

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON NUTRITION (ICN2)

NOVEMBER 19 - 21

INDIA'S STATEMENT

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is indeed an honour and privilege for me to address this august gathering assembled to discuss the twin scourges of hunger and malnutrition. I stand before you to present to you India's understanding, policies and vision on the matter.

Ladies and Gentleman, by the time I finish this statement perhaps two dozen children around the world would have died from hunger and hunger related reasons. They die quietly in some of the poorest villages on earth, many in my own country, far removed from the scrutiny and the conscience of the world. Being meek and weak in life makes these dying multitudes even more invisible in death.

At the first International Conference on Nutrition in 1992, world leaders met and declared - I quote " Hunger and Malnutrition are unacceptable in a world that has both the knowledge and resources to end this form of catastrophe." Ironically, twenty two years later, the world leaders are gathered again not to celebrate the progress but to adopt a similar declaration.

I have been listening intently to the representatives from around the globe over the last couple of days and it really gladdens my heart to hear the commonality of views being expressed - both in acknowledging the problem on hand and on the way forward. We are all not only on the same stage today but fortuitously on the same page too. India joins the world community in pledging its support to the cause of eradication of malnutrition in all its facets.

Ladies and gentlemen, a story is as credible as the statistics underlying the story, sadly the statistics in this story of malnutrition is horrific. The sight of distended bellies, pale skins and sunken eyes remind us that despite all economic progress the world still has about

- 805 million people - one in nine people worldwide - still chronically hungry
- 161 million children under the age of five stunted due to chronic undernutrition.
- one third of the developing world's population suffers micronutrient deficiencies that can lead to blindness, mental retardation and early death;

●and, worldwide an estimated 1.5 billion adults are overweight or obese and at greater risk of non-communicable diseases.

It is abundantly clear that the economic growth rates which the world has witnessed over the past years have not automatically translated into better nutritional indicators and both nutrition specific and nutrition sensitive interventions are required if the world is to break the intergenerational cycle of undernutrition and free itself from the burden of malnutrition. Economic growth alone will not be enough. Nutrition sensitive agriculture, expanding network of social protection to increase affordability of and accessibility to adequate and nutritious food and focussed intervention on under five child and maternal nutritional deficiencies must be mainstreamed into national policies for successfully tackling this problem.

We in India are aware of the problem at hand.

45% of our children under the age of 3 are stunted, 16% wasted and 40% underweight. Coupled with this is the additional burden of 80% of our children in the age group of 6-23 months and 55% of our women in age group of 15 to 49 yrs reported to be anaemic. India today is home to 31% of the world's under 5 stunted children and 37% of the world's total underweight children with prevalence of underweight among children in India nearly double that of Sub Saharan Africa.

Understanding and acknowledging the problem at hand and the sectoral interlinkages needed to tackle the problem, the government of India has announced a mission mode approach to address maternal and child malnutrition in selected 200 high burden districts through a revamped Integrated Child Development Scheme. This nutrition specific and nutrition sensitive programme seeks to harness synergies across nutrition, sanitation, drinking water, primary health care and other related sectors to address malnutrition holistically. Under this mission mode programme the interventions are aimed at being simultaneous so that the benefit of one intervention is not lost on account of the absence of another and they cover the entire life cycle of women and children to create an immediate nutritional impact.

This is in addition to the existing nation wide programme of Integrated Child Development Scheme which provides nutritional support to nearly 103 million beneficiaries with a financial outlay of nearly 3000 million USD annually as of end 2013.

Other schemes such as :

- the National Rural Health Mission with an annual outlay of 3400 million USD (21000 cr),
- the National Rural Drinking Water Programme with an annual outlay of 3500 million USD (22,000 cr)
- the National Food Security Act with an annual outlay of nearly 2 billion USD
- the National Rural Livelihood Mission with an outlay of 6500 million USD(Rs. 40000 crores),
- Sarva Siksha Abhiyan with annual outlay of 4600 million USD (Rs.28258 crore)
- the Total Sanitation Campaign with an annual outlay of 690 million USD (4260 cr)
- Mahatma Gandhi Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme with an annual outlay of 5500 million USD (34000 cr) and
- Mid Day Meal Scheme with an annual outlay of 2150 million USD (13215cr)

further bolster our government's efforts at combating malnutrition.

However, despite these interventions, the problem on hand is humungous and needs continued and concerted effort on part of our government to deliver upon a malnutrition free country. We are acutely aware of this and as we move ahead we seek to learn from and align our strategy with the proposed Framework for Action.

Ladies and Gentlemen, malnutrition is certain to outlive ICN2 but what we need to ensure is that it does not outlive a generation. Curtains will soon come down on ICN2 but with that will start the test of our will to combat what can easily be termed as a shame on the world's conscience. The success or failure of ICN2 will be gauged not by how many of us gathered here, though that too is an indication of our commitment to the cause, but by whether it succeeded or not in forcing the national policymakers to look at all developmental policies through a malnutrition lens, and how effectively it helped make visible the invisible emergency of malnutrition.

By bringing malnutrition back on to the centre stage of global discourse and underlining it as a problem of governments and not just of families, ICN2 has proved to be one of the most successful international conference in recent times. I therefore take this opportunity to thank the DGs of FAO and WHO for piloting this Conference. I also thank Heads of all other UN Agencies which have a crucial role in the field of nutrition and have extended support to this conference.

With these words and recognising the key role it will have to play in eradication of hunger and malnutrition from the face of this earth, India looks forward to working closely with the world community towards this end.

Thankyou Ladies & Gentlemen.
