

6. Maternal And Child Nutrition – ECONOMY / HEALTH

NITI Aayog and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) India have signed a Statement of Intent (SOI) to collaborate on improving maternal and child nutrition outcomes.

1. NITI Aayog–UNICEF India Partnership for Nutrition – Expanded Analysis

Background of the Partnership

1. India continues to face significant malnutrition challenges, particularly among children and women.
2. According to national surveys such as NFHS, indicators like stunting, wasting, and anaemia remain serious public health concerns.
3. Addressing malnutrition requires multi-sectoral coordination involving health, nutrition, sanitation, education, and community awareness.
4. In this context, NITI Aayog and UNICEF India have partnered to strengthen nutrition interventions, particularly in underserved regions of the country.

About the NITI Aayog–UNICEF India Partnership

Focus Areas

1. The collaboration primarily targets Aspirational Districts and Aspirational Blocks, which represent some of the most socio-economically underdeveloped regions in India.
2. These regions often experience –
 1. Poor nutrition indicators
 2. Limited health infrastructure
 3. Low awareness of child development services
3. The initiative aims to provide targeted policy support and capacity-building interventions in these areas.

Objective of the Partnership

1. The partnership aims to combine NITI Aayog's policy leadership with UNICEF's technical expertise in child health and nutrition.
2. The core objective is to improve nutrition and health outcomes for women and children in vulnerable regions.
3. It seeks to strengthen service delivery mechanisms, community awareness, and institutional capacity.

2. Key Areas of Intervention

Strengthening Anganwadi Infrastructure

1. Anganwadi centres are the primary delivery point for child nutrition and early childhood care services under the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS).
2. The partnership focuses on improving –
 1. Infrastructure and facilities
 2. Availability of nutrition services
 3. Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.

Enhancing Nutrition Literacy

1. Community awareness is critical for improving nutrition outcomes.
2. The programme promotes nutrition literacy among families, including –
 1. Importance of balanced diets
 2. Breastfeeding practices
 3. Complementary feeding for infants
 4. Micronutrient intake.

Improving Uptake of ICDS Services

1. Many eligible beneficiaries do not fully utilise services under Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS).
2. The initiative aims to increase awareness and access to services, including –

1. Supplementary nutrition
2. Growth monitoring
3. Health check-ups
4. Early childhood education.

Capacity Building of Frontline Workers

1. Frontline workers play a crucial role in implementing nutrition programmes.
2. The partnership supports training and capacity building of Anganwadi workers, ASHA workers, and health staff.
3. This improves data collection, community outreach, and delivery of services.

3. About the IMPAct4Nutrition (I4N) Platform

Background

1. IMPAct4Nutrition (I4N) is a national platform launched by UNICEF India in partnership with the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII).
2. It seeks to address malnutrition through collective action involving the private sector, civil society, and government agencies.

Objective

1. The main objective is to mobilise the private sector and civil society to support nutrition initiatives across India.
2. It emphasises multi-stakeholder collaboration to address child malnutrition and improve nutrition awareness.

4. Key Features

Multi-Stakeholder Platform

1. I4N brings together –
 1. Businesses and corporate organisations
 2. Development partners
 3. Government agencies
 4. Civil society organisations.
2. These stakeholders collaborate to design and implement nutrition programmes in underserved regions.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Mobilisation

1. The platform encourages companies to allocate CSR funds for nutrition-related programmes.
2. CSR investments focus particularly on Aspirational Districts and Blocks, where development gaps are significant.

Technical Support and Knowledge Sharing

1. I4N provides technical guidance, research insights, and best practices for effective nutrition interventions.
2. It supports evidence-based approaches in areas such as –
 1. Child feeding practices
 2. Micronutrient supplementation
 3. Maternal nutrition.

Behaviour Change Campaigns

1. Behavioural change is critical to improving nutrition outcomes.
2. The platform promotes campaigns related to –
 1. Healthy diets
 2. Breastfeeding practices
 3. Balanced nutrition
 4. Prevention of micronutrient deficiencies.

Support to Government Programmes

1. I4N complements national nutrition initiatives such as –
 1. POSHAN Abhiyaan (National Nutrition Mission)
 2. Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS).
2. It helps expand outreach and improve programme effectiveness through partnerships.

5. Aspirational Districts Programme (ADP)

Launch and Coverage

1. The Aspirational Districts Programme (ADP) was launched in 2018 by NITI Aayog.
2. It covers 112 underdeveloped districts across India.

Objective

1. The programme aims to accelerate socio-economic development in lagging districts through targeted interventions and data-driven governance.

Thematic Focus Areas

The programme focuses on five key development themes –

1. Health and Nutrition
2. Education
3. Agriculture and Water Resources
4. Financial Inclusion and Skill Development
5. Basic Infrastructure

Performance Monitoring

1. Progress in these districts is monitored using 49 Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).
2. Districts are ranked through a real-time dashboard, encouraging competitive federalism and performance-based governance.

6. Aspirational Blocks Programme (ABP)

Launch and Coverage

1. The Aspirational Blocks Programme was launched in January 2023.
2. Initially covering 500 blocks, the programme was expanded to 513 blocks by 2025.

Objective- The programme focuses on saturating essential government services at the block level, ensuring last-mile delivery.

Thematic Focus Areas

The programme operates across five key themes –

1. Health and Nutrition
2. Education
3. Agriculture and Allied Services
4. Basic Infrastructure
5. Social Development

Significance

1. The block-level approach ensures more granular development planning, as many socio-economic challenges are concentrated at the local level.
2. It strengthens cooperative federalism and local governance mechanisms.

Significance of the Partnership

1. The NITI Aayog–UNICEF collaboration represents a multi-stakeholder approach to addressing malnutrition in India.
2. By integrating government policies, private sector participation, and international expertise, the initiative aims to strengthen nutrition outcomes in vulnerable regions.
3. The focus on Aspirational Districts and Blocks ensures that resources are directed toward areas with the greatest development deficits.
4. Such partnerships are crucial for achieving Sustainable Development Goal 2 (Zero Hunger) and SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being).

Conclusion

India's fight against malnutrition requires coordinated action across multiple sectors and stakeholders. The NITI Aayog–UNICEF partnership, supported by initiatives like IMPAct4Nutrition and the Aspirational Districts and Blocks programmes, aims to strengthen nutrition governance and improve health outcomes. By combining policy leadership, community engagement, and private sector participation, the initiative represents a significant step toward achieving inclusive and sustainable development.

Source – <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleaseDetailm.aspx?PRID=2235681®=3&lang=1>

