Reimagining food systems with lessons from India

Why in news?

The first and historic United Nations Food Systems Summit (UNFSS) 2021 has concluded after an intense 'bottom-up' process to address rising hunger.

Why the Food Systems Summit and what is the expectation from its outcome?

> *Global food systems are the networks that are needed to produce and transform food, and ensure it reaches consumers, or the paths that food travels from production to plate.*

- Global food systems are in a state of crisis affecting around 811 million people in the world who go to bed hungry each night.
- The summit involved serious debates of UN member states, civil society, NGOs, academics, researchers, individuals, and private sector to evolve transformative themes and ideas for reimagining food systems.
- It focused on five identified action tracks namely
  - Ensure access to safe and nutritious food for all
  - Shift to sustainable consumption patterns
  - Boost nature-positive production
  - Advance equitable livelihoods
  - Build resilience to vulnerabilities, shocks, and stress
- It aims to get us back on track to achieve all 17 SDGs by 2030 that are directly related to the food system.
- The Statement of Action emerging from the summit supports the global call to "Build back better" after the COVID-19 pandemic.

What are the lessons learnt by India with respect to food security?

- The long journey from chronic food shortage to surplus food producer offer lessons in the area of land reforms, public investments, institutional infrastructure, public support, intervention in agri markets and agri research and extension.
- The period between 1991 to 2015, saw the diversification of agriculture

beyond field crops focussing on horticulture, dairy, animal husbandry and fishery sectors.
- The learnings included the elements of nutritional health, food safety and standards, sustainability, etc.
- The National Food Security Act 2013 anchored the Targeted Public Distribution System, Mid-Day meals and Integrated Child Development Services contributing to food equity.
- During the global food crisis 2008-2012 and the COVID-19 pandemic fallout, vulnerable and marginalised families in India continued to be buffered by its robust TPDS and buffer stock of food grains.
- India's decision to fortify rice supplied through the PDS with iron and Poshan Abhiyan are in lines with nutritional security.

What are the challenges in ensuring food security?

- Climate change and unsustainable use of land and water resources are the most formidable challenges as highlighted by the latest IPCC report.
- Dietary diversity, nutrition, and related health outcomes are another area of concern due to increased focus on rice and wheat.
- Despite being a net exporter and food surplus country, India has a 50% higher prevalence of undernutrition compared to the world average.
- The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World' report, estimates that around a tenth of the global population was undernourished last year.
- Reducing food wastage or loss of food is a mammoth challenge as in India it exceeds Rs. 1 lakh crore.

What does this state of food system calls for?

- The Nobel Peace Prize 2020 conferred on the United Nations WFP highlighted the importance of addressing hunger to create stability.
- Strong cooperation and partnership between governments, citizens, civil society organisations, and private sector must be boosted to to make the world free of hunger by 2030.
- There is a need to collaborate to invest, innovate, and create lasting solutions in sustainable agriculture for equitable livelihood and food security.
- This surely requires reimagining the food system towards the goal of balancing growth and sustainability, mitigating climate change, ensuring healthy, safe, quality and affordable food.

Until the day we have a medical vaccine, food is the best vaccine

against chaos.

Source: The Hindu

