



# SDG 2: Hunger, Malnutrition and Food Security in India

Dr. Seema

Assistant Professor, Department of Economics, Government College for Girls Mohana, Sonipat, India

Email – [seema03111988@gmail.com](mailto:seema03111988@gmail.com)

**Abstract:** *The present study attempt to assess the prevalence of hunger and challenges faced by India in achieving the goal of zero hunger. The goal of zero hunger largely depends on the performance of the agriculture sector. India has come a long way from food deficit country in 1950s to a major food exporting country in recent years. In terms of affordability, accessibility and sustainability dimensions of food security, India has made a remarkable progress but still there is long way to achieve food and nutritional security to its all population and achieving the goal of zero hunger. Food policy interventions in India quite slow in making transition from its focus on food security to nutritional security. This study documents the efforts being made by Indian government to overcome these challenges. The study also offers suggestions regarding overcoming these challenges. India required to adopt a more holistic and multi-pronged approach to overcome the hunger problem.*

**Key Words:** *Global Hunger Index, Hunger, India, Nutrition, Sustainable Development Goals.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION :

In last couple of years, India has emerged as one of the fastest growing economies of the world. In terms of GDP, India is third largest economy of the world. India has achieved self-sufficiency in foodgrain production. India is largest producer of milk, pulses, millets, coconuts and sugar globally and second largest producer of rice, wheat, sugarcane, groundnut, fruits and vegetables. It is paradoxical to see that high level of hunger, malnutrition, food insecurity and poverty prevalent in India. Due to ever increasing population, urbanization, globalization, inflation, climate change, supply chain disruptions, pandemic like COVID-19, global geopolitical situation, ending hunger and ensuring food security has become a massive challenge to India. Food is one of the intrinsic basic needs of life. Food consumption is generally considered as a measure of wellbeing (Duh & Spears, 2017). Indian population has grown from 361 million in 1950 to 1428.6 million in the year 2023. As per the United Nations (2023) estimates, India will be the most populous country on the earth by mid-2023. The issue of hunger and food security have its roots in increased demand and consumption and inequalities in accessibility of adequate and nutritional food to the people. A healthy workforce is a precondition to a nation's development. Keeping in mind this fact, improving the health and nutritional status of its population has always been a priority of India. United Nations adopted the Millennium Development Goals MDGs (2000-2015) for a hunger free world, these goals were succeeded by United Nations Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development. United Nations adopted SDG's including 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015. These SDGs marked a paradigm shift in development vision, ambition and strategy of United Nations members. These 17 SDGs are largely structured around five interlinked Ps: people, planet, prosperity, peace and Partnership (Thyagarajan, 2021). India's Development agenda is also broadly reflected in these SDGs. Government of India has strongly committed to SDG's and launched various programmes and scheme to achieve these goals. The SDG-2 which is a multidimensional goal aiming at ending hunger, ensuring food and nutritional security by promoting sustainable agricultural practices by 2030. SDG-2 encompasses several targets having social, economic and environmental dimensions. Achieving the SDG Goal-2 requires an integrated approach of food system, water, sanitation facilities, health, education and social security net to address the issues of food and nutritional security and sustainability of it. South Asia is the region which accounts for highest hunger level in the world and India accounts for over a quarter of hunger population of the world.

## 2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY :

The present study is descriptive in nature. The study is largely based on secondary data collected from various reports published by public and private organisations, books, published research articles, working papers, authentic news, indices of various national and international organizations like RBI database, Economic Survey of Govt. of India, Global Hunger Index (GHI), FAO reports, Sustainable Development Report 2022. The goal of zero hunger largely

depends on the performance of the agriculture sector (Rao et al., 2018). Hence the systematic review and analysis of the study is based on assessment of foodgrain availability (that is production), accessibility and absorption of foodgrains for the time period 1950-2021. For assessing the extent of hunger, accessibility and utilization aspect of food security the study discusses various indices and reports of various international organizations like Food and Agriculture Organisation.

### **3. PREVALENCE OF HUNGER AND MALNUTRITION IN INDIA**

According to Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) of the United Nations, hunger refers to a painful and uncomfortable physical condition or distress caused of inadequate consumption of dietary energy (Gupta, 2020). If a person does not consume the adequate quantity of calories over a long period of time, the situation of hunger becomes chronic. Prevalence of chronic undernourishment is considered as an indicator of hunger by FAO. As defined by Sustainable Development Report, “Undernourishment refers to the percentage of population who are not able to get enough food to meet the sufficient dietary energy requirement over a period of one year”, where dietary energy requirement is defined as minimum amount of dietary energy to live a healthy and normal life. Severe food insecurity over a long period of time also contributes to the prevalence of hunger in a country. Food Security is a multidimensional concept. The meaning of food security has evolved over time from mere availability of foodgrains to accessibility, absorption, sustainability of foodgrains. Since Independence, the agri-food policy in India largely focused on eradication of hunger by ensuring availability of staple foodgrains to all people at affordable prices at all times. In terms of food availability, India has made a notable progress since its independence from a food deficit nation to a major exporter of foodgrains largely because of historic success of green revolution in late 1960s. Foodgrain production in India has increased nearly six folds from 50 million tonnes in 1950 to 323 million tonnes in 2023 that is sufficient to feed its vast population. In terms of food accessibility and affordability, food policy in India largely focused on providing foodgrains at affordable prices through public distribution system.

Despite the tremendous success of green revolution in terms of massive increase in agricultural production and productivity and managing the hunger problem even through its largest public distribution network is a massive challenge for India. India is still facing the challenge of high prevalence of malnutrition in its population. The rice-wheat cropping system that is the result of green revolution in India has altered the dietary diversity because it replaced the nutrient rich, climate friendly traditional foodgrains like millets from its growing areas and that in turn contributed to the increasing prevalence of malnutrition among population (Kataki, 2002). The subsidized foodgrain distribution through PDS which mainly focused on wheat and rice cereals also resulted in lack of dietary diversity (Malaiarasan et al., 2021).

India has made notable progress on ending hunger and improving nutrition status in last couple of decades. Global Hunger Index GHI score of India has improved from 38.8 (considered as alarming level of hunger) in 2000 to 29.1 in 2022 putting India in ‘serious’ level of hunger. Values in GHI score varies from 0-100 where zero implies no hunger condition and 100 indicates worst condition of hunger. The stunting (low height for age) among children under the age of five years has been declined from 54.2 percent in 1998-02 to 35.5 percent in 2017-21. However, the absolute number of stunted and wasted children still remains quite high in India. The GHI (2022) ranked India 107 out of 121 countries. Most of the South Asian countries performed better than India in this ranking. India is home 224 million (that is 16.3% of India’s population) undernourished people out of 828 million undernourished people globally. It means India accounts for 27 percent of world’s hungry people. It indicates that India is still facing the issue of hunger and malnutrition on a large scale. India has highest rate of child wasting (low weight for height) in the world that is 19.3 percent. India has a high level of child stunting rate of 35.5 percent of children under the age of 5 years (GHI, 2022). In 2020, 973.3 million people in India are those who unable to afford a healthy diet (FAO, 2022). India’s rank in Global SDG Index 2022 was reported at 121 out of 163 countries at a score 60.3 with SDG-2 as a major challenge remained (implies progress on this indicator noted as stagnant or less than 50 percent increase in the required rate). The prevalence of undernourishment has declined but still remained a major challenge. Other indicators of SDG-2 like prevalence of stunting and wasting in children below the age of 5 years, these indicators also remained a challenge for India as nearly 35 percent of children age less five years were stunted and 17.3 percent children age less five years were wasted in 2017. In case of some indicators of SDG-2, India achieved the SDG targets like prevalence of obesity in adults, cereal yield that is production per hectare of harvested land. (Sachs et al., 2022). All above given these facts reflects the worrisome condition of undernutrition in India. This situation calls for new ways to address this challenge of hunger and food insecurity.

### **4. GOVERNMENT INTERVENTIONS :**

To address the above discussed challenge of hunger and malnutrition, the Government of India has actively implemented a number of policies and programmes and adopted multifaceted strategies. For Instance, India through its

various schemes, such as PDS, Targeted PDS, Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS), Mid-Day Meal Scheme, National Food Security Mission, Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana, Anntodaya Ann Yojana, Integrated Scheme for Oilseeds, Pulses, Oil palm and Maize (ISOPOM), Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana, National Mission on Sustainable Agriculture, Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana, National Food Security Act, National Nutrition Mission or Poshan Abhiyan, National Health Mission, Soil Health Card Scheme, Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana (PMKSY), Pradhan Mantri Kisan Scheme, Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalam Ann Yojana. These nutrition, employment, health and social security programmes has helped in improving accessibility of food particularly to poor peoples. Public Distribution System (PDS) under National Food Security Act (NFSA) 2013 provides foodgrains at affordable prices to more than 800 million people. India's PDS system is one of the largest distribution networks of affordable foodgrains of the world. Mid-Day Meal Scheme is feeding about 118 million children with hot cooked meal making it largest of its kind in the world. Despite all these efforts of the Indian on agri-food policy, the challenge of hunger is still remained.

## 5. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS :

To achieve the goal of ending hunger and ensuring food and nutritional security is essentially linked to the of poverty eradication. In India where 16.4 percent population is multidimensionally poor (UNDP & OPHI, 2022). Eradication of poverty is the pre-condition to ensure no hunger and food insecurity condition. However various studies shows that agriculture sector is less effective in eradication of poverty in comparison to other sectors of the economy but by adopting agricultural practices that improve agricultural productivity poverty can be reduced especially in India where almost 70 percent population is rural and agriculture is main source of their livelihood and sustenance. Farm income alone cannot eradicate poverty from rural India. As recommended by various research works that incorporation of sustainability in whole food supply chain is required (Brown et al., 2021). A multi-sectoral reform approach in agriculture sector (on both demand as well as supply side issues) is required to eliminate hunger and poverty. In last couple of years, Government of India is implementing various schemes so that agricultural production can be increased and farmers income can be doubled. Climate smart agricultural practices need to adopted in agri-food system of India. India also needs to focus on elimination of hidden hunger that is the result of micronutrient deficiency (Swaminathan, 2018).

## 6. CONCLUSION:

From the above discussion, it becomes clear that India has made tremendous efforts in achieving the goal of zero hunger by increasing agricultural production, productivity and ensuring food accessibility at least in terms of minimum calorie requirements but India still faces a long way ahead in its target to ensure zero hunger and nutritional security. In order to achieve the targeted goal in India, there is a need for adopting a comprehensive and coordinated multi-sectoral approach that work across states, government departments/ministries, regions and international boundaries and other stakeholders like research institutions, extension services, private, cooperative sector, NGOs. Diversification in terms of cropping or production system, consumption and distribution of food through PDS is need of the hour to realize the goal of zero hunger. Indian initiatives need to adopt problem specific course correction wherever needed. As discussed above, poverty is intrinsically linked to the problem of hunger. India needs to transform its rural economy by effectively utilizing its demographic dividend so that poverty and hunger can be eradicated.

## REFERENCES :

1. Brown, K.N., Venkateshmurthy N.S., Law, c., Harris, f., Kadiyala S., Shankar B., Mohan, S., Prabhkaran D. & Knai C. (2021). Moving Towards Sustainable Food System: A Review of Indian Food Policy Budget. *Global Food Security*, 28 (2021) 100462. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gfs.2020.100462>
2. Duh, J. & Spears D. (2017). Health and Hunger: Disease, Energy Needs, and the Indian Calorie Consumption Puzzle. *The Economic Journal*, 127 (606), 2378-2409. <https://doi.org/10.1111/econj.12417>
3. FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP & WHO. (2022). *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2022. Repurposing food and agricultural policies to make healthy diets more affordable*. Rome, FAO. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cc0639en>
4. Gupta, N., (2020). Zero Hunger: Food for All. *Yojana*, 64 (12), 22-26.
5. Katakai, P. K. (2002). Shifts in Cropping System and its Effects on Human Nutrition: Case Study from India. *Journal of Crop Production*, 6 (1-2), 119-144. [https://doi.org/10.1300/J144v06n01\\_08](https://doi.org/10.1300/J144v06n01_08).
6. Malaiarasan, U., Paramasivam, R., & Felix, K. T. (2021). Does Food Price Subsidy Affect Dietary Diversity? Evidence from South India. *Margin: The Journal of Applied Economic Research*, 15 (2), 268-290. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0973801021990397>.



7. NABARD (2022). Food and Nutritional Security in India: Charting the New Way to a Robust Agri-Food System, *NABARD Research Study-35*, Mumbai.
8. Rao, N. C., Bathla, S., Kumar, A. & Jha, G. K. (2018). Agriculture and Sustainable Development Goals: An Overview and Issues. *Agricultural Economics Research Review*, 31(Conf), (1-7). <http://dx.doi.org/10.5958/0974-0279.2018.00016.2>
9. Sachs, J. D., Lafortune, G., Kroll, C., Fuller, G. & Woelm, F. (2022). *From Crisis to Sustainable Development: the SDGs as Roadmap to 2030 and Beyond*. Sustainable Development Report 2022. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
10. Sinha, D. (2021). Hunger and Food Security in the Times of Covid-19. *Journal of Social and Economic Development*, 23 (Suppl 2), 320–331. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40847-020-00124-y>
11. Swaminathan, M.S. (2018). Food to Nutritional Security. *Yojana*, 62 (5), 11-12.
12. Thyagarajan S.P. (2021). Sustainable Development Goals and Progress of India in Sustenance Towards No Poverty and Zero Hunger. *Research Highlights*, 31 (4), 185-191.
13. UN (2023). India overtakes China as the world's most populous country. *DESA Policy Brief No. 153*. <https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/publication/un-desa-policy-brief-no-153-india-overtakes-china-as-the-worlds-most-populous-country/#:~:text=In%20April%202023%2C%20India's%20population,to%20grow%20for%20several%20decades>
14. UNDP & OPHI. 2022. *Global Multidimensional Poverty Index 2022: Unpacking Deprivation Bundles to Reduce Multidimensional Poverty*. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI), University of Oxford.
15. Von Grebmer, K., J. Bernstein, D. Resnick, M. Wiemers, L. Reiner, M. Bachmeier, A. Hanano, O. Towey, R. Ní Chéilleachair, C. Foley, S. Gitter, G. Larocque, and H. Fritschel. (2022). *2022 Global Hunger Index: Food Systems Transformation and Local Governance*. Bonn: Welthungerhilfe; and Dublin: Concern Worldwide.