

Collectives: A Way forward to Food Security and Food Nutrition in India

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Abstract :

In India, the idea of collectives, FPOs, and cooperatives has come to light as a crucial way to address issues with food security, nutrition, and socioeconomic growth. These cooperative organizations are crucial to the nation's efforts to mobilize resources, take advantage of economies of scale, and support small farmers and producers. In order to promote sustainable agricultural practices and enhance the well-being of rural communities, there is a renewed emphasis on bolstering and spreading these models of collective action with the recent foundation of the Ministry of Cooperation in India. In addition to examining their impact on food security, nutrition, and socioeconomic development in India, the article provides an overview, scope, and importance of cooperatives, FPOs, and collectives. It also compares and contrasts them and looks at recent initiatives introduced by the Ministry of Cooperation to further enhance their contributions. The initiatives taken by the Ministry of Cooperation have the potential to further strengthen these organizations and enhance their impact. By working together and leveraging their collective resources, these entities can make a meaningful difference in addressing the challenges of hunger, malnutrition, and poverty in India. It is crucial for policymakers, stakeholders, and members of these organizations to collaborate effectively and continue innovating to create a sustainable and inclusive food system for all.

Key words: Food Security, Food Nutrition, Collectives, socio-economic development

Introduction

Collectives, cooperatives and FPOs have long been recognized as an important player in improving food security and nutrition in India. With a population of over 1.3 billion people, India faces unique challenges in ensuring that all its citizens have access to an adequate and nutritious diet. Collectives offer a promising solution to this issue by promoting collective action, economic empowerment, and sustainable agricultural practices among smallholder farmers. By pooling resources and sharing knowledge, cooperatives have the potential to increase food production, reduce post-harvest losses, and improve market access for marginalized communities. In this essay, we will explore the role of cooperatives in addressing food security and nutrition challenges in India, highlighting the opportunities and challenges that they face in promoting sustainable development and social equity in the country.

Overview of Food Security and Food Nutrition in India

Food security and food nutrition are critical issues in India, given the vast population and diverse dietary needs of its people. Food security refers to the availability, accessibility, and affordability of food, while food nutrition focuses on the quality and quantity of nutrients in the diet. In India, these challenges are compounded by factors such as poverty, inequality, and inadequate infrastructure for food distribution. According to recent studies, a significant proportion of the population faces issues of malnutrition and hunger, leading to various health problems and hindered economic development. Improving food security and nutrition in India requires a multi-faceted approach that involves government intervention, private sector participation, and community efforts to ensure a sustainable and equitable food system for all. (Balasaheb Kalhapure Balasaheb Kalhapure, Ijrbat)

Cooperatives, Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs), and Collectives play a significant role in India's agricultural landscape by empowering small-scale farmers and producers to collectively market their products, access credit, and avail of various government schemes. Cooperatives are member-owned and democratically run organizations that pool resources and share profits among members. Meanwhile, FPOs are entities created by a group of producers, typically farmers, to improve their bargaining power in the market and access support services. Collectives, on the other hand, are informal groups of producers who come together to achieve common goals such as enhancing productivity or accessing government subsidies. These different organizational structures fill a crucial gap in the Indian agricultural sector by providing a platform for small-scale producers to collaborate, improve their livelihoods, and contribute to food security and socio-economic development in the country. (C. Shambu Prasad, Ajit Kanitkar, Deborah Dutta)

Importance of Cooperatives in Enhancing Food Security

Cooperatives play a crucial role in enhancing food security by empowering small-scale farmers and producers to collectively access resources, markets, and knowledge. By pooling their resources and sharing risks, cooperatives enable members to achieve economies of scale and negotiate better prices for their products. This in turn helps in stabilizing food production and supply, reducing post-harvest losses, and improving overall food access for both rural and urban consumers. Additionally, cooperatives provide a platform for farmers to adopt sustainable agricultural practices, improve food quality, and diversify their production to meet the changing dietary preferences of the population. Through cooperative initiatives, farmers are better equipped to respond to challenges such as climate change, market fluctuations, and food safety regulations, ultimately promoting food security and nutrition in the long run. (Yusheng Chen, Zhaofa Sun, Yanmei Wang, Ye Ma, Weili Yang)

Impact of Collectives on Improving Food Nutrition

Cooperatives play a significant role in improving food nutrition by providing access to fresh and locally produced food products. Through cooperative efforts, small-scale farmers can pool resources and knowledge to implement sustainable farming practices that promote the production of nutritious fruits and vegetables. Additionally, cooperatives often establish direct relationships with consumers, eliminating the need for intermediaries and ensuring that high-quality, nutrient-rich foods are available at affordable prices. By supporting local farmers and fostering a sense of community, cooperatives contribute to the overall well-being of individuals and families, ultimately leading to improved food security and nutrition outcomes. (B. Ahmed, J. Haji, M. Ketema, Kedir Jemal)

Challenges Faced by Cooperatives in Promoting Food Security and Nutrition

One of the key challenges faced by cooperatives in promoting food security and nutrition is the lack of access to credit and financing options. Many cooperatives, especially those in rural areas, struggle to secure the necessary funds to invest in infrastructure, technology, and training programs that would improve food production and distribution. Without adequate financial support, cooperatives are limited in their ability to scale up operations, implement innovative solutions, and reach more communities in need of nutritious food options. Furthermore, the lack of affordable credit options often leads to high-interest loans from private lenders, putting cooperatives at a financial disadvantage. Addressing this challenge requires collaborative efforts from government agencies, financial institutions, and cooperative networks to develop tailored financial solutions that can support the sustainable growth of cooperatives in the food security and nutrition sector. (Konstadinos Mattas, George Baourakis, Constantin Zopounidis)

Contribution to Food Nutrition by Cooperatives, FPOs, and Collectives

Cooperatives, Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs), and Collectives play a crucial role in contributing to food nutrition by promoting sustainable agricultural practices, ensuring food security, and enhancing the livelihoods of smallholder farmers in India. These organizations facilitate access to markets, provide technical assistance, and promote the cultivation of diverse and nutritious crops. By working together,

members of cooperatives and FPOs are able to pool their resources, share knowledge, and leverage economies of scale to improve productivity and profitability. Moreover, collective bargaining power allows these organizations to negotiate better prices for their produce, increasing the income of farmers and contributing to overall food security in the region. With the Ministry of Cooperation spearheading new initiatives to support the growth and development of these organizations, the future looks promising for the enhancement of food nutrition and socio-economic development through cooperative efforts in India. (Roosendaal, L., Brouwer, H., Garcia-Campos, P., Prado-Rivera, F.)

Successful Case Studies of Cooperatives providing food security and food nutrition all around the globe

Cooperatives have long been recognized as a powerful tool for promoting sustainable development and improving the lives of people around the world. In this essay, we will explore the role of cooperatives in promoting food security, improving food nutrition, and contributing to socioeconomic development. By examining successful examples of cooperatives in each of these areas, we can gain a deeper understanding of the potential that these organizations have to create positive change in communities.

Cooperatives are defined as member-owned organizations that work together to achieve a common goal. In the context of food security, cooperatives can play a critical role in improving access to food for members and the wider community. By pooling resources and knowledge, cooperatives can increase the efficiency and effectiveness of food production, distribution, and marketing. One example of a successful cooperative in promoting food security is the Kerala Agricultural Workers' Association (KAWA) in India. KAWA is a cooperative of small farmers and agricultural workers who work together to improve their livelihoods and access to food. Through collective action, KAWA members have been able to increase their crop yields, reduce their reliance on external inputs, and improve their access to markets. Cooperatives can also improve food security by providing access to credit and other financial services. For example, the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh has helped millions of poor farmers and entrepreneurs to access credit and start their own businesses. By providing access to capital, cooperatives can help to create new opportunities for food production and distribution, which can ultimately improve food security for entire communities.

In addition to promoting food security, cooperatives can also play a critical role in improving food nutrition. By providing access to nutritious food options, cooperatives can help to promote healthy eating habits and improve overall health outcomes. One example of a cooperative that promotes healthy eating is the Food Co-op Initiative in the United States. This organization helps to support the development of community-owned grocery stores, which provide access to fresh, healthy, and locally produced foods. By promoting these types of food options, cooperatives can help to reduce the prevalence of diet-related diseases and improve overall health outcomes. Cooperatives can also play a role in educating members and the community on the importance of healthy eating. For example, the Organic Consumers Association in the United States provides educational resources and training programs to help consumers make informed choices about their food. By promoting education and awareness, cooperatives can help to create a culture of health and wellness within their communities.

Finally, cooperatives can contribute to socioeconomic development by creating new opportunities for entrepreneurship and job creation. By providing access to resources and support services, cooperatives can help to empower individuals and communities to take control of their economic futures. One example of a cooperative that has contributed to socioeconomic development is the Mondragon Corporation in Spain. This organization is a network of worker-owned cooperatives that operates in a variety of industries, including manufacturing, finance, and retail. By providing access to capital, training, and support services, Mondragon has been able to create thousands of jobs and contribute to the economic development of the region.

Socio-Economic Development through Cooperatives, FPOs, and Collectives

Cooperatives, Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs), and collectives play a crucial role in socio-economic development by providing a platform for small-scale farmers and producers to come together, pool resources, and access markets more efficiently. These entities not only empower individuals economically but also contribute significantly to food security and nutrition in India. By promoting collective bargaining power and sharing of knowledge and resources, cooperatives, FPOs, and collectives enable marginalized groups to improve their livelihoods and access better opportunities in the agricultural sector. The Ministry of Cooperation's new initiatives aimed at strengthening these organizations underscore their importance in fostering sustainable development and inclusive growth in the country. (A. A. Vyguzov, V. Nikolashin).

New Initiatives by the Ministry of Cooperation have been pivotal in enhancing the role of cooperatives, FPOs, and collectives in ensuring food security, nutrition, and socio-economic development in India. These initiatives include the formation of new policies to promote the growth of cooperatives, providing financial incentives for FPOs, and establishing collaborations between collectives and government agencies to address food security challenges. The Ministry of Cooperation has recognized the potential of these entities in driving agricultural productivity, improving supply chains, and empowering local communities. By actively supporting these organizations, the Ministry aims to create a sustainable ecosystem that contributes to the overall development of the country. (Swaran Singh)

New Ministry of Cooperation Initiatives Transforming India's Food Grain Landscape

The Ministry of Cooperation in India plays a crucial role in promoting cooperative movements across various sectors of the economy. The ministry oversees the implementation of policies and programs aimed at developing and supporting cooperative societies in agriculture, dairy, fisheries, and other sectors. It also works towards enhancing the financial and institutional capabilities of cooperatives to ensure their sustainable growth and contribution to the overall economic development of the country. By fostering a conducive environment for cooperation among different stakeholders, the Ministry of Cooperation helps in creating a more inclusive and equitable economy. The ministry's efforts have led to the establishment of the world's largest food grain structure in India, demonstrating the significant impact of cooperative initiatives on the country's food security and agricultural productivity. (Konstantin I. Pakhorukov)

The Ministry of Cooperation in India has introduced several new initiatives aimed at promoting agricultural development and enhancing the country's food security. One such initiative is the formation of Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) to help smallholder farmers collectively market their produce and access better prices. Additionally, the Ministry has launched the Co-operative Development Fund to provide financial assistance to cooperatives for infrastructure development and capacity building. These initiatives are part of the government's efforts to create the world's largest food grain structure in India by strengthening cooperation among farmers and promoting sustainable agricultural practices. (Dong-Sook Na, Christine Dallaire, p. 1177-1196)

World's Largest Food/ Grain Storage Plan

The Union Cabinet, in its meeting held on 31.05.2023, has approved the "World's Largest Grain Storage Plan in Cooperative Sector", to be rolled out as a Pilot Project. The Plan entails creation of various agri infrastructure at Primary Agricultural Credit Societies (PACS) level, including warehouses, custom hiring center, processing units, Fair Price Shops, etc. by leveraging the 'whole-of-Government' approach. The Plan is being implemented by utilizing the approved outlays of the following Government of India (GoI) schemes for creation/ modernization of infrastructure facilities at PACS level:

Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare: Agriculture Infrastructure Fund (AIF), Agricultural Marketing Infrastructure Scheme (AMI), Mission for Integrated Development of Horticulture (MIDH), Sub Mission on Agricultural Mechanization (SMAM, Ministry of Food Processing Industries: Pradhan Mantri Formalization of Micro Food Processing Enterprises Scheme (PMFME), Pradhan Mantri Kisan Sampada

Yojana (PMKSY) Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution: Allocation of food grains under the National Food Security Act, Procurement operations at Minimum Support Price.

Ministry of Cooperation has constituted Inter-Ministerial Committee (IMC) with Hon'ble Home and Cooperation Minister as its chairman and Hon'ble Ministers and Secretaries of Ministries concerned as its members for smooth and effective implementation of the Plan. The said committee is authorized to modify guidelines/ implementation methodologies of the schemes identified for convergence, as and when need arises, within their approved outlays and prescribed goals for facilitating the Pilot Project of the Plan. The Ministry of Cooperation has also constituted National Level Coordination Committee (NLCC) under the chairmanship of Secretary (Ministry of Cooperation) to steer the overall implementation of the Plan and reviewing the progress of implementation, etc.

In order to monitor the implementation of the pilot project and to ensure seamless integration of the plan with the existing policies/ programmes at State level, States/ Union Territories have also constituted State Cooperative Development Committee (SCDC) at State level and District Cooperative Development Committee (DCDC) in each District under the Chairmanship of Chief Secretary and District Collector respectively. The SCDC/ DCDCs also have members drawn from other departments such as Revenue, Agriculture, Horticulture, etc. and representatives of NABARD, StCB, FCI, WDRA, CWC, SWC. The committees will, inter-alia, examine the storage gap including existing storage facilities, their capacity utilization, capacity of proposed godowns, viability of the applicant PACS, location of the proposed project, connectivity, logistics, availability of basic infrastructure, market linkages, etc.

National Cooperative Development Corporation (NCDC) with the support of NABARD, NABARD Consultancy Services (NABCONS), Central Warehousing Corporation (CWC), Food Corporation of India (FCI), etc. is implementing the Pilot Project in 24 PACS of 24 different States/ UTs. Construction has started at five PACS, one each in the States of Tripura, Haryana, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. Detailed Project Reports are under preparation for the remaining PACS.

The creation of decentralized storage capacity ranging from 500 MT to 2000 MT at PACS level would reduce food grain wastage by creating sufficient storage capacity, strengthen food security of the country, prevent distress sale of crops and enable farmers to realise better prices for their crops. Since PACS would be operating as procurement centre as well as Fair Price Shops (FPS), the cost incurred in transportation of food grains to procurement centres and again transporting the stocks back from warehouses to FPS would also be saved.

The estimated cost of the project for each PACS would vary and depend upon various parameters such as storage capacity, requirement for custom hiring centre, processing units, etc. Interest Subvention under the Agriculture Infrastructure Fund would be dovetailed with the subsidies available under the identified schemes for the construction of godowns and other agri-infrastructure at PACS level.

The establishment of the world's largest food grain structure in India marks a significant milestone in the country's efforts to bolster food security and distribution systems. With an emphasis on streamlining operations and enhancing efficiency, this initiative by the Ministry of Cooperation aims to leverage technology and innovative practices to ensure seamless procurement, storage, and distribution of food grains on a massive scale. By harnessing the power of data analytics and modern infrastructure, this ambitious project is poised to revolutionize the way food grains are managed and distributed in India, ultimately benefiting millions of individuals across the country. (Laura M. Pereira, Caitlin A. McElroy, Alexandra Littaye, Alexandra M. Girard)

Impact of the Initiative on Food Security and Agricultural Development

The new initiative by the Ministry of Cooperation in India has had a significant impact on food security and agricultural development in the country. By focusing on building the world's largest food grain structure, the initiative has increased storage capacity and streamlined distribution channels, leading to improved food

security for millions of people. Additionally, the emphasis on agricultural development has resulted in increased productivity and efficiency in the farming sector, ultimately contributing to the overall growth of the economy. The initiative has not only addressed immediate food security concerns but also laid the groundwork for sustainable agricultural practices that will benefit the country in the long run. Overall, the impact of this initiative on food security and agricultural development in India is substantial and sets a positive example for other countries facing similar challenges. (Renu Modi, Fantu Cheru)

Conclusion

In conclusion, cooperatives have played a crucial role in improving food security and nutrition in India. By promoting collective action, sharing resources, and providing access to markets, cooperatives have empowered small-scale farmers and marginalized communities to improve their livelihoods. Through cooperative efforts, farmers have been able to enhance agricultural productivity, adopt sustainable practices, and strengthen their bargaining power in the market. Additionally, cooperatives have facilitated the integration of smallholder farmers into value chains, leading to increased income and food security. Moving forward, it is essential for policymakers and stakeholders to continue to support and invest in cooperatives to further enhance their impact on food security and nutrition in India. By fostering cooperation and collaboration among farmers, cooperatives can help address the challenges of food insecurity and malnutrition, ultimately contributing to a more sustainable and equitable food system in the country.

The cooperatives, FPOs, and collectives in India highlights the significant role they play in ensuring food security, promoting better nutrition, and fostering socio-economic development in the country. While each model has its strengths and weaknesses, these organizations could become even more powerful and influential as a result of the Ministry of Cooperation's initiatives. Together, these organizations may significantly impact India's hunger, malnourishment, and poverty issues by pooling their resources and collaborating. To develop a sustainable and inclusive food system that benefits everyone, legislators, stakeholders, and members of these groups must work together efficiently and keep coming up with new ideas which will lead to socio economic development and welfare of the stakeholders and benefits the food security and nutrition ecosystem

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