The present study was an attempt to analyze the US’ short-term responses to the problem of food insecurity—at the global level as well as the domestic level. The US response to global food insecurity has been to provide food aid and it has tried to solve the domestic food insecurity problem through a number of food assistance programmes. Both these programmes can be called food safety nets, one at the international level and the other at the domestic level respectively. While “food aid” is the term commonly used to refer to the international food assistance programmes, “food assistance” refers to subsidized domestic food assistance programmes. The fundamental difference between the two is that food aid refers to international sourcing of concessional resources tied to the provision of food, either by a donor or to a recipient.

Interesting, in spite of being the only superpower in the world, a large number of people in the US suffer from hunger. The problem of hunger in the US is not as widespread as in other countries but is more of a personal crisis for a number of people and is a national embarrassment. The US Census Bureau carries out a national survey to assess the state of food insecurity in the US every year. The Economic Research Services wing of the Department of Agriculture then uses these figures to prepare food security reports. Those most vulnerable to food insecurity in the US are: the homeless, who live on the streets or in emergency shelters most of which give only one meal every day; poor children, who may fall through the gaps in the service system and whose nutritional needs are critical for growth and development; some female-headed households; African-American and Hispanic households; those who live in central city areas; the working poor; some legal immigrants subject to eligibility restrictions on food stamps and other assistance; some single-person households, including able-bodied adults without dependents (ABAWDs) who may lose eligibility for benefits; some elderly and immuno-compromised individuals, who experience health problems, poverty and difficulties in purchasing, preparing and eating nutritious foods; some residents in rural areas and communities; American
Indians, Alaska Natives and others who live in remote areas; and migrant and seasonal farm workers. On an average, at least one in every five Americans participates in at least one food assistance programme every year at some point of time.

It thus is a serious enough problem for the US government to have felt the need to intervene as hunger also has domestic economic costs. Therefore, the US government has put in place many food assistance programmes. While some of these are meant to ensure that people get enough food to eat, others are meant to increase the nutritional intake of vulnerable categories like pregnant and nursing women, children, the sick and the elderly. The first of these programmes were established in the immediate aftermath of the Great Depression in the 1930s. Later, they gained support in Congress as well as the Executive as a method of surplus disposal soon after World War II because the US had lost many foreign markets and thus had an abundance of surplus commodities. Most of these programmes are administered at the federal level by the Food and Nutrition Service of the US Department of Agriculture. These programmes are funded by the government, overseen by the government and delivered by a mixed private/public system. They have succeeded in ensuring at least minimal food sufficiency to many households.

The most important of these programmes is the Food Stamp Program (now renamed as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program or SNAP) which helps low-income families to buy food with Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) cards that function like debit cards, but which can only be used to buy food in USDA-authorized retail food stores. Other programmes include the National School Lunch Program for schoolchildren; the School Breakfast Program for schoolchildren; the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children Program (WIC) which is meant to provide adequate and nutritious food for women, infants and children; The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) which provides federal funds and food commodities to states to assist low-income persons in need of short-term hunger relief; the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) which provides food packages to low-income pregnant and breastfeeding women, new mothers up to one year postpartum, infants, children up to the age of six and elderly persons who are at least 60 years old who meet income eligibility requirements; the
WIC Farmers’ Market Nutrition Program which is meant to provide fresh, unprepared, locally-grown fruits and vegetables to WIC participants, and to increase the awareness, use of and sales at farmers’ markets; the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) which gives federal subsidies for meals and snacks (supplements) served to children and adults in public and private profit and non-profit child day care centres, family or groups day care homes, adult day care centres and after-school programmes; the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR) which supplies commodity foods to households with low incomes living on Indian reservations and to American Indian households residing in approved areas near reservations or in Oklahoma every month; and The Nutrition Program for the Elderly which provides elderly people with nutritious food through the Meals on Wheels programs or in senior citizens’ centres and similar group settings, etc. Thus, all categories vulnerable to food insecurity are covered under these programmes. However, many eligible people do not apply for these benefits due to the stigma attached to receiving aid from the government and bureaucratic red-tapism. Also, these programmes exclude non-citizens, strikers and people living in institutional settings.

The present study observes that food assistance programmes have today become safety nets through which many American families obtain adequate food. Though they started off and continue to be means to dispose of surplus commodities, they have become self-sustaining today and are an indispensable part of American society’s welfare programmes because many constituencies lobby for it including farmers’ groups, welfare recipients, school food service administrators, NGOs, the food and beverages industry and the health department. Moreover, food assistance programmes reduce overall economic vulnerability, especially during economic recession and have increased money stock and disposable incomes during downturns in the economy and consequently help in stabilizing the economy. However, most of these programmes are means-tested benefits and not flat-rate benefits and have very strict income and other eligibility requirements. Thus, the US conforms to Esping-Andersen’s classification of it as a “liberal” welfare state even in the case of food assistance programmes. The correlation between wheat stocks and money spent on the major domestic food assistance programmes using data from 1980–2007 was 0.386133 (see page 125) thus showing a moderate correlation and proving our
hypotheses—food assistance increases when there are agricultural surpluses and prices are low; and food assistance allocations are used to insulate commodity producers and traders from fluctuations in domestic production and international prices.

Food aid has been an important component of foreign assistance programmes for over fifty years. Food aid is a term commonly used to refer to donations of food from wealthy countries to countries which cannot feed their people due to various reasons like poverty, famine and other natural calamities and wars or conflicts. Like other types of foreign aid, food aid is also a good method to increase the soft power of a country. Food aid is a normal part of the food supply equation of many developing and least developed countries. Since most poor countries do not have national food safety net programmes, they depend on international food aid. The World Food Programme (WFP) recognizes three categories of food aid based on how the aid is put to use: Emergency Food Aid, Project Food Aid, and Programme Food Aid. Emergency Food Aid responds primarily to the immediate humanitarian needs of people affected by man-made or natural disasters and is generally distributed among displaced populations or in areas experiencing acute food shortages. It is also provided to communities affected by chronic food crises. Project Food Aid, provided in the form of grants, is used in a variety of development projects. Often, when food aid is provided in-kind, some or all of it is sold in local markets to generate funds to cover project costs. Programme Food Aid is given or sold from one government to another. Recipient governments monetize this food aid to generate funds which are subsequently used to fund domestic initiatives. Food aid was originally provided through bilateral channels. But of late, there has been a steady increase in food aid provided through multilateral channels and international organizations like the World Food Program.

Food aid has often been criticized for creating production disincentives for local farmers due to reduction in local commodity prices. However, what must be remembered about food aid is that it is aid which would otherwise not be given and it brings much-needed additional food supplies to countries in need. It also reduces food prices for consumers and makes food more affordable. Several institutions, agencies and agreements play key roles in delivering, monitoring and governing food aid.
flows. These include the Consultative Sub-Committee on Surplus Disposal, the Food Aid Convention, the World Trade Organization (WTO), the WFP, the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the OECD, NGO Codes of Conduct, and the Right to Food Voluntary Guidelines. However, since most of these organizations and rules have no enforcement mechanisms, they have not been very effective in reforming food aid and reducing the ill effects of food aid. Food aid has often proved to be an unreliable safety net for countries because of variations in allocations of food aid by donors each year and because of the counter-cyclical nature of food aid. Important donors of food aid include the US, the EU, Japan, Canada and Australia.

Food aid accounts for a considerable portion of US development assistance. The US is the largest food aid donor in the world and this is one of the most popular yet controversial of US foreign aid programmes. US food aid has huge domestic support and bipartisan support. While on the one hand, it appeals to the humanitarian instincts of the Americans, on the other hand, it is an easy and convenient way of disposing of surplus agricultural commodities and stabilizing domestic food prices. While US food aid programmes were basically launched for humanitarian purposes in the days when they were just ad hoc programmes created for responding to emergencies around the world, once they became institutionalized, other objectives also came into play. In fact, the objectives have evolved and have kept changing in conformity with existing US foreign policy priorities. US food aid programmes were institutionalized through the Agricultural Act of 1949 and the Trade and Assistance Act of 1954 and this institutionalization was prompted by the need to dispose of the huge agricultural surpluses that the US had in the post World War II era. Another reason was that with the beginning of the Cold War, the US felt that by sending food to newly-liberated countries, it could secure their goodwill and provide resources to help them with development while also helping to build future export markets. US food aid programmes include: the PL 480 or the “Food for Peace” Program which supplies agricultural commodities from the US to countries with differing economic development levels under different titles, each with a different purpose and means of allocation; the Food for Progress Program which supplies agricultural commodities to developing countries and countries that are emerging democracies and have pledged to initiate or increase free enterprise in their agricultural economies; Section 416(b) which provides donations of surplus agricultural commodities from price support
programmes for emergency and non-emergency food aid programmes through private voluntary organizations, cooperatives and the World Food Programme; the McGovern-Dole International Food for Education Program and Child Education Program which supports education, child development and food security for poor children across the globe and provides incentives to children to attend and remain in school in addition to providing maternal, child and infant nutrition programmes in foreign countries; and the Bill Emerson Humanitarian Trust which is essentially a food reserve created so that the US can respond quickly to emergencies around the world.

Different US food aid programmes have different legislations governing them, different administrative agencies, different ways of allocation of food aid and differing objectives. Food aid, though primarily the responsibility of the Agriculture Committees in both bodies of Congress, is shared with the International Relations Committee in the House of Representatives. Food aid is the only foreign aid programme not funded within the Foreign Operations measure and is included in the Agriculture Appropriations bill. Agencies and Departments involved in the administration are the Department of Agriculture, Treasury Department, Office of Management and Budget and the State Department. The interagency Food Assistance Policy Council coordinates US food aid policies and programmes. The major lobbies which have had a massive influence on expanding US food aid programmes both in size and complexity as well as the way in which the programmes are implemented include the farmers/agricultural lobby, the agribusiness lobby, Private Voluntary Organizations and US shipping companies. Due to their self-interest in US food aid, these lobbies have been the biggest impediments in the path of reforming US food aid.

Food aid is part of US foreign policy and has often been used as a foreign policy weapon by the US. The history of US food aid proves that food aid has been seen more as a foreign policy weapon than as a means of providing humanitarian relief by the US. The choice of countries like India, South Korea and Vietnam as recipients of US food aid reflect the geo-political objectives of food aid as all these countries were located in regions perceived by the US to be particularly susceptible to Communism and Soviet influence. During the Cold War, food aid played a significant role in
supporting US military intervention in Vietnam and South East Asia and in supporting anti-Communist counter-insurgents and was used for US military and security objectives. Even in the post Cold War era, the trend of using food aid for achieving foreign policy goals has continued. But unlike during the Cold War, when it was used to strengthen friendly countries, it is now used in the War against Terror. Countries which receive more exports from the US, those which are democracies and have a US military presence are more likely to get food aid from the US. In fact, countries which have similar voting patterns with the US in the UN have greater chances of receiving food aid. US food aid increases when total economic aid increases. Regions which receive more economic assistance usually receive more food aid. Figures reveal that there has been a slow but steady decline in the allotment of food aid from the late 1970s. This increased during 1991–1994, presumably because food aid was allotted in large amounts to help the erstwhile Soviet Union and the newly-independent states of the former Soviet Union to tide over the economic crisis in the wake of the disintegration of the Soviet Union. However, there has been a significant decline in US food aid after the Cold War. There is a positive correlation of 0.276514 between total US economic aid and total US food aid given in each year (see page182). This shows that when economic aid increases in a year, food aid also increases. There is a strong and positive correlation of 0.92054 between total US economic assistance and the food aid received by a region indicating an almost perfect positive linear relationship between the two variables (see page182). This proves that regions which receive more economic aid also receive more food aid. There is also a positive correlation of 0.210174 (see page 189) between wheat stocks (the primary commodity in US food aid) and total US food aid thus proving our hypothesis that US food aid increases when there are agricultural surpluses and prices are low and decreases when agricultural prices are high and agricultural production is low. In fact, though surplus have declined in recent years, and therefore the importance of surplus disposal as a factor behind US food aid has declined, surplus disposal continues to remain important for the US as demonstrated by the continued requirement that the Secretary of Agriculture must certify the “availability” of commodities before they are shipped out as food aid. Wheat is the primary commodity in US food aid. There is a moderate negative correlation of –0.3334 between international wheat prices and food aid (see page 191). This again proves our hypothesis that US food aid allocations are used to
insulate commodity producers and traders from fluctuations in domestic production and international prices.

During the Cold War, most food aid went to countries which were not allied with the Soviet Union. The countries behind the iron curtain and Russia started receiving food aid from the US only at the time of the disintegration of the Soviet Union and after it. The US even refused to give food aid to China in the 1960s when that country was reeling under a famine though the US had huge surpluses at that time. This shows that more than economic objectives or humanitarian objectives, foreign policy objectives have greater say in US food aid allocations. Thus, the US farm lobby is not so strong as to influence food aid allocation where it clashes with foreign policy objectives. This disproves our hypothesis that the US farm/agricultural lobby’s overbearing influence tends to overlook the US’ ideological interests in determining food aid allocations. Even though one of the main objectives behind food aid is to dispose of surpluses, the countries to which these surpluses go are always determined by geo-strategic objectives. Overall, the trends in allocation of US food aid over the years prove our hypothesis that US food aid programmes are short-term measures motivated more by economic and strategic reasons than by humanitarian reasons. However, there is little evidence that food aid has been able to advance the US’ geo-strategic objectives and it remains more a tool of the USDA than of the State department. The US donates food aid to its allies, potential allies and places where it has geo-political interests and not necessarily to countries which are most in need of food aid. However, there is no denying the fact that US food aid has generated enormous goodwill for the US in many countries and has helped to provide relief to millions around the world.

Food aid, particularly US food aid, has been at the centre of much controversy and is one of several unsettled issues in the present Doha Round of multilateral trade negotiations that has been going on since November 2001 and was one of the key issues which led to the breakdown of talks. The US has been accused at the WTO of dumping its surplus commodities through food aid to capture new foreign markets and of using food aid to circumvent its export subsidy reduction commitments. It has also been criticized for selling food aid at less than commercial interest rates, subsidizing its farmers by buying commodities at prices slightly above market rates, monetization
of food aid and making countries dependent on food aid. The "tied" nature of US food aid requires that 75 percent of it has to be procured, packed, processed domestically and shipped on US ships. This increases costs and leads to delays caused by shipping commodities over long distances. Another critique against US food aid is that it contains Genetically Modified (GM) material. The US is also criticized for being the only major donor which continues to disburse its food aid bilaterally rather than through multilateral agencies like the WFP.

The US needs to realize that food aid is a key resource which can be used to advance humanitarian as well as developmental goals. America can help its own farmers and citizens as well as the needy around the world better if it stops regarding food aid just as farmer welfare and a foreign policy tool and develops a more rigorous agenda for aid and restructures it so that takes it into account both the costs and the benefits of food aid. While sometimes alleviating hunger in the short term, US food aid generally reduces the prices at which farmers in recipient countries can sell their produce. This discourages farmers and lowers local food production, making it more difficult for poor countries to feed themselves in the long term and affecting long-term food security. Also, US food aid policies are inherently expensive, hard to police, inefficient and at times not sufficient for the recipient countries. US food aid policies are essentially short-term responses to the threat of food insecurity in countries across the world.

The US needs to reorient food aid and improve it. There are many ways in which it can do this and respond to the criticisms against US food aid. The US should try to obtain food aid locally from the recipient country or regionally to give more flexibility, reduce transportation and storage costs and ensure that food aid reaches the people when it is most needed. This would also encourage local farmers and promote regional economic development. The US should also promote the establishment of regional reserves in regions which are most vulnerable to food insecurity crises so that agencies and local government authorities can respond quickly to crises. While meeting short-term emergencies, US food aid should also address the fundamental causes of hunger by supporting measures to address agricultural productivity, technology, market development, education, infrastructure development, health and employment generation in countries receiving food aid and promote the goal of long-
term food security in these countries. The US also needs to give food aid in grant form and move towards cash-based food aid, stop monetization of food aid for greater flexibility and to minimize transaction costs, promote agricultural reforms in recipient countries to boost domestic production and stop donating GM material as food aid. It should, as far as possible, give in-kind food only when local food markets are disrupted due to disasters or natural calamities, when regional purchases of food are not possible and when the affected country or an international agency like the WF appeals for help during emergencies. US food would be more effective if it is free from US' commercial interests including shipping companies’ interests. If at all in-kind food aid is given, open bidding should be introduced to ensure that just a few agri-business firms do not have a monopoly thus reducing the price of food and enabling the US to give more food with the same amount of money. The US needs to ensure that its food aid is targeted well so that food prices in recipient countries do not decrease and discourage local production. To be effective, food aid must be in a form that is easily transportable and serves nutritional objectives for the target population. The US should also support activities meant to improve nutrition among vulnerable categories like women, children and the elderly and to ensure that children go to school through programmes that supply food to children in schools. US food aid should be made faster, more responsive to needs and more flexible by untying it from cargo preferences and rules that most of the food aid must be procured, processed, packaged in the US and shipped on US ships. The US, like other food aid donors, should commit all its food aid donations under the FAC and notify the FAO and the WFP of its food aid shipments in a timely manner to ensure more transparency and accountability. More food aid should be donated through multilateral channels like the World Food Program as this would ensure that food aid is not driven by donors’ national interests. Also, instead of both the USDA and the USAID handling different food aid programmes, food aid programmes should be brought under one agency to bring coherence in objectives. US food aid and food aid programmes of other countries need to be rights-based and needs-based and not surplus-driven. They should not be an end in themselves and should complement rather than replace or weaken long-term strategies for removal of hunger and poverty. They should ideally be oriented towards the goal of ultimately eradicating hunger and poverty and thus ending the need to have food aid itself. Towards this end, world leaders need to tackle the root causes of poverty and hunger. There should be more coordination among
food aid donors to ensure that international guidelines on food aid and need-based targeting are followed. In a clear indication that the US intends to respond to criticism of its food aid programmes, the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee passed the Global Food Security Act that aims at increasing the US government's commitment to combating global hunger considerably with a wide range of measures, more funds, more focus on long-term agricultural development and a special coordinator to manage implementation of these provisions. The Act would restructure aid agencies to enable quicker responses. The Act would set up a US Emergency Rapid Response to Food Crises Fund that would authorize a US$500 million appropriation for "local and regional purchase and distribution of food" and "provision of emergency non-food assistance, including vouchers or cash transfer, safety net programmes, or other appropriate non-food assistance" (IRIN News 2010). This fund would be "in addition, and complementary, to food aid provided through the US Department of Agriculture" (IRIN News 2010).

India is also a food aid donor though the quantity it provides is only a fraction of the quantity of food aid provided by the US. It has provided food aid to countries as diverse as Pakistan, Afghanistan and Cape Verde. Most of the food aid is provided in the form of emergency food aid though in some instances it has provided project food aid and programme food aid. However, India does not have a well-thought out policy on this and instead donates food aid mostly during emergencies as disaster relief. It would be better to move towards cash-based food aid as far as possible as this would reduce delays and also ensure that people get food according to their usual diets and tastes. India should ensure that its food aid should be well-targeted so that it actually provides relief to vulnerable people and provide food aid only during emergencies when there are appeals for help so that its food aid is not seen as a selfish programme like the US'. This would also help increase its soft power in countries to which it provides food aid.

Like in the US, the problem of food insecurity in India is not so much about lack of sufficient food production as about lack of access to food. Therefore, India has also introduced many food assistance programmes. Just like the US, most of the food assistance programmes in India are means-tested benefits. The US has put in place comprehensive school food programmes which provide subsidized or free breakfasts
and lunches for children. Food is provided on the basis of Required Dietary Allowances, which ensures that children get adequate nutrition, including adequate quantities of fruits and vegetables. Similarly, India also has the mid-day meal scheme which is meant to provide nutritious food to children as well as to encourage them to come to school. However, this meal is not only often inadequate and not nutritious, it often lacks quality and is not cooked properly and has led to several cases of food poisoning. Also, when schools are closed for vacations, children do not get even this one meal and very few vegetables and fruits are served. One admirable exception to this is the state of Tamil Nadu which provides food to children even during vacations (Supreme Court Commissioner’s Report on Right to Food 2003b: 8). It is to address this issue that the US has started the Seamless Summer Program and the Summer Food Service Program which provide nutritious food and snacks to children even when schools are closed for vacations. Like the Seamless Summer Program in the US, the mid-day meal scheme should also be made available to school children throughout the year, even when schools are closed for vacations. Another important food assistance programme of the US is the Women, Infant and Children (WIC) Programme which supplies monthly vouchers (or in some cases, food packages) for nutritious foods high in calcium, iron, proteins and Vitamins A and C to supplement the diets of low-income pregnant and postpartum women, infants and children till the age of five who are at nutritional risk. To be eligible, participants must meet income guidelines, a state residency requirement, category requirements (they must fall in one of the eligible categories) and be individually determined to be at “nutrition risk” by a health professional. The WIC is one of the most successful food assistance programmes as studies have found that participation in WIC leads to improved birth outcomes, including higher gestation than among non-participants, reduced expenses on Medicaid costs, improved diets, improved cognitive development among children and reduced future health costs. Another programme is the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) which provides food packages to low-income pregnant and breastfeeding women, new mothers up to one year postpartum, infants, children up to the age of six and elderly persons who are at least 60 years old who meet income eligibility requirements. A programme which is similar to the WIC is in operation in India as well. This is the Integrated Child Development Scheme, which is meant to improve the nutritional status of children till the age of six, pregnant and nursing women and adolescent girls through Anganwadis. This programme, however, has
been affected by the irregular opening of *Anganwadis* and lack of trained workers (Supreme Court Commissioner’s Report on Right to Food 2004: 9). The most important food assistance programme in the US is the Food Stamp Program which has now been renamed the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). All Americans who meet the programme’s income eligibility and asset requirements can claim benefits under this scheme. Eligibility depends on the joint income, expenditures, assets and resources of all members of a household. However, those adults who are able-bodied, childless and are unemployed have time limits on their receipt of food stamp benefits. Such people can obtain benefits only for three months in every 36 month-period unless they are working half-time or taking part in a job programme half-time. The US also has a Nutrition Program for the Elderly which provides nutritious food for the elderly. Comparable programmes in India are the Antyodaya Anna Yojana and Annapurna schemes and the Targeted Public Distribution System. While the Annapurna scheme provides 10 kg of free grain every month to persons who are entitled to old-age pensions but do not actually receive them, the Antyodaya Scheme provides 25 kg of rice and wheat at highly subsidized rates of Rs. 2 per kilograms for wheat and Rs. 3 per kilograms for rice to vulnerable persons, including widows and other single women, pregnant and nursing women, old persons and disabled adults, destitute men and women and primitive tribes with no regular support or assured means of subsistence (Supreme Court Commissioners’ Report on Right to Food 2004: 36). In fact, the Annapurna scheme is today redundant as pensions are universal a least on paper though its discontinuance has not been declared officially. The TPDS provides 35 kg of grain at subsidized prices to households which are Below the Poverty Line (BPL). However, these three schemes, just like the Food Stamp Program, have been criticized because very often eligible households do not get the benefits. Further, the Indian programmes have been hampered by the distribution of low quality grains, confusion regarding the total number of BPL families, misappropriation of funds and the diversion of grains meant for these schemes to the open market due to leakages at various stages. Due to these problems, cash-based programmes might be a better answer but even then the problem of corruption must be tackled firmly for these programmes to work properly. Moreover, cash-based programmes will not offer protection against price jumps. In fact, the existence of a well-functioning PDS in itself will have a sobering effect on food grain prices. The Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) programme
in the US serves low-income families through different kinds of assistance and work opportunities. Similar programmes in India are the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) and the Sampoorna Grameen Rozgar Yojana (SRY) scheme. Employment schemes are the best way to ensure that food reaches the poorest, according to a report by the Supreme Court Commissioners on the Right to Food Office (Supreme Court Commissioner’s Report on Right to Food 2003a: 4). So, the scope of food-for-work schemes like the NREGA and SRY must be broadened, particularly during disasters. The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) in the US provides federal funds and food commodities to states to assist local emergency feeding organizations providing food relief to millions of low-income persons in need of short-term hunger relief. Similarly, the Disaster Assistance Programme provides commodity foods to shelters and relief camps, distributing commodity foods directly to needy households and issuing emergency food stamps to affected people. India does not have any formal food assistance programme for this though it does have ad hoc programmes to provide hunger relief during emergencies and a famine-related programme which is operational only in famine-prone areas. The US also has the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR) which provides food to households with low incomes living on Indian reservations and to American Indian households residing in approved areas near reservations or in Oklahoma every month. Many households take part in the FDPIR as an alternative to the Food Stamp Program because they do not have easy access to food stamp offices or authorized food stores. India too has tribals living in deep forests and in places which do not have ration shops or fair price shops. But there is no programme in place to cater to their needs exclusively. In addition, there are programmes in the US which are meant to provide nutrition to homeless children i.e., the Homeless Children Nutrition Program. There is no such centrally-funded programme specifically for this in India though state governments may have their own schemes. For instance, the Delhi government has started soup kitchens as part of Bhagidari with funds and help from corporate and NGOs.

India has the largest number of malnourished people in the world. Though India, like the US, has a large number of schemes to provide food security to its hungry, these schemes face many problems like: inadequate coverage, inadequate amount of food distributed, lack of good quality grains and fortified food, lack of transparency, lack
of infrastructure, corruption at different levels, confusion regarding eligibility for different schemes, poor implementation, lack of proper targeting, etc. In its food assistance programmes, India should ensure that vulnerable categories get access to food and reduce corruption, which has often led to relief food being sold in black markets. A major problem the Indian government faces is of identifying BPL families as different agencies have different numbers and the method used in surveying BPL families has been criticized as being flawed. More provisions for food security must be made for vulnerable sections which do not fall in the BPL category like the elderly, disabled, the homeless, tribals, etc. Food handed out by the government must include not just grains but also sugar, pulses, oil, etc. Fortified foods like those given in the WIC Program and school food programmes of the US should also be given to vulnerable sections like women, children and the elderly. There is also no system of scrutiny of entitlements in India unlike in the US. Lack of money for financing existing food assistance programmes is another problem Indian states face. Thus, India’s food assistance programmes must be strengthened in order to respond to these challenges. The proposed Food Security Act is a good step towards ensuring that all Indians have some amount of food security.