



Fixing India's Malnutrition Problem

This article is based upon ["Fixing India's malnutrition problem"](#) which was published in The Hindu on 24/11/2022. It talks about Malnutrition in India and related challenges.

For Prelims: India's Malnutrition Problem, Poverty, Calorific Deficiency, Protein Hunger, Micronutrient Deficiency, POSHAN Abhiyaan, Anemia Mukht Bharat Abhiyan, the National Food Security Act (NFSA) 2013, Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) Scheme, Vicious Cycle of Poverty, Information Technology, Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, Bharatiya Poshan Krishi Kosh.

For Mains: Issues Associated with Malnutrition in India, Current Government Initiatives to Tackle Malnutrition.

[India's malnutrition problem](#), especially that of young children, is one of the most pressing public health issues. It causes about **half of child deaths and is a major cause of morbidity** in children. It has **medical and social disorder rooted in poverty and discrimination**. It has an **economic ripple effect that hampers development**.

Government is running various schemes that aim to curb the malnutrition problem. However, there are **still gaps in their funding and implementation**. In order to address this issue holistically, a comprehensive approach is necessary.

What is Malnutrition?

- In malnutrition, the body becomes deficient in **vitamins, minerals, and other nutrients required** to maintain healthy tissues and organs.
 - It occurs in **people who are either undernourished or over nourished**.
- Multiple dimensions of malnutrition in India includes:
 - [Calorific Deficiency](#)
 - [Protein Hunger](#)
 - [Micronutrient Deficiency](#)

What are the Current Government Initiatives to Tackle Malnutrition?

- **National Nutrition Mission (NNM):** The government of India has launched the National Nutrition Mission (NNM), also known as [POSHAN Abhiyaan](#), to **eradicate malnutrition by the year 2022**.
- **Anemia Mukht Bharat Abhiyan:** The mission was launched in 2018 with the **aim of accelerating anemia decline by one to three percentage points annually**.
- **Mid-day Meal (MDM) scheme:** It aims to **improve nutrition levels among school children** in addition to increasing **enrolment, retention, and attendance**.

- **The National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013:** Assuring [food and nutrition security](#) for the most vulnerable is the aim of this law, which makes **access to food a legal entitlement**.
- **Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) Scheme:** It was launched in 1975 and the programme aims to provide food, preschool education, primary healthcare, immunization, health checkups and referral services to **children under 6 years old and their mothers**.

What are the Issues Associated with Malnutrition in India?

- **Arbitrary Identification of Hunger:** Because the criteria for determining a household's below poverty line status is **arbitrary**, and **vary from state to state**. Also, **food consumption has declined significantly** due to an inaccurate classification of **above [poverty line \(APL\)](#) and below poverty line (BPL)**.
 - Furthermore, **poor quality grains** have contributed to the problem.
- **Micronutrient Deficiency:** A severe micronutrient deficiency has been observed in India, which is also known as **hidden hunger**. It has several causes, including poor diet, disease, and **failure to meet micronutrient needs during pregnancy and lactation**.
 - There is also a **lack of adequate knowledge** among mothers regarding **nutrition, breast-feeding, and parenting**.
- **Vicious Cycle of Poverty:** Because of **[low purchasing power](#)**, poor cannot afford to buy the desired amount and desired quality of food for the family. This **adversely affects their capacity for physical work, and they earn less**.
 - Thus, starts a **vicious cycle of poverty, undernutrition, diminished work capacity, low earning and poverty**.
- **Infection Driven Malnutrition:** Infections like **malaria and measles** may **precipitate acute malnutrition** and aggravate the existing nutritional deficit. It is also worsened by **lack of accessibility and affordability to health services**.
 - Also, a child may consume fewer calories during an infection because of reduced appetite which **leads to malnutrition**.
- **Socio-Cultural factors:** In most of the poor households, **women and preschool children especially girls receive less food** than the economically active male members
 - In large families, **rapid succession of pregnancies adversely affects the nutritional status of the mother**. As she tries to manage the big family and **neglect her own health and antenatal checkups during pregnancy**.
 - Undernutrition in mothers may also lead to low-birth-weight babies.

What Should be the Way Forward?

- **Nutritional Awareness:** Promoting **nutritional awareness** at the ground level is necessary by educating the public on the **importance and nutritional quality of locally available low-cost foods**.
 - The **best recipes for preparing proper weaning foods and supplementary foods from low-cost, locally available ingredients** can also be shared with women of the family via **[self-help groups](#)**.
- **Early Detection of Malnutrition:** A well recorded growth health chart of newborn babies and pregnant women can detect malnutrition very early.
 - The **mid-day meal scheme must also be subjected to a social audit** in every district by the states and union territories.
 - Use of **[information technology](#) to improve program monitoring** is also a worthwhile consideration.
- **Improving Health Care Facilities:** Improving the **primary health centers** and other health care services in **especially rural areas** will definitely improve the nutrition profile of women and children.
 - A **good healthcare system that provides [immunization](#), oral rehydration, periodic deworming and proper treatment of common illnesses** can go a long way in preventing malnutrition in the society.
- **Comprehensive Nutrition Profile:** Nutrition is more than food; it involves health, water, sanitation, gender perspectives, and social norms. Therefore, it is imperative that comprehensive policies are developed to address nutritional deficiencies.
 - Bringing together **[Swachh Bharat Abhiyan](#), [Beti Bachao Beti Padhao](#), and Poshan**

Abhiyan can change India's nutritional status holistically.

- **Agriculture-Nutrition Corridor:** India's nutritional hubs (villages) are the most undernourished, and there is a need to develop mechanisms to check the nutritional security of villages.
 - The **Ministry for Women and Child Development** has also launched the [Bharatiya Poshan Krishi Kosh](#) in 2019 in recognition of this link.
- **Availability, Accessibility, Affordability: Improved supplies and production of food,** programs to increase purchasing power, and better agricultural guidance to help farmers yield better crops are essential for **nutritional security**.
 - Government should **assist farmers in marketing their produce** and at the same time ensure that good quality food is available at affordable prices through a **proper well monitored public distribution system**, etc.

Drishti Mains Question

How is India tackling the menace of malnutrition? How can this problem be eliminated from the society?

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Prelims

Q. Which of the following is/are the indicators/ indicators used by IFPRI to compute the Global Hunger Index Report? (2016)

1. Undernourishment
2. Child stunting
3. Child mortality

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

- (a)** 1 only
- (b)** 2 and 3 only
- (c)** 1, 2 and 3
- (d)** 1 and 3 only

Ans: (c)

Mains

Q. How far do you agree with the view that the focus on lack of availability of food as the main cause of hunger takes the attention away from ineffective human development policies in India? (2018)