

Three deficits that cause malnutrition in India

What is the issue?

Data's of various Nutritional indicators are expected to fall in the upcoming phase of NFHS-5 due the COVID-19 pandemic.

Why it is expected to fall?

- Three deficits significantly account for the fall in the data- dietary deficit, information deficit, inequitable market conditions.
- Apart from this, loss of livelihoods, reduced food consumption among the poor & disruption of government nutrition programmes are seen as other factors.

What does dietary deficit indicate?

- It is found among at least 40 % of our population of all age groups.
- This data is substantiated by the reports of the National Nutrition Monitoring Bureau's Third Repeat Survey (2012), NFHS 4, 2015-16, the NNMB Technical Report Number 27, 2017.
- The NHHS-4 and NFHS-5 survey reveals that acute dietary deficit exists among infants below two years & stunting and wasting exist for the infants below six months.
- This is caused either by foetal malnutrition or maternal dietary deficit because current interventions are not focussing the protein-calorie-micronutrient deficit.

What does information deficit indicate?

- Information deficit exists at the household level, especially among lower-income families.
- National IEC (information, education and communication) programme is not available to reach targeted households in order to make the required behavioural change.
- This includes the importance of balanced diets in low-income household budgets, proper maternal, child and adolescent nutrition and healthcare.
- Though IEC and behavioural change is highlighted in all our early Five-Year Plans but successive governments fail to make it happen.

What do inequitable market conditions reflect?

- This account for major cause of dietary deficiency and India's chronic malnutrition.
- Inequitable market conditions deny affordable & energy-fortified food to children, adolescents & adults in lower-income families.
- Though market has lots of expensive fortified energy food & beverages, it is not affordable for low-income groups except non-nutritive junk that cost about Rs 5.
- A study conducted by Karnataka Multi-sectoral Nutrition Pilot Project in 2018 reflects that there is a market demand of 42 million tonnes of low-cost energy food per year.
- And it is possible to produce nutritive fortified energy food for children within Rs 5 which can have 380 calories but no private entrepreneur provides it.
- It also says that there is direct relation between high incidence of stunting and wasting among children, low BMI among adolescents & the lack of low-cost fortified food.

What are the issues with current nutritional interventions?

- National Nutrition Policy 1993 is not updated in accordance with the latest surveys and research findings & interventions are not prioritised with respect to the current facts.
- Budgetary allocations for healthcare are insufficient & ICDS and its monitoring systems are not upgraded.
- The current programmes are not effectively targeting the root causes of malnutrition.
- Unless there is a disease outbreak efforts are not taken to address malnutrition & government intervenes only during disease outbreak.

What can be the future course of action?

- Government should analyse current nutrition-related programmes & find out why it is not able to reduce malnutrition faster.
- Highly malnourished districts have to be identified & additional interventions should be made in these areas.
- Government should show seriousness & start addressing this issue urgently through new ideas and innovations.
- Raising the diet of people from subsistence level to high level of nourishment will improve the nutritional indicator among children, adolescents and adults.

- Government/civil society should provide IEC to the community about malnutrition, its causes & implement programmes to address them.

Source: The Indian Express

