

NEXT IAS

**DAILY EDITORIAL
ANALYSIS**

TOPIC

India's Hunger Challenge

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GOVERNMENT POLICIES & INTERVENTIONS, ISSUES ARISING OUT OF THEIR DESIGN & IMPLEMENTATION

In Context

- India lifted 135 million people out of poverty, however, malnutrition still remains an onerous challenge.

India's Achievements

• Poverty & Hunger:

- ♦ From 2015-16 to 2019-21, **India lifted 135 million people out of poverty.**
- ♦ This is a commendable achievement based on the Multi-dimensional Poverty Index (MDPI) prepared by the NITI Aayog.
- ♦ **When India got freedom** more than 80 percent of people were in extreme poverty, which today hovers around 15 per cent as per MDPI and **about 11 per cent based on income criterion (\$2.15 PPP).**
- ♦ The **UNDP** has estimated that India lifted 415 million people out of poverty (MDPI) over the period 2005-06 to 2019-21.
- ♦ India seems to be **on track to almost abolish poverty** in the next five to 10 years.
- ♦ On **hunger**, at least in terms of food availability, India has done well.

• Revolutionising India:

- ♦ **Green revolution: The Green Revolution** turned India from a “ship to mouth” economy to the largest exporter of rice. It has also enabled India to give free rice or wheat (5kg/month/person) to more than 800 million people under the PM Garib Kalyan Yojana, thus improving their economic access to basic staples.
- ♦ **White revolution:** India also experienced the **White Revolution (milk)** and emerged as the largest producer of milk (222 MT), with the US coming at number two with just 102 MT of milk production.
- ♦ **Gene revolution: The gene revolution** in cotton that was triggered by introduction of Bt cotton, made India the largest producer of cotton.

Challenges

- **Malnutrition:** Malnutrition is still a challenge, especially amongst children below the age of five.
 - ♦ As per NFHS-5 (2019-21), 32 percent of children were underweight, 35 per cent stunted, and 19 per cent wasted.
 - ♦ Although India made reasonably good progress in reducing infant mortality from 57 per 1,000 in 2005-06 to 35 per 1,000 in 2019-21, the progress on other indicators of malnutrition is not very satisfactory.
- **Climate change & food insecurity:** Climate change and the increasing frequency of extreme weather events, from heat waves to flash floods, pose a big challenge not only to India's food system but also to poverty alleviation – gains could reverse with these shocks.
- **Non-communicable diseases:** The rising burden of **cardiovascular** and other **non-communicable diseases** in India, particularly among the rapidly growing “middle class”, is strongly linked to diet and nutrition.

Causes of Malnutrition

- **Calorific deficiency:** Though the government has surplus of foodgrains, there is calorific deficiency because of improper allocation and distribution. Even the yearly allocated budget is not fully utilized.
- **Protein deficiency:** Pulses are a major panacea to address protein deficiency. However, there is a lack of budgetary allocation for inclusion of pulses in PDS. With Eggs missing from menus of Mid-day Meals in various States, an easy way to improve protein intake is lost.
- **Micronutrient deficiency (hidden hunger):** India faces a severe crisis in micronutrient deficiency. Its causes include poor diet, prevalence of disease or non-fulfilment of increased micronutrient needs during pregnancy and lactation.

Suggestions

- **Access to nutritious food:** It is time to elevate **food intake among young children** to be of primary importance, as opposed to being **referred to as “complementary”** in policies and guidelines related to maternal, infant and young child nutrition.
 - ♦ Access to **adequate and affordable nutritious food** is equally necessary for mothers for **healthy breastfeeding**.
- **Need of improved assessments:** To better understand food security for all populations in India, assessments using **household-level food insecurity modules** developed by the Food and Agriculture Organisation can be adapted to measure the extent of food insecurity among Indian households.
- **Evidence-based policy:** Measuring the **availability, accessibility and affordability of nutritious food**, especially for **disadvantaged and vulnerable populations** such as young children, constitutes the foundation for any evidence-based policy to end hunger and improve nutritional security among Indians.
- **Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana:** To achieve the SDG of zero hunger, and building on the **Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana**, India should consider a strategic initiative led by the Prime Minister’s Office **aimed at eliminating food insecurity in India** and **ensuring affordable access** to sufficient quantity and quality of nutritionally diverse food, with a special and immediate focus on India’s youngest children.

Government Interventions

- **Eat Right India Movement:** An outreach activity organized 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, anaemia (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, and 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 in 1975, the ICDS Scheme offers a package of six services to children in the age group of 0-6 years and pregnant and lactating mothers

Way ahead

- A straightforward answer to these challenges would be to keep the focus on accelerating economic growth and making it more inclusive.
- **Fixing the pre-existing schemes** is another important solution to addressing India’s multi-dimensional nutrition challenge.
 - ♦ Getting the already existing schemes right requires greater involvement of **local government and local community groups** in the design and delivery of tailored nutrition interventions.

DAILY MAINS QUESTION

What are the causes of malnutrition for India, that lifted 135 million people out of poverty in the last five years? Suggest policy measures to address the issue of malnutrition.