Thali Index Shows Hidden Hunger Despite Falling Poverty Estimates

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Why in new?

Recent findings show that discrepancies in poverty estimation highlight hidden food deprivation.

- **Thali Index** – It is a proposed measure to assess the standard of living based on food affordability in India.
- It uses the price of a **basic vegetarian thali** (meal) as a practical metric.
- It represents a culturally familiar, nutritionally balanced unit comprising **rice/roti, lentils, vegetables**, and optionally dairy/meat/fish.
- **Thali price reference –** Price of a vegetarian thali taken as ₹30, based on data from **Crisil**, considering regional variations across India.
- **Shift from Calorie-based measurement –** The Thali Index reflects **actual food consumption patterns** that consider nutrition, cultural norms, and satisfaction, not just calories.
- It provides a more relatable and tangible measure for the general public.

Key Findings Using Thali Index (2023-24)

- **Affordability** – Up to 40% of the rural population could not afford two vegetarian thalis a day.
- In urban areas, up to 10% of the population faced the same deprivation.
- It indicates higher food deprivation than suggested by official poverty estimates from SBI or World Bank.
- **Policy implications –** Current poverty estimates may understate the need for food subsidies.
- Thali Index suggests food subsidies **should not be eliminated** but rationalised.
- Thali Index offers a goods-based, realistic measure of food security.
- It is compatible with nutritional and calorific assessments, making it a comprehensive tool for evaluating poverty and deprivation.

Reference

The Indian Express| Thali Index

