State of Food Security & Nutrition in the World Report

What is the issue?

- The latest edition of the State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World (SOFI) report was recently released jointly by five UN organizations.
- It highlights the shortfalls on part of the government to handle the pandemic, which has led to increase in the prevalence of hunger and food insecurity.

What are the highlights of the report?

- India was home to the largest number of undernourished people in the world even before the Covid-19 pandemic.
- The prevalence of moderate to severe food insecurity in India rose by about 6.8% points in 2018-20.
- The number of persons facing moderate to severe food insecurity has increased by 9.7 crores since the outbreak of Covid.
- India, the country with the largest stock of grain in the world [120 million tonnes as of July 2021] accounts for a 1/4th of the world's food-insecure population.
- Globally, in 2020, over 237 crore people were grappling with food insecurity, which is an increase of about 32 crores from 2019.
- South Asia alone accounts for 36% of global food insecurity.

What are the key indicators used?

- Estimates on food insecurity presented in the SOFI report are based on two globally-accepted indicators of food insecurity:

    1. Prevalence of Undernourishment (PoU)
    2. Prevalence of Moderate and Severe Food Insecurity (PMSFI)

- **PoU** - The PoU estimates the proportion of people suffering from a chronic deficiency of calories.
- It is based on estimates of the per-capita supply of food and distributional parameters estimated using the national consumption surveys.
- **PMSFI** - It is a more recent experience-based indicator developed through surveys.
- These include eating less, modifying diet to eat cheaper food, skipping meals, and eating less than adequate food because of lack of money or other resources.

- Since the outbreak of the pandemic, the Indian government has not undertaken any official assessment of food insecurity in the country.
- So, the PMSFI estimates are the only national-level valid and reliable estimates available on the pandemic's impact on food insecurity in India.

- PMSFI estimates show that there were about 43 crores of moderate to severe food-insecure people in India in 2019.
- As a result of the pandemic-related disruptions, this increased to 52 crores in one year.
- In terms of prevalence rates, moderate to severe food insecurity increased from about 31.6%

in 2019 to 38.4% in 2021.

What are the reasons behind?

- Despite being self-sufficient in food production, India faces problems of hunger and food insecurity due to **widespread economic distress, high unemployment & high levels of inequality**.
- A large proportion of the poor is dependent on the informal economy in which incomes are too low and uncertain.
- They do not have assured access to adequate and nutritious food.
- High (and fluctuating) food prices, shrinking public investment, and the economic slowdown have added to the distress among the working classes and the peasantry.
- These problems were aggravated in the recent year due to the lack of preparation to deal with the pandemic.

What is needed now?

- Rregular monitoring of the food security situation in the country.
- Universalizing access to the public distribution system, at least during the pandemic.

Source: The Indian Express

