



EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

Time: 10 min

Date: 14-10-2023

Global Hunger Index: Criticisms & Significance

Government Policies & Interventions, Issues Arising out of their Design & Implementation

In Context

- The Centre's criticism of the **Global Hunger Index (GHI)** should not diminish the significance of the nutrition challenge.

Global Hunger Index 2023

- **India's rank:**
 - In its 2023 Index, the report has ranked India 111 among 125 nations.
 - This is a fall of four places from its previous rankings of 2022.
 - India's ranking is based on a Global Hunger Index score of 28.7 on a 100-point scale where 0 is the best score (no hunger) and 100 is the worst. This categorises India's severity of hunger as "serious".
- **Global position:**
 - India is positioned after neighbouring countries Pakistan (102nd), Bangladesh (81st), Nepal (69th) and Sri Lanka (60th).
 - Afghanistan, Haiti and 12 sub-Saharan countries perform worse than India on the GHI.
- **Stagnation in the fight against global hunger:**
 - According to the GHI 2023 report, the stagnation in the fight against global hunger is largely due "to the **combined effects of** overlapping crises, including the **COVID-19 pandemic, the Russia-Ukraine war, economic stagnation**, the impacts of **climate change**, and the intractable conflicts facing many countries of the world".

Criticisms over methodology

- **Government's criticism over flawed methodology:**
 - While India made significant strides between 2000 and 2015, with its score improving from 38.4 in 2000 to 35.5 in 2008 and 29.2 in 2015, over the past eight years, the country has advanced on the GHI by only 0.5 points.
 - The 2000, 2008 and 2015 GHI scores are the only data that can be used for valid comparisons over time.
 - The Union government, though, contested India's performance for the third year in a row, citing flawed methodology.
- **Unmatchable data:**

- The Ministry of Women and Child Development (MoWCD) said that data recorded on its **Poshan Tracker portal** showed child wasting prevalence of 7.2% among a total of 7.24 crore under-five-year-olds whose data was captured, whereas the **GHI used a value of 18.7% for child wasting**.
- The latter, however, comes from the National Family Health Survey 5 (NFHS) 2019-2021.
- **Poorly designed indicators:**
 - The MoWCD also claimed that three of the four indicators used for calculation of the index are related to the health of children and cannot be representative of the entire population.
 - The fourth and most important indicator estimate of the proportion of the undernourished population is based on an opinion poll conducted on a very small sample size of 3,000.
 - Scholars have also argued that the GHI is a poorly designed measure of hunger.
- **Telephone-based opinion polls:**
 - Another objection the MoWCD reiterated this year was the alleged use of a telephone-based opinion poll to calculate undernourishment, one of the indicators used in GHI.
 - The GHI has maintained that it doesn't use the poll, but relies on data from India's Food Balance Sheet to calculate undernourishment.
- **Issue of comparable methodologies:**
 - The GHI uses the same data sources for all countries to calculate the respective country scores.
 - This ensures that all the rates used have been produced using comparable methodologies.
 - South Asia and Africa South of the Sahara are the world regions with the highest hunger levels, with GHI scores of 27.0 each, indicating serious hunger.
 - West Asia and North Africa is the region with the third-highest hunger level with a score of 11.9 indicating "moderate" hunger level.
 - Latin American and the Caribbean is the only region in the world whose GHI scores have worsened between 2015 and 2023.
 - Introducing exceptions to this process for any country or countries would compromise the comparability of the results and the ranking.

Need of focusing on Nutrition challenge

- **Issue of poor food intake:**
 - Criticisms on the methodologies of calculating GHI are valid. But they should not divert policymakers' attention from the persistent problem of poor food intake.
- **Ineffective implementation of policies:**
 - The **National Food Security Act, 2013** made it incumbent on the state to provide basic cereals and grains to ensure that people do not go hungry.
 - Schemes such as **Poshan 2.0** seek to address the challenges of malnutrition in children, adolescent girls and pregnant women.

- However, technical glitches, bureaucratic hurdles, social and economic inequalities and gender discrimination prevent a large number of people from accessing these benefits.
- **Challenge of child nutrition:**
 - Among the troubling statistics of the National Family Health Survey (NFHS) 5 is the one that relates to child nutrition:
 - It found that 89 per cent of children between the formative ages of 6-23 months do not receive a “minimum acceptable diet” marginally better than the 90.4 per cent recorded in NFHS-4.
 - The survey also flagged high rates of anemia across large sections of children below six years, adolescent girls and boys and women between 15 to 49 years, including pregnant women.

Suggestions & way ahead

- **Focussing on nutritious food intake:**
 - In recent years, scholars have directed attention to the limitations of calorie intake-centred approaches.
 - They have underlined the importance of addressing vitamin and micronutrient deficiency and alerted policymakers to the importance of women’s empowerment.
- **Fixing the pre-existing schemes:**
 - Fixing the pre-existing schemes is another important solution to addressing India’s multi-dimensional nutrition challenge.

About the Global Hunger Index

- **About:** The GHI is a tool designed to comprehensively measure and track hunger at global, regional, and national levels, reflecting multiple dimensions of hunger over time.
- **Published by:** The GHI is published annually as part of a partnership between Concern Worldwide, Ireland’s largest aid and humanitarian agency and Welthungerhilfe.
 - The first GHI report was published in 2006.
- **Indicators:** The GHI score is based on a formula which combines four indicators that together capture the multi-dimensional nature of hunger, including under-nourishment, child stunting, child wasting, and child mortality.

Daily Mains Question

[Q] Analyse the Government’s criticisms over methodologies of calculating Global Hunger Index (GHI). Examine the need of focusing on persisting Nutrition challenges in India.

