



Malnutrition continues to haunt India despite the two biggest nutrition programmes and economic growth, says NHRC Chairperson, Justice H. L. Dattu

Posted On: 27 OCT 2017 6:34PM by PIB Hyderabad

Mr Justice H. L. Dattu, Chairperson, National Human Rights Commission, NHRC today said that while India has registered faster economic growth in the recent period and the per capita income has increased, nutritional status among children and women of the country remains a matter of concern. He was inaugurating a day-long Conference organized by the NHRC in New Delhi on Implementation of the National Food Security Act, 2013 in relation to children & lactating mothers and pregnant women.

Justice Dattu said that the Commission would like to know from the State Governments whether they have been strictly following the orders of the Supreme Court banning contractors in supply of supplementary nutrition under ICDS? Have they made adequate funds available for full implementation of the Maternity Benefit Scheme? Whether the Mid Day Meal, MDM budget is inflation driven or not and whether schools have proper buildings and infrastructure with the facilities for cooking, drinking water and storage of food grains?

Justice Dattu said that malnutrition continues to haunt India despite the two biggest nutrition programmes, the Integrated Child Development Services, ICDS, for children under 6 years, and Mid Day Meal programme, for school going children up to the age of 14. This, he said, is evident from India being ranked 100 among 119 developing countries on International Food Policy Research Institute's (IFPRI) Global Hunger Index (GHI) in 2017.

He said that the recently published National Family Health Survey, NFHS-4 reflects a decline in overall levels of malnutrition in both women and children. However, the pace of decline is far below the progress achieved by numerous countries despite having similar growth trajectories to India. Justice Dattu said that while NFHS-4 demonstrates improvements over NFHS-3 for many key indicators based on nutrition, there are considerable inter-State disparities. Though overall, there has been decrease in the underweight and stunting prevalence among children below 5 years in all States, the absolute levels are still high.

The NHRC Chairperson said that the Commission, in line with its stand for proper implementation of the National Food Security Act as well as ICDS and the Mid-day Meal Scheme, got a feedback on their status from its Special Rapporteurs in different parts of the country.

In North and South 24 Paraganas Districts of West Bengal, it was observed that none of the pregnant women/lactating mothers has been paid the maternity assistance as provided for in Section 4 (b) of the National Food Security Act, 2013. A large number of children aged between 0 to 5 years are moderately malnourished and few of them are severely malnourished.

In Odisha, at some places in Khurda District, attendance figures of the students were found to have been fudged to inflate the MDM Bill. It has also been reported that proper accommodation for the Anganwadi centres is not available, nor these are having toilets and proper water connections. Many mothers in the target group are also not availing supplementary nutrition under the programme.

In Telangana, it has been reported that there is no provision for filtering of drinking water for children. Anganwadi centres do not have toilets and children defecate in the open, which have adverse ramifications on nutrition status through diseases like cholera, diarrhoea etc.

In Karnataka, Anganwadi centres of Dakshin Kannada, Udupi, Kollar and Chickbalapur were found to be running well. However, the serious shortage of Child Development Project Officers is hampering the running of ICDS to some extent. Pregnant and lactating mothers are being provided with supplementary nutrition and iron and folic acid tablets.

Earlier, Mr. Rakesh Srivastava, Secretary, Union Ministry of Women and Child Development said that the Centre hopes to make India free of malnutrition by 2022. About 30 per cent Anganwadi centres operating from rented buildings, are not meeting the prescribed norms, but the government has instructed that the District Collectors have to review the status of malnutrition and stunting to ensure proper implementation of ICDS.

Ms. Rina Ray, Special Secretary, Department of School Education and Literacy, Union Ministry of Human Resource Development said that linking of Aadhar with the Mid Day Meal has not been made mandatory but there is a serious issue of ghost beneficiaries, which could be checked with the help of Aadhar linkages. Four States, which linked Aadhar with Mid Day Meal were able to expose about 5 lakh ghost enrolments for Mid Day Meal Scheme. However, she said that a balance will require to be maintained in having clear identities and also ensuring that no child is denied food due to the lack of it. She said that it is also a point for consideration by the States to provide Mid Day Meal to the poorest of the poor even during school holidays.

Mr. Ambuj Sharma, Secretary General, NHRC, underlying the significance of the deliberations during the Conference, said that India's economic growth does not match its hunger index and a lot is required to be done to plug-in the loopholes in the implementation of schemes to check that trend.

Apart from the inaugural and concluding sessions, the day long deliberations will have two specific thematic sessions. These are: 'Mid-day Meal Scheme for children between 6 to 14 years - steps taken, structural problems, operational issues and bottlenecks' and 'Nutritional support to pregnant women and lactating mothers and children up to 6 years'.

The participants, in addition to the NHRC Members, Mr. Justice P.C Ghose, Mr. S. C. Sinha and Mrs. Jyotika Kalra and senior officers of the NHRC, will include senior officers from the Union Ministries, States and Union Territories dealing with the subject, Members of the NHRC's Core Advisory Group on Right to Food, representatives of other National and State Commissions, technical institutions, international organizations, non-governmental and civil society organizations working at the grassroots and subject experts.

(Release ID: 1507319) Visitor Counter : 15

