**Model finds 'middle ground' for India's lockdown**

The COVID-19 pandemic's health fallout would expectedly drive major public investments towards the health infrastructure and nutrition for a country of 1.3 billion, with the challenge of addressing issues of hunger and malnutrition.

The Indian government has been faced with an unprecedented problem during the lockdown, with labourers walking for thousands of kilometres amid India's country-wide lockdown to get back to their home states.

An episode of the podcast ‘From Field to Plate’ asks the question: ‘What will it take to start growing food again?’

The podcast episode, hosted by **Vinay Shenoy**, features **Prabhu Pingali**, the Robert H. Havemann professor of agricultural economics at the University of California, Berkeley, considered a pioneer of agricultural research in India.

Pingali suggests that the lockdown provides an important lesson in nutrition: it is to boost one’s immunity and maintain good health to better fight the viral attack. Extrapolating that one’s immunity and maintaining good health is intrinsically linked to decisions that women make. Thus, an important policy offshoot of the lockdown could be to invest more in women empowerment, which would help reduce transaction costs of the population.

Pingali also argues that larger investments need to be made in nutrition and the agricultural extension system. Moreover, the lockdown presented an important opportunity for India to push for consumption of locally produced food.

Pingali says the lockdown pushed the government to ensure that the public suffered minimum hardship, which is a huge shift in thinking. It also created a situation where the government could address the needs of the large scale exodus of migrant labourers and jobless agricultural labourers who have left the agriculture sector.

Pingali stresses the need to change the agricultural production system to reduce losses from malnutrition and face the challenges of climate change. Pingali believes that the biggest challenge to India is its water-intensive crops, which are skewed in favour of staple crops like rice and wheat, and get some support pricing, this seems ineffective. The government will need to step up its game to address this problem.

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