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**DAILY EDITORIAL
ANALYSIS**

TOPIC

**BRIDGE THE MILK DIVIDE FOR A
NUTRITIONALLY SECURE INDIA**

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BRIDGE THE MILK DIVIDE FOR A NUTRITIONALLY SECURE INDIA

Context

- For a long time, India has celebrated the **incredible supply-side success** of its **White Revolution, initiated by Verghese Kurien**. However, it is now crucial to shift **focus to the demand side** and ensure that milk reaches the most vulnerable populations.

About The White Revolution (Operation Flood)

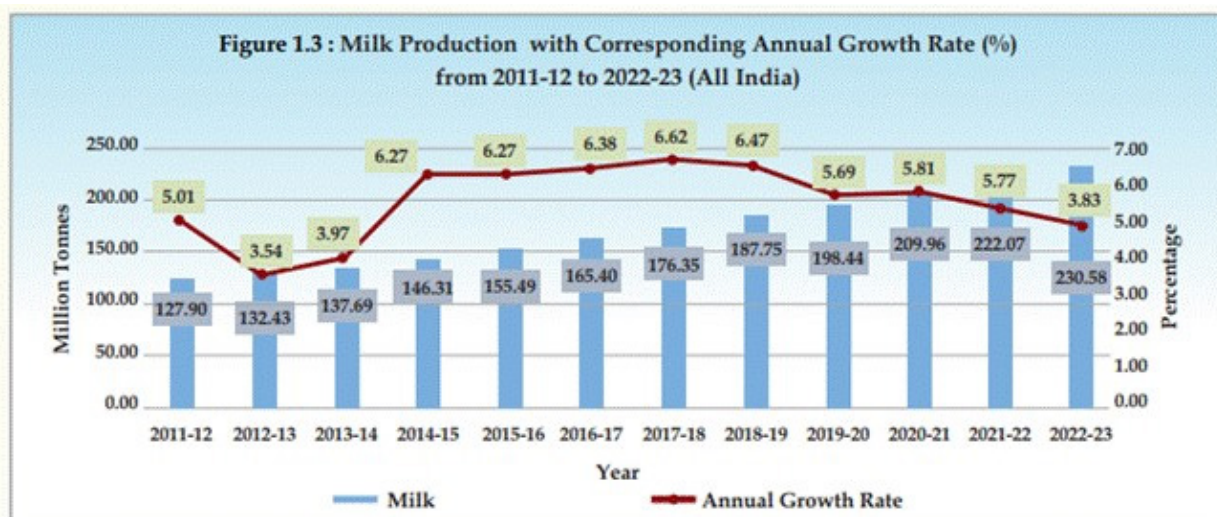
- It was a transformative dairy development program initiated by **India's National Dairy Development Board (NDDB)** in 1970.
- It was aimed to create a nationwide milk grid, linking producers across India to consumers in over 700 towns and cities.
- This effort not only increased milk production but also ensured fair prices for both producers and consumers by eliminating middlemen.

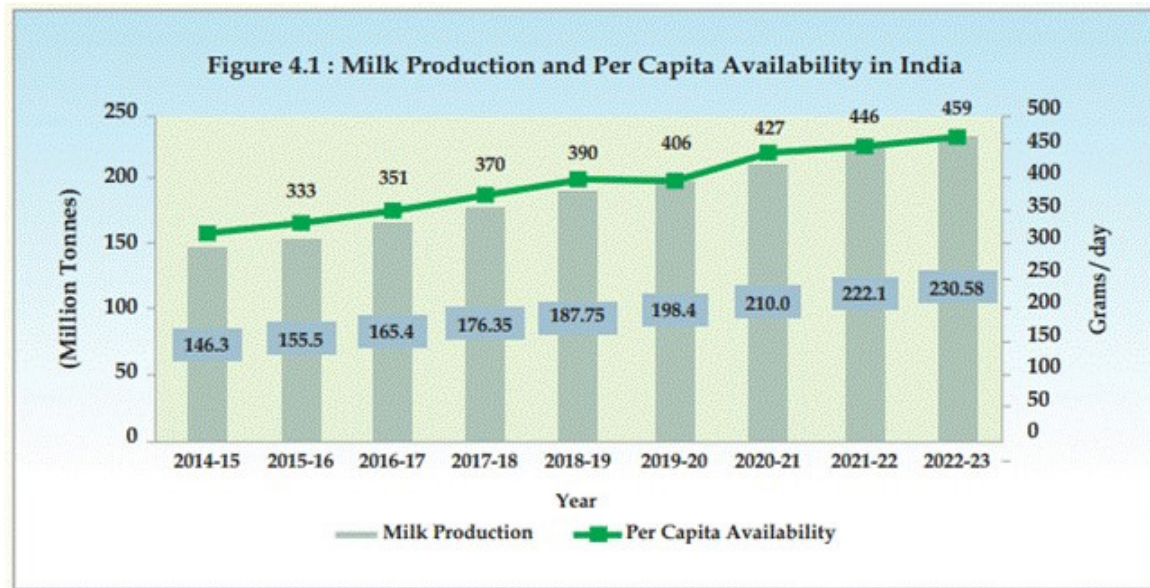
Phases of Operation Flood:

- Phase I (1970–1980):** Financed by the sale of skimmed milk powder and butter oil donated by the **European Economic Community through the World Food Program**, this phase **linked 18 premier milk sheds** with major metropolitan cities, establishing a robust foundation for the dairy network.
- Phase II (1981–1985):** Expanded the number of **milk sheds from 18 to 136** and increased urban markets to 290.
 - By the end of this phase, a self-sustaining system comprising 43,000 village cooperatives with 4.25 million milk producers was established.
- Phase III (1985–1996):** Focused on **consolidating the dairy cooperative movement**, adding 30,000 new cooperatives to the existing network.
 - Emphasis was placed on research and development in animal health and nutrition, further enhancing milk productivity.

Key Outcomes

- Globally **India is 1st in Milk production** with 230.58 million ton per annum (*fiscal year 2022-23, an annual growth of 3.83%*) and it is **25% of world production** of milk **followed by USA**.
 - The per capita availability of milk is around 459 grams/day in 2022-23.
 - Top Milk-Producing States:** Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, and Andhra Pradesh collectively account for over 50% of India's total milk production.
- Livestock Population:** The nation boasts a vast livestock population, including 303.76 million bovines and 74.26 million goats, underscoring the extensive foundation of its dairy sector.





Why Does Milk Matters in Nutrition?

- Milk is often called a **'complete food'** because it contains essential nutrients necessary for growth, development, and immunity.
 - ♦ **Bone health:** Rich in **calcium and vitamin D**, milk is crucial for **preventing osteoporosis and stunted growth** in children.
 - ♦ **Cognitive development:** **Omega-3 fatty acids** and other nutrients in milk aid brain function and cognitive abilities in children.
 - ♦ **Immunity booster:** The presence of **vitamins A, B12, and zinc** enhances immune response, reducing disease susceptibility.
 - ♦ **Protein source:** It provides high-quality protein that supports muscle development and overall health.
- Research links milk consumption to lower odds of **stunting, underweight, and anthropometric failure** in Indian children **aged between six months and five years.**
 - ♦ However, access to milk as vital food remains **unequal across regions, socio-economic groups, and demographics.**

Key Concerns & Challenges

- **Disparity in Consumption:** According to **Household Consumer Expenditure Surveys (HCES)** by the NSSO:
 - ♦ Households in the top-income decile consume three to four times more milk per capita compared to those in the lowest-income decile.
 - ♦ The poorest 30% of Indian households consume just 18% of India's milk.
 - ♦ Urban households consume about 30% more milk per capita than rural households, despite most milk being produced in rural areas.
- **Barriers to Equitable Milk Access:** According to **National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5)** data, milk consumption is **significantly lower among poor households** compared to affluent ones.
 - ♦ **Rural areas**, especially in states like Bihar, Odisha, and West Bengal, report lower intake levels than dairy-rich states like Punjab, Haryana, and Gujarat.
- **Income Disparities and Affordability:** Poor families cannot afford milk regularly, making it a luxury rather than a staple.
 - ♦ Dairy inflation has made milk costlier, with prices rising by 12–15% annually in recent years.
- **Regional Production Disparities:** Milk production is highly concentrated in a few states like Punjab, Haryana, and Maharashtra, while others face supply shortages.
 - ♦ Infrastructure challenges in remote areas limit the availability of fresh milk.

- **Cultural and Dietary Factors:** In some parts of India, especially the eastern and northeastern regions, milk is not a traditional part of the diet, leading to lower consumption.
 - ◆ Religious and ethical concerns influence dairy intake among some communities.
- **Poor Cold Chain and Supply Logistics:** Lack of proper refrigeration and storage facilities in rural areas leads to spoilage and wastage.
 - ◆ Inconsistent supply chains limit milk distribution in underdeveloped regions.

Bridging the Milk Divide: Solutions and Strategies

- **Strengthen Dairy Infrastructure in Low-Production Areas:** Encouraging cooperative dairy farming can enhance milk production in states lagging behind.
 - ◆ Investments in cold storage and transportation will improve milk distribution and reduce spoilage.
- **Subsidized Milk Programs for Low-Income Families:** The government can introduce **milk fortification and ration-based schemes**, ensuring access to affordable milk for underprivileged families.
 - ◆ School meal programs should include milk to improve child nutrition.
- **Encourage Alternative Dairy Products:** Expanding the availability of low-cost dairy alternatives such as fortified milk powder and dairy-based nutritional supplements.
 - ◆ Promoting locally available dairy substitutes in regions with lower milk consumption.
- **Boost Awareness Through Nutrition Education:** Awareness campaigns on the importance of milk in diet should target low-consumption regions.
 - ◆ Schools and community centers can play a vital role in educating parents and children about the health benefits of dairy.
- **Support Small and Marginal Dairy Farmers:** Providing financial incentives, veterinary support, and better market linkages can empower small-scale dairy farmers.
 - ◆ Encouraging sustainable dairy farming practices will enhance milk productivity while ensuring environmental sustainability.

Key Government Initiatives Supporting Dairy Development

- Programs like the **Pradhan Mantri Poshan Shakti Nirman (POSHAN)** and **Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS)** meals can be leveraged to provide milk or milk products.
- Collaborating with institutions such as the **National Institute of Nutrition** to integrate milk or milk products that align with socio-cultural preferences and tolerances is also crucial.
- **Others key initiatives are:**
 - ◆ National Dairy Plan (NDP);
 - ◆ Dairy Processing and Infrastructure Development Fund (DIDF);
 - ◆ Rashtriya Gokul Mission (RGM);
 - ◆ National Programme for Dairy Development (NPDD);
 - ◆ Accredited Agent for Health and Extension of Livestock Production (A-HELP);
 - ◆ Kisan Credit Cards (KCC) for Dairy Farmers etc.

Conclusion

- As India approaches the **Union Budget 2025-26**, addressing these disparities is essential for improved health outcomes for all.
- Ensuring equitable access to milk can significantly contribute to a nutritionally secure India, benefiting millions of vulnerable individuals and fostering overall well-being.

Source: TH

Mains Practice Question

[Q] How can India effectively bridge the milk divide to ensure nutritional security for its most vulnerable populations, and what role should government policies and community initiatives play in this effort?