



Food Security in India

This editorial is based on [“The wheat of the matter: Disruption of supply chains due to Ukraine war has implications for India’s food security”](#) which was published in The Indian Express on 08/09/2022. It talks about Food Security in India and related challenges.

For Prelims: Global Hunger Index 2021, Food Corporation of India (FCI), Antyodaya Anna Yojana, Priority Households (PHH), Soil degradation, Nano-Urea, Heatwaves, JAM trinity platform, Direct Benefit Transfer.

For Mains: National Food Security Act, 2013, Challenges Related to Food Security in India, Sustainable Farming.

India has experienced remarkable [economic growth](#) in recent years and remains one of the **fastest growing economies** in the world. However, [poverty](#) and [food insecurity in India](#) are still areas of concern in spite of many strides. Food is considered as a basic amenity essential for the sustenance, development and growth of an individual.

India has ranked **101 among the 116 countries** on the [Global Hunger Index, 2021](#). According to the [Food and Agriculture Organisation](#), the [Food Price Index](#) has increased by 30% in the year 2021-22.

Although the Government of India has been actively addressing food security at households for a long time through the [Public Distribution System](#) and the [National Food Security Act \(NFSA\) 2013](#), there are still concerns related to Food Security in India amidst **increasing population, climate change** and **global supply chain disruption** ([Russia-Ukraine War](#)) that need to be addressed.

What is Food Security?

- The concept of [Food Security](#) is multifaceted. Food is as essential for living as air is for breathing. But **food security means something more than getting two square meals**. It has following dimensions:
 - **Availability:** It means food production within the country, food imports and the stock stored in government granaries.
 - **Accessibility:** It means food is within reach of every person without any discrimination.
 - **Affordability:** It implies that having enough money to buy sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet one's dietary needs.
- Thus, **Food security** is ensured in a country only when **sufficient food is available** for everyone, if everyone has the **means to purchase food** of acceptable quality, and if there are **no barriers to access**.

What is the Current Framework for Food Security in India?

- **Constitutional Provision:** Though the Indian Constitution **does not have any explicit provision regarding right to food**, the fundamental right to life enshrined in [Article 21 of the Constitution](#) can be interpreted to include the **right to live with human dignity**, which may include the right to food and other basic necessities.
- **Buffer Stock:** [Food Corporation of India \(FCI\)](#) has the prime responsibility of **procuring the food grains** at [minimum support price \(MSP\)](#) and **stored in its warehouses** at different locations and from there it is supplied to the state governments in terms of requirement.
- **Public Distribution System:** Over the years, [Public Distribution System](#) has become an important part of Government's policy for **management of the food economy in the country**. PDS is **supplemental in nature** and is not intended to make available the entire requirement of any of the commodity.
 - Under the PDS, presently the commodities namely **wheat, rice, sugar and kerosene** are being **allocated to the States/UTs for distribution**.
 - **Some States/UTs** also distribute additional items of mass consumption through the PDS outlets such as **pulses, edible oils, iodized salt, spices, etc.**
- **National Food Security Act, 2013 (NFSA):** It marks a paradigm shift in the approach to food security **from welfare to rights based approach**.
 - [NFSA](#) covers **75% of the rural population and 50% of the urban population under:**
 - [Antyodaya Anna Yojana:](#) It constitute the **poorest of-the-poor**, are entitled to receive **35 kg** of foodgrains per household per month.
 - [Priority Households \(PHH\):](#) Households covered under PHH category are entitled to receive **5 kg** of foodgrains per person per month.
 - 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 ration cards.
 - In addition, the act lays down special **provisions for children between the ages of 6 months and 14 years old**, which allows them to receive a nutritious meal for free through a widespread network of [Integrated Child Development Services \(ICDS\)](#) centres, known as **Anganwadi Centres**.

What are the Challenges Related to Food Security in India?

- **Deteriorating Soil Health:** A key element of food production is healthy soil because **nearly 95% of global food production depends on soil**.
 - [Soil degradation](#) due to **excessive or inappropriate use of agrochemicals**, deforestation and natural calamities is a significant **challenge to sustainable food production**. About **one-third of the earth's soil is already degraded**.
- **Invasive Weed Threats:** In the past 15 years, India has faced more than **10 major invasive pest and weed attacks**.
 - [Fall Armyworm \(Pest\)](#) destroyed almost the entire maize crop in the country in 2018. **India had to import maize in 2019** due to the damage caused by the pest in 2018.
 - In 2020, [locust attack](#) was reported in districts of **Rajasthan and Gujarat**.
- **Lack of Efficient Management Framework:** India lacks strict management framework for food security. Public Distribution System faces challenges like leakages and **diversion of food-grains**, inclusion/exclusion errors, **fake and bogus ration cards**, and weak grievance redressal and social audit mechanism.
- **Faults in Procurement:** Farmers have diverted land **from producing coarse grains to the production of rice and wheat** due to a minimum support price.
 - Further, there is a tremendous wastage of around **Rs.50,000 crore annually** by both improper accounting and inadequate **storage facilities**
- **Climate Change:** The [monsoon](#) accounts for around 70% of India's annual rainfall and irrigates 60% of its net sown area. **Changing precipitation patterns and growing frequency and intensity of extreme weather** events such as [heatwaves](#), floods are already reducing agricultural productivity in India, posing a **serious threat to food security**.
 - To increase domestic availability amid low Kharif Crop productivity this year (2022), the **Government of India has banned the export of broken rice**.
- **Supply Chain Disruption Due to Unstable Global Order:** At a time when the [Covid-19 Pandemic](#) had already impacted food supply around the world in 2020, **Russia-Ukraine War in 2022** has **disrupted the global supply chain** and resulted in food scarcity and **food inflation**.
 - **Russia and Ukraine** represent **27% of the world market for wheat**, 26 countries,

mainly in Africa, West Asia and Asia, depend on Russia and Ukraine for more than 50% of their wheat imports.

What Should be the Way Forward?

- **Moving Towards Sustainable Farming : For ensuring Food Security** in India , improvement in productivity through greater use of **biotechnology**, **intensifying watershed management**, **use of nano-urea** and **access to micro-irrigation facilities** and **bridging crop yield gaps across States** through collective approach should be at priority.
 - There is also a need to look forward towards establishing **Special Agriculture Zones through ICT based crop monitoring**.
- **Towards Precision Agriculture:** There is need to increase the use **information technology (IT) in agriculture** to ensure that crops and soil receive exactly what they need for optimum health and productivity.
 - By adopting **precision agriculture** with **high-tech farming practices**, farmers' incomes will increase, input cost of production will be reduced, and many other issues of scale will be addressed.
- **Revitalising Aadhaar Seeding of Ration Cards:** To **speed up the process of Aadhaar linking to ration cards**, ground monitoring measures must be taken that will ensure no valid beneficiary is left out of their share of food grains that can give thrust to the aim of zero hunger (**Sustainable Development Goal- 2**).
- **Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) Through JAM:** There is a need to **streamline food and fertiliser subsidies into direct benefit transfers** to accounts of identified beneficiaries through the **JAM trinity platform (Jan Dhan, Aadhaar, and Mobile)** that will **reduce huge physical movement of foodgrains, provide greater autonomy to beneficiaries to choose their consumption basket and promote financial inclusion**.
- **Ensuring Transparency in Food Stock Holdings :** Using **IT to improve communication channels with farmers** can help them to get a better deal for their produce while **improving storage houses with the latest technology** is equally important to deal with natural disasters.
 - Further, **foodgrain banks** can be deployed at block/village level, from which **people may get subsidised food grains against food coupons** (that can be provided to Aadhar linked beneficiaries).
- **Addressing Issues With an Umbrella Approach:** By **looking at diverse issues from a common lens**, such as inequality, food diversity, indigenous rights, and environmental justice, India can look forward to a **sustainable green economy**.

Drishti Mains Question

Despite various measures to address Food Security in India, major challenges remain. Critically analyse.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Prelims

Q.1 In the context of India's preparation for Climate-Smart Agriculture, consider the following statements: (2021)

1. The 'Climate-Smart Village' approach in India is a part of a project led by the Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security (CCAFS), an international research programme.
2. The project of CCAFS is carried out under Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) headquartered in France.
3. The International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) in India is one of the CGIAR's research centres.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

(a) 1 and 2 only

- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Ans: (d)

Q.2 With reference to the provisions made under the National Food Security Act, 2013, consider the following statements: (2018)

1. The families coming under the category of 'below poverty line (BPL)' only are eligible to receive subsidised food grains.
2. The eldest woman in a household, of age 18 years or above, shall be the head of the household for the purpose of issuance of a ration card.
3. Pregnant women and lactating mothers are entitled to a 'take-home ration' of 1600 calories per day during pregnancy and for six months thereafter.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) 3 only

Ans: (b)

Mains

Q.1 In what way could replacement of price subsidy with Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) change the scenario of subsidies in India? Discuss. **(2015)**

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