Food and Nutrition Security Analysis, India, 2019 - Malnutrition Crisis

Why in news?

A new report, 'Food and Nutrition Security Analysis, India, 2019', authored by the Government of India and the UNWFP has been released.

What is the status of nutrition coverage in India?

- India has long been home to the largest number of malnourished children in the world.
- The highest levels of stunted and underweight children are found in Jharkand, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and Maharashtra.
- 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.
- In India over 40% of children from Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes are stunted.
- Close to 40% of children from the Other Backward Classes are stunted.
- Despite rapid economic growth, declining levels of poverty, enough food to export, and a multiplicity of government programmes, malnutrition amongst the poorest remains high in India.

What are the concerns with malnutrition?

- Malnutrition is a reflection of age-old patterns of social and economic exclusion.
- Malnutrition status of a nation punctures the image of a nation marching towards prosperity.
- It raises moral and ethical questions about the nature of a state and society.
- India after 70 years of independence, still condemns hundreds of millions of its poorest and vulnerable citizens to lives of hunger and desperation.

What is the highlights of the report?

- United Nations World Food Programme (UNWFP) , paints a picture of hunger and malnutrition amongst children in large pockets of India.
- The report shows 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.
- 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.
- Undernutrition can affect cognitive development by causing direct structural damage to the brain and by impairing infant motor development.
- This in turn 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.
- The findings in the report are not new; many studies over the last 5 years have exposed the failure of the Indian state to ensure that its most vulnerable citizens are provided adequate nutrition in their early years.

What are the issues with measures taken in this regard?

- The government's National Nutrition Mission (renamed as Poshan Abhiyaan) aims to -
    1. reduce stunting (height below the norm for age) by 2% a year
    2. bring down the proportion of stunted children in the population to 25% by 2022
- But even this modest target will require doubling the current annual rate of reduction in stunting.
- The minutes of recent meetings of the Executive Committee of Poshan Abhiyaan do not inspire much confidence about whether this can be achieved.
- A year after it was launched, State and Union Territory governments have only used 16% of the funds allocated to them.
- Fortified rice and milk were to be introduced in one district per State by

March this year, but officials in charge of public distribution had not yet got their act together.

- The matter is under active consideration of the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution".
- 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.

Source: The Hindu

Quick Facts

UN World Food Programme

- The World Food Programme (WFP) is the food assistance branch of the United Nations, established in 1961.
- It is the world's largest humanitarian organization addressing hunger and promoting food security.
- The WFP strives to eradicate hunger and malnutrition, with the ultimate goal in mind of eliminating the need for food aid itself.
- It is a member of the United Nations Development Group and part of its Executive Committee.
- The WFP operations are funded by voluntary donations from world governments, corporations and private donors.
- WFP food aid is also directed to fight micronutrient deficiencies, reduce child mortality, improve maternal health, and combat disease, including HIV and AIDS and derive Zero Hunger by 2030.

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