

**Minutes of the Meeting of the Core Group on Right to Food and Nutrition held on 10th
August 2021 at 11:00 a.m.**

A virtual meeting of the Core Group on Right to Food and Nutrition was held on 10th August 2021, from 11a.m. to 01.50 p.m. in Room no. 508, under the chairpersonship of Shri Rajiv Jain, Hon'ble Member, NHRC. The list of participants is annexed.

Inaugural Session

Shri R.K. Khandelwal, Additional Secretary, NHRC, delivered a welcome address and emphasised on the importance of the Commission's Core Group mechanism in fulfilling the mandate of the Commission.

Shri Bimbadhar Pradhan, Secretary General, NHRC, in his opening remarks highlighted several issues related to food security and nutrition. Referring to the SoFI report 2021(The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World), he stated that India accounts for 25% of the global burden of food insecurity, the highest for any country. Access to Food grains under PDS needs more streamlining by simplifying technical processes and AADHAR-related glitches. As we have MGNREGA for rural areas, we need to have a similar wage employment scheme for urban poor and migrants for their employment and livelihoods.

Shri Sudhansu Pandey, Secretary, Department of Food and PD in his address talked about the four fundamental challenges and the ways the government is addressing them. First is the **coverage** under the food security schemes. NFSA, 2013 provides for coverage of the bottom 67% of population. The Union Ministry's Department of Food and PD provides food grains for around 81.35 crore people through PDS, and around 20 crore beneficiaries under ICDS and MDMS. Further, additional 7 crore ration cards provided by the states, roughly covers another 25-crore people. Hence, all the above provisions collectively stand for adequate coverage. The second challenge is regarding the '**quality of coverage**', the third challenge is '**Portability**' and fourth challenge is food security is not enough until we ensure **nutritional security**.

Shri Rajiv Jain, Hon'ble Member, NHRC, in his inaugural address focused upon the mandate of NHRC to promote and protect human rights including the 'Right to Food' covered under article 21, i.e., right to life, enshrined in the Indian Constitution, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and International Covenant of Social, Cultural & Economic Rights.

Agenda-1 Nutrition of pregnant women, lactating mothers and children under 6 years age - Integrated Child Development Scheme

Keynote Speaker **Prof. Sunny Jose, RBI Chair Professor, Council for Sustainable Development**, Hyderabad, in his presentation on 'Revitalising Nutrition Security', highlighted the following issues:

1. **Decreasing trends of Anemia& Stunting during NFHS 3-4**
2. **Trends as per NFHS-5:** Quoting NFHS-5 data, he stated that IDA among pregnant women has increased in 12 states and IDA among lactating women has increased in 11 states.
3. **Shrinkage of coverage of ICDS:** In the post Covid-19 situation it is observed that, as per the study by Gupta et al., ICDS has shown shrinkage in coverage, as per the phone survey conducted in 12 states, 75% states reported less food consumption.
4. **Outreach of schemes:** The reach of PDS goes up to 85-90%. However, only 27.70 % of the population of eligible households has received home ration, hot cooked meals from Anganwadi centre.

Shri Alex P. Thomas, Deputy Secretary, Ministry of Women and Child Development gave information about the Anganwadi services, nutritional requirements and coverage of ongoing schemes.

The issues and suggestions highlighted during the **open discussion** are as follows:

Anganwadi Centres, staff and financing

1. The States/UTs should consider reopening the Anganwadi centres with Covid-19 safety precautions. ICDS must be strengthened and revitalised.
2. Implementation of Poshan Abhiyan as a priority in the aspirational districts.
3. The outreach of the Public Distribution System is wider therefore, PDS may be utilised to leverage the nutrition goals of ICDS for coverage and effectiveness by including Millets, etc.

Ration

4. The greater use of other items such as pulses, edible oils, millets, etc, may be promoted after having a cost benefit analysis.
5. Fortification of food grains should not be made mandatory as evidence related to regional implications, cost benefit analysis and nutritional impact is mixed and it needs to be further studied.

Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojna (PMMVY)

6. The minimum maternity entitlement to be given to **all** pregnant women is ₹6000. Accordingly, PMMVY amount must be raised to at least ₹6000 and the benefit must be extended to all pregnant women and not just for the first live birth.

Others

7. Child care service /crèche facility should be reestablished under the MGNREGA.
8. Junk food products containing high trans-fat often lack labelling.

Agenda-2 Nutrition of Children between 6 to 14 years - Mid-Day Meal Scheme

Keynote Speaker **Dr. R. Hemalatha, Director, ICMR-NIN** in her presentation highlighted following major concerns:

1. The 6 to 14 years of age is a very critical time that has a lifetime impact on health, thus needing due attention, especially when it is about a female child.
2. There is a significant percentage of adolescents suffering from under nutrition.
3. An increase in pre-diabetic and triglycerides symptoms is observed in 10% of adolescents, for both the categories. 4% of children have an increase in cholesterol and high LDL, and 28% of them have a low HDL.
4. A lack in the consumption of milk and curd poses a risk of hypertension in children. There are also high chances of Insulin resistance metabolic syndrome, causing increased risk of CVD & DM2 in children due to the consumption of unhealthy food.

Shri G. Vijay Bhaskar, Director, Department of School Education & Literacy gave a presentation about the Mid Day Meals Scheme and other initiatives of the Government under the concerned agenda.

The suggestions/issues highlighted during the **open discussion** are as follows:

Opening of Schools

1. The steps should be taken to reopen schools with adequate safety precautions and vaccination for teachers.

Nutritional Value

2. There is a need for a revision in the nutritional norms of the food provided under the Mid Day Meal scheme including a breakfast as well as incorporating vegetables, fruits, eggs, pulses, millets and milk products.
3. In terms of systems for MDMs the recommendation should be to use SHGs etc rather than NGOs or religious bodies that exert their own choices and non-nutritionally considered limitations upon the population.

Coverage

4. Mid-Day Meal flagship programme should have coverage till 12th standard. During Covid-19, the meals or ration and cooking cost (in case where schools are shut) should not only be provided for "working days" but all days.

5. MDM cooks' honorarium should be relooked

Inadequacy of Data

6. The number of SAM children identified depends on the number of children actually measured/screened at the ICDS centres. Without that denominator it is hard to know or compare ICDS program data to the NFHS findings as well.

Kitchen Gardens

7. There is a need to have more insight into the implementation of school nutrition gardens.

Agenda-3 One Nation One Ration Card Scheme (ONORC): Implementation, challenges and way forward

Shri S. Jagannathan, Joint Secretary, Department of Food and PD gave a presentation on One Nation One Ration Card Scheme (ONORC).

Dr Dipa Sinha, Core Group Member, made a presentation on issues and the way forward of One Nation One Ration Card Scheme (ONORC). The issues highlighted by her and the following discussion are:

One Nation One Ration Card Scheme (ONORC): Issues

1. The number of transactions has increased but most are still intrastate and few interstate.
2. Not all members of a family migrate, so how this can be dealt with at implementation level when one family member is in another state and others are in another.
3. The technological issues such as biometric failures, network issues, etc are there. It should include manual override protocol.
4. The drive of card cancellation should be done carefully and sensibly.

Coverage Revision

5. There is a need for revising coverage under NFSA by using population estimates projected by MH&FW.
6. Some states are giving additional coverage – but that is on their own and they get the grains at a higher price.
7. Universal PDS should be the immediate response.

Data Paucity

8. There is a huge paucity of data; a proper database needs to be maintained.

Immediate Food Relief

9. The Government may consider giving food relief for at least 2-3 years to all needy people whether they are in the NFSA beneficiaries list or not.

Research

10. A Research Study may be undertaken on experience of ONORC as in Chhattisgarh CORE PDS experience it was seen that many of the portability transactions were intradistrict - in very close by areas, not of migrants but people using better quality shops (better timings, better dealer etc).

The written suggestions provided by **Shri Santosh Mehra, DG (Inv), NHRC** are as follows:

1. FCI is presently holding more than 2 ½ times of the stipulated Buffer stocks of the food grains. it is prudent to distribute food grains to the maximum number of people in the least possible time.
2. The entire focus of MGNREGA is on asset creation. Some percentage of workers can be utilized for delivery of food (including cooked food under ICDS& MDMS) during lockdown.
3. The logistics and transportation models and the “Cloud Kitchen Concept” of UNICORNS like Zomato, Swiggy etc should be studied.
4. Minimum Support Price should be considerably increased for crops like pulses, palm oil, soyabean, millets, etc.

In his **concluding remark, Hon'ble Member, Shri Rajiv Jain** said, it is evident in this discussion that technology alone is not the solution. The discussion was very enriching and some crucial recommendations emerged such as opening Anganwadi centres and schools with appropriate precautions, need of conducting census and other surveys to meet the inadequacy of data, coverage of non NFSA beneficiaries, etc. There are numerous challenges ahead but together we can conquer them all.

The major Recommendations emanated out of the meeting are as follows:

ICDS and Maternity Entitlements

1. Open schools and Anganwadi centres across the country following Covid-19 safety protocols. Have a policy on when these need to be closed depending on local R0 and positivity rates.
(Action by: States/UTs)
2. ICDS functioning including supplementary nutrition, preschool education, growth monitoring, referral, health and nutrition services must be revitalized and strengthened. Towards this, the budget for ICDS that has been reduced must be restored and increased, Anganwadi workers' and helpers' remuneration enhanced and all vacancies in all posts including CDPOs and supervisors need to be filled.
3. Supplementary nutrition under ICDS needs to be enhanced in the present situation with inclusion of food items of high nutritional value such as milk, fruit and eggs.
4. The NFSA mandates at least ₹6000 for **all** pregnant women as maternity entitlement. The PMMVY must be accordingly revised to increase the amount to ₹6000 and include all pregnant women and not just the first live birth.

(Recomm. No. 2 to 4 Action by: Ministry of Women & Child Development)

Mid-Day Meals

5. Nutrition support being given in the forms of food security allowance is too low and not meeting the requirements of children during these times of economic distress. As long as schools are closed, it is better to give support in the form of dry rations or hot cooked meals where possible.
(Action by: States/UTs)
6. The mid-day meals must include food items of high nutritional value such as eggs, milk and fruits. The nutritional and financial norms must be revised accordingly.
(Action by: States/UTs)
7. The food supplied in mid-day meals must be through appointment of local cooks and SHGs.
(Action by: States/UTs)
8. The government must consider introducing a breakfast in school meals and also enhancing the mid-day meal provision to class 10/12.
9. The honorarium to mid-day meal cooks needs to be relooked.

(Recomm. No. 8 & 9 Action by: Dept. of School Education & Literacy, Ministry of Education)

PDS and ONORC

10. PDS must not be only cereal focused but also include pulses and edible oils to improve the dietary diversity of people.
11. For at least the next one year, given the fallout of the pandemic situation, PDS must include all those who are needy but not included in the NFSA beneficiary list.
12. The central government must contribute towards such an expansion in PDS given the state of finances of state governments as well as the excess stocks of foodgrains in FCI godowns.
13. A study needs to be conducted of the implementation of the ONORC scheme so far, particularly to assess how far it is able to help with portability of entitlements for inter-state migrant workers.
14. Given biometric and network difficulties, other alternatives to Aadhaar-based PoS based transactions under ONORC must be explored.

Other

15. The evidence on the efficacy of mandatory fortification is patchy. More studies are needed on the nutritional implications, cost-effectiveness and impact on food systems before mandatory fortification is made a norm.
16. Data on food insecurity and hunger needs to be collected at regular intervals.

(Recomm. No. 10 to 16 Action by: Dept. of Food & PD, Ministry of CA, Food & PD)

The meeting concluded with the vote of thanks by **Dr MDS Tyagi, Joint Director (Research), NHRC.**

List of Participants

Core Group Members

1. Dr Vandana Prasad, Founding Secretary and National Convener, Public Health Resource Network
2. Ms Kavita Srivastava, National Secretary PUCL, Rajasthan
3. Dr Dipa Sinha, Assistant Professor, School of Liberal Studies, Ambedkar University, Delhi
4. Ms. Kavitha Kuruganti, National Convener, Alliance for Sustainable and Holistic Agriculture
5. Shri Sanjeev Chadha, Managing Director, NAFED
6. Mr Vijay Sharma, The Akshaya Patra Foundation

Special Invitees

7. Prof. Sunny Jose, RBI Chair Professor, Council for Sustainable Development, Southern Regional Centre, Hyderabad
8. Prof. S.K. Singh, Professor, International Institute for Population Sciences, Mumbai
9. Ms Purnima Menon, Senior Research Fellow, International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI)
10. Dr Amit Kumar Basantaray, Assistant Professor, Central University of Himachal Pradesh
11. Dr Amrita Dhiman, Assistant Professor, Development Management Institute, Patna

Government Officials from Ministry/Department

12. Shri Sudhanshu Pandey, Secretary, Department of Food and PD
13. Dr R. Hemalatha, Director, ICMR-NIN, Hyderabad
14. Shri S. Jagannathan, Joint Secretary, Department of Food and PD
15. Shri Vijay Bhaskar, Director, Dept. of School Education and Literacy, M/o Education
16. Shri Alex P. Thomas, Deputy Secretary, M/o Women and Child Development
17. Ms Sutapa Mukherjee, Dy. Technical Adviser, M/o Women and Child Development
18. Shri Hemant Kumar Meena, Deputy Secretary, NITI Aayog

NHRC Officials

19. Shri Rajiv Jain, Hon'ble Member (*Chair*)
20. Justice Shri Mahesh Mittal Kumar, Hon'ble Member
21. Shri Bimbadhar Pradhan, Secretary General
22. Shri Santosh Mehra, DG(Inv)
23. Shri R.K. Khandelwal, Additional Secretary (A&R)
24. Shri Surajit Dey, Registrar (Law)
25. Ms Anita Sinha, Joint Secretary (P&T)
26. Dr MDS Tyagi, Joint Director (Research)
27. Shri Arun Kumar Tewari, Section Officer (RU-I)
28. Mr Maninder Singh, JRC
29. Ms Smriti Pandey, JRC
30. Mr Masroof Anwer, JRC
31. Ms Riya Mehra, JRC

GLIMPSES OF THE MEETING



Image-1 Hon'ble Member, Shri Rajiv Jain Chairing the meeting of the Core Group on Right to Food & Nutrition



Image-2 Meeting of the Core Group on Right to Food & Nutrition

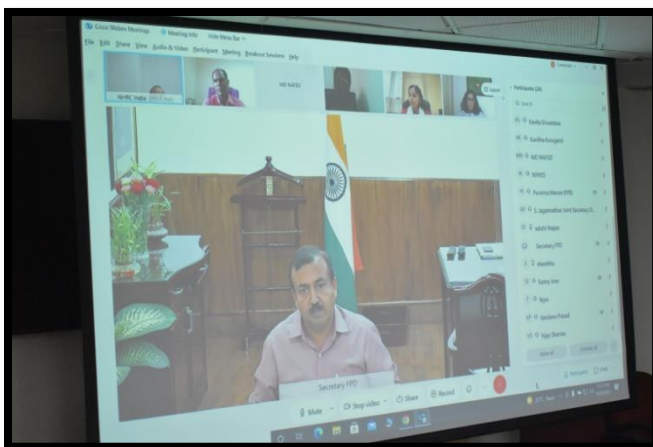


Image-3 Shri Sudhanshu Pandey, Secretary Food addressing the meeting