

1. Nutrition and the Budget's Fine Print

Why in News?

- The **Global Hunger Index**, reported that India suffers from “serious” hunger, ranked 102 out of 117 countries, and that just a tenth of children between six to 23 months are fed a Minimum Acceptable Diet.

Why Nutrition is Important?

- Nutrition goes beyond just food, with economic, health, water sanitation, gender perspectives and social norms contributing to better nutrition.
- The Economic Survey notes that “Food is not just an end in itself but also an essential ingredient in the growth of human capital and therefore important for national wealth creation”.
- Malnutrition affects cognitive ability, workforce days and health, impacting as much as **16% of GDP (World Food Programme and World Bank)**.

Dimensions of Malnutrition:

1. Calorific deficiency
2. Protein hunger
3. Micronutrient deficiency

Various Initiatives taken to Address the Malnutrition:

1. **Bharatiya Poshan Krishi Kosh:**

- ✓ Launched in 2019 by Minister for Women and Child Development and Microsoft founder Bill Gates
- ✓ It is an important approach to address nutrition is through agriculture.
- ✓ It has two components – Development of a Food Atlas and Documentation of promising practices for Jan-Andolan for POSHAN Abhiyaan.
- ✓ The Agro-Food Atlas is to act as a repository of diverse crops across 127 agro-climatic zones of the country having three parts- crops currently being grown, agro-ecological conditions (soil, organic carbon content, ground water availability etc) and guidance on how a greater diversity of crops could be encouraged in a particular district or block to promote dietary diversity and nutrition.

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key groups to address community malnutrition, and which also tackle calorific deficiency and beyond.

Another pathway to address hunger is the Mid-Day Meal Scheme, to enhance nutrition of schoolchildren

3. **Pulses are a major contributor to Address Protein Hunger.** The several states and UTs aims to reach the pulses into welfare schemes like Mid-Day Meal, Public Distribution System, ICDS has been promoted by the centre.
4. The **Horticulture Mission** can be one of the ways to address micronutrient deficiency effectively.
5. In 2018-19, the Government of India launched a **national millet mission which included renaming millets as “nutri-cereals”** also launching a Year of Millets in 2018-19 to promote nutritious cereals in a campaign mode across the country.
 - ✓ This could have been further emphasised in the Budget as well as in the National Food Security Mission (NFSM) which includes millets.
 - ✓ As millets have the potential to address micronutrient deficiencies, the momentum given to these cereals needs to be sustained.
6. **The POSHAN Abhiyaan:** The novelty of the Poshan Abhiyaan is twofold – at the agricultural level, it aims to amalgamate knowledge of regional food systems and at the consumer level, to foster social and behavioural changes among individuals, especially parents.

Impact of linkage schemes:

- With under spending, allocations for subsequent years will also be affected, limiting the possibility of increasing budgets and the focus on nutrition schemes.
- Agriculture and nutrition link is important because about three-fifths of rural households are agricultural in India (National Sample Survey Office, 70th round) and malnutrition rates, particularly in rural areas are high (National Family Health Survey-4).
- Therefore, agriculture-nutrition linkage schemes have potential for greater impact and need greater emphasis.

Way Forward:

- Focus on nutrition-related interventions, beyond digitisation; intensify the convergence component of POSHAN Abhiyaan, using the platform to bring all departments in one place to Address Nutrition.

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- Direct the announcement to form 10,000 farmer producer organisations with an allocation of ₹500 crore to nutrition-based activities.
 - Promotion of youth schemes to be directed to nutrition-agriculture link activities in rural areas.
 - Give explicit emphasis and fund allocation to Agriculture-Nutrition Linked Schemes.
 - Ensure early disbursement of funds and an optimum utilisation of schemes linked to Nutrition.

