Malnutrition

What is the issue?

- As per **Lancet** study in 2017, 68% of 1.04 million deaths of children under five years in India are due to malnutrition.
- **Comprehensive National Nutrition** reveals that in India half of all children under five years are found to be either stunted or wasted.
- The survey was carried out by Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and UNICEF.

What are the effects of malnutrition?

- Children who survive from malnutrition do not perform well in the school as they could otherwise do.
- Their brains do not develop to the fullest & tend to fall short of their real potential — physically as well as mentally.
- Malnourished children are more susceptible to illnesses, their bodies become weaker.
- Thus, any nutrition interventions have to be made within the crucial period of 2 years of child birth. Once missed it could result in irreversible damage to child's physical & mental well-being.

What are the steps taken to address malnutrition?

- ICDS, mid-day meal programme, and PDS are the early childhood nutritional intervention schemes made by the state.
- **POSHAN Abhiyaan** was launched in 2018 to tackle malnutrition in holistic way by strengthening the delivery of essential nutrition interventions.
- India needs to ensure coverage of every single child and mother, along with 12 months of **Poshan Maah** (Nutrition Month), 52 weeks of breastfeeding weeks and 365 days of take-home ration.

How does COVID pandemic pose challenge to malnutrition?

- Pandemic has led to economic insecurities by disproportionately reducing the incomes of vulnerable sections.
- It forced girls to early marriage, early motherhood, discontinue their schooling, reducing institutional deliveries.

- Pandemic - prompted lockdowns disrupted essential services intensified malnutrition.
- It disrupted supplementary food under Anganwadi centres, mid-day meals, immunisation and micronutrient supplementation.
- Thus, it has pushed millions into poverty and affected economically disadvantaged to malnutrition and food insecurities.

How can we address this challenge?

- More funds have to be earmarked to preserve nutritional security particularly women and children in slum areas, migrants, tribal population.
- To truly grasp the COVID-19-caused nutrition crisis, the country must track nutrition indices through data systems.
- Evidence generated through data will help in tracking the positive impact of POSHAN Abhiyaan.
- In this challenging backdrop, leaders from across the stream had come together to support government in a six-pronged action for nutrition.
- The clear action points towards sustained leadership, dedicated finances, multi-sectoral approach and increased uninterrupted coverage of a vulnerable population in nutrition programmes.
- Efforts need to be accelerated & nutrition has to be given primary importance else it will derail the nutrition gains India has already made.

Source: The Hindu

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