

Global Hunger Index (GHI) - India's Position

What is the issue?

India's low rank on the Global Hunger Index (GHI) calls for a relook and revision of the policies and interventions made in this regard.

What is the GHI?

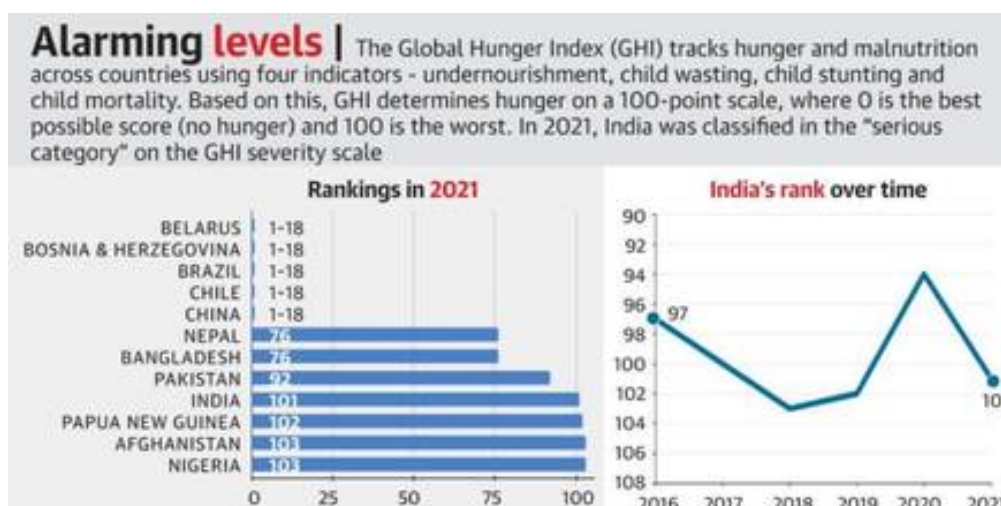
- The GHI has been brought out every year by Welthungerhilfe (lately in partnerships with Concern Worldwide) since 2000.
- A low score gives a country a higher ranking which implies a better performance (low hunger).
- The reason for mapping hunger is to ensure that the world achieves "Zero Hunger by 2030" - a Sustainable Development Goal of the UN.
- This is why GHI is not calculated for certain high-income countries.

Where does Indian stand in the GHI 2021?

India ranks 101 out of 116 countries for which reliable and comparable data exist.

India is also far below some of its neighbouring countries. Pakistan was placed at rank 92, Nepal and Bangladesh both at 76.

- Barring 2020's rank of 94 out of 107 countries, India's rank has been between 100 and 103 since 2017.
- This year's slide in the rank assumes significance especially in the context of COVID-19.
- The Indian government has questioned the methodology and claimed that the ranking did not represent the ground reality.



How is the GHI arrived at?

Four components

1. **Undernourishment** - Share of the population that is undernourished i.e., whose caloric intake is insufficient
2. **Child wasting** - Share of children under the age of 5 who are wasted (low weight for their height), reflecting acute under-nutrition
3. **Child stunting** - Share of children under the age of 5 who are stunted (low height for their age), reflecting chronic under-nutrition
4. **Child mortality** - Mortality rate of children under the age of 5 (partly, a reflection of mix of inadequate nutrition and unhealthy environments)

Sources of data

- Deficiency in calorie intake (33% weight) - Food and Agriculture Organization's Suite of Food Security Indicators (2021).
- Child wasting and stunting (2016-2020) (each accounting for 16.6% of weight) - WHO, UNICEF and World Bank, complemented with the latest data from the Demographic and Health Surveys.
- Child mortality data are for 2019 from the UN Inter-Agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation.

What are the inadequacies?

- Using a uniform calorie norm to arrive at deficiency prevalence for a diverse country as India fails to recognise the regional imbalances.
- There is higher emphasis on undernutrition than on hunger and its hidden forms, including micronutrient deficiencies.
- Recent analysis establishes that 'physical disease environment' at the State level also significantly influences the calorie intake.
- So, the lower calorie intake may also stem from reduced physical activity, better social infrastructure and access to energy-saving appliances, among others and not necessarily mean only deficiency.
- Most in Kerala and Tamil Nadu may get counted as calorie deficient despite them being better in nutritional outcome indicators.
- Conversely, there are States that have a higher average level of calorie intake, such as Bihar and Uttar Pradesh.
- But, their needs may even be higher than the earmarked level of required calories for India as a whole.
- Because these States have high prevalence of communicable diseases and low level of mechanisation in the economy.
- So, it is likely that the existing methodology might underestimate the prevalence of calorie deficiency in these States.
- All this raises questions on the appropriateness of the calorie component of the index.

How about wasting and stunting?

India's wasting prevalence (17.3%) is one among the highest in the world.

- Child stunting in India declined from 54.2% in 1998-2002 to 34.7% in 2016-2020.
- But child wasting remains around 17% throughout the two decades of the 21st century.
- Child wasting is an acute, short-term measure. It can manifest as a result of an immediate lack of nutritional intake and sudden exposure to an infectious atmosphere.
- Possibly, several episodes of wasting without much time to recoup can translate into stunting.
- But, more focus was given to stunting, both in research and policy, as it is a chronic, long-term measure of undernutrition and is a stable indicator.
- However, addressing the episodes of wasting is crucial and it should guide the relative emphasis of policy attention.

What is the picture with child mortality?

- Generally, child undernutrition plays an important facilitating role in child mortality.
- But despite under-nutrition, with the availability of and access to better health facilities, India has kept the mortality rates lower.
- India's child mortality rate has been lower compared to Sub-Saharan African countries despite it having higher levels of stunting.

What is to be done?

- Addressing wasting is inevitable to addressing stunting.
- To this, India should adopt a regional approach by effectively monitoring regions that are more vulnerable to socioeconomic and environmental crises.
- The ranking should guide the policy focus and interventions, especially against the pandemic-induced nutrition insecurity.

Source: The Hindu

