Press Release
Malnutrition in India is declining faster than before, but not fast enough to meet global targets

- Two new reports say urgent action needed to build on new momentum
  - The benefit cost ratio of investing in the scaling up nutrition programmes in India is 34 to 1
  - India’s stunting “represents the largest loss of human potential in any country in human history”

Dec. 10, 2015, New Delhi, India—Child malnutrition rates in India are among the highest in the world. Most recent data show that 39 percent of all children under 5 are very short for their age (stunted). This compares with a 24 percent rate at the global level. Being stunted means that these children are not fulfilling their potential either in childhood or as adults. Their brains and immune systems are compromised, often for their entire life.

Two new reports, released today, both point to India’s improved performance in reducing its high burden of malnutrition. But both reports point out that this improvement could—and should--be much more rapid.

The first report, the 2015 India Health Report (IHR), offers a critical analysis of the current situation with nutrition at the national and state levels. It provides easy-to-understand, state-wise data dashboards for 28 states and Delhi that give a comprehensive view of nutrition and its determinants. It looks at disparities in these outcomes and their multiple determinants across geographical regions, socio-economic classes, and demographic groups and helps identify strategic choices for policy-making at the state level.

Professor Ramanan Laxminarayan, Distinguished Professor, PHFI co-author on the India Health Report said, “In this inaugural India Health Report, we focused on the topic of child stunting and malnutrition, given its magnitude and persistence in our country.”

Highlighting the findings from the report he notes, “Even with recent impressive improvements, India's stunting problem represents the largest loss of human potential in any country in human history. If the population of stunted children in India were a single country, it would be the ninth largest country in the world. Even more worrisome, the problem of undernutrition in India now coexists with the problem of over nutrition and associated non-communicable diseases for a different segment of the population.”
A central message of the IHR is that the performance at the all-India level masks significant differences in state level performance and it is at level of the states that the battle against malnutrition must now be fought.

Purnima Menon, senior research fellow at the International Food Policy Research Institute, and a co-author on the India Health Report, noted that “the scope of action needs to be broad, but given the tremendous variability in implementation across states on delivery of indicators of nutrition and health programmes, water and sanitation coverage, food security and anti-poverty programmes, there is a clear need to invest in closing delivery gaps. Our report also highlights the critical relationships between indicators of women’s status and nutrition, and this is an absolutely urgent area for action.”

The second report, the 2015 Global Nutrition Report (GNR), assesses progress in reducing malnutrition for all 193 countries. It concludes that India is on track to meet 2 of 8 global targets on nutrition and has significantly improved its nutrition performance in the past 10 years. The GNR notes that there has been a big increase in the number of countries on track to meet global nutrition targets, and encourages countries, including India, to establish specific and time bound targets for malnutrition reduction that are consistent with the new Sustainable Development Goals. National targets should help accelerate progress and promote accountability.

The GNR also points out that diet choices affect greenhouse gas emissions and that climate change will affect nutrition status. Climate policymakers should see healthy diets as a major opportunity for climate mitigation. In addition, the key role of food systems in promoting health is highlighted in the GNR. Given that poor diets are the number one risk factor for the global burden of disease, we know very little about how to make food systems more pro-nutrition. The GNR provides some ideas, such as investments to reduce the price of healthy foods such as fruits, vegetables and pulses.

Lawrence Haddad, the co-Chair of the Global Nutrition Report and a senior research fellow at the International Food Policy Research Institute, said “India’s accelerated rate of reduction in under 5 malnutrition is not only good for Indian families and the Indian economy, but it is also good for the world. In fact, India has the opportunity to do for malnutrition reduction in the SDG era what China did for poverty reduction in the MDG era.”

Both the GNR and IHR use available evidence on key areas for action in strengthening nutrition programmes, backed by scientific research, field experiences, expert perspectives and peer review.

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The International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) seeks sustainable solutions for ending hunger and poverty. IFPRI was established in 1975 to identify and analyze alternative national and international strategies and policies for meeting the food needs of the developing world, with particular emphasis on low-income countries and on the poorer groups in those countries. [www.ifpri.org](http://www.ifpri.org).

The Public Health Foundation of India (PHFI) is working towards building a healthier India. It is helping to address the limited institutional and systems capacity in India by strengthening education and training, advancing research and technology and facilitating policy and practice in the area of Public Health. PHFI is headquartered in New Delhi with national presence through its constituent units of four regional Indian Institutes of Public Health (IIPH) and Centres of Applied Research in core public health themes. More information about the India Health Report can be found at: [http://www.phfi.org/](http://www.phfi.org/).


Transform Nutrition is an international consortium of research partners. We use our quality research to inspire action to address undernutrition and work with key actors—policy-makers, civil society and business leaders—in the most affected countries. Find out more at [www.transformnutrition.org](http://www.transformnutrition.org).