

## HIDDEN HUNGER - ECONOMY

**NEWS:** A new study by the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) shows that many Indians in rural areas **suffer from protein deficiency** in spite of producing sufficient protein-rich foods or being able to afford them.

### WHAT'S IN THE NEWS?

#### Major Findings

- More than two-thirds of households surveyed across India's semi-arid tropics consume less protein than the recommended levels, despite the sufficient availability of protein-rich food sources in the market.
- **Consumption of Staples:** Households in these regions rely heavily on staple grains such as rice and wheat, which contribute approximately 60–75% of their daily protein intake. This excessive dependence on staple grains results in an imbalanced diet lacking sufficient protein diversity.
- **Underutilization of Protein-rich Foods:** Protein-rich foods such as pulses, dairy products, eggs, and meat remain significantly underutilized. This is not necessarily due to scarcity but is influenced by a combination of factors, including deeply ingrained cultural food preferences, limited awareness regarding nutrition, and financial constraints.
- **Protein Deficiency in Wealthier Families:** Even among wealthier households with the financial capacity to afford diverse and nutritious food options, protein intake remains below recommended levels. This suggests that economic status alone does not guarantee balanced nutrition, and dietary habits play a crucial role.
- **Impact of Women's Education on Nutrition:** Households where women have attained higher levels of education are more likely to consume a balanced diet that includes a variety of protein sources. This indicates that education, particularly among women, has a direct correlation with improved dietary choices and nutritional awareness.
- **Role of the Public Distribution System (PDS):** India's Public Distribution System (PDS) has played a crucial role in ensuring food security and improving calorie intake for millions of households. However, the PDS primarily focuses on distributing cereals such as rice and wheat, which has inadvertently reinforced a diet dominated by staple grains while failing to provide sufficient access to protein-rich foods.

#### Reasons for the Dietary Habits

1. **Deeply ingrained dietary habits:** Cultural traditions and long-standing food practices contribute to the preference for cereals over protein-rich foods.
2. **Lack of awareness about nutrition:** Many people are unaware of the importance of consuming an adequate amount of protein for overall health and development.

3. **Financial constraints:** While protein-rich foods are available, their relatively higher cost compared to staple grains makes them less accessible to low-income households.



**INDIA** ranks **97** among **118** nations on the Hunger Index





184mn Indians, including many children, are undernourished

- ⊕ Almost **48%** children under **5 years** are stunted
- ⊕ **60%** are anaemic
- ⊕ **70%** consume less than **50%** of the daily recommended micronutrients

⊕ **What constitutes micronutrient deficiency?**






- ⊕ Micronutrient deficiency, also known as hidden hunger, refers to inadequate intake of crucial vitamins and minerals - such as zinc, vitamin A and folate - needed for healthy mental and physical growth of children

**What are its effects**

-  Stunting in children
-  Weakened immune systems
-  Impaired cognitive function
-  Anaemia, low energy levels

**THE SOLUTION**

A diverse diet including

-  Variety of cereals
-  Legumes
-  Fruits & vegetables
-  Animal - source foods
-  Fortified foods and drinks with micronutrients

Source: World Bank, FSSAI, Global Nutrition Report 2016

## Recommendations

- **Enhancing Protein Availability in Government Food Programs:** Increasing the inclusion of protein-rich foods such as pulses, millets, and other nutrient-dense crops in government food programs like the PDS, Mid-Day Meal Scheme, and Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) to improve overall nutritional outcomes.
- **Region-Specific Strategies:** Developing and implementing region-specific strategies to promote balanced nutritional intake, ensuring that dietary interventions are tailored to local food habits and preferences.
- **Integrating Nutrition Education:** Incorporating nutrition education into public health programs, school curricula, and community awareness campaigns to improve understanding of the importance of protein consumption and dietary diversity.
- **Encouraging Diversified Farming Practices:** Providing incentives and support to farmers to cultivate a wider variety of nutrient-dense crops, thereby improving local availability and affordability of protein-rich foods.

## What is the Nutrition Paradox?

- India has achieved self-sufficiency in food production and even export food yet the problem of hunger persists in India.
- Issues like undernutrition and hidden hunger persists in India. The Global Hunger Index (GHI) 2023 ranks India 111th out of 125 countries.

Hidden hunger, or micronutrient deficiencies, occurs when the quality of food that people eat does not meet their nutrient requirements, so they are not getting the essential vitamins and minerals they need for their growth and development.

- The Global Hunger Index (GHI) 2023 ranks India 111th out of 125 countries.
- The National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5, 2019-2021) shows that undernutrition persists—35.5 percent of children under five are stunted, and 19.3 percent suffer from wasting.

**Child Wasting:** The share of children under age five who have low weight for their height, reflecting acute undernutrition.

**Child Stunting:** The share of children under age five who have low height for their age, reflecting chronic undernutrition.

## Reasons that Exacerbate Food Insecurity and Hidden Hunger

- **Income Disparity:** Income disparities exacerbate food insecurity in certain regions. Many people due to poverty cannot afford sufficient food, leading to chronic hunger.
  - Lack of awareness regarding sources of nutrients could be the reason for hidden hunger among the rich.
- **Gender Inequality**
- **Limited healthcare access**

## Community-Led Nutrition Hubs

- **Local Knowledge and Leadership:** Community-led nutrition hubs provide a grassroots solution to food insecurity by leveraging local knowledge and leadership.
  - These hubs focus on sustainable, context-specific approaches, promoting balanced diets tailored to geographical needs, prioritising nutrition over mere caloric intake for healthier communities.
- **Balanced and Diverse Diet:** Nutrition hubs encourage the consumption of diverse foods, including fruits, vegetables, legumes, and animal products, essential for a balanced diet.
- **Supporting Vulnerable Groups:** These hubs effectively reach vulnerable populations like children, pregnant women, poor and the elderly.
  - They provide tailored nutritional support, fortified foods, supplements, and education on specific nutritional needs.
- **Leveraging Local Agriculture:** Such hubs could promote and support local food production and sustainable agricultural practices, increasing access to fresh, nutritious foods.
- This would reduce dependency on external support. This would also reduce the price which often increases due to transportation.
- **Impact of Community-Led Nutrition Hubs:** As per Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) there was a 20 per cent reduction in stunting rates among children under five in regions of Uttar Pradesh following the introduction of nutrition hubs.

**Source:** <https://www.downtoearth.org.in/food/rural-indians-suffer-from-a-hidden-hunger-despite-availability-and-affordability-their-diets-are-protein-poor-icrisat>