

## OPINION

Relevant for: Health, Education & Human Resources | Topic: Poverty & Hunger and related issues

The way we frame a problem determines the solutions we get. Hunger is a global challenge. It is often erroneously assumed that hunger stems from lack of food. However, if we probe the root cause of hunger, the answer is far more complicated.

Though the global food production is enough to feed all human beings, still there are approximately 815 million people suffering from chronic undernourishment. India produces enough food to feed all its citizens, yet it is ranked 100 among 119 countries in the Global Hunger Index rankings. Though the country has been food-secure for the past decade, its economic growth and the changing demographics are transforming patterns of food demand. In India, the problem is further complicated as the food basket differs from region to region. There is a growing need for the design and development of more efficient integrated systems of food production, processing, preservation and distribution that will feed the changing tastes of the nation.

India wastes about 7% of its total annual food production and almost 30% of the fruits and vegetables because of inadequate warehousing facilities and cold storages. The situation is similar in other countries too. In Africa, it is estimated that the food wasted can feed close to 40 million people. Hunger is increasingly a processing, storage, supply chain and logistics challenge. According to the International Institute of Refrigeration, if developing countries had the same level of refrigeration infrastructure as developed countries, they would save 200 million tonnes of food or around 14% of their food supply.

In India, the National Centre for Cold-chain Development (NCCD) estimates that country has only 15% of the required temperature-control transportation facilities and less than 1% of warehouse facilities dedicated for transporting pre-conditioned agricultural produce. This lack of infrastructure means that only 4% of the country's food is moved through cold chains. Cold chains do not just reduce post-harvest losses but also allow farmers to earn more by tapping into well-functioning remunerative markets, while maintaining the quality of their produce. Moreover, with growing climate variability and extremes, resilient transportation infrastructure will allow food to be transported from surplus to climate stressed areas, thus contributing to achieving zero hunger, goal 2 under the 2030 agenda for sustainable development.

India's highly fragmented agricultural landscape makes the problem more complex. For example, despite being the world's largest producer of banana, India has just a 0.3% share of the global trade. This is primarily because of the lack of large scale commercial farms and low consolidation among smallholders. Food loss and wastage is not only an issue of mismanagement of resources but also contributes to massive greenhouse gas emissions. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) estimates that food wastage accounts for 8% of global greenhouse gas emissions.

Developing and upgrading rural infrastructure; training farmers in post-harvest practices that minimize losses; integrating small scale enterprises into value chains; organizing smallholder farmers into farmer producer organizations; customized financial services; investment in agricultural research; and last-mile marketing channels are extremely important to overcome the zero hunger challenge. They are also important for ensuring social equity, gender inclusiveness and reducing agriculture's carbon footprint.

While this is an enormous challenge, it is an opportunity that compels action, especially for

companies that are involved at various stages of the food value chain. Private companies have the competencies, insights as well as the resources to invest in potential solutions. Solving the problem of food loss and waste has the potential to have an enormous impact on society and on the company's own performance. A report by the Boston Consulting Group estimates that solving the problem of food loss and wastage is a \$700 billion opportunity for private companies.

Companies are also better positioned as they are better connected to the various stakeholders along the food value chains and have the ability to influence their behaviour. For example, the retail chain Tesco has started the 'Buy one get one free—later' programme wherein customers can buy certain food items and take the free product later when they actually need it, reducing the attraction to stock discounted products which often leads to food wastage. The problem of food waste is also intensified because of the lack of regulation around industry standards and policies. Companies can be advocates for industry standards that regulate food wastage and help increase general public awareness around the issue. The government, on its part, can have laws that penalize companies for wasting food within their supply chain and encourage repurposing and recycling of food items. For example, since 2016, France has been fining grocery stores for throwing away edible food.

American senator Daniel Webster once said, "When tillage begins, the other arts follow. The farmers, therefore, are the founders of human civilization." The agriculture sector is a laggard in the fast changing economic landscape of the country. The farmer, the first participant of the economy, has to be supported to achieve the highest production and productivity and must be ensured a larger share of profit along the value chain.

Currently, we have a one-way movement of raw materials and a one-way movement of finished goods. This flow must be transformed into a two-way movement of commerce and healthy, nutritious food between the farmers and the consumers to overcome the zero hunger challenge and address poverty in all its forms.

*Tomio Shichiri is the FAO representative in India.*

*With inputs from Kundan Singh, national consultant (economist), FAO.*

**END**

Downloaded from **crackIAS.com**

© **Zuccess App** by crackIAS.com