



Original Article

A Study of Socio-Economic Impact of Zero Hunger Schemes on Marginalized Communities

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Manuscript ID:

IBMIRJ -2025-020814

Submitted: 10 July 2025

Revised: 20 July 2025

Accepted: 10 Aug 2025

Published: 31 Aug 2025

ISSN: 3065-7857

Volume-2

Issue-8

Pp. 50-54

Aug 2025

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Quick Response Code:



Web: <https://ibrj.us>



DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.17129385

DOI Link:

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17129385>



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Abstract

The Zero Hunger program is significant initiative that seeks to reduce hunger and improve food security in underserved communities. This study looks at how aware people are and the program's socio-economic impact based on responses from 100 beneficiaries. It is resulting show that many respondents have seen improvements in their food security and nutritional status. However, awareness of the program remains moderate, indicating a need for better government outreach. Some respondents also reported challenges with the application process, which makes it harder to access the program. It is suggested that enhancing awareness campaigns, simplifying the application process, and ensuring a steady supply of high-quality food to improve the Scheme overall impact and reach.

Keywords: Zero Hunger Scheme, Food Security, Socio-Economic Impact, Awareness

Introduction

Hunger and malnutrition remain critical global concerns, and in India, they continue to affect marginalized communities despite progress in food production and distribution. To address this, the Government of India has introduced welfare schemes aligned with the UN Sustainable Development Goal of Zero Hunger. Even though Mahabaleshwar, a region in western Maharashtra, has a lot of potential for agriculture, it still suffers from poverty, food insecurity, and malnutrition, especially among scheduled castes, tribes, people who don't have land to work, and weaker families. The awareness, accessibility, and efficacy of Zero Hunger programs in enhancing food security, nutrition, and livelihoods are examined in this study to assess their socioeconomic impact in Mahabaleshwar. In addition, it identifies obstacles and implementation gaps and offers suggestions for expanding outreach and ensuring equitable access. The study are intended to contribute to policy discussions regarding sustainable development and achieving zero hunger in rural and semi-urban India as well as study area.

Review Of Literature

Kumari Sudama Yadav and Shabnam Parween (2010) in their joint study "Management of Public Distribution System in Bihar: A Goal of Food Security" noted that the public distribution system is an important program to ensure fair distribution to the weaker sections of the community. However, a detailed analysis shows that it is not very effective. Problems like poor procurement, bad management, consumer dissatisfaction, vested interests, incorrect card classifications, and various forms of malpractice have made the program less effective. This has created a growing gap between the promises made and the outcomes of this key public policy. George (1999), in his analysis of the food security situation in India, found that economic access to food could be achieved through a mix of employment and income policies for the agricultural sector. He emphasized that to reduce poverty and improve food security, the focus should be on agricultural development. Based on consumption patterns, he indicated that about half of rural consumers and two-thirds of urban consumers have nutritionally inadequate diets. Ratan Lal Basu (2011) in his study "Public Distribution System in India and Food Security" observed that the main reasons for food security issues in India relate not to supply failures but to falling incomes and employment in the unorganized sector, along with the failure of the TPDS which excludes many poor people due to the definitions and implementation methods used. While the introduction of the TPDS policy itself may be sound, the real challenges lie in its implementation.

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How to cite this article:

Gole, S. L. (2025). A Study of Socio-Economic Impact of Zero Hunger Schemes on Marginalized Communities. *Insight Bulletin: A Multidisciplinary Interlink International Research Journal*, 2(8), 50–54. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17129385>

Statement of the Problem

The researcher has noticed that marginalized communities in Mahabaleshwar continue to struggle with food insecurity, malnutrition, and poverty despite the implementation of a number of government programs in support of the Zero Hunger Goal. Welfare programs like PDS, ICDS, and NFSA are less effective due to logistical constraints, lack of awareness, inadequate infrastructure, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and social, economic, and geographical barriers. This gap between policy provisions and actual outcomes highlights the need to examine the socioeconomic impact of these programs on vulnerable groups and to identify measures for improving their reach and effectiveness.

Objectives of the Study

1. To study evaluate the level of awareness and of Zero Hunger schemes in the study area.
2. To examine the socio-economic effect of Zero Hunger schemes on the food security and nutritional status in the study area.

Hypothesis of the Study

H₁: There is a strong correlation between awareness and access to Zero Hunger programs a higher awareness leads to improved access.

Research Methodology:

To assess the socioeconomic effects of Zero Hunger programs on underserved communities, the research methodology combines qualitative and quantitative methods. To systematically assess food security, nutrition, income levels, and education prior to and following the implementation of these schemes, a descriptive research design has been used. Population and sampling: The study used stratified random sampling to focus on Mahabaleshwar marginalized communities. In order to ensure that all socioeconomic groups are represented, a total of 100 households—50 rural and 50 semi-urban—have been chosen. Primary Data: The primary data was collected on food security, nutrition, income, and accessibility of Zero Hunger programs has been gathered through structured interviews, focus groups, and surveys. Secondary Data: it is collected through existing studies, government reports, and policy documents have all been analyzed to provide contextual insights.

Data Analysis and Interpretation**A) Demographic Analysis of the Respondents****Table: 1. Gender Wise classification of the Beneficiaries**

Sr. No.	Classification	Frequency	Percent
1	Male	66	64
2	Female	39	36
TOTAL	-	105	100%

Source: Primary data

The above table No.1 data gender-wise classification of the beneficiaries in the Zero hunger scheme indicates a notable difference in the distribution of male and female participants. Out of the total there are Most of the male beneficiaries and 36 percent of the female beneficiaries. It is seen that most of the male in the study area.

Table: 2 Caste/Tribal Identity

Sr. No.	Classification	Frequency	Percent
1	General	15	15
2	OBC	16	16
3	SC	29	29
5	Other (ST and NT Tribes)	43	40.96
TOTAL	-	105	100

Source: Primary data

The above table No 2. data indicate that caste and tribal identity distribution of the beneficiaries participating in the Zero hunger scheme reflects the inclusive nature of the program, targeting individuals from diverse social and economic backgrounds. The survey data shows the following distribution among 105 respondents: there are 15 percent of the beneficiaries belong to the General category. The 16 percent belong to the Other Backward Classes (OBC). 29 percent belong to the Scheduled Castes (SC). The most of the proportion, 40.96%, is represented by other groups, including Scheduled Tribes (ST) and Nomadic Tribes (NT).

Table: 3 Education Level of the Benficries

Sr. No.	Classification	Frequency	Percent
1	No formal education	10	9.5
2	Primary school	25	23.8

3	Secondary school	65	61.9
4	Higher Secondary school	5	33.3
TOTAL	-	105	100

Source: Primary data

The above table No .3 data educational status of the beneficiaries participating in the reflects a diverse range of literacy and educational attainment levels. The majority of respondents, 61 percent, have completed secondary school, indicating a significant portion of participants have a foundational level of education. There 23 Percent of respondents have completed primary school, reflecting a considerable proportion of participants with essential literacy skills. On the other hand, there are 9.5 percent of respondents reported having no formal education, highlighting the inclusion of individuals who are likely to face additional challenges in accessing opportunities due to their lack of education. The only 5 percent having completed higher secondary school, indicating that while the program does include individuals with higher education levels, its primary focus is on those with secondary or lower education.

Table: 4 Household Income

Sr. No.	Classification	Frequency	Percent
1	Below ₹5000	15	14.3
2	₹5001 - ₹10,000	25	23.8
3	₹10,001 - ₹20,000	35	33.3
4	₹20,001 - ₹30,000	20	19.0
5	Above ₹30,000	10	9.5
TOTAL	-	105	100

The above table No.4 data indicates that household income of the zero hunger scheme beneficiaries. There are 14.3 percent of the respondents are income in the below 5000, 33.percent, it reported a monthly household income between ₹10,001 and ₹20,000, indicating that a significant portion of beneficiaries falls into the lower-middle-income group. It is seen that the DAY program is reaching personals who are slightly above the poverty line but still face financial challenges that necessitate support for livelihood enhancement. A 23.8% of the respondents fall into the income range of ₹5001 to ₹10,000. it is observed that most of the level of income is household income between ₹10,001 and ₹20,000.

B) Awareness and Socio-economic impact of Zero hunger scheme: There quantitative data has been analyzed using descriptive statistics such as (mean, median, standard deviation and rank) analysis to examine relationships between scheme implementation and socio-economic outcomes. The data has been analyzed through thematic coding using Advance Excel and SPSS to identify patterns related to awareness, and effect of the zero hunger schemes.

Table: 5 Table Showing Awareness and Socio-economic impact of Zero hunger scheme

Sr. No.	Statement	N	Mean	SD	Rank
Section 1: Awareness of Zero Hunger Schemes					
1.	Aware of the Zero Hunger schemes provided by the government.	105	3.37	.83	V
2.	Received sufficient information about how to apply for Zero Hunger schemes.	105	3.27	.81	IV
3.	The application process for Zero Hunger schemes is easy and accessible for marginalized communities.	105	3.15	.83	III
4.	Government officials and local authorities actively promote awareness about Zero Hunger schemes.	105	3.05	.74	V
5.	Personally benefited from the Zero Hunger schemes in terms of food security and nutrition.	105	3.55	.84	I
Section 2: Socio-Economic Impact of Zero Hunger Schemes					
6.	The Zero Hunger schemes have improved household's access to nutritious food.	105	3.47	.784	II
7.	Due to the Zero Hunger schemes, my family's overall health and nutrition have improved.	105	3.40	.77	III
8.	The financial burden of purchasing food has reduced due to the benefits of Zero Hunger	105	3.26	.77	V

	schemes.				
9.	The quality and quantity of food provided under Zero Hunger schemes meet my family's dietary needs.	105	3.37	.83	IV
10.	The Zero Hunger schemes have contributed to long-term food security for my family.	105	3.57	.78	I

Source: Compiled by researcher

The table data shows an analysis of awareness, accessibility, and the socio-economic impact of Zero Hunger schemes among 105 respondents. The results are divided into two sections: Awareness and Socio-Economic Impact. Section 1: Awareness of Zero Hunger Schemes According to the statement with the highest score in this section (Mean = 3.55, Rank I), many respondents have personally benefited from the Zero Hunger programs in terms of nutrition and food security. This indicates that the program is effectively reaching its audience. With a mean score of 3.37 (Rank V), awareness of the scheme is moderate. This means that while some people know about it, there is still room to improve. Additional simplification and outreach are also required for the distribution of information about application procedures (Mean = 3.27, Rank IV) and accessibility for underserved communities (Mean = 3.15, Rank III). The statement with the lowest ranking (Mean = 3.05, Rank V) concerns the function of local and governmental authorities in raising awareness, implying that community involvement and awareness campaigns must be strengthened to enhance participation. Section 2: Socio-Economic Impact of Zero Hunger Schemes: This section shows that the schemes have positively impacted the beneficiaries. The top statement (Mean = 3.57, Rank I) points out that the Zero Hunger schemes have helped achieve long-term food security. Respondents reported greater satisfaction with household access to nutritious food (Mean = 3.47, Rank II) and improvements in overall health and nutrition (Mean = 3.40, Rank III). These findings indicate that Zero Hunger initiatives have significantly improved food security and nutrition in Mahabaleshwar marginalized communities. However, respondents were less satisfied with the reduction in financial burden (Mean = 3.27, Rank V) and the quality and quantity of food provided (Mean = 3.37, Rank IV). This highlights ongoing concerns about the adequacy and quality of food distribution. While these programs have made substantial contributions to well-being and sustainability, their effectiveness is often constrained by gaps in awareness, communication, and accessibility. These findings underscore the need for enhanced awareness campaigns, stronger community engagement, better food quality control, and simplified processes to ensure inclusivity and maximize the impact of food security initiatives.

Findings of the Study

1. It is seen that Zero Hunger schemes have significantly contributed to food security, with the highest-ranked statement (Mean = 3.57) indicating long-term benefits. Respondents also reported improved access to nutritious food and better overall health due to the scheme's support.
2. It is noted that while many respondents are aware of the scheme, the study highlights gaps in outreach efforts by government officials and local authorities (Mean = 3.05, Rank V). Additionally, challenges in the application process and limited information about eligibility indicate a need for better communication and support.

Suggestions of the Study

1. It is suggested that to the government should enhance awareness initiatives through local authorities, social media, and community programs to ensure that receive sufficient information about the Zero Hunger schemes.
2. It is suggested that the program's efficacy be increased by streamlining the application procedure and guaranteeing that the amount and quality of food supplied under the program satisfies nutritional requirements.

Conclusions

It is concluded that Zero Hunger program has played a key role in improving food security and the socioeconomic conditions in the study area. It is indicate that the program has improved nutritional status, significantly increased access to food, and provided recipients with some financial relief. Most of the respondents reported clear benefits, such as greater food security at home and improved overall wellbeing. However, the study also identified several significant challenges that limit the initiative's effectiveness. To enhance the influence of the Zero Hunger scheme, the study found implementing stronger outreach and awareness campaigns, especially at the community level. The findings conclude that closing existing gaps and making the program more inclusive and effective is essential to achieve the larger goal of ending hunger and ensuring lasting food security. It is increased cooperation between local community organizations and government are necessary for this purpose.

Acknowledgment

The author expresses deep gratitude to the Department of Commerce and Management, Giristhan Arts and Commerce College, Mahabaleshwar, for providing academic support and encouragement in carrying out this research work. Special thanks are due to the local authorities, community leaders, and respondents in Mahabaleshwar who generously shared their experiences and insights, making this study possible.

The author also acknowledges the contributions of scholars and researchers whose studies on food security, nutrition, and welfare programs formed the theoretical foundation of this paper. Finally, heartfelt appreciation goes to family and well-wishers for their constant support, patience, and motivation throughout the research journey.

Financial support and sponsorship: Nil

Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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