

Possibilities leading to India's downfall in the latest GHI rankings

In the latest report published by Concern Worldwide and Welthungerhilfe, it was recorded that India's rating in the Global Hunger Index (GHI) dropped from 107th place out of 121 nations in 2022 to 111th place out of 125 countries in 2023. Some additional reasons could be behind this.

The WHO and UNICEF advise starting breastfeeding immediately after birth and continuing it exclusively for the first six months. According to NFHS-5, only 64% of infants are exclusively breastfed for the first six months, and only 42% of infants are nursed within an hour post-delivery. In India, just 65% of women are literate, and in areas like Bihar and Rajasthan, where child malnutrition rates are high, the percentage is substantially lower. Chronic malnutrition is exacerbated by repeated infections with diarrheal diseases brought on by inadequate sanitation, which also closely correlates with stunting. According to NHFS-4, just 49% of people in India have access to better sanitation services.

Micronutrient deficiencies affect more than 80% of Indians, lowering their resistance to illness. This is mostly caused by a lack of dietary variety, altered eating patterns, food processing that causes plant micronutrient loss, and agricultural homogenization. The effects of food inflation result in lower purchasing power for families. A 1% increase in food prices results in a 0.3% increase in infant and child fatalities, as well as a 0.5% increase in undernourishment.

Lesser penetration of schemes such as ICDS and PMMVY has hampered the social progress of the nation. The ICDS program gives priority to initiatives that provide food supplements, focusing mostly on children over the age of three, when malnutrition has already become a problem. Due to strict requirements, poor women who give birth to several children and teenage mothers are no longer eligible for PMMVY subsidies, which contributes to the intergenerational cycle of undernutrition. Exclusion mistakes and omission of nourishing products from the PDS basket, such as pulses and edible oil, failed to enhance the nutritional status of low-income households.

GLOSSARY

ICDS - Integrated Child Development Services

PMMVY - Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana

NFHS – National Family Health Survey

PDS – Public Distribution System

