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How Can India Overcome The Zero Hunger Challenge

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(The editorial is based on the article “How can India overcome the zero hunger challenge” which appeared in Livemint on 16th October 2018. It analyses the challenges and opportunities for achieving zero hunger challenge in India.)

Hunger is a subjective concept, it's definition varies from person to person depending upon perception and understanding of requirements and objectives of life, availability of resources, socioeconomic and cultural perspectives.

Hunger exists when a person's body lacks required nutrients to grow and develop a productive, active and healthy life. The term hunger includes malnutrition, famine, starvation and appetite as well.

Hunger also denotes the scarcity of food in a country. And in India, hunger is one of the crucial problems. Though it is always assumed that hunger stems from lack of food, it is not completely true as hunger can stem from food mismanagement and wastage as well.

For example, while India produces enough food to feed its population, the country is also home to 25 percent of the world's hungry population. **India ranked 103 among 119 countries in the Global Hunger Index (2018) rankings.** The country's economic growth and the changing demographics are also transforming patterns of food demand. **Therefore a holistic approach to food security requires ensuring available, accessible and nutritious food to eradicate hunger and malnutrition in India.**

What is Zero Hunger Challenge ?

It is a mission which aims at bringing together all stakeholders to communicate the importance of food security, nutrition and inclusive, sustainable and resilient agriculture and to make the world free from hunger, malnutrition and rural poverty. **The Zero Hunger Challenge is guided by a set of core principles that are grounded in the Charter of the United Nations and the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development.**

Goal 2 of Sustainable Development Goals: End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture aims at ending hunger as stated. The Zero Hunger Challenge was launched by United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in 2012 at the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) in Brazil in June 2012.

Causes and Issues Related to Food Scarcity in India

- **India's food basket differs from region to region, which makes it difficult to fulfill the needs of population of every region through domestic production only.**
- Secondly, inadequate warehousing facilities and cold storages is leading to wastage of about 7% of total annual food production and almost 30% of the fruits and vegetables.
- According to the estimation of National Centre for Cold-chain Development (NCCD) the country has only 15% of the required temperature-control transportation facilities and less than 1% of warehouse facilities dedicated for transporting pre-conditioned agricultural produce.
- Moreover, lack of large scale commercial farms and low levels of land consolidation among small farm holders leads to mismanagement in agri production. This has also further aggravated the cycle of rural poverty which in turn has created a poverty situation in the country where small farmers have a reduced capacity to produce food, as most of them cannot afford seeds, fertilizers and modern technologies like pump-irrigation, harvester machines, tractors etc.

Food security and pollution

- **The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) estimated that food wastage accounts for 8% of global greenhouse gas emissions.**
- The problem of food waste is intensified because of the lack of regulation around industry standards and policies. Increased attraction to stock discounted products also leads to food wastage which further serves as reason for food shortage.
- Man made causes such as increased deposits of industrial effluent, unscientific farming and flow of chemical fertilizer into water bodies led to water pollution. Land degradation due to increased human activities has impacted negatively on agricultural production.
- In effect, natural disasters such as floods, tropical storms and prolonged droughts are on the increase and they create devastating impacts on food security particularly in developing countries.

Way Forward

- There is a growing need for the design and development of more efficient integrated systems of food production, processing, preservation and distribution that can feed the changing food requirements of the nation.
- Systems of cold chains which are integrated with agriculture markets should be developed to reduce post-harvest losses and to allow farmers to earn more by tapping into remunerative markets, while maintaining the quality of their produce.
- Resilient transportation infrastructure should be established to allow transportation of food from food surplus to food deficit areas.
- Activities such as upgradation of rural infrastructure, training of farmers in post-harvest practices to minimize losses, integrating small scale enterprises into value chains, organizing smallholder farmers into farmer producer organizations, customized financial services, investment in agricultural research, and last-mile marketing channels should also come into action.
- It also important to ensure social equity, gender inclusiveness and making agriculture less labour intensive and gender friendly to improve production.
- Private companies should invest to bring out potential solutions to minimise food wastage. **A report by the Boston Consulting Group estimates that solving the problem of food loss and wastage is a \$700 billion opportunity for private companies.** Companies are also better positioned as they have the ability to influence consumer behaviour.

For example, the retail chain Tesco has started the ‘Buy one get one free—later’ programme wherein customers can buy certain food items and take the free product later when they actually need it.

- General public awareness around the issue of food wastage should be made through various medias.
- The government, on its part should make laws that penalize companies for wasting food within their supply chain and encourage repurposing and recycling of food items.
- For example, since 2016, France has been fining grocery stores for throwing away edible food. ***'Disposing is cheaper than using or reusing' attitude should be changed gradually.***
- The farmer known as the first participant of the economy, has to be supported to achieve the highest production and productivity and must be ensured a larger share of profit along the value chain.
- The current one-way movement of raw materials (from farmers) and a one-way movement of finished goods (to farmers) must be transformed into a two-way movement of commerce.
- Communication and cooperation between farmers is also needed as it will ensure no single crop is overproduced.

Global Hunger Index

- The Global Hunger Index (GHI) is a tool designed to comprehensively measure and track hunger at global, regional, and national levels.
- It is calculated by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) based in Washington, D.C.
- The scores are calculated annually, considering undernutrition, child wasting, child stunting, child mortality as indicators.