



India's Hunger Paradox

This editorial is based on [India's hunger paradox](#) which was published in The Indian Express on 02/05/2023. It talks about issues of hunger in India despite having self-sufficiency in food production.

For Prelims: [National Family Health Survey -5](#), [Sustainable Development Goal](#), [Mission Poshan 2.0](#), [Integrated Child Development Services](#), [The National Health Mission](#), [Food Safety and Standards Authority of India](#), [Mid-day Meal \(MDM\) scheme](#)

For Mains: [Current status of hunger in India](#), **Causes of persistence problem of Hunger**, [National Food Security Act](#).

India has achieved self-sufficiency in food production spanning more than four decades, but this does not guarantee food security. It is painful to see that despite having surplus food, hunger still persists.

The [National Family Health Survey \(NFHS\)](#) conducted in 2019-21 shows that a considerable proportion of young children in India face food insecurity, which raises concerns about their development and future well-being. To achieve the [Sustainable Development Goal](#) (SDG) 2 of zero hunger, India must take strategic initiatives to eliminate food insecurity and ensure affordable access to nutritious food for all.

What Statistics Reveal?

- **NFHS-5:**
 - Among mothers with a child aged 6-23 months, 18% reported that their child had not eaten any food in the 24 hours before the survey, which is referred to as "zero-food" and raises serious concerns related to severe food insecurity.
 - The **zero-food** prevalence was 30% for infants aged 6-11 months, 13% among 12-17 months old, and 8% among 18-23 months old children.
 - Going without food for an entire day at this critical period of a child's development can have severe implications.
- **Global Hunger Index 2022:**
 - India ranked 107 out of 121 countries.
 - India's child wasting rate (low weight for height), at 19.3%, is worse than the levels recorded in 2014 (15.1%) and even 2000 (17.15%).
 - Prevalence of undernourishment has also risen in the country from 14.6% in 2018-2020 to 16.3% in 2019-2021.

What are the Issues with Current Measures?

- **Limitations of Anthropometric Measures:**
 - Measures of anthropometric failure, such as stunting and wasting, are inadequate for

assessing the extent of nutritional deprivation among young children in India.

- These measures do not provide guidance on the specific nature of the deficiencies and are multifactorial, making it challenging for any single ministry or department to design, implement and monitor policies to reduce undernutrition among children.
- **Specific Deprivations in Food Groups:**
 - The statistics on zero-food reveal substantial deprivations in specific food groups.
 - More than 80% of children had not consumed any protein-rich foods in an entire day, and close to 40% did not eat any grains.
 - Six out of ten children do not consume milk or dairy of any form every day.
- **The Role of Poshan 2.0:**
 - [Mission Poshan 2.0](#) is a flagship program dedicated to maternal and child nutrition in India.
 - However, appropriate food-based metrics are not developed to monitor and assess the program's performance effectively.

What are the Causes of Hunger?

- **Poverty:**
 - Poverty restricts food choices and has been the causative factor of hunger related deaths.
 - The persistent high prices of food items and the regional disparities in terms of development affects the people to afford balanced nutrition.
- **Associated Factors:**
 - Hunger and the related malnutrition are the result of various associated factors ranging from water, sanitation, access to food items.
 - A person's 'nutritional quotient' is also dependent on demographic factors like gender, caste, age, etc.
 - For instance, the nutritional needs of girl child and elderly are not adequately addressed in our society.
- **Lack of Effective Implementation of Policies:**
 - Another important reason behind the persistent hunger is the poor implementation of the schemes and policies.
 - The [Integrated Child Development Services](#) (ICDS) and the [National Health Mission](#) (NHM) have not achieved adequate coverage.
- **Climate Change:**
 - Erratic rainfall and increasing frequency of extreme events have impacted agricultural activities everywhere creating unfavourable conditions for food production.
 - Climate variability affecting rainfall patterns and agricultural seasons, and climate extremes such as droughts and floods, are among the key drivers behind the rise in hunger, together with conflict and economic slowdowns.
- **Micronutrient Deficiency (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.

What is Needed to Address the Problem of Hunger?

- **Need Better Data on Food Consumption:**
 - The deficiency in data related to food and dietary consumption in India highlights the need for a national effort to establish routine dietary and nutritional assessments for the entire population.
 - Measuring the availability, accessibility, and affordability of nutritious food, especially for disadvantaged and vulnerable populations such as young children, is crucial for developing evidence-based policies to end hunger and improve nutritional security.
- **Primary Focus on Young Children:**
 - Access to adequate and affordable nutritious food is essential for young children for healthy development. The government should focus on elevating food intake among young children to be of primary importance rather than just "complementary" in policies and guidelines related to maternal, infant, and young child nutrition.

What are Government Initiatives?

- **[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).
- **Mid-day Meal (MDM) scheme:**
 - [MDM scheme](#) aims to improve nutritional levels among school children which also has a direct and positive impact on enrolment, retention and attendance in schools.
- **[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 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 subsidised food grains under the Targeted Public Distribution System.
- **[Mission Indradhanush:](#)**
 - It targets children under 2 years of age and pregnant women for immunisation 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, pregnant women and lactating mothers.

What Should be the Way Forward?

- **Top Level Initiative Required:**
 - India needs a strategic initiative led by the PMO to eliminate food insecurity and ensure affordable access, with a special and immediate focus on young children.
- **Robust Monitoring:**
 - Zero-food metric should be used to monitor and assess the performance of initiatives such as Mission Poshan 2.0.
 - Developing appropriate food-based metrics to assess food security is essential to evaluate the effectiveness of programs and interventions.
 - The NFHS should extend 24-hour recall questions on consumption of various food items to the population of children under five years and adults.
- **Adoption of Global Practices:**
 - 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.
- **Assessment and Awareness:**
 - A national effort to establish routine dietary and nutritional assessments for the entire population is necessary to understand food and dietary consumption.
 - Awareness campaign regarding malnutrition at pan India level is the need of the hour.

[Drishti Mains Question](#)

How can India achieve the goal of zero hunger and ensure food security for its population? Discuss the challenges in achieving this goal and suggest measures that can be taken to address them.

UPSC Civil Services Examination Previous Year's Question (PYQs)

Prelims:

Q. Which of the following is/are the indicator/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)

Exp:

- International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) was established in 1975 which provides research-based policy solutions to sustainably reduce poverty and end hunger and malnutrition in developing countries.
- Global Hunger Index (GHI) is a tool designed to comprehensively measure and track hunger at global, regional, and national levels. GHI scores are calculated each year to assess progress and setbacks in combating hunger.
- **Dimensions of GHI**
 - Inadequate food supply
 - Child mortality
 - Child under-nutrition.
- **Indicators of GHI**
 - Undernourishment (inadequate food supply); hence, 1 is correct.
 - Under 5 mortality rate (child mortality) ; hence, 3 is correct.
 - Wasting; Stunting (child under-nutrition); hence, 2 is correct.
- **Therefore, option (c) is the correct answer**

Mains

Q: Food Security Bill is expected to eliminate hunger and malnutrition in India. Critically discuss various apprehensions in its effective implementation along with the concerns it has generated in WTO. **(2013)**