

WORLD FOOD PROGRAMME – ECONOMY

The Government of India and the World Food Programme (WFP) have signed a Letter of Intent (LoI) to enhance collaboration in tackling the global hunger crisis. Under this partnership, India will provide fortified rice to WFP for distribution among vulnerable communities in crisis-affected regions worldwide.

Food Crisis – Meaning and Context

Definition – A food crisis is officially declared when hunger levels surpass a nation's own coping capacity, requiring urgent international or humanitarian action to prevent starvation, save lives, and protect livelihoods.

Global Implication – Food crises often arise due to a combination of conflict, climate shocks, economic instability, and supply chain disruptions, making millions of people dependent on emergency food aid.

Rice Fortification – Concept and Importance

Definition – Rice fortification refers to the enrichment of rice grains with essential micronutrients such as iron, folic acid, vitamin B12, zinc, and vitamins A, B1, B2, B3, and B6 to enhance their nutritional profile.

Public Health Relevance – Since rice is a staple food for over two-thirds of India's population, fortifying it can significantly reduce micronutrient deficiencies, anaemia, stunted growth, and related public health challenges.

Strategic Value – By fortifying rice, India can improve domestic nutrition security and also act as a global provider of fortified food aid, reinforcing its position as an agricultural surplus nation.

Key Features of India's Rice Fortification Initiative

Implementing Agency – Led by the Department of Food and Public Distribution (DFPD) under the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food, and Public Distribution.

Core Aim – Utilise India's agricultural surplus and food stockpiles to meet the nutritional needs of vulnerable populations both domestically and internationally.

Mechanism – Supply of fortified rice through government welfare schemes for mass distribution. Export of fortified rice as part of India's humanitarian aid, marking a shift from being a recipient of food aid during the PL-480 era (1950s–60s) to becoming a net donor and global food security contributor.

Rice Fortification Scheme in India

Funding and Type – A centrally sponsored initiative with 100% cost borne by the Union Government.

Policy Framework – Implemented under the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY) with a unified institutional mechanism to monitor quality and distribution.

Primary Objective – To combat widespread anaemia and micronutrient deficiencies at the population level, especially among women, children, and marginalised groups.

Distribution Channels – Fortified rice is supplied free of cost through major welfare programmes, including:

1. **Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS)** – For food security of poor households.
2. **Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS)** – To address nutritional needs of women and children under six.

3. **PM POSHAN (Mid-Day Meal Scheme)** – To provide fortified meals to school children and combat child malnutrition.

World Food Programme (WFP) – Overview

Establishment – Created in 1961 by the UN General Assembly and FAO, headquartered in Rome, Italy.

Role and Functions – Acts as the world's largest humanitarian agency, delivering emergency food assistance during crises such as wars, famines, and climate disasters. Supports communities to build long-term resilience, self-reliance, and sustainable food systems.

Global Presence – Active in 160+ countries and territories, directly assisting millions every year.

Funding Mechanism – Entirely funded through voluntary contributions from governments, corporations, and private donors.

Recognition – Awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2020 for effectively combating hunger, promoting peace, and preventing food insecurity from fuelling conflicts.

Collaborative Efforts between India and WFP

Supply Chain Optimization – Modernisation of procurement and distribution systems to reduce leakages.

Nationwide Rollout of Fortified Rice – Joint efforts to accelerate adoption across all states and union territories.

Annapurta Devices (Grain ATMs) – Automated systems providing 24/7 food grain access to beneficiaries under the National Food Security Act (NFSA).

Jan Poshan Kendra – Community-based centres for spreading nutrition awareness and promoting healthy dietary practices.

Smart Warehousing Technology – Digital solutions for modern storage, inventory management, and grain quality monitoring.

Flospans (Mobile Storage Units) – Flexible and movable storage systems for handling food grains during emergencies and seasonal surpluses.

Global Report on Food Crises (GRFC) 2025

About the Report – An annual global analysis that highlights trends in acute food insecurity, its causes, and regional patterns.

Published By – The Global Network Against Food Crises (GNAFC), a coalition including the EU, FAO, WFP, and multiple humanitarian partners.

Purpose – To provide evidence-based insights that guide policy interventions, humanitarian action, and development strategies.

Key Findings (2024 Data) – Around 295 million people in 53 countries faced acute hunger, marking an increase of 14 million compared to 2023. The 10 most affected countries (Nigeria, Sudan, DRC, Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Yemen, Afghanistan, Myanmar, Pakistan, Syria) accounted for 196 million people, i.e., two-thirds of the global total.

National Food Security Act, 2013 (NFSA) – India's Framework for Food Security

Objective – To ensure food and nutritional security by providing legal entitlements to adequate food grains at affordable prices.

Coverage - 75% of rural population and 50% of urban population are legally entitled to subsidised food grains. In total, about two-thirds of India's population (approx. 800 million people) benefit under NFSA.

Significance - The Act represents one of the world's largest food security programmes, underpinned by India's massive procurement and public distribution system.

Source: <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/india/india-holds-significant-potential-to-help-other-countries-boost-their-food-security-wfp-official/articleshow/123508338.cms?from=mdr>

