GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
MINISTRY OF WOMEN AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT

RAJYA SABHA
UNSTARRED QUESTION NO. 960
TO BE ANSWERED ON 09.02.2022

HUNGER PROBLEM IN INDIA

960 SHRI MALLIKARJUN KHARGE:

Will the Minister of WOMEN AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT be pleased to state:

(a) whether the 2021 Global Hunger Index (GHI) placed India 101st among the 116 countries assessed and whether according to the report published by international non-profits, India is among the 47 countries most likely to not reach the zero-hunger goal;

(b) if so, the reasons therefor;

(c) whether the country has the highest child wasting in the world that affects 17.3 per cent of its children;

(d) whether Government reduced investment in nutrition programmes over the years and merged several existing food programmes in the Union Budget 2021-22; and

(e) if so, the details of budgeted and actual expenditure during the year 2021-22?

ANSWER

MINISTER OF WOMEN AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT
(SHRIMATI SMRITI ZUBIN IRANI)

(a) to (c) As per Global Hunger lndex 2021 report prepared by 'Welthungerhilfe' and 'Concern Worldwide', India’s score is 27.5 and it has ranked 101 among 116 countries. Global Hunger Index is based on four indicators - Undernourishment, Child Stunting, Child Wasting and Child Mortality.

Global Hunger Index (GHI) does not reflect India’s true picture as it is a flawed measure of 'Hunger'. It should not be taken at face value as it is neither appropriate nor representative of hunger prevalent in a country. Out of its four indicators, only one indicator, i.e., undernourishment, is directly related to hunger. The two indicators, namely, Stunting and Wasting are outcomes of complex interactions of various other factors like sanitation, genetics, environment and utilisation of food intake apart from hunger which is taken as the causative/outcome factor for stunting and wasting in the GHI. Also, there is hardly any evidence that the fourth indicator, namely, child mortality is an outcome of hunger.

Data used in the GHI report are sourced from international agencies which are not updated as per the latest data available in the country. Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) of the United Nations, the data source agency for the indicator 'Prevalence of Undernourishment', has relied on the opinion poll conducted telephonically, which has completely disregarded Government's economic response to Covid-19 of providing free foodgrains to 80 crore National Food Security Act beneficiaries under Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojna, and given an unacceptable estimate for India for the triennium period 2018-2020. The 4 questions asked in the poll have no links to availability of food or dietary energy. FAO's estimates on 'Prevalence of Undernourishment' in India for the triennium periods 2015-17, 20016-18, 2017-19 are 14.8%, 14.5% and 14.0% respectively, which clearly show a declining trend. India has not faced any major challenges on the food production and supply part in the recent past which would adversely affect the 'Prevalence of Undernourished' score. Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka, have improved on this indicator during the triennium period 2018-20, signifying that these countries have not been affected at all by Covid-19 pandemic induced loss of job/business and reduction in income levels. These are counterintuitive in view of higher mortality rates due to Covid-19 in 2 countries during 2020. Thus, the assessment made by FAO does not reflect the ground reality and is not worthy of consideration.

Government conducts National Family Health Survey (NFHS) at regular intervals. As per recently released NFHS-5 report, Child Stunting has decreased from 38.4% (NFHS-4, 2015-16) to 35.5% (NFHS-5, 2019-21) and Child Wasting has decreased from 21.0% (NFHS-4, 2015-16) to 19.3% (NFHS-5, 2019-21). Further, percentage of underweight children has gone down from 35.8% (NFHS-4, 2015-16) to 32.1% (NFHS-5, 2019-21).

(d) Investment in the Supplementary Nutrition Programme has been consistent over the years and the programme continues to be a vital component of the Anganwadi Services Scheme under Saksham Anganwadi and Poshan 2.0 announced in Budget 2021-22

(e) Does not arise.

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