

Nutritional dilemma under prevailing COVID-19 pandemic

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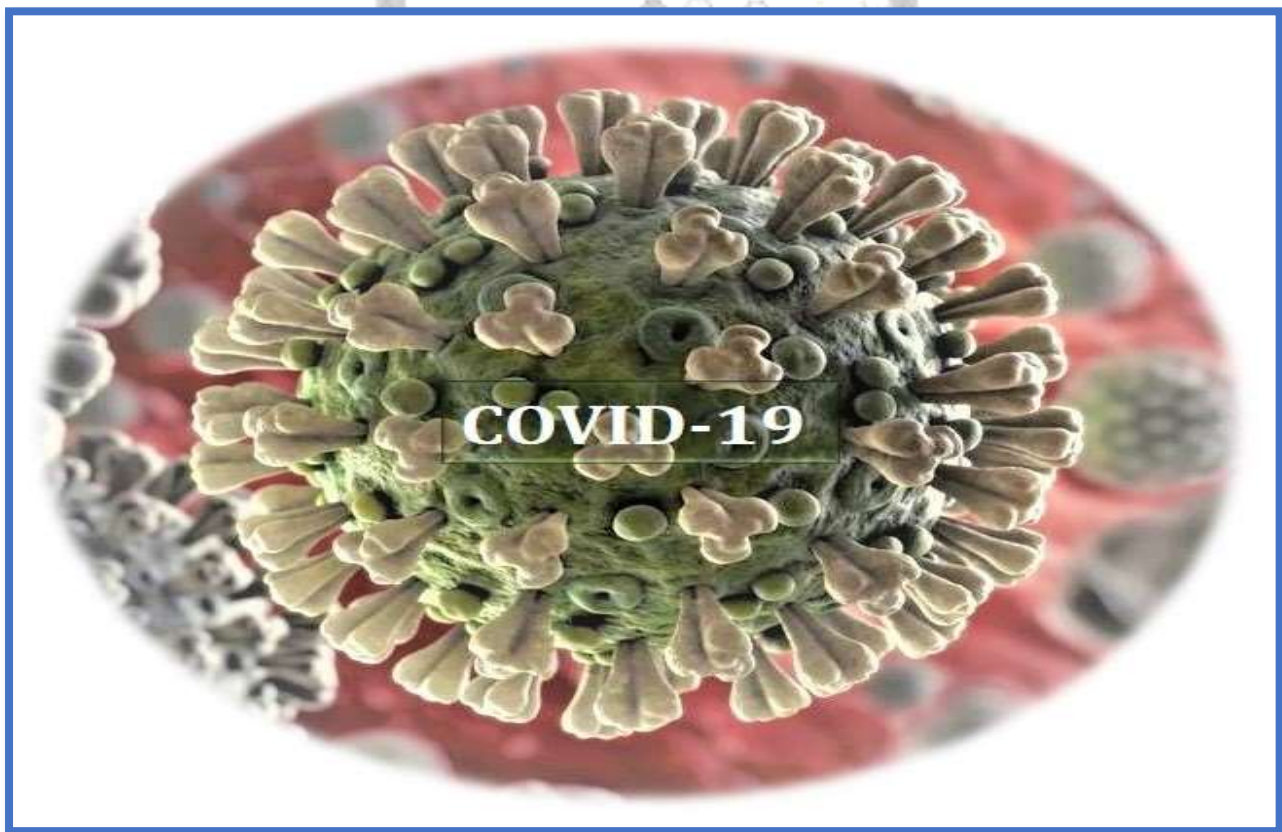
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Abstract

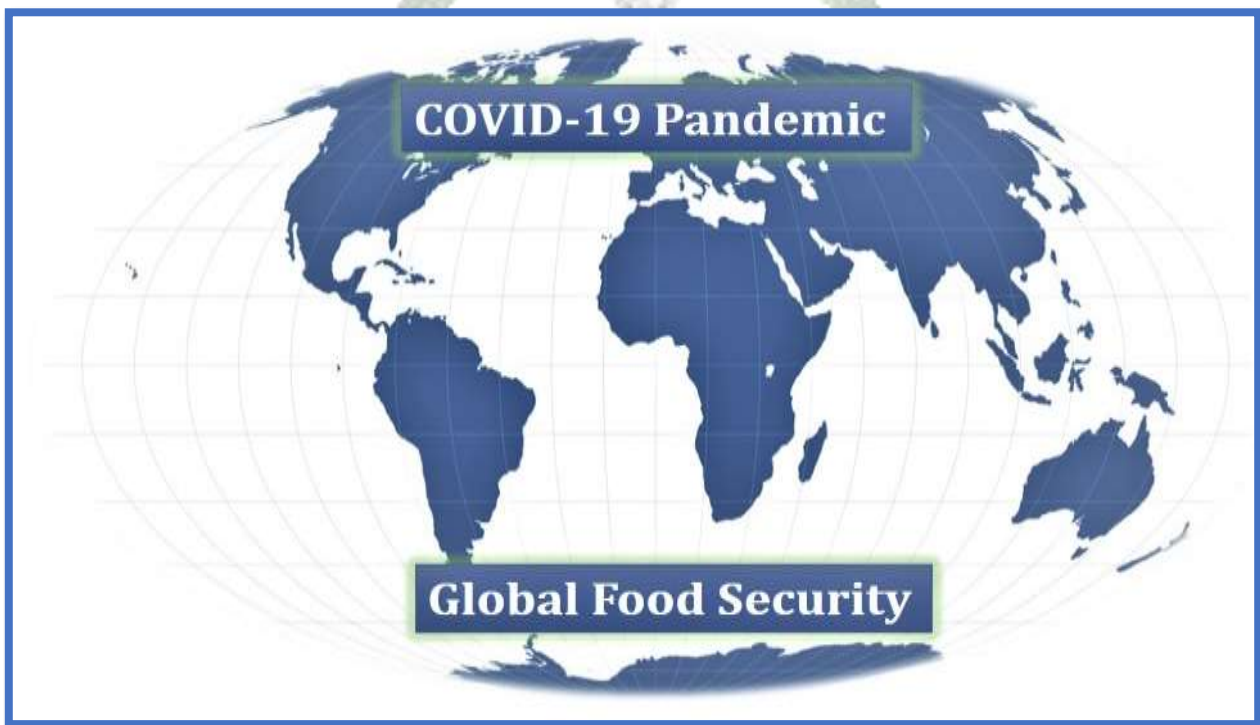
COVID-19 pandemic has severely impacted the nutritional status of millions of poor and vulnerable people across the globe. A holistic approach needs to be embraced to mitigate the problem of global malnutrition particularly during current COVID-19 crisis. Probably it's high time to have suitable mechanisms in place to prevent the current COVID-19 global health crisis from becoming a global food crisis as desperate time requires desperate measures.

Keywords: COVID-19, Diet, Nutrition, Vulnerable.



Introduction

The Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) which has been declared as a pandemic by World Health Organization (WHO), has not only inflicted a mammoth toll of human lives but has also affected the livelihood of millions of poor worldwide, it poses a significant challenge to the health system, economy and food sufficiency and supply chain of any nation and thus may serve as a stepping stone of malnutrition of a global proportion. The food quality particularly in underdeveloped and developing countries would be severely affected and the constraints imposed by frequent lockdowns would only worsen the existing situation. The nutritional availability and condition would be severely affected thus inflicting heavy toll on the vulnerable groups in the society. COVID-19 has severely impacted food availability due to frequent lockdowns, availability of labours, disruption of supply chain and instability of food prices, consequently leading to a gradual shift in consumer preference toward affordable, less nutritious foods.



Food Accessibility

COVID-19 has threatened the availability of food mainly to the low-income groups, who have been impacted by losses of income and livelihood leading to diminishing purchasing power and thereby



their ability to buy quality food. No precise estimation regarding the impacts of COVID-19 on poverty and food insecurity can be deduced as of now. But simulation studies conducted throughout the world have predicted that in between 90 to 150 million people may be impacted and have fallen in the vicious grasp of poverty. As poor household spends nearly more than 50 % of their income on food and have limited or no access to financial supports their food security would be impeded making them particularly vulnerable to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Even the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have predicted a decline of world's economy and the fear of severe economic recession still haunts the world, thus impacting food security and nutrition of millions of people worldwide. The economic slowdown and dwindling income would impact the purchasing power to buy food and avoid hunger and malnutrition as there would be a gradual shift towards cheaper and less nutritious foods resulting in an increase of cases of COVID-19 patients. Even the impact of inadequate or poor nutrition would be detrimental, especially for young children's due to malnutrition.

Nutrition and Diet

The COVID-19 crisis could also indirectly affect the nutrition and consequently diet through disruptions of the supply chains particularly in case of nutrient-rich foods. As fragile supply chains would result in scarcity of nutrient-rich foods which are highly perishable. A decline in incomes would also force many poor households to rely on poor quality food. A breakdown of the supply chain i.e., from farms to market would lead to the shift towards poor-quality diets and further aggravate the situation. This reduces availability of dietary diversity and intake of essential micronutrients would adversely affect the nutritional status by increasing the risk of malnutrition and other adverse health consequences, particularly immunity and susceptibility towards diseases including COVID-19.

Food security and protection of vulnerable groups

As the most important impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is on food security of the vulnerable groups as there is decline in their income and corresponding purchasing power. Social safety schemes need to be adopted to mitigate and safeguard the nutritional status of vulnerable groups. The need of the hour is joint coordination of governments and researchers alike to cope up with the current state of uncertainty. It is important to strengthen and diversify the accessibility and availability of food to the vulnerable groups. Crisis management committees must ensure that a possible nutritional crisis may



be averted. It is important that agricultural sector most notably agricultural inputs, farms, food processing units and distribution system should be declared essential and should be exempted from lockdown measures enforced to curtail the spread of COVID-19, so that food supply chain remains functional. Covid specific health protocols needs to be put in place so as to protect workers in food supply chains and to help contain the spread of COVID-19. Increase access to nutrient-rich vegetables, fruits and eggs to improve nutritional quality particularly for vulnerable groups needs to be guaranteed. It is also important to ramp up community-level screening particularly for children with acute malnutrition along with proper and sufficient availability of life-saving supplements and protective equipment. Surveillance and regular monitoring also need to be done so as to assess

Conclusion

The present COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of early detection of new infectious diseases, improvement of surveillance systems for avoiding future catastrophes. It has also threatened food security of the vulnerable groups and have shown the need of joint coordination between different sectors. A holistic approach needs to be adopted to mitigate the problem of malnutrition particularly during current COVID-19 crisis. Thus, it's high time to have suitable mechanisms in place to prevent the current COVID-19 global health crisis from becoming a global food crisis.

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