

HUNGER AND MALNUTRITION AMONG INDIAN CHILDREN AND MDGs: ISSUES AND OPTIONS

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Hunger and malnutrition is the most neglected form of human deprivation and is one important cause of more than half of all deaths world wide. Malnutrition causes a great deal of human suffering, and it is a violation of a child's human rights. Even today 46 per cent of all children in the country continue to be underweight and a very high proportion of women suffer from anaemia, India is one of the countries with the highest proportion of malnourished children in the world, along with Bangladesh, Ethiopia, and Nepal. In spite of its remarkable economic growth in the past decade, India's progress in reducing child malnutrition has been excessively slow. The care of young children cannot be left to the family alone – it is also a social responsibility. Social intervention is required, both in the form of enabling parents to take better care of their children at home, and in the form of direct provision of health, nutrition, pre-school education and related services.

The present study is based on three important objectives; to examine the current trends and determinants of hunger and malnutrition among children in India, to examine the progress regarding some health and nutrition related MDGs and to suggest the cross-cutting strategic approaches to reducing hunger and malnutrition.

Information on anthropometric measurements of weight and height of children, collected in the National family health survey-3 (NFHS-3), District level RCH survey (DLHS-RCH 2002-04) and other published and unpublished reports of Government of India was used for the study. The procedure of transforming the anthropometric data into Standard Deviation scores (SD) usually mentioned as Z - scores was adopted. Three commonly used anthropometric measures are height-for-age, weight-for-height and weight-for-age. These three indices are expressed in terms of standard deviations from the median for an international reference population specified by W H O.

The main findings of this study, Children age 0 to 6 years is nutritionally the most vulnerable and series of interrelated factors of hunger and malnutrition from rooted in poverty, including a lack of access to food, health care, safe water, sanitation services, and appropriate child feeding and caring practices. These interrelated factors are in turn exacerbated by poor households' and communities' lack of access to human, financial, social, natural, and physical capital, combined with social discrimination, lack of education, and gender inequality. This paper argues for cross-cutting strategies for their nutritional needs, even though there is a close relationship between health, growth, nutrition and development in this age group and these dimensions need to be considered holistically.