Food Security and Nutrition in the World

What is the issue?

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- The UN’s State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World report points to a worrying trend on food security at global level.
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What are the highlights?

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

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- The above numbers are averages and do not reflect the disparities among regions, within countries and between States.
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- Nevertheless, the common factors making food scarce and expensive for many are:
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i. the impact of the economic downturn
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ii. many violent conflicts
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iii. fall in commodity export revenues
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iv. failure of agriculture owing to drought and floods
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- The findings represent a setback to all countries trying to meet the Sustainable Development Goal
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i. on ending hunger
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ii. achieving food security
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iii. improved nutrition
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What is the case with India?

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

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

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