

Diversification of Food Basket under Social Safety Net Programs

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Background

In India, Social Safety Net Programs (SSNPs) like Public Distribution System (PDS), PM-POSHAN and Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS), are a one-stop platform to meet a significant portion of the daily dietary requirements of the most vulnerable households, who also complement these meals through food purchased from markets and their own production. While staple foods continue to remain the focus of the PDS platform, there is a significant opportunity to leverage PM-POSHAN and ICDS for greater nutritional outcomes through a more diverse basket of nutritious food. It, therefore, becomes important to study and propose ways to use fortified foods and diversify the present meals under SSNPs to improve diet diversity and provide balanced nutritious food to beneficiaries.

Scope

Nutrition International carried out a series of analyses (public health and

nutrition, economic, platform and political) that aimed to recommend diversified food baskets under SSNPs for the state of Telangana under the project on 'Scaling up Fortified and Diversified Foods through SSNPs in India'.

The major objective of the study was to develop a set of recommendations and options for the government to consider in terms of the most feasible path for pursuing diet diversification with the goal of reducing the nutrition gap. The analyses were undertaken separately for each of the population groups - pregnant women, lactating mothers, children between seven months to three years, and children between four to six years under the ICDS, primary and upper primary school children under PM-POSHAN and beneficiary households of PDS.

The analysis focused on defining the 'what' and the 'how' of diversification along with identifying economic and political feasibility and the key barriers.

Diversification Analysis - Scope



Public Health and Nutrition Analysis

Which food items are most promising from a public health perspective?

How much of food should be included within the food basket?

Economic Analysis

What will it cost to diversify?

Which of these meals are most feasible from the perspective of cost, consumer preference and availability?



Platform Analysis

Do supply chains exist?

What will be additional cost of supplying new food items?

Political Analysis

What decisions can be politically sensitive?

What are the potential policy opportunities?



Key Results

The Public Health and Nutrition (PHN) Analysis recommended a series of diversified food packages across SSNPs and population groups. This was based on the analysis of food consumption and nutrient intake and comparing the same to recommended guidelines for dietary and nutrient intake. The analysis recommended adding fruits and milk to all population groups under ICDS and PM-POSHAN.

The Economic Analysis used the recommendations of the PHN analysis and estimated the cost of a meal per day per beneficiary under different diet and policy scenarios. The economic feasibility of these scenarios was analyzed based on the current budget of the SSNPs. The analysis suggests a 15-20% increase in budgets to achieve minimum diet diversity under SSNPs.

The Platform and Political Analysis assessment found that in Telangana, dietary diversification in SSNPs is strongly backed by political and administrative willingness. There is an opportunity to diversify food baskets and meals by introducing millets, a variety of pulses and food groups like milk, fruits, and green leafy vegetables under ICDS and PM-POSHAN.

The key challenge to diversifying will be in balancing the demand for diversified foods with their availability and planning for required investments to meet budgetary gaps.

Conclusion

The analysis under this study concluded that it is feasible to diversify SSNPs and help reduce the gap in nutrition intake for beneficiaries across different population groups. An incremental increase in budgets would be required to meet the nutrition requirements of the targeted population groups.

However, before the implementation of any dietary diversification initiative, there is a need to conduct a detailed study to understand consumption patterns and assess the supply across the state. For diet diversification to be successful, it is critical to align it with local preferences and availability. This, combined with awareness raising and nutrition literacy among beneficiaries, can together meet long-term goals of nutritional security.

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