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# PARLIAMENTARY DISCOURSE ON NUTRITION

**What motivates law  
makers to ask questions**



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The majority of the questions raised focused upon the national level implementation of key programmes such as the **Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS)**, **Mid-day Meal Scheme (MDMS)**, **Public Distribution System (PDS)**, **Supplementary Nutrition Programme (SNP)**, **Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescent Girls (SABLA)** and **Poshan Abhiyaan**.

# Executive Summary

Malnutrition continues to be a critical issue in India affecting both children and adults. Nutrition is often a subject of interest in questions posed by parliamentarians to the Indian government. This research reviews two decades of parliamentary questions and their responses in relation to a timeline of critical nutrition events to identify key themes, trends and patterns observed in the discourse on nutrition and attempts to identify what provoked these questions being raised by the parliamentarians.

Data were extracted through the online databases of parliamentary questions from 2000 until 2021. The questions were identified through the following key words: nutrition, undernutrition, micronutrient, wasting, underweight, malnutrition, anaemia, Poshan and obesity. Metadata was collected on the year through parliament session, ministry and parliament house where question was posed. The extracted data were organised in a data base with meta data and name of submitter, name and ministry of respondent, key themes, question and summary of the response provided. Data for 2,005 questions were extracted and analysed with qualitative methods.

The review of two decades of parliamentary questions on nutrition and associated topics revealed information on the topics of interest, themes covered, nature of discourse and what influenced the composition of questions. We found that a majority of the questions raised focused upon the national level implementation of key programmes such as the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), Mid-day Meal Scheme (MDMS), Public Distribution System (PDS), Supplementary Nutrition Programme (SNP), Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescent Girls (SABLA) and Poshan Abhiyaan. In terms of house-wise distribution of questions, Lok Sabha had a higher number of questions as compared to the Rajya Sabha.

The peak years for number of questions raised in the Parliament were 2009, 2011 and 2020. Poshan Abhiyaan, launched in 2018, was identified as the likely stimulus for many questions. Other important events in the nutrition domain were not found to be linked to the number or type of questions raised. In terms of probable triggers, only 10.7% of the total questions had references to specific articles or publications. The referred documents in the Parliamentary Questions included national and international reports, newspaper articles, global and Supreme Court orders as the source of information that prompted questions.

## Other **key findings** include:

- ✔ Out of a total of 52,698 questions, 2,005 questions (4%) were raised on nutrition and associated themes. The highest number of questions (233) were raised in 2021 and the lowest number in 2004 (38). The years 2009, 2010, 2011 and 2021 saw higher number of questions being raised
- ✔ Considering the underlying themes of major nutrition programmes, nearly 891 (44%) questions were addressed to the Ministry of Women and Child Development (MoWCD), 532 (27%) questions were directed at the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW), followed by 230 (11%) questions at the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution
- ✔ Four broad categories of questions have emerged: Questions on the prevalence of malnutrition in the country; questions on nutrition programmes and interventions; questions on implementation of policies and plans of action; questions on institutional bodies including composition, roles and responsibilities and reports submitted by these institutions
- ✔ The number and composition of questions were driven by critical events and probable triggers related to nutrition that had occurred in that particular year but not limited to a particular session (there are 3 sessions per year)
- ✔ Majority of questions raised (74%) focused on the implementation of policies and programmes at the national level, whereas only 10% of the questions were concerned with the implementation of policies and programmes in specific States
- ✔ Five types of sources were cited in the Parliamentary Questions - newspaper articles, Global Hunger Index Reports, reports published by the UNICEF, Supreme Court Orders and reports published by International and domestic organizations
- ✔ Amongst all the sources, reports published by UNICEF have been referred to the highest number of times and constituted 37.5% of the total number of questions that had mentioned a reference (81/221)
- ✔ The discourse on nutrition as evident from analysis appears to be repetitive and limited in scope. This is especially relevant in cases where sources or references were not stated clearly. Many questions leaned towards being outside the realm of discussion, thereby not suggesting any clear change in the policy, legal and institutional frameworks associated with nutrition.







# Introduction

A Parliamentary Question is a question put formally to a minister of the government about a matter they are responsible for, by a member of the parliament. They are used to seek information or to press for action from the government. Parliamentary questions oblige ministers to explain and defend the work, policy decisions and actions of their departments. Questions are asked primarily to elicit information, to ensure accountability and for exercising legislative control over executive actions.

Parliamentary questions are raised during the Question Hour. This hour is one of the most significant components of parliamentary proceedings and it adds a great importance to the institution of parliament. This hour has assumed importance because of government's involvement in matters affecting the day-to-day life of the citizens for which ministers are collectively answerable to the people. The questions asked during this hour may be starred or unstarred.

Malnutrition has remained an important issue in India affecting all age groups, especially children and women. The dichotomy of surplus food grain production and a flourishing economy against slow progress of nutritional and health indicators of children has been at the centre of developmental discussions during the past two decades.

The current research reviews two decades of Parliamentary questions and their responses in reference to a timeline of critical nutrition events. This analysis assesses the parliamentary discourse on nutrition. This article identifies and analyses key themes, trends and patterns observed in the parliamentary discourse on nutrition, on nutrition specific and nutrition sensitive interventions and attempts to identify triggers that provoke these questions being raised by the parliamentarians.



The key words for identifying nutrition themes in the parliamentary questions included **'nutrition, undernutrition, micronutrient, wasting, underweight, malnutrition, anaemia, Poshan and obesity'**.

# Methods

This analysis was conducted by extracting and reviewing data by year, parliament session, ministry from parliamentary questions raised in Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha from 2001 until August 2021. The key words for identifying nutrition themes in the parliamentary questions included 'nutrition, undernutrition, micronutrient, wasting, underweight, malnutrition, anaemia and Poshan and obesity'. The questions were extracted from three priority ministries - Ministry of Women and Child Development, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution. Questions from other ministries such as the Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Ministry of Labour and Employment, Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Ministry of Urban Development were also included.

The transcripts of questions obtained from web-based archives of both the houses were categorically organised as per year, date, house (Lok Sabha/Rajya Sabha), session (Budget/Monsoon/Winter), name of the parliamentarian who posed the question, name and ministry of the parliamentarian who responded to the question, key theme of the question raised, questions and summary of the response provided. An inventory of 2,005 questions on nutrition and associated themes was extracted from the year 2000 until 2021 and analysed on the basis of themes. The questions were analysed qualitatively to identify critical events on nutrition and other developments as probable triggers that may have influenced the discourse on nutrition. Sources in the form of newspaper articles, Global Hunger Index Reports, supreme court orders, reports by international organizations such as the World Bank, UNICEF, United Nations Development Programme, World Health Organization and domestic organizations such as M S Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF), Indian Council for Agriculture Research, that have been cited in the parliamentary questions were analysed to extract the core themes covered and the extent to which these themes have been explored in the questions raised.

The findings of this exercise are discussed in three sections.

**1** The **first section** provides an **overview of the questions raised** in terms of number, topics, broad themes covered, trends and patterns associated with the two houses of the parliament, sessions, policy focus in terms of relevance and impact on national, state level or both, and different ministries.

**2** **Section two** provides **key insights** in terms of the years in which questions peaked, across both the houses and analyses influence of critical events in nutrition on the discourse on nutrition.

**3** The **third section** provides further **information on the probable triggers** impacting the composition of questions raised across all the years.

Recommendations to **strengthen the quality of questions** raised on nutrition at the parliamentary level are discussed in **section four**.



# Trends and patterns of parliamentary questions

## 1 Section

The period of 2000-2021 witnessed a total of 52,698 questions being raised in the Parliament, on various themes and topics, associated with three core ministries—Ministry of Women and Child Development, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution. Out of these 2,005 questions, comprising 4% of the total, were raised on nutrition and associated themes such as stunting, wasting, underweight, anaemia, infant mortality, maternal mortality and obesity (Table 1).

**Table 1: Inventory of questions for 2000-2021**

Year	Lok Sabha (Nutrition and allied subjects)	Lok Sabha (All questions)	Rajya Sabha (Nutrition and allied subjects)	Rajya Sabha (All questions)	Total (Nutrition and allied subjects)	Total Questions (All questions in Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha)
2000	35	1701	32	929	67	2630
2001	38	1481	48	1334	86	2815
2002	52	1485	48	1406	100	2891
2003	24	1241	32	1257	56	2498
2004	21	904	17	414	38	1318
2005	36	1574	41	920	77	2494
2006	11	1121	29	1128	40	2249
2007	38	1205	61	1203	99	2408
2008	45	987	17	676	62	1663
2009	59	1158	58	1040	117	2198
2010	80	1888	57	1499	137	3387
2011	124	1564	46	1178	170	2742
2012	64	1778	25	1391	89	3169
2013	37	1315	15	1055	52	2370
2014	46	1017	10	956	56	1973
2015	34	1228	66	1246	100	2474
2016	34	1626	43	1217	77	2843
2017	33	1472	61	857	94	2329
2018	33	1471	23	1084	56	2555
2019	14	1418	93	1091	107	2509
2020	64	796	28	558	92	1354
2021	154	1037	79	792	233	1829
<b>Total</b>	<b>1076</b>	<b>29,467</b>	<b>929</b>	<b>23,231</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>52,698</b>

**Figure 1: Total number of questions raised in the Parliament from 2000 to 2021**

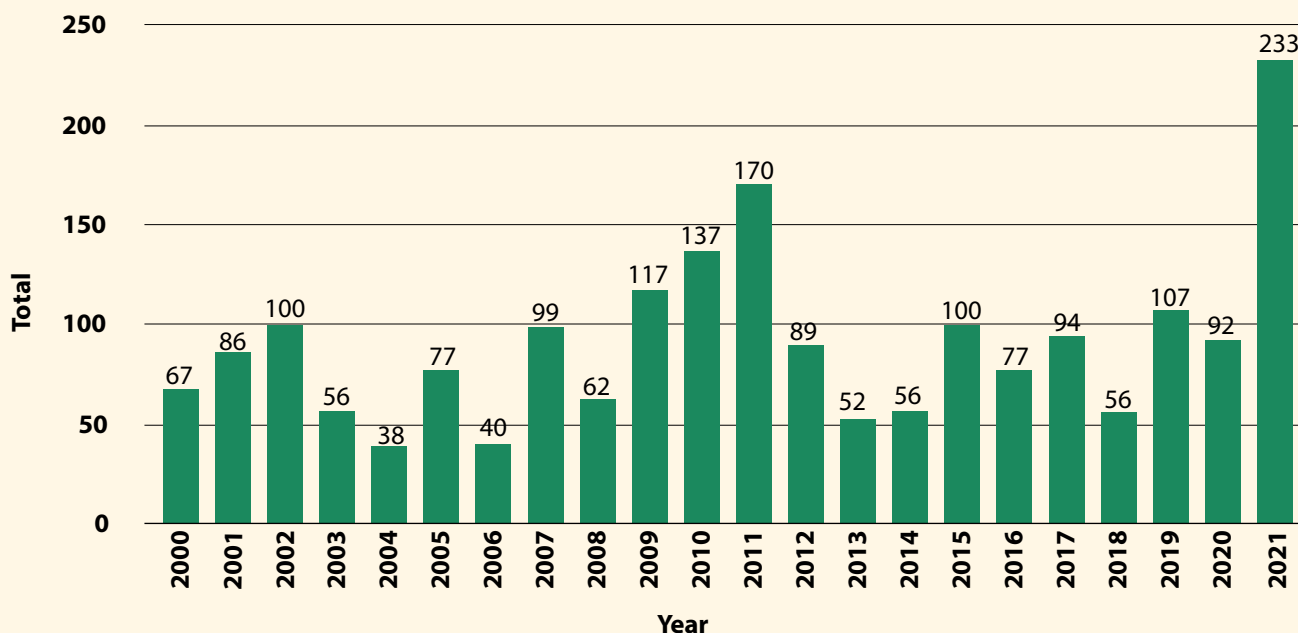


Figure 1 indicates a trend of the quantum of questions raised. On an average, 90 questions were raised each year in the parliament, in Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha. The highest number of questions were raised in 2021 (233 questions) and the lowest number of questions were raised in 2004 (38 questions). The time period of 2000-2021 witnessed peaks and troughs in multiple years. 2009, 2010, 2011 and 2021 were the peak years with higher number of questions being raised as compared to 2000-2008 and 2012-2020.

This research explores and identifies factors that may be attributed to the multiple peaks and troughs that have been observed.

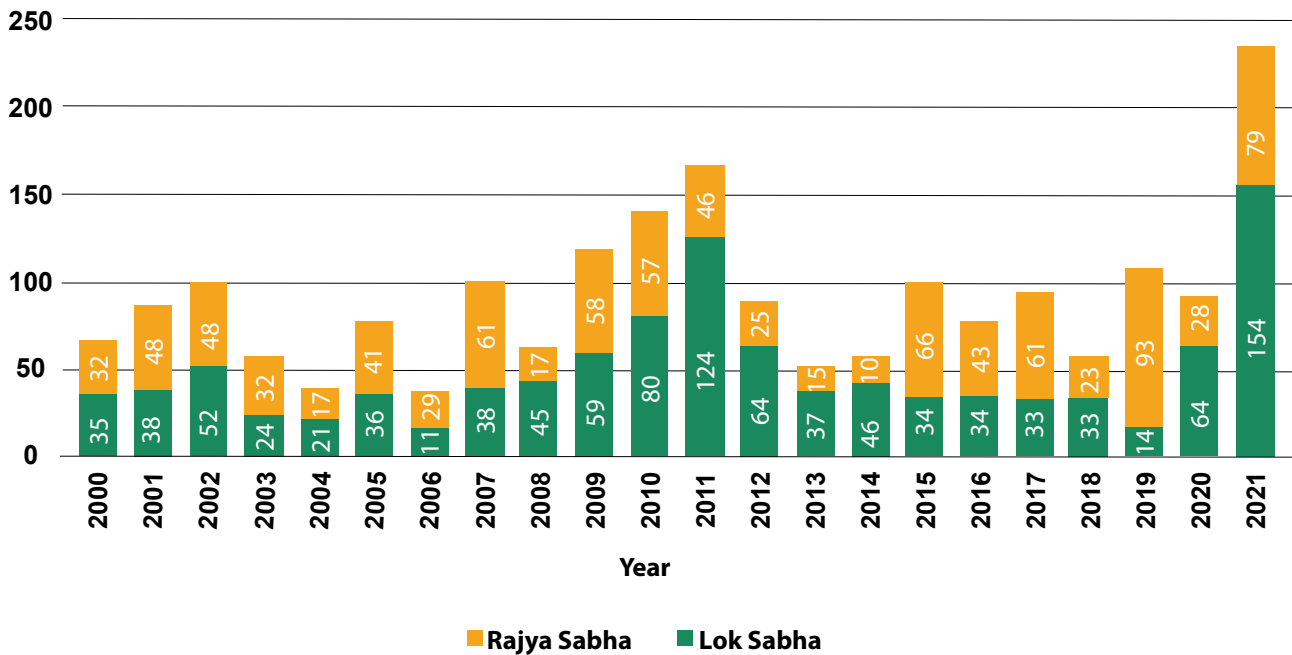


## House-wise distribution of questions

Lok Sabha is the House of People with 552 members, where people who are eligible to vote can elect their representative through direct elections. Rajya Sabha, with 250 members, is the Council of States, where the representatives are indirectly elected by the elected representatives of the Assemblies of States and Union Territories. Lok Sabha plays a major role in legislation. On the other hand, Rajya Sabha has special powers to protect the states' rights in their business with the Union.

Across the time period of 2000-2021, the Lok Sabha witnessed a greater number of questions (1076) as compared to the Rajya Sabha (929). However, a year-wise breakdown of the question reveals that there is a marginal difference in the questions raised between both the houses for the period 2000-2009. The difference in the number of questions raised in both the houses was higher in the years 2011, 2019 and 2021. The number of questions raised in the Lok Sabha significantly increased from 124 in 2011 and eventually dipped to 137 in 2013. The peak was again observed only in 2021 (154), the year of the highest number of questions raised in the Lok Sabha. The peak for Rajya Sabha was in 2019 (93). In summary, 2010-11 and 2020-21 proved to be the most active years for parliamentary questions on nutrition, in the Lok Sabha. With respect to Rajya Sabha, the peak was observed in 2019, followed by another peak in 2021. The lowest number of questions on nutrition in the Lok Sabha were first raised in 2006 (11), followed by 2019 (14), whereas that for Rajya Sabha was in 2014 (10). The number of questions raised in the Rajya Sabha (93), and the lowest number of questions raised in Lok Sabha (14) coincide in the same year.

**Figure 2: Total number of questions on nutrition raised in Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha from 2000 to 2021**



## Ministry-wise distribution of questions

All questions raised in the period 2000-2021 were classified as from one of the three key ministries - Ministry of Women and Child Development, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution or other concerning all other ministries aggregated together.

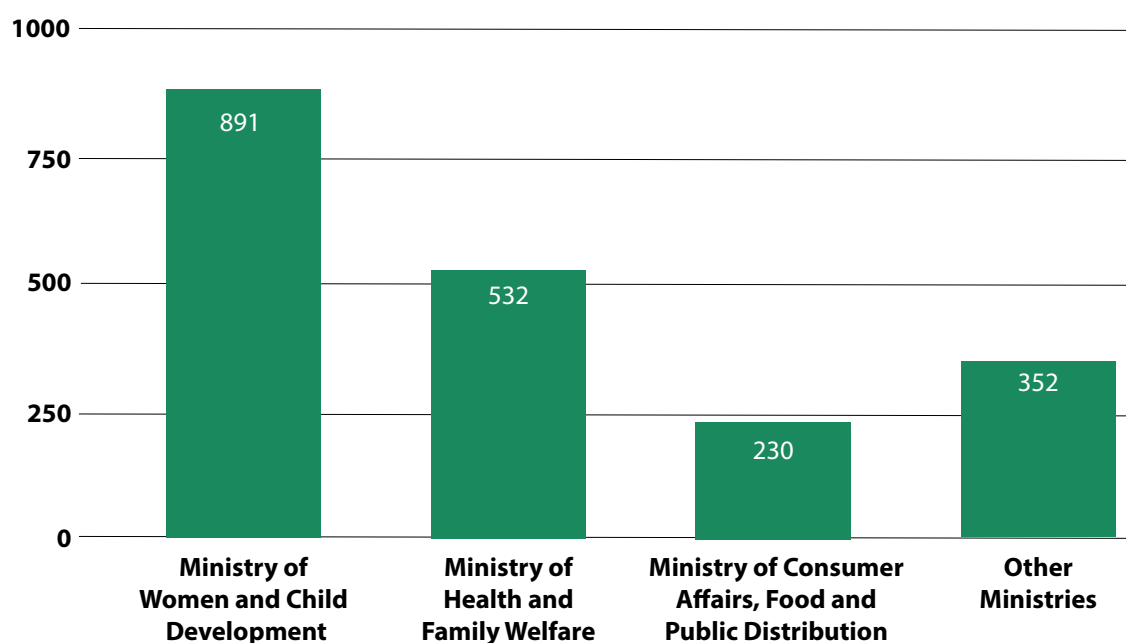
The Ministry of Women and Child Development implements the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) providing a package of services comprising supplementary nutrition, immunization, health check-up and referral services, pre-school non-formal education and health and nutrition education.

Ministry of Health and Family Welfare is responsible for the implementation of several schemes. The National Health Mission (NHM) is the the key flagship scheme which implements programmes covering essential nutrition interventions, e.g., Anemia Mukt Bharat, facility-based care for children with severe wasting, infant and young child feeding, home-based young child care, maternal nutrition, etc.

The Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution is entrusted with the responsibility of implementing Essential Commodities Act, 1955 (10 of 1955) (Supply, Prices and Distribution of Essential Commodities not dealt with specifically by any other Department), monitoring of prices and availability of essential commodities, Prevention of Black Marketing and Maintenance of Supply of Essential Commodities Act, 1980 (7 of 1980), to mention a few.

Considering that the Ministry of Women and Child Development is the nodal for nutrition related issues, 891 questions were addressed to this ministry. This is the highest among the three ministries, over the entire time period of 22 years. 532 questions were directed at the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW), followed by 230 questions at the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution.

**Figure 3: Ministry-wise distribution of questions raised in the parliament on nutrition for 2000-2021**





## Session-wise distribution of questions

A year-wise breakdown of the nature of questions raised in each type of session resulted in four broad categories of questions emerging:



- **Questions on prevalence of malnutrition** in the country, including indicators on stunting, wasting, underweight, anaemia in children and women, hunger and malnutrition deaths, underlying causes, government's reaction to the said findings, remedial measures undertaken to address the problem of malnutrition
- **Questions on programmes and interventions** including objectives, benefits and entitlements provided to beneficiaries and rights-holders, adequacy in terms of quantum and quality of benefits and entitlements provided, scope and coverage in terms of age group, geographical region and socio-economic groups (such as scheduled castes and scheduled tribes), funds allocated and utilised, proposals for revising/strengthening of the programmes, monitoring and grievance redressal associated with existing programmes and launch of new interventions, infrastructure and capacity building, targets, achievements and failures observed during the implementation of food and nutrition related programmes. A significant percentage of these questions are centred on the implementation of Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), Mid-Day Meal Scheme (MDMS), Public Distribution System (PDS), Supplementary Nutrition Programme (SNP) and Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescent Girls (SABLA).
- **Questions on implementation of policies and plans of action** primarily associated with malnutrition, anaemia, child and maternal mortality
- **Questions on institutional bodies** including composition, roles and responsibilities of taskforces, expert groups, councils, food and nutrition councils and boards and reports submitted by these institutions

A session-wise analysis of all the questions raised in the time period of 2000-2021 was undertaken based on the following criteria:

- The number of questions raised in each type of session, across the timeline of 2000-2021
- Whether there emerged any similarities or differences between the type of questions in terms of themes covered, topics and trends for types of questions raised

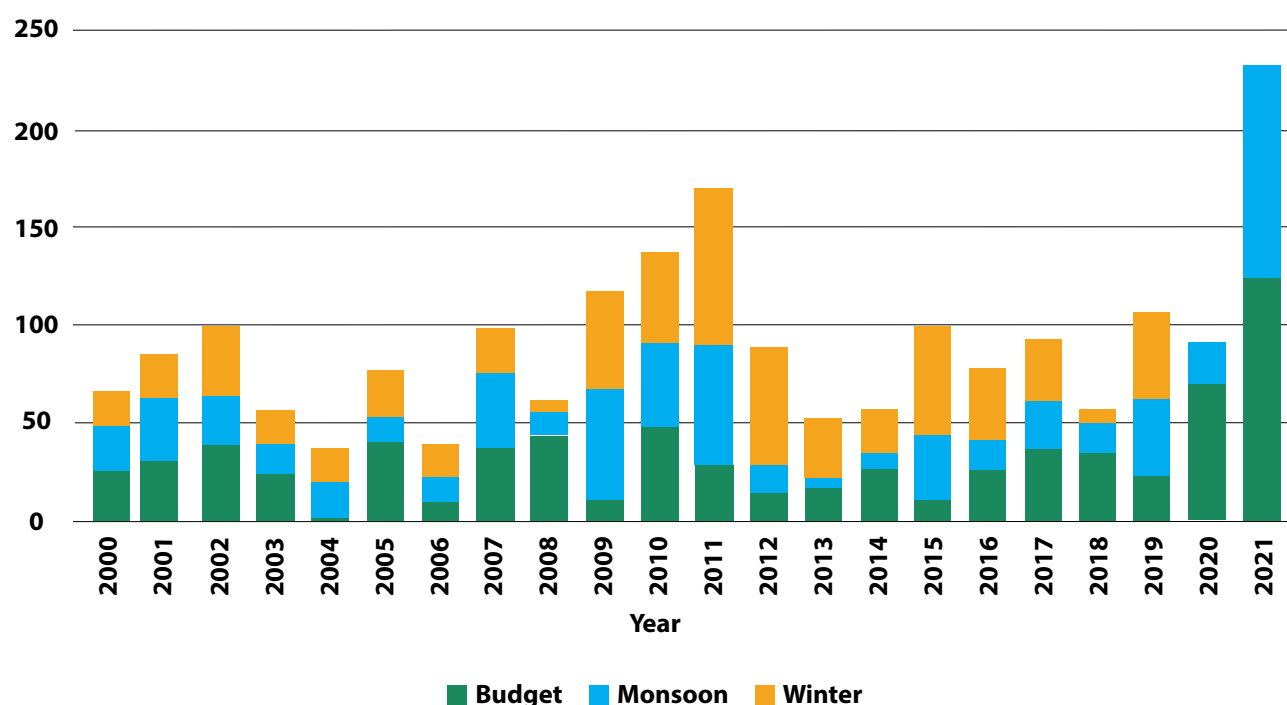
A detailed analysis indicated that there was no significant difference in the number of questions raised in each session. Overall, from 2000 to 2021, the budget sessions witnessed marginally higher number of questions being raised (730) as compared to the winter (639) and monsoon sessions (636). Plotting of the number of questions raised in each session, against the timeline of 2000-2021 indicates a very uneven pattern with repeated peaks (in the years 2011, 2015 and 2021) and troughs (in the years 2004, 2008, 2009, 2014 and 2020).

A comparative analysis of questions raised across the three types of sessions indicates that questions on prevalence of malnutrition, anaemia and mortality have dominated the discussions across all the years. Discussions on status and implementation of programmes and interventions was also prevalent across all the three types of sessions.

The questions on policies, plans of action as well as roles and responsibilities of institutional bodies specifically appointed to advise the government on measures to reduce malnutrition, anaemia and mortality were also discussed in a limited manner across the sessions, over the time period of 2000-21. The reason for a marginal increase in the number of questions raised during the budget sessions, across all the years, can be attributed to financial issues such as under-utilisation of funds in case of Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), Mid-Day Meal Scheme (MDMS) and Supplementary Nutrition Programme (SNP) being discussed more in detail in the years 2008, 2013 and 2014. No specific connection to a critical event was found in 2008, 2013 and 2014.

The session-wise analysis reveals that the number and composition of questions were driven by critical events and probable triggers related to nutrition that have occurred in a particular year, but it was not limited to a particular session (there are 3 sessions per year). In other words, the analysis indicated no particular pattern or trend unique to any session. A detailed analysis of such events and probable triggers is discussed in section 3.

**Figure 4: Trendline indicating session-wise distribution of questions on nutrition for 2000-2021**



## Starred and unstarred questions

Members of the Parliament have a right to ask questions to elicit information on matters of public importance.

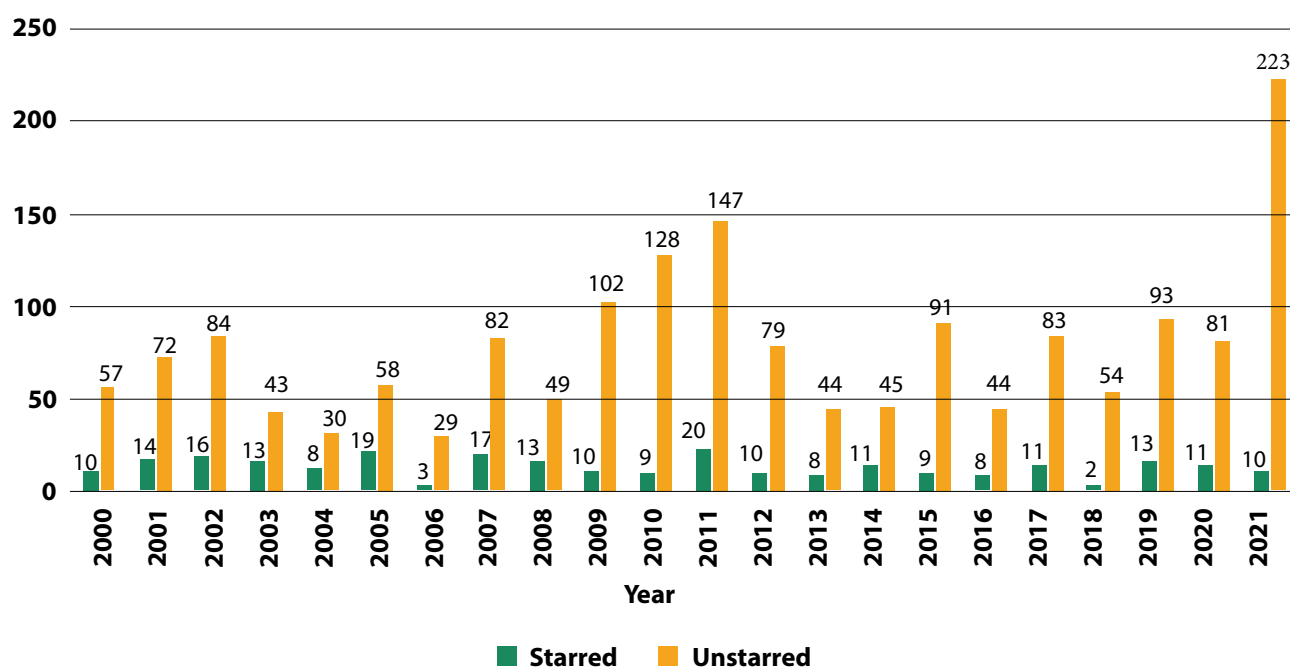
The questions are of two types:

**1 Starred Questions:** A Starred Question is one to which a member desires an oral answer from the Minister in the House and is required to be distinguished by him/her with an asterisk. Answer to such a question may be followed by supplementary questions by members.

**2 Unstarred Questions:** An Unstarred Question is one to which written answer is desired by the member and is deemed to be laid on the Table of the House by Minister. Thus, it is not called for an oral answer in the House and no supplementary question can be asked thereon.

For the purpose of this analysis, the total number of starred and unstarred questions raised in Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha on the topic of nutrition has been considered. From 2000-2021, the number of unstarred questions was more than the number of starred questions raised, across Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha. On the identified themes discussed as part of this article, limited number of starred questions were asked (Figure 5).

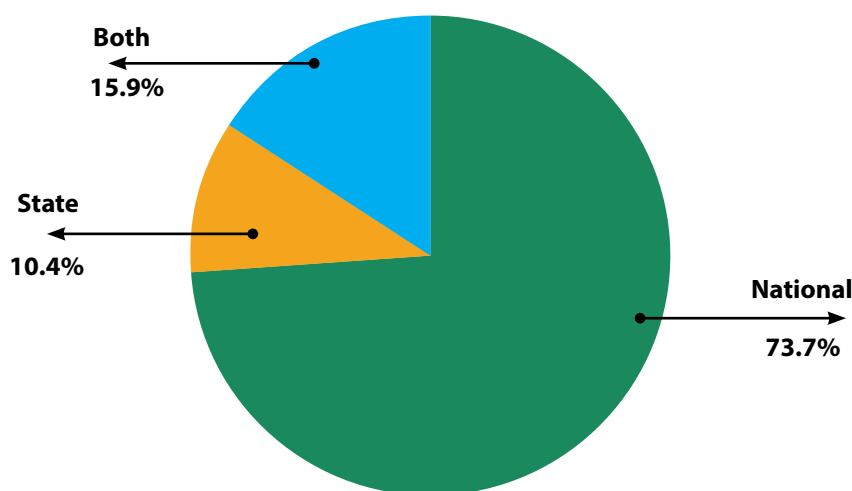
**Figure 5: Total number of starred and unstarred questions raised in the parliament on nutrition for 2000-2021**



## Geographical focus of questions raised in the Parliament

Majority of questions raised in the Parliament (73.7%) focused on the implementation of policies and programmes at the national level, whereas only 10.0% of the questions were concerned with the implementation of policies and programmes in specific States. In terms of reviewing the implementation at the National and State levels, 15.9% questions were based on implementation of policies and programmes at both national level and state level.

**Figure 6: Geographical focus of questions raised in the parliament on nutrition for 2000-2021**



## Themes of parliamentary questions



### Funds allocated and utilised

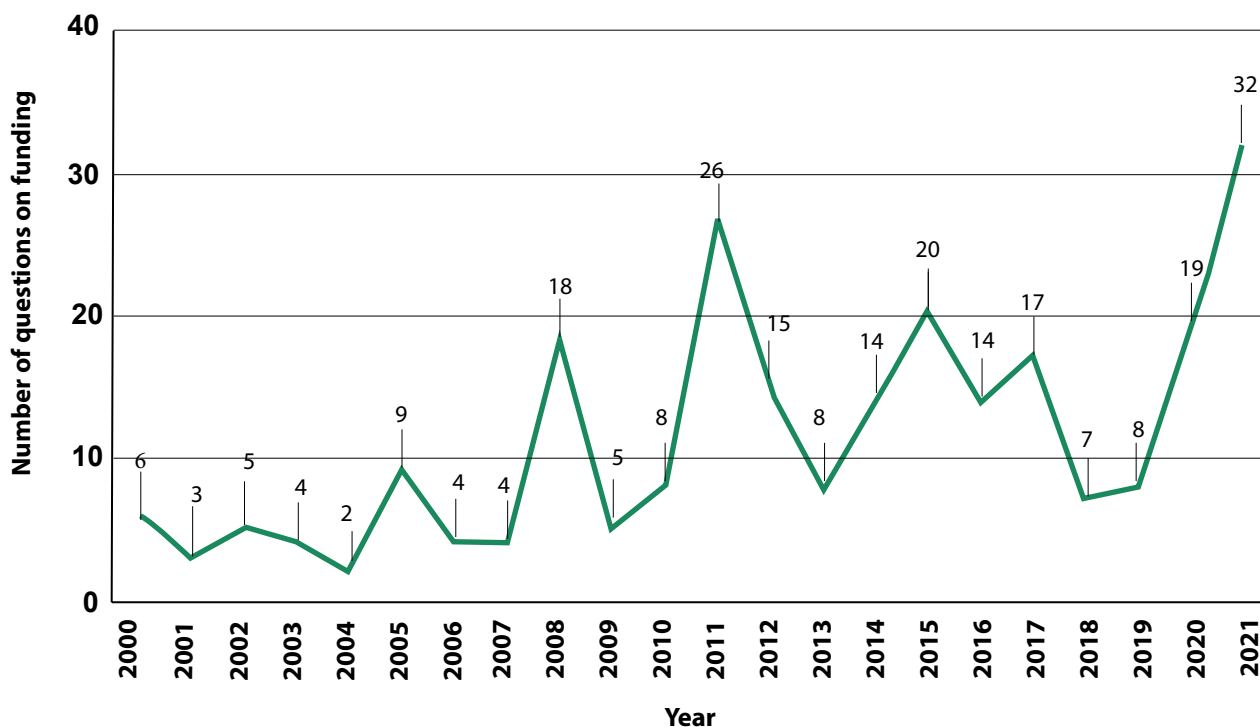
Specific questions on funding and utilisation of funds allocated for schemes under the Ministry of Women and Child Development were tabulated. Questions on funding associated with the programmes and interventions governed by the priority ministries, that is, Ministry of Women and Child Development, Ministry of Health and Family welfare and Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution were found to constitute 12% of the total number of questions raised. Questions on fund allocation and utilization consistently increased from 1990-2000 to 2013-2014; these, however plummeted in 2014-15, picking up in 2016-17 and peaking in 2021.



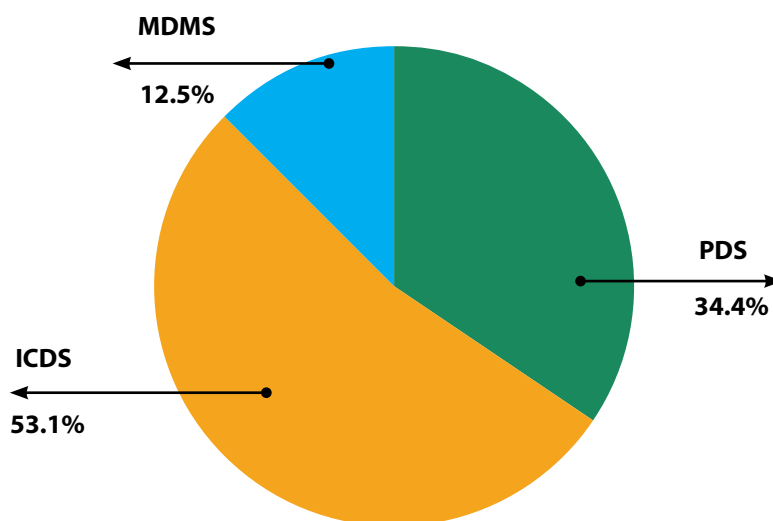
### Grievance redressal

With respect to questions on grievance redressal mechanisms, procedures and responses, majority of the questions were concerning the implementation of ICDS (53.1%), followed by PDS (34.4%) and MDMS (12.5%). Issues covered as part of grievance redressal included the quality of grains and meals being provided to rightholders, utilisation of allocated funds, complaints related to pilferage and systemic administrative challenges. Some questions were also raised on the mechanisms constituted to redress the complaints and prevent the same in future.

**Figure 7: Year-wise (2000-2021) distribution of questions on funding of nutrition programmes governed by Ministry of Women and Child Development, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution**



**Figure 8: Scheme-wise distribution of all parliamentary questions on grievances/complaints received regarding the performance of nutrition related schemes governed by the Ministry of Women and Child Development, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution**





மருத்துவரின்  
Dr. சிவசுப்பிரமணியன்

TIME IS GOLD காலம் மூலம்

31-8-10-2010  
தாள், தாமசுமணி  
6. பூசல்கொடுக்க  
7. சாத்திசூதும்  
8. சா. ச. லா. லா  
9. காலமரணம்  
10. சா. சி. சூர்

உயிர் எழுத்துக்கள் கல்.

கி. ஈ. உ. சூ  
சூர்

# Association between critical events on nutrition and parliamentary questions

## 2 Section

Identification and analysis of critical events, along with probable triggers, provide crucial insights in terms of the type of evidence that has been used to raise questions. These insights are imperative in order to diversify and strengthen the discourse on nutrition at the Parliamentary level.

Three years were identified as those with distinct peaks in terms of questions raised, and these are 2010-11, 2019-20 and 2020-21.

## Identification of themes and events related to questions

An important event associated with nutrition in the year 2010 was the launch of **Indira Gandhi Matritva Sahyog Yojna (IGMSY)**, introduced in October 2010. There was a clear association between the nature, objective and content of the scheme and parliamentary questions raised during 2010 as most of these questions asked dealt with nutrition interventions for adolescent girls and pregnant women.



### An analysis of the key topics on which questions were raised during 2010 include:

- Malnutrition
- Obesity
- Anaemia
- Child and maternal mortality
- Proposal to set up National Advisory Board to curb malnutrition
- Deaths due to starvation
- Nutrition programme for adolescent girls
- Number of Anganwadi Centres
- Complaints regarding non-supply of benefits under ICDS
- Details of funding and utilisation under ICDS in specific states
- Revamping of ICDS
- Proposal to improve SABLA
- Proposal to coordinate the integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) scheme with several schemes on child and maternal nutrition under national rural health mission (NRHM)
- Per capita income and consumption

The discussion on percentage of children who are acutely/severely malnourished, and the role of Nutrition Rehabilitation centres occurred for the first time in 2011 since 2000.

**In summary, the questions raised in 2010 were predominantly about the nutrition interventions for children, adolescent girls and pregnant women.**

In 2011, three important events on nutrition were reviewed to explore their association with the issues raised in the Parliament. These included launch of policy on Management of Severe Acute Malnutrition, 2011 and release of report of the Inter-Ministerial Group on ICDS Restructuring (2011). Another report titled “Fighting hunger and malnutrition: The HUNGAMA Survey Report” was published in January 2011. While this year witnessed a significant number of questions being raised on ICDS and restructuring of ICDS, no questions concerning the policy on severe acute malnutrition or the HUNGAMA report were raised.

In terms of identifying the specific topics and themes covered in 2011, a combination of national, state and district specific questions has been asked in the context of malnutrition, anaemia, child and maternal mortality. Specific focus on these issues was laid in Left Wing Extremist (LWE) districts. Most of the questions were associated with the implementation of Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), while a few questions were asked on Public Distribution System (PDS), Mid-Day Meal Scheme and Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Adolescent Girls (SABLA).



### An exhaustive list of topics covered in 2011 include:

- Anaemia
- Malnutrition
- Micronutrient disorders
- Under-five mortality
- Deaths due to malnutrition
- Enrolment of children and women in Anganwadi Centres
- Proposal to provide hot cooked meals as supplementary nutrition for children in Anganwadi Centres
- Problems associated with provision of supplementary nutrition to children
- Use of iron fortified and double fortified salt in ICDS and MDMS
- Average calorie consumption of children and adults
- Proposal to supply nutritious food to the destitute
- Challenges in National Rural Health Mission
- Obesity
- Proposal to launch National Sickle Cell Anaemia Control Programme
- Status, criteria, coverage, funding and implementation of SABLA; review of nutrient distribution, corruption, funds allocation and utilisation, training centres and infrastructure
- Proposal to introduce revised national framework
- Proposal to include new nutritious items under the Public Distribution System
- Proposal to introduce National Food Security Bill and identification of beneficiaries
- Strengthening of PDS for the proposed National Food Security Act
- Expenditure to be incurred under National Food Security Act and complaints regarding provision of nutrition in Anganwadi Centres.



A significant addition to the type of questions raised in 2011 was the proposal to introduce the National Food Security Bill. Apart from that, there has been an obvious shift towards food and nutritional security, production of food grains and factors influencing the quantity and consumption value. Similar to the questions raised in 2009 and the previous years, questions on prevalence of malnutrition, anaemia, micronutrient deficiencies were raised in 2011 as well.

In terms of themes covered in questions raised during 2019, the focus was on prevalence of malnutrition, anaemia and mortality. It was observed that the Poshan Abhiyaan and the Anemia Mukta Bharat Scheme (launched as an initiative under Poshan Abhiyaan) were key drivers in a number of questions raised. New topics such as rules, procedures, monitoring mechanisms to ensure transparency in the functioning of Anganwadi Centres and other services under ICDS and benefits and scopes of the Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY) were also discussed. Most importantly, the discussion on the progress made in terms of achievement of goals envisaged under Poshan Abhiyaan, demonstrated a clear association between the number and nature of questions and launch of Poshan Abhiyaan.



### Topics discussed during 2019 included:

- Prevalence of malnutrition among children and women
- Progress made in terms of reducing undernutrition in children and women
- Current status of implementation of programmes and interventions concerning malnutrition and anaemia
- Deaths due to starvation
- Steps to achieve targets under Zero Hunger
- Iodine deficiency
- Objectives of the Poshan Abhiyaan
- Details of funds allocated and utilised
- Empowerment of functionaries to use smart phones and tools
- Proposal to establish National Nutrition Council
- Details of distribution of fortified ration as part of the Public Distribution System (PDS)
- Leakages in food supply
- Exclusion of beneficiaries under Public Distribution System (PDS)
- Status and progress made under National Food Security Act (NFSA) implementation
- Restructuring of Anganwadi Centres, review and monitoring of the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS)
- Status of infrastructure under the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) programme
- Proposal for special action plan to minimise child mortality
- Proposal to introduce vegetable cultivation in Anganwadi Centres
- Beneficiaries and entitlements under Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY) and National Food Security Act (including rules and procedures to identify beneficiaries)
- Digitization of services/monitoring of Anganwadi Centres
- Infant Mortality Rate and Maternal Mortality Rate
- Obesity
- Achievement of Millennium Development Goals
- Reduced funds to National Creche Scheme and current status and implementation
- Proposal to hold a Conference of Ministers of Women and Child Development of all State Governments to deliberate on solutions related to malnutrition among women and children

A majority of the questions was raised in 2019 pertain to the status, implementation and impact of key programmes, plans, policies and strategies that have been devised to tackle malnutrition. Questions were also raised on the status of implementation of the National Food Security Act (NFSA, 2013). Questions on the core themes of malnutrition, anaemia, infant and maternal mortality were asked in 2019, similar to the types of questions raised in the previous years.

In 2020, while most of the questions continued to revolve around the prevalence of malnutrition, anaemia, infant, child and maternal mortality, the discourse was influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic. Questions on the impact of the pandemic on the access of services/benefits/entitlements were raised. A very poor connection was found between the number and type of questions raised in 2020 and the Food Safety Standards Regulations prepared in 2020 and effective from 1st July 2021. This was the first mention of food safety found in the parliamentary questions.

Majority of the other questions revolve around programmes to address malnutrition in children and women. Poshan Abhiyaan continued to dominate the discourse on nutrition even in this year and the impact of COVID on the implementation of food and nutrition schemes emerged as an important factor determining the composition of questions raised. The details of schemes such as ICDS, MDMS and PDS in terms of coverage, criteria, assessment, guidelines for identification, monitoring and review were sought.

Two new schemes were discussed in addition to the Integrated Child Development Services, Public Distribution System, Mid-Day Meal Scheme, Supplementary Nutrition Programme – Bhartiya Poshan Krishi Kosh (BPKK) and “POSHAN on Wheels”. Bhartiya Poshan Krishi Kosh (BPKK) is a web portal providing information of India’s crop diversity across all districts for both current and historical crops. This portal aims to provide data on agro-ecological contexts required to produce traditional and locally available “nutrition-rich” crops. To provide further impetus to tackling malnutrition, “POSHAN on Wheels” was launched in Chandigarh in 2019. Mobile Anganwadi Vans under Poshan Abhiyaan were launched to carry nutritious food for infants, expectant and lactating mothers especially at construction sites.

Four per cent of the questions concerning COVID asked about its effects on implementation of programmes, especially the Mid-Day Meals Scheme.





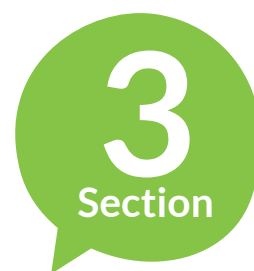
### Specific topics of questions raised in 2020 include:

- High prevalence of stunting and wasting in the country and measures to address high rates of stunting and wasting among children
- Food and Nutrition Board-Structure and functions
- Review and funding, constitution of committee to reduce maternal mortality rate
- Implementation, review, targets and funding of Poshan Abhiyaan in all States
- Proposal to introduce nutrition education in schools
- Proposal to provide balanced diet under National Nutrition Mission
- Non-compliance of Mid-Day Meal with nutritional standards
- Dual burden of malnutrition; status of Bhartiya Poshan Krishi Kosh (BPKK) Scheme-coverage, beneficiaries, field implementation sites
- Status of "POSHAN ON WHEELS"
- Deaths of children due to malnutrition
- Status of Atal Bal Arogya Evam Poshan Mission in Jharkhand
- Impact of NFSA on malnutrition; distribution of fortified rice to curb malnutrition
- Impact of COVID on Mid-Day Meal Scheme (MDMS) and proposal to consider alternatives to ensure food and nutrition security of school going children
- Supplementary nutrition and care
- Complaints on nutritional quality of meals provided in Mid-Day Meal Scheme (MDMS)
- Tracking of nutritional status of children enrolled under Mid-Day Meal Scheme using Common Application Software
- Focus on millet revolution to ensure nutritional security
- Reduction of food subsidy bill
- Details of programmes to eliminate anaemia and malnutrition among women and children
- Impact of COVID on the programmes
- Guidelines to address micro-nutrient deficiencies
- Launch of Scheme for Adolescent Girls (SAG)
- Details of any funds given to Non-Governmental Organization to address malnutrition
- Status, implementation, review and funding of Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescent Girls (SABLA)

While most of the questions continue to revolve around the prevalence of malnutrition, anaemia, infant, child and maternal mortality, the discourse was influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic. Questions on the impact of the pandemic on the access of services/benefits/entitlements provided under Mid-Day Meal Scheme were discussed extensively. New topics such as grievances raised on the quality of meals provided under Mid-Day Meal Scheme (MDMS) and Status of Atal Bal Arogya Evam Poshan Mission in Jharkhand were raised for the first time.



# Probable triggers influencing discourse on nutrition



Section 3 presents analysis to identify probable triggers that may have influenced the narrative and discourse on nutrition at the Parliamentary level, for the time period 2000-2021.

It is difficult to determine the definitive triggers based on source documents cited in parliamentary questions. Only 11% of the questions were found with clear and specific references being made to a particular source (221/2005), while 89% of the questions did not cite any sources.

The sources referred to in the parliamentary questions raised on nutrition were reviewed as possible triggers. In terms of the source of information referred, it was found that five types of sources were cited:

Thematic reports from -

- United Nations
- International organizations
- National organizations
- Newspaper articles
- Supreme Court Orders

## Thematic Reports

### United Nations

#### United Nations Children's Fund

Amongst all the sources, reports published by UNICEF have been referred to the highest number of times and constituted 37.5% of the total number of questions that mentioned references (81/221). These reports include State of the World's Children published in the years 2001, 2004, 2005, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, and 2019; progress reports on child and maternal nutrition published in 2006, 2007, 2009 and 2012 and Comprehensive National Nutrition Survey (CNNS) (2016-18).

Two types of publications by UNICEF – The State of the World's Children and The Progress Report for Children are found to have provided content and issues raised in significant number of questions raised on nutrition, across the timeline of 2000-21. These are in addition to two surveys undertaken as the National Level-Rapid Survey of Children (2013-14) and The Comprehensive National Nutrition Survey (CNNS), 2016-2018; about 81 questions referred to reports published by the UNICEF. Although the themes and core issues discussed in all these reports are diverse, as the questions raised in the parliament are limited in scope and are structured in a very generic manner. Apart from enquiring about the government being aware of the findings, responses to the same and remedial measures undertaken, the questions do not offer much scope for deliberation as to why the findings were dismal or a detailed evaluation of the performance of indicators.

The State of the World's Children reports published by the UNICEF were cited for the years 2001, 2004, 2005, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016 and 2019. All questions referring to these reports appear to be more focused and directed at the key issues of child mortality, maternal mortality, access to basic amenities for children and prevalence of anaemia

**The following key UNICEF reports were cited in Parliamentary questions:**

- ▶ A detailed evaluation indicates that the 2001 State of the World's Children report, focusing on the core theme of early childhood was cited in two questions (one in Lok Sabha and one in Rajya Sabha).
- ▶ The 2004 report, primarily focusing on Girls' education and the promise of education for all, has also been cited once in the Lok Sabha. Four references to the State of the World's Children Report of 2005 were made to (two in Lok Sabha and two in Rajya Sabha). The questions revolved around the prevalence of infant and maternal mortality.
- ▶ While the State of the World's Children Report, 2006 has been referred to only twice and both times in the Rajya Sabha, the Progress for Children, A Report Card on Nutrition, published by the UNICEF in May 2006 seems to have had a greater influence on the questions raised, especially in 2006. The report has been referred to in the context of undernutrition, impact on child health and child mortality and has been cited in 10 questions (three in Lok Sabha and seven in Rajya Sabha).
- ▶ The year 2007 witnessed two references being made to the State of the World's Children, 2007 report, which primarily focused on investing in women's rights to advance the rights of both women and children. "The Progress for Children" published by the UNICEF in December 2007 was referred to in two questions, both of which were raised in the Rajya Sabha. This particular publication particularly referred to the status of child-specific targets set by world leaders at the May 2002 UN General Assembly Special Session on Children.
- ▶ Eight references were made to the State of the World's Children, 2008 report, primarily focussing on the state of child survival and primary health care for mothers. Five questions referred to in the Lok Sabha, whereas three referred to it in Rajya Sabha. These questions were asked in the context of child mortality rates in India, as compared to other countries.
- ▶ Two reports published by the UNICEF in the 2009 - State of the World's Children and Tracking Progress on Child and Maternal Nutrition were cited in questions raised for the years 2009, 2010, 2011 and 2013. While the former was referred to in three questions (one in Lok Sabha and one two in Rajya Sabha), the latter was referred to in five questions (three in Lok Sabha and two in Rajya Sabha). The State of the World's Children report focused on the latest paradigms in health programming and policies for mothers and new-borns, while the report on tracking progress on child and maternal nutrition presented survey-based data on global prevalence of undernutrition (stunting, wasting, and underweight). This report, in particular, discussed in detail the problem of stunting in children.
- ▶ The State of the World's Children report of 2010 was cited only once in Lok Sabha and was done in the context of child mortality and number of child deaths due to preventable diseases.

- The 2011 report, which was based on the core theme of investing in adolescents for breaking the cycles of poverty and inequity was referred to only once in the Rajya Sabha and was done in the context of number of child deaths in the country due to malnutrition.
- In the year 2012, two reports were released by the UNICEF-State of the World's Children and a progress report titled "Committing to Child Survival - A Promise Renewed". The former has been referred to in one context raised in the Lok Sabha and focuses on the core theme of children in the urban world, while the latter has been referred to once in the Rajya Sabha, in the context of identifying and meeting of needs of children living in urban areas. Both the questions were associated with infant and child mortality in India, in comparison to other countries.
- Apart from the State of the World's Children report released in 2013, two very important publications were cited in the questions raised in 2013 and 2014. The first one being the Rapid Survey of Children (RSOC) undertaken by UNICEF. This publication essentially focused on the well-being of children below 6 years and their mothers. It covered aspects of child development, maternal care, school/college attendance among persons aged 5-24 years, early childhood care and pre-school education and the enabling environment. It was referred to in seven questions (five raised in the Rajya Sabha and one raised in Lok Sabha in 2015 and 2016). The second one being a progress report titled "Trends in Maternal Mortality: 1990 to 2010" jointly published by Inter-Agency Group comprising the World Health Organization, UNICEF, United Nations Population Fund (formerly known as United Nations Fund for Population Activities) and World Bank). This report focused on estimating maternal mortality trends across the world. According to this report, India was ranked 126 out of 180 countries when countries were arranged in ascending order of maternal mortality rate.
- The State of the World's Children report published in 2014 was referred to once in the Lok Sabha, in the context of prevalence of high rates of child malnutrition children in the country. This report was based on the core theme - *Every child counts*. It emphasised on the importance of generating credible data and availability of the data on children and communities and using it to hold the duty-bearers to account.
- The State of the World's Children Report of 2015 was cited twice in the Lok Sabha in the context of prevalence of malnutrition rates in the country. The report, which commemorated 25 years of the Convention on Rights of the Child, highlighted how new ways of solving problems often emerging from local communities and young people themselves, can help overcome age-old inequities that prevent millions of children from surviving, thriving and making the most of their potential.
- The Comprehensive National Nutrition Survey (2016-18) conducted by UNICEF is another important source that was cited four times in the Rajya Sabha in the years 2019 and 2020. The questions were raised in the context of prevalence of percentage of stunting and underweight children in India and more particularly in reference to the implementation and review of the Poshan Abhiyaan.

## World Food Programme

The report titled “State of Food Insecurity in Urban India” published in September 2010 and jointly released by World Food Programme (WFP) and M S Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF) has been referred to in one question raised in the Rajya Sabha, in the context of poor performance of nutritional indicators in urban areas of India. This report delves in finer aspects of access and absorption dimensions of food security, especially in urban areas.

The year 2019 had a question based on the Food and Nutrition Security Analysis, India, 2019 published jointly by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation and The World Food Programme (raised in the Lok Sabha). The report highlighted key determinants and linkages that could be useful for decisions on policy, planning and monitoring of Government schemes associated with food and nutrition security in India.

## World Health Organization

A total of five questions were identified with specific references to reports in 2013, which include the World Health Statistics report 2012, published by WHO (raised in Lok Sabha), focusing upon progress made towards achieving the health-related Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and associated targets, State of the World’s Mothers 2013 report by Save the Children, published in May, 2013 (Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha), focusing upon best and worst performers across the world in terms of preventing deaths in mothers and children and World Health Statistics report 2012, by WHO published in 2012 (Lok Sabha), focusing on key topics of noncommunicable diseases, universal health coverage and civil registration coverage.

## World Bank

Two questions referring to a World Bank report titled “Wasting Away - The Crisis of Malnutrition in India”, published in December 1998 were raised in the context of anaemia in Indian women. The fundamental theme of the report is to review the effectiveness, efficiency, and impact of public spending on nutrition in India, and to suggest how these might be enhanced. The questions refer to poor nutritional indicators prevalent in the country, such as half of all children under the age of four are mal-nourished, 30 per cent of new-born are under-weight and 60 per cent of women are anaemic.



One question raised in 2000 in Lok Sabha was in reference to a World Bank Report on Malnutrition. While the question did not specifically mention the title or the year in which the report was published, our analysis indicated the link since the report predominantly discussed malnutrition in India and the impact on productivity. The report stated that malnutrition would cost the country of about 1000 crore rupees in terms of loss of productivity, illness and deaths and would upset the efforts to reduce child mortality.

Seven questions raised in 2010 make specific references to sources that may have been influenced the topics covered by World Bank's Policy Research Working Paper on "Child Mortality among Adivasis in India" and a report titled 'The Next Revolution' by 'Save the Children' have been cited in two questions raised in the Rajya Sabha. Both these reports focus on the core theme of child mortality.

Two questions raised in 2014 in the Lok Sabha cite the UN Interagency Group for Child Mortality Estimation, 2014 and a World Bank report titled "Nutrition in India". While the former provides child mortality estimates, the latter is a capacity assessment of the two key programs, namely the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) and the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) that form the mainstay of India's nutrition delivery system.

In 2019, a question was based on the comprehensive State Health Index report "Health States, Progressive India – Report on the Ranks of States and Union Territories, June 2019" brought out by NITI Aayog, in collaboration with the World Bank and the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (raised in the Rajya Sabha), which provides a weighted composite index based on 23 indicators covering key aspects of health sector performance grouped into three domains namely health outcome, governance and information and key inputs/processes).

## **Food and Agriculture Organization**

Two questions raised in Rajya Sabha in 2015 cite reference to the State of the World Food Insecurity Report, 2015, published by FAO and report of FICCI Research and Analysis Centre, published in August 2015. The FAO report presents data about the progress made towards achieving the internationally established Millennium Development Goal (MDG1) and World Food Summit hunger targets, while the FICCI report discusses the specific issues of quality of mid-day meals being provided in SDMC schools in Delhi.

## United Nations Development Programme and Others

The Human Development Index report of 2003, published by United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has also been referred to in one question raised in Lok Sabha. The question has been raised in the context of prevalence of malnourishment in children and the core theme of the report is based on poverty and inequality.

The year 2009 witnessed references to a diverse set of sources. Out of a total of five questions with references, three questions were raised in Rajya Sabha and two were raised in Lok Sabha. A question referring to a United Nations report on Hunger and Malnutrition was raised in the context of the report criticising a shift towards cash crop instead of food grains and raised its concerns on continued suicides by farmers owing to the unremitted growth on a market economy, which has not benefited the farm sector. The year of publication and title of the report are not mentioned in the question.

UNESCO's Global Monitoring report "Education for All", published in January, 2009 was referred to in one question raised in the Rajya Sabha, in the context of States with lowest coverage of ICDS having the highest malnutrition rates in India. The report primarily focuses on the theme of overcoming inequality and why governance matters the most.

The Human Development Index Report, published by UNDP was raised in one question in 2008, in Lok Sabha. This is in the context of HDI ranking of India in 2007-2008.

## International Organizations

2011 witnessed five questions with specific references being made to reports and publications by international organizations. These included the Lancet Series on still births, April 2011 (Lok Sabha), in the context of estimates of still birth rate in India.

In 2012, four questions were raised in reference to specific reports (two raised in Lok Sabha and two raised in Rajya Sabha) and these include United Nations Global Estimate on child mortality reports, 2011, Child Development Index, released by Save the Children in 2010, Global Food Security Index (GFSI), 2012 brought out by the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) of the news magazine 'The Economist' and Socio-economic Caste Census (SECC), 2011 published by Ministry of Rural Development. Child mortality and undernutrition were key issues that have been discussed in the above-mentioned reports.

The State-Level Disease Burden Initiative Report of 2016 by the Public Health Foundation of India (raised in the Rajya Sabha), presents trends of diseases and risk factors for every state of India from 1990 to 2016 was referred to in a question from 2019.

The Global Nutrition Report, 2016 was referred to more times compared to other publications and was cited in the years 2016, 2017 and 2018. This particular report was cited six times in total (four times in Lok Sabha and two times in Rajya Sabha). The report focuses upon the theme of making and measuring global commitments to nutrition and what it will take to end malnutrition in all its forms by 2030.

In 2017, a reference was made to the Global Nutrition Report, 2017, which is a peer reviewed publication by Development Research Initiatives (raised in the Lok Sabha), focusing upon the core topic of nourishing the SDGs and a report titled “Stolen Childhood” by Save the Children, published in 2017 (raised in the Rajya Sabha), focusing on developing an end of Childhood Index developed on a set of life-changing events that signal the disruption of childhood.

The Global Nutrition Report 2019 published by Development Research Initiatives and the Urban Hungama Report, published by NAANDI foundation in February 2014 have been referred to in two questions raised in the Lok Sabha. While the former provides insights into the current state of global nutrition, highlighting the unacceptably high burden of malnutrition in the world, the latter examines the nutrition status of children aged 0-59 months living in the 10 most populous cities of India, namely: Mumbai, Delhi, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Ahmedabad, Chennai, Kolkata, Surat, Pune and Jaipur.

A report on controlling vitamins and mineral deficiencies in India by Micronutrient Initiative, a Canada based NGO, was referred to in one question raised in Rajya Sabha. Further analysis of the core themes covered in this report could not be undertaken due to unavailability of the report online.

In 2008, the first reference to a research paper has been made in the form of a Lancet study referring to no paucity of nutrition champions in the country. The specific question was raised in the context of poor performance of nutritional indicators in the country (undernourishment and still births, in specific). The question does not specify the title or the year in which the research paper was published.

Other probable triggers include the Global Hunger Index Reports, which was referred to in 19% of the questions with references raised (41/221) across time period of 2000-21.

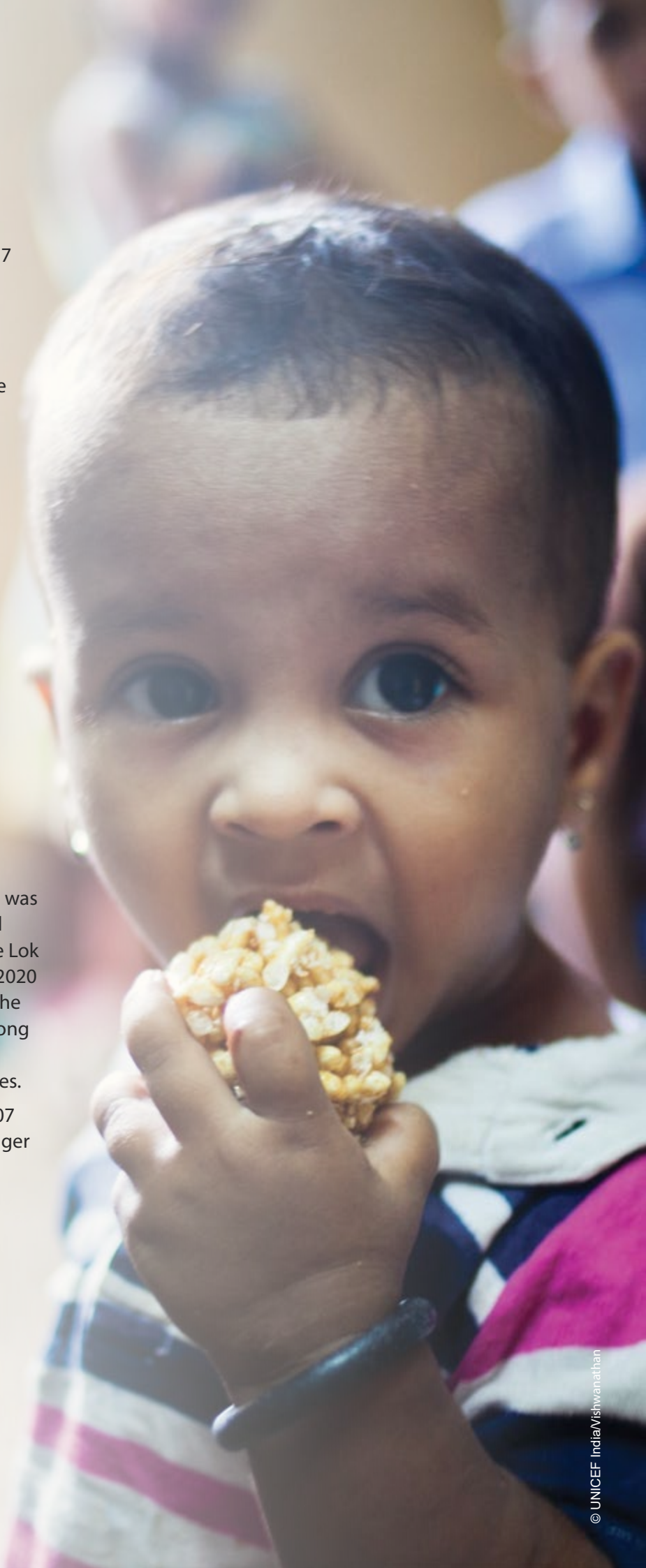
To reflect the multidimensional nature of hunger, the Global Hunger Index combines the following four component indicators- undernourishment, child wasting, child stunting and mortality. The fundamental objective of this index has been to measure hunger while considering contemporary issues influencing and impacting the situation. The Global Hunger Index Reports appear to have a strong influence on the number and nature of questions raised in the Parliament, especially for the years 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021. The Global Hunger Index Report released in 2014 was not cited in the questions raised. A total of 41 questions specifically refer to the Global Hunger Index Reports.

All questions raised in the parliament referring to Global Hunger Index Reports sought information on whether the government is aware of the release and findings of the said report, reasons and underlying factors responsible for poor performance of nutritional indicators in terms of India’s global ranking as compared to other developing nations, government’s reaction to the poor performance of the index and remedial measures undertaken to improve the same. This is a generic composition of questions raised concerning the Global Hunger Index Reports. The Global Hunger Index Reports released over the years have been based on various themes ranging from hunger and climate change, forced migration and building resilience to achieve food and nutrition security. A detailed analysis of the themes covered as part of the Global Hunger Index Reports released over the years has been undertaken in Section 3. Despite the variety of themes covered, all questions raised in the Parliament are limited to the ranking of India, and do not delve further into discussing the impact of factors impacting food and nutrition security. The questions do not take into consideration the prevailing context and emerging scenarios impacting food and nutrition security.

A detailed evaluation reveals that all the Global Hunger Index Reports have been referred to more in the Rajya Sabha as compared to the Lok Sabha until 2013.

- The first global hunger index Report was jointly published in 2006, by Welthungerhilfe and International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI). The report presented determinants, trends and case studies of nutrition in the post-conflict countries of Afghanistan and Sierra Leone. This report has been referred to once in Lok Sabha.
- The Global Hunger Index Report, 2007, published by Welthungerhilfe, International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) and Concern Worldwide was released in October 2007. This report discussed the core theme of devising and implementing measures to reduce acute undernourishment and chronic hunger. It has been referred to in three questions—two in Lok Sabha and one in Rajya Sabha.
- The year 2009 saw a significant number of references being made to the Global Hunger Index Reports released in October 2008 and 2009. While the former focused on the core theme of rising food prices and its impact on hunger, the latter dealt with the core themes of financial crisis impacting food distribution and gender equality. The 2008 report was referred to in four questions (one in Lok Sabha and three in Rajya Sabha). The global hunger index report of 2009 was referred to six times (four in Rajya Sabha and two in Lok Sabha).
- The Global Hunger Index Report of 2010 primarily focused upon the crisis of child undernutrition and was jointly published by Welthungerhilfe, International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) and Concern Worldwide. India was ranked 67th out of 88 countries in this year and this was the core component of all the questions raised. A total of four references have been made to the Global Hunger Index Report of 2010 (one in Lok Sabha and three in Rajya Sabha).
- The Global Hunger Index Report of 2011 was referred to in four questions (one in Lok Sabha and three in Rajya Sabha) and focused on taming price spikes and excessive food price volatility. According to this particular report, India was ranked 67 amongst 81 countries.
- The Global Hunger Index Report, 2012, however, has been referred to only once in Lok Sabha. The core theme of this report was centred on ensuring sustainable food security under land, water and energy stresses and was published by Welthungerhilfe, International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) and Concern Worldwide. The report indicated a further decline in India's performance with respect to nutritional indicators, with a rank of 67 among 79 countries.
- Similar to the 2012 report, the Global Hunger Report of 2013 has also been referred to only once, in the Lok Sabha. The 2013 report focused upon building resilience to achieve food and nutrition security and India was ranked 63rd out of 121 countries. The reports post 2013 witnessed a slight shift in terms of a greater number of references being made in the Lok Sabha as compared to the Rajya Sabha.
- The Global Hunger Report of 2015, published by Welthungerhilfe, International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) and Concern Worldwide, was referred to in three questions (two in Lok Sabha and one in Rajya Sabha). Armed conflict and the challenge of hunger formed the core theme of this report and India was ranked 80th out of 117 countries.
- The Global Hunger Report of 2016, published by Welthungerhilfe, International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) and Concern Worldwide were cited in three questions (two in Lok Sabha and one in Rajya Sabha) in the context of achieving zero hunger. India was ranked 97th out of 118 countries in this report.

- ▶ The Global Hunger Index report of 2017 was referred to only once in Lok Sabha. This report was published by Welthungerhilfe, International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) and Concern Worldwide and focuses on the core theme of inequalities of hunger and according to report, India was ranked 100th out of 117 countries.
- ▶ Based on the core theme of forced migration and hunger, the Global Hunger Index Report of 2018, published by Welthungerhilfe and Concern Worldwide, was referred to only in two questions (one in Lok Sabha and one in Rajya Sabha). India was ranked 103rd out of 119 countries as per this report.
- ▶ The Global Hunger Index Reports of 2019 and 2020, also published by Welthungerhilfe and Concern Worldwide, focuses upon the core themes of challenge of hunger and climate change and linking health and sustainable food systems, respectively, was cited in three questions, in total and all these questions were raised only in the Lok Sabha. No references to the 2019 and 2020 Global Hunger Reports were made in the Rajya Sabha. India was ranked 102 among 117 countries in 2019, which was the lowest among the South Asian countries.
- ▶ In 2020, India was ranked 94 among 107 countries, according to the Global Hunger Index Report, 2020.



## National Organizations

In terms of reports produced by domestic organizations, Indian Council for Agriculture Research, Arjun Sengupta Commission on unorganized workers, M S Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF), National Institute of Public Cooperation and Child Development (NIPCCD) are some of the organizations whose publications concerning malnutrition has been referred to in the Parliament. These reports have been referred to in 28% of the total number of cited questions (61/221).

Another Parliamentary question refers to report No. 3 of 2000 of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India, which is a performance appraisal of the Mid-Day Meal Scheme. The Indian Nutrition profile published in 1998 has also been cited in 2001, in the context of malnutrition among children and energy deficiency amongst adults. Further analysis of this particular report could not be done due to the unavailability of the report online.

The Food Insecurity Atlas of Urban India, authored by Swarna S, Rukmani R, Anuradha G, Manjula M, published by M S Swaminathan Research Foundation in 2002 has been referred to in two questions raised in the Lok Sabha in 2002. The report explores food insecurity and underlying factors in Urban India. Additionally, a survey undertaken by a Pune-based Tribal Training and Research Institute confirming that deaths of 69 percent of the 26 tribal children in Thane district during April-August were due to malnutrition, respiratory disorders, convulsions, and other factors alike. This particular question has been raised in the context of steps being taken especially in Maharashtra and all over the country to avoid recurrence of deaths of tribal children due to malnutrition.

Expert committee reports, research papers published on nutrition and associated themes, policy papers and national level surveys undertaken to estimate the percentage of children and women who are malnourished (NFHS), were cited in a total of 61 questions raised in the Parliament.

A study focusing on hazards of obesity and its relationship with diabetes, among the school children in Delhi undertaken in 2005 has been referred to in one question raised in the Lok Sabha in 2005. The study is essentially a survey on food habits of Delhi children submitted by Delhi Diabetes Research Centre. Due to the unavailability of an online copy of this publication, further analysis could not be conducted.

The year 2001 witnessed references to five reports being made (one in Lok Sabha and four in Rajya Sabha). The question raised in the Lok Sabha refers to a survey undertaken by the National Nutrition Monitoring Bureau on nutrition deficiency among the children of low-income group in Odisha. This report in particular was raised in the context of diet and nutrition surveys undertaken on clinical nutritional deficiencies in urban slums, rural and tribal children. Two questions raised in the Rajya Sabha were associated with an appraisal report prepared by the Comptroller and Auditor General of India on Integrated Child Development Service Scheme between 1992 and 1999. One question in the context of high mortality rate of girl children as compared to boys was raised in Lok Sabha, in 2007. This was in reference to the Sample Registration Survey (SRS) by the Registrar General of the Census.

Three more questions raised in 2009 refer to a publication by the Indian Council for Agriculture Research National Network Project titled "Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability of Indian Agriculture to Climate Change", by Arjun Sengupta Commission on unorganized workers, published in August, 2007 by National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganised Sector, Government of India and a LANCET study titled "The Countdown to 2015: Maternal, New-born and Child Survival", published on 12th April 2008. The Arjun Sengupta Commission was raised in the context of 77 per cent of India's population spending less than Rs. 20.00 per head a day and slash in APL quota allocations by Government depriving them of associated benefits. The Lancet report monitors coverage of priority interventions to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) for reduction of maternal and child mortality.

An evaluation study titled "Three Decades of ICDS" undertaken by National Institute of Public Cooperation and Child Development (NIPCCD) and published in 2009 has been referred to in one question raised in

the Rajya Sabha. This is in the context of evaluating the performance of the ICDS programme. The study synthesises research studies on ICDS conducted during 1996-2008. It includes studies on administration of ICDS, adolescent Girls, anaemia, Anganwadi workers' training centres, community participation in ICDS, functioning of AWCs, health status, nutrition and malnutrition, preschool education, training of functionaries and World Bank Assisted ICDS Projects.

This year also witnessed references being made to publications such as the India Health Report, 2010 brought out by Indicis Analytics and brought out by the Confederation of Indian Industry and the UN Millennium Development Goals Report, 2010 which focused on progress made towards achieving the internationally established Millennium Development Goals. Three out of five questions raised in that year with specific references were in the Rajya Sabha, while two were in the Lok Sabha.

2011 presented questions with specific references being made to reports and publications by national organizations including Socio-economic Caste Census (SECC), 2011 published by Ministry of Rural Development (raised in the Lok Sabha), focusing on socio-economic status of rural and urban households and allows ranking of households based on pre-defined parameters; India Human Development Report, 2011 published by the Institute of Applied Manpower Research of the Planning Commission (raised in the Rajya Sabha), focusing on social inequalities; specifically on how Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes are doing relative to the rest of society, and on how Muslims are doing in terms of human development relative to other religious groups. It estimates the Human Development Index for each state, discusses employment and poverty, the state of hunger and nutrition, the status of health, the achievements and challenges in education, the state of housing/access to electricity/telephones, and the condition of the elderly and disabled; "Children Score Card in Schools and Anganwadis" conducted by children with the help of voluntary organizations World Vision, National Coalition for Education and *Vaada na Todo* campaign in regard to poorly run Anganwadi Centres (raised in the Lok Sabha) and Report on India published by the Harvard School of Public Health (raised in the Lok Sabha) that explores the relationship between economic growth and malnutrition.

The year 2017 also witnessed references being made to the ASSOCHAM-EY report: "Bridging the gap: Tapping the agriculture potential for optimum nutrition" published in 2017 (raised in the Lok Sabha), focusing upon a two-pronged strategy to promote nutritious, diversified and resilient food production.



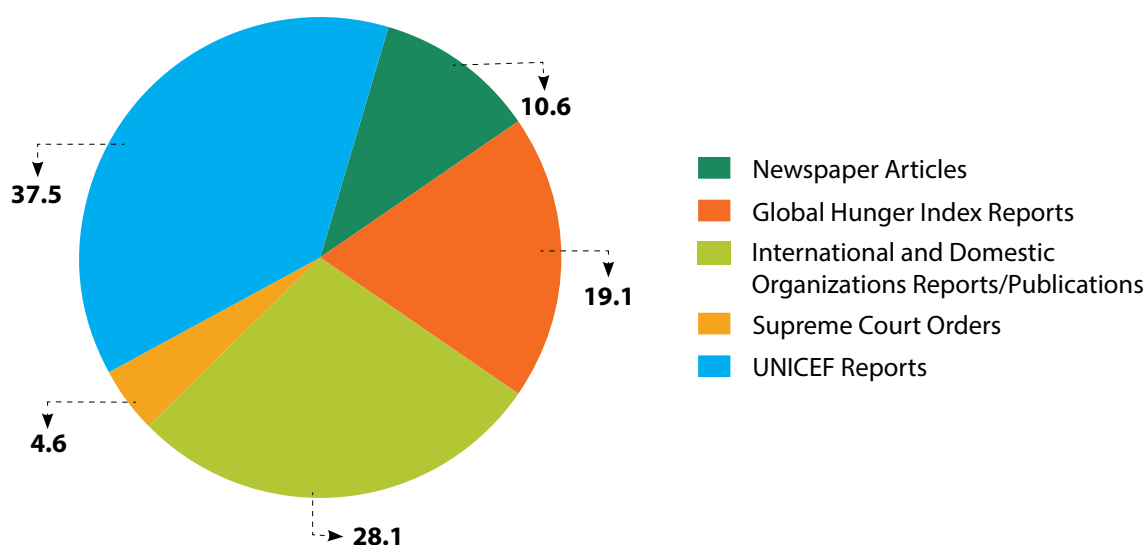
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## Newspaper Articles

Further analysis pertaining to the title of the newspaper articles and reports, name of the organizations publishing the reports, core themes covered in the reports and year of publication has been done and is discussed in detail in the subsequent pages.

Newspaper articles have been referred to only in 10% of questions whereas supreme court orders seem to have the least influence on the questions raised as only 5% questions in total have clear and distinct references to specific orders and directives issued by the Hon'ble Supreme Court, across the timeline of 2000-21.

**Figure 9: Percentage of questions raised on nutrition in the parliament for 2000-2021 based on types of sources cited**



A comprehensive review of the above-mentioned triggers and their possible association with the questions raised has been discussed hereunder.

A total of 23 questions associated with reference to newspaper articles have been identified in the period and were raised in the years 2000, 2001, 2002, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008 and 2012. The number of newspaper articles referred to these years are mentioned in Table 2.

**Table 2: Year-wise distribution of newspaper articles referred to as part of questions raised on nutrition during 2000-2021**

Year	Number of articles referred to in questions raised on nutrition
2000	6
2001	3
2002	4
2004	1
2005	2
2006	2
2007	2
2008	2
2012	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>23</b>



All the articles referred to in the questions raised were sourced from newspapers such as The Hindu, The Statesman, Indian Express, Dainik Jagran and the Times of India.

A variety of topics have been covered as part of the newspaper articles. The most significant topics include:

- Gap in performance of the National Nutrition Mission
- Gap in performance of Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), for questions raised in 2000
- Increasing prevalence of obesity, irregularities in distribution of food under the Public Distribution System (PDS)
- North Indians prone to Vitamin 'D' deficiency.

The topics covered in the newspaper articles cited in questions raised in 2000, 2001, 2002, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008 and 2012 have remained similar, except for topics such as obesity and impact of carbonated drinks on children and micronutrient deficiencies which were limited to 2000 and 2007. Undernutrition, deaths due to poor nutrition and other diseases, child mortality and status of implementation of the Public Distribution System (PDS) and the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) have been referred to in articles cited for 2000, 2001, 2002, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008 and 2012. Information on one article cited in 2004 could not be ascertained as the name of the newspaper, headline or topic was not stated in the question.

From 2004 onwards, references to newspaper articles did not mention the title/headlines or the name of the newspaper in which the article appeared. However, broad categories of topics, as indicated in the specific questions mentioning a newspaper article for 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008 and 2012 covered:

- Distribution of fortified candy amongst poor children
- Restructuring/revising ICDS for 2005
- Prevalence of underweight children in India as reported by IFPRI - Global Hunger index for 2006
- Impact of carbonated drinks on children in 2007
- Deaths of children due to malnutrition
- Under five child mortality in 2008
- Percentage of children who are stunted and underfed in 2012

In questions where newspaper articles have been cited as sources, complete reference and details were not available. The names of reporters for all the 23 articles and headlines for 10 out of 23 articles could not be ascertained. As a result, sufficient information was not available to conduct further analysis on this set of sources.

## Supreme Court Orders

Supreme Court orders were one of the sources that may be considered as one of the probable triggers, especially for the years 2004, 2007, 2009 and 2011. The years in which references have been made coincide with the dates of orders and directives concerning Writ Petition (Civil) No.196 of 2001 – PUCL v/s UOI and Others on Right to Food. Four questions raised in 2004 pertain to the poor implementation of the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS). Specific issues covered in these questions include utilisation of funds under ICDS, proposal to revise limit for distributing supplementary nutritious food in Anganwadi Centres, directing Central and State Government to furnish the reasons for non-implementation of the ICDS and Central and State Government to furnish the reasons for non-implementation of the ICDS Scheme. Four questions citing Supreme Court orders were raised in 2007 (one in Lok Sabha and three in Rajya Sabha). These orders predominantly relate to order to provision of hot cooked meals to children and non-usage of contractors for procurement of food (specific order was not referred to in the question), directive on expanding ICDS for all children below six (Order of 13.12.2006), proposal to revise limit for distributing supplementary nutritious food in Anganwadi Centres and National Level Expert Group report submitted to the Supreme Court on ill-effects of soft drinks on health.

One question raised in 2009 in the Lok Sabha pertains to two Supreme Court Orders - the first being a directive issued on 29th April, 2004 that all 0 to 5 years old children, adolescent girls, pregnant women and nursing mothers shall receive supplementary nutrition for 300 days in a year not being implemented and the second being a directive on 13th December, 2006 that stated that all the Chief Secretaries must personally explain why children and mothers in the country were still starving. The key themes covered in this question included poor implementation of supplementary nutrition for children, pregnant women, lactating mothers and adolescent girls. The reference made in one question raised in 2011 in Lok Sabha examines the status of implementation of distribution of food grains to poor and vulnerable sections of the society. This is in the context of an order issued by the Supreme Court to reserve 5 million tons of food grains for allocation to the 150 poorest districts or other poorer segments of the society.

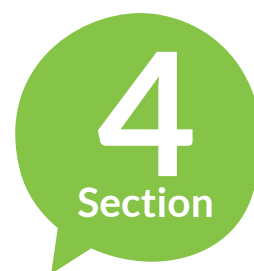
In summary, it can be stated that 89% of the questions raised in the Parliament on the topic of nutrition did not have any specific references to a source and were framed in a generic manner. The sources cited in the remaining questions (11%) indicates that key findings of Global Hunger Index Reports published by Concern Worldwide and Welthungerhilfe and the State of the World's Children published by the UNICEF have been referred to more as compared to newspaper articles, supreme court orders and reports published by international and domestic organizations. Although the core themes covered in each of the reports released by organizations such as UNICEF, FAO, WHO, UNDP vary every year, the questions raised in the Parliament are limited to prevalence of hunger, anaemia, infant, child and maternal mortality.





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# Conclusion and recommendations



## Summary of findings

An extensive review of two decades of parliamentary questions on nutrition and associated topics has revealed extensive information on the topics, themes covered, nature of discourse and the key drivers, probable determinants and triggers influencing the composition of questions. A considerable number of questions have been raised, encompassing crucial aspects of policy implementation, review and monitoring. The number of starred questions raised over a period of 2000-21 has been consistently low, constituting an average of 5% of the total number of questions raised. This may be attributed to the fact that the maximum number of starred questions that can be raised in the Lok Sabha is limited to 20 per day and 15 in Rajya Sabha. Furthermore, a maximum of 230 questions are picked for written responses/ unstarred questions per day in the Lok Sabha and 160 in Rajya Sabha. Given this, the scope for raising unstarred questions on the theme of nutrition is likely to be more than the number of starred questions. Even then, the ratio of nutrition related questions that were starred (5%) is lower than the average proportion of such questions (8.6% in Lok Sabha and 9.3% in Rajya Sabha). Session-wise distribution indicates that there is no particular pattern associated with the type of questions raised in each session. Majority of the questions raised in the Parliament were on the generic topic of nutrition are focused upon the national level implementation of key programmes such as the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), Mid-day Meal Scheme (MDMS), Public Distribution System (PDS), Supplementary Nutrition Programme (SNP), Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescent Girls (SABLA) and Poshan Abhiyaan. In terms of house-wise distribution of questions, Lok Sabha witnessed slightly higher number of questions as compared to the Rajya Sabha.

In terms of assessing the impact of critical events and probable triggers on the number of questions raised in the Parliament for the peak years of 2009, 2011 and 2020, Poshan Abhiyaan was identified as a probable candidate for a significant number of questions. However, the other critical events were found to have no influence on the number or type of questions raised. In terms of probable triggers, only 10.7% of the total questions were raised during 2000-21, had references to specific articles or publications.

It is observed that the level of discourse is limited to National or State level, failing to highlight inter-district, inter-village, inter-community or even inter-constituency differences, which often are crucial to arriving at specific policy solutions. In the absence of such discussion and deliberation, more often than not, the discourse on nutrition tends to be repetitive, limited and stagnant in scope. This is especially relevant in cases where sources or references are not stated clearly. Many questions tend to remain outside the realm of discussion, thereby not suggesting any clear change in the policy, legal and institutional frameworks associated with nutrition.

## Recommendations

In order to ensure enhanced and effective engagement with nutrition at the parliamentary level, and to strengthen policymaking, the following measures may be considered:

- Most all questions focused on verifying the status of indicators, utility of funds and status of programmes, rather than exploring ways to improve the implementation of programmes such as the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), Mid-day Meal Scheme (MDMS), Public Distribution System (PDS) and Supplementary Nutrition Programme (SNP). In fact, many questions were found to be repetitive in nature. Questions must be framed in a manner such that there is scope to determine the causes of failure of programmes, identification of ways in which such failures can be prevented, discuss and deliberate upon measures that can be adopted, develop strict tools for monitoring and evaluation and ensure that there is measurable and tangible progress. This might be strengthened by circulating prior to the commencement of sessions summaries of budget analysis and evaluation reports of schemes along with specific takeaways and actionable recommendations so as to generate interest amongst parliamentarians.
- Main nutrition-related reports that have been identified to trigger Parliamentary questions (global Global Hunger Index Reports, reports published by the UNICEF, Supreme Court Orders and reports published by international and domestic organizations) could be further analysed by the nutrition community and presented in the form of policy briefs to the Parliamentarians to facilitate the formulation of more targeted/specific questions.
- When key nutrition events are organised (conferences, dialogues, seminars, round tables, dissemination of evidence, etc.), special briefing sessions for parliamentarians by the nutrition community to translate conclusions and recommendations into impactful questions should be considered.
- Also, the nutrition community could design ways to orientate parliamentarians on nutrition in general, how it relates directly or indirectly to the SDGs and national missions, policies and programmes to attract increased political attention and strengthen policy making. Orientation on where to find key data and information for each constituency could also help in raising effective engagement.
- Innovative ideas may be considered in order to ensure the continuity of discourse on nutrition. One such idea is to organise a nutrition parliament with elected members or their nominees to deliberate over issues concerning nutrition. This deliberation can be organised at community level and the findings and outcomes of such discussions can be synthesised into crucial points of discussion at the Parliamentary level.

This analysis is a step towards identifying specific areas to strengthen policymaking and accountability at the Parliamentary level. It must pave way for enhanced levels of engagement with and participation of policy makers, in order to prioritise the core issues concerning nutrition in the country, curate strategies to diversify the quantum, quality and types of evidence being used and promote corrective action besides advocacy and discourse on nutrition.



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