

THOUGHTS FOR NUTRI-FOOD TO FIGHT MALNUTRITION

Dr. M S Basu, MD SBSF Consultancy;
Formerly, Director ICAR, Independent Consultant to
Agri-Business Planning & Development (NAIP); Visiting
Scientist ICRISAT and UNIDO International Consultant

The National Food Security Act was introduced in 2013 to ensure access to food to the people living below poverty line (BPL). Apart from the vulnerable section of the people, regular supply of food to school children through mid-day meal; to pregnant mothers through Anganwadi and other deserving classes were ensured. However, the situation even after 7 years remained unchanged, rather aggravated. According to Global Hunger Index: India ranked 94 in hunger index 2020 among 107 countries. This is something alarming and need corrective measures.

In one hand, the poverty-stricken people are already malnourished and on the other hand they have been losing immunity by consuming toxin contaminated food. Such a situation is same with the middle/neo-middle class consuming adulterated foods, drinks, condiments having no trustworthy quality checks whatsoever. This is unbecoming on the face of humanity and has become a growing menace in absence of stringent regulations and punishing adulterants. It may be kept in mind "IF IT'S NOT SAFE, IT'S NOT FOOD"- FAO.

This is high time our government both at the Centre and State Levels must take a note on the concern raised by Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. Think about the quality of ration being supplied to millions of people at both at Below and Above Poverty Levels (BPL /APL) under Public Distribution System (PDS). The food grains in most of the cases are highly infected with molds and store grain pests and sometimes totally unfit for human consumption. Such a poor-quality food grains are usually loaded with aflatoxin, a highly carcinogenic compound besides being immunosuppressive. Need of the hour is to save people living on dole from slow poisoning; all we deserve clean food to live healthy.

WAY FORWARD:

With the rapid climate change in place, growing severity and uncertainty of favourable crop growing conditions for high value hybrids, genetically altered crops; the savior is the Native Crops, son of the soil, which are destined to contribute towards food and nutritional security in complementarity. No Country can afford to undermine the inherent strength of nutri-rich under-utilized, forgotten crops to save the downtrodden from hunger and impoverishment.

This is high time Govt must "Arise, Awake and Stop Not Until The Goal Is Reached" - the killer malnutrition is conquered. No other social problems could be as bigger in dimension than the deaths of malnourished, poverty-stricken people! What needed is the setting up of Food Fortification Units at the State Level for blending Nutri-cereals and Food-legumes namely minor millets, oat, quinoa, high quality protein-maize, groundnut, soybean, edible flax, etc. following WHO standards and using state-of-art technology. The Nutri-food blend can be packed and supplied to the people living below poverty line and economically poorer section through PDS besides the malnourished and sick through rural Health Centres and Schoolchildren through Mid-Day Meal system.

The question remains, who will prepare the blue print for intensifying Food Legumes production both in traditional/ non-traditional areas taking advantage of multiple seasons namely Pre-Rabi, Rabi, Kharif, Summer and Spring by fitting various pulses, oilseeds (groundnut, soybean) in the existing cropping systems/ sequences; expanding areas in new niches to achieve self-sufficiency in Pules and make India free from the clutches of import

damaging economy. Similarly, there should be a novel, time-bound action plan for intensification of Oilseeds production by tapping the vast potential of new niches. For example, intensification of Niger cultivation in the Eastern Ghats, escalating extraction of Rice Bran Oil in major rice growing states, aggressively besides concentrating on forgotten oil-crops like Safflower, Red Sesame, Taramira, Flax and their blending in a scientific manner.

In an agrarian country like India, dominated by resource poor small and marginal farmers confronting with low soil fertility, more particularly after the green revolution era; rotation of cereals with leguminous crops should be encouraged following Cereal-Legume intercropping system as recommended by SAU/ ICAR for a given zone/ region, dispensing with Rice-Rice and Rich-Wheat system in irrigated areas. The practice of importing pulses, the crop known to adds nitrogen in soil, improve soil organic matter beside diversified benefits and other uses in rural India is set to damage economy of smallholder farmers.

bio-fertilizers, micro-nutrients, required training with need-based seed money for rearing birds and animals. At the same time developing local agri-entrepreneurs to assist smallholder farmers in value chain management and marketing is a pressing necessity. The funds required for the purpose may be mobilized by scrapping decades old routine schemes and unproductive research projects.

To strengthen the system further, massive rainwater harvesting, watershed developments and devices for judicious use of water should be put in place and made accessible to farmers in drylands. This will certainly help 90 million smallholders farmers in India to smile.

SPECIAL PACKAGE FOR LANDLESS TRIBAL FARMERS:

Some cash incentives along with seeds of perennial pigeon pea, moringa, tapioca, elephant foot yam, sweet potato, dolichos, wing-bean, amaranth, etc. for backyard cultivation, besides proving a pair of goat/sheep, half a dozen poultry birds, and kits for rearing honeybees should go a long way, empowering downtrodden forest dweller, economically. Scheme for skill development of Tribal for processing of local forest products may be launched. CSR Funds could be utilized for the purpose. A definite project proposal to that effect has been submitted to concerned ministry (Govt. of India) for consideration.

There is an urgent need to chalk out 'State-wise Work Plan' by reaching every farm families. This will help in preparing database of existing resources, the requirements and plan for suitable supplementation programs to provide a level playing field for sustainable income to resource-poor farm-families by way of offering animals, poultry birds, fish fingerlings, agri-tools, seeds, planting materials,

