

### **Subject III**

## **Agriculture, Nutrition and Employment Nexus: Welfare Perspective**

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“Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to *sufficient, safe and nutritious food* that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and *healthy life*” (emphasis added). This definition of food security by FAO in 1996 encompasses both access to food as well as health. It necessitates a wider, multi-sectoral view, for analysis.

A food systems approach is increasingly seen as the lens through which the structural changes occurring in agriculture and nutrition in India are to be viewed. A major channel linking agriculture to health and welfare is through enabling the consumption of diversified diet. A diversified diet is an indication of a diet high in macro- and micro- nutrients, which in turn leads to better nutritional outcomes, especially for children. The paper on this theme provides an empirical substantiation of this relationship. It uses data from both the NSS and the NFHS to find that (a) both household income and education are significant predictors of dietary diversity; (b) dietary diversity is higher in farm households than in labour households in rural areas, suggesting that on-farm availability of diverse foods may be important; (c) dietary diversity is a major determinant of child underweight outcomes; (d) there are significant regional differences in the prevalence of underweight in rural Uttar Pradesh, indicating that targeting of interventions is merited.

There are several other channels by which agricultural outcomes and practices affect nutrition and health. The labour market is an example—higher wages, especially of women, translate into additional resources that are available to invest in child health, among other competing uses. Additional working hours, on the other hand, absent alternative caregivers, may place further demands on women’s time, which is often under-valued and unaccounted for. Another example is that of water, with irrigation requirements translating into mining of groundwater levels to such an extent that the quantity and quality of drinking water are adversely affected, compromising human health. Climate change, with rising extreme weather incidents, is likely to exacerbate these issues. A third area relates to the development of agricultural value chains. Processed foods are often high in sugar and fat content,

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which in turn are the contributing factors to the rising incidence of overweight and obesity.

Thus the overall theme has the potential to support a rich set of analyses, and the field of agricultural economics is best placed to undertake research to provide solutions to these challenges.