



Making accessible food system

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(Mains GS 3 : issue related to Public Distribution System-objectives, functioning, limitations, revamping; issues of buffer stocks and food security.)

Context:

- The first United Nations Food Systems Summit (UNFSS) 2021 held in September concluded to find solutions and 'catalyse momentum' to transform the way the world produces, consumes, and thinks about food and help address rising hunger.
- The food system transformation is considered essential in achieving the sustainable development agenda 2030 where 11 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) out of 17 are directly related to the food system.

Vulnerability of food system:

- In the **COVID-19 pandemic**, the world has seen the fragility and vulnerability of food systems which is projected to double the global hunger figure.
- Food system is in a state of crisis in many countries affecting the poor and the vulnerable.
- Although the flaws in food systems affect all but 811 million poor people in the world go to bed hungry each night.

Food Systems Summit:

- Global food systems are the networks that are needed to produce and transform food, and ensure it reaches consumers, or the paths that food travels from farm to fork.
- The summit created a mechanism for serious debates involving UN member states, civil society, non-governmental organisations, academics, researchers, individuals, and the private sector.
- Summit will help in evolving transformative themes and ideas for reimagining food systems to enhance satisfaction of all stakeholders including future generations.
- The summit provided a historic opportunity to empower all people to leverage the power of food systems to drive our recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and get us back on track to achieve all 17 SDGs by 2030.

The action tracks:

- Food system summit discussed how to Ensure access to safe and nutritious food for all; Shift to sustainable consumption patterns; Boost nature-positive production; Advance equitable livelihoods, and Build resilience to vulnerabilities, shocks, and stress.
- The Statement of Action emerging from the summit offers a concise set of ambitious, high-level principles and areas for action to support the global call to “Build back better” after the **COVID-19 pandemic**.

Lessons from India:

- India's long journey from chronic food shortage to surplus food producer offers several interesting lessons for other developing countries.
- The working of India in the area of land reforms, public investments, institutional infrastructure, new regulatory systems, public support, and intervention in agri markets and prices and agri research and extension help India to reach the level of food surplus.
- The period between 1991 to 2015, saw the diversification of agriculture beyond field crops and brought greater focus on the horticulture, dairy, animal husbandry, and fishery sectors.
- The learnings encompassed elements of nutritional health, food safety and standards, sustainability, deployment of space technology, and the like.

India's collective approach:

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

- In India, food safety nets and inclusion are linked with public procurement and buffer stock policy.
- This policy helped India during the global food crises 2008-2012 and more recently during the COVID-19 pandemic fallout.
- In the most challenging situation, vulnerable and marginalised families in India continued to be buffered against the food crisis by its robust TPDS and buffer stock of food grains.

The challenges ahead:

- Today the climate change and unsustainable use of land and water resources are the most formidable challenges for the food system.
- The sixth (latest) Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report has set the alarm bells ringing, highlighting the urgency to act now.
- Dietary diversity, nutrition, and related health outcomes are another area of concern as a focus on rice and wheat has created nutritional challenges of its own.
- However, India decided to fortify rice supplied through the Public Distribution System with iron.
- Reducing food wastage or loss of food is also a mammoth challenge. Food wastage in India exceeds ₹1-lakh crore.

Anomaly in India:

- Ironically despite being a net exporter and food surplus country, India has a 50% higher prevalence of undernutrition compared to the world average.
- However the proportion of the undernourished population declined from 21.6% during 2004-06 to 15.4% during 2018-20.
- The high prevalence of undernutrition is not due to food shortage in the country thus the supply of fortified rice in **PDS and Poshan Abhiyan** are the steps among many to address the challenge of undernutrition and malnutrition.

Worsening food situation:

- An alarming escalation in global hunger is unfolding, with the 'dramatic worsening' of world hunger in 2020, much of it likely related to the fallout of **COVID-19**.
- 'The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World' report, estimates that around a tenth of the global population was undernourished last year.
- It is important to reiterate that hunger and food insecurity are key drivers of conflict and instability across the world.
- The Nobel Peace Prize 2020 conferred on the United Nations WFP highlighted the importance of addressing hunger to prevent conflicts and create stability.

Reimagining the food system:

- Stakeholders need to make the world free of hunger by 2030 and deliver promises for SDGs, with strong cooperation and partnership between governments, citizens, civil society organisations, and the private sector.
- This surely requires reimagining the food system towards the goal of balancing growth and sustainability, mitigating climate change, ensuring healthy, safe, quality, and affordable food, maintaining biodiversity, improving resilience, and offering an attractive income and work environment to smallholders and youth.

Conclusion:

Achieving the goal of “Advancing equitable livelihood” requires transformation in food systems which are anchored around small- and medium-scale production, family farmers, indigenous peoples, women, and workers in food value chains.