

# **GENDER DIMENSION OF FOOD SECURITY IN INDIA: ISSUES, CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS**

**By**

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Poverty and hunger go hand in hand. Infact, hunger is the most immediate and the most damaging outcome of poverty. Since, a significant proportion of population has always been trapped in viscous circle of poverty over the years, the government realised the importance of food security of the masses at the global level way back in 1996 in the World Food Summit (WFS) held in Rome and established stringent goals to reduce global hunger by half till 2015. Then in 2000, during the UN Millennium Summit, 189 member countries signed the Millennium Declaration consisting of eight Millennium Development Goals. The first and the foremost Millennium Development Goal was to eradicate extreme hunger and poverty throughout the world. The condition of Food Insecurity was alarming in most of the developing countries of the world at that time, but some countries like Ghana and Bangladesh have depicted impressive commitment and progress towards long-term rural development and poverty-alleviation programmes and they have successfully achieved the target of halving the prevalence of malnourishment and hunger since 1990s. The status of India in terms of food security has certainly improved over the years but far from satisfactory. Therefore, to take one step further in this direction, the Constitution of India provided the claim of individuals to food security a status of a human right and in September 2013, Right to Food came into existence.

The problem of food insecurity at household level may appear to diminish over the years, but despite all the landmark decisions in this regard at national and international level, the aspect of intra-household gender disparity against women and girl child in terms of food security has always been ignored. This paper attempts to explore the challenges against food security of women and ways to raise their level of food consumption and nutrition through different modes of women empowerment and offers certain suggestions and policy implications in this regard. The main objectives of the study are: (1) To examine the extent of discrimination in male and female members of the rural households in terms of food security and nutrition, (2) To identify various causes and consequences of this discrimination on health outcomes of females, (3) To assess various forms of women empowerment so as to remove inequality in

food availability and suggest policy implications in this regard. The study is primarily based on primary survey of female members of households of four villages in Haryana through structured interview schedules supplemented by secondary data from various sources as and when required.

The data reveals that in various societies in rural India, women and girl children are often found to be relatively more malnourished within a household. The orthodox social norms, constrained roles to domestic work, limited access to resources, inadequate opportunities of employment are some of the factors behind food insecurity of females in India. This issue remains disguised in most of the studies as our evaluation system provides household level information regarding food availability and hunger and not at the individual level, which provides incomplete picture of food security. Therefore, engendering the issue of food security is necessary to achieve the Millenium Development Goals related to eradication of extreme hunger and poverty of the entire population. Adding a gender dimension to food security, this paper reveals the nexus between gender discrimination and food security in India, the challenges against food security of women, the modes of women empowerment which may ensure better access of women to food and nutrition, steps taken by the government to provide food and nutrition to female population and finally the conclusion of the whole analysis.