

Budget 2019: Hiking food subsidy may be a combative step to fight hunger, but food security issues will be unaddressed

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Budget 2019 India: At \$15 billion, India accounts for over 16% of the economic burden from FBD in LMICs.



Budget 2019-20: According to a World Bank report, the lack of nutritious, unadulterated food, and consumption of unsafe food resulted in 600 million illnesses and 420,000 deaths in 2010. (PTI photo)

Union Budget 2019 India: If the expected 20% hike in food subsidy in the July Budget materialises, it would be India's most combative step in its fight against hunger in recent times. Yet, the question of food safety, fundamental to ensuring food security, remains unaddressed. According to a World Bank report, the lack of nutritious, unadulterated food, and consumption of unsafe food resulted in 600 million illnesses and 420,000 deaths in 2010. Developing, low and middle income countries (LMIC) in South Asia, Southeast Asia, and Sub-Saharan Africa accounted for 53% of these illnesses as well as 75% of the deaths. In India, as many as 100 million cases of foodborne diseases (FBD) were reported in 2011. Children below five years of age are the most vulnerable, due to small body size, developing immunity and lack of control over food preparation. The costs of unsafe food, thus, are not just social but also economic.

At \$15 billion, India accounts for over 16% of the economic burden from FBD in LMICs. The state of food safety in India is the consequence of the actions, or inaction, of its many stakeholders ranging from farmers and food manufacturers to consumers and regulators.

The under-funded Food Safety and Standards Authority of India, for instance, isn't able to regulate the bulk of eateries in the country. While increasing awareness of food safety hazards and mitigation strategies is crucial, policy must provide the impetus for change. Food safety poses a formidable development challenge; policy-makers must ensure that it spurs not reactive damage control but deliberative, evidence-based and forward-looking action.