

Food Security in India: Sub-nationalism and rights-based social policy

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- **Primary research question:** What are the effects of the rights-based approach (RBA) on social policy at a sub-national level in India?
- **Case study:** National Food Security Act, 2013 (NFSA)
- **Relevant characteristics** of Indian governance structure
 - India is a **federal decentralised democracy**
 - **Sub-national levels - state + district + block + panchayat**
 - **Elected representatives** (policy makers) and **government officials** (policy makers + implementers)

Rights-based Approach (RBA) in India

2005 onwards many new rights instituted by the Parliament

e.g. Right to information (2005), rural employment (2005), forest produce (2006), education (2009), and food (2013) etc.

Reasons for adopting RBA

- More durable than scheme.
- Places obligation of implementation on the State.
- Increase accountability of the State.

PARLIAMENT
PASSES AN ACT

- The NFSA passed in 2013

CITIZENS BECOME
RIGHTS HOLDERS

- People entitled to food & nutritional security through:
 - Targeted food-grain rationing (TPDS)
 - Universal child feeding programmes (ICDS+MDMS)
 - Maternity-related conditional cash transfer (PMMVY)

THE STATE
ACCOUNTABLE
FOR REALISATION
OF RIGHTS

- Enable life with dignity by ensuring:
 - adequate quantity of quality food
 - affordable prices
- SCHEMES + INSTITUTIONS + FINANCES + GUIDELINES

STATE FAILURE
CHALLENGEABLE
IN COURT

- Denial of the right to food can be challenged by citizens/organizations in the Supreme Court

Gaps in literature & questions of interest

- **Gap 1: Determinants of rights-based social policy implementation**
 - Why do differences persist across states?
 - Do differences exist within states?
 - If yes, at what level & what factors contribute to them?
 - Does the RBA impact quality of programme implementation at the state & lower administrative levels?

- **Gap 2: Effects of the RBA on power dynamics**
 - Is social policy decision-making more centralized post 2005?
 - Is there an administrative culture post 2005 that permits the Central government to define targets and issue diktats? Is this linked to the RBA in anyway?

Gaps in literature & questions of interest (contd.)

- **Gap 2: Effects of the RBA on power dynamics**
 - Are states becoming reluctant implementers of central policy?
 - Are state-specific needs being ignored?
 - Does the RBA disincentivise innovation in social policy at the sub-national level?
 - Has the RBA catalysed movement building & democratic contestation?
 - Is unequal access based on community & caste addressed through this approach?
 - Has the RBA, in its current interpretation and form, contributed to the larger goal of social justice in India?

Reason and Relevance

- **Why the NFSA?**
 - Programme mix – universal + targeted; in-kind + cash transfer
 - Large and varied population of beneficiaries
 - Permits analysis of - different implementation capacities + States' responsiveness to different segments of its population

- **Relevance of project**
 - Provide policy makers and analysts insights into why social policy continues to be unevenly implemented despite the RBA.
 - Will highlight the need to rethink the interpretation of the RBA in an Indian context, to ensure the gains of rights-based movements are not left unfulfilled.



THANK YOU