



Colossal wastage that is food for thought

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Context

The **United Nations Environment Programme's Food Waste Index Report (FWIR) 2024** reveals that in 2022, the world wasted **1.05 billion tonnes of food**, equating to nearly **20% of all food available to consumers**.

- Food wastage, as defined by FWIR 2024, includes **edible and inedible parts discarded from the food supply chain, from manufacturing and retail to restaurants and households**.
- This differs from **food loss**, which occurs **earlier in the supply chain due to issues such as poor storage, transport and handling**.

Food Waste Index Report (FWIR)

- The report highlights **India's position as one of the highest food-wasting nations, second only to China**.
- While the **per capita household food waste in India (55 kilograms annually)** is **lower than** in some other countries such as the **United States (73 kg)**, India's large population means that this still represents an immense volume of wasted food.
- This crisis is particularly serious in India, where an estimated 78 million tonnes of food are discarded each year, even as over 20 crore Indians go to bed hungry.

Environmental cost of Food Wastage

- The environmental cost of food waste is immense. **Food production is resource-intensive**, requiring huge amounts of land, water and energy. When food is wasted, so are these precious resources.
- In India, food waste accounts for **10%-12% of total municipal waste**, contributing significantly to **methane emissions from landfills** (methane is a potent **greenhouse gas** produced when organic matter decomposes without oxygen).
- The UN Climate Change (2024) reports that food loss and waste generate **8%-10% of annual greenhouse gas emissions globally**.
- Minimising greenhouse gas emissions at the household level, through actions such as reducing food waste, improving energy efficiency and adopting sustainable diets (eating more plant-based foods and less meat), are crucial.
- The social injustice of food waste in India is undeniable. **Despite being a major food producer, India faces significant challenges in food accessibility and affordability**.

- Widespread wastage prevents food from reaching those who need it most; hindering progress toward **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 2 (Zero Hunger) and SDG 12.3 (reduce food waste at retail and consumer levels).**
- Climate change further intensifies food insecurity in India.
- Rising temperatures, erratic monsoons and weather shocks (droughts, floods and landslides) disrupt crop yields and weaken supply chains.
- Food waste exacerbates this by increasing the demand for limited resources.