



drishti

## Covid-19 and Food Security

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This editorial analysis is based on the article **Fighting COVID-19 and food insecurity requires new ideas**, robust political will, which was published in the Indian Express on 2nd of September 2020. It analyses the impact of Covid-19 on food security of the world especially the poor of South Asia.

The **Covid-19** pandemic has severely derailed development across the world. It has compounded the pre-crisis levels of food insecurity and malnutrition with job losses, supply chain disruptions, and declines in revenue from key exports and remittances.

Globally, the World Food Programme predicts that the number of people facing acute food insecurity around the world will almost double to 270 million, including 121 million new food insecure due to Covid-19.

However, **South Asia** is particularly vulnerable, with the number of chronically underfed people projected to rise by to 330 million by 2030. It is also the only subregion in the world where more than half the children from the poorest fifth of society are stunted.

### Impact on Food Security

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#### Extreme Hunger

- Covid-19 has struck at a time when hunger or undernourishment keeps rising.
- According to the latest **UN** estimates, 83 to 132 million more people may suffer extreme hunger in 2020 as a result of the economic recession triggered by the pandemic.
- This would be in addition to the 690 million people going hungry now.

#### Malnourishment

- Apart from extreme hunger people are also suffering from undernourishment.
- It means that they are unable to consume enough healthy calories to lead a normal, active life.

- Over a prolonged period this will have long-term implications for their future.

## **Extreme Poverty**

- According to the **World Bank**, the pandemic's economic impact could push about 100 million people into extreme poverty.
- Soaring unemployment rates, income losses and rising food costs are jeopardizing food access in developed and developing countries alike and will have long-term effects on food security.

## **Recession**

Furthermore, the pandemic may plunge national economies into recession which will severely hamper their power to run welfare schemes for the poor and deprived.

## **Sharpened Social Divides**

- Covid-19 has exposed some of the world's deepest inequalities.
- The rich have been able to keep enjoying even the luxury due to their wealth accumulation.
- Millions of people on the other hand have been thrown out of work and don't have enough money to even feed their families.

## **Way Forward**

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### **Departure From Trickle Down Effect**

- Tackling these new problems will require new ideas and a more robust political will.
- Past progress was sustained by the benign trickle-down effects of strong economies. The Government must take direct responsibility for the ones who are vulnerable and marginalised.
- This is not the case anymore. The facts have changed, and so must our minds.

### **Increasing Resilience**

- We need to find ways to increase resilience across our food systems by identifying new marketing channels like e-commerce which will provide more avenues to the farmers to sell their product in case of low demand in the local market.
- If feasible, relocate markets to larger premises, while ensuring the appropriate infrastructure is in place to maintain health, hygiene, quality and food safety.

### **Increase Efficiency**

- We must increase our efficiency to reduce losses and improve the quality of products available.

- It would be a good initiative to identify collection centres closer to producers, for example develop storage facilities like warehouse receipt system platforms where farmers can deliver their produce without the need to go to markets.
- If possible, allow local markets to remain open, while putting in place strict physical distancing measures within and outside markets.

### **Inclusive Finance**

- Inclusive access to finance to strengthen and expand rural supply chains is also crucial.
- Banking products and financial services must be made available to poor populations on priority basis.

### **Comprehensive Recovery Programme**

- The **Food and Agriculture Organisation** (FAO) of the United Nations has recently launched a new comprehensive Covid-19 Response and Recovery Programme to provide an agile and coordinated global response aimed at ensuring access to nutritious food for everyone.
- It aims to mobilise all forms of resources and partnerships at the hands of every country.

### **Encouraging Innovation**

- We must, as a priority, enable farmers to be more dynamic, entrepreneurial and competitive through continual innovation.
- We need smallholder farmers to produce nutritious foods, without fear of crop failures, and we also need to get those foods to the mouths of the hungry across the region and beyond.
- To do this, smallholders desperately need access to financial resources, technology and innovation.

### **Indian Response to Covid-19**

- To remedy the situation emerging out of the Covid-19 pandemic and to prevent any major devastation by way of loss of human lives and livelihood, the country has unitedly taken some quick decisions.
- The government enhanced its social safety programs including direct benefit transfers such as cash transfers under **PM Kisan scheme**, more liberal financing under **MGNREGA** like advance disbursement, direct cash grants to construction workers and release of free and subsidized food grains under **Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana** to about 800 million people to ensure food for all.

- The Government announced a special economic package of Rs 20 lakh crore (equivalent to 10% of India's GDP) under **Atma Nirbhar Bharat Scheme** with the aim of making the country independent against the tough competition in the global supply chain and to help in empowering the poor, labourers, migrants who have been adversely affected by Covid.
- Rapid up-gradation of health infrastructure and manpower; and swift readjustment of policies and programs with active association and participation of all stakeholders, be that politicians, governments, NGOs, and private sectors, were other daunting tasks performed by the governments.

## Conclusion

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- The **Asia-Pacific region** has some of the best agricultural scientists, institutions and innovative ideas. If we are able to cooperate and coordinate then we can also battle this pandemic.
- There is no time to waste. Everyone needs to lend a hand. Governments, academia, the private sector, UN agencies, civil society organisations, international financial institutions and the people who bring us the food we eat, the smallholders should come together and help each other in every way possible.
- We need to be working in unison to overcome pandemics that by definition affect and involve everyone.
- The FAO has rolled out the Hand-in-Hand initiative to tackle these collective challenges, and the FAO Regional Conference for Asia and the Pacific, which will be virtually hosted by Bhutan, is the perfect opportunity for the countries to forge ways to expedite action and leverage resources.
- By working together, learning and contributing together, we can overcome both pandemics and transform the agri-food system.



### ***Drishti Mains Question***

Covid-19 crisis has derailed the development process of the world and only a sustained innovative and coordinated effort can help the world overcome this crisis. Discuss the steps taken by India in this regard.



Watch Video At:

<https://youtu.be/JxSQyKRX6Po>

This editorial is based on **“For the weakest: On sub-classification among SCs”** which was published in The Hindu on August 31<sup>st</sup>, 2020. Now watch this on our Youtube channel.

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