Centre for Environment & Agriculture

Advocacy Paper

India's poor rank in the Global Hunger Index (GHI).
Questionable food consumption data is the cause

The recently released Global Hunger Index (GHI)- 2021 ranks India at 101 far below such small economies as Laos, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka Bangladesh, Pakistan, Benin, Togo, Ghana, Sudan, etc. Understandably, this has ruffled many feathers in India.

The GHI is published annually every October by two NGOs- the Ireland based Concern Worldwide, and Germany based Welthungerhilfe

The indicator used to monitor the global hunger index is based mainly on country data regarding per capita food availability, per capita food consumption and per capita energy requirement.

India's low rank is baffling. In the last 10 years, India's GDP has registered 45% growth. India is now the sixth largest economy ($2623 bn) in the world. Per capita income has steadily increased too.

It is relevant to note that India ranks the second largest in agricultural production. India's food production has rapidly grown outpacing the population growth. India is the world's largest milk producer and consumer. India produces 188 mn tons of milk out of the global production of 883 mn tons. India has a lion's share of 21% in the world milk production. The per capita milk availability in India is far above the minimum 300gm/day prescribed by the ICMR

India ranks the second largest in wheat, rice, fruits & vegetables production. India's fruits & vegetables production is 4 times higher than

that of the USA. No other country produces and consumes as many different kinds of fruit & vegetables as India.

India is known for its diet diversity. Besides, the Indian diets vastly differ from other countries in the world. In India, the food grains, vegetables and dairy products make the staple diet. Indian diets are generally low in fat, high in fiber and considered heathy, traditionally.

Yet, India is pushed to the bottom in the recent GHI. India which ranked 65th in the GHI in the year 2012 slipped to 101st in 2021. India is placed among the countries that face **"serious hunger"** with a score that falls between 20 - 34.9.

The "hunger" in the GHI refers to distress associated with lack of food.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), the GHI captures three dimensions of hunger (i) Insufficient availability of food (ii) shortfalls in nutritional status of children and (iii) child mortality.

Insufficient food (calorie) intake is an important indicator of hunger that can negatively influence the hunger index ranking.

How robust is our country's data on the per capita food consumption? It is dubious. Sample this:

Food commodity	Per capita Availability[1] (g/day) (Gross)	Per capita Consumption[2] (g/day)	Remarks
Milk (2019-20)	396	119	There is huge difference/gap between the daily per capita availability and per capita consumption in milk, fruits & vegetables. Remember, India hardly exports these food items.
Fruits (2019-20)	204	49	Going by this data, for every 1000 kg of milk produced/

			available, only 300 kg is consumed as milk and dairy products. The rest 700 kg goes missing/unaccounted.
Vegetables (2019-20)	376	86	In case of fruits & vegetables for every 1000 kg produced, as much as 800 kg goes missing /unaccounted. The gap between per capita availability and per capita consumption is huge. It cannot be attributed to postproduction, storage and handling losses.

Source: [1] Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare

[2] Report titled **"What India Eats"** (2020) by ICMR – National Institute of Nutrition

It is clear, the per capita consumption data provided by the National Nutrition Monitoring Bureau (NNMB under NIN-ICMR*) is strikingly inconsistent with the per capita availability statistics from the Ministry of Agriculture which is based on the annual production.

The dubious food consumption data significantly distorts the "calorie intake" and "undernourishment" calculations used in assessing the Global Hunger Index (GHI). The result is appalling. It has made a huge dent in our country's image. The term "India's Hunger Index" showed over 12 million web pages on the Google search as of 10 am, 18th Oct 21.

Observations and suggestions:

The average per capita consumption data need not arithmetically match the average availability of a given food commodity. But when the per capita consumption data shows that it is just 20% of the per capita availability, it means something is seriously wrong – either in data collection or processing. Such questionable consumption data cannot be allowed to be used for calorie intake/undernourishment calculations at the national level and Hunger Index at the global level. Data integrity is most important.

For adults in the group of 19-30 years engaged in "moderate activities", NIN-ICMR recommends the calorie intake of 2222 to 2956 kcal/d for men and 1767 to 2494 kcal/d for women depending on body weight. (Source: Nutrient Requirement for Indians-2020). This is among the highest in the world and almost at par with the levels in the last century known for physical activities at home and work.

Higher calorie requirement coupled with questionable food consumption data leads to overestimation of "undernourishment" in India.

It is a double whammy.

Urgently needed:

Proper co-ordination among various ministry officials and a thorough review of per capita food consumption data mindful of the increased food availability in the recent decades.

Unless this is done in a scientific and transparent manner with the details uploaded in the NIN-ICMR website, the next year's GHI may deliver India a rank worse than the present one.

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*NIN-ICMR stands for National Institute of Nutrition under Indian Council of Medical Research. The NIN is headquartered in Hyderabad.

*This advocacy report has been prepared by **Centre for Environment & Agriculture (CENTEGRO)**; a Mumbai based non-profit think tank. CENTEGRO actively works, among others, on matters that concern Indian agriculture, trade, economy and environment.*

E mail: info@centegro.org │ Website: indianagriculturalfacts.com

For more information contact our team leader S. Ganesan (+91 9959552725)