

Assessment of Food Security Among Vulnerable Groups in Odisha during COVID-19



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ACRONYMS

AAY	Antyoday Anna Yojana
CFM	Complaints and feedback mechanism
FCS	Food consumption score
FHH	Female-headed households
FPS	Fair Price Shop
GoO	Government of Odisha
HCM	Hot cooked meals
HH	Household
MDM	Mid-day meals
MGNREGS	Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme
NFSA	National Food Security Act
NGO	Non-Government Organization
OBC	Other Backward Classes
PHH	Priority Households
PMGKY	Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana
PMAY	Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana
r-CSI	Reduced Coping Strategies Index
THR	Take Home Rations
TPDS	Targeted Public Distribution System
UNICEF	United National Children’s Fund
WFP	World Food Programme
WSHG	Women’s self-help groups

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

In April 2020, shortly after the nation-wide lockdown began in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Inter-Agency Group (IAG) in Odisha, including Oxfam India, Catholic Relief Services, World Vision India, Caritas India, HelpAge India along with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and WFP commissioned a 'Joint Rapid Needs Assessment'. The initial findings, especially of WFP's specific analysis on food and nutrition security, prompted the Government of Odisha (GoO) to request WFP to carry out a follow up study to examine the current status of food security, nutrition and livelihoods among specific vulnerable population of Odisha such as daily wage earners, returnee migrant workers, small/marginal farmers.

The follow-up assessment was initiated in September 2020 in partnership with the State Government and the IAG with the following objectives:

- Examine the current status of food and nutrition security and identify any changes since the observations in the first report, with a focus on vulnerable groups, such as daily wage earners, returnee migrant workers, small/marginal farmers, urban slum dwellers and Tribal populations.
- Assess the responsive measures of national and state government to the crisis, the extent to which recipients benefitted from them, and identify the gaps in access and need by vulnerable groups.
- Identify the food and basic needs among the vulnerable groups.
- Examine the impact of COVID on the livelihoods of households dependent on social safety nets/schemes, especially small and marginal farmers, and daily wage earners, with reference to the harvest and markets.
- Provide recommendations to the GoO for further refining their response to the COVID crisis

Methods

Similar to first round of assessment, the follow-up assessment employed mixed-method approach of desk review and a household survey which was quantitative, consisting of a structured questionnaire. The survey was conducted in 15 districts of the Odisha, including different livelihood zones, Aspirational Districts and Tribal areas. A total of 5 districts were selected from each of the three divisions of state, namely southern, northern, and central divisions for a total of 820 households. A second sample of 300 households was drawn from three districts with urban slums, namely Sambalpur, Khurda, and Ganjam - 100 slum dwelling households from each.

Main findings

- The average household size for the sample was 4 persons, except for households headed by women, where the average size was 3 persons. Female headed households were more likely to be found in the daily wage labour group while slum dwelling households were most likely to be hosting at least one migrant worker (20 percent). Nearly 10 percent of households identifying as scheduled tribes had migrant workers. Physically or mentally disabled persons were slightly more likely to be found in the slum dweller households but in general, were not so common amongst the sample.
- Asset ownership is a good proxy of relative household wealth but may be less accurate for slum dwellers. Tribal households are the poorest in terms of asset wealth, followed by female-headed households. Households accumulate assets in a particular way, but mobile phones are the most important assets for all wealth groups, followed by electric fans.
- In the survey, households were asked to name their top three livelihood activities. Rural households rely on wage labour – both agricultural and non-agricultural (around 60 percent of households) while about one-quarter also rely on crop sales and over 10 percent on livestock/livestock products for their livelihoods. Urban households also relied heavily on non-agricultural wage labour (45 percent), followed by Government schemes and programmes (22 percent), skilled labour (19 percent), small business (18 percent) and salaried work (18 percent). For both groups, the type of livelihoods used did not change much due to COVID; however, the intensity of the engagement likely was affected by the pandemic.
- Nearly half the households reported loss of jobs in past 30 days, which was highest in female headed

households and lowest in smallholder households. Reduction or loss of income in past 30 days was more common – most likely in slum dwellers, female headed households and those with migrants. Compared to same time last year, men’s income was more likely to have decreased in slum dwellers and households with migrants. For women, income lost or decreased was highest in female headed households, smallholders and Tribal households.

- Two-thirds of households reported having food stocks at the time of the survey – 71 percent of female headed households (high) and 58 percent of slum dwellers (low). However, the level of stocks was low in female headed households, with most having one week or less. Smallholders had the largest food stocks.
- All groups averaged 2-3 meals per day but female headed households and households hosting migrants were least likely to have more than 3 meals. HHs with acceptable dietary diversity and food frequency had daily consumption of cereals and oils, vegetables and pulses 4-6 days/week, dairy and sugar 3 days, meat/fish 2 days and fruits one day per week.
- Dietary diversity and food frequency were best in smallholder and Tribal households and worst in households hosting migrants. It was also lower in female-headed households and slum dwellers.
- Most HHs rely on purchase to access food – more so with slum dwellers. Overall, reliance on government schemes to access food was low. Female headed households, slum dwellers and households hosting migrants were most likely to rely on government schemes to access their food.
- Lack of affordability or high prices was cited as the main reason by households consuming insufficient quantities of food, more so among female-headed households. Fear of COVID-19, distance and closure of markets were cited as key reasons for lack of access to markets.
- When dealing with food shortages, female headed households and households hosting migrant were more likely to use preventative measures such as consuming less preferred foods or reducing intake. Tribal households were more likely to use reactive strategies such as reducing number of meals or not eating all day.
- Food insecurity was highest in households with migrants. Tribal households were least likely to be food secure and also had quite a few vulnerable households. Food security was best in slum dwellers, followed by female-headed households. In order to manage the impact of COVID-19 and the national lockdown, borrowing money was common (40-50 percent) while sale of assets was not.
- Slum dwellers are not benefitting from government programmes as much as other vulnerable groups where the outreach is good. It appears that there are both inclusion and exclusion errors for targeting of Government programmes. A systematic ‘clean-up’ process is needed. There could also be a problem with targeting Other Backwards Classes (OBC) for Government programmes.
- Outreach of Government information and support on COVID was good across all vulnerable groups. Wage earners, female-headed and smallholder households were the least likely to get food support. Most respondents were satisfied with the amount of food support but not with the timeliness of it. Dissatisfaction was higher among slum dwellers, wage earners and smallholders.
- Though Atma Nirbhar Bharat was designed primarily to benefit migrants, only 13 percent households with

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