian States in this respect add further to the concern of food insecurity and malnutrition in the country. West Bengal, which is generally known for its fiscally indisciplined behaviour, is also one of the poor performing States in terms of malnutrition. Towards improving the food and nutrition situation in the country, both government as well as civil societies/non-governmental organisations play their respective roles. While government (both Central and State) runs a number of programmes for this purpose, private entities, like NGOs complement government's efforts towards this end by providing quality food to the needy.

In light of the above background, the present study is an attempt to conduct a subnational level analysis of food and nutrition situation in India, thereby exploring the role of both public as well as private stakeholders (though in a comparative perspective) in improving the outcomes. West Bengal has been considered as the case of an in-depth investigation in the present study. Specifically, this study seeks to find answers to the following questions:

- I. Did Government of West Bengal make quality spending for food and nutrition?
- II. What is the current scenario of private participation (through CSOs/NGOs, etc.) in financing and providing for food and nutrition services to the needy in West Bengal and how efficiently have these entities performed with and without government support?
- III. How cost-effective are related projects under PPP mode as compared to those under traditional mode?

IV. What are some general and specific challenges in implementing PPP for food and nutrition in the state?

The methodology employed in the present study comprises of a survey of the available widely scattered literature on the subject, exploratory statistical tools for data analysis, tables and graphs for representation purposes and sophisticated econometric techniques for further empirical investigations. Notwithstanding the timely contribution of this study to the existing knowledge base on the subject, it suffers from lack of secondary data on various important aspects, like district level government expenditure, comprehensive database on activities and parameters of NGOs, all relevant information on PPP projects, etc. The time and resource constraints in hand did not allow this study to conduct the required field surveys and interviews with various stakeholders involved in the process of improving food and nutrition security.

Given the need and purpose of the present analysis, this study has been divided into six chapters. Chapter 1 is introductory in nature and sets out necessary background for this study. It provides a historical overview of the evolution of the concept of food and nutrition security, presents global scenario and traces India's relative situation with wide interstate disparities in this respect. The second chapter of the thesis surveys the relevant literature in the area of food and nutrition. It first discusses the theoretical underpinnings of the issue from demand-side as well as supply-side perspectives, along with some common factors, such as pandemic which affect the food and nutrition situation and shape policies for it. This is followed by a discussion of the relevant empirical contributions, covering studies from India and abroad. Literature has also been explored for examining the collaborative efforts to improve food and nutrition situation in India and elsewhere.

In Chapter 3 of the thesis, the broad trend and pattern of government expenditure of States is analysed so as to have an idea of fund allocation for social sector, in general, and for food and nutrition (and related services), in particular. This is followed by empirical investigation of the effectiveness and efficiency of government expenditure towards food and nutrition. While the analysis conducted in this chapter took into account all Indian States, the primary focus has been on West Bengal.

The fourth chapter of the study examined the role of non-governmental organisations in improving the food and nutrition outcomes and also assesses their resource-use efficiency. Through a structured interviews with a handful of NGOs as well as schools, the chapter also

enumerates various challenges being faced by NGOs in performing their operations smoothly. In the fifth chapter of the study, the relative cost-efficiency of projects on water supply sanctioned under the traditional and PPP modes has been assessed. Finally, Chapter 6 concludes the present study by summarising the findings and highlighting the limitations of the study, discussing some policy suggestions and identifying the future research agenda.