

General Studies-1; Topic: Issues relating to poverty and hunger.

State of Nutrition in India

1) Introduction

- India is facing dual challenges of undernutrition and obesity.
- As the country aspires to fulfil its economic and social development goals, nutrition is one area which requires greater attention.

2) Present Status

- 26 million children suffer from wasting (a low weight-for-height ratio), more than in any other country.
- The country has the second highest number of obese children in the world.
- Between 1980 and 2015, obesity doubled for children and tripled for adults.
- An additional 2.6 million children will be obese in India by 2025, a trend that will not reverse without action.
- Research shows that Indians have higher levels of body fat and lower levels of lean muscle when compared to many other populations.

3) Reasons for Lack of Nutrition

- One of the primary reasons for children being undernourished is that often their mothers are undernourished.
- Women without education or without much voice in their families often fail to ensure adequate diets for their children.
- Malnourishment in a girl, combined with early marriage, has a cascading effect of health complexities across generations.
- Poverty, dietary issues, poor sanitation and low social status of women.
- Inadequate iron intake can lead to iron deficiency anaemia (IDA) which leads to permanently impaired cognitive abilities.

4) Concerns / Challenges

- Rising obesity is putting pressure on already fragile health systems in India by posing high risk of cardiovascular diseases, diabetes and some cancers.
- High burden of premature mortality.
- Indian children eating more junk food while becoming increasingly sedentary.
- Poor nutrition affects early childhood development, learning and earning potential with life-cycle effects on national health and economic growth.
- India has the highest levels of malnutrition and the highest number of stunted children in the world.
- The pace of decline of under nutrition is far below what numerous countries with similar growth trajectories to India have achieved.
- India pays an income penalty of 9% to 10% due to a workforce that was stunted during their childhood.

5) Early Nutrition care

- A well-nourished child is one-third more likely to escape poverty.

- They will learn better in school, be healthier and grow into productive contributors to their economies.
- Good nutrition provides the brainpower to build the economies of the future.

6) Government's Efforts

- The government announced that it would release an annual “state of nutrition” report, detailing India’s level of stunting, malnutrition and feature best practices for States to scale up nutrition interventions.
- PM’s Overarching Scheme for Holistic Nourishment (POSHAN) scheme to boost nutrition among children and women.

7) Way Forward

- Nutrition must be placed at the heart of efforts to end poverty, fight disease, raise educational standards and tackle climate change.
- Our policy response has to move from “food security” to “nutrition security”.
- Political will to drive “best buys” such as sugar taxes and mass media campaigns on healthy diets.
- Sustained efforts to promote millets and pulses production and distribution under food security programme.
- Regulatory and fiscal measures to decrease the availability, affordability and promotion of unhealthy foods, while making healthy foods more accessible.
- For example taking the lead from a directive by the Delhi High Court, that India should ban the sale of junk food in and around schools.
- Recent Lancet study on India showed that higher taxes on junk food can actually lead those on lower incomes to live healthier lives.
- Obesity management, prevention and treatment should be provided as essential health services .
- The best practices of states which are successful in reducing stunting, anaemia and malnutrition are to be studied, and successful models are to be adopted at the national level.
- Research suggests that \$1 spent on nutritional interventions in India could generate \$34.1 to \$38.6 in public economic returns.
- Ingenious tribal women are growing plants of nutritious value following their age-old tradition and other people must follow it by including such plants in their backyard.
- Fortified food can be incorporated into mid-day meals, public distribution shops and anganwadi centres.

8) Conclusion

- Boosting nutrition levels across the country is one of the biggest low hanging fruit in the Indian public policy sphere.
- If we can conquer space, we can conquer malnutrition.