Chapter II
CONCEPT OF FOOD SECURITY

The term food security for the first time was used in the World-Food Conference held at Rome in 1974 in which the attention of world Community was drawn towards problems of hunger and starvation of million of people in the World. The conference was organized by FAO (Food and Agricultural Organization) in the wake of 1972–74 world food crisis, made a call for ending hunger by 1984, which led to the development of the concept of food security as physical and economic access to food to all people at all time. It was realized in the Conference that World Food Security is the common responsibility of the international community and gave the call that no child, women and man should go to bed hungry and no human being’s physical and mental capabilities should be stunted by malnutrition. Since then the Food security has been a persistent issue raised in several national and international seminars and conferences organized during the last two decades. It has also found a prominent place in the research themes of scholars specially the geographers, economists and sociologists (Minhas, 1976; Sen, 1981; Radhakrishna, 1991; Tendulkar, et al., 1993; George, 1996; and Suryanaryana, 1996). The concept of food security is very complex, multidimensional and global, and it is being debated since last three decades (Mohammad, 2003).

Food security as a global issue has been defined in a number of ways. It is to be interpreted as means for adequate availability of food items, particularly food grains. It also refers to the adequate purchasing power to meet the food requirement at household level (Sarkar, 2001). Hence, a strategy for food security would encompass the essential components of food availability, with focus on those who are living below poverty line. Food security generally implies the physical supply of a minimum level of food grains during all periods including those of harvest failures (Reultinger, 1977). According to FAO (1984) the basic concept of food security implies that “all people at all times have both physical and economic access to the basic food they need”. But the World Bank has modified it indicating, “food
security is access by all people at all times to enough food for an active and healthy life”. Its essential elements are availability of food and the ability to acquire it (World Bank, 1986).

The most comprehensive and perhaps, largely accepted definition came out from the World Food Summit at Rome in 1996. “Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life”. This definition emphasizes three basic dimensions of food security: (i) Availability of food means physical supply of desired food in sufficient quantity, (ii) Accessibility which implies an economic access indicating close link of purchasing power to food security, and (iii) Stability in supply which include access to global market (Bhattacharya, 2001, quoted in Mohammad, 2003).

Availability of enough food for all can be attained through efficient domestic production in each country and import of food from other countries. Appropriate use of natural resources can ensure universal food security sustainability. Stability can be ensured by taking appropriate pre-emptive steps, through which harmful seasonal and inter-annual instability of supplies can be reduced. Natural and man made disasters can often be anticipated or even prevented when they occur, can be timely effective and constructive. Accessibility to the adequate and safe food to all may be made possible by carefully taking into consideration the adequate income of people and sound governmental intervention and policies. The vast majority of malnourished do not have, at the first instance, adequate access to natural resources, jobs, income or social security (Chaturvedi, 1997 and Ghosh, 2000).

The term ‘food security’ has been derived from the Latin word ‘secure’, means free from care and anxiety and hence, implies not only access but also right to food or freedom from hunger. The United Nations has legitimately considered the access of around 826 million hungry people of the developing world to adequate food as a Universal Human Right and collective responsibility of the world community. The universal declaration of Human Rights (1948), and the International Convention of Economic, Social and
Cultural Rights (1966), recognized that to be free from hunger is a fundamental right of every one (Halim, B., 2002).

There is a considerable imbalance between the food consumption and domestic production of food in developing countries, and the call for food security aims to minimize this gap through the short term and long term measures. The problem has a short-term dimension due to inter-year fluctuations in food supplies. It can be measured by short-term variability in food grain availability, while the problem has a long-term dimension and it is the growing import needs of less developed countries. Import increased from 52 million tones, in 1972 to over 70 million tones in 1978 [Green and Kirkpatrick, 1982]. A major feature of the global food security scenario is that marked imbalances exist across regions. Nearly, 80 per cent of world population live in the developing countries, these countries, put together, produce only 59 million tones of the world’s cereal production while developed countries had a surplus of 92 million metric tones during the 1985–86. This imbalance between food and population compels the developing countries to import the surplus of the developed countries through commercial purchase, bilateral arrangement and through multilateral aid. The situation would become grimmer in coming years, in view of the fact that there is a recent trend of decrease in cereals production in the developing countries. During 1970–85, the annual growth rate of food production was 3.8 per cent, which dwindled to 2.8 per cent in subsequent years. This means increase of food import to avert famine. But many deficit countries are not in a position to import foodgrains because of their inability to pay for it (Banerjee, 1997).

The concept of food security cannot be restricted to the boundaries of a country alone, it is a global concept. Hunger and deprivation in any part of the world are totally incompatible with the food security concept of the modern world. No region of the world is totally free from scarcities and failure of crops, but on the world-wide basis the surplus of one region would go a long way in meeting the deficit of others. In chronic deficit countries, however, domestic production may not be adequate to sustain the necessary reserves and in their case the stocks could be built through imports alone. Such deficit
countries are generally short of foreign exchange to finance the import bill and they will need the assistance of the surplus countries as also of the international financial institutions for building up their reserve and the infrastructure needed for it. It is in this sense that the concept of food security is global (Acharya, 1983).^9

The concept of food security is the management of food economy in a manner that society does not depend on external assistance to meet the normal cyclical shortage that occurs in the agricultural economy. In situation of exception, misfortunes and when the calamity persists for more than one year, it would be obvious that resources would be slender to combat the misfortune and assistance from friendly countries would be essential. This mutual give and take is obligatory, if the lessons of the human civilization are not to be ignored. Nevertheless, it is equally important that help from outside countries collective would be possible only when the philosophy of food security is adopted by every country (Acharya, 1983)^10.

In theory, self-sufficiency of a state is not crucial because inter-state movement of food should make it possible to transport it to deficit states. Nonetheless, in practice, adequate production at the state level is important because it facilitates consumption, particularly in rural areas and by the poor (Srivastava, 2000).^11

Food security means not only the availability of food for direct consumption, but it also has other implications. The fact is that the world now produces enough food; capable of feeding every stomach does not solve the problem. It is a question of not only production but distribution or attacking the underlying factors that cause hunger. The issue is further compounded by regional disparities and most importantly, individual families or intra-household food situation. Even within a household, women face the brunt of chronic malnutrition as they are affected by age old gender discrimination (Ghosh, 2000).^12

Distribution efficient and of the right type is also integral part of food security system. Availability of stocks with government will be of little use if they cannot be supplied to the people who need them and at the right time.
Indeed there have been instances when absence of a proper distribution system led to large-scale food crisis despite availability of stocks. It would be no exaggeration to say that the distribution system takes care of a very large part of the food security concept. It is the art of managing scarcities and shortages, which is the central feature of food security system of a country. Availability of food grains will have little relevance if people do not possess purchasing power to buy them for their consumption. This compulsion casts a responsibility on the government to device ways and means by which, in the first instance, food is available within the country and in the second, people have means to purchase or access food through employment generation schemes dovetailed with development programmes on a fairly continuing basis. (Acharya, 1983).

Stability in food price is important specially for the poor, who spend a large part of their income on food, when food prices increase, many who are in the margin of the poverty line get pushed down.

Indian food policy has two important objectives; first to stabilize food grain supplies and prices overtime through stock policies and second, to make foodgrains more evenly available across regions to stabilize prices by procuring grains from surplus areas and supplying them in deficit areas. Accordingly, food grain markets in India have faced several interventions including controls on private storage and movement through policies such as the Essential Commodities Act and Zoning that prohibits private trade in foodgrains across broad zones. Private agents buy grains at low prices in peak seasons or from surplus areas and sell them when prices are high during the lean season or in deficit areas thereby lifting up the prices. Food price stability and food security can thus be promoted if this is restriction on private storage and trading activities. Although, serious efforts have been made in the recent past to improve food supply to the poor by way of introducing the Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS). In the wake of economic reforms, the PDS is perceived as the main safety net to protect the poor from potential short-run price induced adverse effects of economic reforms (Radhakrishna, 2002). In India, a large number of fair price shops are developed, where the grains are supplied out of the stocks procured by the
state at prices which are generally below the ruling market prices, i.e. at the minimum support prices. It is argued that though the system is meant to meet the requirements of the poor, in effect it is taken advantage of by the ‘not-so-poor.’ It is also contended that the cost incurred on the PDS is unjustifiably high. There is force in both these comments. However, the alternative is not to abandon the system, but to ensure that proper targeting is done, and the distribution costs are controlled. For realizing these objectives the involvement of the local level institutions can be extremely helpful. In our country such involvement could now be facilitated with the establishment of the Panchayati Raj System.

The concept of food security has undergone considerable modifications in the recent years. Food availability and stability are considered good measures of food security till the seventies, and the achievement of self-sufficiency was accorded high priority in the food policies of developing countries. However, though some countries were successful in achieving self-sufficiency by increasing their food production and also improved their capacity to cope with year-to-year fluctuations in production, they could not solve the problem of chronic household food insecurity.

This necessitated a change in approach and as a result the food energy intake of vulnerable groups is now given prominence in assessing food security. It has become common practice to estimate the number of food insecure households by comparing their calorie intake with the required norms. However, the widely accepted norms of the level of calorie intake required for overcoming under-nutrition have been questioned. Nutritionists argue that energy intake is a poor measure of nutritional status, which depends on not only the nutrient intake but also non-nutrient food attributes, privately and publicly, provided inputs, and health status. The non-food factors, which influence biological absorption, are also considered important for food security.

It is suggested that the assessment of malnutrition should be based on outcome measures rather than input measures. The suggested ‘outcome measures’ include anthropometric measures, clinical signs of malnutrition, biochemical indicators and physical activity. Among these, anthropometric
measures are considered to have an advantage over other indicators since body measurements are sensitive to even minor levels of malnutrition whereas biochemical and clinical indicators are useful only when the level of malnutrition is extreme. Outcome indicators are also more closely related to health and functional capacity.
REFERENCES