

1. What do you understand by 'hidden hunger'? How big is the problem of hidden hunger in India? What are the remedial measures to address hidden hunger? Discuss.

Introduction

Hidden hunger is a condition of lack of minerals and vitamins in human body. The nutrition deficiency is caused not due to the lack of food, but due to the lack of food which is rich in nutrients. In other words, it is micro-nutritional deficiency caused by lack of balance in an otherwise full diet.

Body

Hidden hunger is mainly due to the deficiency of one or more micronutrients such as iron, folate, zinc, vitamin A, vitamin B12 and vitamin D. Its effects can be devastating, leading to mental impairment, poor health, low productivity, and even death.

As per FAO reports, hidden hunger affects around 2 billion people or every 1 in 3 persons all over the world. African, Sub-Saharan and South Asian subcontinent regions are hotspots where the prevalence of hidden hunger is high. Even in the developed countries, micronutrient deficiency, particularly iron and iodine deficiency are widespread.

In India - as per the reports of UNICEF, over 80 per cent adolescents suffer from "hidden hunger" and less than 10 per cent of boys and girls consume fruits and eggs daily.

The issue with hidden hunger is that in most of the cases, the family is unaware of the malnutrition being developed which makes it harder to tackle the issue. For instance, Night blindness, a condition afflicting millions of pregnant women and children, stems from low intake of foods rich in essential nutrients like Vitamin A is largely prevalent in India.

Also, Budget constraints limit access to nutrient-rich foods for many families, who are unaware or unable to afford a nutritious diet.

Remedial measures:

- Commercial food fortification: in common dietary foods. Also, as fortified foods mainly reach Urban people, it must be subsidized or made mandatory to reach rural areas as well. Some of the examples are
 - When fortified with vitamin A and D, milk, which remains a staple for many Indians, can help alleviate dietary deficiencies when supplementation is not available. E.g. Milk fortification project by NDDB.
 - Salt fortification is already been done to address Iodine deficiency in India.

- adding B vitamins, iron, and/or zinc to wheat flour and adding vitamin A to cooking oil and sugar.
- Diversifying diets: dietary diversification ensures a healthy diet that contains a balanced and adequate combination of macronutrients, essential micronutrients and other food-based substances such as dietary fiber. A variety of cereals, legumes, fruits, vegetables, and animal-source foods provides adequate nutrition for most people.
- Biofortification: involving breeding food crops, using conventional or transgenic methods, to increase their micronutrient content. E.g. vitamin A maize, vitamin A cassava, iron beans, iron pearl millet, zinc rice, and zinc wheat.
- Supplementation: through government schemes like the folic acid tablet distribution to pregnant women to address iron deficiency and vitamin B12 deficiency. Similarly, vitamin A tablets to children every 6 months in early years and so on.
- Community management and acute malnutrition (CMAM) strategy where in the community work together to identify and address the micronutrient deficiency.
- Implementing programs like Ready to use therapeutic food (RUTF) of UNICEF, Eat Safe project of FSSAI which aims at easy availability of fortified food.
- Improve inter-ministerial coordination and implement integrated nutritional schemes like Poshan Abhiyan which bring a holistic approach to address nutritional deficiency both micro and macro.
- Modification in food subsidy schemes like NFSA, Mid-day meal scheme and so on to include diverse dietary food which provide both micro and macro nutrients required.
- Awareness campaigns to sensitize people the gravity of the issue.

Conclusion

SDG 2 which is the target of Zero hunger would be complete only when hidden hunger is also addressed. Thus, the government has to adopt a holistic and integrated approach to address the issue.

Note: Make note of the data (hidden hunger data is not often available). Also, know the difference between malnutrition and nutrition deficiency due to hidden hunger which deficiency of micro nutrients.

2. How does lack of social empowerment lead to poverty? Illustrate with the help of suitable examples.

Introduction

Social empowerment is a means to build a socially just society. It is understood as the process of developing a sense of autonomy and self-confidence, and acting individually and collectively to change social relationships and the institutions and

discourses that exclude poor people and keep them in poverty. The holistic empowerment of all sections of the society is a necessary condition for the development of a country.

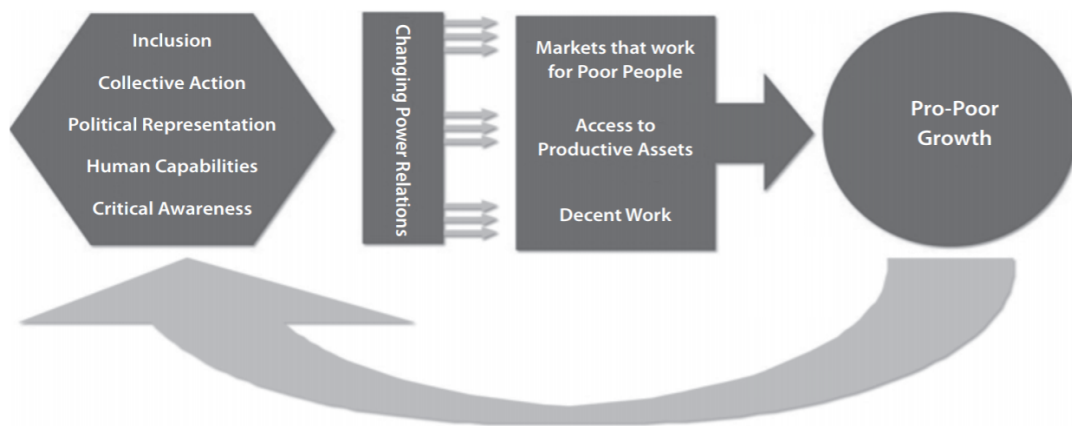
Body

- Poor people's empowerment, and their ability to hold others to account, is strongly influenced by their individual assets (such as land, housing, livestock, savings) and capabilities of all types: human (such as good health and education), social (such as social belonging, a sense of identity, leadership relations) and psychological (self-esteem, self-confidence, the ability to imagine and aspire to a better future).
- Poor people's involvement in local associations and inter-community cooperation mechanisms can contribute to social empowerment by improving their skills, knowledge and self-perception. Local associations also act as self-help mechanisms through which poor people organise their economic activities, such as farming cooperatives, or microfinance groups.
- It is also important to recognise that associational life at the local level takes place predominantly within the informal sphere, such as religious organisations, traditional and customary institutions, and informal community based groups. It is these organisations that exert the most influence on poor people's lives.
- Vulnerable groups, such as the very poor, women and marginalised communities can often lack the skills and confidence to engage in community decision-making. For example, Manual scavengers in India are inadequately organised which perpetuates their poverty cycle.
- Socially marginalised groups not only enter the market with poorer human capabilities than others; they also receive lower returns for equal effort because of discrimination. A project supporting farmer groups in Malawi and Kenya found that women farmers, despite being equally productive and entrepreneurial, received a lower price for their crops than did men farmers
- Women constitute a majority of the poor and are often the poorest of the poor. The societal disadvantage and inequality they face because they are women shapes their experience of poverty differently from that of men, increases their vulnerability, and makes it more challenging for them to climb out of poverty. For example, there is growing feminisation of agriculture in India but lack of social empowerment of women makes them vulnerable to poverty.
- Human capabilities, such as decent health and literacy, give people the freedom to engage in economic activities and participate in political and cultural life. Unpaid care work within families, largely undertaken by women, is vital for human well being and represents a major contribution to the development of human capability.
- Job creation and productivity gains have historically been the most powerful forces for improving living standards—and India is in need of deep reforms that can encourage businesses to invest, scale up, and hire. Microfinance

programs have succeeded in increasing the incomes of poor households and protecting them against complete destitution.

- Education is the first step that empowers any marginalised community to attain socio-economic mobility in society. Presently, education has become a potent tool for empowering the masses, especially the people belonging to socially and economically weaker sections of the society. Lack of education can lead to poverty cycle as can be seen with regards to tribal community in india who have literacy rates less than national average.
- Poverty eradication among migrants through empowerment based on more integration and accessibility. Poverty is a situation that hits migrants in particular. In this case, empowering migrants means to ensure them a balanced access to services, in particular the ones available to all other citizens (health, care, insurance, jobs, etc...).

Figure I.1. The empowerment transmission cycle



Conclusion

Empowerment and pro-poor growth form a virtuous cycle. Mutually reinforcing economic, social and political aspects of empowerment allows people to move out of poverty through participating in, contributing to and benefitting from growth processes which further help in achieving national ideals.

3. Do you think our current urbanisation pattern creates a platform for poverty and destitution? Analyse.

Introduction

The world passed a landmark statistic sometime in 2014, when over 50% of the world’s population was estimated to be living in urban areas. The world’s urban areas are highly varied, but many cities and towns are facing problems such as a lack

of jobs, homelessness and expanding squatter settlements, inadequate services and infrastructure, poor health and educational services and high levels of pollution.

Body

- Urbanisation is an increase in the number of people living in towns and cities. Urbanisation occurs mainly because people move from rural areas to urban areas and it results in growth in the size of the urban population and the extent of urban areas.
- These changes in population lead to other changes in land use, economic activity and culture. Historically, urbanisation has been associated with significant economic and social transformations. However, urbanisation also has disadvantages caused by rapid and unplanned urban growth resulting in poor infrastructures such as inadequate housing, water and sanitation, transport and health care services.
- It is clear that in the last century, which saw rapid urbanization across the globe, India did not face an “urban explosion” as did many other regions of the world, especially in the Americas. India’s level of urbanization increased from 17.6 per cent in 1951 to only 23.7 per cent in 1981 and 27.8 per cent in 2001. Consistent with its low per capita income India ranks among the last thirty in the list of countries listed according to their urbanization levels.
- Although the total urban population increased more than 11 fold between 1901 and 2001, from about 26 million to 285 million, the number of settlements increased by 140 percent to 4378 from 1830. The increase in the number of towns has also been steady across the decades.
- Thus most of the growth has been due to the enlargement of existing towns at every level and not significantly due to the addition of new towns. The majority of settlements now classified as towns have exhibited urban characteristics for a long time.
- The rapid increase in urban populations has meant that peri-urban areas are growing much more quickly than formal urban centres. Peri-urban areas are those areas immediately around a town or city. They are areas in transition from countryside to city (rural to urban), often with undeveloped infrastructure, where health and sanitation services are under pressure and where the natural environment is at risk of degradation.
- Rapid population increases and unplanned growth create an urban sprawl with negative economic, social, and environmental consequences. In developing countries, about a third of urban inhabitants live in impoverished slums and squatter settlements (UN-Habitat, 2012). Slums are urban areas that are heavily populated and have substandard housing with very poor living conditions, creating several problems.
- Many low-income families gravitate to these informal settlements that proliferate in and around towns. Poverty is one of the most critical issues facing urban areas. Urban poverty degrades both the physical and social environment. This then makes it more difficult for people to escape from poverty and they fall victim to the ‘vicious cycle’.

- However, urban problems may be magnified in megacities (congestion, waste disposal, air pollution, lack of housing) and prove more problematic to solve. India has many megacities in the present day.
- These factors have created breeding grounds for urban poverty and destitution which have the following features -
- Inadequate income leading to inadequate consumption.
- Inadequate supply or non-existence of public infrastructure like provision of piped water supply, drainage, roads, footpaths, etc.
- Inadequate provision of basic services that include, for example, schools, day-care centers, vocational training institutions, health care centers, transport and communication, etc.
- Absence of protection from disasters and hazards in the fields of environmental safety, pollution, ethnic conflicts, violence, discrimination and exploitation.
- In India, urbanization is still viewed by many as a disease, and a trend that needs to be reversed. Urban areas instead of being seen as an opportunity are seen as entities that are a burden, unruly and chaotic. Most coverage in the press harps on highlighting the issues of environmental degradation, inequity, slums, unemployment, poverty and chaos. This further hampers the overall image and standing of urban areas.

Conclusion

With variations in the size of the cities and towns, the intensity of the brunt of poverty experienced by the poor may also vary. In fact, it is expected that the acuteness of poverty would be higher in metropolitan areas, like Bangalore city, than in smaller cities and towns, which further necessitates action based on a bottom up approach of planning.

4. Critically evaluate the effectiveness of the MGNREGA as a poverty alleviation programme.

Introduction

National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS) is a demand-driven **social security measure** that provides a minimum of 100 days of unskilled work per household in a financial year.

It is hailed as world's largest anti-poverty program.

Founding pillars of the program

- Asset creation
- Social security
- Social inclusion
- Gender parity
- Equitable growth

Body

Effectiveness of the MGNREGA as a poverty alleviation programme

- **Increased rural wages** – The average wage per person-day has gone up by 81 per cent since the Scheme's inception, with state-level variations.
- **Reduced distress migration** - On an average, 5 crore households have been provided employment every year since 2008.
- **Successful in its targeting**
- **Risk mitigation mechanism** – non-normative rainfall during the agricultural season leads to higher overall participation in NREGS
- **Agriculture**
 - Usage of barren areas for cultivation
 - creation of assets on lands of small and marginal farmers
 - Aided small and marginal farmers in moving to dual and multi-cropping.
 - MGNREGS has contributed to improved or sustained groundwater levels, increased water availability for irrigation, increased irrigated area and finally, improved drinking water availability for humans and livestock.
- **Empowerment of the weaker sections** - As per a NSSO report
 - Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) have accounted for 51 per cent of the total person-days generated.
 - Women for 47 per cent, well above the mandatory 33 per cent as required by the Act.
 - FRA beneficiaries are entitled to 150 days of employment. In states like Rajasthan, communities like the Sahriyas have been given an entitlement of 200 days
- **Financial inclusion** - Payments under the scheme are by way of Direct Benefit Transfers.
- **Human Development Indicator** –
 - Improvement in food security and nutrition.
 - Availability and work by adult household members in MGNREGS inversely affects child labour and positively impacts children's schooling.
- Areas with low consumption expenditure have higher MGNREGS demand as compared to areas with higher consumption expenditure.
- After ALP, women, SC and ST workforce increased under MGNREGS during times of economic distress.

Limitation of the MGNREGA as a poverty alleviation programme

- **Delay in payments** - less than a third of the payments were made on time.
- While women's participation rates in MGNREGA are satisfactory, **women are excluded from planning.**

- **Grievance redress** and having an ombudsperson remain a challenge for the administration.
- While, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Sikkim have been able to institutionalize **social audits**, the other states are fast catching up.
- A study by **National Council of Applied Economic Research**, found that implementation is linked with local administration.
 - Chhattisgarh - 60% participation of poor (strong program implementation)
 - Bihar – 11% poor participation of poor.
- **Up-skilling the MGNREGS Workers and accelerated upliftment from poverty is not happening.** Convergence with Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalya Yojana (DDU-GKY), involvement of SHGs is not taking place.
- **Micro financial benefits** like micro credit, micro insurance, using the JAM trinity has not been planned yet.

Conclusion

The NREGS may still be the best immediate policy option to protect the poor, landless, vulnerable, rural poor.

5. How effective can be strategy of providing a universal basic income to the poor as a poverty alleviation measure in India? Critically evaluate while discussing its pros and cons.

Introduction

Universal basic income (UBI) is an unconditional cash payment given to all citizens with the assumption that they are willing to work but unable to find one. It's a western concept where high level of automation has resulted in high unemployment. The idea has been popularized by philosophers like Thomas Paine who argued that resource of earth is common property of all.

In Indian context, where every third person is a poor, there are huge marginal and small farmers, daily wage workers, who move in and out of poverty, the concept can be useful as a poverty alleviation measure in India. Also universality of program avoids exclusion, bureaucratic burden of identifying beneficiary and cash transfer will not be market distorting.

Body

UBI is an effectiveness poverty alleviation measure in India

Pros

- **Improving living standards** – A study in Indore showed positive results, where majority of people (more than 66 per cent) used it for constructive purposes, like agriculture and some reported a five times increase in livestock. Others tried to uplift their family status by sending children to better schools.

- **Improving production** – Telangana which provides unconditional income of Rs 8,000 per annum to every farmer, shows to have increased the cultivated acreage and also the production by approx. 30 per cent.
- **Investment in agriculture** – This can increase productive investment, increase access to markets and stimulate local economies. Income support can be used to make a repayment or at least activate a bank account which can then receive a loan.
- **Choice of spending** – It will provide people with the choice of spending their money, like sending their children to better schools and other such purposes.
- **Acts as insurance** – Regular income protects farmers during price crash or crop loss.

However, without wider reforms, the poor remain handicapped in their ability to “buy” themselves out of poverty, whether through entrepreneurship or investments in their human capital. A UBI handout could reduce the political incentive for these reforms.

The poor are already abandoning public schools in large numbers and accessing non-state providers to meet their demand for quality human capital. While a UBI would support this trend, fundamental reforms are needed to establish accountability within public schools and enable non-state actors—non-governmental organizations and private schools—to deliver quality learning outcomes.

Cons

- Motivation for work - demographic dividend is the asset of our nation. If youth loose motivation to work then innovation and urge to compete with other nation will be lost. This will hamper out growth.
- Free lunches always pose a moral hazard, where the money can be spent for unproductive purposes or make a person lazy.
- Irrigation facilities, quality inputs, market reforms and land reforms like land bank and land leasing unless undertaken, farming cannot be made remunerative.
- Resource constraint – Approx. Rs. 8000 per year per family, as suggested by Economic survey 2017-18, will be meagre and an adequate amount to take them out of poverty will drain the government exchequer.
- There is a possibility that inflation might increase by the same extent by which income has been given, thus negating the effective increase in income.

Conclusion

Hence in Indian context the adoption of UBI should involve wide ranging debates and discussions. A partial basic income scheme may be introduced on experimental basis to know its practical viability. But along with it more reforms like strengthening entrepreneurship, remove barriers to job creation, and increase the returns to human capital investments by the poor, specific reforms to allow the poor to gain better education and health etc must be taken.

