

Food Security in Nepal: An Overview from Policy Perspective

Basu DevKaphle¹, Govinda Rizal², Shanta Karki¹, Madhu Sudhan Ghimire¹ and Madhu Maya Paudel³

1. Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development, Kathmandu 44600, Nepal

2. Tokha, Tokha 8, Kathmandu 44600, Nepal

3. Ministry of Health and Population, Kathmandu 44600, Nepal

Abstract: More than 20 countries including Nepal have the right to food enshrined in their constitutions. The article 36 of the constitution of Nepal-2015 broadly enlivens the essence of all the past, present and future policies of Nepal related to food security, food sovereignty, and food rights. The article and the essence of the constitution are in perfect synergy with the United Nations sustainable development goals-2015. Nepal's policies on food, when implemented, are sufficient to guide the agricultural development to end hunger, achieve food security, improve nutrition, and promote sustainability. The challenge has been to learn a lesson from the past and focus on the implementation of the numerous guiding policies to achieve the goals of the constitution.

Key words: Food security, food sovereignty, policy, sustainable development goals, trade.

1. Introduction

Food security, food sovereignty and right to food have emerged as a global concern to end the extreme hunger, poverty, and malnutrition, all of which are interrelated. The World Food Summit of 1996 defined food security as existing “when all people at all times have access to sufficient, safe, nutritious food to maintain a healthy and active life” [1]. Food security deals more with production and distribution whereas the right to food is a legal right entitling every individual to demand fulfillment. Similarly, food sovereignty is cogitated as a political concept to advocate the rights of people to define their own food and agriculture production, and to promote the formulation of ecologically sustainable trade policies and practices.

Food security is based on four pillars: food availability—ensuring food available in sufficient quantities and on a consistent basis; food accessibility—ensuring the people be able to regularly

acquire adequate quantities of food; food stability—ensuring the stability in the food supply from year to year and during different seasons of the year; and food utilization—ensuring consumed food has a positive nutritional impact on people.

The concept of food sovereignty emerged from La Via Campesina' in the mid-1990s as a critique of the concept of food security and corporate food regimes that were controlling local food markets [2, 3]. It is argued that hunger in the world exists because food and resources are not equitably distributed. For this, a rights-based policy to ensure community and people's control over food systems is the only solution in assuring food for all, especially the poor and marginalized. Food sovereignty advocates the right of peoples, communities, and countries to determine their own production systems related to agricultural labor, fishing, food and land and associated policies which are ecologically, socially, economically and culturally appropriate to their unique circumstances. Food sovereignty is the “right of nation and people to control their own food systems, including their own markets, production modes, food cultures and

Corresponding author: Basu Dev Kaphle, M.Sc., Agri-Economics, Joint Secretary, research field: food security policy.

environments” [1]. Food sovereignty manages food production and consumption according to the needs of local communities, giving priority to production for local consumption. Food sovereignty includes the right to protect and regulate national agricultural and livestock production and to shield the domestic market from the dumping of agricultural surpluses and low-priced imports from other countries. Landless people and small farmers must have an access to land, water and seed, as well as productive resources and adequate public services. Food sovereignty thus is a means to achieve the goal of food security through local sustainable production [4].

Food sovereignty also emphasizes on control over territory, land, grazing, water, seeds, livestock, and fish populations for local food providers and indigenous people. Privatization of such resources, for example through intellectual property rights regimes or commercial contracts, is generally rejected. Food sovereignty rejects technologies, such as genetic engineering, that undermine food providers’ ability to develop and pass on knowledge and skills needed for localized food systems. It maintains production and distribution systems that protect natural resources and reduce greenhouse gas emissions, avoiding energy intensive industrial methods that damage the environment and the health of those that inhabit it [5].

The SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals) would be the main basis for integrating the food production system into the post-2015 development agenda including “end hunger, achieve food security and improve nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture” as second of the seventeen proposed SDGs.

2. Food Security and Sovereignty in Different Plan and Policies of Nepal

Nepal’s food security policies are spanned by several national policy documents that address different dimensions of food security, nutrition, food sovereignty. In all the five-year plans since 1956 agriculture sector has been receiving the major shares

of the national budgets. Nepal has made increasing efforts, especially in the past decade, to adopt policies appropriate to addressing food insecurity problems, particularly through the APP (Agricultural Perspective Plan) (1995-2015) [6] and the Ninth Five-Year Plan (1997-2002) [7], however, the performances did not exceed the expectation due to the low investment in agricultural sector and poor coordination as provisioned in the APP. The overall performance of APP is mixed. Cereals sector, in general, did not perform well during APP period which hampered the food and nutritional security [8].

Likewise, the tenth Periodic Plan (2002-2007) [9] has mentioned supporting food nutrition security through raising agricultural production and productivity, and increasing incomes and reducing poverty. The National Agricultural Policy (2004)¹ included various provisions for marginalized and vulnerable groups having less than half a hectare of land to improve food security. It has also mentioned to create food storage provisions, a mobilization network on a local participatory basis and to develop food and nutrition safety nets for poor farmers.

The first TYIP (three-year interim plan) (2007/2008-2009/2010) [10] introduced a long-term vision on food security. The second TYIP (2010/2011-2012/2013) [11] has also included a separate section for food and nutrition security. The third three-year interim plan (2012/2013-2015/2016) [12] aimed to attain food security through commercialization, diversification, quality promotion, mechanization, and rural infrastructure development.

Nepal has expressed its commitment to undertake Zero Hunger Challenge Initiatives introduced by Rio+20 conference on sustainable development, held in Brazil in 2012 to end hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition by 2025 in a sustainable manner [13].

Ministry of agricultural development has

¹ NAP. 2004. National Agricultural Policy (NAP) 2004. Ministry of Agricultural Development, Kathmandu. www.lawcommission.gov.np.

established a food security and environment division with a food security section to make plan and policies with implementation mechanism regarding food and nutritional security.

National Seed Vision (2013-2025) [14] aims to increase crop productivity, raise income and generate employment through self-sufficiency, import substitution, and export promotion of quality seeds. The Seed Vision will contribute to ensuring food security to poor, women and disadvantaged groups. Edible food availability will reach 8 million MT by 2025 equivalent to 200 billion rupees at the current price. Implementation of the Seed Vision will have a significant impact on ensuring seed security, increasing productivity and raising income through seed self-sufficiency, import substitution, and export promotion which ultimately leads to food security, employment generation, biodiversity conservation, climate change adaptation, and gender equity as well as social inclusion [15].

When the prevailing policies and laws are taken synergistically and implemented in combination with appropriate mechanism there is a promising legislative framework that can have a positive impact on food security leading to food sovereignty in Nepal as mentioned by ADS. However, the absence of specialized food security and food sovereignty law makes it difficult to address all aspects of food security.

NFC (Nepal Food Corporation) provides food item to the public at government rates often during festivals and natural disasters. The NFC also supplies subsidized food to 30 districts including 22 remote districts across the country where local productions are in a deficit. It follows the Government's food policy with the responsibility of collection, transportation, storage, sale and mobilization of food. The NFC handles food aid received by the country [15].

Basically, there are three sources of the food supply in Nepal: domestic production, import from neighboring

countries and food support from donor agencies like the WFP (World Food Program). Interventions are carried out by WFP in the food insecure areas identified by NeKSAP (Nepal Food Security Monitoring System) in close collaboration with the Government. This system helps to monitor the food security situation up to local level, and prepares quarterly food security phase classification report.

3. Constitutional Provision for Food Sovereignty

The Constitution of Nepal (2015) includes “food sovereignty” as a fundamental right for Nepalese citizens. It includes food sovereignty along with employment, shelter, health, and education as the basic rights of people to be established in the policy framework of the state of Nepal.

Constitution of Nepal has enshrined the right to food as a fundamental right for its citizens. The right to food and other related provisions are mentioned in articles 36 and 42 as follows.

- Article 36 (1) ensures the right to food for every citizen,
- Article 36 (2) ensures that every citizen has the right to be protected against food scarcity that may cause a threat to life,
- Article 36 (3) ensures that every citizen has right to food sovereignty as provided by law,
- Article 42—the right to social justice—includes the provision on food.

4. Agriculture Development Strategy and Food Sovereignty

The ADS has clear mandate to achieve food and nutrition security leading to food sovereignty in its vision statement. The ADS also recognized the critical importance that farmers' access and control of the means of production—primarily land—has for the success of the strategy which is the prerequisite of food sovereignty. Critical land issues such as tenancy, fragmentation, degradation, land use planning need to

be resolved over the course of the ADS and their resolution will require the participation of the farmers' organizations, cooperatives, and private sector in order to find equitable and efficient mechanisms for enhancing land productivity as mentioned in ADS. The ADS has provisioned farmers' participation in different institutional mechanisms to ensure their functional involvement at the center and local level.

Moreover, the ADS promotes the formulation of legislation related to food rights and food sovereignty consistently with the principles of the Interim Constitution. Specific initiatives to deepen the understanding of farmers' rights, promote these rights, monitor them, and protect them will be formulated as part of the activities under the Governance component of the ADS. Farmers' rights are ensured and strengthened through legislation on Rights to Food and Food Sovereignty along with the formation of farmers' commission. The ADS envisage food and nutrition security program as a prioritized national program under ADS flagship programs with sufficient consensus, resources, and effective management. Impact of ADS will be evaluated through time.

5. Food-Related Legislation in Nepal

According to international law, every human being has rights to be freed from hunger and rights to have safe and nutritious food. Universal declaration on human rights, Conventions on Child Rights and other international legal documents have ensured the rights of food. Nepal has also enacted and updated a number of legislations concerning food.

Aquatic Animal Protection Act 1960 [16] has made provisions on the protection of aquatic animals in order to maintain peace and order as well as convenience and economic interests of the general public. Land Act 1964 [17] has clearly mentioned about the equitable distribution of the cultivable land and by making easily accessible the necessary know-how and resources on agriculture and to keep up the convenience and economic interests of the general

public by providing encouragement to make a maximum increase in agricultural production. The Land Act also provides agricultural debt related to safeguards for farmers along with incentives for cooperative farming in order to ensure access to food and resources for farmers. Government has formulated and adopted the Natural Calamity (Relief) Act 1982 [18] focusing on relief. According to the 1982 Act, there is a provision of distribution of emergency relief materials like food, cooking utensil, shelter, medicine, and other necessary material. The Black-Marketing Act 1975, the Competition Act 2007, the Consumer Protection Act 1997 and the Essential Commodities Act 1961 [19-22] have provision for protecting consumers from irregularities concerning the quality, quantity, and prices of food. These acts have taken measures that prevent unreasonable price hike of food, collusion, price fixing, and deflection in the supply of food from food-scarce regions to other regions of the country. In addition, the above-mentioned laws have provided authority to the government to fix and monitor the price of foodstuffs. Water Resources Act 1992 [23] and the water resource rules [24] have made arrangements for the rational utilization, conservation, management and development of the water resources that are available in Nepal in the form of surface water, underground water or in whatsoever form. It has given the priority order on the utilization of water resources like drinking water and domestic users; irrigation; and agricultural uses such as animal husbandry and fisheries. The Industrial Enterprises Act 1992 [25] has given priority to establish Agro and Forestry-based industries and provides various incentives, including tax exemptions, in the establishment of agro-based industries in remote regions of Nepal. The Local Self Governance Act, the Animal Health Act, the Food Act, Animal Slaughterhouse Act all include quality control and standardization of food (www.lawcommission.gov.np).

6. National Cereal Food Availability

The total cereal production for 2014/2015 was 9.26 million tons. After the deduction of losses and other usages (seed and feed), the quantity of cereals available for human consumptions has been recorded at 5.5 million MT whereas the national requirement is 5.53 million MT. It clearly shows that there is a national surplus of 0.15 million tons in the food balance sheet. However, when viewed from local cereal production and cereal food requirements 32 districts were cereal food deficit in 2014/2015. This included 4 in the far-western development region, 7 in the mid-western development region, 3 in the western development region, 13 in the central development region and 5 in the eastern development region. The central hill and central Terai sub-regions have the highest edible cereal deficit. The total edible cereals production and requirement illustrates the trend of maintaining an edible cereal surplus above the national requirement for the past few years (Fig. 1). However, it is interesting to note that there is a

misunderstanding among many people that Nepal is a food deficit country calculating only the import aspects of fine milled rice basically from India. But it is not true when analyzed by total edible cereal availability to the total population nationally. Because of national-wide preference of rice consumption in Nepal, domestic production has not been enough to meet the rice demand (Table 1). Nepalese peoples' food habit has changed along with the rise in living standard due mainly to remittance and urbanization. In addition, there is comparatively low productivity of rice and encroachment of productive land for other uses rather than agriculture production due to poor implementation of land use policy. Due to these reasons, the trend of importing fine and aromatic rice has increased in Nepal for a few years. The utilization of locally available food through product diversification will be effective to reduce the overdependence on imported rice.

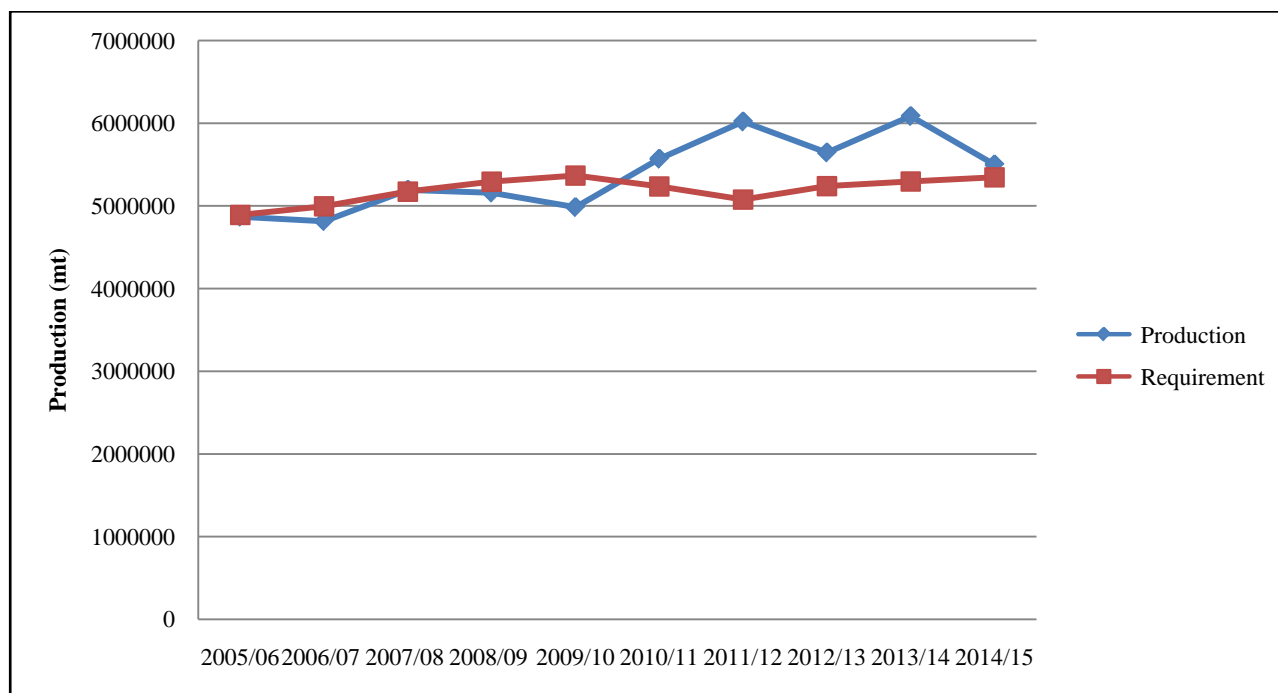


Fig. 1 Total edible cereal production and requirement in different years.

Source: Statistical Information on Nepalese Agriculture-2017, Ministry of Agriculture Development.

Table 1 Actual consumption, requirement, availability and gap/surplus of major crops.

Food items	Population	Actual consumption (kg/person/year)	Requirement (tons)	Availability (tons)	Gap/surplus (tons)
Rice	28,104,289	122	3,428,723	2,555,123	-873,600
Maize	28,104,289	41.55	1,167,733	1,251,563	83,830
Wheat	28,104,289	17	477,773	1,449,145	9713,72
Millet	28,104,289	9	252,939	225,894	-27,045
Barley	28,104,289	0.37	10,399	10,107	-292
Buckwheat	28,104,289	0.29	8,150	8,897	747
Total	28,104,289	190.21	5,345,717	5,500,729	155,012

Source: Statistical Information on Nepalese Agriculture-2017, Ministry of Agriculture Development.

7. Challenges for Food Sovereignty

Developing and maintaining food sovereignty is a great challenge to developing and least developed country like Nepal. Firstly, food sovereignty includes the multi-sectoral and multidimensional issues related to land, water, seeds, credit, market and indigenous knowledge due to which wide consultation is needed for the formulation of laws and policies and their implementation for wider acceptability. Secondly, Nepal is gearing up at its own pace on the implementation of WTO (World Trade Organization) agreements due to which cheap food is coming distorting the domestic market ultimately affecting the Nepalese farmers' product. Likewise, there is the chance of bio-piracy and misuse of patenting. All these pose the challenge for food sovereignty. Thirdly, global warming and climate change is another emerging challenge for food sovereignty. In conclusion, legal provisions of food sovereignty need to be made compatible with the different agreement and provisions of international organizations with the cautious review without compromising national sovereignty. However, casual implementation of food security and food sovereignty laws make it difficult to address all aspects of food security.

8. Implementation Status, Policy Gaps, and Future Direction

As discussed in earlier sections, the government has made decades-long efforts, to adopt policies appropriate to addressing food insecurity problems,

particularly through the APP (Agricultural Perspective Plan) (1997-2017) and National Agriculture Policy (2004). However, the performance was not satisfactory as expected due to inadequate resources in the agricultural sector and weak functional coordination among the key stakeholder and political instability. For a few years, the MoALD (Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development) has given the top priority to food and nutrition security in the annual budget program to ensure food and nutrition security. When the prevailing policies and laws are taken synergistically and implemented in combination, there is a promising legislative framework that can have a positive impact on food security leading to food sovereignty in Nepal. Furthermore, MoALD priority will be to maintain and promote food sovereignty with food security by the formulation of laws as mentioned in ADS complementation to the constitution of Nepal.

9. Conclusions

Nepal has been making strong and sufficient policies to ensure the food security. Implementation of these policies and addressing the international commitments will make Nepal a food and nutrition secure country. In Nepal, malnutrition and hunger are mostly confined to conflict areas, geographically remote areas, regions hit by droughts and natural calamities. The policies which prioritize such areas and population should be formulated and implemented.

References

- [1] World Food Summit. 1996. 13-17 November 1996, Rome, Italy.
- [2] Wittman, H., Desmarais, A. A., Wiebe, N., eds. 2010. "Food Sovereignty." In *Reconnecting Food, Nature and Community*. Oakland, CA: Food First.
- [3] Fairbairn, M. 2010. *Framing Resistance: International Food Regimes & the Roots of Food Sovereignty*, edited by Wittman, Desmarais, and Wiebe, pp. 15-32.
- [4] Adhikari, J. 2014. "Seed Sovereignty: Analysis the Debate on Hybrid Seeds and GMOs and Bringing about Sustainability in Agricultural Development." *Journal of Forest and Livelihood* 12 (1): 33-46. [http://www.forestation.org/app/webroot/tinymce/editor/plugins/filemanager/files/JFL%20VOI%2012%20\(1\)/Adhikari.pdg](http://www.forestation.org/app/webroot/tinymce/editor/plugins/filemanager/files/JFL%20VOI%2012%20(1)/Adhikari.pdg).
- [5] Manandhar, P. 2014. "Food Security: Key Terms and Debates." In *Food Security in Post Conflict Nepal: Challenges and Opportunities*, edited by Upreti, B. R., Sharma, S. R., and Paudel, S. B. Kathmandu: Kathmandu University and Nepal Centre for Contemporary Research.
- [6] Agriculture Perspective Plan (APP). 1995. National Planning Commission Secretariat, Singadurbar, Kathmandu, Nepal.
- [7] NPC. 1997. *Ninth Five Year Plan (1997-2002)*. National Planning Commission, Kathmandu, Nepal.
- [8] Agriculture Development Strategy (ADS). 2015. *Ministry of Agricultural Development*. Singhadurbar, Kathmandu.
- [9] NPC. 2002. *Tenth Periodic Plan (2002-2007)*. National Planning Commission, Kathmandu, Nepal.
- [10] NPC. 2007. *First Three-Year Interim Plan (2007/08-2009/10)*. National Planning Commission, Kathmandu, Nepal.
- [11] NPC. 2010. *Second Three-Year Interim Program (2010/11-2012/13)*. National Planning Commission, Kathmandu, Nepal.
- [12] NPC. 2012. *Third Three-Year Interim Plan (2012/13-2015/2016)*. National Planning Commission, Kathmandu, Nepal.
- [13] FAO. 2015. *Food and Agriculture Organization Nepal (FAO-Nepal) 2015*. Zero Hunger Challenge Initiatives Launched in Nepal. FAO Nepal News Bulletin, November-January 2015.
- [14] SQCC. 2013. *National Seed Vision (2013) Seed Quality Control Centre (SQCC)*. Lalitpur, Nepal.
- [15] NFP. 2019. *National Food Program 2019*. Accessed 22nd June 2019. <http://www.nfc.com.np/>.
- [16] NLC. 1960. *Aquatic Animal Protection Act (1960) Aquatic Animal Protection Act, 2017 (1960)*. Nepal Law Commission. www.lawcommission.gov.np/en/archives/13836.
- [17] NLC. 1964. *Land Act (1964) The Lands Act, 2021 (1964)*. Nepal Law Commission. www.lawcommission.gov.np.
- [18] NLC. 1982. *Natural Calamity (Relief) Act (1982) Natural Calamity (Relief) Act. 2039 B.S. (1982)*. Nepal Law Commission. www.lawcommission.gov.np.
- [19] NLC. 1975. *The Black Marketing Act (1975) Black-Marketing and Some Other Social Offenses and Punishment Act, 2032 (1975)*. Nepal Law Commission. www.lawcommission.gov.np.
- [20] NLC. 2007. *Competition Act (2007) Competition Promotion and Market Protection Act, 2063 (2007)*. Nepal Law Commission. The Government of Nepal.
- [21] NLC. 1997. *Consumer Protection Act (1997)*. The Nepal Law Commission. The Government of Nepal. www.lawcommission.gov.np/en/archives/17465.
- [22] NLC. 1961. *Essential Commodities Act (1961) Essential Commodities Control (Authorization) Act, 2017 (1961)*. <http://mos.gov.np/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Essential-Commodities-Control-Authorization-Act-2017-1961.pdf>.
- [23] NLC. 1992. *Water Resources Act (1992). Water resource, 2049 (1992) The Government of Nepal*. Nepal Law Commission. http://mowss.gov.np/assets/uploads/files/Water_Resource_s_Act_2049-english.pdf.
- [24] NLC. 1993. *Water Resources Rules (1993). Water Resources Rules, 2050 (1993)*. The Government of Nepal. Nepal Law Commission. <http://www.moewri.gov.np/images/category/water-resources-rules-2050-1993.pdf>.
- [25] NLC. 1992. *The Industrial Enterprises Act (1992). The Industrial Enterprises Act, 2049 (1992)*. Nepal Law Commission. The Government of Nepal. <http://www.tepc.gov.np/assets/upload/acts/2the-industrial-enterprises-act1515.pdf>.