

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

Food and Nutrition Security Analysis, India, 2019

1) Introduction

- The report, 'Food and Nutrition Security Analysis, India, 2019', authored by the Government of India and the United Nations World Food Programme, gives a picture of hunger and malnutrition amongst children in large pockets of India.
- Despite rapid economic growth, declining levels of poverty, enough food to export, and a multiplicity of government programmes, malnutrition amongst the poorest remains high.

2) Present Status

- The poorest sections of society caught in a trap of poverty and malnutrition, which is being passed on from generation to generation.
- Mothers who are hungry and malnourished produce children who are stunted, underweight and unlikely to develop to achieve their full human potential.
- Highest levels of stunted and underweight children are found in Jharkhand, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and Maharashtra.
- Over 40% of children from Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes are stunted.
- Close to 40% of children from the Other Backward Classes are stunted.

3) Effects of Malnutrition

- Malnutrition is a reflection of age-old patterns of social and economic exclusion.
- The effects of malnourishment in a small child are not merely physical.
- A developing brain that is deprived of nutrients does not reach its full mental potential.
- A study in the Lancet notes, "Undernutrition can affect cognitive development by impairing infant motor development."
- This affects the child's ability to learn at school, leading to a lifetime of poverty and lack of opportunity.
- These disadvantaged children are likely to do poorly in school and subsequently have low incomes, high fertility, and provide poor care for their children, thus contributing to the intergenerational transmission of poverty.
- Stunting and malnourishment starts not with the child, but with the mother.
- An adolescent girl who is malnourished and anaemic tends to be a mother who is malnourished and anaemic.
- This in turn increased the chances of her child being stunted.

4) Progress

- Some progress has been made in reducing the extent of malnutrition.
- The proportion of children with chronic malnutrition decreased from 48% percent in 2005-06 to 38.4% in 2015-16.
- The percentage of underweight children decreased from 42.5% to 35.7% over the same period.
- Anaemia in young children decreased from 69.5% to 58.5% during this period.

5) Concerns / Challenges

- India has long been home to the largest number of malnourished children in the world.

- Hunger and malnutrition amongst children affects the image of a nation marching towards prosperity.
- It raises moral and ethical questions about the nature of a state and society that still condemns hundreds of millions of its poorest and vulnerable citizens to lives of hunger and desperation.
- Many studies over the last five years have exposed the failure of the Indian state to ensure that its most vulnerable citizens are provided adequate nutrition in their early years.
- National Nutrition Mission aims to reduce stunting by 2% a year, bringing down the proportion of stunted children in the population to 25% by 2022.
- This will require doubling the current annual rate of reduction in stunting.
- A year after National Nutrition Mission was launched, State and Union Territory governments have only used 16% of the funds allocated to them.
- Fortified rice and milk which were to be introduced in one district per State by March 2019, has not been done.
- Anganwadis are key to the distribution of services to mothers and children.
- But many States, including Bihar and Odisha, which have large vulnerable populations, are struggling to set up functioning anganwadis, and recruit staff.
- For the poor and marginalised, access to food is impeded by social, administrative and economic barriers.
- Entrenched social attitudes that see the poor and marginalised as less than equal citizens

6) Way Forward

- Nutrition must be placed at the heart of efforts to end poverty, fight disease, raise educational standards and tackle climate change.
- 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.
- Social institutions must work to improve nutrition and children's welfare in free societies
- Political commitment, administrative efficiency, literacy and women's empowerment also play a vital role.
- 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.