

SOVEREIGNTY AND SUSTAINABILITY OF FOOD IN INDIA

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1. Food in India; An Overview:

India is a vast country characterized by acute poverty and uneven distribution of national income. The scarcity of food and storage of essential commodities coupled with galloping inflation has adversely affected the Indian economy. But apart from all the facts, India is known for its agrarian nature, as about 70% of the total population depends on agricultural activities for their livelihood. After independence, the country has made progress in all sectors, especially significant transportation observed in terms of food grains production. But unfortunately, instead of Green Revolution, our country is home to the largest number of hungry people in the world and shares a fraction of 1/3rd with the world's hungry and starved population making a count of nearly 860 million people. In addition to severely depressing productivity, a second consecutive year of drought causes the pipelines to entirely dry up, there is little food left in private or community reserves, and the situation is then conducive to famine. The issue was made worse earlier because large inventories in one region of the nation lacked transportation infrastructure, making it impossible to move them to troubled areas. Famine so continued to be a part of India's past. The idea of achieving a minimum standard for all people is made all the more pertinent when it comes to goods like food grains, which are needed by everyone to fulfill one of their most fundamental requirements and whose catastrophic scarcity had led to millions of lives lost throughout our nation's pre-independence period. In a nation like India, where about 300 million people are still living in poverty and whose stunted physical and mental development has resulted in malnutrition, the fairness notion with regard to food becomes persuasive. India's food policy aims to achieve social justice through its price, food grain production, and distribution policies, through the operation of the largest public distribution system in the world, through a number of programs aimed at reducing poverty, some of which distribute food grains as part of wages, and through initiatives aimed specifically at combating malnutrition. (Sharma, 2022).

1.1 Food Sovereignty:

The rise of food sovereignty reflects a series of basic failures in the corporate global food regime that has come to emerge in the last quarter century (McMichael 2013). Dominated by global agro-food transnational corporations, driven by financial market imperatives of short-run profitability, and characterized by the relentless food commodification processes that underpin 'super marketization', the corporate food regime forges global

animal protein commodity chains while at the same time spreading transgenic organisms, which together broaden and deepen what Tony Weis (2007) calls 'the temperate industrial grain-livestock' agro-food complex. At the point of agricultural production, the dominant producer model of the corporate food regime is the fossil-fuel-driven, large-scale, capital-intensive industrial agriculture mega farm, which is in turn predicated upon deepening the simple reproduction squeeze facing petty commodity producers around the world and increasing the ranks of the relative surplus population (AkramLodhi and Kay 2010).

food sovereignty is based on the right of peoples and countries to define their own agricultural and food policies and has 6 interlinked and inseparable components:

1. A focus on food for people: food sovereignty rejects the idea that food is merely another commodity and instead places the right to sufficient, healthful, and culturally acceptable food at the core of food, farm, livestock, and fisheries policy;
2. Valuing people who produce food: food sovereignty opposes policies, actions, and programs that devalue and endanger the livelihoods of women and men who plant, harvest, and process food. It also recognizes and supports their efforts.
3. Localizes food systems: Food sovereignty places producers and consumers at the center of decision-making on food concerns, protects producers from food being dumped in local markets, and shields consumers from harmful and subpar food, including food that has been genetically modified and contaminated with transgenic organisms; condemns governance frameworks that rely on unfair global commerce and give corporations control;
4. Gives local food providers control over territory, land, grazing, water, seeds, livestock, and fish populations while respecting their right to use and share them in a manner that is socially and environmentally sustainable; it encourages productive interaction between food providers in various territories and from various sectors that aids in the resolution of conflicts; and it places control locally. It opposes the exploitation of natural resources for profit through regulatory, business, and intellectual property rights frameworks;
5. Enhances knowledge and abilities: Food sovereignty enhances the abilities and local knowledge of food suppliers and their local organizations that manage and conserve localized food production and harvesting systems.;
6. Works with nature: Food sovereignty uses the contributions of nature in a variety of low-input agro-ecological production and harvesting methods that maximize the contribution of ecosystems and enhance resilience, and rejects methods that harm ecosystem functions, depend on energy-intensive monocultures and livestock factories, as well as other industrialized production methods.

1.2. Food Security VS Food Sovereignty

The sovereignty of food is nothing but a clear alternative to the idea of food security, as food security talks about the terms and conditions by which food is produced, and it is, to them, vital to know what food is produced, who grows food, where and how that food is produced, the scale of food production, as well as the environmental and health impacts of food production (Patel 2009). Food insecurity is a result of unfair institutions and policies that have ruined livelihoods, the environment, and other resources. Contrarily, food sovereignty offers a concept that is an alternative to the increased vertical integration of agriculture and its dominance by international agro-food transnational corporations, which many supporters believe to be exploiting peasants and workers and undemocratically concentrating economic and political power. Instead, proponents of food sovereignty contend that the food system should be based on decentralized agriculture, with human and local community control over food production, processing, distribution, and consumption. In this sense, food sovereignty presents a vision of a different food system, and in less than 20 years, this vision has developed into an international movement.

1.3. The Contradiction of Food Sovereignty

There are mainly two contradictions by which the social-property relations of capitalism of food sovereignty can be understood. The first contradiction is that food sovereignty requires the local control of resources by peoples and communities but does not explicitly challenge the structural control of the resources – of land, water, and others – that are necessary to achieve food sovereignty (Demarrias 2013).

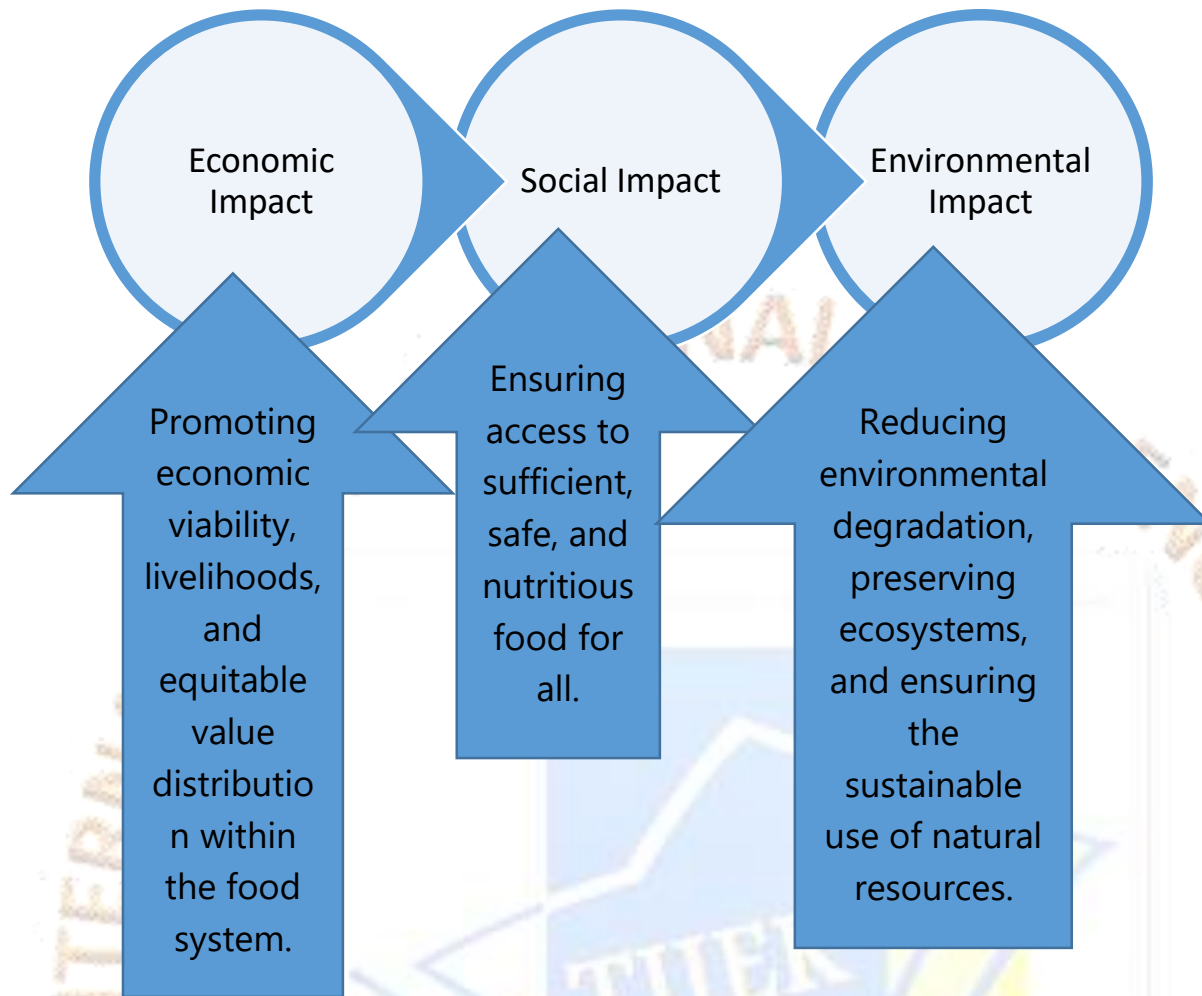
The second contradiction of food sovereignty is that it says nothing about the political conditions that are necessary to exercise the autonomy necessary to build food sovereignty. The struggle for food sovereignty requires that people are able to use their individual and collective rights. However, this assumes that people are able to claim their individual and collective rights (Patel 2007).

2. Sustainable Food System

In 2014, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations released a report titled "Sustainable Food Systems: Concept and Framework." The report provided an overview of the concept of sustainable food systems and presented a framework for understanding and promoting sustainability in the food sector. Here are some key points from the report:

Definition of Sustainable Food Systems: The FAO defined sustainable food systems as those that contribute to food security and nutrition, economic, social, and environmental sustainability across the entire food value chain. Such systems are characterized by resource efficiency, resilience, inclusiveness, and social equity.

Sustainability is examined holistically in sustainable food system development. In order to be sustainable, the development of the food system needs to generate positive value along three dimensions simultaneously: economic, social, and environmental.



Components of Sustainable Food Systems: The FAO identified four components of sustainable food systems: a. Food Supply Chains: Ensuring efficient and sustainable production, processing, storage, distribution, and consumption of food. b. Food Loss and Waste: Reducing post-harvest losses and food waste throughout the supply chain. c. Sustainable Diets and Nutrition: Promoting healthy and sustainable diets that meet nutritional needs and minimize negative environmental impacts. d. Governance and Policy: Establishing supportive policies, regulations, and institutions that promote sustainable food systems and address social and environmental challenges.

Principles of Sustainable Food Systems: The FAO outlined five principles to guide the development of sustainable food systems: a. Improving Efficiency and Resource Use: Optimizing resource use, minimizing waste, and reducing the environmental footprint of food production and consumption. b. Protecting and Enhancing Ecosystems: Preserving biodiversity, conserving natural resources, and promoting sustainable land and water management practices. c. Supporting Social Equity and Food Access: Ensuring equitable access to food, empowering vulnerable groups, and promoting social inclusivity within the food system. d. Promoting Health and Nutrition: Enhancing the nutritional quality of food, promoting healthy diets, and addressing malnutrition in all its forms. e. Strengthening Resilience and Adaptability: Building resilience to shocks, including climate change, and fostering adaptive capacity within the food system.

The FAO's report emphasized the importance of transitioning towards sustainable food systems to address the challenges of food security, nutrition, environmental degradation, and socio-economic inequalities. It provided a framework for policymakers, researchers, and stakeholders to understand and promote sustainability in the food sector.

2.1. Food Sustainability in India

Food sustainability in India is a critical issue due to the country's large population and diverse agricultural landscape. Various factors are responsible to deal with the sustainability of food in India. Some of them are as follows:

- **Agriculture and Farming:** Agriculture is a vital sector in India, employing a significant portion of the population. However, sustainable farming practices, such as organic farming, crop rotation, and integrated pest management, are still not widely adopted. Excessive use of chemical fertilizers, pesticides, and water-intensive practices have resulted in soil degradation and water scarcity in some regions.
- **Water Management:** India faces significant challenges in water management, particularly in agriculture. Inefficient irrigation techniques and over-extraction of groundwater contribute to water scarcity, especially in regions heavily dependent on monsoon rains. Encouraging water-efficient irrigation methods, implementing rainwater harvesting, and promoting water conservation are crucial for long-term food sustainability.
- **Genetic Diversity:** India is known for its rich genetic diversity in crops. However, there has been a decline in traditional and indigenous crop varieties due to the promotion of high-yielding varieties. Preserving and promoting indigenous crops and traditional farming systems can enhance food security and resilience to climate change.
- **Climate Change:** Climate change poses a significant threat to food sustainability in India. Erratic weather patterns, increased frequency of extreme events like droughts and floods, and rising temperatures affect agricultural productivity. Implementing climate-smart agriculture practices, such as resilient crop varieties, efficient irrigation, and improved soil management, can help mitigate these challenges.
- **Food Waste:** India also faces considerable food waste, which affects both food security and sustainability. An estimated 40% of food produced in India is lost or wasted due to poor storage facilities, inadequate transportation infrastructure, and inefficient supply chains. Addressing these issues through better infrastructure, storage facilities, and awareness campaigns can reduce food waste and enhance sustainability.
- **Sustainable Livestock Production:** Livestock production, including dairy and poultry farming, is a significant part of India's agricultural sector. Promoting sustainable livestock practices, such as improved animal health, efficient feed management, and waste management, can help reduce the environmental impact and enhance overall food sustainability.

- **Government Initiatives:** The Indian government has taken several initiatives to promote food sustainability. Programs like the National Mission for Sustainable Agriculture (NMSA), Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana (PMKSY), and Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana (PKVY) aim to support farmers in adopting sustainable agricultural practices, water management, and organic farming.

Efforts are underway to address these challenges and promote food sustainability in India. Public awareness, farmer education, technological innovations, and policy interventions play crucial roles in achieving a more sustainable and resilient food system in the country.

3. Food sovereignty and food sustainability

There is a close relationship between food sovereignty and food sustainability. While the concepts of food sovereignty and food sustainability have distinct focuses, they are interconnected and mutually reinforcing.

Food sovereignty refers to the right of individuals, communities, and countries to define their own food and agricultural systems, emphasizing local control, self-reliance, and the rights of small-scale farmers and food producers. It advocates for the empowerment of local communities to determine their own food production, distribution, and consumption systems based on their social, cultural, and ecological contexts.

On the other hand, food sustainability focuses on the long-term viability and resilience of food systems. It encompasses practices that ensure the availability of nutritious food for present and future generations while minimizing negative environmental and social impacts.

The following points can discuss the relation of food sovereignty and sustainability:

- **Localized and Diverse Food Systems:** Both food sovereignty and food sustainability recognize the importance of localized and diverse food systems. Food sovereignty emphasizes the significance of locally adapted agricultural practices, traditional knowledge, and indigenous crops. Similarly, food sustainability emphasizes the importance of diverse crop varieties, agro ecological approaches, and reduced dependence on external inputs. Localized and diverse food systems promote ecological resilience, enhance food security, and reduce the environmental impact of food production.
- **Environmental Stewardship:** Both concepts advocate for environmentally sustainable practices in agriculture. Food sovereignty recognizes the importance of ecological balance, biodiversity conservation, and agro ecological approaches to maintain the health of ecosystems. Food sustainability promotes sustainable farming practices, such as organic farming, conservation agriculture, and integrated pest management, to minimize the use of synthetic inputs and protect natural resources. Environmental stewardship is essential for long-term food production and maintaining the resilience of food systems.

- **Resilience and Self-Reliance:** Food sovereignty and food sustainability both emphasize the need for resilient and self-reliant food systems. Food sovereignty promotes local food production and distribution networks, reducing dependence on external sources. Similarly, food sustainability aims to enhance the resilience of food systems by diversifying production, improving resource management, and strengthening local food supply chains. Resilient and self-reliant food systems are better equipped to withstand external shocks, such as climate change, market fluctuations, or disruptions in global food trade.
- **Social and Economic Justice:** Both concepts emphasize the importance of social and economic justice within the food system. Food sovereignty focuses on empowering small-scale farmers, supporting local food economies, and ensuring fair and equitable access to land, resources, and markets. Food sustainability seeks to address issues of food access, food affordability, and equitable distribution of resources. Both concepts recognize the importance of addressing social inequalities and ensuring that the benefits of sustainable food systems reach all segments of society.

In summary, food sovereignty and food sustainability are interrelated concepts that share common goals and principles. While food sovereignty emphasizes local control, self-reliance, and the rights of small-scale farmers, food sustainability focuses on long-term viability, environmental stewardship, and resilience. Together, they contribute to the development of equitable, resilient, and sustainable food systems.

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