

Urbanisation, calorie dense diets to drive Asian food systems: report

The report says urbanisation, income growth will lead to higher consumption of calorie dense convenience food, which will pivot Asia towards the double burden of undernutrition and obesity

Sep 11 2018. 06 28 PM IST

Sayantan Bera



The report observed that although Asian consumers will move away from direct consumption of cereals like rice, in different countries they will still eat different food—like poultry in Indonesia, pork in China, and dairy products in India. Photo: iStock

New Delhi: Nearly half of the world’s urban population will reside in Asian cities by 2030, altering food production, demand and trade in the continent, said a report released on Tuesday.

Urbanisation and income growth will lead to higher consumption of calorie dense convenience food, which will pivot Asia towards the double burden of undernutrition and obesity, said the report ‘Bringing Together Asia’s Food Systems’ by the Economist Intelligence Unit. The report is commissioned by Cargill, a global agribusiness and food company.

Based on a survey of 400 business leaders in the region, the report identified six mega-trends which will drive Asian food systems in the coming years.

These are growing urbanisation, diets becoming energy dense, the double burden of obesity and undernutrition, rising agricultural R&D expenditure, consumers demanding safe and

sustainably grown food, and a greater role of political choices in allocating resources between urban and rural areas.

The report observed that although Asian consumers will move away from direct consumption of cereals like rice, in different countries they will still eat different food—like poultry in Indonesia, pork in China, and dairy products in India.

“India’s strong vegetarian culture reduces the possibility that the country will emerge as a major meat consumer, but some projections estimate that India’s meat consumption will rise to 9 kg (per person per year) in 2050, from a base of 3 kg,” the report said.

Releasing the report, India’s food processing minister Harsimrat Kaur Badal said India is the leading producer of several farm products but continues to suffer large losses and wastage due to poor post harvest management and during transport and storage of food.

India needs technologies not only to reduce food wastage but also in food fortification, Badal said, adding that 70% of adolescent girls in India are malnourished.

Discussing the report, government think-tank Niti Aayog member Ramesh Chand said that the private sector in India spends less on agriculture research compared to other developed nations.

Data from the report showed that Asian countries continued to under-invest in agriculture research — 0.5% of agricultural GDP in China, 0.4% in India — compared to 5.5% in Japan and 3.6% in Australia.

Commenting on food fortification to address the nutrition challenge in India, Madhavi Das, chief management services officer at Food Safety and Standards Authority of India, said, “We are supporting fortification as a supplementary strategy and working with the industry to motivate them to sell more low fat, low salt and low sugar products.”

“Our goal is to make India trans-fat free by 2022,” Das said.