



## Thousand days of nutrition, and a billion dreams

**Bottom line:** As the flagship programme (POSHAN Abhiyaan) completes 1,000 days this week, it is time to renew our commitment to nutrition. Renewed focus on nutrition is critical as COVID-19 threatens to derail the gains India has made in nutrition in more than one way.

### Loss of potential

Malnourished children tend to fall short of their real potential — physically as well as mentally. That is because malnutrition leaves their bodies weaker and more susceptible to illnesses. In 2017, a staggering 68% of 1.04 million deaths of children under five years in India was attributable to malnutrition, reckoned a Lancet study last year.

### Steps Taken by Government

1. The country has been making progress on nutrition for the last two decades, but it was after the Overarching Scheme for Holistic Nutrition (POSHAN) Abhiyaan in 2018, that a holistic approach to tackle malnutrition started gathering momentum.
2. Under it, the government strengthened the delivery of essential nutrition interventions so that more children have the right start in life for optimum growth, health, development and a prosperous future.

### Post-COVID challenges

1. For one, COVID-19 is pushing millions into poverty, reducing incomes of many more and disproportionately affecting the economically disadvantaged, who are also most vulnerable to malnutrition and food insecurities.
2. For instance, economic insecurities often force girls into early marriage, early motherhood, discontinue their schooling, and reduce institutional deliveries, cut access to micronutrient supplements, and nutritious food which largely tends to be perishable, all of which may worsen malnutrition. Accelerating

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efforts to address these will be needed to stop the regression into the deeper recesses of malnutrition.

3. Second, pandemic-prompted lockdowns disrupted essential services — such as supplementary feeding under Anganwadi centres, mid-day meals, immunisation, and micro-nutrient supplementation which can exacerbate malnutrition.

### **Need to continue Financial commitments**

1. In terms of policies, vision, strategies, India already has some of the world's biggest early childhood public intervention schemes such as the Integrated Child Development Scheme, the mid-day meal programme, and Public Distribution System.
2. India needs to ensure coverage of every single child and mother, along with 12 months of Poshan Mah (Nutrition Month), 52 weeks of breastfeeding weeks and 365 days of take-home ration.
3. To ensure this, the country needs to retain its financial commitments for the nutrition schemes it already runs and earmark additional funds to preserve nutritional security in vulnerable communities, particularly women and children in slum areas, migrants, the population in tribal areas and districts with malnutrition rates.

### **Conclusion: Data-Driven Evidence-Based Policy Interventions**

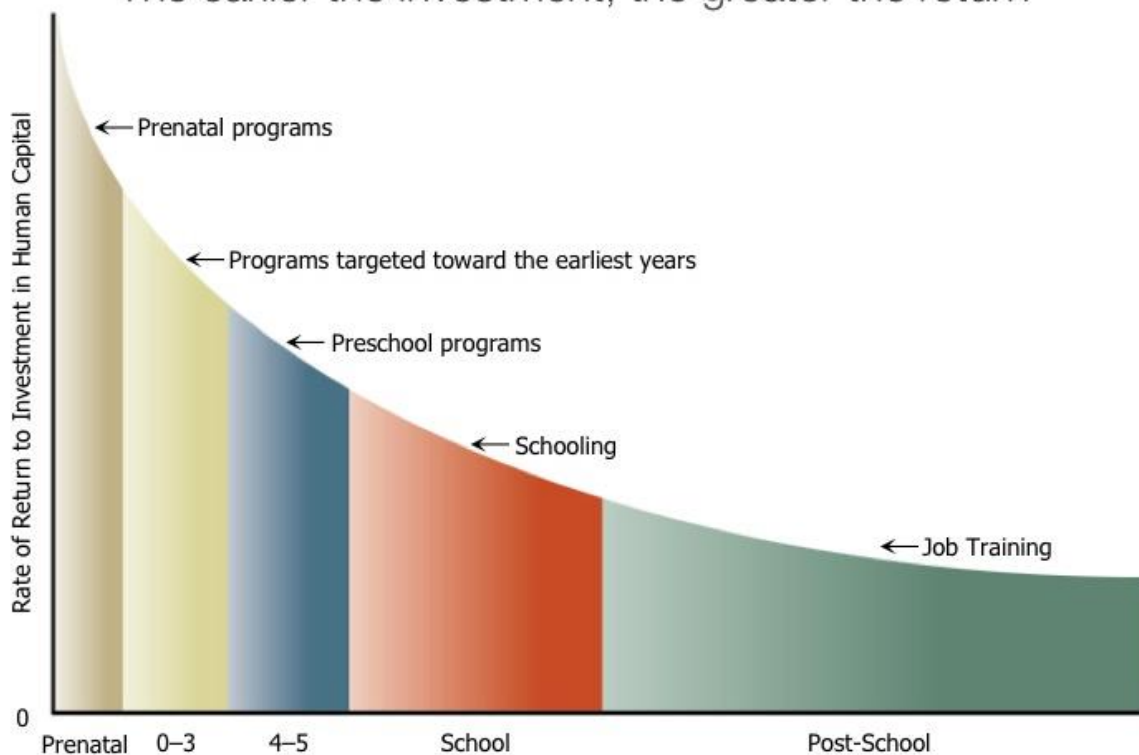
However, to truly grasp the depth and breadth of the COVID-19-caused nutrition crisis, the country must track nutrition indices through data systems. Evidence generated through data will also serve well to track the positive impact of POSHAN Abhiyaan, and course correct on the long journey to a well-nourished India.

**Learn Through Graphics: Heckman Curve can be utilized for Health, Education or even moral values, the earlier we invest better returns we get.**



## EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT IS A SMART INVESTMENT

The earlier the investment, the greater the return



Source: James Heckman, Nobel Laureate in Economics

### The road taken

#### Highlights of the Judgement:

1. The SC has ruled that it will be premature to expect the authorities to obtain environmental approvals at the stage of identifying the land linked to the proposed alignment of a highway, but, once the land was notified for acquisition and surveyed for feasibility, they would have to apply for all statutory clearances.

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2. It would be at the stage of entertaining objections that questions such as whether the project was truly a 'public purpose' could be dealt with. However, the land could be taken over and construction began only after the competent authorities can give their clearances, along with measures for mitigating and remedying possible environmental damage.

### **HC Court View Point was more Environment Centric**

1. The judgment of the Madras High Court, which had taken a nuanced position in favour of environmental protection, agriculture and preservation of rural livelihoods over the economic benefits of a new highway on virgin land, has been set aside by this SC judgement.
2. It had favoured early judicial intervention, relying on judgments from the U.S. that spoke out against letting projects advance to such a stage that there is an irreversible commitment of resources.

### **Concerns:**

1. The three-judge SC Bench has now ruled that the High Court was wrong in holding that clearance under environmental and forest laws were required even before the initial land acquisition notice.
2. It goes on to uphold the Centre's power to notify any stretch of land, including greenfield land, and not merely a pre-existing road, as a national highway.

### **Departure from Its own Dictum**

1. As part of a growing body of jurisprudence on sustainable development, the top court had laid down in Karnataka Industrial Areas Development Board (2006) a general principle that in future, before acquiring land for development, the possible adverse environmental impact should be "properly comprehended" and the acquisition was done in a way that did not impair it.
2. In a departure from this dictum, it now says the statutory framework governing highways and the process laid down for acquiring land for highway projects did not provide for a prior clearance requirement.



## Why quarterly growth numbers are not robust

**Crux:** Official figures on GDP overestimate growth as they are based only on limited organised sector data. The higher growth rate of the economy actually masks the decline in the unorganised sector.

### Methodological issues

1. The full extent of data usually used to project quarterly growth rates was not available and so “some other data sources” were used. Press release admitted that “these were clearly limited” and stated that estimates are “likely to undergo revisions”.
2. There are two implications of these statements. First, the data of Q1 and Q2 are not only not comparable with each other but also with the data for 2019-20.
3. The shortcomings in the data cannot be rectified later since if the data were not available/ not collected, they cannot be obtained later. So, there cannot be certain about the speed of economic recovery.
4. Second, the method of calculation of quarterly growth rates was already flawed. The biggest flaw is that almost no data from the unorganised sectors, except for agriculture, are available to calculate the contribution of this component of the economy to the GDP.
5. It was implicit in the method of estimation that this component could be proxied by the data from the organised sectors of the economy. This was never a good assumption.
6. After the shock to the economy due to the lockdown, this is even less valid. Demonetisation in 2016 had already disrupted this link between the organised and the unorganised sectors. Now the disconnect after GST and Pandemic shock is much greater.
7. Now, Unorganized sector performing dismally can not have data of the organized sector as a proxy for its performance. The lockdown has aggravated this tendency of overestimation of GDP.