

Poshan Pakhwada 2023: A Strategic Innovation to Combat India's Malnutrition Challenge

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Adequate nutrition is essential for our physical and mental growth and development. It forms the foundation of our very existence, as it impacts health outcomes in every stage of life. The importance of nutrition is well recognised in the United Nations, Sustainable Development Goal (SDG)-2 as “Zero Hunger” which aims to promote food security for all and end hunger and all forms of malnutrition by 2030. Nutrition is also the key to attainment of other SDG's as well, with 12 of the 17 SDGs having indicators relevant for nutrition.^[1]

India accounts for almost 1/3rd of the global burden of under-nutrition. Considering, India's population size, investing in actions to reduce all forms of malnutrition is especially important, not just for India itself, but also to support the attainment of global targets.^[2]


Nutrition, has special relevance for children and women, as it has a series of implications for the overall social and economic development of the nation. Nearly every third child in India is undernourished – underweight (32%) or stunted (35.5%) and every fifth child (19%) is wasted as per NFHS-5 (2019-21). Moreover, 2 out of every 3 child (67%) and every second pregnant women (52%) is anaemic as per NFHS 5.^[3]

Government of India, has always accorded highest priority to the issue of malnutrition and is committed to ensuring that every child, adolescent girl and

woman attains optimal nutritional status. A number of schemes with direct/indirect effect on nutritional status of children (0-6 years age), pregnant women and lactating mothers have been launched over the last few decades, but haven't been able to achieve desired change in nutritional status and the progress has been very slow. Some of the possible reasons being lack of synergy between various schemes, lack of community participation and ownership, issues with regards to funding and capacity building of staff and strengthening of infrastructure. POSHAN Abhiyaan, launched by [Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi](#) in Jhunjhunu, Rajasthan in March 2018, is India's Flagship programme that identifies and seeks to address the following key essential components critical in the fight against malnutrition.^[4]

1. Delivery of high impact interventions, including behaviour change communication (BCC)
2. Multisectoral convergence
3. Adequate financing (setting up a three year budget of Rs.9046.17 crore)
4. Monitoring to track progress and learn
5. Leveraging technology

It is an overarching framework that seeks to create synergy, leverage funds, functionaries, technical resources and IEC activities from existing programs and schemes such as the Integrated Child

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Development Services (ICDS), Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY), National Health Mission (NHM), Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM), National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM), National Rural Employment Guarantee Assurance (NREGA) and the Public Distribution System (PDS). The idea is multi-ministerial convergence to align efforts of every stakeholder in a direction that could positively impact holistic development and adequate nutrition.

It also intends to convert Nutrition Awareness into a “Jan Andolan” i.e people's movement with involvement of Panchayati Raj Institutions/Village Organizations/SHGs etc. and ensuring wide public participation. PoshanPakhwada, a fortnight-long campaign held in March, is a major outreach and social & behaviour change campaign undertaken under the Jan Andolan component of POSHAN Abhiyaan with astounding reach and results. It includes a conglomeration of activities like Poshan Melas, Rally on nutrition, Prabhat Pheree, Session on nutrition at schools, Self-Help Group meetings, Anaemia camps, growth monitoring of children, home visits of newborn babies by ASHA/AWW, Village Health Sanitation and Nutrition Day (VHSND) Community Based Events (CBE) etc. Every year an issue pertaining to adoption of healthy Nutritional Behaviours is to be undertaken to sensitize masses and seek their active participation making it a people's movement. Ministry of Women and Child Development has been identified as the nodal ministry for coordinating the conduct of activities with other departments. These activities are compiled at the Block/District/State level on daily basis and updated on the Jan Andolan Dashboard at www.poshanabhiyaan.gov.in.

Poshan Maah (September) and Poshan Pakhwada (Fortnight in March) are nationwide nutrition-centric annual Jan Andolans that seek to encourage community participation and mobilise people to promote a healthy and nutritious diet to curb malnutrition among children and women.^[5]

The 5th Poshan Pakhwada themed 'Nutrition for all: Together towards a healthy India' was observed from 20th March 2023 to 3rd April 2023. The objective was promotion of “shree anna” for food diversity, creating an environment of competitiveness for good health and nutrition and to strengthen and upgrade Aangan Wadi Centres (AWC).

Poshan Pakhwada 2023 –Key initiatives

- Promotion and popularization of Shree Anna/ millets for nutritional well being
- Celebration of Swastha Balak Balika Spardha
- Popularize Saksham Anganwadi.

Promotion and popularization of “shri anna” or the best of all grains i.e. Millets. They are traditional nutritious small-seeded staple foods grain, that once accounted for about a third of India's food basket. It includes pearl millet (bajra), finger millet (ragi) and sorghum (jowar) being most popular ones. Green Revolution with emphasis on production of staple crops such as rice, wheat and maize is believed to have eliminated food diversity and reduced the importance of millets in our farms and plates.

Millets are now recognized as smart foods - that are “good for health,” “good for the planet,” and “good for the farmer;”. The year 2023 is the International Year of Millets, that seeks to increase the attention and interest for millet consumption, push for global cooperation to promote millet in various ways.

Swastha Balak Balika Spardha

Primary beneficiary under this scheme are Children (6 month-3 years and 3-5 years) and secondary beneficiary include Care-givers (i.e. Parents, Other Family Members, Other local persons) comprise the secondary beneficiary. The initiative involves cooperation & joint efforts by ICDS staff (CDPO, Supervisor, AWW/AWH), Local PRI representative / Ward members, Health Staff (PHC-MO/ANM/ASHA), Local School Teachers, SHGs, NGOs (Organizations like Lions Club, Rotary Club)

Advantages of Millets

- Superior Micronutrient profile and bioactive flavonoids compared to other cereals
- Low Glycaemic Index and also associated with the prevention of diabetes.
- Good source of minerals like iron, zinc, and calcium.
- Gluten-free and can be consumed by Celiac disease patients.
- Beneficial effect on management and prevention of hyperlipidemia & risk of CVD.
- Helpful in the reduction of weight, BMI, and high blood pressure.
- Consumed with legumes in India, they supplement protein, increase the amino acid content, and enhance the overall digestibility
- Millet based value-added products in ready to cook, ready to eat category are easily accessible and convenient to the urban population.
- Can be used as food as well as fodder, which make it more farming efficient.

Millets Health Benefits



Source: Agricultural & Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA), Government of India.^[6]

The objectives of this initiative are to

1. Bring focus on the “Swastha Balak Balika-Healthy Child”
2. Identify healthy children in age group of 6 months to 3 years and 3 to 5 years –on objective marks based criteria
3. Generate awareness and conduct campaigns for growth measurement of children under 5 years
4. Generate a spirit of competitiveness for good health and nutrition
5. Promote Breastfeeding and Complementary feeding practices
6. Promote counselling regarding importance of diet diversity and age appropriate feeding
7. Promote concept of peer educator (mother-to-mother/ family/ community)

The event is to be celebrated with distribution of Certificate to Winning Child and Parent (especially mothers, to encourage spirit of positive competition) and reward like indigenous toys, hygiene kit, water bottle, fruit basket etc. Small gifts like nutrition kit/ hygiene kit to all participating children.^[7]

Saksham Anganwadi:

Government of India in the financial year 2021-22, restructured the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), POSHAN Abhiyaan and the Scheme for Adolescent Girls (SAG) into Mission Saksham Anganwadi and Poshan 2.0, also known as Poshan 2.0.^[8]

Poshan 2.0 seeks to focus on Maternal Nutrition, Infant and Young Child Feeding Norms, Treatment Protocols for SAM/MAM and Wellness through AYUSH practices to reduce wasting and under-weight prevalence besides stunting and anemia, supported by the 'Poshan Tracker', a new, robust ICT centralised data system which is being linked with the RCH Portal (Anmol) of MoHFW.

Poshan 2.0 aims to redress some of the challenges identified with the existing schemes including inadequate nutrition quality and delivery, weak community ownership, poor implementation, the absence of an integrated approach to nutrition security, and an insufficient focus on diet diversity, traditional wisdom in nutrition practices, and behaviour change to promote practices that nurture health, wellness and immunity through a 5 year roadmap.

Five Year roadmap -Poshan 2.0

- ⇒ Short term (6-12 months)- Focus on Aadhaar seeding of eligible citizens, resource readiness of Anganwadi Centres (AWCs), governance including setting up of District Nutrition Committees and Poshan Panchayats, promoting dietary diversity, and robust data management.
- ⇒ Medium term (1-3 years)- the scheme plans to strengthen convergence, frontline worker capacity, diet diversity through Poshan Vatikas, and Behaviour Change Communication campaigns.
- ⇒ Long term (3-5 years)- Upgrade 2 lakh AWC's as Saksham Anganwadis and construct pucca AWC's in lieu of semi-pucca and rented AWC's, and foster proactive community ownership of the programme.

The restructured mission consists of the following sub-schemes:

1. Nutrition Support by Supplementary Nutrition Programme (SNP) for children (6 month - 6 years), pregnant women, lactating mothers and adolescent Girls (14-18 years)
2. Early Childhood Care and Education [3-6 years] and early stimulation for (0-3 years)
3. Upgrading Anganwadi Infrastructure - Saksham Anganwadi
4. Poshan Abhiyaan

Poshan 2 leverages on technology to strengthen nutrition delivery systems. The 'Poshan Tracker' application rolled out by MoWCD on 1st March 2021, is for dynamic identification of stunting, wasting, under-weight prevalence among children and last mile tracking of nutrition service delivery. It will enable real-time monitoring and tracking of all AWCs, AWWs and beneficiaries on defined indicators. Beneficiaries will be Aadhaar seeded to ensure last mile tracking and delivery of services. Poshan Tracker will help Mission Poshan 2.0 in generating data, providing feedback to Program Managers and documenting the impact of scheme on nutrition indicators. The Ministry/ States/ Districts will be able to make effective and timely interventions based on the data, thereby facilitating continuous evaluation and the progress of different components.

Other Initiatives:

Poshan Panchayats with women in leadership roles and with mandatory representation of vulnerable communities seeks to transform the current model of Jan Andolan into Jan Bhagidari for a Kuposhan Mukta Bharat. Poshan Panchayat offer an excellent platform to discuss reasons for malnutrition specific to their jurisdiction and facilitate necessary community/social support mechanism.

Poshan Vatikas are kitchen or nutri-gardens at or near Anganwadi Centres, and in Government schools and Gram Panchayat lands. The innovation seeks to rope in adolescent girls and Below Poverty Line (BPL) women to manage the Vatikas. The idea is to inculcate collective ownership, collective responsibility and community co-operation. The garden will also enhance knowledge of school children on plants and their growth process. Anganwadi Workers have a big role in counselling the beneficiaries to sensitize them on importance of a Nutrition Garden, nutritional value of fruits and vegetables, their importance in healthy and balanced diets and consequences of their deficiencies.

Best Practices under Poshan 2

Mission Sampurna Poshan-Asifabad, Telangana:

It is a success story of behaviour change resulting in inclusion of millet consumption in diet by 80% of beneficiaries. A series of 33 Food Festivals, 10 Millet recipe trainings were conducted covering 225 Anganwadi. Millet recipes, cooking videos in local language were circulated, Anganwadi workers made door-to-door visits daily to monitor healthy food intake, subsidized millet seeds were distributed to 2500 households on a pilot basis.

Mera Bachccha Abhiyaan Model -Datia, Madhya Pradesh:

Intensive weighing campaigns of children 0-5 years every 3 month were done to identify malnourished children. The highlight of the Abhiyan was the Adopter who took the responsibility of nurturing the SAM child through regular interventions with the family of the child

Project Sampurna in Bongaigaon, Assam:

Introduced the concept of 'Buddy Mothers', wherein two mothers form a pair, one with a healthy child, the other with a malnourished child. They exchanged best practices and worked on diet charts to monitor the daily food intake of their children. The local Government arranged for milk and egg on alternate days for all identified children for the first 3 months.

Conclusion:

As per the Global Nutrition Report 2022, India is 'on course' to meet the targets of maternal, infant, and young child nutrition (MIYCN), childhood overweight, and childhood stunting, However considerable progress is needed to meet the target of childhood wasting or anaemia reduction among women of reproductive age.^[9]

The beauty of Poshan Pakhwada, is convergence of various government departments, civil society organizations and private sector to address a multitude of issues having a bearing on health of

mothers and children and working on alternative solutions. Poshan Pakhwada have been successful in catalysing peoples involvement in discussion and adopting healthy nutrition habits. There have been various innovations combining tradition and nutrition to catch people's attention, shattering gender stereotypes, setting up a competitive spirit organising red carpet celebrations for babies. However, there are challenges continuing with the momentum beyond the fortnight, capacity building of frontline workers, tracking and ensuring appropriate care for those with any form of malnutrition. A strong political commitment and leverage on technology like Poshan Tracker are the strengths of the program that can take care of keeping up the momentum beyond the campaign fortnight. Thus, to conclude Poshan Pakhwada targeting on behaviour change in community and promoting healthy, nutritious diet via Jan Bhagidari and Jan Andolan and strengthening nutrition delivery systems seems to be an appropriate strategy with long term impact and setting the way for a Malnutrition Free – Healthy India.

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