

Nutrition and Union Budget

What is the issue?

- There was reference made to the unprecedented scale of developments under the National Nutrition Mission in the 2020 Budget speech.
- This had reflected the urgency around nutrition in India.

What is the nutritional status of India?

- The Global Hunger Index 2019 reported that India suffers from “serious” hunger, ranked 102 out of 117 countries.
- It also reported that just a tenth of children between 6 to 23 months are fed a minimum acceptable diet.

What is the National Nutrition Mission?

- Prime Minister’s Overarching Scheme for Holistic Nutrition (POSHAN Abhiyaan) is the National Nutrition Mission.
- It is a major initiative to address malnutrition.
- (Malnutrition - A condition that results from eating a diet in which one or more nutrients are either not enough or are too much.)
- POSHAN’s focus of the bulk of the funding has been on technology, whereas, actually, it is convergence that is crucial to address nutrition.

What is the plan?

- There are multiple dimensions of malnutrition that include calorific deficiency, protein hunger and micronutrient deficiency.
- An important approach to **address nutrition is through agriculture**.
- The Bharatiya Poshan Krishi Kosh which was launched in 2019 is a recent attempt to bridge this gap.
- Existing schemes can well address India’s malnutrition dilemma but there are gaps in addressing this concern.

Where are the gaps in addressing this concern?

- For understanding this, one needs to analyse the Budgetary allocation and the expenditure in the previous year (2019-20) to understand more.
- **Calorific deficiency** - The Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS)

scheme provides a package of services which address community malnutrition and also tackle calorific deficiency.

- The allocation in 2020-2021 is marginally higher, but clearly, the emphasis needs to be on implementation.
- **Protein hunger** - A scheme for State and Union Territories aims to reach pulses into welfare schemes (Mid-Day Meal, ICDS, etc) also shows under utilisation of budgetary allocation in the 2019-20.
- **Micronutrient deficiency** - The Horticulture Mission is one way to address micronutrient deficiency but here too implementation is low.
- In 2018-19, the Government of India launched a national millet mission to promote these nutritious cereals in a campaign mode.
- This could have been further emphasised in the Budget as well as in the National Food Security Mission (NFSM) which includes millets.
- However, the 2019-20 budgetary allocation points to an underutilisation of the resources and low implementation in these above schemes.

What are the impacts of linkage schemes?

- **Under-spending** - With under-spending, allocations for subsequent years will also be affected.
- This will be limiting the possibility of increasing budgets and the focus on nutrition schemes.
- **Agriculture-nutrition link** - While agriculture dominated the initial Budget speech, this link was not explicit.
- This link is important because about 3/5th of rural households are agricultural in India (National Sample Survey Office, 70th round) and malnutrition rates, particularly in rural areas are high.
- Therefore, agriculture-nutrition linkage schemes have potential for greater impact and need greater emphasis.

How can better nutrition be brought into India?

- India needs to hasten to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 2 of 'Zero Hunger' by 2030.
- The convergence component of POSHAN should be intensified, using the platform to bring all departments in one place to address nutrition.
- These should be an announcement to form 10,000 farmer producer organisations with a ₹500 crore allocation to nutrition-based activities.
- There should be promotion of youth schemes to be directed to nutrition-agriculture link activities in rural areas.
- There should be an explicit emphasis and fund allocation to agriculture-nutrition linked schemes.
- The early disbursement of funds and an optimum utilisation of schemes

linked to nutrition should be ensured.

Why concentrating on nutrition is important?

- Nutrition goes beyond just food, with economic, health, water sanitation, gender perspectives and social norms contributing to better nutrition.
- This is why implementation of multiple schemes can contribute to better nutrition.
- The Economic Survey notes that “Food is not just an end in itself but also an essential ingredient in the growth of human capital and therefore important for national wealth creation”.
- Malnutrition affects cognitive ability, workforce days and health, impacting as much as 16% of GDP.
- In that sense, while Budget 2020-21 looks toward an ‘Aspirational India’, fixing the missing pieces on the plate, can make a difference not just to better nutrition but to build a wealthier nation too.

Source: The Hindu

