IPCC report: Plants-based diet will be kinder on the planet

What is the issue?

- A new report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) on climate and land was released recently.
- It says that a plants-based diet will be kinder on the planet than a meat-based one. To know more about this report, click here.

Why we need to rethink the global land use?

- It is because the fight to lower the greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, and mitigation of climate-change impact, rests on this rethinking.
- A **large part of land use is tied to human diet**, from pastures for grazing of meat animals to agriculture.
- Thus, the IPCC report says a **plants-based diet will be kinder on the planet than a meat-based one**.
- It recommends that governments, especially the nations where meat consumption is high, to work on reducing this.

Why the report says plant-based diet is kinder?

- Land use and management, including agriculture and deforestation, contribute almost a quarter of the GHG emissions.
- Unless land is managed more sustainably, keeping global warming under 1.5^{o}C above pre-industrial levels is impossible.
- Deforestation for pastures to graze cattle and cattle themselves are emission-intensive and produces large amounts of methane (GHG).
- The emission foot-print of **manufacturing animal-feed**, **water- and electricity-use** in raising and slaughtering of meat animals, and **processing/packaging** of meat is significant.
- That's why the report says plant-based diet present major opportunities for adaptation and mitigation.

What the report projects?

- It says, by 2050, **dietary changes could free up lands** of about millions of square kilometres and **reduce global carbon emissions** by up to 8 billion tonnes annually (relative to business-as-usual).
- Due to politics and socio-cultural sensibilities associated with dietary habits,

report’s authors have refrained from telling people what to eat.

What are the risks in the shifting?

- In a country like India, where rice is a staple food, pushing a plant-based diet could result in more demand for unsustainably produced rice.
- This could increase the methane emission. Already, agricultural **methane emission** from Rice-farming alone is about 24%.
- **Nitrous oxide emissions** – a potent heat-trapper, from agriculture have almost doubled since the 1960s, given fertiliser application has increased nine-fold globally.
- Besides, research by the Carnegie Mellon University shows that, without reducing caloric intake significantly, simply changing to plant-based diet will increase GHG emissions and energy/water use.

Why the window to act on sustainable land use is narrowing fast and what could be done?

- Human use, already affects 60-85% of forests and 70-90% of other natural ecosystems. Soil, land and forests are major carbon sinks.
- But, with manifest climate change effects, desertification and degradation of land is becoming an ever-growing threat, and humans are responding with even more unsustainable use.
- Therefore, the IPCC report calls for stepping up efforts to keep the land productive while enhancing its carbon-absorbing capacity (Carefully calibrated plant-based diet could be one way to do this).

Source: Financial Express

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