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## Higher Food Prices and Nutrition Security

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### Why in News

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Recently, the **Tata-Cornell Institute for Agriculture and Nutrition in New York** has conducted a study titled “**Pandemic Prices: Covid-19 Price Shocks and their Implications for Nutrition Security in India**”.

It **analysed prices of cereals** (wheat and rice) and **non-cereals** (onion, tomatoes, potatoes, five pulses and eggs) **in 11 tier-1 and tier-2 cities from 1<sup>st</sup> March-31<sup>st</sup> May 2020 compared to the same period in 2019.**

### Key Points

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- Following the **lockdown**, all food groups **witnessed a rise in prices**, but the rise in prices was higher for non-cereals compared to cereals.
- After the **lockdown was lifted, prices of cereals and non-cereals stabilised quickly** while those of **protein-rich pulses continued to remain high.**
- **Data Analysis:**
  - **Wheat and Rice:** Retail prices were either stable or cheaper than weeks preceding the lockdown and last year.
  - **Potato, Onions and Tomatoes:** The prices went high initially but later on stabilised. Onion prices went as high as 200-250%.
  - **Eggs:** The prices fell initially (because of fear of coronavirus through poultry) but increased by March-end and then stabilised two months later.
  - **Pulses:** The prices rose during the lockdown and continued to remain higher than the pre-Covid-19 levels.

- **Concerns:**
  - The relative stability in cereal prices and enhanced prices of pulses will most likely **distort spending and consumption decisions** resulting in a **staple-based, protein-deficient diet** hampering the **food security** in the country.
  - The relatively higher prices of more nutritious food make it **difficult for the poor and marginal population to access** such nutrient-rich food.
    - As a result, the proportion of such foods in the diets goes further down and is **replaced by less nutritious and calorie-dense foods.**
  - It will **worsen the nutritional status of women and children** across India, and more so in the impoverished regions of the country.
  - The study also **criticised the amendment to the Essential Commodities Act, 1955** which **deregulated** cereals, edible oils, oilseeds, pulses, onions and potatoes.
- **Suggestions:**
  - The government can **ensure the provision of supplementary protein by timely interventions to stabilise** the increase in prices.
  - Policies that **insulate non-staple supply chains from price shocks and fluctuations** are necessary.
  - **Abolishing outdated restrictions to address farm sector bottlenecks** is very important.

## Way Forward

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- Food and nutrition security is ensured if all of the citizens of a nation have enough nutritious food available, all of them have the capacity to buy food of acceptable quality and there is no barrier on access to food.
- The right to nutritious food is a well-established principle of international human rights law. It has evolved to include an obligation for state parties to respect, protect and fulfil their citizens' right to food and nutrition security.

**Source: TH**