

1. Do you think India's public distribution system meets the objectives of food security for the poorest? Critically examine. What are the key areas of improvement? Discuss.

Approach

Candidates can start the answer with highlighting concept of PDS its role in Indian food security programme and then write about its achieved objectives also write its shortfall and issues in the end with give few suggestions to improve.

Introduction

PDS evolved as a system of management of scarcity through distribution of foodgrains at affordable prices. Over the years, PDS has become an important part of Government's policy for management of food security in the country.

Body

PDS meeting objective of food security for poor:

- It has helped in stabilising food prices and making food available to the poor at affordable prices.
- Such as Landless labourers, marginal farmers, rural artisans /craftsmen, such as potters, tanners, blacksmiths, slum dwellers, destitute and persons earning their livelihood on daily basis in the informal sector in both rural and urban areas has benefited.
- NFSA its life cycle approach and rights-based and justiciable right framework, wherein special provisions for supplementary nutrition have been made for pregnant women and lactating mothers and children in the age group of 6 months to 14 years and subsidised foodgrains to 75 per cent of the rural poor and 50 per cent of the urban poor population.

Trailing in GHI Ranking:

- India ranks 101 on the Global Hunger Index 2021 based on indicators like undernourished population and children suffering wasting and stunting.

Issues associated with programme:

- Identification of beneficiaries and social exclusion: Studies have shown that targeting mechanisms such as TPDS are prone to large inclusion and exclusion errors.
- 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.
- Nutritional Insecurity: The food basket comprises mostly foodgrains like rice and wheat, which provide calories to beneficiaries, but have not been able to address protein and micronutrient deficiencies, which are prevalent in India.

- Inconsistent quality: The majority of the respondents reported that the quality of ration is inconsistent— sometimes it is fine, sometimes it is awful. The complaints were mainly of bad quality of wheat. Most of the recipients were unsatisfied with the quality of wheat and rice.

Way forward

- Improving storage capacities: As it is understood that storage capacities need to be improved ensuring proper storage of procured food grains for PDS schemes.
- Vigilance Committee and social auditing: At the State, District, Block and Fair Price Shop (FPS) level to check corruption, leakages and nutritional quality.
- To eliminate exclusion errors: Experts like Abhijeet Banerjee and Raghuram Rajan have gone on record recommending a temporary ration card for a period of six months to everyone who is in need with minimal checks.
- Nutritional Security at Large: Adding to staple foods that are widely consumed, this is an excellent method to improve the health of a poor section of the population.

Q-2 Are you in favour of India approving the use of genetically modified food on wide scale ? why or why not ?substantiate your views .

Approach -

In this question candidates need to write their opinion on usage of genetically modified food on wide scale .should we use it or not and further substantiate their views.

Introduction -

In an unprecedented move, the Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC), which is a nodal authority to approve genetically modified (GM) crops in India, has cleared the way for commercial cultivation of GM mustard.

Body -

Approval of GEAC for GM mustard is considered to be a watershed moment for Indian agriculture, because a GM food crop has been approved for commercial release for the first time, after the approval non-food Bt cotton in 2002.

- With this approval, the gene modification of more than 200 varieties of rice, wheat, maize, brinjal, castor and cotton, among other crops, will get a fillip.
- GM crops are needed and whether such crops benefit the farmers who are facing an income crisis from crop cultivation for more than two decades now.
- The anti-GM activists has been opposing the cultivation of GM crops over the years citing three important reasons:
- (a) that it is the country's biotechnology policy which is responsible for the ongoing agrarian crisis; (b) that this technology is bound to deprive the livelihood of the poor agricultural labourers who are mostly women and children; and (c)

there is a possibility that this technology can damage human health and the environment.

- But the fact is The use of toxic pesticides and chemical fertilizers promoted through the Green Revolution technology has been accepted by all. But, when it comes to GM technology that aims to enhance the agricultural productivity with less cost and water, there is opposition.
- Can we ensure food security and higher income for farmers without promoting new technology in agriculture? Farmers in vast majority have accepted GM technology.
- The GEAC's approval for GM mustard is indeed an encouraging signal at a time when the value of import of edible oil has skyrocketed from ₹29,900 crore in 2010-11 to ₹68,200 crore in 2020-21. Mustard is one of the most important oilseed crops cultivated in India. Its area has increased from 2.88 million hectares (mha) in 1960-61 to 6.69 mha in 2020-21.
- States like Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Gujarat, Jharkhand and Assam are the major growers of the crop; they together account for 95 per cent of India's total area under mustard. But the data available from the price policy reports published by the CACP show that the productivity and profitability of crop have not increased significantly between 2010-11 and 2019-20.
- While the average productivity computed for eight major States was hovering around 13-14 quintal/ha, the profitability of the crop computed (at 2004-05 prices) in relation to cost C2 declined from ₹7,715/ha to ₹4,148/ha during this period
- The increased cost of cultivation and stagnant productivity are not allowing farmers to harvest the expected profit from its cultivation. When GM mustard promises to increase productivity with less cost of cultivation, what is wrong in promoting it

Defaming evidence

- The anti-GM group often argues that the root cause for the agrarian crisis is due to the advent of biotechnology in agriculture. If this is so, Indian farmers should have rejected Bt cotton. Instead, the farmers brought the entire cotton area under Bt cotton within 10 years after its introduction.
- Rising labour costs, increased cost of cultivation and stagnant productivity of crops are some of the serious problems farmers are facing in recent years. We need technology that can save labour costs, reduce water consumption and increase the productivity of crops. GM technology reportedly provides these benefits to farmers.
- The evidence clearly shows how Bt cotton has entirely changed cotton crop cultivation in India. Since the introduction of Bt cotton in 2002, India's cotton area, production and yield increased tremendously.
- While the production increased from 8.62 million bales (one bale = 170 kg) to 35.38 million bales, the productivity of cotton increased from 191 kg/ha to 462 kg/ha during this period. Not only this, the increased coverage of Bt cotton reportedly saved about 40 per cent of the total chemical insecticides used for cotton.

- But the anti-GM lobby continues to claim that Bt cotton has caused crop failures and farm suicides in India. Going by the evidence of Bt cotton, there is no doubt that GM mustard will also change its production scenario by benefiting the small, marginal and resource-poor farmers who depend on this crop for their livelihood. If the price of GM seeds is unreasonable, let us question it sturdily so that the government can make appropriate interventions to control it.
- Given the trends in different countries, GM technology is going to dominate Indian agriculture in the near future. Presently, over 90 per cent of corn, cotton and soybean are cultivated using GM seed in the US. These crops can come to India by import, even if we don't adopt them.

Conclusion -

India needs GM technology for its agriculture to improve the income of farmers and also to protect food security. However, the concerns related to the cost of seed, health of humans and cattle and environmental safety must be addressed without any compromise.

Q -3 How would you define hunger. do you think India's performance on global hunger index is a true reflexion of status of hunger in India ? critically comment .

Approach -

A simple straightforward question where candidates need to write about hunger and does global hunger index is a true reflexion of status of hunger in India.

Introduction --

India has ranked 107th out of 121 countries in the Global Hunger Index (GHI) 2022, report Jointly published by Concern Worldwide and Welthungerlife, it is down from the 101st position the previous year .

Body -

hunger is defined as a condition in which a person does not have the physical or financial capability to eat sufficient food to meet basic nutritional needs for a sustained period. In common parlance, hunger refers to discomfort due to a lack of food.

Factors Responsible for Hunger and Malnutrition in India-

- Poverty Backing Hunger: Poor living conditions limit the availability of food for children, while overpopulation, coupled with limited food access, result in malnutrition in children, especially in rural India.
- Faulty Public Distribution: There has been a wide variation in the distribution of food in urban and rural areas, with grains being diverted to the open market in order to make a higher profit, and poor quality grains being sold in ration shops, and the irregular opening of these shops contributing to hunger and malnutrition.

- Unidentified Hunger: Due to the arbitrary nature of the criteria used to determine a household's Below Poverty Line status and the fact that these criteria vary from state to state, food consumption has declined significantly due to the inaccurate classification of above poverty line (APL) and below poverty line (BPL).
- Besides this, the poor quality of grains have further contributed to the problem.
- Hidden Hunger: India is experiencing a severe micronutrient deficiency (also known as hidden hunger). There are several causes of this problem, including poor diet, disease, and a failure to meet micronutrient needs during pregnancy and lactation.
- Lack of adequate knowledge amongst mothers regarding nutrition, breast-feeding and parenting is another area of concern.
- Gender Inequality: Due to patriarchal mindset, gender inequality places the girl child at a disadvantage compared to boys and causes them to suffer more since they are last to eat and considered less important.
- In contrast to boys, girls are deprived of mid-day meals due to a lack of access to school.
- Lack of Immunisation: Children are neglected when it comes to preventive care (specifically immunizations) due to lack of awareness and not given access to health care for diseases due to affordability issues.
- Lack of Audit for Nutritional Programmes: Although a number of programmes with improving nutrition as their main component are planned in the country, there is no specific nutritional audit mechanism at local governance level.

However, the GHI is not such a simplistic measure “it captures the multidimensional nature of hunger”.

There are 4 measures it used by GHI:

- Undernourishment: The share of the population whose caloric intake is insufficient. This makes up 1/3 of the GHI score.
- Child Stunting: The share of children under the age of 5 who have low height for their age, reflecting chronic undernutrition. This makes up 1/6 of the GHI score.
- Child Wasting: The share of children under the age of 5 who have low weight for their height, reflecting acute undernutrition. This makes up 1/6 of the GHI score.
- Child Mortality: The share of children who die before their 5th birthday, reflecting in part the fatal mix of inadequate nutrition and unhealthy environments. This makes up 1/3 of the GHI score.
- The overall score is placed on a 100-point scale and a lower score is better. A score between 20 and 34.9 is pegged in the “serious” category and this is where India finds itself with a total score of 29.1. (GHI 22).

Indian government criticism of GHI 2022

- The Indian government has questioned the methodology of GHI. There are two major sub-parts to the government’s contention:
- First, that the GHI uses “an erroneous measure of hunger”, that 3 out of the 4 variables used are related to children and cannot be representative of the entire population.
- Second, that the 4th indicator of GHI, the proportion of undernourished population is “based on an opinion poll conducted on a very small sample size of 3000”, which is not justified with a country like India representing one-fifth of the world’s population.

Way Forward-

- Viewing Nutrition Through Different Lenses: Better nutrition involves more than just food, it includes health, water, sanitation, gender perspectives, and social norms. Therefore, there is a need to look forward to comprehensive policy to fill the nutritional gap.
- If Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, Beti Bachao Beti Padhao and nutrition policies like Poshan Abhiyan are interlinked, India's nutritional situation will undergo holistic changes.
- Bringing Social Audit Mechanism: States and Union Territories should compulsorily carry out the social audit of the mid-day meal scheme in every district, with the help of local authorities and simultaneously work on nutritional awareness.
- Use of information technology to improve program monitoring can be thought of too.
- Re-orienting PDS: There is a need to be re-orient and an up-scale Public Distribution System to make it more transparent and reliable and ensure availability, accessibility and affordability of nutritious food, also making a positive impact on the purchasing power of the lower socio-economic segment of the population
- Agriculture-Nutrition Corridor: Currently, India's nutritional hubs (villages) are the most deprived of adequate nutrition, there is a need to devise mechanisms to check "Nutritional security of villages" in line with agricultural-commerce.
- Recognising the importance of this link, the Ministry for Women and Child Development launched the Bharatiya Poshan Krishi Kosh in 2019

Conclusion-

World is facing a serious setback in efforts to end hunger with conflict, the climate crisis, COVID-19 pandemic, compounded by the war in Ukraine are major drivers of hunger. The situation is expected to deteriorate further as global crises overlap. Possible solutions and the scale of investment required along with policy implementation.