

Three programs that could effectively reduce poverty and malnutrition

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Climate change, although a global phenomenon, will have serious implications for the poor in India, making them more vulnerable to food insecurity and hunger, unless adequate programs are in place to protect them. Climate change, induced by global warming, will affect agriculture sector in the Indian sub-continent in many ways.

While the direct impact on agriculture will be felt through the changes in production systems, the indirect impact of these changes will be felt by consumers through factors mediated by income – loss and price increases. Hence, programs and plans have to be revised by giving due credit to adaptation and mitigation and using innovative cropping strategies.

The current programs need to be modified to meet the challenges that climate change will bring about. Achieving food security for all in the event of climate change will require redesigning of policies and programs from both the production and consumption perspectives.

On the consumption side, programs that are intended to increase the accessibility of food and utilization of food needs to be redesigned to accommodate the likely effects of climate change. On the production side, efforts are needed to improve the technological, institutional and policy innovations.

Largest safety net program :

In improving the food accessibility through increasing purchasing power and food utilization, the current programs, such as the public distribution system (PDS) reinforced by the proposed National Food Security Act (NFSA), National Rural Employment Guarantee (NREG) Scheme, mandated by NREG Act, and the integrated child Development Services (ICDS), one of the oldest and largest safety net programs in the world.

Implemented well jointly, these three programs could effectively reduce poverty and malnutrition in the next 15 - 20 years. Yet, the crucial policy challenge in the next few years is how we could organize these safety net schemes to contribute the long term adoption and mitigation in the climate change agenda while redacting poverty. The National Food Security Act (NFSA) promises to ensure 20 kg. of food grain to a family living

below the poverty line at the price of Rs. 3 per kg a channel through which production surpluses could be diverted to meet the hunger challenges.

This could effectively help to bring more efficiency to the public distribution of food. Yet the challenges remain in terms of increased consumptions of proteins and micronutrients, high level leakages of quality food grains to local markets, through organized intermediate purchases.

Long-standing intervention :

The National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS) provides 100 days of guaranteed employment to those who are willing to work. Implemented for the past four years in various states, it has shown mixed results of reaching out to the poor, corresponding to the nature of governance in the local areas. ICDS, a long-standing intervention also has the potential to reduce the high level child malnutrition prevalent in many states, continues to struggle in providing a better delivery on the governance grounds.

The Indian arid eco-system which is unique to several respects provides ample opportunities to establish agro-based and allied cottage industries. The National Horticulture Mission which aims at providing a holistic growth in rural sector can certainly address the dual challenge of climate change and poverty reduction. Empowering the poor families is the best approach one could prudently think of at this moment to mitigate the ill – effects of the climate change. It could be achieved through the demand and supply side solutions.

The phenomenon of climate change brings both the challenge and opportunity for identifying the precise changes that will be needed in various agro ecological zones of India.

The crop-planning exercise that was conducted fifteen years ago needs to be revised in the light of evidences on the reductions in the yield of crops due to climate change. There is a need to reorganize the production priorities for the agro-ecological zones in the light of climate change. Identifying the new set of production activities and delivering the appropriate