Strengthening Poshan Abhiyan

What is the issue?

\n\n

Poshan Abhiyan scheme needs to be strengthened further to meet the twin challenge of meeting zero hunger and ensuring nutrition.

\n\n

What is the necessity?

\n\n

\n
- Good nutrition is critical to avert the irreversible cumulative growth and development deficits.
\n
- It contributes towards improving maternal and child health, learning outcomes, adult productivity and strengthening gender equality.
\n
- The National nutrition mission(NNM) reflects an amalgamation of scientific principles, political fortitude and technical ingenuity.
\n
- The Abhiyan highlights a strong focus on convergent actions from the national to the village level.
\n
- The scheme targets to reduce stunting, under-nutrition, anaemia (among young children, women and adolescent girls) and reduce low birth weight by 2%, 2%, 3% and 2% per annum respectively.
\n
- The target of the mission is to bring down stunting among children in the age group 0-6 years from 38.4% to 25% by 2022.
\n

\n\n

What is the status of India?

\n\n

\n
- Nutrition security is inextricably linked to food and agriculture, yet, the

agriculture sector does not clearly fall within the scope of the Abhiyan.
\n
- However, there are areas where the sector could support the Abhiyan and help to achieve its objectives.
\n
- According to 'The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2018' report, 821 million people suffer chronic undernourishment in the world of which 196 million reside in India.
\n
- The twin burden of malnutrition, that is, undernutrition, along with overweight and obesity, coexists in many countries and its cost to the global economy is equivalent to $3.5 trillion a year.
\n
- The momentum towards a reverse trend is slowly gaining ground, which is reflected in the production record of horticulture crops, fruits and milk.
\n
- In 2017-18, milk production in India rose to 165 million tonnes from about 35 million tonnes in 1980, also making it one of the largest employers of rural people, especially women.
\n
- India ranks second in fruits and vegetables production in the world, after China.
\n
- As per the National Horticulture Database (2015-16), India produced 90.2 million metric tonnes of fruits and 169.1 million metric tonnes of vegetables.
\n
- The area under cultivation of fruits stood at 6.3 million hectares while vegetables were cultivated at 10.1 million hectares.
\n

\n\n

What should be done?

\n\n

\n
- **Focus** - Focus should be made on increasing the production of targeted nutrition-rich crops (nutri-cereals), homestead gardens, diversification of the agricultural production system towards fruits, vegetables and aquaculture.
\n
- **Approach** - "Triple A" approach should be advocated, that is building the capacity of ASHA, Anganwadi Worker (AWW) and Auxiliary Nurse Midwife (ANM) workers to leverage the agriculture extension services in the country.
\n

\n\n

\n

- The extension workers have a direct and ongoing contact with smallholder farmers.
\n
- They can be the agents of change for nutritional intervention by leveraging modern technologies to impart nutrition-linked messages for bringing about sustainable behaviour change towards food and nutrition.
\n
- **Support** - UN agencies such as FAO can provide support to develop and plan targeted activities for capacity building of the agriculture extension agents, so they can promote nutrition-sensitive agriculture.
\n
- The support can help to foster research on areas such as bio-fortification of crops, enhancing production diversity including the coarse grains/millets and food safety.
\n
- In line with the Zero Hunger vision, the FAO of the United Nations can support ongoing NNM efforts related to dietary diversity through agricultural diversification and sustainable intensification.
\n
- This will make the agriculture and food system more nutrition-sensitive, climate-resilient and socio-economically viable simultaneously.
\n
- **Targets** - The key nutrition interventions and strategies, which form the core of NNM, contribute to the targets of the World Health Assembly for nutrition and the SDG Goal 2 challenge of meeting “zero hunger”.
\n

\n\n

\n

- The Poshan Abhiyan presents an opportunity for inter-sectoral collaboration that can amplify collective actions to improve nutrition indicators and achieve the goal of “zero hunger” in the country.
\n
- Thus agriculture should not merely be an activity that focuses on increasing productivity but should also ensure nutrition security of the population.
\n

\n\n

\n\n

Source: The Indian Express

\n

