

## THE ROAD TO ZERO HUNGER BY 2030

### Resilient food systems will have to be built back as the world is not on track to achieve global targets

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**F**ood is the essence of life and the bedrock of our cultures and communities. It can be a powerful means to bring people together to grow, nourish and sustain the planet. The exceptional circumstances we have all been living in through 2020 underscores this — not only does COVID19 pose a threat to food security and agricultural livelihoods, it compounds the threats already faced by 690 million people around the world. This World Food Day, we — the food agencies of the United Nations (UN) — pledge to work together to end hunger, eradicate food insecurity and achieve Sustainable Development Goal 2.



There is much to be done. While we can all be proud of the progress we have made — for instance, agricultural productivity has improved significantly in recent decades — yet sadly, more than two billion people globally still lack access to sufficient, nutritious and safe food. Projections show that the world is not on track to achieve zero hunger by 2030, or to meet global nutrition targets. India has gone from being a net importer to a net exporter of food grains. This strength has been evident through the pandemic. Central and State governments were able to distribute around 23 million tonnes from India's large domestic food grain reserves in three months (April to June) through the Public Distribution System, providing much needed emergency assistance to families around the country. The government also successfully mobilized food rations for 820 million people from April to November 2020, including finding alternate solutions to provide food rations to 90 million schoolchildren. Throughout the national lockdown imposed in March, there were efforts to remove bottlenecks in the food supply chain due to restrictions on movements, and to ensure that agricultural activities weren't disrupted. Thanks to these measures, agriculture grew at 3.4% during the first quarter this financial year and the area cultivated this kharif exceeded 110 million hectares. This is a major achievement.

## **MALNUTRITION, ANAEMIA**

But the focus on food during the COVID19 containment measures has also brought out the multidimensionality of India's food challenges — not least those centred around malnutrition and climate change. Even as malnutrition in India has notably declined over the past decade, the Comprehensive National Nutrition Survey 2016-18 revealed that over 40 million children are chronically malnourished, and more than half of Indian women aged 15-49 years are anemic. Initiatives such as the Integrated Child Development Services — which provides cooked meals and take home rations to 100 million children under the age of six, as well as to pregnant and lactating mothers — and the midday meal programme, are however stellar examples of how the government is working to fix these challenges.

Climate change continues to be a real and potent threat to agro biodiversity, which will impact everything from productivity to livelihoods across food and farm systems. Though India is dealing innovatively with climate change — for example, through the development of drought and flood tolerant seed varieties, weather based agricultural advisories, promotion of millets, and small scale irrigation — this year, we saw how climate related shocks made it difficult for farmers to deal with pest and locust attacks, as well as floods and cyclones. Intensified food production systems with excessive use of chemicals and unsustainable farming practices cause soil degradation, fast depletion of groundwater table and rapid loss of agro biodiversity. These challenges multiply with an increase in fragmentation of landholdings. In India, more than 86% farmers have less than two hectares of land contributing around 60% of the total food grain production and over half the country's fruits and vegetables.

All this points to two undeniable imperatives: the way we produce food must change through agro ecology and sustainable production practices in agriculture and allied sectors; and second, we must stop the waste — one third of the food we produce is wasted. That is why the UN, and our three agencies — the FAO (The Food and Agriculture Organization), IFAD (International Fund for Agricultural Development) and WFP (The World Food Programme) — are committed to working with government, civil society, farmers' organisations and the private sector to build sustainable food systems.

## SUPPORTING INDIA

During the COVID19 precipitated lockdown, the FAO, IFAD and the WFP worked in close coordination to support the Government of India's Empowered Group 5 on facilitating supply chain and logistics management, so necessary items such as food and medicines were available. The agencies provided daily updates on the real time situation on the ground, collating challenges/red flags, dynamic anecdotal data and good practices from their sources in the field. This prompted swift action in terms of resolving bottlenecks and ensured progress on addressing red flag issues.

What is a food system? It is a framework that includes every aspect of feeding and nourishing people: from growing, harvesting and processing to packaging, transporting, marketing and consuming food. To be sustainable, a food system must provide enough nutritious food for all without compromising feeding future generations.

As countries begin to develop and implement COVID19 recovery plans, it is also an opportunity to adopt innovative solutions based on scientific evidence so they can build back better and make food systems more resilient and sustainable. Today, with the FAO celebrating 75 years of fighting hunger in over 130 countries, IFAD becoming the first UN agency to receive a credit rating, and the WFP being awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace this year, we are more committed — and better prepared — than ever to together develop solutions with the government, civil society and private sector.

## WORKING IN CONCERT

That is why this World Food Day (October 16), we call for global solidarity to help all populations, and especially the most vulnerable, to recover from the crisis, and to make food systems more resilient and robust. Everybody — governments, the private sector, civil society and local communities — has a role to play in transforming our food systems so they can withstand increasing volatility and climate shocks, deliver affordable and sustainable healthy diets for all, and provide decent livelihoods for food chain workers. We must all work in concert to make sure that our food systems nourish a growing population and sustain the planet, together.

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