

Towards transformation

Establishing clear, scientific targets to guide food systems transformation is an important step towards achieving SDGs and the objectives of the Paris Agreement

May 2nd, 2019



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The Spring Meetings 2019 of World Bank Group-IMF had an insightful panel discussion titled “On the Menu: Can Food be the Planet’s Medicine?” at the Preston Auditorium April 10 (which the writer had the opportunity to attend). In her opening remarks at the discussion, mWorld Bank CEO Kristalina Georgieva made a forceful plea that food is so critically important for the future as the world would have to provide quality food to 10 billion people in 2050. The goal of healthy diets by 2050 requires substantial transformation in dietary habits. Without proactive action by all stake holders, the world risks failing to meet UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and today’s children will inherit a planet severely denuded, degraded and where much of the population faces malnutrition.

The food system includes all elements and activities that relate to production, processing, distribution, preparation and consumption of food. According to World Bank, more than 820 million people still lack adequate food and many more consume low-quality and low-calorie diet. Diets are linked to human health on one hand and global environmental sustainability on the other. But there is a lack of global co-ordination on healthy food and sustainable food production.

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How food is produced, what is consumed and how much is lost or wasted, all heavily shape the health of both people and our planet. To have a holistic view, and address the issues, a study group: EAT-Lancet Commission was formed. EAT is a global non-profit foundation established by the Stordalen Foundation, Stockholm Resilience Centre to catalyse a food system transformation. EAT gathered 37 of the planet's foremost experts who, for the first time ever, propose scientific targets for what constitutes a healthy diet from a sustainable food system. **This ground breaking report was launched in Oslo, Norway January 17. Since then this report has been released in over 25 countries, including in India, April 4, 2019, at the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) Headquartered at FDA Bhavan, New Delhi.** EAT-Lancet Commission's report provides the first ever scientific targets for healthy diets and sustainable food production based on a broad spectrum of the latest scientific literature. It was published in 'The Lancet', a world-leading scientific medical journal, and combines research on health, nutrition, agriculture, environmental sciences and political sciences, and presents the correlating result. The Commission focuses on two end points of the global food system: final consumption of healthy diets and sustainable food production. The Commission presents an integrated global framework and for the first time, provides quantitative scientific targets for healthy diets and sustainable food production. The Commission shows that feeding 10 billion people a healthy diet within safe planetary boundaries for food production by 2050 is both necessary and possible.

Food is the single strongest lever to optimize human health and environmental stability on Earth. Most studies indicate that a diet rich in plant-based foods and low animal source confers both improved health and environmental benefits. A healthy diet should optimise health: Physical, mental and social well-being and not merely life without disease. The study states that transformation to healthy diets by 2050 will require substantial dietary shifts. This includes more than doubling consumption of fruits, vegetables, legumes and nuts and more than 50 per cent reduction in intake of less healthy foods such as sugar, red meat and starchy vegetables. The dietary mix of a region will depend on the nutrition level of the population and "diet gap" should be addressed appropriately. The commission assessed that the potential impacts of dietary shifts would benefit mankind as it would prevent approximately 11 million deaths per year which represents about 20-24 per cent of total adult deaths.

A great food transition is needed globally for the sustenance of mankind. According to the EAT document: "The Great Food Transformation will not occur without widespread multi-sector, multi-level action, which must be guided by scientific targets." Delayed action will

increase likelihood of serious, even disastrous consequences. One important strategy is to reorient agricultural priorities from producing high quantities of food to producing healthy food. Agriculture and fisheries must produce a diversified food basket that nurtures human health and environmental good. Along with dietary shifts, agricultural and marine policies must be oriented towards variety of nutritious foods that give rise to biodiversity rather than aiming for increased volume of a few crops.

The current global food system requires a new agricultural revolution based on sustainable intensification and innovation. This would entail at least a 75 per cent reduction of yield gap on current cropland, radical improvement in fertiliser and water use efficiency, recycling of phosphorus and bio-diversity within agricultural systems. Additionally, to achieve negative emissions globally, according to the Paris Agreement, the global food systems must become a net carbon sink from 2040. The future strategy should substantially reduce food losses at the production side and food wastage at the consumption side for the global food supply to remain within a safe operating space. Public policy should aim to achieve 50% reduction in global food loss and waste according to SDG targets. Actions encompass stepping up post-harvest infrastructure, food transport, processing and packaging, enhanced collaboration along the supply chain, training producers and creating awareness and educating consumers.

Kristalina Georgieva, CEO, World Bank also mentioned that globally, most food subsidy amounting to a total of \$570 bn is misdirected. Further, the third largest carbon emission comes from wasteful food, which needs to be curbed.

Food will be a defining issue of the 21st century. The EAT-Lancet Commission concludes that unlocking its potential will catalyse the achievement of both the SDGs and Paris Agreement. Establishing clear, scientific targets to guide food systems transformation is an important step in realising this opportunity.