

## 6. Nutrition Security – Economy

Despite achieving record foodgrain production (food security), India faces persistent child malnutrition (stunting, wasting) and high anaemia rates, a gap PM Modi termed "hidden hunger." The national focus is now shifting to nutrition security, using policies like POSHAN Abhiyaan 2.0, mandatory rice fortification across PDS and Mid-Day Meals, and promoting millets to ensure a quality-driven, diverse diet.

### A National Shift in Focus

**The Call to Action** – At the inaugural session of the Emerging Science, Technology and Innovation Conclave (ESTIC) 2025, Prime Minister Modi urged the scientific community to spearhead a national transition.

**The New Goal** – The focus must evolve from achieving food security (ensuring sufficiency of food) to ensuring nutrition security (ensuring a high-quality, diverse diet for all).

#### Status of Food Security in India

**Record Food grain Production** – India has achieved significant success in production. According to the Third Advance Estimates for 2024-25 – Total food grain production reached a record 353.96 million tonnes. This includes 117.51 million tonnes of wheat and 149.07 million tonnes of rice.

**Extensive Safety Net** – The National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013, ensures a vast distribution network for subsidised food grains.

1. It covers approximately 81.35 crore beneficiaries.
2. This accounts for 75% of the rural population and 50% of the urban population.

**Sufficient Storage Capacity** – As of July 2025, the Food Corporation of India (FCI) and state agencies maintain a total of 917.83 Lakh Metric Tonnes (LMT) of storage capacity (both covered and Cover and Plinth – CAP) for central pool grains.

**The Core Problem** – Despite this success in *quantity* and *availability*, food security does not automatically guarantee nutritional security.

### Comparison – Food Security vs. Nutrition Security

| Parameter                    | Food Security                                                  | Nutrition Security                                                        |
|------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Focus</b>                 | Calorie sufficiency (having enough food to eat).               | Adequate intake of macro & micronutrients (having the <i>right</i> food). |
| <b>Goal</b>                  | Prevent hunger and starvation.                                 | Ensure holistic physical and cognitive well-being.                        |
| <b>Indicators</b>            | Grain availability, Public Distribution System (PDS) coverage. | Rates of Anaemia, stunting, wasting, obesity, and diet diversity.         |
| <b>Approach</b>              | Quantity-driven.                                               | Quality- and diversity-driven.                                            |
| <b>Policy Orientation</b>    | Cereal-centric (focused heavily on rice and wheat).            | Crop & diet diversification (including millets, pulses, fruits, etc.).    |
| <b>Main Schemes</b>          | PDS, National Food Security Act (NFSA), Mid-Day Meal.          | Poshan Abhiyaan, ICDS, Food Fortification Mission.                        |
| <b>Measurement Metric</b>    | Food availability per capita.                                  | Nutrition outcomes and overall diet diversity.                            |
| <b>Sustainability Aspect</b> | Provides short-term relief from hunger.                        | Ensures long-term health, human capital, and sustainability.              |

### The Urgent Need to Focus on Nutrition Security

**1. Persistent Child Malnutrition (NFHS-5, 2019-21)** – Despite food surpluses, India's children suffer from high rates of malnutrition.

1. Stunting (low height-for-age) – 35.5% of children under five.
2. Wasting (low weight-for-height) – 19.3% of children under five.
3. Underweight – 32.1% of children under five.

**2. Poor Maternal and Women's Nutrition (NFHS-5) –**

1. **Malnourishment** – The proportion of malnourished women (BMI < 18.5) declined modestly from 22.9% to 18.7%.
2. **Anaemia** – Anaemia among women (aged 15–49 years) remains alarmingly high at **57%**, posing serious risks to mothers and newborns.
3. **Micronutrient Deficiencies ("Hidden Hunger")** –
  1. **Scope of Problem** – India faces widespread deficiencies of essential micronutrients like iron, vitamin A, zinc, and iodine.
  2. **Survey Findings** – The Comprehensive National Nutrition Survey (CNNS) found that over 50% of preschool children suffer from vitamin A or iron deficiency.
  3. **Root Cause** – This "hidden hunger" persists even in food-secure households that depend heavily on cereal-based diets, which lack essential vitamins and minerals.
4. **Economic and Social Impact** –
  1. **Human Capital** – Malnutrition limits human capital development by impairing cognitive and physical growth.
  2. **Productivity** – This leads to reduced productivity in the workforce.
  3. **Economic Drain** – It increases healthcare costs for the nation and perpetuates the inter-generational cycle of poverty, thereby affecting national development goals.

### Policy Initiatives Toward Nutrition Security

**POSHAN Abhiyaan (National Nutrition Mission)** – Launched in 2018, this is the flagship program to reduce stunting, undernutrition, and anaemia. It operates through a convergence model, bringing together various ministries. The revamped Mission POSHAN 2.0 integrates the Supplementary Nutrition Programme and utilizes the Poshan Tracker App for real-time monitoring of children's and women's nutrition status.

### Fortification of Foods

**Mandated Fortified Rice** – The Government has mandated the distribution of fortified rice (with iron, folic acid, B12) through all major social safety nets (PDS, ICDS, Mid-Day Meal schemes) by 2028.

**Other Fortified Foods** – The FSSAI's Food Fortification Initiative continues to promote the fortification of other staples like edible oil, milk, and salt.

**The Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS)** – This foundational scheme provides supplementary nutrition, growth monitoring, and health education at the community level through the network of Anganwadi centres.

**Anaemia Mukt Bharat (2018)** – A targeted strategy aimed at accelerating the reduction of anaemia among high-risk groups (children, adolescents, and women).

### Agricultural and Food System Diversification

**Dietary Diversity** – Actively promoting millets and pulses in the food system to enhance dietary diversity, building on the success of the International Year of Millets 2023.

**Biofortification** – The Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) is conducting research on **biofortified crops** (e.g., iron-rich bajra, zinc-rich wheat, protein-enriched maize) to address hidden hunger at the agricultural source.

### Way Ahead – Recommendations

**Enhance Dietary Diversity** – The Public Distribution System (PDS) basket must be expanded beyond cereals to include pulses, millets, and edible oils to ensure a more balanced food supply.

**Focus on the First 1,000 Days** – Strengthen maternal and child health services with a critical emphasis on –

1. Antenatal nutrition for pregnant women.
2. Exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months.
3. Proper complementary feeding practices thereafter.

**Address Underlying Determinants** – Nutrition is multi-faceted. Efforts must also improve –

1. Sanitation (WASH).
2. Access to safe drinking water.

3. Women's education and empowerment.

**Community Empowerment** – Empower women through Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and community mobilisation to spread dietary awareness and promote healthy practices.

**Data-Driven Governance** – Utilise governance tools like the Poshan Tracker, NFHS, and the Health Management Information System (HMIS) for district-level targeting and monitoring. Shift the administrative focus from tracking input delivery (e.g., number of meals served) to measuring actual outcomes (e.g., reduction in stunting rates).

Source – [https - //www.thehindu.com/sci-tech/agriculture/use-science-for-improving-agriculture-pm-modi-says-at-estic/article70237526.ece](https://www.thehindu.com/sci-tech/agriculture/use-science-for-improving-agriculture-pm-modi-says-at-estic/article70237526.ece)

