

Food and Nutritional Security in India

1) Introduction

- Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to safe, nutritious and sufficient food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.
- Article 47 of the Constitution of India states that, "the State shall regard raising the level of nutrition and standard of living of its people"
- Over decades, though there has been reduction in severe acute food insecurity, the under-nutrition and micronutrient deficiencies are widespread.

2) Present status

- National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013 was to be fully implemented across India by July 2016.
- As of now, only five States have fully executed it as per the provisions of the Central Act and the progress in other States has been tardy.
- Poor quality of food lacking essential micronutrients and no diet diversity, and unhygienic conditions of storage
- AAY households have a greater access to PDS but the problem of undernourishment is more serious among them.
- The expansion and intensification of agriculture, including crops, livestock and forest-based systems, has led to soil degradation and loss of biodiversity, and greatly affecting environmental and human health.

3) The Challenge of Food Security

- The crux of India's food problem today pertains not so much on increasing food availability or production but with the distribution of food.
- Meeting the demand for food to feed this growing population from scarce land resources is one of the major challenges of the new century—a fact that was highlighted in World Food Day.
- Estimates show that each one degree rise in temperature will cause grain yields to decline by 5%, posing a serious threat to food security.
- Rising levels of atmospheric carbon can influence the growth and productivity of agricultural crops.
- The soil-plant/crop-atmosphere continuum poses serious challenges under changing climate scenarios with reference to scale, scope and magnitude.
- According to the IPCC, reduction in the quality of soil, compounded by climate change, will lead to a worldwide decline in agricultural production, thereby threatening food security
- In the next 25 years, land degradation and desertification may lead to a decline in global food production by up to 12 per cent, which might trigger a rise in food price by 30 per cent.

4) Food security in India can be achieved by

- Guarantee coverage of farmlands with crop insurance
- Ensure procurement of produce at the right time with minimum support price (MSP) for rice and wheat
- Include minor millets and promote the same through the public distribution system
- Restructure the entire Food Corporation of India by efficient management and enlarged storage capacity so that precious food grains are not left to rot in the open and sold as cattle feed at half the price
- Encourage urban agriculture using biodegradable municipal solid waste to grow rice and vegetables near urban centres to reduce transportation cost.
- Example: Produce from East Kolkata Wastelands covering 1,200 hectares provides 25-35 per cent of fish and vegetables at affordable prices
- Promote salt-tolerant rice varieties in coastal regions
- Promote sustainable agriculture under the National Action Plan on Climate Change through organic farming using farmers' seeds

5) The Odisha study

- Better accessibility to food and hence energy intake of poor people, especially those under AAY, has been made possible due to concerted efforts initiated by the government.
- Abolition of private procurement and storage system, and a greater role for public agencies in controlling diversion of food grain from the godown to the millers
- proper recording of procurement, storage and distribution of grains across the departments
- distribution of food through self-help groups and gram panchayats and its regular monitoring at the block and ward levels
- The efforts of the State government in ensuring food security should be replicated in States that are yet to fully implement the National Food Security Act and reform their respective distribution systems.

6) Pulses and Nutrition

- Pulses, because of their role in improving sustainability, notably through soil management, also impact food security.
- Pulses are part of a healthy, balanced diet and have been shown to have an important role in preventing illnesses such as cancer, diabetes and heart disease.
- In addition to contributing to a healthy, balanced diet, pulses nutritional qualities make them particularly helpful in the fight against some non-communicable diseases.

- The WHO estimates that up to 80% of heart disease, stroke, and type 2 diabetes and over a third of cancers could be prevented by promoting better eating habits, of which pulses are an essential component.
- Encouraging awareness of the nutritional value of pulses can help consumers adopt healthier diets.

7) Role of Government in Food Security

- The country has adopted multi-sectoral, multipronged strategy to combat these problems and to improve the nutritional status of the population.
- Over the years, there has been improvement in access to food through the PDS
- The ICDS programme aimed at providing food supplementation for pre-school children, pregnant and lactating women.
- The Mid-day-meal programme aimed at improving the dietary intake of primary school children and reduction in the school dropout rates has been operationalised.
- National programmes for tackling anaemia, iodine deficiency disorders and Vitamin-A deficiency are being implemented.
- The Soil Health Card scheme of the government is a laudable effort that has reached out to approximately 30 million farmers to improve agricultural productivity and soil health.
- The Government of India has also initiated a project called the National Initiative on Climate Resilient Agriculture.
- In a step towards universal food fortification to combat malnutrition, the government is planning to make the process mandatory for all staple food items like rice, wheat flour, edible oils and milk sold in the open market.

8) Solution

- National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013 if fully implemented, is likely to benefit 720 million people through availability of 5 kg per capita per month of subsidised food grains. This would ensure food security and enhance nutritional status.
- Provision has been made under the NFSA to provide one additional coarse cereal viz. millet along with wheat and rice, which can further enhance the nutritional security of the poor households.
- Though wheat and rice contribute significantly to energy intake, the time has come to increase our focus on coarse cereals and pulses to improvise adequate intake of protein.
- The States must gear up to work on adequate logistics for digitisation of ration cards, computerisation of off take and delivery of food grains, and effective monitoring of fair price shops, possibly through involvement of communities or other feasible ways.
- FAO places high priority on restoring degraded soils, sustainable management of land and water resources and the promotion of agricultural systems and agro-ecological practices that nurture soil biodiversity.

- FAO promotes the adoption of sustainable agricultural practices tailored to local contexts
- Strategies on agricultural production should focus on sustainable production, enhanced natural resource management, reduced soil emissions, and mitigating the risks of climate change
- In a recently released report on Desertification, Land degradation and Drought, the UNCCD (United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification) observed that food security can't be achieved without looking into the issue of desertification and land degradation.
- Aquaculture, along with crop production and dairy and livestock farming, has an important role to play in promoting a balanced nutrition.



INSIGHTSIAS
SIMPLIFYING
IAS EXAM PREPARATION