

Business Standard

Bringing nutrition centre-stage to help improve health conditions in India

An important and complementary strategy for fighting malnutrition is food fortification
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Simplistic perhaps, but the much quoted cliché, “An apple a day keeps the doctor away”, underscores the importance and value of [nutrition](#). Indeed, we are what we eat. And that’s why [nutrition](#) as an issue is vitally important for us and the country.

While India has made remarkable progress, the growth has been hampered by [malnutrition](#). It is the underlying cause of over 45 per cent of mortality under the age of five. Lack of proper [nutrition](#) is also responsible for a high prevalence of childhood stunting and maternal and childhood anaemia.

Bringing nutrition centre-stage

While there have been many programs to address the issue, the results were less than satisfactory. Come 2018, nutrition received the attention it deserved. Launched by the Government of India, the POSHAN Abhiyan is a multi-ministerial, multi-sectoral comprehensive approach to reducing [malnutrition](#) by ensuring convergence of various nutrition-relate schemes.

Poshan Abhiyaan

The devil, it is said, is in the detail. The best of schemes come undone with poor implementation.

The Poshan Abhiyaan, therefore, consciously placed a catalysing resource of young and committed professionals — the “Swasth Bharat Preraks” — at the disposal of the district administration to provide techno-managerial support and ensure effective implementation.

The results are visible. Driven by the passion to make a difference, over 300 preraks are making change happen across the country. Working closely with district officials and communities, they are innovating, inspiring, catalysing and deepening the impact of Poshan Abhiyan.

Food fortification

An important and complementary strategy for fighting [malnutrition](#) is [food fortification](#). It is the addition of key vitamins and minerals such as iron, iodine, zinc, vitamins A & D to staple foods such as rice, wheat, oil, milk and salt to improve their nutritional content.

The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has notified the standards of fortification for wheat, oil, milk, double fortified salt and rice. It is a major step towards promoting fortified staple foods as a key intervention for improvement in the micronutrient status of the population at a reasonable cost.

Systems strengthening

The nutrition interventions need to be guided and informed by latest research and evidence. The National Nutrition Resource Centre (NNRC) and the [Food Fortification](#) Resource Centre (FFRC) are providing this institutional support.

Stepping up the momentum

Nutrition has come centre-stage and there is a strong ground-swell of movement for a “kuposhan-mukt” India. Diverse stakeholders are coming together and it is becoming a people’s movement. However, it would be important to further step up the momentum to reduce stunting and anaemia, and improve health and nutrition for a healthy India.