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ANALYSIS**

TOPIC

India's Struggle with Hunger

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INDIA'S STRUGGLE WITH HUNGER

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

In Context

- India lifted 135 million people out of poverty, however, malnutrition still remains an onerous challenge.

India's Achievements

- **Poverty & Hunger:**
 - ♦ From 2015-16 to 2019-21, **India lifted 135 million people out of poverty.**
 - This is a commendable achievement based on the Multi-dimensional Poverty Index (MDPI) prepared by the NITI Aayog.
 - ♦ **When India got freedom** more than 80 percent of people were in extreme poverty, which today hovers around 15 per cent as per MDPI and **about 11 per cent based on income criterion (\$2.15 PPP).**
 - ♦ The **UNDP** has estimated that India lifted 415 million people out of poverty (MDPI) over the period 2005-06 to 2019-21.
 - ♦ India seems to be **on track to almost abolish poverty** in the next five to 10 years.
 - ♦ On **hunger**, at least in terms of food availability, India has done well.
- **Revolutionising India:**
 - ♦ **Green revolution: The Green Revolution** turned India from a "ship to mouth" economy to the largest exporter of rice. It has also enabled India to give free rice or wheat (5kg/month/person) to more than 800 million people under the PM Garib Kalyan Yojana, thus improving their economic access to basic staples.
 - ♦ **White revolution:** India also experienced the **White Revolution (milk)** and emerged as the largest producer of milk (222 MT), with the US coming at number two with just 102 MT of milk production.
 - ♦ **Gene revolution: The gene revolution** in cotton that was triggered by introduction of Bt cotton, made India the largest producer of cotton.

Challenges

- **Malnutrition:** Malnutrition is still a challenge, especially amongst children below the age of five.
 - ♦ As per NFHS-5 (2019-21), 32 percent of children were underweight, 35 per cent stunted, and 19 per cent wasted.
 - ♦ Although India made reasonably good progress in reducing infant mortality from 57 per 1,000 in 2005-06 to 35 per 1,000 in 2019-21, the progress on other indicators of malnutrition is not very satisfactory.
- **Climate change & food insecurity:** Climate change and the increasing frequency of extreme weather events, from heat waves to flash floods, pose a big challenge not only to India's food system but also to poverty alleviation – gains could reverse with these shocks.
- **Non-communicable diseases:** The rising burden of **cardiovascular** and other **non-communicable diseases** in India, particularly among the rapidly growing "middle class", is strongly linked to diet and nutrition.

Causes of Malnutrition

- **Calorific deficiency:** Though the government has surplus of foodgrains, there is calorific deficiency because of improper allocation and distribution. Even the yearly allocated budget is not fully utilized.
- **Protein deficiency:** Pulses are a major panacea to address protein deficiency. However, there is a lack of budgetary allocation for inclusion of pulses in PDS. With Eggs missing from menus of Mid-day Meals in various States, an easy way to improve protein intake is lost.
- **Micronutrient deficiency (hidden hunger):** India faces a severe crisis in micronutrient deficiency. Its causes include poor diet, prevalence of disease or non-fulfilment of increased micronutrient needs during pregnancy and lactation.

Suggestions

- **Access to nutritious food:** It is time to elevate **food intake among young children** to be of primary importance, as opposed to being **referred to as “complementary”** in policies and guidelines related to maternal, infant and young child nutrition.
 - ♦ Access to **adequate and affordable nutritious food** is equally necessary for mothers for **healthy breastfeeding**.
- **Need of improved assessments:** To better understand food security for all populations in India, assessments using **household-level food insecurity modules** developed by the Food and Agriculture Organisation can be adapted to measure the extent of food insecurity among Indian households.
- **Evidence-based policy:** Measuring the **availability, accessibility and affordability of nutritious food**, especially for **disadvantaged and vulnerable populations** such as young children, constitutes the foundation for any evidence-based policy to end hunger and improve nutritional security among Indians.
- **Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana:** To achieve the SDG of zero hunger, and building on the **Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana**, India should consider a strategic initiative led by the Prime Minister's Office **aimed at eliminating food insecurity in India** and **ensuring affordable access** to sufficient quantity and quality of nutritionally diverse food, with a special and immediate focus on India's youngest children.

Government Interventions

- **Eat Right India Movement:** An outreach activity organized by the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) for citizens to nudge them towards eating right.
- **POSHAN Abhiyan:** Launched by the Ministry of Women and Child Development in 2018, it targets to reduce stunting, undernutrition, anaemia (among young children, women and adolescent girls).
- **Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana:** A centrally sponsored scheme executed by the Ministry of Women and Child Development, is a maternity benefit programme being implemented in all districts of the country with effect from 1st January, 2017.
- **Food Fortification:** Food Fortification or Food Enrichment is the addition of key vitamins and minerals such as iron, iodine, zinc, and Vitamin A & D to staple foods such as rice, milk and salt to improve their nutritional content.
- **National Food Security Act, 2013:** It legally entitled up to 75% of the rural population and 50% of the urban population to receive subsidized food grains under the Targeted Public Distribution System.
- **Mission Indradhanush:** It targets children under 2 years of age and pregnant women for immunization against 12 Vaccine-Preventable Diseases (VPD).
- **Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) Scheme:** Launched in 1975, the ICDS Scheme offers a package of six services to children in the age group of 0-6 years and pregnant and lactating mothers

Way ahead

- A straightforward answer to these challenges would be to keep the focus on accelerating economic growth and making it more inclusive.
- **Fixing the pre-existing schemes** is another important solution to addressing India's multi-dimensional nutrition challenge.
 - ♦ Getting the already existing schemes right requires greater involvement of **local government and local community groups** in the design and delivery of tailored nutrition interventions.

Mains Practice Question

[Q] What are the causes of malnutrition for India, that lifted 135 million people out of poverty in the last five years? Suggest policy measures to address the issue of malnutrition.

