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Problems of hunger and wastage of food in India: Magnitude, causes and remedies

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Abstract

Hunger is very big problem in India. Almost 2000000000 people in India sleep hungry each night. 1907. 7 millions Peoples are under-nourished in India. And there are lots of other miserable stats which show that India is in the grave problem of hunger. 14.5% of India's populations are under-nourished. Many die daily with disease related to hunger and nutrition deficiency in India. Many don't grow properly and face issues such as stunting and wasting. The problem that hunger and nutrition deficiency has created definitely needs attention. Media could help by bringing the problem of hunger and undernourishment to light so that government and other non-governmental organization could help. Many policies and schemes have been brought by government but implementation of the most of the scheme was ineffective, some of the reasons for ineffectiveness of the schemes and programs are corruption, unawareness of people about the schemes, lack of knowledge, etc. so steps should be taken to effectively implement the policies.

Food wasting is considered one of the most prominent causes of hunger and under-nutrition in India. About 40 per cent of the food India produces gets wasted every year. Cost of food inflate due to wasting of food in such a huge amount which makes it unaffordable for poor peoples to buy food, so wasting of food one of the main reasons of the hunger and under-nutrition. Poverty is equally responsible for hunger many people in India live on less than Rs. 50 per day and due to insufficient amount of money to buy food they live hungry and malnourished. India is performing very poorly in eradicating hunger according to Global Hunger Index even North Korea is performing better than India. Stress is also contributing in making the problems of hunger and under-nutrition in India worse as it kills the crave to eat and thus person starts taking less food and which eventually leads to mal-nutrition. So reducing stress could contribute in reducing the problem of malnourishment and under-nourishment. And finally there is one other problem called obesity which seems strikingly different problem but according to UN obesity can be the other side of the same coin. More than 700 million people are obese. While hunger's ability to kill makes it vivid in our minds, obesity, which has doubled since 1980, is tied to a host of health issues, too, including diabetes, high blood pressure, and an increased likelihood of stroke.

So obesity is equally harmful for a country as is hunger. We must fight hunger and obesity by complaining if we see that schemes are not implemented properly, and giving the knowledge of the schemes to the people and the most important and that is, by not wasting food. We can fight hunger and make our country free from hunger and under-nourishment.

Keywords: Hunger, Wastage, Magnitude, Causes and Remedies

Introduction

According to oxford dictionary, hunger is a severe lack of food or a feeling of discomfort or weakness caused by lack of food, coupled with desire to eat, i.e., it is a kind of sense or a kind of signal that brain gives to us that we should eat something and fill up our stomach or a craving to eat something. This is how we define hunger at individual level. But when we talk about hunger in a country then it takes much broader meaning.

Implications of hunger

When we talk about the problem of hunger in a country we talk about a whole range of issues, for instance, how many people are sleeping hungry in the country?, are people eating balanced?, what kind of diseases (caused by improper diet) people are vulnerable to?, what are the steps taken by the government of the country to eradicate hunger?, how is hunger

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related to poverty?, how could we solve the problems of hunger?, and other similar questions and related topics. According to Forbes, hunger is about malnutrition and under-nutrition.

Some stats related to hunger and malnutrition

India is a huge country with a huge population of more than 1.3 billion people and is home to huge undernourished population of almost 190.7 million people (according to FAO estimates) which is about 14.5 percent of country's total population and huge amount of food is being wasted every year.

In India

- 51.4 percent women in reproductive age between 15 to 49 years are having the symptoms of anemia.
- 38.4 per cent of the children aged under 5 are stunted i.e., too short for their age.
- 21 per cent of the children suffer from wasting i.e., weight is too low for their height
- 1 in 4 children is malnourished
- 3000 children die every day from illness related to poor diet.
- Millions of people sleep hungry at night (almost 200 million people)

So these are the problems related to hunger that people in India face.

Though India is one of the fastest developing countries with a growth rate of 7.1 per cent (fiscal year 2016-17) and is supposed to become a superpower by 2030, GDP of India in 2017 was \$2.439 trillion, according to IMF was 6.7%, according to agricultural ministry food grains production is estimated at a record 272 million tones 2016-17, and the amount of food produced can feed the twice the current population of India, even then problem of hunger, under-nourishment, malnourishment, and other illness and problem related to hunger is prevalent in India. And one of the main reasons is wasting of food in India.

Some data regarding food wasting in India:

- According to Agricultural Ministry, Rs 500 billion worth of food produced is wasted every year in the country.
- The amount of food wasted in India is more than the amount of food consumed by many countries.
- According to TOI, availability of solid food with breast milk for young children (when they transition from exclusive breastfeeding) declined from 52.7% to 42%.

Steps taken by government to eradicate hunger

Despite lots of initiative taken by the Government of India (GOI) for hunger eradication from India, it seems to have no effect on the undernourished and mal-nourished population of India.

There are a lot of reasons that could be said are responsible for hunger, under-nourishment, malnourishment, or diseases related to food and nutrition deficiency. Some of the reasons are:

- Wastage of food in large amount. It is one of the most important reasons for hunger. Some facts about the wasting of food in India:
 - Indians waste as much food as the whole United Kingdom consumes.

- According to the United Nation Development Program, up to 40 per cent of food produced in India is wasted.
- Food wasting causes inflation in food price.
 - It means as the demand of food increases the price of the same amount of food increases and due the increased price many are not able to buy it.
 - Price increases because more food is demanded and more food is demanded because food is being wasted.
- Inadequate number of cold storage also leads to food wastage as foods rot.
- Food is wasted in huge amount in marriage, conference and party
- Failures to invest in agriculture, supporting small farm
- Failure of food schemes. Some facts about food schemes and its failure
 - One of the most famous schemes implemented till now is Midday Meal Scheme, implemented on August 15, 1995. It is a good scheme to provide good and healthy diet to students, but this scheme is not implemented correctly. Some of the facts about this schemes are:
 - Around Rs 1,321,500,000,000 is being spent every year round on this scheme.
 - In majority of states, private entrepreneurs are acquiring monopoly over Mid Day Meal scheme
 - Control on the quality of food to be eaten is almost non-existent. Attention is not paid at all over the hygiene and cleanliness of foodstuffs, and nobody is prepared to take responsibility of the quality of meals served
 - Even if fund is given for good quality of food but they intentionally buy bad quality of food just to save money
 - Many schools skip the program several times a month.
 - Antodaya Anna Yojna is a scheme launched by government of India on December 25th 2000. It was launched to provide food at highly subsidized rate to poorest families. Here are some facts about Antodaya Anna yojna:
 - The government began providing the poor families opportunity to buy up to 35 kilograms of rice and wheat at a highly subsidized cost of three rupees per kilogram of rice and two rupees per kilogram of wheat
 - But one of the main problems of this scheme is corruption. The distributors usually sell the cereals at higher cost in the market and distribute the inferior quality of cereals to the people.
 - Thus the cereals don't reach to the right people and many people starve.

Global hunger index

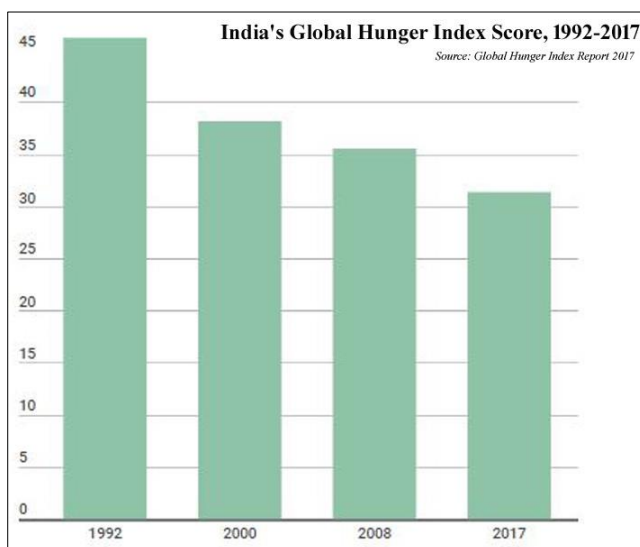
The Global Hunger Index (GHI) is a multidimensional statistical tool used to describe the state of countries' hunger situation. The GHI measures progress and failures in the global fight against hunger.

- Calculation

- The Index ranks countries on a 100-point scale, with 0 being the best score (no hunger) and 100 being the worst, although neither of these extremes is reached in practice. Values less than 10.0 reflect low hunger, values from 10.0 to 19.9 reflect moderate hunger, values from 20.0 to 34.9 indicate serious hunger, values from 35.0 to 49.9 reflect alarming hunger, and values of 50.0 or more reflect extremely alarming hunger levels.
- The GHI combines 4 component indicators: 1) the proportion of the undernourished as a percentage of the population; 2) the proportion of children under the age of five suffering from wasting; 3) the proportion of children under the age of five suffering from stunting; 4) the mortality rate of children under the age of five.

- Global hunger index and India

- India ranks 100th on Global Hunger Index
- India stood at 97th position the previous year
- India's score in Global Hunger Index is 31.4, which indicate India has serious hunger problem
- India ranks below many of its neighbouring countries such as China (29th rank), Nepal (72), Myanmar (77), Sri Lanka (84), and Bangladesh (88). It is ahead of Pakistan (106), Afghanistan (107)
- As of 2015-16, more than a fifth (21%) of children in India suffer from wasting (low weight for height)- up from 20% in 2005-06
- The following is the India's Global Hunger score index:



Graph 1: India's global hunger index score, 1992-2017

- Some of the reasons that could be given for falling rank in Global hunger index are mentioned above, like wastage of food, corruption in PDS system, ineffective implementation of schemes such as Midday Meal Scheme, Antodaya Anna Yojna, etc.

Role of media in combating hunger

The role of media is not limited to country level, but it is global. Poverty is the principal cause of hunger. Here, the importance attached to the media can be seen in its ability to

influence the political leaders' agenda through presenting the poverty-related news and developments as one of the most striking issues. Moreover, as the media puts poverty and hunger-related news at the top of their agenda and share them with the masses, they inevitably become more aware of the issue and as a result, they want to take steps in order to put an end to this problem. In this context, it can be stated that, one of the most important steps that the masses can take in trying to eliminate this issue can be seen in their relations with the public authorities whether can they be political leaders or state institutions. In other words, they can put a considerable amount of pressure on political elites by becoming organized as civil society movements and so on.

Apart from that, the media by making the masses become much more aware of the starving people in different corners of the world play a key role in stimulating the non-governmental organizations (aid organizations) to get engaged in combating this problem worldwide.

In short, it can be said that, the media as one of the most significant actors in shaping the public agenda can play a major role in combating global problems such as global hunger. On the one hand, they may sell hunger as a worldwide commercial product and thus getting benefits, on the other hand, they increase global awareness and hence help aid organizations provide much more assistance for those in need.

Poverty and hunger

Poverty, food prices and hunger are inextricably linked. Poverty causes hunger. Not every poor is hungry, but almost all hungry are poor. Millions live with hunger and malnourishment because they simply can't afford to buy enough food, cannot afford nutritious foods or cannot afford the farming supplies they need to grow enough food of their own. Hunger can be viewed as a dimension of extreme poverty. It is often called the most severe and critical manifestation of poverty. So, in order to eradicate hunger from the world we need to eradicate poverty first.

Hunger and nutrition

- Relationship between hunger and nutrition
If one doesn't eat enough food to fill current physiological needs — they feel hunger. When a person has hunger for a sustained period of time, he or she can develop malnutrition, either mild or severe, depending on one's body needs and food intake.
- Malnutrition is defined as any disorder of nutrition. It may result from an unbalanced, insufficient or excessive diet or from impaired absorption, assimilation or use of foods. Under-nutrition is a condition of malnutrition caused by an inadequate food supply or an inability to use the nutrients in food.
- Under-nutrition can begin in the womb.

Food habit and hunger

Often people eat even when they are not hungry, they just eat because they are habituated, like snacking during work and this can lead to health problems such as increased weight, tiredness. It also harms lots of poor people as even buying food when not necessary will increase the price of food gradually and people who need it and don't have enough money will be affected. So eating food more than necessary just because of habit is similar to wasting food.

Hunger and stress

It is found that hungry people are more vulnerable to physiological stress. According to a Harvard Mental Health letter stress causes people to overeat. In the short term, stress can shut down appetite. A structure in the brain called the hypothalamus produces corticotrophin-releasing hormone, which suppresses appetite. The brain also sends messages to the adrenal glands atop the kidneys to pump out the hormone epinephrine (also known as adrenaline). Epinephrine helps trigger the body's fight-or-flight response, a revved-up physiological state that temporarily puts eating on hold.

But if stress persists, it's a different story. The adrenal glands release another hormone called cortisol, and cortisol increases appetite and may also ramp up motivation in general, including the motivation to eat.

So stress is bad for both the people who eat less and those who eat more. So reducing stress is important for fighting hunger.

Hunger vs obesity

Obesity is a medical condition in which excess body fat has accumulated to the extent that it may have a negative effect on health. People are generally considered obese when their body mass indices (BMI), a measurement obtained by dividing a person's weight by the square of the person's height, is over 30 kg/m², with the range 25–30 kg/m² defined as overweight. The takeaway from this year's United Nations report on food security around the globe is bleak—after a decade of declining, hunger is up, with almost 40 million more people estimated to be going hungry in 2016 than in 2015. Throughout the report, the stats on hunger are paired with equally jarring stats about the worldwide rise in obesity, which also continues to skyrocket. While the increase in hunger is making headlines, the numbers in the report make it obvious that the world is facing food problems on multiple fronts. An estimated 815 million people are going hungry at the same time that more than 700 million people, including more than 100 million children, are obese. While hunger's ability to kill makes it vivid in our minds, obesity, which has doubled since 1980, is tied to a host of health issues, too, including diabetes, high blood pressure, and an increased likelihood of stroke. It's easy to see hunger and obesity as two infuriating but separate issues—a baffling manifestation of a split world, of the haves and the have-nots. But in reality, the numbers are actually two sides of the same coin: A startling portion of the world does not have access to reliable, nutrient-rich food. The undernourished obviously suffer this problem, but in many cases, those who end up obese suffer from a lack of access to nutritious food, too.

So, hunger and obesity are two different problems but seems to have same effect. So we need to fight them and make our country and world free from these problems.

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