

Nutrition and India [UPSC Notes for GS I]

Nutrition and India

Context

- India has a dismal track record when it comes to health and nutrition indicators.
- Initiatives like POSHAN abhiyan to tackle this social issue have been gaining traction.

Background

- According to National Family Health Survey-4 (NFHS-4), 2015-16, over one-third of all under-five children are stunted (low height-for-age), every fifth child is wasted (low weight-for-height), and more than 50 per cent of the children are anaemic.
- On the flipside, nearly one fifth of India's adults are either obese or overweight as per NFHS-4 data, leading to an increased risk of diabetes and cardiovascular disorders.
- In adults, 20% of men and 23% of women can be considered undernourished in the country. On the other hand, 21% of women and 19% of men are overweight or obese. The simultaneous occurrence of over nutrition and under-nutrition indicates that adults in India are suffering from a dual burden of malnutrition (abnormal thinness and obesity).
- As per the UNICEF, India ranked 10 among countries with the largest number of underweight children, and ranked 17 for the highest number of stunted children in the world.
- According to Global Nutrition Report India has almost one-third (31%) of the world's stunted children. India tops this list of countries.

Major causes of Malnutrition

- Malnutrition is caused by a set of complex factors that are rooted in our socio-cultural milieu. Such factors include access to clean drinking water, sanitation, female literacy etc.
- Caste, social status etc also play a significant role in determining the level of malnutrition.
- Our diet is mostly cereal driven. Lack of a balanced diet also causes undernutrition or malnutrition.
- Inefficient PDS system, lack of awareness about nutritional requirements, lack of area-wise nutritional plan based on local geography and culture, lack of convergence among various existing schemes etc are other reasons for the prevalence of malnutrition.

National Nutrition strategy

- The Strategy aims to decrease all forms of malnutrition by the year 2030, with a focus on the most vulnerable and critical age groups.
- The strategy envisions a decentralised approach which will promote greater flexibility and decision making at the state, district and local levels.
- Further, the Strategy aims to strengthen the ownership of Panchayati Raj institutions and urban local bodies over nutrition initiatives.
- The strategy also envisions a holistic approach that ties together supplementary nutrition during pregnancy and lactation, promotion of breastfeeding, bi-annual vitamin A supplements for children in the age group of 9 months to 5 years, micro-nutrient supplements and bi-annual deworming for children etc.
- Governance reforms envisioned in the Strategy include: (i) convergence of state and district implementation plans for ICDS, NHM and Swachh Bharat.

Poshan Abhiyan

- The chief aim of the mission is to improve the nutritional status of Children from 0-6 years, Adolescent Girls, Pregnant Women and Lactating Mothers.

- It aims to reduce stunting from 38.4% as mentioned in the NFHS-4 to 25% by 2022.
- The key intervention in this scheme is the use of ICT tools by Anganwadi workers for easy monitoring and swift implementation of the scheme. It ensures convergence with various programmes i.e., Anganwadi Services, Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY), Scheme for Adolescent Girls (SAG) of MWCD Janani Suraksha Yojana (JSY), National Health Mission (NHM), Swachh-Bharat Mission, Public Distribution System (PDS), Department Food & Public Distribution, Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) and Ministry of Drinking Water & Sanitation.

Way Forward

- Improved training should be given to Auxiliary Nurse Midwife (ANM) & ASHA workers along with Anganwadi workers.
- Farmers must be given adequate knowledge about diverse and nutritious crops that can be grown in addition to traditional crops like cereals.
- Mid-day meals must be designed based on local culture and geography and greater flexibility must be given to states to design interventions based on regional conditions
- Develop and implement Annual Integrated Health, Nutrition and Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) action plans for all districts under the POSHAN Abhiyan.
- Ensure that nutritional food varieties like millets and food items like fortified wheat flour etc are available through PDS.
- The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the UN estimates that if women farmers had the same resources as men, it would have led to 150 million fewer hungry people. Therefore, promoting the welfare of women farmers is also imperative in our fight for nutritional security.
- Ensuring that nutrition, food safety, and the importance of a healthy and diverse diet are taught as a compulsory topic in schools.