Global Hunger Index & India

What is the issue?

- The Global Hunger Index (GHI) has ranked India at 101 out of 116 countries in the category of having a 'serious' hunger situation.
- The Government has objected to the methodology of the Global Hunger Index stating that it is not based on facts.

How are GHI rankings calculated?

The GHI is a tool that measures and tracks hunger globally as well as by country and is prepared by European NGOs of Concern Worldwide and Welthungerhilfe.

- GHI rankings are based on Hunger Index Scores, which are a weighted normalised average of four indicators.
    1. Percentage of undernourished in the population - PoU
    2. Percentage of children under five years who suffer from wasting – CWA (low weight-for-height)
    3. Percentage of children under five years who suffer from stunting – CST (low height-for-age)
    4. Percentage of children who die before the age of five – CM (child mortality)
- The respective thresholds for PoU, CWA, CST and CM are 80, 30, 70 and 35, respectively.
- The standardized scores take a value from zero to 100, where zero is the lowest level of a given measure of undernourishment and 100 the highest.
- The aggregate GHI score is a weighted average of the four indicators where PoU and CM have a weight of one-third and CWA and CST have a weight of one-sixth each.
- Looking at each of these indicators separately, India shows a worsening in PoU and CWA in comparison with 2012.

Why has the Indian government objected the methodology?

- The assessment has been made based on the results of a opinion poll which was conducted telephonically by Gallup and not based on facts.
- All the data used are from official data sources of respective national governments.
- In the absence of food consumption data in most countries, this indicator is estimated based on a modelling exercise using available data and therefore subjected to some margin of error.
- Most of the criticism of the FAO's PoU data has been about how it underestimates hunger.

What do the national reports say on India's status of hunger?

- The partial result of the National Family Health Survey-5 (2019-20) shows that stunting and wasting indicators have stagnated or declined for most States.
- The leaked report of the consumption expenditure survey (2017-18) showed that rural consumption had fallen between 2012-18.
- All these data are for the period before the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Many of the surveys find that over 60% of the respondents are eating less than before the national lockdown in 2020.
- Distruption of services such as Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) and school mid-day meals would further slowdown in improvement in malnutrition.

What aggravated the situation of hunger?

- Provision of additional free foodgrains through the Public Distribution System (PDS) is the only substantial measure taken.
- And even this leaves out about 40% of the population and includes only cereals.
- Higher food Inflation, especially edible oils ia slso affecting people's ability to afford healthy diets.
- Budget 2021 saw cuts in real terms for schemes such as the ICDS and the mid-day meal.
- The distant dream of diverse nutritious diets for all Indians has to be met.
- Focus has to be on the big states, where both the population of children and prevalence of undernutrition among them is big.

References

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