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NUTRITION SENSITIVE AGRICULTURE

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Malnutrition is a serious concern which we are facing all over the world.It includes stunting, underweight and wasting. The data released by Joint Child Malnutrition Estimates in 2021 shows us that around the globe, 149 million children under five are affected by stunting, while 39 million children under 5 are overweight, and 45 million children are affected by wasting. According to the Global Hunger Index (2021), India ranks 101 out of 116 countries which pushes India into the 'serious' category. Based on the National Health Survey (2019-2021),59.1% of women and 31.1% of men between the age of 15-19 years are anaemic in India. The Women and Child Development Ministry estimates that there are 17.76 lakh severely acute malnourished children and 15.46 lakh moderately acute malnourished children across the country.

How to Combat Malnutrition and to Promote Good Health Among People?

Nutrition Sensitive Agriculture (NSA) is one such approach which is focused on growing crops which are rich in nutrition in order to support good health, and eradicate hidden hunger and malnutrition. Proper nutrition has an important role in health and development. For achieving their full potential, a person needs to consume a diet which is healthy and diverse in nature (legumes, tuber crops, nuts, vegetables, fruits, meat, etc.).Agriculture is the source for all meals we enjoy at our dinner table. Food, agriculture, nutrition and health go hand in hand. Therefore, exploring NSA will help us to meet the dietary needs of the population of all age groups. NSA includes:

1. **Diversification of crop and diet** -- In simple terms, it means growing various kinds of crops in our fields. Each and every crop provides us with different micronutrients, for example, leafy green

Courtesy: pngkey.com

vegetables are a rich source of calcium and iron. Likewise, Cole crops like cabbage and cauliflower are rich in vitamin A, C and K. Diversifying our crops will help us to put nutrient rich food on our tables.

Courtesy: clipground.com

2. **Cultivation of Biofortified crops**--It is the process of enriching the micronutrient content of food crop through genetic modification or selective breeding. These crops have more micronutrients when compared with the traditional varieties of the crop. An initiative by ICAR-CTCRI Kerala under the name 'The Rainbow Campaign' was started to scale up biofortified sweet potato to combat nutrition deficiency (vitamin A) in North Eastern region of India. The main aim of the campaign was to promote tuber crop-based rainbow diet. In Maharashtra, school children were given Iron-rich Pearl Millet which led to a reduction in Iron deficiency in less than 6 months.

Courtesy: Clipground.com

3. **Livestock rearing and fish farming**-- Micronutrients like vitamin A,B_{12}, D and minerals are abundant in milk, eggs, meat, etc., consumption of which will lead to a reduction in hidden hunger.

4. **Establishing Nutri-gardens**-- It involves growing nutrient-rich crops in order to make sure that there is year-round availability of diverse and healthy crops. These crops are grown organically and promote good health.

Courtesy: Foodandhealth.com

Nutrition Sensitive Agriculture aims at uplifting poor households by providing them with proper nourishment, encourages gender equity and also imparts nutrition education. An awareness and understanding on nutrition can increase the production of nutrition rich crops. As people become more aware and nutrition sensitive, the demand for these crops will increase too which will in turn lead to an increase in income of rural households. In India and also in most parts of the world, women are seen as the homemaker and the caregiver in a household, therefore, their participation in agriculture activities and their empowerment is an absolute necessity. Women empowerment can be done by supporting them with credit and providing income-generating opportunities. Through this, they will be able to look after their own nutrition requirement as well as their child's

requirement. While going for Nutrition Sensitive Agriculture, several activities must be taken into consideration like upgrading storage facilities for harvested crops. Also, processing and preservation techniques should be scientific and improved in order to preserve the nutritional benefit. Efforts should also be directed towards how to decrease post-harvest losses and food safety measures must be taken into consideration. There are several schemes which encourage Nutrition Sensitive Agriculture. These include National Food Security Mission, National Nutrition Mission, Poshan Abhiyan, Mid-Day Meal Scheme, Integrated Child Development Scheme, Food for Work programmes and many more.

Conclusion

Many advancements have taken place in the field of Agriculture and nutrition over the past several years. Applying the accumulated knowledge in the field level is an important challenge as well as a necessity if, we want to further develop Nutrition Sensitive Agriculture. Overcoming malnutrition and nutrition deficiency is possible only if we focus on growing crops which are rich in nutrition. Both 'quantity' and 'quality' should be given equal priority and attention while producing food for the population. Only eradicating hunger is not sufficient but hidden hunger must also be addressed and steps must be taken to overcome malnutrition deficiency. Policies must be favourable towards Nutrition Sensitive Agriculture if we want to achieve sustainable goals in the near future.

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