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Reimagining Global Food Systems

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This article is based on [Reimagining food systems with lessons from India](#) which was published in The Hindu on 04/10/2021. It talks about the success of food security in India and how the developing world can learn from India.

Recently, the first and historic **United Nations Food Systems Summit (UNFSS) 2021** concluded after an intense '**bottom-up**' process conceived in 2019 by the UN Secretary-General to find solutions and '**catalyse momentum**' to transform the way the world produces, consumes, and thinks about food and help address rising hunger.

In terms of larger goals, the food system transformation is considered essential in achieving the **sustainable development agenda 2030**. This makes strong sense as 11 [Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\)](#) out of 17 are directly related to the food system.

In this context, it is imperative that the developing countries learn from the success of Indian food security.

Role Model For Other Countries

- **Lessons From India' Tryst With Food Insecurity:** The long journey from **chronic food shortage to surplus food producer** offers several interesting lessons for other developing countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America in the area of land reforms, public investments, institutional infrastructure, new regulatory systems, public support, and intervention in agri markets and prices and agri research and extension.
- **Diversification of Agriculture:** The period between 1991 to 2015, saw the diversification of agriculture beyond field crops and brought **greater focus on the horticulture, dairy, animal husbandry, and fishery sectors.**

The learnings encompassed elements of nutritional health, food safety and standards, sustainability, deployment of space technology, and the like.

- **Equitable Distribution of Food:** One of India's greatest contributions to equity in food is its **National Food Security Act 2013** that anchors the **Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS)**, the **Mid-Day meals (MDM)**, and the **Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS)**.

Today, India's food safety nets collectively reach over a billion people.

- **Food Distribution:** Food safety nets and inclusion are linked with public procurement and buffer stock policy.

This was visible during the global food crises 2008-2012 and more recently during the COVID-19 pandemic fallout, whereby vulnerable and marginalised families in India continued to be buffered against the food crisis by its robust TPDS and buffer stock of food grains.

Challenges in Achieving Food Security

- **Climate Change and Unsustainable Agriculture:** Climate change and unsustainable use of land and water resources are the most formidable challenges food systems face today.

The latest **Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)** report has set the alarm bells ringing, highlighting the urgency to act now.

- **Dietary diversity, nutrition, and related health outcomes** are another area of concern as a focus on rice and wheat has created nutritional challenges of its own.

- India has taken a bold decision to fortify rice supplied through the **Public Distribution System with iron**.
- Agricultural research institutes are about to release varieties of many crops having much higher nutrition as a long-term solution for undernutrition and malnutrition.

- **Prevalence of Undernourishment:** It is ironic that despite being a net exporter and food surplus country at the aggregate level, India has a 50% higher prevalence of undernutrition compared to the world average.

- The high prevalence of undernutrition in the country does not seem to be due to food shortage or the low availability of food.
- The Government of India and States are seriously concerned about this paradoxical situation of being food surplus and at the same time, having 15% of the population undernourished.

They are trying to address other possible reasons for low nutrition through several nutritional interventions. As announced recently, the supply of **fortified rice in PDS** and **Poshan Abhiyan** are the two steps among many to address the challenge of undernutrition and malnutrition.

- **Reducing food wastage or loss of food** is a mammoth challenge and is linked to the efficiency of the food supply chain.

Food wastage in India exceeds Rs. 1-lakh crore.

Way Forward

- **Sustainable Approaches:** We must collaborate to invest, innovate, and create lasting solutions in sustainable agriculture contribution to equitable livelihood, food security, and nutrition.

This surely requires reimagining the food system towards the goal of balancing growth and sustainability, mitigating climate change, ensuring healthy, safe, quality, and affordable food, maintaining biodiversity, improving resilience, and offering an attractive income and work environment to smallholders and youth.
- **Crop Diversification:** Diversification of cropping patterns towards millets, pulses, oilseeds, horticulture is needed for more equal distribution of water, sustainable and climate-resilient agriculture.
- **Institutional Changes in Agri-Sector: Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs)** should help get better prices for inputs and outputs for small holders.
 - **E-Choupal** is an example of technology benefiting small farmers.
 - Women's empowerment is important particularly for raising incomes and nutrition.

Women's cooperatives and groups like **Kudumbashree** in Kerala would be helpful.
- **Sustainable Food Systems:** Estimates show that the food sector emits around 30% of the world's **greenhouse gases**.

Sustainability has to be achieved in production, value chains and consumption.
- **Non-Agriculture Sector:** The role of non-agriculture is equally important for sustainable food systems. Labour-intensive manufacturing and services can reduce pressure on agriculture as income from agriculture is not sufficient for small holders and informal workers.

Therefore strengthening rural **Micro, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (MSMEs)** and food processing is part of the solution.

Conclusion

It is important to reiterate that hunger and food insecurity are key drivers of conflict and instability across the world. 'Food is peace', is a catchphrase often used to highlight how hunger and conflict feed on each other.

The **Nobel Peace Prize 2020** conferred on the United Nations WFP highlighted the importance of addressing hunger to prevent conflicts and create stability. The citation communiqué articulated this well by quoting the line: **“Until the day we have a medical vaccine, food is the best vaccine against chaos.”**

Drishti Mains Question

India's long journey from chronic food shortage to surplus food producer offers several interesting lessons for other developing countries in the world. Discuss
