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## **ANTHROPOLOGY SNIPPET-501**



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## Nourishing The Tribal Food Systems



Food systems aggregate the food value chain, nutrition, livelihoods and climate systems, range of actors that provide a right to life and a life to live with dignity. The tribal food system is dependent on dryland agriculture, forests, common property, water resources, and biodiversity. The tribals have been fighting for Jal (water), Jangal (forest) and Jameen (land).

Agricultural and food policies have largely focused on increasing food production and mitigating hunger and energy inadequacy. The food subsidies on rice and wheat, urbanisation, globalisation and the consumption of highly refined and processed foods given the societal changes have impacted tribal food systems.

In particular, traditional food systems in the tribal areas, the local diversity from plants and crops that are rich food sources of macro and micro-nutrients, notably the millets, wild edible foods, leafy vegetables, nuts, seeds and fruits are being largely eroded and losing their rightful place.

The diluted food systems have caused multiple burdens of malnutrition, namely, undernutrition, micronutrient malnutrition as well as overweight/obesity which are conditions favourable for emerging non-communicable diseases. Malnutrition is not only impairing the cognitive potential, demographic dividend, growth, and productivity but is also increasing the burden of the disease.

### Reforms in the Food Systems

Investment in tribal food systems will supercharge demographic dividends. It calls for a leadership agenda of action. To increase the availability, accessibility, affordability, and consumption of safe and nutritious foods; the undernourished tribals need a caring, resilient, inclusive, nutrition-sensitive and sustainable food system. The suggested reforms are as follows:

1. Structural Reforms- A new legislation on food systems that can take care of a) sustainable food and nutrition, b) food safety and c) preserving biosafety and biodiversity is necessary for a dignified living and just and equitable governance. Effective implementation of the provisions under the Forest Rights Act- 2006,

Panchayat Extension to Scheduled Areas (PESA) Act and the NITI Aayog's Model Agricultural Land Leasing Act- 2016 will go a long way in increasing entitlements. There is a high incidence of physical violence and early marriage among tribal women. Investment in women's empowerment and rights and workable institutional arrangements will be key drivers in addressing exclusions and gender-based disparities. Special food systems strengthening measures for aboriginal extinctive primitive tribes is needed as they suffer from multiple marginalisations.

2. First and Second Windows of Opportunity- The food systems for tribals need to prioritise actions for the First 1000 Days of life- The First Window of Opportunity and adolescent girls-The Second Window of Opportunity. During the first 1000 days, through inter-personal counselling and home contacts by the grassroots functionaries, initiatives should be taken to promote appropriate infant and young child feeding. Prevention and control of adolescent anaemia and improving reproductive health and life skills of adolescent girls will pave the way for a safe and healthy outcome in newborns.

3. Atmanirbhar POSHAN (Nutritional Self Reliance)- It is one of the critical policy measures on revitalising food systems. Each district must be self-sufficient in at least six food groups- this can bring food and nutritional self-sufficiency at the sub-national level. These food groups constitute cereals and millets, pulses, milk and milk products, roots and tubers, green leafy vegetables, other vegetables, fruits, sugar, fat/oil and meat, fish, poultry, and eggs.

4. Integrated Strategy to Address Disease Burden- There must be an integrated strategy on addressing issues of malnutrition, lymphatic filariasis and malaria, childhood TB, sickle cell anaemia and HIV reduction. In this regard, India needs to establish a centre of excellence. In the endemic areas, screening of filaria and malaria need to be incorporated specifically in routine antenatal care, village health nutrition and sanitation days (VHNSD) and in the gram sabhas.

5. Addressing All Forms of Hunger- Addressing protein, calorie and hidden hunger, known as micronutrient malnutrition, would require investing in the tribal cultural endowments, traditional diets, dryland agriculture and crops with high nutrition (millets, pulses, wild edible foods among others) which were traditionally consumed by the tribals. It calls for expanding food programs and income safety nets, diversifying both production and farming system to include poultry, fishery, and dairy. Increasing dietary diversity, promoting food fortification and bio-fortification, and streamlining the existing supplementation programs would control hidden hunger. Working with India's Jal Jeevan Mission to increase access to safe water and making the water a source of nutrients would be a significant milestone.

6. Prevention and Control of Overweight and Obesity- It would require multiple strategies on addressing the local food system to improve access to safe and nutrient-dense foods and discourage the intake of high salt, sugar, and fatrich foods. Food-

based dietary guidelines need to be used as a tool in agriculture, food, and health planning to set targets in healthy food production and consumption. India's food regulating body FSSAI, Micro Small and Medium food Enterprises and Farmer's Cooperatives can play an enabling role in reducing the impending double burden on malnutrition.

COVID-19 provides an opportunity for new world order. It is a critical wake-up call to redesign the food systems that promotes and protects biodiversity, delivers a nutritious and affordable diet for all. All the stakeholders need to come together to systematically solve the food and nutrition divide for sustainable food systems and the planet.

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