

Workforce Nutrition



Actionable Area

Ensuring nutrition security for the current working population and children who will enter the workforce in the future. The focus is to build strong human capital that act as a driving force to move away from low-skilled jobs to a knowledge-based economy.

Issue

- With 66% of the population under working age, India has a huge potential to achieve economic growth faster than the largest global economies. This requires a focus on building a strong human capital which further needs to ensure nutrition security.
- Malnutrition has consequences beyond an individual's health and wellbeing. A study in 19 countries estimated that "\$8–38 billion per year [are lost] from reduced worker productivity due to employees being underweight, and \$4–27 billion per year due to obesity." Child malnutrition alone is responsible for approximately 15% of the total disease burden in India, which costs India around 3% of its gross domestic product (GDP) every year, i.e., about \$46 billion, and up to 8% of its productivity. Poor and vulnerable sections of the population have minimal access to diverse foods and are more negatively impacted during public health crises.
- Improving investments in human capital through improved workforce nutrition interventions is one way to influence both national economies and global public health. 'Workforce Nutrition' as defined by the

Cost of Malnutrition



\$8–38 billion per year are lost from reduced worker productivity due to employees being underweight.



\$4–27 billion per year are lost from reduced worker productivity due to employees being obese.



Around \$46 billion are lost every year due to child malnutrition in India. Costing up to 8% of the country's productivity.

Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN), refers to a set of interventions that work through the existing structures of the workplace to address fundamental aspects of nutrition amongst employees and/or supply chain workers. These programmes aim to create improved access to and demand safe and nutritious food. Breastfeeding support programmes are included in this definition.

- Given that most working-age people will eat at least one meal a day at work, businesses can play a catalytic role in sustaining a healthy and thriving workforce. Access to nutritious food in work settings is often inadequate – a missed opportunity given the strong connection between health, nutrition, and productivity. There is a strong business case for corporates, employers, and governments to introduce effective workforce nutrition programmes. A recent World Bank analysis estimates that every \$1 invested in interventions to meet the World Health Assembly nutrition targets would yield an economic return between \$4 and \$35.
- A simple workforce nutrition initiative reduces the risk of non-communicable diseases and provides enough energy and nutrients to perform tasks. This can result in reduced rates of accidents and absenteeism, increases productivity, and reduces mistakes.

Status

Government Initiatives

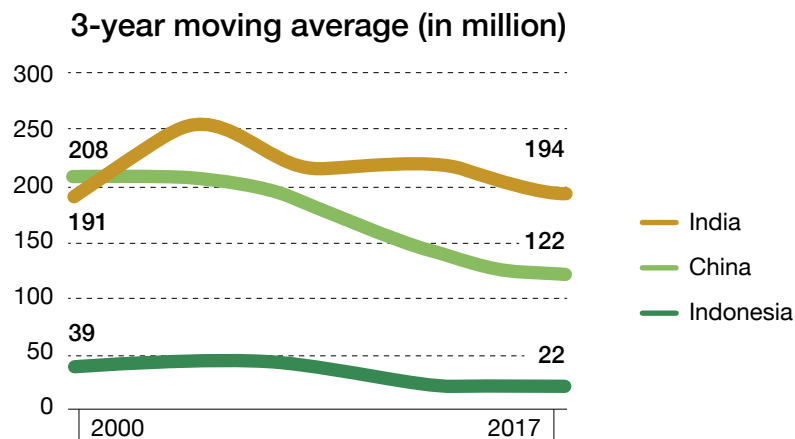
- The nutrition policies and programmes of the government of India are targeted at the population in general and not specifically at the working age. This is particularly true for workers in the unorganised sector, who constitute more than 90% of India's 450 million-strong workforces. The existing laws and regulations for workers provide for occupational health and safety, labour welfare, and work conditions. But nutrition is overlooked in these policies.
- The national initiatives on maternal and child nutrition such as the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), Mid-Day Meal, and the recent flagship programme POSHAN Abhiyaan (Nutrition Mission) have had moderate success in decreasing the number of children who are stunted, wasted, and anemic. These interventions are critical to developing a nutritionally secure workforce for tomorrow.
- The National Food Security Act (NFSA) guaranteed access to staple foods at very subsidised rates. However, the affordability of other important sources of nutrition such as fresh fruits, vegetables, dairy products, and other important food groups is still a challenge for many. For the past 40 years, food policies have largely focused on providing calorie-dense diets and reducing absolute hunger;

however, concentrated efforts to reduce hidden hunger or micronutrient deficiency need to be additionally prioritised with urgency.

Private Sector Initiatives





A very recent development towards workforce nutrition in the private sector is the corporate wellness programmes, which include nutrition-related services such as diet counselling, weight management, and physical exercises. But very few Indian businesses have introduced these wellness programmes. They benefit only about 10% of employees, primarily from the formal sector.

India is home to the highest number of undernourished people in the world, a title China used to hold until the early 2000s.



Source: FAO, NFHS

Vision 2030

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Reimagine nutrition security for a healthy and productive Indian workforce through the involvement of both public and private sector stakeholders.
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Workplaces can be leveraged as an optimal point of nutrition intervention, and Nutrition Education programmes for the workers should be introduced.
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Change the food environment at workplaces.
- 
Concerted efforts to create healthy and safe working spaces for women.
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Businesses should step up their workforce nutrition interventions to tackle the increasing disease burden along with the government.

Pathways

POLICY



Government should introduce a workforce nutrition policy and programme and augment investments in nutrition programmes by a much stronger commitment and involvement of the private sector.

Industries should explore innovative ways to introduce nutrition policies and programmes for their workforce.

Involve businesses, corporates, and other stakeholders in the governmental efforts and make nutrition a part of their business strategy.

Introduce family-friendly policies at workplaces of which breastfeeding support should be a crucial part.

Make workforce nutrition an integral part of a company's policy.

IMPLEMENTATION



Employers should influence the behaviour of workers by providing a supportive and enabling environment.

Employers should introduce Healthy Food at Work by focusing on increasing employees' access to healthy and safe foods at work, either for free, with a subsidy, or at full cost to the employees.

Bring corporate canteens on board for this initiative as these are outsourced to a food vendor.

Form health and wellbeing committees at workplaces to work together with the food vendors to develop nutritious food menus and monitor and evaluate the impact of the programme.

Provide to working mothers creches and lactation stations at workplaces.

Businesses should introduce nutrition-focused health check-ups as part of the workforce nutrition intervention, coupled with counselling.

The private sector should evaluate and monitor such nutritional programmes to measure their financial impact on their businesses.

Pathways

KNOWLEDGE & RESEARCH



Leverage existing infrastructure to bridge the knowledge gap on nutrition and improve access to nutritious diets for the workforce.

Support the employees in tracking progress on nutrition-related goals, increasing their knowledge about health and nutrition.

Article by:

Tarun Vij who leads the India Country Program of GAIN.

With inputs from:

Mr. Basant Kar; Mr. Saroj Kumar Mohanta (Ecociate), Mr. Pratyush Panda (ACC Cements); Mr. K K Upadhyay (independent expert); Mr. Kirti P Mishra (Ecociate); Mr. Rajeev Ahal (GIZ), Mr. Manish Mishra (Ministry of Skills and Entrepreneurship Development), Ms. Komal Ganotra (GAIN); Mr. Avilash Dwiwed (Tata Projects), Aishwarya Choubey (GAIN); Bhuvaneshwari Balasubramanian (GAIN), Biju Mushahary (GAIN); and Ms. Neha Khara (GIZ).