



drishti

Convergence of Agriculture and Nutrition

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This article is based on "[A jan aandolan for nutrition](#)" which was published in The Indian Express on 18/11/2019. It talks about the government's efforts to tackle malnutrition in India.

Agricultural productivity in India has seen impressive growth in recent years fuelled by systemic and scientific improvements like the Green Revolution, globalisation and industrialisation of the food sector. Even after all this growth, malnutrition continues to remain a challenge with serious social and economic costs.

There has been a significant disconnect between agriculture and nutrition due to the demands on quantity rather than quality, driven by exponential population growth but there is a need to converge agriculture and nutrition if the problem has to be tackled.

Challenges

- India is a **geographically and culturally vast country** which makes it far difficult to keep track of the levels of malnutrition.
- The **advent of modern food systems** has resulted in a loss of knowledge on and consumption of traditional and local nutrient-rich foods in favour of less nutritious industrialised and processed food products.
 - For example, the replacement of nutrient-dense millets by other grains has been a result of globalisation.
- Missions to tackle nutrition from farm to table **involve multiple stakeholders**, with the government at one end and individuals at the other and it makes this loop hard for common people's understanding.

Malnutrition

- It is a **complex and multi-dimensional issue**, affected mainly by a number of factors including-
 - Poverty
 - Inadequate food distribution and consumption
 - Improper maternal infant and child feeding care practices
 - Inequity and gender imbalances
 - Poor sanitary and environmental conditions
 - Restricted access to quality health, education and social care services
- It has **long-lasting and critical effects** on a nation's progress and future.
- The **World Bank** reports that the **annual cost of malnutrition in India is at least \$10 billion** and is **driven by the loss of productivity, illness and death**.

Steps Taken by Government

Government has taken several steps to address the concern. The following initiatives can go a long way to address the gap and propel parents and communities to rethink on consumption patterns.

Poshan Abhiyaan

- It was **set up by Government of India in 2017** for a **three-year time frame** commencing from 2017-18 which **aims at targeted reduction of stunting, undernutrition, anaemia and low-birth-weight babies** in India.
- It is set up under the aegis of the **Ministry of Women and Child Development (WCD)**.
- At the **agricultural** level, it aims to **amalgamate knowledge of regional food systems**.
- At the **consumer** level, it aims to **foster social and behavioural changes** among individuals, especially parents.
- It seeks to **improve linkages between communities and health systems**, thus paving the way for a mass movement to promote a transformative change.

Bharatiya Poshan Krishi Kosh

- It is a **repository of diverse crops across 128 agro-climatic zones** in India.
- The **Harvard Chan School of Public Health** through its **India Research Center** and the **Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation** will document and evaluate promising regional dietary practices.

- In consultation with the Ministry of WCD, the project team will **select around 12 high focus states** which are **representative of the geographical, social, economic, cultural and structural diversities** of India.

In each of the states or group of states, the team will **identify a local partner organization** which has relevant work experience in **Social and Behavior Change Communication (SBCC)** and nutrition for developing the Poshan atlas.

Poshan Atlas

- It is a **food atlas** developed by the Ministry of WCD to keep all the food-data at one place.
- The data would be **accessible to policy-makers, administrators, experts and communities to help meet nutritional outcomes**.
- The information gained through the atlas will be passed on at the district level for implementation through cooperative tasks among all the stakeholders.
- The atlas will create a **repository of traditional foods/crops and cultural practices associated with them**. These tools will help in developing closer ties between the agricultural and nutrition sectors.

Suggestions

- Such missions should consider **easing the lengthy processes along the food supply chain** and make **every stakeholder accountable** (government, market and consumers) for their works.
- **Food and crop diversity need to be linked with agro-ecological patterns** like soil, groundwater, etc.
- **Awareness** about the traditionally grown crops, about their nutrition and micro-nutrient content, about ways to move away from mono-cropping and increase crop diversity to increase diet diversity should be spread.
- **Understanding social, behavioural and cultural practices** can promote healthy dietary practices and reinforce healthy dietary behaviours both at individual and community levels.
- **Creation of a database** linking relevant agro-food system data can be more cost-effective and sustainable over the long run which would save a lot of finances.

Awareness and knowledge about our crop diversity and regional variations in nutritious food will provide a nudge for behaviour change across the country propelling demand which, in turn, will provide opportunities to farmers and agro-processing units to address consumer needs. Citizens of India will have to come together and join hands to revive our food and crop diversities and use our traditional knowledge for tackling undernutrition and malnutrition.

Drishti Mains Question:

“The awareness of the extent of malnutrition despite agricultural growth has led to a need to converge agriculture and nutrition.” Explain.