Food Waste Management in India

Mains: *GS II – Governance*

Why in News?

The Solid Waste Management Rules, 2026 introduced Extended Bulk Waste Generator Responsibility (EBWGR), promoting food-waste prevention, redistribution and sustainable management in India.

What is the India's Regulatory Framework for Food Waste Management?

- **Solid Waste Management Rules, 2026** – Notified on January 28, 2026, and effective from April 1, 2026.
- **Extended Bulk Waste Generator Responsibility (EBWGR)** – Facilities generating at least 100 kg of waste daily, including hotels, hospitals, malls and institutional campuses, must process wet waste on-site or arrange certified processing.

> ***Bulk waste generators*** *account for nearly 30% of India's total solid waste.*

- **Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR)** – Established *under the Plastic Waste Management Rules, 2016,* with 2022 guidelines introducing targets, reporting obligations and a centralised monitoring portal for plastic packaging.
- **Need for a Food Waste Hierarchy** – The existing framework emphasises composting and biogas generation.
  - However, preventing food from becoming waste and redistributing edible surplus should receive priority.
- **Proposed Food Waste Hierarchy** –
  - **Prevention** – Improve demand forecasting, procurement, inventory management and portion sizes to minimise avoidable food wastage.
  - **Redistribution** – Donate safe and edible surplus food to food banks, NGOs and vulnerable communities.
  - **Recycling and Recovery** – Convert unavoidable food waste into compost and biogas.
  - **Disposal** – Minimise landfill disposal of untreated organic waste.
- **Existing Initiatives** –
  - **FSSAI's Save Food, Share Food** – Promotes prevention and redistribution of surplus edible food.
  - **EPR Framework** – Establishes producer responsibility, reporting and accountability for packaging waste.

- **Global Practices** – The US EPA's Wasted Food Scale and EU Waste Hierarchy prioritise prevention and redistribution over disposal.

What is the Significance of Food Waste Prevention and Redistribution?

- **Food and Nutritional Security** – Redistributing edible surplus can improve access to nutritious food among vulnerable populations.
  - Reduces the contradiction between food wastage and persistent hunger and malnutrition.
- **Environmental Sustainability** – Preventing organic waste reduces landfill dependency and methane emissions.
  - Composting improves soil health, while biogas generation supports renewable energy production.
- **Economic Benefits** – Better inventory management reduces procurement and disposal costs for businesses.
  - Redistribution can lower waste-management expenditure and improve resource efficiency.
- **Strengthening Urban Governance** – Reduces the burden on municipal authorities responsible for waste collection, transportation and disposal.
  - Promotes decentralised waste management and greater accountability among bulk generators.
- **Climate Change Mitigation** – India's First Biennial Transparency Report (2025) recorded 93.84 million tonnes of CO_2-equivalent emissions from the waste sector in 2022.
  - Solid waste disposal accounted for nearly 29% of these emissions.
  - Methane constituted nearly 16% of India's total greenhouse gas emissions in 2022, making food waste prevention important for climate action.

What are the Challenges in Effective Implementation?

- **Weak Enforcement** – India's EPR framework faces fragmented oversight, inadequate monitoring and relatively weak penalties.
- **Limited Accountability** – Businesses may prioritise composting and biogas processing instead of preventing food waste.
- **Food Safety Concerns** – Poor storage, transportation and handling can compromise the safety of donated surplus food.
- **Infrastructure Deficits** – Inadequate cold-chain facilities, food banks and decentralised processing infrastructure restrict redistribution.
- **Reporting Challenges** – Absence of reliable waste measurement and verification mechanisms can encourage inaccurate reporting.
- **Institutional Coordination** – Effective implementation requires coordination among FSSAI, local bodies, businesses and civil society organisations.

What is the Way Forward?

- **Adopt a Food Waste Hierarchy** – Integrate prevention, redistribution, recycling and disposal as a clear priority sequence under EBWGR.
- **Strengthen Enforcement** – Introduce measurable targets, periodic audits, digital

reporting and penalties for non-compliance.

- **Incentivise Prevention** – Provide greater compliance credits and financial incentives for reducing food waste and donating edible surplus.
- **Strengthen Food Redistribution** – Expand food banks, NGO partnerships and safe food collection and distribution networks under FSSAI guidelines.
- **Improve Infrastructure** – Promote cold storage, scientific waste segregation, decentralised composting and biogas facilities.
- **Promote Behavioural Change** – Encourage responsible consumption, better portion planning and awareness among households, institutions and food businesses.

What lies ahead?

- India's food-waste management strategy must move beyond treating waste towards preventing its generation.
- Integrating a food waste hierarchy into EBWGR can simultaneously strengthen food security and advances the principles of a circular economy and sustainable development.

Reference

Down To Earth| Who pays when good food goes to waste?

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