
1. It's about Food, Nutrition and Livelihood Security

Context:

- The current national lockdown to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the problems of food, nutrition and livelihood security confronting a large number of rural people, in particular, migrants to Cities.
- While some measures have been announced, we need to understand the different dimensions of food security in a holistic manner in order to address this problem in its Totality.

Different Dimensions of Food Security:

- **Availability of Food:**
- The availability of food in the Market, and this is seen as a function of production.
- Fortunately, thanks to **the Green Revolution, today we have enough food in the market and in Government Godowns.**
- While some special exemptions have been given to the agricultural sector, farmers are confronted at the moment with labour shortages, many of the inputs, including seeds, are expensive or unavailable, marketing arrangements including supply chains are not fully functional, pricing is not remunerative, and public procurement is also not adequate.
- As in the absence of demand, the lack of storage or value addition facilities, especially for perishable commodities, we do not yet know exactly what the impact of the current pandemic will be on the kharif sowing

Access to Food:

- The access to food, which is a function of purchasing power, as unless you are a farmer and grow your own food, others have to buy it
- Fortunately, the government, through the National Food Security Act (NFSA) and the PDS, has assured some additional food to every individual during this crisis
- This should be further strengthened and the food basket widened by including millets, Pulses and Oil
- Steps should also be taken to avoid hidden hunger caused by the deficiency of micronutrients in the diet
- In light of the closure of schools and Anganwadi Centres, and the consequent disruptions in the provision of midday meals or other nutritional inputs, it is important to pay attention to the life cycle approach advocated in the NFSA.

Job Security:

- Food security and access to nutritious, good quality food is also contingent on job security.
- If job security is threatened, then so is food and nutrition security. We have to ensure people do not lose their jobs, and one way of doing this will be to ensure value addition to primary products
- One example of such value addition is the Rice Biopark in Myanmar, wherein the straw, bran, and the entire biomass are utilised
- The Amul model provides a good example from the dairy sector of improved incomes to milk producers through value addition.
- Similar attention needs to be given to the horticulture sector on a priority basis.
- Women farmers are at the forefront of horticulture and special attention needs to be given to both their technological and economic empowerment during this crisis.

Livelihood Security:

- A second pathway to livelihood security for small and marginal farmers and landless households, and women within them, is strengthening the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA)
- The definition of a worker in MGNREGA has so far been applied only to unskilled, manual work, and not to skilled jobs in agriculture and allied activities.
- Given the lack of jobs and incomes during the COVID-19 crisis, it is imperative to expand the definition of work in MGNREGA to cover skilled work related to farmers and their Farming Activities.

Focus on Non-Food Factors:

- The other dimension of food security is absorption of food in the body or its utilisation, which is dependent importantly on sanitation, drinking water and other non-food factors, including Public Health Services.
- Ensuring that these services are functional depends on the capacities of the local panchayats and their coordination with other Local Bodies.

Conclusion:

- Through a combination of farmers' cooperation, technological upgrading and favourable public policies in procurement, pricing and distribution, we can deal with the fallouts of the pandemic.

Source: The Hindu