



DAILY EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

TOPIC

**DEPRIVATION PROBLEM OF
INDIA'S CHILDREN: URGENT &
SYSTEMATIC REFORMS**

www.nextias.com

DEPRIVATION PROBLEM OF INDIA'S CHILDREN: URGENT & SYSTEMATIC REFORMS

Context

- According to the '**State of the World's Children (SWOC) 2025**' report by **UNICEF**, developing nations such as **India** face **extreme child poverty** and **multidimensional child deprivation**.

Key Findings of 'State of the World's Children 2025'

- Global Trends:** Over 1 billion children globally are experiencing multidimensional poverty — lacking access to education, healthcare, housing, nutrition, sanitation, or water.
 - Malnutrition remains a leading cause of child mortality. Stunting, wasting, and micronutrient deficiencies continue to affect millions, especially in low- and middle-income countries.
- Climate Change and Conflict:** UNICEF's report highlights that **four in five children worldwide** now face **at least one extreme climate hazard annually**.
 - For millions, environmental shocks threaten access to water, food, and safe shelter.
 - Additionally, **conflict zones have doubled their impact** on childhood — with **19% of the world's children** living in areas affected by violence in 2024, compared to around 9% in the mid-1990s.
 - Reducing development aid could further exacerbate global inequalities, potentially leading to **4.5 million additional under-five deaths by 2030** and forcing **six million children out of school** by next year.
- Development Aid Cuts:** Projected reductions in international aid could result in 4.5 million additional under-five deaths by 2030 and 6 million more children dropping out of school by 2026.

India's Child Poverty Challenge

- According to the report, **206 million Indian children** experience at least one form of deprivation.
 - Alarming, **62 million** among them face **two or more**, spanning critical dimensions like **education, health, housing, nutrition, sanitation, and water**.
- It underscores how poverty extends beyond income. It's about the **quality of life, access to services, and opportunities for development**.
- India is a **signatory to United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)** which recognises the holistic development of children and fulfilment of their human rights.

India's Policy Framework: Progress with Gaps

- Budgetary Allocations:** In India's **2025-26 Union Budget**, the **Ministry of Women & Child Development (MWCD)** received **₹26,890 crore**, including:
 - ₹21,960 crore for **Saksham Anganwadi & POSHAN 2.0**
 - ₹1,500 crore for **Mission Vatsalya**;
 - The Ministry's share in central expenditure has **declined from 0.96% (2015-16) to 0.5% (2025-26)**, signaling that **child welfare has not become a higher policy priority**, even amid growing needs.
- ASER & NFHS-5 Findings:** Children **between the ages of 0-18** constitute about **40% of India's population**.
 - According to the **Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) report, 2023**, about **40% of children in the rural areas** between the **age group 3-6 years** are **out of pre-school or an Anganwadi centre**.
 - According to the Fifth Round of the National Family Health Survey (**NFHS-5**), **children in India: stunting (35.5%) and weight (19.3% children being underweight)**.
- Implementation Gaps:** Delays in **Anganwadi upgrades, shortages of trained staff, and slow fund disbursement** have hindered programme outcomes.
 - Such **systemic inefficiencies** dilute the impact of even the best-intentioned budgetary allocations.
- Urban and Digital Divide:** Urban slums present the **harshest intersection** of challenges — malnutrition, unsafe housing, pollution, and disrupted education.

- ◆ Moreover, **digital exclusion** keeps millions of children **disconnected from online learning and skill-building opportunities**, widening the educational gap.
- **High Child Population:** India is home to the largest child population in the world, making its progress essential to global child development goals.
- **Persistent Inequities:** Children from marginalized communities—especially Dalits, Adivasis, and those in rural or conflict-affected areas—face disproportionate deprivation.

Efforts Related To Children in India

- ICDS and mid-day meals; PM Schools for Rising India (PM SHRI); Eklavya Model Residential School (EMRS - a programme for tribal children); Pradhan Mantri Young Achievers Scholarship Award Scheme for Vibrant India (PM YASASVI) for Other Backward Classes (OBCs), Economically Backward Classes (EBCs) and De-notified Tribes (DNTs) etc.

Case Study: Kerala's Decentralised Model

- Kerala provides a **notable success story**. The state has empowered local committees to actively engage with **Anganwadis** through its **panchayati raj institutions** and **community-based organisations (CBOs)**.
- These community-owned and -led structures have strengthened **child rights** and improved **welfare outcomes** by fostering **accountability, local ownership, and inclusive participation**.

Way Forward: A National Mission for Child Rights

- India needs to elevate **child poverty eradication** as a **national mission** to align with **UNICEF's five-point framework**. It requires:
 - ◆ **Universal digital access** and **inclusive education**;
 - ◆ **Stronger social protection systems**;
 - ◆ **Last-mile public service delivery**;
 - ◆ **Inter-ministerial coordination** for integrated policy action; and,
 - ◆ **Empowered frontline workers** and **real-time monitoring** for transparency.
- **Integrated Approach Needed:** The report urges a '**whole-of-government**' **strategy** that unites health, education, nutrition, and child protection under a cohesive framework.
- **Data-Driven Policy:** Improved real-time data collection and monitoring are essential to track progress and target interventions effectively.
- **Family-Based Care:** UNICEF advocates for a shift from institutional care to family- and community-based child protection systems.

Conclusion: Investing in the Future

- India's **demographic dividend** will only bear fruit if today's children grow up **healthy, educated, and secure**.
- Without bold reforms and targeted investment, millions will remain **unseen, unheard, and unserved** — excluded from the promise of national progress.

Source: BS

Daily Mains Practice Question

[Q] Discuss the various dimensions of deprivation faced by children in India. Examine the systemic reforms required to address the multifaceted deprivation faced by children in India.

