



Tackling Hunger

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This article is based on “**Alarming hunger or statistical artefact?**” which was published in The Hindu on 18/10/2021. It talks about India’s malnutrition problem.

India has slipped to **101st position in the Global Hunger Index (GHI) 2021** of 116 countries, from its **2020 position of 94th**. With a score of **27.5**, India has a level of hunger that is in the serious category. This has brought to fore the urgency and the need to bring changes in India’s nutritional policy.

GHI Findings

GHI has four components. **India’s performance in the four components** is:

- **Undernourishment:** Share of undernourished in the population: **15.3%** in 2018-2020.
- **Child Stunting:** Prevalence of stunting in children under 5 years: **34.7%** in 2016-2020.
- **Child Wasting:** Prevalence of wasting in children under 5 years: **17.3%** in 2016-2020.
- **Child Mortality:** The Under-5 Mortality Rate: **3.4%** in 2019.
- **Analysis:** Since 2000, India has made substantial progress, but there are still areas of concern, particularly regarding child nutrition.
 - India’s GHI score has decreased.
 - The proportion of undernourished in the population and the under-five child mortality rate are now at relatively low levels.
 - While child stunting has seen a significant decrease, it is still considered very high.
 - Despite improvements over the year, India has the highest child wasting rate of all countries covered in the GHI.

Causes of Malnutrition

- There are multiple dimensions of **malnutrition in India** that include
 - **Calorific deficiency**- Though the government has **surplus of foodgrains**, there is calorific deficiency because the allocation and distribution is not proper. Even the yearly budget allocated is not fully utilised.
 - **Protein hunger- Pulses** are a major contributor to address protein hunger. However, there is not enough budgetary allocations done to tackle the problem. With Eggs missing from menus of Mid-day Meals in various States, an easy way to improve protein intake is lost.
 - **Micronutrient deficiency** (also known as **hidden hunger**): India faces a severe crisis in micronutrient deficiency. Its causes include poor diet, disease, or increased micronutrient needs not met during pregnancy and lactation.
- **Other Causes**: Access to nutritious food is only one of the determinants of nutrition.
- **Other factors like**:
 - Poor access to **safe drinking water** and
 - Poor access to **Sanitation** (especially toilets),
 - Low levels of **immunisation** and
 - Education, especially of women, contributes equally to this dismal situation.

Government Interventions

- **Eat Right India Movement**: An outreach activity organised by the **Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI)** for citizens to nudge them towards eating right.
- **POSHAN Abhiyan**: Launched by the **Ministry of Women and Child Development** in 2018, it targets to reduce stunting, undernutrition, anemia (among young children, women and adolescent girls).
- **Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana**: A **centrally sponsored scheme** executed by the **Ministry of Women and Child Development**, is a maternity benefit programme being implemented in **all districts** of the country with effect from 1st January, 2017.
- **Food Fortification**: Food Fortification or Food Enrichment is the **addition of key vitamins** and minerals such as iron, iodine, zinc, Vitamin A & D to staple foods such as rice, milk and salt to improve their nutritional content.
- **National Food Security Act, 2013**: It legally **entitled up to 75% of the rural population and 50% of the urban population** to receive subsidized food grains under the **Targeted Public Distribution System**.
- **Mission Indradhanush**: It targets **children under 2 years of age and pregnant women** for immunization against **12 Vaccine-Preventable Diseases (VPD)**.

- **Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) Scheme**: Launched on **2nd October, 1975**, the ICDS Scheme offers a **package of six services** to children in the age group of 0-6 years, pregnant women and lactating mothers.
 - Supplementary Nutrition,
 - Pre-school non-formal education,
 - Nutrition & health education,
 - Immunization,
 - Health check-up and
 - Referral services.

Way Forward

- **Agriculture-Nutrition linkage schemes** have the potential for greater impact in dealing with malnutrition and thus, needs greater emphasis.
 - Recognising the importance of this link, the **Ministry for Women and Child Development** launched the **Bharatiya Poshan Krishi Kosh** in 2019.
 - There is a need to promote schemes directed to nutrition-agriculture link activities in rural areas. However, implementation remains the key.
- **Early fund disbursement**: The government needs to ensure early disbursement of funds and optimum utilisation of funds in schemes linked to nutrition.
- **Underutilisation of Resources**: It has been pointed out many a times that expenditure made under many nutrition-based schemes is considerably lower than what was allocated under them. Thus, emphasis needs to be on implementation.
- **Convergence with other Schemes**: Nutrition goes beyond just food, with economic, health, water, sanitation, gender perspectives and social norms contributing to better nutrition. This is why the proper implementation of other schemes can also contribute to better nutrition.

The convergence of **Swachh Bharat Abhiyan**, **Jal Jeevan Mission** with schemes pertaining to nutrition, will bring holistic changes to India's nutrition scenario.
- **Mid Day Meal Scheme**: The **Mid-Day Meal Scheme** aims to enhance the nutrition of school children by providing a balanced diet in schools. By including milk and eggs in each states' menu, preparing a menu based on climatic conditions, local foods etc. can help in providing the right nutrition to children in different States.

Conclusion

- With the largest number of undernourished people in the world, India needs to hasten to achieve **Sustainable Development Goal** 2 of 'Zero Hunger' by 2030.
- According to the **World Food Programme** and **World Bank**, malnutrition affects cognitive ability, workdays and health.
- In that sense, fixing the nutrition problem of India, can make a difference not just to better nutrition but to build a wealthier nation too.

- The GHI ranking should prompt us to look at our policy focus and interventions and ensure that they can effectively address the concerns raised, especially against **Covid-19**-induced nutrition insecurity.

Drishti Mains Question

India has a long road ahead to end hunger and malnutrition. Discuss. Also, suggest some measures for India to improve its Global Hunger Index ranking in 2022 and beyond.