



MAINS iMPACT 2025

30-07-2025

HUNGER AND FOOD INSECURITY

SYLLABUS:

GS 2 > Social Justice >> Poverty and Hunger

REFERENCE NEWS:

Hunger affected up to **720 million people worldwide in 2024** — around **8.2 per cent** of the global population, while 2.3 billion people in the world were estimated to have been moderately or severely food insecure, according to the **'State of Food and Nutrition in the World' (SOFI) 2025 report released by the United Nations** on July 28.

Global Hunger and Food Insecurity (2024)

- **Hunger affected 720 million people** in 2024 — about **8.2% of the global population**.
- An estimated **2.3 billion people** were **moderately or severely food insecure**.
- Although improved from 8.5% in 2023 and 8.7% in 2022, **hunger remains well above** pre-COVID levels and higher than in **2015**, when the **2030 Agenda** was launched.

Regional Trends

- **Asia:** 323 million undernourished (highest globally).
- **Africa:** 307 million undernourished; over **1 in 5 people** chronically hungry.
- **Latin America & Caribbean:** 34 million undernourished.
- **Asia has the largest number**, but **Africa has the highest proportion** of food-insecure people.
- Progress was seen in **Southeast Asia, Southern Asia, and South America**, but **hunger worsened in other parts of Africa**.

2030 Projections

- By **2030, 512 million people** (about **6% of global population**) may be chronically undernourished.
- Only a **65 million reduction** is expected since 2015 — showing slow progress.
- **Africa will account for 60% of global undernourishment** in 2030; **17.6% of its population** will be affected.
- **Asia and Latin America** are expected to bring **undernourishment rates below 5%**.

About SOFI Report

- Prepared annually by **FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP, and WHO**.

- Tracks progress on **SDG targets 2.1 and 2.2** (zero hunger, nutrition, and food security for all).

SOFI REPORT ON INDIA:

Pandemic and Economic Shock Legacy: The report notes that the **COVID-19 pandemic continues to have lingering effects** in India, increasing vulnerability and food insecurity. **Inflation, unemployment, and supply chain disruptions** have made nutrient-rich foods unaffordable for many.

Undernourishment & Food Insecurity

- **Undernourishment in India** fell significantly, contributing to the **decline in Asia's Prevalence of Undernourishment (PoU)** from **7.9% (2022)** to **6.7% (2024)**.
- **Southern Asia's PoU** dropped from **13.9% to 11.0%** in the same period, largely driven by India.
- **Undernourished people in India** dropped from **243.9 million (2005)** to **172.1 million (2024)**.
- India's **improvement in affordability of a healthy diet** drove reductions in food insecurity across **LMICs (Lower-Middle Income Countries)**.

Affordability of a Healthy Diet

- **Cost** increased from **\$2.77 (2017)** to **\$4.07 (2024)** per person/day (PPP).
- **Proportion unable to afford** dropped from **59.2% (2017)** to **40.4% (2024)**.
- **Absolute number of people** unable to afford healthy diets decreased from **804.9 million (2017)** to **586.5 million (2024)**.

Nutrition Indicators

- **Child stunting (<5 years)** fell from **41.7% (2012)** to **32.9% (2024)**.
- **Child wasting** worryingly **increased** from **18.7% to 41.7%**.
- **Child overweight** rose from **2.1% to 3.7%**.
- **Adult obesity** rose from **4.1% (2012)** to **7.3% (2022)**.
- **Anaemia in women (15–49 years)** increased from **50.1% to 53.7%** (164M to 203.5M women).
- **Exclusive breastfeeding (0–5 months)** improved from **46.4% to 63.7%**
- **Low birth weight** declined from **29.5% to 27.4%** (UNICEF-WHO); Government of India reports lower figures (18.2%).

Policy Interventions & Market Measures

- **Reduced import duties** on edible oils during price spikes.
- **Export bans on rice** to stabilize domestic supply.
- **Released 10M tonnes of wheat** from stocks in July 2023, bringing wheat inflation down from **12% to 3–7%**.
- Used **eNAM platform** during COVID-19 to link farmers to markets and manage supply chains.

- **Cold chain gaps** still cause high post-harvest losses — a key challenge to food price stability.
- **Mobile tech use** (e.g., Kerala fishermen) has improved market efficiency and price stabilization historically.
- Government initiatives like **PM Poshan (Mid-Day Meal)**, **Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS)**, and **PM Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana** have been crucial.

IMPACT OF HUNGER AND FOOD INSECURITY ACROSS THE WORLD

Health and Nutritional Deficits

- **Stunting, wasting, and malnutrition** continue to plague children in low- and middle-income countries.
- Globally, **148 million children under 5 were stunted** in 2024.
- In India alone, **56.4 million children were stunted**, and **47.7 million were wasted** in 2024 (SOFI 2025).
- **Micronutrient deficiencies** (hidden hunger) cause cognitive delays, low productivity, and maternal health risks. For example, **anaemia affects 53.7% of Indian women (15–49 years)**.

Economic Loss and Productivity Decline

- Malnourishment **reduces labour productivity** and increases healthcare costs.
- The **World Bank estimates** that malnutrition reduces a country's GDP by **up to 11%**.
- Food insecurity **limits human capital development**, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia.
- Africa has **307 million undernourished people**, the highest global prevalence (~21%).

Social Unrest and Migration

- Hunger is a **driver of conflict and displacement**, as seen in parts of **East Africa, Yemen, and Syria**.
- The **Global Report on Food Crises (2023)** links food insecurity to political instability in over 20 countries.
- In war torn Gaza, there are over 60000 hunger and malnutrition deaths.
- In **Venezuela**, severe food insecurity contributed to the outmigration of **over 7 million people** since 2015.

Intergenerational Impact

- **Children born to malnourished mothers** are more likely to suffer cognitive impairments and chronic diseases.
- UNICEF notes that **undernourished girls become undernourished mothers**, perpetuating a cycle of poverty and poor health.
- **Low birthweight**, prevalent in parts of South Asia (India: 27.4% in 2020 – SOFI), leads to lifelong disadvantages.

- **Women and girls are disproportionately affected** by food insecurity due to unequal food allocation and limited access to income or land.
- SOFI 2025 data reveal a higher prevalence of food insecurity among **women globally**.
- In emergency contexts, **girls are often withdrawn from school** or married early due to food shortages.

Failure to Meet SDG Goals

- Global hunger in 2024 remained **above pre-pandemic levels**, threatening the achievement of **SDG 2: Zero Hunger** by 2030.
- Over **2.3 billion people globally** were **moderately or severely food insecure** in 2024.
- If trends continue, **512 million people** will remain chronically undernourished by 2030.

Economic Inequality and Affordability Gaps

- In **lower-middle-income countries**, affordability of a healthy diet remains a major challenge.
- In 2024, **586.5 million people in India** couldn't afford a healthy diet — despite improvements from 2017 (SOFI).
- Globally, the **cost of a healthy diet** rose to **\$4.07/day (PPP)** in 2024, up from **\$2.77/day** in 2017.

WAY FORWARD:**Strengthening Agricultural Resilience**

- India's **Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana (PMKSY)** and **Soil Health Card Scheme** improve irrigation and soil productivity.
- **FAO's Committee on World Food Security (CFS)** recommends investment in **climate-resilient crops**, crop diversification, and early warning systems for droughts and floods.
- Promote **Agroecology** and **Precision Agriculture** for sustainable yield without degrading ecosystems.

Improving Affordability and Access to Nutritious Food

- **Public Distribution System (PDS)** and **PM Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY)** provided free foodgrain to 800 million people during COVID-19.
- **NITI Aayog** recommends **One Nation One Ration Card** and expanding **Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT)** for food subsidies.
- Encourage **community kitchens**, **mid-day meals**, and **nutritional gardens** in rural/tribal belts.

Tackling Child and Maternal Malnutrition

- **UNICEF and WHO** advocate for **integrated maternal-child health programmes** with nutrition, WASH, and immunisation.
- **India's Poshan Abhiyaan** and **Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS)** should be strengthened with local data monitoring and cross-departmental coordination.
- Promote **exclusive breastfeeding** (target: 70%+) and **fortification of staples** (rice, wheat, milk).

Investing in Food Infrastructure and Cold Chains

- **eNAM platform** in India helped reduce post-harvest loss by linking farmers to buyers digitally.
- **FAO and World Bank** recommend investment in **cold chains, warehouses, and rural logistics** to reduce wastage (India loses ~30% perishable food).
- Enhance **public-private partnerships (PPP)** for agri-infrastructure and smart warehousing.

Addressing Inequality and Gendered Access

- **Global Food Policy Report (IFPRI, 2023)** calls for **women-focused interventions** — credit access, land rights, targeted nutrition.
- **Kerala's Kudumbashree** model promotes women-led micro-enterprises and nutrition programs.
- Build **resilience through social protection** — maternity entitlements, pensions, and school meal programs.

Using Data and Technology for Food Governance

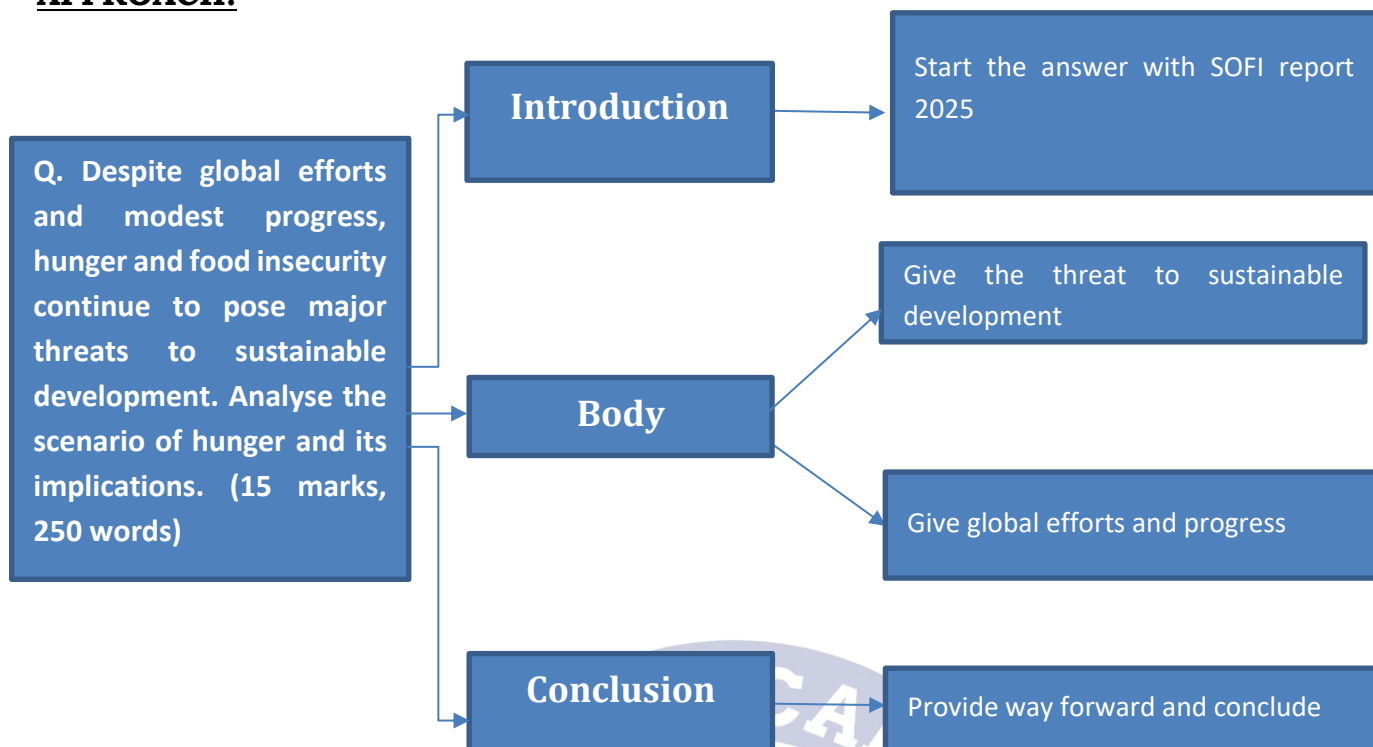
- **FAO's AMIS (Agricultural Market Information System)** enables real-time policy response to food price shocks.
- India's use of **ICRISAT** and **space-based crop forecasting** should be expanded for targeted relief.
- **Gallup-based FIES (Food Insecurity Experience Scale)** should be integrated into local planning like SDG dashboards.

Global Partnerships and Multilateral Action

- Collaborate with **WFP, FAO, IFAD**, and other UN bodies to align national policies with **SDG 2 goals**.
- India can leverage the **Global South leadership (G20 Presidency, Voice of Global South Summit)** to foster food security in South Asia and Africa.
- Promote **South-South Cooperation** for sharing seeds, technology, and expertise.

PRACTICE QUESTION:

Q. Despite global efforts and modest progress, hunger and food insecurity continue to pose major threats to sustainable development. Analyse the scenario of hunger and its implications. (15 marks, 250 words)



MODEL ANSWER:

The *State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World (SOFI) 2025* report reveals that **720 million people** globally faced hunger in 2024, while **2.3 billion** experienced moderate or severe food insecurity. Despite a slight decline from previous years, these figures remain **higher than pre-pandemic (2019) and 2015 SDG baselines**, highlighting a growing crisis.

Hunger and Food Insecurity: A Threat to Sustainable Development

1. Health & Nutrition (SDG 2 & 3):

- Chronic undernourishment impairs child growth.
- **Stunting affects 148 million** children under 5 globally (SOFI 2025).
- In India, **child wasting increased to 41.7%**; anaemia among women rose to **53.7% (2023)**.

2. Economic Loss (SDG 1 & 8):

- The World Bank estimates malnutrition can reduce **GDP by 11%**.
- Low productivity, poor cognitive development, and increased health costs hamper economic growth.

3. Education (SDG 4):

- Undernourished children perform poorly in schools.
- Food insecurity often forces children into child labour or early dropouts.

4. Gender Inequality (SDG 5):

- Women and girls often eat last and least.
- Anaemia affects over **203 million Indian women** aged 15–49.

5. Peace & Stability (SDG 16):

- Hunger contributes to civil unrest.
- Regions like the Horn of Africa and Yemen have witnessed conflict driven by food scarcity.

Global Efforts and Progress:

1. **UN SDG 2 – Zero Hunger by 2030** was launched in 2015 but is **off track**.
2. **Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), WFP, and UNICEF** have coordinated school feeding and emergency food aid.
3. **India's PM-GKAY and Poshan Abhiyan**, and global policies like **FAO's Global Action Plan on Food Security and Nutrition** aim at direct interventions.
4. **Cost of healthy diets rose globally**, but India improved affordability from **59.2% unable (2017) to 40.4% (2024)**.
5. Yet, projections show **512 million people** may still face hunger in 2030.

Way Forward:**1. Strengthen Agricultural Resilience**

- Promote climate-smart farming (Committee on Doubling Farmers' Income, 2017).
- Scale up millet and pulse cultivation for nutrition security.

2. Enhance Social Protection Schemes

- Expand DBT and One Nation One Ration Card.
- Leverage JAM trinity for efficient delivery.

3. Invest in Nutrition-Specific Interventions

- Merge maternal-child health under Poshan 2.0.
- Ensure food fortification and breastfeeding support.

4. Improve Storage and Logistics

- Address cold chain gaps causing 30% food loss (World Bank).
- Incentivise private sector through Viability Gap Funding (NITI Aayog).

5. Global Collaboration and Innovation

- Use digital tools (e.g. AMIS, AI4FoodSecurity) to track and respond to food insecurity.
- Collaborate via G20 and South-South partnerships.

SOFI 2025 is a wake-up call. While India has shown some progress in reducing hunger and improving affordability, **the path to Zero Hunger by 2030 remains steep**. A **multidimensional, rights-based and globally coordinated approach** is essential to secure food and nutritional equity — the bedrock of sustainable development.

