

World Bank Report on Stunting

Why in news?

\n\n

World Bank recently released a report on the prevalence and effects of stunting.

\n\n

What are the highlights?

\n\n

\n

- A child is stunted if the height-for-age ratio is not proportionate.

\n

- **Effects** - Children with stunted growth are more prone to enduring adverse outcomes later in life.

\n

- They suffer from impaired brain development.

\n

- This leads to lower cognitive and socio-emotional skills, and lower levels of educational attainment.

\n

- **India** - The World Bank analysed 140 countries for workers who were stunted as children.

\n

- Of these, only Afghanistan (67%) and Bangladesh (73%) surpassed India's proportion (66%).

\n

- Around 66% of the working population in India are earning 13% less.

\n

- This is specifically because of lack of skills due to stunting in childhood.

\n

- This is one of the highest proportions worldwide in such reductions in per capita income.

\n

- **Others** - The average reduction for South Asia was 10% and North America 2%.

\n

- Middle East and North Africa do better, with a reduction of 4%.

- \n
- This is better compared to Europe and Central Asia with a reduction of 5%.
- \n
- The economic impact of stunting was not limited to Asia and Africa.
- \n
- Stunting has affected almost all continents in varying amounts.
- \n
- But Indians lost more income than people, on average, from Sub-Saharan African countries.
- \n
- Notably, countries poorer than India have handled stunting better.
- \n
- E.g. Senegal, with a per capita GDP of half as that of India's, was able to reduce stunting in its children by half over 19 years to 2012.
- \n
- Peru, too, demonstrated a remarkable decline in its childhood stunting characteristics.
- \n
- This was largely due to its nutrition, health and sanitation interventions.
- \n

\n\n

- \n
- **Returns** - The World Bank report calculated that the returns on a national nutrition package outweigh the costs.
- \n
- This is in reference to interventions focussed mainly on maternal and neonatal health.
- \n
- But given the time lag between childhood and joining workforce, the effects begin to show only 15 years after implementation.
- \n
- After the initial 15 years, the cost remains static and the benefits continue to increase as more of the workforce begins to benefit.
- \n
- The average rate of return predicted for the programme was 17%.
- \n
- But for India the returns were forecast at 23%.
- \n

\n\n

What is the current scenario?

\n\n

\n

- The percentage of childhood stunting in India's current working-age population does not reflect the percentage of children currently stunted.
\n
- This is given the gap between childhood and joining the workforce.
\n
- Notably, the current number of stunted under-five children in India has reduced drastically.
\n
- Over 26 years to 2014, the percentage of stunted Indian under-five children has reduced from around 62% to 38%.
\n

\n\n

What are the causes for India's state?

\n\n

- \n
- Stunting is affected by a variety of socio-economic determinants.
\n
- More than the economic development state, it reflects the treatment of women and children.
\n
- The related causes for stunting lie in social inequity with women's status and health, household wealth, access to services, etc.
\n
- India clearly has inadequacies in women's well-being and efforts to reduce poverty.
\n
- The two most influential deciding factors are women's BMI and women's education.
\n
- These factors explained the difference in child stunting between highly sensitive and less sensitive districts.
\n

\n\n

What lies ahead?

\n\n

- \n
- In India, Integrated Child Development Services, PDS and mid-day meal schemes address children's nutrition.
\n
- The Swachh Bharat Abhiyan and the National Rural Water Drinking

Programme address sanitation needs.

\n

- Despite these, improving women's well-being remains a challenge for policy.
- A nutrition-specific national programme could significantly tackle stunting.
- The National Nutrition Mission (POSHAN Abhiyan) should thus be promoted to address nutritional gaps for women.
- There has to be a specific focus in the lower income brackets if stunting is to be truly eradicated.

\n

\n\n

\n\n

Source: Business Standard, Financial Express

\n

