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**DAILY EDITORIAL
ANALYSIS**

TOPIC

**A FOOD-SUFFICIENT INDIA
NEEDS TO BE HUNGER-FREE TOO**

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A FOOD-SUFFICIENT INDIA NEEDS TO BE HUNGER-FREE TOO

Context

- There needs to be a transformation of India's agri-food system, ensuring that healthy diets are available and affordable for all, as it was highlighted as one of the **Sustainable Development Goals (Goal 2)** set to be realised by 2030.

About

- India has made significant strides in achieving food sufficiency, but the journey towards eradicating hunger and malnutrition is far from over.
- Despite being self-sufficient in food production, India continues to grapple with high levels of hunger and malnutrition, highlighting a **critical paradox** in its development journey.
- A food-sufficient India must be a hunger-free India, where every individual has the opportunity to lead a healthy and productive life.

Why Does Zero Hunger Matter?

- A world with zero hunger positively impacts our economies, health, education, equality, and social development. It's a cornerstone for building a better future for everyone.
- Moreover, hunger limits human development, making it challenging to achieve other sustainable development goals like education, health, and gender equality.
- **Economies:** Productive, well-nourished individuals contribute to economic growth.
- **Health:** Proper nutrition prevents diseases and improves overall well-being.
- **Education:** Hungry children struggle to learn effectively.
- **Gender Equality:** Empowered women play a pivotal role in eradicating hunger.

Paradox of Food Sufficiency and Hunger

- India's agricultural sector has seen remarkable growth, making the country one of the largest producers of food grains globally.
 - ◆ However, this achievement does not automatically translate into a hunger-free nation.
- **Global Hunger Index 2024** ranks India 105th out of 127 countries, indicating a serious level of hunger.
 - ◆ Malnutrition, stunting, and micronutrient deficiencies are widespread, particularly in rural areas.
- The **National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5)** highlights that while caloric intake has improved, nutritional adequacy remains a concern.
- This paradox is primarily due to the unequal distribution of food and the economic barriers that prevent many from accessing a healthy diet.

Key Challenges

- **Inequitable Distribution:** Despite food sufficiency, the distribution of food remains unequal
 - ◆ Many regions, especially rural areas, lack access to affordable and nutritious food.
- **Economic Disparities:** Income disparities exacerbate food insecurity, with the poorest households struggling to afford a balanced diet.
- **Climate Vulnerability:** Climate change impacts agricultural productivity, affecting food availability and prices.
- **Stunted Growth and Malnutrition:** Extreme hunger and malnutrition hinder sustainable development. Stunted growth affects 148 million children, while 45 million children under the age of 5 suffer from wasting.
 - ◆ **Micronutrient deficiencies**, often referred to as **hidden hunger**, are prevalent, leading to long-term health issues.

- ◆ These conditions not only impair physical health but also limit cognitive development and economic productivity.

Analyzing The Paradox: Food Sufficiency and Hunger

- **Economic Access and Affordability:** One of the core issues is the **affordability of nutritious food**. The cost of a healthy diet has risen globally, and India is no exception.
 - ◆ Many households, especially in rural areas, lack the purchasing power to afford balanced meals. It is a significant barrier to achieving a hunger-free India.
 - ◆ Policies need to focus on making nutritious food affordable and accessible to all segments of the population.
- **Nutritional Quality and Public Health:** Ensuring food sufficiency is not just about quantity but also about the quality of food. A diet that is rich in essential nutrients is crucial for combating malnutrition.
 - ◆ **Public health initiatives** must prioritise the distribution of nutrient-dense foods and educate the population about healthy eating habits. It can help address the hidden hunger caused by micronutrient deficiencies.
- **Policy Interventions and Social Safety Nets:** To bridge the gap between food sufficiency and hunger, India needs robust policy interventions. **Social safety nets like the Public Distribution System (PDS) and mid-day meal schemes** play a vital role in providing food security to vulnerable populations.
 - ◆ However, these programs need to be continuously monitored and improved to ensure they reach those in need effectively.
- **Role of Sustainable Agriculture:** Sustainable agricultural practices are essential for maintaining food sufficiency while ensuring environmental health.
 - ◆ Promoting organic farming, reducing food wastage, and improving supply chain efficiencies can contribute to a more resilient food system.
 - ◆ These measures will help ensure that food production keeps pace with the growing population without compromising the environment.

Strategies for a Hunger-Free India

- **Strengthening Food Distribution Systems:** Ensuring that food reaches the most vulnerable populations through efficient and transparent distribution mechanisms.
- **Promoting Nutritional Awareness:** Educating the public about the importance of a balanced diet and the role of essential nutrients in maintaining health.
- **Enhancing Social Safety Nets:** Expanding social security schemes to provide food assistance to those in need, such as the National Food Security Act and the National Nutrition Mission.
- **Addressing Climate Change:** Implementing sustainable agricultural practices to mitigate the impact of climate change on food production.
- **Improving Healthcare Access:** Providing access to healthcare services to address malnutrition and related health issues.

India's Efforts

- India, once a net importer of food grains, has **transformed into a net exporter**. During the pandemic, the government efficiently distributed food grains through the **Public Distribution System**, providing emergency assistance to families.
 - ◆ However, India also faces challenges related to malnutrition and climate change.
- **Malnutrition and Anaemia:** While malnutrition has decreased over the past decade, the **Comprehensive National Nutrition Survey 2016-18** revealed that more than 40 million Indian children suffer from chronic malnutrition.
 - ◆ Additionally, **over half of Indian women aged 15-49 years are anaemic**.

- **Programs like the Integrated Child Development Services** (providing meals to children under six and pregnant/lactating mothers) and the mid-day meal scheme demonstrate India's commitment to addressing these challenges.

Conclusion and Way Forward

- A food-sufficient India must also be a hunger-free India. This goal requires a multi-faceted approach that addresses economic access, nutritional quality, and sustainable agricultural practices.
- By implementing comprehensive policies and strengthening social safety nets, India can move closer to ensuring that every citizen has access to adequate and nutritious food.
- Food isn't just sustenance; it's woven into our cultures and communities. It has the power to bring people together, nourish our bodies, and sustain the planet.
- World leaders, during the SDG Summit in New York, reaffirmed their commitment to eradicating poverty and ending hunger. However, it's clear that concerted efforts are needed to bridge the gap between aspiration and reality.

Source: TH

Mains Practice Question

[Q] Despite India being a food-sufficient country, hunger remains a prevalent issue. What are the underlying factors contributing to this paradox, and what steps can be taken to ensure that food sufficiency translates into a hunger-free nation?

