

UN's report on Food Security and Nutrition

Why in news?

A report of the UN's State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World points to a worrying trend on food security at global level.

What did the report highlight?

- Absolute numbers of people facing hunger and poor nutrition have always been high.
- However, there was a reduction in the rate of undernourishment since the year 2000.
- But that has slowed from 2013, registering a worrying increase in 2016.
- Around 815 million people endure chronic food deprivation in 2016, as against 775 million in 2014.
- The deprivation is greater among people in conflict-affected and climate change events affected regions.
- Contrastingly, the report says that child under nutrition rates continue to drop.
- However, one in four children is still affected by

What are the common factors making food scarce and expensive?

The above numbers are averages and do not reflect the disparities among regions, within countries and between States.

Nevertheless, the common factors making food scarce and expensive for many are:

- The impact of the economic downturn
- Many violent conflicts
- Fall in commodity export revenues
- Failure of agriculture owing to drought and floods
- The findings represent a setback to all countries trying to meet the sustainable development goal
- On ending hunger
- Achieving food security
- Improved nutrition

What is the scene in India?

- India's efforts at improving access to food and good nutrition are led by the National Food Security Act.
- There are special nutritional schemes for women and children operated through the States.
- Despite these, 14.5% of the population suffers from undernourishment.
- At the national level, 53% of women are anaemic.
- Thus, Centre and State governments fall short on the commitment to end undernourishment.
- Institutions such as the State Food Commissions have not made a big difference either.

- Distributing nutritious food as a public health measure is still not a political imperative.

What is the way forward?

- Families below the poverty line consume more cereals and less milk compared to the affluent.
- NITI Aayog's report on the role played by rations in shaping household and nutritional security highlights this.
- Complementing rice and wheat with more nutritious food items should be the goal.
- The report on nutritional deficiency calls for evaluating the role played by the Public Distribution System.
- Assessing dietary diversity for those relying on subsidised food is crucial.