Addressing Nutritional Concerns

What is the issue?

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The urgency to address poor nutrition in India especially among children, adolescent girls and women is compelling.

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What is the status of under nutrition in India?

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- According to the Global Nutrition Report 2016 and the Global Hunger Index (GHI) 2017, India ranks at 100 out of 119 countries with a low overall score of 31.4.
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- Among children less than 5 years, wasting (low weight for height), continues to be 21% in the 2017 index, it was 20% in 1992.
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- There has been a reduction in stunting (height for age) from 61.9% in 1992 to 38.4% in 2017.
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- Mortality among children less than 5 years old has declined to around 5% from 11% during the same period.
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- However, 25% of India’s children less than 5 years old are still malnourished.
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- Added to this is the fact that 190.7 million people in India sleep hungry every night.
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- Over half of adolescent girls and women are anaemic.
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What measures were taken in this regard?

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- **Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS)** has a network of 1.4 million Anganwadi Centres.
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- It thus reaches almost 100 million beneficiaries who include pregnant and nursing mothers and children up to 6 years.
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- **Mid-day meals (MDM)** reach almost 120 million children in schools.
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- **Public Distribution System** (PDS) reaches over 800 million people under the National Food Security Act.
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- **National Nutrition Strategy** (NNS) **-** Union government has announced this flagship program of the Ministry of Women and Child Development.
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- This will be anchored through the National Nutrition Mission (NNM) and has set very ambitious targets for 2022.
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- The PoshanAbhiyaan has also specified three-year targets to reduce stunting, under-nutrition and low birth weight by 2% each year, and to reduce anaemia by 3% each year.
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- Additionally, NITI Aayog has worked on a National Nutrition Strategy (NNS).
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- It isolated the 100 most backward districts for stunting and prioritised those for interventions.
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What are the concerns with government schemes?

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- Both the NNS and the NNM have recognised the criticality of working collaboratively across Ministries.
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- Yet both are silent on the constructive role of private sector, development agencies and civil society.
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- There are no initiatives to exploring new models to address the structural and systemic issues on a priority basis.
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- In the absence of coordination with industry to create an effective supply chain, this proposed intervention will be another missed opportunity.
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What are the measures to be taken?

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- An overhaul of capacity and capability of 3 existing programmes such as ICDS, MDM and NNM should be the first priority.
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- For purposeful action both union and state government need to have common goals and metrics for improving nutrition.
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- They should come up with metrics that are clear and measurable and a real-time tracking mechanism.
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- The approach, commitment and resources therefore have to be inter-generational, multi-sector, and multi-dimensional.
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- Government needs to mandate and scale staple food fortification comprising edible oil, wheat, rice and dairy products, in addition to salt.
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- Nutrition has to be “marketed” and made interesting, engaging, simple and personally relevant.
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- This is an expertise where the private sector can meaningfully contribute.
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- Well-structured public-private partnerships could thus be the catalyst.
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Source: The Hindu

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