

Nutrition schemes need to be expanded

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Whichever way you slice it and dice it, the shameful reality is inescapable – India is home to the largest number of hungry people, about a quarter of the estimated 820 million in the whole world. The National Family and Health Survey (NFHS), last carried out in 2004-05, had shown that 23% of married men, 52% of married women and a chilling 72% of infants were anemic – a sure sign that a shockingly large number of families were caught in a downward spiral of slow starvation.

Global research has now firmly established that depriving the fetus of essential nutrients – as will happen in an under-nourished pregnant woman – seals the fate of the baby once it is born. It is likely to suffer from susceptibility to diseases and physical retardation, as also to mental faculties getting compromised.

So, continuing to allow people to go malnourished, is not just more misery for them: it is the fate of future generations in balance. What can be done to fix this tragedy? The government already runs two of world's biggest nutrition programmes: the midday meal scheme for students up to class 12 and the anganwadi pro-

HEALTH REPORT

Malnourished population	213-230m
Under-weight kids (under 5)	44%
Under-5 mortality	6.6%
Anaemic infants	72%
Anaemic married women	52%

(Sources: IFPRI; FAO; NFHS-3)



gramme under which infants and children up to 6 are given "hot cooked" meals. These need to be spread and more resources pumped in to tackle weaknesses. For instance, a report by the anganwadi workers' federation revealed that as many as 73,375 posts of anganwadi workers and 16,251 posts of supervisors are lying vacant. But the biggest contribution to fighting hunger would be providing universal coverage of the PDS with adequate amounts of grain, pulses and edible oils included.