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*Abstract: Despite substantial economic growth, India still has one of the highest undernutrition rates in the world, and combined with its large population, India is home to almost 40 per cent of the world’s stunted children. Despite recent rapid economic growth, the proportion of stunted children under the age of three in India declined very slowly, from 51 per cent in 1998-99 to 45 per cent in 2005-06. This project sought to synthesise research on India’s public policies in order to bring evidence on what can be done to counter this problem of undernutrition at scale. We undertook three sets of activities for this purpose:

a) Synthesis of existing research and commissioning new studies: twelve papers were commissioned and two background papers were prepared for this. The 12 papers came together in an edited book (description and contents of the volume appear in Annexe 1).

b) Preparation of policy communication materials: along with the other materials (commentary in EPW, included in Annexe 2; article in business standard available at: http://www.business-standard.com/article/opinion/sonalde-desai-the-great-indian-poverty-game-112032900014_1.html), IDS has now prepared a policy brief aimed at Indian policy makers, with specific recommendations that could be operationalised (attached in Annexe 3). We also co-organised a conference. A newspaper article which publicised the key messages from our conference is available at: http://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/cereal-indiscretions/
c) Developing capacity at NCAER: In addition to being co-editors of the volume and commenting on the policy brief, NCAER has now gotten an additional extension to the project, the report for which they will be submitting independently.

*Keywords: Undernutrition, India, Public policy, National Food Security Act

1. The Research Problem
This research sought to inform and influence the current state of debate in India on the issues of malnutrition and food security. It was undertaken in order to explore the reasons why India’s burgeoning growth rates have not translated into better nutrition outcomes for its people. It additionally aimed to understand and shape the current policy process around the recently passed National Food Security Act (NFSA) as well as restructuring of the Public Distribution System (PDS) and Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), all of which have potential to improve nutritional outcomes and increase food security in India. When the project was initiated, the NFSA was a draft bill, but it has since been passed as an Act of Parliament, with a constitutional mandate. While the union budget has allocated nearly US$2 billion towards its implementation, actual rolling out of the act has been slow, with no state implementing the act as of date. This project considered it important to ensure that appropriate empirical information was collated and brought to bear on the NFSA’s implementation, specifically to ensure that the processes contributes to positive nutritional outcomes.

2. Objectives:
The overall goal of this project was to synthesize and (where needed) reanalyse existing research, in order to inform and influence the current state of the debate in India regarding nutrition and food security issues. The project aimed to address the question: ‘What are the absolute priorities for accelerating undernutrition reduction in India, and how can they be achieved through public policy initiatives like the NFSA?’ It did so by marshalling evidence from a variety of disciplinary perspectives.

The specific objectives of this project were to:

a) **Synthesise existing research and commission new analyses**, where needed, to understand the issue of malnutrition in India and the barriers to achievement of food and nutrition security. This objective was achieved through i) Preparation of a background paper providing disaggregated results from a variety of data sources such as the National Family Health Survey and National Sample Surveys, and ii) Preparation of a background paper analysing the barriers and opportunities to achieving food and nutrition security from the perspective of policy actors, tailored specifically to the debates and discourses surrounding the NFSA before it was passed in the Indian Parliament. In addition, 12 papers were commissioned from experts in the field, and discussed at an in-country
conference. Subsequent to this, these papers were modified and collated into an edited book that has now been submitted to Routledge for publication.

b) Ensure that this research is responsive to the policy discourse in India around Nutrition and Food Security issues, and that research insights are brought into policy discourse such that public policies, particularly the NFSA, can be made more nutrition sensitive. This objective was fulfilled through a stakeholder mapping, identifying the stakeholders involved in the making of the NFSA, and subsequently identifying research priorities and opportunities for influence through one-to-one interviews with most of these stakeholders. In addition, there was an e-discussion organized by IDS through an online forum called Eldis Communities, which was received well by the paper writers. This discussion fed into the structure and arguments of different papers, specifically contributing to the framing of an overarching introduction tying the research findings together. Finally, a policy brief was prepared by IDS, identifying key policy recommendations in order to tackle the problem of undernutrition at scale. These recommendations included a call for strengthening governance of nutrition programmes; collecting credible, timely and regular data; making public policies universal; working across sectors; and recognising and addressing gender disparities.

3. Methodology

The main methods in which evidence was collected and collated were:

a) **Stakeholder mapping through NetMap**, a technique to capture a range of stakeholders and their priorities. This was done through a full day workshop with selected respondents, using specific questions around who the main actors involved in the making of the NFSA were. This generated a visual map, which was then coded and information entered into excel, thereafter using VizuaLyzer software to conduct analysis and generate different visual maps.

b) **Face to face unstructured interviews** with selected respondents, using elite interviewing techniques.

c) **E-discussion** with stakeholders and experts in the field, and analysing the key issues arising from there

d) Preparation of **two background papers** identifying the main areas for research

e) **Commissioning papers**, based on the main areas of research identified during the e-discussion and preparation of the two background papers. Subsequently, presenting these papers at an in-country conference, and reviewing, revising and collating these into an edited book.

4. Project Activities

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a) **Two day e-discussion**, organised by IDS on 11 and 12 June 2014. Participants included the project team (NCAER and IDS) and various authors of the papers. A total of 53 posts over two days were contributed, showing a high level of engagement by the participants. The discussion focused on complementarities between the papers, the points of consensus and departure, and how the various paper-writers conceptualized the problem of undernutrition in India. Participants debated the best solutions to this issue. (Annexe 4 contains a short summary of this e-discussion)

b) **High level conference on nutrition policy organised in June 2014, near Delhi (NCAER):** This conference brought together the authors of the various papers, as well as senior policy makers and experts in the field.

c) **Edited book completed and sent to Routledge:** The papers submitted by the authors were presented and discussed at the high level conference. Following this, we gave guidance to all authors for revising their papers. There were also commentaries commissioned from Veena Rao and Arti Ahuja, based on conference discussions. On receipt of the completed papers, the Introduction chapter was authored by all four editors (Desai, Haddad, Chopra and Thorat). Routledge was contacted as a publisher, and a contract was prepared and signed with them for the publication of the book. This book is due for publication in July or August 2015.

d) **Communication material, including policy briefs, press releases and blogs finalised and disseminated (IDS/NCAER):** A paper has been prepared and presented titled ‘Enhancing Nutrition Security via India’s National Food Security Act: Using an axe instead of a scalpel?’ by Desai and Vanneman for presentation at the India Policy Forum (forthcoming in a volume published by Sage). In addition, following the conference, an op-ed was prepared by Sonalde Desai ([http://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/cereal-indiscretions/99/](http://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/cereal-indiscretions/99/))

5. **Project’s Outputs**

a) An edited volume to be published by Routledge: Desai, Sonalde, Lawrence Haddad, Deepta Chopra and Amit Thorat (Editors). *Investing in the Future: Public Policy Opportunities to End Undernutrition in India*. This volume, containing 16 papers and commentaries, assesses the status and causes of undernutrition in India and examines the effectiveness of policies designed to address undernutrition. Contributors to this volume include leading academic researchers in the field of hunger and nutrition and policymakers with vast experience in designing and implementing policies as well as civil society representatives involved in advocacy to reduce undernutrition. The book chapters and the overview chapter are attached (zip file) to this report as Annexe 5.

6. Project Outcomes

Through the activities of the project, we have been able to identify the key stakeholders and their prime interests around food security and nutrition. This has in turn informed our influencing and convening strategies, and developed a shared and clear understanding of the key barriers to the achievement of food and nutrition security in India. An important distinction between nutrition and food security has been made, at the same time promoting the linking up of these two agendas in terms of the various researchers and policy makers being brought together on a common platform to discuss the synergies and complementarities they hold. Further, concrete steps through which public policies, including the NFSA, can be made more nutrition sensitive, have been identified and signalled to the policy makers and stakeholders in India.

7. Overall Assessment and Recommendations

There have been a series of delays in the project which led to a request for extension. The delays were in obtaining papers and seeking reviews. The Indian national elections and the uncertainty around any policy initiatives around the time of elections were also problematic. Despite these delays however, this has been a very useful and relevant project, in highlighting not only the challenges in making undernutrition a priority policy issue in India, but also in identifying key policy recommendations that can help address the issue at scale in India.

Annexes:
Annex 1 – Description and contents of edited book
Annexe 2 – EPW commentary
Annexe 3 – IDS Policy brief
Annexe 4 – Short summary of e-discussion
Annexe 5 – Zip file containing all the book chapters and the overview chapter as submitted to Routledge
Annexe 6 – Background paper 1, by Deepta Chopra

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