

Need for cheap cooked meals for rural poor

A concept note prepared by

[Anil K. Rajvanshi](#)

Director, [Nimbkar Agricultural Research Institute](#),
P.O. Box 44, **Phaltan-415523**, Maharashtra, India
E-mail: anilrajvanshi@gmail.com

Issues

1. Tremendous pollution in rural huts because of wood/biomass-based cooking.
2. Households need utensils for cooking and eating in. They also require firewood etc. for cooking. All these things cost money.
3. After a day's hard work in the field the women have to do all the household chores like cooking and washing dishes. Not very pleasant and also very tiring. Because of that their eating is also not very good and they age fast. They also eat minimum amount of food with very little variety.
4. Nutrition quality of the food they eat is very poor. Malnutrition in rural poor is epidemic and we are creating a whole generation of mentally challenged citizens.
5. Rural poor buy all sorts of different things like grains, vegetables, oil, salt, sugar, tea etc. on almost a daily basis from public distribution system (PDS) or open market. If not available in PDS then they tend to eat less.

Possible solution

1. Creation of new and expansion of existing rural restaurants. These restaurants will be regular ones but for people below poverty line (BPL) will get meals at subsidized rates. They will pay only Rs. 10 per meal and the rest will come from Government subsidy to the restaurant.
2. Use of UID card to get subsidized meals for rural poor. Total should be Rs. 30/day for 3 vegetarian meals of breakfast, lunch and dinner. Thus each meal should cost ~ Rs. 10. Average wage of laborer ~ 100/day. Hence 30% will go in food. In U.S. it is < 10% of total disposable income.
3. With existing open market prices for vegetables and groceries average food cost for a family of four comes to Rs. 50/meal or Rs. 12.50/person per meal. If the PDS prices are taken for the groceries then the average cost will be Rs. 7.5/person per meal. Hence the subsidy from the Government for this program will be quite small.
4. GOI or state Governments should subsidize this food for BPL people. Also the restaurant owners will get soft loans and other line of credit for setting up facilities.
5. Corporate world can take this up as a part of their corporate social responsibility activity. Their participation may ensure good quality restaurants and services.

6. McDonalds-type restaurant systems for rural areas to be set up for quality control both in terms of hygiene and in terms of quality of food material. Wholesome simple vegetarian food should be available in these restaurants.
7. More clientele (volumes) will make these restaurants economical. Existing models of dhabas, udipi-type restaurants etc. can be used in this scheme.
8. Food coupons in western countries work on the above lines. However quite a number of fast food restaurants in US do not accept them. Besides these coupons are most of the times used for non-food items. It will be mandatory for rural restaurants to accept payment via UID cards for BPL citizens. Soup kitchens, langars and temple food are based on charity. For large scale rural use it should be based on good social enterprise business model.

Possible benefits

1. The above strategy will result in least pollution in rural households since cooking will be reduced. This will be beneficial for their health. Besides women's chores will be reduced drastically.
2. Will need fewer utensils in house and hence less expenditure. For other things like hot water for bath, making tea or boiling milk some utensils and fuel will be required. Our [lanstove](#) may provide the necessary functions.
3. The rural poor will get better nutrition and tasty food through eating in these restaurants. Time saved can be used for resting and other gainful activities like teaching children, etc.
4. Much more efficient use of energy may result. Energy/kg of food cooked in households is greater than Energy/kg used in restaurant. The main thing will be to reduce drastically the food wastage in these restaurants.
5. Rural restaurants can be forced to use clean fuels like LPG or locally produced biomass-based liquid fuels. This strategy is very difficult to enforce for individual households.
6. Social interaction of residents in these restaurants will also result.
7. Large scale employment generation in rural areas may result because of this activity. With an average norm of 30 people employed/100 chair restaurants this program has the potential of generating about 20 million jobs permanently in rural areas. Besides the infrastructure development in setting up restaurants, food chain etc will create a huge wealth generation in these areas.
8. In the long run this strategy may provide better food security for rural poor than the existing one which is based on cheap food availability in PDS – a system which is prone to corruption and leakage.
9. Cooking is a luxury for rich and upper middle class. For rural and urban poor it is a chore and a misery. Hence subsidized meals in rural restaurants are a necessity for these people.

[HOME](#)

©Anil K Rajvanshi, December 2011.