



SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT TARGET TO ELIMINATE HUNGER AND EFFECT OF COVID-19 IN INDIAN CONTEXT

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ABSTRACT

Hunger denudes human life. It can change a human to an animal. Since the initial days of human civilisation till the advanced civilisation the human is struggling to collect adequate food, but till today this has not been materialised. Hunger is the greatest enigma in humanity. It is experienced that many men and women across the globe are struggling to feed their children properly. It is also estimated that one in nine persons in present day are still going to bed on an empty stomach each night. Considering the growing trend of hunger, the United Nations had launched a Zero Hunger Challenge in 2012. Reports depict, even though the rate of hunger is falling, but it is far from satisfactory. The third consecutive rise in world hunger was witnessed in 2017, the number of undernourished people, facing chronic food deprivation had increased to 821 million. To face the challenge, which is very fundamental to human life and humanity as a whole, a set of Sustainable Development Goals were set by the member states in UN, which replace the previous target of Millennium Development Goal. The set of a 17 points agenda under Sustainable Development Goals is targeted to be achieved by the year 2030.

The government of India, being a member state of UN is strongly committed to the SDG agenda 2030. With a view to eradicate poverty and free its people from hunger, the Government of India adopted various welfare measures and launched several schemes. Apart from the Central Government policies many state governments had also made provision to provide subsidised food and other basic amenities for life to people.

While India was aspiring for becoming super economic power, the covid pandemic from 2019 had put a break in the economic progress of the country. The methods and strategies adopted by the government to restrict spreading of the pandemic had badly affected the life and living of daily wage earners, the unorganised workers. Due to loss of their employment and lack of means for sustenance these persons were pushed to hunger. To bring the agenda zero hunger back into track is presently a big challenge before the economist, the government and a matter for academic debate.

The present paper is to explore the right to food of the citizen in India, duties of the welfare state to supply food to the hunger inconsonance with the international commitment of SDG and find out the method to overcome the problem of hunger in post covid situation.

Key Words:- Hunger, zero hunger, subsidised food, covid pandemic, Right to food, Food security, sustainable Development Goal

1. Introduction:

“The war against hunger is truly mankind’s war of liberation”-J.F.Kennedy

Since the beginning of life in the earth, the relation of life and food has been remained interdependent. Every living being including human are in search of food. Perhaps, the competition for collection of food and capability of collection of food had been the major source of formation of the society. Considering this power, the society is classified into weak strong, rich poor or underdeveloped and developed categories. The nomenclature whatever may be given to the society but, the truth is every human being is struggling to come out of hunger and it is a continuous

process. Despite of the fact the entire human community is competing to collect more and more food but it is found that man has not succeeded in defending hunger yet.

The word 'hunger' in its strict sense is not properly defined. It has been defined by different authors taking into different consideration of its causes and effects. Some had believed that it is caused due to disproportionate in human reproduction and production of food; other had attributed it to the class exploitation and some other of the opinion to consider to each factor responsible for individual's capability of acquiring enough food. But Hunger is the basic need of any human being, in presence of hunger a human being loses all its virtue and turns into an animal. It is the highest enigma on humanity. Therefore, human must overcome from hunger as its basic right.

Among The basic Human Rights principles, the conditions that assure dignity of the individuals and rights to be free from hunger is vital to the dignified life. it is an established principle under both International and National laws to ensure people of their right to food by making them able to feed themselves either by producing it or by procuring it. Therefore, right to food is such an essential right of individual's sustenance and denial or incapability to fulfil of such right leads to infringement of one's right to live with dignity.

It has been realised that, the right to food can only be assured by enforcement of these rights, for this in the World Health Summit 2002 it was resolved, by all the 179 participating States, to bring about a change in the approach from an anti-hunger movement aiming towards food security to the one aiming to ensure right to adequate food. The right to food as a component of human right imposes certain basic responsibilities upon the States of which the principal being the responsibility to act expeditiously to completely eradicate hunger at all times, including the times of natural disasters and other calamities. Keeping many such ideals in view, all the Member States of the United Nations agreed upon certain Sustainable Development Goals in 2015 as an ultimate action to eradicate poverty and to save the world by ensuring peace and prosperity to all the people by 2030.

In Indian context, even though India claims to be one of the fastest growing economy of the World, but it is struggling in clearing its position in the Global Hunger Index amongst other developing countries. Many strategies were drawn and efforts had been made to effectuate the promise of zero hunger by the government within the time frame. Among the provisions the important schemes of the government are the provision for ICDS scheme for notorious food for mother and children, mid-day meals for school children, the pension schemes for the elderly persons, provision for highly subsidized food for the persons below the poverty line and several other nutrition-based schemes. The latest development in this regard is the enactment of the National Food Security Act, 2013. The Act, applicable to the whole of the country, ensures a change in the approach of food security from completely being a welfare approach to rights-based ones. As per the provisions of the Act about three forth of the rural populace and half of the urban populace are entitled to obtain subsidized food grains under Targeted Public Distribution System. And by the rights provided, presently these rights can be enforced by judicial activism. Therefore, the judiciary had also directed the government to protect the persons from hunger, As Right to Food is intrinsic to lead a life with dignity, Article 21 of the Constitution of India which guarantees fundamental right to life and personal liberty should be read including Articles 39(a) and 47 which highlights the obligations of the State to ensure the effective recognition of such rights.

Even though having so many Constitutional provisions as well as judicial interpretations favouring right to food, still the country is witnessing large number of people being the victims of starvation death. Recently giving a direction to both the Central and State Governments, the National Human Rights Commission has emphasized that right to free from hunger is a fundamental right. As Right to Food is intrinsic to lead a life with dignity, Article 21 of the Constitution of India which guarantees fundamental right to life and personal liberty should be read including Articles 39(a) and 47 which highlights the obligations of the State to ensure the effective recognition of such rights.

The reality depicts that Food security has been a major concern in India. It is estimated that due to the present pandemic 71 million people would be pushed into extreme poverty. Further it is also estimated that an additional 130 million people would be added to the list, to the existing 820 million people already classified as food insecure category. In the Global Hunger Index 2020 India ranked 94 among 107 countries to the contrast of 102 out of 117 in 2019¹. From the above studies it can be stated that despite of constant efforts made by the government of India to effectuate the sustainable target and trying to improve its condition on eradicating hunger, but, the Indian progress has been stalled by different reasons.

The Covid-19 pandemic engendered a once-in-a-century global crisis in 2020 – a unique recession where 90 per cent of countries are expected to experience a contraction in GDP per capita. Faced with unprecedented uncertainty at the onset of the pandemic, India focused on saving lives and livelihoods by its willingness to take short-term pain for long-term gain.

¹Sanjeeve Gowda.G.S, Right To Food In India: A Constitutional Perspective, Universal Multidisciplinary Research Institute Pvt. Ltd., International Journal of Law and Legal Jurisprudence Studies: Volume 3 Issue 2

Presently the sustainable development target to eliminate hunger is inching towards its final target. But the present condition depicts that in 2020 India is lagging far behind the target. The reasons may be many, but one of the chief reasons is attributed to the covid pandemic. In this context the present study is to make an assessment of the Indian policies to achieve the zero-hunger target as set by sustainable development goal in the post covid situation.

1.1. Objectives of the Study:

- To study the International commitment on hunger.
- To Study the Sustainable Development Goal target to curb Hunger.
- To study the Indian Legal and Administrative Framework towards Right to food.
- To Study the hindrances faced by the government due to Covid Pandemic in context of Right to Food.
- To access the preparedness of the Government to counter the problem of Covid situation and right to food in India.
- To suggest Remedies.

1.2. Scope And Limitation:

The present study is confined to study the legal mechanism available in International and National level and the special mechanisms adopted by government of India to effectuate the International commitments and its preparedness in case of disasters. Therefore the present study is confined to impact assessment to covid pandemic on realisation of right to food in India.

Even though the area is related to the subject of economics but as the researchers are belong to Law, the study is limited to legal instruments and implications made in this context.

1.3. Methodology:

An analytical and doctrinal method has been followed throughout the course of this research and various aspects will be considered before reaching a conclusion of all factors involved. To achieve the afore-mentioned objective, the scope of the researcher will be confined to secondary data obtained from books and articles from the library, journals, news Papers Articles, websites etc on the relevant area.

2. Hunger and international commitment to curb hunger:

Food is the most vital thing for the existence of human. The basis of all human rights is life, further a life means a dignified life and important component of dignified life is to be free from hunger. Right to food is such an essential right to individual's sustenance that denial or incapability to fulfil such right leads to infringement of one's right to live with dignity. Therefore, Freedom from hunger and right to food are complementary and supplementary to each other. Right to food ensures that food as a basic human need must be made available, accessible and adequate for every individual without any prejudice. As a basic human right, require conditions those safeguard the individual from right to gain access to food and to have it either by producing with their own effort or by procuring it from other sources. The human rights approach to the right to food and nutrition is becoming popular and it provides for an element of accountability on the State to be compelled to protect the vital interests of subjects.

2.1 International concern on Hunger:

The right to food and to be free from hunger as basic human rights is recognized by the international law. The United Nation's Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural rights had acknowledged the right to adequate food is indivisibly linked to the inherent dignity of the human person and is indispensable for the other human rights enshrined in the International Bill of Human Rights². Further, it is also inseparable from social justice and demand for adoption of appropriate economic, environmental and social policies at both the national and international levels to eradicate poverty. The right to adequate food can be realized when every person in the society has physical and economic access to adequate food or means for its procurement at all time. The Right to food' as a basic human right is also recognized by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which provides for the right to a standard of living for everyone with adequate health and wellbeing including food and other basic amenities for a person and his family³. The Article puts stress on food as the basic requirement necessary for a decent standard of living for any human being. It has been observed that the right to food does not mean handing out free food to everyone. However, governments are obliged not to prevent access to adequate food by, for example, forced eviction from land, destruction of crops or criminalization of poverty. Governments also have to take adequate steps to ensure that private sector activities do not impinge on people's right to food⁴. The International Covenant on Economic, Social,

²International Bill of Human Rights

³Article 25 of Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

⁴ Ziegler jean, Special Rapporteur of UN on Right to Food.

and Cultural Right (ICESCR) had placed basic obligation of each nation to report its progress in protecting and preserving the right to food. According to ICESCR of United Nations- The most appropriate ways and means of implementing the right to adequate food will inevitably vary significantly from one State party to another. Every State will have a margin of discretion in choosing its own approaches, but the Covenant clearly requires that each State party take whatever steps are necessary to ensure that everyone is free from hunger and as soon it can enjoy the right to adequate food.⁵ ICESCR recognized the right to an adequate standard of living including adequate food and called on states party to ICESCR to ensure the realization of the right. ICESCR provides that 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 States Parties will take appropriate steps to ensure the realisation of this right, recognizing to this effect the essential importance of international co-operation based on free consent. Further, it recognized the fundamental right of everyone to be free from hunger and urged states to establish programs improving the production and distribution of global food supplies⁶. As the member states had not taken adequate steps to implement the right to food the ICESCR had noted the matter and made notice to the States⁷.

3. Challenge to curb hunger and Sustainable Development Goal:

Poverty and hunger are so closely related that one cannot be explained without the reference of the other. Through the international covenants the member states were obliged to take effective steps to realise the right, this substantial progress in fighting hunger was in the backdrop of global economic recessions in the 1990s and again in 2008.

3.1 International approach to curb hunger

The Zero Hunger Challenge was launched by United Nations in 2012⁸. It had worked till 2015 but a steady decline in nutrient of people was experienced. World Food Program had observed that the near achievement of the Millennium Development Goals hunger targets shows us that we can indeed eliminate the scourge of hunger in our lifetime. We must be the Zero Hunger Generation. Keeping this in view, all the Member States of the United Nations agreed upon certain Sustainable Development Goals in 2015 as an ultimate action to eradicate poverty and to save the world by ensuring peace and prosperity to all the people by 2030. The very Preamble of the Sustainable Development Goal, 2030 acknowledges extreme poverty society in entirety. the Sustainable Development Goal have 17 goals and the second one speaks for ending Hunger by achieving food security and improved nutrition and encouraging sustainable agriculture. The Member States of the United Nations took a vow to put an end to poverty and hunger in all their forms and magnitudes and to guarantee all the people to live with dignity in a healthy surrounding. It has inspired action at country level and contributed to ensuring that food and nutrition security and sustainable agriculture have remained high on the global development agenda. It has encouraged all to work together towards ending hunger.

3.2 Indian preparedness on hunger and approach towards sustainable development goal:

The right to food has been part of the international human rights regime since its inception. Access to food was first declared a right under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,⁹ Further the right was included in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights¹⁰ to cover the right to adequate food and the right to be free from hunger. The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights has further defined the right to food.¹¹ India has also ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, where in it is committed to right to food. Further, India is also a party to Rome Declaration of the World Food Summit¹². The Zero Hunger Challenge was launched by United Nations in 2012. all the Member States of the United Nations agreed upon certain Sustainable Development Goals in 2015 as an ultimate action to eradicate poverty and to save the world by ensuring peace and prosperity to all the people by 2030. India being a member of UN and signatory to different covenants the international covenants and declarations, it is obliged to fulfil its international commitments through the national laws.

India is a developing country with vast population, in the current situation for fighting with hunger it is standing in the lower lag of the world hunger index¹³ among other developing countries. Even though due to many reasons like repeated natural calamities, vast population and developing economics, this country had not become capable to make

⁵General Comment 12 on ICESCR

⁶Article 11(1) of ICESCR

⁷In 1999 the UN sub-commission had noticed the States defaulted.

⁸launched by United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon

⁹Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948,

¹⁰Article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

¹¹General Comment 12 ICESCR

¹²Rome Declaration of the World Food Summit in 1996

¹³India ranks 71 out of 113 major countries in terms of food security.

zero hunger so far But, still India has very clear in its stand to deal with the issues relating to ensuring right to food and to eradicate hunger of its citizens.

3.3 Indian laws to ensure right to food:

The constitution of India had made it obligatory on the part of the government to protect its citizen from hunger and other financial distress and the Indian judiciary by interpreting the provisions ensure these rights of the citizen. Indian constitution under the fundamental rights had provided the Right to life to all its citizen,¹⁴ The right to life has been interpreted by the apex court as not merely animal existence¹⁵, right to life include to live with human dignity¹⁶ it would include all these aspects which would make life meaningful, complete and living. The first case to ensure 'Right to food' in India is the case of Kishen Pattnayak and ors. v. State of Orissa¹⁷, where the petitioner brought it to the notice of the Supreme Court regarding the starvation deaths caused in different districts of the state of Orissa. Taking serious note on the issue, it was observed that No one in this country can be allowed to suffer deprivation and exploitation particularly when social justice is the watch word of our Constitution¹⁸. In Shanti Star Builders v. Narayan Khimalal Totame, the Supreme Court while protecting interests of the weaker sections of the society from being deprived of their basic needs held: "The right to life is guaranteed in any civilized society. That would take within its sweep the right to food, the right to clothing, the right to decent environment and a reasonable accommodation to live in."¹⁹ Time and again the word 'Life' under Article 21 of the Indian Constitution was stretched by the judiciary to its maximum limit to include 'to live with dignity. And presently it is well established that, freedom from hunger is a precondition for leading a dignified life having right to food and other basic necessities.

Further India as a welfare state is committed to all-round development of its citizen. The Directive Principles of State Policy make it obligatory on the part of the States to take necessary steps for creation of an egalitarian order. Freedom from hunger being embedded in 'Right to food' is quite distinctly visible in many other express provisions of the Indian Constitution had put a positive duty on the state to maintain social order²⁰ for promoting welfare of the people, 'right to livelihood'²¹, right to work, right to education and public assistance in cases of unemployment, old age, sickness etc.²², right to living wages for workers²³ and raising the level of nutrition and the standard of living and for improving public health.²⁴ As the Directive Principles under the Indian Constitution are not enforceable through courts these provisions cannot be enforced against the state. However, with a view to overcome such technical impediment, the judiciary has now made the directive principles complementary and supplementary to the fundamental rights. Therefore, it had included right to food within the purview of right to life under Article 21 through judicial interpretations as it is fundamental to right to life and made it enforceable by law. Further, judiciary in a plethora of judgements had inclined to enforce the economic wellbeing of the citizens under DPSP through respective fundamental rights.²⁵

While dealing with a PIL relating to realisation of right to food in India the Apex court had scrutinized the policies and Programmes in terms of obligation to respect, protect the right²⁶ and observed that India is signatory to many international treaties involving right to food. Indian Constitution also indirectly refers to right to food. Therefore, there is an obligation for the Indian Government to fulfil the right to food of the people. In spite of many programmes, there are concerns regarding food and malnutrition. Some of the worst violations of the right to food can be seen in India today. We examined the problems of various welfare programmes²⁷. It had further observed that, in order to realise the right, the following programmes such as Public Distribution system and Annapurna schemes; Extending Antyodaya Anna Yojana to all the destitute in the country.; Nutrition programmes for education (mid-day meal schemes) and Integrated child development schemes (ICDS); Extending Maharashtra's Employment Guarantee Scheme (EGS) throughout India. Part of the wages can be paid as food; Gender aspects of food security should be given importance in realizing right to food. Women's economic and social empowerment not only improves intra-household food distribution and health related matters but also improves the working of food and nutrition

¹⁴Article 21 of Indian Constitution provides right to life.

¹⁵In *Francis Coriel Mulian v Union territory of Delhi*

¹⁶ In *Maneka Gandhi v. Union of India*,

¹⁷AIR1989 SC677

¹⁸opcit

¹⁹AIR1990 SC630

²⁰Article 38 of Indian Constitution

²¹Article 39 of Indian Constitution

²²Article 41 of Indian Constitution

²³Article 43 of Indian Constitution

²⁴Article 47 of Indian Constitution

²⁵*Chameli singh v state of up, Pashim bang khet mazdoor sabha case*, and many other case

²⁶ *People's Union for Civil Liberties case in 2001*

²⁷ibid

programmes, have to be strengthened and implemented effectively²⁸. It had stated that they had also examined the market reforms needed for achieving higher and sustainable growth in agriculture and right to food for the poor. All the things have to be based on rights-based framework of equality, non-discrimination, transparency, accountability and participation (ENTAP). Better monitoring systems have to be developed at Central, state, district and village levels to realize right to food. Justiciability is one aspect of right to food²⁹.

Judicial activism has not only given shapes to different food related schemes as legally binding entitlements for the marginalized sections of the society, but has also identified the government officials to be held responsible for noncompliance of the schemes. The Government of India and the State Governments had also formulated provisions to ensure the basic rights to their citizen³⁰. Among these provisions, the important schemes are the provision for mid-day meals for school children, the pension schemes for the elderly persons, provision for highly subsidized food for the families below poverty line and several other nutrition-based schemes³¹. The latest development in this regard is the enactment of the National Food Security Act, 2013. This Act is applicable to the whole of the country, ensures a change in the approach of food security from completely being a welfare approach to rights-based ones. As per the provisions of the Act about 67% of the rural population and half of the urban population are entitled to obtain subsidized food grains under Targeted Public Distribution System. Even though this most ambitious plan has been criticised that it has been made to serve the political interest and made without making the ground work and its success was doubted³². But the 2014 Global Hunger Index report of the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) shows considerable improvement in India's hunger index. India was in 55th rank out of 76 countries. Since 2017 gradually it is declining in the position in hunger index and presently it is ranked 94 among 107 countries to the contrast of 102 out of 117 in 2019 In the Global Hunger Index 2020³³.

India being a member of UN had shown its commitment to work on the sustainable development goals. Despite of some positive policies and schemes adopted by the government to reduce the number of hunger population, the result is not up to satisfaction. The present status of India in Global Hunger Index depicts a very slow progress in the country in lowering the hunger condition. The reason for this is attributed to repeated natural calamities and especially to the Pandemic COVID 19 for weakening the economic condition of every individual and the country as a whole.

4. The Effect of Covid 19 on the problem of Hunger in India:

The Covid-19 pandemic is a global crisis started since 2019, almost countries in the world had suffered contraction in their GDP and Per Capita Income. India as a developing country is worst affected by this pandemic. In the first phase of covid pandemic the government of India had focused to check the spread of the pandemic by imposing intense lockdown. Priority was given to save life, but it has been alleged that due to lack in preparedness the livelihood of many persons, mainly of indigenous, unorganised labours and daily wagers had suffered a much. Due to lack of employment and subsistence and without any support from the government for supply of subsistence, the migrant labours had tried to return back to their own home. Due to the intense lockdown and without any means of transport, these people had tried to walk for hundreds of miles in hunger and thirst, consequently many casualties occurred in the way in hunger and by accident. Considering the gravity of the issue various High Courts had directed the State Governments to provide adequate food and transport facilities to save the distressed people from hunger and facilitate their return to their home. During the second wave of the pandemic India focused on saving lives and livelihoods by its willingness to take short-term pain for long-term gain. India recognised that while GDP growth will recover from the temporary shock caused by the pandemic, human lives that are lost cannot be brought back.

5. The Action of Government of India to counter hunger in post covid situation:

It has been realised that, even before COVID-19 reduced incomes and disrupted supply chains, chronic and acute hunger were on the rise due to various factors including conflict, socio-economic conditions, natural hazards, climate change and pests. COVID-19 impacts have led to severe and widespread increases in global food insecurity, affecting vulnerable households in almost every country including India, with impacts expected to continue through 2021 and into 2022. The government of India had declared many schemes to bring the economy to the track again. In this context various schemes such Kisan Credit Cards (KCC) as part of Prime Minister's Aatmanirbhar Bharat Package; The Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana; Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana and Social Infrastructure,

²⁸ibid

²⁹ibid

³⁰People's Union for Civil Liberties case, Writ Petition (Civil) No.196 of 2001 on 28th November 2001

³¹Opcit, People's Union for Civil Liberties case in its order in 2002

³²Sanjeev Gowda.G.S, Right To Food In India: A Constitutional Perspective, Universal Multidisciplinary Research Institute Pvt Ltd International Journal of Law and Legal Jurisprudence Studies: Volume 3 Issue 2

³³Opcit.

Employment and Human Development sector Government's incentive to boost employment through Aatmanirbhar Bharat Rozgar Yojana and rationalization and simplification of existing labour codes into 4 codes; increased Wages under Mahatma Gandhi NREGA cash transfers of up to Rs. 1000 to existing old aged, widowed, and disabled beneficiaries under the National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP) and to women beneficiaries under PM Jan Dhan Yojana; Free COVID-19 vaccination drive for different category of persons is very much relevant to strengthen the economy of the different class of people³⁴. Especially the schemes like supply of subsidised food grains to 80.96 crore beneficiaries free of cost until November 2020 and 5 kg per person per month for four months (May to August) to approximately 8 crores migrants³⁵ (excluded under NFSA or state ration card) were the relevant steps to eradicate hunger crisis during the pandemic.

Control of the spread of Corona virus has been considered a big challenge for India, as India is a country where around 194 million people go hungry every single day³⁶. Most of the population lacks the accessibility and affordability for sufficient and nutritious food to maintain their immunity. It is estimated that more than 50% of children and women between the age group of 15-49 years are among the economically disadvantaged people in India are anaemic³⁷. The persons under food insecurity are socio-economically poor and more prone to have poor health. The majority of workforce in India belongs to informal sector, such as domestic servants, construction workers, vegetable vendors, agricultural workers, forest workers, daily wagers etc. Many of these labourers are internal migrant labourers and they are very vital to the informal sector and micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) in India. Under nutrition and food insecurity is a major problem among this migrant population, especially women and children.

COVID-19 produced an acute and widespread crisis of hunger across India. It was felt that those working as migrant labourers are not getting the benefit of the Public Distribution System devised in India. Due to the rigid Public Distribution System different states do not coordinate in themselves to encounter the challenge and consequently, it creates severe crisis. Considering the gravity courts have directed the state governments to supply the food materials to the migrant labourers without having ration cards also. And the latest is the central government has declared the One Nation and one Ration scheme. It is expected that by this scheme the person of different states migrating other states for employment can obtain the subsidised food materials in their work place. And this will help to a large extent to counter the Hunger crisis.

6. Conclusion:

Right to food is a basic human right, therefore the states cannot evade their onerous duty to ensure right to food to its citizen. Considering the acuteness of the problem the international communities had taken various initiatives to eliminate the hunger crisis. The Zero Hunger Challenge was launched by United Nations in 2012 but a steady decline in nutrient of people was experienced. World Food Program had observed that the near achievement of the Millennium Development Goals hunger targets shows us that we can indeed eliminate the scourge of hunger in our lifetime. We must be the Zero Hunger Generation. Keeping this in view, all the Member States of the United Nations agreed upon certain Sustainable Development Goals in 2015 as an ultimate action to eradicate poverty and to save the world by ensuring peace and prosperity to all the people by 2030. It has inspired action at country level and contributed to ensuring that food and nutrition security and sustainable agriculture have remained high on the global development agenda. It has encouraged all to work together towards ending hunger³⁸. India being a party to the covenants and UN had committed to adopt the sustainable development goal.

India as a welfare State is committed for all-round development of its citizen. In the constitution of India there are many provisions which are linked with right to food and by many judicial interpretations the apex court had ruled the right to food is essential to effectuate right to life and directed the state for the protection of the same. The Directive principles also put obligation on the State to protect the persons from hunger and in case of economic necessities. Further the government of India had made many programmes, policies and formulated law to provide sustenance to its people. While the condition of eradication of hunger was improving till 2017, a decline in the condition is experienced thereafter.

It has been reported that there are nearly 195 million undernourished people in India and around 43% of children in India are under nourished. In the food security index India rank 71 out of 113 major countries. The reason for this has been attributed to the effect of repeated natural calamities affecting the agriculture sector and other economic sector and the effect of lockdown and shut down aroused out of the COVID 19 pandemic.

³⁴Arkaja Singh "Hunger, COVID-19 and The Indian Administrative State", Centre for Policy research

³⁵ibid

³⁶TWC India team, 2019, agricultural wastage is the leading cause of hunger in India; <https://weather.com/en-IN/india/news/news/2019-09-06-agricultural-wastage-leading-cause-hunger-india>, retrieved on 1.08.2021

³⁷International Institute for Population Sciences (IIPS) and ICF 2017. National Family Health Survey (NFHS-4), 2015-16, India. Mumbai: IIPS http://rchiips.org/NFHS/factsheet_NFHS-4.shtml retrieved on 1.08.2021

³⁸opcit

India is a country in which majority of its workforce belongs to informal sector. During Covid 19 the government had adopted the strategy of lockdown and shutdown had affected these people heavily. The labouring class such as daily wagers, construction workers, street vendors and domestic helpers etc are affected by the pandemic and lockdowns due to loss of jobs and the lack of access to the benefits that come with formal employment. Agriculture and village economy a vital component of Indian economy was also suffered, due to frequent lockdown causing loss of marketing facility to sale the agricultural products the income of the rural house hold was drastically fallen. The migrant labours, those who are mainly from rural areas, shifted to urban areas for working in various unorganised sectors were forced to return to their natives due to loss of their job and social security cover, this has also put a burden on the economy of the country. Culmination of all these effects created by Covid 19, India has experienced a negative GDP and a serious setback to the Indian economy.

In this critical situation India has to counter two issues one is the Corona Pandemic and other is the Food security of its people under sustainable development Goals. Soon after the second wave of the Corona Pandemic, the government of India had tried to back the economy in track. By the direction of various courts and the policies drawn by different state and central government to help out the corona victim families and especially the workforce those were returned to their home an initiative to revive from the shock of Corona pandemic is started.

Regarding the second issue of food security under sustainable development, the present statistics depicts feeding around 189.2 million people³⁹ will be a difficult task for the government of India. The economic slowdown due to corona virus and insecurity of income majority of people had reduced spending on food and nutrition had aggravated the problem. However, it has been stated India is one of the largest producers of food materials. Further, the government of India has also focused on the public distribution System and attempted to provide financial assistance and supply of food materials in subsidised price to some category of people etc are the steps, that keeping live the aspiration of obtaining the zero hunger sustainable development Goal.

7. Suggestions:

The steps taken by the government is not adequate to achieve the target in the time frame. There is urgent need to focus in some other areas to improve the overall condition to eradicate hunger from the country. Therefore, some suggestions in this context are proposed.

- The government of India to provide income security has devised many programmes such as Prime Minister's Aatmanirbhar Bharat Package; The Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana; Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana; increased Wages under Mahatma Gandhi NREGA cash transfers of up to Rs. 1000 to existing old aged, widowed, and disabled beneficiaries under the National Social Assistance Programme and Free COVID-19 vaccination drive for different category of persons is very much relevant to strengthen the economy of the different class of people. These policies are criticised in two fronts such as- huge expenditure from the state exchequer is to be made to run these programs and due to faulty method of selection of beneficiaries, all the deserved persons are not getting the benefit of the scheme. It is feared that such expenditures cannot be continued for long period.

Therefore, it is suggested that the government should declare the economic policy to provide income to the persons to strengthen the economy and proper identification of the deserved beneficiaries should be made to provide the social security benefits.

- India has adopted a rigid Public Distribution system, through which subsidised food grains are supplied to the deserved families. But it has been alleged that even though the state governments have tried to reach all the beneficiaries but it is not considered seriously by the Central Government and there is a gap in the Centre and state for effectuation of PDS.

It has been accepted that adequate food grain and other produces, if it can be effectively managed the food crisis can be countered in India. This can be done by adoption of a universalised public Distribution system. However, recently the government of India had announced one nation one ration programme the efficacy of the programme is to be tested.

- Concern has been raised over the large amount of subsidies provided during covid period. It has also been feared that cut in subsidies in expenditures during covid period as it may create inequalities between rich and poor persons in the society.

Therefore, most economists argue for greater capital expenditure by the government to tide over the current precarious economic condition. Higher public investment in infrastructure has been a time-tested economic cure for such crisis⁴⁰.

- Finally, to counter both the problem of the economic crisis caused by covid and counter the hunger problem, strengthening the economy of the country is highly essential. Presently, due to insecurity of income the purchasing

³⁹ Report of The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World, 2020

⁴⁰ Praveen Chakravarty; A Healthy White Paper Beginning, The Hindu 12. 08. 2021, Cuttack edition.

power of people in general has been reduced. The government has made schemes for the poor persons for their subsistence. This alone can hardly bring the growing economy in to its previous condition.

Therefore, it is considered that if the purchasing power of the persons can be elevated, it can act as a catalyst to bring the economy into track. So, it is felt that some liquid monetary incentive to persons can enhance the purchase power of the person, which will help to reconstruct the economy of the country and by the cycle of economic chain will be faster. Ultimately this will help the persons to make increase in their income. Thus, they will be able to access and acquire sufficient food. Consequently the zero hunger targets can be achieved by the country.

The above are some observations made by the researcher, however the government as legally and constitutionally bound by its onerous duty to achieve the zero hunger target set by the Sustainable Development Goal. Therefore, it must act in a positive way, consulting various experts in different area to achieve the most humanitarian goal.

