



# Stunted, wasted

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## **Stunted, wasted-The national framework to improve nutrition for children must be upgraded on priority**

- The health, longevity and well-being of Indians has improved since Independence, and the high levels of economic growth over the past two-and-half-decades have made more funds available to spend on the social sector.
- Yet, the reality is that a third of the world's stunted children under five — an estimated 46.6 million who have low height for age — live in India.
- As the Global Nutrition Report 2018 points out, this finding masks the wide variation in stunting levels in different parts of the country.
- District-level data show high and very high levels of stunting mainly in central and northern India (more than 30% and 40%, respectively), but less than 20% in almost the entire south.
- This shows the important role played by political commitment, administrative efficiency, literacy and women's empowerment in ensuring children's health.
- Food and freedom go together, and the availability of one strongly influences access to the other; social institutions can work to improve nutrition and children's welfare in free societies, and the absence of hunger enables people to develop their capabilities.
- Governments should acknowledge the linkages and commit themselves to improved nutritional policies. The national framework to improve nutrition already exists.
- Among the factors affecting the quantity and quality of nutrition are maternal education, age at marriage, antenatal care, children's diet and household size.
- A second issue is that of the quality of nutrition in packaged foods available to children.
- India should invest more of its economic prosperity in its welfare system, without binding itself in restrictive budgetary formulations.
- The latest report on stunting and wasting should convince the Centre

that it needs to understand the problem better and work with the States to give India's children a healthy future.

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