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TOPIC OF RESEARCH: **IMPACT ON FOOD SECURITY IN SLUM POPULATION DURING COVID-19 LOCKDOWNS: A STUDY OF SURENDRANAGAR CITY IN GUJARAT**

FINDINGS

The review of literature, observations and data showcases that people residing in slums face myriad of problems which were both structural as well as functional in nature. The COVID-19 pandemic affected people's lives in distinct ways. Many people were facing the problems of food insecurity and malnutrition prior to the pandemic as well but this pandemic aggravated their problems manifolds and brought in forefront their vulnerabilities. The lockdown measures led to marked deterioration in household food security; reduction in income and employment; disruption in the PDS and market access and increase in food price volatility. This led to constrained access and dietary quality. Significant number of respondents reported about skipping meals, reducing portion sizes and shifting to cheaper, less diverse diets. The vulnerability was disproportionately distributed amidst the beneficiaries as well as non-beneficiaries of AAY. The government initiatives and relief provided by CSOs did provide partial mitigation, but the gaps in coverage, delays and administrative barriers weakened its effectiveness.

As beneficiaries of AAY were chosen to be respondents for our study which largely caters to people belonging to the poorest of poor households, the socio-economic variable showcases an overwhelming majority of respondents belonging to lower socio-economic status. The impact of COVID-19 lockdowns on slum dwellers of Gujarat was comprehended within major perspectives like the economic concerns; physical, social and psychological impact; physical and health-related

concerns. The beneficiaries of AAY had significant advantage over non-beneficiaries of AAY in the context of food security, economic stability and nutritional access. However, there is room for addressing implementation challenges for achieving its full potential in the state of Gujarat. Meanwhile, the non-beneficiaries of AAY encountered greater vulnerability to food insecurity and economic stress which emphasizes on the need for proper targeting and expansion of the scheme. The implementation issues of AAY remains about identifying the targeted beneficiaries; delay in issuing of ration cards; concerns about quality of food grains being distributed and irregularity of supply in some regions.

The coping mechanisms adopted to overcome the crisis of food security by slum dwellers during COVID-19 lockdowns were diverse. The respondents consumed low-quality less expensive food, bought food on credit from grocery stores, borrowed food from acquaintances, relied on government's and CSOs aid to meet their food requirements. Some dietary changes adopted during the lockdowns were reducing the frequency of meals; decreasing the diversity in food items; consuming less preferred foods and reducing portion sizes. Economically people adopted distinct methods to cope up with the crisis like reducing expenditure on non-food items; adopting distinct livelihood strategy like street vending, small-scale entrepreneurship, etc. The slum dwellers relied on social support networks and community ties which provided them informal lending and mutual aid during lockdowns. Government and CSOs provided food aid and relief packages sometimes during the lockdowns. Only in extreme circumstances, their assets were sold.

Therefore, need was felt to bring together lives and livelihoods which are most prone to risks; strengthen the social protection system related to nutrition and invest in sustainable future. The role of community networks in terms of word-of-mouth information and social networks do play a prominent role in shaping one's expectations. Addressing poverty necessitates an all-inclusive strategy which encompasses economic development, education, healthcare, social protection and inclusive policies which target the root structural causes. Hence, addressing food security needs a multi-dimensional approach and right to food must be considered fundamental to human dignity and development.