



# Sprouting sustainable nutrition sensitive food systems

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## Context

- The global food system is facing significant challenges from resource limitations and climate change even while trying to ensure food accessibility and affordability.
- **Despite being a major producer of milk, fruits, vegetables, grains and livestock, India struggles with nutritional issues**, which include undernutrition and overnutrition, alongside widespread micronutrient deficiencies.
- These jeopardise its demographic dividend and economic resilience. **Ranked 105 out of 127 countries in the Global Hunger Index 2024, India's food insecurity requires urgent action.**
- The data from the **National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5)**, 2019-21 is cause for concern. Among **children under five, 35.5% are stunted, 32.1% are underweight, and 19.3% suffer from wasting**. Simultaneously, there is a worrying increase in **overweight and obesity**, affecting 24% of women and 22.9% of men.
- Additionally, **57% of women of reproductive age are anaemic**, underscoring the widespread issue of **hidden hunger**. Thus, there needs to be a comprehensive strategy to address malnutrition in a holistic manner.
- Food insecurity is no longer just about hunger. It now encompasses all forms of malnutrition, including diet-related non-communicable diseases (NCDs). Millions, including food producers, struggle to afford a healthy diet.
- According to the **FAO, 55.6% of Indians are unable to afford nutritious food**
- If unaddressed, malnutrition will continue to impede human capital development, drive up health-care costs, and **reduce economic productivity**.
- Yet, within this crisis lies a **powerful opportunity** — **transforming food systems around nutrition**, sustainability and equity can boost national well-being and support progress on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- **Nutrition-sensitive agriculture is central**, requiring **agricultural policies that integrate nutrition objectives** by promoting the cultivation of **climate-resilient, biofortified crops, enhancing crop diversity**, and improving post-harvest storage systems to bolster food security and dietary quality.
- Community-led nutrition interventions such as the **Nutrition-Sensitive Community Planning (NSCP)** model enable local communities to address nutrition determinants including soil and water conservation, Water, **Sanitation**, and Hygiene (WASH), and health-care access through a bottom-up approach.
- **School-based nutrition programmes such as Nutri-Pathshala** help combat childhood malnutrition by incorporating **biofortified grains into school meals**, while also supporting local agriculture by sourcing from nearby farmers.