

INDIA MAY MISS NUTRITION TARGETS

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Poverty & Hunger and related issues

State of imbalance: India is among the three worst countries for steep within-country disparities in stunting.

India is among 88 countries that are likely to miss global nutrition targets by 2025, according to the Global Nutrition Report 2020 released on Tuesday. It also identified the country as one with the highest rates of domestic inequalities in malnutrition.

In 2012, the World Health Assembly identified six nutrition targets for maternal, infant and young child nutrition to be met by 2025. These require governments to reduce stunting by 40% in children under five and prevalence of anaemia by 50% among women in the age group of 19-49, ensure 30% reduction in low-birth weight and no increase in childhood overweight, increase the rate of exclusive breastfeeding in the first six months up to at least 50% and reduce and maintain childhood wasting to less than 5%.

According to the Global Nutrition Report 2020, India will miss targets for all four nutritional indicators for which there is data available — stunting among under-five children, anaemia among women of reproductive age, childhood overweight and exclusive breastfeeding.

Underweight children

Between 2000 and 2016, underweight rates have decreased from 66.0% to 58.1% for boys and 54.2% to 50.1% in girls. However, this is still high compared with the average of 35.6% for boys and 31.8% for girls in Asia.

In addition, 37.9% of children under five are stunted and 20.8% are wasted, compared with the Asia average of 22.7% and 9.4% respectively.

One in two women of reproductive age is anaemic, while at the same time the rate of overweight and obesity continues to rise, affecting almost a fifth of the adults, at 21.6% of women and 17.8% of men.

India is identified as among the three worst countries, along with Nigeria and Indonesia, for steep within-country disparities on stunting, where the levels varied four-fold across communities.

Stunting level

Stunting level in Uttar Pradesh is over 40% and the rate among individuals in the lowest income group is more than double those in the highest income group at 22.0% and 50.7%, respectively. In addition, stunting prevalence is 10.1% higher in rural areas compared with urban areas.

The same applies for overweight and obesity, where there are nearly double as many obese adult females than there are males (5.1% compared to 2.7%).

Coming at a time the world is battling COVID-19, which has exposed different forms of socio-economic inequities, the authors have called for promoting equity to address malnutrition.

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