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## Game of Grains: Why India's agri-food policies need a holistic review?

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*If one asks whether India's green revolution has helped the country to achieve self-sufficiency in food, the obvious answer from the people of the highest echelons of policy making and politics would be a chest-thumping "YES".*

*But, in truth, what was happening was literally "policy hi-jacking" by few groups with vested interests and the intent to maintain their status quo under the guise of*

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*augmenting food security. In the process, nutritional security, health and wellbeing of the population have become collateral damages.*

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### **Changing composition of India's food basket**

The term "Food Basket" here actually means a real basket that an average Indian homemaker takes to shop for groceries and food. Some decades ago, her (now a days, more of "His" too) basket will have plenty of vegetables, small millets and a rich variety of leafy greens in addition to staple grains such as rice and wheat. However, many of these items had been vanishing slowly from the food basket and most of these are not even known to the millennials and Gen X. Even the older generation that is popularly called as the baby boomers, who used to consume these diverse foods everyday had, to a large extent, forgotten them. The transformation of diets since last few decades in India is mind-blowing and disturbing too.

### **Is shrinking diet diversity a serious concern?**

If one might think how relevant or important diversity in diets i.e. the different types of commodities and foods that supply nutrients consider this. In a recent study on how and from where population in different countries derive their calories revealed that in the past 50 years, more and more countries became dependent on fewer crops. In other words, diets of majority of people in several countries across the globe are becoming homogenous and the dependence on few key crops such as wheat, maize (corn), and soybean. If harvests in any of the major regions that produce these crops face adverse weather, the ramifications go deeper and wider across the globe. Price tend to soar and producing countries may take knee-jerk reactive measures to curb trade which will further strangle global availability. Any increase in food prices will push millions deep into hunger and poverty particularly in the low income food deficit countries in Asia and Africa. These issues may cause even social unrest and may lead to unexpected situations like the recent Arab Spring.

### **Possible causes impacting diet diversity**

Rising disposable incomes in tandem with economic growth are driving dietary

changes particularly in favor of animal protein which in turn drives enormous growth in corn and soybean sectors.

Economists are conveniently blaming the country's impressive economic growth and claim that people tend to move ahead to consume more food items that are "perceived rich" and less of those foods that are "perceived inferior" (but by no means nutritionally!!). However, what these statistics do not reveal is the resulting impacts on human health, nutritional wellbeing and eventually productivity of the generation that misses out on important sources of nutrients from these diverse food crops.

### **Policy hi-jacking: Marginalization of non-strategic crops**

If one asks whether India's green revolution has helped the country to achieve self-sufficiency in food, the obvious answer from the people of the highest echelons of policy making and politics would be a chest-thumping yes. But, in truth, what was happening was literally "policy hi-jacking" by few groups with vested interests and the intent to maintain their status quo under the guise of augmenting food security. In the process, nutritional security, health and wellbeing of the population have become collateral damages.

Read more here: [http://issuu.com/gfmt/docs/mag1508\\_w1/38](http://issuu.com/gfmt/docs/mag1508_w1/38)



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