

FAILING ON FOOD: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON CHILD MALNUTRITION AND THE VALUE OF GOOD SCHOOL MEALS

Relevant for: Economy | Topic: Food processing and related industries in India: scope and significance, location, upstream and downstream requirements and supply chain management

The [approval of the PM POSHAN scheme by the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs](#) until 2025-26 comes at a critical time when real income declines and the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic have affected the ability of families to ensure good nutrition. The findings in Phase I of the NFHS-5 for 22 States and Union Territories in December 2020 were shocking: [childhood stunting rose in 13 States](#), there was [high prevalence of anaemia among children and women](#), and [wasting was a serious concern](#) in 12 States. The slippage over the previous survey period exposes the worsening scourge of malnutrition, threatening to deprive millions of children of a fully productive adult life. It will take a serious effort to address this hidden crisis, backed by strong budgetary commitment. The centrally supported hot meal programme in Government and Government-aided schools, covering 11.8 crore children, will be supplemented with nutritional elements in identified aspirational districts and areas with high anaemia. The scheme, which is proposed to be extended to pre-primary children, provides for social audit, creation of school nutritional gardens to source fresh produce, involvement of farmer-producer organisations as providers, and lays emphasis on local food traditions. While these are positive features, momentum towards eradicating malnutrition hinges crucially on annual budgetary outlays and proof of POSHAN's working will lie in measurable outcomes.

Support for the PM POSHAN, which the Government says has been approved over the five-year period at 1,30,794 crore, including 31,733 crore from States and UTs, must remain elastic. While some child growth metrics such as stunting require a longer window to measure, problems such as anaemia and low weight lend themselves to speedy amelioration. The Government must demonstrate that [Saksham Anganwadi-Mission POSHAN 2.0](#), which amalgamates the POSHAN Abhiyan and schemes covering anganwadis, crèches and adolescent girls, is fiscally stronger than its erstwhile component parts. There must be a meaningful increase in the current Budget estimate over the combined past outlay for the subsumed individual schemes. On nutritional planning, the renewed plan should introduce a greater diversity of diets that compensates for micronutrient and protein deficiency. Strong supplementation of nutrition at school, in the community, and at childcare centres is critical at a time when criticism of food inflation has met with a tone-deaf response, and pandemic-induced income declines have depressed essential consumption. The lower offtake of foodgrains for the noon meal scheme during the pandemic over the previous year and patchy food distribution mechanisms in many States should set alarm bells ringing. The future of a generation of Indians is at stake.

[Our code of editorial values](#)

U.S. President Biden should not buckle to pressure from irate anti-vaccine campaigners

END

Downloaded from crackIAS.com

© **Zuccess App** by crackIAS.com