

Sowing better to eat better

1. The health of a country's agri-food systems determines the health of its people. The findings from the first round of the Fifth National Family Health Survey suggest that nutrition-related indicators have worsened in most States.



2. The survey covers 17 States and five Union Territories, which comprise 54% of India's population. In addition, findings from the Comprehensive National Nutrition Survey (2016-18) have highlighted the role of micronutrient malnutrition.

The agri-food systems are the most important part of the Indian economy. India produces sufficient food, feed and fibre to sustain about 18% of the world's population (as of 2020). Agriculture contributes about 16.5% to India's GDP and employs 42.3% of the workforce (2019-20).

A multi-pronged approach and reinventing Agri-food systems:

1. For Indians to eat better, India must sow better. A structural shift in dietary patterns and nutrition requires a shift in production.
2. Pathways for nutritional security consist of improving dietary diversity, kitchen gardens, reducing post-harvest losses, making safety net programmes more nutrition-sensitive, women's empowerment,



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enforcement of standards and regulations, improving Water, Sanitation and Hygiene, nutrition education, and effective use of digital technology.

3. Addressing the complex problem of malnutrition is a colossal task for which we need to look at agri-food systems as a whole and adopt a multi-pronged approach.

Challenges:

1. While COVID-19 has exacerbated the nutrition issue, climate change has challenged agricultural production itself.
2. However, the country's agri-food systems are facing new and unprecedented challenges, especially related to economic and ecological sustainability, nutrition and the adoption of new agricultural technologies.
3. The edifice of India's biosecurity remains vulnerable to disasters and extreme events.
4. There is an urgent need for reorientation of the long-term direction of agri-food systems to not only enhance farm incomes but also ensure better access to safe and nutritious foods.
5. Additionally, the agri-food systems need to be reoriented to minimise costs on the environment and the climate.

Way forward:

1. Mainstreaming agrobiodiversity, greening agriculture, promoting nutrition-sensitive agriculture and strengthening national food security.
2. The transformation of agri-food systems must be rooted in agro-ecology. The more diverse an agricultural system, the greater its ability to adapt to shocks.
3. Different combinations of integrated crop-livestock-forestry-fishery systems can help farmers produce a variety of products in the same area, at the same time or in rotation.
4. Less food should be wasted, and the food supply chain need to be more resilient to shocks. Food systems can help combat environmental degradation or climate change.
5. Sustainable agri-food systems can deliver food security and nutrition for all, without compromising the economic, social and environmental bases.