



Food Assurance

A guide to implementation







Preface



I have read with much satisfaction and admiration the details of the Food Assurance Programme conceived, developed and proposed by the Centre for Environment Concerns, Hyderabad, and its Director, K S Gopal. It augurs well for the marginalized poor of Andhra Pradesh, who in recent years have had to face high levels of hunger over long stretches of time, that the Government of Andhra Pradesh has accepted the proposal and has decided to implement it through its latest order – G.O.Ms.No.297 dated 12th October 2004. Time was when we thought that the cruelty of migration was mitigated at least to some extent by availability of work at the place where people went, but as my own investigation into the case of death by starvation in February 2004 of Dharavathu Kamili, a tribal woman of Lali Tanda of Mathampalli mandal of Nalgonda district showed, even migration is no guarantee for employment and accessing of food. The case of Kamili has also highlighted the cruelty of gender because some of the available employment she came across while on migration was so heavy that a woman could not have undertaken it. The Food Assurance Programme of the Centre for Environment Concerns answers some of the major concerns emanating from these issues by the way it is designed.

The core element of this programme is that the poor are immediately and dynamically enabled to exchange their only asset, namely, labour, for food grains that the Government has in plenty, so as to live above hunger. Food grains are to be given under this programme on credit at the very beginning of the month to the identified poor families, and the poor families, through their labour, will repay that credit. The poor themselves, in terms of their outturn, will determine the value of labour returned by them to the State. There is a refreshing element of trusting of the poor in this programme, a concept hitherto regrettably alien to our culture.

Among the major gains of this programme are those relating to the elimination of some of the stark irregularities noticed in the way the Food for Work programme was implemented in the last two or three years. The current

design does not countenance contractors because the works have to be implemented by the families identified and willing to come forward to actually work on the works selected. The selection of the works itself has to be done by the community, which will determine both the number of the works and their value. The works would necessarily have to be within the Gram Panchayat itself and the decision about the selection of the work will rest with the Gram Panchayat, assisted by the self-help groups. The Gram Sabha has to approve the eligibility of the families offering to work in the programme. The Collectors, whose responsibility it is to ensure that no family shall go hungry for want of food in Andhra Pradesh, would appoint special officers at the mandal level to approve the works and guide the Gram Panchayats.

As in everything else, the proof of the pudding is in the eating, and in this programme, literally so. The state government has the ultimate responsibility to ensure that the programme succeeds, the touchstone being whether there are going to be any more starvation deaths in our state. In the past, certain mechanisms like the village level committees and even some self-help groups promoted by the government turned out to be the source of parallel power, corruption, dysfunctional implementation of programmes and eventually, enormous waste of taxpayers' money. In the implementation of this Food Assurance Programme, the government and its officers should ensure that such structures at the Panchayati level are not clothed with parallel powers and avoid defeating the constitutional powers and responsibilities given to the Gram Panchayats. Any committees set up should be designed to assist and help the Gram Panchayat but not to dominate or defeat them. Also, given the levels of hunger and distress obtaining in the state caused by the deteriorating rural agricultural and employment scenario and with even farmers demanding wage employment opportunities, the state government should prepare itself to take forward this programme as part of the much-needed reform of the public distribution system as it exists at present and use this as a starting point of an Employment Guarantee Programme.

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Overview and Concept

Background

Alleviation of poverty is seen as the key to addressing hunger. The experience of the Centre for Environment Concerns (CEC), Hyderabad, suggests that confidence of food access is essential to the poor to avail or take advantage of possible opportunities of enterprise, investment and to resist exploitation. Food-related safety nets assume significance to the poor seeking a living in the semi-arid areas facing chronic drought. This is not ameliorative nor sidestepping the cardinal ethic of teaching how to fish. As food consumption cannot be postponed with debilitating effects on denial, management of poverty merits central consideration.

In the late nineties, CEC promoted community grain banks and consuming of local cereals. The notion of food self-sufficient villages was enticing but the results were not enthusing. A survey of 'successful' community food banks in dry land areas saw more claims than facts. The reason is not lack of good intent or investment, but the nature of food and farm vagaries witnessed in drought-prone areas. There are problems of storage and shelf life of the grain. Food habits are changing and there is no move for inter-grain bank transfers and exchange. Our conclusion was clear – community grains banks are useful but not adequate.

In 2001, CEC conceived the Rice Credit Line to lend food to the poor people in remote and chronic drought areas having small, uncertain and fluctuating incomes. It offered different repayment models to suit local conditions, harvested the small and meager incomes in the household, made food a priority in the household expenditure basket, and households were



confident of having their cereals. The government offered rice at special drought relief prices, which was higher than the below poverty prices but lower than above poverty level prices. The demand, enthusiasm and repayment compliance it generated was amazing. Evaluations showed that the poor could negotiate better for wages, commodity prices or while selling forest collections. It provided solace to women, reducing tensions and even domestic violence. From a modest forty tons, it expanded in six months to cover six districts and over a hundred thousand households. The scheme worked as it had value to poor households. This can be seen from the fact that while grain is no longer provided by the government, community groups in the state are implementing the rice credit line with tie-up with producers and rice mill owners. The Government of India has asked CEC to pilot this in select drought districts in North India to examine its feasibility. If proven to work well, the grain should come from the central government and hold the food stocks in the country.

While mentoring the rice credit line, CEC saw the potential of Food for Work (FFW) in drought relief and hunger mitigation. In June 2004, CEC developed the concept of Food Assurance, and with the help of officials, could persuade the Andhra Pradesh Government to adopt it in place of the ineffective and corruption-ridden Food for Work (FFW) scheme. The AP Government agreed to use all FFW stocks for Food Assurance. The initial four lakh tons of rice can cover over a million households with assured food, on the lines of monthly pay packet, for the next four months. Hunger should become history in Andhra Pradesh.

Food Assurance provides 40 kg of rice and Rs 100 in cash each month to needy households in drought areas. The people repay this through labour on works identified by them. Skeptics may ask what happens if people take the grain and not deliver on work. However, it is a fact that poor people take loans and women's groups have a credible record of repayment. Besides, what they repay is what they have in plenty – labour. This will happen when the system is efficient and there is no corruption or delay. The poor can plan and develop tangible community infrastructure to improve their quality of life. When labour becomes currency, new resources will be available to development and poverty alleviation. This change needs assistance of

officials, non-officials and volunteers, and in this task we hope our publication will be helpful.

Introduction

Seven hundred and fifty mandals in Andhra Pradesh are affected by drought. The food situation of the poor is worsening, as it is the fourth successive drought. To address this situation, the state government has pioneered an innovative approach of "Food Assurance" by revamping the massive food relief centred Food for Work (FFW) programme. The Food Assurance Programme of the government involves all needy households receiving 40 kg of rice and Rs 100 each month for a period of four months, and the people repaying their cash value through works. The period will be extended based on needs, availability and validity of the approach in addressing hunger by further periods. Food Assurance aims to ensure that food reaches the households in time and people are confident of access to food. The government is committed to reaching all needy households. Food Assurance will begin in the 95 notified acute rainfall-deficit mandals and will be extended rapidly to other needy people and areas through planned extension by capacity building of the communities and facilitating officials for effective implementation. A pilot Food Assurance was implemented by the Society for Elimination of Rural Poverty (Velugu) with the assistance of CEC in select villages in three drought districts in Andhra Pradesh and this experience has been used in developing the operational aspects of the programme. While all care has been taken to fit the operational details with the government order, certain ground level good practices are built in to ensure smooth and effective implementation.

Why Food for Work Failed

The conventional intervention measure adopted by the government in providing food to needy people in drought areas is through FFW. However, FFW is observed to have severe limitations in meeting the food needs of all the poor in drought areas on time, defeating its basic objective. The reasons are examined below.

- ◆ Food needs cannot be postponed and have to be provided on time.



Lack of food has debilitating consequences on the poor. While cattle are happy on having the day's fodder, human beings have solace only when they are sure of their next meal.

- ◆ The complex nature of drought intervention measures and decision-making in the government defeats the purpose of a mitigation measure and timely intervention. The state government sends a report to the Centre, followed by a visit of a team of officials to the state. They submit an assessment that is reviewed by the National Calamity Fund, based on whose decision money and grain are released to the state for relief measures. Then state and central officials grapple with the practical logistics problems of transporting and storing food in the needy areas. This cumbersome procedure prevents a nimble and rapid response to crises like drought.
- ◆ 'Works' rather than the food needs of the poor became the focus. Experience shows that the focus has been on developing 'works'. The senior officials have been concerned with monitoring and certifying 'works' rather than distributing food in time and to all the needy. This leads to corruption in works certification and food distribution; a role for contractors or nominees and use of machinery; far lying yet needy areas getting neglected; needy communities without power base getting sidelined and food arriving on completion of work.
- ◆ All the above causes are interlinked and result directly from the undesirable emphasis on 'works'. Contractors step in and use machinery to complete 'works', and there is massive misuse of funds. Corruption is rampant in procuring the necessary certifications as well as in the food distribution process. Officials, for their own convenience, often limit the programmes to areas that are close to the headquarters, while more needy yet far flung areas are neglected. Only communities with political clout manage to procure the 'works' while those without power base are sidelined. At the end of all this, the poor receive food only at the end of completion of the 'works', if at all, and that is too late. Therefore, they are forced to sell the food in order to pay the debts they have incurred during the crisis.



Given below is an extract from an article on what happened in FFW to a ruling party politician-cum-contractor in the massive six million ton FFW implemented in Andhra Pradesh.

Adapaka Appala Naidu, 37, Sarpanch of Venku Patrunirega village in Vizainagaram district and belonging to the ruling Telugu Desam party, attempted suicide by consuming pesticide on 9 May in protest against abnormal delay in the release of Food for Work rice. He was rushed to the hospital. Naidu had executed several works, including laying of roads and drains under the Food for Work Programme during 2002-2003, for which he was to receive 250 quintals of rice. Following repeated requests, an order was issued sanctioning 150 quintals of rice, but later the quantity was reduced to 28 quintals. Naidu said that he took the extreme step following harassment from private moneylenders as he had executed the works by taking loans from them. He also alleged that he paid Rs 40,000 to Panchayat Raj junior engineer Chandrasekhar; Rs 8000 to the MPDO; and Rs 5000 to the DE for sanctioning works and release of rice but all in vain. (*The Hindu*, 11th May 2003)

New Approach – Old Objectives but a Paradigm Shift

To serve the original objective of FFW – to address food needs of hungry households in drought areas – the programme must be restructured. In Food Assurance, grain and cash are given on time and if necessary, on credit. Sometimes, grain may be advanced and at other times, people would have repaid the value by work and have to obtain the grain. It is thus a bank involving loans and deposits and implemented in such a way that timely food access is assured to the needy. The role and task of officials change and enable efficient services to realize the government commitment of a hunger-free society. Thus people are customers and not beneficiaries. To avoid delays, technical measurement and measurement book (MB) recording are for purposes of audit and done at the convenience of the engineers. Meanwhile, the estimation of cost carried out by the people, which has the endorsement of the Gram Panchayat, is sufficient. However, to enable effective reconciliation of the two estimates, it would be good that



technical personnel are involved while working out the cost estimates. The Gram Panchayat and the village committee must ensure regular work, demonstrating the commitment of the people to repay, as accumulated defaults are difficult to collect and inculcating the paying ethic is vital for getting prompt repayment. The value of the 'works' taken up is limited to the value of food and cash borrowed during the period, ensuring all areas and households being covered under food assurance.

The borrowers identify the works and its estimate and this is agreed to by the Gram Panchayat for each of the works. The community can take up the works at any suitable time, with public employment being supplemental to other local work opportunities. All works must be completed within the four-month period with some progress each month or more work done when other wage opportunities are not available. Even if the 'works' complete before, they would get the grain again each month and not the entire allotment. It is best to facilitate the community to first meet the immediate food needs of people and then complete the works in time and enjoy confidence of future grain access. All poor must be covered under Food Assurance. However, as this is a drought mitigation measure, other households, regardless of status, are entitled to join if they accept the conditions in the scheme and members of such households repay the value of the grain through physical work.

Food Assurance changes the nature of government officials' tasks. Their primary task is to ensure timely provision of grain of the right weight and quality, its distribution being transparent and properly recorded. To eliminate bureaucratic delays in granting approvals a time limit is provided for administrative and technical sanctions. If these are not received within the stipulated time it is taken as approved. The administrative sanction must come within three working days of identifying the households in the village. If the sanction is not accorded, the reasons must be stated or after the stipulated time period the sanction is deemed automatically given. The responsibility is on officials to deliver in time and if some errors are observed in the field later, then the concerned official will be held responsible for not providing the response in time and stating the reasons. The measurement book and other records are completed at any later time as suited to officials

and the onus is not on people implementing the works but on technical staff of the government.

Why Food Assurance

Food Assurance addresses the strength of poor people – their ability of labour. We see poor people take loans and repay the same. Here, the asset of the people, labour, is exchanged for grain and as labour is plenty with them they should be able to repay this loan effectively. Women from poor households have demonstrated their integrity with cash and there is no need to worry about their ability to repay when asked to repay in labour. What is however required is the confidence in the government machinery, as poor people cannot write complex measurement books. However, they can estimate by calculating how much effort is involved in a particular work and this is the basis of their estimation of the works. To ensure transparency in costing, the government has involved the Panchayati Raj to approve the cost estimates. Such an approach is used for works under the SGRY for works less than Rs 50,000. If necessary, the people can take help from technical people or expertise from the government or other sources. They then present and negotiate the cash value of each 'works' with the Gram Panchayat and obtain its approval. This accepted valuation is central to measuring repayment.

The advantages of Food Assurance are as follows:

- ◆ The poor receive food when they need it most.
- ◆ The role of the officials is one of facilitators rather than enforcers.
- ◆ The communities have ownership of the works undertaken, thereby doing works that are suitable both to the community need and the skills of the workers.
- ◆ The extent of 'works' taken up is limited to the cash value of food borrowed.
- ◆ The people get food during the difficult time of summer and execute works when the weather is more merciful and when the work is "productive".

- ◆ It provides dignity to the poor and involves borrowing and lending.

The following are the distinguishing features of Food Assurance vis-à-vis Food for Work.

Old Scheme (Food for Work Programme)	New Scheme (Food Assurance Programme)
Work was central and access to food was considered following progress on works.	Focus on identifying needy families in all habitations to provide food and cash on time each month.
Attention of officials only on identification, sanctions, value and technicalities of works. Thus food access of the needy people was delayed and uncertain.	Self-selection of households and approved at Gram Sabha with people agreeing to work for the value of grain and cash, to be repaid in four months. Timely food access.
Works estimate made and approved by officials.	Estimates for work made by people and approved by Gram Panchayat.
Grain is released only after check measurement, administrative and technical clearance.	Grain is given by the 5 th of each month and progress of work is monitored by the Gram Panchayat.
Work starts after sanction and grain given after check measurement entered in the measurement book and is the basis for giving grain.	Panchayat approves estimates and grain is given through Food Assurance cards. MB recording after the completion of work and necessary adjustment can be made later.
People not sure when and how much grain they would receive till it reaches them.	Each household receives 40 kg and Rs 100 each month.
Reduced costs by using machinery or employing skilled people only.	Work is manual and people decide nature of works/implementation.
Few large works, with some villages getting benefit of unlimited grain.	Works limited to value of grain and cash taken by the habitation.



Contractors responsible for getting the labour and completing works.	Borrowers form work teams and take responsibility for various works
Contractors distribute grain to the beneficiaries, with no role for govt.	Grain distribution transparency is fully ensured by officials.
Minimum and equal wages often overlooked.	Minimum and equal wages built in estimation of value of each work.
Govt. officials see that works are of good value, quality, and on time.	Govt. officials ensure food and cash in correct quantity/amount reach people on time.
Households ensure timely and quality works of the value received.	Govt. ensures timely food to households.

Decision-Making

As Food Assurance basically alters the implementation of FFW while centrally retaining its objectives, decision-making shifts radically. Officials must now focus on timely provision of food and cash. Next, officials must accept the primacy of the works chosen by the community and its estimation. Once it has received endorsement of the Panchayat, it must be accepted by the officials and recording of the works in the measurement book is done to meet the requirements of audit. Officials must help the community in implementing the works through technical advice. Thus the entire process must be simple with the responsibility being entrusted to the community.

Focus Areas

Food Assurance is conceptually simple, involving the process akin to that adopted by banks in lending and receiving deposits. However, certain areas need greater attention. The first is reliability, i.e., the people should be assured that their borrowing is delivered on time, as agreed and without any delays or running around officials. The grain must reach the households every month in good quality and correct weight. The next is that people have their own sense of group homogeneity. Hence, borrowers can be divided responsibility-wise into groups in order to seek compliance in terms of



borrowing and repayment. The concept of SHG is a sound principle for lending being repaid through peer pressure. This helps in smooth implementation of works and some people taking responsibility.

The other area deals with valuing the work in cash terms. There is scope for conflicts between various estimates, especially those prepared by the community and the engineers. This is partly due to the manner in which works have been undertaken and estimated so far. Therefore, the GO has made it clear that the basic responsibility for estimating works lies with the community and its acceptance by the Gram Panchayat. In planning works and ensuring quality, the authorities must provide for assistance from working or retired engineers or even those who have taken contracts. Also, each month there must be progress on works, indicating the interest of the borrower to repay through labour and this must be monitored before issuing the monthly coupons. However, this power must not be used to deny people food but to see that work is under progress. It is for this reason and the fact that some people will give their names and not report for work that in the beginning the grains are given only after the households have delivered four person days of work. All works involving cash outlays must be avoided to ensure centrality of human labour.

Senior officials must guard against abuse, delay and corruption. Some widely known areas where these could happen include the delivery points at the Civil Supplies Corporation and at the village fair price dealer; the village secretary refusing or delaying in the discharge of his responsibility; department engineers seeking bribes for favourable check measurement; and with officials responsible for issuing administrative and technical sanctions. The Collector must hold a meeting, streamline and oversee the functioning of these officials and seek strict compliance and timely implementation. This can be ensured by seeing that these officials deliver rather than people repeatedly coming to them or waiting for them. Collectors must ensure monitoring by mandal officials for open and transparent distribution of grain and cash and involving all poor households to access the grain. Officials must facilitate carrying on of the works without waiting for any official approval and forming community teams in taking up various works. Cost estimates of the works must be worked out based on minimum



wages, and engineers must provide for centrality of the people's estimation of the works while recording the measurement book. A village level committee involving the borrowers, women leaders and existing groups along with some Panchayat representatives can be very useful in managing the scheme effectively.

Transparency

Food Assurance has nothing to offer to anyone except the households that toil. Thus, it is friendless among those wielding power and profit. While food is a basic need, it is also a powerful tool of subjugation and exploitation, and delay is a weapon to extract bribes or dominate people. The government attaches great importance to transparency and right to information. All documents connected with Food Assurance are public documents and can be made available for public scrutiny at any point of time. The Gram Panchayat's resolution, including the list of families covered and estimation of each work, must be displayed at the Panchayat building and other prominent places. Food Assurance Card must be issued to eligible households after reporting for four days of work, and grain distribution must be done openly involving the village Food Assurance Committee. Care should be taken to see that there is no under-weighting at the supply point of the Civil Supplies Corporation or at the delivery point, i.e., at the PDS dealer. Grains should reach the village on a particular pre-notified date, and at least three members of the village Food Assurance Committee must be present to sign on the delivery challan.

Services

Civil society organizations have played a key role in developing Food Assurance. The government recognizes the potential of such organizations in training officials, developing training materials, experience sharing, helping communities in actual implementation, and in monitoring and providing feedback on the progress in implementing Food Assurance. The Centre for Environment Concerns, a Hyderabad-based voluntary organization, which developed the concept and piloted its implementation along with select NGOs and community-based organizations, has volunteered to assist the government in these areas. CEC has trained



personnel, along with people willing to serve on civil society monitoring of Food Assurance, in some of the districts. Another key source of help, expertise and manpower is with Velugu and their field personnel. For further details and assistance please write to: K.S. Gopal, Centre for Environment Concerns, 3-4-142/6, Barkatpura, Hyderabad. Phone: 040-27564959/27563017 or e-mail to hyd2_cenvicon@sancharnet.in

Operations

The Government of Andhra Pradesh has decided to adopt Food Assurance in the Food for Work Programme, implemented from 2nd October 2004 in 94 mandals, identified as having over 60 percent rainfall deficit. While these mandals will be the focus initially, the programme must expand to all needy mandals. This will happen over time, after streamlining, gearing up and training the administrative system and personnel for effective delivery. The phased expansion of Food Assurance thus depends on how soon the district can equip itself to effectively expand the scheme keeping in mind the spirit and intent of Food Assurance. Under no circumstances should the old ways of implementing Food for Work be continued except some measures provided in the guidelines. While the grain is provided from allocations made under Food for Work to the district, the cash component is mobilized by the District Collector from available resources for activities such as land development and Velugu social community initiative fund. Food Assurance provides 40 kg of rice and Rs 100 in cash every month. It is implemented for an initial period of four months and further extended based on community demand and people's food need. The scheme is managed, supervised and implemented in the village by a 10-member committee involving five persons from the community taking the grains and five persons from the Gram Panchayat, with at least half the committee members being women.

Planning

The first step in Food Assurance is that all stakeholders must understand and appreciate the new approach by holding a meeting of political parties,



local leaders, government officials and the media. The objective is to disseminate information, seek cooperation, and build on their suggestions for better implementation without deviating from the basic principles of Food Assurance. Collectors should also request the press to widely disseminate the basic principles and strategy underlying the programme. A simple communication plan can ensure wide knowledge and appreciation of the scheme among all stakeholders.

The Collector must look at ways to finance the cash component and ensure that adequate grain of good quality is available with the Civil Supplies Corporation. The Collector may identify and involve local-based NGOs in community facilitation. He must form and enable a district level civil society body to assist in monitoring and reporting the progress on the field. Also, key points of delay must be identified and made accountable for timely performance. The Collector must work a schedule to ensure that quality grain reaches the villages before the 5th of each month and the quantity is as required.

At the mandal level, the implementing personnel would include the Mandal Revenue Officer (MRO) and the Mandal Development Officer (MDO) staff, engineers, non-officials of the Panchayati Raj, village secretaries, PDS dealers, members of community bodies such as Mandal Mahila Sanghams and mutually aided cooperatives, and personnel from Velugu and NGOs. The personnel from all agencies and levels should know the programme and its guidelines. . There should be a pool of resource persons at the district level and training material to handle the preparatory training sessions. The workshop should not exceed more than four hours and involve about 40 participants. At the end of the workshop, everyone must be clear about the process, rights and entitlements of the community, facilitation role of officials, tasks of the village Food Assurance Committee and coordination with representatives of the Gram Panchayat. For wider understanding, printed copies of the Food Assurance guidelines must be made available in Telugu to the community.

Villagers will need assistance for some time to gain confidence and implement the scheme effectively. Support activities must be planned and

taken up by involving local leaders and NGOs. These include:

- ◆ Understanding and cooperation of village non-officials.
- ◆ Training and reorienting of officials and facilitators at various levels.
- ◆ Involving local voluntary agencies to assist the community in implementation.
- ◆ Wide dissemination of the scheme among the literate in the community.
- ◆ Monitoring for strict and timely compliance by field officials.
- ◆ Transparency in the giving of grain and cash and maintaining muster rolls at work.
- ◆ Forming mandal level citizens' committee with public-minded citizens like journalists, lawyers, doctors and teachers, and facilitating their occasional travel to the villages for independent monitoring, building people's confidence and reporting to the District Collector for effective measures to address any bottlenecks.
- ◆ Ensuring that laws such as minimum and equal wages laws are strictly complied with in the cost estimate for works and its acceptance by engineers
- ◆ Identifying small, useful and meaningful works that can be completed with human labour and available manpower resources.
- ◆ Identifying and making available people who can help in estimation and ensuring quality of the works .
- ◆ Ensuring that correct quantity and quality of grain is provided through coordination with Civil Supplies Corporation and fair price dealer network.
- ◆ Implementing a calendar schedule for delivery of the grain supplies and officials being made responsible for it.
- ◆ Planned scaling up based on availability of grains, cash, trained manpower and logistics to ensure assurance.



- ◆ The MRO and MDO must be accountable in any reports of hunger.
- ◆ Complaints of delays or lack of transparency must be addressed immediately.

Learning from the Pilot

The Society for Elimination of Rural Poverty (Velugu) and Centre for Environment Concerns piloted Food Assurance in select villages in three chronically drought-prone districts of Andhra Pradesh. The pilot demonstrated the following learning:

Everyone must understand the scheme, entitlements and attendant obligations and tasks. This is done through training and information sharing

Cover all household which need the grain and agree to repayment by work. In case of households with single women or infirm and sick people, ensure their food needs from other government programmes, or villagers can agree to do extra days of work for them and thus include them in the household.

A committee of 10-12 persons, mostly women and representing constituencies such as village organizations (VOs), DWACRA, SHGs, CMEY and select members from the Gram Panchayat must be constituted to assist, share responsibility, divide tasks and oversee implementation. Where needed, habitation level committees can be constituted. The committee must meet regularly, maintain records and take stock of the situation and provide guidance to the community.

The Gram Panchayat must own and assist the process and implementation. It must ensure smooth and regular flow of information between the committee and the panchayat.

Transparency is very important while giving grain and cash and in identifying, planning and estimating the works. The people should choose the works, which must be small with tangible benefits to them.

The community or team must work out an implementation schedule and stick to it.

Groups or teams with identified volunteers must take responsibility for specific 'works'.



It is better to involve technically capable local people in planning and cost estimates of the works. The estimation must be detailed, based on manpower needs for each works and recorded fully. Approval for cost estimates should be taken from the Gram Panchayat.

Minimum wages and equal wages must be ensured while working out the cost estimates.

To avoid variation in estimates of people and technical person, details should be provided in terms of man-days, muster rolls and details of each of the labour activities in the work. This will help in having acceptance of audit requirements needed for a measurement book.

Regular visit to the site of the works by officials and the members of the Food Assurance Committee.

The programme must not be seen as opportunity to take up major village infrastructure development activities. Resources for them must come from other activities.

Once the programme takes off in some villages, even problematic villages will fall in line and adopt all the procedures fully. So it is a good idea to start in villages where cooperation is higher.

It is important to recognize that work is dignity and central in the ethics of poor people and the government is not providing a 'free lunch'.

Implementation

It is better to start small and scale up gradually rather than expand all over at the beginning. This is vital in case of Food Assurance as the approach is novel and it is likely to be patterned, against the intent, on the old lines of Food for Work programme. Experience shows that for an innovative scheme to work smoothly and become a model to others, the community must be united and homogeneous, habitation should be small and remote, and there should be cooperation from the Sarpanch and Gram Panchayat. Also, villages with an effective village organization or an active NGO working among the people with community level institutional mechanism can be a good starting



point. After starting in such villages and demonstrating the effectiveness of the programme, the scheme can be safely expanded on demand from the community and Gram Panchayat to other villages in the mandal. Success in these villages is key in planning easy expansion, as the people now know how the scheme works; its benefits, benchmarks are established; and the community will negotiate and agree among themselves to compliance and effective implementation. Such a planned expansion will enable smooth, transparent and timely implementation of all activities and interactions envisaged in Food Assurance, reducing monitoring and fire-fighting headaches.

After identifying the initial villages, designated officials along with NGO, VO and Sarpanch will hold a Gram Sabha. The operational details of the scheme will be shared and doubts clarified. The borrowers must know that each identified household will receive 40 kg of rice as loan, along with Rs 100 for the next four months and the value of the grain borrowed must be repaid through labour of identified works. They must also agree to take up any extra work being done in case of variation in the estimation after the works are completed. The role of the Gram Panchayat and the Food Assurance Committee must be explained and implementation and record keeping must rest with the committee constituted for this purpose. The next step is to constitute at the Gram Sabha a 10-12 member village Food Assurance Committee. Its role is very crucial and selection of the members must ensure representation of all sections of working people, along with leaders coming from existing groups such as DWACRA, CMEY, VO, etc. At least three members must be representatives of the Gram Panchayat. The committee must have a large presence of women from the households that join the scheme.

At the Gram Sabha, people enlist the names of their households after agreeing to the conditions of Food Assurance. If needed, each household must be asked to provide two persons guaranteeing the labour of the member in the completion of the works; these could be people from among themselves. The Gram Sabha then identifies a shelf of works and this is prioritized. Each work must state clearly its benefits to the community. After this the work begins and after four person days of work, the households receive a



Food Assurance card along with the first quota of grain and cash. The four days are used, as some people may give their names and not report for work.

The meeting of the Food Assurance Committee must be held soon after the Gram Sabha is over. It will look at each work and estimate its value keeping in mind the minimum and equal wages provision and number of person days needed for each work. The expected benefits to the community from each of the works must be listed in detail. The committee will ensure good quality and durability of the works being undertaken and if need be, take assistance from any technical person available in the village. The nature of works taken up can include earthwork, bush clearance, tank deepening, farm access roads, filling of disused wells, removal of stones, village sanitation, including removal of parthenium and other weeds in the habitation. There must not be any stipulation of the works being taken up merely because the cash component is coming from RIDF or Velugu or such funds at the disposal of the Collector.

The cost estimation of the works is calculated by the Food Assurance Committee, keeping in mind the number of days and persons each work needs and keeping the minimum wages in mind. After cost estimation, approval is obtained from the Gram Panchayat. The facilitators must see that the overall cost of the 'works' is not beyond the value of the grain to be provided over the next four months. There must be no need for any cash component for materials, etc., in the works being proposed. The emphasis must be on labour-oriented small-value works, close to the habitation. It should be preferred by the work teams, who should take up the responsibility for the works. In case public works are not forthcoming, works can be taken up on private lands with preference to land distributed by the government. Technical sanction is not required to start implementation of food credit or the works.

The Food Assurance Committee is primarily responsible for transparency, as well as smooth and timely implementation. Their task is to develop people's estimate for each of the identified works and get the acceptance of the Gram Panchayat. In doing so, help from retired persons



or available expertise with NGOs or local people must be used. For each work, a team of workers and their leader must be identified along with broad agreement on when the work will begin and be completed. They must help the people in implementing works with committee members agreeing to shoulder specific tasks. These include proper weighing of the grain, ensuring transparency in distribution of the grain and cash, helping people in their list of works, maintaining records of grain and cash distribution, making people responsible for maintaining the household-wise muster roll, informing the officials when the work is completed, sending monthly reports of the progress of work to the MRO and seeing that all information is publicly displayed and made available. In case of conflicts or delays they must resolve them through consultations and representation to officials. The committee must meet fortnightly, allocate responsibilities among themselves, maintain records and minutes and use the sale value of the empty rice bags to meet costs in effectively administering Food Assurance and ensuring that no household is hungry. They would do this by asking officials to include the needy in drought pension and other grain-based schemes for the destitute and the infirm or mobilizing the community to give a small part of their monthly grain or agreeing to work voluntarily for the grain provided to such needy households.

After the Gram Sabha information sought in Annexure I is filled in by the Food Assurance Committee, it is submitted to the Mandal Revenue Officer for formal administrative sanction. Work can begin immediately. After four days of work the households reporting for work receive the Food Assurance card. This avoids people who have listed their names but have no intent of doing labour. This card and the administrative sanction form the basis to release the grain. The grain must be provided immediately after the cards are given while it may take some time for the cash component to be received. In case of delay, the cash component must be given by the time the people come for their next grain allotment. Any delay or deferring of cash component must be notified to the committee and the time when they will be given must be put on the notice board and other public places. The cash distribution like that of grain must be done at an open meeting under the aegis of the Food Assurance Committee.



The government has decided that grains must be supplied within the first five days of the month. This is regardless of the date when the scheme actually began in the village. Thus, if in the first time, the grain is given on the 20th of the month, the community will receive the next grain by the 5th of the following month. The task of the Collectors is to ensure that grain reaches the village by the 5th of each month. While its availability may vary at the time of the first lending, administrative approval should not be delayed beyond four days after the Food Assurance Committee has submitted information in the given format (Annexure I). Strict instructions and compliance on this must be ensured by the District Collector. The Collectors must keep note of the time provided for action and ensure the same.

The Food Assurance Committee works out detailed cost estimates for each work that is proposed and obtains the approval from the Gram Panchayat. This estimate is signed by the Panchayat and sent to the MRO. After the village reports completion of any work, the MRO will send a departmental person to certify that the work has been done and record the check measurement. This has no bearing on providing the monthly grain except ensuring that work is in progress and people are coming for work. The monthly report from the Food Assurance Committee on this is sufficient. Thus as long as some work is in progress and the households are reporting it, each month the grain is provided regardless of check measurement. The person undertaking the check measurement must meet the committee and offer suggestions to ensure that the works are durable and of good quality.

It has been found that work teams are a good way to ensure that the work is being done effectively. So the shelf of works can be given to groups who take the responsibility for implementing them. There must be no delay in people obtaining their monthly grain due to insufficient documentation, technical obstacles or 'awaiting' verification of the works. The resolution of the Food Assurance Committee for the first grain and later the endorsement of the Gram Panchayat on estimation for each work and its total value covering the grain and cash provided over the four months period is sufficient basis for providing grains each subsequent month. By the end of each



month the committee will send a note reporting progress of work and person days. All actions are purely administrative in nature to be complied with in time by officials.

Once the listing is completed, works are identified and valued, and the approximate time periods of implementation planned. Experience shows that within two or three months of starting the scheme, the community would complete the works and households will continue to obtain the grain for the remaining period. Even if all the estimated works are completed the entire grain cannot be given except on a monthly basis. So while at the start we are advancing grain, those involved in implementation must ensure that soon the community should be advancing their labour. The committee must ensure that the work begins immediately or alongside of the giving of the grain.

While this scheme envisages the grain to go to households with able-bodied people, the most vulnerable and hungry are households with destitute, old, infirm, handicapped, etc. Their needs can be addressed in several ways – the community can give a handful from the grain received; community agrees to do extra work for the value of the grains given to such people; or these persons are identified and officials ensure their coverage under various food-related relief schemes such as *Annadata*, or old age pensions. It is useful to consider involving the physically challenged to take up works independently or with others, as this will involve them and provide dignity by getting them grain based on their services.

Availability of grain with the civil supplies can be a problem. The Collector must monitor grain availability and its release schedule in the beginning of each month. A major complaint among people is under-weighting of the grain. The Collector must post a person at the civil supplies depot to ensure proper weighing before transporting the grain to the village. The transport contractor must deliver the grain to the PDS dealer in the presence of at least three members of the Food Assurance Committee. Their signatures must be obtained on the delivery challan. The grain must be weighed and distributed to households at an open meeting and in the presence of the members of the Food Assurance Committee. The empty rice bags are retained



by the committee and their sale proceed used to cover expenses incurred by the committee in facilitating the implementation of food assurance.

Estimating Valuing of Works

The first acceptable valuation of the cost estimate for each work in Food Assurance is vested with the community and is endorsed by the Gram Panchayat. This forms the basis for any external estimation that may be done after the works are completed. Technical persons must go by this unless they see any gross violation or major over-estimation. The technical personnel are available to the community only to ensure quality work rather than its cost estimation as per standards provided in standard measurement books. They must know that the nature of works taken are purely labour-driven and the government is committed to ensuring basic food needs along with minimum and equal wages, which was missing in traditional food for work and sought to be corrected in Food Assurance. The village Food Assurance Committee must have a household-wise muster roll and identified persons in the committee must volunteer to visit each place of work and record the same.

In estimating costs all details of the work must be considered. For instance in tank rehabilitation or water body-related works it must include each activity and its costs such as earth digging, carrying the soil and putting it on the bund. In case of road being laid, it must include bush clearance, levelling, watering, etc. However, all the works must be manual in nature and the estimates based on the person days of work involved. The people's estimate must be prepared by the village committee and if necessary by taking assistance of technical people from within or outside the government and endorsed by them in writing. Detailed explanation of each work and how it will be done keeping the durability and quality aspect of the work must be mentioned. For instance, in the case of earth work, the approximate physical estimates of how much earth will be excavated, its texture, time taken in transportation by head load and filling, etc., should be covered. All agreements, decisions, names of people taking the grain and on the committee must be written in a book and made available to anyone desiring information on the scheme.

As the community has worked out the people's estimate, there is no need for any technical sanction. In case an official thinks that some works need engineering advice and technical detailing, this should not hold up the giving of the grain, and engineers must be given a specific date by which they must complete this and if not done in time, we must go by what has been worked out by the committee and representing the consensus of the community. So in Food Assurance the authorities go by people's estimate.

Identifying and Implementing Works

- ♦ Listing possible works by the VO in consultation with those borrowing the grain.
- ♦ State reasons for its identification and benefits to the community.
- ♦ Approximate value of the each work and when it will begin and be completed.
- ♦ The Gram Sabha decides in order of priority the works to be taken up.
- ♦ Valuing of each work, which is authenticated by the Gram Panchayat after preparation by VO.
- ♦ Works entrusted to teams with a set of people taking the responsibility.
- ♦ Works involving cash apart from labour must be avoided.
- ♦ Value of the work cannot exceed the grain being provided in the four-month period.
- ♦ Implementation to be planned such that work is completed within the four-month period.
- ♦ The works must be small, with visible and measurable benefits for the community .
- ♦ There are two ways of estimating the works. The first involves daily wage with extent of work clearly defined such as removal of shrubs, stones, etc. The other is where the team completes a work based on an estimate based on daily wages and persons needed.

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- ♦ In case the work involves technical inputs, obtain advice of engineers or local experts.
 - ♦ Keep the quality aspect in mind to avoid complaints.
 - ♦ List all the works and begin immediately, so that midway the work is ahead of the grain. This is important as *rabi* work will begin and people will not be able to undertake work. So plan the work to fit in periods when the people are free and ensure that the work is completed at the earliest.
 - ♦ While the grain in the beginning may be provided as an advance, the works will exceed the grain within a few weeks, but the community will obtain the grain each month.
 - ♦ In case, after giving the first grain no work has begun until the second distribution, this would weaken the programme. Hence at least half the value of the grain must be completed while providing the next grain, and this must be overseen and ensured by the committee.
 - ♦ It is expected that within two months all works would be completed. But this can happen only when people gain confidence that grain will be supplied each month.
 - ♦ Grains of the balance months cannot be given in one go even if work is completed in advance.
 - ♦ After work is completed the MDO is informed and arranges for check measurement and recording in the measurement book.
 - ♦ Any variation in cost estimates between the engineer, MB and the Panchayat is placed before the Gram Sabha by the engineer and corrective measures taken up by the community.

Record Keeping

The following records are kept in each village or habitation. These are minimal and indicative and more can be added to suit local conditions but the records must be uniform within the mandal and followed by all.

- 
1. List of borrowers of the grain and cash with signatures.
 2. Date of monthly arrival of the grain and its total weight.
 3. List of works identified and group leaders taking responsibility to implement.
 4. Estimate of each work and approval of the Gram Panchayat.
 5. Muster roll of the households coming to work.
 6. Cash earned from sale of gunny bags and its usage.
 7. Minutes of the meetings of the Food Assurance Committee and their decisions.
 8. Copies of Annexure I, approval of works by the Gram Panchayat and monthly progress report sent to the MRO.

Annexure

Five annexures for each decision of the Food Assurance Committee are provided. These help keep information in a systematic manner, avoid conflicts, and ensure speedy implementation. The data must be available for public perusal and copies maintained by the committee and the Gram Panchayat. An important input is the dates column and these should be filled accurately so that officials undertake their tasks as stipulated in the GO. The following are the Annexures.

1. Annexure I - Format of data collected to start Food Assurance
2. Annexure II - Details of works & estimates prepared by Food Assurance Committee
3. Annexure III - Resolution of the Gram Panchayat
4. Annexure IV - Monthly Progress Report
5. Annexure V - Food Assurance Cards

Format of data collected to start Food Assurance

This format is filled by the village or habitation Food Assurance Committee or Gram Panchayat and submitted through the village secretary to the MDO. It is the basis for administrative sanction, given within three working days of its receipt by the village secretary. After this period it is assumed as approved. The duty of the MDO to see that grain is received by the community within the next ten days and by the 5th of each month.

1. Date of Filling the Format:
2. Name of the Village & Mandal
3. Total Number of Households in the Panchayat:
4. Number of Households in Food Assurance:
(List of names to be maintained by the Panchayat)
5. Total quantity of grain required per month:
6. No of identified households x 40 kg x Number of Months
7. Total Value of the Grains for the period:



Value of Cash:

Total Value of Borrowing

(Match this with the total works to be taken up)

8. Names of Members of the Food Assurance Committee:

- | | |
|----|----|
| a. | g. |
| b. | h. |
| c. | i. |
| d. | j. |
| e. | k. |
| f. | l. |

8. Date of holding Gram Sabha meeting

9. Have guidelines been discussed at the Gram Sabha?

10. Names of participating officials at Gram Sabha

11. Name & Address of the NGO assisting the community
(if applicable)

12. Signature of the any two members of the Food Assurance Committee
and the representatives of the Gram Panchayat

Signature

Signature

Signature

Signature



Details of works & estimates prepared by Food Assurance Committee

i) Details of works

Work identified	Expected benefit	Work begins	Name of Leader
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a)

b)

c)

d)

e)

f)

g)

ii) Approximate Cost Estimates for works*

Description of Work	Person days of Work	Cost Estimation
a)		
b)		
c)		
d)		
e)		
f)		
g)		

* Detailed calculation and work description must be recorded for each in a register maintained by the Food Assurance Committee and available for inspection to all.

Names of the persons providing technical assistance

Signature of three members of the Food Assurance Committee

Resolution of the Gram Panchayat*

The Gram Panchayat at its meeting held on ----- agreed to assist in using Food Assurance to effectively ensure food to all needy households and extend all help in implementation. It agrees that the following are the cost estimates for each of the works identified by the Food Assurance Committee.

The following is the value of grain to be received in our village/habitation.

No of identified households:

Period - 4 months

Quantity per household - 40 kg

Price per kg of rice Rs 8.00

Monthly cash loan Rs 100

Period 4 months

The total value of grain and cash to be provided is Rs

	Description of Work	Accepted Cost Estimate	Expected Date of completion
a)			
b)			
c)			
d)			
e)			
f)			
g)			

The Gram Panchayat will help the community and the government to ensure transparency and timeliness in providing the grain and cash and in ensuring completion of all works.

Signatures of Sarpanch or Upa-Sarpanch with seal, and signatures of three women members of Gram Panchayat or Food Assurance Committee

Name	Signature
------	-----------

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.

* Developed on the basis of Annexure II

Monthly Progress Report

Submitted before end of each month by the Food Assurance Committee or Gram Panchayat to the MDO through village secretary.

1. Name of the Village, Mandal & District:
2. Report for the month ending:
3. Names of officials visiting the village during the month:
4. Total grain received in the Month and Date
5. Grain distribution date and total quantity
6. Cash Received in the Month and Date
7. Cash Paid - Date and Number Covered*

Date: Households Covered: Amount per household:

8. Sale proceedings earned from gunny bags

Amount Collected: Amount Utilized:

9. Destitute and infirm households

Number of households: Total Quantity:

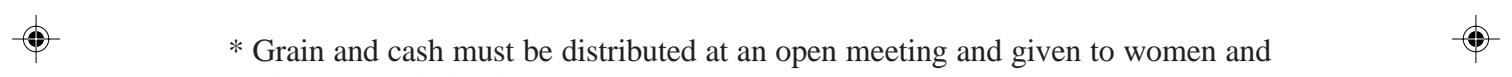
10. Total Person days of Work in the month as per muster roll:

Males: Females:

- 
11. Total Households reporting for work
 12. Requirement of grain for next month
 13. Coverage of Households for next month:

14. Detailed Progress of Each work and current status

Work	Status/Progress
a.	
b.	
c.	
d.	
e.	



* Grain and cash must be distributed at an open meeting and given to women and signatures obtained

Signed by Members of the Village Food Assurance Committee with copies submitted to MRO and Gram Panchayat



Annexure 5

Food Assurance Card

I. Name of the Household	Village	Mandal
Name of husband	Name of wife	

II. Grains taken during the months*:

Month	Date	Signature
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		

III. Cash taken during the months*

Month	Date	Signature
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		

* Grain and cash must be given to women at open meeting and their signature taken



IV. Days of working in the month by the family**:

Month	Description of work	Man	Women	Others	Total days of work
1					
2					
3					
4					
5					
Total					

** As also seen from the muster roll

V. Balance sheet of the family:

Month	Month-1	Month-2	Month-3	Month-4	Month-5	Total
Value of grain taken						
Total person days						
Debit/ Credit						