

Child Malnutrition: Trends and Issues

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ABSTRACT Approximately, one out of every three children under five in developing countries is malnourished. Data clearly shows that the worst affected region is South Asia. 50 percent of children in the whole of South Asia are not able to meet their food requirements and are therefore undernourished. Half of the world's malnourished children are to be found in just three countries, Bangladesh, India and Pakistan. In a recent World Bank report (2005) it is indicated that 47 percent of Indian child population under five is still malnourished. Although there is decline in incidence of malnutrition, but why after so many decades of efforts, improvement in agriculture, increase in educational levels, great economic strides and advances in technology, so many of Indian children are still going hungry? The picture as emerging of the situation of the young Indian child in relation to nutrition and development calls for great attention. Experience shows that malnutrition and ill health are traceable partly to economic causes, food availability and partly to educational factors. Ignorance is perhaps the biggest hurdle facing the silent majority in India. For, even while living in poverty, the health and nutrition status would be appreciably better, if people know what to do about it. Many other factors which can help in improving the nutritional status are like small family norms, avenues for employment, safe drinking water, a clean environment, appropriate farm and food policies including prices. But above all women's education, knowledge about sound feeding practices and eating habits, growth monitoring and women supportive socio-cultural norms need to be given more emphasis.