

Challenge of Under-nutrition: Indian Scenario

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Globally one in three mal-nourished children lives in India. The study focuses on the extent and proximate determinants of under-nutrition in India and seeks action strategies. For this, NFHS-3, nation-wide sample survey data of 56,428 children below five years is used. Three indices of physical growth quantify the nutritional status of children, i.e., stunting- chronic malnutrition, wasting- acute malnutrition and underweight- mix of two.

Extent of stunting, underweight and wasting is 48.3 per cent, 42.8 per cent and 20.1 per cent. About 7.2 per cent children under-five years suffer from all the three forms of under-nutrition at once. The risk of dying is at its highest for this group. A typical child with under-nutrition is a rural, poor, with low standard of living, Hindu, tribal with less educated mother.

In child under-nutrition, chronic under-nutrition is more prevalent. Under-nutrition can be inter-generational: if the mother is under-nourished, the child may also be under-nourished. Inadequate care during pregnancy results in low birth weight babies which is a proximate determinant for under-nutrition and childhood diseases. Maternal nutrition needs more attention.

Though supplementary nutrition is necessary, it is not sufficient. Better livelihood opportunities for parents and equitable healthcare for all is essential.

I Background

Developing world is fighting to bring down the rates of maternal mortality and child mortality. Almost all countries design their health policies and programmes that aim at reducing their values. The United Nations too has realized the need to address these issues and included them in the list of development goals. It is universally acknowledged that for reduction in mortality, it is essential to address its determinants successfully. Amongst the major determinants of child mortality, nutrition has been identified as a modifiable risk factor and is, therefore, addressed separately even in Millennium Development Goals (MDG). Goal 1 in MDG aims at eradication of extreme poverty and hunger. The objective of addressing poverty is that it is a nutrition sensitive measure and so indirectly addresses under-nutrition. The latter can be arrested by providing employment which, in turn, reduces hunger in developing countries.

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