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GENERAL STUDIES 2: SOCIAL JUSTICE

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TOPIC: HEALTH / NUTRITION

Tackling the problem of nutrition

Nutrition Challenges in India

- Nutrition in India is not only about food insecurity but also heavily influenced by cultural, caste, and gender dynamics.
- Current policies tend to focus primarily on malnutrition among women and children, overlooking other vulnerable groups, such as men, senior citizens, and women outside the reproductive age.
- Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) like diabetes and hypertension, which result from poor nutrition, are often neglected in policy discussions and interventions.
- Nutrition deficiencies manifest in two forms:
 - Some individuals suffer from a lack of sufficient food.
 - Others have access to food that lacks essential nutrients, leading to malnutrition despite adequate caloric intake.

Alarming Nutrition Statistics

- India faces severe nutrition challenges, particularly in child malnutrition and anemia among women.
- According to the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5) data:
 - 36% of children under the age of five are stunted.
 - Only 11% of breastfed children aged 6-23 months receive an adequate diet.
 - 57% of women aged 15-49 years are anemic.
 - 24% of women and 23% of men are either overweight or obese.
 - 14% of the population is taking medication for diabetes, indicating poor nutritional practices leading to NCDs.

Current Approach & Its Limitations

- Current nutrition schemes mainly focus on providing take-home rations, supplementary foods, and iron-folic acid tablets.



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- The Poshan 2.0 scheme focuses on specific regions like aspirational districts and the North-East, reinforcing the misconception that malnutrition is confined to particular geographic areas or groups.
- The existing approach fails to adopt a comprehensive perspective on nutrition, as it mainly addresses malnutrition in a limited demographic, particularly women and children.
- A more inclusive, public health-driven approach is essential to address nutrition issues across all social strata.

Need for a Comprehensive Nutrition Strategy

- A robust nutrition policy must go beyond maternal and child health to address diverse nutritional needs, including those of men, the elderly, and marginalized communities.
- Solutions should be locally sourced, focusing on improving diets through nutrient-dense, affordable foods that are accessible to people across different regions and income groups.
- Effective institutional mechanisms are required to ensure that nutrition services reach the community level and are implemented efficiently.

Role of Health and Wellness Centres (HWCs)

- HWCs are vital institutions for advancing a universal nutrition agenda in India.
- Currently, HWCs mainly provide nutrition support to pregnant women, lactating mothers, and children, but there is a need to expand their services to include the wider population, including middle-class citizens.
- For HWCs to be effective in nutrition delivery, they must ensure:
 - Wider coverage in both urban and rural areas.
 - Adequate staffing for nutrition-related services.
 - A systematic approach to the implementation of nutrition advice and interventions.

Key Factors for Success

- The involvement of local elites and community leaders is crucial for creating a sense of ownership and engagement in nutrition initiatives.
- Integration of nutrition strategies with local cuisines can promote better dietary habits, as people are more likely to adopt changes that align with their cultural and culinary preferences.
- Past public health campaigns have shown that success is more likely when there is active community engagement and when interventions are aligned with local practices and needs.

Conclusion

- Nutrition must be viewed as a fundamental part of overall health and well-being, not just as a deficiency issue.

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- A locally tailored, well-integrated nutrition plan that includes the involvement of communities and the expansion of services through HWCs can lead to better health outcomes across all social groups in India.

Source: <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/tackling-the-problem-of-nutrition/article69337137.ece>



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