India’s Malnutrition Problem

Why in news?

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More than two-thirds of Indian districts in north and central India have high to very high levels of stunting.

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What is stunting?

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- Stunting is a complex problem which is related to the low height of the children with respective to their age.
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- Stunting prevalence (percentage of under-5 children who have a low height for their age) is an important indicator of the nutritional status of children.
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- The factors which believed to implicate stunting are prenatal health, breastfeeding and diet.
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- Children in richer South Asian countries are shorter on average than those in poorer Sub-Saharan African countries.
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- Much of the height variation among those regions could be explained by various socio-economic factors.
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What is recent findings on stunting in India?

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- A study on stunting was conducted by the Washington-based agri think tank International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI).
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- According to the study more than two-thirds of India’s 640 districts, mainly in north and central India, have high to very high levels of stunting

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- The study has analysed and spatially mapped data from the National Family Health Survey (NFHS 2015-16) on India's high childhood stunting prevalence of 38.4%.
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- A third of the global population of stunted pre-schoolers are in India.
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- It concluded that very high-stunting districts could eliminate 71% of the gap with low-stunting districts if they are able to improve on specific issues of gender and inequality.
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- These include differences in women's low body mass index ,women's education, children's adequate diet, assets, open defecation, age at marriage, antenatal care, and household size.
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What measures needs to be taken?

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- The study shows that only focusing on health- and nutrition-related factors under the existing Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) isn't enough.
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- There is need to address gender-related inequalities at the district level so as to reduce stunting.
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- Factors concerning women across their life cycles, such as their education, nutrition, age at marriage, care during and after pregnancy, play a significant role, as do the overall socio-economic status of the household need be addressed.
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- Recently Union government has also launched National Nutrition Mission (POSHAN Abhiyaan) with a district-level focus to reduce stunting.
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Source: The Indian Express

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