

# THE AWARE CONSUMER

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16 October 2021

## World Food Day 2021

– The Grave Threat  
of Food Insecurity

RESEARCH FEATURE

Hunger Amidst  
Abundant Production

OUT OF THE BOX

The Social Security  
Safety Net of  
Cooked Meals for  
School Children

INTERVIEW

Mr. Arun Singhal, IAS  
CEO - FSSAI

THEME:

**Our actions are our future.**

Better production, better nutrition,  
a better environment and a better life



PLUS

ROUND UP • MY MARKET • THE PRESCRIPTION



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# VIEWPOINT

MESSAGE FROM PUBLISHER & EDITOR



## The Future of Food is in Our Hands!

**THE FOOD WE** eat and the way we eat it affects our health and also that of our planet. Our diets and eating habits have witnessed a sea change on account of rapid urbanisation, globalisation and rise in disposable incomes.

Yet, the maladies of hunger and undernutrition continue to haunt the modern world. Hunger is the distress associated with lack of food while undernourishment denotes deficiencies in energy, protein, vitamins or minerals. As per the United Nations estimates, hunger affects 9.9% of mankind with as many as 811 million people going to bed hungry every night.

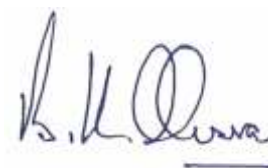
The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) - a specialized agency of the United Nations is dedicated to defeating hunger across the globe. It leads international efforts for achieving food security for all by ensuring that everyone has regular access to enough high-quality food to lead active and healthy lives.

In 1979, in a bid to promote global awareness and action for those who suffer from hunger, the FAO designated 16th October - the day on which the organization was founded in 1945 - as World Food Day.

The first World Food Day was organized on 16th October, 1981 and since then it is celebrated every year across the globe with a different theme every time

highlighting the areas calling for action. Many other global and national organisations concerned with hunger and food security - including the World Food Programme and the International Fund for Agricultural Development – join hands with the FAO to make safe and nutritious food available to all even while emphasising the need to ensure a healthy diet.

#WorldFoodDay2021 will be marked during the ongoing global COVID-19 pandemic for the second year running. The uncertainty brought on by this unprecedented health crisis is intensifying the need to preserve access to safe and nutritious food. Each of us can and should play a part in ending hunger!



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*fssai*

  
FOOD SAFETY AND STANDARDS  
AUTHORITY OF INDIA

*Inspiring Trust, Assuring Safe & Nutritious Food*  
Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India



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# PRAFULL D. SHETH

Editorial Board Member



## COMMITTING TO END WORLD HUNGER

**ACCORDING TO THE** United Nation's Hunger Report, hunger is the term used to define periods when populations are experiencing severe food insecurity – where they go for entire days without eating due to lack of money, lack of access to food or other resources.

In 2015, world leaders at the United Nations charted a new set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the second of which is to 'end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture' by 2030.

The World Food Programme (WFP) - the food-assistance branch of the United Nations founded in 1961 to focus on hunger and food security - is the world's largest humanitarian organization. Driven by the dreadful fact that one in nine people worldwide do not have enough to eat, the WFP strives to save and change lives by delivering emergency food relief. It also works with

communities to improve nutrition and build resilience. This kind of food and food-related assistance is at the heart of its struggle to break the cycle of hunger and poverty.

In 2020 itself, WFP assisted a whopping 115.5 million people in 84 countries. It was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2020 for the unrelenting efforts to combat hunger, contributing to peace in conflict areas, and for acting as a driving force to prevent the use of hunger as a weapon of war and conflict.

The UN WFP joins hands with FAO to celebrate World Food Day every year, raising awareness of the issues behind poverty and hunger. The World Food Day is observed in more than 150 countries

annually to promote awareness and inspire action to end world hunger. This kind of collective action makes World Food Day one of the most celebrated days of the UN calendar. Hundreds of events and outreach activities bring together the governments, businesses, NGOs, media and general public.

Indeed, now is the time to look into the future we need to build together! ▶

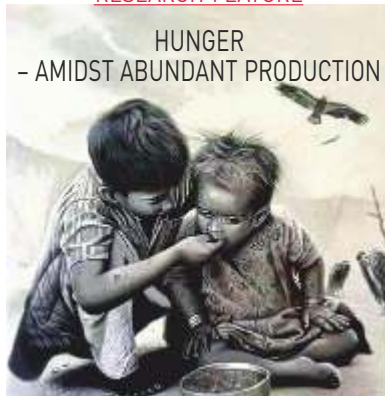


*Why zero hunger is key  
for building a better world.*



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RESEARCH FEATURE



**HUNGER  
- AMIDST ABUNDANT PRODUCTION**

Food insecurity at the individual and household level coexists with surplus food grain production in India.



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HORIZON



**INDIA CAN TAKE A FRONT SEAT IN  
DRIVING GLOBAL FOOD SECURITY**

The United Nations estimates that the pandemic could double the number of food insecure people in the world.



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INTERVIEW



**Mr. Arun Singhal, IAS,  
CEO - FSSAI**

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MY MARKET



**FOOD-FOR-ALL  
- THE PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION WAY!**

India's Public Distribution System is perhaps the largest machinery of its type in the world, providing food security even as it hedges the poor against price rises in food commodities.



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OUT OF THE BOX

**THE SOCIAL SECURITY SAFETY NET OF  
COOKED MEALS FOR SCHOOL CHILDREN**



The Mid-Day Meal Scheme addresses two of the pressing problems of majority of children in India - hunger and education.



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IN FOCUS

**THE SPECTRE OF  
UNWHOLESOME AND  
UNSAFE FOOD**



DR. ISMAHANE ELOUAFI

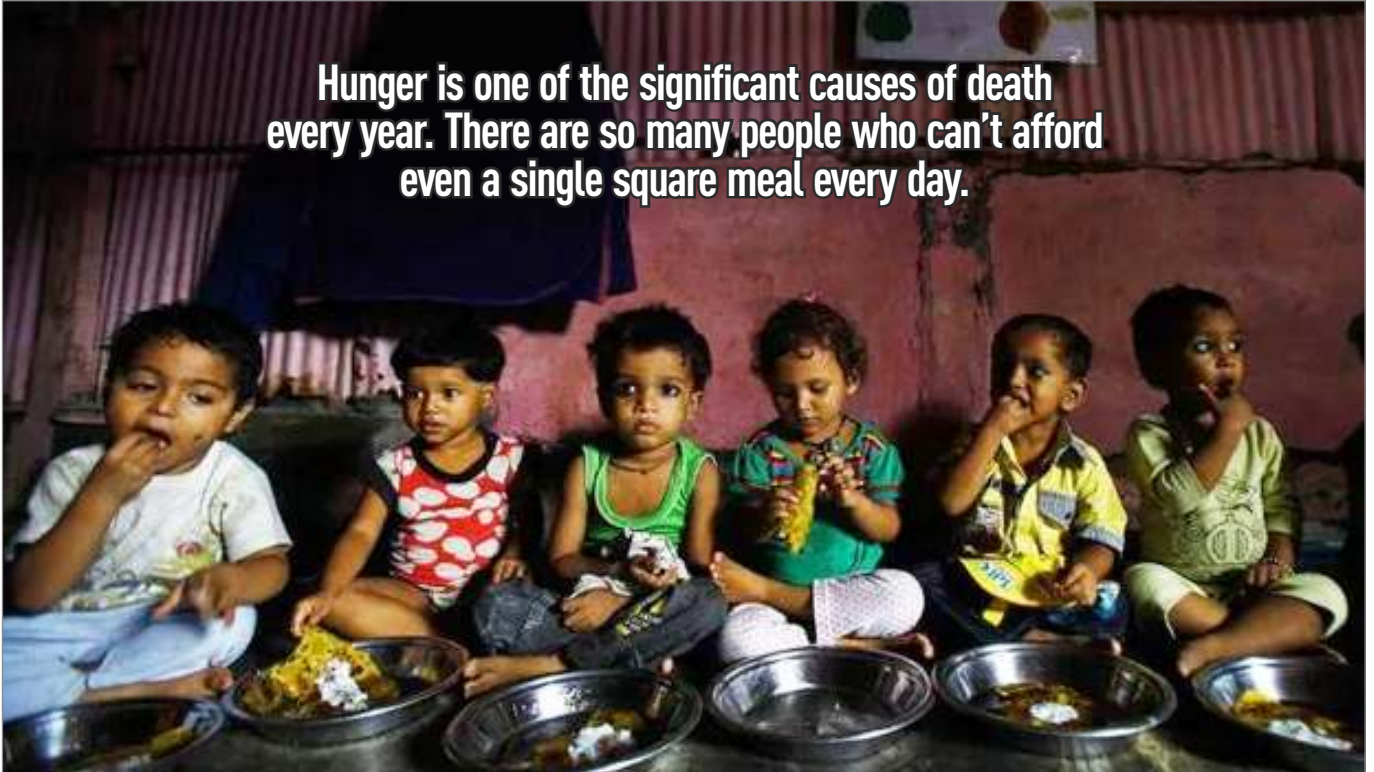
DIRECTOR GENERAL OF INTERNATIONAL CENTER FOR BIOSALINE AGRICULTURE (ICBA)

“A few staple crops dominate our food production systems and diets. This needs to change as it is neither good for our health nor is sustainable for our planet. We must diversify the crops we grow so that we have more naturally nutritious foods and our food production systems are better prepared for climate change and other risks.”



# ROUNDUP

Hunger is one of the significant causes of death every year. There are so many people who can't afford even a single square meal every day.



# UN Summit

## – A Rallying Call for Global Food Systems Transformation

'We need a world where good food is affordable and accessible – where governments and businesses work together to provide it – and where farmers in every country grow food in a way that protects the planet!' – UN Good Food For All

DATA BRIEFING

With more than half the world's population living in urban settings and consuming

# 70%

of the world's food supply, cities need to be a focus for sustainable development.

**ON WORLD FOOD** Day, 2019, the UN Secretary General, Antonio Guterres had announced the UN Food Systems Summit as a part of the Decade of Action for delivery on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030, each of which relies to some degree on healthier, more sustainable and equitable food systems. The aim of the Summit is to deliver progress on all 17 of the SDGs through a food systems approach, leveraging the interconnectedness of food systems to global challenges such as hunger, climate change, poverty and inequality.

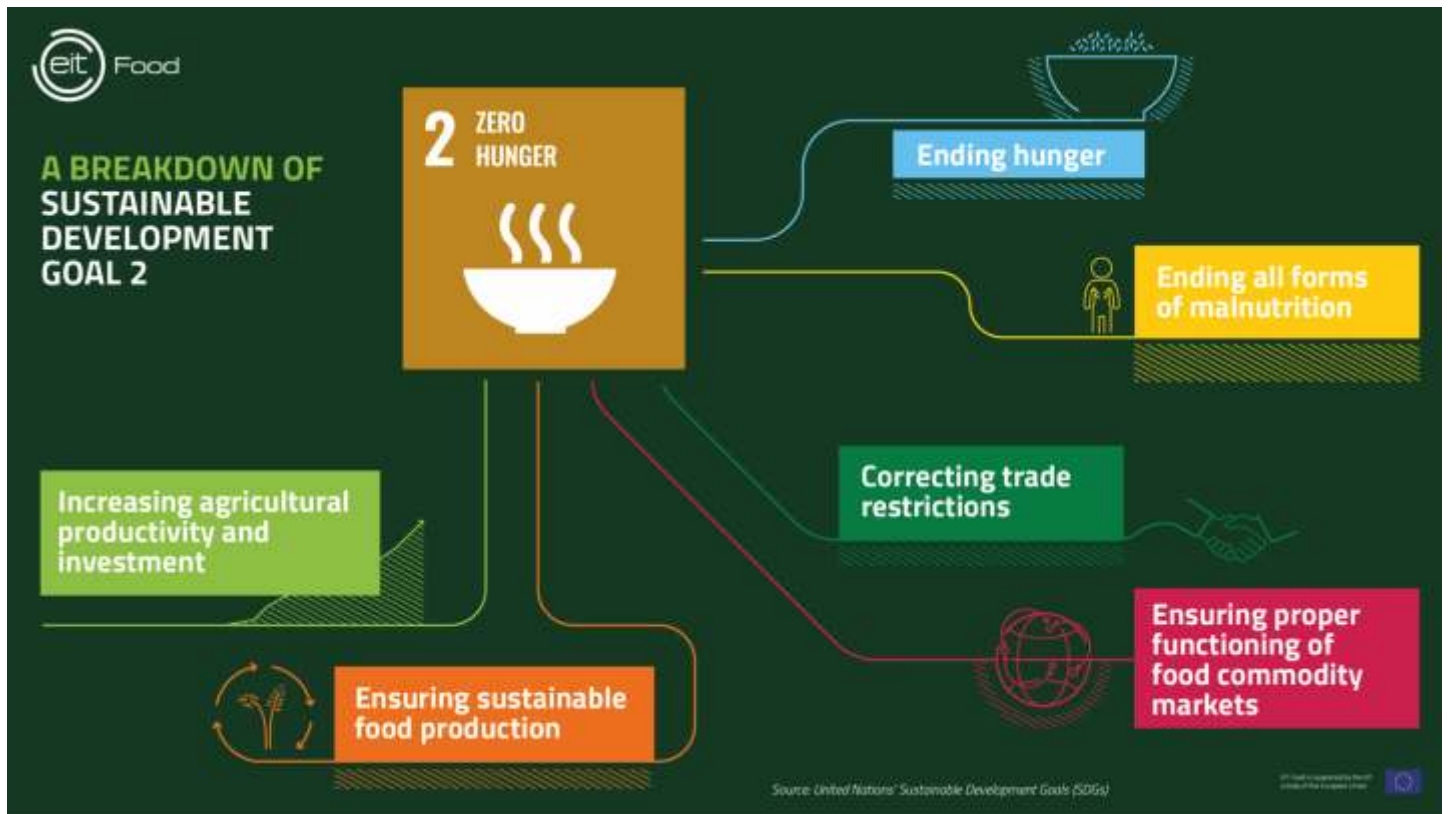
Following the announcement, the Summit organizers arranged a series of national dialogues, online meetings, public forums and surveys on the Summit's five action tracks, seeking a broad range of ideas and perspectives to 'develop food systems that cater to all'. Spread over more than a year and across locations worldwide, the activities involve a broad range of actors in examining the most effective channels for making our food systems stronger and more equitable.

This opened a critical opportunity for governments and all stakeholders for inclusive dialogues and for mobilizing multi-stakeholder action, both around the short-term socio-economic response and medium-term priorities to 'build to transform'. Stakeholders can take advantage of the platform to forge an improved and accelerated approach to the complex task of transforming food systems. This will awaken the world to the fact that all of us must work together to transform the way the world produces, consumes and thinks about food! ▶

# Setting the Stage with a UN Food Systems Pre-Summit

**IN PARTNERSHIP WITH** the Government of Italy, a three day Pre-Summit of the UN Food Systems Summit took place in Rome from 26th to 28th July, 2021.

It was organized as a forum to take stock of the consultative process of diverse public engagement, consultations and data gathering leading to the Summit and assess the progress achieved. It further aimed to deliver the latest evidence-based and scientific approaches worldwide, launch a set of new commitments through coalitions of action and mobilize new financing and partnerships. This has laid the groundwork for an ambitious and productive full Summit, which will take place on 23rd September, 2021 alongside the UN General Assembly in New York.







The pre-Summit was the first major UN event to be held in a hybrid format in response to COVID-19 trends – a vast virtual programme was complemented by in-person events in Rome. It featured the active involvement of high-level representatives from more than 100 countries and regions including the Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi, Prince Charles of Britain and Qu Dongyu, the Director General of the Rome-based UN FAO, which hosted the event. The inputs came not only from government policy leaders, ministers of agriculture, environment, health, nutrition and finance and multi-lateral organizations. The 'People's Summit' brought civil society, researchers, environmental groups and the private sector into the fold. Even farmers and youth representatives were included in decision-making positions.

Secretary General, Guterres launched the event by calling attention to the growing problem of food insecurity - especially in poor and developing countries. He remarked, “We are at a pivotal moment. At this pre-Summit, we can define the scope of our collective ambition and strengthen our efforts to achieve all 17 SDGs by transforming our food systems”.

Heads of various States and Governments called on fellow leaders to transform their countries' food systems, emphasized the key role of women in transforming

productive systems and urged children and young people to be at the heart of the food systems transformation. The upcoming World Food Day 2021 was launched during the pre-Summit itself.

We must lean into our hopes and work together in ambitious ways to put the world on a better path - Agnes Kalibata, UN Secretary General's Special Envoy to the Food Systems Summit

The multi-stakeholder event accentuated the potential of food systems to drive progress on all 17 SDGs while casting light on the world's greatest food-related challenges. Affiliated parallel sessions were organized as a platform to bring out additional voices and valuable ideas from around the world. These talks will slowly help change the way the world looks at food systems and nutrition.

The Summit consolidated all that it heard into national pathways, after which the member states around the world were expected to start working on how to operationalize the best ideas and commitments to close the gaps and raise ambition towards achieving the SDGs by 2030. ▶

We must build on the momentum that the run-up to the Summit has already generated and continue to build the evidence base on interventions and engagement models that best support the transformation of food systems - *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2021* report

# A GLOBAL SUMMIT FOR STRONGER FOOD SYSTEMS

**THE UNITED NATIONS** is convening the very first Food Systems Summit on 23rd September, 2021 to launch bold new actions to transform the way the world produces and consumes food, with an aim to get back on track to achieving the SDGs. The virtual event intends to draw a roadmap for a major shift in the way the world produces and consumes food.

Guided by Action Tracks - aligned with the five objectives – the Summit offers stakeholders a space to share and learn with a view to fostering new actions and partnerships and amplifying existing initiatives. Together, they can explore how the four key cross-cutting levers of change - human rights, finance, innovation and empowerment of women and young people - can be mobilized to meet the Summit's objectives and deliver wide-reaching benefits. The Action Tracks are:

1. **Ensure Access to Safe And Nutritious Food for All** - End hunger and all forms of malnutrition and reduce the incidence of non-communicable diseases, enabling all people to be nourished and healthy.
2. **Shift to Sustainable Consumption Patterns** - Build consumer demand for sustainably produced food, strengthen local value chains, improve nutrition and promote the reuse and recycling of



food resources, especially among the most vulnerable.

3. **Boost Nature-Positive Production** - Optimize environmental resource use in food production, processing and distribution, thereby reducing biodiversity loss, pollution, water use, soil degradation and greenhouse gas emissions.
4. **Advance Equitable Livelihoods** - Contribute to the elimination of poverty by promoting full and productive employment and decent work for all actors along the food value chain, reducing risks for the world's poorest, enabling entrepreneurship and addressing the inequitable access to resources and distribution of value.
5. **Build Resilience to Vulnerabilities, Shocks And Stress** - Ensure the continued functionality of sustainable food systems in areas that are prone to conflict or natural disasters.

This will require everyone to take action to transform the world's food systems.

Dozens of heads of States and Governments are expected to re-affirm their commitment to the SDGs at the Summit and invest in food as one of the most powerful tools to achieve the goals. India will be represented by the Ministry of Agriculture which is working on Action Track 4 to improve resilience through social protection and ensure that food systems leave no one behind.

The UN Deputy Secretary-General, Amina J. Mohammed, outlined the Summit agenda as:

- A statement of action from the UN Secretary General
- A compendium of the Summit's two-year preparations
- Presentations by different countries on the national pathways for transforming their food systems and regional positions on food systems (akin to that presented for



Africa during the pre-Summit)

- Identification of themes to enable coalitions in the global community cutting across the five Action Tracks and incorporating the four Levers of Change around key areas
- A follow-up and review process supported by the UN and its agencies.

The Summit aims to deliver the following outcomes:

- Generate significant action and measurable progress towards the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It will succeed in identifying solutions and leaders, and issuing a call for action at all levels of the food system, including national and local governments, companies and citizens.
- Raise awareness and elevate public discussion about how reforming our food systems can help us all to achieve the SDGs by implementing reforms that are good for the people and the planet.
- Develop principles to guide governments and other stakeholders looking to leverage their food systems to support the SDGs. These principles will set an optimistic and encouraging vision in which food systems play a central role in building a fairer, more sustainable world.
- Create a system of follow-up and review to ensure that the Summit's outcomes continue to drive new actions and progress. This system will allow for the sharing of experiences, lessons and knowledge; it will also measure and analyse the Summit's impact.

In sum, this will become a platform for ambitious new actions, innovative solutions and plans to transform food systems, and leverage these shifts to deliver progress across all the SDGs. It will offer an opportunity to the world to review the choices and be bold on the outcomes we seek throughout the Decade of Action, and put the world on a new trajectory within a generation. ▶

# Global Events Celebrating #WorldFoodDay

**SCORES OF EVENTS** and activities will take place worldwide to mark World Food Day on 16th October. Many of them will also explore key outcomes of the Summit and discuss the way forward.

Global leaders, FAO special Ambassadors, heads of the Rome-based UN agencies and other keynote speakers will join FAO Director General QU Dongyu to mark the global World Food Day ceremony on 15th October. The event will call for the transformation of agri-food systems to ensure that everyone, everywhere has access to enough, affordable, safe and nutritious food to lead active and healthy lives.

World Food Day 2021 will be the first International Day to be celebrated at Expo Dubai as a series of activities and events calling for global solidarity in rethinking and reshaping food systems for the people and the planet. A site-wide celebration will unite Expo's family of stakeholders and visitors in a commitment to build forward better.

World Food Day will be celebrated on 16th October at the G20 Green Garden in Rome's ancient Appia Antica Park. The G20 Green Garden invites visitors to reflect on the future of our planet in an open-air museum celebrating biodiversity, nature and history while calling for global solidarity to create a sustainable future for all.

In addition to this, there will be food tastings, cooking demonstrations, music performances, roundtables et al. You too can take part in #WorldFoodDay by giving food to people who need it the most or at least raising awareness about people who do not have food!

Come forward and share your appreciation for #FoodHeroes - all those who produced, planted, harvested, fished or transported food



Food and Agriculture  
Organization of the  
United Nations



#WorldFoodDay  
#FoodHeroes  
fao.org/world-food-day



from the farm to the table by braving the SARS-CoV-2 virus. They are continuing to provide food to us no matter the circumstances.

What's more, you can become a Food Systems Hero yourself by committing to learning, sharing, gathering and acting for food systems transformation. The United Nations is

ready to guide you in getting your community involved in the global movement for safe, sustainable and equitable food systems.

Everyone everywhere will need to come together and drive bold actions to make the changes our world so desperately needs. So join in, and take your first action. ▶

**Consumers, Beware**

# Importance of Healthy Eating During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Eating healthy has never been as important as today! A healthy and wholesome diet is playing a vital role in maintaining our physical and mental health during the novel coronavirus outbreak.



*Healthy food is  
crucial to battle the  
SARS-CoV-2  
virus on all fronts!*

**FOOD IS THE** essence of life. Maintaining a healthy diet is crucial for our overall health. After all, the food we eat directly affects the way our body functions and even the way we feel.

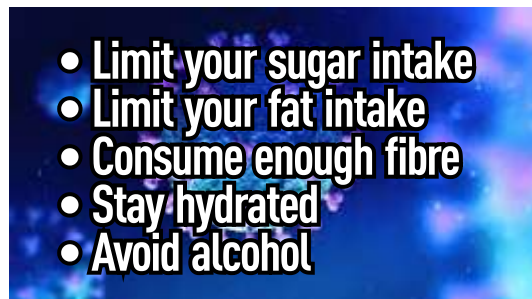
Healthy eating has become all the more important in today's COVID times. It can be tempting to sideline healthy food options and reach for comfort food during this challenging period. The unexpected stress makes it easy to slip into unhealthy eating habits as we just don't feel up to following a healthy diet.

In fact, it is not even as if the food we put in our body can avert or even cure the COVID-19 disease. However, the fact remains that what we eat and drink can affect our body's ability to prevent, fight and recover from any infection, the grave COVID-19 included. This is because a well-balanced diet of nutritious foods keeps the immune system in top condition. In addition to this, it helps maintain mental well-being too. On the other hand, undernourished people are always more susceptible to infections. Lack of nutrients and energy can impede recovery as well.

Dominique Burgeon, Director of Emergency and Resilience Division of FAO cautions, "As the number of (COVID-19) infections in vulnerable countries grows – among populations who are already malnourished, weak and vulnerable to disease – a 'crisis within a crisis' could emerge".

Following are some simple guidelines for staying healthy during the pandemic:

- Eat fresh vegetables and fruits every day. They are loaded with vitamins, minerals and fibre. In fact, the United Nations has designated 2021 as the International Year of Fruits and Vegetables (IYFV).
- Include wholegrains like wheat, maize and rice, and legumes like lentils and beans.
- Embrace some foods from animal sources like milk, yoghurt, eggs, meat and fish. Meat portions should ideally be smaller as they contain saturated fats.
- Consume nuts and healthy fats such as peanut, sesame, olive or other oils rich in unsaturated fatty acids in moderate amounts.
- Avoid foods that are high in fat, sugar and have low nutritional value – like processed foods including chips and biscuits, sweets, chocolate and ice cream.
- Cut down on salt used during cooking and limit the intake to 5 grams per day. Check the food labels and choose foods with low sodium content. This will also give an idea of the nutritional value of the food.
- Drink water regularly to stay well-hydrated. Stick to plain water instead of sweetened beverages that contain empty calories.



- Sugar, caffeine and alcohol are not only unhealthy, they can also ramp up anxiety. Avoid going overboard with cravings or stress snacking. Indulge in small treats once in a way only.
- Build a daily routine of regular meal times comprising of nourishing foods. Recognize stress, anxiety or mood swings and deal with it upfront rather than drowning it in emotional eating.
- While there is currently no evidence that COVID-19 can spread from food or food packaging, it is imperative to practice good food hygiene and safety. Follow WHO's five keys to safer food:
  - (1) Keep hands, cooking utensils and cooking surfaces clean
  - (2) Separate raw and cooked foods
  - (3) Cook thoroughly
  - (4) Keep food at safe temperatures
  - (5) Use safe water
- Adopt other healthy lifestyle measures like staying physically active, getting adequate sleep and refraining from smoking.

## Some More Tips

Food preparation itself has become exceptionally taxing with work from home, children at home or just staying cooped at home - there is no time, no energy or no interest. Planning nutritious meals

ahead for a couple of days and choosing cooking methods that suit your interest and skills can ease the burden to some extent. Opt for quick and simple meals. Involving family members, especially children, in meal planning and cooking can add fun to the chores.

Try to cut down on grocery shopping trips to curtail unnecessary exposure to the virus. Carrying a list will ensure that you are in and out of the supermarket quickly, that too without missing out on any essential items. Following other basic guidelines will ensure that the shopping is safe and efficient. Don't forget to wash your hands after leaving the store and after putting away the groceries.

Apart from this, all of us have to continue to follow WHO and government advisories to protect against COVID-19 infection and transmission. Social distancing, sanitizing and wearing masks remains crucial.

## Conclusion

We are in the grip of untold difficulties and changes today. The challenges have made mindful eating all the more important for keeping the body and mind healthy. We should eat a variety of foods within each and across all food groups to ensure adequate intake of important nutrients. Pay careful attention to what you are buying, cooking, serving and eating! ▶



# HUNGER

## Amidst Abundant Production

Food insecurity at the individual and household level coexists with surplus food grain production in India. There is more than enough food to meet the needs of the population and yet, hunger, malnutrition and starvation are rising.

**India has made rapid strides in reducing hunger and malnutrition. However, the paradoxical enigma is that food insecurity continues to exist even as we post record levels of agricultural production.**

**INDIA IS DUBBED** as the world's largest food basket today. And for good reason. In 2017-18, our total food grain production was around 275 million tonnes (MT). We are ranked as the world's largest producer of milk and pulses. The annual milk production is estimated at 165 MT and we account for 25% of the total global production of pulses. India again ranks as the second largest producer of rice, wheat, sugarcane, groundnut, vegetables, fruits and cotton. It is also one of the leading producers of plantation crops, spices, fish, poultry and livestock.

Before the pandemic, India was looking to export US\$100 billion worth of agricultural products by 2025, tapping into new markets in Latin America and Oceania.

Despite this bountiful production that goes beyond self-sufficiency and extends to exports, high levels of food insecurity and malnutrition still persist in the country. The irony is that even with the overflowing granaries, India has the largest population of hungry people and one-third of the world's malnourished children. According to UN estimates, 21% of the 1.3 billion population survives on less than US\$1.90 a day. Moreover, while our per capita income has tripled in the last two decades, the minimum dietary intake has taken a fall.

The Global Hunger Index ranks India 94th among 107 countries in the Global Hunger Index 2020 report, falling way behind our neighbours Nepal (73rd), Bangladesh (75th) and Pakistan (88th). Death due to starvation is still common in some parts of Jharkhand and Bihar.

### Growing Gap Between Rich and Poor

There is a stark contradiction in the population – hunger and malnutrition is widely prevalent in the vulnerable sections while the incidence of chronic overweight and obesity continues to rise.

Changing lifestyles and unhealthy diets are the root cause of obesity coupled with a tendency to overconsume among the affluent population. This is manifesting as various non-communicable diseases. In fact, India is marking an increasing prevalence of overweightness in children and adolescents, especially in the urban population. According to the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-4), the number of obese people has doubled in the past 10 years.

Malnutrition is a silent emergency – it is not only limited to deficient diets because people do not have enough food to eat. It is also defined by excesses or imbalances in the intake of energy and/or nutrients due to an unhealthy diet. In fact, there is a growing tendency to consume more calories, even as the intake of key micronutrients has fallen drastically. Eating the right things is crucial for fighting the malaise of malnourishment.

### Overflowing Food Stocks versus Widespread Hunger

Food security at the national level refers mainly to availability of sufficient stocks of food to meet the demand in the country. But while India is defined by ample domestic supply, millions of people still go to bed hungry.

## 2020 GLOBAL HUNGER INDEX







## It is peculiar that India has mountains of food but still fails to feed its hungry!

Indeed, India had a stock of 77.7 million tonnes of rice and wheat right at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic (FCI), which was more than sufficient to respond to urgent demands for food and ensure zero hunger in the country during these challenging times. Despite the lockdown and other restrictions, 70 MT of rice and wheat was still available as of September 2020. Yet, millions of people continue to go hungry and undernourished.

Here it should also be noted that the stocks are of food grains while the country has a perennial dearth of fruits, vegetables and other perishables, which constitute about 78% of the total consumption.

### Why are we not able to feed the poor despite having ample resources?

It is clear that food is available and mostly accessible. However, food affordability is under the scanner as many people lack the capacity to purchase sufficient food to meet their dietary needs.

The high level of hunger can be attributed to declining relative incomes, low produce of small and marginal farmers and a flawed public distribution system defined by pilferage, wastage and mismanagement. Lack of a universal public distribution is also considered a major drawback.

The FAO estimates that nearly 40% of the food produced in India is lost or wasted every year due to inefficient supply chains. For instance, 20% of the entire food production gets lost before it reaches the marketplace on account of lack of proper cooling and storage facilities.

Government policies are often skewed as the authorities refuse to distribute the food grains to the poor and hungry even as the stocks are rotting in the warehouses.

Moreover, excessive rainfall, lack of water, drought and soil erosion coupled with insufficient agricultural facilities and growth in population have made matters even worse.

### Improving India's Hunger Situation

The WHO defines food security as a situation when all people at all times have physical and economic access to sufficient and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preference for an active and healthy life. On the other hand, according to the UN's Hunger Report, hunger

is the term used to define periods when populations are experiencing severe food insecurity - meaning that they go for entire days without eating due to lack of money, lack of access to food or other resources.

Given the scale of food insecurity in the country, India is at a key juncture to tackle hunger on a global scale. It is imperative for India to prioritise food security as a core policy goal. We need to address the challenge head on and build on our successes.

Indeed, India does have a bevy of food assistance policies that work as a safety net by guaranteeing access to food for the impoverished population. Programs like the mid-day meal scheme in schools, the public distribution system and the anganwadi system (to provide rations to pregnant and lactating mothers) have posted significant successes. Further action is urgently needed from national and state governments to ensure that vulnerable groups are not left behind.

Governments should note that strengthening both food production and distribution is key here. A few policy changes are essential to tackle issues like inadequate food distribution, social and economic conditions, inequality and poverty.

Smallholder farmers are one of the most poverty-stricken sections of society as agriculture continues to be an unpredictable sector. The government has to work towards increasing the income of these small and marginal farming households. In fact, the right measures of establishing broad and equal livelihoods can start closing the caloric and nutrient gap for the poor.

Some more suggested measures for improving food security:

- Education and literacy
- Integrated nutrient management
- Water for sustainable food security
- Enhancing yield of major commodities
- Increase in productivity
- Emphasis on empowering small farmers

The United Nations priority groups are partnering with the government to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of food assistance and also to scale up the nutrition services. For instance, the World Food Programme has collaborated with states like Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Odisha to design nutritious take-home rations (THRs) aligned to both ICDS norms and global guidelines for such products for young children and pregnant/lactating women. They have set up THR production units where women's self-help groups produce the same while following industrial quality assurance and control protocols. There are programs for capacity building of women's self-help groups and establishing the link between THR and social behaviour change communication.

### Conclusion

Achieving complete food security still remains a distant dream for the country. Till when will scores of Indians be condemned to live with hunger and die of starvation? ▶

## FAO's Report Sounds the Alarm on Rising Hunger and Formidable COVID-19 Challenges

The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World is an annual flagship report prepared by a team of technical experts at the FAO in collaboration with IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO. It informs the world about the progress achieved towards ending hunger, achieving food security and improving nutrition. It also provides an in-depth analysis on key challenges for achieving these goals in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

**WE PRESENT A** brief overview of The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World (SOFI) 2021: Transforming Food Systems for Food Security, Improved Nutrition and Affordable Healthy Diet for All that was launched on 12th July, 2021.

Well before the emergence of the SARS-CoV-2 virus, the world was already off-track from meeting the commitment to end world hunger and malnutrition in all its forms by 2030. The COVID-19 pandemic has not only worsened the discouraging trends, but the effects will last long beyond 2020, as we are already seeing in 2021. This becomes obvious from the findings that after remaining virtually unchanged for five years, the prevalence of undernourishment in the world has increased 1.5 percentage points (from 8.4% to around 9.9%) in just one year. More than half of these undernourished people are found in Asia (418 million) and more than one-third in Africa (282 million) and more than 45 million being wasted.

Child malnutrition continues to persist at an alarming rate – an estimated 22% (149.2 million) of children under

5 years of age were affected by stunting (too short for their age), 6.7% (45.4 million) were suffering from wasting (too thin for their height) while 5.7% (38.9 million) were overweight in 2020. 29.9% women of reproductive age were affected by anaemia. (Refer Table 1 below).

The efforts to eradicate malnutrition have been challenged by disruptions in essential nutrition interventions and negative impacts on dietary patterns during the pandemic. Based on a conservative scenario, it is projected that an additional 22 million and 40 million children in low- and middle-income countries will be stunted and wasted respectively between 2020 and 2030 due to the pandemic.

The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2021 presents the latest authoritative estimates on global hunger - Between 720 and 811 million people in the world (or almost one-tenth of humanity) faced hunger in 2020. (Refer Table 2) Considering the middle of the projected range (768 million), around 118 million more people were facing hunger in 2020 than in 2019. Compared to 2019, about 57 million more people in Asia,

This is the first evidence-based global assessment of chronic food insecurity in the year the COVID-19 pandemic emerged and spread across the globe. It also offers an indication of what hunger might look like by 2030.

2021

A woman wearing a purple hoodie, blue gloves, and a traditional conical hat is walking on a sandy beach. She is carrying two blue baskets filled with various fruits, including coconuts and mangoes, balanced on a wooden pole across her shoulders. The background shows the ocean waves. The text 'THE STATE OF FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION IN THE WORLD' is overlaid in large white letters on the right side of the image.

# THE STATE OF FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION IN THE WORLD

**TRANSFORMING FOOD SYSTEMS  
FOR FOOD SECURITY, IMPROVED NUTRITION  
AND AFFORDABLE HEALTHY DIETS FOR ALL**

46 million more in Africa and 14 million more in Latin America and the Caribbean were affected by hunger in 2020. It is apparent that global COVID-19 containment measures have contributed to one of the largest increases in world hunger in decades.

While the global prevalence of moderate or severe food insecurity has been slowly rising since 2014, the estimated increase in 2020 was equal to that of the previous five years combined. Nearly one in three people in the world (2.37 billion) did not have access to adequate food in 2020 – an increase of almost 320 million people in just one year. Most of these people live in Asia (1.85 billion) and Africa (1.0 billion). Moreover, close to 12% of the global population (928 million) was severely food insecure in 2020, 148 million more than in 2019.

The global gender gap in the prevalence of moderate or severe food insecurity also has grown larger in 2020. For every 10 food-insecure men, there were 11 food-insecure women in 2020, up from 10.6 in 2019.

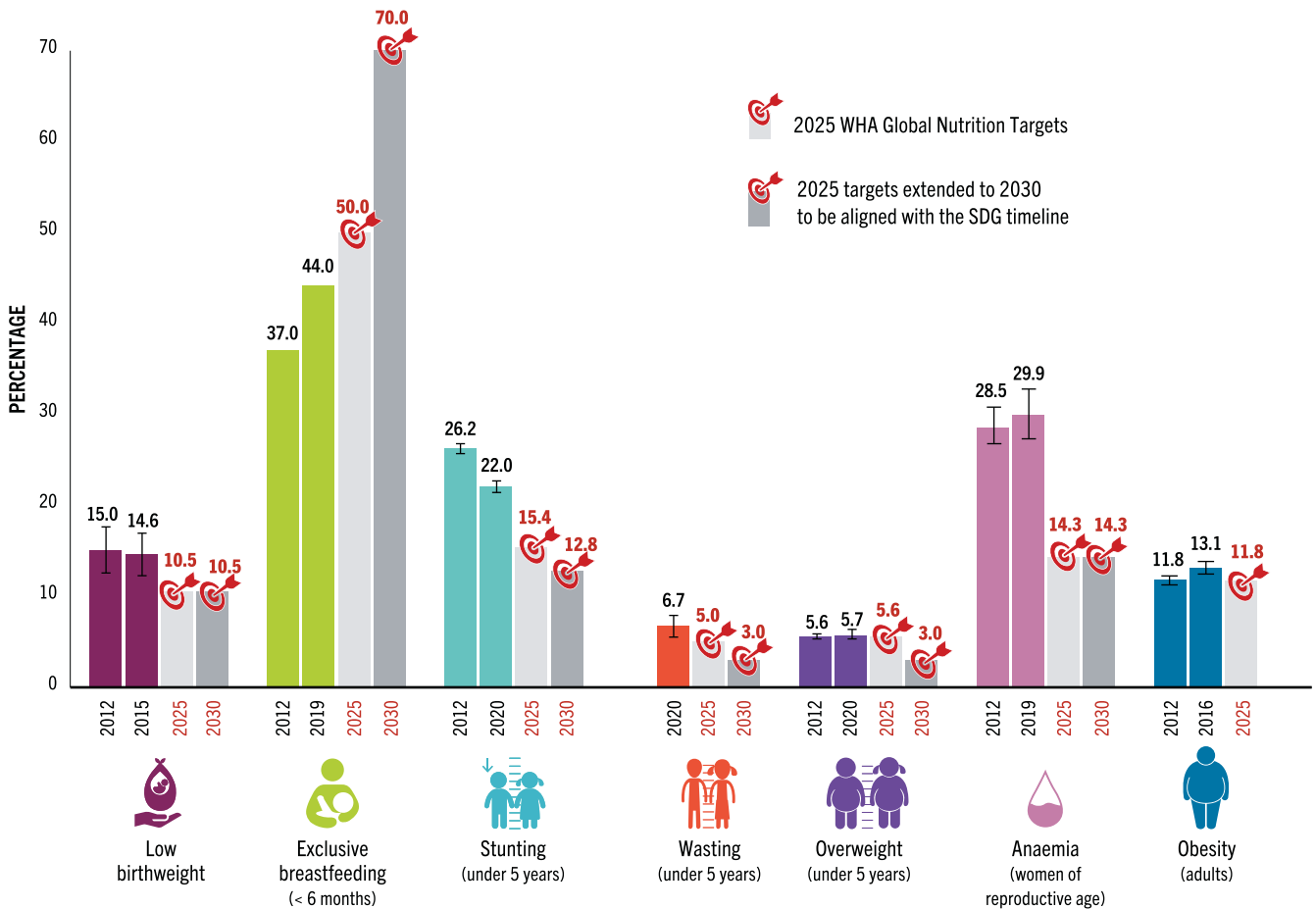
The report presents new estimates of the cost and affordability of healthy diets, which provide an important

link between the food security and nutrition indicators and the analysis of their trends. The high cost of healthy diets coupled with persistent high levels of income inequality put healthy diets out of reach for around 3 billion people, especially the poor, in every region of the world in 2019. In other words, no part of the world has been spared!

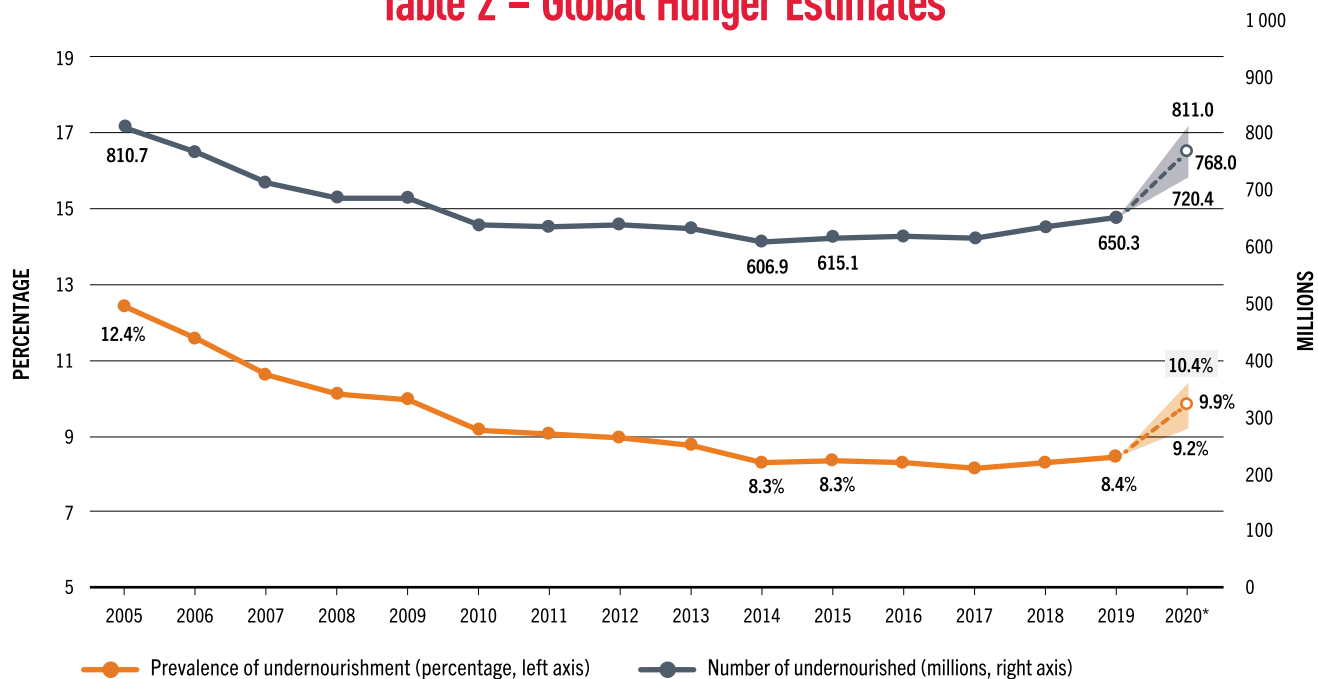
It is further projected that global hunger will decrease to around 710 million in 2021 (9%), and then continue to decrease marginally to less than 660 million (7.7%) in 2030. This figure stands 30 million higher than if the pandemic had not occurred, revealing the lasting effects of COVID-19 on global food security. (Refer Table 3 and 4) These consequences will be compounded due to the intergenerational effects of malnutrition and the resulting impacts on productivity and, hence, economic recovery.

In sum, the report highlights the need for a deeper reflection on how to better address the global food security and nutrition situation. With less than a decade left to reach the end of the time horizon set for achieving the SDGs, comprehensive and urgent efforts are required to address the detrimental effects of the pandemic and achieve the 2030 global targets.

**Table 1 - Current global trends vis-à-vis 2025 and 2030 targets**

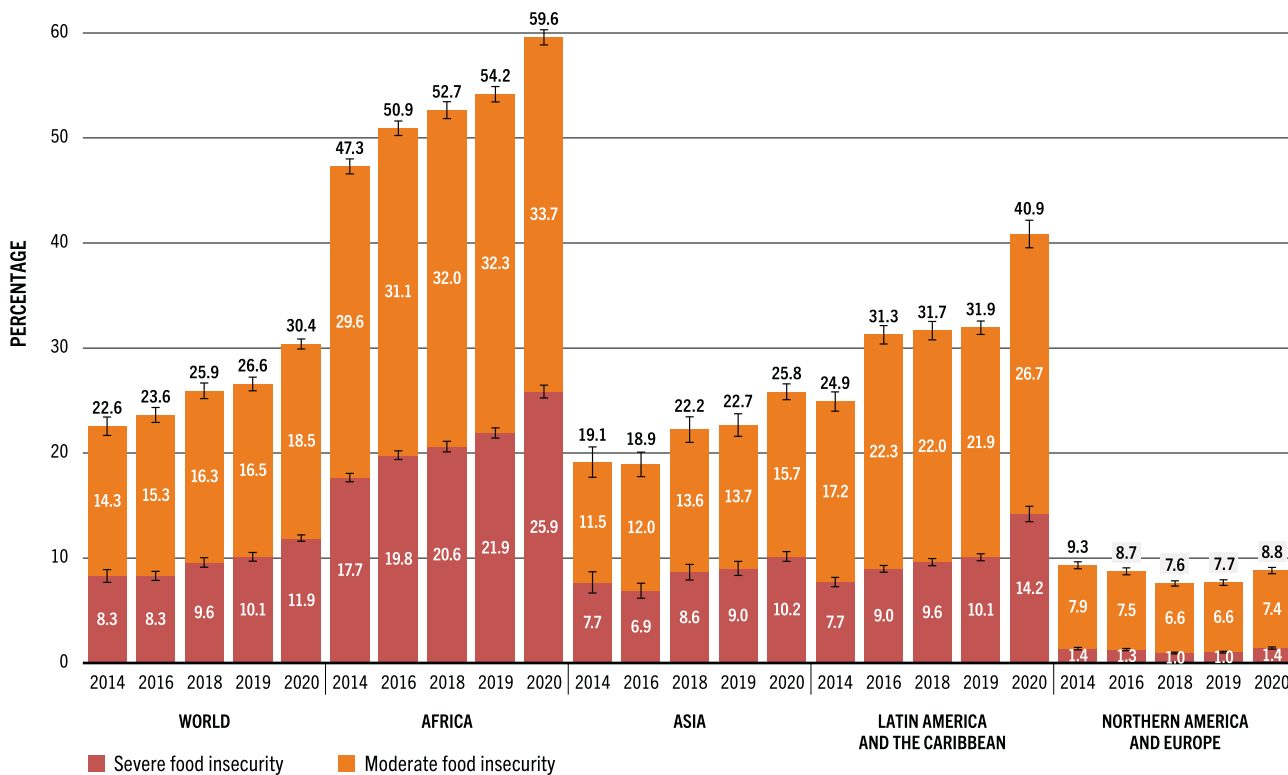


**Table 2 – Global Hunger Estimates**



NOTES: \* Projected values for 2020 in the figure are illustrated by dotted lines. Shaded areas show lower and upper bounds of the estimated range. SOURCE: FAO.

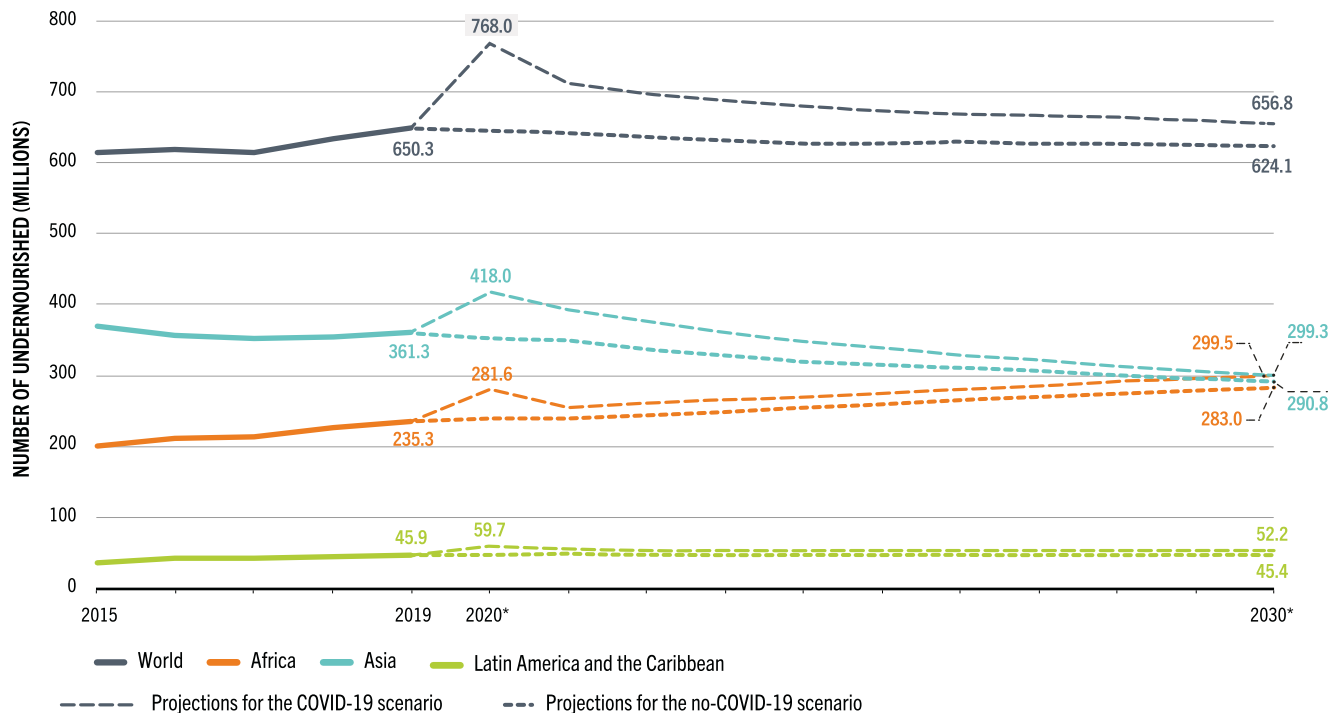
**Table 3 – Moderate or severe food insecurity has been increasing around the world since 2014**



NOTE: Differences in totals are due to rounding of figures to the nearest decimal point. SOURCE: FAO.

## Table 4 – Projections of global hunger with and without COVID-19

THE COVID-19 SCENARIO PROJECTS A SMALL DECREASE IN GLOBAL HUNGER BETWEEN 2021 AND 2030, WITH WIDE VARIATION IN EVOLUTION ACROSS REGIONS



NOTES: \* Projected values. The 2020 projected values are based on the middle of the projected range. The full ranges can be found in Annex 2. SOURCE: FAO.

### The Indian Scenario: Status of Malnutrition

The prevalence of undernutrition in India was 15.3% during 2018-20, an improvement from the 21.6% during 2004-06. However, the country stands significantly low when compared to the global average of 8.9% during the same period.

In 2020, about 17.3% of children under the age of five years suffered a wasted growth, the highest among all countries. About 31% of children were stunted, which is an improvement from 41.7% in 2012. However, it is still higher than many other countries in the world. There has also been an increase in the prevalence of obesity among the adult population from 3% in 2012 to 3.9% in 2016. Anaemia among women of reproductive age has only marginally improved from 53.2% in 2012 to 53% in 2019.

### Complementary Food System Solutions

The SOFI 2021 report draws on the analyses of the past four editions about the major drivers behind the recent rise in hunger and slowing progress to reduce malnutrition in all its forms. These drivers include conflicts, climate variability and extremes, and economic slowdowns and

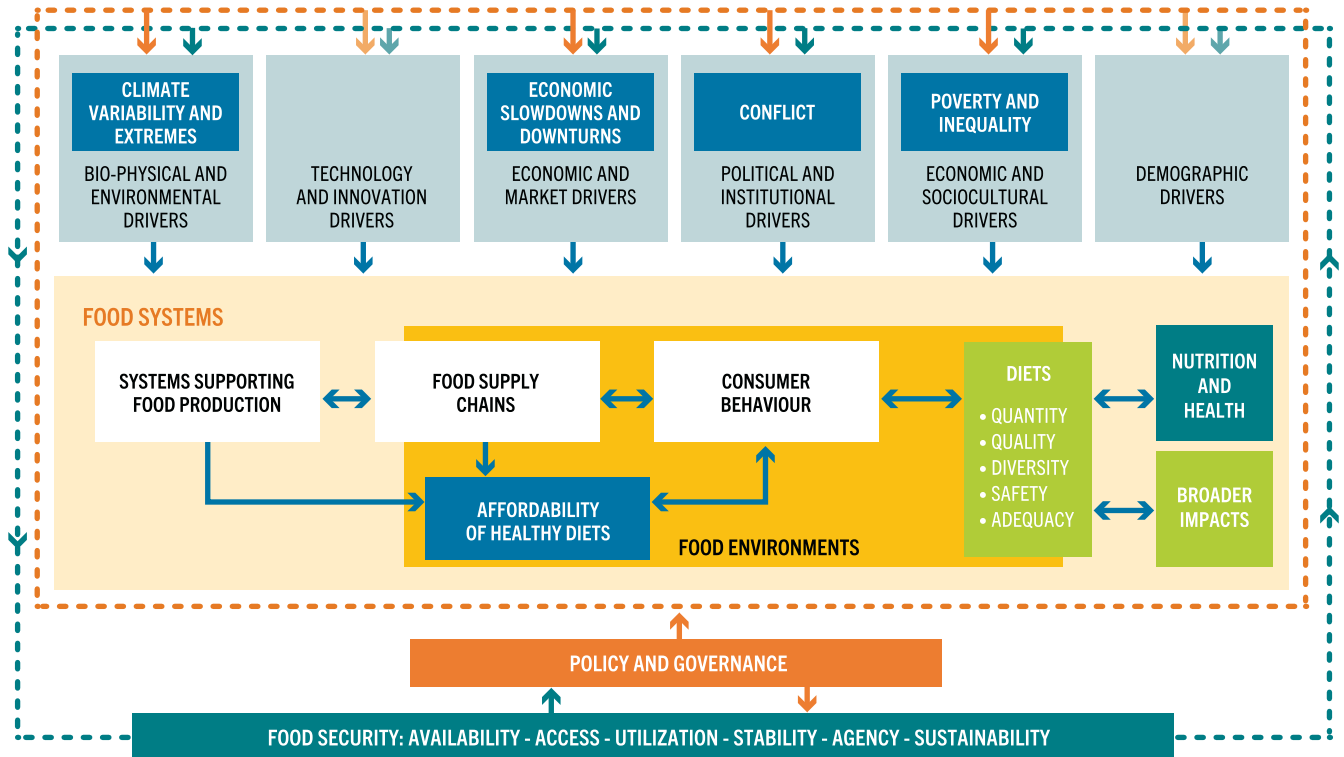
downturns – all exacerbated by the underlying causes of poverty and very high and persistent levels of inequality. 70% of the low- and middle-income countries are affected by at least one of these drivers and 41% (38 of 93 countries) also have high income inequality, which worsens their impact. Moreover, majority of the undernourished people and stunted children live in countries affected by multiple drivers.

*These major drivers are unique but not mutually exclusive, as they interact to the detriment of food security and nutrition by creating multiple, compounding impacts at many different points within our food systems.*

The current edition has generated updates and additional analyses to create a holistic view of the combined effects of these drivers (both on each other and on food systems) and how they negatively affect food security and nutrition around the world.

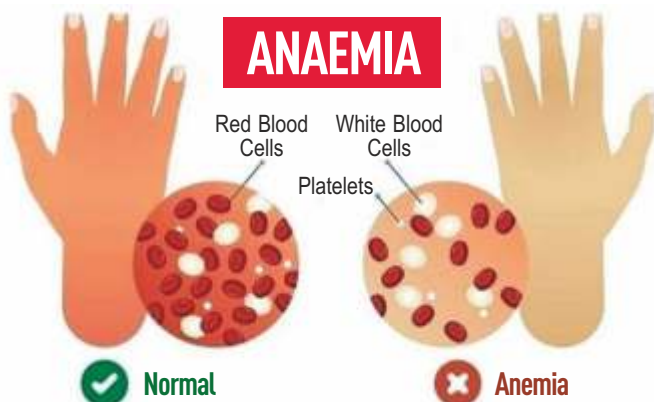
It is clear that food systems bear a critical responsibility for the nutritional quality, safety, affordability and sustainability of diets. Recognizing that systemic changes are needed in the ways in which food is produced and consumed, the report lays down six transformation pathways for food systems transformation. These are designed to address the negative impacts of

### IMPACTS OF VARIOUS DRIVERS ARE TRANSMITTED THROUGHOUT FOOD SYSTEMS, UNDERMINING FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION



SOURCE: Adapted from HLPE. 2020. *Food security and nutrition: building a global narrative towards 2030*. A report by the High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition of the Committee on World Food Security. Rome.

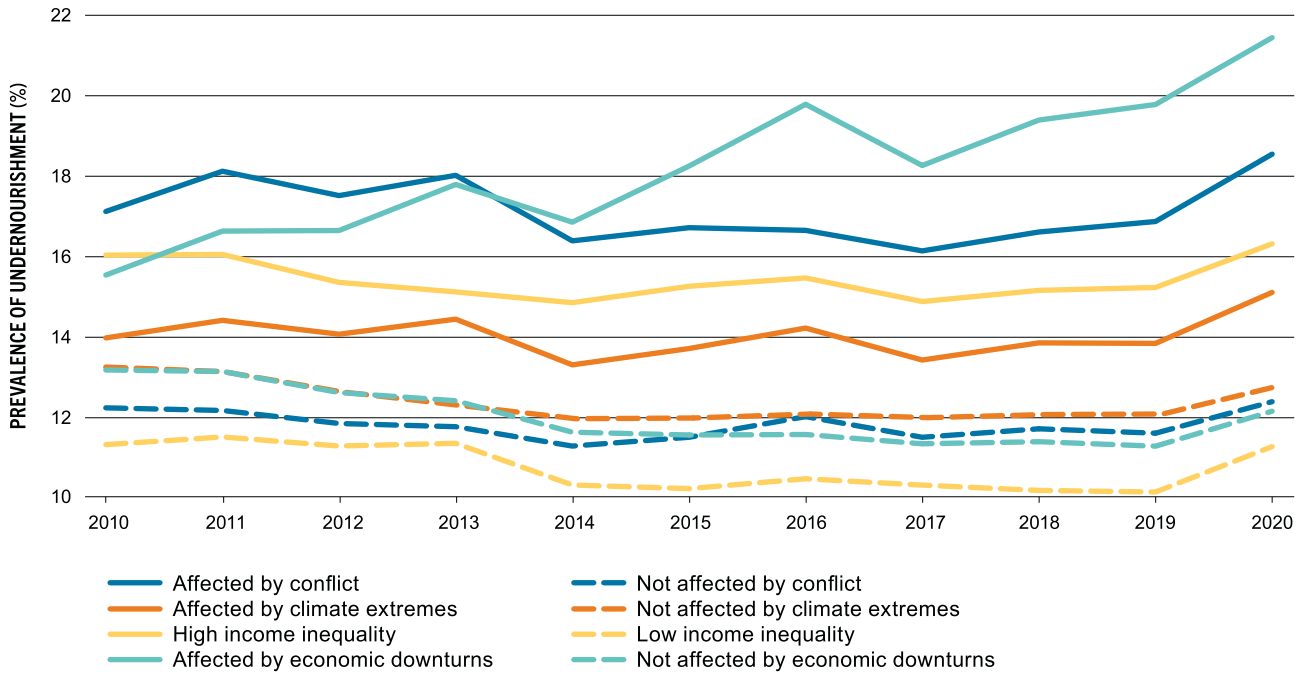
**An estimated 22% (149.2 million) of children under 5 years of age were affected by stunting (too short for their age), 6.7% (45.4 million) were suffering from wasting (too thin for their height) while 5.7% (38.9 million) were overweight in 2020. 29.9% women of reproductive age were affected by anaemia.**



the major drivers, with a focus on ensuring access to affordable healthy diets for all, sustainably and inclusively.

- **Integrate humanitarian, development and peace-building policies in conflict areas** – For example, through social protection measures to prevent families from selling meagre assets in exchange for food.
- **Scale-up climate resilience across food systems** – For example, by offering smallholder farmers wide access to climate risk insurance and forecast-based financing.
- **Strengthen the resilience of the most vulnerable to economic adversity** – For example, through in-kind or cash support programmes to lessen the impact of pandemic-style shocks or food price volatility.
- **Intervene along supply chains to lower the cost of nutritious foods** – For example, by encouraging the planting of biofortified crops or making it easier for fruit and vegetable growers to access markets.
- **Tackle poverty and structural inequalities, ensure interventions are pro-poor and inclusive** – For example, by boosting food value chains in poor communities through technology transfers and certification programmes.

## HUNGER IS HIGHER AND HAS INCREASED MORE IN COUNTRIES AFFECTED BY CONFLICT, CLIMATE EXTREMES OR ECONOMIC DOWNTURNS, OR WITH HIGH INEQUALITY



NOTES: The figure shows the prevalence of undernourishment between the years 2010 and 2020 for low- and middle-income countries affected by any of the three drivers (conflict, climate extremes or economic downturns), and for countries with high income inequality. PoU estimates are unweighted. The analysis is shown for 110 low- and middle-income countries with available PoU information. See **Annex 4** for definitions and methodology of countries affected by the different drivers.

SOURCES: PoU based on FAO; Gini index of income inequality data based on World Bank, 2021. World Development Indicators. In: *World Bank* [online]. Washington, DC. [Cited 24 April 2020]. [datatopics.worldbank.org/world-development-indicators](http://datatopics.worldbank.org/world-development-indicators); see sources of Figure 17 for data on drivers (conflict, climate extremes and economic downturns).

- Strengthen food environments and change consumer behaviour to promote dietary patterns with positive impacts on human health and the environment – For example, by eliminating industrial trans fats and reducing the salt and sugar content in the food supply or protecting children from the negative impact of food marketing.

The pathways present in-depth guidelines on how to move from silo solutions to integrated food systems solutions. They also call for multi-sectoral leadership by the policymakers along with business interventions, as higher collaboration is needed to mitigate the growing prevalence of hunger.

### Types of Policy and Investment Portfolios Required

Given that most food systems are affected by more than one driver, the formulation of comprehensive portfolios of policies, investments and legislation should be elaborated along several pathways simultaneously. This will allow for maximizing their combined effects on food systems transformation, exploiting win-win solutions and mitigating undesirable trade-offs.

Coherence in the formulation and implementation of policies and investments among food, health, social

protection and environmental systems is also essential to build on synergies towards more efficient and effective food systems solutions.

Systems approaches are needed to enable win-win solutions while managing trade-offs, including territorial approaches, ecosystems approaches, indigenous people's food systems approaches and interventions that systematically address protracted crisis conditions.

The UN Food Systems Summit 2021 will bring forward a series of concrete actions that people, food systems actors and governments from all over the world can take to support a transformation of the world's food systems.

### Conclusion

We are at a critical moment in time that requires new food systems approaches and urgent actions to build forward better and get back on track towards achieving the Zero Hunger target and other SDGs by 2030. There is much to be learned from the vulnerabilities and inequalities laid bare by the pandemic.

While 2020 was an immense challenge for the world, it should also be considered as a warning of unwelcome events to come if more resolute actions to change course are not taken. This is because the major drivers have their own trajectory or cyclicity and will continue to occur. ▶



## India Can Take A Front Seat in Driving Global Food Security

The United Nations estimates that the pandemic could double the number of food insecure people in the world. As a responsible global power, India should gear up to play a leadership role in helping other underdeveloped countries achieve a modicum of sustainable food security.



*India has enjoyed steady economic growth and achieved self-sufficiency in grain production in recent years.*

**INDIA HAS DISPLAYED** a fabulous turnaround in food grain production in the last couple of decades, going from depending on food aid in the 1950s to becoming self-sufficient in food grains in the 1970s to becoming a net exporter of food today! The country has taken huge leaps forward riding on the back of innovative and cost-effective solutions to farming challenges that paved the way for commendable agricultural development. The Green Revolution of the mid-1960s helped us to surmount the recurring bane of harvest failures and famine conditions – it is considered an ideal and an inspiration by many backward nations.

The government has also taken significant steps to combat hunger and undernourishment among the impoverished population with food security programmes and other initiatives.

### Partnering for Food Security

Despite the unprecedented challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, India is continuing to be a net security provider in the Indian Ocean region. In cognizance of the

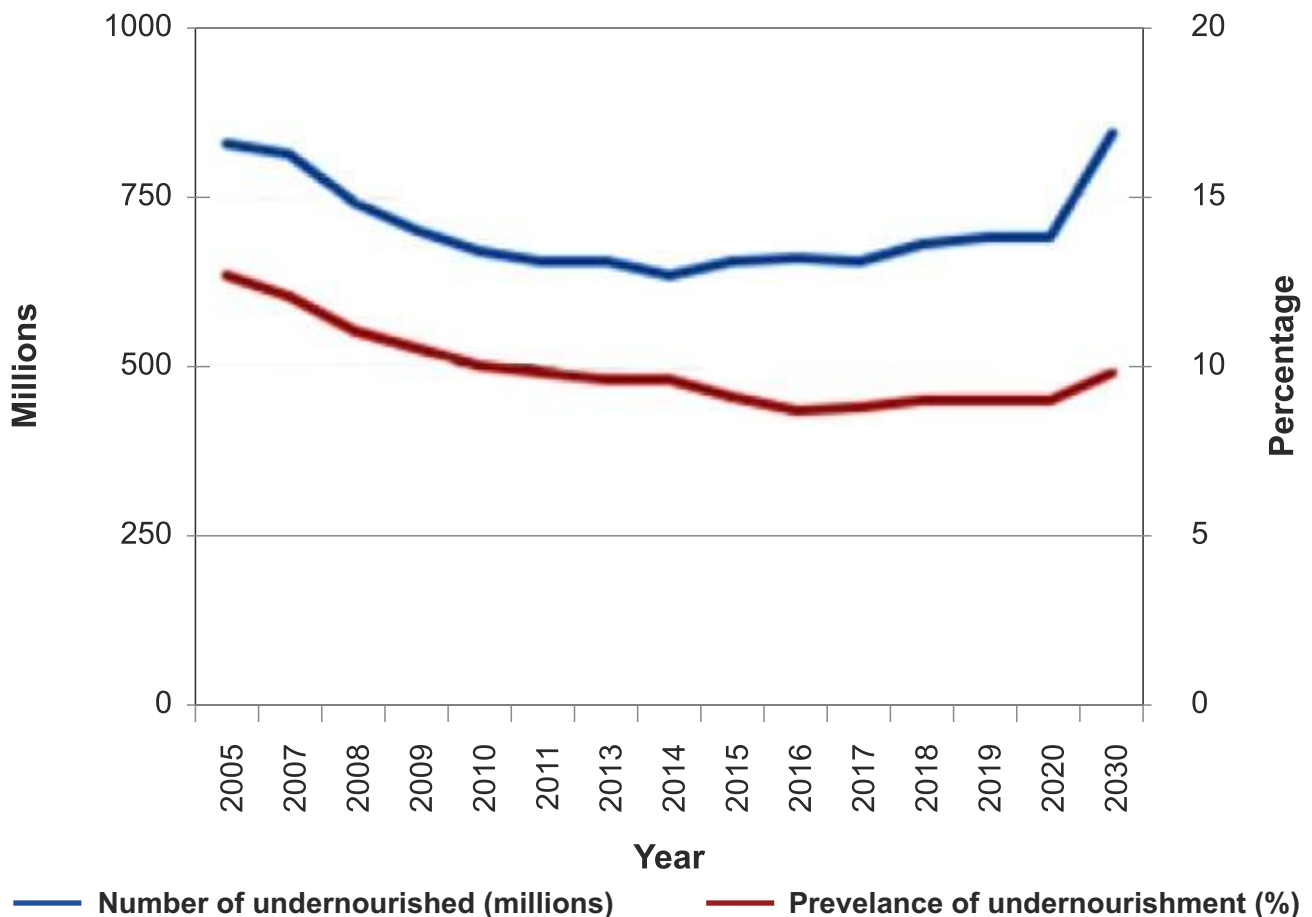
novel situation, the government did not hesitate to extend emergency relief and assistance to various countries. In May 2020, 580 tonnes of food supplies were delivered to the Maldives, Mauritius, Madagascar, Comoros Islands and Seychelles followed by food aid to African nations like South Sudan, Djibouti and Eritrea in October 2020. We were on the beat with medical support and food aid to Nepal, Afghanistan and other countries.

### Donning the Flagship Mantle

India's advances in food security can serve as valuable lessons for other developing nations. Most African countries which are critically dependent on imported food grains or food aid are looking towards India to replicate its success formulae, particularly the Green Revolution.

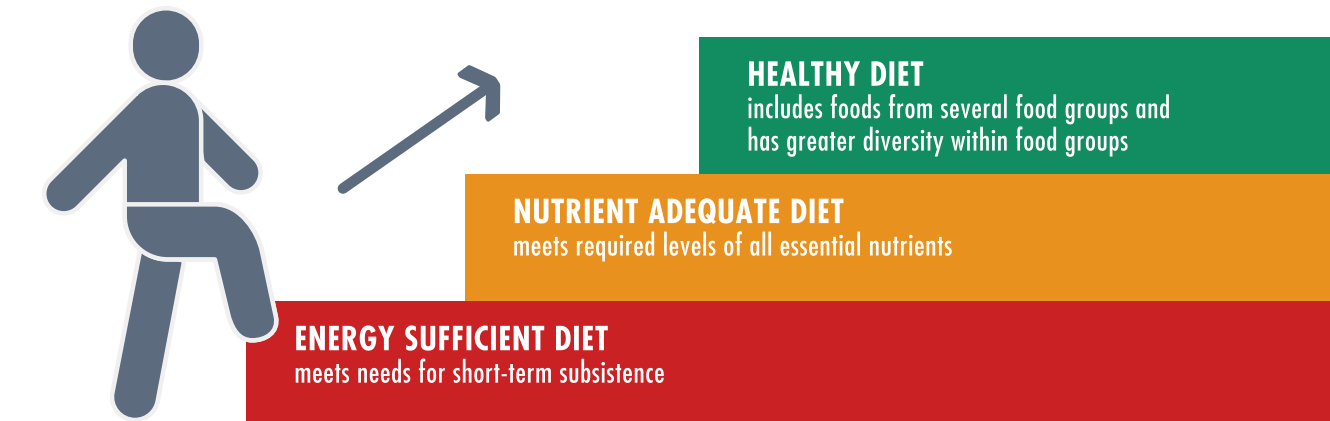
Food security is a key pillar of the India-Africa partnership framework for strategic cooperation. India is helping African countries build the policy and institutional foundations for reversing the productivity decline in agriculture and ensure food security on the continent. We are playing a key role in supplementing their food output

## Number of Undernourished People Globally



Source: Graph generated using data from Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations

## THREE INCREASING LEVELS OF DIET QUALITY



by providing low-cost technology solutions, improved seeds and agricultural machinery.

The USAID and India are in a strategic peer-to-peer partnership; our government, civil society organizations and the private sector are willingly:

- sharing proven technological and institutional solutions like low-cost tractors, seed systems and water management technologies across the globe.
- transferring agricultural knowledge and innovations to Bangladesh and Nepal to address food and nutrition security challenges.
- developing supply chains in Nepal to reach poor and smallholder farmers (including women) with agro-inputs and technologies that enhance productivity.
- training agricultural practitioners (farmers, processors, extension workers and policymakers) from 11 African and 6 Asian countries in specialized farming practices to improve productivity and income.

We should also provide continual support to African and even Asian countries through technology partnerships, joint research in promoting drought resistant crops, promoting climate smart agriculture, and increasing resource efficiency in the usage of water, land, fertiliser and electricity.

### Global Pitch for Food Security

India has been championing food security issues at the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and does not hesitate to push in favour of the interests of other developing countries during various discussions. Our leaders are actively canvassing on the global platform for allowing the flexibility of maintaining public stocks for food security purposes in developing countries. We are pushing for border-free exports and have walked the talk by providing food security to the neighbouring nations.

We have also been advocating global food supply and security since the onset of the pandemic. While many of the developed countries adopted protectionist measures and banned food exports, India took the humanitarian approach of placing food security concerns above trade priorities. The country did not impose any restrictions on exports of farm produce as people's lives were at stake.

### Our Own Position is Critical

Yet, we need to look at saving the hungry in our own backyard first! Despite the landmark achievements in the agricultural sector, India still contributes to a quarter of the global hunger burden.

The new challenges of the COVID crisis are posing an additional threat to the food and nutrition security scenario in the country. According to the UN data, India has nearly 195 million undernourished people as of 2021. The figure stood at 189 million before the pandemic!

Declining incomes and rising unemployment is a cause for worry as it exacerbates the food vulnerabilities of major sections of the population. The government should rise to the occasion by supporting rural livelihoods and improving the functioning of the food and agriculture markets. However, the continued agitation by the farmers against the agrarian bills is further deepening the agricultural crisis in the country.

### Conclusion

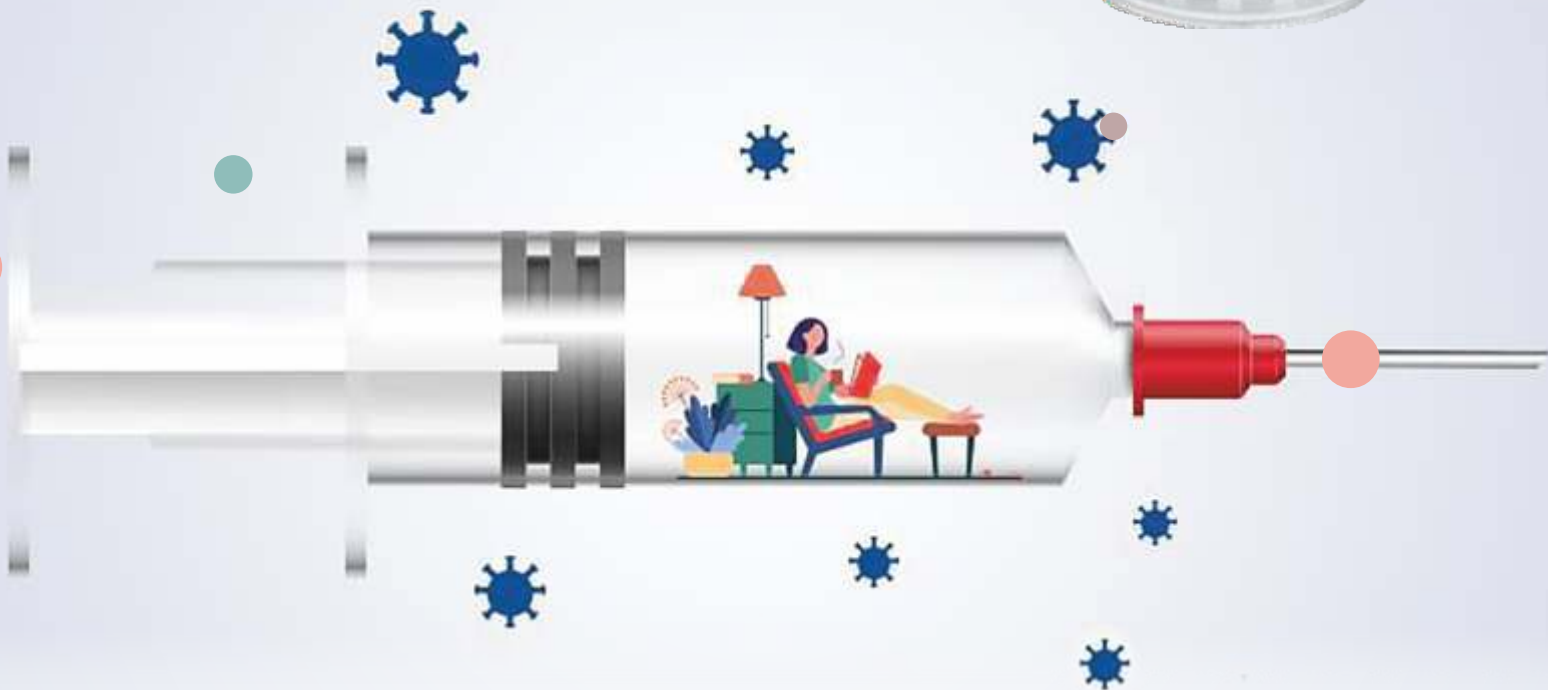
Experts are opining that the path to recovery post the pandemic should focus on a world without borders. India can don a leadership role in the fight against food insecurity by adopting domestic food security policies on the one hand and helping the global community minimise the disruptions in food supply chains on the other by ensuring continued flow of food and other products across borders. ▶



#LetsBeatCorona

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**Rajiv Nath**

- Mg. Director@ HMD
- Forum Coordinator@ AIMED

*“Not every war is won  
on a battlefield.  
Some wars can also be won  
sitting at home.”*

#StayHomeStaySafe



*India is ensuring food and nutrition security for the most vulnerable through various schemes and programmes*

## Tackling Food Insecurity for a Hunger-Free India

India has always been defined by efforts to provide adequate food and nutrition to the population. As food touches the life of every citizen and dictates the general health of the nation, various laws and regulations have been passed by different governments to ensure food safety and security. Access to food is a legal right today.

**IT WAS DURING** the Second World War that India faced acute food shortages for the first time and a Food Department was established in the pre-independence era itself to meet the exigencies. This Food Department was re-designated as Ministry of Food after independence.

The following decades witnessed numerous permutations and combinations with the Food Ministry being merged with other ministries like Agriculture, Community Development, Civil Supplies and others. Following many bifurcations and other shakeups, it finally donned the avatar of the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution in the year 2000, which is continuing till date.

Under this Ministry, the Department of Food & Public Distribution is charged with ensuring food security for the citizens of the country. It has a mission of managing the food economy through efficient procurement, storage and distribution of food grains along with ensuring availability of essential commodities and monitoring prices of the same.

## Food Security

It is a fact that every government of independent India has been focusing on food security. A comprehensive food-based social safety net is in place – it benefits the underprivileged and low income people who would otherwise not be able to afford daily provisions in the face of spiralling food prices. The massive Public Distribution System (PDS) provides food grains at heavily subsidized rates to the needy. Ration cards are issued to the eligible households and they can procure food grains (wheat, rice), pulses, sugar and fuel through their assigned fair price shops.

The public distribution system was revamped a couple of times to improve both the focus and reach of the scheme. The benefit was expanded to 35 kgs of rice or wheat every month for every family below the poverty line while households above the poverty line are eligible for 15 kgs of food grains on a monthly basis.

2013 marked a paradigm shift in India's attitude towards food security - from a predominantly welfare approach to a rights-based approach - with the government bringing in the National Food Safety Act (NFSA). Also known as the Right to Food Act, it is applicable pan-India across all states and union territories. It covers almost two-thirds of the entire population by legally entitling 75% of the rural population and 50% of the urban population to receive food grains at highly subsidized rates. As a step towards women empowerment, the eldest woman of the household of age 18 years or above is mandated to be the head of the household for the purpose of issuing of ration cards under the Act.

The Act is centred on four existing programmes to provide food and nutritional security — the Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS), the Mid-Day Meal (MDM) scheme, the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) and the Indra Gandhi Matritva Sahyog



Yojana (replaced by the Pradhan Mantri Matri Vandana Yojna programme in 2017).

This was India's answer to the United Nations' Millennium Development Goal (MDG) of halving the proportion of poor people suffering from hunger by 2015.

In addition to this, the Food Security Allowance Rules, 2015 adopted a life-cycle approach with special provisions for supplementary nutrition for pregnant women, lactating mothers and children in the age group of 6 months to 14 years. Recently, the Department of Food & Public Distribution further attempted to widen the scope of the NFSA by extending it to include all eligible disabled persons.

The Act is further supplemented by direct cash transfers for provisioning of food entitlements as well. In case any of the beneficiaries are unable to get the entitled food grains or meals for some reason, they should receive a food security allowance as prescribed by the Central Government. Pregnant and lactating women also get cash maternity benefits to supplement their nutritional needs.

NFSA is the joint responsibility of the centre and state/UT governments. The Food Ministry implements the Act while the State Commission monitors and evaluates the implementation.

The NFSA is hailed as the largest food security program in the world – it insulates the poor from price volatility of food grains while ensuring intake of nutritious food by the maximum people. However, it is beset with the regular problems of poor quality of food grains and widespread misuse and mismanagement, because of which the benefits often fail to filter down to the target population!

## Food Safety

The Food Safety and Standards Act (FSSA) was passed in 2006 as a holistic approach to revolutionize the way the business of food is monitored in India. The 'One Nation – One Food Law' mandate consolidates this



## National Food Safety Act (NFSA) covers almost two-thirds of the entire population by legally entitling 75% of the rural population and 50% of the urban population to receive food grains at highly subsidized rates.

statute as a single reference point for everything related to food hygiene, labelling, additives and contaminants along with their inspection, certification, export and import.

The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) was established in 2011 under the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India as a single line of command for facilitating food safety. It is an autonomous body that ensures availability of safe, wholesome and hygienic food for human consumption by laying down science-based standards for food articles and regulating their manufacture, storage, distribution, sale and import.

Apart from instituting globally benchmarked standards and practices for food, it also lays down guidelines for accreditation of food testing laboratories, establishes rules for food safety research, appoints food safety authorities at state level, provides scientific advice and technical support to the Central Government and so on.

All Food Business Operators like manufacturers, retailers, packaging units, storage units, transporters, distributors, restaurants, hotels, caterers, exporters and importers have to obtain an FSSAI license before commencing operations. This registration works like a certificate of food safety and the license number has to be mandatorily printed on the food products.

### Food Sufficiency

The National Development Council (NDC) adopted a resolution to launch a Food Security Mission comprising rice, wheat and pulses - increase the annual production of rice by 10 million tonnes, wheat by 8 million tonnes and pulses by 2 million tonnes by the end of the

Eleventh Plan (2011-12). Accordingly, a centrally sponsored scheme, 'National Food Security Mission' (NFSM), was launched in October 2007.

The Mission met with overwhelming success by achieving the targeted additional production through interventions like cluster demonstrations on improved package of practices, cropping system demonstrations, seed distribution of high yielding varieties, efficient water application tools, plant protection measures, nutrient management/soil ameliorants to the farmers, etc.

It was continued with new targets and revised operational guidelines till 2017-18. Coarse cereals were also included in the Mission. Following the bumper production during 2017-18, the authorities set new targets for 2019-20.

### Dealing With The COVID Crisis

The government has once again readily stepped up to the plate following the daunting COVID-19 crisis which has compromised the food security of millions around the country. During the first lockdown itself, the Centre responded promptly with swift measures and coordinated efforts to help the poor and vulnerable families. It dispensed Rs. 1.74 lakh crore worth of extra rations through the TPDS during the first three months, doubling the quantity and free distribution of 5kgs rice/wheat and 1kg pulses along with additional cash provisions. The food package was subsequently extended till November 2021 and additional incentives are also continuing till date.

In fact, there has been no dearth of cash, food rations and cooked meals for millions of migrant labourers, daily wage earners, poor and various additional vulnerable groups. 37,900 relief camps were set up for migrants by

## Challenges

We live in a world where  
**1 IN 9 PEOPLE IS UNDERNOURISHED**



75% of crop diversity has been lost to **MONOCROP CULTURE** making crop more **VULNERABLE TO PEST OUTBREAKS AND DISEASES**



**SMALLHOLDER FARMERS** provide 80% of the food consumed in the developing world. Mostly rainfed their agriculture is particularly **VULNERABLE TO DROUGHTS AND FLOODS**



## Solutions

**INCREASE AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTIVITY** and **ENSURE EQUITABLE ACCESS** to food for all



**DIVERSIFY PLANT VARIETIES** to reduce crop failure and promote nutritious diets



**INVEST IN SMALLHOLDER FARMERS** especially **WOMEN** to increase food security and improve nutrition for the poorest



NGOs and private sector (with government support), serving food to more than 16 million people.

Many states also implemented swift and proactive measures – in the form of additional food items and cash support - to ensure food and nutrition security for the people. Some of the notable ones are - highly subsidised, cooked food in the Amma canteens in Tamil Nadu, Mukhyamantri Dal-Bhat Yojana in Jharkhand, Annapurna Raso in Rajasthan and Aam Aadmi canteen in Delhi. Similar community kitchens provided highly subsidised cooked meals in Kerala, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra and Odisha as well.

It is reported that the railways transported 5.2 million tons of food grains from 25th March to 25th April 2020, which is double the quantities moved during the same period in 2019.

However, many of the urban poor, slum dwellers and other deserving families still missed out on food support from the government and were left starving in the terrible times. Many beneficiaries are also missing the boat as the anganwadis (childcare centres) and schools continue to remain closed since the onset of the pandemic.

During the second wave of infections, the government was once again on the beat with adjustments to the TPDS like advance allocations, longer hours for the Fair Price Shops, additional rations at no cost and specific provisions for migrants.

The government should now focus on expanding its reach even while continuing home delivery of meals and cooking material to the vulnerable sections of the population to curtail the heightening food insecurity. Additional measures should be taken to ensure that the food is nutritious as well.

### On the Cards

The government is now trying to bring in national portability by introducing the 'One Nation One Ration Card' scheme that eliminates the limitation of geographical location from the food security entitlement. With this, migrant workers and their family members will be able to access the PDS benefits from any fair price shop anywhere in India.

This kind of universalisation of food security across the country is a great move, but is still facing numerous hurdles and postponement. It should be operationalised – with proper issuance of ration cards – very soon.

### Conclusion

The multiple laws on ensuring food safety and security to the population are mostly beset with lack of uniformity, enforcement and the like. It is calling for continued attention with policy adjustments and strategic initiatives based on the new realities. ▶



**“ Under Eat Right India Movement, FSSAI promotes a variety of food items considering the vast diversity in diet, culture, customs etc. prevalent in our country. ”**

## **Mr. Arun Singhal, IAS**

1987 batch, is currently the Chief Executive Officer of India's apex food regulator Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI). With his vast experience as Additional Secretary in MoHFW, he has been proactively working towards drugs and food regulation, medical education, implementation of Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Yojana (PMSSY)- under which new AIIMS are being set up in the country - and in administration and expansion of Institutes of National Importance like AIIMS Delhi, PGI Chandigarh and JIPMER Puducherry.

Mr. Singhal has a rich and varied experience of administrative work in diverse areas including Petroleum and Natural Gas, Industrial Development, Rural Development, Agriculture Marketing and Medical Education. He is in conversation with The Aware Consumer on the upcoming occasion of World Food Day.





“FSSAI launched the **“Aaj Se Thoda Kam”** mass awareness campaign to reduce salt, fat and sugar in diets, and Trans-Fat Free India@75 to eliminate trans-fats by 2022.”

**Q As you know 'World Food Day' is celebrated every year on 16th October to promote worldwide awareness and action for those who suffer from nutritional deficiency and for the need to ensure healthy diets for all. What actions are taken by FSSAI to ensure healthy diets for all?**

Despite social and economic growth, India is still grappling with high levels of malnutrition and food borne illnesses. Nutrient deficiencies and toxicity from unsafe food and poor dietary habits are linked to nearly all modern health conditions. The double burden of under-nutrition coupled with increasing incidence of obesity, particularly among children, is threatening our social and economic fabric. As food is a common thread linking citizens anywhere and everywhere, the Government of India is mainstreaming access to safe, healthy, and sustainable diets through the flagship program 'Eat Right India', led by FSSAI.

Eat Right India is a National Movement to transform the food ecosystem of the country by ensuring safe, healthy and sustainable food for everyone, at all times. Under this, FSSAI promotes a variety of food items considering the vast diversity in diet, culture, customs etc. prevalent in our country. Citizens are nudged to make right food choices and promote diet diversification with a variety of whole grains ranging from wheat and rice, which are commonly consumed, to millets and other indigenous grains for better nutrition.

Furthermore, FSSAI released the standards of fortification for five staples, and unveiled the +F logo for

consumer awareness and easy identification of fortified products in October 2016. Large-scale fortification of 5 staples including rice, wheat flour, edible oil, milk and salt with micro-nutrients appears to be a good vehicle to deliver nutrients to large sections of the population.

FSSAI uses various tools and mediums to create consumer awareness about healthy diets. Recently, FSSAI has announced the launch of Walkathon and Eat Right Melas across 75 cities across the country to commemorate 75 years of India's Independence. These events aim for massive outreach to educate people and spread awareness about safe, healthy and sustainable diets through an interactive and informative model.

**Q There is a systemic connection between the food we eat and our health. How can the health of our people, animals, plants and the environment help us meet the needs of the future?**

Food is an integral part of our life and thus there has always been an exclusive focus on what we eat. The food we eat should not only be safe and healthy for us, but it should also be sustainable to our planet so that resources can be optimally utilized without undue pressure on the ecosystem as well as the environment.

In order to address public health issues related to food safety and nutrition holistically, there is a need to understand the bigger picture i.e., aggregating the entire range of stakeholders and their interlinked value-adding activities, originating from agriculture, manufacturing, processing, distribution and retailing together with a focus



on broader economic, societal and sustainable development. This approach is called the 'Food Systems Approach'. It is a highly interconnected approach which involves a shared responsibility between governments, producers and food businesses along with consumers. Here, everyone has a role to play - from farm to table, to ensure that the food we consume is safe, nourishing and sustainable to both people and the planet.

Through Eat Right India, FSSAI advocates the Food Systems Approach and has charted out a vision for 2050 that ensures coherence at the policy level across all sectors. The movement adopts a 'whole of government' approach, bringing together all food-related mandates from ministries of agriculture, health, environment and others. Recently, the Eat Right India movement was declared as one of the Top Visionaries for the Food Systems Vision Prize 2050. This Prize was instituted by the US-based Rockefeller Foundation in association with SecondMuse and Open Ideo. The ten finalists shortlisted among over 1300 applicants were announced as Top Visionaries.

Although the country does not yet have a holistic policy to promote sustainable and healthy food systems, the Eat Right India movement is promoting several programmes working in this direction at various levels, across the food value chain from pre-harvest to consumption.

**Q Women are the fulcrum of our food system. Why are they always left behind without any efforts to preserve their knowledge and traditional best practices adopted to improve accessibility to wholesome food?**

As the world's attention is turning to redesigning food systems to deliver safe and healthy food, livelihoods, and sustainable environments for all, it is equally important to ensure that the important role of almost half of the consumers i.e. women – shouldn't be ignored.

Women are the nucleus of our global food system and are responsible for the household's health, nutrition and

well-being. At the same time, women are also directly involved with raising livestock and tending to crops. However, there is a gender inequality which has flagged an urgency to protect the livelihoods of women living at the edge of vulnerability. Indian women play a crucial role in eradicating hunger and malnutrition; however, limitations in the recognition of their rights have hampered access to equitable systems of food.

Women farmers/entrepreneurs who control resources generally have better-quality diets. Efforts need to be made to fight dietary taboos, establish better support cooperatives as well as mainstream the benefits of wholesome diets in the context of women, especially those at the reproductive stage, through ancient and traditional practices like inclusion of millets, local & seasonal produce in their daily diets.

This will not only help them improve the nutritional status of their families, but will also motivate them to translate this ancient wisdom for commercialization purposes. Women led self-help groups, small scale food processing and cottage industries should be promoted so that women can support redesigning of food systems across countries to deliver safe, healthy and sustainable diets to people.

**Q Will 'Good Food for All' ever become a reality in India? What can we do to achieve this goal? Is the government open to repurposing old policies and adopting new ones for the same?**

Established under the Food Safety and Standards Act (FSS), 2006, the FSSAI is the apex food regulatory body in the country with the mandate to ensure safe and wholesome food for all citizens. Since its formation, the food authority has been making constant efforts to ensure safe, healthy and environmentally sustainable food for everyone.

FSSAI has embarked on a series of initiatives to transform the country's food ecosystem through the 'Eat Right India' movement, targeting both food businesses and consumers to create an environment of right food practices and habits. Various initiatives are currently running in different parts of the country covering Jails, Hospitals, Educational Institutions, Places of Worship, Street food vendors as well as Fruits & Vegetables Markets to enhance the country's food ecosystem and attain a healthy future.

For mass consumer awareness and bringing about a shift in eating behaviour, emphasis has been placed on encouraging healthy food choices. FSSAI launched the "Aaj Se ThodaKam" mass awareness campaign to reduce salt, fat and sugar in diets, and Trans-Fat Free India@75 to eliminate trans-fats by 2022. FSSAI also launched "Do You Eat Right?" book that translates the technical concepts on food and nutrition and provides practical ways to make right food choices. Nudging consumers to eat right not only creates awareness but constantly reiterates the importance of 'mindful' eating to ensure a sustainable change in habits.

Further, to enable mass engagement and scaling up of Eat Right India initiatives at the pan-India level, we have also launched challenges like Eat Right Challenge

# Millet

- ❖ *Small-seeded hard crops,*
- ❖ *It can grow well in dry zones or rain-fed areas*
- ❖ *It develop from seeds to ready to harvest crops in just about 65 days.*
- ❖ *It can keep well for two years or beyond.*

## EAT A BALANCED DIET FOR A HEALTHY LIFE

- Include fresh, seasonal fruits and vegetables in your diet.
- Drink plenty of clean water. Keep yourself hydrated.



## **LOGO** **A SYMBOL OF GOOD HEALTH**



Look out for **FORTIFIED** logo on the packet while buying WHEAT FLOUR, RICE, OIL, MILK and SALT. It contains nutrients that are important for your health.



**OUR ACTIONS ARE OUR FUTURE.**



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 A BETTER ENVIRONMENT AND A BETTER LIFE.**



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Foodsafetyinindia

for cities and districts and EatSmart Cities Challenge to galvanize a large number of stakeholders from our food safety departments as well as stakeholders from over 100 smart cities respectively. These challenges are envisioned as a competition among cities to recognize their efforts in adopting and scaling up various initiatives under Eat Right India. An annual competition for school children called Eat Right Creativity Challenge was also organised in the form of online poster and photography competition to inculcate safe and healthy eating practices amongst children.

The role of a regulatory body like FSSAI is to ensure setting-up of globally benchmarked standards, robust guidelines on hygiene and sanitation across the value chain and ensure quality of food by setting and enforcing standards, food testing and surveillance and monitoring. However, the primary responsibility to ensure that proper food safety measures and guidelines are implemented across the value chain lies on the shoulders of food producers, distributors, handlers as well as retail vendors. In addition to this, it is very important for consumers to remain vigilant and

awareness on safe food and healthy diets through an interactive and informative model. To generate awareness on vitamin D, project Dhoop was introduced in the schools of Delhi-NCR which urged schools to shift their morning assembly to noon time, mainly between 11 am and 1 pm to ensure maximum absorption of Vitamin D through natural sunlight. Renowned celebrities like Sakshi Tanwar and Virat Kohli have been engaged for a nation-wide TV campaign on fortified foods.

For mass awareness, these campaigns have been aired on Doordarshan and other satellite channels as well as radio and cinema along with social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and LinkedIn for wider outreach. Radio campaigns on generating awareness about fortified milk, rice, salt and popularizing +F logo were also undertaken. Efforts have been made to generate wider awareness amongst people through featured articles on fortified foods and their health benefits in leading magazines/ online media platforms.



nutritionally literate. They also need to understand and adopt healthy eating habits so that it can help in preventing malnutrition in all forms as well as a wide range of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and conditions.

Apart from this, a much needed collaboration between international bodies, governments, producers, and consumers can improve the status quo and ultimately ensure food safety for every citizen. After all, safe and nutritious food implies healthier population which will help us meet the needs of the future.

**Q FSSAI has been working on a war footing to fortify staples such as food grains, edible oil, salt etc. in order to battle hidden hunger. But, are consumers - in this case, the general public - aware of the facts and benefits of fortification? What steps have been taken to raise public awareness on fortified foods?**

Food fortification is the process of adding micronutrients to food items to improve the quality of diet for a group, community, or population. It is a scientifically proven, sustainable and cost-effective solution to address micronutrient deficiencies. The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) released the standards of fortification for five staples, and unveiled the +F logo for consumer awareness and identification of fortified products in October 2016.

In the past, FSSAI has conducted a series of awareness campaigns like Swasth Bharat Yatra where 2.5 crore citizens were engaged directly through a pan-India cyclothon. Eat Right Melas have been organized to build

**Q On the occasion of 75th Independence Day, our Honorable PM Shri Narendra Modi announced fortified rice to be distributed under various government schemes by 2024. What strategy will be adopted by FSSAI to meet this target?**

A: The announcement is significant as our country is grappling with high levels of malnutrition especially among women and children. Government of India has already approved the Centrally Sponsored Pilot Scheme on "Fortification of Rice & its Distribution under Public Distribution System" for a period of 3 years. Fifteen State Governments have consented and are making efforts for implementation of the Pilot Scheme. FSSAI is providing technical support to this scheme. Currently the distribution has been started across 6 States and others are in the pipeline. Food Cooperation of India is also providing fortified rice in MDM and ICDS across the country.

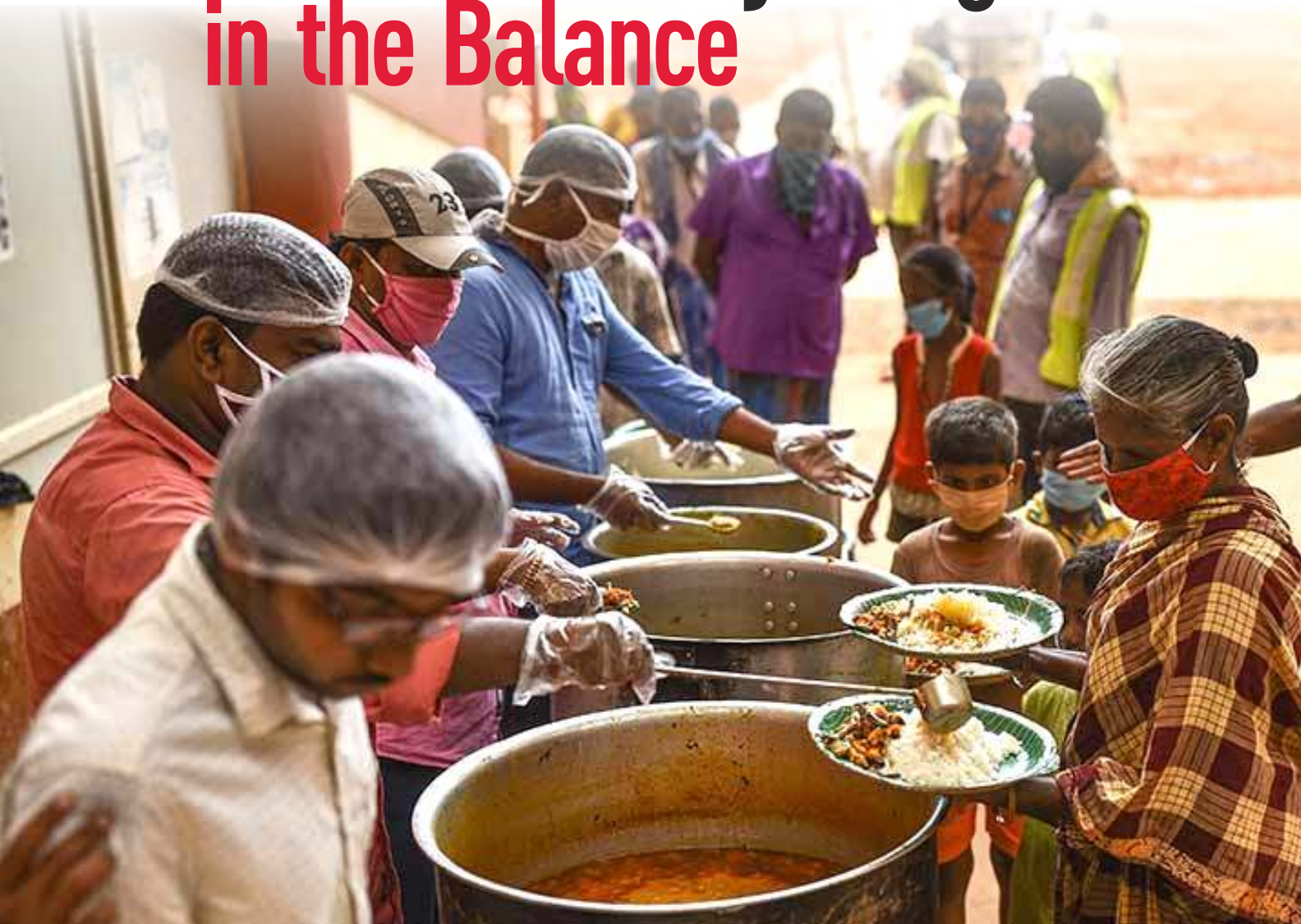
FSSAI is conducting sensitization activities to spread knowledge amongst the public for better understanding of the benefits of fortification. We have expedited our efforts across major intervention areas like (i) Advocacy and Sensitisation; (ii) Training and Capacity Building; (iii) Consumer Awareness and Demand Generation and (iv) Quality Assurance, Monitoring and Evaluation. FSSAI is also setting standards for Fortified Rice Kernels (FRKs) and ramping up testing infrastructure for quality assurance.

Adopting food fortification, when combined with social safety net programs (SSNP) will be an effective approach to combat dietary iron deficiency anaemia especially in vulnerable population. ■



**Pyush Misra**  
Trustee,  
Consumer Online Foundation

## **A Crisis Looms Ahead – Food Security Hangs in the Balance**



**The pandemic is a wakeup call for the world to ensure food security for all**

“The COVID-19 pandemic is threatening the world's food systems; we are on the brink of a global food emergency today. Arresting the spike in world hunger is crucial for the world to achieve a turnaround and honour its pledge to end hunger by 2030.”

**THE WORLD IS** at a critical juncture following the sudden onset of the SARS-CoV-2 virus which snowballed into the COVID-19 pandemic. From 2019 to 2020, the number of undernourished people grew by as many as 161 million, driven largely by the new contagion that reared its ugly head at the end of 2019 (Action Against Hunger International Nutrition Security Policy).

It is true that even before the pandemic, the incidence of hunger was already rising in the world while progress on malnutrition was found to be lagging. The coronavirus disruption has spiked world hunger manifold, and aggravated other issues to the extent that it is threatening the headway that the world has made in health and development. The food systems are particularly facing a grave threat of crisis.

The lockdown and other related containment measures have placed significant pressures on agricultural production and disrupted global supply chains. International, regional and even local food systems are being severely tested in ways that no one could have ever anticipated. Restrictions on movement and border closures have transformed into severe labour shortages even as it hampered the movement of agricultural produce. Harvesting slowed down and food transport was hampered.

There was food loss and waste on the one hand even as food prices were rising on the other. The already stretched food markets were compromised to the extent that more than 2.3 billion people (or 30% of the global population) lacked year-round access to adequate food in 2020. Moreover, malnutrition intensified disproportionately with over 149 million children under five years of age

being stunted and more than 45 million being wasted. (FAO estimates)

### Other Side of the Calamity

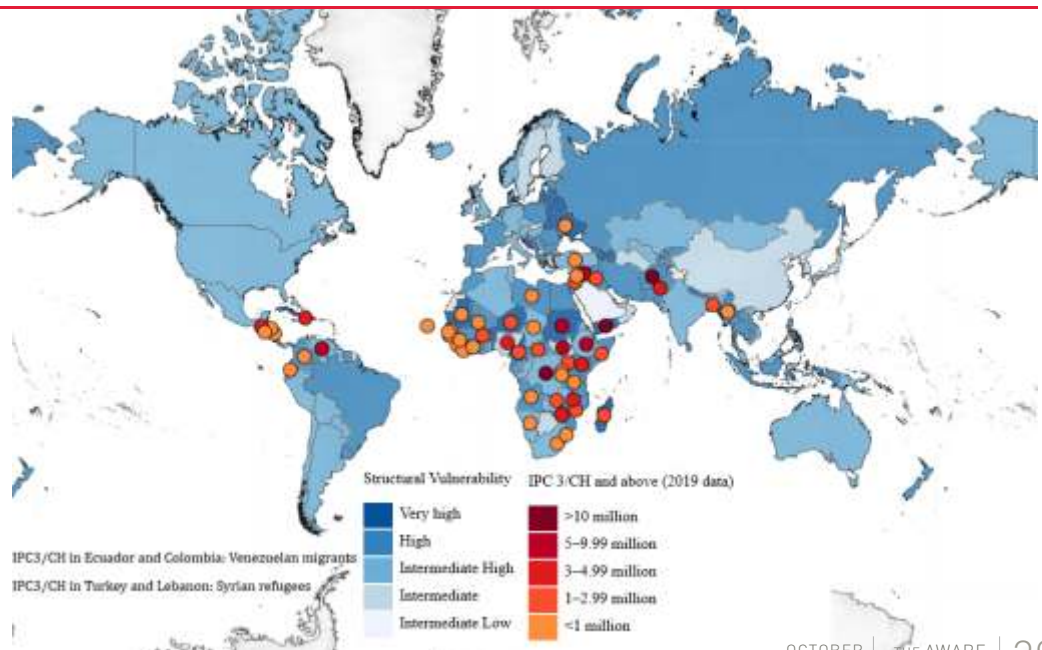
Food insecurity is skyrocketing; but it is not just insufficient supply that is to blame. The pandemic is also impacting the demand for food. People have lost their jobs and the most vulnerable segments bowed by already meagre incomes are forced to starve. Nutrition security is worsening as a growing number of people have no choice but to reduce the quantity and quality of the food they consume. At times, it is a trade-off between stepping out and braving the virus or staying at home and going hungry.

Even the agricultural supply chains has been hard pressed to keep up with the changes in the consumption patterns - first panic buying, then shifting away from processed food, and now the decreasing incomes.

The FAO report on The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2021 estimates that the SDG 2 (Zero Hunger by 2030) will be missed by a margin of nearly 660 million people with a mean part being linked to the lasting effects of the pandemic. The preceding 2020 report had pegged the number of undernourished people in 2030 at 840 million people, even without accounting for the impact of the pandemic.

A food emergency is defined as 'an extraordinary situation in which people are unable to meet their basic survival needs, or there are serious and immediate threats to human life and well-being'.

## Structural Vulnerability And Known Food Insecurity Hotspots





**We Have to Act Fast**

Hunger has become a critical issue in many countries. The situation is only going to get worse; a global food emergency is on the cards. Preserving access to safe and nutritious food is an essential part of the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Panic-driven reactions are a strict no-no; they will only end up deteriorating the already precarious food and nutrition security.

There is a limited amount of time and we have to act urgently with planned actions on a war footing to minimize the damage. An agile and collaborative response is necessary to protect our food systems and ensure nutritious food for all, both during and after the pandemic.

FAO's comprehensive and holistic *COVID-19 Response and Recovery Programme* is designed to proactively and sustainably strengthen the long-term resilience of food systems and livelihoods. Indeed, the world needs to work together – with multi-stakeholder collaboration at all levels – to address the global challenge.

Apart from this, nations should boost their social protection programmes with a determined focus on food and nutrition assistance to meet the immediate needs of their vulnerable populations. It is crucial to support healthy diets, and thus better health prospects, for the consumers. It is equally vital to support small farmers to increase food production; it is these food heroes - farmers and other workers throughout the food system - who ensured that food made its way from farm to fork amid the unparalleled disruptions.

Moreover, there is a lot we can learn from the vulnerabilities and inequalities that have been exposed by

the pandemic. The weaknesses of the global food system has come to the fore. We have to invest in developing a more inclusive, environmentally sustainable and resilient food system that can withstand the stress of future pandemics even as it offers better protection for all. India also needs to move fast to reconfigure the food systems to take care of the millions of livelihoods and lives depending on them.

In fact, the *State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2020* report clearly outlined that transforming food systems is essential for achieving food security, improving nutrition and putting healthy diets within reach of all. The 2021 edition goes a step further and outlines six 'transformation pathways' to counteract the hunger and malnutrition drivers. It calls for an 'enabling environment of governance mechanisms and institutions' and urges the policymakers of all countries to consult widely; to empower women and youth; and to expand the availability of data and new technologies.

Our ability to act, in our shared best interest and for greater collective impact, has never been more important.

- FAO Director-General, Qu Dongyu

**Conclusion**

The pandemic is a wake-up call to make concerted efforts to get back on track towards the goal of ending hunger and malnutrition in all its forms. Else, pandemic or not, the problems will only intensify in the coming years. ▶



## Food-For-All



**- The Public Distribution Way!**

*India has the largest population facing food shortages in the world*

India's Public Distribution System is perhaps the largest machinery of its type in the world, providing food security even as it hedges the poor against price rises in food commodities.

**THE INDIAN CONSTITUTION** does not have any explicit provision regarding right to food. In June 2021, the Supreme Court of India decreed that the fundamental Right to Life under Article 21 of the Constitution may be interpreted to include the right to live with human dignity, having right to food and other basic necessities.

Indeed, no human should every have to go hungry. Taking cognizance of this basic tenet of life, the Government of India has always focused on enhancing the food security of the impoverished sections of the population by ensuring availability of adequate food grains at affordable prices.

The Public Distribution System (PDS) is a strategic policy constituent for eradicating poverty and serves as a safety net for those who cannot afford to purchase food grains and essential commodities at market prices and also remain nutritionally at risk. It is designed to serve a two-fold purpose – providing price support for the surplus to farmers and facilitating supply of food grains - wheat, rice, sugar and kerosene oil - at subsidized prices to the poor on a recurring basis. Some states/UTs also provide additional items of mass consumption such as pulses, edible oils, iodized salt, spices, etc.

### Evolution

PDS has a long history in India during which it has undergone several reforms to improve both coverage and efficiency.

First established as a war-rationing measure before Independence, PDS was re-introduced by the government in the face of inflationary pressures in 1950. The critical food shortages of the 1960s transformed the PDS into a social safety system with a broadened outreach. The focus was on containing the rise in food grain prices while ensuring access of food to the people. Creation of Food Corporation of India (FCI) and Agricultural Prices Commission in 1965 to improve domestic procurement and storage of food grains consolidated the position of PDS.

From 1985 to 1990, the entire population was brought under the PDS and it became a permanent feature of the country's economy. The Revamped Public Distribution System (RPDS) was launched in 1992 to strengthen and streamline the PDS and also improve its reach to the far-flung, hilly, remote and inaccessible areas where a substantial section of the poor reside.

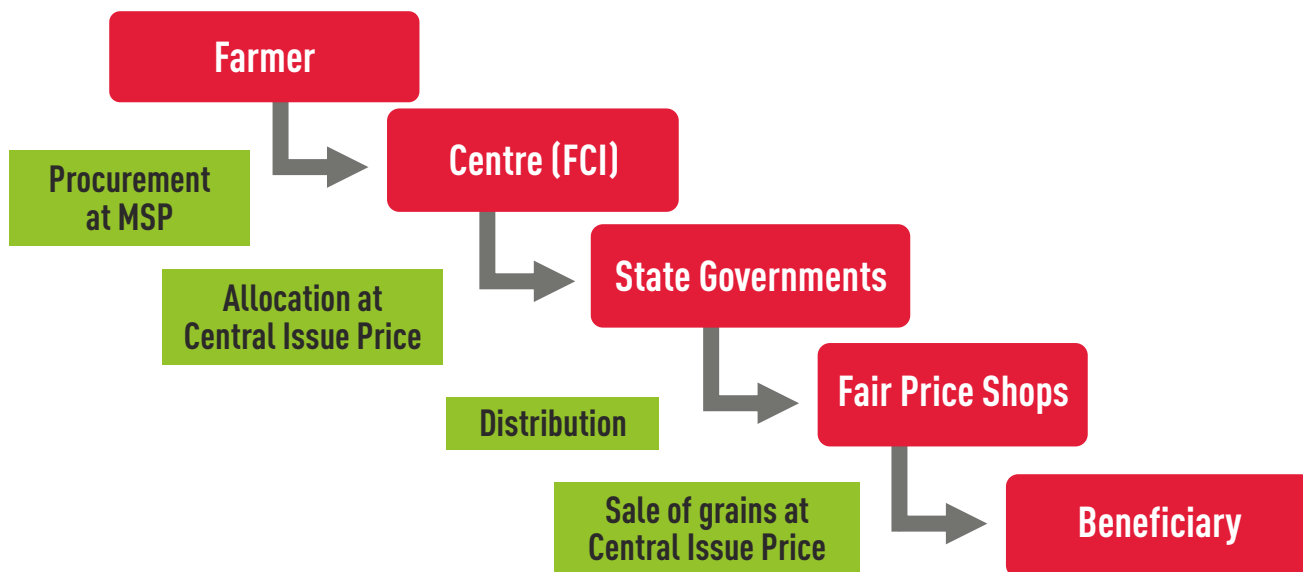
However, the PDS came under harsh criticism for failing to serve families below the poverty line (BPL), having an urban bias and uneven coverage, etc. Realizing this, the Government of India streamlined the PDS by introducing the Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS) in 1997 to benefit 6 crore poor families (20 kgs of food grains per family per month) with 72 lakh tonnes of food grains earmarked annually. The states were required to formulate and implement fool proof arrangements for identifying the poor and delivering the food grains in a transparent and accountable manner.

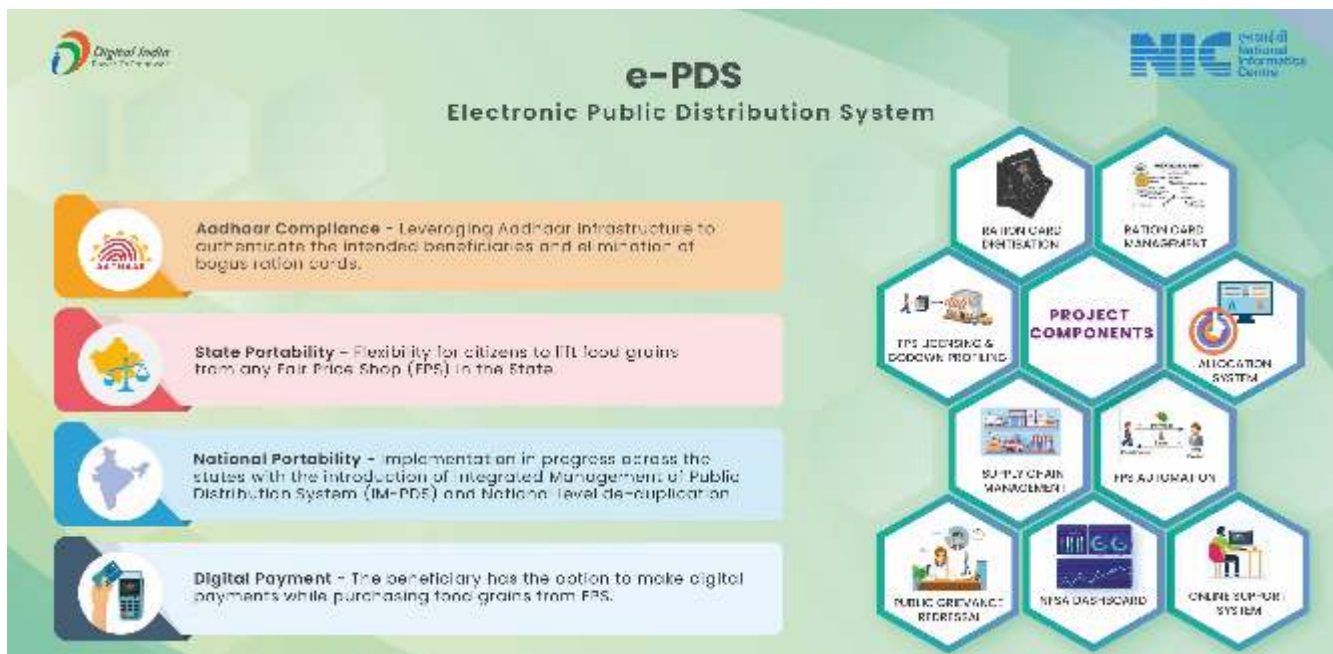
Special cards were issued to the BPL families for availing specifically subsidized prices while families above the poverty line were categorised as APL families. Better monitoring of the delivery system was also introduced. Fair price shops (colloquially dubbed as ration shops) were established for the distribution of food grains at subsidized rates across the country.

The year 2000 saw the launch of the Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) to make TPDS more focused and targeted towards one crore 'hungry' and poorest of the poor families from the earlier identified BPL population. They are categorized as Antyodaya (AAY) families and issued rice and wheat at Rs. 3/kg. and Rs. 2/kg respectively. By 2005, this was slowly expanded to cover 2.5 crore poorest households. Hence, there are three categories of families - APL, BPL and AAY - with different category-wise Central Issue Prices under TPDS.

Identifying the beneficiaries is a continuous process as it takes births, deaths and migration into account while trying to eliminate fake, duplicate and ineligible ration cards.

With the enactment of legal entitlement to food under the National Food Security Act, (NFSA) 2013, 75% of the rural





populace and 50% population of urban areas are deemed as eligible households for food security. There are two categories – AAY families and priority families (identified in accordance with such guidelines as the State Government concerned may specify).

The AAY households are entitled to 35kgs of food grains per family per month while priority households are entitled to 5kgs per person per month. The food grains were to be made available at subsidized prices of Rs. 3/kg for rice, Rs. 2/kg for wheat and Re.1/kg for coarse grains for an initial period of three years. Thereafter, prices were to be fixed by the Central Government from time to time, but not exceeding MSP. The government has been continuing the same subsidized prices till date.

With an annual budget of Rs 18.9 lakh crore, 58 million tonnes of wheat and rice are distributed at these highly subsidised prices to 814 million people across all states.

Adaptations to the TPDS were swiftly announced during the lockdown in 2020 following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and also in the recent debilitating second wave of the deadly infections in 2021.

### How Does it Work?

PDS is operated under the joint responsibility of the central and state governments. The Central Government, through FCI, procures, stores, transports and bulk allocates the food grains to the state governments. The states are responsible for identifying the eligible families, issuing ration cards and supervising the functioning of Fair Price Shops (FPS).

The FPS or ration shop is an integral part of the PDS. They sell wheat, rice and sugar at prices lower than the market price (called Issue Price). Other essential commodities may also be sold. A person must have a ration card to buy items from these shops – they will be

much cheaper but of average quality.

Ration shops are now present in most localities, villages, towns and cities. India has more than 5.5 lakh ration shops, constituting the largest distribution network in the world.

PDS rests on the pillar of building up a buffer stock of food grains. It is these stocks - procured under price support from the farmers - that the central government releases in prescribed quantities to each state for distribution under PDS. Grain banks have been established in food scarce areas and Panchayat Raj institutions have also been involved in the distribution system.

### Heady Laurels

PDS is ensuring food and nutritional security in the nation by making food available to the poor at affordable prices. The public gets easy access to food grains and essential commodities while the farmers are incentivized fair value of their produce by way of the Minimum Support Price mechanism. This contributes to increase in food grain production as well. It has also helped in stabilising food prices and maintaining buffer stocks to hold up during periods of less agricultural food production.

The greatest achievement is preventing famines in the country. The PDS helped the nation tide over droughts and other calamities with dignity and effectiveness.

### Problems Persist

Huge as it may seem on paper, all is not well with the TPDS. There is imperfect targeting with critical gaps in terms of inclusion and exclusion errors. Genuine beneficiaries are not getting food grains while ineligible ones enjoy undue benefits. Estimates by an expert group set up in 2009 pinpointed that PDS suffered from nearly 61% errors of exclusion and 25% inclusion of



## 9 Services of 'Mera Ration App'



beneficiaries. Gross corruption mars the process of extricating the extremely poor from the less needy folks.

The quality of food grains in ration shops is decidedly inferior and many years old at times. Some dealers resort to swapping the good stock received from FCI with substandard food grains and sell the good quality supplies in the open market.

Then again, the stock assigned to a family cannot be bought in instalments. But the poor mostly do not have enough cash on hand to buy 35kgs of food grains at a time! Some even sell their ration cards to others.

There is large scale leakage of food grains during transportation. Widespread pilferage is common in the form of illegal diversions, black marketing and other malpractice by the FPSs.

The delivery machinery is further crippled by poor co-ordination and lack of transparency coupled with weak monitoring and inadequate administrative accountability.

### Suggestions for Improvement

- Items other than rice and wheat should be excluded as the benefits meant for the poor are cornered by others. Sugar at subsidised rates attracts well-to-do families while kerosene oil encourages illicit diversion for adulteration with diesel.
- Distributing bio-fortified foods – as experimented in Gujarat – can enhance the nutritional level of the public.
- The coverage of food subsidy should be restricted to the population below poverty line. Households with adequate purchasing power only need assured availability of food grains at stable prices in the market.
- Capacity building and training of the implementing authorities can fortify the TPDS system.
- Targeting and accessibility built at the community levels through the participation of civil society groups and tracking can increase coverage across the country.
- Aadhar card linkage can bring in better identification of beneficiaries. According to a study by the Unique Identification Authority of India, using Aadhaar with TPDS can eliminate duplicate and ghost (fake)

beneficiaries and make identification of beneficiaries more accurate.

- Manual processes related to PDS operations - especially FPS sales – contribute to a majority of the pilfering and diversions. Ensuring fair last mile delivery is possible through computerized automation and use of electronic devices with biometric authentication of the beneficiaries. Some states are already leveraging technology to improve efficiency.
- Seasonal migrant workers and those living in unauthorized colonies have been missing out on the food security benefits for decades. Deploying 'One Nation, One Card' has the potential to benefit 60 to 80 million migrant labourers.
- Shifting towards Direct Benefit Transfer – as envisaged under the NFSA - can effectively plug leakages and facilitate better targeting even as it provides greater autonomy to beneficiaries to choose their consumption basket and enhances their dietary diversity.

The World Food Programme is working with the government to reform and strengthen the TPDS by improving the efficiency, accountability and transparency so that food reaches those who need it most!

### Conclusion

The 'Mera Ration' mobile app launched in March 2021 is a masterstroke for ration card holders who move to new areas for livelihoods. It is designed to facilitate the 'One Nation-One Ration Card' system as beneficiaries can use it to register their migration details; identify the nearest fair price shop based on their new location; check their food grain entitlement, recent transactions, status of Aadhaar seeding, etc. Currently available in English and Hindi, it will be upgraded to 14 languages.

More such technology-based solutions can pave the way for better implementation of progressive and pro-poor initiatives. And PDS – the biggest welfare programme of the government - will continue to remain the cornerstone of the country's food and nutrition security! ▶



**Payal Agarwal**  
Editorial Consultant

# The Social Security Safety Net of Cooked Meals for School Children

“The Mid-Day Meal Scheme addresses two of the pressing problems of majority of children in India - hunger and education - by providing cooked lunches to the underprivileged school-going children and thus, encouraging them to attend school more regularly. But will the pandemic sound the death-knell for child nutrition?”



*India's Mid-Day Meal Scheme is the world's largest school meal programme, covering nearly 12 crore children.*

**NUTRITION INSECURITY AMONG** children is a harsh fact of the Indian populace. There is an inordinately high prevalence of malnutrition which leaves the children stunted, wasted and underweight. Addressing nutritional deficiencies during this age is crucial for ensuring proper growth and development of the children.

It is noted that in most of the impoverished families, the kitchen fires are lit only in the evenings when the parent(s) bring home the daily wages. As a result, the children do not get food in the day and go to school with an empty stomach!

To address this fervent issue of child hunger, the Government of India hit on the weapon of government schools that educate around 60% of the country's children (most of them being below the poverty line) and launched the ambitious 'National Program of Nutritional Support to Primary Education' (NP-NSPE) as a centrally sponsored scheme on 15th August 1995. It was designed to provide nutritiously cooked afternoon meals on every working day to every child enrolled in class 1 through 5 of government, government-aided and local body run schools. This move was expected to indirectly improve the number of students enrolling and attending school as well.

### The Making of MDMS

The Mid-Day Meal Scheme can actually be traced back to 1925 when this novel measure was first introduced for disadvantaged children in the Madras Municipal Corporation. Tamil Nadu was again the first state of free India to launch a mid-day meal programme in primary schools in 1962 and by 1990, twelve states were offering the scheme to all or most of the students.

Initially implemented in 2,408 blocks of the country for children aged 6 to 12, by 1997-98, the NP-NSPE had been introduced in all districts of the country. Yet, it was marked by various lacunae in implementation. In 2001, the Supreme Court – following a PIL which was dubbed the 'Right to Food' case - decreed, 'We direct the state governments/union territories to implement the Mid-Day Meal Scheme by providing every child in every

government and government-assisted primary school with a prepared midday meal'.

In 2002, the scheme was extended to provide wholesome freshly-cooked lunch to children studying in Education Guarantee Scheme and Alternate Innovative Education centres including Madrasas and Maqtabas across the country. In 2007, upper primary students of class 6 to 8 were brought under the umbrella and the scheme was renamed as National Programme of Mid Day Meals in Schools.

The food norms and cooking costs were further revised on various occasions and now the Mid Day Meal Scheme (MDMS) is considered a legal entitlement under the National Food Security Act, 2013.

The nutritional guidelines for ensuring a nutritious and balanced diet are:

Entitlement norm per child per day under MDMS		
Item	Primary (Class I-V)	Upper Primary (Class VI-VIII)
Calories	450	700
Protein (in grams)	12	20
Rice/Wheat (in grams)	100	150
Dal (in grams)	20	30
Vegetables (in grams)	50	75
Oil and fat (in grams)	5	7.5
Salt & condiments	As per need	As per need

Furthermore, the students are entitled to receive micronutrients (vitamin A, iron, and folate) tablets and de-worming medicines in the amount provided for in the school health programme of the National Rural Health Mission. Some states even provide additional nutrition from their own resources. The nutritional support is supposed to be continued even during summer vacations in drought-affected areas.

The central and state governments share the MDMS costs, with the centre footing 60% and the states 40%. It is implemented as:

- Decentralised model - meals are cooked on-site by local cooks/helpers or self-help groups
- Centralised model - external organisations cook and deliver the meals to the schools (mostly through public-private partnerships).

Some states even provide 'dry rations' - uncooked 3kgs of wheat/rice to students with 80% attendance.

The government offers ample support to the NGOs to encourage them to provide midday meals. NGOs like Nalabothu Foundation, Akshaya Patra Foundation, Ekta Shakti Foundation and Naandi Foundation participate on a regular basis. International assistance has also been forthcoming.

### Primary Features

- The mid-day meals are served on the school premises on all working days of the school.
- Quality items with AGMARK are procured for cooking the mid-day meals in the schools.
- Two or three adult members taste the cooked meals from the school management committee.
- The Food and Drugs Administration Department of the state can collect samples for ensuring the quality and nutritional value of the meals.
- The State Steering-cum-Monitoring Committee (SSMC) oversees the implementation, including establishing a mechanism to maintain the quality and nutritional standards of the meals.
- Food allowance is provided to the children when the cooked meals cannot be provided because of unforeseen circumstances, including the entitled quantity of food grains and the prevailing cooking costs.

### Benefits

- With school children (6-14 years) forming about 20% of the total population and the government providing free and compulsory education, the MDMS has successfully improved the nutritional status of school-age children.
- The hope that their young ones will at least get one plate full meal every day encourages parents to

send children to school. More children from disadvantaged sections (especially girls, Dalits and Adivasis) have enrolled in the schools while student absenteeism and dropouts has reduced manifold. In fact, this has become one of the most important interventions by the government to promote education.

- Children with a full stomach are able to pay more attention to their studies and participate fully in the class activities leading to improvement in student performance.
- Mothers, especially working ones, benefit with an easing of pressure of feeding their children during the day.

In 2019 itself, daily meals were provided to 9.17 crore children in 11.35 lakh schools. The government has budgeted Rs.160 crore for 2.54 million tonnes of rice and wheat every year for the meals.

The 'School Feeding and Learning Achievement: Evidence from India's Midday Meal Program' study published by the Journal of Development Economics in 2019 correlated the number of months children had school meals with their performances in standardised reading and mathematics tests. The test scores of around 12.3 lakh primary school children revealed that the average reading score was 18% higher for children who ate school lunches for 3 to 4 years than those who had them for less than a year. Children with access to the programme scored 9% higher in mathematics. Furthermore, average test scores for children with 52 months of exposure (the maximum in the sample) were almost 3 times higher than children with only 4 months of exposure.

Despite the success of the mid-day meal scheme, child hunger continues to persist across the country. The program is marred by irregularity, inefficiency, corruption, hygiene and even caste discrimination. Quality of food is often not up to the mark, with recurring instances of children falling sick after eating in school.

According to the Comprehensive National Nutrition Survey (CNNS) 2016-18, 22% and 35% of school-going age children continue to be stunted and underweight respectively.



*Depriving generations of children the potential to contribute in the future*

## Children's Health Falls Victim to the Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has taken the wind out of the sails of the school feeding programme and is threatening to reverse years of progress to tackle malnutrition among children. The closure of schools from just prior to the nationwide lockdown disrupted not only the children's education but also their access to basic nutrition. With schools continuing to remain mostly shut since the past 1.5 years, the nutritional gap is rising which mars the cognitive development of the children.

The United Nations policy report on the 'Impact of COVID-19 on Children' states that the rising malnutrition will affect around 370 million children across 143 countries who solely rely on meals in schools for their daily nutrition. The UNICEF's 'COVID-19: Missing More Than a Classroom' study highlights that the pandemic has led to a 30% reduction in nutritional coverage which used to be achieved through school meal programmes.

In April 2020 itself, the Ministry of Human Resource Development issued a request that all states and union territories should continue providing mid-day meals or food security allowance of food grains and its cooking cost (even during summer vacation period) to fulfil nutritional requirements of eligible children under the scheme and to safeguard their immunity. The total central allocation

for MDMS was increased to Rs.11,500 crore in 2021-22.

Many states are distributing food rations or cash in lieu of the MDMS during the pandemic. However, actual delivery has been lax with variances in coverage, continuity and quality of implementation, leaving large numbers deprived. There has also been a sharp decline in the offtake of food grains under MDMS in April and May 2020 compared to the same months in 2019.

The recent Save the Children Foundation (SCF) survey of 7,235 families across 15 states concluded that 40% of children were not provided meals during the lockdown. Even The U.N.'s World Food Programme country director, Bishow Parajuli urged the government to restart MDMS saying, "The involvement of state agencies, civil society organisations and multilateral agencies to avert hunger ensured collaboration, including the creation of a standard operating procedure for procuring, preparing and serving mid-day meals".

## Conclusion

The primary school age of children is marked by a dynamic period of physical growth and mental development. Proper nutrition is mandatory during this period as it will determine their lifelong health and productivity. Can we allow the pandemic to put generations of children under health risk? ▶



Without nutritious food  
there is no health!

# The Spectre of Unwholesome and Unsafe Food

The food that people eat should meet their nutritive requirements and be safe as well. This will ensure proper growth and development along with a long and healthy life. Indeed, safe and nutritious food is the key to a healthy future!



**NOTHING CAN BE** worse than hunger! When people don't know how they will get their next meal, their entire focus is on finding food in some way or the other. The really starving and famished folks even resort to foraging food from the dustbins on the roads. Finding even a few morsels can get the edge off their hunger, for a few hours at least.

However, the problem is not limited to food insecurity; it is crucial that the food should be nutritionally adequate and safe as well. It can be argued that when people are constantly short of food, they will not stop to consider whether the food they manage to get is nutritive or even safe. All they want to do is fill their growling stomachs!

### A Different Kind of Hunger

When starving people do get food, it is mostly cheap and filling, but lacking in nutrients. Over time, this creates subclinical deficiencies in the body, which is known as 'hidden hunger'.

The 2014 Global Hunger Index focused on Hidden Hunger and stated that, "Everyone has the right to adequate food in a quantity and quality sufficient to satisfy their dietary needs. One of the key challenges going forward is to shine a light on food quality, to address hidden hunger."

Constantly imbibing low-quality, unwholesome or even inadequate food is a cause for serious concern. The costs of undernutrition are quite heavy, especially among children – they can range from disruptions in growth, diminished learning capacity, poor school performance

and vulnerability to diseases to productivity in adult life. The impact continues for generations as malnourished women tend to give birth to low birth-weight infants. What's more, at times, chronic undernourishment can even lead to death.

Nearly 47 million or 4 out of 10 children in India are suffering from chronic undernutrition. The WHO estimates that around 45% of deaths among children under 5 years of age are also linked to undernutrition.

The UN report on *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2020* highlights that as much as 99.1% of the Indian population can currently afford a basic energy sufficient diet that just meets their calorie needs, but only 22.1% can afford a healthy diet that meets the 'recommended intake of more diversified and desirable food groups'. It estimated that around 60.9% Indians can afford the middle ground of nutrient adequate diet.

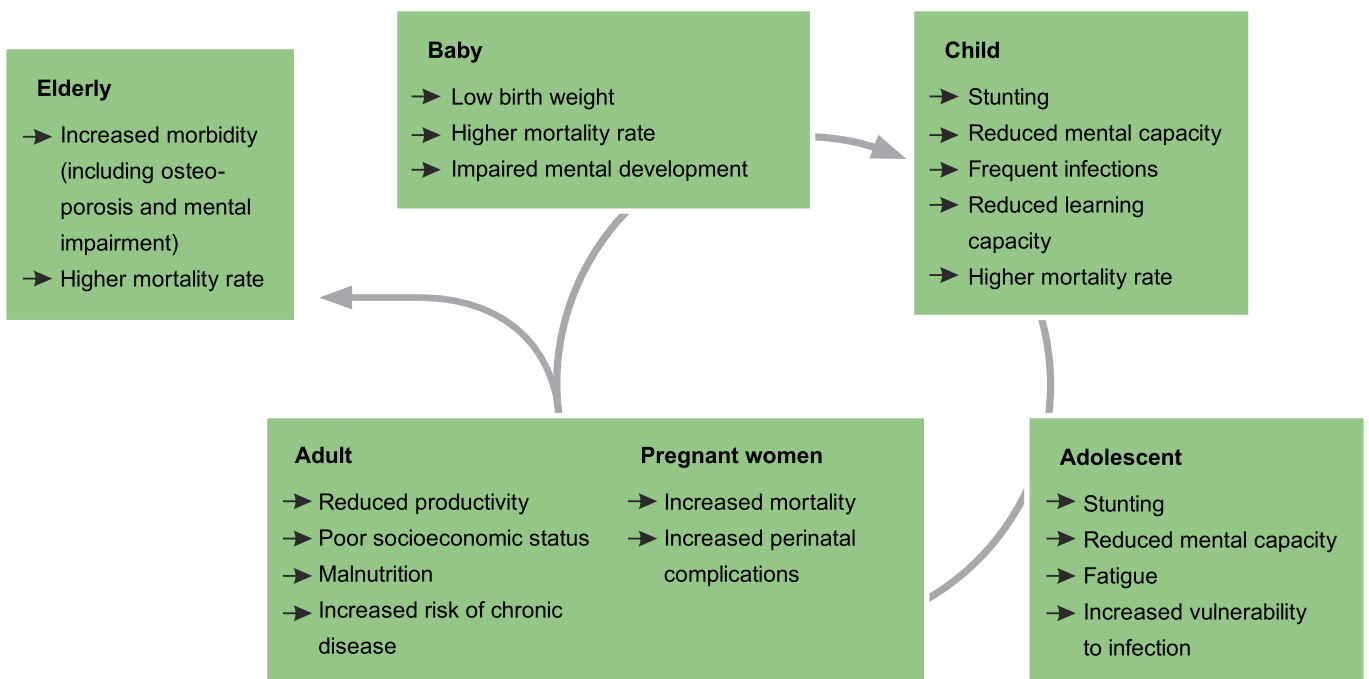
### Effects of Undernutrition

Undernutrition manifests in four forms:

**Wasting** – This is defined by a low weight-to-height ratio. When a person does not have enough food to eat or has an infectious disease, it can lead to severe weight loss, thus causing wasting. A moderately or severely wasted child has increased risk of mortality, but treatment is possible.

**Stunting** – This is defined by a low height-to-age ratio due to chronic or recurrent lack of nutritious food. It is usually associated with poor socio-economic conditions,

## CONSEQUENCES OF MICRONUTRIENT DEFICIENCIES THROUGHOUT THE LIFE CYCLE



Source: Adapted from ACC/SCN (2000).

2 ZERO HUNGER

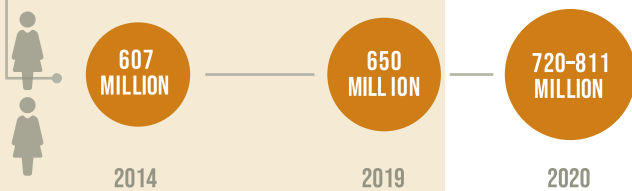


## END HUNGER, ACHIEVE FOOD SECURITY AND IMPROVED NUTRITION AND PROMOTE SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE

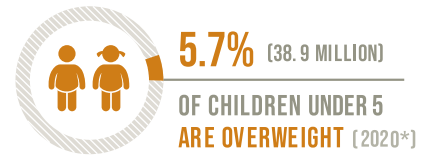
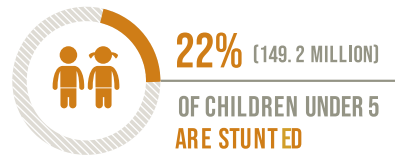
# THE GLOBAL PANDEMIC IS EXACERBATING WORLD HUNGER

WORLDWIDE, AN ADDITIONAL **70-161 MILLION PEOPLE** ARE LIKELY TO HAVE EXPERIENCED HUNGER AS A RESULT OF THE PANDEMIC IN 2020

NUMBER OF UNDERNOURISHED PEOPLE IN THE WORLD



## PANDEMIC WILL WORSEN CHILD MALNUTRITION



\*THESE 2020 ESTIMATES DO NOT REFLECT IMPACT OF PANDEMIC

ALMOST **ONE THIRD OF WOMEN** OF REPRODUCTIVE AGE GLOBALLY SUFFER FROM ANAEMIA, IN PART **DUE TO NUTRITION DEFICIENCIES**



**2.37 BILLION PEOPLE ARE WITHOUT FOOD OR UNABLE TO EAT A HEALTHY BALANCED DIET ON A REGULAR BASIS (2020)**

poor maternal health and nutrition, frequent illness, and/or inappropriate infant and young child feeding and care in early life. A stunted child will fail to reach his or her physical and cognitive potential.

**Underweight** – This is defined by a low weight-to-age ratio. Attributed to malnourishment, underweight children may be stunted, wasted or both.

**Micronutrient Deficiencies** - When the food lacks sufficient vitamins and minerals, it leaves the body undernourished and will impede proper growth and development. Inadequacy of micronutrients can have serious consequences – low folic acid and calcium can make the body prone to certain diseases, less zinc can interfere with growth and lack of iodine, iron and Vitamin A pose a significant threat to health, particularly for children and pregnant women. Research indicates that iron deficiency is impairing the learning ability of more than half of India's schoolchildren.

The Global Nutrition Report 2020 indicates that 37.9% of children under 5 years in India are stunted and 20.8% are wasted. Additionally, the 2020 Global Hunger Index reported an undernourishment rate of 14% in India.

Between 2006 and 2016, stunting in children below five years declined from 48% to 38%. However, this is not enough. Micronutrient deficiencies should be tackled from the core with effective strategies like fortification of foods, biofortification of crops, diet diversification and supplementation with syrups or pills.

## What Makes Food Nutritious?

It follows that people should not only get food to eat, but it should be nutritious as well. This means that the food should contain adequate amounts of proteins, carbohydrates and fats along with the essential vitamins and minerals that will nourish the body.

This is not just for the poor and food insecure people alone. Everyone needs to pay attention to the nutritive value of the food they eat as a nutritious diet keeps the body strong, energetic and in the pink of health.

Eating a wide range of foods that include a variety of nutrients is the easiest way to have a balanced diet. Therefore, people need to eat more of whole grains, fruits and vegetables while steering clear of foods that are high in fats, free sugars and sodium. Dairy, legumes, nuts, seeds, fish and lean meats should also be included in the diet whenever possible.

High costs of nutritious foods are considered the biggest challenge for establishing high diet quality, both for impoverished and low-income households. The UN report estimates that the cost of a healthy diet is 60% higher than the cost of the nutrient adequate diet, and almost 5 times the cost of the energy sufficient diet.

The better-off population is defined by a modern penchant for junk food, packaged items and other unhealthy options. These not only have zero nutrients, but are also loaded with calories, trans fats, salt, sugar and other unhealthy elements. They also tend to avoid



*A nutritious diet throughout life promotes normal growth and development and supports overall health and well-being. It reduces the risk of chronic diseases as well.*

preparing home-cooked and nutritious food as it takes too much time and effort.

## The United Nations Decade of Action on Nutrition

The UN General Assembly declared 2016-2025 as the United Nations Decade of Action on Nutrition. This opens an unprecedented opportunity for addressing all forms of malnutrition while meeting the global nutrition targets and diet-related NCD targets. It calls for policy action across six key areas:

- Creating sustainable, resilient food systems for healthy diets
- Providing social protection and nutrition-related education for all
- Aligning health systems to nutrition needs, and providing universal coverage of essential nutrition interventions
- Ensuring that trade and investment policies improve nutrition
- Building safe and supportive environments for nutrition at all ages
- Strengthening and promoting nutrition governance and accountability, everywhere

Furthermore, Bishow Parajuli, India Country Director of UN World Food Programme has suggested five urgent actions to protect children's right to nutrition in the COVID-19 pandemic:

- Safeguarding and promoting access to nutritious, safe and affordable diets
- Investing in improving maternal and child nutrition through pregnancy, infancy and early childhood
- Reactivating and scaling-up services for the early detection and treatment of child wasting
- Maintaining the provision of nutritious and safe school meals for vulnerable children
- Expanding social protection to safeguard access to nutritious diets and essential services

## How Safe Is The Food We Eat?

Unsafe food is another global threat that is endangering health and lives.

Food passes through various hands before it reaches the consumer – it can get contaminated at any stage, from production, transportation, processing, storage and sale to even cooking. Any kind of improper handling can introduce foreign objects, harmful toxins and bacteria, viruses or parasites.

This kind of adulterated food impinges on the public's health. Consuming unsafe food is risky on many levels – from falling sick to contracting serious diseases. In fact, researchers have identified more than 250 food-borne diseases and it can even lead to death.

The United Nations established the Codex Alimentarius - a collection of internationally recognized standards, codes of practice, guidelines and other recommendations relating to foods, food production and food safety – and calls on all member nations to formulate their own laws accordingly.

The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) is an independent statutory body with a clear mandate to ensure safe, wholesome and hygienic food for the consumers. Over the years, this apex food regulator has instituted some very novel and successful programs to strengthen the food safety infrastructure and ensure that all foods are safe for human consumption.

The 'Eat Right India' movement incorporates all the key players in the food ecosystem through different programs to create an environment of right food practices and habits. It is also reaching out to the huge unorganized food sector of street food vendors, dhabas and other eateries with schemes such as 'Clean Street Food Hub', 'Clean and Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Markets' and 'Eat Right Station'. The food handlers are trained on maintaining hygiene and cleanliness, pest control, garbage disposal, etc. followed by regular third-party audits. Many popular street food clusters in different parts of the country have been awarded the clean and safe hub tag so that consumers can enjoy the street foods here without the fear of falling sick!

The 'Hygiene Rating Scheme' has been introduced for individual outlets such as restaurants, sweet shops and catering establishments. It evaluates the food businesses based on standards of hygiene and sanitation and rates them on a scale of 1 to 5, where 5 indicates Excellent Compliance and 1 indicates Poor Compliance of food hygiene and safety standards. The ratings are displayed in form of symbols i.e. smileys. This empowers consumers to make informed food choices.

To make school and office campuses safe for people to eat, the 'Eat Right School' and 'Eat Right Campus' initiatives certify the establishments based on predefined benchmarks of safe, healthy and sustainable diets.

Laboratory testing is another integral part of the food safety ecosystem. The FSSAI ensures credible food testing through a robust network of primary food testing laboratories, referral food laboratories, national reference food laboratories and ancillary national reference food laboratories. They follow scientific methods of sampling and analysis as prescribed by the regulator.

To supplement the food testing labs, the FSSAI launched the 'Food Safety on Wheels' initiative where mobile vans conduct simple tests on-the-go for common adulterants in milk, water, edible oil and other food items of daily consumption. They also conduct training and awareness activities about food safety, hygiene and healthy eating habits.

The FSSAI even instituted a Food Safety Index which measures and ranks the relative performance of all the states and union territories on various parameters on an annual basis.

These measures are going a long way in preventing, detecting and managing food-borne diseases.

## Conclusion

In sum, food is a basic human need - everyone should have a right to food and the food should be nutritious and safe on all counts! ▶



**Dr. Alka Mukne**  
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Board Member-PSAIF

Food systems touch every aspect of human existence. Failing food systems pose a grave threat to our health, economy, human rights, peace and security.

# Transforming Food Systems That Are Failing Our Planet

Food systems are driving climate change and the unfolding environmental crisis. There is an urgent need to rethink how we produce, process, transport, market, consume and dispose our food. Our collective choices as producers and consumers will impact what our tomorrow will look like!

**FOOD IS EVERYTHING!** Everything depends on food – from individual well-being to that of the community, the economy and the planet. Our food systems form the foundation of our health. But what if the food system itself is damaged or is threatening our future?

## Decoding the Food System

The agri-food system is the world behind our food. It includes the constellation of activities related to how food is grown, harvested, processed, packaged, transported, distributed, traded and marketed before it reaches our hands. We think this does not involve the end consumer and delude ourselves that we are not actually a part of the food system!

However, fact of the matter is that the production to distribution cycle only forms the food supply chain. Food system is a broader term that encompasses the entire farm to fork process, covering even how food is bought, prepared and disposed. It also incorporates non-food products (like forestry, animal rearing, use of feedstock, biomass to produce biofuels, and fibres) along with all the people, activities, investments and choices that come together to get us the food and agricultural products.

The world's agri-food systems currently employ 1 billion people, more than any other sector.

Therefore, every time we eat something, we automatically become a part of the food system. In fact, our choice of which food we purchase, how we cook it, store it and dispose it forms a central element of the agri-food system. What's more, these

choices also influence other parts of the food system.

The health of our food systems impinges not only on our physical health, but also the environment and the economy.

## An Urgent Global Call

Unfortunately, the natural resources, the environment and the climate are paying a heavy toll for the way we currently produce, market and consume food. It is destroying natural habitats and contributing to species extinction. The inefficiencies are costing trillions of dollars in lost resources.

The current food system is part of a war on nature!

– United Nations Organization

Intensified agriculture – attributed to the global consumption of resource-intensive foods – coupled with the conversion of natural landscapes for crop production is degrading soils, destroying forests and diminishing biodiversity. Many parts of the world are suffering from lower crop yields and livestock productivity; decline in fisheries, aquaculture and agroforestry production; and changes in the nutrient composition of major staples, with reductions in proteins, minerals and vitamins.

The constant growth in population and wealth status is changing our consumption patterns. To add to this, vast quantities of food are lost every day – it is not just about food that is spoiled during production or transport; waste also includes food that is thrown into the waste bins in households, retail stores and restaurants. Squandering food in such a negligent manner ends up wasting the precious resources used to produce it.

14% of the world's food is lost due to inadequate harvesting, handling, storage and transit and 17% is wasted at consumer level. (FAO)

The world's food systems are currently responsible for more than 33% of global anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions. A major part of this can be attributed to food that is not consumed and ends up decomposing in the landfills.

The world's food systems are fragile and vulnerable to collapse; and the severe consequences have heightened due to the ongoing COVID-19 crisis. It is threatening food production in some of the world's poorest areas. Riding on such broken food systems, how will the Earth support 10 billion people by 2050?

In fact, the dysfunctional food systems of today are compounding profound inequalities and injustices. At least 2 billion people don't have regular access to sufficient amounts of safe, nutritious food; 3 billion cannot afford healthy diets. And yet, obesity continues to increase worldwide.

The pandemic is raising the alarm on the urgent need to transform our food systems. It has become even harder for farmers - already grappling with climate variability - to sell their harvests. Rising poverty is pushing more and more consumers into poverty, unable to afford even two square meals a day.

The writing on the wall couldn't be bleaker - This Has To Change!

## Getting Back to Nourishing the World

Today we are standing at a turning point – rebalancing and transforming our food systems is crucial for them to provide nutritious and affordable

## The Humungous Price of Food

- Around 1 million species are facing extinction. (IPBES, 2019)
- A third of fish stocks are overfished. (FAO, 2019)
- Soil carbon decreases by 42% when forest land is converted to crops; soil carbon decreases by 59% when pasture is converted to crops. (FAO, 2015)
- 2,000 to 5,000 litres of water is needed to produce a person's daily food. (FAO, 2012)

food for all and become more efficient, resilient, inclusive and sustainable. An efficient food system will provide decent livelihoods for the people who work within them and yield decent profits. An inclusive one will encourage the full participation of indigenous folks, women and youth. Resilience in the food system will deliver broad-based benefits for society. Being sustainable will not only protect the natural resource environment but also help it to thrive.

This calls for decisive action to ensure that:

- A variety of sufficient, nutritious and safe food is available at an affordable price to everyone; nobody is hungry or suffers from any form of malnutrition.
- The shelves are stocked at the local market or food store, but less food is wasted.
- The food supply chain is more resilient to shocks such as extreme weather, price spikes or pandemics, while limiting environmental degradation or climate change.

Therefore, a sustainable food system will ensure that everyone has sufficient safe food to eat; the food supply chain is viable, buoyant and all-encompassing; and there are decent conditions and social protection for those who work in it. In other words, it will spell food security and nutrition for all, that too, for generations to come!

FAO is working with countries and other partners to make our agri-food systems more efficient, inclusive, resilient and sustainable.

## Shaping Food Systems Fit for the Future

This is the opening year of the United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration (2021-2030). It is throwing a challenge to the world to massively scale up restoration efforts that will breathe new life into the degraded and imperilled ecosystems, thus opening a chance for a healthier future.



*A sustainable agri-food system calls for transforming the way the world produces and consumes food. The future of food is in our hands!*

*"We need to think about a system that can work, feed everyone, save the environment and diversity. That's what's at stake in these talks"*

- Agnes Kalibata, UN Secretary General's Special Envoy at the Food Systems Pre-Summit

Collective action is needed for this shift to happen - everyone must play their part. Governments should change policies, private sector should change business models, all of us should change our mindsets and behaviour.

**Government** – Policies, investment and governance should foster the sustainable production of affordable nutritious foods and promote farmer participation. Policies should promote equality and learning, drive innovation, boost rural incomes, offer safety nets to smallholders and build climate resilience.

**Private Sector** – Be socially responsible and support public health goals by following national food legislations, priorities and guidelines as well as transforming their operations and approaches.

**Farmers** - Innovative technologies and training, finance, incentives and social protection can help farmers to provide sustainable healthy diets locally and globally.

**Academia** - Generate evidence-based knowledge to demonstrate climate change strategies for sustainable food systems, and share this with governments.

**Consumers** - It is food consumption that will be the most effective

transformation - Therefore, we need to break our consumption patterns by opting for nutritious and environmentally/socially responsible products. This calls for purchasing locally grown and seasonal foods, refusing to buy foods with excessive packaging, and educating ourselves about the environmental and social impact of the foods we eat. Simultaneously, we should also be more sustainable in our daily actions by reducing food loss and waste.

Such changes in consumer behaviour and collective demand will bring about a drastic change in what is available in the markets and ultimately what is grown by the farmers. It will also pressurise the governments to design green and sustainable policies, promote better production and motivate greater investment in sustainable healthy diets.

## Conclusion

The way we produce, consume and dispose food is exacting a heavy toll on our planet. There is an urgent need to transform the food systems to pave the way for better production, better nutrition, a better environment and a better life..... leaving no one behind!

This will empower us to change course and make progress towards all 17 Sustainable Development Goals. Rebuilding the food systems of the world will also enable us to answer the UN Secretary General's call to 'build back better' from COVID-19. ▶

## Improving India's Food Security After the Pandemic Passes



**Bishow Parajuli**, India Country Director of UN World Food Programme is repeatedly stressing that there is a direct link between malnutrition and diseases like COVID-19. This is because lack of proper nutrition lowers the immune response and makes people more susceptible to infections.

Following is an excerpt of his studied views on how India can tide the food security crisis that will emerge after the pandemic is finally over.





**IT WAS NOT** a surprise that the sudden lockdown has resulted in massive challenges and difficulties in many areas. But the swift measures and efforts to ensure that everything is run well has been the hallmark of the Government of India's responses to the daunting requirement of COVID-19. This is so that all aspects of the essential services are run well, and no important component is left out for a prompt government response.

The steps in establishing a high-powered empowered group at the centre and in the states and subsequent engagement of the highest leadership at different levels and among partners including civil society, UN organisations and private sectors have been a few commendable steps towards good coordination and resolving challenges and bottlenecks.

Also, the clarity with which various timely measures are being taken to respond to the crisis, helped



implement the response packages and readjust policy based on new realities. This is laudable in a situation where the full extent of impact of such steps is continuing to evolve. Some challenges remain at state level given the differing turnaround time for action in each state and there was an enormous challenge of migrant labourers being stranded on the roads, facing a lot of discomfort regarding lack of food and other support.

### **Towards a post-COVID-19 India**

The Comprehensive National Nutrition Survey suggested that a third of Indian children are stunted and underweight. The challenges of COVID crisis are likely to deteriorate this situation. The International Labour

Organisation has estimated that around 400 million Indians in informal sectors are likely to be pushed in deep poverty due to COVID. India's vulnerability to climate change and increasing frequency of extreme events all together pose a serious challenge to the food and nutrition security scenario in the country. It is highly unlikely that the situation will revert to the 'old' normal soon. I'm concluding this with five key thoughts:

**Expansion of coverage of social safety nets** – First, given the Centre is spending a vast amount of resources, there is a need to work towards ensuring that the large number of vulnerable people who are currently out of food based social safety nets are all included into the food system across all states. Given huge rise in number of labour force, there could also be provision made to introduce food for assets scheme promoting afforestation or community infrastructure programme. This 'One Nation, One Card' across the country is a great move in this direction and no hurdle should allow it to stop its universalisation soon.

**Diversification of the food basket of social safety-nets and feeding behaviours** – Second, in view of limited access to nutritious food, there is a need to expand the food basket to ensure that all key nutrient requirements are fulfilled. Strategies such as nutri-garden/kitchen gardens, micronutrient supplementation and fortification along with direct cash distribution should promote better nutritional outcomes.

**A surveillance system for food and nutrition security and engagement with NGOs** – Third, with movement of migrant labourers, loss of wages and livelihood at various locations, there is a potential emergence of new hotspots with respect to food and nutrition security. Continued engagement by NGOs can help fill blind spots and complement government efforts.

**Integration of tracking systems of the three food-based safety nets under NFSA** – Fourth, it will be opportune to collectively look at all three food-based interventions and integrate their data on beneficiaries to promote complementarity and further enhancement of their effectiveness and their impact.

**Supporting agriculture and allied sectors** – Finally, it is crucial to closely watch emerging concerns in the availability of farm inputs such as labour, agricultural inputs, machinery and finance, so that the farming system continues to run uninterrupted and long-term food security is continued to be ensured.

Food security in India's post-COVID-19 phase will influence the country's growth in more ways than one. So strengthening the same today with timely and strategic initiatives will define how India fares tomorrow, and will need continued attention. ▶

*You can read the full article here - <https://thewire.in/agriculture/how-india-can-improve-its-food-security-after-the-pandemic-passes>*



**Komal Kedia**  
Marketing Associate

## Activating a Food Movement of Ambitious Change for Future Survival

“An ecological crisis is fast emerging in the country. If left unchecked, it will cause irreversible damage to our natural resources as well as lead to productivity losses. It is not just about sustainable food production alone; sustainable food consumption is imperative for correcting the course of the future!”



*Increasing agricultural production will further strain the already stressed natural ecosystems. What we need is sustainability – in both food production and consumption!*

**WITH OUR FOOD** systems under threat and the continued prevalence of hunger in the country, there is an urgent need to improve our limited agricultural productivity and eliminate the wasteful farming practices. The slowdown in agricultural growth is further aggravated by the resource constraints that are in turn strained by the expanding population.

Farmers are already bearing the brunt of floods, droughts, rising temperatures, unpredictable rainfall, soil salinisation, crop diseases and pests. Climate change, land degradation and shrinking biodiversity are new challenges that are testing our agricultural production. Large tracts of farmlands have become barren due to imbalanced use of fertilisers. The mineral-deficient soils are not only narrowing the range of crops being grown, but also leading to malnutrition among the population.

### Redesigning Government Subsidies

Successive governments have always focused on subsidising electricity, fuel and fertilisers for farmers. However, this ends up delivering a disproportionate benefit to owners of large landholdings. Food insecurity continues to be rampant among the those who grow our food itself. According to the Indian National Sample Survey Office, most Indian farmers possess less than one hectare of land, which, is not enough to achieve food security through subsistence farming.

The skewed scenario is amplified by the fact that government assistance only ends up encouraging farmers to continue growing crops of their choice without paying any heed to the market dynamics. For instance, Indian farmers are merrily producing more and more sugarcane even though both domestic and international markets are oversupplied with sugar. The lucrative Minimum Support Price (MSP) further intensifies the lopsided production in the country with farmers excessively focusing on wheat and rice crops. These water-intensive crops are declining the water table on the one hand and increasing pollution from stubble burning in the winter months on the other.

Fact of the matter is that wheat, rice and sugarcane account for 40% of the gross sown area but consume 80% of the irrigation water (Economic Times, July 2020). Groundwater depletion has become a fervent issue around the country. Of the total land area of 329 million hectares (Mha), 147 Mha is characterised by degraded soil or water-related issues.

Therefore, the government needs to reconsider subsidies for these crops to control the adverse impact on natural

resources. Instead, lucrative MSP and input subsidies should be introduced for water- and nutrient-efficient crops (such as millets and pulses) that use less water and also replenish the soil while at it. Incentivising the production of climate-resilient crops that can handle temperature variations and precipitation fluctuations is also crucial. The subsidy on electricity can be redirected to adoption of drip irrigation techniques and installing solar panels for electricity generation as it will help conserve natural resources.

### Sustainable Food Production

The need of the hour is sustainable food production. Adopting sustainable practices such as crop rotation, mixed cropping, limiting use of fertilisers and pesticides, using bio-fertilisers and integrated pest management need to be promoted across the country. This will conserve natural resources, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, cut down production costs and also counter climate-related risks.

Sustainable agriculture integrates three main goals: environmental health, economic profitability and social equity. This can be achieved on seven fronts - crop diversification, genetic diversity, integrated nutrient management, integrated pest management, sustainable water management, post-harvest technology and sound extension programmes (FAO).

Organic farming is another sustainable option as it improves the structure of the soil, decreases residual pesticides and even reduces the ground water pollution with the help of nitrates. Carbon farming is also highly beneficial as it helps the land to store more carbon and reduces the greenhouse gases released into the atmosphere. This has been successfully experimented in the Saguna Rice Technique (SRT), a form of zero-till conservation agriculture, in two districts of Maharashtra starting with 20 farmers.

The FAO suggests that farmers should be further encouraged to:

- engage in dialogue, participate in extension services, farmers' organizations, cooperatives or farmer field schools and learn about nutrition, biodiversity, digital technologies and farming techniques to build resilience.
- adopt sustainable agricultural practices that respect biodiversity, are more environment-friendly and use natural resources more efficiently.



*Indigenous Indian diets were far healthier than what we eat today!*

## Investigating the Forgotten Vegetables and Fruits of India

Food designer Akash Muralidharan (25) started a mission to rediscover the local produce that have disappeared from everyday dishes in South India. On 1st March, 2020, he launched a unique 100-day 'Cook and See' project (recorded on Instagram) to boost the revival of the unsung vegetables. Armed with his grandmother's 70-year-old recipe book and cheery determination, he started foraging through Chennai. Ending the project in mid-June, he managed to discover about 70 vegetables available within Chennai itself that are becoming increasingly absent from people's plates.



- consider climate-smart agriculture approaches that use natural resources in a sustainable way and use seed varieties or livestock breeds that are more resistant to drought and disease.
- minimize losses by harvesting at the right time, improving storage facilities, and learning about best practices and technologies.

### Sustainable Food Consumption

Food choices are highly individualistic, but is what we are eating sustainable as well? As consumers, we need to shift our eating habits towards more environment-friendly options.

This involves selecting foods that are healthy for the body as well as the ecosystem – therefore, these foods should use minimum natural resources while curtailing the emission of waste, pollutants and toxic materials. In other words, we should curtail our meat consumption and shift to plant-based foods that are seasonal, organic and locally produced so as to avoid jeopardizing the needs of the future generations. And above all, avoid wasting food!

Truth be told, it is the commodification of food that is driving the penchant for modern and easily available products. We are moving towards hybrid varieties, while hundreds of native vegetable varieties are becoming extinct every year.

Environmentalists are advocating that we should reduce the consumption of resource-intensive foods and



*Some of the heritage foods that have been 'forgotten' by recent generations*

go back to consuming ancient foods like millets, maize and other forgotten vegetables like elephant yams, sunberry and red okra. We have to think beyond the staple rice and wheat and bring back their poor cousins (that often grow in the wild) on to our plates.

These are climate-resilient crops that can adapt to a wide range of ecological conditions and require low irrigation requirements even as they yield better growth and productivity (even without fertilisers).

A 2017 study led by scientist, Narasimha D. Rao at the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis states that moving to coarse grains like millets can cut down greenhouse gas emissions associated with agriculture by up to

25%. What's more, they are loaded with vitamins and minerals too.

The demand for such sustainably-produced nutritious foods based on food diversity and local ecosystems will push farmers to produce more of the same, thus bringing about a wholesome shift in farming practices. This will mitigate climate change and environmental degradation even as it improves our own wellbeing!

Food labelling and awareness campaigns can also empower people shift to a healthy and sustainable lifestyle.

### Conclusion

A conscious move to more sustainable diets is what will improve the food production system! ▶

## A Better Way To Deal With Hunger

Food security is a serious threat for the world. 155 million people in 55 countries experienced acute hunger in 2020, requiring urgent food, nutrition and livelihood assistance (Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) estimates). About 1 billion people still do not have sufficient food in low and lower-middle income countries.

Consumers from across the country share their views on the problems of food insecurity.

**FOOD IS THE** bedrock of our lives. The brewing hunger crisis is a global threat. This food insecurity affects diet quality and people's health in different ways. There is an urgent need to focus on food and nutrition by providing safe, nutritious and adequate food assistance to the vulnerable households.

**Mohd. Asif, Panipat**

Scores of livelihoods among the poor and vulnerable communities have been compromised or destroyed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The resulting economic shocks have put their ability to source food under question. The pandemic also amplified the vulnerabilities of our food systems. It is important to focus on providing food to the disadvantaged sections and ensuring that they have food on their plates. Yet, there are certain decisive barriers to the efficient functioning and overall success of food assistance schemes in our country. The at-risk groups should be comprehensively covered through the targeted components of the schemes.

In fact, achieving food and nutrition security will remain a major challenge long beyond the pandemic. Holistic efforts by using digital solutions, improved and targeted enforcement, regular monitoring and capacity building will be essential in the days to come.

**Mansi Agarwal, Hyderabad**



*Do you ever have to think whether you will have food to eat today?*

The answer to world hunger is to stop wasting food. Overcoming the likelihood of food wastage in the production, post-harvest and consumption stages will ensure that no one will ever go hungry!

**Kasim Baig, Jodhpur**

Good food is everything! We have to join hands to make Good Food for All a reality! The government, the private sector, individuals and other sectors have to work together to keep the domestic supply chain gears moving and ensure that every tummy is full every day.

**Dr. Rishi Mehra, Timapur**

We are all part of the food system. But unfortunately, today's food systems are failing the planet. We need to transform them so they work better with nature and for the future. There are systemic connections between people, the environment and the economy that will enable us meet the needs of the future. All of us must come together to bring about the transformation that the world needs.

**Kamal Agarwal, Kozhikode**

Do we consider the food we eat a privilege or take it for granted? Shouldn't we be thankful for enjoying this 'legal right' of indulging in any type of food we wish without a second thought, when scores of people across the country are suffering from hunger? We need to do more to raise awareness and combat this problem.

**Jagjyot Singh, Amritsar**

How we produce, market and consume food has a big impact on the Earth's capacity to sustain us, and that has a direct impact on human health and our economic prosperity

– Prince Charles at the UN Food Systems Pre-Summit

## YOUR OPINION MATTERS

## Letters to the



## editor

(August –  
Drugs & Cosmetics Act, 1940  
– Need for Overhaul)

This is a new section we are introducing from this month. Please feel free to send in your comments, views or feedback on The Aware Consumer magazine at [bejonmisra@theawareconsumer.in](mailto:bejonmisra@theawareconsumer.in). We will publish your opinions and implement your feedback while ensuring that your voice is heard on the right platforms.



Dr B R Jagashetty

Dear Bejon ji,

It is very nice that you have brought up a magazine entirely on DCA/DCR. However it would have been much more attractive if it had

contained the interviews/ opinions of actual regulators from both Central and State like Sri S W Deshpande, Dr. Adeshara, Dr. Dasgupta etc., who have seen in and out of the regulations.....

Regards



Sidharth Shah  
Hyderabad

Dear Sir

The article/write up on defective medical devices is an eye opener. It brings to light the negligence by global companies in their home markets, but more importantly not complying or turning a blind eye in Indian markets. To bring the manufacturers and traders of medical devices to task, we need to have a strong regulatory body which can ably frame new rules from time to time.

Alongside the role played by publications like 'The Aware Consumer' are vital in bringing education and better understanding of the rights of citizens. I would urge the publishers to strongly consider having editorial time and space with national and regional media players so that the voice of your publication can reach the masses more frequently and deeply.

Regards

## UPDATE ...



### Moving a Step Ahead

## Our Efforts Sowing the Seeds for Change

**IT IS WITH** great pride and joy that we inform our readers that the August edition of our magazine dedicated to the Drugs & Cosmetics Act – Need for Overhaul is becoming the harbinger of change at the national level.

The Ministry of Health & Family Welfare constituted a committee on 27th August, 2021 for preparing a New Drugs, Cosmetics and Medical Devices Bill so that a new Drugs, Cosmetics and Medical Devices Act can be framed under the Chairmanship of the Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI), Dr. V.G. Somani.

The Government of India has ordained the committee to undertake pre-legislative consultations, and examine the present Act, previously framed Drugs and Cosmetics Bills and submit a draft documents for a de-novo Drugs, Cosmetics and Medical Devices Bill by 30th November, 2021.

In this regard, the committee conducted a virtual consultative meeting with the Consumer Associations on 18th September. We have also deposed in front of the committee and presented our inputs, ideas and suggestions in a structured manner.

This is the kind of change we are dedicated to bringing about in the country one small step at a time. We hope to see a new and updated drug regulation policy that will improve the standards of healthcare in the 'pharmacy of the world!' ▶

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## NABH AYUSH ENTRY LEVEL CERTIFICATION PROGRAM

### TAKING QUALITY TO OUR ROOTS



#### NABH

is a constituent board of Quality Council of India (QCI).

It is playing a pivotal role at the National level in propagation, adoption and adherence to healthcare quality standards in AYUSH healthcare delivery systems.

With an objective to bring more light to AYUSH related treatments, the Government of India in 2014, formed the Ministry of AYUSH and consequently brought in the National Accreditation Board for Hospitals & Healthcare Providers (NABH) to start implementing quality healthcare standards for hospitals providing AYUSH treatments as well.

In the recent years, there has been a paradigm shift from allopathy system to traditional healthcare. To support this trend, health insurers have started offering AYUSH treatment covers as part of their health insurance policies. NABH Ayush Entry Level Certification Standards provide an objective system of empanelment by insurance and other third parties. These standards also address the need for quality control and quality monitoring in AYUSH healthcare as required by the Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PM-JAY) under the Ayushman Bharat Scheme.

NABH AYUSH Entry Level Certification standards are easily downloadable from NABH website.



[www.nabh.co](http://www.nabh.co)



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