

A Milestone to Achieve Hunger Free India: Challenges and Initiatives

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ABSTRACT:

The prevalence of hunger remains a significant challenge in today's world, affecting millions of people across various regions. The present paper delve into the intricate dimensions of hunger status in India. The hunger status in India is a complex issue that is improving over the years, but still possess significant challenges. The study attempts to highlight a multi-faceted approach to understand the factors contributing to Hunger in India including poverty, inadequate access to food, malnutrition, climate change and socio-economic disparities.

Additionally, it emphasizes on the efforts that are needed to improve food security, address poverty situation and ensure the equitable distribution of resources. It suggests focusing on improving access to nutritious food, enhancing livelihood opportunities, and promoting social inclusion for achieving Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) target of ending hunger and malnutrition by 2030.

Keywords: Hunger, Malnutrition, Sustainable Development

1. INTRODUCTION:

India being the most populous country with 1.428 billion people, has long been grappling with the issue of hunger and malnutrition. The poor hunger status in India is a complex issue that stems from various socio-economic, political, and environmental factors. Some of the primary reasons behind this problem include property, inequality, unemployment and underemployment, climate change, lack of education and awareness about nutrition. The primary motive behind the Zero Hunger target in India is to ensure food and nutritional security for all its citizens. This goal aims to eradicate hunger, undernourishment, and malnutrition by providing access to adequate, safe, and nutritious food. By achieving Zero Hunger, India aspires to contribute to the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 2, which envisions an end to global hunger by the year 2030. It is quite impossible to think about fulfilling sustainable developmental goal without achieving zero hunger. Achieving Zero Hunger in India also aligns with the country's broader development objectives, as it is essential for fostering human capital, reducing poverty, environmental sustainability and promoting overall social and economic growth. By ensuring that all citizens have access to sufficient food, India can create a healthier, more productive, and equitable society.

2. OBJECTIVES:

The primary objectives of my study are given below:

1. To provide a thorough understanding of the current state of hunger and malnutrition in our country.
2. To discuss about the unique challenges faced by vulnerable populations, such as children, pregnant women, and the elderly.

3. Government policies and programs addressing hunger and malnutrition.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

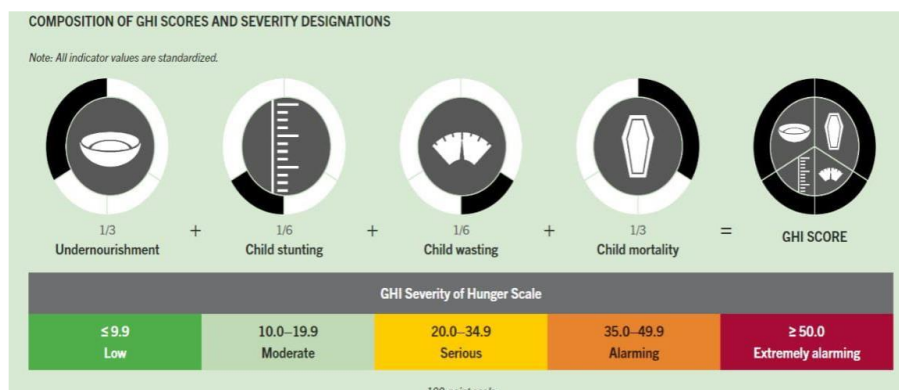
The present paper “A milestone to Achieve Hunger Free India: challenges and initiatives” is basically analytical in nature. It makes use of secondary data and information. The secondary data are collected from Official websites of the Ministries of the government of India, Global Hunger Index report, journal etc. By adopting a mixed-methods approach, this study aims to provide a holistic understanding of the hunger situation in India.

3.1 - Organizational reports on India's hunger situation:

Measuring hunger status in India is essential for assessing effectiveness of policies, targeting interventions, ensuring food security, promoting social justice, fulfilling international commitments, and raising awareness about the issue. By monitoring hunger levels, the government can evaluate the success of its policies and programs aimed at reducing hunger and malnutrition. Accurate data on hunger status enables policymakers to identify regions and demographics that are more vulnerable to hunger and malnutrition. Additionally, regular measuring of hunger status helps in determining whether the country is moving towards achieving its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 2, which aims to end hunger, achieve food security, and improve nutrition.

According to the UN’s Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) 29.6% of the global population (2.4 billion people) experienced moderate to severe level of food insecurity in 2022. India was having the third-highest rate of undernourishment, with 233.9 million affected people. Fortunately, the proportion of undernourished individuals in India decreased from 21.4% in 2004-06 to 16.6% in 2020-22. The organization's prediction that around 600 million people may suffer from chronic undernourishment by 2030 is a matter of concern, as it highlights the ongoing challenge in combating hunger globally.

The Global Hunger Index (GHI) is an annual tool designed to measure and track hunger at the global, regional, and national levels. It is a joint initiative by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), Welthungerhilfe, and Concern Worldwide. It helps to compare levels of hunger between different countries and regions. The global hunger index uses four important component indicators - undernourishment (the share of the population whose caloric intake is insufficient), child stunting (the share of children having low height under five years of age), child wasting (the share of children having low weight under five years of age) and child mortality (the share of children who die before their fifth birthday) – to assess the state of hunger in countries around the world. A higher GHI score indicates a more severe hunger situation, while a lower score suggests a lower level of hunger.



(Source: Global Hunger Index report)

While India has significantly advanced in the last few decades in the production of food grain leading to a notable decrease in malnutrition rates, it continues to bear a huge burden of food and nutrition insecurity, ranking 111st position out of 125 countries on the 2023 Global Hunger Index with a score of 28.7 (slipped 4 notches from 107th rank in 2022). This report indicates a “serious” category of hunger level for the country India and the pathetic scene is that India is ranked below its neighboring countries – Sri Lanka (60th), Nepal (69th), Bangladesh (81st), Pakistan (102nd). Afghanistan is the only South Asian country that lags behind India in GHI listing. While India made significant progress between 2000 and 2015, with its score improving from 38.4 (classified under the alarming score) in the year 2000 to 35.5 in 2008 and 29.2 in 2015, over the past eight years, now the country has advanced on the GHI by only 0.5 points after the year 2015 (showing only 1.7 percentage change since 2015).

However, the Indian government challenged the credibility of this ranking, asserting that it is an unreliable measure of hunger due to differences in data interpretation and methodology used by various organizations, citing other data sources and highlighting the country’s progress in reducing hunger and malnutrition. and even stating that the report shows a mala-fide intent. One reason for this discrepancy is the variation in data collection methods and sources. The GHI is compiled by a coalition of international organizations, including Welthungerhilfe, Concern Worldwide, and the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI). The Indian government, on the other hand, uses its own National Family Health Survey (NFHS), POSHAN tracker (specifically focused on India to measure and monitor hunger and malnutrition) and other domestic data sources. Ministries of Indian government believe that the index is an incorrect measure of hunger and suffers from serious methodological issues, because three out of the four indicators used for the computation of the index are associated with the children health and cannot be identical synsets of the entire population. The fourth most important component indicator namely proportion of undernourished population (POU), is based on an opinion of a very small sample size of 3000, which is not only wrong or unethical but also leads to biasness. Two other indicators Stunting and Wasting are the results of critical interactions of various other factors like environment, genetics, sanitation and utilization of food intake apart from hunger. Another factor that contributes to the controversy is the political context. Critics argue that the Indian government may be downplaying the severity of hunger and malnutrition to maintain a positive image and avoid potential backlash. The report highlights India’s alarming child wasting rate of 18.7%, the highest globally, and a child stunting rate of 35.5%, ranking 15th highest. These data are derived from the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5) 2019-21 data. In contrast, real-time data from the Ministry of Women and Child Development’s POSHAN Tracker reports a wasting rate of 7.1% as of April 2023 and 6% as of November 2023 reports. Saying in a word, the POSHAN tracker is consistently reporting a child wasting rate of less than 7.2 per cent each month, against the 18.7 per cent recorded in GHI. The National Health Family Survey (NHFS) conducted by the ministry of health and family welfare is Displaying a continuous progress in the malnutrition indicators of underweight, child stunting and wasting. As per the recent data provided by NFHS-5 (2019-21), the nutrition indicator components for children under five years have improved as compared with NFHS-4 (2015-16). Child stunting has reduced from 51% in 2000 to 38.4% in 2022 and further to 35.5% in 2023, while Wasting has reduced from 21.0% to 19.3%. As per the data of POSHAN Tracker for the month of November 2023, when around 7.44 crore children under 6 years were observed, 37.51% were found to be stunted, 17.43% were found to be underweight and 6% children under 5 years were found to be wasted. Besides, GHI highlights that India currently stands at 16.6 percent of undernourishment and under five mortality rate at 3.1 percent from 9.2 percent in 2000. Moreover, It is essential to recognize that

hunger and malnutrition are complex issues, and therefore addressing them requires a comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by each country.

3.2 - Challenges in implementing hunger reduction and food security policies:

Addressing hunger reduction in India involves tackling various challenges. Some of these challenges include:

- 1. Poverty:** A significant portion of India's population lives below the poverty line, which directly contributes to food insecurity. To reduce hunger, it is crucial to focus on poverty alleviation through job creation, better wages, and social welfare programs.
- 2. Inequality:** There is a vast disparity in income and access to resources in India. This inequality leads to unequal distribution of food, further exacerbating hunger issues. Implementing policies that promote equitable distribution of wealth and resources can help reduce hunger.
- 3. Agricultural inefficiencies:** India faces challenges in its agricultural sector, such as inadequate infrastructure, lack of modern technology, and inefficient irrigation systems. These factors contribute to low crop yields and food shortages. Investing in agricultural development and modernization can help increase food production and availability.
- 4. Climate change:** Unpredictable weather patterns, changes in temperature, rainfall patterns, and natural disasters can significantly impact agricultural productivity, leading to food shortages and increased hunger. Implementing sustainable farming practices and adapting to climate change can help mitigate these risks.
- 5. Inadequate food distribution:** Despite having sufficient food production, India struggles with efficient distribution, leading to food wastage and inaccessibility in certain regions. Improving the logistics and supply chain systems can help ensure food reaches those in need.
- 6. Lack of education and awareness:** Poor nutrition and lack of knowledge about healthy eating habits contribute to malnutrition and hunger. Educational programs and awareness campaigns can help improve dietary choices and reduce hunger.
- 7. Inadequate public healthcare:** Access to proper healthcare, including nutrition-related services, is limited in many regions of India. Strengthening public healthcare systems can help address hunger and malnutrition.
- 8. Urbanization:** Rapid urbanization leads to increased demand for food and resources, putting pressure on agricultural lands and food production. Implementing sustainable urban planning and promoting local food production can help reduce hunger in urban areas.
- 9. Political will and governance:** Effective policies and governance are crucial for addressing hunger. A strong political will and commitment to implement policies that prioritize food security and hunger reduction are essential for long-term success.
- 10. International cooperation:** Global food security is interconnected, and India can benefit from international cooperation and support in addressing hunger. Collaborating with other countries, international organizations, and NGOs can help India tackle its hunger challenges more effectively.

3.3 - Nutrition and Food Security enhancing steps, policies and programs addressing hunger and malnutrition:

The significance of a hunger-free India lies in the pursuit of a more equitable, healthy, and prosperous society. Hunger and malnutrition not only affect the physical well-being of individuals but also hinder their cognitive and emotional development, limiting their potential to contribute positively to the nation's growth. The Indian government has implemented various programs and policies to address hunger and

malnutrition. Some notable initiatives include the Public Distribution System (PDS), Mid-Day Meal Scheme, and the National Food Security Act (NFSA), which aim to provide subsidized food grains, free meals for school children, and legal entitlements to food for vulnerable sections of society. Some of the initiatives adopted to tackle malnutrition and food insecurity are discussed briefly:

1. The First Five-Year Plan in 1951 recognized nutrition's importance for health and productivity. Subsequent plans focused on nutritional improvement for vulnerable groups, leading to the introduction of the Minimum Needs Programme (MNP) in the Fifth Five-Year Plan, which aimed to provide basic services and facilities up to specified norms. The MNP contained two types of activities: (a) basic human resources development activities covering education, health, drinking water supply, nutrition, and rural housing and (b) basic infrastructure for area development activities like rural roads and village electrification. It is interesting to note that public distribution was added to the MNP list during the seventh five-year Plan.
2. **Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS):** The program started in 1975 is a program designed to address the nutritional and health needs of children under (six years of age), pregnant women and lactating mothers and adolescent girls between 14-18 years of age. It provides supplementary nutrition, health check-ups, referral services, immunization, preschool education, nutrition and health education to ensure proper growth and development. The services are provided by the Anganwadi workers (AWW) and Anganwadi Helpers (AWH). This nutritional improvement initiative began in selected blocks and later extended to other regions. Both the 6th and 7th Plans focused on this issue, emphasizing the importance of family awareness, knowledge, and income for nutritional enhancement. They also highlighted the significance of creating job opportunities and income stability. The 11th plan observed the importance of raising public health spending to at least 2% of GDP.
3. **Public Distribution System (PDS):** The Indian government has made substantial progress through the Public Distribution System (PDS) initiative, which aims to provide subsidized food and essential items to vulnerable groups. The PDS has been an important tool to provide food security to the people in India. Key achievements include expansion to benefit around 80 crore people, the introduction of Targeted PDS for better targeting, the Food Security Act for legal entitlements, e-PoS machines for transparency, online portals for information, inclusion of more commodities, and improved supply chain management. However, there's still work to be done on addressing issues like leakages and inefficiencies. The PDS has undergone several modifications. In 1997, the government initiated the Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS) with a dual-priced regime. This system catered to households below and above the poverty line. Under TPDS, there was a special category named Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) for the poorest of the poor households. They received 35 kg of food grains at highly subsidized rates: Rs. 2 per kg for wheat and Rs. 3 per kg for rice. The PDS has expanded its scope by including more essential commodities like edible oils, sugar, Kerosene etc. in some states.
4. **National Food Security Act (NFSA):** The Food Security Act, 2013, was implemented to provide legal entitlements to eligible households for receiving subsidized food grains. The Act's legal scope extends to 50% of the urban population and 75% of rural population to provide subsidized food-grains under Targeted Public Distribution System. It is a belief that it has further strengthened the PDS initiative as it marks a paradigm shift in the approach from 'welfare' to 'right-based' approach. Government of India is going to provide free food-grains to all NFSA beneficiaries i.e. Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) households & Priority Household (PHH) persons this current year through 5.33

lakhs Fair Price Shops across the country which will ultimately strengthen the provisions of NFSA, 2013.

5. **Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY):** Introduced in 2020, PM-GKAY provides additional free food grains to the beneficiaries under NFSA to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the poor.
6. **Online portals and mobile applications:** The government has developed online portals and mobile applications like the National Food Security Act (NFSA) Portal and the m-PoS App to facilitate easy access to information and grievance redressal for PDS beneficiaries.
7. **National Agricultural Market (e-NAM):** It is an online platform that aims to create a unified national market for agricultural produce. This initiative helps farmers get better prices for their products and ensures that food reaches consumers at reasonable prices.
8. **Mid-Day Meal Scheme (MDMS):** Although India experiences economic growth in specific sectors, it still falls on several other aspects. One among them is nutrition and nourishment. The MDMS Launched in 1995, aims to provide a cooked meal to every enrolled student in government and government-aided schools across India. This initiative not only addresses hunger among school children but also helps improve their attendance and overall educational performance. Serving hot cooked meals to all eligible children (3 – 6years of age), Implementation of School Health programme, Setting up of School Nutrition Gardens, Social Audit of implementation of the scheme are the key provision Mid Day Meal Scheme.
9. **Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY):** This scheme was launched on 1st January,2017. Under the scheme, Pregnant women and lactating mothers are entitled to receive cash maternity benefit of Rs.6,000 (including Rs.1000 under Janani Suraksha Yojana) in three installments as a compensation for wage loss during the pregnancy and to provide nutritious food.
10. **Creation of Food Storage Facilities:** The Indian government has been working on building modern food storage infrastructure to ensure that food grains can be stored safely and efficiently. This helps in managing the supply of food grains and prevents wastage.
11. **National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA):** Also known as Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), this act aims to guarantee at least 100 days of wage employment per household in rural areas annually. This helps increase household income and reduces vulnerability to hunger. This program got adopted in 2006. One main merit of wage-employment programme lies in its self-targeting nature due to manual work and consequent effectiveness in reaching the poor and vulnerable section.

These policies and initiatives have contributed significantly to improve food security and reducing hunger in India. However, challenges remain in ensuring the effective implementation and reach of these programs, particularly in rural and remote areas. So, there is still a long way to go in eradicating hunger in India.

4. SUGGESTIONS:

Firstly, focus on holistic rural development. Implement comprehensive policies and programs that address multiple aspects of rural life, such as agriculture, employment, healthcare, and education, to create a supportive environment for reducing hunger.

Secondly, Encourage the establishment of small-scale food processing units in rural areas to add value to locally produced agricultural products, creating additional income opportunities and reducing food

wastage.

In third, Empowering women in agriculture sector is important. Invest in women's education, training, and access to resources, as they play a crucial role in food production and nurturing in Indian households. Collaborating with international organizations and NGOs is another important step to be taken. Partnership with international organizations and non-governmental agencies to leverage their expertise, resources, and funding to support hunger-relief initiatives in India.

Investing in food storage and transportation infrastructure is also another step to be taken for achieving hunger free country. Improve the storage and transportation infrastructure to prevent food spoilage and ensure that food reaches its intended destination.

5. CONCLUSION:

In conclusion, while India has made some progress in reducing hunger, there remains significant issues and challenges in the country. There should be a comprehensive and manifold approach that can address the root causes or the issues of food production, distribution, and access. By working together and prioritizing the well-being of all citizens, India can strive towards a future where hunger is no longer a pressing issue.

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