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# 80% Indians don't get enough to eat: report

**Findings come at a time when 7%-pl inflation in a poll year has brought food security on political centre stage**

Paromita Shastri



**New Delhi:** At a time when India is seeking a permanent seat at the UN Security Council, a report submitted to a panel of the global body says four out of five Indians don't get enough food to eat due to rampant corruption and untimely allocation.



As the government strives to meet international guidelines in welfare schemes to boost its image abroad, reality bites harder at home in an election year—as highlighted in the report to the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

Hunger pangs: The report says caste and gender discriminatory practices are also major causes for worry, and hurt nutrition programmes such as the mid-day meal programme.

The report has said the country's public distribution system

(PDS) is in a disarray due to untimely allocations, leakages and rampant corruption, thereby depriving some 80% Indians of enough food.

The report has been prepared by the People's Collective for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, coordinated by Programme on Women's Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (PWESCR), a civil society organization working among women, ahead of India's scheduled review before the committee on 7-8 May after two decades.

Titled *Divided Destinies, Unequal Lives: Economic Social and Cultural Rights and the Indian State*, it has stressed the need for drafting employment guarantee programmes for women and called for taking steps to check human rights violations among tribals and other underprivileged groups.

Highlighting the plight of vulnerable groups such as migrants, refugees, urban poor and homeless, it said lack of citizenship prevents them from accessing the PDS.

Caste and gender discriminatory practices are also major causes for worry, and hurt nutrition programmes such as the Integrated Child Development Scheme and the mid-day meal programme, the report pointed out.

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Social and Cultural Rights in 1979, under which a country is expected to come out with a rights review every five years. India brought out only one in the early years.

Priti Darooka, executive director of PWESCR, which coordinated the report put together by about a hundred civil society organizations, many of them working at the grass roots, said: "With India now keen on a permanent seat on the UN Security Council, the government has now found it important to abide by the guidelines of the global body, especially those concerning human rights."

She also said that the government's record in this regard has hardly been noteworthy. Even a comprehensive monitoring body for various welfare schemes under the Planning Commission, recommended by the UN Special Rapporteur on Right to Food in 2005, was announced by the finance minister only recently—in the 2008-09 budget.

The report's concern over the right to food comes at a time when raging inflation of 7% and above in an election year has brought food security on the political centre stage. The administration is struggling to bring down inflation, with little success so far. Even the Rs5,000 crore National Food Security Mission to raise the production of foodgrain launched in 2007, will start having a positive effect only next year and the current supply shortages will continue, Planning Commission member Abhijit Sen had said in a recent interview.

Meanwhile, Syeda Hameed, member, Planning Commission, who was presented with a copy of the report, said, "This is a useful and detailed document prepared by a huge number of NGOs, many of whom work closely with the commission and highlights the areas where there is still a lot of gap between policy and administration."

The report expresses serious concern over severe violations and non-compliance of the Indian state in fulfilling its obligations under the UN covenant. "Many gaps exist between the promise and assurances made by the state and their actual delivery," it said.

Despite legal and constitutional safeguards, including the recent Forest Rights Act of 2006, indigenous communities are being attacked and intimidated, the report said. The government has introduced legislations such as the Special Economic Zone Act of 2006 to allow commercial activity and also cleared commercial mining operations even in areas protected under Schedule V of the Constitution. In 2007-08, these people received only 4.88% of the total Plan funds, as against an ideal proportional allocation of 8%.

Despite high economic growth, the state has failed to put in place even the most basic entitlements for tribals, women and Dalits, the report says.

N. Paul Divakar, national convenor of the National Campaign of Dalit Human Rights, a Dalit advocacy organization, said: "For 27 years, that is since the inception of scheduled caste sub plan, earlier called special component plan, in 1979-80, the Centre and the state governments have made a mockery of the guidelines. About 45% of Dalits are still poor, compared to 21% among the non-Dalits."

Divakar also said that the ministry of social justice and empowerment has cut down allocations for pre- and post-secondary scholarship to Rs731 crore in 2008-09 compared with Rs811 crore in the last fiscal year.

The report, quoting a recent Planning Commission study, said: "Women remain largely untouched by gender-just and gender-sensitive budgets." Some 57% of girls are married off before they are 18. Women still earn only 38% of the average male wage despite the Equal Remuneration Act having been passed in 1976. "

"Women's names must be put on *kisan* credit cards and

other legal documents and their entry into public work spheres and marketplace infrastructure needs should be encouraged," it suggested.

Since most women work in the unorganized sector, which is now providing more jobs than the formal sector, the report called for immediate legislation of the Unorganized Sector Workers Social Security Bill, 2007.

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