

General Studies-2; Topic- Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

Global Nutrition Report 2018

1) Introduction

- The health, longevity and well-being of Indians has improved since Independence.
- High levels of economic growth over the past two-and-half-decades have made more funds available to spend on the social sector.
- However, WHO's Global Nutrition Report 2018 points out a wide variation in stunting levels in different parts of the country.

2) Report Findings

- A third of the world's stunted children under five — an estimated 46.6 million who have low height for age — live in India.
- With 46.6 million children who are stunted, India tops the list of countries followed by Nigeria (13.9 million) and Pakistan (10.7 million).
- District-level data show high and very high levels of stunting mainly in central and northern India.
- Stunting is caused by long-term insufficient nutrient-intake and frequent infections.
- A quarter of the children display wasting (that is, low weight for height) as well.
- The households with the lowest incomes had the highest number of wasting and stunting among children aged under five years.
- Wasting is a strong predictor of mortality among children under five. It is usually the result of acute significant food shortage and/or disease.
- India also figures among the set of countries that has more than a million overweight children.
- Only 21% of packaged foods in India were rated as being healthy.

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) Consequences

- Malnutrition is responsible for more ill-health than any other cause.
- Beyond health, slow progress on malnutrition is also impacting the social and economic development of countries.
- The health consequences of being overweight and obese contribute to an estimated four million deaths globally.
- The problem of malnutrition remains severe across all regions and none of the countries are on course to meet all nine global nutrition targets.

- It is estimated that malnutrition in all its forms could cost society up to US\$3.5 trillion per year, with overweight and obesity alone costing US\$500 billion per year.

5) India's Efforts

- India has made efforts to counter the trend of slowing decline in malnutrition rates.
- The Poshan Abhiyan--National Nutrition Mission--aimed at reducing malnutrition in women and children was launched in March 2018.
- India also became one of 59 countries to impose a sugar tax on sweetened beverages.
- The Goods and Services Tax on soft drinks was increased from 32% to 40% in 2017.
- However, to speed up progress on both reducing all forms of malnutrition by 2025 and achieving zero hunger by 2030, India can learn from successes elsewhere.
- A combination of public policies, agricultural research and economic growth has led to reduction in malnutrition in several countries.
- The GNR 2018 cited progress made by China, Ethiopia, Bangladesh and Brazil in reducing hunger and malnutrition.

6) Way Forward

- The national framework to improve nutrition for children must be upgraded on priority.
- Social institutions must work to improve nutrition and children's welfare in free societies.
- The absence of hunger enables people to develop their capabilities.
- Governments should acknowledge the linkages and commit themselves to improved nutritional policies.
- ICDS must be subjected to a rigorous review in states where it has not worked well and targeted interventions for supplementary nutrition must be made.
- Among the factors affecting the quantity and quality of nutrition are maternal education, age at marriage, antenatal care, children's diet and household size.
- Even political commitment, administrative efficiency, literacy and women's empowerment also play a vital role.
- Now that mapping of malnutrition at the district level is available, it is incumbent on State governments to address these determining factors.
- Prioritizing and investing in data to identify key areas of action.
- India should invest more of its economic prosperity in its welfare system, without binding itself in restrictive budgetary formulations.
- Research suggests that \$1 spent on nutritional interventions in India could generate \$34.1 to \$38.6 in public economic returns.

7) Conclusion

- The latest report on stunting and wasting should make the Centre understand the problem better and work with the States to give India's children a healthy future.