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### **Tracking hunger in Bihar with Special Reference to Patna District (Danapur Area)**

Swati • Mrinalini • Jaya  
• Kamini Jha

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Corresponding Author : Kamini Jha

**Abstract :** *In 2009, India was ranked 66th among 88 countries in the Global Hunger Index drawn up by the International Food Policy Research Institute. In 2010, India's rank slipped to 67th among of 85 countries. India is home to a quarter of the world's hungry – about 230 million people – according to a World Food Programme report released on March 2009. More than 455 million Indians survive on US\$ 1.25 (Rs 56 approximately) a day or less, compared with 420 million in 1981. This paper is an effort to track, investigate and report the struggle to rid the emerging nation*

*from its developing state of hunger and malnutrition. It is high time to transform the writhing Bihar to shining Bihar and take up those issues that are actually genuine to the poor masses. Bihar is India's second fastest growing state. There has been a package of surprises brought to limelight relating to infrastructural development, improvement in the IT sector, better health facilities and greater emphasis on education with mind mines in Bihar. Bihar's GDP grew by 11.03% between 2008-09 but still we lack a major revolution i.e. the revolution to make Bihar free from poverty and hunger. With a population of 9 crores, 54.04% of the population is BPL which is one of the highest figures of our country. The effort of the government to give the 'right to food' to the masses ,can be supplemented by the state authorities by various policy measures. In spite of numerous govt. schemes and programmes, the benefits have failed to improve the conditions of the deprived ones. The anomalies are there within the system and mere formulation of laws cannot help the situation. What is needed is a clear and loud expression of implementations of policies in spirit. Thus the only ray of hope is the increasing awareness and mobilization of the rural poor whose potential can be utilized to improve the management of the entire system.*

#### **Swati**

B.A. III year, Economics (Hons.), Session: 2008-2011,  
Patna Women's College, Patna University, Patna,  
Bihar, India

#### **Mrinalini**

B.A. III year, Economics (Hons.), Session: 2008-2011,  
Patna Women's College, Patna University, Patna,  
Bihar, India

#### **Jaya**

B.A. III year, Economics (Hons.), Session: 2008-2011,  
Patna Women's College, Patna University, Patna,  
Bihar, India

#### **Kamini Jha**

Assistant Professor, Department of Economics,  
Patna Women's College, Bailey Road,  
Patna – 800 001, Bihar, India  
E-mail : [kaminijhathakur@gmail.com](mailto:kaminijhathakur@gmail.com)

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## Introduction :

Bihar is India's second fastest growing state. With a population of nine *crores*, the state's revenue and development expenditure has increased in the past few years according to the World Bank. In the present scenario, a changing face of Bihar could be viewed in the upcoming years. It has been a package of surprises brought to limelight, relating to infrastructural development, improvement in the IT sector, better health facilities, greater emphasis on education and other wide range of reforms which are already visible. Global business and economic leaders feel that Bihar now has good opportunity to sustain its growth. With manufacturing growth rate at 36.07% Bihar has become the second best manufacturing state in India. Bihar's GDP grew by 11.03% between 2008-09 but still we lack a major revolution i.e., "The revolution to make Bihar free from poverty and hunger." It is said by a well known economist, "Everything else can wait but not hunger." Unfortunately in spite of numerous government schemes and safety nets, hunger remains widespread and has become a problem which needs fast solution. Hunger in Bihar relates to the images of rundown, overcrowded, rat infested houses, homeless persons, untreated illness and malnourished people. It is high time to transform "The withering Bihar to shining Bihar" and take up those issues that are actually genuine to the poor masses of Bihar. Over the last quarter of the century, most parts of India especially Bihar have failed to cater to the basic necessities of life- one of them being food security, there is a high level of invisible hunger among the poor who are so habituated to poor diets that they perceive it as a normal feature. And this is the reason why Bihar is home to more poor people than any other state in India, that is, almost half of India's poor reside in Bihar. With a population of nine *crores*, 54.04% of the population is below the poverty line which is one of the highest figures of our country. The state shows the regional concentration of poor in the northern regions which are highly affected by the

Maoists. They live in a state where children live and die on wild berries and red ants. This is a stark reminder of the degree of hypocrisy we practise. On the one hand there is massive food production while on the other hand farmers commit suicide. Inferior quality of production, inadequate warehousing facilities, rotting grain and starving millions are no longer an irony but a shame and sheer mockery of our democracy. Starvation deaths common in Bihar are the worst and least common manifestation of hunger. The analysis made on the basis of survey proves the fact that there is very low calorie and nutrition intake across various socio economic groups resulting in poverty and malnutrition. Life is so precarious in certain districts that each one wants to get rid of their life to escape the hazards of hunger escalating over here. Before going in depth let us analyze the new face of hunger in Bihar economy where grains are rotting instead of feeding the poor.

### Persons below the poverty line (in %)

Year	Buffer	Actual	Buffer	Actual	Buffer	Actual
2001	9.5	30.5	9.2	22.0	18.7	52.7
2002	9.5	33.8	9.2	22.5	18.7	50.3
2003	9.5	21.8	9.2	13.2	18.7	35.0
2004	9.5	13.8	9.2	10.4	18.7	23.6
2005	10.1	9.4	9.0	10.3	19.1	19.7

Source : HT Times Aug, 2010.

### Malnutrition in 0-6 age group :-

Bihar	–	54.04%
Orissa	–	54.04%
Karnataka	–	43.09%
Delhi	–	34.7%

From the above data it is clear that a whopping chunk of Bihar's population is grappling with hunger which is plunging humanity into gravest of crisis in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and also spreading hunger and poverty from rural areas into cities. Female death rates are over 50% higher than that of male especially in North West Bihar where the ratio is much higher than the average. Thus the ones who

are affected most constitute the poorest section of the population including the urban poor. The only ray of hope is the increasing awareness and mobilization of the rural poor whose potential can be harnessed to improve the management of such schemes and to pressurize the states into making structural changes. From its bleak past, Bihar may be finally moving towards a brighter future, but the common *Bihari* is not patting himself just yet. May be he is still waiting for this high growth to translate into better food on his table and more money in his pocket. Thus “tracking hunger” is an initiative to stimulate healthy economic expansion by acting as a powerful incentive to spread government and public awareness. It should not just remain as a woolly idealism but a practical able and achievable goal. And it is by no means impossible if we can only muster the will.

#### **Meaning of Hunger :**

The word ‘HUNGER’ often evokes images of emaciated people. It may be defined as lack of ability to assure on a long term basis a food system that provides the total population access to a timely, reliable and nutritionally adequate supply of food.

The UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) defines ‘Hunger’ as the consumption of fewer than 1,800k calories a day, the minimum requirement to live a healthy and productive life. In other words, it is a deplorable condition where the survival of human being is threatened due to lack of basic food which is out of reach of people either due to inadequate supply or low standard of living.

There are three degrees of hunger :-

- Acute Hunger
- Chronic Hunger
- Hidden Hunger

Acute Hunger is a condition in which death is imminent due to an absolute shortage of food. Chronic Hunger refers to lack of food intake adequate for health, growth and minimum energy

needs. Hidden Hunger describes those with a diet for a prolonged period of time which may result in shortened life span. There are various major causes of hunger which are illustrated below:-

- Rising population, Poverty and Unemployment
- Maternal under nutrition
- Food insecurity
- Inadequate infant and child feeding
- Iodine, Iron, Vitamin A, Zinc deficiency
- Limited household

Thus “HUNGER” is one of the major challenges before Indian economy. And Bihar is also not untouched by it. In fact Bihar is one of the states which scores among the lowest across all human development indicators in terms of health, below poverty line families, literacy, per capita income etc. Bihar is one of the largest populous states of India. Large population is a major hindrance in tackling the problem of hunger. Apart from population there are various factors which are discussed above. The inefficiency of government policies is also responsible for the problem of hunger. Still in the 21<sup>st</sup> century there are millions of people who are craving for three meals a day.

Thus there is a need for proper and major steps to be taken. There should be proper implementation of government policies regarding different food policies like Public distribution system, midday meal programs etc. There should be generation of more employment opportunities. General masses or privileged class should voluntarily come forward to help the needy ones. These are some of the important steps to be taken. Only then we can get rid of this problem called ‘HUNGER’.

#### **Objectives :**

- The objective of this project is to reveal the prevailing condition of deprived and marginalized sections of the society with specific study of *Danapur* area in Patna district.

- To alleviate the challenges of hunger in Bihar.
- To analyze the loop holes in the economic model.
- To analyze the various schemes like mid day meal scheme, public distribution system, food security bill, BPL card, integrated child development scheme and others at the state level.
- To track, investigate and report the ground level reality of hunger in Bihar, its extent, magnitude and the various mechanism adopted by the government to mitigate the sufferings of the people.

#### **Hypothesis :**

- Mere enactment of law is not sufficient but implementation with proper spirit is necessary
- Proper measures of storage and delivery to save grain rotting are needed.
- Revealing and realizing the bitter truth that it is only a handful of people who are progressing and not the teeming millions who still go to sleep hungry.

#### **Methodology :**

Area of study - Patna district, [Danapur].

Tools and techniques of data collection :-

#### **Primary data :**

Interaction with the people and observation.

#### **Secondary data :**

##### **Newspapers**

- The Hindu
- The Times Of India

##### **Magazines**

- Frontline
- India Today
- Outlook

#### **Introduction of the case study :**

45 years old *Parwatiya devi* a resident of *Danapur* sat smoking in front of her broken hut

desparately waiting not for social justice and dignity but for the rains to stop so that she could go out for rag picking. This is the kind of life the *Musahar* community leads in “*Garib ka raaj*” Bihar for whom liberty, equality, dignity and social justice is a distant dream even after 63 years of independence. *Musahar* literally means rat eater. The *Musahar* community was named after their vocation of hunting rats. The community is at the lowest rung in the social hierarchal order even among Dalit communities. *Musahars* are the worst victims of human rights violation in Bihar.

They live on the fringes of society in isolation, carrying on with their lives silently. They depend on physical labour for their life and livelihood, the total population of the *Musahar* community is 30 lacs in the state. Among them 96.7% are landless laborers. *Musahar* is the most deprived community in terms of livelihood resources. A few pots, small broken huts, torn clothes and their bare bodies are the only property they possess. A majority of them are landless, they do not own housing land. They are known for their hard work and agricultural skills. They largely grow paddy for landlords. Still they get only 2-3 kg grains as wages for a day. This leads to famine, malnutrition and starvation among the *Musahars*.

The *Musahar* community has no access to health facilities, private dispensaries and hospitals. Government hospitals are ill- equipped and doctors and health workers are absent during duty hours which lead *Musahars* to face dire consequence related to health. Ironically the *Musahar* community is in peril in a welfare state. *Musahars* live as slaves in a democratic country.

Is it not a shame to us when *Musahar* children go in search of jobs instead of going to school they become child laborers instead of enjoying childhood and instead of consuming nutritious food? Is this a democracy where the right to vote is being determined by the ruling class, feudal landlords or goons? Will they ever get opportunities to enjoy

fundamental rights? Will their deprivation ever come to an end?

These questions may remain so, till there are strong people to stand up in support of these exploited, deprived and betrayed communities.

**Problems :**

The major problems responsible for hunger in Bihar are:-

- Measures undertaken for direct intervention of state for poverty removal have produced unsatisfactory results, mainly due to the defect in the delivery system.
- Half of the grain given to public distribution system leaks out without reaching below poverty line people and so it has exclusion and inclusion errors.
- There is a shoddy implementation of programs and policies in the state like mid day meal scheme, public distribution system and food security bill which show the deplorable situation.
- Bihar is unable to settle on the below poverty line head count decided on the basis of a combination of 13 socio-economic parameters including calorie intake and income.
- Though Bihar is not a food deficient state, faulty food grain pricing policy and almost dysfunctional public distribution system have led to a seasonal food crisis in the state.
- Bihar is not only poor but also poorly managed, such is the callous attitude towards the downtrodden that tons of food grains are rotting in godown instead of feeding the poor.
- The calorie intake is below the minimum level since nutritional program was operational only in three out of twelve areas.

- Food Corporation of India, which is the largest state run grain agency, has tons of outdoor stocks threatened by rain.
- Even the public distribution system faces two limitations:-
  - Increase in cost due to transport and
  - Loss in storage.

**Suggestions :**

- There should be increase in awareness regarding the various policy measures among the poor sections of the society.
- Multi-pronged measure should be undertaken at state level for a comprehensive long term sustained food and nutritional security.
- There should be sprawling subsidies, food grain network and efficient anti hunger projects carried with willingness and zeal.
- There should be transparency in the system and strict actions and mechanisms of redressal should be undertaken in case of non implementation.
- There should be proper facilities in government hospitals so that cheap medicines and vitamins are provided to anaemic and critically ill pregnant women.
- There should be active involvement of the community and local level nutritional surveillance so that large scale leakage of BPL card should be checked.
- The grain should be released to the state government and public distribution scheme should be improved instead of letting it rot.
- Urgent measures like setting of the time line for the implementation of the programs are needed by the state government.
- Right to information act to monitor government schemes and programs like public distribution

system, integrated child development scheme, mid day meal programs etc are also required.

Finally warehousing should be made as priority leading sector and substantial tax holidays should be provided for investors to promote massive structural reforms.

Thus the above measures undertaken will help to grapple the vicious cycle of hunger in Bihar.

#### **Food security: the challenges ahead :**

Food security is the “the access of all people to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life. ”It has four basic components: availability, accessibility, utilization and stabilization. Availability, is a function of production, accessibility is related to purchasing power, utilization is determined by the availability of minimum basic needs- safe drinking water, primary health care, primary education, proper housing facilities ,environmental hygiene and fourth one stabilization is influenced by the extent of attention given to the sustainability of the system. The challenges of meeting the food requirement of ever increasing population and plateauing productivity of agriculture can only be met through sustainable agriculture. This will involve approaches like integrated nutrient management, integrated pest management, integrated disease management, eco agriculture, increased involvement in Agro- infrastructure, improving farm productivity by crop diversification, developing suitable site specific farming system models, developing innovative methods like system of rice intensification, removal of barriers to both internal as well as external trade, institutional reforms, input provisioning, greater thrust on rain fed areas, value addition, research and development particularly on the impact of climate change on agriculture and streamlining the public distribution system for an effective delivery mechanism.

#### **Hunger and poverty :**

There is an extremely high prevalence of hunger and malnutrition in Bihar. At some places the poorest families are eating on alternative days, as we celebrate the 64<sup>th</sup> year of independence. The rampant malnutrition, anaemic mothers and stunted children indicate our failure to feed the empty stomachs. India has more states under “alarming to extremely alarming” categories with Madhya Pradesh being the worst affected. No state in India is in the “low to moderate hunger index” category.

#### **Food wastage :**

A recent headline that captured the attention of all was that food grains worth 580 billion got spoiled due to lack of storage facilities with the Food Corporation of India. It is no less than a sin to waste such huge quantities of food grains when millions in the country remain unfed and the daily ration of calories of many others is much below the minimum necessary for their survival. It necessitates looking for alternatives to public distribution system.

#### **Small and marginal land holdings :**

The Bihar economy is predominantly rural and agriculture oriented. Per capita availability of land in Bihar has declined. Such meagre land holdings by a large majority of the farmers are neither viable nor sustainable for a state with million plus mouths to feed. The declining trend in the average size of farm holdings also poses a serious problem.

#### **Institutional reforms :**

Consolidation of holdings to avoid further fragmentation and a proactive policy for small, marginal farmers and landless laborers through innovative mechanisms like cooperative farming, contract farming need to be devised. The extension system of the state has to reorient itself to the changing needs of the farming community. Public extension systems have not given the desired results. Private extension systems too are profit oriented. As such, suitable public private

partnership models need to be put in place to effectively deliver the services to the farmers.

### **Agro infrastructure :**

We still are lacking in the desired infrastructure for providing irrigation to the cultivable areas, technology for soil and moisture conservation, infrastructure for storing perishable products, road connectivity for bringing perishable products in the market at the earliest, chain of cold stores at the village level, small level industries for value addition and harvesting structures for conserving water. The challenge of meeting the food requirement of an ever increasing population can only be met by practising sustainable agriculture, protecting natural resources from being degraded and polluted and using production technologies that conserve the natural resource base of crops. We need to look into the potential green revolution areas of various regions of Bihar which have been neglected so far. Without these the battle for food security cannot be won.

### **Various Policy Measures Undertaken To Track Hunger**

- **Integrated child development scheme :** It is one of the largest program for nutritional and school needs of children younger than six administered through various centers nationwide. But it has hardly affected Bihar since one in two children are malnourished. It is India's worst rate.
- **Below poverty line card :** It enables the poorest to obtain benefits under government poverty alleviation program that is subsidized health income, scholarship and public distribution. But most of them are hardly classified as poor officially.
- **Mid day meal scheme :** It is a popular name for school meal program in India. It involves the provision of lunch free of cost to school children on all working days. The key objectives

of the program are protecting children from starvation and hungers increasing school enrollment and attendance, improved socialization and social empowerment. It has already covered 1.2 crore children and is the largest school lunch program in India; where as in Bihar the quality of food which should be provided to younger school children is not maintained properly.

- **Public distribution system :** It means distribution of essential commodities to a large number of people through a network of fair price shops on a recurring basis. The various commodities are rice, wheat, sugar and kerosene. It serves as a safety net for poor who are nutritionally at risk. PDS with a network of about 4.99 lakhs fair price shops is perhaps the largest network in the world. It operates both under the responsibility of state and central government. The central government has taken the responsibility for procurement, storage, transportation and bulk allocation of food grains etc. The responsibility of distributing the same to consumers through the network of fair price shops rests with state government.

The operational responsibilities including allocation within the state, identification of families below the poverty line, issue of ration card, and supervision and monitoring the functioning of fair price shops rests with the state government.

- **Food security bill :** It is an access to sufficient and affordable food which can relate to a single house hold or to the global population. This law can create not one but many legally enforceable guarantee of direct feeding, pensions, maternity entitlement and subsidized food.

### **Conclusion :**

The major challenge facing the Bihar government in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is how to balance

growth with equity, efficiency with employment, food production with distribution, free markets with hunger and poverty alleviation, while dealing with rapid population growth. So just painting a broad picture of absolute hunger in dilapidated urban slum is not enough before we can formulate effective policies and programs to attack hunger at its source. The bitter and angry denial of starvation by administration should be viewed justifiably as criminal negligence. Glittering economic growth rates do not mean a hunger-free nation. India, with its large economy and robust growth, is ranked among countries that face an alarming situation. At a wider level malnutrition is a consequence of multiple deprivation that call for action on related issues as well. The anomalies are there within the entire system and mere action of law cannot help food security. What is needed is the clear and loud expression of implementations of policies in spirit. Out of nine *crores* only 10 % of the population live in the urban areas and if this is the situation of 10%, what could be expected from the rest 90% living in rural areas and villages. Bihar's GDP growth rate is 11.03% but still the benefits have failed to trickle down to the lower strata of the society. This growth and development will have a little or no impact if the hungry and the unprivileged do not get even the basic deal needed to grow and upgrade themselves. It is high time we ask the opinion of those millions of men, women who are forced to sleep hungry every night and have to teach their innocent children how to live with hunger and be habituated to it. The threat of malnutrition seems to be a forgotten problem in Bihar as it demands urgent action. The necessary steam required to make the engine move is increased production,

procurement, distribution and storage which are four basic stages for food security. Therefore, feeding the poor is not a matter of policy but of morality and every citizen should try to cater the needs of hungry people as far as possible. The IMF might forecast India's GDP growth rate to cross 9% but we seem certain to miss one of the key millennium development goals that is halving malnutrition by 2015. It is high time to alter the destiny of millions and develop another India where Bharat *Nirman* is more important than India shining. Food is essential for life and thereby for citizens and surely no price tag or limit can be imposed on it.

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