

RIGHT TO FOOD CAMPAIGN

DEMANDS FOR BUDGET 2016

The Budget for 2016 is being prepared in the context of many parts of the country being affected by drought resulting in greater distress, hunger and starvation for a large number of people. It has been over two years since the National Food Security Act (NFSA) has been passed and only recently it has begun to be implemented with seriousness in many states of the country. However, there is still a far way to go for full implementation of the act. While ensuring the NFSA entitlements will definitely provide some relief to the people, a number of other measures are also needed. We hope that the budget will take these into consideration. Following are some suggestions in relation to protecting food security:

NFSA - PDS

1. Provide the entire budget required for implementation of the PDS entitlements under the NFSA.
2. Although millets are included in the NFSA entitlements as an option, they are not being provided in most places. The budget must make adequate provisions for procurement of millets and its distribution at Re.1/kg (as stipulated in the Act) through the PDS.
3. With the increasing prices of pulses, its consumption (which was already low) among people has further decreased. Pulses are an important source of protein in our country. Hence, pulses must be included in the PDS at subsidised prices.
4. The pilot initiatives of introducing cash transfers in PDS, in the three UTs (Puducherry and Chandigarh) are all showing serious problems in implementation. The proposed pilot in and Dadra-Nagar Haveli has not even managed to take off. Based on this experience, the government must take a pause and work towards strengthening the PDS rather than putting undue focus on DBTs
5. The PDS control order 2015 initially proposed to phase out the AAY but following protests has been amended to restore the Antodaya Anna Yojana. However, in a number states (e.g. Odisha, Delhi, Rajasthan) the number of AAY cards has come down drastically and new households are not being provided AAY cards. This budget should announce that the AAY will continue, make adequate allocations for the same based on the projected populations for the year 2016 and announce that AAY is restored.

NFSA – Maternity Entitlements

1. The NFSA provides for a universal maternity entitlement for all pregnant women. However, such an entitlement is currently being provided by the central government in only 53 districts which are the pilot districts under the Indira Gandhi Matritva Sahyog Yojana (IGMSY). In an affidavit filed in the Supreme Court, the Ministry of Women and Child Development (WCD) has stated that it will universalise the scheme in three years, starting with 200 districts in the current year. However, there were no funds provided for the same and hence the scheme remains restricted to 53 districts. The Budget 2016 must make adequate provisions to cover all pregnant women in at least 200 districts, with a plan to ensure unconditional universalisation within three years' time.

Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) Scheme

1. The budget last year saw a 50% cut in the ICDS allocations. Following a number of protests, including from the Ministry of WCD, there has recently been partial restoration in the budget for 2015-16. However, the initial cuts still caused a lot of confusion and disruption on the ground. ICDS is a very important, but under-funded schemes, and needs support from the central government. The budget for ICDS needs to be expanded and not cut. The cost sharing norms must be the same as earlier.
2. Universalising ICDS requires that the number of AWC's substantially increase in urban slums, tribal and hilly areas.
3. There has been no revision in the cost norms for supplementary nutrition in spite of the recent inflation in pulse prices. This has resulted in a dilution of the quality of food provided. The cost norms must be upwardly revised keeping in mind the current market prices.
4. Further, the principle of inflation-indexing of all these unit costs on a regular basis must be established in the budget.
5. Budgetary provisions should be made for ICDS reforms, costs for a second worker, at least 5% AWC's being converted for crèches with extended timings as proposed under Restructured ICDS.
6. Provide budgetary support to women's groups and issue guidelines for 70% local/ decentralised procurement and production in the provisioning of supplementary nutrition in ICDS

Agricultural packages

1. Budgets for supporting labour costs and input costs for subsistence food-producing farmers targeting women farmers.
2. Provision must be made for coverage of small and marginal farmers, lease holders and share croppers for kisan credit cards.
3. Registration of women farmers and agricultural labour, salt pan harvesters for social security and access to agricultural support must be ensured.

Special Drought Package

The government must announce a special package for all drought-affected districts. This must include the following:

1. Announce universal Coverage of PDS with NFSA entitlements in drought affected areas one year, or a minimum of at least six months.
2. Include in drought affected areas at least 2 kilograms of dal and 5 kilograms on edible oil at subsidised prices as part of the monthly PDS entitlements.
3. Care should therefore please be taken to cover all vulnerable households with AAY cards, including all Musahar households, households headed by single women, and households of disabled persons and old people living alone.
4. Ensure that all affected villages begin MG NREGA works, and are geared to undertake 150 days' wage work for every household, with wages paid within one fortnight at the most after the works.
5. MDM Meals in Holidays and Inclusion of Eggs: School meals should be provided in all schools even during holidays, with inclusion of one egg for every child daily in addition to current entitlements of a nutritious hot cooked meal.

6. Emergency Feeding: Emergency feeding on the KBK pattern should be provided in all schools for any destitute and aged persons, and all pregnant and lactating women who seek a meal when the MDM is served.
7. Drinking Water: A drive should be undertaken to ensure that there is at least one functional hand-pump for drinking water in every hamlet. In case there are villages or hamlets without hand-pumps, then arrangements should be made urgently for water camps.
8. Fodder Banks and Cattle Camps: Fodder requirements should be assessed, and fodder banks created in every village, as well as sufficient numbers of cattle-camps for starving and abandoned cattle.
9. Loans taken for current crop which is destroyed should be written off, as also the interest on older loans, and the repayment schedule restructured to enable loan repayment in coming years in ways that do not become intolerable for the farmers reeling under drought.
10. Prevention of Usury: Firm measures should be taken against private money-lenders who use open or tacit force to recover their illegal and usurious loans.