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Q13

What are the salient features of the National Food Security Act, 2013 ? How has the Food Security Bill helped in eliminating hunger and malnutrition in India?

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2021 · GS III · 15 marks · Farm Subsidies and PDS

Issues related to direct and indirect farm subsidies and minimum support prices; Public Distribution System - objectives, functioning, limitations, revamping; issues of buffer stocks and food security; Technology missions; economics of animal-rearing.

Core demand of the question

- What are the salient features of the **National Food Security Act, 2013**? How has the Food Security Bill helped in eliminating hunger and malnutrition in India?
- State 75 per cent rural and 50 per cent urban **coverage**. Do not claim hunger is fully eliminated
- Keep the explanation within a 15-mark length

Revision summary

NFSA covers up to 75 per cent of rural and 50 per cent of urban population through TPDS.

Priority persons get 5 kg a month at Rs 3/2/1; **AAY** gets 35 kg per household.

Maternity benefit, ICDS, and mid-day meals are statutory, with a food security allowance if grain fails.

The Act reduced starvation risk and proved its pipeline in COVID years.

Malnutrition persists because the entitlement is cereal-heavy and care, WASH, and diet diversity sit outside the ration shop.

Introduction

The **National Food Security Act, 2013** turned cheap grain from a scheme into a **legal entitlement**. It covers up to **75 per cent of the rural** and **50 per cent of the urban** population through the Targeted Public Distribution System, and it links maternity and child feeding to statute. It has reduced starvation risk for millions. It has not eliminated hunger or malnutrition.

Body

Salient features of NFSA 2013

- **Coverage ceiling**: up to **75 per cent rural** and **50 per cent urban** population as eligible households.
- **Priority households** receive **5 kg per person per month** of grain at **Rs 3/2/1** per kg for rice, wheat, and coarse cereals.
- **Antyodaya Anna Yojana** households retain **35 kg per household per month**.
- Identification of eligible households is left to States within the ceiling, with **women as heads** of ration cards where possible.

- **Pregnant women and lactating mothers** are entitled to a **maternity benefit** of not less than **Rs 6,000**, besides nutritious food through **ICDS**.
- Children get age-wise meals through **ICDS** and the **mid-day meal** (now PM-POSHAN) as **legal rights**, not only administrative schemes.
- **Food Security Allowance** is due if entitled grain is not supplied.
- Grievance redress, transparency, and a role for local bodies are written into the Act. **TPDS** remains the delivery spine.

How the Act has helped

- A rights-based PDS expanded and regularised cheap calories, which **cuts starvation deaths** and distress grain prices in poor districts when it works.
- **Aadhaar and portability** (One Nation One Ration Card) later made the same entitlement more usable for migrants, which the 2013 text anticipated as reform of TPDS.
- ICDS and school meals as statute made it harder to quietly close feeding centres. That supports **child calorie access** even when it does not by itself fix diets.
- During **COVID**, NFSA plus extra Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan grain showed the value of an existing legal pipeline.

Why hunger and malnutrition are not eliminated

- NFSA is largely a **cereal entitlement**. Hidden hunger is about **protein, fat, iron, and diet diversity**. Cheap rice does not end anaemia.
- Leakage, exclusion errors, and quality complaints persist even after digitisation, especially where State capacity is thin.
- **Maternity benefit** in practice has often been narrower than the Act's Rs 6,000 vision (PMMVY design and budgets).
- NFHS rounds still show high **stunting, wasting, and anaemia**. That is malnutrition with a full PDS in many States.
- Open-market price spikes, WASH, women's education, and care time decide nutrition as much as the ration shop.
- Global Hunger Index methods are debated, but domestic anthropometry is enough to reject a claim of elimination.

What would complete the Bill's promise

- Fortification where safe, **pulses and millets** in PDS, ICDS quality, and **POSHAN** convergence.
- Keep the legal grain floor; add diet quality rather than declaring victory.

Flow diagram

NFSA 2013 -> TPDS 75 percent rural 50 percent urban
 NFSA 2013 -> Maternity ICDS MDM rights
 TPDS 75 percent rural 50 percent urban -> Less starvation risk
 Maternity ICDS MDM rights -> Less starvation risk
 Cereal-only leakage care gaps -> Hunger and malnutrition remain

Conclusion

NFSA 2013 made cheap grain, maternity feeding, ICDS, and mid-day meals justiciable for a large covered population. It has helped against hunger as starvation. It has not eliminated malnutrition, because calories at Rs 3 are not a complete diet or a complete care system.

Facts & figures

Coverage

NFSA: up to 75 per cent of rural and 50 per cent of urban population.

Priority ration

5 kg per person per month at Rs 3/2/1 for rice, wheat, and coarse cereals.

AAI

Antyodaya: 35 kg per household per month at the same issue prices.

Maternity benefit

Act provides not less than Rs 6,000 for pregnant and lactating women; delivery through later scheme design has been tighter.

ONORC

One Nation One Ration Card: portability reform that made the NFSA entitlement more migrant-friendly.

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