

## Understanding and Combating Undernutrition<sup>1</sup>

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### THE VISIONARY

I feel honored in giving a lecture in the memory of Late Dr. V.G. Panse. While Dr. Panse was a strict administrator he was also a very kindhearted person. He was a terror to incompetence, but impetus to the conscientious work. I had opportunity to interact with him both as a student and as a Research Apprentice and I have been witness to his kindness, care and support on several occasions.

His contributions to agricultural statistics are monumental and it would do no justice if one tries to enumerate them. Not only he was instrumental in the creation of IASRI, he was also a Founder Member of the Indian Society of Agricultural Statistics. He was also an outstanding player of Bridge and I was fortunate to play the finals of the IASRI open tournament against him at his residence. The subject of agricultural statistics owes a lot to his stewardship and I am sure all of us here would join me in paying rich tributes to such a Visionary.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

India has serious challenges of population and poverty. About one-third of the population still lives below the poverty line. Although, we have achieved self-sufficiency in food grains, a large segment of the population still finds it hard to meet nutritional requirements.

The nutritional status of women and young children is an important indicator not only for judging their health status, but also is indicative of development. Besides food security and level of poverty, it is also closely related to access, practices and behavior of the population to health, education, safe drinking water, environmental sanitation, hygiene and other social services. Lowered economic productivity and increased expenditures on health services resulting from under-nutrition significantly affect the national economy.

Undernutrition is widely prevalent in India especially among children below 5 years, adolescent girls and

women. In our country, mothers are the main care providers for infants, children and the other family members; they tend to protect their children and their family members and ignore their own health and this in turn makes the women, both in rural and urban areas vulnerable to undernutrition. Most of the women in developing countries are vulnerable to undernutrition throughout their life cycle, for which the main reasons are both social and biological in nature. Girls, particularly adolescents, are usually discriminated against in access to health care, education and diet. An undernourished mother is more likely to produce a child with low birth weight and hence an undernourished child. This completes the cycle of under-nourishment:

Undernourished mother → Undernourished children and an Undernourished girl child → Undernourished mother.

Undernutrition is no longer considered as an outcome of only food deficiency or a health problem but as a multi-dimensional problem inter-facing various aspects of access, practices and behavior. Malnutrition encompasses both undernutrition and overnutrition that may be due to deficiency or excess, respectively, of Macronutrients (Protein Energy Malnutrition (PEM) and obesity) or caused by Micronutrients (like vitamin-A, iron and iodine among others).

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