Addressing malnutrition

What is the issue?

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- Various findings suggest that measures to address the malnutrition problem are not paying the desired results.
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- This rises the need for alternative measures to take the benefits to the targeted audience.
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How serious is the malnutrition problem?

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- The recent National Family Health Survey data has indicated that a third of our child population is being stunted.
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- And more than half the women in the reproductive age-group are being anaemic.
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- Besides, a recent World Bank Report has highlighted that India is paying about 9-10 per cent income penalty.
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- This is because of the fact that roughly three-fourth of the present workforce suffered from stunting in childhood.
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- The adverse effect on lifelong learning capacities and lower adult productivity is the result of early onset of stunting hampering mental and physical growth.
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What are the limitations in addressing this?

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- Government initiatives like the National Health Mission (NHM), Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) and the Swachch Bharat Mission (SBM) have come in this regard.
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- However the pace of reduction of malnutrition has been suboptimal.
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- This is partially explained by our narrow approach to food.
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- As, measures have largely relied on in-kind transfers such as in the foodgrains through Public Distribution System (PDS), meals or Take Home Rations (THR) through Anganwadi Centres (AWC).
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- Besides, in many states these initiatives are marred by pilferage and leakages.
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- Also, there is only around 50 per cent enrolment because of lack of awareness of the programmes, seasonal migration and discrimination by field workers.
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- The successful results of in-kind transfers and meal programmes in southern States are largely due to the underlying social capital in these States making it context-specific.
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What is the way forward?

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- An alternative to address this could be Conditional Cash Transfers (CCTs) that have emerged as an effective policy tool in driving developmental change globally.
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- CCTs are preferred over the food transfers as they have been successful in:
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1. reducing poverty.
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2. bridging inequality.
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3. inducing desired behavioural changes.

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4. diversifying diets and increasing consumption of meat, milk, vegetables and sugar.
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5. addressing nutritional deficits.
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- Cash in the hands of the women, with the right kind of ‘messaging’ can make significant improvements in addressing the malnutrition crisis.
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Source: BusinessLine

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