



Mains Practice Question

Q. “The awareness of the extent of malnutrition despite agricultural growth has led to a need to converge agriculture and nutrition.” Comment. (250 words)

27 Nov, 2019 GS Paper 3 Economy

Approach

- Introduce by mentioning relevant data about India’s food production and malnutrition.
- Mention some steps taken by the government to address malnutrition.
- Suggest measures to address malnutrition by linking it with agricultural production.

Introduction

- India's agricultural production has been increasing every year, and India is among the top producers of several crops such as wheat, rice, pulses, sugarcane and cotton. It is the highest producer of milk and the second highest producer of fruits and vegetables.
- Despite this, India has the world's worst level of child malnutrition. Malnutrition accounted for 68.2 per cent of the total under-5 deaths in India in 2017 as per a report by Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) and National Institute of Nutrition (NIN).
- India has been ranked at 102nd place among 117 economies in the Global Hunger Index (GHI) 2019.

Body

In this backdrop, it becomes imperative to converge targets of food production to objectives of malnutrition and minimise any such gap.

Suggestions to converge agriculture and nutrition:

- **Crop diversification:** There is a need to promote awareness about the traditionally grown crops (like millets), about their nutrition and micro-nutrient content, about ways to move away from mono-cropping and increase crop diversity to increase diet diversity.
- **Promoting food fortification:** It involves the addition of key vitamins and minerals such as iron, iodine, zinc, Vitamin A & D to staple foods such as rice, milk and salt to improve their nutritional content.
- **Use of Genetically Modified Crops:** Proper scientific studies should be initiated to study the effects of GM crops in Indian conditions and to frame laws related to introduction of GM food crops in India.
 - For ex: Both Bangladesh and the Philippines would be soon introducing world’s first Vitamin-A enriched rice varieties (Golden Rice), to fight against Vitamin A deficiency (VAD), which is the main cause of preventable blindness in children.
- **Addressing rural poverty:** Malnutrition can be tackled by making farming more remunerative and sustainable. This can be done by increasing productivity by the use of better quality seeds, fertilizers, improved farm mechanization, better irrigation facilities, easy credit availability, use of technologies like Artificial Intelligence in agriculture, and better forward and backward linkages

etc.

- **Improving post harvest logistics and management:** As per a report by the Food and Agriculture Organization, nearly 40% of food is wasted post-harvest in India. Hence, there is a need to improve storage and processing techniques to prevent food wastage, which can be utilized in the PDS system.
- **Promoting feminization of agriculture:** Women have greater propensity to spend on children's nutrition and education. Hence, there is a need to take initiatives like promoting organic farming, allied activities like livestock rearing, beekeeping, etc as women are more involved in these activities.

Steps taken by the government:

- **Poshan Abhiyaan**
 - It was set up in 2017 for a three-year time which aims at targeted reduction of stunting, undernutrition, anaemia and low-birth-weight babies in India.
 - It seeks to **improve linkages between communities and health systems**, thus paving the way for a mass movement to promote transformative change.
- **Bharatiya Poshan Krishi Kosh**
 - It is a repository of diverse crops across 128 agro-climatic zones in India.
 - The project team will identify a local partner organization for developing the Poshan atlas.
- **Poshan Atlas**
 - It is a food atlas developed by the Ministry of WCD to keep all the food-data at one place.
 - The atlas will create a **repository of traditional foods/crops and cultural practices associated with them**. These tools will help in developing closer ties between the agricultural and nutrition sectors.

Conclusion

- Awareness and knowledge about our crop diversity and regional variations in nutritious food will provide a nudge for behaviour change across the country propelling demand which, in turn, will provide opportunities to farmers and agro-processing units to address consumer needs.
- Citizens of India will have to come together and join hands to revive our food and crop diversity and use our traditional knowledge for tackling undernutrition and malnutrition.