

# Farmer wages must be improved to prevent millions in India from malnutrition

October 22 2019

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India is the largest producer of milk, and many grains, in the entire world. However, in a peer-reviewed article published in *Strategic Analysis* Divakaran highlights how the current [food](#) systems are an unending work in progress for the gargantuan task of feeding India's millions. They show it's a system that requires constant improvements to ensure a future of better [food security](#).

In the latest episode of Taylor & Francis' podcast series "How Researchers Changed The World" out today (Tuesday 22 October), which marks the end of series one, Divakaran provides a passionate account of how returning from the Indian Army with a severe injury following "a burst of AK47 and a grenade that took a portion of my leg away"—an incident which left him fighting for his life miles from a hospital—meant he questioned the very purpose of defending his country in the first place.

Divakaran was decorated with Shaurya Chakra for gallantry beyond the call of duty. He retired from the army after 30 years of which 7 were in India's National Security Council Secretariat. He believes that National Security should go beyond defending borders or ideology but should "essentially protect people's security." In his view, this means the right to food security among other equally important concerns like the environment, access to clean water, economics, and healthcare.

In the podcast, he explains how his 2019 study shows that the key to resolving food security in India is, initially, to better reward people working in agriculture—the largest employer in India—making them "feel important again," not exploited, and enjoying a profit.

"Attention must be given to ensure that farming continues to be supported in the face of threats like climate change and the failure of the monsoons. The present agricultural production situation may look comfortable, but coupled with a growing population, the situation could get more difficult in the future. Ceaseless efforts are, therefore, required to improve upon the food security in the country."

Efforts to improve food [security](#) in India are being made at governmental level. The introduction of The National Food Security Act seeks to provide not only food and nutritional security to the beneficiaries, by ensuring access to adequate quantities of quality food at affordable prices, but also a life of dignity. The Minimum Support Price (MSP) is a government scheme supporting the farmers and removing the exploitative middle men. The Public Distribution System, through the distribution of essential food grains across the country at subsidized and affordable prices, has prevented famines successfully and achieved self-sufficiency in the production of cereals.

However, the issue has not been resolved as there are many weaknesses within the system, Divakaran argues.

As the MSP does not cover a large number of farmers, and also many important crops, adequately, it is also a weakness. It encourages the presence of middlemen who extract the farm produce at low prices, and sell it at much higher margins.

"Also, while MSP has prevented starvation and famines through the supply of carbohydrates, it has not successfully overcome the issues of

malnutrition and stunting. Despite the large and unprecedented buffer stocks, huge pockets of hunger and deprivation continue to exist."

Whilst improved pay for agricultural workers is one aspect to resolve the issue, Divakaran states that going forwards improved and cheaper IT-based technology should be utilised for supply chain management and the control of retail operations at the ration shops.

"This includes the use of beneficiary identification at the ration shops and software for the tracking of stock movements in order to prevent theft," Divakaran states. "The availability of modern storage techniques like silos, as well as public private partnerships to construct new storage, are also opportunities."

**More information:** D. P. K. Pillay et al, Food Security in India: Evolution, Efforts and Problems, *Strategic Analysis* (2019). [DOI: 10.1080/09700161.2018.1560916](https://doi.org/10.1080/09700161.2018.1560916)

Provided by Taylor & Francis

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