

# Food SECURITY

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## Introduction

Man's primary needs are food clothing and shelter. Man can go to quite a bit of an extent without clothing and shelter, but never without food.

Man being a living entity, should perform and exhibit the characteristics of a living organism. The food that man consumes provides the needed constituents to perform the living functions. These include energy giving constituents, growth support constituents, and constituents that provide for the correct functioning of an array of biochemical reactions on which the physiological activities depend. These constituents includes a variety of the so called vitamins and minerals that needs to be obtained through the food that man consumes. These supports activities that occur in the human system from cells, tissue, organs through to the entire human system level, finally reflects his performance in the society, both physical as well as mental. If any of the nutrients are inadequate, then his functioning

with respect to physical and mental performance will be below expectations. Human performance depends on a society's or a country's state or the level of development. Nutrients therefore need to be available in the diet at a proper level, throughout his lifetime. Any inadequacy of nutrients in the diet will result in illnesses, the extent and severity of which depends on the specific component nutrient and the amount. Nutritionists describe these illnesses due to dietary inadequacies as undernourishment or malnourishment. Therefore adequate amounts of nutritious meals should be made available to every individual in a country. We could specify and state that every individual in the family should receive the correct amount of nutritious food daily, weekly, monthly and annually, and throughout each individual's lifetime. This applies to all families of a village, district, province and the entire country.

The responsibility of achieving this target lies with the government. Every government must be sensitive to



this task, and must have on their agenda provision of adequate nutritious food first, and then the other two major human needs, i.e clothing and shelter. In other words the government must have the priority needs of the people right , and then asses needs, plan programs, draw up policies, acquire ability to execute them, execute them practically, evaluate performance, and bring about corrective measures.

### Food security defined

Food security can then be stated as a state of adequate and unhindered availability of nutritious food to a society.

The real food needs (including specific nutrients) of an individual depends on factors such as age, sex, pregnancy status(in the case of females), and tasks performed by the individual. i.e. whether high energy consuming and exhaustive work, sedentary etc. , and the corresponding energy needs. Therefore working out food requirements for a society is a much involved process. This process has to take into consideration the above population characteristics in the society, as well as the nutritional composition of the food available in that society. The latter includes levels of carbohydrates, proteins, fats, vitamins and minerals contained in the food. The foods also needs to be that of the particular choice in that society. For example, in Sri Lanka, rice, certain yams/tubers and wheat flour are the main carbohydrate sources, while some seeds/pulses fish, and dry fish are the main protein source. The vitamin and mineral sources are based on the variety of fruits and vegetables available in Sri Lanka. Milk and eggs are also good nutritious foods.

One has to determine the nutritional content of these commodities, preferably at the state when the food is consumed, while at that same time review the population needs to arrive at the nutritious food requirement of the society on a daily, weekly, monthly, yearly basis taking also into consideration population growth.

Through the involvement of special units of global organizations such as the United Nations Organization e.g. "INFOODS" under UNU, much work has been

carried out on global food compositional data, while promoting country based time series data and assessing dietary needs for different countries, and working out specific nutritional needs. These organizations e.g.WHO, have looked at dietary deficiency effects, worked out remedial programs, and suggested ways and means of achieving food needs in different countries. In 1996, the World Food Summit, considering various factors related to food availability, defined food security as "All people at all times having physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their daily needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life".

At this Summit representatives from 185 countries (including Sri Lanka), and the European Union(EU) vowed to achieve food security globally and reaffirmed the "right of every one to have access to safe and nutritious food, consistent with the right to adequate food and the fundamental right of every one to freedom from hunger.

This session also set out a suggestion for an ongoing effort to eradicate hunger in all countries with a time bound measurable goal of reducing the number of hungry people by half by the year 2015. It has been found that at present the number of hungry people the world over is declining at the rate of six million a year, which is far below the twenty two million needed to achieve the set target.

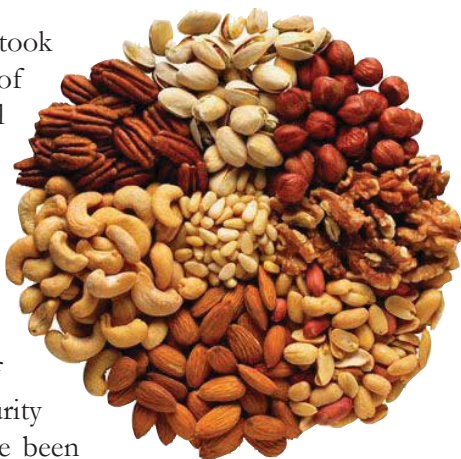
Since persistent hunger was found to continue, further sessions were held in 2001 and also in 2002 in order to monitor the progress.

The 2001 World Food Forum on food sovereignty taking up the issues at that time considered several factors with respect to making food available, and redefined Food Security as the people's right to define their own policies and strategies for the sustainable production, distribution and consumption of food that guarantees the right to food for the entire population, on the basis of small and medium sized production, respecting their own cultures and the diversity of peasant, fishing and indigenous forms of agriculture production, marketing



and management of rural areas, in which women play a fundamental role. This statement targets the poorer countries, i.e. developing countries like Sri Lanka, where the problem really exists.

The 2002 forum took up the dedication of the international community to eradicate poverty, as a primary need to eliminate hunger, and several new programs in favor of achieving food security the world over have been launched.



### **The global situation**

With respect to the global situation, the current world population is said to be just above seven billion. The world's poverty status is said to be around 1.2 billion people. i.e. 22% of the world population. These poverty stricken people live on less than US \$ 1/= per day. Thus hunger effects more than 800 million people.

Seventy percent (70%) of the world population is extremely poor, poverty stricken and food insecure. These people live mostly in the developing or the poor countries, and in the rural areas. These countries are unable to provide the basic needs that rest on several socio economic and political factors.

Over the years the world's food production has seen an increase, which is much over and above the needs for the increasing world population food needs. But there are factors like unequal distribution, availability, and accessibility, international trade and marketing, which lead to food insecurity, malnutrition, instability etc. Specific data on a regional basis are available within the relevant divisions of the UN system.

### **The Sri Lanka Situation**

The current population in Sri Lanka is just above nineteen million. Out of the total number of households in the country around 1/5th do not consume the required minimum calories per day. This inadequate calorie



consumption like in many of the developing countries is related to several factors. These include non-availability of food, inability to acquire, inability to select food based on nutrition (due to lack of food and nutrition knowledge), food distribution factors, wars and political unrest, population movements, natural and man made disasters, food beliefs and myths etc.

Food consumption inadequacies cause food and nutrition related diseases such as stunting, wasting and underweight among children, iron deficiency anemia in females and so on. Several projects related to areas such as meal composition, comparison of recommended and real dietary intake, dietary pattern of school children, food and nutritional knowledge (including stakeholders in the food chains of grain, fruit and vegetable and fishery sectors) in selected areas in Sri Lanka carried out by the Sri Jayewardenepura University Food Technology group shows negative impacts, i.e. the existence of quite prominent and visible low levels than what it really should be.

Sri Lanka being an Island and a small country is blessed with adequate water resources, sunlight and natural environment for good and adequate food production. It commands a very high potential for food crop



production, livestock development and developing and exploiting the country's marine resources for fisheries coupled with the inland fishery potential. Application of available and proven novel technologies in these sectors in order to increase production of foods, ensuring use of correct post-harvest technologies, promoting preservation of these by processing etc., would help in achieving food security. Surveys have also shown that there is around 30 to 40% of food crop losses in post harvest, amounting to more than Rs.10 billion a year, while at the same time causing environment problems. It has been proved that this is due to improper and unscientific post harvest management (practices).

### **Achieving food security**

In any country there are three fundamental norms that need to be addressed in achieving food security.

The first is food availability. This is to be achieved by food production as needed through cultivation of appropriate food crops, livestock and animal farming for meat, milk and eggs as the case may be, and exploiting marine and inland fisheries potential. Different countries do exhibit all these at different capacity potentials. Sri Lanka is fortunate being a small Island country, it has an extremely high potential for these three sectors.

Countries must adopt latest technologies in exploiting these sectors. There are ample opportunities in Sri Lanka to adopt novel scientific technologies for improving production in all these sectors. The need is to pass down knowledge to producers and the rest of the stake holders in the food production system by providing the means to practice with the knowledge.

The second is economic and physical access to food. This need is important at house hold and national level. At the national level if a country is not able to produce all the food needs for food security of the people, it must import food from other countries. For this purpose the country must have adequate financial resources and a solid economy. The country has to earn money through exports, providing services, collecting taxes etc. and also may have to depend on food aid. The latter situation occurs in case of internal conflicts, where the World Food Program(WFP) provides food for the war displaced, and also for unexpected disasters like the Tsunami etc .At the household level production of food at the domestic level should be promoted. Selling some of these or by being in paid employment, accounts for the ability to buy the additional family needs. In the Sri Lankan situation the minimum monthly stipend must be increased by working out on the real needs.

The third factor is correct food utilization. This is critical at the individual level, and important at the household level. This factor brings together nutritional as well as other quality and quantity aspects of the food consumed. Use of clean water improves food utilization by individuals and ensures good health. To achieve this a certain level of food and nutritional knowledge is needed. Studies on this issue in Sri Lanka have shown that such knowledge should be passed on to the people. We have a situation where stake holders from producers to the retailers do know very little or nothing at all with respect to the scientific aspects and the nature of the food commodities that they themselves handle. The result is that there is much food wasted at all levels. Consumers too exhibit problems in selecting, and price comparison, and deciding on what gives the highest nutrients for the lowest price.

Under each of the above three factors, there are several other considerations that can be described for achieving the set targets. A close analysis of the definition of food

security spelt out in 2001 by the international food sovereignty forum, and examining each phrase of this definition with each of the above three factors proposed above for achieving food security, and then planning and executing programs, followed by periodically monitoring and evaluation as well as taking corrective measures, will help a country like Sri Lanka to achieve food security status sooner.

It should be stated that there have been programs launched by the government at various times such as food stamp scheme, provision of a free weaning food like Thripasha, the rural awakening and support programs like Samurdhi(formerly Jansaviya) etc. to ensure supply of food for the needy. The present activities under agro development, promotion of fisheries and the livestock sectors, promoting agro/food processing, promoting small and medium scale industry, home gardening, free school meals, the fresh milk drive etc. are targeted towards poverty reduction and food provision for the masses. Further, the ongoing trade center concept is making market outlets for the producers and providing ease access to the consumer. Sri Lanka is also a partner under the Millennium Development Goals Program, where the activities target human development.

The machinery in my view to achieve food security is in place at present under several of the Mahinda Chintanaya propositions. Some projects are already working to some extent in Sri Lanka. The need is for those responsible in handling them to see to it that the processes are made practical, and then subject for evaluation and correcting. Further, the war is over and perhaps the money being saved and the human resources now available from even the defense system could now be trained and used to win the hunger war.



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