



Transforming India's Food Systems

Why in News

Sustainability of [Food Systems](#) is going to be crucial in the years to come due to [climate change](#).

- India also **has to transform its food systems**, which have to be inclusive and sustainable for higher farm incomes and nutrition security.
- Earlier, the [United Nation's report on the Food System](#), suggested that today's food systems are heavily afflicted by power imbalances and inequality, and do not work for most women.

Key Points

▪ Food Systems:

- According to the [Food and Agriculture Organisation \(FAO\)](#), food systems encompass the entire range of actors involved in:
 - Production, aggregation, processing, distribution, consumption and disposal of food products that originate from agriculture, forestry or fisheries, and parts of the broader economic, societal and natural environments in which they are embedded.

▪ Challenges in India's Food Systems:

◦ Effect of Green Revolution:

- Although there has been significant progress in the country's agricultural development due to the [Green Revolution](#), It has also led to **water-logging, soil erosion, groundwater depletion** and the **unsustainability of agriculture**.

◦ Current Policies:

- Current policies are still based on the **deficit mindset of the 1960s**. The procurement, **subsidies and water policies are biased** towards rice and wheat.
 - Three crops (rice, wheat and [sugarcane](#)) corner 75 to 80% of irrigated water.

◦ Malnutrition:

- The [NFHS-5](#) shows that **under-nutrition has not declined** in many states even in 2019-20. Similarly, obesity is also rising.
- The cost of the EAT-Lancet **dietary recommendations for rural India ranges between USD 3 and USD 5 per person per day**. In contrast, **actual dietary intake** is around **USD 1 per person per day**.

▪ Steps Needed to Transform India's Food Systems:

◦ Crop Diversification:

- Diversification of cropping patterns towards millets, pulses, oilseeds, horticulture is needed for more equal distribution of water, sustainable and **climate-resilient**

agriculture.

◦ Institutional Changes in Agri-Sector:

- **Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs)** should help get better prices for inputs and outputs for small holders.

- **E-Choupal** is an example of technology benefiting small farmers.

- Women's empowerment is important particularly for **raising incomes and nutrition**.

- Women's cooperatives and groups like **Kudumbashree** in Kerala would be helpful.

◦ Sustainable Food Systems:

- Estimates show that the food sector emits around 30% of the world's **greenhouse gases**.

- Sustainability has to be achieved in **production, value chains and consumption**.

◦ Health Infrastructure & Social Protection:

- The Covid-19 pandemic has uncovered the weak well being infrastructure in international locations like India, notably in rural areas and a few areas.

- Inclusive food systems also need strong social protection programmes. India has long experience in these programmes. Strengthening India's **National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, Public Distribution System (PDS)**, nutrition programmes like **Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS), Mid-Day Meal** programmes, can improve income, livelihoods and nutrition for the poor and vulnerable groups.

◦ Non-Agriculture Sector:

- The role of non-agriculture is equally important for sustainable food systems. **Labour-intensive manufacturing and services can reduce pressure on agriculture as income from agriculture** is not sufficient for small holders and informal workers.

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

Way Forward

- The **UN Secretary-General** will convene the **Food Systems Summit in September 2021**, which aims for a transformation of global food systems in order to achieve the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030**. **It is a great opportunity to boost policies** for achieving SDGs.
- Science and technology are important drivers to achieve these goals. **India should also aim for a food systems transformation, which can be inclusive and sustainable**, ensure growing farm incomes and nutrition security.

Source: IE