



Towards a Food-Secure and Hunger-Free India

This editorial is based on “[A food-sufficient India needs to be hunger-free too](#)” which was published in The Hindu on 16/10/2024. The article brings into picture the global challenge of food insecurity and malnutrition, highlighting rising costs, conflicts, and climate change as key aggravators. It emphasizes India's progress in food production but stresses the need for a shift towards ensuring access to affordable, nutritious diets to combat persistence.

For Prelims: [Food insecurity](#), [malnutrition](#), [National Food Security Act](#), [International Food Security Assessment](#), [Global Hunger Index\(GHI\) 2023](#), [One Nation, One Ration Card](#), [Household Consumption Expenditure Survey](#), [POSHAN Abhiyaan](#), [National Family Health Survey 5](#), [Agriculture Infrastructure Fund](#), [National Food Security Act \(NFSA\) 2013](#), [National Food Security Mission](#), [National Agriculture Market \(e-NAM\) Platform](#), [National Food Processing Mission](#), [Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana \(PMFBY\)](#), [National Horticulture Mission](#)

For Mains: Issues Related to Food Security and Hunger in India, Government Initiatives Related to Food Security and Elimination of Hunger.

[Food insecurity](#) and [malnutrition](#) remain persistent challenges across the globe. The rising cost of healthy diets, averaging **USD 3.96 per person per day in 2022**, further exacerbates the issue, leaving **2.83 billion people unable to afford nutritious meals**.

India, once food-deficient, has made significant strides in agricultural production but still grapples with nutritional inequalities. While the country has implemented robust food security measures like the [National Food Security Act](#), **challenges** persist. Moreover, the focus needs to be shifted from **mere food sufficiency to ensuring universal access to affordable, nutritious diets**, highlighting the need for a transformation in the **agri-food system to address both hunger and malnutrition**.

What is the Current Status of Food Security and Hunger in India?

- **Food Security:** As per the [International Food Security Assessment \(2022-32\)](#), about **333.5 million people in India were food insecure in 2022-23**.
 - This figure is projected to decrease significantly to 24.7 million by the next decade.
 - Also, recent exploration shows that **63.3% of the rural population (527.4 million people)** could not afford the cost of a required diet (CoRD) even with **100% of income spent on food**.
- **Hunger in India (NSSO Statistics):** **3.2% of the population is not compliant with a minimum of 60 meals per month**, 2.5% of the population may fall into the category of not having two square meals a day (3.5 crore people).
 - In [Global Hunger Index\(GHI\) 2023](#), India was ranked 111th out of 125 countries, below Pakistan and Sudan

- Although critics argue that GHI places India poorly due to its **components focusing more on nutrition and early-age mortality** rather than actual hunger.

Why has Food Security in India Not Translated into Reduced Hunger?

- **Inefficient Public Distribution System (PDS):** Despite improvements, India's PDS still faces challenges in reaching all intended beneficiaries.
 - **Leakages, corruption, and exclusion** errors persist. According to a 2022 report, more than **90 million eligible people** have been excluded from legal entitlements under the [Targeted Public Distribution System \(TPDS\)](#).
 - The **Covid-19 pandemic** exposed further weaknesses, with many migrants unable to access food rations outside their home states.
 - In response, the government launched the ["One Nation, One Ration Card"](#) scheme, but its implementation remains incomplete.
- **Income Inequality and Poverty:** While India has made strides in **poverty reduction (24.82 crore Indians escape Multidimensional Poverty in the last 9 years)**, significant income disparities persist, affecting food access.
 - According to the [World Inequality Report 2022](#), India is among the most unequal countries in the world, with the **top 10%** and **top 1%** of the population holding **57% and 22%** of the total national income respectively
 - Recent data from the National Family Health Survey-5 (2019-21) shows that **35.5% of children under five are stunted**, indicating long-term nutritional deficiencies linked to poverty and inequality.
- **Nutritional Challenges and Dietary Diversity:** Food security in India often focuses on **calorie sufficiency rather than nutritional adequacy**.
 - The country faces a **"triple burden" of malnutrition: undernutrition, micronutrient deficiencies, and obesity**.
 - The [Household Consumption Expenditure Survey 2022-23](#) indicates that the average per capita daily calorie intake in rural India is **1,564 kcal for the poorest 5%, compared to a required 2,172 kcal**.
 - In urban areas, the intake is **1,607 kcal against a requirement of 2,135 kcal**.
 - Consequently, an estimated **17.1% of rural and 14% of urban populations** are classified as deprived based on the total monthly per capita expenditure thresholds for adequate nourishment.
 - The government has initiated programs like [POSHAN Abhiyaan](#) to address **malnutrition**, but progress is slow.
- **Urbanization and Changing Food Systems:** Rapid urbanization in India is **transforming food systems and consumption patterns**.
 - **Urban food insecurity is increasingly prevalent**, with the urban poor facing unique challenges in accessing nutritious food.
 - A 2022 study by the Tata-Cornell Institute found that **51% of urban slum households in Delhi experienced food insecurity**.
 - In response, the government expanded the [Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana \(PMGKAY\)](#) to provide free foodgrains, but challenges in urban food distribution and nutrition persist.
- **Gender Disparities in Food Access:** Persistent gender inequalities contribute to food insecurity and malnutrition in India.
 - Women **often eat last and least in households**, leading to poorer nutritional outcomes.
 - The prevalence of anemia as per the [National Family Health Survey 5 \(2019-21\)](#), is **57.0% in women (15-49 years)**.
- **Inadequate Focus on Non-staple Foods:** India's food security policies have traditionally focused on **cereals, particularly wheat and rice**. This approach overlooks the importance of diverse, nutrient-rich foods.
 - India is the world's second-largest producer of Wheat, with a **whopping 40% increase in production since the early 2000s**.
- **Post-harvest Losses and Food Waste:** Significant food losses occur due to inadequate storage, transportation, and processing infrastructure.

- It is estimated that nearly 30-40% of fruits and vegetables in India turn waste due to lack of proper cold storage facilities.
- To address this, the government launched the [Agriculture Infrastructure Fund](#). However, as on **30th. June 2024**, only **₹43,391 crores** have been sanctioned, out of which ₹28,171 crores have been disbursed under the scheme, indicating slow progress in improving post-harvest infrastructure.
- **Limited access to Clean Water and Sanitation:** Food and nutritional security is closely linked to **water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) conditions**.
 - **Poor WASH can lead to malabsorption of nutrients** and frequent illnesses, undermining food security efforts.
 - While India has made progress through the [Swachh Bharat Mission](#), challenges persist. Still over **163 million people in India lack access to clean water**, and 21% of the country's communicable diseases are caused by unsafe water.

What are the Government Initiatives Related to Food Security and Elimination of Hunger ?

- **Food Security:**
 - [Essential Commodities Act of 1955](#)
 - [National Food Security Act \(NFSA\) 2013](#)
 - [National Food Security Mission](#)
 - [National Food Processing Mission](#)
 - [Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana \(PMFBY\)](#)
 - [National Horticulture Mission](#)
 - [National Agriculture Market \(e-NAM\) Platform](#)
 - [2023 as the International Year of Millets](#)
 - [Mega Food Park Scheme](#)
- **Hunger:**
 - [Eat Right India Movement](#)
 - [POSHAN Abhiyan](#)
 - [Mid-day Meal \(MDM\) scheme](#)
 - [POSHAN Tracker App](#)
 - [Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana](#)
 - [Food Fortification](#)
 - [Integrated Child Development Services \(ICDS\) Scheme](#)

How Can India Simultaneously Achieve Food Security and Reduce Hunger?

- **Strengthen and Diversify the Public Distribution System (PDS):** Expand the PDS to include a wider variety of nutritious foods beyond cereals, **such as pulses, millets, and fortified foods**.
 - Implement technology-driven solutions like **biometric authentication and GPS tracking** to reduce leakages and improve targeting.
 - Accelerate the implementation of the "**One Nation, One Ration Card**" scheme to ensure food access for migrant workers.
 - For example, **states like Tamil Nadu have successfully included pulses in their PDS**, improving dietary diversity.
 - The government could set a target to include **at least three non-cereal items in the PDS across all states**, backed by robust supply chain management.
- **Invest in Climate-resilient Agriculture:** Scale up programs promoting **drought-resistant crop varieties**, water-efficient irrigation systems, and sustainable farming practices.
 - Expand the coverage of crop insurance schemes like [Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana](#) to protect farmers against climate shocks.
 - Invest in research and development of **climate-adaptive agricultural technologies**. For instance, the [Indian Council of Agricultural Research \(ICAR\)](#) has developed **flood-tolerant rice varieties like Swarna-Sub1**, which can survive submergence for

two weeks.

- **Enhance Nutrition Education and Behavior Change:** Launch comprehensive nutrition education campaigns targeting diverse demographics, including **school children, pregnant women, and community leaders**.
 - Leverage technology and mass media for wider reach. Integrate **nutrition education** into school curricula and anganwadi services.
 - For example, the **POSHAN Abhiyaan's Jan Andolan (people's movement)** approach has shown promise in raising nutritional awareness.
 - Expand this model with a target to reach **every rural household with personalized nutrition counseling** through frontline health workers within three years.
- **Strengthen Urban Food Security Measures:** Develop targeted food security programs for urban poor, including **community kitchens, urban agriculture initiatives, and food banks**.
 - Improve the mapping and identification of vulnerable urban populations. Collaborate with civil society organizations for better outreach.
 - For instance, the **Akshaya Patra Foundation's centralized kitchens model** could be scaled up in partnership with municipal corporations.
- **Promote Dietary Diversification and Indigenous Foods:** Incentivize the production and consumption of locally-adapted, nutrient-rich crops like **millets, pulses, and indigenous vegetables**.
 - Support small-scale food processing units to enhance the **availability of diverse, ready-to-eat nutritious foods**.
 - Launch awareness campaigns promoting the nutritional benefits of traditional foods. The government of India's proposal declaration of **2023 as the International Year of Millets is a step in this direction**.
- **Empower women in Agriculture and Nutrition:** Implement policies to increase women's land ownership and access to agricultural inputs.
 - Provide **targeted agricultural extension services** and financial literacy programs for women farmers.
 - Strengthen **women's self-help groups and their role in local food systems**. For example, the **Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana** has shown success in empowering women farmers.
 - Set a target to increase women's participation in agricultural decision-making through initiatives like reserving a **fixed percentage of leadership positions in Farmers Producer Organizations for women**.
- **Improve Post-harvest Management and Reduce Food Waste:** Invest in decentralized **storage facilities, cold chains, and food processing units**.
 - Implement technologies like **hermetic storage bags and mobile apps** for better inventory management.
 - Encourage **public-private partnerships in developing agri-logistics infrastructure**, supported by initiatives like **establishing one multi-commodity storage** facility in each block and promoting **farm-gate processing units**.
- **Enhance Social Protection for Informal Workers:** Expand and streamline social security measures for informal workers, including **portable benefits and easier registration processes**.
 - Implement **urban employment guarantee schemes**.
 - Strengthen linkages between social protection and nutrition programs. For example, **Odisha's "Urban Wage Employment Initiative"** during the Covid-19 pandemic, **Rajasthan's Urban Employment Guarantee scheme** can serve as models.
- **Implement a Life-cycle Approach to Nutrition:** Design and implement nutrition interventions that address specific needs at different life stages, from pregnancy to old age.
 - Strengthen existing programs like **Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS)** and introduce new initiatives for **adolescents and elderly**.
 - For instance, **Karnataka's "Mathrupoorna" scheme provides one full meal to pregnant women**. Expand such programs nationwide, setting a target to reach the maximum number of pregnant and lactating women with comprehensive nutrition support within three years.
- **Leverage technology for Better Targeting and Monitoring:** Implement AI and big data analytics for real-time monitoring of food security indicators and early warning systems for

potential hunger hotspots.

- Use **satellite imagery and remote sensing for crop yield predictions** and climate risk assessments.
- Develop user-friendly mobile apps for beneficiaries to access entitlements and provide feedback. For example, the "**Mera Ration**" mobile app has improved PDS accessibility.

Conclusion:

Addressing food security and hunger in India is crucial not only for national development but also for achieving the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**, particularly **Goal 2**, which **aims to end hunger and ensure access to safe, nutritious food for all**. By enhancing public distribution systems, investing in **climate-resilient agriculture, and promoting dietary diversity, India can transform its agri-food systems**. These efforts will not only alleviate hunger but also contribute to the overall health and well-being of its population, **aligning with global commitments to eliminate hunger by 2030**.

Drishti Mains Question:

Evaluate the challenges to food security in India and their impact on hunger levels. How can India ensure sustainable food security to eliminate hunger?

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)

Q. In the context of India's preparation for Climate-Smart Agriculture, consider the following statements: (2021)

1. The 'Climate-Smart Village' approach in India is a part of a project led by the Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security (CCAFS), an international research programme.
2. The project of CCAFS is carried out under Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) headquartered in France.
3. The International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) in India is one of the CGIAR's research centres.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

(a) 1 and 2 only

(b) 2 and 3 only

(c) 1 and 3 only

(d) 1, 2 and 3

Ans: (d)

Q. With reference to the provisions made under the National Food Security Act, 2013, consider the following statements: (2018)

1. The families coming under the category of 'below poverty line (BPL)' only are eligible to receive subsidised food grains.
2. The eldest woman in a household, of age 18 years or above, shall be the head of the household for the purpose of issuance of a ration card.
3. Pregnant women and lactating mothers are entitled to a 'take-home ration' of 1600 calories per day during pregnancy and for six months thereafter.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

(a) 1 and 2 only

(b) 2 only

(c) 1 and 3 only

(d) 3 only

Ans: (b)

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)**