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Right to Food as Human Right in India: Strategy and Approaches

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Abstract

Food is a basic human right—a right to livelihood and life itself. It has been recognized in India as a part of the Right to Life enshrined under Article 21 of the Constitution. However, amidst the gains from economic growth, hunger, and malnutrition persist and continue to be critical issues, especially amongst the most marginal sections. This paper looks at the right to food within the Indian context, dealing with aspects that take into consideration availability, accessibility, adequacy, and sustainability. It gives an overview of the international human rights framework, constitutional and legal obligations in India, prevailing food security situation across vulnerable groups, and initiatives by the government. The Supreme Court of India has played a major role in establishing the right to food through various landmark orders, one being *PUCL v. Union of India & Others*, after which the Government of India enacted the National Food Security Act (NFSA) in 2013. According to NFSA, subsidized food grains are to be provided to two-thirds of the population; however, their implementation remains a challenge. Realization of the right to food, therefore, needs an integrated and rights-based approach, entailing effective legislation of food rights, strengthening of food security schemes, promoting sustainable agriculture, addressing root causes of hunger and malnutrition, and increasing community participation and accountability. In doing so, India would adopt strategies aimed at ensuring that food security is assured for all citizens, dignity upheld, and social justice promoted. The commitment to the right to food is both a moral and legal imperative for reaching a just and equitable society.

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Introduction

Food is a fundamental right of every human being, as it is the essence of life itself. It is that right, a universal entitlement that should be available to all people, irrespective of their economic or social status. In India, through judicial activism, the right to food has been recognized to form part of the fundamental right to life under Article 21 of the Constitution. However, despite the economic boom in India, malnutrition and morbidity induced by food deprivation continue to remain particularly high among the poorest sections. The right to food is a basic human right because it is a necessity for leading life with basic dignity. It has been recognized by the United Nations as a human right and, therefore, indispensable for the attainment of other rights such as the right to health and the right to life. The right to food is not only a morally binding issue but one that could bring economic returns in terms of investments.

The importance of this study lies in the fact that for that the right to food is being looked into in an Indian context, and the availability, accessibility, adequacy, and sustainability of food is being analysed with equity and justice in mind. A human rights approach towards the question of food has been adopted, which is different from the earlier studies regarding safety of food. This study is important, since the study assessed the status of realization of the right to food in India and what more could be done.

The general guiding research question is therefore: How can the right to food be realised in India, and what strategies and approaches are required at the various levels?

The objectives of the study are

1. To examine the right to food in the Indian context and analyse its availability, accessibility, adequacy, and sustainability in terms of equity and justice.
2. To assess the progress made in realizing the right to food in India and identify areas where further action is needed.
3. To propose strategies and approaches for realizing the right to food in India, taking into account the obligations of the government to respect, protect, and fulfil this right.

This study, therefore, is confined to the Indian context, having as its core the right to food as a fundamental right of every human being. Based on this premise, the current study has examined the legal and policy frameworks recognizing the right to food in India, along with various programmes and schemes that have so far been implemented in pursuance of this right. The present study identifies challenges and barriers to the realization of the right to food in India, besides putting forward strategies that could help overcome these challenges. One of the limitations of the present study is that it is not comprehensive regarding the right to food in all contexts.

2. Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework with which the right to food can be understood as a human right in India encompasses, inter alia, its definition and evolution, the international human rights framework along with the obligations of India, and the constitutional and legal frameworks that underlie this right. This section further undertakes an explanation of the aforementioned dimensions that provide complete insight into the right to food in the Indian context.

▪ Definition and evolution of the Right to Food

The right to food can be defined as a person's right to have regular, permanent access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food to maintain a healthy and active life. It intrinsically emanates from the broader context of human rights, putting the emphasis on the availability, accessibility, adequacy, and sustainability of food. The right to food originated from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, which recognized the right to an adequate standard of living, inclusive of food. It was until the adoption of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in 1966 that the right to adequate food was explicitly enshrined in Article 11. This development represents an increased awareness of food as a basic human right, one where, without gratification, other rights such as the right to health and life cannot be satisfied. The right, however, has been in focus through various legislative measures and policies within the perspective of food security in India. The passing of the National Food Security Act in 2013 had been ambitious in providing subsidized food grains to about two-thirds of its population. This act serves as an important measure in implementing the right to food, besides aligning national policies with international human rights standards.

▪ International human rights framework and India's obligations

India is a party to various international human rights instruments which cast obligations for ensuring the right to food. The ICESCR, which India ratified in 1979, obligates the state to take steps with a view to achieving progressively the full realization of the right to adequate food. Article 2(1) of the ICESCR obligates the states to undertake all

appropriate measures to ensure the rights recognised in the covenant without discrimination to all individuals within their territories and subject to their jurisdiction. It is not only the ICESCR that binds India, but other international treaties, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. These instruments reinforce the importance of ensuring food security-particularly for vulnerable groups like women and children. These treaties impose obligations on India to formulate and implement proper policies and programs to address hunger and malnutrition. The United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights reiterated the responsibilities of states to take immediate measures to eradicate hunger and ensure that everyone gets sufficient food to eat, as well as undertake comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation, addressing root causes of food insecurity.

▪ Constitutional and legal framework in India

The Indian Constitution provides a strong backdrop to the realization of the right to food through the directive principles of state policy. Article 47 casts a duty upon the state to raise the level of nutrition and the standard of living of its people and to improve public health. Furthermore, Article 39(a) requires the state to strive to secure the right of the people to an adequate means of livelihood, which is essentially linked with food security. The statutory regime in India further reiterates the right to food by way of various enactments. One of the most striking enactments in regard to ensuring right to food and nutritional security through access to a sufficient amount of food at reasonable prices, is the National Food Security Act of 2013. It offers entitlements to subsidized food grains for the eligible households under this act, and therefore, the right to food is operationalised. The Supreme Court of India has also played a very important role in interpreting the right to food as part of the right to life provided under Article 21 of the Constitution. The court has, through different orders, emphasized the state's responsibility to ensure food security and directed the government to initiate programs with the purpose of combating hunger and malnutrition. In a nutshell, the conceptual framework of the right to food in India emanates from commitments to international human rights and is supported by constitutional provisions and legal instruments. This framework reveals that what is needed toward ensuring the realization of the right to food for every individual, particularly for the most vulnerable, is a multi-facet approach.

▪ Status of Food Security in India

Food security presents a bright chiaroscuro in India, wherein the standing contrast between the current problems of hunger and malnourishment faces the government's strife to overcome such issues. The paper summarises the overall scenario regarding the identification of vulnerable groups and areas, coupled with initiatives and programmes launched by the government to ensure food security for all.

▪ Overview of hunger and malnutrition in India

But despite economic growth and improvements in food production, India still hosts a very high population of people who suffer hunger and malnutrition. According to the FAO, India has the largest population of undernourished people-the estimated number of undernourished people in India having faced hunger during 2014-16 stands at 194.6 million. Many

population groups suffer from malnutrition in India; however, it is worst among the country's children and adolescents. Data from 2015-16 also indicates that 38.4% of children under five are stunted (low height-for-age), 21% are wasted (low weight-for-height), and 35.7% are underweight. Similarly, 11% of adolescents are overweight or obese, while 30% of boys and 56% of girls aged 15-19 years are anemic. Malnutrition contributes to a big part of child mortality in India and accounts for nearly half of the 1.3 million deaths that occur annually in the country. The high prevalence of malnutrition underlines the need for urgency in addressing the issues of food insecurity and ensuring access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food for all.

▪ **Vulnerable groups and regions**

There is disproportionate vulnerability in India: across social groups and geographies on grounds of hunger and malnutrition. Poverty compels 30% of the population to live below the international poverty line of less than \$1.90 per day. Rural areas, as well as the marginalized communities who are a part of agricultural work and the informal sectors, include other vulnerable groups. Gender inequalities ensure that undernutrition and anemia prevail among women and girls at higher rates. NFHS-5 data reveals that 57% of women in the age group of 15-49 years are anaemic, while 25% of men in this age bracket suffer from the condition. Even the prevalence of malnutrition shows a regional pattern. According to the Global Hunger Index 2022, India is ranked 107 among 121 countries. However, there are wide variations even within states. While Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, and Uttar Pradesh are among the states with better manifestations of stunting and wasting, Kerala and Punjab epitomize relatively better practices concerning food security.

▪ **Government initiatives and programs**

In this context, the government of India has taken various measures and programmes on issues related to hunger and malnutrition. This is testified to by the National Food Security Act, 2013, aiming at availing subsidized food grains to 75% of the rural population and 50% of the urban population. The said Act entitles the entitled households to 5 kg of food grains per person per month at a subsidized rate. Other key initiatives include:

- **Integrated Child Development Services Scheme:** Provides supplementary nutrition, pre-school non-formal education, primary healthcare, immunization, health check-up, and referral services to children in the age-group of 0-6 years and their mothers.
- **Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana:** Offers a cash incentive of ₹5,000 to pregnant women and lactating mothers.
- **National Nutrition Mission:** It has been proposed that there should be 'Malnutrition Free India' by 2022 through multisector intervention.
- **MDM Scheme:** It provides mid-day meals to the school-going children in order to raise their nutrition level along with increasing enrolment, retention, and attendance.

Though these programmes have been able to provide some progress on food security, issues persist in implementation, coverage, and targeting. Indeed, more needs to be done to strengthen the Public Distribution System, accessibility to safe drinking water and sanitation, and community engagement in nutritional awareness. The food security issue

in India is complex. Continued progress in anti-poverty policies, better access to health care and education, and the advancement of gender equality are needed to fight hunger and malnutrition. Only then can such a right to food for every Indian be realized through government initiatives and programs in combination with civil society participation and international cooperation.

Constitutional Provisions for the Right to Food in India

The Right to Food in India has been sandwiched between various constitutional provisions, all of which have the single objective of realizing dignity and welfare amongst its people. This section examines three important articles of the Indian Constitution, namely Article 21, Article 39(a), and Article 47, which provide a legal basis for the right to food.

▪ **Article 21: Right to life and personal liberty**

Article 21 of the Indian Constitution guarantees right to life and personal liberty: "No person shall be deprived of his life or personal liberty except according to procedure established by law." Interpretation by courts of law, more particularly the Supreme Court of India, has given an entirely new dimension to this article. The Supreme Court, in landmark judgments like *PUCL versus Union of India(2001)*, expanded Article 21 to include the right to food as an inherent part of the right to life with dignity. This court stated that the right to life is not a mere animal existence but a guarantee for leading a well-endowed dignified life, including all the necessities of life that would include proper nutrition. The interpretation consequently imposes on the State a positive obligation to allow access to food for each person and identifies, in turn, the right to food as part of a right to life. The orders, which are interim in nature, have been quite strong and far-reaching, ensuring food security by ordering the implementation of various food schemes and legally entitled benefits to food for the vulnerable population. Judicial activism has reconfirmed that the right to food is part of the right to life under Article 21.

▪ **Article 39(a): Adequate means of livelihood**

The Constitution, under Article 39(a), empowered the State with the bound policy in ensuring that all citizens, men and women equally, get a right to an adequate means of livelihood. This constitutes one of the most important directive principles underlying the importance of economic security to food security. In this respect, the linkage between livelihood and food security becomes critical since only those with an inadequate means of livelihood are also unable to access enough food. The framers of the Constitution were aware that a person cannot exercise this right unless a citizen was guaranteed means to earn a decent livelihood. Article 39(a) has far-reaching implications inasmuch as the State is duty-bound to implement policies and programs aimed at providing opportunities for employment, equitable remuneration, and social security measures. These will be essential steps toward claiming the right to food through the empowerment of individuals and their respective families by way of securing nutritional needs.

▪ **Article 47: Duty of the State to raise the level of nutrition**

Article 47 of the Indian Constitution lays a specific duty on the State to raise the level of nutrition and the standard of living of its people and to improve public health. This

provision puts forth the responsibility of the State in ensuring that citizens have access to sufficient nutrition, which is very important in their overall well-being. The obligation befalling upon the State under Article 47 is not of a perceptual nature but, in fact, it serves as an injunction towards making concrete policies for improvements in food security and nutritional standards. This comprises provisions for food assistance programs, public distribution systems, and nutritional education for the vulnerable groups of people. Practically, Article 47 has shaped a number of government initiatives so far, including National Food Security Act and Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) scheme, among others. These programs aim at fighting hunger and malnutrition, especially among women and children, to achieve the constitutional mandate in improving nutritional levels.

Taken together, Article 21, Article 39(a), and Article 47 provide a fairly robust framework of the right to food in India. These articles, through judicial interpretation and state initiatives, impose a duty on the state for ensuring that adequate food is available for all citizens as part of their fundamental right. Recognizing the right to food as an essential component of the right to life reflects a commitment toward human dignity and social justice, pursued with food security for all.

Supreme Court Judgments Relating to Right to Food

The Supreme Court of India has played the lead role in the establishment of the right to food as a fundamental right of humans through an expansive interpretation of Article 21 of the Constitution. This section reviews the landmark judgments shaping jurisprudence on the right to food in India.

▪ Increasing the Ambit of Article 21: Right to Food

Article 21 of the Constitution of India guarantees the fundamental right to life and personal liberty. The Supreme Court of India, through a series of landmark orders, interpreted this article within its fold, thereby assuring the right to live with human dignity, which includes the right to food. One of the earliest cases that were the bedrock for such interpretation was *Francis Coralie Mullin v. Administrator, Union Territory of Delhi* (1981). Herein, the Court held that the right to life includes the right to live with human dignity and all that goes along with it, such as the bare necessities of life, including adequate nutrition. The Supreme Court further extended this ambit of Article 21 in judgments pronounced in *Shantistar Builders v. Narayan Khimalal Totame, 1990*; and *Chameli Singh v. State of U.P., 1996*. The Court held that the right to life guaranteed under Article 21 encompasses the right to a proper standard of living; likewise, it takes in right to adequate nutrition, clothing, and shelter.

▪ Landmark judgments establishing food as a basic necessity

The Supreme Court has further reinforced the recognition of the right to food as an integral part of the right to life through various landmark judgments. In *Kishen Pattnayak v. State of Orissa (1989)*, the Court held in that right to food is a basic human right and that state should meet the nutritional requirements of a person who cannot earn his livelihood because of unemployment, under-employment, or for any other reason. *Shantistar Builders vs. Narayan Khimalal Totame (1990)* - The Court once again held that the right to food is a basic human right and the State had an obligation to

ensure that no citizen had to live without adequate food.

▪ PUC v. Union of India & Others case and its impact

The most important case directly recognizing the right to food as a fundamental right is *PUC v. Union of India & Others*. It was in this case that the PUC filed a writ petition stating that the failure of the government in providing food grains to poor people, despite having surplus stocks, in itself resulted in the violation of their right to food which comes under the right to life within Article 21. The Supreme Court, in the landmark judgment, held that the right to food is an integral part of the right to life under Article 21. The Court issued directions to the Central and State governments to implement various food-related schemes, namely the Midday Meal Scheme, the Integrated Child Development Services, and Antyodaya Anna Yojana as legal entitlements. The impact caused by the case, *PUC v. Union of India & Others*, has been enormous. It has resulted in the passage of the National Food Security Act in 2013, which covers nearly two-thirds of the population and offers them food grains at subsidized rates. The Court has passed several interim orders to ensure that the schemes related to food are executed properly and deal with various problems like deaths due to starvation, malnutrition, and distribution of food in states during emergencies. To sum it up, the decisions by the Supreme Court have played an important role in laying the foundation for making the right to food a human right in India. By interpreting Article 21 to include the right to food, the Court has placed a constitutional obligation on the state to ensure access to adequate food for every citizen. Such judgments facilitate progressive legislation and the implementation of food security programs to make the right to food a reality for all.

National Food Security Act, 2013

▪ Objectives and key provisions of the Act

National Food Security Act, 2013, has come into force with the objective of providing subsidized food grains to about two-thirds of the population of India, adopting for the first time a right-based approach to food security against the earlier welfare approach. The important features of the Act are:

- **Legal entitlement:** To subsidized food grains for 75% of the rural population and 50% of the urban population, covering around 800 million people.
- **Beneficiaries:** Are entitled to receive 5 kg of food grains per person per month at highly subsidized prices: rice at ₹3/kg, wheat at ₹2/kg, and coarse grains at ₹1/kg.
- **Nutritional support:** For pregnant women and lactating mothers, who are entitled to a nutritious meal, free of charge, under the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) scheme?
- **Free meals for children:** Aged 6-14 years under the Mid-Day Meal (MDM) scheme.
- **Maternity benefit:** Of not less than ₹6,000 for pregnant women and lactating mothers.
- **Women empowerment:** By identifying the eldest woman of the household as the head of the household for the purpose of issuing ration cards.
- **Grievance redressal mechanisms:** At the district and state levels.
- **Transparency measures:** Such as disclosure of records related to the Public Distribution System (PDS) and social audits.

▪ **Subsidized food grains for targeted beneficiaries**

NFSA provides subsidized food grains to two categories of beneficiaries, namely: PHH and AAY households. Subsidized food grains are provided to both categories at highly subsidized rates of 5 kg per person per month. The state-wise coverage under the Act is in accordance with the 2011-12 Household Consumption Expenditure survey conducted by the NSSO. Under the TPDS, the Central Government allocates the required food grains from the central pool to the State Governments.

▪ **Challenges in implementation**

Despite the enactment of the NFSA, several challenges persist in its effective implementation:

1. **Identification of beneficiaries:** Accurately identifying eligible households and individuals remains a challenge, especially in urban areas.
2. **Leakages and diversion:** Diversion of food grains from the PDS and leakages in the system continue to be a concern.
3. **Inadequate storage facilities:** Many states lack adequate scientific storage facilities at the district and block levels to store the allocated food grains.
4. **Lack of awareness:** Low levels of awareness among beneficiaries about their entitlements under the Act.
5. **Capacity constraints:** Weak institutional capacity of Fair Price Shops (FPS) and state agencies to effectively implement the provisions of the Act.
6. **Funding constraints:** Insufficient funds allocated by the Central Government for transportation, handling of food grains, and FPS dealers' margins.

This requires efforts at concerted Central and State Governments, backed by active civil society organizations and beneficiaries. Strengthening of the PDS, improvement in storage infrastructure, increased awareness, and capacity building of implementing agencies could help in effectively realizing the right to food under NFSA.

International Commitments and the Right to Food

The right to food has been interpreted in various international instruments as a basic human right, reflecting a universal concern to consolidate food security. The most relevant international pledges or commitments that underpin the right to food discussed here include the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

▪ **Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)**

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948, is a landmark document laying the grounds for the recognition of the right to food as a human right. Article 25(1) of the UDHR stipulates that "Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services." The Universalist wording within the Declaration of UDHR, without referencing any culture or political regime or religion, managed to make the right to food one of universal entitlement. More evidence that the Declaration was an important document is the fact that international treaties and national constitutions were based upon it after its issuance, and that it has been translated 530 times, which is more than

any other document in the world.

▪ **International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1976)**

The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, though adopted in 1966, did not come into force until 1976; it, too, is a legally binding treaty under which the right to food has been expressly recognized. Article 11 of the ICESCR reads: "The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate food, clothing and housing, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions." The ICESCR recognizes the "fundamental right of everyone to be free from hunger" and requires states to take measures to improve methods of production, conservation, and distribution of food, as well as the improvement of an equitable distribution of world food supplies in relation to need. The ICESCR, having been ratified by 171 countries of which India is a signatory as of 2023, is therefore a legally binding instrument committing states to respect, protect, and fulfill the right to food within their respective jurisdictions.

▪ **Other relevant treaties and conventions**

In addition to the UDHR and ICESCR, this right is further supported by other international conventions and treaties:

1. **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW):** Adopted in 1979, CEDAW requires states to guarantee that rural women have a right to an adequate living condition, including housing, sanitation, electricity, and water supply as well as transport and communications.
2. **Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC):** The Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted in 1989, recognizes the right of every child to a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development, including adequate nutrition.
3. **The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities,** adopted in 2006, identifies rights of persons with disabilities to an adequate standard of living for themselves and their families, including adequate food, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions.

Taken together, these international instruments and the UDHR and ICESCR establish a general framework for the recognition and protection of the right to food as a human right. They underline the commitment at the global level toward ensuring food security for all and provide a basis for national and international efforts to realize this right. Adopted in 1989, the CRC recognizes the right of every child to a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral, and social development, including adequate nutrition.

Strategies and Approaches to Realize the Right to Food

Realization of the right to food in India is essentially multi-fold, embracing legal, social, economic, and environmental dimensions of food security. Herein, key strategies and approaches necessary for the proper realization of the right to food for all citizens are discussed. A well-defined legal framework for the right to food is thus a core requirement. Strengthening existing laws, so that they are justiciable, will empower citizens to claim their rights.

1. **Codification of Rights:** While the NFSA Act, 2013,

provided a legal backing to the right to food, much work remains to be explicitly encoded within the Constitution. This would render this right enforceable, empowering citizens with a possibility for access to legal remedy due to violation of such a right.

2. **Judicial Interpretation:** The judiciary, particularly the Supreme Court of India, has been playing a very important role in interpreting the right to life under Article 21 to include the right to food. Continued judicial activism is required for the expansion of this interpretation and holding the government liable for food security.
3. **Legal Aid and Awareness:** Legal aid and awareness of food rights provided to the marginalized people will have the potential for developing a sense of self-efficacy among the beneficiaries to assert for their rights and justice. Legal literacy programs can help citizens be aware of their entitlements under the various schemes being run for food security.

▪ **Improving implementation of food security schemes**

The effective implementation of food security schemes is at the heart of realizing the right to food:

1. **Capacity Building:** This can be realized by strengthening the capacities of implementing agencies, from national to state and sub-state levels. This can be addressed by conducting training programs for officials engaged in the execution of the food security scheme, which shall help them understand the right to food and deliver more service effectively.
2. **Monitoring and Evaluation:** The establishment of robust mechanisms of monitoring and evaluation would contribute to the effectiveness of the food security programs. Regular audits, social audits, and community feedback will indicate gaps to be identified and ensure accountability in the implementation process.
3. **Targeted Interventions:** Examples could be tailoring the particular needs of food security programs to be more effective by targeting women, children, and marginalized groups, and hence make appropriate mechanisms for the distribution of food to those with the highest need.

▪ **Promoting sustainable agriculture and reducing post-harvest losses**

Food security and the right to food are only guaranteed with sustainable agricultural practice. Strategies in this area include:

1. **Investment in Sustainable Practices:** Sustainable agriculture, such as organic farming, agroecology, and permaculture, will contribute to raising food production without destruction to the environment. The government should give incentives and support to farmers for such methods.
2. **Reducing Post-Harvest Losses:** Besides this, post-harvest losses could be reduced by improving storage, transportation, and processing facilities to augment the food supply. This involves investment in infrastructure and technology and also the training of farmers on best practices.
3. **Diversification of Crops:** A diversification of crops will improve food security by reducing dependence on a few staple crops. Such an approach can increase nutrition by making diverse types of food available.

▪ **Addressing underlying causes of hunger and malnutrition**

Realizing the right to food requires addressing the root causes of hunger and malnutrition. Realization calls for:

1. **Poverty Alleviation:** Poverty alleviation packages that make provisions for livelihoods, social protection, and access to basic services could contribute toward reducing food insecurity. In this regard, schemes for employment generation and skill development programs become quite crucial.
2. **Nutrition Education:** Promotion of nutrition education and awareness programs would help the communities to understand and adopt better food choices, hence improved dietary practices. Programmes undertaken at the mother or caregiver levels have a high outcome in child nutrition.
3. **Access to Healthcare:** Availability of access to health services guarantees that the health conditions related to malnutrition are covered, such as maternal and child health programs. Keeping nutrition in continuity with healthcare services can be an effective way of giving better health outcomes and lowering the rate of malnutrition.

▪ **Ensuring participation, accountability, and grievance redressal**

The right to food requires mechanisms of active community participation and accountability. Strategies include:

1. **Community Participation:** Communities must be involved in the planning, implementation, and monitoring of the food security programs within their environments. This is a participatory approach that empowers the people with the power to raise their concerns and be part of decision-making processes.
2. **Accountability Mechanisms:** There is a need to have clear accountability mechanisms regarding government officials and agencies dealing with food security so that they may carry out their duties accordingly. It involves setting performance indicators and making the officials accountable for their actions.
3. **Grievance Redressal Systems:** Effective grievance redressal mechanisms can afford people an opportunity to complain about the violation of their right to food. Accessible and responsive systems build trust in the government programs and ensure timely resolution of issues.

Realizing the right to food in India requires a holistic, integrated approach that encompasses legal, social, economic, and environmental dimensions. Promoting better legal frameworks, ensuring proper implementation, sustainable agriculture, and addressing the roots of hunger will bring participation, accountability, and thus great strides toward food security for all its citizens.

▪ **Emphasizing the need for a comprehensive and rights-based approach**

This encompasses food sufficiency, food accessibility, adequacy, and food sustainability. The right to food has been recognized in several international human rights instruments, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. In this respect, the Right to Food in India has been consolidated both by constitutional provisions and landmark

Supreme Court orders expanding the meaning of the right to life to include the right to food. However, high levels of hunger and malnutrition, especially among vulnerable groups, remain. The NFSA, enacted in 2013, represented another milestone in the translation of the right to food into reality; however, its actualization is bedevilled by inefficiencies in the public distribution system, inadequate targeting, and generally persistent poverty. It is possible to realize this right to food effectively through comprehensive and rights-based approaches. This approach realizes that food security has multiple dimensions with a number of other human rights, including the right to health, education, and living a decent life. The focus shifts to fighting root causes of hunger and malnutrition, which poverty, social inequality, and lack of access to resources are among. This, in turn, calls for active participation of communities in decision-making processes, accountability, and transparency in food security programmes, measures for grievance redressal. Rights-based approaches enable people to claim their rights while holding the state liable for its commitments on food entitlements, moving food security away from a charity-based intervention to one of legal entitlement.

Future prospects and recommendations for realizing the right to food in India

Some recommendations to realize the right to food in India can be made as follows:

1. **Strengthening Legal Frameworks:** Incorporating the right to food into the Constitution and improvement in the justiciability aspect of food rights will help citizens seek legal redress against their violation.
2. **Improving Implementation of Food Security Schemes:** Building capacity, monitoring, and evaluation can further streamline the efficiency and effectiveness of the programs of food security so that entitlements reach the needy.
3. **Promoting Sustainable Agriculture:** This could improve the availability of food and nutritional enhancement through investing in sustainable agriculture to reduce post-harvest losses.
4. **Addressing Underlying Causes of Hunger:** Inclusive poverty alleviation programs, nutrition education, and access to healthcare will address the root causes of food insecurity.
5. **Ensuring Participation and Accountability:** Community participation mechanisms, mechanisms for accountability, and redress of grievances empower citizens to bring effectiveness in food security.

Thus, the realization of the right to food in India requires a multi-dimensional approach, which encompasses legal, social, economic, and environmental factors. Further, adopting an integrated and rights-based framework will help the country work toward ensuring food security for all its citizens in order to uphold their dignity and further social justice. The commitment to the right to food is an ethical imperative, but above all, a legal obligation that should be fulfilled to have a fair and just society. In conclusion, realizing the right to food in India requires a multi-dimensional approach that addresses legal, social, economic, and environmental factors. By adopting a comprehensive and rights-based framework, India can work towards ensuring food security for all its citizens, thereby upholding their dignity and promoting social justice. The commitment to the

right to food is not only a moral imperative but also a legal obligation that must be fulfilled to achieve a just and equitable society.

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