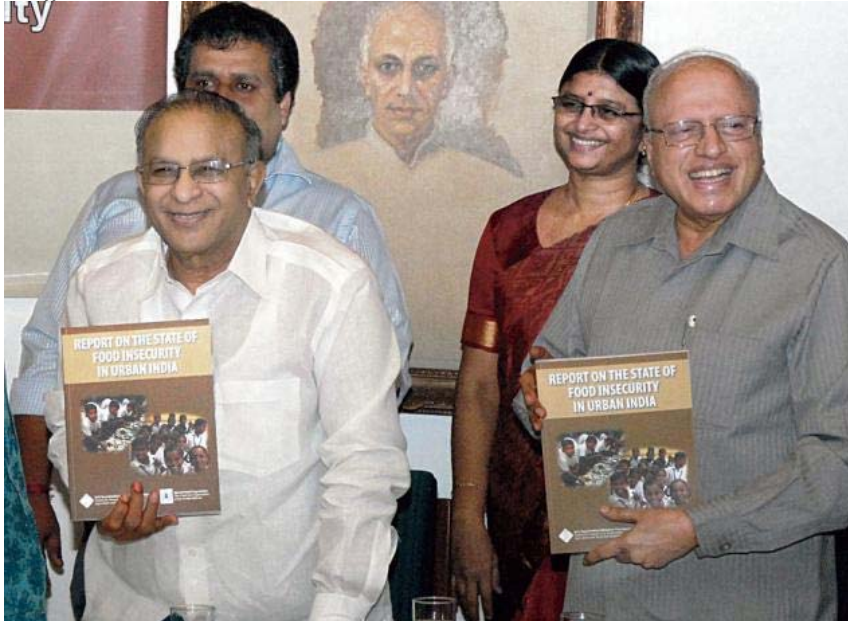


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Urban food security has deteriorated in many States, says report

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Union Minister for Urban Development, Jaipal Reddy with M.S. Swaminathan, Chairman, MSSRF and Dr. R. Rukmani (centre), Director in-charge, Food Security, MSSRF, at the release of report on the state of Food Insecurity in Urban India, in New Delhi. Photo: Kamal Narang

Chronic under-nutrition among women decreased in Bihar and Orissa

The urban food security situation has deteriorated in Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Gujarat, Haryana, Karnataka and Madhya Pradesh, while Punjab showed a marginal worsening till 2006, says a Report on the State of Food Insecurity in Urban India released here on Friday by Union Urban Development Minister Jaipal Reddy.

"Indicators such as the percentage of anaemia amongst women and children, the percentage of women with chronic energy deficiency and the percentage of children stunted or wasting, worsened for India as a whole and for a number of States between 1998-2000 and 2004-06," the report said.

Chronic under-nutrition among women significantly increased in Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Gujarat, Haryana, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Tamil Nadu. It however, improved in poorer States such as Bihar and Orissa. The period of economic reforms and high GDP growth has not seen a clear improvement in urban food security across all States, the report points out.

"Taking into account the fact that urban inequality has worsened since 1991, the implications for the food security status of the urban poor or slum dwellers are worrying to say the least," said the report prepared jointly by the M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation and the World Food Programme. Mr. Reddy presented the first copy of the report to Rajya Sabha member Mabel Rebello.

At the same time, it points out that urban food security improved in Bihar, Kerala, Orissa, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal. The improvement has been marginal in Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra.

The three States that have seen a spate of farmers suicides in the decade from 2000 —Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka — find themselves in the category where urban food insecurity has worsened between 1998-2000 and 2004-06.

Significantly, the report, that has covered 18 States, singles out Uttar Pradesh for dramatic improvement and suggests it is worth exploring. Other States with poor indicators earlier such as Bihar, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan have made significant improvements in their urban food security status.

The report suggests targeted interventions to improve employment opportunities so as to enhance access to food. It also suggests improved access to safe drinking water and sanitation as a key to addressing the issue of food absorption and, above all, strengthening of the Public Distribution System.

Gandhiji's dream

M.S. Swaminathan hoped that the proposed Right to Food Act would fulfil Gandhiji's hope for the country's poor to get food with dignity. "There should be a decentralised grid of foodgrains to address hidden hunger and under-nutrition. With necessary awareness, analysis and action hunger can be eliminated."

WFP representative Mihoko Tamamura pointed out that mere availability of food in urban markets did not guarantee food security for the poor and expressed the hope that the report would facilitate a "more rational allocation of resources in the poorest urban areas."

Keywords: [food security](#), [Right to Food Act](#), [Urban development](#)