

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
MINISTRY OF WOMEN AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT

RAJYA SABHA
UNSTARRED QUESTION NO. 1274
TO BE ANSWERED ON 08.12.2021

ADDRESSING HEALTH ISSUES OF CHILDREN

1274 SHRI SUJEET KUMAR:

Will the Minister of Women and Child Development be pleased to state:

- (a) whether Government acknowledges the issues of child stunting, undernourishment, child and under-five mortality in the country as stated in the Global Hunger Index Report;
- (b) if so, whether Government is planning to address these health issues on the priority basis; and
- (c) whether Government accepts the report in its entirety, if not, a detailed response clarifying and explaining the denial thereto?

ANSWER

MINISTER OF WOMEN AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT
(SHRIMATI SMRITI ZUBIN IRANI)

(a) to (c) As per Global Hunger Index 2021 report prepared by 'Welthungerhilfe' and 'Concern Worldwide', India's score is 27.5 and it has ranked 101 among 116 countries. Global Hunger Index is based on four indicators - Undernourishment, Child Stunting, Child Wasting and Child Mortality.

Global Hunger Index (GHI) does not reflect India's true picture as it is a flawed measure of 'Hunger'. It should not be taken at face value as it is neither appropriate nor representative of hunger prevalent in a country. Out of its four indicators, only one indicator, i.e., undernourishment, is directly related to hunger. The two indicators, namely, Stunting and Wasting are outcomes of complex interactions of various other factors like sanitation, genetics, environment and utilisation of food intake apart from hunger which is taken as the causative/outcome factor for stunting and wasting in the GHI. Also, there is hardly any evidence that the fourth indicator, namely, child mortality is an outcome of hunger.

Data used in the GHI report are sourced from international agencies which are not updated as per the latest data available in the country. Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) of the United Nations, the data source agency for the indicator 'Prevalence of Undernourishment', has relied on the opinion poll conducted telephonically, which has completely disregarded Government's economic response to Covid-19 of providing free foodgrains to 80 crore National Food Security Act beneficiaries under Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojna, and given an

unacceptable estimate for India for the triennium period 2018-2020. The 4 questions asked in the poll have no links to availability of food or dietary energy. FAO's estimates on 'Prevalence of Undernourishment' in India for the triennium periods 2015-17, 2016-18, 2017-19 are 14.8%, 14.5% and 14.0% respectively, which clearly show a declining trend. India has not faced any major challenges on the food production and supply part in the recent past which would adversely affect the 'Prevalence of Undernourished' score. Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka, have improved on this indicator during the triennium period 2018-20, signifying that these countries have not been affected at all by Covid-19 pandemic induced loss of job/business and reduction in income levels. These are counterintuitive in view of higher mortality rates due to Covid-19 in 2 countries during 2020. Thus, the assessment made by FAO does not reflect the ground reality and is not worthy of consideration.

Government conducts National Family Health Survey (NFHS) at regular intervals. As per recently released NFHS report, Child Stunting in the country has decreased from 38.4% (NFHS-4, 2015-16) to 35.5% (NFHS-5, 2019-21) and Child Wasting has decreased from 21.0% (NFHS-4, 2015-16) to 19.3% (NFHS-5, 2019-21). Further, percentage of underweight children has gone down from 35.8% (NFHS-4, 2015-16) to 32.1% (NFHS-5, 2019-21).

The Government is implementing several schemes and programs under the Umbrella Integrated Child Development Services Scheme as direct targeted interventions to address the problem of malnutrition in the country. All these schemes address one or other aspects related to nutrition and have the potential to improve nutritional outcomes in the country. For alleviation of malnutrition, Government has announced **Mission Poshan 2.0** to strengthen nutritional content, delivery, outreach and outcomes with focus on developing practices that nurture health, wellness and immunity to disease and malnutrition. Steps have been taken to improve nutritional quality and testing in accredited labs, strengthen delivery and leverage technology to improve governance. Government has advised States/UTs to ensure that the quality of supplementary nutrition conforms to prescribed standards laid down under the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006 and regulations made there under.

States/UTs have been advised to promote use of AYUSH systems for prevention of malnutrition and related diseases. A programme to support development of Poshan Vatikas at Anganwadi centres to meet dietary diversity gap leveraging traditional knowledge in nutritional practices has also been taken up.

Malnutrition is not a direct cause of death among children under five years of age. However, it can increase morbidity and mortality by reducing resistance to infections. Malnourished children are more vulnerable to any infection than normal children, therefore, data regarding child mortality due to malnutrition is not maintained by GoI at central level. Overall Under-five mortality rate has reduced from 49.7% to 41.9% during the span of four year since 2015-16.
