

3. Need a Different Approach to Address Child Malnutrition

Prelims Level: Governance - Schemes

Mains Level: GS-II Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States and the performance of these schemes.

Why in News?

- Though National Family Health Survey-4 (NFHS-4) shows an encouraging improvement in child nutrition, the world level rankings on child nutrition draws a different picture about India.

Reports that pings on Child Nutrition:

- **UNICEF's report** - one in three malnourished child in world belongs to India, half of the children under three years old are underweight and a third of wealthiest children are over-nutrient-ed.
- The 2018 **Global Hunger Index (GHI)** report ranked India 103rd out of 119 countries.
- According to the **Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR)**, in 2017, malnutrition was the predominant risk factor for death in children younger than five in every state of India.
- According to the **Global Burden of Disease Study 2017**, malnutrition is among the leading causes of death and disability in India.

Measures to address the lag in Improving Child Nutrition:

1. Timely Intervention:

- The focus must be on the pregnant, breastfeeding mother and the child, especially in the first two years of the child's life, which is the crucial phase for physical, mental and cognitive development.

2. Targeted Approach:

- A targeted approach is needed because the size of the needy and the budgetary constraints already pose a big challenge.
- NFHS-4 provided district level data as well, hence the focus should be on the ones which require urgent attention.
- More public programmes which cover important nutrition-specific areas such as maternal nutrition should be started.

3. No “one size fits all approach”:

- As these districts are concentrated in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Jharkhand , Karnataka, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Gujarat – their governments should make arrangements for the required funds and formulate policies to tackle high incidence of stunting in these districts.
- Further, even within these districts, the pockets where child malnutrition is high should be identified and the intervention or the target should go down till the clusters of Anganwadis where the problem is concentrated.

4. Policy Implementation based in Real Time Data:

- Policy initiatives should be guided by accurate real-time data at the sub-district level also.

5. Educating Girls and Spreading Awareness:

- Efforts should be made to spread messages on hygiene and sanitation, particularly the need to do away with open defecation practices.
- Similarly, education for girls should be advocated, as should the importance of enabling the financial independence of women through skilling and employment opportunities along with their inclusion in the formal financial network.

6. Sound public Service Delivery Institutions:

- Lastly, Programmes will have an impact only when there are sound public service delivery mechanisms, especially in the nutrition, health and education sectors.
- Hence, building a cadre of dedicated professionals in the government needs a high degree of political will and administrative commitment, centred around developing skills and knowledge and building motivation to stay the course.