Social Movements and the Politics of Right to Food Campaigns: The case of India

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Paradox of global hunger

- There is enough food to feed everyone on Earth
- Right to food is well codified (UDHR; ICESCR; 3 decades of soft law)
- Yet 925 million of the world’s 6.7 billion people are malnourished
- Hunger contributes to half of all global deaths
Paradox of hunger *in India*

- Food insecurity is typically associated with non-democracies or politically unstable countries
- India is the world’s largest democracy
- Has been democratic for half a century
- Has experienced high economic growth for a decade
- Has strong constitutional protections for economic rights
Paradox of hunger *in India*

- Yet one-third of ALL malnourished children in the world are Indian
- 42% of all Indian children are underweight
- India has more hungry people than 26 of the poorest African states
SERF scores (Fukuda-Parr 2012)

State performance in fulfilling economic and social rights – SERF Index (scores for 99 countries)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Composite</th>
<th>Food</th>
<th>Health</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Housing</th>
<th>Work</th>
<th>Income (PPP 2008)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>87.4</td>
<td>91.1</td>
<td>90.1</td>
<td>94.8</td>
<td>75.8</td>
<td>83.6</td>
<td>9,559</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>79.7</td>
<td>90.4</td>
<td>94.8</td>
<td>83.6</td>
<td>65.8</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>5,712</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>Ghana</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>85.6</td>
<td>60.0</td>
<td>78.7</td>
<td>52.3</td>
<td>82.2</td>
<td>1,351</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>67</td>
<td>South Africa</td>
<td>61.5</td>
<td>61.7</td>
<td>57.6</td>
<td>71.4</td>
<td>70.2</td>
<td>46.6</td>
<td>9,604</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>87</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>56.1</td>
<td>32.7</td>
<td>74.7</td>
<td>82.8</td>
<td>62.6</td>
<td>27.9</td>
<td>2,796</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>96</td>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>42.5</td>
<td>47.7</td>
<td>33.4</td>
<td>66.7</td>
<td>43.3</td>
<td>21.5</td>
<td>1,939</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Research Design

- Goal: to “map” the prevalence of hunger in India and social responses to it
- Analyze variation in response
- Focus: 3 types of protest:
  1) Public interest law
  2) Street Protest
  3) Farmer suicides
## Indian Food Policy Context

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Food Corporation of India (FCI)</strong></th>
<th><strong>Public Distribution System (PDS)</strong></th>
<th><strong>Department of Food and Public Distribution</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Manages food stocks</td>
<td>Channels the food grains, sugar, kerosene from FCI.</td>
<td>Covers import/export, storage, movement and distribution of food grains; oversees grain price support system.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY)</strong></th>
<th><strong>Mid-Day Meal Scheme (MDMS)</strong></th>
<th><strong>National Old Age Pension Scheme</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Food for &quot;poorest of poor.&quot;</td>
<td>Lunchtime meals for school children.</td>
<td>Food support is available to all poor persons aged 65 years or older through this program.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Annapurna Scheme</strong></th>
<th><strong>Integrated Child Development Scheme</strong></th>
<th><strong>National Maternity Benefit Scheme (NNBS)</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Benefits elderly.</td>
<td>Health care, nutrition and pre-school education of children up to age 6; also covers nursing mothers.</td>
<td>Support for pregnant and nursing mothers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>National Family Benefit Scheme</strong></th>
<th><strong>Sampoorna Gramin Rozgar Yojana</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Payment upon death of primary breadwinner.</td>
<td>Food for Work program, including distribution of FCI grains.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Problems:

- **Corruption**: 70% of the $12 in govt funds billion budgeted for food is loss to waste and corruption

- *Program effectiveness varies widely*: see marked state-level variation in effectiveness of Public Distribution System (PDS) and other food programs
PDS system: state-level variation
Research data

- 2 original datasets:
  - a) **PIL dataset** (i.e., 64 major cases out of over 150 filed)
  - b) **News events dataset** (i.e., have coded 3 major English-language newspapers from 1990-2010)
- In progress: adding 2 local language papers and one additional English paper from 2010-present
- c) **Field-based study** (January & June 2012)
Social Movement Response: In the COURTS

- 2001 “Peoples’ Union for Civil Liberties” (PUCL) case & corresponding Supreme Court orders
- 2002 & 2003: Supreme Court creates positions of 2 “Commissioners” to monitor ongoing implementation of interim orders
- Names a dozen NGOs to act as eyes and ears for Commissioners; research/report at the state-level nationwide
- “Right to Food Campaign” spearheads ongoing research & advocacy
- Key NGO: HR Law Network (200 staff attorneys; 28 offices nation-wide)
PUBLIC INTEREST LAW
Supreme Court orders on “right to food”

Number of Interim Orders per Year

- High Courts
- Supreme Court
- Total

Year:
- 2001
- 2002
- 2003
- 2004
- 2005
- 2006
- 2007
- 2008
- 2009
- 2010
- 2011

Number of Interim Orders:
- 0
- 2
- 4
- 6
- 8
- 10
- 12
- 14
- 16
- 18
- 20
Social Movement Response: 

**In the STREETS**

- We culled 1,339 relevant articles on right to food protests from over 30,600 published (1990-2012)
- *Times of India, Hindustan Times, Press Trust of India (1990-2012); Deccan Herald (2010-2012)*
- Only 31 focused specifically on *street protests*
- 311 focused on farmer suicides
- 476 addressed general food-related policy topics
- Little media coverage of hunger until 2010; our findings are similar to Dreze (2004)
Protest activity

- **Based on 1990-2010 media coding of Times of India, Press Trust of India, Hindustan Times:**

- **LOCATIONS:** New Delhi (15); Assam (1); Uttar Pradesh (1); Chhattisgarh (1); Jharkhand (1); Andhra Pradesh (1); Punjab (1)

- **ACTIVITY TYPE:** procession; dharna (fast); rally; petition; caravan; sit-in; hartal (strike); protest; convention; human chain; march; fast

- **ORGANIZATIONS INVOLVED:** Bharatiya Janata Party; Sahyog; People’s Union for Civil Liberties; Right to Food Campaign; Communist Party of India-Marxist; Assam State Committee of Communist Party of India; the Sangathan; VP Singh and National Action Committee

- **CHARACTER:** Mostly non-violent
Social Momement Response: Engagement in *Party Politics*

- United Progressive Alliance (UPA) – headed by Sonia Gandhi
- Has led governing coalition since 2004
- Incorporates hunger as part of its “everyman” ("aam admi“) platform focus
- Key members of “Right to Food” campaign are active in UPA and the government’s “National Advisory Council”
- National Food Security bill emerged in 2010; currently being debated (introduced in Dec. 2011)
Social Movement Response:  
Engagement with *Political Parties*

- Key debates:
- 1) Should NFSA have universal coverage?
- 2) Content? (adequacy/appropriateness)
- 3) Cash transfers or foodstuffs only?
Media Coverage using “National Food Security Bill” as Coding Term

Press Trust of India
Times of India
Hindustan Times
Overarching findings

- Hunger and protest do not necessarily coincide in expected ways
- Indian “Right to Food” social movement has shifted its arena of struggle: from the courts, to the streets, to political parties
- The shift to party politics (i.e., since 2010) challenges dominant interpretations of “interest-based” Indian social movements (Katzenstein, Kothari and Mehta 2001)
Map of hunger and social responses
# INDIAN STATES - Variation in SERF

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STATE</th>
<th>SERF – Food (2005-06 data)</th>
<th>STATE</th>
<th>SERF – Food (2005-06 data)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kerala</td>
<td>77.38</td>
<td>Karnataka</td>
<td>40.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamil Nadu</td>
<td>65.18</td>
<td>Uttarakhand</td>
<td>40.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goa</td>
<td>63.70</td>
<td>West Bengal</td>
<td>39.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jammu and Kashmir</td>
<td>62.65</td>
<td>Assam</td>
<td>38.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manipur</td>
<td>61.14</td>
<td>Delhi</td>
<td>37.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tripura</td>
<td>58.19</td>
<td>Haryana</td>
<td>34.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nagaland</td>
<td>53.48</td>
<td>Maharashtra</td>
<td>33.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sikkim</td>
<td>52.05</td>
<td>Madhya Pradesh</td>
<td>32.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punjab</td>
<td>51.44</td>
<td>Jharkhand</td>
<td>31.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mizoram</td>
<td>50.04</td>
<td>Chhattisgarh</td>
<td>23.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Himachal Pradesh</td>
<td>48.72</td>
<td>Gujarat</td>
<td>23.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rajasthan</td>
<td>45.11</td>
<td>Bihar</td>
<td>23.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andhra Pradesh</td>
<td>43.21</td>
<td>Meghalaya</td>
<td>18.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arunachal Pradesh</td>
<td>42.94</td>
<td>Uttar Pradesh</td>
<td>17.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orissa</td>
<td>42.13</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Next steps

- Unpack links between protest and party politics
- Explain sub-regional variation in protest
- Field study: ongoing